A Phenomenological Study of Undergraduate Students Use of Multiple Online Identities in the Creation of a Personal Brand

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Purpose of Research

- Due to privacy and security concerns related to use of the Internet, users may choose different strategies in how to manage their online identities. Understanding undergraduate students’ experiences with using multiple online identities may yield valuable information that helps to describe the essence and meaning of their experiences in areas that include the creation of online identities, the management of online identities, online identity theft, online identity verification, and the advantages and disadvantages of having an online identity through the creation of a personal brand.

Background

- In the 2013 Educause Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR) study of undergraduate students and information technology, Dahlstrom, Walker, and Dziuban (2013) found that students continue to want separation between academic and social uses of technology.
- Arteaga Sánchez, Cortijo, and Javed (2014) concluded that although social media has a great potential for cooperative and collaborative learning, there is a need to understand how students interact with it.
- In a study by Waycott, Sheard, Thompson, and Cleerehan (2013), a key finding was that there was an evident tension between instructors who wanted student work available publicly online with their real identity, rather than students posting public content anonymously.
- The Washington & Lee University School of Law Library and Law Technology (Miller & Briggs, n.d.) has developed a web presence guide for their students in which they highlight benchmarks and steps that they encourage students to take in the context of preparing their online identity for potential employers.
- Coursaris, Van Osch, Sung, and Yun (2013) explored managing online identities in Twitter with the authors concluding that further research is needed to understand how identities and services may be adopted and discontinued.

Research Questions

- The central question in the study is focused upon understanding the lived experiences of undergraduate students in their use and experience with the Internet and multiple online identities, at the time when they are forming their own identities as young adults and upcoming professionals on a career path.

Methodology

- The approach to inquiry will take place using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand the phenomenon through personal accounts (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009).

Goal

- The phenomenon being studied relates to experiences of users of the Internet and how multiple online identities may be leveraged to provide security and privacy to the end users. Through current news and research, the phenomenon is a relevant one in being written about in numerous news outlets, and is of concern to those who may be seeking employment and may come under scrutiny if items of concern turn up through Internet background searches of individuals. Through the study, a goal is to understand best practices that undergraduate students use to effectively brand and market themselves to identified audiences.

Reference List