

**Background:**

The purpose of this ethnography is to understand how UNC's chapter of *Camp Kesem* utilizes its Facebook page to present itself as an organization, how it uses Facebook to interact with people who might be interested in getting involved, and how it interacts with its other key publics. The ultimate research question is how *Camp Kesem's* UNC chapter can increase its recruitment and retention rates. Understanding how UNC's chapter of *Camp Kesem* uses its voice and interacts with its key publics and conversely how its key publics interact with *Camp Kesem* on social media may provide insights into its recruitment and retention efforts, which it has struggled with in the past.

**Observations:**

This ethnography was conducted on Monday, Oct. 7, 2019 from 9:10-10:10 p.m. at the North Carolina Study Center and in my apartment on my personal laptop. The homepage of the UNC Chapel Hill *Camp Kesem* Facebook features a cover photo with campers and bubbles in the foreground. It's a colorful photo in motion, and one of the campers has a stuffed animal dog on top of her head. The page has a five-star review with a total of 8 reviews, and 585 people have liked the page, with 611 people following the page for updates. The first post seen is the upcoming interest meeting on Oct. 10, which will be its second interest meeting of the year. There are 12 people that say they are going and 9 people that say they are interested. The cover photo features 17 campers, all of whom are smiling and have matching lanyards on. Their clothes are colorful, there is a lot of tie-dye, and they are making silly faces and poses. It is a very welcoming and exciting photo.

While it is hard to capture sensory impressions other than sights and sounds on a social media ethnography, there were many posts that captured all five senses as effectively as it could. A good example is *Camp Kesem's* pinned post from Oct. 10, 2017, which is at the top of its posts section. It is a five-minute video about the last day of camp. The cover photo of the video features campers in a human pyramid in swimsuits covered in what looks like food, and they are all smiling and laughing. The video interviews campers and counselors about what it is like to attend *Kesem*, and the overall vibe is very loving and heartwarming. Both counselors and campers speak with passion; they talk about the activities that happen on the last day of camp, and there is footage of them having a food fight. Some people squirt chocolate sauce on each other while some dump a whole can of marinara sauce on others. They are laughing and covered in food, which informed my sensory impressions. I felt like I could feel the food on myself, and smell the bizarre combinations, despite not being there. There was a lot of footage featuring belly flops and swimming, talent shows, games, and hugs, which all seemed very cathartic and wholesome. The post with the video had the most engagement out of all of the posts I looked through. It has close to 10,000 views on Facebook and nine comments, mostly from parents who described *Camp Kesem* as a "blessing" and "a beautiful place to 'escape' the devastating effects that cancer leaves behind!!!! <3"

Another prominent video on its Facebook page was a post by a counselor called the "Camp Kesem Krawl Challenge." In the video, a camp counselor nominated his fellow counselors to post a video of them crawling like a caterpillar within 24 hours of his initial post. The counselor then proceeded to crawl like a caterpillar in different locations to funny music like "Can't Stop the Feeling," "Lip Gloss," and "Wagon Wheel." He even slid down a flight of stairs head-first on his stomach. This post had 72 likes and 8 comments, which is a lot of engagement compared to other posts. Some of the comments were "You're everything," and "OMG can't believe you hahahahaha" with a follow-up comment from the same person: "Also this looked like the PERFECT karl krawl form."

I looked at two of *Camp Kesem*'s events in detail, one of them being its annual fundraising event, "Make the Magic," that happened on April 5, 2019. On the event, it says 52 people went and there were 42 people interested. The logo is very cute and girly, featuring "A Night Under the Stars" in cursive handwriting with a bluish-purple background and white stars surrounding it. The logo didn't mention anything about *Camp Kesem* or the title "Make the Magic." There were also very few descriptions about the event in the description section, and the tone wasn't necessarily enthusiastic. It said "Camp Kesem at UNC Chapel Hill invites you to join us for our annual Make the Magic benefit gala" and it didn't specify how much tickets cost. I also looked at its interest meeting event from last year. It had to be rescheduled due to Hurricane Florence, and the event was titled "Camp Kesem First Meeting Take 2." The event cover photo featured a counselor doing a "face palm" with a camper smiling next to him. In the description, it said "Because Flo decided to throw us a curveball, we've rescheduled our first interest meeting of the year," which gave the event a comedic tone. It was definitely capitalizing off of the jokes and memes circulating UNC Facebook pages at the time.

In terms of insider language, there were some repeated phrases, one of them being "I Kesem because..." and then they list why they are involved with *Camp Kesem*. One person tagged "Camp Kesem at UNC Chapel Hill" in his post and held a chalkboard that said "I Kesem because CANCER SUCKS." The post included his fundraising link. The overall vibe of the language on its Facebook page is very joyful, happy, and encouraging, featuring language that, in my eyes, is very 40-to-50-year-old Facebook language. An example of this is one of the reviews on the page: "They make the kids feel seen and understood and most of all have boatloads of FUN. Thx Kesem!!! You guys are the best!"

### **Reflection:**

All in all, there doesn't appear to be as much engagement and communication on *Camp Kesem* at UNC Chapel Hill's Facebook page as there could be, which might be affecting *Camp Kesem*'s recruitment and retention efforts among student volunteers. The posts and events that seem to get the most reactions are the ones that show *Camp Kesem*'s personality, whether that is through a really good, cathartic video and/or photo story or through comedy. Especially when looking at the "Camp Kesem Krawl Challenge" video and through last year's Facebook event for its interest meeting, there seems to be opportunity to leverage its comedic voice for more engagement, as well as contribute to *Camp Kesem*'s overall fun attitude. What was most surprising to me was the presentation of *Camp Kesem*'s annual fundraising event, "Make the Magic." Previous interview research for *Camp Kesem* suggests that the visibility of big fundraising events matters a lot to student volunteers, and that a big incentive in volunteering for an organization is having a highly visible event to work toward. The event's lack of branding and lack of unique, exciting, and enthusiastic descriptions in the event was surprising to me. There were also no photos posted afterward from the event, so the event's success and visibility are relatively unknown to *Camp Kesem*'s greater audience.

It was very interesting to look at a Facebook page through a detail-oriented lens in order to capture all of the sensory impressions for ethnographic research. Ethnographic research does not assume objectivity, so I realize that I bring many biases to my observation and analysis. What catches my eye and what I pay attention to might be different based on my identity and how I read and consume media. In order to get information that is less biased, I would either have to conduct more ethnographic research or have people who are different than me conduct the same ethnographic research and compare and contrast the results. Qualitative insights like these are incredibly important, however, and something that numbers can't necessarily reveal.