

Hotel School Alumni’s Intentions to Use Communication Channels – a Cross-Generational Comparison Study

Alumni communication is vital in sustaining the relationship between alumni and their alma maters. This research investigated four cohorts of alumni, and their intentions to use a range of traditional and digital communication channels, including social media. An online questionnaire was sent to 8,060 alumni and resulted in 595 usable responses, yielding a 7% response rate. The research results showed that alumni have the highest intentions to use the alumni e-newsletter and the alumni website and the lowest intentions to use social media, e.g. Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Among alumni cohorts, significant statistical differences in their intentions to use these communication channels were identified. Given our findings, alumni communication staff are encouraged to leverage different communication channels targeting alumni in different age groups.

Keywords: alumni association; alumni communication; higher education marketing; communication channels; social media

Introduction

A strong alumni group is one of the most critical components of a high quality hospitality management program and a selling point when students consider their choice of institution (Assante, Huffman & Harp, 2008; Cha, Kim & Cichy, 2013; Assante, Huffman & Harp, 2010). Alumni actively contribute to their alma maters through both monetary and non-monetary support, including political influence (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2008). Universities and colleges are also increasingly reliant on the service and influence of their alumni to achieve institutional goals (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). The alumni are, additionally, of ever increasing financial importance given reduced

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3 government investment, creating a higher reliance on external stakeholders for financial
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5 support. Alumni giving is one of the criteria used by US News and World Report to
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7 rank universities, although Pearlman, Ryu & Schaffer (2010) argued that alumni giving
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9 may reflect more of the alumni size than the quality of hospitality program rankings. In
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11 fact, Assante et al. (2008) developed a list of quality indicators for hospitality
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13 management programs, including not only alumni financial support, but also alumni
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15 relations and alumni input into programs, as critical indicators.
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18 US institutions have become proficient and experienced in soliciting support
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20 from their key stakeholders, while there was less impetus for EU institutions to be
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22 active in this area (Ebert, Axelsson & Harbor, 2015). Yet, this is gradually changing as
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24 the higher education market becomes more competitive and additional financial support
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26 becomes more critical. A growing number of hospitality and tourism education
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28 institutions are actively involved in soliciting alumni support which means that
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30 marketing communications are essential to sustaining relationships and to secure a
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32 strong sense of attachment to the brand of the institution. Yet, recent research shows
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34 that there is a lack of understanding of this issue within hospitality management
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36 programs (Cha et al., 2013; Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2008).
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39 Furthermore, the scant, existing research related to alumni communications
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41 tends to focus on the frequencies, content, or format (both traditional and digital); or on
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43 selected channels, such as magazines, annual reports, online newsletters, website,
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45 appeal / campaign letters (Levine, 2008; Iskhakova, Hoffmann, & Hilbert, 2017). Also
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47 they have not comprehensively investigated alumni's preferences for communication
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49 channels, and in particular, social media channels, to communicate with their alma
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51 maters. These digital channels, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram,
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53 have become part of an established range within the integrated communication channels
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3 deployed by many higher education institutions to reach a range of stakeholders. The
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5 interactive content, rich and real-time nature of these new information channels not only
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7 enable higher education institutions to have one-on-one conversations with alumni, but
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9 also provide channels for alumni to communicate with each other. They have the
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11 potential to create, maintain and enhance a sense of belonging and community (Kelleher
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13 & Sweetser, 2012). Research also shows that these more social communities contribute
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15 to loyalty and have the potential to generate financial support (Levine, 2008).
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18 Hotel schools were initiated in Switzerland in 1893 in response to the growing
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20 tourism demand and the challenges of finding qualified talent to work for the tourism
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22 and hotel industry (Jung, Kim, & Schuckert, 2014). Over the years, hotel schools have
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24 not only focused on the hotel industry, but also developed specializations in various
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26 tourism sectors, and recruited more international students (Weiermair & Bieger, 2006;
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28 Jung et al., 2014). Previous research investigated the nature of hotel schools
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30 (Weiermair & Bieger, 2006; Jung et al., 2014), students values (Johns, Henwood, &
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32 Seaman, 2007), learning and education experiences (Charlesworth, 2007), and alumni's
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34 expectations (Vieregge, Robinson, and Drago, 2013).
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37 Generally, universities have a designated alumni department to address alumni
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39 communications and related issues, and academic faculty or administrators are less
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41 involved with alumni relationships. The unique nature of independent hotel schools
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43 makes us believe that this research is beneficial to administrators and faculty members
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45 at these education institutions. Faculty members at independent hotel schools provide
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47 education and conduct research like their general university peers, but also take on
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49 responsibilities in recruitment, admissions, student affairs, and alumni relationships.
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51 For example, faculty members cultivate alumni relationships by joining homecoming
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53 events, providing business and career advice, and recruiting internships to work for
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2 alumni's companies, etc. The small scale of most of these schools also indicates that the
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4 relationships between professors and staff and alumni may be more intimate, since they
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6 probably know most alumni. Hence, the alumni related issues are more relevant to a
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8 broader scope of stakeholders within the domain of these hotel schools.
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11 Alumni communication related research remains limited (Levine, 2008;
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13 Vieregge et al., 2013), and most has focused on fund raising issues such as donors'
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15 profiles and loyalty for universities (Farrow & Yuan, 2011). Previous researchers have
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17 recommended that future research should investigate communication channels used by
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19 universities to communicate with their alumni, and suggested that longitudinal or cross
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21 generational studies deserved more research attention (Levine, 2008; Farrow & Yuan,
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23 2011; Cha et al., 2013; Vieregge et al., 2013; Palmer, 2013). This research addressed
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25 the call from previous researchers with a cross-generational sample, and has made a
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27 contribution by investigating the perspectives of the studied recipients of the marketing
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29 communications from the alumni association. This has informed the alumni associations
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31 of the channels that their members intend to use, across different generations. As
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33 Fontaine (2014, p117) states "In the near future, the success of an institution of higher
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35 education will depend on treating different customers differently". This research was
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37 the first step in acknowledging the generational differences in communication
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39 preferences in the context of alumni communication, while incorporating an extended
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41 range of communication channels.
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46 **Literature Review**

47 ***Models of Alumni Associations***

48 Alumni associations should be viewed as strategic and vital assets (Martin,
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50 Moriuchi, Smith, Moeder & Nichols, 2015; Barnard & Rensleigh, 2008). Alumni could
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52 not only provide monetary and non-monetary contributions to their alma maters but also
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contribute to continuity of the “brand” and a sense of history to the academic establishment. Universities and colleges in the U.S. have a long tradition of cultivating alumni relations in comparison to their European peers, where the funding models of higher education vary significantly. In the US, higher education institutions have diverse levels of involvement in the private economy and some rely on a small number of big donors and stakeholders. On the contrary, many European higher education organizations are supported solely by government or public funding. These differences in funding and culture impact on alumni relations and what these institutions expect of their alumni (Vieregge et al., 2013; Ebert et al., 2015). There are also more staff devoted to alumni relations in the US and Humphreys (2014) estimates that Europe is five to 10 years behind their US counterparts in alumni investment and engagement (Humphreys, 2014; Fearn, 2009).

Alumni Involvement

Alumni engage in various roles in academic institutions. Hanson (2000) found that several factors, such as organizational prestige, social identification, years since graduation, and respect for alumni leaders, could be predictors of alumni that are most likely to support their institutions. Many colleges and universities have adopted programs that involve alumni directly in the recruitment of prospective students in addition to a range of other major activities e.g. hosting and participating in alumni events. These events may include homecoming activities, conducting campus tours, recruitment activities, participating in student candidate interviews, encouraging donations and sponsorship, providing students with hands-on learning experiences, and mentoring (Singer & Hughey, 2002). Alumni relations, alumni financial support, and alumni input into the academic program have been identified as indicators to assess the quality of hospitality management programs (Assante, et al. 2008). Furthermore,

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3 alumni support is important for mentoring, internships, and career placement of
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5 hospitality management program graduates (Assante et al., 2008).
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10 *University and Alumni Communication*

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12 To be sustainable and successful, universities and colleges must engage in
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14 mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders, including alumni, and tailor
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16 marketing practices in line with their vision (Stefanica, 2014; Barnard & Rensleigh,
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18 2008). Managing alumni's information and communication needs should contribute to
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20 relationship building (Barnard & Rensleigh, 2008). By understanding their publics'
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22 motives, academic institutions are better able to tailor their communication resources
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24 effectively (Sisson, 2014). The key communication channels used by higher education
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26 institutions and their alumni associations include; printed magazines, web sites,
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28 electronic newsletters, annual reports, fundraising letters and campaign materials
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30 (Levine, 2008).
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35 Meanwhile, most colleges and universities are increasingly looking to social
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37 media as a means of engaging with stakeholders, including alumni (Linvill, Rowlett &
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39 Kolind, 2015; Palmer, 2013; Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012). In extending the residual
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41 commitments of their alumni, many alumni associations focus on emotive appeals
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43 (Solinger, Hofmans, & Olffen, 2015). Positive emotional expressions are more likely to
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45 be propagated across social media than negative ones and education brands are using
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47 their social media to create deep emotional connections. In addition to consuming this
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49 emotive content, people may participate through interacting with the content, as well as
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51 with other users, on social media sites with user-to-user interaction. User-to-user
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53 interaction occurs when people interact with each other through e-mail, instant
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55 messaging, chat rooms, message boards, etc. Such interaction can be ways for alumni
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to, at least partially, fulfil their social interaction needs (Alhabash, McAlister, Hagerstrom, Quilliam, Rifon & Richards, 2013). Universities now need to re-evaluate their social media plans to acknowledge their specific alumni user needs and different generational audiences, aligned with the functionality of specific social media platforms, particularly as the ‘net’ generation (NetGen) reach alumni status (Linville, et al., 2015). Interactively sharing information should be the core of the relationship building activities initiated by the alumni associations (Barnard & Rensleigh, 2008). Being connected to universities’ social media channels may indicate alumni want to interact in more depth with their alma maters but the frequency, content, tone or intensity of the communication mode must be personalized to alumni generational preferences (Sission, 2014).

Based on diffusion theory, Kelleher & Sweetser (2012) interviewed university communicators and established that social media adoption is mostly attributable to the relative advantages, compatibility, and triability of these channels. Particularly, a key relative advantage for higher education communicators is the ability of social media to reach geographically dispersed stakeholders, such as alumni. Furthermore, university communicators also identified the ability to share information to the public, cost savings, effectiveness, and convenience as the benefits offered by social media (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012).

Palmer (2013) analyzed six Australian universities’ social media presences and reported a wide range of social media exploitation including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, a university blog, Flickr, and LinkedIn. On the contrary, Botha, Farshid, and Pitt (2011) found that universities in South Africa were not distinctly positioned in

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3 social media, and that none of them seem to currently have a concerted strategy for
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5 engaging its stakeholders in a particular social media platform. A wide ranging
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7 misalignment of social media to channel attributes was also apparent in the higher
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9 education sector. McAllister (2012) revealed that more than half of the universities
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11 studied had Facebook pages, but did not allow users to post content or photos, or
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13 participate in discussions and wall posts. Interestingly, colleges and universities were
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15 not using Twitter in a dialogic way; rather they were using it as an institutional news
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17 feed to a general audience (Linville, McGee & Hicks, 2012). Similarly, Pinterest was not
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19 employed in a manner consistent with users' expectations (Linville et al., 2015).
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23 *Alumni Expectations to Alumni Association*

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25 Hotel school graduates had similar expectations of their alumni associations and,
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27 additionally, Swiss hotel school graduates had higher participation rates in alumni
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29 networks than non-Swiss hotel school graduates (Vieregge et al., 2013). Swiss hotel
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31 school graduates expected the alumni networks to provide information about
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33 employment opportunities, for example a job bank; and to keep alumni in touch with
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35 each other (Vieregge et al., 2013). This expectation of proactive alumni is supported in
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37 a survey of alumni conducted at the University of Johannesburg which determined that
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39 98.2% of respondents wanted the alumni office to establish contact with them and
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41 86.7% of the respondents preferred to receive the information by e-mails or through the
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43 brand website (Barnard & Rensleigh, 2008). Furthermore, the information alumni
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45 wanted to access included; career opportunities, bursaries and postgraduate study,
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47 current research projects at the institution, alumni achievements, general campus
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49 activities, cultural activities, fundraising projects, and sport activities (Barnard &
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51 Rensleigh, 2008).
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Generational Differences

Researchers found generational differences may cause differences in media use (Voorveld and van der Goot, 2013) and Twitter usage (Metallo and Agrifoglio, 2015). In China, generation X and elder generations had different media consumption patterns (Don, Wang, & Zhou, 2006). Generation Y adopted new media based on “the content to be found and the activities to be done” (Geraci and Nagy, 2004). Only generation Y was willing to use social media to voice concerns related to work (Holland, Cooper, & Hecker, 2016).

Generational Differences in Alumni

In terms of generational differences in alumni, the Stanford Alumni Association reported that 46 per cent of their alumni who were 39 years of age or younger, 23 per cent of alumni who were 40 to 59 years old, and only 8 per cent of alumni aged 60 years and older received the e-newsletter. The percentages of alumni receptive to the e-newsletters decreased as the alumni’s age increased (Levine, 2008). Levine (2008) also recorded that there is a positive relationship between the frequencies of alumni magazines and alumni newsletters and alumni’s financial generosity, indicating that the more communication with alumni, the more likely they were to contribute to their alma mater.

Previous research examined how academic institutions choose the communication channels they utilized with their stakeholders but give little consideration as to what the alumni themselves intended to use. In the case of hotel schools such as this case, there were also unique challenges with a widely geographically dispersed and mobile alumni that had a strong emotional attachment to both the institution and the broader hospitality industry. Furthermore, given the limited

research on alumni from the hotel school perspective and the changing models of communication in a wider context, researchers acknowledged the limitations of investigating only traditional media (Levine, 2008); or only one or two specific digital channels, such as Facebook (Farrow & Yuan, 2011) or Twitter (Palmer, 2013). Researchers recommended that future research should include new digital channels and conduct longitudinal studies including older alumni in the future (Cha et al., 2013; Vieregge et al., 2013; Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Palmer, 2013; Levin, 2008).

Hence, this research was designed to address these calls for further study. The specific research questions are therefore;

- (1) What are hotel school alumni's intentions to use various communication channels to be informed about their alumni association?
- (2) Do hotel school alumni cohorts / generations differ in their intentions to use different communication channels?

Method

Background and Context

Founded in 1893, Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) is the first hotel school in the world. In contrast to larger universities, hotel schools such as EHL, have a more intimate relationship between professors and students, as faculty take on responsibilities in recruitment, admissions, student affairs, and alumni relationships.

In terms of communication channels, EHL has e-newsletters, a website with designated web pages for alumni, and a wide social media presence in LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Furthermore, the EHL alumni association has its own LinkedIn and Facebook profiles.

EHL set up the alumni association, l'Association des Anciens, in 1926 with 110 alumni. Now, EHL's alumni association is known as AEHL, and has 25,000 alumni in 120 countries and has four staff members working with 70 chapters. AEHL offers services including about 400 events around the world every year. The events include class reunions (5, 10, 20 years, etc.) at EHL; local chapter gatherings and social activities; as well as the annual AEHL reunion. Communication activities and services include; e-newsletters, personal profiles in the AEHL database, information and recruitment sessions and career services (AEHL Services, n.d.).

Instrument and Subjects

The survey items were developed through interviews of AEHL staff members and alumni during the spring of 2015 through a series of semi-structured interviews. The online survey questionnaire consisted of several sections, and the two relevant sections reported in this research are personal information, including the graduation year, gender, nationality, and membership in the local alumni chapter and an evaluation of the intentions to use a range of communication channels related to their alumni association. These eleven communication channels were the e-newsletter, AEHL website, EHL magazine, LinkedIn, Facebook page, AEHL app, EHL website, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and in person or by phone. These channels were evaluated using 5-point Likert scales ranging from not likely at all (1) to most likely (5). After the pilot test to ensure clarity of items, minor adjustments were made. The final version of the survey was presented in French and English.

An e-mail explaining the purpose of the survey along with a link to the online survey was distributed to 8,060 AEHL members in spring 2015. Two weeks later, a second e-mail was sent to remind participants and encourage participation in the survey.

The population for this research was defined as all alumni who provided their e-mail addresses with AEHL. Out of 8,060 e-mail addresses, 830 alumni responded with a usable count of 739 responses. Next, the listwise deletion method was used to treating missing data. Consequently, this reduced the total responses to 595, and the corresponding response rate was approximately 7% which is comparable to that of previous alumni studies of 5.5% (Viergge et al., 2013), 6% (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2008), 7% and 12% (McAlexander, Koenig, & DeFault, 2015). The final sample was proportionately representative of the generational cohorts. These generational cohorts have been exposed to a range of communication methods during their transformational education years with early cohorts exposed to traditional communication such as newsletters via traditional mail with later generations being exposed to more digital channels such as Facebook or email.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVAs and presented in tables and figures. All statistical tests used $p \leq 0.05$, i.e. the confidence level is 0.95.

Results

Respondent profiles and cohorts composition

The respondents were mainly male (55%) and about half of the respondents were chapter members (49%), mainly Swiss (41%) and French (15%). The range of graduation years was between 1957 and 2014, which covers several generations of alumni. Four cohorts were created. Cohort 1 to 3 each represents a duration of 10 years. For Cohort 4, the duration is more than 10 years, as it contains alumni graduated in and before 1984 (between 1957 and 1984). All respondents were distributed into a

cohort based on their graduation years. Table One shows the number of respondents within each cohort.

Insert Table One Near Here

The intentions to use communication channels

The first research question was addressed in Table Two, which presents the means and standard deviations of alumni’s intentions to use various communication channels. Overall, the intentions to use are in the following order; e-newsletter (M = 3.79, S.D. = 1.24); AEHL website (M = 3.14, S.D. = 1.31); EHL magazine (M = 2.87, S.D. = 1.40); LinkedIn (M = 2.82, S.D. = 1.41); Facebook (M = 2.71, S.D. = 1.53); AEHL app (M = 2.71, S.D. = 1.57); EHL website (M = 2.5, S.D. = 1.24); in person/phone (M = 2.42, S.D. = 1.43); YouTube (M = 1.70, S.D. = 1.08); Instagram (M = 1.57, S.D. = 1.08); and Twitter (M = 1.41, S.D. = 0.86).

Among the five social media investigated, alumni preferred to use LinkedIn and Facebook, and gave YouTube, Instagram and Twitter the lowest intentions to use among all channels. It is interesting to note that the low intentions to use YouTube, Instagram and Twitter were consistent across all cohorts.

Insert Table Two Near Here

Insert Figure One Near Here

Table Two and Figure One present the means and standard deviations for the intentions to use various communication channels by cohorts. It is interesting to note that the intentions to use the e-newsletter and EHL website increase along with the age

of the cohorts, with older cohorts preferring these two channels. This is in contrast to other channels, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, AEHL app, and Instagram. For these channels, as the members in the cohort get older, their intentions to use decrease.

Different intentions to use communication channels among cohorts

Insert Table Three Near Here

For seven channels with significant differences, post-hoc Tukey HSD tests were conducted to identify the differences among cohorts. Based on post-hoc Tukey HSD tests, significant differences were found:

Between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2: AEHL website ($p = 0.04$); Facebook ($p = 0.00$); EHL website ($p = 0.02$); Instagram ($p = 0.02$)

Between Cohort 1 and Cohort 3: AEHL app ($p = 0.01$); EHL website ($p = 0.02$); Facebook ($p = 0.00$); Instagram ($p = 0.05$)

Between Cohort 1 and Cohort 4: EHL magazine ($p = 0.00$); LinkedIn ($p = 0.01$); Facebook ($p = 0.00$); AEHL app ($p = 0.00$); EHL website ($p = 0.00$); Instagram ($p = 0.00$)

Between Cohort 2 and Cohort 3: no significant differences

Between Cohort 2 and Cohort 4: EHL magazine ($p = 0.01$); LinkedIn ($p = 0.03$); Facebook ($p = 0.00$); AEHL app ($p = 0.01$)

Between Cohort 3 and Cohort 4: EHL magazine ($p = 0.00$)

Discussions

The above findings answered the call made from previous researchers to investigate generational differences, as well as comparing different traditional and

digital channels. Our discussion **focuses** on the difference between cohorts first, and follows with channel discussions.

Intentions to use communication channels by cohorts

Figure Two presents intentions to use by cohorts. As shown in Figure Two, overall, Cohort 1 had the highest intentions to use e-newsletter, Facebook, and AEHL App. Cohort 2 had the highest intentions to use e-newsletter, AEHL website, and LinkedIn. Cohort 3 preferred the e-newsletter, AEHL website, and the EHL magazine. Cohort 4 preferred the e-newsletter, EHL magazine, and AEHL website.

Insert Figure Two Near Here

In terms of generational comparisons, it is not surprising to note that Cohort 1 and Cohort 4 differed from other cohorts. Cohort 4 preferred the EHL magazine, a traditional media much more than cohort 1, 2, and 3 did. It may indicate that older alumni are more comfortable with traditional, static, one-way, communication, in comparison to other cohorts. On the other hand, in comparison with other cohorts, Cohort 1 had much higher intentions to use Facebook and Instagram, but much lower intentions to use the EHL website. Hence, AEHL should use the EHL magazine to reach older alumni, and Facebook for the recent graduates. Although Cohort 1 had higher intentions than other cohorts to use Instagram, the mean was only 1.78, meaning Instagram is not a preferred channel in comparison to other channels to reach cohort 1.

Channel Discussions

It’s interesting to note that there are no significant differences between the four cohorts in terms of their intentions to use the e-newsletter. Hence, hotel schools should

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3 recognize the alumni place value on the alumni e-newsletter. This may be because they
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5 all are sent the e-newsletter and are somewhat passive in their communication with their
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7 alma mater when receiving information. Despite the fact that it limits the interactive
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9 nature of communication, the e-newsletter has a long shelf life and can be read with no
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11 limits on time or readership. Furthermore, it could be used as a springboard to connect
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13 more deeply with alumni if a call to action was included to join in the conversation in a
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15 social platform.
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18 Alumni, regardless of their cohorts, had higher intentions to use communication
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20 channels that are specific to alumni, such as the e-newsletter, AEHL website, and to
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22 some extent, the AEHL app. Given that alumni were not present on campus and have
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24 completed their studies, their information needs were different from other stakeholders.
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26 Previous researchers found that alumni expect the alumni network to help them to keep
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28 in touch with each other, and to provide information about employment opportunities,
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30 bursaries and postgraduate study, and current research projects at the institution
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32 (Vieregge et al., 2013; Barnard & Rensleigh, 2008). Additionally, Solinger et al. (2015)
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34 suggested that alumni marketing may suffice by focusing on emotive appeals in
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36 upholding the residual commitments of their alumni. Hence, alumni staff should
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38 consider both informational and emotional needs of their alumni when developing their
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40 content strategy, and align the content, channels, and alumni audience.
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46 Comparing between the AEHL and EHL websites, all cohorts rated the AEHL
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48 website higher than the generic EHL website. Together, this may indicate that alumni
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50 prefer a specific website addressing their needs, instead of the general website targeting
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52 all stakeholders. As the content on universities' websites increase, different
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54 stakeholders may experience difficulties finding the right information they need and
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website optimization must ensure that different segments are served by the various sub sites and micro sites.

Among all new social media channels, it is interesting to note that the overall ratings were highest for LinkedIn, followed by Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, respectively. The lower ratings assigned to Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram were critical reminders that not all social media are the same or that all formats of social media content were appealing. Another explanation could be that alumni do not associate these three social media in the context of their careers and professional life. This may also be related to the fact that sites like Facebook were more socially interactive and synchronous with profiles, photos, videos and messages to keep in touch with family, friends and colleagues which are distinctly different from sites such as YouTube, and Twitter where content was more broadcast and asynchronous. It is important to note that ANOVA tests found no significant differences between cohorts for YouTube and Twitter, which may indicate that the low relevance of these two channels for all cohorts.

Furthermore, the ratings of LinkedIn, Facebook, the AEHL app, and Instagram all decline as cohorts get older. It is not surprising that newer generations rated new channels higher, while older cohorts rated them lower. For example, from the Tukey test, Cohort 4 had very low intention to use LinkedIn in comparison to other cohorts. Whether this scenario is due to the fact that they are likely to be at a later stage of their career where they no longer need career prospecting and visibility; or may be due to a lack of competence in social media engagement cannot be determined in this study.

Similarly, Cohort 1 had much higher intention to use Facebook, but whether it is related to their long established presence in social media requires more investigation.

Conclusion, limitations, and future research

Conclusion

This research used a cross-generational sample to investigate alumni's intentions to be informed about their alumni association. The communication channels investigated here include e-newsletter, EHL magazine, in person/phone, AEHL website, EHL website, AEHL app, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. Regardless of their cohorts, all alumni rated e-newsletter as the highest; and YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter the lowest three channels for communication. It is clear, for this particular sample, that though the new social media channels were gaining in importance, they were not the channel of choice for alumni seeking alumni-related information. Alumni specific channels, such as the alumni e-newsletter, alumni website, and to some extent the alumni app, were their preferred channels. It is interesting to notice that alumni across all cohorts had higher intentions to use the passive channel of the e-newsletter, in preference to the dynamic, interactive social media channels. This research reveals that there were generational differences in channel preferences, indicating alumni associations could target alumni cohorts via specific channels.

Limitations and future research

The main limitation of this study was that it may be only specific to hotel school alumni from a wide range of geographical locations, as in our sample. Hotel schools that serve a local population where the alumni may have closer physical links to their

graduates and therefore can offer a more personal service and contact to their alumni
may produce different results. Additionally, this research focuses on identifying the
intentions to use different information channels, but did not attempt to identify the
underlying reasons or motivation for these different preferences. Nor did it define the
relevant content for different generational cohorts. Specifically, whether the channel
preferences were related to alumni’s stages of career, or familiarity with certain media,
should be further investigated. Similarly, based on the identified channels, the next
challenge is to identify relevant, emotive and rich content for alumni cohorts, as well as
the successful content strategies to be used. Further research will investigate the
specific needs and motivation for alumni communication and will focus on generational
channel and content preferences, particularly examining how to leverage the strong
emotional attachment to both the institution and the hospitality industry when designing
content.

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Table One
Cohort Profiles

	Graduation Years	Number	Percentage
Cohort 1	2005 – 2014	266	45%
Cohort 2	1995 - 2004	133	22%
Cohort 3	1985 – 1994	93	16%
Cohort 4	1957 - 1984	103	17%
	Total	595	100%

Table Two

Intentions to Use: Means and Standard Deviation for all and by cohorts

	All (N = 595)		Cohort 1 (N = 266)		Cohort 2 (N = 133)		Cohort 3 (N = 93)		Cohort 4 (N = 103)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
AEHL e-newsletter	3.79	1.24	3.72	1.23	3.77	1.28	3.88	1.28	3.93	1.19
AEHL website	3.14	1.31	2.94 ^a	1.24	3.31 ^a	1.34	3.30	1.39	3.27	1.32
EHL magazine	2.87	1.40	2.61 ^a	1.37	2.94 ^b	1.34	2.83 ^c	1.39	3.49 ^{a b c}	1.36
LinkedIn	2.82	1.41	2.97 ^a	1.35	2.95 ^b	1.35	2.57	1.54	2.46 ^{a b}	1.47
Facebook	2.71	1.53	3.24 ^a	1.45	2.58 ^{a b}	1.51	2.28 ^a	1.51	1.89 ^{a b}	1.23
AEHL app	2.71	1.57	3.00 ^a	1.57	2.77 ^b	1.58	2.41 ^a	1.53	2.16 ^a	1.39
EHL website	2.50	1.24	2.23 ^a	1.17	2.62 ^a	1.23	2.67 ^a	1.35	2.88 ^a	1.20
In person / phone	2.42	1.43	2.38	1.43	2.50	1.46	2.35	1.54	2.47	1.31
YouTube	1.70	1.08	1.78	1.11	1.64	1.06	1.68	1.12	1.56	0.99
Instagram	1.57	1.08	1.78 ^a	1.26	1.46 ^a	1.00	1.45 ^a	0.90	1.27 ^a	0.66
Twitter	1.41	0.86	1.42	0.89	1.44	0.89	1.40	0.87	1.32	0.69

Note: Means in the same row followed by the same subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Scale = 1-5 (1 = not likely at all and 5 = most likely)

Table Three
ANOVA Test Results

		df	S.S.	M.S.	F	Sig.
AEHL newsletter	Between Groups	3.00	4.26	1.42	0.92	0.43
	Within Groups	591.00	915.31	1.55		
	Total	594.00	919.57			
AEHL website	Between Groups	3.00	18.62	6.21	3.67	0.01
	Within Groups	591.00	999.36	1.69		
	Total	594.00	1'017.97			
EHL magazine	Between Groups	3.00	57.94	19.31	10.36	0.00
	Within Groups	591.00	1'101.83	1.86		
	Total	594.00	1'159.77			
LinkedIn	Between Groups	3.00	28.14	9.38	4.77	0.00
	Within Groups	591.00	1'160.89	1.96		
	Total	594.00	1'189.03			
Facebook	Between Groups	3.00	164.18	54.73	26.51	0.00
	Within Groups	591.00	1'220.09	2.06		
	Total	594.00	1'384.28			
AEHL app	Between Groups	3.00	62.48	20.83	8.80	0.00
	Within Groups	591.00	1'398.22	2.37		
	Total	594.00	1'460.70			
EHL website	Between Groups	3.00	39.02	13.01	8.78	0.00
	Within Groups	591.00	875.72	1.48		
	Total	594.00	914.75			
In person / phone	Between Groups	3.00	1.89	0.63	0.31	0.82
	Within Groups	591.00	1'218.58	2.06		
	Total	594.00	1'220.46			
YouTube	Between Groups	3.00	4.25	1.42	1.21	0.31
	Within Groups	591.00	691.69	1.17		
	Total	594.00	695.94			
Instagram	Between Groups	3.00	23.64	7.88	6.97	0.00
	Within Groups	591.00	668.36	1.13		
	Total	594.00	691.99			
Twitter	Between Groups	3.00	0.98	0.33	0.44	0.72
	Within Groups	591.00	434.41	0.74		
	Total	594.00	435.38			



