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Adoption of Social Media Marketing Among Professionals

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A Study of the Adoption of Social Media Marketing Among Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Social media marketing is the professional use of social media websites such as Facebook
for marketing purposes. This thesis project examines the adoption patterns and factors
behind the decision to use social media marketing among professionals. The researcher
conducted in-depth interviews with business professionals from the real estate rental
industry in Statesboro, Georgia, and analyzed the results and implications using thematic
analysis. Everett Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory provides the theoretical
framework for the research with social media marketing being the innovation. The
participants identified that observability, relative advantage and complexity/simplicity
were major factors for adopting social media marketing. The findings also indicated that
college educated Millennials who have previously created personal social media profiles
are likely to adopt social media marketing for their organizations. Finally, results showed
that social media marketing has penetrated smaller markets such as Statesboro, and even
non-adopters recognize it as a productive marketing tool.

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Introduction

Technology is changing the channels and methods people use to communicate with one another, especially since the introduction of the Internet to the public in 1992 (Ganna, 2004). This is not only happening between person to person, but also, between business to consumer. It is important to understand communication evolution because we communicate everyday, nonverbally, verbally, online, etc. Communication professionals such as marketers, advertisement creators and public relations practitioners are particularly concerned with the changing foundation for communication because it affects their relationship with their client's and audience's. A growing trend that is driving business and consumer engagement levels is the adoption of social media for business practices (Tuten & Angermeier, 2013).

Many organizations around the world have recognized social media as a viable marketing tactic to reach key audiences. Businesses such as Target, Whole Foods and Dell use social media to research a target audience, provide customer service, advertise for events, engage with key publics and more (Tuten & Angermeier, 2013). On the other hand, many organizations have decided not to use social media as a marketing tactic for reasons of privacy, security and information control (Tuten & Angermeier, 2013). Professionals choose to either adopt or not adopt social media as a marketing tactic for their business for various reasons. Current research is limited on the possible patterns or characteristics that may exist between those professionals who decide to implement social media for marketing and those who do not. This work strives to identify those possible patterns and/or characteristics between adopters and non-adopters.

The term "social media marketing" is used to define the trend of using social media to communicate promotional and brand building activities to targeted audiences through social media websites. Peter Shankman, author of *Customer Service: New Rules for A Social Media World*, said that the term, social media marketing, is now redundant. Shankman said referring to something as social media marketing is as unnecessary as calling something television marketing or radio marketing. In other words, Shankman feels that social media is already so integrated into society that it is synonymous with traditional marketing outlets, and it does not need to be differentiated as a separate type of marketing (Shankman, Personal Communication, November 7, 2013). However, for the purposes of this paper, the researcher will refer to the trend of using social media as a business tool as social media marketing to emphasize the difference between using social media versus using traditional outlets. Traditional marketing tactics include, but are not limited to, television ads, radio ads, print ads, billboards, etc.

Professionals' choice to adopt social media marketing could be dependent on several factors. One possible reason for adopting social media marketing is to reach a target audience that is highly active online. In the *Innovation Journal,* Mustaffa (2011) says, "In essence, the changing global media landscape is shaping the socialization processes, values, and beliefs of young people, and influencing young people's decisions, in areas such as educational choice, employment and leisure." Millennials, those born after 1980, are making decisions and choices based off Facebook, which is a generational trait. Millennials grew up with the introduction of the Internet, causing a significant difference in information-gathering habits. According to a study conducted by the *Pew Research Center* (2010), 72% of young adults use social networking sites. This suggests

that social media provides organizations marketing to young adults with a cost-effective way to reach 72% of their target audience. On the other hand, the same study found that only 40% of adults 30 years and older have adopted social media. Organizations often choose media outlets for promotional materials based on the age, generation and media use habits of its target audience.

Everett Rogers' (1983) diffusion of innovations theory is a helpful tool to understand the use of social media marketing because it examines the adoption of innovations by society. Rogers says that diffusion is a social change caused by an innovation. In this case, social media marketing is the innovation and this project will observe how it is being diffused into society, specifically, smaller markets with a population of 50,000 or less.

Rogers defines five adopter categories: innovators, early adopters (or acceptors), early majority, late majority and laggards. Each category has unique characteristics that are defined as ideal types. Ideal types are conceptualizations of adopter characteristics based off observations in order to make comparisons possible (Rogers, 1995, p. 263). Exceptions to the ideal type do exist. For example, innovators tend to be venturesome, early adopters tend to have respect from the community, the early majority tends to deliberately adopt new ideas before the average person, the late majority tends to be skeptical and the laggards tend to be traditional (Rogers, 1995, p. 263-266). Socioeconomic factors such as age, education and income are also common patterns between each adopter category. For example, earlier adopters tend to have more years of formal education, higher social status, and a greater degree of upwards mobility. Rogers

explains, "The innovators become richer and the laggards become relatively poorer through this process" (Rogers, 1995, p. 269).

For this research project, the researcher will conduct in-depth, qualitative interviews with professionals from the real estate industry in Statesboro, Georgia, who are targeting Millennials. Statesboro has a population of 29,997 (99% urban, 1% rural) with an estimated average income of $18,592 (Onboard Informatics, 2013). Statesboro is a unique market because it is home to more than 20,000 college students who attend Georgia Southern University. The real estate industry is one of the most competitive markets in Statesboro, which provides the researcher with a good sample of marketing professionals targeting Millennials. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher analyzed the responses in order to answer the three research questions: what, if any, factors affect a marketing professional/ manager's choice to adopt social media marketing; what, if any, patterns exist in each adopter category; and, what, if any, changes in marketing practices have come from social media? The researcher used a thematic analysis approach to identify themes that answer the research questions. This research will be particularly useful for professionals in similar industries trying to implement social media tactics, public relations and marketing practitioners who have clients in similar industries and communication scholars.

The following sections provide the outline for the rest of the thesis: Literature Review, Methodology, Results, and Discussion and Conclusion. The literature review section summarizes a variety of research describing generational statistics, Facebook, Twitter, social media marketing, integrated marketing communications, social media market penetration, and the diffusion of innovations theory. Next, the methodology

section explains the method used to conduct the qualitative interviews and thematic

analysis. Then, the results section addresses the findings from the data analysis. Finally,

the discussion and conclusion section explains what the findings mean in relation to the

theoretical framework introduced in the literature review.

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize several studies and applicable

research to provide the reader with a well-rounded understanding of generational media

habits, social media origins, the benefits and drawbacks of social media marketing, and

the context of social media marketing within the theoretical framework of Everett

Roger's diffusion of innovations theory.

The Pew Research Center (2010) classifies five generations: Millennials (ages 18-

33), Gen X (ages 34-45), Baby Boomers (Ages 46-64), Silent Generation (65-73), and

G.I. Generation (ages 74 and older). Each generation has unique news consuming habits.

Millennials remain the largest group of adopters of social media. Every generation has

generalized characteristics and qualities based off research from organizations like the

Pew Research Center. According to the Pew Research Center (2010), Millennials are

confident, self-expressive, upbeat, connected and open to change. The same report found

that 75% of Millennials have created social media accounts and 62% use wireless

Internet away from home. These numbers have grown by 68% from 2005 when only 7%

of Millennials used social media. In 2006, 51% of Millennials used social media, and in

2008, 71% used social media (see figure 1 in appendices). The report also said that

Millennials who have attended college are more likely to be online, create social media

profiles, post videos, connect to wireless Internet, and text than those who did not attend

college. Millennials also generally have positive outlooks on modern technology and believe that it makes life easier rather than complicated. Another important finding is that Millennials check their social media profiles more often than other generations who have created accounts.

　　While the Millennials are currently the largest users of the Internet and social media, it is important to realize that older generations are experiencing fast adoption rates with the fastest growth rate coming from the G.I. generation (ages 74 and older) from four to 16 percent since 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2010). Forty five percent of Internet users ages 65 and older now use Facebook, which is up 10% from 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2013). Across the generations, there is an explosion of social media and mobile devices. In 2005, only 5% of the public used social media websites. Those numbers grew to 11% in 2006 and 27% in 2007. In 2010, 41% have created some form of a social networking profile whether it be on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. According to State of the News Media (2014) half of Facebook users are getting their news from Facebook without looking for it. Most of these users are between the ages of 18 and 29 (millennials). Despite wider acceptance of the Internet across generations, some professionals still express doubt as to whether or not social media is a viable marketing tactic and business function no matter the generation of their target audience (Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

　　A significant influence in the adoption of social media marketing is the age of the professional making the adoption decision. According to Gerlich et al. (2012), research is unclear which demographic information affects the adoption rate of social media. The only research that seems to be clear is that younger people are more likely to adopt social

media than older people (Gerlich et al. 2012). Baby Boomers and Generation X

individuals generally do not use or rely on Facebook as much as Millenials and therefore,

may have trouble relating to Millenials' extensive reliance on social media (Thompson &

Gregory, 2012). According to the Pew Research Center (2010), Millenials will form more

than half of America's workforce in the next decade, which implies that social media will

become a widely accepted business tool and tactic in the future. In an article from the

Psychologist-Manager Journal, Thompson and Gregory (2012) said, "…older

generations may view logging into Facebook as "messing around," and not consider that

the employee may be looking up a colleague's cell phone number or posting an update

that is relevant to their work." Instances like this show the generational gap between

those who grew up with the Internet and those who did not. In the workplace, where

several generations come together, it is essential for everyone to understand and respect

the organization's policy on social media (Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

Other than age, gender is a significant demographic in analyzing the adoption of

social media marketing. The Pew Research Center (2010) found that females are more

likely to use Facebook than males. In 2013, 76% of women used Facebook while only

66% of men use Facebook. Young women are also checking their profiles more often

than young men. Approximately 33% of young women check their social networking

sites several times a day compared to 24% of young men. These statistics are key to

understanding the U.S. demographics of people who are currently using social media.

In the social media world, two driving platforms are statistically the most popular,

Facebook and Twitter. Released in 2004, Facebook is considered to be the most highly

trafficked website on the Internet with over 901 million users worldwide (Facebook

Newsroom, Statistics). According to Facebook (2012), users spend more than 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook scanning and taking in all kinds of information. Facebook allows its users to create a profile with pictures and status updates, connect with millions of people around the world through friend requests and wall posts, and monitor friends and family's activity through the news feed. Slightly different than Facebook, Twitter is a micro-blogging website that lets users tweet in 140 characters or less, brief messages, which would appear on followers' twitter feed. Followers can retweet, favorite or reply to tweets. Samantha Collier (2012) from PR Daily said Twitter has more than 100 million active users, 40% of those users don't create tweets, but rather read others tweets, click on links and gather news. Collier's research showed that on average, 750 tweets are retweeted per second. Both Facebook and Twitter are rapidly growing media of communication for personal and professional uses. The Pew Research Center (2013) found 42% of online adults use multiple social media sites. Other popular sites include Pinterest, a site dedicated to virtual scrapbooking, Vine, a micro-video sharing website, LinkedIn, a job-searching, professional networking website, and Instagram, an application centered on photography that is highly compatible with both Facebook and Twitter. However, despite the introduction of other sites such as Pinterest and Instagram, Facebook continues to be the platform of choice. For this reason, the researcher chose to study the adoption process of specifically Facebook and Twitter as the social media marketing channels.

Current research suggests social media marketing is both beneficial and potentially harmful to marketing efforts, with most of the research emphasizing the benefits (Agnihotri, et. al., 2012; Tuten & Angermeier, 2013; Corstjens, 2012).

Communication professionals who are involved with promoting goods, services, ideas or

messages are adopting social media as a marketing tactic because it has shown to be

innovative and useful**.** Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap and Singh (2012) said that

social media has the ability to affect all parts of the sales process no matter the

organization's products or services. The authors also said that social media as a

marketing tactic allows for a wider and more connected network for the salespeople

(Agnihotri et al., 2012). Many businesses in progressive markets have adopted social

media marketing as the newest form of mass communication; therefore, many are

recognizing it as a viable, low cost public relations and marketing tactic. Another study

from the *Journal of Marketing* (2012) focuses on the impact that social media has on an

organization's success. Naylor, Lamberton, and West (2012) said that by 2011,

approximately 83% of Fortune 500 companies were using some form of social media to

connect with their target market. Furthermore, the study suggests that consumers are

progressively relying more on social media to research brands. This implies that social

media websites are becoming a vital part in business and branding and should be

implemented in order to better reach consumers. It also suggests that social media is not

only useful in promotional and sales aspects, but in building mutually beneficial

relationships with the target audience, which is why it is a popular public relations tactic

as well. According to the *Journal of Advertising Research* (2012), the early adopters who

have implemented social media marketing are "well placed for new opportunities"

(Corstjens, 2012).

One study that focuses on the potential negative implications of social media is

"Before and Beyond the Social Moment of Engagement: Perspectives on the Negative

Utilities of Social Media Marketing." In the study, Tracy Tuten and William Angermeier (2013) assert that businesses are using social media to reach their customers for a variety of business functions such as customer service, promotion, product development, lead generation and research. According to their research, social media can be mutually beneficial for the customer and the organization. The consumer gets social enhancement, interpersonal interconnectivity, self-discovery and entertainment. The organization gets access to target markets, engagement opportunities, media cost reduction and the chance to facilitate word of mouth communication. On the other hand, their research says that lack of privacy, customer information security and loss of information control are major concerns for businesses.

Tuten and Angermeier's (2013) research serves to remind professionals of the negative consequences that may come with implementing social media marketing. Some noteworthy negative concerns of social media marketing for brand building include security breaches, loss of control over content, viral spread of negative press or word of mouth, and new forms of legal liability. The researchers suggest that businesses that use social media marketing should be careful not to expose financial information, employee data or corporate secrets, all of which are security breaches for the organization. There is also a risk that a negative comment from a customer goes viral, potentially damaging the organization's brand. If multiple customers publically share complaints about the brand, this puts the organization in a vulnerable position because the organization will be expected to respond since social media is open for two-way communication. Organizations that use social media marketing must also be aware of how their employees represent the company online. The study says, "Employees can hurt the public

image [of the brand] based on their participation in social media just as they can in the offline world" (Tuten & Angermeier, 2013). Finally, there is a potential for legal liabilities such as a privacy tort, misuse of online data in the hiring process, sexual harassment violations, discrimination accusations, etc. Because the organization's social media accounts are extensions of the brand, the organization is liable for the content. The United States legal system is still catching up to define social media law, and in the meantime, organizations should be aware of the possible risks involved with opening social media accounts. Ultimately, Tuten and Angermeier's say that the positive utilities of social media marketing outweigh the negative utilities, so businesses will continue to adopt social media marketing as long as the positives continue to outweigh the negatives (Tuten & Angermeier, 2013).

Corstjens found in his study, "The Power of Evil: The Damage of Social Media Strongly Outweigh Positive Contributions," that the consumers have a significant impact on brand building and reputation through social media sites (Corstjens, 2012). For example, if a customer has a poor experience at a hotel, the customer can tweet about his or her experience, and negatively contribute to the hotel brand's reputation. The article compares micro-social media activity/events with brand performance in the market. It also establishes social media marketing as a crucial tool to be successful in business:

> Based on a survey of more than 3,000 senior executives across industries, geographies, and functions, a recent McKinsey report indicated that companies qualified as "networked"… outperformed other companies in terms of market share, profitability, and market leadership (Corstjens, 2012).

The article investigates how companies can set up technology capabilities and analytics to monitor and manage social media conversations concerning branding. Ultimately, the results found that negative conversations on social media outweigh positive conversations meaning that when consumers criticize the brand, it is much more detrimental as opposed to when they praise the brand is constructive (Corstjens, 2012). This is a popular reason why professionals are hesitant to implement social media for their organization. It opens up public, two-way communication between the organization and its consumers in a way that has never existed before.

It may be argued that this new two-way communication on social media is ultimately what sets social media marketing apart from traditional marketing tactics. However, some believe that social media marketing is no different than traditional marketing, and should be considered an accepted marketing tactic by professionals now (P. Shankman, Personal Communication, November 7, 2013). When asked about the future of social media marketing, Peter Shankman, founder of Help A Reporter Out (HARO), said that social media marketing is just marketing like every other type of marketing (television ads, radio ads, print ads, etc.). Shankman asserts that social media marketing will supplement traditional marketing, but in the end it is all the same. He said that people need to stop looking at it as different types of marketing; thus, social media jobs are essentially marketing jobs that require good writing skills (P. Shankman, Personal Communication, November 7, 2013). Shankman also resides in New York City where social media marketing has penetrated the market much more than smaller markets such as Statesboro, Georgia.

Another growing trend in the communication world is the idea of integrated marketing communications. Kenneth Clow and Donald Baack (2014) define integrated marketing communications (IMC) as the "coordination and integration of all marketing communication tools, avenues, and sources in a company into a seamless program designed to maximize the impact on customers and other stakeholders." They assert that an effective campaign utilizes all marketing activities into one package for the client to efficiently reach its target audience (Clow and Baack, 2014, p. 6). This can include bundling marketing, advertising and public relations services into one, complete service. Clow and Baack (2014) discuss how the Internet has changed marketers' strategies for traditional tactics such as contests and sweepstakes. Contests and sweepstakes are now taking place on social media. Organizations like Microsoft, Sephora, NASCAR, Comcast Chick-fil-A, and McDonald's have all used Twitter and Facebook to reach audiences to create a viral buzz about the brand (Clow and Baack, 2014, p. 333). Jennette Schlinke and Stephanie Crain (2013) claim that social media is a core tool integrated marketing communications used to reach the target audience. They say that four key considerations should be taken into account when devising a social media strategy: goals, strategy, tools and implementation, and risks. First, it is important for the organization to consider the goal that it is attempting to accomplish with social media. Next, the organization must strategize consistent content and brand development for its social media presence. Then, it the organization should look for available tools and resources. For example, Facebook (2014) offers the Facebook for Business page with over 4.5 million likes, which informs users with the latest news, tips and practices on using social media for business. Finally, the organization should evaluate potential risks of using social media such as cost and

loss of message control. Crain and Schlinke (2013) conclude their article with the assertion that professionals should treat social media like any other business initiative by employing careful planning and strategizing when integrating it with other forms of marketing communications.

The diffusion of innovation theory is a near-ideal theoretical framework for this study because it examines the adoption and penetration of a technological innovation by a society. Everett M. Rogers (1983) developed the diffusion of innovation theory in the 1960s. Rogers says that:

> "Diffusion is a kind of social change, defined as the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system. When new ideas [the innovation] are invented, diffused, and adopted or rejected it leads to certain consequences, ultimately social change occurs" (1983, p. 6).

In this case, the innovation is social media marketing and this thesis project examines the factors that affect adoption of social media marketing and looks at some of the consequential social change (diffusion). According Rogers (2003), an innovation is defined as a change in the technology or media used or a change in how people engage in a traditional process. One key point to realize is that diffusion (or social change) is "a particular type of communication in which the information that is exchanged is concerned with new ideas…by which one individual communicates an idea to one or several others" (Rogers, 1983, p. 17). With that in mind, this thesis project will look to see what overall changes are underway because of social media marketing as a technological innovation. The theory observes how new technologies and ideas are diffused to the public and it

defines an adoption process that takes place over time. The process includes: innovators, early acceptors (or adopters), early majority, late majority, and laggards. Each group adopts the product, service, or idea at different times and as the adoption curve grows, the profit/sales curve grows, until it stabilizes or declines after the laggards finally adopt the innovation (Rogers, 2003). *Figure 2* in Appendix D illustrates the adoption curve of an innovation over time. The bell curve illustrates the innovators and early adopters first, who adopt quickly. Next, come the early majority and late majority who adopt when the average society member does so. Finally, the laggards are last to adopt the innovation (Rogers, 2003). Rogers also says that each category of adopters tend to have discernible characteristics or ideal types (Rogers, 1995, p. 263). Innovators are usually young, venturesome, social, risk takers, from high social classes, and with plenty of resources. Early adopters are normally young, college educated, and socially forward. They tend to be respected opinion leaders in society. Early majority is typically average in social class who interact frequently with peers. Late majority is often times skeptical, below average social class and financially unstable. Finally, laggards are usually older, traditional, low social class and little financial flexibility (Rogers, 1995). There may be exceptions to the ideal types. Every innovation experiences some sort of adoption curve whether it is accepted or rejected. Social media marketing is an innovation that is still being adopted over time, and the researcher will study the specific factors that are affecting the professional's decision to adopt as well as look for trends in the adoption process.

There are specific elements that can increase an innovation's adoptability which include an innovation's trialability, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity/simplicity, and observability (Rogers, 1983, p.15). Trialability occurs when

the consumer can try the product or service before purchasing. With social media marketing, a business could try opening a free social media account and develop a trial social media marketing strategy in order to reach its target market. Relative advantage occurs when the consumer is gaining something by choosing to purchase or simply use the product or service. Relative advantage can be effectively measured in economic terms (Rogers, 1983, p.15). In terms of social media marketing, businesses must decide if it is worth investing in a new hire to handle the social media accounts or pay for in-house training. The business must also consider the cost difference between social media marketing efforts and traditional marketing efforts. Either way, the business has to decide if social media marketing will provide a high enough return on investment. Compatibility is whether the product or service is compatible with the consumers' lifestyle and values. For example, the business must evaluate whether social media marketing is something it can financially invest in and whether it will be fitting with the business' mission statement. The complexity/simplicity factor looks at how complex or simple the innovation is to adopt. This may be one of the most deciding factors for the decision to adopt social media marketing. Some professionals feel that social media is too complex to adopt, not only for themselves but for their target market as well. Some professionals feel that social media marketing is not worth the investment of learning how to operate social media in order to market their product or message. Finally, observability is whether others can observe and see that the consumer has paid for the product or service. Social media marketing excels in observability because it is all about connecting with other consumers, employees and professionals who can all communicate together on the

social media platforms. All of these factors will continue to increase the rate of adoption of social media marketing by business professionals.

Understanding the adoption process is a major aspect when considering the diffusion of innovation theory. According to Rogers (1983), the theory looks at the process of how an innovation is communicated through channels and outlets over time to a social system (Rogers, 1983, p. 10). In order to analyze how social media marketing is being accepted by professionals as a way to market to target audiences, the researcher will conduct in-depth qualitative interviews with professionals from the same region and industry. Each organization's team makes up a part of a social system, which is "a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal" (Rogers, 1983). The social system for this study is the rental housing market with each organization striving to convince college students to sign leases. The interviews will help the researcher determine any factors and/or trends that affect the rate of adoption of social media marketing. They will also provide an inside look at professional's personal opinions of social media as a business function.

For this thesis, the researcher will conduct in-depth, qualitative interviews with marketing professionals from the real estate industry in Statesboro, Georgia, who are targeting Millennials in order to gain a better understanding of the adoption decision of social media marketing. Statesboro has a population of 29,997 (99% urban, 1% rural) with an estimated average income of $18,592 (Onboard Informatics, 2013). Statesboro is a unique market because it is home to more than 20,000 college students who attend Georgia Southern University. The real estate industry is one of the most competitive markets in Statesboro, which provides the researcher with a good sample of marketing

professionals targeting Millennials. The researcher will focus on answering the following

research questions.

Research Questions

1. What, if any, factors affect a marketing professional's choice to adopt social

    media marketing?

2. What, if any, patterns exist in each adopter category?

3. What, if any, changes in marketing practices have come from the adoption of

    social media marketing?

Methodology

The purpose of this section is to describe exactly how this study intends to answer

the three research questions, as well as, justify the research and data analysis methods

used.

In order to answer the research questions, in-depth interviews were conducted

with eight marketing professionals in the real estate industry targeting Millennials. The

in-depth interviews are a form of qualitative research. Lindlof (1995) wrote that

qualitative research is better than quantitative research when studying the human

condition, especially when addressing questions about culture, interpretation and power.

The penetration of social media as a marketing tactic in business is changing

communication culture for marketing and public relations practitioners across industries

(Avery et. al, 2010). For this reason, qualitative research is beneficial in understanding

the adoption process of professionals for the innovation of social media marketing. Grant

McCracken (1988) says, "The method [qualitative research] can take us into the mental

world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the

world" (p. 9). This thesis strives to study the opinions of real estate professionals and

better understand the adoption decision process of social media marketing, which can be

obtained by conducting qualitative interviews. Quantitative research would starve the

researcher of rich detail that is needed for insight on the adoption decision. In order to

maintain consistency with the professionals, the researcher chose professionals who work

for the rental housing industry in the same region, and target college-aged students.

Because Statesboro is home to Georgia Southern University, the rental housing market is

arguably the most competitive industry in the city because there are more than 20,000

students renting properties.

The described method is the best way to answer the research questions because it

thoroughly evaluates the participant's opinions, use and experience with social media

marketing. The overall intention of the research is to develop a better understanding of

the adoption of social media marketing as an innovation and to take a snapshot of the

adoption patterns and views among professionals.

Sampling and Recruitment

While quantitative methods use random sampling, the qualitative method of in-depth

interviews requires specific selection of participants (Lindlof, 1995). In the case of social

media marketing, the participants need to be more experienced and knowledgeable on the

subject than the average person. First, the researcher searched an online rental guide for

Statesboro, Georgia. Then, the researcher identified 15 rental organizations to contact.

Next, the researcher called each rental organization to identify the marketing professional

and his or her contact information within the company. Then, the researcher sent out

recruitment emails to the 15 identified professionals. A copy of the recruitment email can

be found in Appendix A. Eight out of the 15 professionals agreed to conduct the

interview. Once they agreed to participate, the researcher communicated with the

participants to set up interview times and provide the informed consent forms. An

informed consent form was also emailed to all participants who verbally agreed to

participate at the beginning of their interview. A copy of the informed consent email can

be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection Method

In-depth interviews are long, one-on-one conversations between the

researcher and participant about the research topic. When observations alone are not

sufficient sources of data, in-depth interviews are often employed to understand the topic

in richer detail (Lindlof, 1995). The researcher conducted phone interviews using the

Institutional Review Board approved question guide, which can be found in the Appendix

B. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for future data analysis. The researcher

was careful to avoid any leading questions and to construct open-ended questions that

encourage detailed responses (McCracken, 1988). The semi-structured question guide

contains 13 open-ended questions with several sub-questions. The interview questions

strive to help the researcher answer the three main research questions: what, if any,

factors affect a marketing professional's choice to adopt social media marketing, what, if

any, patterns exist in each adopter category, and what, if any, changes in marketing

practices have come from social media? Questions one through three address basic

demographics such as age, gender and education level. Questions four and five address

research question two: what, if any, patterns exist in each adopter category? For example,

question four asks: where do you get your news? Questions six through 12 address

research question one: what, if any, factors affect a marketing professional/ manager's choice to adopt social media marketing? For example, question six asks: what do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business? Question 13 addresses research question three: What, if any, changes in marketing practices have come from the adoption of social media marketing? Question 13 asks: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience. The subquestion asks: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like? Some of the questions may overlap research questions depending on the participant's response. The interviewer looked for any trends in the factors that affect adoption: trialability, observability, relative advantage, complexity/simplicity and compatibility. The interviewer also identified any patterns between the adopter categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority or laggards.

For confidentiality reasons, the organizations and professionals were assigned false names. Names or any other identifying information have not be published anywhere for this thesis project. The audio recordings of the interviews have been immediately deleted after the researcher transcribed the interviews using the generic names and taking out any identifiable information. Information including trade secrets or any other sensitive facts were also removed from the interview transcripts to protect the participants and their organizations.

Assumptions of the Method

By selecting specific organizations and participants for the in-depth interviews, the researcher assumes the participants are able to explain media habits, marketing techniques and communication experience in a detailed way. The researcher also assumes

that the research questions being asked by this thesis can be answered using qualitative research. Finally, the researcher assumes that the participants are honest with their responses.

Data Analysis Method

The researcher used Owen's (1984) approach to thematic analysis to analyze the results of the eight interviews. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying and reporting themes with a body of data, in this case, the interview transcriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Owen's (1984) criteria for thematic analysis include recurrence, repetition and forcefulness. Recurrence occurs when at least two responses reflect the same meaning, even if different words are used. Repetition occurs when key words, phrases or sentence are repeated at least twice. Forcefulness happens during the oral exchange if significant changes occur in the participant's volume, inflection, positioning of words, or dramatic pauses. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher underlined any reoccurring themes, bolded any repetitive words and italicized any forceful tones. Certain words are repeated such as Facebook, Twitter and social media because of the subject matter. In some cases the words were bolded to signify repetition and in some cases they were not depending on the context of the answer.

The participants' answers to the interview questions allowed the researcher to categorize the professionals into the appropriate groups: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority or laggards. The participant's described behaviors helped the researcher determine adopter category characteristics for the adoption of social media marketing using two separate adoption curves. This project analyzes two curves: a

Millennial curve of the personal adoption of social media and a professional, social media marketing adoption curve.

For the Millennial curve of the personal adoption of social media, the researcher can categorize participants who fall under the Millennial generation based off the year of their initial adoption of social media. Sub question 5d asks: when did you create your Facebook and/or Twitter account? The researcher can compare the year the individual adopted social media with the adoption chart (figure 1) provided by the Pew Research Center located in the Appendix D. For example, if a Millennial adopted social media in 2006, 51% of the Millennial population had adopted social media so that participant would be considered early majority (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The second adoption curve examines professionals of all generations adopting social media marketing. There is less available research on the adoption of social media marketing, so it is harder for the researcher to accurately define adopter categories. For example, are the people adopting social media marketing now a part of the early majority or late majority? Is the curve even close to the apex, or is social media marketing already on its way out?

The limitation with this categorization strategy for the second curve is that it's impossible to predict social media's timeline of adoption. In a 2010 study by the Pew Research Center, 41% of individuals have adopted social media (just social media, not social media marketing), which suggests the innovation (social media marketing) is still in the early majority stage. After, 51% adopt social media marketing, the innovation will move to the late majority stage. It may die out in five years or it may last for decades.

Because of this, it is hard to predict when the late majority of adopters take place because the apex of the curve is unknown.

Another limitation is that different social media platforms have different timelines. For example, Facebook has been in use longer than Twitter. Also, Facebook is not the first social media website to exist. The first social media website, Friendster, opened on the Internet to the U.S. public in 2002 and MySpace followed shortly after in 2003 (Curtis, 2013). These websites had their own adoption curves, but this thesis focuses on Facebook and Twitter and the adoption of social media in general because of the current size, popularity and reach of these websites. However, in order to answer the research questions, the researcher needed to categorize participants using the aforementioned system.

The researcher also analyzed transcriptions for mentions of factors that affected adotion of the innovation. The adoptability factors that may affect adoption: trialability, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity/simplicity, and observability. The researcher looked for key words and phrases that indicate the presence of any of the factors. For example, if the participant talks about sharing posts on other pages to maximize visibility, observability would be the factor affecting her adoption choice. If a participant said that social media was cheaper than paid advertising, then the factor of relative advantage would be affecting the adoption choice. If a participant said that social media was too hard for him to use, then the complexity/ simplicity factor would be affecting his adoption choice. The researcher used thematic analysis to determine any reoccurring or repetitive factors throughout the interviews.

Results

The researcher recruited eight participants from the real estate industry in Statesboro, Georgia. Statesboro has a population of 29,997 (99% urban, 1% rural) with an estimated average income of $18,592 (Onboard Informatics, 2013). Participants range in age from 21 to 59 years old. There were three males and five females interviewed. All participants work for housing rental organizations that target college-aged individuals. All participants also exercised marketing content control for their organization. Each organization offered more than 300 beds. Organizations opened between 1991 and 2013. All participants are either college graduates or soon-to-be college graduates. The participants ranged from early adopters to laggards based on Everett Rogers' adoption curve and adopter categories. Seven Millennials and one Baby Boomer were interviewed.

Research Question One

The first research question asks: what, if any, factors affect a marketing professional's choice to adopt social media marketing? In order to answer this question, the researcher looked for signs of Everett Roger's adoptability factos: observability, relative advantage, complexity/simplicity, trialbility and compatibility. All of these factors can encourage or discourage adoption of an innovation. For example, if an innovation is too complex for the individual to adopt, he or she will choose not to adopt it.

The results support three of the five adoption factors that Everett Roger's Diffusion of Innovation theory outlines: observability, relative advantage and complexity/simplicity. Participants did not discuss compatibility or trialbility as reasons to adopt social media as a part in their integrated marketing strategies. The factor that

occurred the most throughout the interviews was observability because participants were highly driven by their target audience and competitors observing their organization's social media activity.

According to participants, observability affected seven out of eight participants' decision to adopt. Participants were attracted to the potential social media has for reaching their target audience and exposing them to their brand. Lucy Granger explained her strategy for sharing posts, "Everyone has it, so if you ask everyone who lives in our organization to like it [the post], it will show up on 400 tenants' Facebooks and all their thousands of friends." Bethany Smith put it more simply, "the more people who share your posts, the more people who will see it." Participants also expressed awareness that most businesses in their market utilize social media, so in order to stay competitive, their organization adopted social media as well. George Perry said, "I think it's something you have to do now. I mean it's crucial, and in business, everyone is going to that, especially for us focusing on college students. It's dumb not to."

Another major adoption factor was relative advantage. Seven out of eight participants use social media as an outlet that offers a relative advantage over other marketing tools. Kelly Appleton said, "We use a little of everything. So we prospect and that's a lot of face-to-face interaction. We go to campus, we host events, stuff like that, in order to get that face-to-face interaction. We do a lot of social media like Facebook. We also do things like Craigslist and Trulia and Zillow…The only thing we don't really do are TV ads and stuff like that because they're not cost effective." Participants also expressed that social media ultimately facilitates word-of-mouth, which they said is the biggest driver of getting leases signed. Susan Fitzpatrick said, "In our market we tend to

use a lot of nontraditional tactics because people aren't using those traditional medias as much as they do in other cities. Everything here is very word-of-mouth. People rely on what their friends tell them, so reputation management is huge and making sure our presence is always positive."

A third adoption factor was the complexity/simplicity of social media as a marketing tactic. Seven out of eight participants first adopted social media for personal use, and transferred their skills to use it for professional use. One participant, who did not adopt it for personal use, expressed that it was too complex to adopt for his organization. Richard Grayson said, "If there was an easier way for me to sit down with some XYZ company would come out and help, I would probably be much more entertaining in doing it versus trying to investigate it myself." Although Grayson expressed adoption hesitation due to complexity, he recognized that social media is growing to be an integral part of marketing strategies. He said, "I don't want to be behind the curve when it hits, and I'm not able to rent anything." Grayson said that there may be a day that he will lose business by not employing social media marketing.

Research Question Two

Research question two asks: what, if any, patterns exist in each adopter category? The researcher looked to identify distinct adopter categories and any patterns existing within the adopter category. There are two main adoption curves analyzed: the personal adoption of social media and the adoption of social media marketing for professional use. For the personal social media adoption curve, the researcher identified adopter categories based off when the participant adopted social media (and if the participant adopted social media) compared to the Pew Research Center's (2010) social networking users chart. The

professional, social media marketing curve was harder to identify because there is less research describing U.S. professionals' use. Despite lack of available research, the researcher placed the professionals in adopter categories using the information and characteristics provided from the interviews.

In terms of the professional, social media marketing curve, several patterns were apparent for the early majority adopter category. Katie Robertson, Bethany Smith, Kelly Appleton, Brian McMillan, Susan Fitzpatrick, George Perry and Lucy Granger are in the early majority adopter category because they adopted social media for their organizations before the average organization adopted social media. Richard Grayson is in the laggard adopter category because he does not use social media for his organization. The early majority participants are all between the ages of 21 and 28 years old and are Millennials. They all gather their news from the Internet. Several participants laughed nervously when they answered that they got their news from social media sites. Katie Roberston answered, "Um, I guess social media. *(Laughs)* I don't watch the news. I don't watch CNN. I don't go to MSNBC. So yeah, social media."

In terms of the personal, social media curve for Millennials, Katie Robertson is an early adopter because she adopted when only 7% of the Millennial population had social media profiles. Bethany Smith, Kelly Appleton, Susan Fitzpatrick and George Perry are early majority becaue they adopted when 51% of the Millennial population had social media profiles. Lucy Granger is in the late majority because she adopted when 71% of the Millennial population had social media profiles. From 2008 to 2010, there was only a 4% increase of Millennial adoption compared to the 20% increase from 2006 to 2008, which suggests the adoption curve is stabilizing. There is a positive relationship between

those who adopted social media for personal use and those who adopted social media marketing for professional use; however, there is a lag time between adoptions. Most participants adopted it personally first, and professionally second.

All the participants agreed that social media is an effective marketing tactic; however answers were divided when asked if it was the most effective tool. The two males in the early majority category felt that traditional, face-to-face marketing was the most effective tool for driving sales. Brian McMillan said, "I personally like face-to-face marketing. But, social media marketing is good when trying to reach a broader audience, but if I really want to get a reaction and see results, I like face-to-face marketing." Brian suggested that face-to-face was the most effective sales tactic for his organization, but he still recognized social media marketing's efficiency in reaching larger audiences. George Perry said,

> "I'm more of a fan of old-school marketing with paper and getting hand-
> to-hand contact with the prospect. I prefer talking to someone in person
> rather than online, but at the end of the day, social media is used so much,
> you have to do that to be able to reach the maximum amount of people
> that you want…I don't think it [social media] is the most effective thing
> that we're doing right now. I think we would take a hit and it would be
> noticeable if we didn't do it… but I don't think social media is the reason
> we are filling up, I think it is the reason people are staying."

The five female participants chose social media marketing over traditional marketing as the most effective tool. Bethany Smith said, "I would say social media marketing because the newest generation- they're always on their phone, always on the different social

media websites." Bethany emphasized the significance of their target marketing's generation, Millennials, and their high use of technology. Katie Robertson said, "I think that social media marketing is more effective for us because of the demographic market we are targeting." Katie also referred to the age of the target audience as a key reason to use social media marketing. Although the gender difference is interesting, the sample is not large enough to draw conclusive evidence.

Research Question Three

Research question three asks: what, if any, changes in marketing practices have come from the adoption of social media marketing? The researcher looked for reoccurring themes in responses about the future of social media marketing and the current use of social media as a business tool. The researcher also observed the increased penetration of social media as a marketing tool in smaller markets with population sizes similar to Statesboro, Georgia with seven out of eight professionals having adopted it and one professional willing to adopt it. Finally, the participants identified several obstacles that they've encountered from adopting social media marketing.

Every participant said that social media will be a driving force in the future of marketing practices. Responses included "Everthing is probably going to go online," "It's going to go completely online," "It [the future] is endless and unlimited. Who knows what Twitter will look like five years from now because it looks nothing like it did five years ago," and "I can see it almost all being online It already to an extent is. I don't know – it definitely is going to get bigger and bigger." Some participants expressed concern over the future of communication. Richard Grayson said, "Most young people – and maybe older ones I don't see – are glued to that phone. They just have to be in

constant contact with somebody. I just don't think it is the healthiest thing in the world to be doing all the time." Other changes participants discussed is the shift in platforms from Facebook to Twitter for the demographic of college aged students (Millennials). Susan Fitzpatrick said, "a lot of people are using Facebook less because there is an older audience that wasn't five years ago." She also commented on the target audience's needs for immediate information, "I think things like Snapchat are a little more up-and-coming. I think as social media progresses, were going to see more instantaneous communication."

Participants also described problems with negative feedback posted publicly to their pages. Katie Robertson discussed her strategy of dealing with minor complaints online, publicly so residents could observe the organization's quality customer service and care for residents. Also, if a resident had the same complaint, he or she could find the answer before posting an additional complaint to the page. If the negative comment was damaging to the reputation, the Robertson would ask the complainer to handle the problem offline. Other participants did not offer solutions to negative content posted to their pages. This suggests that professionals are still in the process of learning how to use two-way communication to their advantage, and handle negative feedback appropriately.

Several participants identified another social media obstacle as recruiting members from the target market to like or follow the page. Previous research has not addressed this as a common obstacle. Brian McMillan said that most residents would like the page, but potential residents would not. He also said that there content appeals mostly to residents, which would explain why non-residents would not be interested in following the organization. George Perry, who had more success with receiving more than 1,000

likes from both residents and non-residents, said that the key was to post a variety of engaging information that portrays the brand's personality. He said, "We don't promote specials all day every day. We do it more as a resident life window- it is a window of what it is like to live at our property." This may be an industry-specific problem. Also, none of the participants personally use analytic software to analyze social media buzz about their brand. They focus more on number of likes, shares, followers, etc. Two participants mentioned that their corporate offices have control over web analytics and monitor brand reputation online, but the participants are more concerned with the daily content on their pages.

Discussion and Conclusion

Significant findings in the results section exist for each research question. Research question one found that three of the five adoptability factors affect professionals decision to adopt social media marketing for their organization. Also, participants identified the generation and demographics of their target audience as a major reason for adopting social media marketing. Finally, there is a positive relationship between the participants adopting social media for personal use first and professional use second.

The three factors participants discussed as major factors for the adoption of social media marketing are observability, relative advantage and complexity/simplicity. Observability was a reoccurring theme throughout the data analysis. Participants were primarily concerned with sharing content that would be seen by as many people as possible. They talked about having employees and current residents share posts in order to increase observability. Relative advantage of non-traditional methods like social media marketing over traditional marketing methods was also expressed in context to the age

and media use habits of their target audience. This suggests that professionals make adoption decisions based on their target audience's age and media use habits. If the audience fits into a generation that is active online, like Millennials, the professional chooses to adopt social media marketing to enhance observability. Finally, the complexity/simplicity factor is significant in the choice to adopt social media because if it is too complex, the professional will not invest in it. Richard Grayson, the one participant who has not adopted social media marketing said,

"If I was trying to venture into a new market or grow my business beyond what I currently have- I would need other avenues, and I think social media, it would be the way to go…I basically want to have it [social media] done and then be shown how to use it. Again, I'm not computer savvy, but I am computer learnable, and I can do anything like that."

Grayson is expressing the lack of relative advantage of social media for his organization (his organization has a 95 percent occupancy rate) and the complexity factor because it is too hard for him to learn on his own. A significant observation was that seven out of eight participants adopted social media for personal use first and social media marketing second. Meanwhile, Grayson has not adopted social media for personal or professional use. This suggests that professionals are more motivated to adopt social media marketing for their organization if they already understand how to work it for personal use.

For research question two, the researcher categorized participants in an adoption curve that analyzes the adopter categories of social media marketing. The researcher found that common patterns of professionals who adopt social media marketing in the early majority are college educated Millennials. Also, the five women rely more heavily

on social media as their most effective marketing tactic, while the two men rely on face-to-face marketing tactics such as handing out T-shirts and flyers. The difference in the evaluation of social media effectiveness could be dependent on the participant's interpretation of the use of social media. For example, one participant judges social media marketing's effectiveness based on customer engagement and target audience reach, while the other judges effectiveness based off sales. The gender difference may be insignificant because of the small sample size. However, statistics show that women are more likely to use social media than men (Pew Research Center, 2010). This is an area for future, quantitative research on gender differences in social media marketing strategies.

Everett Rogers (1995) outlined specific adopter characteristics for each category. The two categories the participants fell into for the professional, social media marketing curve were early majority and laggards. According to Rogers (1995), early majority characteristics are typically average in social class and interact frequently with peers. All early majority participants said that they mostly use their personal social media accounts to stay in touch with family and friends- a sign of interacting frequently with peers as Rogers said. Laggards are typically older, traditional, low social class and little financial flexibility. The one laggard was 59 years old. However, he did mention financial flexibility. He said that he would be open to paying someone to teach him, he just didn't know who to pay. The biggest division between adopters and non-adopters was age and generational media use habits. All of the Millennial professionals used the Internet to gather news, while the Baby Boomer professional relied on the newspaper and television. The research supports the literature and Pew Research Center (2010) data that says that

younger people are more likely to have social media accounts than older people. The

research also shows the older generation's interest in adopting social media, despite the

technology learning curve.

All participants indicated that word-of-mouth and referrals from friends was the

best source of marketing for their organization. However, opinions of adopters were

divided as some felt that social media drives that word-of-mouth communication; while

other felt that face-to-face interaction was more effective. Many participants talked about

handing out T-shirts, flyers and other free giveaways as a way to stimulate brand

awareness. George Perry said, "If I can give you a flyer, person-to-person, and talk to you

about what I'm selling, you are more likely to buy it then if you read it on Facebook and

said 'OK that's cool' and flip to the next page." On the other hand, Bethany Smith

pointed out a flaw with this system, "It's kind of hard because when we go out and hand

out stuff to people, [they] are looking down at their phones or Ipads or any type of

electronic device more than they are willing to look you in the face." The main difference

between the two approaches that participants discussed was that some participants

evaluated social media's effectiveness based on leases signed, while others evaluated

their social media's effectiveness based on engagement and interaction with the target

audience. This could be a difference in social media objectives for the organization as

well. Some organizations are employing social media as another tactic to drive sales

numbers. Other organizations are utilizing it to increase customer engagement and

loyalty. Most research supports social media as a marketing tool for driving customer

engagement, loyalty and service (Agnihotri, et. al., 2012; Tuten & Angermeier, 2013;

Corstjens, 2012). The participants who aren't impressed with social media marketing's

effectiveness for driving sales numbers may be more satisfied if they implement social media as a communication tool rather than a sales tactic.

Research question three found that all participants believe that social media marketing will only grow in use, and that social media marketing has penetrated organizations in smaller markets such as Statesboro, Georgia; although, there is still some confusion as to how to effectively use social media to meet objectives. Participants also identified several obstacles to the utilization of social media marketing such as combating negative comments and getting a potential audience to pay attention to social media content.

The results imply that social media marketing is still in the process of being adopted by society, especially within smaller markets. Professionals in the real estate rental industry recognize that it is becoming a "crucial" business function, but they are still learning how to integrate it effectively. As discussed in research question two, marketing professionals are struggling to identify appropriate objectives for their social media strategy. Some participants are evaluating the success of their social media accounts (compared to traditional marketing medias) by measuring sales numbers. This evaluation system is ineffective because social media is a communication tool that primarily drives engagement and interaction, not bottom-line sales. Professionals are also testing the water in handling obstacles such as finding ways to gain more likes and combating negative comments on public forums. This suggests that while professionals have adopted social media marketing, they are still figuring out how to use it professionally. Most of them are Millennials, who adopted social media in high school or college for personal use; now, they are young professionals representing their

organization's brand. For many, the trial and error method seems to be popular. If the target audience consistently likes more posts than others, the professional mimics that communication style in future posts. For example, some participants talked about the importance of posting visuals because they garnered attention more than plain-text posts. In conclusion, marketing professionals recognize that social media marketing is a crucial tactic to adopt; however, they are still learning how to use it effectively with detailed strategies, objectives, metrics and other evaluation tactics to ensure successful business to consumer communication.

Future Research and Limitations

Future quantitative research could be conducted based off the results of this thesis. An interesting observation was that the three males preferred traditional, face-to-face marketing over social media marketing, while the five females preferred social media marketing over traditional marketing. Pew Research Center (2010) also shows that women are 76% likely to use social media while men are 66%. However, the sample was not large enough to draw conclusive evidence on gender differences. Future research could evaluate if there is a significant difference between male and female preferred communication and marketing tactics.

Another future quantitative study could be look at market penetration of social media marketing. Large, centralized cities such as Atlanta, Georgia have higher rates of social media marketing penetration. A study analyzing the penetration of social media marketing in markets with smaller populations such as Statesboro, Georgia would also give better insight on the diffusion of social media marketing as an innovation.

Finally, a study examining how organizations define social media objectives and measure the effectiveness of social media marketing would provide insight on the strategy behind implementing a social media marketing strategy (or lack thereof). It would also show how organizations are measuring the effectiveness or return on investment of social media marketing.

One major limitation of this study is the unknown apex of social media marketing as an innovation on the adoption curve. Because it is impossible to predict when social media marketing has hit its height, it was impossible for the researcher to accurately categorize the participants as early adopters, early majority or late majority. Laggards are clear because they do not use social media. Innovators are also clear because they formed the group that introduced social media to the public. The three middle categories are impossible gage because the social media timeline is indefinite and ongoing. Another limitation of this study is the sample size and age of participants. The age of the participants in this study was unknown until the interview, so the seven Millennials and one Baby Boomer participant was unintentional. A participant sample from a wider variety of generations and from different adopter categories would provide more well-rounded results and discussion. The final limitation for the study is that Statesboro, Georgia is a unique market because it is a college town. While the town has a population less than 30,000, it is home to a research university with over 20,000 students (mostly Millennials), which makes for an interesting market. Other towns with small populations may have different results because of the absence of the university.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Recruitment Email

Dear professional one,
I am a senior Georgia Southern University honors student conducting research on social media marketing. I am contacting you because I am looking to interview local professionals in the rental housing industry about their views on social media marketing for their organization. I am interested studying why some professionals are quick to adopt social media marketing for their organization and why some professionals are hesitant to adopt it. I want to see if there are similar characteristics or patterns in professionals who use it for their organization and professionals who do not use it. I am looking for trends and will report the result in my final thesis project, which will be completed in May 2014. Please let me know if you and your organization are willing to participate. The Georgia Southern University Honors Program and I appreciate your help in furthering our research in the communications field.
Thank you,
Liana Moran

Informed Consent Email

Hi (participant's name),

My name is Liana Moran and I am a senior public relations student at Georgia Southern University. I'm working on a thesis project for the university honors program that studies the factors that affect the adoption of social media marketing among professionals. I will be looking for any trends that exist between the professionals who use social media marketing for their organization and those who do not. The purpose of this study is to provide communication professionals and academics with a better understanding of the adoption process of social media marketing, since it is such a new communications platform.

The extent of your participation is answering my interview questions one time. Once my project is completed, I can provide you with a copy of the final thesis if you are interested in the findings. There are no right or wrong answers, and you and your organization will remain anonymous. My professional adviser, Dr. Camille Broadway, and I will be the only ones with access to this information, and we will shred your names and any other identifying information once we assign the generic names such as organization # and professional #. The interview will also be recorded to help analyze the results. The audio recordings will be deleted as soon as I transcribe the interviews with the appropriate anonymous names for you and your organization. The audio recordings and contact lists will be locked in Dr. Broadway's office until all generic names are assigned.

The interview should take no longer than 30 minutes. You have the right to ask me any questions throughout the interview as well as stop the interview at any time. You can also decline to answer any question that you feel necessary. There is no penalty for not completing the interview or for withdrawing early. There is minimal risk in participating in this study, and there will be no monetary reward. The honors program and I thank you for your participation. This information will benefit the academic and professional community and allow people to further understand social media marketing as a possible business tool. You must be at least 18 years of age to consent to this interview. If you consent at this time, please send an email back to lm02113@georgiasouthern.edu verifying your name, date and your consent that the consent procedure has been followed.

Thank you,
Liana Moran

Appendix B: Question Guide

1. How many rental units does your organization offer?

    a.   What percentage of those units are rented?

    b.   How long has your organization been open?

2. In what year were you born?

3. Are you a college graduate?

4. Where do you get your news? (Prompts: Newspaper, TV, Radio, Internet, Social Media)

5. Do you have a personal social media account?

   If yes:

   a. Which social media websites do you use?

   b. How often do you check Facebook and/or Twitter?

   c. How often do you post on Facebook and/or Twitter?

   d. When did you get a Facebook and/or Twitter?

   e. What prompted you to create a Facebook and/or Twitter?

   f. Why do you continue to use social media?

   If no:

   g. Have you ever tried to create a Facebook and/or Twitter account?

   h. Why do you not have a Facebook or Twitter account?

6. What do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business?

7. How do you see social media fitting into your business plan?

8. What are your organization's marketing tactics?

   a. Does your organization have a marketing team?

   b. Do you believe the marketing tactics are successful?

9. Does your organization have a Facebook and/or Twitter?

   If yes:

   a. Does your organization use its social media to market towards its target audience?

   b. What prompted your business to create a social media account?

    c. Please describe your organization's social media marketing strategy.

    d. Please explain whether you think social media marketing or traditional

       marketing is more effective for your organization.

If no:

    e. Why has your organization decided not to create a social media account?

    f. Has your organization ever tried to open a social media account?

    g. What interest, if any at all, does your business have in creating a social

       media account?

10. Does your organization have a social media policy?

    If yes:

    a. Please describe your organization's social media policy.

    b. What kinds of problems or obstacles, if any, has your organization

       experienced with its social media account?

11. How do you believe students hear about your organization?

12. Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your

    organization? If so, what did you determine. If not, why not?

13. What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach

    your target audience?

    a. What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

Appendix C: Transcriptions

Thematic Analysis of Interview

Key:
- <u>Reoccurrence</u>
- **Repetition**
- *Forcefulness*

- R: Researcher
- P: Participant

Participant One: Bethany Smith

R: How many rental units does your organization offer?

P: 214 units and 624 beds

R: What percentage of those units are rented currently?

P: 71 percent

R: How long has your organization been open?

P: 1991

R: In what year were you born?

P: 1991 (23)

R: Are you a college graduate?

P: Yes

R: Where do you get your news?

P: Where do we get our news in regards to what?

R: Personally, where do you get your news? TV, newspaper, Internet?

P: <u>Internet</u>

R: Do you have a personal social media account?

P: Yes I do

R: Which social media websites do you use?

P<u>: **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, vine**</u>, chive and snapchat

R: How often do you check Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Throughout the day

R: How many times on average would you say?

P: Twitter twice a day, Facebook probably like eight

R: How often do you post on Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Daily on Facebook and every other day on Twitter

R: When did you get a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: ooh.. I got a Facebook in 2007 and mmm.. I guess 2012 I got Twitter

R: What prompted you to create a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Um.. Facebook was just coming out and Twitter was work related- I created my own account

R: Why do you continue to use social media?

P: <u>To connect with family and friends</u>

R: What do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business?

P: I think it's a good tool to use because most people use it. It's a good way to **reach** <u>a large amount of people</u> in a short amount of time.

R: How do you see social media fitting into your business plan?

P: Well a lot of our stuff that we do with promoting our new floor plan <u>or promoting events</u> or letting our residents know about emergency updates. We use Facebook and Twitter.

R: What are your organization's marketing tactics?

P: We actually use our CA's (community assistance) as a way to get in touch with organizations on campus because we've all graduated or in masters programs so we have CAs tell us about different organizations on campus or the ones we should team up with. They serve as the liaison between the organization and us.

R: Does your organization have a marketing team?

P: Our marketing team that we have right now, um, we're creating an even bigger one. Right now its just the staff but were hiring marketing outreach assistants so they can go to the places that we don't have the time to go.

R: Do you believe the marketing tactics are successful?

P: Um, yes we are still in the starting phases. Every year is different for our property especially with the new beds that were built. Every year we try different tactics in order to find out what is going to work best this year because we get a new market every year. The market is never the same.

R: Does your organization have a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Yes

R: Does your organization use its social media to market towards its target audience?

P: Yes

R: What prompted your business to create a social media account?

P: As a better way to connect with the market and the residents. You know the majority of the residents have one or the other. So we have to market our Facebook page and that's where we send out messages and promote and then the more people who share your post the more people who will see it

R: Please describe your organization's social media marketing strategy.

P: It depends on what special were running at that time. Like I said the market changes all the time. Like right now were doing a three hundred dollar visa gift card campaign. So a lot of our posts let people know about the three hundred dollars and how they can get it and how they can refer people so their friends can get it too. We use it as a way to get the message out and then all of our staff share it so that it gets on more than one Facebook. It gets on my Facbeook the LC's facebook all the staff members so more and more people can see it.

R: Please explain whether you think social media marketing or traditional marketing is more effective for your organization.

P: I would say social media marketing because the newest generation- they're always on their phone, always on the different social media websites. Its kind of hard because when we go out and hand out stuff people are looking down at their phones or ipads or any type of electronic device more than they are willing to look you in the face so we still do the traditional method of going around and handing out but we reach more people using social media.

R: Does your organization have a social media policy?

P: Our staff has to sign a confidentiality form that prohibits them from posting anything discussed at work or in regards to their job. They cannot post to it. Me and my PR are the only ones who have access to the Facebook page. So we are

the only ones who can actually post different things on our page We are able to be tagged in people's comments. But that is a grounds for termination if anything is negatively said and one of our employees posted it.

R: What kinds of problems or obstacles, if any, has your organization experienced with its social media account?

P: Basically just getting our residents to <u>like the page</u>. It's a great tool but if people don't like the page, they don't see our posts, they don't see our announcements. So basically were trying to get more and more people to like the page so we can get more awareness

R: How do you believe students hear about your organization?

P: **Word of mouth** majority. Somebody's talking about it or they receive a flyer. Majority when I ask people they say hey my friend told me about it- so **word of mouth.**

R: Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your organization? If so, what did you determine. If not, why not?

P: Yeah, every time someone comes and takes a tour they get a survey about us. That's one that tells us if they saw something, a flyer, some one told them or on Facebook.

R: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience?

P: Its very effective if you use it properly. If you know your market and you're making sure that the posts and the flyers that you put on there are something that your market actually wants. Because you could post all day and if it's not eye catching or something that somebody is interested in, they'll never catch on to it.

R: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

P: <u>Everything is probably going to go online.</u>

Participant Two: Kelly Appleton

R: What is your title at your organization?

P: I'm the sales manager

R: How many rental units does your organization offer?

P: 536 beds

R: What percentage of those units are rented currently?

P: Our current percentage, we report to the stock market, is about 75%

R: How long has your organization been open?

P: We opened in 2010

R: In what year were you born?

P: 1989

R: Are you a college graduate?

P: Yes

R: Where do you get your news?

P: <u>Twitter</u> (laughs)

R: Do you have a personal social media account?

P: Yes

R: Which social media websites do you use?

P: **Twitter, Facebook, Instagram**… <u>I used to use vine</u>. And I write a blog using blogger

R: How often do you check Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Everyday. More than 5 times a day. I check instagram like 15 times a day.

R: How often do you post on Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: About 5 times per week

R: When did you get a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: ooh gosh.. I was in highschool so May 2006. I was a senior. 2009 for Twitter, when it got big.

R: What prompted you to create a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: <u>Everyone else was doing it</u> (laughs)

R: Why do you continue to use social media?

P: With me being almost 25, a lot of my **friends** don't live in Statesboro anymore-they don't even live in the state. Facebook is how I keep up with them. I use Instagram because I'm nosy and like to look at pictures. Twitter…A lot of my emphasis in college was social media so I keep up with that for news. I also use the apps on my phone.

R: What do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business?

P: I think its great, especially with our organization.

R: How do you see social media fitting into your business plan?

P: We utilize social media *religiously*. Its posted on HootSuite which is a social media organizational tool to keep up with Twitter and Facebook. We post corporate policies three to five times, I post like 15. That's how people find out about our rates and stuff like that- that's how people compare us to other people because they can pull up ours and see rates and compare it to our competition and compare rates without ever having to talk to us.

R: What are your organization's marketing tactics?

P: We use a little of everything. So we prospect and that's a lot of **face to face** interaction. We got to campus, we host events, stuff like that, in order to get that **face to face** interaction. We do a lot of social media like Facebook. We also do things like Craigslist and Trulia and Zillow. They're all apartment guide kind of things. We utilize a thing called silverpop which is a constant contact e-blast. We literally utilized everything. The only thing we don't really do are TV ads and stuff like that because they're not cost effective

R: Does your organization have a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Yes. We have **Facebook, Twitter**, Instagram. I started a vine that we don't use.

R: Does your organization use its social media to market towards its target audience?

P: Yes

R: What prompted your business to create a social media account?

P: Basically to be able **to keep up** with the trends and everything else that's going on.

R: Please describe your organization's social media marketing strategy.

P: I wish we had a better strategy. *We basically post a lot of crap*. I do things more friendly – kind of how I would talk on social media. I am 25 so I can relate to everyone that's here. So I keep it light and fun and friendly. I post a lot of pictures so I keep pictures kind of friendly and fun, not so formal and adult like.

R: Please explain whether you think social media marketing or traditional marketing is more effective for your organization.

P: Social media marketing, definitely

R: Traditional marketing includes the face-to-face interactions. Do you think that social media is more effective?

P: We get a lot of our prospects from **face to face** interactions. But a lot of people who follow through with everything and complete the tour and complete the lease have heard of us via social media.

R: Does your organization have a social media policy?

P: I'm going to assume so (laughs)

R: What kinds of problems or obstacles, if any, has your organization experienced with its social media account?

P: We haven't. But I know other organizations of our chain run into the problem of **negative feedback**. You know, so and so broke in- all those kinds of things you have to combat customer service wise. That's a big social media problem- but we haven't had any of that. You know we have residents who complain about the gate not working- it wasn't like oh yall suck. But we do have other organizations across the country who have to combat those kind of negative customer service issues on social media.

R: How do you believe students hear about your organization?

P: Umm… I'm going to say Facebook. I would say Facebook because I share stuff on my personal Facebook page and I encourage them. Our maintenance guy shares it. So definitely social media- probably the easiest way to hear about whatever is going on.

R: Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your organization? If so, what did you determine. If not, why not?

P: We have our brand manager in our corporate office monitor a lot of it, especially since Statesboro is such an overpopulated community of apartments. They monitor a lot of that, so I don't have too. I do track how many likes we get in a month and all of that- but now that they've started sponsoring ads on Facebook- they can track how many people are getting visibility to our new website- so the corporate office handles a lot more of that than I do.

R: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience?

P: I love social media. That's my end goal is for that to be my entire job. I think its very effective if its done correctly.

R: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

P: Oh gosh. Its going to blow up. Its all about the person utilizing it- using it effectively, and then the biggest problem is there's so many social media websites that are the same. You know Myspace came back and its no different from what Myspace was 15 years ago and its really no different than Facebook. So we keep getting the same stuff over and over again- so they're going to have to keep changing things to keep things evolving without creating all new websites.

Participant Three: Brian McMillan

R: What is your title at your organization?

P: My title is leasing manager slash leasing agent

R: How many rental units does your organization offer?

P: We 368 beds

R: What percentage of those units are rented?

P: 30 to 40 percent

R: How long has your organization been open?

P: About ten to twelve years

R: In what year were you born?

P: 1990

R: Are you a college graduate?

P: Not yet – this is my last semester

R: Where do you get your news?

P: Ill go to <u>Yahoo</u> a lot and this might sound weird but <u>buzz feed</u> have you ever heard of that- yeah- even though they don't follow a typical news format- I like the way they present the news in a comedic type of manor

R: Do you have a personal social media account?

P: Yes I have **Facbook and Twitter**

R: How often do you check Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: I check it everyday- <u>I have it on my phone. I use the organizations account more than my own account</u>

R: When did you get a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: ooh.. I got a Facebook right before I came to college so around 2008.

R: What prompted you to create a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Just because it was a good <u>network</u> for college students to meet each other. And I just found out who my roommate was and I wanted to see what this guy looks like so I found him on Facebook and it's a great vehicle for businesses.

R: Why do you continue to use social media?

P: You know to keep up with **old friends, new friends**. I mean right now I'm about to graduate so I need to network as much as possible and branch out on Facebook<u>. I don't use it socially as much as I used to.</u> Twitter is the thing I used the most socially on a daily basis.

R: What do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business?

P: I think its great. It works especially in reaching residents who currently live here. Lets say we throw an event and we need to get the word out we can update our Facebook with a status or picture of the event and then we don't have to send out flyers and everything. Its free marketing on Facebook.

R: How do you see social media fitting into your business plan?

P: I mean it's a big part of it. Just because the world is advancing technology wise and our generation-I'm not gonna lie- is **too absorbed in the new Iphone** and what not and the only thing we really care about is whats the newest trend on

facebook, twitter or instagram. Nobody really wants to go to the webpage when they can just go to Facebook and stuff like that.

R: What are your organization's marketing tactics?

P: Ok well me personally- I like to hand out Tshirts on campus to random people or Ill stop by classrooms and hand out Tshirts and take pictures of people with Tshirts. Last week for instance I set up a game like corn hole and if people made it in a certain area they won a gift card or t shirt or free sub sandwich, so that was really fun. We also reach out to other vendors such as sub shops and pizza restaurants and we give them coupons and stuff that they can hand to students.

R: Does your organization have a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Yes we do

R: Does your organization use its social media to market towards its target audience?

P: Yes we do

R: What prompted your business to create a social media account?

P: To be honest <u>who doesn't have a Facebook account</u> now a days? Almost every complex in any college town have a Facebook- it's a great networking tool.

R: Please describe your organization's social media marketing strategy.

P: On Facebook we don't really post statuses to people who don't live here. <u>Most of our updates appeal to current residents</u> so I would say its definitely a tool for our current residents but we need to branch out to reach new people.

R: Please explain whether you think social media marketing or traditional marketing is more effective for your organization.

P: I personally like **<u>face to face</u>** because I'm better with **<u>face to face</u>**. I'm really good with conversations and I think my personality appeals to people when I talk to them. I personally like **<u>face to face</u>** marketing. But social media marketing is good when trying to reach a broader audience but <u>if I really want to get a reaction and see results I like face to face marketing.</u>

R: Does your organization have a social media policy?

P: No explicit anything- nothing that would upset anybody racially, culturally - you know.

R: What kinds of problems or obstacles, if any, has your organization experienced with its social media account?

P: I mean we have a few residents who post complaints on Facebook to get a reaction. Thay think if they post on our page than they will get a result out of that. So I would say the worst is having residents who are unpleased who reach out to us on social media.

R: How do you believe students hear about your organization?

P: The Tshirts are the best thing in my opinion because we hand out a bunch of them. We just changed our name recently so were really having to rebrand ourselves and get our name out there. So I think Tshirts are the best marketing tool we have now.

R: Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your organization?

P: At the beginning of the year we did a market survey and we looked at competition and numbers and look at what marketing tools we want to use next.

R: So you guys primarily focus on face to face marketing rather than social media marketing?

P: Yes, the only marketing we do on social media is with out current residents because they'll like us on Facebook. Its hard to get people who don't live here to like us on Facbeook because they don't care about daily updates and stuff like that.

R: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience?

P: I think its great but we need to come up with better ideas to get people who don't live here to be attracted to our website or Facebook and follow us so they can see our specials. I would say the effectiveness of it outside of reaching our residents is not where we want it to be. We're working on that.

R: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

P: Its going to <u>be completely online</u>. I would hope not because I don't think it should be to the point where everything is based off the Internet but **<u>word of mouth</u>** can only go so far to reach a broader audience. Like your platform you have to go to social media you have to use Facebook, you have to use Twitter, you have to use Instagram. But I think Facebook is to the point that its good for businesses but Twitter is going to be appealing to people more than Facebook in my opinion.

Participant Four: Susan Fitzpatrick

R: What's your official title at your organization?

P: Area marketing manager at two properties in the area

R: How many rental units does your organization offer?

P: 709

R: What percentage of those units are rented currently?

P: 93 or 94 percent

R: How long has your organization been open?

P: August 2013

R: In what year were you born?

P: 1989

R: Are you a college graduate?

P: Yes

R: Where do you get your news?

P: My phone- I use my Android a lot

R: Do you have a personal social media account?

P: I do

R: Which social media websites do you use?

P: **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram**, snapchat- Instagram is the biggest one

R: How often do you check Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: I don't really check it. The updates come to me- Im not really on it so much. A lot of things are kind of pushed to us now.

R: How often do you post on Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: On Twitter once every 2 weeks to a month and on Facebook once every 2 weeks.

R: What prompted you to create a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Probably the fact that I was in high school and everyone else was doing it

R: Why do you continue to use social media?

P: For right now staying in touch with family because they live far away

R: What do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business?

people
years
the
more

P: It's great I'll be interested in seeing how social media evolves obviously a lot of are using Facebook less because there is an older audience present that wasn't five ago. You know a lot of people are using Twitter And of course we're switching Snapchat type thing it's kind of interesting to see how social media is becoming *quick.*

R: How do you see social media fitting into your business plan?

P: It fits in everything that we do. If we're at an **event** were taking pictures and we post on Instagram immediately. From Instagram the update in live time to our website. If you go to our website on the bottom all of our Instagram pictures are there. Facebook is good but I feel like it is more informational content now. Twitter is very instantaneous and we use that kind of to plan. So for example if we're going somewhere and we need to get people prepped for it.

R: What are your organization's marketing tactics?

P: In our market we tend to use more nontraditional tactics because people aren't using those traditional medias as much as they do in other cities. Everything here is very **word-of-mouth.** People rely on what their **friends** tell them so reputation management is huge and making sure our presence is always positive. For example Google reviews is a huge thing going on right now and apartment ratings.com is another one. We monitor very closely our reputation and what people are saying. If someone is dissatisfied we bend over backwards to fix whatever is going on.

R: Does your organization have a marketing team?

P: Just me (laughs)

R: Do you believe the marketing tactics are successful?

P: I don't have data for this market but I know if you take for example a past project we had a 14 1/2 increase in social media outreach through the insights page. For this market I think what we do well is engage people. If you look at us versus our competitors you can see that people are liking our post not always the same people. When we do contests and stuff people are engaging with us which is good.

R: Does your organization have a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: yes

R: Does your organization use its social media to market towards its target audience?

P: yes

R: What prompted your business to create a social media account?

P: the fact that everybody is using it

R: Please explain whether you think social media marketing or traditional marketing is more effective for your organization.

P: We like to be proactive instead of reactive. A lot of times you are going to be reactive because people post to your page So you don't really have a choice. Being proactive I try to plan out what our posts are going to look. Some days we have a lot of stuff going on and I utilize our team to a great extent.

R: Does your organization have a social media policy?

P: Yes our corporate office previously was hands off and let the websites do what we wanted to do. Now we're coming to a phase where everything is standardized. It has to be appropriate we do get monitored very closely. If I post something and they don't like it I know within five minutes.

R: What kinds of problems or obstacles, if any, has your organization experienced with its social media account?

P: Getting new likes is hard. There are campaigns available on Facebook to buy likes but I'm really not about that. Those aren't organic and it's not something you're actually going to get a lease from. With Twitter the   hardest thing was learning it just because I don't really use my Twitter a lot. Now that I really know where the conversations are happening and how to engage people and really just explain why they should be here and kind of build that hype- I think that was the biggest obstacle

R: How do you believe students hear about your organization?

P**: Friends, word of mouth**

R: Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your organization? If so, what did you determine. If not, why not?

P: Absolutely every guest card that comes through the door we log into the computer. I pull reports once a month just to see where the traffic is coming from. If there's any discrepancies we can pull the guest cards and look a little further into it maybe make some phone calls.

R: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience?

P: I don't think it's as effective as it used to be. *I think social media is very saturated* you know there is a lot of messages coming through. Even if you just look at your email box alone there is a lot of junk mail coming through. You know even Kohl's has got it down to a science for every day to get a special offer. It can be really hard to get peoples attention so I think things like Snapchat are a little more up-and-coming. I think a social media progresses were going to steam more instantaneous communication. it's going to become more streamlined.

R: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

P: Very quick.

Participant Five: Katie Robertson

R: How many rental units does your organization offer?

P: We offer 339 units with a total of 1087 beds

R: What percentage of those units are rented currently?

P: currently we are at 88.5 percent for the occupancy from 2013-2014

R: How long has your organization been open?

P: We opened in Aug 2013 for residents to move in

R: In what year were you born?

P: 1986

R: Are you a college graduate?

P: Yes

R: Where do you personally get your news?

P: Um, I guess social media. (Laughs) I don't watch the news. I don't watch CNN I don't go to MSNBC. So yeah, social media.

R: Do you have a personal social media account?

P: yes

R: Which social media websites do you use?

P: I use Instagram, I use Twitter, I use Facebook. Vine.

R: How often do you check Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Each daily. I probably check Facebook three times today and Twitter, probably once a day

R: How often do you post on Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: maybe once a week

R: When did you get a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: I got Facebook back when only colleges had it and you had to wait for it to get to your college. Think it was spring 05 when I got Facebook.

R: What prompted you to create a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: All of my friends that UGA had it and Twitter I got twitter in 2009. I got Twitter because we had to do a presentation about it for my social media class that was the next best thing and it was actually a tool like LinkedIn back then.

R: Why do you continue to use social media?

P: Everyone is on it. It's a good way to **keep up** with people and it's also a good way to find out what's happening, What other people are doing, See what is trending.

R: What do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business?

P: I think it is very effective because it is something that people check daily. It is a routine and everyone's lives. Everyone checks Facebook, everyone checks

Twitter, everyone checks Instagram to see what their friends are doing so it definitely works to get the word out there for whatever it is you're wanting to promote because they know to look there first. A lot of people would rather go to your Facebook or Twitter Instagram to see what your daily special is rather than going to your website Because it just gives more information.

R: How do you see social media fitting into your business plan?

P: It's a very intricate part because of the demographic that we target. They're a demographic that is on top of social media, they know the next coolest thing. They know what's happening, when it's happening, when it's coming out. We have to know how to reach them so it is very intricate.

R: What are your organization's marketing tactics?

P: We don't post without an image, a video, movie or link we don't like to just do word posts That way it gets pushed and it is seen by more people. We frequently post, the more you tweet, the better. We definitely try to tweet 2 to 3 times per day and Facebook post once per day. Just the more you're out there the more people look at it, so that's what we shoot for. We shoot to have people retweet or like what we post because the more interaction we get the more likely people are going to keep looking at our future posts

R: Does your organization have a marketing team?

P: Yes

R: Do you believe the marketing tactics are successful?

P: Yes I definitely do. Whenever we come into a new market we have a sales and marketing team that goes out And targets our perspective residence. They're doing a great job at it. You know they know what the best next thing is and how to get it out in front of people and making the community aware of something that is literally just dirt for a little while and they're selling it.

R: Does your organization have a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Yes

R: Does your organization use its social media to market towards its target audience?

P: Yes

R: What prompted your business to create a social media account?

P: Because it is something that our <u>target audience and target demographic love using</u>. It's something that they look at every day and it's the best way to reach anyone, anyone from age 10 two, heck, I know people his grandmothers have a Facebook now, so 80. They all have Facebook's and they all know what it is. <u>If you want to get their attention your business needs a Facebook account at the minimum.</u>

R: Please explain whether you think social media marketing or traditional marketing is more effective for your organization.

P: I think <u>that social media marketing is more effective for us because of the demographic market that we are targeting</u>. We want college-age students and that's what we portray . We will rent to anyone who meets our guidelines and wants to live here but we definitely have a target audience they are the people who are using social media and using new apps and using their phones to the best of their ability so we definitely use Facebook and Twitter to target those people so we let them know about us and let them know that were here to stay we do some print ads we do some TV ads we do still use some mainstream marketing like the Internet and different websites . We're definitely not all social media, but we put more time and energy into social media because it is something better to make graphic audience watches and they look for us to be on it. and that's what were looking for

R: Does your organization have a social media policy?

P: Yes, we pretty much say if it is not something you don't want your grandma to see, then you should not put it up.

R: What kinds of problems or obstacles, if any, has your organization experienced with its social media account?

P: A lot of our obstacles came from the fact that we had a rough move in. We had a lot of bad reviews Or bad tweets about us and the lack of giving people exactly what we promise. But we went to people and we talk to them, we replied and said please list what is wrong, we will be more than happy to come out and fix it – things like that. We're definitely on top of our social media. For example, if someone tweets at their Internet is out, We tweet with the resident with the issue along with the Internet provider in order to help them and let everyone be in the loop.

R: Do you try to handle the problem on the social media account or offline with the resident?

P: If it is Something that can be handled on our social media account and it is not an intricate problem we like to fix it and say hey we can hook you up with our Internet provider. We like to keep that stuff on social media so that when people see yet they know that were not ignoring them were helping them out. There are certain times we do

bring it off, if it elevates. But if it is something we can fix the social media that we definitely move forward on social media.

R: How do you believe students hear about your organization?

P: I think the largest way people hear about us is **word-of-mouth** and also drive-bys. We do have a large following on social media. We also do a lot of marketing with our logo out there like <u>T-shirt giveaways,</u> stuff like that. But I definitely think **word-of-mouth** is our biggest way that people hear about us.

R: Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your organization? If so, what did you determine. If not, why not?

P: We have at our corporate level but I have not seen that. Every time someone comes in to take a tour, they fill out a survey asking how they found out about our organization. Majority of the ones I have seen have said friends.

R: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience?

P: I think it's very effective. <u>As long as you know how to market what you're putting out to the target audience</u> That you're trying to **reach.** I think social media is a great way for people to find you and know more about you.

R: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

P: Oh gosh, it looks nothing like it did 10 years ago when I got on Facebook, so what the future looks like? It *is endless and unlimited* who knows what Twitter will look like five years from now because it looks nothing like it did five years ago. So it is limitless.

Participant Six: George Perry

R: How many rental units does your organization offer?

P: 586 units

R: What percentage of those units are rented currently?

P: 92 percent

R: How long has your organization been open?

P: August 2013

R: In what year were you born?

P: 1988

R: Are you a college graduate?

P: Yes

R: Where do you get your news?

P: I get everything online.

R: What's your title at your organization?

P: I'm the assistant general manager.

R: Personally, where do you get your news? TV, newspaper, Internet?

P: I get everything online

R: Do you have a personal social media account?

P: Yes

R: Which social media websites do you use?

P: **I'm on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram**. I don't use it a whole lot because I have to use it so much at work. Nine times out of ten by the time I'm done doing it for work, I don't want to get on my own stuff.

R: How often do you check Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: I check it maybe once per day

R: How often do you post on Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Max once every two weeks. I hardly ever post on it.

R: When did you get a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: I've had it since high school. Back then I was on it all the time. I'm not really big on using it socially anymore. Now I just use it for work.

R: What do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business?

P: I think it's something you have to do now. I mean it's **crucial**, and business everyone is going to that, especially for us focusing on college students, it's dumb not to

do it. You   pretty much have to.

R: How do you see social media fitting into your business plan?

P: It's a huge part, it's actually a daily thing. It's a <u>major, major part of our marketing strategy.</u>

R: What are your organization's marketing tactics?

P: I'm more of a <u>fan of old-school marketing</u> with paper and getting hand-to-hand contact with that prospect. I <u>prefer talking to someone in person rather than online</u>, but at the end of the day, social media is used so much you have to do that to be able to reach the maximum amount of people that you want. So we do have other things like I said, whether it be paper, flyers, Giveaways, parties and stuff like that, but social media is definitely a major part.

R: Does your organization have a marketing team?

P: Me (laughs). Me and my employees.

R: Do you believe the marketing tactics are successful?

P: Yes

R: Does your organization have a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: We have a <u>Facebook, Twitter and instagram account</u>

R: Does your organization use its social media to market towards its target audience?

P: Yes, definitely

R: What prompted your business to create a social media account?

P: <u>I think it's something you have to do now</u>. I mean it's **crucial**, and business everyone is going to that, especially for us focusing on college students, <u>it's dumb not to do it</u>. When   <u>you're targeting that young of an audience, you pretty much have to.</u>

R: Please describe your organization's social media marketing strategy.

P: We try not to be in business on our Facebook Instagram or Twitter. We don't go at as a business. We don't want to promote specials all day every day. *We do it more as a resident life window– it is a window* of what it is like to live at our property. We have our events on there, we have specials, but it is definitely not every day thing. It's more pictures of events we're throwing, pictures of real pictures of our property and

current events. We will do music and everything to keep students interested in us, to show our   style, and what we're about. Like I said it is a window of what it is like to live here and what you're missing out by not living here. It's not a business it's not forcing specials down your throat. I have worked at companies where we've done that and it didn't work. People realize that and they stop looking at it, they ignore it. We have over a thousand followers and there's a reason for that.

R: Please explain whether you think social media marketing or traditional marketing is more effective for your organization.

P: <u>I personally like the old-school stuff better.</u> I'm just a real big fan of reaching the audience **face-to-face**. If I can give you a flyer, person-to-person, and talk to you about what I'm selling. <u>You are more likely to buy it then if you read it on Facebook</u> and said okay that's cool, and flipped to the next page. Personally I like the old-school stuff better but a lot of people in my company and in my profession like social media better. I'm just one of those guys – I like the old-school stuff better.

R: Does your organization have a social media policy?

P: Yes we do. Basically you have to have all three: Facebook, twitter, and Instagram. Facebook is a timeline, day to day thing. Events, pictures, every day stuff. Twitter is a moment, and off-the-wall idea. Instagram is something you capture and want to never forget. That is the way we look at it. Policy is appropriate stuff. We don't want googled pictures, we want real stuff to represent that life for trying to represent.

R: What kinds of problems or obstacles, if any, has your organization experienced with its social media account?

P: No, besides coming up with stuff to post some times.

R: How do you believe students hear about your organization?

P: **<u>Word-of-mouth</u>**. We are the new thing in Statesboro. We are the place to be right now, and everybody is talking about us. We're the place to live so word-of-mouth is definitely the way our reputation is spreading.

R: Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your organization? If so, what did you determine. If not, why not?

P: We do ask them when they sign. It is not hundred percent accurate because it's

an online application, and a lot of times, people just click through it. At the end of the day that's our job: to know what the public is thinking, and to react to it. We're constantly talking the residence and future prospects and random people at the bar, and that is the way people are hearing about it. At our pool parties and friends are coming and taking towards and talking about how awesome we are– it is all word-of-mouth for the most part.

R: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience?

P: I think it is effective. It is a good tool to use. I do not think it is the most effective thing that we're doing right now I think we would take a hit and it would be noticeable if we didn't do it area and it is not an option if we do it or not – we have to do it and we need to do it, but *I don't think social media is the reason we are filling up, I think social media is the reason people are staying*. I think residence love social media and our resident life. It gives like I said a window of what how it is to live here, and I think people love that it gives another tool for people to check us if they are interested. But *I don't think social media is the key to our success social media is not what's making a sign leases right now.*

R: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

P: <u>I'm thinking it's going to grow. It is only going to get **bigger**</u>. People are going to continue to do social media and companies are going to take advantage of that to all of that free traffic eventually it will probably start costing businesses than it already does and eventually, marketing – I can see it almost all being online. It already to an extent is. I don't know – it definitely is going to get **bigger** and **bigger**.

Participant Seven: Richard Grayson

R: How many rental units does your organization offer?

P: 300 plus leases

R: What percentage of those leases are filled currently?

P: 90 to 95 percent

R: How long has your organization been open?

P: I think 06' give or take

R: In what year were you born?

P: 1955

R: Are you a college graduate?

P: I am

R: Where do you get your news?

P: Local news- obviously from the paper and the local network. Most of it by the TV.

R: Do you have a personal social media account?

P: No I don't have Facebook or anything. I don't have networking or anything. I consider myself a small company.

R: Have you ever tried to create a Facebook or Twitter account?

P: No I have not

R: Why haven't you tried to make a Facebook or Twitter?

P: I'll be honest and again – Being 90 to 95% Occupied- I'm not looking for a lot more space to fill that. I don't know if that's the right answer (laughs) But I look at the ways I market now – you know we've got Georgia MLS, We've got real estate today, the local sign process, a lot of referrals. My basic way of communicating and I have found it to be pretty good, even with college kids all the way up to older generations is *texting*. I might be **old-school**, but I do text a lot probably twice as much as I used to.

R: What do you think about using social media as a marketing tool in business?

P: I think it has its place. Again, if I was trying to venture into a new market or grow my business beyond what I currently have – I would need other avenues and I think social media it would be the way to go. That's the way to go. All generations below – you would know that age – that is the way to communication with them.

R: What are your organization's marketing tactics?

P: We use Georgia MLS, real estate today, the local newspaper, and a lot with signs. And signs are at least when somebody is riding by there and sees that sign, They are already comfortable and living in that place. I'm not trying to convince

them to move around Statesboro. However if you are riding and you're looking for a place to live, that sign is strong. And another thing that I have great success with is referrals. All of my tenants have my own personal cell number. I am the kind that likes to be one-on-one with my clients. I want you to be able to contact me. I just think that is a <u>strong presence when you can communicate one-on-one.</u>

R: What interest, if any, does your organization have in creating a social media account in the future?

P: I would consider it. To be honest with you, we are definitely behind the times in doing that. But were blessed with being successful. So there hasn't been a big desire on my part to go forward that way. But outside of that, I certainly see why and how it is necessary. That is the way of the future. It is all moving to that. You can forget all of these media signs that were using now Because you get so much instant exposure and network. I have a daughter and son who are 18 and 21 – I know. But again, it is more work on my part when I don't have a need.

R: How do you believe students hear about your organization?

P: Definitely signs and referrals.

R: Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your organization? If so, what did you determine. If not, why not?

P: No I have not

R: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience?

P: I think it's great. And again, it is a great way to do and again, I think I am behind in not using it. (Laughs) But again being a smaller company – and I will be honest with you – one key reason is – and I have the perfect age children to do it – I am sure there are many ways to sign up or find people who will help you do it, but I probably missed that. If there was an easier way for me to sit down and some XYZ company would come out and help, I would probably be much more entertaining in doing it versus trying to investigate it myself. If people came to me and said Mister I can do that, 123, 456, for whatever price and whatever time, it would be much more for me to consider versus me just trying to start my own. That's probably not going to happen on my own. (laughs).

R: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

P: I couldn't even begin to think where that may go. *That is the way of the future*. There is no doubt about that. And again, I don't want to be behind the curb when that hits and I'm not able to rent anything. But one thing, and I'm not trying to take the easy way out. But if there was a way for it to be advertised and be

accepted by somebody like me that needs help. I basically want to have it done and then be shown how to use it. Again, I'm not computer savvy but I am computer learnable and I can do anything like that. My daughter told me I couldn't learn how to tweet, and I don't know (laughs) I don't know if I should believe her or not. She is addicted it- the phone- the phone changed the wall. That is everything to them. It's too much sometimes. It is too much. But what do you do? Most young people- and maybe older ones I don't see- are glued to that phone. They just have to be in constant contact with somebody. I just don't think it is the healthiest thing in the world to be doing all the time. That is not me. I am trying to text and do that stuff but its overboard. It's probably my age. My 21 year old son and my 18 year old soon do not leave with out it. They lose their shoes, they lose their cars, but they are not going to lose that phone (laughs). Generation gaps are going to have different ways of learning things. But I'm not so naïve to say its not a great way to do it.

Participant Eight: Lucy Granger

P: What is your title at your organization?

P: Community Assistant

R: How many rental units does your organization offer?

P: 401 bedrooms

R: What percentage of those units are rented currently?

P: 86 percent

R: How long has your organization been open?

P: We've been open since 2009, so about 5 years

R: In what year were you born?

P: 1993

R: Are you a college graduate?

P: I am still in college

R: Where do you get your news?

P: My like news?

R: If you wanted to see what was going on- where would you look?

P: <u>Usually Facebook</u> (laughs)

R: Do you have a personal social media account?

P: Yes

R: Which social media websites do you use?

P: <u>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Vine</u> (if that counts)

R: How often do you check Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: I check Facebook a couple of times per day and Twitter every hour

R: How often do you post on Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: Facebook, once every couple weeks and Twitter- at least once a day

R: When did you get a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: My Twitter account- I got in 2012. My Facebook account, probably 2008.

R: What prompted you to create a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: **<u>Friends</u>**

R: Why do you continue to use social media?

P: <u>Because that's how you find out everything</u> (laughs)

R: What do you think about using social media as a marketing tactic in business?

P: I think its smart because we use it here. <u>That's how I find out everything</u>.

R: How do you see social media fitting into your business plan?

P: Well that's how we do a lot of our marketing <u>because we target college students</u>. It's pretty much our main source of marketing besides TV commercials, and flyers, and campus stuff.

R: What are your organization's marketing tactics?

P: Well we have a Facebook page, and were working on Instagram page. That is how we post contests and specials and everything like that.

R: Does your organization have a marketing team?

P: She assigns the community assistance to do it.

R: Do you believe the marketing tactics are successful?

P: Yes. For example we posted on Facebook- it was the main way we advertised our last signing day, And we ended up going up 12% in occupancy that day.

R: Does your organization have a Facebook and/or Twitter?

P: We have Facebook page, and we're working on Instagram page. We don't have an official Twitter, we technically have a Twitter but we haven't used it a lot yet.

R: What prompted your business to create a social media account?

P: Well I mean that's how everyone is marketing to college students nowadays. It's the easiest way to get it out there.

R: Please describe your organization's social media marketing strategy.

P: We pretty much look at what all the college students want And build off of that and use Facebook to Get the word out there so people know about our organization and any specials we have, incentives, or anything.

R: Please explain whether you think social media marketing or traditional marketing is more effective for your organization.

P: I think social media is. We're also looking into purchasing Google ads. It reaches people in a certain area-Like you can pay for how many people it shows up on their Facebook as advertisements on Facebook, Instead of paying for a TV the advertisement that some people might watch. It's like pretty much everyone has a Facebook, we could put it on there and gear it towards our client base. Like people who Google Housing – it will come up for that.

R: Does your organization have a social media policy?

P: No because it's so small that they haven't had to worry about it.

R: What kinds of problems or obstacles, if any, has your organization experienced with its social media account?

P: We haven't really had any. We did have a problem with having two Facebook's because we were switching people because we don't have a set marketing team. Other than that we haven't really had a problem.

R: How do you believe people hear about your organization?

P:I feel like people hear about college apartments in general <u>from each other</u>, but other than that I would definitely say Facebook is how people find out about college housing.

R: Have you conducted any research to determine how students first hear about your organization? If so, what did you determine. If not, why not?

P: Not really

R: What is your personal opinion on the effectiveness of using social media to reach your target audience?

P: P: It's like I said before, if we did the search engine – I think it's the smartest way. But I mean it is free, so <u>I think it is stupid not to use it</u>. Everyone has it so if <u>you ask everyone who lives in our organization to like it, it will show up on 400 tenants Facebook's and all of their thousands of friends</u>

R: What do you think the future of social media and marketing looks like?

P: I think more and more businesses are already using it, so I feel like local businesses are going to catch on more. I don't really think it will stop commercials but I think commercials will be more for the bigger company and we will see less local commercials.

Appendix D: Charts and Graphs

Social Networking Users
% of adults who use social networking sites

	Feb/Mar 2005*	Aug 2006*	Nov/Dec 2008*	Jan 2010**	05-10 Change
All	5	11	27	41	+36
Millennial	7	51	71	75	+68
Gen X	7	10	38	50	+43
Boomer	5	4	13	30	+25
Silent	2	*	2	6	+4

*Data from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. Question wording varied from 2005 to 2008. The 2005 item was worded "Use online social or professional networking sites like Friendster or LinkedIn." The 2006 item was worded "Use an online social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or Friendster."
The 2008 item was worded "Use a social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn.com."
**Question wording: Have you ever created your own profile on any social networking site?

Figure 1 Social Networking Users (Source: Pew Research Center, 2010)
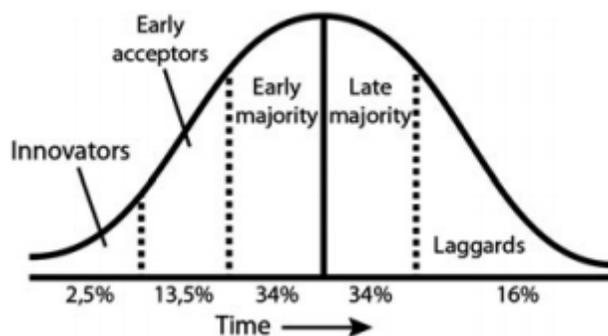
Figure 2 Adoption Curve (Source: Fill, 2005, p.54)