MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Branding Higher Education for Student Recruitment: A Shift From Academia to Career-Focused Education

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Abstract

This major research paper analyzes the data coded across Ryerson's digital and social media student recruitment platforms to identify what main messages Ryerson communicates during application and enrollment periods for students. The following research questions help guide the study: *What messages does Ryerson communicate about itself in the mission statement and recruitment platforms in Why Ryerson's Facebook page, Why Ryerson's blog posts and the Undergraduate tab on Ryerson's website? In what ways do Ryerson's primary branding messages change across its different social media and digital platforms?* Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) conventional qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data coded in Ryerson's mission statement, the Undergraduate tab on the Ryerson website, the Why Ryerson Facebook page and the Why Ryerson blog during the Ontario University Fair and March Break Open House student recruitment time periods. The study led to identify the main messages Ryerson communicates during student recruitment time periods and additional patterns and themes that were not directly informed by the literature.

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Introduction

It can be argued that its history, the provincial government and the increased value of a degree in the work force have shaped the current place of higher education in Ontario. With the mark of the double cohort in 2003 that changed high school from a five year to a four-year diploma, Ontario universities saw an exponential increase in the number of students applying to their institutions. Due to the increase in numbers, there was financial strain placed on universities to accommodate for the incoming students (Doucet, 2004). The institutions did not receive additional funding from the provincial government to combat this strain and were therefore forced to look at other options of financial income to support themselves. Universities in Ontario then started to look to students' tuition as a way to combat the financial strain. In 2005, *Statistics Canada* reported that Ontario universities rely on 24% of their revenue to come from students' tuition. This placed Ontario as the second province in Canada, next to Nova Scotia, with the highest tuition rates (Smith, 2005).

In conjunction with this time period, students also began to receive pressure from the labour market to acquire post-secondary credentials in order to secure a full time job (Domene, Socholotiuk & Woitowicz, 2011). In addition to this, job openings that paid more, offered flexible hours and perks were advertised to individuals who obtained a post-secondary degree. This shift is claimed by to have then influenced the way students in Generation Y, aged 16-24, view how they participate in academic learning, as there was more of a focus to obtain the degree than there was to use the opportunity for academic advancement (Bolan & Robinson, 2013). Brotheridge and Lee (2005) coin this as *degree-purchasing orientation*, which uses university as an opportunity to participate in the labour market. This then considers students as consumers and educators as service providers. With a degree-purchasing orientation, students consider applying to and enrolling in a university based on a variety of factors. Choudhury, Bennett and Savani (2008) list these factors as, the general status of a university, the location and physical quality of the campus, the learning

facilities and student support services offered, the types of sport teams and clubs to join and opportunities to socialize on campus. Universities are then allegedly using this information to compete for students.

Jawad, Bin and Ibne (2012) state that universities are using this information to brand and market themselves to prospective students, as students are more likely to trust an institution that is familiar and has developed a high level of respect from the student. Universities are using mission statements to develop their brand then marketing their brand through a variety of different digital and social media platforms (Armstrong & Lumsden, 2000). These platforms include university-operated websites, university operated blogs and social media channels, such as Facebook. This project explores how the Ontario institution, Ryerson University, uses the identified main messages to brand themselves for student recruitment on digital and social media platforms.

Ryerson University was chosen as the focus of this project because of its recent transition from a polytechnic college to a university in 1993. In June 2003, Ryerson was granted official university status by the provincial government, which is the same time the landscape of higher education in Ontario began to change with the introduction of the double cohort and the requirements necessary to participate in the job market (Ryerson University, 2016).

This will be explored using Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) conventional qualitative content analysis, because existing literature about higher education branding and marketing is limited. Influenced by the literature, four platforms were selected and used for data analysis, which is Ryerson's official mission statement, their website and the department of student recruitment operated blog and Facebook page. Where applicable, data were analyzed during two student recruitment time periods as outlined in the literature review. The first being the Ontario University Fair, which is the only fair in Canada that welcomes Ontario universities to hold information sessions for students as they begin searching for universities to apply to (Bolan & Robinson, 2013). The second is the open house time period, which is held after universities send

out their acceptance letters to prospective students (Fischbach, 2006). The purpose of this event is to invite students to visit the campus and learn more about the university's atmosphere (Oplatka, 2007).

Emergent data were analyzed across these platforms and sorted into codes and overarching categories, which was partly influenced by the data and partly influenced by the appearance of reoccurring themes and patterns. The discussion section addresses the research questions and identifies how Ryerson University's branding and marketing tactics align with what the literature states is the best branding and marketing tactics for universities during student recruitment time periods.

Literature Review

Place of Higher Education in Contemporary Society

Post 1950's

Brotheridge and Lee (2005) define higher education as, "a community in which all members engage in the pursuit of knowledge and the joy of learning to enhance their participation in and indeed enrich society" (p.72). This definition fits seamlessly into what participation and enrichment in society meant after World War II. Attending university was seen as a normal life cycle as it facilitated social mobility, raised Canada's standard of living and introduced new research in culture and science (Axelrod, 2014). In 1971 there were 50 Canadian universities with 316 thousand full time undergraduate students (Axelrod, 2014). Due to the increasing demand for higher education, the Minister of University Affairs in Ontario attempted to meet the need in 1970 with the construction of three new universities (McMillian & Baxter, 2011). All of these universities were publically funding by the federal government.

In 1970, Bill Davis, the Minister of University Affairs in Ontario, began to build new universities to cope with the rise of increasing undergraduate enrollment rates. This resulted in the creation of York University, Lakehead University and Wilfred Laurier University (Mcmillan & Baxter, 2011). His hope was to build universities that would not need to compete with one another as each university would specialize in a

specific field of interest and would offer similarly priced tuition. For example, the University of Toronto, Queen's University, the University of Western Ontario, and University of Ottawa were designated as comprehensive institutions whereas the University of Waterloo, University of Guelph and McMaster University specialized in science (Mcmillian & Baxter, 2011). This was congruent with the guidelines established by the Council of Ontario Universities in 1973 that advised against advertising and comparison with other schools (Bolan & Robinson, 2013).

Student Recruitment Time Periods

Organizations like the Ontario University Registrars' Association (OURA) developed initiatives to support and articulate the value of higher education through The Ontario University Fair. The first fair held in 1997 invited students and their parents to come together to connect with Ontario universities to learn about campus programs and academic life. It is the only event in Ontario where prospective students were able to meet current students, faculty and staff and attend hourly presentations and interactive sessions (Bolan & Robinson, 2013). Wang (2009) identifies this as an important period for prospective students to learn about the reputation and quality of academic programs offered at universities. Wang (2009) claims that prospective students want to ensure that they are not only receiving a degree from a prestigious program but are increasing their chances of finding a job after they graduate in a lucrative field that offers them financial gain and success. In addition, universities started to organize their own initiatives to attract potential students to learn more about their institutions with open houses.

Oplatka (2007) states that universities in Canada have begun to introduce open houses in the past two decades. Open houses occur once acceptance letters have been sent out to prospective students, inviting them to visit the university, tour the campus, meet the faculty and learn more about the academic programs offered (Fischbach, 2006). He goes on to suggest that students use open houses as an opportunity to learn about the administrative structure of the institution, hear in-depth explanations of academic programs and a chance to

review course content that is necessary for the completion of their degree. Overall, it is an opportunity to see and experience the atmosphere of the institution (Oplatka, 2007).

Although this structure remained static for a period of time, the Ontario post-education system saw drastic changes beginning in 1995 when Mike Harris was elected as the 22nd Premier of Ontario (Doucet, 2004). In just under a year over 400 million dollars was cut from the education budget, half of which was allocated to supporting Ontario universities. Harris then proposed to deregulate tuition over a two-year period which meant universities in 1998 would be able to determine the cost of tuition prospective students would be paying as long as anything above a 30% increase in tuition was set aside for scholarships and bursaries (Doucet, 2004). This proposition was not able to sustain universities as an increase in enrollment from the baby boom generation, which was on average applying to post-secondary institutions after secondary education, was increasing. In 2003, this number hiked exponentially with the introduction of the double cohort.

The Double Cohort

The Double Cohort marks a change in secondary education in Ontario as it saw the last OAC/grade 13 year, making high school a four year diploma. Even though there was an exponential increase in the number of enrolled students across the province, there was little additional provincial funding provided to equip universities to deal with the financial strain (Doucet, 2004). Smith (2005) reports that universities were relying on tuition fees to help tighten the funding gap. She references the data collected by *Statistics Canada* in 2005 that shows universities in Ontario acquired 24% of their revenue from student tuition (Smith, 2005). As Ontario universities faced financial burden over the years, the job market in Ontario changed drastically which would play an integral role in shaping the place of higher education in contemporary society.

Post 1990s

Domene et al. (2011) state that participation in post secondary education has increased over the past two decades. They say that Canada is changing from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy, which means employers are requiring prospective employees to hold post secondary credentials. Allegedly, if a student wishes to secure a career with a high paying salary, special benefits and flexible work hours, students will be more likely motivated to engage in their studies (Domene et al., 2011). Domene et al. (2011) continue to say that degrees are becoming more important than the learning it represents. This has introduced a shift in the place of higher education in contemporary society, as students are no longer looked at as students, but may appear to be conceptualized as a consumer purchasing a product, which is their degree (Bélanger, Syed & Mount, 2014; Bolan & Robinson, 2013; Brotheridge & Lee, 2005; Chapelo, Moleworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011; Pringle & Huisman, 2013; Sauntson, Morrish, Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011).

Student as a Consumer

Degree Purchasing Orientation

To describe what the student as a consumer in regards to higher education is, Brotheridge and Lee (2005) coined the term *degree purchasing*. Degree purchasing is, "an instrumental view of education in which students value education primarily as a vehicle for labor market participation rather than as an avenue for learning" (Brotheridge & Lee, 2005, p.72). This then considers students as consumers and educators as service providers (Sauntson et al., 2011). Molesworth et al., (2009) state that overall, students would rather have a degree to use as a bargaining chip in the job market rather than use their degree as an opportunity to advance their academic knowledge.

Bolan and Robinson (2013) supported this concept by saying Generation Y students (students aged 16-24) are more likely than any other age group to fall into a degree purchasing orientation. They argue that students experience the strongest degree purchasing orientation tendencies during application and enrollment periods. During these enrollment periods, a variety of factors influence a student's decision to apply and/or

accept an offer to a university. Factors that affect students during application and enrollment decisions are the general status of the university, the location and physical quality of their campus, the learning facilities, student support services, sports opportunities and opportunities to socialize on campus (Choudhury et al., 2008).

Prestige

The general status or prestige of a university can be determined through how it is represented in the media. As a means of perpetuating degree-purchasing tendencies amongst students, students are given hierarchical list of universities to choose from that are most often found in Canadian news magazines (Bleikle, 2005). The most popular form of this amongst Canadian universities is *Mclean's Magazine* that issues a yearly report ranking and promoting institutions (Page, Cramer & Page, 2010). Each school is ranked on six categories, which are, the size of a school's student body, the number of classes taught by tenured faculty, the budget directed towards student services, the number of resources available in the library and the reputation of the university based on alumni support (Page, et al., 2010). Page et al. (2010) go on to suggest that students show less interest in attending a university that is ranked poorly compared to a university that is ranked excellently.

Location

The location of a university may also affect a student's choice of institution of where to study. Giliberti (2011) states that there are two types of campuses that students can attend. The first is the suburban campus, which is located outside major cities and closer to smaller communities, which thrives on the income and the innovation universities bring (Insch & Sun, 2013). The second is the urban campus, which plays an instrumental role in the social and physical planning of the city (Giliberti, 2011). For example, a campus that is close to a financial center is a process of constant renewal because access to urban services allegedly opens pathways for continual growth. Haar (2011) supports the benefits of urban campuses for students, by stating that urban campuses accommodate diverse individuals, advanced technology, ideas and knowledge.

Insch and Sun (2013) conducted an empirical study with two groups of students at the University of Otago in New Zealand. They analyzed how much merit the focus group placed on physical, social and cultural elements in influencing their choice to study at that university (Insch & Sun, 2013). The study showed that prospective students were most interested in the accommodation, safety, sense of community and cultural scene the university had to offer them. Additional factors that weighed in on a student's decision to attend a university were opportunities for professional networking and career opportunities, which they found more of close to urban universities.

Building Structure and Social Services

Choudhury et al. (2008) also state that prospective students consider building structures, such as libraries, and support services that aid students during their degree when considering enrolling to a university and when accepting an offer of admission. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1996) conducted an empirical study with a focus group, interviewing Canadian customers of a credit union with a questionnaire about the quality of service firms. The results of the study can be used to assess how students may choose whether or not to attend a university based on the student services within the institution that are available to them. The study suggested that customers who use services, such as requesting loans or renting technology such as computers, wish to use services that respond in a timely manner. In addition, when customers use the facility, they wish to use services that provide them with procedures in place that allow the consumer to access what it is they need time efficiently and effectively.

Campus Culture

Lastly, Insch and Sun (2013) state that students consider opportunities to socialize on campus an important factor when considering university options. The results of their study showed that participants

claimed that shopping, dining, and the sense of community at a university were some of the most important factors drawing them into a particular institution. They continued to say that, "These attributes encapsulate students' social interaction and personal networks and the atmosphere of the city in terms of its liveliness and spirit" (Insch & Sun, 2013, p.187). Elliott (1994) explores this further by stating that people are drawn to what is happening inside inner cities. The vibrancy of street life, people involved in outdoors events and arts and music excite individuals because of the possibility of being part of it all (Elliott, 1994).

In addition, Billings & Terkla (2014) state that campus culture provides students with a sense of purpose and commitment outside the academic realm. They state that a strong sense of campus culture felt by students should influence their values and beliefs and as a result, can create rituals, symbols, myths, and language known across the institution (p.45). Examples of this are, campus wide known cheers, chants, logos and phrases commonly used to positively represent the school. They go on to say that a weak campus culture can be identified by the lack of these attributes created by higher education institutions. By students taking part in activities and events that promote these rituals, symbols, myths and language, they are developing a sense of character within the institution in union with their peers. This character is allegedly claimed by Billings & Terkla (2014) to be a pull for students to attend a university that has a strong campus culture. So if the notion is that students are consumers and educators are service providers (Brotheridge & Lee, 2005), how might universities use this knowledge during recruitment time periods?

Higher Education Branding Theory

Defining a University Brand

In order for universities to attract prospective students during enrollment periods, they need to be able to build and have their own brand in order to compete for students with other universities (Aula, Tienari & Waeraas, 2015). Because there is no concrete definition of higher education branding, as the literature continues to gain momentum, the definition of a commercial marketing brand will be used when discussing

branding techniques. A brand is, "[A] mixture of attributes, tangible and intangible, symbolized in a trademark, which, if managed properly, creates value and influence" (Mittleman, 1996, p.210). In lament terms, branding is a way for universities to determine who they are, what they value as an institution and how they wish to frame their image in a favorable manner to members of the public (Belanger et al., 2007).

The importance of a brand comes from the university being able to articulate what it is as an institution, but also from the fact that students are more likely to trust a university that is familiar and have developed a high level of respect from the student (Jawad et al., 2012). To understand the student's perception of a university, it is suggested by Jawed et al. (2012) that universities must know what students wish to search, select and purchase. From what is outlined in the literature (Choudhury et al., 2008) about the student as a consumer, it is assumed that students care about the general status of a university, the location and physical quality of their campus, the learning facilities, student support services, sports opportunities and opportunities to socialize on campus.

Branding Strategies

Choudhury et al. (2008) suggest that universities should use this knowledge of what students want to brand themselves. They state that the most important branding elements for universities to use are the educational identity of the university, its learning environment, the employability of graduates, the institution's reputation, location and social and sports facilities (p.25). Aula et al. (2015) claim that the most effective way for universities to brand themselves revolves around marketing and communication activities hosted by the institution. Ways to do this range from mailing marketing materials such as guidebooks, brochures, and letters on official institutional letterhead to marketing materials that are hosted on the Internet (Armstrong & Lumsden, 2000). They continue to say that the benefits of using internet based marketing materials in comparison to print are that it is cost effective, eliminates small errors like spelling and grammar and can be accessed by a larger group of people (p.85). There are additional factors that potentially contribute to the benefits of marketing a brand online today.

Internet as a Tool for Student Recruitment

To bridge a gap in the literature, as there is little available in terms of how the internet is used for a tool of student recruitment, a look at how the internet emerged as a tool for student recruitment in the employment sector is discussed. Chowdhury and Srimannarayana (2013) state that online recruitment began in the early 1990s and was praised by the media because it has employers looking to recruit individuals to their company. Such benefits include, "...improve[d] efficiency, new assessment tools, reduce[d] costs, standardize[d] systems and expand[ed] the applicant pool" (Chowdhury & Srimannarayana, 2013, p.186). On the opposite end of the spectrum, prospective employees looked to use the internet to look for employment because it is perceived as being efficient, user-friendly, provide necessary information and fair (Chowdhury & Srimannarayana, 2013). There is also evidence in the literature that suggests the internet is an excellent tool for student recruitment because their targeted audience of Generation Y (aged 16-21) frequently uses the medium in comparison to print, radio or television (Botterill, Bredin & Dun, 2015).

Botterill et al. (2015) coin Generation Y as the, "vanguards of internet and wireless use" (p.538). That this generation spends the most time online accessing the internet with their computers, cellphones and tablets. Botterill et al. (2015) go on to say that they referred to a study conducted in the UK in which 40% of surveyed individuals from Generation Y would feel a sense of displacement if they should ever lose or have their digital devices confiscated. This finding suggests that Generation Y feels a sense of connection to digital technologies that no other age group would experience. Meaning that they value their connection to the online world because they spend the most time out of every other age group developing connections online and gathering information (Botterill et al., 2015).

Overall, it is suggested that Generation Y's use of social media is to communicate with others instead of informing others. For example, allegedly, they would rather socialize with friends online instead of commenting on political events, they would rather read stories than write them and would rather download than create and publish their own music. This suggests that they are more interested in observing content online than developing and creating it themselves. Types of platforms that Generation Y individuals use to communicate are mostly spent on social media platforms, with a concentrated focus on some digital platforms as well (Botterill et al., 2015). This literature then shapes what ways universities use digital and social media marketing collateral for online student recruitment practices.

Marketing Materials

As there is no established definition used to explain marketing materials used for student recruitment in higher education, a definition from commercial marketing will be used to describe the term. Brunswick (2014) defines marketing materials as the, "development and efficient distribution of goods, services, ideas, issues, and concepts for chosen consumer segments" (p.111). With this working definition in mind, there are two platforms that support the development and distribution of beliefs and values, which are social media and digital platforms. For the scope of this paper, two social media platforms and one digital platform were used to analyze how universities use online marketing materials for student recruitment and one corporate branding material was consulted to guide how a university would influence the dissemination of their brand across platforms.

Mission Statement

Kreber and Mhina (2013) define a mission statement as, "a public document that universities draft to describe their purpose and functions [in a few paragraphs or pages of writing]" (p.54). Although its intended purpose is not a marketing material for student recruitment, it is used to guide what universities communicate about themselves to the public, which are vital to this paper. Sometimes mission statements are received with

criticism as Kreber and Mhina (2013) discuss that some research believe mission statements are vague and lack any clear sense of purpose. Kreber and Mhina (2013) view mission statement more optimistically, claiming that it helps universities identify who they are and where they should and/ or want to go in the future.

Kopp (2013) adds to the definition of a mission statement by adding some quantifiable purposes that an institution can communicate through this document. Kopp (2013) states that a mission statement can communicate its purpose, its responsibilities to its students, its vision for the future and the educational mission (p.192). Overall, in the mission statement there is a focus placed on an institution's goals and its responsibility to its students because a study conduced in 2007 by the Education Conservancy in the United States claims that is the most effective way to communicate a university to the public. The study randomly selected 300 mission statements from universities in American and analyzed them for similar elements. The top three reoccurring results placed a focus on, how a university serves a local area, how it commits to diversity and how it commits to liberal arts (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Mission statements represent an example of collateral used by universities for corporate branding. In addition to this document, there is another type of collateral used on a digital platform, which are university-operated websites.

Websites

Rahman and Ahmed (2013) state that websites, which are a collection of pages on the internet, are used by universities to, "...display information about courses and programs, promotion of their research programs and delivering online learning facilities and assignments" (p.40). University operated websites can be accessed by anyone, as they are public domains, but are meant and most frequently used by students, faculty and members of the public to learn about the available services offered. In their study dedicated to how students identify and rate usability factors of Dhaka University in Bangladesh, students identified and rated the university website on five criteria. They were, the navigation, organization, use of communication,

design and content of the website (Rahman & Ahmed, 2013). A focus on what is communicated about the content of a university website for student recruitment is explored further.

Saichaie and Morphew (2014) state that 84% of students in the United States refer to university websites to gather information about the institution. They go on to say that the text and images presented on this platform give prospective students an opportunity to absorb the messages that are communicated to them. Overall, Saichaie and Morphew (2014) state that while existing literature on how universities use websites for student recruitment is limited, universities tend to place an emphasis on their role in providing services to communities around them, aiding economic development and preparing graduates for the work force (p.502). They go on to say that from a student's perspective, there are different factors that prospective students monitor during enrollment periods. Prospective students are seemingly more interested in learning about admission processes and more importantly, the location of the campus (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). To the students learning about the physical campus and the opportunities that are available on campus, such as the types of clubs and activities that are available is more pertinent to their decision making process. In addition to digital platforms used by universities for student recruitment, social media platforms have been introduced into the marketing mix.

Facebook

With the rise of the internet came the evolution of social media (Belanger, Bali & Longden, 2014). Belanger et al. (2014) define social media as, "...a web platform that enables an individual to create and maintain a public or semi-public profile" (p.15). They go on say that social media can be used by brands to target consumers and communicate about their products because the platform is viewed as being unbiased, reliable and trustworthy. Allegedly from a universitiy's perspective, the prime uses of social media for student recruitment is to deliver information about the institution to students, enhance the appearance of campus life and foster students academic outcomes (p.19). Of all the social media sites that universities use

for student recruitment, there is one site that stands out from others as being the most commonly used amongst universities and the most well received amongst prospective students. This platform is Facebook, which Carrillat, d'Astous and Gregoire (2013) define is the best social media platform universities can use for student recruitment.

Carrillatt et al. (2013) state that Facebook has grown to become one of the most popular social media platforms on a global scale. They go on to say that in the United States, Facebook has almost reached a 100 percent penetration rate of popularity amongst prospective university students. Facebook is also claimed to be a flexible platform, allowing users to tailor messages to its audience and use its interactive features to develop strong relationships (p.475). Johnston, Chen and Hauman (2013) state that prospective students view and engage with a university's Facebook page to decide which university to apply and/ or enroll to for a few reasons. One, to learn information about the institution and ask questions or share information and two, to engage in trends that involve learning about campus activities and events. In addition to Facebook, there is another social media platform that attempts to engage prospective students, which is a university blog.

Blog

Garden (2011) loosely defines a blog as, "a platform that shares information and interaction: it is more about conversation than content" (p.486). Sandlin and Pena (2014) state that blogs are becoming an increasingly important social media platform for universities to use for student recruitment. With 42% of Fortune 500 companies operating their own corporate blog, universities are starting to learn how a blog may impact students during their university search (Sandlin and Pena, 2014). Currently, 33% of Canadian universities use a blog and 66% of that 33% use it for student recruitment purposes. They go on to say that blogs are typically operated and managed by current students attending the university, as it adds personal narratives and reflections that allow prospective students to gain insight into campus life.

Sandlin (2012) states that prospective students tend to trust blogs written by current first year students because they feel as though students would be more honest in how they represent and view the institution compared to the way faculty would. This air of authenticity allows the blog to communicate a more human tone, as other platforms can be perceived as being very stale and mindlessly regurgitation content (Sandlin, 2012). Sandlin (2012) goes on to say that as blogs continue to develop as a medium, there will become a more streamline process in how they are presented. Because they are usually student operated, it is important to ensure that the content within the blog is still in line with the branding and marketing strategies developed by the university.

In summary, the history of higher education in Ontario outlines how there is currently competition amongst universities for students. This competition was shaped by the decrease in funding from the provincial government and the increase in demand for a university education from Generation Y (16-24 year old) students. This demand is reminiscent of the ever-changing job market, which requires students obtain a bachelor degree, at minimum, in order to be considered eligible for labour market participation. A result of this shift has allegedly influenced the minds of incoming students, who are now starting to view education as a tool for advancing their careers instead of an avenue for academic learning. This is what is known as degree-purchasing orientation and is most prominent in students (aged 16-24) during academic application and enrollment periods. In the literature, Sauntson et al. (2011) state that this has shaped how universities and students interact during application and enrollment periods, as students are now seen as consumers and faculty of the university as service providers.

Overall, this then effects how students view universities to apply and/ or enroll to and use a list of factors to determine which institution they should commit themselves to for the next four years. As a result of this, universities are using these factors to shape how they brand themselves and market themselves to prospective students across a variety of digital and social media platforms. The next section will outline the

research questions that use sections from the three themes to identify the main messages that universities use to brand themselves on social media and digital platforms.

Research Questions

This thesis uses Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) conventional qualitative content analysis to analyze the data because existing literature surrounding higher education branding and marketing literature is scarce. The analysis is framed to answer two research questions that examine the messages communicated on Ryerson University's social media and digital platforms:

(1) What messages does Ryerson communicate about itself in the mission statement and recruitment platforms in Why Ryerson's Facebook page, Why Ryerson's blog posts and the Undergraduate tab on Ryerson's website? This question will help answer what main messages Ryerson communicates about itself as an institution during application and enrollment time periods based on the data that emerges as codes.
(2) In what ways do Ryerson's primary branding messages change across its different social media and digital platforms? This will allow the main messages communicated across Ryerson's digital and social media platforms to be compared. Main themes and patterns will arise from the data coded across these platforms, which will offer insight into how Ryerson positions itself for student recruitment. This data will then be compared with what is said in the literature about the main messages higher education institutions use to brand themselves across the social media and digital platforms.

Methodology

The data collected across Ryerson's social media and digital platforms were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis. A conventional approach was taken to analyze the data, as defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). This approach was consulted because existing literature on higher education branding is limited, as the field is continuing to expand. The codes identified in the data analysis section were created based on the emergence of key words, phrases and patterns that emerged from the data. In addition, codes

were also influenced by themes and patterns outlined in the literature on how universities use social media and digital platforms for student recruitment during application and enrollment time periods. The following sections, including data collection and data analysis, outline how the data across the platforms were chosen for collection and analysis and what codes were informed by the data.

Data Collection

The data collection involved acquiring content from Ryerson's social and digital media platforms. This included, Ryerson's mission statement, Ryerson's Undergraduate tab on their website, the Why Ryerson blog posts and Why Ryerson Facebook posts. Ryerson's mission statement was chosen because it is a document that outlines what values the university communicates about itself to the public. This textual document was used to identify what values outlined in Ryerson's mission statement were also communicated across the digital and social media platforms for student recruitment.

The digital and social media platforms that were analyzed include portions of Ryerson's website and social media platforms that focus on student recruitment. Ryerson's mission statement was collected on April 4th, 2016, the day the data analysis for this MRP began. The coded data was organized through a numbering scheme to make it easy to refer back to during analysis. Each piece of data was listed as MS, standing for mission statement, followed by a number, in chronological order, representing the example of coded data.

The first digital platform that data was collected from was Ryerson's website, which has a number of headings dedicated to providing information about the university. The Undergraduate tab on their website specifically focuses on providing information to prospective students interested in attending the institution, with a focus of information directed towards high school students in Ontario. The data from the Undergraduate tab on the website was collected on April 4th, 2016, right after the second pivotal undergraduate recruitment time period in Ontario during the academic school year.

This data collection was done before Ryerson changed information on this tab from student recruitment messaging to admission acceptance messaging. The first time period is the two-week lead up to the Ontario University Fair (OUF) and the one-week of aftermath, which ranges from September 9^a, 2015 to September 30^a, 2015. The second time period is the two-week lead up to Ryerson University's March Break Open House (MBOH) and the one-week review of the aftermath. This range includes March 4^a, 2016 to March 25^a, 2016. The coded data was also organized through a numbering scheme to make it easy to refer back to during analysis. Each piece of data was listed as W, standing for website, followed by an acronym for the heading underneath the Undergraduate tab, followed by a number, in chronological order, representing the example of coded data.

Within the Undergraduate tab is a link to the Why Ryerson hub, which is operated by the Undergraduate Admissions and Recruitment department. The hub is responsible for, "...the promotion of, and admissions process for, undergraduate degree programs at Ryerson University" (Why Ryerson, 2016). Unlike Ryerson's Undergraduate tab on their website, the Why Ryerson blog posts are time stamped. This means that the data could be compiled within the OUF and MBOH student recruitment time periods for analysis. The coded data for the blog posts were organized through a numbering scheme. Each piece of data was listed as B, standing for blog, followed by OUF or MBOH, indicating the time frame the post was published, followed by a number, in chronological order, of the blog post during the time period followed by another number, in chronological order, representing the example of coded data.

On the header of the Why Ryerson blog are hyperlinks to the five Why Ryerson social media pages, which are, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Facebook was selected as the only social media platform for analysis because it is the only platform, next to Twitter, that is text-based. This MRP focuses on textual based data because a more focused and thorough analysis can be performed within the scope of this project. The coded data for the Facebook posts were organized through a numbering scheme. Each piece of

data was listed as FB, standing for Facebook, followed by OUF or MBOH, which indicated the time frame the post was published, followed by a number in chronological order, representing the example of coded data during that timeframe.

Mission Statement

Ryerson's mission statement is located on Ryerson's website, under the About tab on the Accountability Gateway page. This page is within the section of the Ryerson website that is administrative. It is a clickable PDF link that directs you to the 100-word document. Ryerson University's mission statement was written in 1993 by the President's office at the institution. It outlines the goals and values of the institution as a polytechnic university (Ryerson University, 2012). The mission statement was collected on April 4^a, 2016, which is two weeks after the second pivotal recruitment period at Ryerson had been executed. A screenshot of the mission statement was taken to ensure that the data set was not changed or altered during data analysis. It was then stored as a PDF file on a hard drive.

Ryerson's Undergraduate Tab on the Website

Ryerson's website consists of a homepage with eight menu options called, Current Students, Undergraduate, Graduate, Continuing Education, Alumni, Supporting, Student Life and Faculty & Staff. The menu option, Undergraduate, was solely chosen for analysis as it contains pertinent information regarding student recruitment. On the Undergraduate menu option there was a total of eight headings. These eight headings were titled, About, Admissions, Apply, Programs, Costs, Scholarships, Info and Connect. Table 1 provides a summary of the main sections of the Undergraduate tab. For a detailed description of all pages in the undergraduate page, see Appendix A.

Heading	Sub-Page	Description	Collection (Y/N)
Homepage	Scrolling Banner	Text based images with short facts about Ryerson University.	Y
About	About Ryerson	Short text-based blurbs providing an overview of	Y

Table 1: Ryerson's Undergraduate Tab

Heading	Sub-Page	Description	
		the undergraduate experience students receive at Ryerson.	
About	Key Dates	Important dates for students to submit their applications by.	N
About	Life at Ryerson	A listing of the different types of resources available to students upon enrollment.	Y
About	The Toronto Advantage	An explanation as to why living in downtown Toronto offers students a competitive advantage as scholars.	Y
Admissions	Admission Requirements Overview	A link that directs users to the different sub-pages under the Admissions heading.	N
Admissions	Admission Requirements by Program	A list of the different programs available at Ryerson and the academic requirements needed to be eligible for admission.	N
Admissions	Canadian Secondary School Applicants	A list of provincial and territorial requirements if applying to Ryerson from outside Ontario.	N
Admissions	English Language Requirements	How to apply for English Proficiency is English is not an applicant's first language.	N
Admissions	Homeschooled Applicants	The requirements for students interested in applying to Ryerson that were previously homeschooled.	N
Admissions	Internationally Educated Students	A list of requirements for international students applying to Ryerson.	N
Admissions	Mature Students	A list of requirements for students who did not begin higher education schooling before the age of 21.	N
Admissions	Ontario Secondary School Applicants	A list of requirements for students who are applying to Ryerson straight from a high school located in Ontario.	N
Admissions	Special Students	A list of requirements for students who are interested in taking classes at Ryerson but not pursuing a degree.	N
Admissions	University/ College Transfer Students	Students who are interested in transferring from another institution of higher learning to Ryerson.	N
Scholarships	Scholarships Homepage	A list of the different scholarships available to first year undergraduate students attending Ryerson.	Y

The data from the Undergraduate tab on the website was collected on April 4^a, 2016 through screenshots.

Each page was then stored as a .png file on a hard drive. This information was stored in an external location

because Ryerson would soon be changing the content on the website from a focus on student recruitment towards tips and steps on how students can accept their offer of admissions and pay their deposit.

Why Ryerson's Blog Posts

The Why Ryerson blog is linked to the Undergraduate tab on Ryerson's website. It is meant to provide, "...information about Ryerson programs, campus and student news, admissions updates and useful information from our [the Undergraduate Admissions and Recruitment] office" (WhyRyerson, 2016). The blog posts are written by two authors, students employed by the Undergraduate Admissions and Recruitment office and staff members in the same department. All of the posts contain both text based content as well as images. Images are outside the scope of this MRP because there was too much data to be observed and were excluded from the data collection and analysis.

On April 4^a, 2016, all of the blog posts were collected through screenshots that were then stored as .png files on a hard drive. The blog posts were collected during the OUF time period from September 9^a, 2015 to September 30^a, 2015 and during the MBOH time period from March 4th, 2016, to March 25th, 2016. This was done to ensure that the blog posts were not re-edited or deleted by the authors during the process of analysis. A total of 19 blogs were collected and 17 blog posts were used for analysis. The blog posts, "My Top 5 Favourite Nostalgic Movies on Netflix", and, "10 Essential Twitter Accounts to Follow", were excluded from the analysis because they contained information that was not relevant to student recruitment and fell outside the scope of this MRP. Table 2 describes the data collected from Why Ryerson's blog posts.

Blog Number	Title	Date Posted (DD/MM/YYYY)	Author	Collected (Y/N)
B1-OUF	Orientation Week and Re-Cap of Week of Welcome	10/09/2015	Student	Y
B2-OUF	5 Reasons Why You Should Come to the Ontario Universities' Fair	17/09/2015	Staff	Y
B3-OUF	Ryerson News: September 14-18	18/09/2015	Staff	Y
B4-OUF	Tessa: Introducing Myself!28/09/2015		Student	Y
B5-MBOH	10 Views From RU That You've Probably	04/03/2016	Student	Y

 Table 2: Why Ryerson's Blog Posts

Blog Number	Title	Date Posted (DD/MM/YYYY)	Author	Collected (Y/N)
	Never Seen Before			
B6-MBOH	My 5 Favourite Nostalgic Movies on Netflix	07/03/2016	Student	Ν
B7-MBOH	My Trip to Montreal!	08/03/2016	Student	Y
B8-MBOH	10 Defining University Experiences	09/03/2016	Student	Y
B9-MBOH	4 Cool New Student Groups on Campus	10/03/2016	Student	Y
В10- МВОН	FAQ: Part Three	11/03/2016	Student	Y
B11- MBOH	Common Pet Peeves of a Ryerson Student	14/03/2016	Student	Y
B12- MBOH	10 Essential Twitter Accounts to Follow	07/03/2016	Student	Ν
В13- МВОН	Moving Up, On and Out!	15/03/2016	Student	Y
B14- MBOH	What It's Like to Have a 3-Day Week	17/03/2016	Student	Y
В15- МВОН	How to Cope With March Sadness	21/03/2016	Student	Y
В16- МВОН	March Break Open House Recap	22/03/2016	Staff	Y
В17- МВОН	Ryerson Zone Learning	23/03/2016	Student	Y
B18- MBOH	March Applicant Updates	24/03/2016	Staff	Y
В19- МВОН	4 Ways to Grow Professionally	24/03/2016	Student	Y

Why Ryerson's Facebook Posts

The last platform that was looked at was the Why Ryerson Facebook page. On Ryerson's website under the Undergraduate tab on the left hand side of the header is a list of social media platforms. There are a total of five social media platforms listed, which are, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. Out of the five, only two of the platforms are text-based, which are Facebook and Twitter. Due to the fact that Facebook allows for a higher number of words to be attached to each post in comparison to Twitter's 140-character word limit, it provided more data to be analyzed, which makes it the more compatible platform

for this study. All Why Ryerson Facebook posts posted during the two pivotal time period for student recruitment during the academic year, which are the OUF time frame, which ranges from September 9th to September 30th, 2015 and the MBOH time frame, from March 4th, to March 25th, 2016. The Facebook posts were captured as screenshots on April 4th, 2016, and stored as .png files on a hard drive for analysis.

The information stored from the Facebook posts were, the date each post was published and the textbased content within the post. There was no information listed that identified who the author of each post was. The Facebook data that was used for analysis was small, because there were 36 Facebook posts that were not used for analysis. The posts that were not used for analysis were links that directed users to other social media or digital platforms, or contained driving instructions and traffic updates on how to get to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre for the OUF and Ryerson for the MBOH. Table 3 provides a summary of the Facebook posts collected from each timeframe. For a detailed description of the Facebook posts, see Appendix B.

Timeframe	Number of Facebook Posts Published	Number of Facebook Posts Included for Analysis
OUF	19	4
МВОН	42	21

Table 3: Why Ryerson's Facebook Posts

Data Analysis

A conventional qualitative content analysis approach was used to analyze the data, as defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). This inductive category development is consulted when existing literature is limited. For the analysis, the 87 pieces of data that were collected were then analyzed to identify reoccurring categories. The themes that emerged from the data were influenced by pre-existing higher education branding literature. All of the codes identified were coded based on the emergence of key words, phrases and patterns. A total of 13 codes emerged from the data. The following section outlines the codes and the categories they fell within and how they were described as for analysis.

Educational Identity

Nisan & Pekarsky (2012) describe educational identity as what ways a university uses education to communicate its beliefs and values in terms of what is best for the individual and society. It focuses on what role academia has on influencing societal functions. The three codes, knowledge mobilization, employability of graduates and career-focused education, were identified under the educational identity category (*See Table*

4).

Code Name	Description	Example
Knowledge	Describes how academic research can	"The special mission of Ryerson University is
Mobilization	lead to practical advancements in the field.	the advancement of applied knowledge and research to address societal need." (MS.1)
Employability of Graduates	Explains how students are paid for doing work to learn how to shape work in the future.	"that prepare students for careers in professional and quasi professional careers." (MS.2)
Career Focused Education	Represents how students view education as a tool to advance their career instead of a tool for learning.	"Performance Production student Christopher shares how his degree is preparing him for his career." (FB.OUF.1)

Table 4: Educational Identity Codes

There are similarities in the way each code in this category is discussed across the social media and digital platforms. The code knowledge mobilization is often coded as a compound sentence because it connects two styles of learning to produce a desirable outcome. For example, the words, applied knowledge and research and education and experience are reoccurring words used to describe the code in Ryerson's mission statement and in the Undergraduate tab of their website.

The codes employability of graduates and career-focused education seem similar in their description but vary in their narrative. Employability of graduates is coded from the perspective of the institution, as in what skills the university can offer students to give them a competitive edge in the workplace. For example, data that lists Ryerson in comparison to other universities discuss types of careers students can transition into and the skill time management is frequently mentioned. Whereas career-focused education is coded from the perspective of the students, who decide what skills they can acquire from the university to gain a competitive edge in the workplace. For example, how students use networking opportunities for their benefit, learning how to operate technology from their industry of choice, or free conferences to attend.

Learning Environment

The category, learning environment, captures data that describes what tools and resources Ryerson has to offer in terms of the pursuit of academia. It focuses on the physical locations and contexts of an institution of where the skill or knowledge is taught. Under the category, learning environment, five codes were identified, which are, urban campus, facilities, quality faculty, academic programs and student coping mechanisms (*See Table 5*).

Code Name	Description	Example
Urban Campus	Describes how a university's location in the inner-city provides additional learning opportunities for students outside the classroom.	"Our students use the city as an urban laboratory, with direct access to almost every industry imaginable." (W.A.1)
Facilities	A building that is used by a university to make an action related to academia easier.	"Ryerson has two state-of-the-art fitness and athletic facilities available for students." (W.LAR.15)
Quality Faculty	The excellence of teaching staff at a university.	"there will always be that one prof who's your favourite because of how much they know on their field of study and how they can engage you on a deep level" (B.8.8)
Academic Programs	A variety of required and elective courses that offer seminars, workshops, and online components in addition to traditional live classes that makes up an undergraduate degree.	"Interested in Ryerson's BA in English?" (FB.MBOH.4)
Student Coping Mechanisms	Ways to deal with copious amounts of academic work assigned by the university.	"Sure, you can choose to skip class for a day" (B.11.10)

Table 5: Learning Environment Codes

In the data, the code urban campus is described as an opportunity for students that provide a learning experience outside the classroom. On the Undergraduate tab on the website, data that is coded urban campus often uses the words, Toronto, city and diverse, followed by an example of an opportunity for students. Opportunities that are described are access to different industries and leaders within those industries that provide networking opportunities for Ryerson students. Across the social media platforms, the Why Ryerson

Facebook page and the Why Ryerson blog, data coded as urban campus is used by the author to express a feeling of gratitude for living in Toronto. For example, the words, I love, happy and enjoy frequently appear, followed by the words Toronto, my city, Ryerson and the GTA, for providing students with opportunities to learn.

The data coded as facilities referred to names of buildings located around Ryerson's campus, with a focus placed on the Student Learning Centre (SLC), which is a multi-purpose building. In addition, it was interesting to note the way the data coded as academic programs was described. On the Undergraduate tab and the Why Ryerson Facebook page, the academic program arts and contemporary studies was frequently mentioned, which includes subject-based options like English, French, History and Philosophy (Ryerson University, 2016). This differed from the Why Ryerson blog, as the data coded as academic programs describes the programs available under faculty of communication and arts design, such as, the School of Fashion, the School of Journalism, Radio and Television Arts and School of Professional Communication.

Student Support

Student support focuses on the actions or resources available to students at Ryerson. It focuses on transportation, academic care, housing options and payment opportunities to assist students while they complete their degree. The student support category breaks down into the three codes, scholarships, housing accommodations and expansion of access (*See Table 6*).

Code Name	Description	Example
Scholarships	A grant or award given to a student to fund	"Annaliese Loeppky is Ryerson's first Loran
	their educational endeavors.	Scholar" (FB.OUF.3)
Housing	Spaces for students to live in that are	"Ryerson has three-on-campus co-
Accommodations	relatively close to the university's campus.	educational residences with a total of 850
		rooms, most of which are private."
		(W.LAR.3)
Expansion of	Described as resources available to	"[Ryerson is recognized] for its commitment
Access	students with disadvantaged backgrounds	to accessibility" (MS.4)
	or in disadvantaged situations.	

Table 6: Student Support Codes

Within the student support category, the data coded as scholarships on the Undergraduate tab proved to be intriguing. On this digital platform, a lot of detail went into describing the scholarships available to prospective students wishing to attend Ryerson. There was a specific focus on providing details about the President's National Entrance Scholarship, President's International Entrance Scholarship, the International Secondary School Student Merit Scholarships and the Terence Grier Entrance Scholarship. These scholarships were then briefly described on the social media platforms, Why Ryerson's Facebook page and Why Ryerson's blog post, which were written from the perspective of the award winners on what qualifications made them an exemplary candidate for the award.

Social Ambience

The last category to be identified is social ambience. It outlines organizations or events that produce a positive atmosphere for an institution of higher learning. After passing through the data, a total of 13 codes were established. The social ambience category consists of the two codes, sports/ club opportunities and campus culture (*See Table 7*).

Code Number	Code Name	Description	Example
4A	Sports/Club Opportunities	An organization on campus dedicated to a particular activity or interest.	"Ryerson has a crazy amount of student-lead teams, clubs and organizations" (B.10.16)
4B	Campus Culture	Described as an event or activity that promotes the university's school spirit and positively affects the student's mindsets or pattern of behaviour.	"A free trip to Montreal? You best believe Raven said "yes!" (FB.MBOH.8)

Table 7: Social Ambience Codes

On the Undergraduate tab, the data coded as campus culture describes activities and events that offer students a social outlet off campus. The header titled The Toronto Advantage describes the art galleries, amusement parks, sporting venues and malls that are in close proximity to Ryerson. It is describes as offering students a way to connect to the Canadian and International community (Ryerson University, 2016). This varies from how campus culture was coded in the data on the social media platforms, Why Ryerson's

Facebook page and Why Ryerson's blog. Campus culture is described here as attending the Orientation and Reading Week events hosted by the Ryerson Students Union. The use of pronouns in the data coded as campus culture is interesting to note, as it is often described as we, us, our, and community, eliciting that certain events foster a community.

After analyzing the data with the codes and categories that were outlined, the data was processed and organized into findings to answer the two research questions.

Findings & Discussion

Four charts were created to report on the data collected for analysis. Each chart listed the percentage of codes and categories that emerged on each digital and social platform. This allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the data to determine which codes and categories appeared the most frequently on each platform. All the findings reported below are divided by research question as a way to organize the discoveries into sections.

RQ1: What messages does Ryerson communicate about itself in the mission statement and recruitment platforms in Why Ryerson's Facebook page, Why Ryerson's blog posts and the Undergraduate tab on Ryerson's website?

Mission Statement Messages

Ryerson's mission statement is a formally written document that lists the different messages Ryerson communicates about itself. Table 8 presents the codes that emerged from the mission statement.

Category	Codes	Codes Total (%)	Categories Total (%)
Educational Identity	Knowledge Mobilization	50	66.6
Educational Identity	Employability of Graduates	8.3	
Educational Identity	Career Focused Education	8.3	
Learning Environment	Urban Campus	0	25
Learning Environment	Facilities	0	
Learning Environment	Quality Faculty	8.3	
Learning Environment	Academic Programs	16.7	

Table 8: Mission Statement Messages

Category	Codes	Codes Total (%)	Categories Total (%)
Learning Environment	Student Coping Mechanisms	0	
Student Support	Scholarships	0	
Student Support	Housing Accommodations	0	8.3
Student Support	Expansion of Access	8.3	
Social Ambience	Sports/Club Opportunities	0	0
Social Ambience	Campus Culture	0	

Fully 50% of the mission statement was coded as messages pertaining to knowledge mobilization. Additionally, within the category educational identity, messaging related to employability of graduates and career-focused education were observed as well (8.3%). Overall, the majority of messaging within the mission statement was coded as educational identity (66.6%).

Ryerson's Undergraduate Tab on the Website Messages

The Undergraduate tab on Ryerson's website uses a mixture of formal and informal language to communicate student recruitment messages. Ryerson uses this digital platform to describe the environment around itself to make the institution seem as desirable as possible. Table 9 describes the codes that emerged through analysis that Ryerson uses to communicate about student recruitment.

Category	Codes	Codes Total (%)	Categories Total (%)
Educational Identity	Knowledge Mobilization	13.3	
Educational Identity	Employability of Graduates	6.0	28.9
Educational Identity	Career Focused Education	9.6	
Learning Environment	Urban Campus	20.5	
Learning Environment	Facilities	3.6	34.9
Learning Environment	Quality Faculty	2.4	34.9
Learning Environment	Academic Programs	8.4	
Learning Environment	Student Coping Mechanisms	0	
Student Support	Scholarships	8.4	
Student Support	Housing Accommodations	8.4	19.2
Student Support	Expansion of Access	2.4	
Social Ambience	Sports/Club Opportunities	6.0	16.8
Social Ambience	Campus Culture	10.8	

Table 9: Ryerson's Undergraduate Tab on Website Messages

The code urban campus was the most frequent code to emerge from content on Ryerson's Undergraduate tab (20.5%). In addition, the codes knowledge mobilization (13.3%) and campus culture (10.8%) emerged the second most frequently. Overall, a majority of the data in Ryerson's Undergraduate tab was coded as learning environment (34.9%).

Why Ryerson Blog Posts

Two types of authors, students and staff members write Why Ryerson's Blog posts. The stylistic writing and tone of the blog posts changes between the two authors. The student blog posts use informal language with the frequent use of slang terminology and focuses on the social opportunities available at Ryerson. In comparison, the staff written blog posts use formal language and focus on the academic related opportunities and successes of Ryerson. Table 10 describes the primary messages communicated on this social media platform.

Category	Code	OUF (%)	MBOH (%)	Codes Total (%)	Category Total (%)
Educational Identity	Ð		10.0	11.9	20.0
Educational Identity	Employability of Graduates	0.9	6.2	7.1	29.0
Educational Identity	Career Focused Education	1.9	8.1	10.0	
Learning Environment	Urban Campus	3.3	2.8	6.1	
Learning Environment	Facilities	1.4	4.7	6.1	31.1
Learning Environment	Quality Faculty	1.4	3.3	4.7	
Learning Environment	Academic Programs	5.2	3.3	8.5	
Learning Environment	Student Coping Mechanisms	0	5.7	5.7	
Student Support	Scholarships	1.9	3.3	5.2	
Student Support	Housing Accommodations	0.5	2.4	2.9	11.0
Student Support	Expansion of Access	0.5	2.4	2.9	

Table 10: Why Ryerson Blog Post Messages

Category	Code	OUF (%)	MBOH (%)	Codes Total (%)	Category Total (%)
Social Ambience	Sports/Club Opportunities	1.9	8.1	10.0	27.5
Social Ambience	Campus Culture	9.0	8.5	17.5	

Under the Why Ryerson blog posts, the data was most frequently coded as campus culture (17.5%). The codes knowledge mobilization (11.9%) and career-focused education (10.0%) were then the second most frequently coded data. Overall, a majority of the data coded emerged from the education identity category (29%).

While analyzing the data between the OUF and MBOH timeframe, it is interesting to note that the code student coping mechanisms emerged from the data coded during the MBOH timeframe (5.7%) as none of the other social and digital platforms had this code emerge from the data. In addition, the code campus culture was almost equal between the two timeframes, emerging 9.0% during the coded OUF data and 8.5% during the MBOH coded data. Within the OUF timeframe the codes career focused education and sports/club opportunities emerged equally from the data (1.9%). During the MBOH timeframe, the same codes emerged equally, but more frequently than during the OUF timeframe (8.1%).

Why Ryerson Facebook Posts Messages

The Why Ryerson Facebook page uses descriptive words in short sentences to write each post. There is no information that states who the author of each post is, but the tone and style of the Facebook posts are youthful, using simplistic language to communicate information. Table 11 lists the messages communicated through the Why Ryerson's Facebook posts.

Category	Code	OUF (%)	MBOH (%)	Codes Total (%)	Category Total (%)
Educational	Knowledge Mobilization	1.6	0	1.6	
Identity	Employability of Graduates	0	0	0	6.4
	Career Focused Education	0	4.8	4.8	

Table 11: Why Ryerson Facebook Posts Messages

Category	Code	OUF	MBOH	Codes Total	Category Total
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Learning	Urban Campus	0	3.2	3.2	
Environment	Facilities	0	0	0	
	Quality Faculty	0	3.2	3.2	14.5
	Academic Programs	1.6	6.5	8.1	14.5
	Student Coping	0	0	0	
	Mechanisms				
Student Support	Scholarships	1.6	1.6	3.2	
	Housing	0	1.6	1.6	6.4
	Accommodations				0.4
	Expansion of Access	0	1.6	1.6	
Social Ambience	Sports/Club	0	3.2	3.2	
	Opportunities				12.9
	Campus Culture	1.6	8.1	9.7	

On the Why Ryerson Facebook page, the codes campus culture emerged most frequently from the data (9.7%). The code that emerged from the data the second most frequently was academic programs (8.1%). Overall, majorities of the data were coded underneath the learning environment category (14.5%), followed closely by the social ambience category (12.9%).

Comparing the data that was coded from the OUF timeframe to the MBOH timeframe, a few interesting results were noted. During the OUF timeframe, no data emerged as the career-focused education code, whereas the career-focused education code emerged from the data quite frequently during the MBOH timeframe (4.8%). In addition, the code campus culture emerged exponentially more frequently during the MBOH timeframe (8.1%) compared to the OUF timeframe (1.6%).

Through the analysis of these findings, overall themes and patterns were identified and theoretical concepts presented in the literature were used to explore how the literature shaped the results.

RQ 2: In what ways do Ryerson's primary branding messages change across its different social media and digital platforms?

To answer this question, themes related to Ryerson's branding messages are presented.

Ryerson's Branding Messages

The data that were coded within Ryerson's mission statement was used to identity what main messages Ryerson communicates about itself. The most frequently identified message in Ryerson's mission statement tends to be education identity, which emerged 66.6% from the data with an emphasis on the code knowledge mobilization with 50%. On Ryerson's Undergraduate tab, the digital platform used for student recruitment, the most frequently identified main message was learning environment (34.9%). There was an emphasis placed on the code urban campus, which emerged 20% from the data.

These identified main messages presented on the digital media differed from what main messages were identified on the social media platforms. The most frequently identified message on Why Ryerson's Facebook page was learning environment, which emerged 14.9% from the data with an emphasis on the code campus culture (9.7%). This was similar with the main messages identified on the Why Ryerson blog. The most frequently identified message was learning environment, which emerged 31.1% from the data with an emphasis on the code campus culture (17.5%). Therefore, across all student recruitment and corporate branding platforms, the main three messages identified in the data are knowledge mobilization, urban campus and campus culture.

The main message identified as knowledge mobilization in Ryerson's mission statement is congruent with what the literature says about the purpose of mission statements. Kopp (2013) uses a study conducted by the United States Education Conservancy in 2007 that looked at the mission statements of 300 universities, to report that universities emphasize educational goals and responsibilities towards its students use a mission statement. In addition, the main message identified as urban campus on Ryerson's Undergraduate tab on the website fits in with what the literature says about using websites for student recruitment.

In the literature, Saichaie and Morphew (2014) report that most students use university websites during student recruitment periods to look at two specific things. The first is admissions content, such as the

application process and costs. The second is the location of the campus, in terms of its physical structure and the opportunities that the campus can provide in terms of the types of activities and clubs that are available to students. This is consistent with what Insch and Sun (2013) state, as they claim that a city's physical, social and culture elements affects a student's choice in determining where they wish to study. A student's attraction to a university's location comes from how the university portrays a sense of community, how the university is able to academically accommodate students and the accessibility of the campus to additional attractions in the city (p.185).

The main message identified as campus culture on Why Ryerson's Facebook page and in the Why Ryerson blog is also equal to what the literatures states about using social media platforms for student recruitment. Carrillatt et al. (2013) claim that high school students look at higher education institutions Facebook pages to find social opportunities. In addition, Sandlin and Pena (2014) states that high school students, who are soon to become prospective students, look at blogs run by higher education institutions in order to find an accurate portrayal of what their university experience will be like. They goes on to say that these prospective students are looking for students currently attending the university to write the blog, because they may be more honest about what to expect from the campus experience.

Overall, the main messages identified as codes in the data fall within overarching categories. These categories analyzed collectively across the digital and social media platforms suggest that different platforms are used to communicate overarching themes of either practical skill or social development.

Practical Skills vs. Social Development

The data suggests that Ryerson's digital and social media platforms tend to focus on communicating messages that relate to the practical skill enhancement of its students. These messages identify in what ways Ryerson would offer students opportunities for growth in a practical setting based on the resources available at the institution. Within Ryerson's mission statement, the message knowledge mobilization emerged from

the coded data at 50%, employability of graduates at 8.3% and career focused education at 8.3%. Collectively, the combined total of 66.6% states that more than half the data coded in Ryerson's mission statement falls within the category educational identity. On the Undergraduate tab on Ryerson's website, the message urban campus emerged from the coded data at 20%, knowledge mobilization at 13.3%, career focused education at 9.6% and academic programs at 8.4%. Even though most of these codes fall under the educational identity category, the category, learning environment, emerged the most frequently from the data at 34.9%.

On the Why Ryerson Facebook page and in the Why Ryerson blog posts, the data is similar but it slightly varies. Cumulatively, a majority of the data coded on Why Ryerson's Facebook page falls under the category, learning environment (14.4%). But the most frequently communicated code from the data is campus culture (9.7%). In the Why Ryerson blog, the same results are shown. A majority of the data is coded as learning environment (31.3%). But, the two most frequent codes to emerge are sports/ club opportunities (10%) and campus culture (17.5%), which fall under the category social ambience. In addition, the data coded under the learning environment category (31.3%) is almost equal to the data coded under the social ambience category (27.5%).

This finding is similar with what is said in the literature about practical and social development as a tool for student recruitment. In Choudhury et al.'s (2008) study, interviews were conducted with marketing directors from universities in the UK to determine the most important aspects prospective students consider before applying to a university. The results showed that the marketing directors said there is a strong push from a university's marketing department to communicate its educational identity to prospective students, but prospective students are more interested in learning about the social activities, events or organizations that would become available to them. Therefore it is interesting to note that the digital platforms operated by Ryerson's faculty focus on frequently communicating the codes that fall under the educational identity

category. Whereas the social media platforms operated by students employed by Ryerson place a strong emphasis on talking about the institution's social ambience, specifically its campus culture.

Focus on Academic Resources During the OUF and MBOH Timeframes

The OUF and MBOH timeframes were only applicable to analyze the data on the Why Ryerson Facebook page and the Why Ryerson blog because these platforms time stamped their content. To observe the themes presented in the data, the data coded within each timeframe on one platform was compared against the data coded within each timeframe on the other platform.

On the Why Ryerson Facebook page, the most frequent messages to emerge from the data coded during the OUF timeframe were knowledge mobilization, academic programs, scholarships and campus culture, each at 1.6%. Within the blog, the messages to appear most frequently were campus culture, which emerged 9% from the coded data, and academic programs, which emerged 5.2% from the coded data. This shows that on the social media platforms within the OUF timeframe, the two most frequently communicated messages are campus culture and academic programs.

In the literature, Brotheridge and Lee (2005) state that the OUF is vital for universities to make a positive impression on prospective students because it's usually the first point of contact in connecting. They continue to say that the OUF is an opportunity to host interactive sessions to introduce high school students to the campus programs available and what to expect in regards to the academic lifestyle. Wang (2009) furthers this statement by claiming that prospective students are interested in learning about the reputation and quality of academic programs offered at a university because a degree from a prestigious program would increase their chances of finding a good job after graduation. The data coded on the social platforms suggest that during the OUF timeframe there is a slight focus on promoting the campus culture of Ryerson over sharing information about academic resources available to prospective students. The data presented in the

OUF timeframe on these social media platforms slightly vary from the data presented on these platforms during the MBOH timeframe.

On the Why Ryerson Facebook page, the data coded within the MBOH timeframe saw campus culture (8.1%) and academic programs (6.5%) to be the most frequently communicated messages on the platform. In the Why Ryerson blog, the most frequently communicated messages during the MBOH timeframe were knowledge mobilization (10%) and campus culture (8.5%), with the codes sports/club opportunities and career-focused education falling closely behind at 8.1%. Overall, across the social media platforms the messages most frequently communicated during the MBOH timeframe are knowledge mobilization and campus culture.

Fischbach (2006) states that universities hold open houses once acceptance letters have been sent out to students. The students, to obtain more information about the university before accepting the offer, then use the open houses. Fischbach goes on to list three things students are most interested in learning about, which are, how universities operate administratively, receiving in-depth explanations about the programs offered and a chance to review course content, which is part of the degree requirements (p.227). While Ryerson appears to be communicating to students during the MBOH timeframe program expectations and reviewing degree requirements, it is also communicating activities, events and organizations for students to become involved in. This suggests a gap between the data and the literature, as the literature suggests universities focus on promoting the academic resources available to students while it appears Ryerson is splitting its efforts between focusing on this and the campus culture it has to offer.

Career-Focused Education

Across the digital and social media platforms for corporate branding and student recruitment, the code career-focused education was never the most frequently communicated message. In Ryerson's mission statement, it emerged from the coded data at 8.3% but the most frequently communicated message on this

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platform was knowledge mobilization, emerging from the coded data at 50%. On the Undergraduate tab it emerged at 9.6%, but fell short to the code urban campus, which was coded in the data at 20.5%. On the Why Ryerson Facebook page, the career focused education code emerged from the data at 4.8%, but the most frequently communicated message was campus culture (8.1%). In the Why Ryerson blog, the code career focused education emerged from the data at 8.1% and once again, fell short to the code knowledge mobilization, which emerged from the data at 10%.

In the literature, Bolan and Robinson (2013) state that prospective students are more likely to fall into a degree-purchasing orientation during application periods. Degree-purchasing orientation, suggested by Sauston et. al (2011), considers students consumers of higher education degrees who look to obtain the certification as a way of advancing their career. While the literature suggestions that degree-purchasing orientation is prominent in discussions about students' value of higher education, the data in this study did not suggest that Ryerson's recruitment strategies rely on this message. Ryerson's messaging appears to rely on messages related to knowledge mobilization over career-focused education.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to analyze what the main messages Ryerson University uses to brand itself during student recruitment time periods across its digital and social media platforms. Using Ryerson's mission statement as a document that identifies the main messages Ryerson communicates about itself, main messages identified across the other digital and social media platforms were compared and contrasted. In Ryerson's mission statement the most frequently communicated message was knowledge mobilization, which falls under the educational identity category. In Ryerson's website in the Undergraduate tab the most frequently communicated message was urban campus, which falls under the learning environment category. In the Why Ryerson Facebook page the most frequently communicated message was campus culture, which

falls under the social ambience category and in the Why Ryerson blog the most frequently communicated message was again, campus culture, which falls under the social ambience category.

This research suggests that Ryerson communicates messages pertaining to knowledge mobilization, urban campus and campus culture. This slightly differs from what Kopp (2013) says about the purpose of mission statements as he states mission statements are also used to comment on a university's commitment to diversity, in addition to the expansion of knowledge and location of campus. In addition, the main messages communicated across the digital and social media platforms fall within the boundaries with what the literature states are the purposes of these platforms for student recruitment.

Ryerson's website most frequently communicated the main message urban campus, which is what Saichaie and Morphew (2014) state is the most important aspect prospective students consider during student recruitment time periods while referring to university websites. On the social media platforms, Facebook and the blog, Ryerson's most frequently communicated main message were found to be related to campus culture, which is also related to the literature. Johnston et al. (2013) and Sandlin (2012) state that Facebook and blogs are social platforms that students use during student recruitment periods to learn about a university's campus culture.

Additional themes and patterns emerged from the data that communicated different messages than those found in the literature. The main discovery was that while degree-purchasing orientation is prominent in the literature relating to how students consider selecting a university, it did not appear frequently in Ryerson's messaging. This suggests that for future communication strategies, Ryerson could focus on communicating messages related to degree-purchasing orientation across their digital and social media platforms for student recruitment. Ryerson's Undergraduate tab on their website would be the best place to communicate this message because of what the literatures claims students look for when viewing a university's website during student recruitment time periods. As Saichaie and Morphew (2014) state,

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students are most interested in viewing a university's website because it details information about the university's campus and how an institution prepares its graduates for careers in the work force. Therefore, Ryerson could place more of an emphasis on their website describing how they prepare students for labour market participation. This suggestion can be explored with further analysis.

Also, the data coded as academic programs emerged quite frequently from the data, which was not commented on as something of importance in the literature. Across all digital and social media platforms, there was a focus placed on discussing the different types of programs available at Ryerson and how these programs take a modern approach to learning by implementing various workshops, lectures and assignments and activities that are innovative.

This study was limited to analyzing data coded across three of Ryerson's student recruitment platforms, which is a small sample from the other student recruitment platforms Ryerson operates. While there still needs to be additional research conducted to better understand student recruitment practices of higher education institutions in Ontario, the results of this paper can inform in what ways Ryerson uses its digital and social media platforms for student recruitment.

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Heading	Sub-Page	Description	Collection (Y/N)
Homepage	Scrolling Banner	Text based images with short facts about Ryerson University.	Y
About	About Ryerson	Short text-based blurbs providing an overview of the undergraduate experience students receive at Ryerson.	Y
About	Key Dates	Important dates for students to submit their applications by.	N
About	Life at Ryerson	A listing of the different types of resources available to students upon enrollment.	Y
About	The Toronto Advantage	An explanation as to why living in downtown Toronto offers students a competitive advantage as scholars.	Y
Admissions	Admission Requirements Overview	A link that directs users to the different sub-pages under the Admissions heading.	N
Admissions	Admission Requirements by Program	A list of the different programs available at Ryerson and the academic requirements needed to be eligible for admission.	N
Admissions	Canadian Secondary School Applicants	A list of provincial and territorial requirements if applying to Ryerson from outside Ontario.	N
Admissions	English Language Requirements	How to apply for English Proficiency is English is not an applicant's first language.	N
Admissions	Homeschooled Applicants	The requirements for students interested in applying to Ryerson that were previously homeschooled.	N
Admissions	Internationally Educated Students	A list of requirements for international students applying to Ryerson.	N
Admissions	Mature Students	A list of requirements for students who did not begin higher education schooling before the age of 21.	N
Admissions	Ontario Secondary School Applicants	A list of requirements for students who are applying to Ryerson straight from a high school located in Ontario.	N
Admissions	Special Students	A list of requirements for students who are interested in taking classes at Ryerson but not pursuing a degree.	N
Admissions	University/ College Transfer Students	Students who are interested in transferring from another institution of higher learning to Ryerson.	N
Apply	Programs Accepting Applicants	The three terms individuals can apply to Ryerson.	N
Apply	Application Dates	The dates that students must submit documents by to apply to study at Ryerson.	N

Appendix A: Data Collected From Ryerson's Undergraduate Tab

Heading	Sub-Page	Description	Collection (Y/N)
Apply	How to Apply	Steps on how to apply to Ryerson.	N
Apply	Applications and Related Forms	Forms that individuals will have to fill out to apply to Ryerson.	N
Apply	Submission of Documents	A portal for students to submit documents to.	N
Apply	After Applying	Steps for individuals to follow after applying to Ryerson.	N
Apply	Approved Students	How students can accept an offer to Ryerson.	N
Apply	Choose > Ryerson	How students can sign into their Ryerson portal once accepting their offer of admission.	N
Programs	Programs Homepage	A list of programs available at Ryerson.	Ν
Costs	Costs Homepage	A price range of what students would pay in tuition for each faculty if attending Ryerson.	N
Costs	Fees and Finances	A list of what services tuition costs go towards.	Ν
Scholarships	Scholarships Homepage	A list of the different scholarships available to first year undergraduate students attending Ryerson.	Y
Info	Info Homepage	Links to the different sub-pages under the Info heading.	N
Info	Downloads	Links to different information brochures about Ryerson.	N
Info	For International Applicants	Financial information pertinent to international students accepting an offer of admission.	N
Info	For New Students	Links to information packages for students to review before attending classes at Ryerson.	N
Info	For Parents and Family	Tips for family members assisting their offspring attending Ryerson.	N
Info	For Teachers and Counsellors	Contact information for teachers and counsellors to use when needing assistance with inquiries.	N
Info	For Students With Disabilities	A link to a database with information for students with disabilities attending Ryerson.	N
Connect	Contact Info	Links to the different sub-pages under the connect heading.	N
Connect	Visits and Tours	Information on how to sign up for a tour at Ryerson.	N
Connect	Media	A collection of YouTube videos used across Ryerson's Undergraduate menu option.	N
Connect	Social	A list of Ryerson's Undergraduate Recruitment social media links.	N
Connect	Use of Information	A document outlining how Ryerson protects confidential information submitting to its website.	N

Facebook Post	Date Published (DD/MM/YYYY)	Description	Collected (Y/N)
FB.OUF.1	10/09/2015	Link to an article about Ryerson Zone Learning.	Y
FB.OUF.2	10/09/2015	An announcement about accessing your Ryerson portal.	N
FB.OUF.3	10/09/2015	Details about Ryerson's Orientation Week.	Y
FB.OUF.4	11/09/2015	An announcement about accessing your Ryerson portal.	N
FB.OUF.5	22/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.6	24/09/2015	A photo of students at the OUF.	N
FB.OUF.7	25/09/2015	A photo of students at the OUF.	N
FB.OUF.8	25/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.9	25/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.10	25/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.11	26/09/2015	Directions to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre for the OUF.	N
FB.OUF.12	26/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.13	27/09/2015	A traffic update about how to get to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.	N
FB.OUF.14	27/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.15	27/09/2015	Information about academic programs at the OUF.	Y
FB.OUF.16	27/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.17	28/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.18	29/09/2015	Describes a scholarship opportunity available to undergraduate students at Ryerson.	Y
FB.OUF.19	29/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.OUF.20	30/09/2015	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.1	04/03/2016	Information about academic programs at Ryerson.	Y

Facebook Post	Date Published (DD/MM/YYYY)	Description	Collected (Y/N)
FB.MBOH.2	04/03/2016	Describes the urban campus at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.3	07/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	Ν
FB.MBOH.4	08/03/2016	Information about academic programs at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.5	08/03/2016	Link to a blog post about nostalgic movies to watch on Netflix.	N
FB.MBOH.6	08/03/2016	Describes the urban campus at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.7	08/03/2016	Information about academic programs at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.8	08/03/2016	Shares how an undergraduate student won a free trip courtesy of Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.9	09/03/2016	Information about academic programs at Ryerson.	N
FB.MBOH.10	09/03/2016	Shares some defining university experience students will have at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.11	10/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.12	10/03/2016	Describes the urban campus at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.13	10/03/2016	Describes student groups on campus.	Y
FB.MBOH.14	11/03/2016	Describes the types of faculty students will work with at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.15	11/03/2016	Shares a link to Why Ryerson's Snapchat page.	N
FB.MBOH.16	13/03/2016	Reminder for students to spring their clocks forward for daylight savings.	N
FB.MBOH.17	14/03/2016	An image celebrating Pi Day.	N
FB.MBOH.18	14/03/2016	Shares news of the men and women basketball team win at the OUA Championships.	Y
FB.MBOH.19	14/03/2016	A link to a blog post about Ryerson's students pet peeves.	N
FB.MBOH.20	15/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.21	15/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.22	15/03/2016	Describes housing accommodations at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.23	16/03/2016	Describes scholarship opportunities available to undergraduate students at Ryerson.	Y

Facebook Post	Date Published (DD/MM/YYYY)	Description	Collected (Y/N)
FB.MBOH.24	16/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.25	16/03/2016	Undergraduate student describes how his degree is preparing him for a career.	Y
FB.MBOH.26	17/03/2016	Link to a couple of Twitter accounts to follow.	N
FB.MBOH.27	17/03/2016	An image wishing students a Happy St.Patrick's Day.	N
FB.MBOH.28	17/03/2016	Describes scholarship opportunities available to undergraduate students at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.29	17/03/2016	Describes Ryerson's urban campus.	Y
FB.MBOH.30	17/03/2016	Link to blog post about having a 3-day week as a student.	N
FB.MBOH.31	18/03/2016	An image encouraging people to attend the MBOH.	N
FB.MBOH.32	18/03/2016	Describes Ryerson's urban campus.	Y
FB.MBOH.33	18/03/2016	Describes academic programs at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.34	18/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Snapchat.	N
FB.MBOH.35	21/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.36	21/03/2016	Describes student support services available at Ryerson.	Y
FB.MBOH.37	22/03/2016	How to accept an offer of admission to Ryerson.	N
FB.MBOH.38	22/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.39	23/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.40	23/03/2016	A link to Why Ryerson's Instagram page.	N
FB.MBOH.41	24/03/2016	Describes how a student uses the skills learned from Ryerson in their career.	Y
FB.MBOH.42	24/03/2016	Dates Ryerson will be closer over Easter.	N
FB.MBOH.43	24/03/2016	Describes tips on how to grow professionally outside the classroom.	Y