The pros and cons of posting on social media

By Thao Nelson, The Conversation, adapted by Newsela staff on 07.27.17

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Social media has opened many opportunities of communication, but can be risky. Family and friends are not the only ones who might want to know what people are really like in their private life. Photo by: Kritina Lee Knief/Getty Images.

Dear Student,

This year, 10 high school students were accepted to Harvard University. But then Harvard changed its mind. It decided to not let the students in. Why? They belonged to a private Facebook group. This group shared pictures and messages that Harvard said could be upsetting and hurtful to other people. Was Harvard right to do this? Do young people know how posting online can be harmful?

A lot of people may search your name online. They do this to learn more about you. What will they find? They might make decisions about you because of it. There are some things you should know.

1. Social Media Posts Disappear, Right?

Have you ever posted something online? Do you think it will go away? Do you think only your friends could see it? Think again.
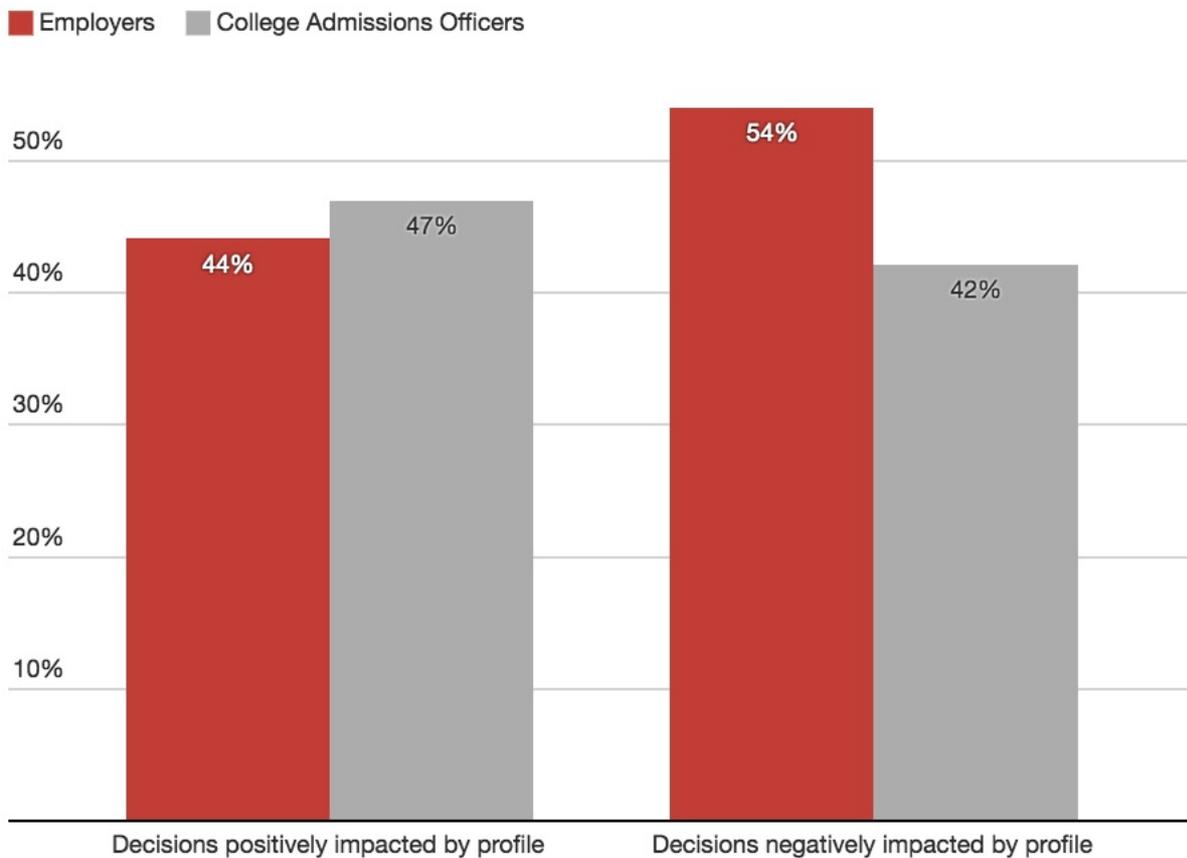
You're not always in charge of who sees what you post. Everything you post could be saved by people who see it. Do you think something you posted long ago is hidden? How easy would it be to find it? Easier than you might think!

2. Do Employers And Colleges Actually Look At This Stuff?

Someday you will apply to college or for a job. The people who look at your application will want to learn about you. They may search for you online. Seven out of 10 use social media sites to learn more about people who apply for jobs.

Can your social media profile impact your future?

Kaplan and CareerBuilder surveyed hundreds of professional and academic recruiters to find out how social media is used to research candidates. Of those who use social media, many reported that their decisions were impacted.

■ Employers ■ College Admissions Officers

- Decisions positively impacted by profile: 44% (Employers), 47% (College Admissions Officers)
- Decisions negatively impacted by profile: 54% (Employers), 42% (College Admissions Officers)

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3. What Are Recruiters Watching Out For?

So what should you not post online? Stay away from posting:

• Embarrassing photos or videos

• Mean or hateful language

• Posts with bad spelling or grammar

• Complaining or bad-mouthing

4. Is All Information Online Harmful?

Remember that not everything posted online is bad. Not all online information will hurt you. Some can help instead. CareerBuilder is a website for searching jobs. It found that nearly half of employers who screened people applying for jobs found good information about these people online. They chose to hire these people as a result. This good information includes:

• Your education and experience are what the recruiter wants.

• Your profile picture and summary is professional.

• Your personality and interests are similar to those of the company or university.

• You're involved in your community.

• You have positive, supportive comments.

5. How Do I Clean Things Up?

Learn what is out there about you. Search your own name online. Look at all of the social media sites you use. Don't forget the ones you haven't used for a while. Get rid of anything that could send the wrong message. Remember, things can't be unseen.

Bottom line: Would you want someone you might work for to read or see something? What about the college you want to attend? If not, don't post it. Have you posted it already? Remove it.

Sincerely,

Your Career Counselor

Thao Nelson is a lecturer at Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, in Indiana.

Quiz

1   Read the section "1. Social Media Posts Disappear, Right?"

Which sentence from this section explains why things you post online do not disappear?

(A)   Have you ever posted something online?

(B)   Everything you post could be saved by people who see it.

(C)   Do you think something you posted long ago is hidden?

(D)   Easier than you might think!

2   Read the paragraph from the section "2. Do Employers And Colleges Actually Look At This Stuff?"

Someday you will apply to college or for a job. The people who look at your application will want to learn about you. They may search for you online. Seven out of 10 use social media sites to learn more about people who apply for jobs.

Which question is answered by this paragraph?

(A)   Why do colleges and jobs use social media?

(B)   How do people learn about colleges and jobs online?

(C)   Who are the colleges and jobs that use social media?

(D)   When do people apply for colleges and jobs online?

3   What does the introduction [paragraphs 1-3] show the reader?

(A)   a description of things colleges do to find students on social media

(B)   a story about students who got in trouble because of social media

(C)   an explanation of why postings on social media are hard to hide

(D)   a list of colleges that often look for students by using social media

4   Which section of the article gives information about how your social media profile can be helpful?

(A)   "2. Do Employers And Colleges Actually Look At This Stuff?"

(B)   "3. What Are Recruiters Watching Out For?

(C)   "4. Is All Information Online Harmful?"

(D)   "5. How Do I Clean Things Up?"