

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS OF  
INTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND SATISFACTION:  
A SURVEY OF ONE MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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by  
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## APPROVAL

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled,

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND  
SATISFACTION:

A SURVEY OF ONE MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

presented by Meredith Mann,

a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my peers at the University of Missouri, for my undergraduate and graduate experience would not have been the same without you.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research was to examine the relationship between perceptions with internal strategic communication and satisfaction with those communication efforts. Specifically, the purpose was twofold: 1) to determine student perceptions of the impact of strategic communication on satisfaction; and 2) to understand how student satisfaction with communication efforts correlate with their future intentions to support the university once they are alumni. This was accomplished with an online survey of undergraduate students at a major Midwestern university. As student satisfaction predicts retention and future alumni support, universities must focus more on branding efforts and image development early on in the students' academic career. As such, the current study will examine student perceptions and satisfaction with how universities attempt to brand themselves with internal strategic communication directed at influencing student satisfaction with the campus. Findings will assist university public relations teams on how they can improve a university's brand with an internal student audience.

**KEYWORDS:** university communication, brand development, brand reputation, satisfaction, strategic communication, internal publics

## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

Universities and other institutions of higher education serve many different constituents: students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members. While a number of studies have examined the external communication of universities (e.g., communication with donors or alumni), few studies have examined the internal communication of universities. This is necessary if universities are to meet the unique information needs of one internal public that has gone largely unexplored: undergraduate students. Researchers have investigated the relationship between communication satisfaction and job productivity (see Clampitt & Downs, 1993) but much of this research is focused on internal communication of commercial businesses with employees, which does not address the serious implications of understanding the perceptions and communication satisfaction that undergraduate students may have of universities that attempt to communicate with them about their college campuses.

The purpose of the research is to fill a gap in the literature by investigating the relationship between internal communication, specifically strategic communication, and satisfaction. Specifically, the purpose was twofold: 1) to determine student perceptions of the impact of eight dimensions of strategic communication on satisfaction; and 2) to understand how student satisfaction with communication efforts correlate with their future intentions to support the university once they are alumni.

This was accomplished with an online survey of undergraduate students at a major Midwestern university. As student satisfaction predicts retention and future alumni support, universities must focus more on branding efforts and image development early on in the students' academic career, at the undergraduate level. As such, the current study

will examine students' perceptions and satisfaction with how universities attempt to brand themselves with internal strategic communication directed at influencing student satisfaction. Research regarding this topic would be beneficial for universities because their reputation is built from the inside out. It is crucial for the student body to feel valued and supported, and the administration is responsible for making these groups feel like their opinions matter. Creating messages and effectively communicating them is important for any organization, and for a university to thrive, it is important to acknowledge the groups who potentially have the biggest impact. Findings will inform the vast research on communication satisfaction and will assist university public relations teams on how they can improve a university's brand with an internal student audience.

## **Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Strategic Communication**

Strategic communication is defined as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (Hallahan, 2007, 3). By planning and being intentional, any group of individuals can effectively share a message to their audience. Strategic communication can be divided into six different disciplines, based on the type of messaging that is taking place: management, marketing, public relations, technical communication, political communication, and information/social marketing campaigns (Hallahan, 2007). For the purposes of this research, public relations will be the main strategic communication discipline discussed.

The purpose of public relations is “to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with key constituencies. This includes consumers and customers, as well as investors and donors, employees and volunteers, community leaders, and government officials” (Hallahan, 2007, 6). First introduced by Edward Bernays (1952), public relations can be considered an “engineering of consent,” meaning that by using an engineering-like approach, practitioners can use information and tactics that have been successful in the past to gather support from others (Cernicova, 2016). This can be applied to university communications because in order for the university to be successful, it must communicate to its internal and external publics in an efficient, yet meaningful way, in order to build and maintain relationships.

Universities have integrated the concept of strategic communication, whether it be through its academic programming or its own messaging efforts. According to Hallahan (2007), “Universities that have adopted this approach range from the University of

California in the United States to the University of British Columbia in Canada to the University of the Free State in South Africa” (Hallahan, 2007, 7). The term strategic communication also has been used to categorize to the integration of advertising and public relations curriculum in university communication and journalism programs (Hallahan, 2007).

Being familiar with the umbrella of strategic communication, university public relations practitioners can utilize many different options in communicating with their constituents, whether they be internal or external. While their messaging should be altered accordingly, deliberately incorporating multiple messaging strategies can be valuable.

### **Internal and External Communications**

When looking at university public relations and strategic communication, practitioners must be aware of the audience they are presenting their message to, whether it be to internal or external publics. While this study will primarily focus on internal publics, specifically students, it is important to acknowledge the number of constituents a university communications team must acknowledge.

Internal publics, as defined in this study, are individuals who are interacting with the university on a regular basis, i.e., during the school year. Internal publics include current students and faculty. Current students, including undergraduate and graduate students, interact with the university through their classes, student organizations, and other campus involvement. Faculty, including professors and administrators, interact with the university through their teaching, research, and service to the university.

External publics, as defined by this study, are individuals who have limited interaction with the university. External publics include alumni, prospective students, and surrounding community members. Alumni are individuals who were students and/or graduates of the university, who might still have a connection to the university in some capacity. Prospective students are individuals, primarily high school students, who have shown interest in attending the university. Surrounding community members are individuals who live in the city or town in which the university resides and have interaction with the university simply because of their location.

### **University Reputation, Regarding Culture and Student Satisfaction**

While considering the umbrella of strategic communication and the different publics, universities can create messaging strategies that create a positive brand for their institution. Brand image can have an effect on how students view the university, can create a sense of community and overall feel, and can determine whether these publics are satisfied with the experience that is provided for them.

A study conducted at a university in Portugal analyzed the influence of image on students' views of a university and how important the perceived message is to the success of the institution. By measuring the university image held by its students, universities can determine the level of loyalty and satisfaction students have towards it. A survey, administered to nearly 3,000 students, showed that image is the construct that most greatly affects a student's level of satisfaction most. Placing an emphasis on university image is not only important for current students, but also for students who are considering enrolling (Alves and Raposo, 2010).

Similarly, a study was conducted at a university in South Korea, to see how much of an impact image has on student satisfaction. The process of image building can determine how committed students are to their alma mater before and after graduation, when it comes time to make alumni donations. Surveys were administered to these students, looking at variables such as external prestige and the students' attitudes. The finding showed that constructs of university image, such as personality, reputation, and external prestige, positively affected how students' viewed their university. They also found that students consider others' views of the university to be very important (Sung and Yang, 2008).

Occurrences or crises on campus can also have an effect on university reputation, based on the culture that the institution seemingly suggests. This can be influenced by media representation, as discussed earlier, or simply by the culture in which students partake. In 2006, three Duke University lacrosse players were charged for the rape of a North Carolina Central University student. While the players were found innocent, Duke's position and defense strategies were questionable, basing them completely on the university's reputation. This case also emphasized that since sexual assault is a prevalent issue on college campuses, having strategies to handle the public relations issues related to these cases are crucial (Barnett, 2008).

### **Community and Relationship Building**

When considering ways to build a positive reputation, universities should acknowledge that through their public relations efforts, solid relationships and a sense of community can be cultivated, which can provide many beneficial outcomes. For some

small college towns, the university can be the foundation of a much larger community. As discussed in a study regarding Auburn University, it is very important for universities to build relationships with the members of the surrounding community in order to build trust and maintain a positive reputation (Kim, Carvalho, and Cooksey, 2007).

Relationship building with internal publics and providing a sense of community for these individuals is just as important as building them with the surrounding community members. In order to do this, universities can integrate university administration and public relations practitioners' roles and responsibilities (Kummerfeldt, 1975). Public relations practitioners must prioritize the efforts that are being made on campus, because the support that they receive from internal publics is immediate and essential and will only be provided if they truly deserve it (Kummerfeldt, 1975, 10).

If university constituents, especially the internal publics, feel a sense of community, the university will benefit. Focusing on the cultivation of this positive atmosphere can provide additional positive consequences, such as reputational and commercial benefits, which will be discussed later.

### **Social Media and Online Presence**

One strategic communication tactic that universities can capitalize on is social media and online brand development. These channels allow universities to communicate in an efficient and current manner. Having an updated website and social media accounts can ensure that they are communicating with all of their constituents in a way that makes information easy to digest and accessible.

University websites are the first essential piece for creating a strong online presence. While educational institutions were among the first to develop websites, it is important for these sites to contain current information and an easy-to-use interface. These features are especially important for potential students, because websites can be the first interaction that universities have in the recruiting process (Astani and Elhindi, 2008).

In addition to having a website presence, universities are starting to take advantage of different social media platforms. One social media site on which many universities capitalize on is Facebook. With more than 1.04 billion daily active users as of December 31, 2015, universities should be aware that most of their constituents use Facebook to connect with others (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). However, one study, through a content analysis of university websites and Facebook pages, showed that opportunities available to communicate are underutilized by universities, and it suggested that they take advantage of open forums and opportunities for their stakeholders to participate in the communication (McAllister, 2012).

Twitter is another popular social media site, with 320 million monthly active users as of December 31, 2015 (Twitter- About, 2015). One study, through a content analysis of 113 institutions' tweets and utilization of dialogic communication, analyzed communications strategies amongst universities and liberal arts colleges in the United States. The findings showed that most tweets are targeted at a general audience (students, alumni, parents, faculty, etc.) and most of the messages focused on the usefulness of the information provided (Linvill, McGee, and Hicks, 2012).

Problems adopting social media accounts is evident through another study, which was conducted through interviews of university communicators. They were required to adopt some sort of social media to use for their university communication efforts and reflect on their experience. Major themes discussed in their findings were: publics, information sharing, cost/efficiency, and convenience. Insights into how older generations view social media were provided, as well as how to convince someone who is unfamiliar with social media to adopt it to reach a wider audience (Kelleher and Sweetser, 2012).

Another study at Syracuse University looked at how the use of a university's website can have positive effects on their reputation. A visitor's experience on a university website can be very interactive and customizable to their particular needs, which can ultimately demonstrate the university's personality and attitude. From distributing an online survey to students, faculty, and staff, the study concluded that many students used the website for email and to check grades. However, the website also promoted a sense of community, which can ultimately lead to positive brand image (Morris, 2003).

While social media is constantly growing and becoming one of the easiest ways to communicate information, university practitioners must pay attention to how they are using it. It is a constantly evolving and worldwide tool, and university practitioners should be familiar with the ways that it can assist in their communication efforts.

## **Media Portrayal and Interaction**

In addition to communication put out by the university, earned communication can provide universities with additional reputation-building opportunities. Media outlets, such as print and television, can persuade external publics, especially community members, to think a certain way about a university. While practitioners can not necessarily control all of the messages that are being produced about their institution, they should do their best to ensure that there is minimal hindrance to their organization's messaging strategies.

In a previously mentioned study done in Alabama, a content analysis assessed local newspaper articles and survey results from residents of the Auburn-Opelika to determine how Auburn University was portrayed in the media, and how it affected community members' opinions about the school. Through this content analysis of a local newspaper, research found that while news articles were 55.3% unfavorable, editorials/opinion columns (69.7% unfavorable) and letters from readers (83.3% unfavorable) were particularly focused mostly at issues with the administration (Kim, Carvalho, and Cooksey, 2007). Interviews were also conducted with community members, showing a negative relationship between exposure to such articles and their perception of the universities. Readers who found the university less trustworthy reported less likely to engage in supportive behaviors. This proved that media can play an integral role in shaping the public's opinions about an organization (Kim, Carvalho, and Cooksey, 2007).

A similar study focused on *The Kansas City Star's* coverage of the demolition of Kansas City homes for an UMKC expansion. A content analysis studied day-by-day the

news coverage of UMKC's interaction with the public. UMKC did not discuss their expansion plan with the neighboring publics before they announced it would be implemented, which attracted negative attention from the neighborhood, city council, state legislators, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. While UMKC's communication was not ideal, this analysis demonstrated that effective communication strategies are not only important for the well-being of a university's public, but also for the well-being of the institution itself. (Leeper and Leeper, 2006). This study exemplified that while universities are represented in the media outside of their own releases, communication blunders such as these can help universities improve on their own future messaging efforts.

While a university's image in the media plays a large role in communicating with external publics, two-way communication efforts are ultimately beneficial. A study looking at two universities in the eastern United States found that administrators have a skewed view of the role of public relations practitioners, and that their role is "preoccupied with elevating the image of their school through news releases or feature stories" (Luo, 2005, 24). Focusing on other symmetrical communication strategies and participating in formal research, as opposed to writing press releases or communicating with the media, can be more beneficial for university public relations practitioners. University administrators should also be more cognizant of the role these practitioners are playing, which will result in more effective messaging being produced (Luo, 2005).

## **Communication Techniques**

While reputation management, usage of digital media, and media portrayal can be some ways to improve internal communication, how they craft that message and decide to communicate it with others is a basic yet imperative part of the process. From word choice to message dissemination strategy, public relations practitioners should be aware that each element is important when preparing their communication pieces.

Sentence and paragraph structure can allow practitioners to understand how the message they are releasing is being processed by constituents and media outlets. A content analysis done by Warren and Morton (1991) used Flesch readability scores to compare the writing styles of public relations releases and newspaper stories, as well as the reading level of the language used. From these findings, releases were favored by newspapers if they were easy to understand. Active voice was preferred, and while journalism schools emphasize short paragraphs and sentences, releases with longer paragraphs were used more (Warren and Morton, 1991).

Dialogic communication, a style of communication that encourages discussion and conversation between two parties, can be one way that universities reach out to a surrounding community. A content analysis of 19 New Jersey community college websites showed, that by using dialogic communication, universities can reach out to people who have a relationship with the college, as well as potential relationships, such as prospective students. The study also showed that colleges should be available for questions and comments from constituents, and these colleges should move from content-driven sites to more conversational outlets (McAllister-Greve, 2005). By having more open and conversational communication strategies, universities are not only receiving

input from their constituents, but their constituents get the feeling that their opinions and voices are being heard by the administration.

Examining the communication behavior between students and the university is also important when considering student's behavioral intentions towards the university. Factors affecting students' supportive behavioral intentions include relationship and reputation, and the willingness of students to support their school once they graduate can be affected by the satisfaction that they had with their educational experience. Therefore, active communication with students should be a strong emphasis (Sung and Yang, 2009).

Crisis communication strategies should also be put in place for universities, because, like any major corporation, scandals can become public and damaging very quickly. A study reviewed crisis response strategies of allegations against the LSU women's basketball coach for displaying inappropriate conduct with her players. Through a survey administered to LSU undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members, negotiation and relationship management efforts, negotiation and relationship management efforts were analyzed. The strategies were placed into three categories: denial, bolstering, and negotiation. From this study, we can conclude that it is very difficult to have every party receive a favorable outcome, and sometimes negotiation and advocacy response strategies are the most effective (Varma, 2011). At any rate, while most crises are unpredictable, having response strategies is not only smart, but necessary.

## **Brand and Image Development**

In order for any product or organization to successfully set themselves apart from the competition, one thing must occur first: brand development. Universities are no different. Most of the research on university public relations focuses on the concept of branding, because it is imperative that universities capitalize on the brand that their education system can provide.

Effective internal branding relies on these brand development strategies. A case study examining the importance of these strategies found that many universities tend to focus on their taglines, logos, and advertising campaigns, while failing to recognize that students, alumni, and faculty are their own source of “built-in” branding. The study also suggested that universities should think of branding as developing a sense of culture, and that relationships built within the institution are their most valuable assets to creating their brand (Whisman, 2009).

Brand development can also provide universities with a better understanding of their mission and brand position, which can give them an advantage over their competitors. In “Brand management in higher education: The University Brand Personality Scale”, Rauschnabel, et al., (2016) discuss the amplified need for measuring brand development and management efforts of corporations compared to universities, and this research created a scale for doing just that. From this research, the main takeaway was the development of the University Brand Personality Scale (UBPS) and its six dimensions: prestige, sincerity, appeal, lively, conscientiousness, and cosmopolitan (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016, 2). This scale provides universities with a way to measure

how its message is being disseminated to its constituents, while also ensuring that the university's image is being preserved (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016, 2).

However, creating that sense of distinctiveness in image branding is challenging for university public relations practitioners because all institutions are trying to create a unique name for themselves. In 2007, a study was conducted by administering surveys to enrolled Syracuse University students to examine the implications of a university's visual image. Three dimensions were found to contribute to university image: quality of academic performance, quality of external performance and emotional engagement (Alessandri, Sung-Un, and Kinsey, 2007). The close link between university reputation and university visual image is very important, and universities that have a solid grasp on this concept can greatly improve their communications efforts (Alessandri, Sung-Un, and Kinsey, 2007).

Universities are also beginning to use corporate marketing strategies in competing with other schools to get the brightest and best students. This competition for resources and students is due to the long-term decline in government spending in the higher education sector, and many institutions have designated departments for such branding efforts (Ali-Choudhury, Bennett, and Savani, 2008). Reports, such as *US News & World Report*, state that universities are working towards different variations of earned marketing strategies, as well as logo and motto development. However, an analysis of image brand development showed that there is little evidence that proves a branding program is actually worth the cost. All publicity is not necessarily good publicity, and universities must see if investing in these types of programs are worth it (Bunzel, 2007).

Therefore, while brand development is important for marketing and public relations, universities should consider strategies that utilize their constituents positively for these unique communication efforts. While factors such as academic performance and athletic programming can be positive brand boosters, there are many other tactics and factors that go into successful brand development.

### **Commercial Benefits**

Successful branding can lead to other beneficial outcomes for the university, such as monetary contributions. Without tuition payments or donations from alumni, universities would not be able to advance properly in order to compete with other universities for the best students.

Historically, public relations efforts on university campuses were improved by recognizing that having these positions was monetarily beneficial. Public relations has been part of university administration since as early as 1641, when pamphlets were sent to England asking for donations to Harvard College (Warner, 1996). The University of Michigan was the first school to set up a publicity office in 1897, but in the 1960s, financial necessity was deemed as the main reason for placing more of an emphasis on university publicity efforts. In the late 1970s, the American Alumni Council and the American College Public Relations Association merged into the Council for Advancement and Support Education (CASE) to advance the field of university public relations, in addition to fundraising and alumni relations (Warner, 1996).

Support from alumni is prevalent when it comes to contributions to higher education institutions. While historically involvement in the university was up to the

alumni network, universities are now calling upon their graduates for personal contributions. According to McDearmon (2012), “Charitable contributions to colleges and universities in the United States peaked in 2008 with over \$31 billion in donations.” Support for these institutions can also be in the form of time, such as joining the institution’s alumni association. While these behaviors are based on alumni’s perceived role for their institutions’ well-being, these behaviors must be initiated through communication by the institutions (McDearmon, 2012).

An article published in Poland regarding higher education in Europe discussed the commercialization of higher education institutions. The article noted that it is important for public relations practitioners to realize that universities, while educating students, are also reliant on economic factors. It also discussed that the interaction between universities and media in Poland is two-way; however, the benefits are greater for media outlets. Media outlets are focused on profits, while universities are not admittedly so. The article, ultimately, poses the question of whether the capitalization of higher education institutions is necessarily a bad thing (Nartowski, 2003). Universities should not give off the feeling that they are solely in it for the money, but constituents must keep in mind that universities are, in fact, businesses.

### **Chapter 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In regards to university communications, internal strategic communication, specifically with students, is an area of research that is relatively underdeveloped. Based on past research on university communications and branding efforts, research to gauge how students feel about the branding efforts, in the form of strategic communication, that is occurring at their university during their time as an undergraduate student could be crucial to their overall satisfaction with the institution. Student satisfaction also has implications for future alumni or donor support. With varying opinions on whether branding efforts are important to a university's overall image, more research should be conducted in this area. However, student perceptions of their institutions' brand can be compromised for a variety of reasons, and how universities communicate to their students during times of crisis is an area that can continue to be developed.

Therefore, through my research, I will seek to answer the following question:

RQ1: How do Millennial college students perceive the University's internal strategic communication aimed at informing them of campus issues and what is their level of satisfaction with those communication efforts?

Undergraduate students represent potential future donors of a university, and can provide alumni support in the form of monetary donations as well as other forms of support as well (e.g., guest speakers, etc.). The communication of a university with its undergraduate students may influence whether or not students choose to support a university after graduation. Therefore, it is important to examine whether there is a link between student's current satisfaction with university communication and students'

future intention to donate money to the university or support the university in some other form as future alumni.

As noted, research on communication satisfaction is vast but much of this research is focused on the communication that occurs between a commercial business manager and its employees, which ignores the nature of the relationship between a university and its internal constituents, namely, undergraduate students. Past studies have focused on establishing a link between communication and productivity (e.g., Tubbs & Hain, 1979). For example, businesses with effective communication with employees will see higher productivity, and lower rates of absences and grievances (Gregson, 1987). Others have found a positive influence of communication training programs on the effectiveness of organizations that communicate with employees (e.g., Tavernier, 1980). In other words, while there is a theoretical linkage between communication and productivity – and we know that communication that management provides to employees plays a significant role in whether or not that organization is effective (Tubbs & Hain, 1979). However, few studies have attempted to apply this theoretical notion to the issue of university efforts to communicate with undergraduate students in a university setting.

This thinking leads to the next and final research question:

RQ2: Is there a correlation between student perceptions and satisfaction with internal strategic communication efforts and intentions to support the University after graduation?

## Chapter 4: METHODOLOGY

**Survey.** Analytical surveys are beneficial because research can be conducted regarding relationships among variables and explanations for certain situations (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). Additionally, surveys can allow researchers to collect large amounts of data from a variety of individuals in a short period of time and can be externally valid in the university setting (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011).

For this thesis, an online survey served as the primary method for gathering students' perceptions of their institution's internal branding efforts. This survey was released through Qualtrics, an online portal used to create surveys. According to the Division of Information Technology, "Qualtrics meets the security requirements associated with gathering data classified as Restricted (DC Level 3)" ("Qualtrics", 2016).

**Participants.** The researcher used a convenience sample made up of undergraduate and graduate students from a large public relations lecture course at a major Midwestern university as participants for the survey. All students who took the survey were given five points of extra credit. Students who wished to opt out of the survey had the option to earn credit through an alternative assignment. Specifics on this credit for the students was determined by the professor prior to recruitment. Participation was completely voluntary.

**Survey measurement.** Through the umbrella of strategic communication as proposed by Hallahan, et al. (2007), this survey sought to determine student perceptions of the impact of strategic communication on satisfaction. It also dove into how student satisfaction with

communication efforts correlates with their future intentions to support the university once they are alumni.

The survey consisted of questions focusing on: 1) university reputation 2) community and relationship building 3) social media/online media 4) communication techniques 5) brand/image and 6) commercial benefits, with an additional question asking participants about how they believe their university's brand has changed over the past school year. Under the demographic section of the survey, the researcher asked questions about age, year in school, and the field of interest students have within the strategic communication emphasis area.

Within the university reputation section, participants answered a series of questions regarding their perception of the university. Utilizing a scale created by Sung and Yang (2008) regarding university image, participants chose selections based on a Likert scale of 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat disagree, 6= Disagree, and 7= Strongly Disagree. Examples of these university perception scales include: "The University of Missouri puts student care as the top priority," "The University of Missouri looks like a university with strong prospects for future growth," "The University of Missouri is well-managed."

Within the community and relationship building section, participants answered a series of questions regarding how they believe external publics perceive their university, especially in regard to media reports and place in the community. Utilizing a scale created by Alessandri regarding university visual identity and reputation, participants chose selections based on a Likert scale of 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Somewhat

agree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat disagree, 6= Disagree, and 7= Strongly Disagree. Examples of these community and relationship building scales include: “The media reports of the University of Missouri are in general positive,” “The University of Missouri is visible in the mass media,” “The University of Missouri is a responsible member of the community.”

Within the social media and online media section, participants were asked to briefly visit the university’s website and then answer questions based on their perception of the site. Based on a scale created by Astani and Elhindi (2008) regarding university websites, participants specifically answered questions in a matrix based on information content and usability. Participants chose selections based on a Likert scale of 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat disagree, 6= Disagree, and 7= Strongly Disagree. Examples of questions in this social and online media matrix include: “The range of information is high,” “The information is current,” “The website is entertaining.”

Within the communication techniques section, participants answered a series of questions regarding their satisfaction with how the university communicates with them. Utilizing a scale created by Sung and Yang (2009) regarding student university relationships and reputation, participants chose selections based on a Likert scale of 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat disagree, 6= Disagree, and 7= Strongly Disagree. Examples of these communication techniques scales include: “The University of Missouri and students are attentive to what each other say,” “The University of Missouri believes students’

opinions are legitimate,” “I believe that the University of Missouri takes students’ opinions into account when making decisions.”

Within the brand and image section, participants answered a matrix of questions regarding their view of their university’s brand. Utilizing the University Brand Personality Scale (UBPS) created by Rauschnabel, et al (2015), participants stated how much they believed the university displayed each of the brand personality characteristics. Participants chose selections based on a Likert scale of 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat disagree, 6= Disagree, and 7= Strongly Disagree. Examples of brand personality characteristics include: “Accepted,” “Considerable,” “Productive,” “Athletic,” “Creative.”

Within the commercial benefits section, participants stated their likelihood of giving back to the university once they graduate and receive alumni status. Based on a scale created by McDearmon regarding alumni identity and the relationship to supporting their institution, participants determined if they would be willing to perform various activities (Attend on/off campus events, attend on/off campus athletics, become an association member, make a financial donation). Participants chose selections based on a Likert scale of 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat disagree, 6= Disagree, and 7= Strongly Disagree.

Finally, participants stated their feelings towards their own university’s brand, and how these feelings have changed over the past year. For the first question in this section (My feelings about the University of Missouri brand have changed over the past year), participants chose selections based on a Likert scale of 1= Strongly agree, 2= Agree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat disagree, 6= Disagree, and

7= Strongly Disagree. For the second question in this section (Over the past year, my feelings toward the University of Missouri brand have become...), participants chose selections based on a Likert scale of 1= Extremely positive, 2= Moderately positive, 3= Slightly positive, 4= Neither positive or negative, 5= Slightly negative, 6= Moderately negative, and 7= Extremely negative.

Upon completing the survey, participants entered in their last name and school email for extra credit purposes. This information was not linked to the participant's individual responses and was removed for analysis.

**Statistical Analyses.** Once the survey was closed, which had 139 total participants, statistical analysis was done in order to test the research questions. In addition to looking at basic descriptive statistics and data distribution, the Pearson correlation was utilized. By determining the degree of the relationship between the independent and dependent variable, the researcher was able to determine the influence of strategic communication efforts on student perceptions of satisfaction. This type of correlation was used in research conducted by Morris (2003) regarding university website use and image valence, so using a statistical analysis such as this would provide statistically significant results.

## Chapter 5: RESULTS

**Sample Demographics.** The survey was distributed on May 9, 2016 and was closed on May 13, 2016. Once the data was downloaded from Qualtrics and transferred to SPSS, any response sets that were unfinished were dropped from the data set. Individual scale items were reverse coded so that a lower value indicated a negative response and a higher value indicated a positive response. Then, descriptive statistics were conducted to determine the demographic characteristics among the sample. Of the 133 surveys that were started, 128 were completed. 122 participants (95.3%) were between the ages of 20-22. Five participants (3.9%) were between the ages of 23-24, and the remaining participant (0.8%) stated being 25 years old or older.

Considering that this public relations class is an upper-level course, participants were at sophomore-level standing or above. Ninety-three students who participated were at junior-level standing, which was the majority of the participants (72.7%). The remaining participants were two sophomores (1.6%), 28 seniors (21.9%), and five MA students (3.9%).

The final demographic question asked the field of interest that students were studying within the strategic communication emphasis area. While this is a public relations course, all fields of interest were represented. Sixty-three students were in the public relations field of study, comprising of almost half of the participants (49.2%). Other listed fields of study that were represented included 19 Account Management participants (14.8%), 8 Art Direction participants (6.3%), 12 Copywriting participants (9.4%), 3 Media Planning participants (2.3%), and 9 Sports & Entertainment

Management (7.0%). The remaining 14 participants stated that they did not have a specific field of interest (10.9%).

**RQ1: Perceptions.** In regard to the first research question “How do millennial college students perceive the University’s internal strategic communication aimed at informing them of campus issues and what is their level of satisfaction with those communication efforts?”, the researcher sought to determine the perceptions that students had of internal strategic communication aimed toward them. To this end, participants were asked their perceptions of different facets of university communication and branding: university reputation, community and relationship building, social/online media, and brand/image. Participants were also asked how satisfied they were with the university’s communication efforts overall. These different facets created the sections that the survey questions were grouped into. When looking at the descriptive statistics for each individual facet, mean and standard deviation were the primary measures that were evaluated.

The first section asked participants their perception of the university’s reputation. For the purposes of this study, I labeled this section as *University Reputation*. Out of the four university reputation scales that were provided, students agreed most with the statement that the university had strong prospects for growth (M= 5.25, SD= 1.39). Students were also positive about their feelings towards the university’s consideration for student well-being (M= 5.18, SD= 1.29), that the university was socially responsible (M= 4.57, SD= 1.46), and that the university was well managed (M= 4.38, SD= 1.48).

The second section asked participants their perception of the university’s ability to build relationships and develop a sense of community. For the purposes of this study, I

labeled this section as *Community & Relationship Building*. Participants believed that their university was extremely visible in the mass media ( $M= 6.05$ ,  $SD= 0.84$ ), but they did not believe that the media reports about their university were positive ( $M= 2.83$ ,  $SD= 1.41$ ). Both of these findings may have been influenced by factors beyond the strategic communication efforts of the university and will be discussed in Limitations and Future Research. However, students' views about their university being a responsible member of the community was still positive ( $M= 4.98$ ,  $SD= 1.23$ ).

The third section asked participants their perception of the university's online and social media, by having them review the university's main website and stating their perceptions about its particular attributes. For the purposes of this study, I labeled this section as *Social/Online Media*. Participants perceptions were in general positive (see *Perceptions of Social Media & Online Presence* table in Appendix C). Of all of the possible attributes for the website, participants were the most positive about the accuracy of the website's information ( $M= 5.93$ ,  $SD= 0.82$ ), how current the website's information was ( $M= 5.91$ ,  $SD= 0.84$ ), and the range of information that the website provided ( $M= 5.79$ ,  $SD= 0.93$ ). Participants were not as positive in regards to the website's information being exciting and interesting, but the results were still in general positive ( $M= 4.79$ ,  $SD= 1.33$ ).

The fifth section of the survey asked participants about their overall perception of the university's brand and brand image, by saying how much they agreed with a list of 24 brand attributes. For the purposes of this study, I labeled this section as *Brand/Image*. In general, students believed that all of these attributes applied to their university's brand, with an average mean of 5.3311. Out of the 24 brand attributes, the top five brand

attributes were Athletic (M= 5.88, SD= 1.04), Lively (M= 5.81, SD= 0.9), Networked (M= 5.76, SD= 1.19), Creative (M= 5.69, SD= 1.06), and Helpful (M= 5.55, SD= 0.99), The bottom five attributes were Competent (M= 5.16, SD= 1.54), Reputable (M= 5.10, SD= 1.35), Fair (M= 4.91, SD= 1.44), Trustworthy (M= 4.88, SD= 1.51), and Cosmopolitan (M= 4.55, SD= 1.57).

The final section asked participants about how their feelings towards their university's brand have changed over the past year. For the purposes of this study, I labeled this section as *MU Brand*. Participants somewhat agreed that their feelings towards the university's brand have changed over the past year (M= 5.52, SD= 1.33), and that their feelings towards the university's brand are slightly negative (M= 3.45, SD= 1.30). Again, these findings may be skewed given factors beyond the strategic communication efforts at the university where the students were surveyed.

**Satisfaction.** In addition to gathering more information about the student perceptions of internal strategic communication at their university, I wanted to also gauge the level of satisfaction that those students had with those communication efforts. The fourth section asked participants about their satisfaction through four questions regarding their university's communication efforts overall. For the purposes of this study, I labeled this section as *Communication Techniques*. When looking at the descriptive statistics for this section, mean and standard deviation were the primary measures that were evaluated.

In general, the participants were neutral about their satisfaction towards the communication efforts, with the means of all four questions representing the "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" with their university. Students were more satisfied with the university's emphasis on student opinions (M= 4.46, SD= 1.51) and the way the

university and students are attentive towards what each party (university and students) has to say ( $M= 4.46$ ,  $SD= 1.6$ ), but the level of satisfaction was not considerably more than their satisfaction with how the university listens to what students have to say ( $M= 4.25$ ,  $SD= 1.58$ ) or how the university takes student opinions into account when making decisions ( $M= 4.11$ ,  $SD= 1.62$ ).

**RQ2.** In regard to the second research question “Is there a correlation between student perceptions and satisfaction with internal strategic communication efforts and intentions to support the University after graduation?”, the researcher sought to determine the correlation between student perceptions and satisfaction with internal strategic communication efforts and intentions to support the university after graduation. To this end, students were asked how likely they would be to donate or participate in activities at their alma mater. For the analysis, a Pearson-correlation will be used. In order to run this correlation, two indices were created: one for the sections of questions regarding student perceptions and satisfaction, and one for questions regarding intentions to support the university post-graduation.

First, I looked at the descriptive statistics for the section regarding support for the university post-graduation. This section asked students how likely they would be to participate in certain events as an alumnus, based on their experiences at the university as a student. For the purposes of this study, I labeled this section as *Commercial Benefits*. In general, students were neutral about supporting the university post-graduation. Participants said they somewhat agreed that they would attend on-campus athletic events ( $M= 5.41$ ,  $SD= 1.72$ ). Participants said they neither agreed nor disagreed that they would

attend on-campus events (M= 4.95, SD= 1.6), attend off-campus events (M= 4.77, SD= 1.63), join the alumni association (M= 4.58, SD= 1.65), and attend off-campus athletics (M= 4.41, SD= 1.91). Participants said they slightly disagreed that they would be likely to make a financial contribution to the university (M= 3.72, SD= 1.65).

Next, I created indices for the two sections I would use for the Pearson-correlation by summing the values of each section. The first index was a summation of the results from six of the seven previously mentioned sections: University Reputation, Community & Relationship Building, Social/Online Media, Communication Techniques, Brand/Image, and MU Brand. This index would represent participants' perceptions and satisfaction with their university's internal strategic communication. The second index was a summation of the results from the seventh section: Commercial Benefits. This index would represent the participants' intentions to support the university after graduation.

Once these indices were created, a Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between student satisfaction with internal strategic communication efforts and intentions to support the university after graduation. There was a moderate, positive relationship between these two indices ( $r = .45$ ,  $N = 121$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

After seeing the results from this Pearson correlation, I wanted to see which of the six sections included in perceptions and satisfaction had most positive correlation with the Commercial Benefits section. To do this, I ran a Pearson-correlation with each of the six components of university communication, individually, to see which had the most positive correlation.

Each of the six sections has positive correlations with participants' intentions to support the university after graduation, but there were stronger correlations with some summations than others. The strongest positive correlation was with the Brand/Image section ( $r=.418$ ,  $N= 124$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by Satisfaction ( $r= .365$ ,  $N= 127$ ,  $p < .001$ ), University Reputation ( $r= .354$ ,  $N= 128$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Social/Online Media ( $r= .329$ ,  $N= 128$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Community & Relationship Building ( $r= .273$ ,  $N= 128$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The weakest of the correlations, while still positive, was MU Brand ( $r= .112$ ,  $N= 126$ ,  $p < .21$ ), meaning this correlation was not statistically significant.

## Chapter 6: DISCUSSION

**Theoretical Implications.** This study surveyed undergraduate students at a major Midwestern university, specifically the University of Missouri, to determine their perceptions and satisfaction with the university's internal strategic communication efforts, and how much those efforts affected their intentions to support the university after graduation. Instead of utilizing a specific theory of communication as a guide, this research was conducted through the lens of the umbrella of strategic communication. While this research was conducted primarily through a public relations standpoint, understanding the many facets of the umbrella of strategic communication can be beneficial for university public relations practitioners.

Through the umbrella of strategic communication, seven concepts were created to highlight the crucial components of university internal communication. Each of these concepts inspired the seven sections of the survey in which participants provided insights. For the most part, these concepts revolved around participants' perceptions and satisfaction with the university's internal strategic communication efforts, namely their branding strategies.

While examining previous studies on university branding and internal communication, the researcher found that little research has been conducted in this area. While some research has been conducted regarding university branding, student satisfaction, and online image, this study is one of the first to consider effect of multiple strategic communication techniques that impact students' perceptions. Most studies, as demonstrated in the literature review, focus on one or multiple universities in order to understand how one technique can impact the university's communication efforts.

*University Reputation* was the first category used to determine student perceptions of the University of Missouri's communication tactics. Four reputation scales developed in a study by Sung and Yang (2009) were utilized. While these scales were only a portion of the research that Sung and Yang conducted, their research demonstrated that external prestige was one of the largest determinant of how supportive students were of their university. When considering the results from the *University Reputation* section and the following section, *Community & Relationship Building*, this study contradicts prior research. According to the study conducted by Alessandri (2007), quality of external performance is one of the three highest dimensions that contribute to university image. In this research study, participants, for the most part, agreed with statements discussing the university having a positive reputation. Students also agreed that their university was extremely visible in the mass media, but that they disagreed that the media reports were positive. Even then, students still agreed that their university was a positive member of the community. These results show that while students are aware of the negative reputation that their institution had last year, which will be discussed later in the Limitations section, their perception of their university's reputation is still relatively positive.

*Social/Online Media* was the next category that was used to determine student perceptions of the University of Missouri's communication tactics. While there are many social media and online outlets that a university utilizes to share messages, the researcher chose to look solely at the university's main website, due to ambiguity in university social media messengers and an infinite number of online communication tools. By utilizing research done by Astani and Elhindi (2008), the researcher took components

from a table they created analyzing design characteristics of university websites. While Astani and Elhindi's study asked participants to answer 28 questions regarding the websites of the top 50 universities in the U.S., this research mainly looked at information content and usability of the University of Missouri's primary website. From Astani and Elhindi's study, their research showed that content is one of the most important components of a university's website, and that compelling content will attract more viewers.

*Brand/Image* was the next category that was used to determine students' perceptions of the University of Missouri's communication towards students. By utilizing the University Brand Personality Scale (UBPS) created by Rauschnabel, et al. (2015), participants determined which of the 24 characteristics were portrayed by the University of Missouri. Research conducted by Rauschnabel, et al., revolved around the construction of UBPS and determining the adjectives used to typically describe a university, but this research shows how a university could utilize the UBPS for their own strategic communication efforts, as further discussed in the practical implications.

*Communication Techniques* was the section that determined students' satisfaction with the University of Missouri's strategic communication efforts. By utilizing components of a scale created by Sung and Yang (2009) titled "Student-university relational outcomes", students were able to state how satisfied they were with how the university was communicating with them. Sung and Yang's original scale comprised of four sections: control mutuality, commitment, relational satisfaction, and relational trust. For the purposes of this research, scale items were taken from the control mutuality and relational satisfaction sections. While Sung and Yang's research was done at a private

university is Seoul, this research, once again, shows that this kind of research can and should be done at American institutions of higher education. Both studies show that communication should increase with students, but it is also important to understand which communication tactics are the most vital.

Next, the researcher was able to see the relationship between student perceptions and satisfaction compared to their intentions to support the university after graduation by utilizing a Pearson-correlation. Unlike prior research regarding alumni support conducted by McDearmon (2012), this study surveyed current students, not current alumni. The results showed a moderate, positive relationship, meaning that students' perceptions and satisfaction with the university could have an effect on student's plans to keep a vested interest in the University of Missouri.

**Practical Implications.** One of the most important practical takeaways from this research, in my opinion, are the characteristics that current students believed described the university's brand, through the University Brand Personality Scale (UBPS) created by Rauschnabel, et al (2015). According to this research, the University of Missouri's brand is thought to be Athletic, Lively, Networked, Creative, and Helpful. By understanding things that students reflect positively on regarding their university experience and their university's brand, The University of Missouri can make university branding messages seem more authentic, and like Rauschnabel, can capitalize on this information from students as their own "built-in" branding.

Another section that would be especially valuable to the University of Missouri would be the section titled *MU Brand*. This section asked participants, who had already

stated their perceptions and satisfaction with the University of Missouri's brand, if their opinions of the university's brand had changed, and if that opinion was positive or negative. While considering the rest of the results, participants were, for the most part, neutral or slightly positive, while this section had participants feeling slightly negative about the university's brand. Therefore, the Pearson correlation for the last question of the survey was not statistically significant when considering the rest of the results. This could elude to the circumstances under which the survey was conducted, which will be discussed further in the Limitations and Future Research section.

Not only can research of this nature inform the University of Missouri how current students feel about their university's brand, but it can lead to substantial financial benefits. There was a moderate, positive relationship between student satisfaction and their intentions to support. While this is not a causal relationship and does not eliminate other factors, this does provide some evidence regarding how important student satisfaction can be to an institution financially. If students have a positive experience during their university career, chances are that they will be more likely to contribute to the university and participate in university events as an alumnus. Financial donations and positive words about the university from alumni can lead to potential success in the future, which would allow the university to expand and evolve to better cater future generations of students.

**Limitations & Future Research.** Limitations of this research include with the sample, specifically because the survey respondents will be taken from a convenience sample of the strategic communication emphasis area at this university's journalism school. During

the fall of 2015, the University of Missouri faced a period of campus unrest and racial allegations towards the university's administration (Blatchford, T., & Weinberg, T., 2015). Because of the time during which this research was conducted, students might have a heightened awareness of the brand that the university is portraying, as opposed to other universities' students who might not be as aware of branding strategies. Students will also have a heightened awareness of the communication being administered to them because they are themselves, discussing how to effectively disseminate messages to certain audiences in their courses.

In terms of quantitative research, a similar survey could be conducted with other departments and areas of study on campus, which would allow for a more representative sample of the entire student body. Questions could also cover more areas within strategic communication and could go into more detailed questions within the seven sections included in this study. This would provide more research into possible external factors for how students feel about their university's brand. Research could also be done across different universities (public vs. private, large vs. small, type of institution) to see how branding can affect different types of institutions.

Future qualitative research in this area could include interviews with university communicators, and the possible gap between the branding strategies they are using and the messages that students are actually seeing or receiving. Research could also include focus groups or interviews with university constituents, internal and external, to see how branding strategies can be improved across the university with individuals who have a stake in the university's well-being and overall success.

Future research could also be extended to external communication regarding the university. While media portrayal was discussed in the literature review as a factor in how student's perceive a university's brand, the purpose of this study was to examine internal communication efforts. Questions about how the media affects students' perceptions could provide even more information about how to create a positive university brand.

**Conclusion.** Strategic communication efforts on university campuses are becoming increasingly important, and universities across the country are recognizing the impact that these efforts can have on the success and reputation of their institution. While university branding is evolving and putting more of an emphasis among university communicators, it is essential that universities focus on the constituents closest to home: its students. By understanding how students perceive the university's internal communication strategies and branding efforts, institutions can better understand the experiences and concerns of its students. Students are conscious of the communication that their administration is delivering to them, and it can impact their university experience.

As was illustrated in the research done for this thesis, it is important for universities to understand how to successfully implement multiple methods and consider different facets of the strategic communication process. Evaluating these techniques can inform the university if the desired message is being perceived by their constituents, specifically in this research, the internal constituent group that is current students. If universities can successfully maintain and capitalize on their communication strategies, these institutions can prosper and, ultimately, better serve future generations of students.

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## APPENDIX A

### Research Participant Consent Form for university internal communications survey

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri- Columbia. I hope to better understand student perception of the impact of strategic communication on satisfaction, and how satisfaction with these efforts correlates with future intentions of alumni donations. You must be a current student to participate. If you decided to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey, which will take approximately 10-15 minutes. You may decline to answer any question, or you may withdraw your participation at any time by ceasing to respond to questions or closing your browser window.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Meredith Mann ([msmpq4@mail.missouri.edu](mailto:msmpq4@mail.missouri.edu)), the Primary Investigator for this project. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied with any aspect of this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board, 483 McReynolds, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, (573) 882-9585 or by email at [irb@missouri.edu](mailto:irb@missouri.edu).

**Benefits and Risks of being in the Study:** The risk in participating in this study is no greater than what would be expected in a daily conversation about similar topics and there should be no potential risk in participating. Your participation will help us understand about the lives of those who are between 18-24 years of age.

**Privacy and Confidentiality:** The data for this project will be collected anonymously. Identifying information will be omitted from the data set, all identities will remain confidential, and individual responses will only be analyzed as a whole.

I have **read and understand** this form, and consent to the research it describes to me.

**If you consent to participate, please click “continue” below.**

**APPENDIX B****Final Survey Questionnaire**

Q16 What is your age?

- Under 18 (1)
- 18 (2)
- 19 (3)
- 20 (4)
- 21 (5)
- 22 (6)
- 23 (7)
- 24 (8)
- 25 or older (9)

Q1 What is your year in school?

- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)
- Graduate student (Master's or PhD) (5)

Q19 Within strategic communication, what is your field of interest?

- Account Management (1)
- Art Direction (2)
- Copywriting (3)
- Media Planning (4)
- Public Relations (5)
- Research (6)
- Sports and Entertainment Management (7)
- Video Storytelling (8)
- I do not have a specific field of interest. (9)

Q11 The University of Missouri puts student care as the top priority.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q12 The University of Missouri looks like a university with strong prospects for future growth.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q13 The University of Missouri is well-managed.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q14 The University of Missouri is socially responsible.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q6 The media reports of the University of Missouri are in general positive.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q7 The University of Missouri is visible in the mass media.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q8 The University of Missouri is a responsible member of the community.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)



Q16 The University of Missouri and students are attentive to what each other say.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q17 The University of Missouri believes students' opinions are legitimate.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q18 I believe that the University of Missouri takes students' opinions into account when making decisions.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q19 The University of Missouri really listens to what students have to say.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)





Q26 My feelings about the University of Missouri brand have changed over the past year.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q27 Over the past year, my feelings toward the University of Missouri brand have become:

- Extremely positive (1)
- Moderately positive (2)
- Slightly positive (3)
- Neither positive nor negative (4)
- Slightly negative (5)
- Moderately negative (6)
- Extremely negative (7)

Q24 Thank you for participating in this survey. In order to earn extra credit for Professor Stemmler's Public Relations course, please enter in your last name and MU Pawprint. (Information will not be linked to your survey results.)

Last Name (1)

MU Pawprint (2)

Table 1

*Perceptions towards University Reputation*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The University of Missouri puts student well-being as the top priority.	128	1.00	7.00	5.1875	1.29049
The University of Missouri looks like a university with strong prospects for future growth.	128	1.00	7.00	5.2500	1.38610
The University of Missouri is well-managed.	128	1.00	7.00	4.3828	1.48016
The University of Missouri is socially responsible.	128	1.00	7.00	4.5703	1.45637

Table 2

*Perceptions of Community & Relationship Building*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The media reports of the University of Missouri are in general positive.	128	1.00	7.00	2.8350	1.40739
The University of Missouri is visible in the mass media.	128	2.00	7.00	6.0547	0.84470
The University of Missouri is a responsible member of the community.	128	1.00	7.00	4.9766	1.23253

Table 3  
*Perceptions of Social Media & Online Presence*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The range of information is high.	128	2.00	7.00	5.7891	0.92772
The information is current.	128	2.00	7.00	5.9141	0.84208
The information is accurate.	128	2.00	7.00	5.9375	0.82050
The information is useful.	128	2.00	7.00	5.7578	0.93696
The website is entertaining.	128	2.00	7.00	4.8672	1.20609
The website is exciting and interesting.	128	1.00	7.00	4.7891	1.32601
The website is easy to use.	128	2.00	7.00	5.7188	0.99556
The website has an attractive layout.	128	1.00	7.00	5.5391	1.00316

*Note.* Participants were asked to browse the University of Missouri's website for a few minutes, and then

Table 4  
*Satisfaction with Communication Techniques*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I am satisfied with the way the University of Missouri and students are attentive to what each other say.	128	1.00	7.00	4.4609	1.59676
I am satisfied with the emphasis that the University of Missouri puts on students' opinions.	127	1.00	7.00	4.4646	1.50552
I am satisfied with the way that the University of Missouri takes students' opinions into account when making decisions.	128	1.00	7.00	4.1094	1.61798
I am satisfied with the way that the University of Missouri listens to what students have to say.	128	1.00	7.00	4.2500	1.58238

Table 5  
*Perceptions towards Brand and Image Development*

Variable	n	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Accepted	128	1.00	7.00	5.2031	1.34784
Leading	127	1.00	7.00	5.1811	1.38826
Reputable	128	1.00	7.00	5.1016	1.35065
Successful	127	1.00	7.00	5.4173	1.12293
Considerable	127	1.00	7.00	5.2992	1.17050
Humane	128	1.00	7.00	5.3047	1.34316
Helpful	128	2.00	7.00	5.5469	0.98700
Friendly	128	2.00	7.00	5.5078	1.19708
Trustworthy	128	1.00	7.00	4.8750	1.51111
Fair	128	1.00	7.00	4.9063	1.44417
Productive	128	1.00	7.00	5.3750	1.14328
Special	128	1.00	7.00	5.3750	1.25491
Attractive	128	1.00	7.00	5.4219	1.26497
Athletic	128	2.00	7.00	5.8750	1.04241
Dynamic	128	2.00	7.00	5.4141	1.21362
Lively	128	2.00	7.00	5.8125	0.90275
Creative	128	2.00	7.00	5.6875	1.06298
Organized	128	1.00	7.00	5.3359	1.23771
Competent	128	1.00	7.00	5.1563	1.53919
Structured	128	1.00	7.00	5.4219	1.34346

Effective	128	1.00	7.00	5.1953	1.40336
International	127	1.00	7.00	5.2283	1.57958
Cosmopolitan	128	1.00	7.00	4.5469	1.57170
Networked	128	1.00	7.00	5.7578	1.18883

*Note.* Participants were asked to evaluate the University of Missouri's brand based on the variables listed above.

Table 6

<i>Commercial Benefits</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Attend on-campus events	128	1.00	7.00	4.9453	1.60368
Attend off-campus events	128	1.00	7.00	4.7656	1.62889
Attend on-campus athletics	128	1.00	7.00	5.4141	1.72306
Attend off-campus athletics	128	1.00	7.00	4.4063	1.90911
Become an alumni association member	128	1.00	7.00	4.5781	1.64871
Make a financial donation	128	1.00	7.00	3.7188	1.64550

*Note.* Participants were asked based on their experience as a University of Missouri student the likelihood of participating in the above events as an alumnus, based on their experience as a University of Missouri student.

Table 7

*Perceptions towards MU Brand*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My feelings about the University of Missouri brand have changed over the past year.	126	1.00	7.00	5.5159	1.33107
Over the past year, my feelings toward the University of Missouri brand have become...	128	1.00	7.00	3.4531	1.30329

*Note.* For the second variable, participants answered from Extremely Negative [1] to Extremely Positive [7].