

Recruiting Millenials into Student Organizations: Exploring Cialdini's Principles of Human Influence

Laura Serviere-Munoz¹, R. Wayne Counts²

(1. The Satish and Yasmin Gupta College of Business, USA; 2. Lariccia Scholl of Accounting and Finance, Williamson College of Business Administration, Youngstown State University, One University Plaza, Youngstown, OH 44555, USA)

Abstract: Professional student organizations are a source for experiential learning opportunities widely available in many Universities. However, attracting and retaining the current Millennial has proven challenging and the research addressing ways to improve retention and participation using theory has been limited. Using Cialdini's principles of influence, this study found support for social proof, authority, and scarcity as the significant values that have an impact on whether Millenials are active in their student life. In addition, age was a significant negative predictor of student participation. By being able to effectively recruit and retain Millenials, student organizations provide opportunities for developing communication proficiency, leadership and entrepreneurial skills that allow them to be better practitioners upon graduation.

Key words: experiential learning; student organization; millennials

JEL codes: J11, M31, M53

1. Introduction

In a recent editorial in a marketing education journal, Peltier, Scovotti and Pointer (2008) highlighted the significance of emphasizing curriculum and experiential learning. Business students are increasingly being pressured to graduate with the set of skills required of business-ready practitioners (Lincoln, 2007). Businesses desire that new graduates possess critical thinking skills, entrepreneurial skills, and also be highly creative. This skill set will allow them to develop a wide range of strategies as well as face and solve every day challenges (Hill & McGinnis, 2007). Such a demand for experiential learning has led to a new approach in the classroom where team exercises, group projects, service-learning projects (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006), as well as case analysis and business simulations (Forman, 2006; Hunt & Madhavan, 2006) are now actively incorporated. Outside the classroom, cooperative education, internships, consulting projects and other means are also widely accepted and adopted (Forman, 2006; Hunt & Madhavan, 2006; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006).

A common practice that provides students with experiential learning opportunities is through professional student organizations. These organizations provide students with hands-on opportunities to practice the concepts

Laura Servier-Munoz, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Marketing, The Satish and Yasmin Gupta College of Business; research areas: experiential learning, consumer behavior. E-mail: lserviere@udallas.edu.

R. Wayne Counts, Ph.D., CPA, Assistant Professor, Lariccia School of Accounting and Finance, Williamson College of Business Administration, Youngstown State University; research areas: experiential learning, tax planning, taxpayer behavior. E-mail: rcounts@ysu.edu.

learned in the classroom (Clark & Kemp, 2008). In addition, students develop communication proficiency, leadership skills, entrepreneurial abilities, and organizational insights enhancing their overall career preparation. However, attracting and retaining a committed and active base of students is not easy: "I do not have time," "what is the point?" "I do not fit" and "I see no value" are some of the common expressions that faculty advisors face when working with these organizations. Faculty advisors find it difficult to recruit and maintain active members (Clark & Kemp, 2008; Vowels, 2005). Moreover, these professional student organizations are valuable to students and could translate into potential consulting or academic research opportunities for the faculty member and into an increased number of departmental majors and greater exposure in the business community (Peltier, Schibrowsky, & Kleimenhagen, 1995). However, as Clark and Kemp (2008, p. 44) stated: "almost no research has examined the benefits of using theory to increase the number of students involved in professional organizations." A moderate number of studies have investigated the role these organizations play in presenting students with professional learning experiences (Peltier, Scovotti, & Pointer, 2008).

Within the professional student organization literature, two factors are gaining relevance as a means to increase and sustain student participation: experiential learning and Cialdini's principles of influence. Experiential learning is a well-known approach that is believed to go beyond the classic boundaries of a classroom or disciplinary area (Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp, & Mayo, 2000). Experiential learning improves the likelihood of students' learning how to apply theoretical concepts and provides a better understanding of the world that is around them when combined with critical thinking approaches (Petkus, 2007). Along with experiential learning, Cialdini's principles of human influence, based on automatic cues or judgmental heuristics, are deeply rooted in the same concepts that "relationship marketing" employs, such as trust, commitment, cooperation, and dependence (Clark & Kemp, 2008). While derived from the field of psychology, the principles are used extensively in marketing areas such as in sales management where they are utilized in; sales force training to improve sales effectiveness, and the growth of customer-salesperson relationships (Cialdini, 2001). Overall, these two approaches are frameworks that can increase organizational membership recruitment and participation (Clark & Kemp, 2008) as they complement each other.

This paper is an answer to the need for research that investigates in greater detail how different pedagogies might influence student organizations and curricula (Peltier, Scovotti, & Pointer, 2008). We explore whether the principles of influence do have a significant impact in the recruitment and participation for student organizations. It is important to note that, although there are other venues such as: fraternities and sororities, honor societies, and social clubs. Although all of the aforementioned organizations help in social skill development, university involvement, and resume enhancement, this manuscript follows Clark and Kemp's (2008) approach to focus solely on professional student organizations. Professional student organizations, in addition to all the benefits afore mentioned, provide "career networking opportunities and often create a real world, career-related learning experience" (p. 43). The purpose of this study is to determine what values are; significant to students, have an impact on their student life, and lead to an effective recruitment and retention in student organizations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing and its benefits to business transactions, such as customer satisfaction, retention and commitment, is a well-examined and adopted concept for marketing researchers (Anderson & Weitz, 1992;

Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Gounaris, 2005; Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Verhoef, 2003; Wilson, 1995). However, as noted by Gruen, Summer, and Acito (2000) relationship marketing has not been studied as it should as the theoretical basis for student organizations retention, involvement, and commitment. Some of the studies that to the best of our knowledge employed marketing theory to promote enrollment in professional organizations are: Clark and Kemp (2008), Gruen, Summer, and Acito (2000), Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Kleimenhagen (1995); Peltier, Scovotti, and Pointer (2008). Clark and Kemp's (2008) paper is particularly useful as it employed relationship marketing, along with Cialdini's principles of influence, as the framework for aiding faculty to recruit and generate greater participation in professional student organizations. Adopting marketing principles to manage the activities related to professional student organizations leads to students actively practicing the principles and concepts presented in the classroom in an environment where no actual job or grade is on the line (Clark & Kemp, 2008). Such a "protected environment" could be a strong motivator to join organizations as they represent an opportunity for improvement and a better professional future. Additional student benefits derived from implementing theoretical concepts along with faculty interactions and real-world experiences are: experiencing extracurricular activities (which can be listed in a resume), accelerating maturation processes, gaining an integrated view of the concepts learned, improving professional preparation, and leading to higher-order thinking (Peltier et al., 2008).

From a business standpoint, adopting relationship marketing can also have several benefits for the organization itself and for the college in which this organization functions. As noted by Clark and Kemp (2008), many faculties have been resistant to incorporate marketing tools to provide "service to the university in the form of student organizational advising" (p. 45). Some of the results that can be expected from adopting relationship marketing concepts to the managing of student organizations are: customer retention and share development (Gounaris, 2005; Gustafsson et al., 2005), commitment (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Gounaris, 2005; Gruen, Summer & Acito, 2000; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), trust (Gounaris, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and customer satisfaction (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Marketing tools can be a vehicle to carry out concepts covered in the classroom as well as improve student engagement in college or university organizations. For example, colleges could expect greater alumni involvement derived from the satisfactory experiences gained during a student's college years. This could possibly translate into higher levels of future financial support (scholarships, endowments), time involvement (becoming mentors for students, participating as guest speakers and panelists), and development of the college's human capital (allowing access to their networks, facilitating internships, hiring within college). In addition, prosperous student organizations provide visibility for the college within the community and lead to increased enrollment (Peltier et al., 1995). At the faculty level, involvement with these organizations can represent an opportunity for better teaching or service evaluations (some schools assess advising in the teaching rubric), and for access to consulting or research opportunities (Peltier et al., 1995).

2.2 Cialdini's Principles of Influence

We share Clark and Kemp's (1998) view that relationship marketing and Cialdini's six principles of influence can be a powerful way to influence students to join and be active members in student organizations. The following is a review of Cialdini's principles of influence.

Reciprocity—This principle addresses the sense of obligation to pay back a favor or gift previously received. The principle states that individuals will feel obligated to repay the kindness, generosity, or service received from another individual and this sense of obligation will be present in personal and social situations (Cialdini, 2001). Reciprocation also works outside our social networks which allow us to create paths to reach decision makers and

sponsors whom we might need to influence (Cialdini & Martin, 2006). As Cialdini (2001) notes, a small initial favor at the individual or social level can lead to a similar return arising from a sense of obligation. However, there is also the possibility that a much larger return could be experienced. This sense of obligation and the likelihood of receiving greater returns are augmented if the original "gift" was seen by the receiver as being meaningful, personalized, and unexpected (Cialdini & Martin, 2006). It is important to note that individuals who are perceived to take more than what they give can be perceived as free loaders, ingrates, or moochers and might experience social sanctions from the group (Cialdini, 2001). Reciprocity can be especially critical for student organizations if the individual judges as invaluable and extremely satisfying the experiences gained.

Commitment and Consistency—These two behaviors are rooted to each other due to their nature. People will tend to align themselves (be consistent) to commitments for which they have publicly declared. Commitments and consistency denote that individuals will feel greater pressure to be reliable and dependable with their own words and behaviors (Cialdini & Martin, 2006). It is our own human nature that induces us to be reliable and consistent (Cialdini, 2001). Commitment is an internal concept that tends to grow over time if the individual is to remain consistent with his or her actions. To be highly effective, Cialdini points out that commitments should be perceived by the individual as being active, with a purpose, and without any coercion (Cialdini, 2001). However, gaining commitment is not enough, what is also needed is the consistency that the individual will act on such commitment. To do so, the individual needs to own, act on, and make public such commitment, which, ultimately will influence behaviors (Cialdini & Martin, 2006).

Scarcity—Research shows strong evidence that people tend to want more of things that are rare, decreasing in availability, or difficult to attain. Scarcity is centered on the concept of loss: what people cannot have, or have less of, is what they tend to want (Cialdini & Martin, 2006). Under a scarcity view, individuals perceive opportunities to be more valuable if they are less available or restricted. Scarcity also influences an individual's perceptions of quality and the way information is evaluated. Quality is also perceived to be better for less available options. Scarcity acts as an indicator that options that are less available and more restricted are of higher quality. Regarding information, Cialdini notes that individuals will tend to want or be more receptive, and be more favorable to information that is not widely available. Information that is perceived to have a limited access or more exclusive in nature will be more valuable than information that is accessible to everyone (Cialdini, 2001).

Authority—Expertise leads to authority and people tend to defer to the experts (Cialdini & Martin, 2006). The power of expert endorsement should not be overlooked as it leads to authority. Individuals should let it be known that they have certifications, advanced education, or experience when talking to individuals regardless whether or not they are decision makers. People seek experts regardless of their organizational hierarchy (Cialdini & Martin, 2006). This principle is derived from the teachings we receive from our social groups that we should abide or obey those who are "legitimate" authority figures. By obeying this authority, individuals are no longer engaging into a judgment process as they are now relying on the expert's judgment (Cialdini, 2001). Advanced education, trainings, certificates, and experience are sources of authority as they provide that much valued expertise. In addition, those interested in being *persuasive* authority figures should strive to have credibility and a credible position comes from possessing expertise and trustworthiness (Cialdini & Martin, 2006).

Social Proof—The principle of social proof states that when individuals are experiencing uncertainty or indecision while trying to make the right decision, they will frequently turn and observe the actions of others as a guide about what decision to make (Cialdini & Martin, 2006). This resides is the fact that most individuals are followers and imitators rather than initiators and thus will arrive at a decision after they have observed the

decisions and consequences of those who are in their environment (Cialdini, 2001). More importantly, individuals tend to seek guidance from individuals who are parallel or similar to them in education, age, experience, and social standing. This “social proof” is what social psychologists refer to as *descriptive norms*. As they name denotes, these are principles that will provide helpful and functional information and serve as a guide when experiencing uncertain circumstances (Cialdini & Martin, 2006).

Liking—Cialdini (2001) claims that individuals tend to follow and are influenced more highly by those whom they like. People are inclined to say “yes” (agreement), comply, and like those individuals who are attractive and similar, give praise, and share associations. Liking might initially arise for some from individuals who are attractive, as people are inclined towards physical beauty (Cialdini, 2001). Liking also grows when a person finds that he or she shares similar interests or graduated from the same institution, thus strengthening “likeability” (Cialdini, 2001). To be able to persuade, individuals need to focus on finding similarities and pointing them out and give compliments and praise (Cialdini & Martin, 2006). Liking is not pervasively instant. It is better if developed over time in non-competitive environments (Cialdini, 2001). To exert influence one should focus on cooperative environments where partnerships and collaborations are fostered. Exhibiting any of these characteristics will lead to a positive response (liking, agreement) from the person one is trying to influence (Cialdini & Martin, 2006).

3. Hypotheses

Cialdini's principles, reciprocity, commitment and consistency, scarcity, authority, social proof and liking, are powerful behavioral motivators. In addition, little work has looked into the antecedents of retention in professional organizations (Gruen et al., 2000; Clark & Kemp, 2008). Organizations that experience continuance commitments from their members tend to have higher levels of membership participation as well (Gruen et al., 2000). Clark and Kemp (2008) proposed that student organizations that practice Cialdini's principles of influence benefit from a more participative membership. If professional organizations' leaders adopt these principles it can lead to improving their recruiting and membership retention as well. Overall, an increased involvement in student organizations that provide exposure to business situations will lead to many benefits to the students who will have better chances at securing employment and performing effectively. Thus we propose:

H1: Reciprocity will influence the intention to participate in professional student organizations

H2: Commitment and consistency will influence the intention to participate in professional student organizations

H3: Scarcity will influence the intention to participate in professional student organizations will positively influence the intention to participate in professional student organizations

H4: Authority will influence the intention to participate in professional student organizations

H5: Social proof will influence the intention to participate in professional student organizations

H6: Liking will influence the intention to participate in professional student organizations

4. Research Method

4.1 Measures

All variables used in this study were based on established scales using a five-point Likert response format. The intention to participate in professional student organizations was assessed using three items with stems: I Plan

to, I intend to, and I want to (be an active member in a student organization) as used by Kidwell and Jewell (2003). The scale ranged from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. The six principles of influence were assessed by asking the respondents to rate how important were for them each of the actions. Four actions were listed per principle on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from not at all to very important. The scales can be found in Table 1. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha for intention to participate in a professional student organization was .96. The alpha for each of the principles was as follows: .78 for reciprocity, .81 for commitment and consistency, .85 for scarcity, .79 for authority, .80 for social proof, and .71 for liking as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Scales and Internal Reliability

Scale	Alpha level
Intention to be an active member	0.96
1. I plan to be an active member in a student organization	
2. I intend to be an active member in a student organization	
3. I want to be an active member in a student organization	
Reciprocity	0.78
1. The organization has "members only" events	
2. There are special awards for members such as outstanding member	
3. There is a "buddy system." members help each other	
4. The organization provides benefits and members are expected to give back as well	
Commitment and Consistency	0.81
5. Each member develops their own individual goals to achieve during the year	
6. All the members participate in setting the organization's goals	
7. Members meet and are in-charge of implementing their individual and organizational goals	
8. Members are expected to attend or participate in at least one event per semester	
Social Proof	0.80
9. Ideas are exchanged and there is interaction with other student organizations	
10. The organization is praised by either the Dean, Department Chairs or Area Coordinator	
11. Students "dress the part" in events. If it's a community event, they wear the organization's t-shirt	
12. There are promotional materials highlighting the organization's activities/achievements throughout the school	
Liking	0.71
13. The organization has attractive members	
14. There are some members who you identify with or find similarities	
15. Members often interact and help each other	
16. Group experiences, such as travels and interesting activities, are part of the organization	
17. There is frequent interaction between the organization and the faculty advisor	
Authority	0.79
18. The faculty advisor actively participates and supports the organization	
19. Officers of the organization are required to attend a training session	
20. The College or School supports and participates with the organization (faculty is willing to help the members)	
21. Alumni are involved with the organization	
22. Industry and community participate with the organization	
Scarcity	0.85
23. The organization holds events for members only such as resume workshop or industry speakers	
24. There are exclusive awards available only to members	
25. There are scholarships available only to members	
26. Exclusive activities/projects for members that provide experience (i.e., doing marketing plans)	

4.2 Data Collection

The data for this study was collected by faculty members who served as collegiate advisors for professional student organizations. Participants were asked to voluntarily answer the surveys in five different classes in a college of business located in a southern state. The classes covered were from the disciplines of accounting, marketing, management, and finance in an effort to capture a diverse and representative sample. One of the

student organizations available to students in such school was a collegiate chapter of the American Marketing Association. The sample consisted of 242 participants of which 48.6 percent (118) were female and 51 percent (124) male. Most of the respondents were “younger Millennials” between the ages of 18 and 29 years old, 93.8 percent. The remaining 6.2 percent captures those between 30 and 34 years old. Ethnicities were as follows: 48 percent (117) white, 42.8 percent (104) Hispanic, 4.1 percent (10) African American, 2.9 percent (7) Asian, and 4 individuals marked their ethnicity as “other”. One third of the sample, 30.9 percent, was a first college generation and most of our sample worked either part time (50.2 percent) or full time (27.2 percent).

Table 2 Sample Description

Descriptor	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	124	51.4%
Female	118	48.6%
Millennials		
Younger Millennials (18-29)	227	93.8%
Older Millennials (30-34)	15	6.2%
Ethnicities		
White	117	48.3%
Hispanic	104	42.8%
African American	10	4.1%
Asian	7	2.9%
Other	4	1.9%
First College Generation	75	30.9%
Work Status		
Part-Time	121	50.2%
Full-Time	66	27.2%
Does not work	55	22.6%

Note: N = 242

5. Results

A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of the six principles of influence on intention to participate in professional student organizations. The overall R^2 for the model was .315 and the adjusted R^2 was .298. The results showed support for three of the six principles as being significant predictors. The significant principles were scarcity ($\beta = -0.174$; $p < 0.05$), social proof ($\beta = 0.237$; $p < 0.05$), and authority ($\beta = 0.325$; $p < 0.01$) thus supporting H3, H4, and H5. The results for the other principles were as follows: reciprocity ($\beta = -0.046$; $p > 0.10$), commitment and consistency ($\beta = 0.086$; $p > 0.10$), and liking ($\beta = 0.152$; $p > 0.10$) thus not supporting H1, H2, and H6.

Noticing that our sample captured a wide range of Millennials, from 19 to 34, we decided to run a second regression model as a post-hoc analysis to assess the impact of age and the principles of influence on intentions to participate in professional student organizations. The R^2 and adjusted R^2 for the second model were 0.348 and 0.329 which denotes a slight improvement from the previous model. Regarding the principles, the results confirmed the findings obtained in the first model where scarcity, social proof, and authority remained as the significant predictors ($\beta = -0.172$, $\beta = 0.222$, $\beta = .341$; $p < 0.05$) and reciprocity, commitment and consistency, and liking remained insignificant ($\beta = -0.020$, $\beta = 0.083$, $\beta = 0.106$; $p > 0.05$). Age was a significant negative predictor for this model ($\beta = -0.185$; $p < 0.05$). These results suggest that as Millennials age, their desire and intention to

participate in student organizations diminishes. This has important implications for recruiting and participation activities that will be addressed in our Discussion section.

Table 3 Results of the Study

	Dependent variable: Intention to participate in professional student organizations	
	Model 1	Model 2
Independent Variables		
Reciprocity	-0.074 (0.122)	-0.033 (0.120)
Commitment and Consistency	0.144 (0.128)	0.139 (0.125)
Social Proof	0.356 (0.134)**	0.334 (0.131)**
Liking	0.274 (0.153)	0.191 (0.151)
Authority	0.570 (0.158)**	0.597 (0.154)**
Scarcity	-0.239 (0.110)**	-0.237 (0.107)**
Control Variable		
Age		-0.060 (0.018)**
Model Characteristics		
R ²	0.315	0.348
Adjusted R ²	0.298	0.329
N	242	242

Notes: Unstandardized parameters are shown. Standard errors are in parentheses. Significant effects denoted by * ($p < 0.10$), ** ($p < 0.05$), *** ($p < 0.01$).

6. Discussion

This study is the first one to the best of our knowledge to test whether the principles of influence are a significant recruiting and motivational tool for professional student organizations in colleges. Specifically, our study shows support for three of the six principles. Social proof and authority are principles that should be employed when promoting recruitment and participation among potential and current members as they have a significant and positive influence on students. Regarding social proof, the results support the notion that Millennials will follow the lead of those who are perceived to be similar. Therefore, it is important than when seeking enrollment and participation that promotional focus on testimonials of fellow students. It is important that the students portrayed in these testimonials are similar in appearance, age, social standing, and experience as people tend to follow and imitate those who are similar to themselves. These testimonials will positively motivate the decision making of joining and being an active member of student organizations as Millennials will have a “social proof” of the benefits of joining, especially is they were hesitating or being insecure about their decision. The results also indicated that the principle of authority has positive impact on the intention to participate in a student organization. Parallel to the “social proof” principle, Millennials will seek authority figures to guide them in what right choices seem to be such as professors and counselors. These figures represent a legitimate source for substituting decision making because of the experience and expertise that these figures are associated with. It is important though that before assuming a figure is influential that the expertise is well-known (Cialdini), in this case, among the student body. This will provide credibility and trust among Millennials and therefore create a greater likelihood of a positive influence.

Along with social proof and authority, scarcity was also a significant predictor. However, its influence turned out to be negative. This was an unusual result that when linked to the traits and characteristics exhibited by Millennials confirms and expands our understanding of them. Scarcity proposes that individuals tend to want what is rare or not widely available, something with a certain degree of exclusivity but for Millennials a scarce resource

is not an attractive option. The results show that Millennials showed a lesser intention to participate in student organizations if these were perceived to be restrictive or with “member’s only benefits”. Millennials are not attracted to these options and thus this concept should not be highlighted as part of recruiting efforts because they seem to be focused on creating a better environment for everyone where inclusion, not exclusion, is the norm. This focus on inclusion is expected because, after all, Millennials have been described to be team oriented, optimistic, confident, and eager to achieve (Howe & William, 2003). Based on this team-work orientation and the lack of significance on “exclusivity”, one could draw that Millennials believe everyone should have a chance and less available options are not necessarily perceived to be of higher quality but a way of segregation; a not very attractive concept for them.

Reciprocity, commitment and consistency, and liking were not significant predictors of intention to be an active member. This does not necessarily mean that these principles should not be completely eliminated but that perhaps their use should be limited as their power of persuasion is limited as the concepts were not relevant for our sample. Millennials were not inclined to engage in student organizations if they sensed it was their duty or were obliged to repay the favors and benefits received: reciprocity. Perhaps a more attractive way to engage students would be not to make them feel a sense of obligation but instead a sense of giving back by paying it forward. Organizations could ask for volunteers who helped younger members in the activities and nature of the organization. In this way, the likelihood of experiencing reciprocity from the member base is augmented. The chances of experiencing reciprocity from its members are expanded as well if the students have experienced a significantly positive and personalized experience because after all, Millennials seek personalized experiences (Taken Smith, 2012).

Other principles that were not relevant for Millennials were commitment and consistency. Consistency is associated with stability and regularity and perhaps, due to the changing nature of what the college experience represents, Millennials are not attracted to a concept that will not allow them to be flexible. Millennials might be more focused on balancing school work, athletics, social life, and academic commitments and might be looking for the option that allows them to achieve such balance. One of the issues that arise though is that such lack of consistency also denotes their lack of commitment for their choices. The final non-significant principle was “liking”. Following those who are physically attractive or those who give compliments and praise did not create a preference or a liking among our sample that was enough to become an active member. Millennials will not easily say “yes” and participate just because there are others who they like. A key thing to point out though is that commitment and consistency and liking are both developed over time. This can be a possible explanation as to why in recruiting and initial membership stages, students will not, for example, exhibit a consistent and committed behavior. However, as time elapses and students develop affinity in a collegial environment towards their group members a behavioral switch will occur because they now “like” their group members, they will exhibit a committed and consistent behavior because they want to see their student organization succeed. Therefore, to truly influence and gain an active participation, leaders should turn to commitment and consistency and liking not in recruiting or initial stages but in latter stages where a relationship has developed.

Finally, age was a negative indicator of intention to participate in student organizations. As these Millennials grow older, the likelihood of being recruited and enthusiastically or energetically participating are reduced. One plausible explanation might be that they might have additional responsibilities, such as a family and/or a job to keep that take precedence for them. In addition, it might be more important as they grow older and their graduation date approaches to start focusing on searching for a job than remained involved in student activities. The implications for recruiters and leaders are that they should actively promote enrollment into student

organizations in the freshman and sophomore years when students are younger. This could represent a complete re-design of the first year student experience in which students are introduced to their potential colleges as well as their corresponding student organizations to maximize the benefits that they can gain from becoming members.

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