Preserving an Identity in the Social Media Age: Who is the Person Behind the Screen?

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Social media allows individuals to portray themselves in whatever way they choose. Each person has a different definition of what is appropriate to share on social media. Some individuals will encourage others to only share images that a future employer would approve of, while other people give little care about what is shared on their page. The beauty of social media is that even though everyone has a different approach to what they share and post, these entities allow us to be connected and to see the important moments in each other’s lives. When looking through my social media, I found that I use different forms of social media for different purposes. I determined that these different approaches are based on who I know on the social media, and what it can be used for. From these factors, I have established what is typically a subconscious trend from which I decide what to share on each of my profiles, including on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Whether it be consciously or subconsciously, people can show the world the parts of themselves that they think are most important. Social media is an outlet to express one’s self, both personally and academically. In my own personal use of social media, I have shared my academic ventures and successes, but the academic pursuits have not taken precedence over my social media feeds.

As a student at Longwood University, I have spent countless hours in classrooms, studying, and working towards earning my degree. Many days and nights have been spent volunteering, working with various organizations on campus, and spending time with friends. While I do not share on social media often, I typically use it to share big accomplishments or exciting experiences. I have had many times in college where I have wanted to share about my academic success, but I have found myself worrying that I may seem like I am bragging. Even though I know that my family and friends would be proud of me, I tend to share less than I could, simply because I do not want to over share or seem too boastful. Therefore, I do not believe my social media feeds represent me academically, but I do feel that they represent other important aspects of who I am.

A social media page can be used to communicate and connect with friends, family, and even strangers from all over the globe. Because it allows an individual to connect with so many, it can be important to carefully choose what you share with those people, so they can see what’s happening in your life, but not get overrun with a ton of posts. On Facebook, I am friends with my immediate and extended family, some old teachers, and even previous bosses. These individuals have inspired my page to be used frequently, but also cautiously. Facebook is the site that I would be most likely to share my academic pursuits, because these family members and friends care about what is happening in all facets of my life. Personally, I do not want everyone to know everything going on in my life, so I tend to be very select with the personal information that I share. Facebook, as defined by my use of the site, is the family reunion site of the social media platforms.

While Instagram is a global phenomenon, promoting friendships and connections across continents and oceans, its use does not span multiple age groups in the way that Facebook does. Due to this, most of the people that are following me are my age, so I just share snippets of my life. Prior to looking through this account, in my memory it felt like I used this profile very often, but I was mistaken. In fact, I’ve posted only once a month for quite awhile now. I feel that this is because Instagram is a site to share the highlights of your life, and I rarely attend big events or take “Instagram-worthy” pictures, so I have not shared much on that platform. To define Instagram in one phrase, I would refer to it as the “highlight reel” of the social media groups. I haven’t had very many highlight reel moments in my academic career, so I do not believe Instagram has helped me show the social media world who I am as a student here at Longwood.

If I had to choose one term to define Twitter, I would say that it is the comedic relief of the social media sphere. I rarely share my own stories on Twitter, but every time I open the site, I am met with funny anecdotes of other’s daily lives. Twitter is also the site to share all the stories that you don’t want people at the family reunion on Facebook to see. Due to this trend of stories, I have not shared any academic achievements on Twitter.

LinkedIn is one of my least-used sites, yet it is the profile that I put the most thought and effort into creating because its main purpose is to serve as a tool for employers. While this site does not show much about my personal life, it highlights much of my academic and professional career so far, and I plan to continue to update LinkedIn in that manner.

I use each social media site in a different way, and therefore each represents a different part of me. Facebook represents the family-oriented person I am, as well as my desire to stay connected with important people in my life. Instagram serves as my highlight reel of all of the experiences that are illustrated more in depth through my other forms of social media. Twitter helps release tension and stress without fear of what grandparents or coworker friends may say, and it is balanced out by LinkedIn, which serves as a representation of my professional and academic side. While none of my social media profiles represent my full self, together they represent much of who I am.