



# The Lakeside Life

LEWIS SMITH LAKE



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## **Executive Summary**

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of The Lakeside Life Magazine's brand awareness. Our purpose in completing this research was to discover various opportunities for the Lakeside Life to expand on. Our main objective was to gain a better understanding of what lake goers are seeking out of their Smith Lake experience so the Lakeside Life Magazine can tailor their platforms to that audience.

For primary research methods, we utilized the organization's webpage, social media handles such as Facebook, Instagram, Vimeo and conducted a survey. Results were measured using the 297 survey respondents from the Lakeside Living's website, Facebook, and Smith Lake Alabama's website. After our 3 week survey, a conclusion of the results was drawn. In order to correctly interpret the results, we utilized the research software Qualtrics. We ran correlation reports to show whether and how strongly pairs of variables were related. Through the correlation reports, we discovered multiple opportunities for the Lakeside Life Magazine to expand on. The major findings are as follows:

1. Respondents would enjoy more restaurants on the lake that served alcohol.
2. Family and recreational activities are preferred over professional.
3. Most survey respondents already owned a home on Smith Lake; therefore, there is lack of others renting a home.

Our main recommendations are that Lakeside Life should continue to utilize Vimeo & Youtube channels to market available lots and homes on the lake, incorporate, sponsored ads for Instagram and Facebook to increase exposure to the magazine's website and to seek opportunities to bring more alcohol-serving restaurants to the lake. If each recommendation is taken into consideration, Lakeside Life's brand awareness will increase.

## **Research Specifics**

The survey conducted on behalf of The Lakeside Life Magazine was constructed in hopes of bringing more lake enthusiasts to Smith Lake. The research conducted was geared toward identifying what specific activities, features, and incentives would draw more lake enthusiasts to Smith Lake. Smith Lake is often compared to other well-known lakes in the region such as Lake Martin. Smith Lake would like to evolve into a leisure sanctuary that offers a lake experience like no other. Therefore, it was important to gather findings on what lake goers want their lake lifestyle to be like based on personal preferences, circumstances, and experiences.

This research study was focused specifically on figuring out what lake enthusiasts want out of their lake experience. This study included asking questions about the possibility of owning/ renting property on Smith Lake, favorable lake activities, and duration of stay. The survey was the beginning step in collecting this data. Lake enthusiasts answered a collection of questions that prompted direct answers and some personal commentary. Our research group relied mainly on primary research with the aid of some secondary research to understand how lake enthusiasts viewed Smith Lake.

Our research mainly focused on how invested lake enthusiasts are in Smith Lake and lake life in general. The Lakeside Life Magazine needed to know information such as economic status, age, and activity preferences to determine the target audience they should be marketing to. The Lakeside Life Magazine wants to know how to promote and

market Smith Lake in a way that will draw in more lake goers. The magazine plans to do so through their preferred mediums.

## Literature Review

Social networks have become one of the main mediums for organizations and their clients/consumers to communicate. The content, timing, and frequency of the social media-based conversations occurring between consumers are outside managers' direct control. Therefore, managers must learn to shape consumer discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organization's mission and performance goals (Faulds, 2009). To accomplish this, strategic methods are used such as blogs, social media, and advertising tools are utilized.

It has become common for lakes to have their own magazines and online publications. Similar to *The Lakeside Life Magazine*, Lake Martin has their own publications as well. Lake Martin runs two publications which are *Lake Magazine* and *Lake Martin Living Magazine*. Along with their magazine publications, Lake Martin utilizes social media platforms for outreach.

*Lake Magazine* features their publication online and in print. The magazine is a compilation of advertisements, news, activities and events happening at the lake. The majority of the advertisements are catered to real estate and those looking to build a home on the lake. *Lake Magazine* also has a Facebook page with 2,795 followers, an Instagram page with 867 followers, and a Twitter page with 623 followers. The magazine's social media pages feature photos, videos, and testimonies of lake-goers enjoying the activities and lifestyle the lake offers. All of the platforms express similar messages and content to express the magazine's main objectives.

*Lake Martin Living Magazine* is a massive publication with a larger following on social media across the board. The magazine has 4,234 followers on Facebook and

1,063 followers on Twitter. Similar to other magazine publications, they feature lake news, events, and home building advertisements. This publication has less interaction with its readers on their social media and instead uses the platforms as a way showcase content directly from the magazine *The Alexander City Outlook*.



## Media Analysis

The Lakeside Life team represents an upscale take on the Lewis Smith Lake. The Lakeside Life Magazine showcases and discusses what Smith Lake has to offer for their residents and visitors. The magazine promotes their blog, social media accounts, and lakeside living. The company aims to increase awareness about Lewis Smith Lake as well as gain residents to build or buy a home on Smith Lake property. The Lakeside Life Magazine mission statement: "We aim to bring together all who "lake" in every way, and bring forth an appreciation for the myriad of ways people enjoy lake life, and offer suggestions for you to get out and experience lake life in every possible way."

Observations about the magazine's methodology were made from Facebook, Instagram, Vimeo and The Lakeside Life website. The Lakeside Life Facebook and Instagram platforms featured several photos and videos for lake enthusiasts to interact with and leave comments. This was a way to gauge interaction and interest in Smith Lake. Vimeo was a visual representation of what the Smith Lake has to offer lake goers. The website was helpful in getting a look at the magazine itself. The digital version of the magazine was a direct print of the magazine, which can be accessed from any device.

The main form of communication that The Lakeside Life relies on is social media. The magazine uses their Instagram and Facebook post to keep readers up-to-date about advertisers, new blog posts, and attractions at the lake. All of the magazine's platforms contain the same images and messages across the board. A reader can go to any of them and see the same content. The Lakeside Life Facebook page went from around 215 followers in September to 834 likes in November.

The most traditional form of media The Lakeside Life uses is the printed magazine. The premiere issue of The Lakeside Life was put out on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017. This is the only form of traditional media the magazine has used since its inception.

#### SWOT Analysis:

- **STRENGTHS:**

Smith Lake itself has multiple strengths. Their lake is one of the cleanest in the south, which makes the area appealing for potential visitors and buyers versus other lakes that are muddy and unsanitary. Smith Lake is family oriented with the scenery and various cliffs to jump from. It is also driven by their fishing community. The magazine itself is strong when it comes to social media. Their social media posts contain consistent messages throughout each platform. Their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram profiles all use the same Hashtags and posts, which they keep up to date and personable.

- **WEAKNESSES:**

Weaknesses shown throughout their organization stem from the fact that their brand is fairly new. The first release of the magazine was just this year to a select number of individuals. They don't have a concrete customer base yet. The company is still growing on social media because they are so new and don't have a large audience yet. The biggest outcome that is needed within this organization is that there needs to be more growth and interaction.

- **OPPORTUNITIES:**

Although this organization is just starting up, there are many opportunities to grow within the company. Like previously stated, their social media platforms are continuing to grow. They just recently added a Vimeo account to their social media platforms, which is a fun way to show off their properties and scenery to potential visitors or buyers. Another opportunity The Lakeside Life has is the ability to advertise. They can emphasize the most appealing aspects of the lake and the target audiences in their magazine. To do this they could get a deal with a local advertising agency to pinpoint what would attract more people to the lake. Features in the magazine could include their big fishing community since it is a major part of their target audience. The magazine could cover big fishing tournaments that this community puts on to showcase their events and attract new visitors.

Because so many millennials rely on social media for their everyday entertainment, strategically placing ads on Instagram and Facebook timelines would be a great idea for the magazine. The team could set up these ads to come up on a viewer's timeline each time they search Smith Lake or their properties. This is also a great advertisement strategy. Holding giveaways on social media is another strategy companies use to gain a following. Possibly giving away vouchers for their marinas or Jet Ski rentals for following and sharing posts would gain the magazine's following.

- **THREATS**

The main threat surrounding The Lakeside Life magazine is that there is already another magazine rendered around Smith Lake called "Smith Lake Living." When researching this magazine, it is apparent that their social media and appearance isn't

professionally appealing or advanced. The Lakeside Life has the potential to grow and out print this magazine with the help of advertising and PR. Other threats to consider are the lakes near Smith Lake and their magazines. Popular lakes like Lake Martin have a strong magazine and a strong following. A lot of people around the area go to lakes like Lake Martin because there is a lot of talk about how much fun it is and all of the things to do there. Getting the word out about Smith Lake and their amenities is vital to the growth of their lake and magazine.

#### Media Results and Recommendations:

The overall communication goal for our client is to bring exposure to the Lakeside Life Magazine while also attracting lake enthusiasts and building an inclusive community at Smith Lake. As of now, our client has four main communication tools that they utilize regularly: Facebook, Vimeo, Instagram, and the Lakeside website and blog. Our client has a wide age range of target audience members, so it is important to effectively communicate their brand through each of these handles.

- **FACEBOOK:**

September at the beginning of the project, the Lakeside Life Facebook page had 261 likes. After just two months, the page has experienced a growth of 541 likes. The Facebook page has increased its use of vibrant and high-quality photos over the course of two months and often has promotional post such as giveaways with lake-related items. Although the Facebook following has increased, interactions with posts have stayed consistent. The lack of consistent quality graphics may be causing the plateau of “likes” on each post. The hashtag #thelakesidelife is consistent with all posts which

aides in driving traffic. The page recently received 26 likes and 11 shares for a drone video covering homes and properties at Smith Lake. The video was shared from the companies Vimeo account.

- YOUTUBE & VIMEO:

Video channels like Vimeo and Youtube are a great way to quickly attract traffic to social handles. Videos are fast paced and easy to view, however, they take more time to create than still photos or written posts. The Lakeside Vimeo account currently has two followers, two videos with four likes; however, its most recent video has over 296 plays. This channel is best used for quickly sharing real estate opportunities with potential and current lake-goers. By providing high-quality video, viewers can easily imagine themselves spending time on Smith Lake, which is one of the main goals of our client. Both videos created are consistent with the viewing time and the company's mission.

- INSTAGRAM:

Instagram is a must have for companies to connect with the millennial audience. Instagram is the most social and interactive of the four platforms used, so it is vital to have a consistent brand and theme with this handle. The Lakeside Life Instagram currently has 131 posts, 814 followers and is following 639 other users. The Instagram page was created on August 4, 2017. Secondary research shows that the posts with the most engagement are high-quality graphics with some form of nature included. Almost every post with water received 70-100 likes. Graphics with large text received 24-60 likes. The tone and audience are kept in mind consistently throughout this platform, but the overall aesthetics could be improved by strategically placing high text graphics

sparingly throughout the handle. The handle does not stray from the focus of the platform which aides in brand development and theme. Hashtags are a major tactic in driving Instagram traffic. The hashtag #thelakesidelife is used on every graphic consistently, which makes it easier for users to find photos posted by the client. Graphics could be more easily discovered with the use of more related hashtags and may reach a larger audience.

- BLOG:

The Lakeside Life blog and website is the focal point that leads to all other social handles of the company. The blog's branding and presentation is vital because it sets the tone for all other platforms. The blog found on the Lakeside Life website posted first on August 8, 2017. The blog includes community members of Smith Lake, recipes to cook at the lake, favorite decorative items for the lake, lake events, and much more. The common theme and mission are kept throughout the blog with every post focusing on some aspect of lake life. Interactions are hard to measure from secondary research methods, but according to Social Media Examiner, companies who post to their blog 1-3 times monthly are likely to double their leads by "complementing" social media posts.

#### Final Media Recommendations:

Final recommendations regarding communication tools would be to closely examine the posts that have been successful and post similar content that had lots of interactions. The tone, message, and theme were consistent across all platforms. The Vimeo communication channel should continue to be used and developed further and posted across all platforms. One final recommendation for our client would be to ad

sponsored ads for Instagram and Facebook to increase exposure to the magazine's website.

## **Methodology**

Our research was conducted using the computing system Qualtrics. By using this software, we were able to plug each individual question into the system, which included our screener, demographic, scale, and open-ended questions. When individuals submitted their survey responses, Qualtrics recorded the data. When we were ready to run the analytics on the data, Qualtrics collected each individual response and put the data together using easy-to-read charts and tables of our data (see appendix).

The audience we chose to partake in our survey were members of the Smith Lake community. We reached out to these members by putting the survey on Lakeside Life Magazine's website, their facebook page, and the Smith Lake Alabama Facebook page which gave us a great response rate. We had 339 people complete the survey in the three weeks we had it available to the public. Once we felt like we had enough survey responses to analyze our research competently, we ran the data through Qualtrics for further analyzing.

The survey was composed of 15 questions consisting of two screener questions, four demographic questions, six scale questions, and three open-ended questions. The screener questions were the first two opening questions that were meant to indicate if survey participants were renters or property owners. The demographic questions were meant to indicate the target audience for Lakeside Living Magazine. The scale questions were meant to determine the participants' interests while at the lake and to find out how they'd like to see Smith Lake expand recreationally. Finally, the open-ended questions were meant to expand on scale questions to capture an in-depth analysis of what visitors and residents would like to see for the future of the lake.



## Discussion and Recommendations

From the survey conducted, our group found that there are three main areas that Lakeside Life Magazine can expound on through their communication channels. Our findings cannot be generalized, as they are specific to Smith Lake.

1. Advertisement for Rental and Homeowner Opportunities
2. Advertisement for Current Restaurants and Opportunities
3. Family and Recreational Activities Promoted and Encouraged

The following recommendations are based on the survey responses. The numbers and percentages given are from the pool of 297 participants. Please note that the majority of survey participants received this survey through a Smith Lake Facebook page, and have had exposure to Smith Lake prior to this survey.

1. The survey showed that of the 297 participants, 66.7% responded that they were extremely unlikely to rent a home for the weekend on Smith Lake, and 13.9% responded that they were neither likely or unlikely to rent a home. However, when asked how likely the participant was to buy or build a home on Smith Lake, 37.46% responded that they were extremely likely and 14.78% responded that they were neither likely or unlikely to buy or build a home. After reading through the open-ended responses, we conclude that the majority of respondents already own a home on Smith Lake, or have a family member that owns a home, but there is still a large market for potential homeowners. Vimeo & Youtube channels should continue to be used to market available lots and homes on the lake. Please note that the majority of survey respondents are already Smith Lake

visitors, and Lakeside Life Magazine could potentially tap an unreached market through these social channels. **Please see Figure 1.3 for a complete breakdown.**

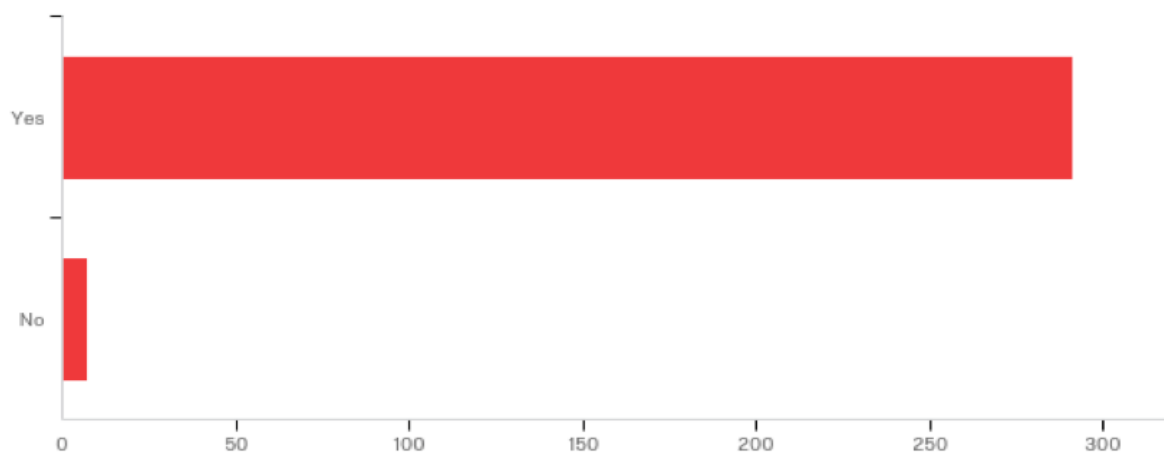
2. The survey showed that 43% of participants are extremely likely to consume alcohol while on vacation (**See Question 9 for actual numbers**). However, 41% also reported that they are extremely likely to visit a lake where it is very hard to find alcohol. Our conclusion is that the current Smith Lake audience is unaffected by the dry county element to Smith Lake. However, the open-ended questions revealed that respondents would enjoy more restaurants on the lake that did serve alcohol. Other responses included individuals stating that they bring their own alcohol to the lake with “no problem.” Our recommendation is to advertise the current restaurants on Smith Lake and in the area, but also seek opportunities to bring more restaurants to the lake. We suggest that Lakeside Life send out an additional survey focusing on just the lack of restaurants in the area to give restaurant owners an opportunity to open new restaurants on Smith Lake.
3. The majority of respondents reported that their preferred lake activities were recreational rather than professional. Categories “Rest and Relaxation” and “Family Activities” both received over 33% of the votes. With this knowledge, Lakeside Life should expound on these particular activities market. Young children tubing and swimming, families cooking out, and individuals casually fishing on the lake should be showcased on Lakeside Life’s digital platforms and in print. Furthermore, focusing in on individual families and individuals and telling

their story should be continued through the #howilake social media campaign, and on the Lakeside Life blog. **Please see Appendices questions 3 and 4** for a further explanation of response details, and **Figure 1.2** for a breakdown of age groups in relation to lake activities preferred.

## Appendices

In the appendix, we have chosen questions from the survey that pertain to the overall objective of Lakeside Magazine; to understand what lake goers want out of their lake experience. The graphics are to aid for a better understanding of survey findings.

### Q1 - Do you regularly visit or vacation at Smith Lake?

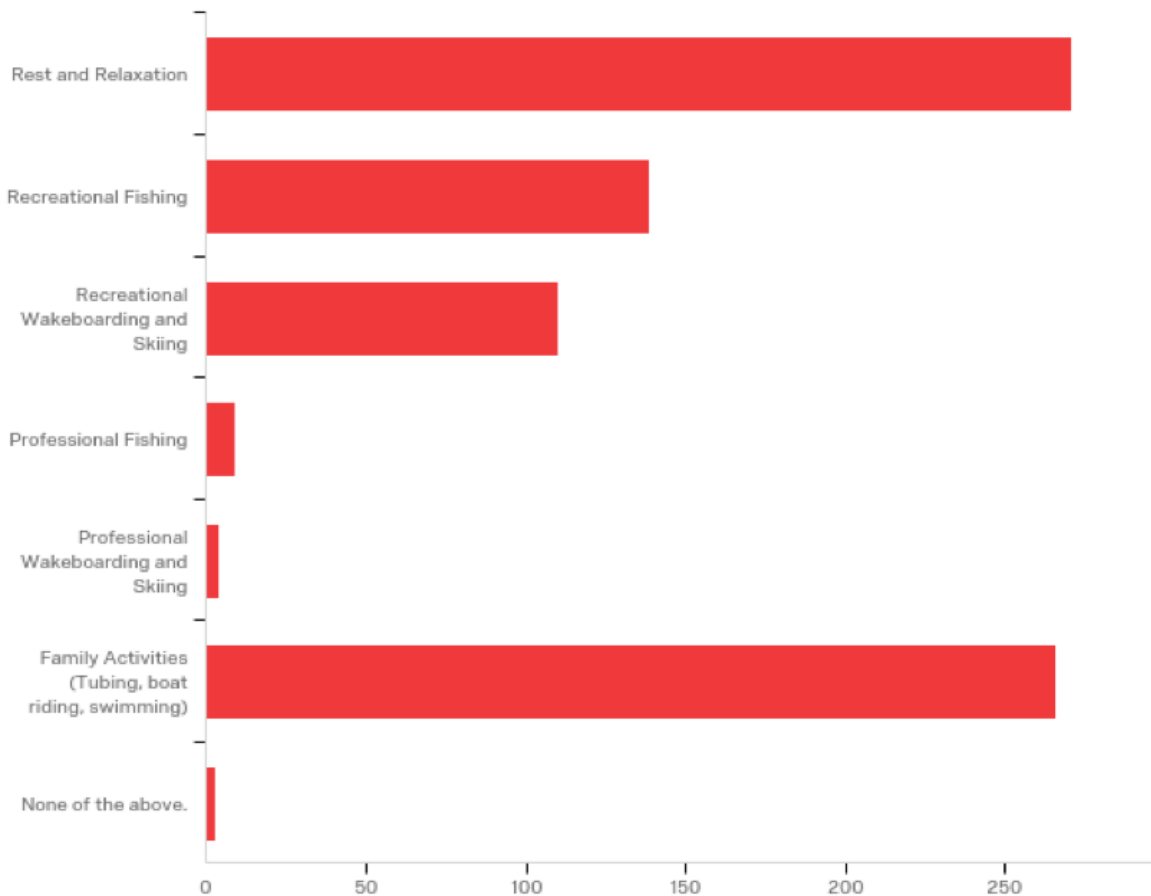


This question retrieved 295 responses, however, 290 respondents regularly visit Smith Lake. Only seven of the respondents do not regularly visit Smith Lake, which is a great percentage for this specific survey. It should be noted that this survey was posted to a controlled sample of Facebook groups pertaining Smith Lake visitors and not the general public. Of those responding yes, 43.92% visit Smith Lake more than twice a month and 33.45% live full-time at Smith Lake.

**Q2 - How often do you visit Smith Lake?**

<b>#</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Count</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Less than once a month</b>	<b>6.76%</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Once a month</b>	<b>6.42%</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Twice a month</b>	<b>9.46%</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>More than twice a month</b>	<b>43.92%</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>I live full-time at Smith Lake</b>	<b>33.45%</b>	<b>99</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>296</b>

**Q3 - What activities do you mostly participate in while visiting Smith Lake? Check all that apply.**



Of all the activities, almost every respondent checked both family activities (tubing, boat riding, swimming) and rest and relaxation. Both categories received over 33% of the votes. Recreational fishing came in third place as the most participated activity and recreational wakeboarding and skiing came in fourth. **Please see Figure 1.2 Age vs. Activities Cross Tabulation for a full breakdown of the age demographics in relation to lake activities.**

**Q4 - In one sentence or more, please explain your answer to the above question.**



Open-ended question 4 gave further insight as to what the Smith Lake enthusiasts enjoy and partake in when visiting. The majority of respondents reported that recreational and relaxing activities are what they are mostly seeking. Other activities mentioned frequently were boat riding, fishing, watching the sunset, and simply to “get away.”

**Q5 - How likely are you to rent a lake condo or home for the weekend?**

<b>#</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Count</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Extremely unlikely</b>	<b>65.75%</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Somewhat unlikely</b>	<b>8.22%</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Neither likely nor unlikely</b>	<b>14.04%</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Somewhat likely</b>	<b>6.51%</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Extremely Likely</b>	<b>5.48%</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>292</b>

**Q6 - How likely are you to buy or build a home on Smith Lake now or in the future?**

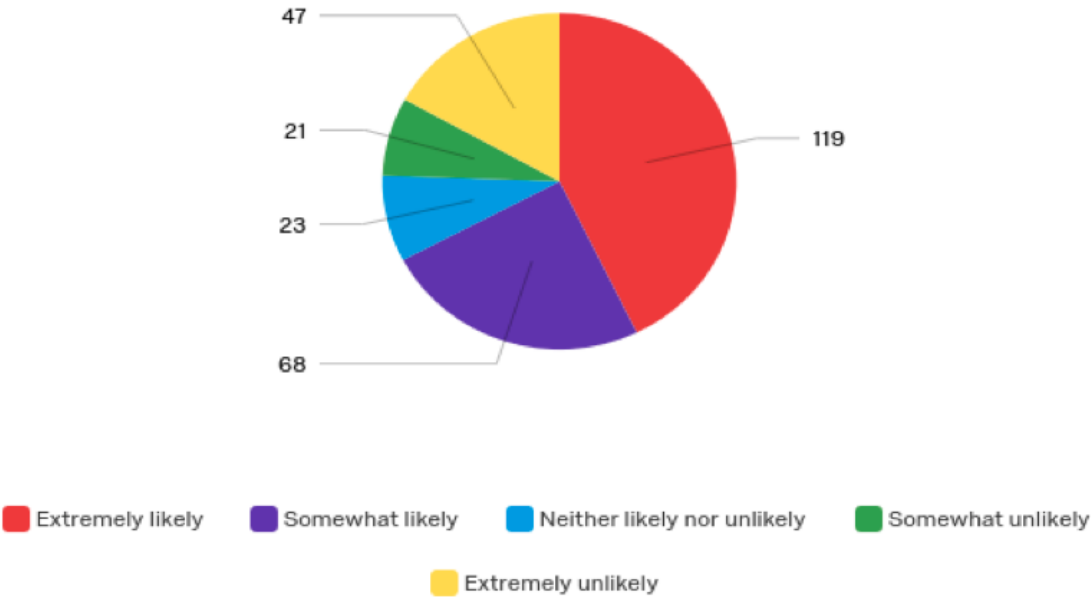
<b>#</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Count</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Extremely unlikely</b>	<b>28.82%</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Somewhat unlikely</b>	<b>5.56%</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Neither likely nor unlikely</b>	<b>14.93%</b>	<b>43</b>





gave insight as to why or why not the respondents would want to rent or own a home on Smith Lake. The majority of respondents reported that they already own a home on the lake. Some respondents reported that friends or family own a home, so they do not need to purchase one, but may in the future. Few respondents reported that owning or renting a home on Smith Lake would be too expensive. **Please see Figure 1.3 Salary vs. Renting and Home-owning for a full breakdown of respondents likely or unlikely to rent or buy a home on Smith Lake in relation to their yearly salary.**

**Q9 - If you are of legal age, how likely are you to recreationally consume alcohol while on vacation?**



Since Smith Lake is mostly a dry lake, this question put into perspective what the lake audience seeks when relaxing on vacation. Of the 295 respondents, 119 are extremely likely to consume alcohol while on vacation and 68 respondents are somewhat likely to consume alcohol. While there was a large portion of respondents extremely or

somewhat likely to consume alcohol on vacation, 47 respondents reported that they are extremely unlikely to consume. **Please see Figure 1.4 Age vs. Consuming Alcohol & Visits to a Dry Lake** for a complete report on age demographic breakdown in regards to alcohol consumption while on vacation and the likelihood of respondents visiting a dry lake.

# Lakeside Life Complete Survey

Thank you for participating in the Smith Lake survey. The goal of this survey is to have a better comprehension of what lake goers are seeking out of their lake experiences on Smith Lake. This survey is currently being done by Auburn University Public Relations students for academic purposes.

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Q1 By taking this survey you consent to all information being valid and used for research purposes.

- Yes I consent. (1)
- No I do not consent. (2)

Q2 Do you regularly visit or vacation at Smith Lake?

- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
- 

If you checked Yes to the question above, please answer the following two questions. Otherwise, mark N/a.

Q3 How often do you visit Smith Lake?

- Less than once a month (1)
  - Once a month (2)
  - Twice a month (3)
  - More than twice a month (4)
  - I live full-time at Smith Lake (5)
  - N/a (6)
-

Q4 What activities do you mostly participate in while visiting Smith Lake? Check all that apply.

- Rest and Relaxation (1)
- Recreational Fishing (2)
- Recreational Wakeboarding and Skiing (3)
- Professional Fishing (4)
- Professional Wakeboarding and Skiing (5)
- Family Activities (Tubing, boat riding, swimming) (6)
- None of the above. (7)



Q5 In one sentence or more, please explain your answer to the above question.

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Q6

How likely are you to rent a lake condo or home for the weekend?

- Extremely unlikely (1)
  - Somewhat unlikely (2)
  - Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
  - Somewhat likely (4)
  - Extremely Likely (5)
- 

Q7 How likely are you to buy or build a home on Smith Lake now or in the future?

- Extremely unlikely (1)
  - Somewhat unlikely (2)
  - Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
  - Somewhat likely (4)
  - Extremely likely (5)
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Q8 In one sentence or more, please explain why or why not you rent, buy and/or build a home on Smith Lake?

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Q9 If you are of legal age, how likely are you to recreationally consume alcohol while on vacation?

- Extremely likely (1)
  - Somewhat likely (2)
  - Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
  - Somewhat unlikely (4)
  - Extremely unlikely (5)
- 

Q10 How likely are you to visit a lake that's located in a dry country with few places to find alcohol?

- Extremely likely (1)
  - Somewhat likely (2)
  - Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
  - Somewhat unlikely (4)
  - Extremely unlikely (5)
- 

Q11 In one sentence or more, please explain your expectations if you were to visit Smith Lake.

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Q12 What is your age?

- 19 or younger (1)
  - 20 - 26 (2)
  - 27 - 35 (3)
  - 36 - 45 (4)
  - 46 - 59 (5)
  - 60 or older (6)
- 

Q13 What is your average yearly salary?

- \$19,999k or less (1)
  - \$20k-\$39,999k (2)
  - \$40k-\$79,999k (3)
  - \$80k-\$99,999k (4)
  - \$100k or more (5)
- 

Q14 Please indicate your marital status.

- Single (1)
  - Married (2)
  - Widowed (3)
  - Divorced (4)
  - Separated (5)
-



Q15 Please indicate the number of children you have.

- Zero (1)
- One (2)
- Two (3)
- Three (4)
- Four (5)
- More than four (6)

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