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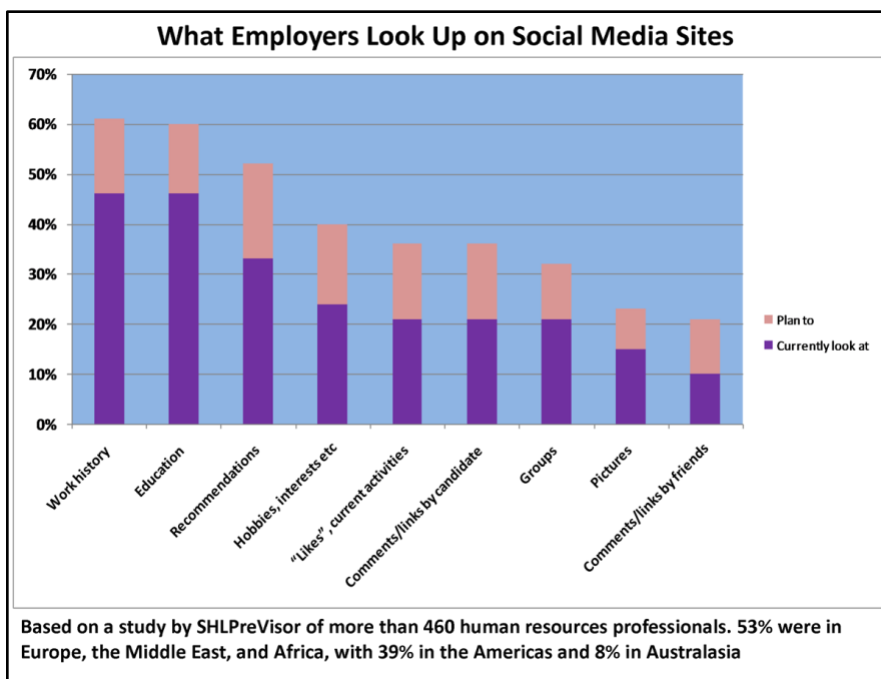
***“Think about what people are doing on Facebook today. They’re keeping up with their friends and family, but they’re also building an image and identity for themselves, which in a sense is their brand. They’re connecting with the audience that they want to connect to. It’s almost a disadvantage if you’re not on it now.”***  
**– Mark Zuckerberg, Founder, Facebook**

Casual users of social media – especially younger users – rarely consider the aspects of social media that Mark Zuckerberg references. They are not thinking of their “image,” “identity,” or “brand,” to their detriment. Although high school students do use social media, they are using social media outlets that are more temporary to reach their “audience” of friends and acquaintances. With colleges and employers both open to checking social media before making offers and actually following through on those opportunities, students can take a cue from the business world. Marketing experts have learned to use social media; they consider multiple factors for a successful social media campaign, including branding, message, platform, and audience. High school students should and can learn how to use different social media platforms effectively to market themselves for future success. In essence, they need to learn *media mastery*, which includes “the choices (conscious or unconscious), habits, and patterns people develop in their lives regarding the use of media, based on...the characteristics and capabilities of media” (Rice 1230). In mastering media, and similar to businesses, students can

begin to create their online identity early, building a multi-platform “brand” that makes them more desirable to intended audiences, such as colleges and employers.

### EMPLOYERS’ USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO RESEARCH APPLICANTS

Recently, stories of job offers being withdrawn from prospective employees due to their social media posts has been in the news. While some may think it’s rare for employers to check social media of potential hires, 70% of employers use social media to screen job applicants before hiring (Salm). Whether there are gaps in or questions about an applicant’s resume or the position being filled requires more than a cursory



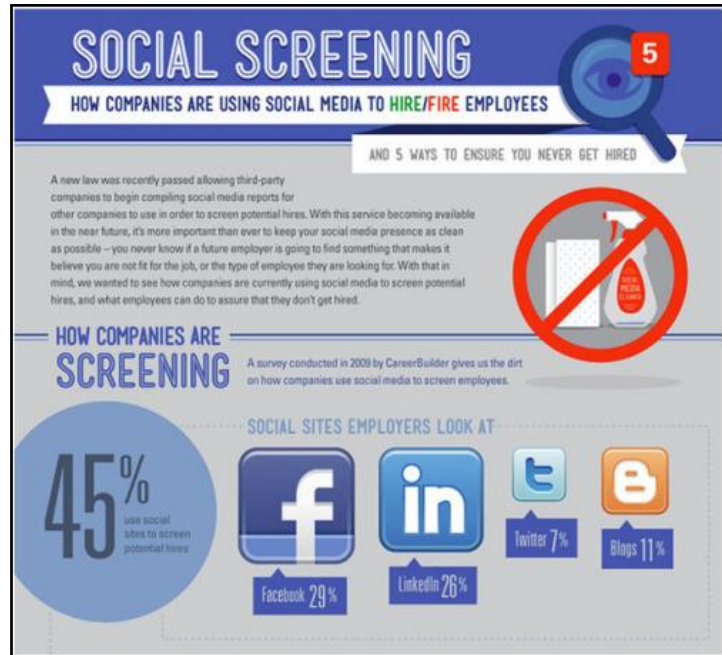
hiring process, employers can and do turn to social media for supplemental information.

(Vatamanescu 65).

Looking through social media profiles, employers are most often looking for information supporting a candidates qualifications,

professionalism, and interpersonal skills (Driver). When employers are making a decision regarding to who hire, HR managers will look at profiles on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and personal blogs to get a better idea of the kind of person a

potential hire is. “[Social Media] profiles are liable to stand for cogent indicators for the prospects’ personalities and potential, for their predispositions and professional perspectives” (Vatamanescu 62). Being aware of how and why employers search social media should affect how users utilize it.

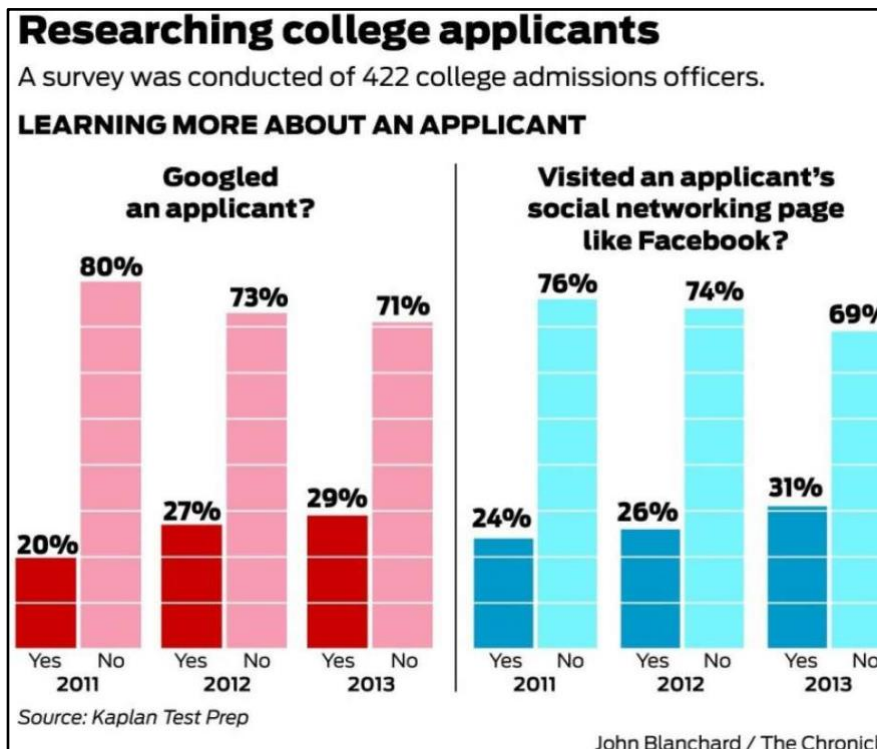


ADMISSIONS OFFICERS’ USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO RESEARCH APPLICANTS

The same screening standards used by employers are also utilized by college

admissions officers.

According to a 2012 survey by Kaplan, “college admissions directors are very much interested in browsing and searching candidates on Facebook and Google in order to thoroughly assess them” (Vatamanescu 66). Much



like the HR manager, admissions officers have searched some applicants social media accounts to get a better understanding of what type of person a potential student is. In a 2018 Kaplan poll, “4% of admissions directors at independent colleges said their schools had rejected or revoked acceptances at least four times in the last two years, and at 14% of private colleges, that has happened at least once” (Jaschik). Likewise, a “2013 study of 600 medical school admissions officers in the United States found that 9% routinely looked at applicants’ social media presence, and half said unprofessional social media content could negatively affect a student’s chance of acceptance” (Glaser E1146). Additionally, posts that boast of illegal behavior or contain vulgarity can negatively impact an applicant’s chances for acceptance. Again, keeping the thought processes of admissions personnel in mind can help guide users in effective social

**Number of Times in Last Two Years Decisions Have been Revoked or Applications Denied Over Social Media Posts**

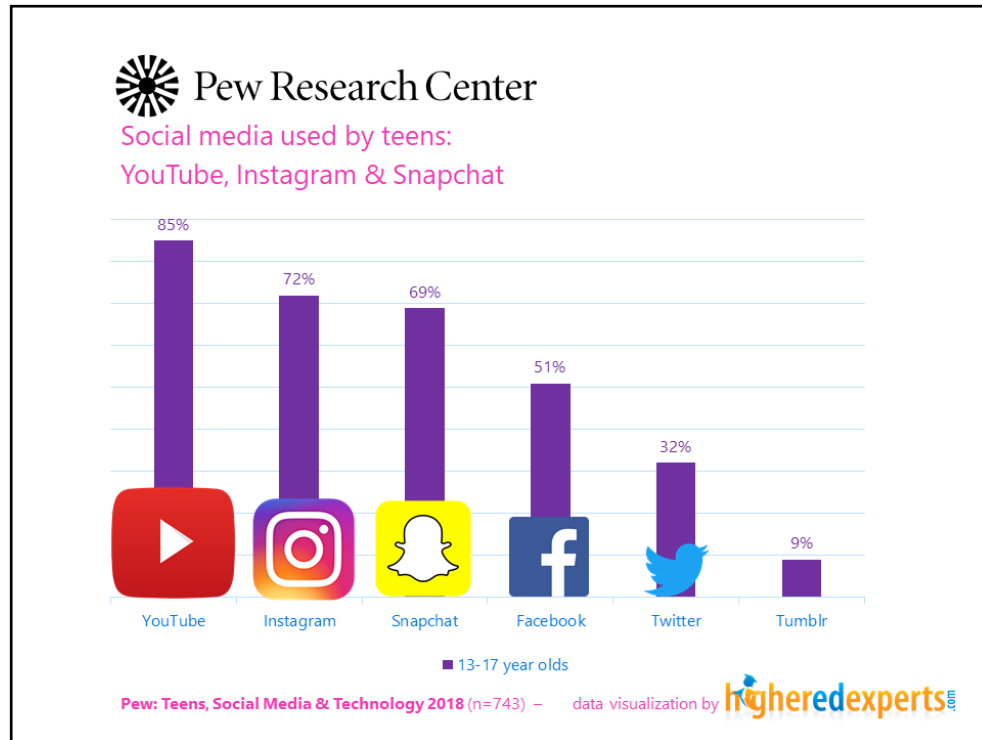
Number of Times	Public	Private
Once	1%	7%
Two or three times	2%	3%
Four or more times	1%	4%

media use.

## CURRENT SOCIAL MEDIA USE OF YOUNG ADULTS

Given the impact social media can have on a student’s future, students are unprepared to tap the potential that media like Facebook and Twitter can have. A 2008 StudentPoll found that of students who were surveyed and who reported having a social networking account, only 11.6% were using their accounts for actual networking (Ryan). For students, Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube are the primary social platforms (Joly).

92% of teens go online daily (“Social Media Use”). Recent polls of the young-adult age group indicate that social media use is primarily for keeping in touch with friends and “having a say” on topics. The majority of young adults are using Snapchat, where posts



“disappear,” over other forms of more permanent social media (Smith).

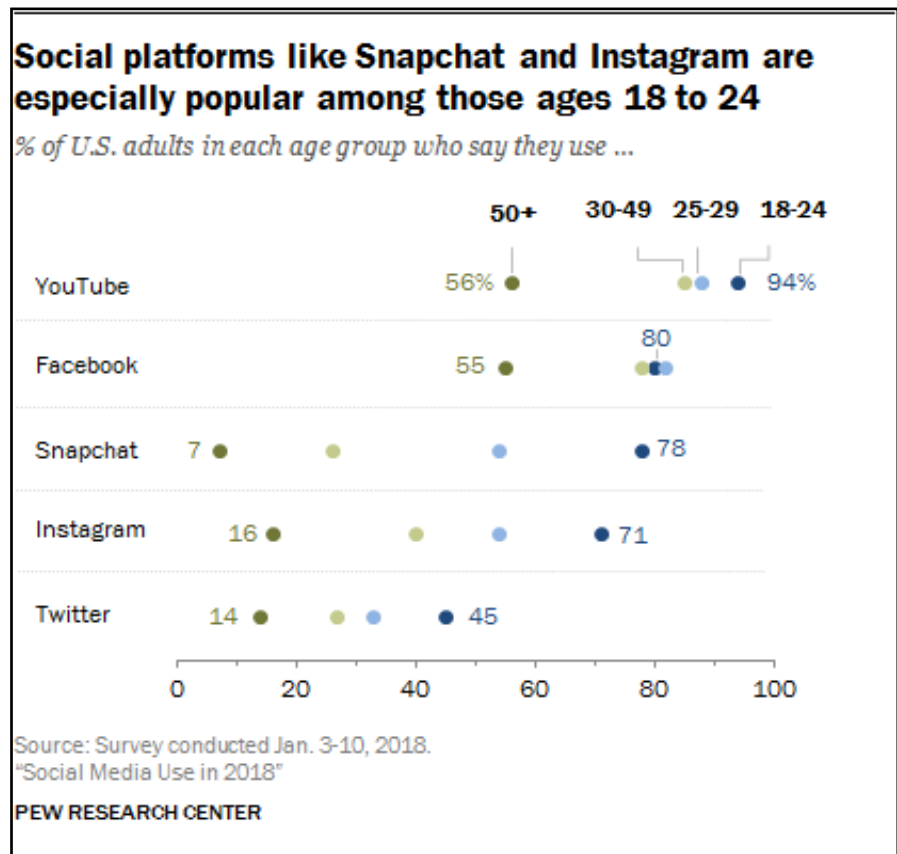
When it comes to more permanent social media (like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter), young users, without guidance, can make missteps that turn into barriers to certain opportunities (Glauser E1147). Because of this, as one college admissions officer stated in a Kaplan survey, “I think high school seniors make poor choices sometimes when they put stuff online.” (Jaschik). While many of the young users are aware of the misuse of social media by themselves and their peers (“Social Media Use”), and they are aware that this information can be viewed by admissions officers and employers, “they are not disposed to modify their online self-presentations to meet

the employers' expectations" (Vatamanescu 66). Rather than take a more thoughtful and moderate approach to social media while using it, many students continue to use media at will and then choose a full social media lockdown before submitting applications (Vatamanescu 67). This plan, though, can backfire. "One-quarter of hiring managers expect candidates to have some sort of online presence, and nearly 60 percent are less likely to call someone in for an interview if they can't find them online"

(Driver). Rather than "going dark" on social media, the better route is teaching students the responsible use of social media so they can use it to their advantage.

TEACHING RESPONSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Young users of



social media are prime for learning about responsible social media use in promoting themselves. Students can continue with their friends on Snapchat, which affords greater privacy for users (Bayer 957), and/or create informal profiles using a nickname (Glauser E1146) on other sites to keep some information private (remember to check those privacy setting!). At the same time, these student can use the marketing capabilities of

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to build their permanent online “brand” through more thoughtful, careful posts. On Facebook, “the community created around the user is of great importance in his/her perception and, consequently, choices are crucially influenced by the anticipated reaction of the other users” (Vatamanescu 64). Younger social media users favor visual communications and expect to be able to customize their experiences, and they’re “all about their smartphones” (“Social Media Use”). Students can go from consumers of visual information to designers of their own information visualization by “think[ing] carefully about the way they intend to represent their data and creat[ing] structures that support that representation” (“Visual Mapping”).

#### HOW STUDENTS CAN USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO BUILD A BRAND

Students can learn to create a consistent “brand identity” for themselves across social media platforms, one that is easily searchable by prospective colleges and employers. Utilizing Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and/or LinkedIn, students can build their permanent visual resume for future “searchers” to find. Visual brand identity is the total of everything an audience can see when they look at a profile; together, all of those visual elements tell a story that can reaffirm the shared values of the brand and audience (Thomas). The voice of the brand needs to be consistent across platforms (Franc). Substantial overlap already exists between users on social platforms. 73% of Twitter users and 77% of Snapchat users also use Instagram (Smith); adding Facebook to the mix would not be difficult. The public “brand” profiles should utilize the same colors and images to reinforce the consistency (Franc).

### Substantial 'reciprocity' across major social media platforms

% of \_\_\_ users who also ...

	Use Twitter	Use Instagram	Use Facebook	Use Snapchat	Use YouTube	Use WhatsApp	Use Pinterest	Use LinkedIn
Twitter	–	73%	90%	54%	95%	35%	49%	50%
Instagram	50	–	91	60	95	35	47	41
Facebook	32	47	–	35	87	27	37	33
Snapchat	48	77	89	–	95	33	44	37
YouTube	31	45	81	35	–	28	36	32
WhatsApp	38	55	85	40	92	–	33	40
Pinterest	41	56	89	41	92	25	–	42
LinkedIn	47	57	90	40	94	35	49	–

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 3-10, 2018.  
"Social Media Use in 2018"

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90% of LinkedIn users  
also use Facebook

First, students need to identify the intended audience, in terms of audience identity (Thomas). Students can do a little research to learn about the qualities that a particular college, employer, or program is looking for, and begin to curate visual content to address those qualities. The shared visual content lets the audience know that the student offers value (Thomas).

The value and personality shared by the student is most effective in visual content. One reason is that Facebook posts with images garner 2.3 times more engagement than posts without visuals (Franc). Also, Tweets with images get 150% more retweets, and on Instagram, "images are everything" (Franc). "Presenting a story though photography communicates a different – often deeper – understanding of person, place, event or narrative than can be expressed through written word" (Shurbaji). Posting these visuals on sites like Facebook allows users to "advance a



desirable image” (Vatamanescu 69). For example, if a student wishes to enter the field of management, he/she can post images and visuals that cater to the characteristics of a manager, such as leadership and entrepreneurship. Students will also need to consider how they present their *personalities* visually (Thomas), because successfully promoting a brand identity involves more than just text. Personality should be consistent, and involve not just images, but also “imagery choices, photo filter, and color schemes (Thomas). By playing up images, students can emphasize key components of their personality that appeal to the target audience.

Once a student has his/her personality and narrative in place, he/she should share it...repeatedly. The visual content can go beyond photos. According to research, audiences would rather watch a video than read text (Thomas), so students

### Social Media and College Admissions

Used during both the recruiting and reviewing processes, social media is becoming a valuable tool for schools to find their future students.

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#### 1 RECRUITING STUDENTS

A majority of college survey respondents reported that their colleges use social media to recruit students:

- 85% of colleges use Facebook to recruit students
- 66% of colleges use YouTube to recruit students
- 80% of admissions officers received a friend request on Facebook in 2010

Additional reading: <http://bit.ly/NkkZot>

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#### 2 HOW DO COLLEGES USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR RECRUITMENT?

By creating social media accounts, colleges connect with students in a variety of ways:

- 1 in 3 colleges say social media is more efficient than traditional media in reaching their target audience.
- 92% of undergraduate admissions officers agree that social media is worth the investment they make in it.

Their profile pages become a forum for students to ask questions about the school.

Schools can post application deadline information as well as other news and events.

Colleges can post virtual campus tours for students who can't view the college in person.

Schools can post information about academic programs for prospective students.

Institutions set up contests to get current and prospective students engaged.

Colleges may host video chats to provide face-to-face information to prospective students.

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#### 3 REVIEWING APPLICANTS

While admissions officers obviously focus on judging a student's application, more and more beginning to judge students online profiles, too.

Additional reading: <http://bit.ly/NyXmL6>

#### WHO HAS LOOKED UP STUDENTS ON FACEBOOK?

Law School Admissions Officers	37%
Business School Admissions Officers	24%
College Admissions Officers	22%

Admissions officers can't look up every student, but they may if there are warning signs in and from:

- Recommendation letters
- Anonymous reports about inappropriate behavior
- You write something questionable on the school's Facebook page

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#### 4 REASONS FOR REJECTIONS

12% of admissions officers who check social media sites said posts like...

- Alcohol consumption in photos
- Vulgar posts @ # \$ \* !
- Illegal activities in photos and posts

...had negatively impacted a prospective student's chances.

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#### 5 HOW STUDENTS CAN IMPROVE THEIR ODDS

Certain posts and photos can hurt a student's chances at being accepted. Find out how to prevent this:

- Google your name and see what comes up. If there are inappropriate photos or posts, delete them.
- Manage your online info, so there's a consistent and positive message.
- Check your settings to see which info you've posted is public and what is private.
- Consider your audience. If you wouldn't want your grandparents reading a post or seeing a photo, delete it.

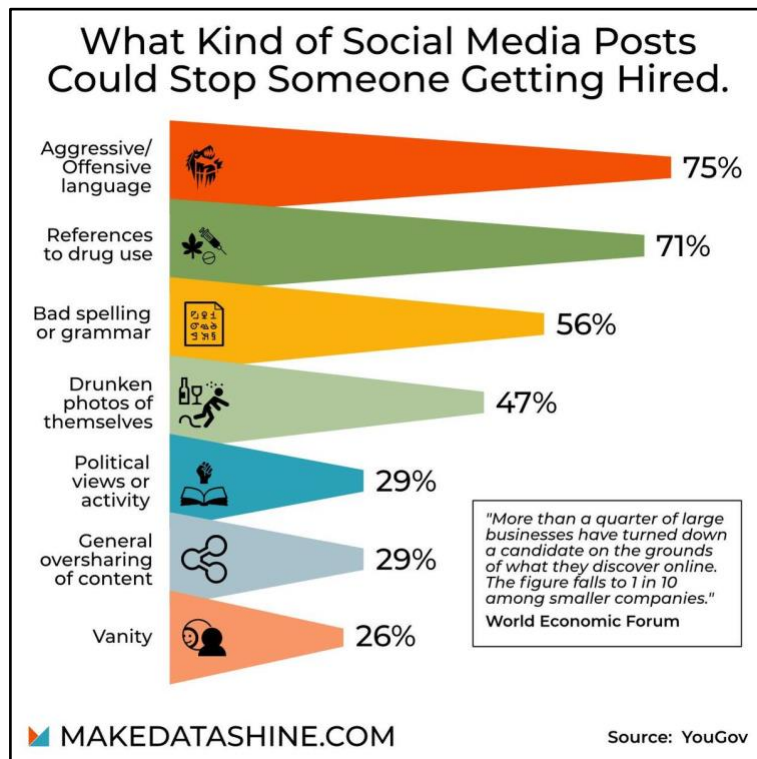
SOURCES: usnews.com | abcnews.go.com | press.kaptest.com | noodle.org | umassd.edu  
 Information provided by: <http://www.onlinecolleges.net/>

**ONLINE COLLEGES**

should work on shooting, editing, and sharing video content as well. Sharing persistent content increases the potential audience size and allows each audience member to view social artifacts longer and more often (Bayer 957). Moreover, students need to be “social” on their profiles, actively engaging with their community. Engaging with one’s audience encourages them to revisit (Franc). The more potential universities and employers revisit innovative, interesting, and relevant profiles, the more likely they are to offer acceptances of matriculation/employment.

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF BRANDING AND VISUAL STORYTELLING

By using social media like Facebook, which is more permanent than their preferred-Snapchat, students can realize the importance of online identity, and manage

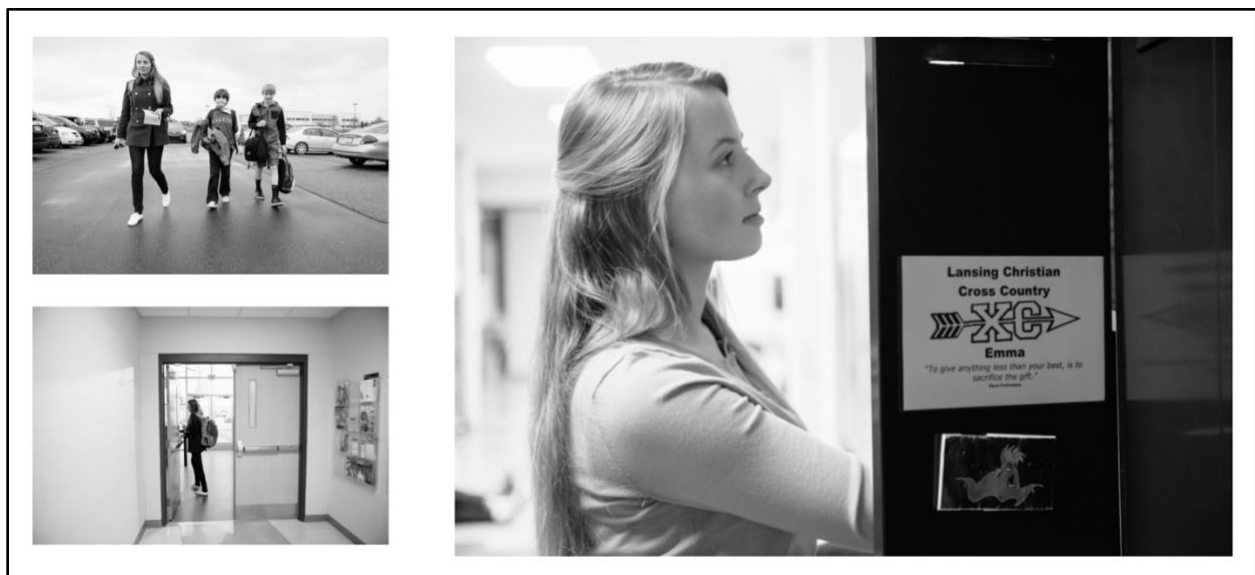


their image with more context than Snapchat allows (Rice 1232). While Snapchat prompts users to be more free to post “fun” shots (think: unattractive selfie) (Bayer), curating a Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and/or LinkedIn identity requires more thought. Users of social networks have “almost full control over data disclosure, and

subsequently they can manage...their self-presentation” (Vatamanescu 62). This

identity should avoid employment and admissions “red flags” like inappropriate or unprofessional photographs; photos involving illegal activity or seemingly unprofessional conduct; “discriminatory comments related to race, gender, or religion;” and unprofessional screen names (Salm). Given the appeal of visual content, students need to learn, practice, and utilize visuals and visual storytelling in crafting their self-presentation. “Photo sharing...supports a range of purposes, including recording memories and supporting relationships, self-presentation, and self-expression” (Bayer 959).

One method of visual storytelling students can use is through a *photo essay*, which combines narrative and pictures with an overall topic or theme (Shurbaji). Creating a Facebook Album, a student can present “a finite number of pictures around a theme or an event to communicate what happened, [or] define a situation” (Shurbaji). Similar to photo storytelling in journalism, photo narratives on social media can meaningfully convey the story behind an accomplishment or award. Since photo essays are “often used to show how extensive and event is,” (Shurbaji), students can use this method to providing series of images with meaningful captions to tell the story of “a day

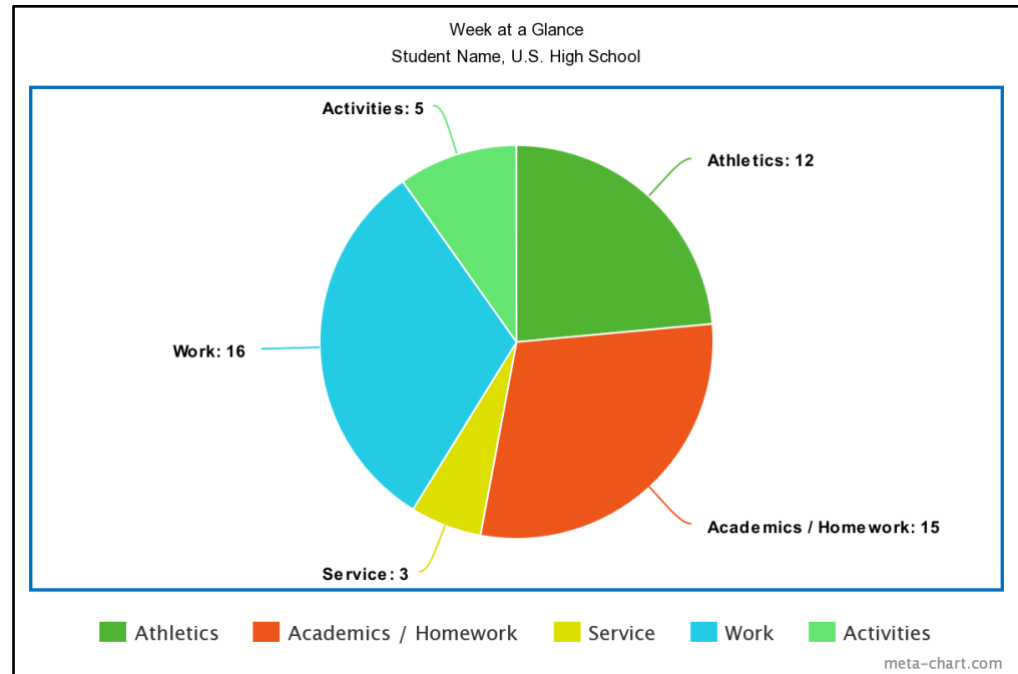


in the life,” volunteering at a local community service event, and/or participating in the science fair. Posting photos of student involvement / successes can advertise one’s strengths; sharing specific photos or photo stories taps into a “level of emotional perception and increases our capacity for emotion and to feel ‘together’” (Bayer 959).

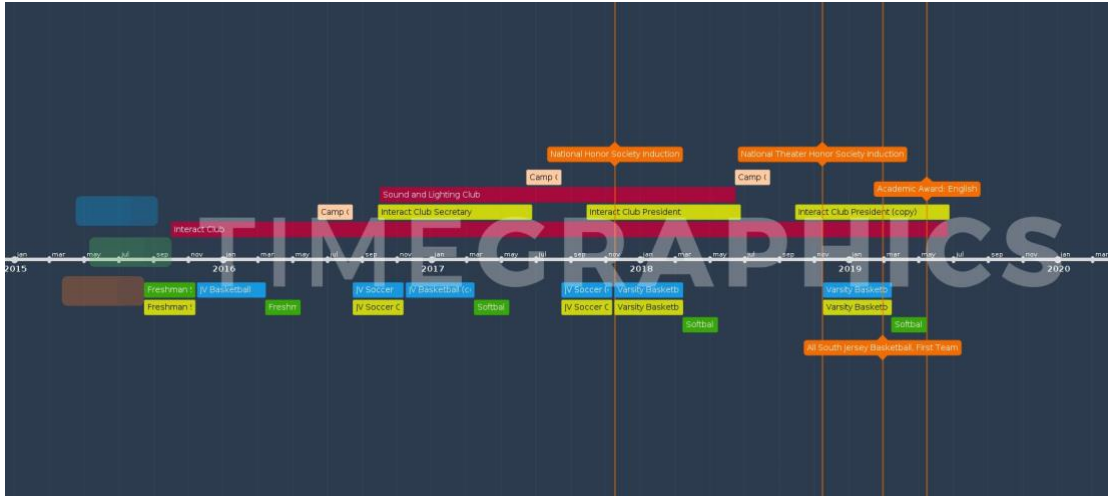
*Photo packages*, which require supplementary texts for the viewer to understand details (Shurbaji), can also be utilized by students to promote their brand on social media. “Photos in a package can’t stand alone, since a viewer needs more details about their significance in a story” (Shurbaji). Photo packages can underscore the breadth of attaining a long-term goal: earning Eagle Scout, being a part of a State Champion sports team, scoring the 100<sup>th</sup> goal of a soccer career, winning first place in the science fair. The supplementary text would be necessary to delineate these major accomplishments from more common occurrences that can look/feel similar in images (earning a badge, winning a regular-season game, scoring a goal, participating in the science fair).

A *photo story* may be the most intimate, and therefore effective, way for students to promote their brand. Because a photo story is about “one person, place or situation” (Shurbaji), it can demonstrate a sense of emotion and personality associated with the student at that particular time. Photos stories need to be approached as *stories*, with a beginning, middle, and end. Students can use photo stories to convey the tense anticipation of class elections or the nervousness and joy of opening night of the play.

In addition to photos, students can also use data mapping / visualization to tell the story of involvement with activities or athletics, or to



trace the journey to attaining a goal set in one's educational career. As the audience views these visuals it "can find out numerous things about the user's personality, daily routine, activities, hobbies, interests" (Vatamanescu 71), and the user can "promote an online image based on [others'] expectations" (Vatamanescu 64), including admissions officers and employers. Data visualization can give a clear sense of how the parts of a student career make up the whole student. Choosing the right data visualization can enhance a photo story, or stand on its own to tell the story.



With college acceptances becoming more competitive, and more students using social media, there is a chasm between the two that can be successfully crossed with education and practice. Taking a cue from business marketing and PR using visual storytelling and data visualization, high school students can successfully cultivate an interesting and interactive online brand to market themselves to target audiences like universities, scholarship programs, and employers. Understanding how social media can work for and against a person, students can promote the positive aspects of their personality and accomplishments while keeping the less desirable qualities on ephemeral social media like Snapchat, or on a private profile under a pseudonym. Putting one's best features out for public consumption in order to appeal to a desired audience is a practice marketing and PR have utilized forever; it's time that students learn to do the same for a more successful academic and economic future.

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