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Assessing Online Content Attractiveness and the Next Generation of Rural Law Enforcement Officers

Brandi M. Thomas
Walden University

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College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Brandi Thomas

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Review Committee

Dr. Victoria Landu-Adams, Committee Chairperson,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Robert Spivey, Committee Member,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Dianne Williams, University Reviewer,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Assessing Online Content Attractiveness and the Next Generation of
Rural Law Enforcement Officers

by

Brandi Thomas

MS, Eastern Kentucky University, 2000

BA, Lindsey Wilson College, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Criminal Justice

Walden University

October 2021

Abstract

The recruitment of law enforcement applicants has been a focus for scholars for many years, especially in rural areas. With the increased use of the Internet by younger generations, the problem for rural law enforcement administrators is a lack of online recruitment strategies tailored to younger applicants. Researchers have demonstrated that administrators in rural agencies recognize the challenges of recruiting the next generation of law enforcement officers. Furthermore, literature illustrates how the younger generation has predefined work preferences and uses online environments to search for ideal jobs. However, researchers have yet to establish how younger generations perceive website content and the style of rural agency websites to recruit younger applicants. The purpose of the study was to explore what rural law enforcement agencies in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee are doing to attract younger applicants based on online content and Generation Z's perceptions of the website content. The generational theory analyzed the disconnect between older and younger generations involving recruiting rural law enforcement officers. A qualitative case study method was used to collect data from two rural administrators, seven Generation Z individuals, and ten rural agency websites. Analyses indicated that Generation Z found the content and style of rural agency websites unattractive and lacked the information they wanted during online job searches. Furthermore, rural administrators continued to use traditional recruitment strategies and limit online recruitment strategies. Implications for positive social changes are a better understanding of what Generation Z are searching for on agency websites and how rural law enforcement agencies can tailor their online presence to attract Generation Z applicants.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband, who always kept pushing me to reach my goals and never allowed me to give up.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Younger generations entering the workforce seek employment through online databases, and they are searching for media-rich content (Frasca & Edwards, 2017) and direct information about jobs (Gansen et al., 2018). With only 58% of law enforcement agencies using online recruitment strategies (Kim et al., 2017) and smaller agencies less likely to use social media (Hu & Lovrich, 2019), rural law enforcement agencies must consider their future recruitment plans as the pool of potential applicants continues to decrease. Chapter 1 includes the background of current research and gap in the literature the study addresses, research problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and theoretical framework.

Background

The Internet is an up and coming tool for recruitment. Whetstone et al. (2006) recommended law enforcement administrators be honest about line of work, the challenges, career paths, and professional development. Smaller law enforcement agencies are not likely to use social media (Hu & Lovrich, 2019), even though the principal method of locating employment opportunities is online (Peirce & Lee, 2019).

Younger generations entering the workforce seek career advancement, job security, flexible hours, and financial stability (Mihalca, 2018). They seek jobs online with detailed job descriptions and action-oriented statements from potential agencies and organizations (White et al., 2019). Online job seekers look for online media because it provides organizational credibility (Frasca & Edwards, 2017). Job seekers focus on

direct information about the job, opportunities for advancement, and positive outcomes of working for potential employers (Ganesan et al., 2018).

Law enforcement administrators recognize challenges facing the recruitment of the next generation of law enforcement officers and to develop recruitment plans tailored toward younger generational values and career expectations. Low salaries and rural locations are not attractive to younger generations considering employment in law enforcement (Moore, 2017). Plus, there is concern by administrators that younger applicants may not understand the application and hiring process, along with job descriptions and responsibilities.

There is a lack of knowledge in discipline about online content offered by rural law enforcement agencies to entice and recruit potential applicants from younger generations such as Generation Z. Knowledge about rural law enforcement agencies and attracting and recruiting potential applicants from the younger generation is lacking. There is no information about rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies and methods to attract potential applicants focusing on younger generations' work preferences and values. A study about rural law enforcement agencies' uses of online recruitment strategies to attract younger generations and feedback about online agency content are vital to help rural agencies with their recruitment plans.

Problem Statement

There is a problem involving recruitment of rural law enforcement officers. That problem is the lack of online recruitment strategies tailored to younger generational values and career expectations, employer branding, and value alignment with younger

generations. The result is rural agencies need to connect with younger generations in new ways and use online environments to communicate. However, rural law enforcement agencies do not consider their online presence and content to attract younger generations to apply for employment (Aiello, 2018; Kim et al., 2017). This problem impacts the recruitment of younger applicants to rural law enforcement agencies. Traditional recruitment methods, such as family, friends, advertisements, and career events, are not primary sources for job seekers today (Peirce & Lee, 2019).

None of the research focuses on rural law enforcement strategies to recruit younger generations through online content that aligns with what younger job seekers search for in potential employers. This study addressed a gap in recognizing rural law enforcement recruitment strategies through their online presence, perceptions of current online content according to younger generations, and presence of generation-specific content to attract potential younger applicants. I address a gap in the literature regarding younger generations' perceptions about rural law enforcement online content and rural agencies' ability to attract potential applicants through their online presence. As rural law enforcement administrators develop recruitment plans, the study's findings will guide recruitment of younger applicants.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore rural law enforcement recruitment strategies for younger generations, online agency attractiveness, and perceptions of younger generations toward agency online content. I intended to discover what rural law enforcement agencies are doing to attract younger applicants based on

their online content. The study involves rural law enforcement agencies from West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and participants were between the ages of 18 and 20.

Research Questions

RQ1: What type of strategies do rural law enforcement agencies use to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations?

RQ2: How do younger generations perceive rural law enforcement agencies' online content for attracting applicants?

RQ3: What are the terms related to Generation Z's work preferences and personal characteristics in terms of rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies and content?

RQ4: What information about organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to teams, and workplace atmosphere is present in online content for prospective applicants from Generation Z?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The generational theory is the theoretical framework selected for the study. The generational theory, developed by Strauss and Howe in 1991 and later updated in 2008, outlines terms, concepts, and generational cohort differences. Additionally, the generational theory supports an understanding of personality differences and work values among generations in workplaces such as rural law enforcement agencies. The generational theory separates generations in 20-year increments, and each generation poses specific personality and value sets based on their socialization and exposure to historical world events. The next generation of potential rural law enforcement officers

conflicts with previous generations (Baby Boomers and Generation X) due to their work preferences and predefined ideologies about the workforce.

The Generation Z cohort is technologically driven and uses online environments to seek information (Twenge, 2017). This makes online presence for rural law enforcement critical in attracting and enticing younger generations to consider applying to their agencies. Workforces find it hard to keep up with and embrace changing employee personalities and work preferences (Anderson et al., 2017). Younger generations look for specific work characteristics. Older generational employers must consider their online presence and content to be competitive in recruiting Generation Z.

The generational theory by Straus and Howe establishes an understanding of why generations differ in their personalities and how the differences create disconnect and conflicts between generations. The generational theory was chosen because it provides a framework for understanding differences between rural law enforcement administrators and potential younger applicants and how online agency content can increase or decrease interest in rural agencies.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative case study methodology to explore the recruitment of younger applicants for rural law enforcement agencies via online presence in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The qualitative research method approach allows for exploring, discovering, and describing a phenomenon through study participants' perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I aim to discover online recruitment content

strategies according to rural law enforcement agencies and how younger applicants perceive their attractiveness.

Qualitative data collection consists of interviews with rural law enforcement administrators responsible for recruitment and online content, focus groups with individuals between 18 and 20, and a conventional content analysis of online information from rural law enforcement agencies. Data collection instruments include semi-structured interviews with rural law enforcement administrators and focus group sessions with individuals between 18 and 20. Different online sites will be used for data analysis involving rural agencies' online content.

Definitions

Attractiveness: The quality of being pleasing or appealing to one's senses; having qualities or features that captures one's interest (Allen et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2008; Cober et al., 2003; Frasca & Edwards, 2017; Kissel & Buttgen, 2015).

Generation: "A cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality" (Strauss and Howe, 1991, p. 60).

Generation Z: Individuals born between 2001 and present (Strauss & Howe, 1991). They are also known as iGen, homeland generation, and post-millennials.

Media richness: The ability of media content to transmit clear information and creates a positive affective state to influence one's attitude and decision-making toward the message (Allen et al., 2013; Frasca & Edwards, 2017).

Millennials: Individuals born between 1982 and 2000 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). They are also known as Generation Y or Gen Y.

Navigational usability: The online user's ability to find information (Nielsen, 2000).

Online Content: Information located on websites and social media networks.

Online content credibility: Content considered trustworthy, knowledgeable, and likable (Frasca & Edwards, 2017).

Peer personality: "A generational persona recognized and determined by 1) common age location, 2) common beliefs and behaviors, and 3) perceived membership in a common generation" (Strauss and Howe, 1991, p. 64).

Recruitment: The practices and activities an organization does to attract potential applicants and future employees (Barber, 1998).

Small rural law enforcement agencies: Agencies with less than 20 sworn law enforcement officers in locations with fewer than 50,000 residents (Collins, 2004).

Website usability: Perceived ease of retrieving information on a website (Nielsen, 2000).

Assumptions, Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations

I identified assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study. Assumptions are statements made in a study presumed to be true about participants and procedures (Vogt & Johnson, 2011). I assumed that all participants in the study were willing participants and honest. Second, I assumed the two different samples' inclusion criteria were appropriate and ensured participants had similar experiences required for the study. Thirdly, I assumed participants had a sincere interest in participating in the research and no other motives. Assumptions are necessary in this context because they

allow me to draw conclusions from the analysis that participants' responses are true, no other motives, and meet the inclusion criteria for participating in the study.

A study's scope involves identifying boundaries of participants, locations, timeframe, and research objectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The study is restricted to rural law enforcement agencies in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee and participants between the ages of 18 and 20. I explored rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies geared toward younger generations. My objectives were to interview rural law enforcement administrators responsible for online content and recruitment, allow 18 to 20-year-old individuals from Generation Z to review rural law agencies' online content, and discuss and complete conventional content analysis of these agencies' online content geared toward younger generations. I did not interview rural law enforcement agencies that did not have an online presence or recruit individuals for focus groups outside of Generation Z. Additionally, law enforcement agencies that were not rural were not considered for the study.

The study's limitations include the inability to generalize to larger populations because of the case study design, replication, and limited access to participants due to COVID-19. A reasonable measure to improve the study's transferability is by providing detailed data descriptions to compare other contexts in the larger society. Replication of the study is a potential limitation and is overcome by using detailed descriptions about procedures and processes to collect data through an audit trail. Due to the nature of online content changing constantly, information may not be obtainable for future replication. To address limited access to participants during the study, several options for obtaining data

will be available to participants, such as virtual meetings, email questions, and in-person meetings.

Significance

The study includes information about potential disconnects between what rural law enforcement uses as online recruitment content and whether this content is appealing to younger generations. I addressed online recruitment content of rural law enforcement agencies because younger generations seek jobs online. This research can advance recruitment strategies for younger applicants by identifying deficiencies in online content of agencies and lack of content attractiveness to entice individuals to apply. Implications for positive social change include helping rural law enforcement administrators recognize how younger generations perceive online content when considering applying for employment. This exploratory case study of rural law enforcement online recruitment content can provide information about how to proceed with recruitment plans tailored to younger generations.

Summary

As online presence by law enforcement agencies becomes more vital to communicate with communities and recruit new applicants, online content and recruitment plans must consider potential applicants' personalities and generational differences. There is a rural law enforcement administrator concern involving recruiting younger qualified applicants to rural agencies. This qualitative case study involves semi-structured interviews with rural law enforcement administrators, individuals from the Generation Z cohort ages 18 to 20 years old, and content analyses of online content of

rural agencies. The study's findings will fill the gap in literature by reviewing rural law enforcement agency online content attractiveness to recruit next generation law enforcement officers through content type and Generation Z perception of the content. Chapter 2 includes a literature review involving generational work preferences, law enforcement recruitment strategies, and online presence.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The shortage of qualified applicants for law enforcement positions is a trend across the United States (Libaw, 2017). The generational theory was used to acknowledge situational factors facing rural law enforcement as they attempt to recruit qualified applicants from younger generations. Recruitment strategies of rural law enforcement agencies are contingent on recognizing younger generations' work preferences and workplace attributes. Potential applicants use online searches to seek employment (Faberman & Kudlyak, 2016; Piercy & Lee, 2019). Therefore, the quality of an agency's online presence to entice younger qualified applicants to apply is vital.

Literature Search Strategy

The criminal justice databases, business and management databases, educational databases, ProQuest, Theses Global, and Google Scholar were used to locate literature. Keywords and phrases used during research were: *rural law enforcement, rural police, police recruitment, police applicants, incentives, recruitment policies and procedures, recruitment incentives, generation z, millennials, online job seekers, online social media, Facebook, Twitter, social networking sites, generational theory, social media, work values, technology, and online police presence.*

Limited current research on rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies and younger law enforcement applicants creates a challenge for the literature review. Therefore, the literature review involves recruitment strategies from various law enforcement agencies focusing on online content, media richness, and online police

presence. I considered dissertations, government documents, and conference presentations to address younger generations and rural law enforcement recruitment strategies and online presence.

Theoretical Framework Analysis

The theory used for this study was the generational theory by William Strauss and Neil Howe. The view is also known as the fourth turning theory. The premise of the generational theory is historical events influence generations and people change their behaviors based on these events during their lifetime. Ryder (1965) viewed generations as cohorts and identified them as groups of people who experience the same social events during the same period or time interval. Massey (1976) said generations share values, and when generational cohorts come into conflict with one another, they are at odds with each other because of value programming. The generational theory was used to explain generational differences across time and influences generations impose on society because of their value systems and personalities.

Strauss and Howe (1991) defined the term generation as “a cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality” (p. 60). Society’s values change based on the current dominant generation and its personality (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The length of a particular generation is ambiguous. Strauss and Howe (1991) delineated life phases into 20-22-year spans and suggested separating generations. Phase of life categories include youth, rising adulthood, midlife, and elderhood. The youth life phase lasts between ages 0 and 21. The rising adult life phase comprises ages between 22 and 43. Their social roles are activities such as

working and starting families and testing societal values. The midlife phase ranges in age between 44 and 65. The elderhood life phase is the oldest phase which lasts between the ages of 66 and 87. Their social role is stewardship, which means supervising, mentoring, and passing along values to younger generations (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Peer personality, according to Strauss and Howe (1991), is “a generational persona recognized and determined by 1) common age location, 2) common beliefs and behaviors, and 3) perceived membership in a common generation” (p. 64). Historical events in America influence identities and values, as well as how different ages perceive and react to one another.

At each of the different phases of life, there are turning points, or four-part cycles. Strauss and Howe (1991, 1997) identified two types of social movements: secular crisis and spiritual awakening. Social movements happen 40 to 45 years apart and drive societal focus on changing world institutions and public behavior (secular crisis) and changing values and personal behavior (spiritual awakening). Strauss and Howe (1991, 1997) said generations try to change social roles of phases of life as they age and mature. Each generation learns and reacts to social movements. They attempt to carry their values and personality into different life stages, which can create conflict (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Each generation is unique in terms of peer personality and breaks into four generational types. The four generational types include adaptive, idealist, reactive, and civic. Idealist and civic generations are dominant generations emerging from social movements. Recessive generations from the social movements are reactive and adaptive.

Generation Z grow up during a secular crisis and fall into the civic generation category. Generation Z are considered heroic as rising adults and help build institutions during midlife. Rural law enforcement administrators could fall into the reactive, idealist, and adaptive generational categories depending on the person's age (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Strauss and Howe (1991) broke down eras into four categories: awakening, inner-driven, crisis, and outer-driven eras. The two dominant periods are the awakening and crisis eras because they deal with idealist and civic generations. Figure 1 shows how Generation Z (civic generation) moves through the identified ages and the crisis and awakening eras.

Figure 1

Cycle of the Four Generational Types with Secular Crisis and Spiritual Awakening

<u>Social Movement</u>		<u>Secular Crisis</u>		<u>Spiritual Awakening</u>		
<u>Year</u>	<u>Year 0</u>	-	<u>Year 22</u>	<u>Year 44</u>	-	<u>Year 66</u>
Elder Age 66-87	Adaptive	-	Idealist	Reactive	-	Civic
Midlife Age 44-65	Idealist	-	Reactive	Civic	-	Adaptive
Rising Age 22-43	Reactive	-	Civic	Adaptive	-	Idealist
Youth Age 0-21	Civic	-	Adaptive	Idealist	-	Reactive

Note. This figure demonstrates the cycle of the four types of generations through the years with emphasis on the civic generation type. Generation Z falls into the civic category. Generation Z moves through the cycle of eras with emphasis on secular crisis and spiritual awakening. Adapted from *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, Strauss and Howe, 1991.

The last four generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z) are the main generations addressed in the study. The Baby Boomer age group born between 1943 to 1960 is the first turning or the outer-driven era in past generations' patterns. Generation X, also known as the thirteenth generation, consists of individuals born between 1961-1981 and represents the second turning of spiritual awakening. Generation Y, also known as the Millennials, are born between 1982 to 2000. Generation Y (Millennials) sit in the third turning of unraveling. Last, Generation Z, also known by Strauss and Howe as the Homeland Generation, represents youth who are born between 2001 and the present time. Generation Z individuals are experiencing the fourth turning, known as the secular crisis (Strauss and Howe, 1991).

The secular crisis breaks down into three parts, the catalyst, the climax, and the resolution. As prophesied to happen in 2005 by Strauss and Howe, the catalyst for the secular crisis placed Generation Z cohort experiencing the beginnings of the crisis. The climax period for the crisis was predicted for 2020, while the crisis's resolution happens in 2026 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Viewing historical events between 2005 and 2007, several events can collectively serve as a point for a social crisis. Relationships with Afghanistan and Iraq and North Korea are examples of factors associated with social concerns. Political protests over war, racial tensions, immigration, and terrorist attacks provide additional social events. Last, the housing market crash, the first-generation iPhone availability, the late-2000 recession, and Barack Obama's submission to candidacy for President 2008 election complete a list of factors contributing to the social crisis. The climax crisis occurred around 2020 (Strauss & Howe, 1997). The decade

portrays political gridlock and poor government leadership (Gallup, 2019), high college costs (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), and distrust for institutions (Montanaro, 2018). The decade shows there are fewer homebuyers (Leefeldt, 2018), fewer individuals getting married (Gage, 2018), and individuals having fewer or no children (Miller, 2018). A failing educational system (Lynch, 2017) and overreaching exposure to the world through the internet and technology (Anderson & Rainie, 2018), plus the emergence and spread of COVID-19 indicate the climax.

Generation Z individuals are completing high school, entering, and finishing college, and finding a place in the workforce. Rural law enforcement agencies must consider recruitment strategies to secure and retain rural law enforcement officers moving into the future. The Baby Boomer and Generation X cohorts are the hiring authority deciding policies and procedures for recruitment. The workforce environment is favorable to generational conflict due to the differences between the generations. With the national shortage of law enforcement applicants, rural agencies must consider generational differences and their online presence to attract applicants. The generational theory provides the theoretical backdrop for understanding rural law enforcement online presence and Generation Zs' perceptions of the online content. Research questions focus on strategies by rural law enforcement agencies to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations and the content provided through their online content. Younger applicants' perceptions of online content by rural law enforcement agencies offer the possibility of generational conflict through the lens of generational theory.

Millennial and Generation Z Cohorts Defined

Different names given to Millennials are Generation Y and Gen Y. Generation Z individuals receive titles such as Gen Z, iGen, Homeland Generation, and Post-Millennials. The breakdown of generations is subject to disagreement across the literature. For example, Strauss and Howe (1991) identify the Millennials as having a birth date between 1982-2000 and the Generation Z cohort as having a birth date between 2001 and the present. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) label the Millennial cohort born between 1981-1999, with no label for Generation Z. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) provided their age boundaries to the Millennial cohort born between 1981-1995. The next generation after 1995 is Generation Z. McCrindle (2012) identified Millennials as being born between 1980 and 1994, and Generation Z was born between 1995 and 2010.

The number of Millennials and Generation Z in the United States varies because different agencies define generational birth years differently. One source claims that the Millennials consist of those born between 1981 and 1996 and constitute 72 million. Generation Z consists of 90.5 million individuals and is born after 1997 (Duffin, 2019). Kasasa (2019) claims that Millennials are born between 1980 to 1994 and makeup 95 million. Generation Z individuals have a birth date of 1995 to 2019 and make up 25% of the overall United States population (Kasasa, 2019). The United States Census Bureau (2015) documented the Millennials born between 1982 to 2000 and made up 83 million of the overall population. Last, Dimock (2019), with the Pew Research Center, published writing, identifying a clear-cut birth date between the Millennials and Generation Z in 1996 because of social events that shaped Millennials' values and personality. Events

such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, political polarization, the economic recession, and President Obama's election are all events. Millennials witnessed and influenced the socialization process through their influential years (Dimock, 2019).

The sensitivities and understandings of each generation differ from individuals and societal groups. Personality characteristics and value systems behind the Millennials and Generation Z are similar because they fall into the technology-driven generations. However, there are differences between the two ages as society witnesses Generation Z going into higher education and the workforce.

“Trophy kids” and “The Me Me Me Generation” are names given to the Millennials, along with lazy, coddled, selfish, and delusional to describe negative characteristics. Their first focuses are on image, fame, and money, compared to helping the broader community. Millennials' positive characteristics consist of being open-minded, diverse, supportive of rights for different groups, confident, and open to new ideas and ways of living (Main, 2017). A study about Millennials' job attribute preferences; Millennials want a work-life balance, career advancement and development, job security, excellent fringe benefits, and good relationships with their superiors. Additionally, the Millennials reported a relaxed work environment with friendly coworkers, flexible hours, and a stress-free work environment (Mihalca, 2018).

XYZ University (2018), generational research and management consulting firm, completed a survey with 1800 Generation Z members. The research shows that Generation Z's characteristics confirmed that they are diverse and will account for 36% of the workforce by 2020. The Generation Z cohort's key attributes include a level of

competitiveness because of the culture of sports and competitive educational environments. Generation Z members are skeptical and individualistic. They seek financial stability (Miller, n.d.) and want structure, goals, challenges, and a path to succeed and progress. Generation Z members are entrepreneurial and want to share their ideas and be engaged in the workplace's decision cycle. Members of the Generation Z cohort prefer to work independently, and 58% want to own their own business one day. They focus on a good salary, an enjoyable work environment, flexible schedule, opportunity to create new projects, the chance to learn new skills, and community focus when choosing a job. Generation Z accepts change, is diverse, and wants a voice in their future careers with agency leadership. Last, since Generation Z grows up in a disrupted society, they are comfortable disrupting and challenging the system (XYZ University, 2018). Events currently shaping the Generation Z cohort consist of seeking information from social media and the overall online environment presence (Pew Research Center, 2018). Increased exposure to diversity, family members' economic struggles due to the Great Recession, violence in media, continued political turmoil, and globalization (Twenge, 2017; Beck & Wright, 2019) are additional factors. Generation Z is the most home-schooled generation (Renfro, 2012), and they seek and obtain most of their information from social media and online (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Recruitment of Younger Generations in the Workforce

As the workforce becomes competitive, the next generation is becoming more selective about careers they pursue. Millennials are considered the most educated generation; however, early benchmarks by Generation Z reflect they are on track to be

the best-educated generation (Fry & Parker, 2018). The phrase “global war of talent” by Michaels et al. (2001) refers to competition between organizations to locate, recruit, and retain the top workforce talent in a career field. As the workforce competes for qualified and talented applicants, understanding applicants’ preferences and ideal workplace, plus how they seek and research jobs, are vital to the hiring authorities.

Work Preferences of Younger Generations

In Canada, Hestra and McGowan (2016) found perceptions by potential recruits and their value alignment with the organization were deciding factors for applicants to consider employment. Desai and Lele (2017) found Generation Z has perceptions of an ideal workplace and has predefined ideologies toward their workplace. Employers must acknowledge and consider new ways of thinking to attract younger generations (Bencsik et al., 2016).

Bencsik et al. (2016) completed a study about managing Millennials and Generation Z's generational cohorts and recommended considering new ways of communicating with the younger generations. They urged employers to consider changes in their organizational culture to manage the workforce's younger generations.

Continuing with changes to the workplace culture and values, Twenge (2010) addressed the need for employers to motivate young employees and recognize the high importance younger generations place on work-life balance. Anderson et al. (2017) found traditional leadership theories do not mesh with the younger generation’s personality.

Organizational leaders find themselves challenged to keep up with the changing workforce personalities and work attitudes. They recommend embracing the workforce's

changing face and not seeing the generational gaps as dangerous to the organization (Anderson et al., 2017).

Dong et al. (2018) presented a study about differences between Millennials and Generation Z and their attitudes toward work-related characteristics. A small private Midwestern university served as the location for a sample of 153 students. Both generations in the study acknowledged they wanted a positive working environment, and Generation Z cared more about income and reasonable working hours and schedules. Personal satisfaction and a positive working environment were the top qualities millennials look for in jobs. Generation Z overwhelmingly identified income, fair wages, and personal satisfaction as the main qualities they look for in positions (Dong et al., 2018). Dong et al. (2018) recommended that organizations prepare to provide work with purpose, and organizations hold the same social values the Generation Z individuals have.

Zaharee et al. (2018) completed an exploratory study to identify workplace environments and cultures that attract younger generations to recruit and retain early-career technical professions. They identified six categories of incentives Millennials look for when considering certain employers and agencies. The six categories include salary and benefits, professional development opportunities, purposeful work, flexible work arrangements, and organizational ethos. However, Zaharee et al. (2018) found that young employees want the same as all reported generations. Different ages want competitive salary and benefits packages and flexible work hours that support a work-life balance and meaningful work.

The literature directs the need for agencies and organizations to develop recruitment plans tailored to differences in career expectations and core skills (Oh et al., 2016). Employer branding (Csiszarik-Koesir & Garia-Fodor, 2018; Ganesan et al., 2017), and marketing to young people's values and workplace expectations (Henstra & McGowan, 2016) are essential in recruitment plan development. Catano and Hines (2016) identified the need for organizations to consider the applicants' values in their recruitment plan. They continued to add that the applicants' values must be in the content of the recruitment ads.

Ganesan et al. (2017) completed a theoretical exploration of how message content in print job advertisements impacts potential employees' recruitment. They considered organizational familiarity, the ads' aesthetic appeal, the human resource offerings, the organizational attributes, organizational culture, work characteristics, and employee portrayal. Ganesan et al. (2017) found that direct content information about the job and career expectations, opportunities for advancement and professional development, and a positive image were vital in an applicant's intention to apply to the organization. Content effectiveness of job advertisements indicated a more attractive brand image for those with intentions to apply to the organization (Ganesan et al., 2017). Reis and Braga (2016) found similar results with employer branding and focused on specific job attributes that influence perceptions of organizational attractiveness. They found employer branding necessary to address work values, the meaning of work, job expectations, different opportunities for promotion, and learning new skills, plus excellent compensation, and interesting work details (Reis & Braga, 2016).

In 2018, Csiszarik-Koesir and Garia-Fodor completed a study about Generation Z's preferences for workplace selection and the different factors influencing their selection. They found several factors that influence their choice of a workplace. However, the three main factors included opportunities for promotion, belonging to a good team, and a comfortable work atmosphere. Csiszarik-Koesir and Garia-Fodor (2018) clustered the generation based on different variables determining the choice of the workforce. They identified two main groups, those wanting stability in a workplace and those who are ambitious/trendy. The results recommended that employers consider younger applicants' characteristics and develop a recruitment plan utilizing image branding (Csiszarik-Koesir & Garia-Fodor, 2018).

The research conducted over the last five years identifies organizations and agencies' needs to consider their recruitment plans and strategies while focusing on the values and preferences of the younger generations. As law enforcement agencies continue to experience a shortage of qualified applicants, agencies must consider their image and recruitment strategies to attract applicants from rural agencies.

Online Job Searches and Younger Generations

The principal method of locating employment opportunities and hiring workers is online job searches (Faberman & Kudlyak, 2016). The original study by Kuhn and Skuterud (2004) found a share of unemployed job seekers who used online job searches in 2000. However, online job searches were no more effective than traditional methods of searching for employment. In 2014, Kuhn and Mansour replicated the study based on data from 2008-2009, and those using online job searches increased by three times. The

chances of finding employment were higher than traditional methods only. Faberman and Kudlyak (2016) used data from the 2011 Computer & Internet Use Supplement and found the usage of online job searches by those who were unemployed tripled, increasing from 26% to 76% between 2000-2011. The increase in online job searches directly connects to the number of individuals accessing the internet (82% of employed and 71% unemployed) (Faberman & Kudlyak, 2016).

Piercy and Lee (2019) conducted a study to determine which job seekers used information sources. They identified three information sources based on familiar sources (family, friends, and acquaintances), traditional sources (employment agencies, printed advertisements, and career events), and internet-based sources (online pages and social networking sites). They found most job seekers use online resources. Additionally, the results showed that older and underprivileged adults used traditional sources to seek employment, while individuals with more education and computer efficacy relied on internet-based sources.

White et al. (2019) found that Millennial online job seekers looked for more detailed job descriptions and action statements instead of a simple job title. In an earlier study about social networking websites, Nikolaou (2014) found that males and older job seekers used LinkedIn, while younger job seekers preferred Facebook. However, job boards remain a top priority in online job searches such as monster.com and careerbuilders.com (Nikolaou, 2014). The literature demonstrates the increased online presence of younger generations but limited or no information about rural law enforcement agencies and online content quality to attract applicants to the policing field.

Online Organizational Attractiveness and Recruitment

In a study focusing on online organizational attractiveness by considering recruitment through web-based corporate sites, social media, and video recruitment, the media's richness played a significant role in the organization's credibility. It promoted a more positive image (Frasca & Edwards, 2017). The sample for the study was 342 college students currently enrolled or just graduated. The sample consisted of 74.3% of enrolled college students, allowing for the inference; this sample consists of a younger generation. Using three media sources (Facebook, YouTube, and corporate website), the results showed that the site's media richness provided more source credibility and increased the organizational attractiveness for the online job seeker. Media richness, such as high personal focus, multiple cues, and information, provided the factors for determining high source credibility. Facebook was more credible in the study than YouTube or the organizational website (Frasca & Edwards, 2017). Frasca and Edwards' (2017) findings suggest organizations use social media to provide a personalized focus and information to allow the job seekers to determine if they are a "fit" for the organization.

Organizations use social media to attract potential employees and grow organizational attractiveness, along with employer branding. Kissel and Buttgen (2015) conducted a study to explore employer branding and employer attractiveness and how social media impacted the two. The research focused on how certain content in social media messages influenced submitting applications by job seekers and the employer's attractiveness. The sample included 30 German-language career sites on Facebook, the

companies controlled in study one. Two hundred and sixty-five German-speaking job seekers participated in study one. The second study included career sites in social media not regulated by the companies. One hundred student respondents in four student or graduate online platforms for career development. Kissel and Buttgen (2015) used perceived available information, self-congruity, corporate image, employer attractiveness, application intentions as the variables in the study. They used partial least square estimates for both measurements in their structural equation. The study results indicated several items, such as perceived attractiveness, significantly influence whether a job seeker applied. More information online allows one to consider if they are a good fit for the organization, plus company-controlled content appears more trustworthy. Companies should communicate their brand to job seekers (Kissel and Buttgen, 2015).

In 2013, Allen et al. completed three studies with different approaches to understand how individuals notice, consider and respond to organizational websites regarding recruitment. The first study revealed that job seekers pay more visual attention to written information than graphic images and more attention to content with hyperlinks. The second study involved a qualitative method to understand online job seekers and their content and design perspectives. Allen et al. (2013) discovered that online job seekers focused more on content than on-site design. Job seekers wanted information about the job openings and organizational information, geographical location, career paths, and applying. The third study captured individuals' judgments about the website and their attitude toward the organization, plus their intentions to apply for a job. The third study results showed that content, design, and communication features influenced

attitudes toward the organization and considered a career. Overall, the studies found that text information about the job and company attracts visual and verbal attention (Allen et al., 2013).

Additionally, presentation style, diversity of information, the ability to apply, and career pathways presented themselves as essential items in attracting potential employees (Allen et al., 2013). Thompson et al. (2008) found similar results in an early study focused on online recruiting and website attractiveness. They found the website and usability design were essential to gain positive impressions about an organization from online job seekers and the need for the organization to provide job and organizational-related information on their websites (Thompson et al., 2008).

Early research about job seekers' attraction to an organization focused on online content (compensation, organizational culture, training opportunities) and website style (aesthetics and usability) (Cober et al., 2003). The study results found evidence job seekers' attraction depended on the perceptions of good salary and benefits, a supportive organizational culture, and career professional development. Additionally, the findings suggested that the website's style, such as the website usability or navigational usability, were essential factors for increasing online attraction toward an organization (Cober et al., 2003).

Recruiting Strategies by Law Enforcement Agencies

Older research by Whetstone et al. (2006) completed a study on state police and highway patrol agencies' recruitment practices. They surveyed 49 states in the U.S., with 44 states responding. The smallest agency responding had 132 troopers, and the largest

agency responding had 4,168 troopers. Police administrators responded by providing a rank order of their top three recruitment strategies. The results indicated seven main types of recruitment strategies according to their utilization by the different departments. Attending career fairs, visiting colleges, and online applications were the top three strategies used, followed by community visits, military base visits, cadet programs, and mentoring programs. When researchers asked police administrators which strategies, they felt were the most successful for recruiting potential applicants, they identified their website/online application as number one, followed by career fairs, then visited college campuses (Whetstone et al., 2006). Whetstone et al. (2006) addressed the need for police executives to be flexible and customize their recruitment plans toward the intended audience. They recommended that agencies be honest about the line of work, challenges, career paths, and professional development (Whetstone et al., 2006). In 2006 Generation X recruitment focused on the use of the internet. Wilson et al. (2010) recognized and identified concerns for rural law enforcement agencies to recruit younger generations. They found that older generations are more likely to prefer rural locations (Wilson et al., 2010). Moore (2017) found similar results with his study of recruitment for rural policing. He found that older individuals with a lower academic level who like to live in a rural setting were more likely to consider rural policing employment. Younger generations reported salaries, and the police agency's rural locations were not attractive for consideration of work (Moore, 2017).

In 2017 a forum held by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, where the participants consisted mainly of law enforcement administration, discussed the

challenges, opportunities, and strategies for hiring police officers. Three main themes emerged during the forum important for recruitment plans. The plans should include hiring people who reflect the agency and community's values and vision, making the hiring process more efficient and advancing diversity and inclusiveness in the hiring process (Morison, 2017). A connection to the Millennials and Generation Z cohorts implied that agencies needed to consider speed and efficiency in their hiring process because traditional hiring processes are slow. Other recommendations from law enforcement practitioners included a new way of thinking about tattoos, past drug use, educational standards, and financial problems. Last, a new approach to what is known as “growing their candidates” through specialty programs was essential to sustaining the agency’s culture (Morison, 2017).

Scheer et al. (2018) conducted a study to measure criminal justice student expectations of a police career and possible consideration. The data would help inform agencies for Generation Z. They found younger generations do not know the process of becoming a police officer or what the line of work entails. Scheer et al. (2018) recommended that police agencies evolve and examine how to meet the needs of career advancement, the pace of work and negate negative media portrayal of law enforcement work. Jolicoeur and Grant (2018) identified the need for law enforcement to recruit and show service activities in their recruitment materials and not unrealistic job expectations. Linos (2018) found that recruitment messages on postcards, such as the benefits of applying, such as job challenges or career benefits, increased the number of individuals applying to police agencies.

Law Enforcement Web Presence

Rosenbaum et al. (2011) completed the first nationwide study to determine police departments using police websites. In 2008, they found in a sample of 666 departments, 42.5% maintained a webpage. With the emergence of Facebook and Twitter between 2005 and 2006, researchers focused on police web presence and social networking sites to determine the police's types of messages. Before Rosenbaum et al. (2011), others completed studies about social media posts on Twitter by law enforcement agencies and comments from community members they served (Crump, 2011 and Heverin & Zach, 2010). Aiello (2018) followed the study by Rosenbaum et al. (2011) and extended the research. Aiello addressed the number of police agencies using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, plus agency sophistication of technology to predict their online presence. The results indicated 88.35% of departments in the study used social media networking sites and were active in at least one of the three (Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube). Sixty-four percent of the departments in 2014 used Facebook, while 64.7% used Twitter. The least used social media networking site was YouTube (Aiello, 2018). Aiello (2018) recommended follow-up research to consider factors that push law enforcement agencies to maintain an online presence and seek civilian engagement.

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), in 2015, 96% of United States police departments used social media, and 94% of those using Facebook (IACP, 2015). The IACP collects social media data on police departments and provides tools and resources for agencies on different social media platforms. The most recent social media survey report is from 2016. Five hundred and thirty-nine law

enforcement agencies represented the sample and consisted mainly of small to medium jurisdictions, with less than 50 officers serving full-time. Local police made up 90% of the agency type, followed by 5% of the sheriff's office. When asked, "what does your agency use social media for," notifying public safety concerns was the main reason for 91% of agencies reporting. Recruitment and applicant vetting were among the lesser uses for social media, indicating that only 58% of the sample used social media for recruitment efforts. They suggested further research to understand better how they use the online environment and what additional resources will support them in the future (Kim et al., 2017).

By applying a grounded theory approach, Hu et al. (2018) considered designs and placement of Facebook posts of 14 different police departments across the United States. The total number of Facebook posts examined was 7,153. Hu et al. used the theory of diffusion of innovation to establish a gap in the literature and lack of theory toward analyzing information and conceptualizing social dynamics within police departments' Facebook usage. Facebook delivered online messages to the public with limited videos or hyperlinks. The results showed that police departments use media to interact with the public through four major themes. The themes include crime fighters, traditional cops, public-relations facilitation, and mixers/balancers. The researchers recommended examining public attitudes toward police departments' Facebook posts, which was one of their limitations (Hu et al., 2018). Hu and Lovrich (2019) examined social media content as a tool to determine the level of promotion for community-oriented policing. They used the 2013 Law Enforcement Management and Administration Statistics (LEMAS) to

identify organizational characteristics of the agency through social media presence. The results focused on what the police agencies do, such as task forces and communicating to the public. Hue and Lovrich (2019) found that smaller agencies are not as likely to use social media as larger agencies, possibly explaining the lack of employees and technology skills.

Dai et al. (2017) conducted a study to analyze the properties and topics of posts on Facebook and Twitter. The research concentrated on identifying law enforcement online communication frequency, citizens' interactions, and insights to improve local departments' social media strategies. Dai et al. used seven police departments in Virginia and completed a content analysis with text mining to classify posts by the departments on Facebook and Twitter. The period consisted of 6 months for data collection from 2013 to 2014, and the researchers looked at posts, comments, likes, shares on Facebook and Twitter. All police departments were mid-size departments, and the results showed that Facebook was agency-related information such as recruitment and ceremonies. The recruitment posts by agencies showed 13 posts for both social media sites, while citizen interaction demonstrated 218 likes, 150 shares, and 25 comments on Facebook. As for Twitter posts on recruitment and citizen interaction, the numbers were smaller, with 11 favorites, 24 retweets, and one comment (Dai et al., 2017). Twitter posts delivered more life-related information, such as traffic reports and closings, for engaging citizens (Dai et al., 2017).

In Arkansas, Beshears (2017) asked sheriff's offices about their variety of social media use and communications with their communities. The research filled a gap in

examining the type, size, and characteristics of the communities the agencies served and communicated through social media. Fifty-two agencies responded and provided data for the study. The results indicated and supported social media use for crime-solving and community relations and the agencies' frequency of communication on social media. Beshears recommends future research through a qualitative design to better understand law enforcement's use of social media to communicate to the communities they serve.

Summary

The literature's significant themes focused on younger generations' predefined ideologies about work, employer's recruitment plans, employer branding, and consideration of new ways to communicate with younger potential employees by an organization. Other themes are law enforcement agency presence online, online content, and recruitment strategies: the research literature details Millennials and Generation Z cohorts' personality attributes and work preferences. Value alignment to an employer (Desai & Lele, 2017), work-life balance (Twenge, 2010), and purposeful work (Dong et al., 2018; Zaharee et al., 2018) describe work preferences for younger generations. Younger generations seek career advancement, job security, flexible hours, challenges, and financial stability (Mihalca, 2018). Generation Z wants to share their ideas and be part of the workplace's decision cycle and is comfortable disrupting the system (XYZ University, 2018). Younger generations seek jobs online and look for more detailed job descriptions and action-oriented statements during their search (White, Stafford, & Beaver, 2019). They focus on the media richness of the online content, which provides the job seeker with organizational credibility (Frasca & Edwards, 2017). Last, direct

information about a job, career expectations, opportunities for advancement, professional development, and a positive image are critical pieces of information to get individuals to apply for a job (Allen et al., 2013; Cober et al., 2003; Ganesan et al., 2017; Kissel & Buttgen, 2015; Thompson et al., 2008).

Early research about law enforcement recruitment strategies identified the need to use the internet as a tool for recruitment (Whetstone et al., 2006). Today, only 58% of agencies use online recruitment efforts (Kim et al., 2017). Past research concentrating on law enforcement's presence online considered the types of messages and social media use (Crump, 2011; Hevern & Zach, 2010; and Rosenbaum et al., 2011). Aiello (2018) found that 88.3% of departments use one social media tool for their agency. Smaller agencies are not likely to use social media (Hu & Lovrich, 2019), and studies of online police presence reflect results from larger urban and suburban agencies (Dia et al., 2017). The literature recommendations suggest that future research considers a better understanding of how agencies use the online environment to communicate (Aiello, 2018; Beshears, 2016; Kim et al., 2017).

Law enforcement administrators are noticing and discussing the challenges facing their agencies moving into the future. At the 2017 forum held by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, three points were made to develop recruitment plans: making the hiring process more efficient, advising diversity and inclusiveness, and hiring individuals who reflect the agencies' values and vision (Morison, 2017). The literature points to employers' need to develop a recruitment plan tailored to younger generations' values and career expectations (Oh et al., 2016; Catano & Hines, 2016) and

employer branding (Csiszarik-Koesir & Garia-Fodor, 2018; Reis & Braga, 2016).

Agencies must consider new ways to communicate with younger generations, which means they must consider their own organizational culture to manage a more youthful workforce (Bencik et al., 2016). Traditional leadership theories do not support the next generations' personalities and work preferences (Anderson et al., 2017). Finally, the literature shows concern for recruiting younger generations to rural law enforcement agencies (Moore, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). Moore (2017) found that low salaries and rural locations are not attractive to younger applicants. Last, Scheer et al., (2018) found that younger applicants do not understand the process of becoming an officer or job descriptions and responsibilities.

The literature provides no information about the online content provided by law enforcement agencies and what attracts individuals to their websites, social media sites, or job board announcements. The limited available literature on rural law enforcement agencies, in general, poses a need for future research and their recruitment strategies. First, Generation Z cohort is the next workforce, and limited research exists about how agencies recruit and compete for qualified applicant pools. At this point in the research, no information exists about rural law enforcement's online recruitment strategies and methods to attract the next generation of law enforcement. Second, literature discusses law enforcement presence on the internet, but no information about the content provided to potential applicants focuses on work preferences and values. Finally, no literature exists about specific recruitment strategies utilize to attract younger generational

applicants. Overall, online recruitment strategies to attract younger generations to rural law enforcement are gaps in the literature for the discipline.

Younger generational perceptions of agency online content and the level and quality of the information provided to attract and entice one to apply to a rural law enforcement agency are critical gaps in the literature. The present study will extend the knowledge of rural law enforcement recruitment strategies and the agency's online presence and content for potential applicants. The study will follow a qualitative case study design. The qualitative case study sample includes rural law enforcement agencies from West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, plus 18 to 20-year-olds from Generation Z.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the use of rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies for younger generations, online content of rural agencies, and perceptions of younger generations regarding agency online content. I explored what rural law enforcement agencies are doing to attract younger applicants based on their online content. The study involved rural law enforcement agencies from West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee and individuals between 18 and 20, plus a content analysis of rural law enforcement online content. I identified the rationale for the research design, role of the researcher, population and sample, instrumentation, procedures for collecting data, data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The phenomenon was online recruitment content by rural law enforcement agencies and perceptions of the content according to Generation Z. Concepts explored during the study included online terminology, content attractiveness, organizational information, job descriptions, and value alignment according to younger applicants. The research design selected for the study was an exploratory case study. An exploratory case study design involves exploring a phenomenon for which there is no clear outcome (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case study is an in-depth examination of a single case or multiple cases (Yin, 2013), and allows for variable-oriented research in order to discover variables over a small number of cases (Ragin, 2000). The selected research design

allowed for collecting data from three sources: rural law enforcement administrators, potential job seekers from Generation Z, and rural law enforcement online content.

Research Questions

The research questions for this qualitative case study were:

RQ1: What types of strategies do rural law enforcement agencies use to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations?

RQ2: How do younger generations perceive rural law enforcement agencies' online content in terms of attracting applicants?

RQ3: What are the terms related to Generation Z's work preferences and personal characteristics in terms of rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies and content?

RQ4: What information about organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to teams, and workplace atmosphere is present in online content for prospective applicants from Generation Z?

Role of the Researcher

I took the role of an observer-participant because I facilitated focus groups featuring Generation Z participants and semi-structured interviews with rural law enforcement administrators. I have witnessed criminal justice agencies struggle with recruiting younger qualified applicants. As a college professor of criminal justice in Kentucky, I observed a disconnect between younger generations in law enforcement. I worked with young people every day and recognized the divide between hiring authorities and Generation Z.

There was no preexisting relationship with participants from Generation Z due to the nature of the recruitment process through social media. Additionally, there were no preexisting relationships with rural law enforcement agencies and administrators because no relationships existed between me and randomly selected rural law enforcement agencies.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The sampling frame for the rural law enforcement agencies in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee was identified using the web site USA Cops. Small rural law enforcement agencies include agencies with less than 20 sworn officers that serve fewer than 50,000 residents (Collins, 2004). Forty-three counties in West Virginia, 120 counties in Kentucky, and 95 counties in Tennessee were used to identify rural law enforcement agencies. A computerized random number generator was used to select 10 counties from an alphabetical list for each state. The simple random sampling approach allowed for probability sampling, which permitted all county law enforcement agencies to be considered for the study. If a county had more than one agency, the largest agency in the county became part of the sample, but only agencies with less than 20 sworn officers and an online presence were considered for the study. Ten rural law enforcement agencies from West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee were randomly selected and invited to participate in the study. A second number sample was generated if a randomly selected county could not participate, followed by a third until 10 samples became secured. According to Namey et al. (2016), eight in-depth interviews are enough to reach 89%

saturation with a range of five to 11 interviews, and 16 in-depth interviews will lead to a 90% saturation rate with a range of 11 to 26 interviews. Only two rural law enforcement interviews occurred. I made several attempts to recruit rural enforcement agencies via emails and telephone calls over a year.

The sample of Generation Z individuals was determined using nonprobability sampling. The sampling approach to secure Generation Z participants for focus groups was purposive sampling through Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit. According to Guest et al. (2017), three focus groups of five to eight participants are enough to identify themes in a data set.

Twenty potential participants were contacted, sent consent forms, and assigned to one of three focus group sessions. The final participant sample consisted of seven Generation Z individuals between 18 and 20 from three separate focus groups.

Instrumentation

I was the key instrument for collecting data. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with rural law enforcement administrators, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and rural law enforcement online content reviews. Content validity for each instrument used in the study was established through best practices, as Brod et al. (2009) identified to help guide the qualitative research. I established interview guides for completing interviews (see Appendix B) and focus group sessions (see Appendix C) and completed all interviews individually for consistency, audio-recorded interviews, and visually observed nonverbal behaviors.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I used semi-structured interviews begins with a limited number of predetermined questions with the intent to follow-up with additional questions for each main question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Two semi-structured interviews were completed by rural law enforcement administrators responsible for their agencies' recruitment and online content. Four interview questions (see Appendix A) were used to answer RQ1. To establish content validity, I conducted all interviews, audio-recorded the interviews, followed an interview guide, and analyzed the data collected. The interview questions were formatted in a semi-structured method and were aligned with research question one. The creation of the research question and interview questions were adapted from the thorough literature review.

Focus Groups

A group of between five and eight participants, represent an identified population whose ideas and opinions provide data for a topic of interest known as a focus group (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I directed the focus groups with a predetermined set of core questions and allowed the participants to provide their perceptions of the online content of the rural law enforcement agencies and answer follow-up questions. Three focus groups were scheduled with twenty participants. A total of 7 participants attended the focus groups. Three main questions were used in the focus groups to review each rural law enforcement agency's online content (see Appendix A). The three focus group questions answered RQ2. I established content validity as outlined by Brod et al. (2009) by conducting three focus groups, audio-recorded the sessions, worked from an interview

guide (see Appendix C), and analyzed the data collected. The research question and interview questions were adapted from the literature review.

Rural Law Enforcement Online Current Extant Data

A conventional content analysis was performed on ten rural law enforcement agencies' online content for the study. The conventional content analysis answered RQ3 and RQ4. The two research questions used to guide the online content analysis are adapted from the literature review. The content analysis was conducted with a step-by-step guide (see Appendix D) to establish content validity.

Procedures

Procedures for the study included aligning each data collection instrument to the research questions, identifying where the collection occurred, who collected the data, the frequency, the duration of data collection, how data was recorded, and a follow-up plan if too few participants. Additionally, procedures explained how participants exited the study through debriefing. The Walden University's IRB approval number was 06-22-20-0658647.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The first data collection contained semi-structured interviews with two rural law enforcement agencies in one of the three states (West Virginia, Kentucky, or Tennessee). Interviews with rural law enforcement administrators helped to answer the first research question regarding recruitment strategies. I collected data by randomly selecting ten rural agencies from each state through a random number-generated system, requested agency participation, and completed semi-structured face-to-face interviews with law

enforcement administrators. If a county had more than one agency, the largest agency would become part of the sample. If a randomly selected county could not participate, a second number generated random sample occurred until samples become secured. Audio-recording allowed me to capture the interview, while note-taking captured the nonverbal cues. The face-to-face interviews followed an interview guide and lasted approximately 30 minutes in length. A consent form provided before the interview ensured the participant's confidentiality and permission to participate in the study. An explanation of the interview process presented before the interview led to the consent form's acknowledgment of the consent. After the interview, I provided a debriefing of the procedures and successfully ended the interview.

After the decline to participate or nonresponse by West Virginia rural law enforcement agencies, Kentucky and Tennessee were added to the study population. I obtained Internal Review Board approval to obtain written emailed responses by rural law enforcement administrators. Thirty-eight agencies in West Virginia, 14 agencies in Kentucky, and seven agencies in Tennessee received recruitment emails. Agencies in West Virginia received three recruitment emails, while the agencies in Kentucky and Tennessee received two recruitment emails starting in May 2020.

I transcribed the two interviews in a word document and added them to the data repository only accessible by a secure password. Each interview was labeled as "1 LE Interview" and "2 LE Interview. A separate file was maintained identifying the interviewee's name and agency location.

Focus Groups

The second data collection method included three focus groups. The focus group participants (ages 18 to 20) were recruited from social media using Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit (Generation Z Group). I used a recruitment flyer on social media sites and secured participation from 20 volunteers. The potential participants received an emailed consent form and scheduled Zoom meeting invitation for one of the three sessions. Semi-structured interview questions were used to obtain data on generational perceptions of rural law enforcement online content and answered RQ2. Focus group participants reviewed ten rural law enforcement agencies' websites. Agency content was presented to the groups one at a time, followed by a short discussion about the content and group's perceptions until all ten agencies were reviewed. Participants were asked to address the attractiveness through three interview questions.

Focus groups were held through Zoom Meetings. The estimated time for completing each focus group was one hour. Focus group participants received information outlined in the focus group interview guide (see Appendix C). I debriefed the participants on the group procedures, ensured confidentiality, and successfully ended the session. Audio-recording was used to capture the focus group discussions and notetaking to capture nonverbal cues.

I transcribed focus group sessions in a word document and added it to the data repository only accessible by a secure password. Each focus group was labeled as FG1, FG2, and FG2. The focus group participants were recognized as Participants 1 through 7 in both the transcriptions and analysis.

Rural Law Enforcement Online Current Extant Data

The third data collection method involved a conventional content analysis of the ten rural law enforcement agencies' online content used in the focus groups. Online content analysis of rural law enforcement agencies was the last step of the data collection process. Only rural law enforcement agency websites were used for the content analysis. Online content and review notes addressing RQ3 and RQ4 were captured in a word document. Notes included non-text information such as pictures, colors, difficulty locating, and overall attractiveness. The file for each agency was uploaded to the data repository. The data repository is password protected to ensure the protection of all data.

Data Analysis Plan

A conventional content analysis was followed to complete the data analysis. Conventional content analysis is one of three types of content analysis approaches and allows categories to flow from the data and avoid using preconceived categories. The conventional approach was appropriate because the phenomenon was limited in the research literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I completed a content analysis based on the step-by-step protocol of Adu (2019) using Microsoft Word, anchor coding, and sorting. The first coding cycle involved in vivo coding to capture concepts from the participants verbatim (Saldana, 2009) using the anchor codes for sorting the content (Adu, 2019). Anchor Codes served as the vehicle for sorting and establishing categories within the data. Focused coding allowed the emergence of categories from sorting the anchor codes (Adu, 2019; Saldana, 2009). I identified emerging themes from the grouped categories in the second cycle of coding. The three data sources were individually analyzed for themes and then triangulated to draw inferences for combined comparison.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issues of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To ensure credibility, I used triangulation from three data sources to strengthen the design and reduce the potential for researcher bias. Triangulation potentially increases the validity of the study (Denzin, 1970). Reaching saturation levels is an additional source to increase the credibility of the study. According to Guest et al. (2017), three different focus groups with five to 8 participants are enough to identify themes in a dataset. Namely et al. (2016) identified that the number of in-depth interviews needed to meet 80% saturation is eight, while 16 interviews provide 90% saturation levels. For the study, I selected a minimum of 10 interviews with rural law enforcement administrators and three focus groups with five to 8 participants to reach a high saturation level. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions and the societal climate around law enforcement personnel, only two interviews with rural law enforcement administrators occurred, and 7 participants attended and participated in scheduled focus group sessions.

Transferability refers to the applicability of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba claim a thick description of the phenomenon increases the transferability of the research findings. To ensure a thick description of the research process, I completed detailed notes during the data collection about the environments, cultural and social contexts, and participants' nonverbal communication to increase the findings' transferability.

Dependability focuses on the consistency of the findings and replication of the study (Yin, 2013). Providing an audit trail of the research steps allows other researchers to replicate the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified six categories of information needed for the audit process of the research steps. The six categories include raw data, data reduction, analysis notes, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials related to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information. The value of the audit trail was helpful and allowed transparency of the research process. Plus, audit trails support the enhancement of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry (Carcary, 2009).

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the findings of the research and confirming the findings. A strategy to establish confirmability is keeping a reflexive journal to report one's preconceptions, beliefs, values, and assumptions that become present during the research process. I maintained a reflexive journal and reported initial preconceptions, beliefs, values, and assumptions.

Ethical Procedures

The care and consideration of participants in the study were the main concern and helped maintain the research process's trustworthiness. During the recruitment of rural law enforcement administrators and focus groups, courtesy and professionalism were critical.

Access to Participants

I obtained contact information for the rural law enforcement administrators through open resources online. I contacted rural law enforcement administrators from

West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee to participate in the study. At no time during the recruitment process were administrators pressured to participate. Once participant selection was complete, consent forms were sent via email to explain the research process and acceptance of their participation.

I used social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit to access and recruit potential Generation Z participants for the study. At no time during the recruitment process were individuals pressured to participate. Once participant selection was complete, consent forms were provided further to explain the research process and acceptance of their participation.

Treatment of Human Participants

I received approval from Walden University Internal Review Board to ensure all aspects of the study were ethical and approved. At any time, a participant decided not to participate, I debriefed the participant. All participants were treated with courtesy, professionalism, and protection.

Treatment of the Data

Transcription copies and audio-recorded data are stored on a secure travel drive and placed in a private lockbox for the next five years. The physical documents such as reflexive journals and audit trail information are secured in a locked safe for the next five years. Names of the participants were not shared or used in the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. All data collection was labeled with alternative names and the corresponding names stored separately.

Summary

The methodology for the study was a qualitative case study with multiple cases but one unit of analysis (rural law enforcement agency online content). The participants for the study included rural law enforcement administrators and Generation Z participants ages 18 to 20 years. Conventional content analysis was used to analyze interviews, focus group sessions, and obtained online content from rural law enforcement agencies. Issues of trustworthiness included strategies such as triangulation of data sources, saturation levels, and an audit trail, which contained a reflexive journal and note-taking. Ethical procedures such as confidentiality, interview guides, and institutional approvals were necessary to conduct the research ethically.

Results of the data collection and analyses are presented in chapter four. Chapter four provides setting, participant demographics, data collection and analyses, and findings.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies for younger generations, online content attractiveness, and perceptions of younger generations toward agency online content. This chapter contains case study results on rural law enforcement agencies in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The research questions were:

RQ1: What types of strategies do rural law enforcement agencies use to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations?

RQ2: How do younger generations perceive rural law enforcement agencies' online content in terms of attracting applicants?

RQ3: What are the terms related to Generation Z's work preferences and personal characteristics in terms of rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies and content?

RQ4: What information about organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to teams, and workplace atmosphere is present in online content for prospective applicants from Generation Z?

The chapter includes the setting, participant demographics, process of data collection and analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness followed by results of this qualitative case study.

Setting

The study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collected involved telephone and virtual contacts with participants. Additionally, data collection began shortly after the shooting of Breonna Taylor in March 2020 and the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Societal unrest involving law enforcement personnel and negative media may have contributed to limited participation by rural law enforcement administrators in the study. Restrictions on face-to-face interactions during the pandemic created barriers in terms of recruitment and data collection.

Demographics

Participants in the study included two rural law enforcement administrators and seven focus group participants. Both rural law enforcement administrators were male. The first participant was 53 and had served 30 years in law enforcement. The second participant was 45 and had served 23.5 years in law enforcement. All participants worked in agencies with less than 20 sworn officers who served fewer than 50,000 residents.

Focus group participants consisted of four males and three females. Four participants were 18, one participant was 19, and two were 20. According to Strauss and Howe, participants were required to be 18 to 20 to meet the definition of Generation Z.

Rural law enforcement agency websites selected for the study involved five sheriff offices and five police departments. Five agencies were from West Virginia, and two administrators in West Virginia were interviewed for the study. Three agencies were from Kentucky, while the other two agencies were from Tennessee.

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

I interviewed rural law enforcement administrators from West Virginia for the study. The two interviews occurred by telephone and were audio-recorded for approximately 45 minutes. I followed an interview guide (see Appendix B) to maintain flow in the interviews. In addition, semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) were used to provide answers to RQ1. I made several attempts to recruit rural enforcement agencies by email and telephone for a year. However, rural law enforcement agencies were reluctant to participate in the study due to COVID-19 quarantine and health concerns, plus perceived negativity toward law enforcement officers.

Focus Groups

Twenty participants agreed to join the focus groups. A total of seven participants attended three virtual focus groups. I used three semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) to lead focus groups and answer RQ2. Focus group participants reviewed 10 rural law enforcement agencies through a virtual Zoom session. I followed an interview guide (see Appendix C) and audio-recorded sessions, and each focus group session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Due to the possibility of participant fatigue, I limited reviews of online content to agency websites and disregarded additional online content such as social media.

Rural Law Enforcement Online Current Extant Data

I reviewed 10 rural law enforcement agencies to collect data with focus groups. Agency website reviews consisted of counting observed online content such as the

number and type of pictures, website color schemes, social media links, personal messages by the sheriff or chief (see Appendix E). In addition, I completed notes and observations of content on each website to answer RQ3 and RQ4.

Data Analysis

All data were coded manually and followed the step-by-step protocol of Adu. Steps included assigning anchor codes for each research question, statements for each anchor code, compiling and arranging codes, tallying frequencies of codes, sorting codes, and generating categories and themes to answer research questions (Adu, 2019). The first cycle of coding included in vivo coding using anchor codes established from the research questions. The second coding cycle involved focused coding and identifying the most significant initial codes, frequency of those codes, and relationships between codes. Categories emerged during the second cycle of coding to address the research questions, which generated themes.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The two rural law enforcement interviews underwent first cycle coding using two anchor codes. The two anchor codes were recruiting strategies and problems recruiting and attracting. I identified 28 initial codes. The initial codes were arranged alphabetically under their anchor codes. Eighteen initial codes focused on recruiting strategies, while 10 initial codes identified problems with recruiting and attracting.

I completed the second cycle of coding and sorted codes into categories. Categories for recruiting strategies were traditional recruitment media, traditional in-person recruitment, and contemporary online recruitment media. Categories for recruiting

and attracting were features of the profession and attributes of Generation Z. The first emerging theme was administrators' focus on traditional media and in-person recruitment strategies with limited online recruitment strategies. The second emerging theme was that administrators recognize Generation Z as hard to recruit and compete with larger agencies.

Focus Groups

I transcribed the audio-recorded focus group sessions and combined the participants' comments by separating the remarks by each agency. The first coding cycle consisted of in vivo coding using the anchor codes positive perceptions and negative perceptions and completing the first cycle of coding produced initial codes and code frequencies for each rural law enforcement agency. Initial codes were arranged alphabetically under anchor codes. Participants stated 130 positive perception comments and 178 negative perception comments for the ten rural law enforcement agencies' websites (see Appendix F).

I completed the second cycle of coding and sorted the codes into categories. Categories that emerged from the positive and negative perception anchor codes were website style and content, and attractive to Generation Z to apply for employment. Sorting in each category underwent further examination and identified additional subcategories. The positive and negative website style and content subcategories included color, pictures, design/layout/setup, and written content. The subcategories for positive and negative categories of attractive to Generation Z for potentially applying for employment were agency culture and recruitment/career information. The first emerging

theme was younger generations identified website content and style, which grabbed their attention. From this theme, two subthemes emerged, positive accolades for website content and style and negative accolades for website content and style. A second emerging theme was attracting Generation Z for employment, and two subthemes emerged. Subthemes were positive accolades for attraction and negative accolades for attraction.

Rural Law Enforcement Online Current Extant Data

I explored and collected data from the ten rural law enforcement agency websites reviewed by focus group participants. Collected data underwent first cycle coding, in vivo coding. Initial codes related to work preferences and personal characteristics emerged from the online content. Sixty-four terms appeared across the ten rural law enforcement agency websites to answer RQ3.

Four anchor codes, identified by RQ4, were used to sort online content. Anchor codes included organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to a team, and workplace atmosphere. The first cycle of coding identified initial codes for each agency. After completing the first coding cycle, I combined the anchor codes of organizational culture and workplace atmosphere. The meanings are closely related and separating would create confusion in the results of the study. The total initial codes for organizational culture/workplace atmosphere across the ten agencies was 84, while the total for opportunities for promotion was one. The total initial codes for belonging to a team was one. I completed second cycle coding for the organizational culture/workplace atmosphere initial codes and established two categories, community-related and service-

related. Total frequency of community-related initial codes was 17, and the total initial codes for service-related codes was 67.

Furthermore, I completed counts on the ten rural law enforcement agency websites to better understand different types of content found on the websites (see Appendix E). The categories included the website type, kinds of pictures on the homepage, content type, online application submission, website color scheme, social media links, number of videos, and images of staff and K9s.

The first identified theme for rural law enforcement website reviews was an emphasis on community-related and service-related information. The second theme was the limited information about promotion opportunities, a team, employment, minimum qualifications of an officer, and the application process.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The researcher used triangulation method from three data sources to strengthen the design and reduce the potential for researcher bias, plus increase credibility. I maintained thick descriptions and detailed notes of the research process regarding the environments, cultural and social contexts, participants' nonverbal communication during virtual sessions to increase transferability. An audit trail kept during the stages of the research provided evidence of dependability and transparency of the research process for replication. Additionally, an audit trail and reflexive journal provided evidence of confirmability to establish trustworthiness.

Findings

Each research question and theme present the findings. The themes are supported by categories, meanings, frequencies, and evidence from the data. Table 1 provides a summary of each research question and related theme.

Table 1

Emerging Themes and Related Research Question

Research Questions	Themes
<i>RQ1</i> : What type of strategies do rural law enforcement agencies use to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations?	<p>Theme 1: More traditional and in-person but limited online recruitment strategy.</p> <p>Theme 2: Generation Z is hard to recruit due to competition.</p>
<i>RQ2</i> : How do younger generations perceive rural law enforcement agencies' online content for attracting applicants?	<p>Theme 3: Website content and style that grabs Generation Z's attention.</p> <p>Theme 3a: Positive accolades for website content and style.</p> <p>Theme 3b: Negative accolades for website content and style.</p> <p>Theme 4: Attracting Generation Z for employment.</p> <p>Theme 4a: Positive accolades for attraction.</p> <p>Theme 4b: Negative accolades for attraction.</p>
<i>RQ3</i> : What are the terms related to Generation Z's work preferences and personal characteristics in rural law enforcement's online recruitment strategies and content?	<p>Theme 5: Community-related and service-related information.</p>
<i>RQ4</i> : What information about organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to a team, and workplace atmosphere is present in online content to prospective applicants from Generation Z?	<p>Theme 6: Limited information existed.</p>

RQ1

What type of strategies do rural law enforcement agencies use to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations?

Theme One: More Traditional and In-Person but Limited Online Recruitment***Strategy***

The first theme emerged from the administrators' interviews focused on traditional media and in-person recruitment strategies with limited online recruitment strategies. The categories provided the essence of their recruitment strategies and attracting younger applicants (see Table 2). The meanings and evidence from the rural law enforcement administrator interviews in Table 2 summarize findings to support theme one.

Table 2***Recruiting Strategies and Attracting Younger Generation Applicants***

Category	Meaning	Evidence from the data
Traditional Recruitment Media	Using local newspapers, news channels, posters, and banners in the community	"We advertise in our own local paper...we are like, come to us ... we are not coming to you." (Administrator 1) "... traditional advertisements through the local press and media. We also have recruitment posters, and other banners, that we put throughout the community." (Administrator 2)

Traditional In-Person Recruitment	Employment fairs, college fairs, internship program, the reputation of the department, know the applicants personally	"We solely rely on reputation, in the community...we usually know the parents of the boy or girl." (Administrator 1) "...different employment fairs we have attended...engaged local colleges and programs." (Administrator 2)
Contemporary Online Recruitment Media	Using city/county social media sites, job boards, and webpage	"...webpage." (Administrator 1) "...city social media accounts..., we advertise on different sites such as indeed.com." (Administrator 2)

Theme Two: Generation Z is Hard to Recruit Due to Competition

The second theme that surfaced from rural law enforcement administrator interviews was that administrators recognize Generation Z is hard to recruit and it is difficult to compete with larger law enforcement agencies. Two categories were used for sorting the difficulties recruiting and attracting the younger generation of applicants, as shown in Table 3. Categories include features of the profession and the attributes of Generation Z individuals. Meanings and evidence from the rural law enforcement administrator interviews in Table 3 summarize findings to support theme two.

Table 3

Problems Recruiting and Attracting Younger Generation Applicants

Category	Meaning	Evidence from the data
Features of the Profession	Compete with larger areas, low salary, rural area,	"The money is, in rural areas is not the greatest, we

	traditional print/deliver application process	have to compete with the larger areas." (Administrator 1) "...traditional print application and delivered to us." (Administrator 2)
Attributes of Generation Z	Hard to recruit, not focused on career, want to know how much money and how to develop a career	"Z people, it is hard to recruit them...they are not really focused on a career." (Administrator 1) "they are a lot more inquisitive, a lot more detailed oriented, and...they are definitely modifying your approach to address specific detailed-oriented questions." (Administrator 2)

Themes emerging from the rural law enforcement administrator interviews answered RQ1 by addressing what strategies rural law enforcement agencies use to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations. Rural law enforcement agencies use local media outlets and in-person recruitment as their primary strategies and limited online recruitment strategies. Rural law enforcement administrators acknowledged the difficulties of recruiting Generation Z because they are inquisitive and ask detail-oriented questions about employment. Additionally, rural agencies indicated

competition with larger law enforcement agencies because of lower salaries and rural locations.

RQ2

How do younger generations perceive rural law enforcement agencies' online content for attracting applicants?

Theme Three: Website Content and Style that Grabs Generation Z Attention

Two subthemes emerged from theme three. Theme 3a is positive accolades for website content and style, and theme 3b is negative accolades for website content and style.

Theme 3a: Positive Accolades for Website Content and Style. Focus group participants made 92 positive comments about website content and style. The meaning of the website content and style category includes positive perceptions about the website's array of colors, type of colors, amount and types of pictures, how the website is organized, and type and amount of textual content. The most significant category with the highest number of positive comments was design/layout/setup. The least significant category mentioned positively was website colors.

Design/Layout/Setup. The websites' layout and organization were online features participants targeted several of their comments. Forty-one positive comments were captured when asked what is attractive about the rural law enforcement websites. Below are participants' quotes about the design and organization on the reviewed websites.

Participant 2: “Yeah, what works for me are the drop-down tabs; like I said- easier to find what you are looking for. I like the information, it's laid out nice. The tabs at the bottom, information, and the subtitles find what you are looking for.”

Participant 3: “It's good organization.”

Participant 4: “I like the way it's set up where you can find everything pretty quick; the way its set up, it's easy to find what you need.”

Participant 5: “Nothing too bulky; everything is spark noted; definitely jumps out and grabs you from the get-go, from the by American flag to the blue letters.”

Participant 6: “Yeah, I feel like the layout is very easy. The layout of all the information is very easy, and it's not super wordy, and I feel like the layout of it is what makes it really good.”

Written Content. Written content on each website emerged as a significant category in the focus group sessions. Fifteen positive comments were made, and below are three participants' comments that provide the core of the participants.

Participant 1: “Not many words.”

Participant 2: “It says everything you need right there on one page, so you don't keep scrolling so much.”

Participant 5: “It's definitely straightforward, to the point.”

Pictures. The participants made 19 positive comments about website pictures in the sessions when asked what is attractive about the rural law enforcement websites.

Below are participants' quotes about the use of pictures on the different websites.

Participant 2: “I feel like when you see more pictures, it's more appealing, so like the more pictures, the more, the better.”

Participant 5: “Pictures are good.”

Participant 6: “It's aesthetically pleasing, nice to look at pictures; when even you first get on the page, it draws attention to the viewer.”

Participant 7: “It actually has a picture of the sheriff, pictures of the officers, pictures of their K9 unit.”

Colors. A website's colors were discussed as one of the appealing features. Seven positive comments were made about a website's color. Three participants notably captured the core of focus group participants when asked what is attractive about the rural law enforcement websites.

Participant 2: “This looks pretty interesting; I like the layout and the colors. Color, the color stands out.”

Participant 5: “I always liked using the color red on the website, red kind of wakes you up and kind of gets your eye.”

Participant 7: “It's very bright; it uses colors that will insight, intrigue information uh into their department.”

Theme 3b: Negative Accolades for Website Content and Style. Participants made 122 negative comments about the website style and content. The meaning of the website content and style category includes negative perceptions about the website's array of colors, type of colors, types and number of pictures, how the website is organized, and the type and amount of textual content on the website. The most significant category with

the highest number of negative comments was written content. The least significant category mentioned negatively was website pictures.

Written Content. Written content on each website emerged as a significant category in the focus group discussions. Sixty-one negative comments were made in the, and below are seven of the participants' comments.

Participant 1: "I think it's just boring, too many words."

Participant 2: "When I see a lot of words like this, I do not want to read it. It doesn't look like it has enough information on it on the homepage. I feel like it could have a little more when it talks about salary and stuff."

Participant 3: "Too much to read."

Participant 4: "Less words. I don't really like the way that it's all right there; I feel like they need more to go to where you want to find. And end up having to read all of that, a lot of people our age don't want to read that much."

Participant 5: "For me-the big thing I notice is, it's extremely word-heavy; I feel like people in my generation don't enjoy reading, but we would like the sparks notes, especially the younger ones, just spark note it. And instead of a big bulky paragraph and you have to scroll down the page."

Participant 6: "It's like whenever you are reading a book, and you read up to like 50 pages, and nothing is grabbing your attention, you just stop reading it, and it is like their homepage does not draw me in at all, it should have some of the main information on the homepage."

Participant 7: “It does not really have much content on the pages or any at all, umm, which is,...red flag so. We are used to tik tok now, and it's 60seconds videos at most, so it's short and sweet. I still like to read, but several of my friends don't. Like, I might read all this, but I cannot see some of them doing it.”

Design/Layout/Setup. Participants directed several comments toward the websites' layout and organization. Forty negative comments were captured in the sessions when asked what is attractive about the rural law enforcement websites. Below are participants' quotes about layout and organization of the websites.

Participant 2: “Yes, kinda dull; it's not catching my eye. I feel like our generation does not really like that kind of layout. I think they would like it more organized and set up so they could find stuff faster.”

Participant 3: “I do not really like the layout that much. I do not like the way they have it set up. I really think they could have done something different, make it easier.”

Participant 5: “It seems like somebody started on it and got in a really good direction with it, and then either that person just stopped or quit.”

Participant 6: “Kinda hard to read with the patterns and backgrounds. Its looks like a word document, basic settings and some of the words bolded.”

Participant 7: “If anything, the text is a little small. I wish they would have kind of condensed all of the above sections into that same kind of idea as well because when you are skimming over things, you do not want to have to read the entire thing to get an idea of what you are reading. Just having the mission, vision, core values in those drop-down

boxes like they have the last three. I think it would be beneficial to catch your attention. Because if you see that animation, you are more likely going to want to read it.”

Colors. Website colors were discussed negatively by participants. They made fourteen negative comments about the websites’ color. Two participants notably captured the heart of the focus group participants when asked what is attractive about the rural law enforcement websites.

Participant 2: “I’m not really a fan of these colors. I don’t like the colors.”

Participant 3: “I just don’t like the colors.”

Pictures. Focus group participants discussed the limited number of pictures and the type of pictures. Seven negative comments were caught in the sessions when asked what is attractive about the rural law enforcement websites. Below are two participants’ quotes about the use of pictures on different websites.

Participant 4: “I agree with what he said; more pictures always.”

Participant 7: “Umm, this is just the technology side of me; that picture in the back is absolutely horrible; they could of found about 1000 better ones, just by looking online.”

Theme Four: Attracting Generation Z for Employment

An additional theme emerging from focus group data collection was younger generations searching for employment, career information, and a sense of who they would be working for if they applied. Two subthemes emerged for theme four. Theme 4a is positive accolades for attraction, and 4b is negative accolades for attraction.

Theme 4a: Positive Accolades for Attraction. Focus group participants made 53 positive comments about agency websites’ ability to attract Generation Z applicants. The

meaning of the category includes positive perceptions about the website's ability to attract a younger generation with information about the agency and what it is like to work at the agency, career information, and appealing recruitment information. The most significant subcategory with the highest number of positive comments was recruitment/career information. On the other hand, the least significant subcategory mentioned positively was agency culture.

Recruitment/Career Information. Participants discussed how each website was attractive and if the website content recruited them to apply for employment. Participants identified thirty positive comments, and below are two participants' remarks.

Participant 6: "Provide a good amount of information on employment, qualifications."

Participant 7: "It catches your eye; it actually has a picture of the sheriff, which is something I like a lot, I want, I personally want to look into when I am looking for someone to talk to or looking for a job."

Agency Culture. Participants were asked about the agencies' online content to attract younger generations to the workforce. Agency culture emerged as a category in the data. Twenty-three positive comments were collected from the sessions about agency culture. Below are three participants' comments that provided the essence of the participants.

Participant 3: "It looks more like fun and interesting."

Participant 5: "It gives you a sense of whom you are working with; I like that."

Participant 7: "I do like that it has one of the officers right there or that the sheriff, and from what I can tell, that's his message personally; he typed that out himself. Now that is

not something you don't see a lot that I do like (oath). It does show what a specific officer does; they put their oath out there, so they are held accountable.”

Theme 4b: Negative Accolades for Attraction. Focus group participants made 51 negative comments about agency websites' ability to attract Generation Z applicants. The meaning of the category includes negative perceptions about the website's ability to attract a younger generation with information about the agency and what it is like to work at the agency, career information, and appealing recruitment information. The most significant subcategory with the highest number of positive comments was agency culture. The least significant subcategory mentioned positively was recruitment/career information.

Agency Culture. Twenty-eight negative comments were collected from focus group sessions about agency culture. Below are two participants' comments that provided the consensus of the participants.

Participant 5: “I like the inclusion of the staff, and I like the history thing, but a big thing for me is just names. Because what I enjoy about the -agency- where it gave you a brief rundown of each individual person, but this one is just named on the page.”

Participant 6: “I also feel like a face, maybe the sheriff face right there or maybe, group picture or something, Not just a courthouse ... getting the sense this is an actual job, and its... not personal. It seems like a website just for the police officers- like they are only going to be looking at it. I do not think anyone looking for a job is going to necessarily see someone returning and be like, "oh my gosh, I need to work here." It is not personal

at all, and if you are going to be working with these people and it does not convince you to do.”

Recruitment/Career Information. Focus group participants discussed how each website was attractive and whether the content recruited them to apply for a rural law enforcement agency position. Participants identified 23 negative comments, and below are three participants’ remarks.

Participant 5: “This is in the sense of recruiting; I, this doesn't really jump off the page as something that is recruiting me. I do not feel like, if I'm one here looking for a job, this is not convincing me to want to apply. It does not necessarily grab me in the sense of recruitment, and it just seems like this is our website and if you need anything, here is all the stuff. Does not necessarily have the idea- oh, we are definitely looking for people to bring to our team. I feel like a lot of these websites just do not necessarily grasp the idea of wanting to convince somebody to be part of their police department.”

Participant 6: “They are going to hit the back button; there is virtually no information on it, job availability, or pictures, ... fill out an application for police, but that's very, very vague.”

Participant 7: “An online application, like a Google form or something along those lines, is something that I have a feeling most Gen Z would prefer.”

Themes three and four and subthemes, emerged from focus group comments on rural law enforcement agency websites and answered RQ2. The frequency of positive and negative comments per rural law enforcement agency is available for review in Appendix F. The frequency of positive and negative comments per agency allows the review of

individual perception comments to illustrate the percentage of positive and negative comments. For example, Agency #2 and #8 received 41% of the total positive comments, while only 6% were negative comments. Conversely, agencies #1, #4, #5, and #7 received 56% of the total negative comments while only receiving 21% of the positive comments.

RQ3

What are the terms related to Generation Z's work preferences and personal characteristics in rural law enforcement's online recruitment strategies and content?

Theme Five: Community-Related and Service-Related Information

One theme emerged from the review of terms and expressions on the ten rural law enforcement websites. The theme was rural law enforcement websites focused on community-related and service-related information. The terms and expressions were categorized into community-related or service-related. Terms used in the website content that Generation Z identified as work and personal preferences identified in the literature review answered RQ3. Sixty-four terms and expressions were identified. Table 4 provides a breakdown of each agency and terms and expressions for community-related and service-related information.

Table 4

Identified Generation Z Terms Located on Agency Websites

Agency	Community-Related	Service-Related
Frequency	Frequency	

#1	5	partnership, feedback, cooperate, mutual trust, community	4	well trained, responsibilities, duties, standard of excellence
#2	6	partnerships, social media, recruit local citizens, train, compassion, community-oriented	6	professional, values, collaborate, opportunity, activities, fairness
#3	2	understanding, compassion	0	~
#4	2	employment, photographs	0	~
#5	0	~	3	salary, duties, responsibilities
#6	0	~	2	trained, duties
#7	2	partnerships, suggestions	1	duty
#8	1	door open	10	duties, ethics, honesty, openness, fairness, profession, value respect, teamwork, goal leadership, traditional and non-traditional services, constant self-improvement, teamwork, problem-solving skills, willingness to adapt to different cultural and ethnic environments
#9	3	partnership, working hand-in-hand, communicate	6	law fairly, equitably, problem-solving strategies, innovative approaches, individualism, equally, enhanced performance, professional growth, quality training, flexible approach
#10	1	partnerships	10	
Total	22		42	

RQ4

What information about organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to a team, and workplace atmosphere is present in online content to prospective applicants from Generation Z?

Theme Six: Limited Information Existed

Theme six emerged by reviewing the ten rural law enforcement websites through the lens of RQ4. The theme was rural law enforcement agency websites have limited information about promotion opportunities, being part of a team, employment, minimum qualifications of an officer, and the application process. I obtained textual content and notes about visual images used on the ten rural law enforcement websites. Following the four anchor codes for the first and second cycle initial coding, four categories were identified. Due to the similarity between the organizational culture and workplace atmosphere, the two categories were combined for sorting the data.

One agency (Agency #9) mentioned teamwork, which identified with the category belonging to a team. Furthermore, one agency (Agency #10) provided online content about opportunities for promotion. Eighty-four items were captured from the online agency websites for organizational culture and workplace atmosphere. Organizational culture and workplace atmosphere identify organization values, philosophies, and type of environment leadership administrators support. The frequency and evidence of the data are presented for each agency in Table 5. Furthermore, I completed a frequency count on types of written content and visuals of the ten rural law enforcement agencies to provide an overall picture of the agencies (see Appendix E).

Table 5

Organizational Culture and Workplace Atmosphere Category Evidence

Agency	Frequency	Evidence in the data
One	9	Standard of excellence expected; Focus on information exchange with the community. Focus on Constitutional Rights

Two	15	Creates a sense of professionalism and community; Transparency with community organization chart, emails, phone numbers; Links to the different partners in the community with their logo/branding image
Three	5	Pictures of police hat, cruiser, and officer writing a ticket; Provide service with understanding, compassion, integrity Preserve the rights of citizens,
Four	7	crime prevention, protection of life, property, maintain order; History of the previous sheriff over time; Victim notification program links and Sex Offender link, Humane officer link name
Five	5	Responsibilities of the sheriff and term limits, salary range provided, with the amount of additional compensation for collecting taxes; information about concealed weapons
Six	7	States the team of officers, volunteers, and administration are trained as well as any in America; Treat everyone with dignity and respect in a professional manner
Seven	5	Dedicated to building a strong community and making the city a better place; Serve and protect
Eight	11	Promote security and safety in the community; High quality of service to protect life and property, crime prevention; Detecting and investigating criminal activity; Apprehension and incarceration of criminals
Nine	10	Message by the chief that all citizens should know what is going on in the mission; Discusses they are constantly looking for quality officers; Provides the responsibilities of officers and the qualifications needed.
Ten	10	Community policing philosophies and strategies to identify problems and solutions to enhance the quality of life and safety in the community, time-tested police methods used; "Out of the box" best practices for partnerships and stakeholder support
Totals	84	

Summary

Six themes appeared from the collection and analyses of the three data sources. The categories and themes emerging answered the four research questions. Theme one and

two answered RQ1 by identifying that rural law enforcement administrators continue to use traditional media and in-person recruitment strategies with limited online recruitment. Furthermore, rural law enforcement administrators recognized that Generation Z individuals are hard to recruit, and there is competition with larger agencies for applicants.

Theme three and four answered RQ2. Focus group participants identified positive and negative aspects of the website content and style and how the information on each website attracts Generation Z to apply for employment with their agency. The colors, pictures, design/layout/setup, and written content of the agency websites were key discussion points, both positive and negative, by the focus group participants. Design/layout/setup was the most significant subcategory mentioned positively, while colors received the least number. The written content was the most significant subcategory collecting negative comments, while pictures received the least amount.

Additionally, participants commented on the agency websites and their ability to attract Generation Z from an agency culture and recruitment/career information aspect. Limited information exists on rural law enforcement agency websites for the recruitment of potential Generation Z applicants. Younger generations search for employment and career information and a sense of who they would be working for if they applied to the agency.

The last two themes emerged from answering RQ3 and RQ4, which focused on reviewing the researcher's ten rural law enforcement agency websites. RQ3 was answered by theme five, which identified that information, such as terms and expressions used on

the websites, falls into two categories, community-related or service-related. In addition, limited information using Generation Z specific terms and expressions were present on the agency websites. RQ4 was answered by theme six and identified limited information about belonging to a team and opportunities for promotion. Additionally, theme six identified inadequate information about employment and the application process.

The next chapter discusses interpretations of findings, the study's limitations, recommendations of further research, impact of positive social change, and a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies toward younger generations, agency website content attractiveness, and younger generations' perceptions of online content. I aimed to identify what types of online strategies rural law enforcement use to recruit younger generations via semi-structured interviews and Generation Z focus group participants' perceptions about those websites. Furthermore, I concluded data collection with a thorough review of each agency website. Six themes emerged across three sources of data.

Identified problems for law enforcement and recruiting younger generations include a lack of online recruitment plans tailored to younger generations' values and career expectations. I found evidence that agencies need to communicate with the younger generation in new ways. I addressed the gap in the research by exploring rural law enforcement online recruitment strategies and online content, along with Generation Zs' perceptions of rural law enforcement websites. Overall, I found that rural law enforcement agencies do not consider their online content, whether it is attractive to younger applicants, which in turn impacts recruitment for rural law enforcement agencies. With applicant shortages, administrators must make the development of online recruitment strategies a priority. I address each research question and themes and discuss them in the context of Strauss and Howe's generational theory.

Interpretation of the Findings

RQ1

RQ1 was about what type of strategies rural law enforcement agencies use to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations. The two themes were traditional and in-person recruitment strategies and difficulty recruiting Generation Z because smaller agencies compete with larger agencies. The results of interview data confirmed previous studies regarding traditional recruitment strategies and difficulty recruiting younger generations to rural law enforcement. Rural law enforcement administrators continue to use traditional media and in-person recruitment strategies even though the strategies are not the primary sources for job seekers (Peircy & Lee, 2019). Rural law enforcement agencies rely on archaic recruitment methods such as newspapers, news channels, community posters, banners, and in-person visits to colleges and employment fairs. Most job seekers use online resources today (Piercy & Lee, 2019), and Generation Z have ideas about the ideal workplace (Desai & Lele, 2017). Rural law enforcement administrators acknowledge they have low salaries, and rural locations of agencies are not attractive for younger applicants. After speaking with rural law enforcement administrators about online recruitment strategies to attract a younger generation, the next step was to ask Generation Z cohorts how they perceived rural law enforcement agency websites.

RQ2

RQ2 was about how younger generations perceived rural law enforcement agencies' website content for attracting applicants. The data results confirm previous

studies about website attractiveness. Generation Z individuals look for website attractiveness, along with multiple cues such as colors and pictures that capture their attention when considering applying. Generation Z participants commented negatively about textual content when there was either too much to read or not enough about what they wanted to know. If the website had a good design with attractive colors and pictures and brief and concise information about the agency, Generation Z cohorts would consider applying. If the website had one or two colors and appeared not credible, they said they would move to a different website.

Another critical perception of rural law enforcement agency online content was a limited amount of employment and career information, plus a sense of who they would be working for if they applied. These findings relate to website design and content. Generation Z participants wanted to know about agency culture, such as work values and leadership philosophies. They also wanted direct information about job and career expectations, opportunities for promotion, and salary information. However, only one rural law enforcement agency provided employment qualifications, while none of the agencies provided online information about the selection process. Information about employment qualifications, the selection process, and job responsibilities are vital for recruiting younger generations because according to Scheer et al. (2018), individuals do not fully understand the application and selection process.

If rural law enforcement agencies continue to limit their online content toward a younger audience and use unattractive designs and narratives, they will continue to struggle to identify and recruit the best possible applicant pool. Even though rural

agencies have lower salaries and are in rural areas, developing online recruitment strategies to attract younger applicants must be a priority goal. Agencies must show younger applicants why their agency is unique, what careers entail, how officers make a difference in communities, and salaries.

RQ3

RQ3 involves types of terms used on rural law enforcement agency websites related to Generation Z work preferences and personal characteristics. Reviewing the 10 rural law enforcement websites showed terms found on websites related to community topics and services completed by officers. The limited number of terms used on agency websites complemented what Generation Z focus group participants perceived negatively about those websites. Younger generations look for descriptions and action statements about potential jobs (White et al., 2019). Therefore, rural agencies must know what type of information and verbiage is needed to attract younger applicants.

RQ4

RQ4 was about information found on rural law enforcement agency websites concerning organizational culture, workplace atmosphere, opportunities for promotion, and belonging to a team. Results confirmed previous research findings that agencies must consider their culture and communicate their brand to job seekers. Opportunities for promotion and belonging to a team were found once among 10 agency websites. Textual written content and pictures on websites provided information about organizational culture and work atmosphere; however, this was limited. The most common pictures on agency websites included courthouses, officer badges, and sheriff/chief pictures. Only

four agencies provided information about officers' responsibilities, and only one agency listed qualifications to become an officer. No agencies explained the process of applying or selecting or offered an online application submission process. Additionally, only one agency provided a link to another social media account, and no agencies included videos on their websites. When rural law enforcement leadership considers what should or should not be put on their websites to attract Generation Z applicants, they must consider information preferences and website design. Administrators responsible for recruitment and online website content appear to be disconnected from younger generational preferences, what is attractive to Generation Z, and how to recruit them effectively. If information is not less than 30 seconds, potential employees will not stay focused on the content.

Considering all three data sources and emerging six themes, it appears the overarching theme of the study is that rural law enforcement administrators are disconnected from the younger generation and understanding what type of online content attracts younger applicants. The overarching theme is evident based on the comments made in the interviews illustrating the use of traditional and in-person recruitment strategies, yet the younger generation prefers to search for jobs online. Additionally, the younger generation perceives rural law enforcement online content as dull, wordy, unattractive, technological deprived, and not focused on recruiting them to their agency. Continuing this vein, the observations I made support the lack of specific items the younger generation is looking for on potential employer websites. The study's findings

address the gap in the literature and extend discipline knowledge about rural law enforcement recruitment strategies to attract the younger generation.

Theoretical Framework: Generational Theory

The generational theory by Straus and Howe was the theoretical framework for comparing online recruitment strategies and methods to attract the younger generation to rural law enforcement. The theory offers the backbone to understanding disconnect between rural agency recruitment strategies and Generation Z's work preferences, plus online employment searches. Generational theory separates generations by 20 years, and each generation creates its personality based on socialization and exposure to historical world events. Additionally, society's values change based on the current dominant generation and the generation's personality. Understanding Generation Z is technologically driven and uses online environment to seek information, there is a divide between rural law enforcement website content and limited attractive cues to entice the person to apply. Age differences between hiring authorities and the younger worker can create a work environment for generational conflict. The nation is seeing a shortage of law enforcement applicants. Therefore, rural agencies must consider generational differences and their online presence to attract younger applicants.

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Limitations of the Study

Several limitations to the trustworthiness of the study exist. The first limitation is the inability to generalize to a larger population due to the case study design. Second limitation is the lack of replication because of the changing online content data. Third limitation of the study includes limited access to rural law enforcement administrators for interviewing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and societal unrest toward law enforcement in general. Therefore, data saturation was not reached for rural law enforcement administrator interviews. Only two administrators were interviewed. Three focus groups with five to 8 participants must be completed to reach data saturation in focus group data collection. Only seven total participants participated in three focus groups. Thus, the data saturation for the focus group data collection was not met, providing for a fourth limitation of the study. Last, rural law enforcement agency online data only included agency websites due to time constraints of the study. Agency social media content on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, or job boards was not analyzed. However, despite these limitations, data saturation was reached with those available for the study

during data collection, which provided great insight into the construct of the subject matter investigated.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study's findings offer three recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is to understand why rural law enforcement administrators continue to choose traditional recruitment strategies and not online methods to attract the younger generation through a mixed-methods design. A second recommendation for future research is to consider a qualitative design of why rural agencies do not provide officer qualifications and a detailed description of their application/hiring process on their agency website. The final recommendation for future research is to explore the ways rural agencies use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Tik Tok, and job boards to recruit applicants over time through an exploratory qualitative design.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The study provides positive social change for rural law enforcement agencies across the United States. Rural law enforcement agencies who wish to recruit younger applicants and create a more robust online presence to attract the applicants can use the study's results to develop online content. Generation Z individuals are looking for potential employers who offer a website and online content that appeal to them through bright colors, personal pictures, concise information about careers, detailed job descriptions and the qualifications, promotion opportunities, salaries, and a sense of the agency's culture that aligns with their values and work preferences. Overall, rural law enforcement agencies must consider the audience they are trying to recruit and what is

appealing to that audience as they plan their recruitment strategies for future positions by providing information younger applicants are searching for when considering a career.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicated rural law enforcement's online recruiting efforts to secure the next generation of rural law enforcement officers must improve. Agencies are falling short for attracting younger qualified applicants because they lack the essential information and appeal Generation Z individuals are seeking when completing job searches online. Administrators acknowledge they continue to use traditional and in-person recruitment methods, with limited online strategies. In addition, rural agency websites prove inadequate attracting Generation Z because textual content is wordy, dull and portrays few pictures representing the agency. Generation Z search for direct information about career opportunities, minimum qualifications, salary, and visual cues illustrating an agency's culture and personality.

Rural law enforcement administrators must be honest about the line of work to potential applicants regarding minimum qualifications, selection process, salary, and benefits. Additionally, they should provide more pictures, videos, and information about the agency for a better understanding of agency culture and leadership philosophies. Generation Z is next in line to fill rural law enforcement positions and agencies must consider the audience when recruiting and providing attractive online information to compete with larger agencies moving forward.

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Appendix A: Research and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>RQ1: For Law Enforcement Administrators</p> <p>What type of strategies do rural law enforcement agencies use to attract and recruit qualified applicants from younger generations?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What type of recruitment strategies does the department use to attract applicants? 2. How would you describe your efforts to recruit younger generations? 3. How does the agency use online tools to recruit applicants? 4. How would you describe the next generation of the workforce (Gen Z)?
<p>RQ2: Generation Z Focus Group</p> <p>How do younger generations perceive rural law enforcement agencies' online content for attracting applicants?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In your opinion, what can you say about the online content to attract applicants in this generational era? 2. What can you describe as what does or what does not work when it comes to online content to attract younger generations to the officer workforce? 3. Do you think if the online content is made attractive, it will influence greater interest in the next generation of rural law enforcement officers? How so?
<p>RQ3:</p> <p>What are the terms related to Generation Z's work preferences and personal characteristics in rural law enforcement's online recruitment and content?</p>	<p>Content Analysis</p>
<p>RQ4:</p> <p>What information about organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to a team, and workplace atmosphere is present in online content to prospective applicants from Generation Z?</p>	<p>Content Analysis</p>

Appendix B: Rural Law Enforcement Interview Guide

Introduction:

Good evening. I am Brandi Thomas from Walden University. I am completing my dissertation study to receive my Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. I appreciate your time and attention to help me learn about rural law enforcement agencies online content and recruitment strategies to attract Generation Z.

Researcher Role:

My role as the researcher and facilitator of the semi-structured interview questions is to provide you the opportunity to answer based on your knowledge.

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of the study is to access rural law enforcement recruitment strategies for younger generations, online agency attractiveness, and the perceptions by younger generations toward the agency's online content.

Consent Form and Audio Recording:

Each participant received an email with the consent form. Does anyone have any questions about the consent form before we proceed? The discussion will be audio-recorded. Do I have your permission to audio-record the session? No names will be used in the write-up and the group is to maintain complete confidentiality.

Overview of the Process:

Participants will be asked four questions.

1. What type of recruitment strategies does the department use to attract applicants?
2. How would you describe your efforts to recruit younger generations?
3. How does the agency use online tools to recruit applicants?
4. How would you describe the next generation of the workforce (Generation Z)?

Conclusion:

This ends my interview questions. I appreciate your help and participation in my study. Do you have any questions? Thank you again for your time.

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction:

Good evening. I am Brandi Thomas from Walden University. I am completing my dissertation study to receive my Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. I appreciate your time and attention to help me learn about Generation Z's perceptions about rural law enforcement agencies online content.

Researcher Role:

My role as the researcher and facilitator of the focus group is to lead you through a discussion about 10 different websites by rural law enforcement agencies in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of the study is to assess rural law enforcement recruitment strategies for younger generations, online agency attractiveness, and the perceptions by younger generations toward the agency's online content.

Consent Form and Audio Recording:

Each participant received an email with the consent form. Does anyone have any questions about the consent form before we proceed? The discussion will be audio-recorded. Do I have your permission to audio-record the session? No names will be used in the write-up and the group is to maintain complete confidentiality.

Overview of the Process:

The focus group participants will be shown 10 different websites. Each website will be discussed using 3 main questions. The focus group will proceed through all 10 agencies and discuss each.

1. In your opinion, what can you say about the online content to attract applicants in this generational era?
2. What can you describe as what does or does not work when it comes to online content to attract younger generations to the officer workforce?
3. Do you think if the online content is made attractive, it will influence greater interest in the next generation of rural law enforcement officer? How so?

Conclusion:

This ends our discussion about the websites. I appreciate your help and participation in my study. Does anyone have any questions? I will collect your addresses through email and send you your \$20.00 Walmart gift card in the mail. Thank you again.

Appendix D: Rural Law Enforcement Website Selection and Review Guide

Selection of the ten rural law enforcement agencies for review:

Ten rural law enforcement agencies selected randomly from the overall list of agencies interviewing and receiving emails to participate in the study. The first two completed the interview process, while the others were listed and randomly selected from the working list of emailed agencies.

Research Questions and Identifying Content:

For the two research questions directly related to rural law enforcement online details, the named codes and categories established through the research document in the literature review were used to identify certain terms.

RQ #3: What are the terms related to Generation Z's work preferences and personal characteristics in rural law enforcement's online recruitment strategies and content?

RQ #4: What information about organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to a team, and workplace atmosphere is present in online content to prospective applicants from Generation Z?

Procedures for Review of Websites:

- Review each rural law enforcement agency website and document frequencies of observed content and visuals.
- Review each rural law enforcement agency website and document terms related to Generation Z work preferences and personal characteristics.
- Review each rural law enforcement agency website and document information related to organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, belonging to a team, and work atmosphere in the online content.

Coding and Sorting:

1. Anchor codes established to address each research question.
2. Sort the anchor codes into categories.
3. Identify themes.

Appendix E: Observed Agency Website Counts

Descriptions of Observed Content and Visuals	Number of Agencies
Local Gov't/Stand Alone Websites	
Part of local Govt Website	5
Stand-Alone Website	5
Pictures on Main Page	
Courthouse	3
Badge	7
Sheriff/Chief Picture	3
American Flag	2
Artwork in Background	1
Officer Hat	1
LE Cruiser	2
Police Activity (working with community)	1
K9	1
Agency Store Front	1
Staff Picture	2
Personal Message from Sheriff/Chief	5
Community Information Exchange- tip submission online	4
Mission/Vision Provided	8
Religious Message/Orientation	2
Download Documents and Mail/Physical Drop Off	3
Links to other community agencies	5
Multi-layered webpage	7
Responsibilities of Officers (listed not in the narrative)	4
Qualifications to become an officer listed	1
Explain the Process of applying and steps of the application process	0
Agencies with Online Application Process (based on Webpage)	0
Agencies with a breakdown of divisions and responsibilities/duties	3
Agencies listing Community/Civil Programs Partnerships	3
Crime Statistics Provided on Agency Site	1

Organizational Flow Chart Provided	1
List of Qualifications for Agency Volunteers	1
Salary Range provided	1
Officers with Specialized Training Provided	2
Online submission for Citizens to provide Kudos and concerns about officers	1
Website Color Scheme	
One Color	1
Two Colors	5
Three Colors	2
Social Media Links for Agency Accounts on Webpage	
FaceBook	1
Instagram	0
Twitter	0
YouTube	0
Number of videos on Websites	0
Number of Agencies with Staff Pictures	7
Number of Agencies with K9 Unit Pictures	3

Appendix F: Frequencies of Positive and Negative Perceptions of Agency Websites

Agency	Positive Perception Total	Negative Perception Total
One	5	37
Two	30	6
Three	18	16
Four	15	22
Five	3	22
Six	11	12
Seven	4	20
Eight	23	6
Nine	9	18
Ten	10	9
Totals	130	178