

Prospectus
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Literature Review

This study on the college choice of Asbury University Freshmen occupies an under researched area, namely that of the effect of social media coverage of a University's spiritual atmosphere on college choice. There has, however, been research in adjacent areas.

College choice has been well-considered by researchers. One early model is the Chapman model. The Chapman model focuses on the influences on choice, dividing them into student characteristics and external characteristics (Chapman, 1981). Other models, including the Hossler and Galleger model and and Cabrera and LaNasa model think of the college choice process as occurring in stages, which both papers list as predispositions, search, and choice (Bergerson, 2009).

Besides general models of college choice, the reasoning for choosing a private vs. public and religious vs. non-religious private colleges has been investigated in "Graduates' Reasons for Choosing to Attend Religious and Public Colleges." (Moss & Cockriel, 1990). That article found that parents have more influence on the selection of religious colleges and the social atmosphere is a significant factor for selecting religious colleges. Similarly, "Religious and Spiritual Identity: The Impact of Gender, Family, Peers and Media Communication in Post-Adolescence" reports perceived social atmosphere as being important (Mullikin, 2006).

There has also been literature about the communication surrounding religious revival. The book "The Asbury Revival: when God used Students to Wake a Nation." mentions the use of media, telephone, word of mouth, and letters in spreading the word about an earlier

student-led revival (Atcheson, 2020). The book “The First Great Awakening in Colonial American Newspapers: A Shifting Story” goes into detail on the ways media covered religious revival. The book “Wheelock's World: Letters and the Communication of Revival in Great Awakening New England” similarly covers revival communication (Smith, 2012).

There has also been literature covering how institutions are perceived. The book “Reputation Management: The Future of Corporate Communications and Public Relations” by Tony Langham (Langham, 2019) and the book “Preventing Crisis at your University: The Handbook for Protecting your Institution’s Reputation” by Simon Barker both cover institutional reputation (Barker, 1969).

So, the literature includes treatments of why students choose schools, how mediated communication is used to spread and talk about religious revivals, and what constitutes and affects how people think about institutions. This provides a good foundation for investigating the effects of social media coverage of the 2023 Asbury revival on subsequent enrollment, while highlighting the lack of similar previous investigations. This study will provide insight into what role anticipated spiritual atmosphere has on people decision-making, and how those expectations are formed by mediated communications. More broadly, this may lead to research insights to do with how organizations can convey their spiritual atmospheres to prospective employees, students, or visitors by means of mediated communication.

Annotated Bibliography

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Bibliography

COLLEGE CHOICE (Secular then Christian):

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Communication (Christian then Secular):

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RQ1- How did social media coverage of the 2023 Asbury Outpouring affect how incoming freshmen and transfers thought about the revival?

RQ2- Did incoming freshmen and transfers' beliefs about the Outpouring affect their college choice?

RQ3- Why did incoming freshmen and transfers decide to come to Asbury University?

METHODS:

Subjects:

The population being studied would be fall 2023 freshmen and transfers at Asbury University. The larger of those two groups by far is the freshman, who are mostly aged 17-19. There are more female freshmen than male freshmen.

We plan to gather a volunteer sample by a variety of means, both digital and physical. Emails will be sent out to the student body and posters put up around campus. As well, certain professors plan to advertise the study in their classes. Interested freshmen and transfers will then be able to participate come time for the study.

As a result of the above, our sample of subjects will be made up of whichever freshmen and transfers decide to volunteer. This fact may result in the sample being somewhat unrepresentative of the population we want to study.

Methods and Procedures:

We propose a mixed-methods approach, including two focus groups of 6-12 students each followed by a survey to be completed as many freshmen and transfers as decide to.

The focus groups will be on campus in-person. The groups will be made up of walk-in volunteers, who will be incentivized to attend by us providing coffee and desert, gift cards to the university coffee shop, as well as be the prospect of discussing and hearing others' stories. The sessions will be audio- and video-recorded for purpose of our later review, but participant identities will be kept confidential.

Participants will be provided informed consent forms. The contents of the form will be read to the group, explaining the purpose, design, and risks of the study. Once the participants have been read the form, they will have the opportunity to sign and continue or to leave with no consequences. Also, participants will be free to leave at any point for any reason.

Following the focus groups, the transcripts and recordings of the sessions will be analyzed for content and themes. The findings of that analysis will be used to formulate survey questions. The resulting survey will later be sent out to 2023 freshmen and transfer students.

Overall, focus groups will be made up of volunteers incentivized by food, gift cards, and the whatever intrinsic appeal participation holds for them. The qualitative findings of the focus

groups will be used to design a survey. The survey will provide quantitative weight to the final findings of the study.

Proposal Summary:

We propose a study on the effects of social media coverage of the 2023 Asbury Outpouring on the college choice and expectations of Asbury's fall 2023 freshmen and transfer students. The study would be mixed methods, including two focus groups and a survey. The sample of participants would be volunteers, which may potentially make study results non-representative of the population we wish to study.

This study is very doable. This study would be performed by a professor and their class of research students. For this reason, the amount of work involved would be very manageable. Because of the size of the population being studied, as well as the exiting nature of the Outpouring events and stories, it is also very probable that we get enough volunteers and respondents to yield meaningful results. And so, the study is feasible both on the researcher and the participant side of things.

This study is significant. The Asbury University 2023 Outpouring was a historic event, and we have a unique and limited time to capture the impressions and thoughts of new students. This study could provide insights into how media coverage affects what people think about a place's spiritual atmosphere. In a spiritually impoverished time in North America, this is not unimportant.