Student affairs professionals aim to reach students where they are. Many college students are on Facebook and are highly engaged with the site. As a result, a growing number of student affairs professionals are interested in developing interventions that involve reaching students on Facebook and other social media. Facebook began to be popular among students between 2004 and 2005 and now is nearly ubiquitous on college campuses, but relatively little research is available on how Facebook use relates to student outcomes. The slow advancement of research on Facebook outcomes is mimicked by a slow progression of interest in and adoption of the platform by student affairs professionals. I have been researching social media sites since the early 2000s and have spoken to many student affairs professionals since, and I have consistently been surprised at administrators’ xenophobia regarding the site. In most cases, student affairs administrators
have preferred to stay away from Facebook, relegating it to students. Of course, that attitude has slowly changed; however, many upper-level student affairs administrators have only a cursory understanding of how Facebook is used and its effect on student development, learning, and interpersonal relationships. Indeed, in the absence of curiosity and knowledge about the platform, administrators are left with media accounts of why Facebook is “bad.”

A quick search of news archives reveals traditional media outlets’ sensationalism regarding Facebook. These headlines illustrate:

- Is Facebook leading to narcissist outlook? (Chowdhury, 2013)
- Facebook causes one-third of divorces (Allen, 2012)
- Study finds Facebook causes depression and isolation (Jimenez, 2013)
- Anxiety and alcohol use linked to Facebook (Moore, 2013)
- Facebook use can lower grades by 20 percent (Choney, 2010)
- Facebook is the worst social network for bullying (Gayle, 2013)

Many people who read these stories conclude that social media are the driving force behind negative outcomes. This result makes sense from an information-processing perspective: humans use unconscious, simple shortcuts to reduce the vast amounts of information we receive from the world into manageable data. The *availability heuristic* (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973) is one such unconscious shortcut, whereby we overestimate the probability of an event because of easy-to-remember examples. For instance, someone might overestimate the probability of being in a plane crash because media reports of plane crashes are easy to recall. The same holds true for social media: because the headlines typically report negative relationships and are widely broadcast, many people believe, for example, that today’s youth are more
narcissistic than other generations because they use social media or that there is a high probability that children will get bullied if they use Facebook. These conclusions, however, are unwarranted based on available evidence concerning outcomes of social media use.

This book provides evidence to show that Facebook and other social media are a reflection of the offline world. Social media are no more than tools by which we communicate in a novel way (although the term novel is used with tongue in cheek here, as Facebook has been a part of our social milieu for so long). Social media are no more causative of an outcome than any other tool. Go back and reread the example headlines and substitute the phrase “using a shovel” for Facebook. It’s silly to think that a shovel could cause your grades to decrease by 20 percent. Now you have a sense of how irresponsible it is to say that Facebook causes certain outcomes. That’s not to say that there isn’t a relationship between Facebook use and certain variables—just that there isn’t a causative relationship.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of news reporters are not trained in differentiating between correlation and causation. So when they hear that a study found a negative correlation between time spent on Facebook and grades, reporters understand that to mean that Facebook caused lower grades. It is not possible to say that Facebook use caused lower grades because, as of this writing, no controlled experiments have examined a causal link between the two variables. Indeed, it would be extremely difficult to craft such a study, given the penetration of Facebook on college campuses. Later in this chapter, I’ll highlight the research on digital inequalities, which shows that students who don’t use Facebook tend to have sociodemographic characteristics in common; therefore, it would be nearly impossible to find a suitable group of Facebook nonusers to use as a sample for appropriate comparisons to the general population.
Take, for example, the headline “Facebook use can lower grades by 20 percent.” The study in question was correlational and found a relationship between Facebook use and grades. Issues with sampling, methodology, and analyses aside, there are many reasons why there might be a correlation between Facebook use and grades. The most important reason is typically called the *third variable problem*—which I refer to as the *third, fourth, fifth, etc. variable problem*, as an infinite number of variables may actually cause the relationship between the original two variables to appear. In the case of Facebook use and grades, *self-regulation* (voluntary control of impulses in order to achieve goals) may be a reasonable culprit (see figure 1.1). Students who have poorer abilities to self-regulate typically get lower grades; because such students are less academically motivated, they may use Facebook in ways that keep them away from their studies. Another important point to remember in considering the relationship between Facebook use and grades is that it is impossible to tell directionality with a correlation. Students with lower grades tend to use Facebook more, but it could be that being a bad student drives increased Facebook use rather than that Facebook causes lower grades.

![Figure 1.1](image)

**Figure 1.1.** Depiction of hypothesized relationship showing that self-regulation may be the variable that causes the relationship observed between Facebook use and grades. Solid arrows suggest causal links, while the dotted arrow denotes a correlation.
These methodological issues are helpful to keep in mind when evaluating the literature on social media use. It’s also helpful to understand the difference between *access* and *use* when thinking about outcomes of social media utilization. Just because any group of students uses Facebook doesn’t mean that they will all use it in the same ways. And the ways in which those students use Facebook are much more important in predicting what they will get out of it. In other words, whether or not students use Facebook is less decisive in predicting outcomes than what they do on the site. Recall the example of the shovel as a tool: a shovel can be very effective for digging a hole in which to plant a tree; however, that same shovel is very ineffective when you try to use it to eat cereal.

A contributing, very problematic issue is that of disingenuous or ill-informed interpretation and communication of research findings by the researchers themselves. An original study of the relationship between Facebook use and academic performance was misrepresented by both the media and the person who conducted the research. Calls for accountability from other researchers were met with resistance and further misrepresentations of the limitations of the study. In the past year, I have read two research papers in high-impact, prestigious journals in which the researchers interpreted a nonsignificant result as significant. Sometimes it’s hard for researchers to move beyond their biases and preexisting notions. These examples teach us the necessity of critically examining even peer-reviewed research.

Using evidence to guide thinking and practice is essential in student affairs. Up to now, however, higher education has been dominated by fearful myths about youth social media use based on inadequate or miscontextualized research. Myths about social media use don’t sync with the reality of how youth use these technologies. The actual evidence paints a different picture, which is much more optimistic than popular assumptions. I’m not being
naively optimistic about this; there are certainly both positive and negative outcomes associated with students’ use of social media. However, it’s imperative to understand how students’ use of social technologies can be normative and beneficial. This book is an attempt to help the reader move beyond the limits that our culture has placed on our understanding of the phenomenon of youth social media use. Only then can we move forward and learn to leverage these technologies innovatively to support student engagement and learning.

WHAT ARE SOCIAL MEDIA?

For the purposes of this book, social media are defined as applications, services, and systems that allow users to create, remix, and share content. Social media typically have social networking features. That is, they allow interaction among users who may “friend,” “follow,” or “circle” one another. Although today’s social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are easily recognizable containers for social interactions, using the Internet for social connection is not a new phenomenon (an issue explored in further detail in chapter 8). Most of the current social media sites and services have a specific function inherent in their design. For instance, Facebook is designed to allow users to readily connect with others and to share content, while Twitter is designed to allow users to broadcast short messages and to follow the short messages of others. Facebook is used to maintain social connections with family, friends, and people with whom users want to keep in touch, while Twitter is used to follow conversations, topics, and people of interest. Twitter updates are ephemeral, in that if a user who follows many people who tweet regularly isn’t logged in to Twitter at the time someone the user follows posts an update, the user is likely to miss seeing the update. On Facebook, however, one is unlikely to miss an update from a signifi-
cant friend because Facebook’s algorithms ensure that important people’s posts are seen, no matter when they were posted.

The design-specific and design-driven affordances of social media allow the user experience and resultant culture to develop in prescribed ways. For instance, when Facebook allowed users to subscribe to the public posts of others without being their friends, a new method was created for sharing and receiving memes posted on sites such as Tumblr and Instagram (in this context, memes are concepts that are spread rapidly on the Internet, usually in the form of a graphic and intended to be humorous; see figure 1.2 for an example). Facebook changed by allowing users to subscribe to the public posts of users they couldn’t friend (for example, celebrities like George Takei), which changed the culture of Facebook by increasing the number of memes shared on the site. Additionally, Facebook added the pages feature, which allows any user to “like” and subscribe to a page and its updates. Pages can be used by public figures to connect with other Facebook users without having to use a personal account to “friend” them.

Figure 1.2. An example of a popular meme from 2012: Mckayla is not impressed.
Source: http://mckaylaismnotimpressed.tumblr.com/
Social media strategists in the business sector will extol the virtues of engagement with the audience when discussing good practices. In the social media marketing world, such engagement (in this context defined as interactive communication with your “audience”) is directly related to an outcome (the promotion of a product—with product loosely defined here to mean a person, item, experience, or philosophy). These good practices for social media marketing stem directly from the user culture of social media sites, specifically Twitter and Facebook. On Twitter, the user culture is very interested in online engagement. Most Twitter users harbor the expectation that they will be able to interact with those they follow. The level of expectation that someone a user follows will respond to a tweet directed to that person (an “@ reply”) is inversely proportional to the social status of that person. So, for instance, a user will be less likely to expect a response from the Barack Obama account than from my Twitter account. Early in 2011, I collected data from Twitter that showed that tweeting senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) were less likely to @ reply than a sample of tweeting student affairs professionals (Junco, 2011). Because of the correlational nature of the investigation, many variables could have played a role in the finding; however, it was curious to note the differences in culture between SSAOs and other student affairs professionals. An important question was whether SSAOs were treating Twitter as a method of broadcasting information, while the junior student affairs professionals were treating Twitter as a method to engage with others. This differential alone could lead to differences in student outcomes because of the ways that the interactions are perceived, with students perceiving more social distance between them and upper-level administrators. While that might be an intentional strategy for the administrator, it might work against facilitating students’ academic integration.

While the affordances of social media often flow from the original intent of the site designers, as is clear from the previous
examples, some affordances are realized when users engage with the site in novel ways. This dynamic provides opportunities for student affairs professionals. Understanding the affordances of a social media service can allow us to develop novel ways of communicating with and engaging with our students. As is explained in chapter 5, the affordances of Twitter make the service a more efficient tool for ongoing classroom discussions, while the affordances of Facebook make it more efficient for threaded class discussions and a more powerful tool than a learning management system (LMS). However, Facebook may be a more appropriate tool to advertise campus activities and programs through its pages feature.

Although an exhaustive review of all social media sites and services is well beyond the scope of this book, the following section reviews the most popular social media for college students in the United States as of this writing. Furthermore, the nature of social media and technological change is such that sites that are popular when this book was being written may decrease in popularity significantly by the time the book is published; conversely, sites that haven’t even been launched yet may garner a huge following. Chapter 8 discusses the future of social media and how student affairs professionals can stay current (and perhaps ahead of the curve) with emerging sites and technologies. Although the most popular social media sites and services will be described, it is valuable for readers unfamiliar with these platforms to investigate them, not just by signing up for accounts and actively engaging on them, but also by asking students how they use these platforms.

**Why Focus on Social Media?**

Social media sites and services are incredibly popular among college students. College students use the Internet and social media at higher rates than the general population, perhaps because college students typically have greater and relatively unfettered
access to hardware and broadband (Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier & Pérez, 2009; Smith, Rainie & Zickuhr, 2011). In addition, college students engage through social media to help in their transition from high school. Their social media use acts as a bridge between the uncertain feelings of transition and the solidification of social and academic integration at their college or university. Because such a large percentage of students use social media and because social media use is related to academic and psychosocial outcomes, it behooves student affairs professionals to understand how they can use these technologies in beneficial ways.

Using social media in educationally relevant ways has been shown to be related to student engagement, campus involvement, adjustment to college, and academic outcomes such as grades and persistence (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield & Fiore, 2011; Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco, 2012a; Junco 2012b; Junco, Elavsky & Heiberger, 2012; Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2011; Karpinski, Kirschner, Ozer, Mellott & Ochwo, 2012; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Yang & Brown, 2013). Therefore, student affairs professionals can leverage social media in ways to help students attain the desired outcomes of a college education. Social media can also be leveraged as powerful tools to predict student behaviors and characteristics with the goal of early identification of students at risk for academic failure. For instance, Kosinski, Stillwell, and Graepel (2013) were able to predict with a high degree of accuracy traits such as gender, sexual orientation, race, religious preference, and political affiliation using only Facebook likes. While research in this area has not yet included the higher education context, these researchers’ methods show promise for the field of education. Such methods along with the related field of learning analytics are examined in chapter 8.

At the very least, student affairs professionals should understand how social media are used by students in order to have a
better understanding of how these media interact with the developmental processes most important to our profession. Indeed, 96 percent of respondents to the NASPA Technology Knowledge Community social media survey believed that new student affairs professionals should have social media skills (compared with 99 percent who said they should have Microsoft Word skills; Valliere, Endersby & Brinton, 2013). While some research has already been conducted showing connections between social media use and student development, student affairs professionals are encouraged to document the learning and psychosocial outcomes obtainable through social media interventions. Later chapters will focus specifically on how students develop identity using social media; how social media use is related to student engagement; how social media can improve student academic and social integration; how to plan, get support for, and implement social media interventions; and how student affairs professionals can evaluate the outcomes of social media interventions.

A Word of Caution

“If you are not paying for it, you’re not the customer; you’re the product being sold.” Blue_beetle (2010) wrote that now-famous quote about the changes to the social news aggregation site Digg in 2010. While perhaps an oversimplification, the general idea is true. On Google and Facebook, advertisers are the customers, and users are the product being sold to those customers. Ultimately, these companies are responsible to their advertisers. As social media users, we tend to conflate consumers and customers. Let’s take Google and Facebook as examples. We are users and consumers of Google products such as Gmail and Facebook; however, we are not Google’s customers. What does this distinction mean in practice? Facebook has had a long history of disregarding user privacy. A chronological list of Facebook’s privacy
faux pas can be found on the “Criticism of Facebook” page of Wikipedia (“Criticism of Facebook,” 2014). Standard practice at Facebook seems to be to update or add features, change privacy settings, and change the user interface in ways that compel users to share more information, often without users knowing they are doing so. Perhaps this is related to the history of Facebook and to how Facebook’s creator and CEO sees the world (an issue discussed in more detail in chapter 3), but it is also likely related to Facebook’s business model. If Facebook can get users to share more information about themselves, Facebook can then mine this information for its advertisers more effectively. Also, if users share more, they and their friends are likely to be more engaged on the site. This issue is not just confined to Facebook. Google relies on advertising for a large proportion of its revenue, as do Twitter, Yahoo, and many of the other social media sites and services. Making this structure even more problematic, most Internet users have little idea how their online browsing data are being mined to predict their purchasing behaviors.

To add to these concerns, in the summer of 2013, technology companies, including Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and Apple, came under scrutiny for their participation in the National Security Agency’s PRISM program, which covertly mines massive amounts of user data (Greenwald & MacAskill, 2013). Twitter was the only one of eight major technology companies to refuse to make it easier for the National Security Agency (NSA) to have access to user data (Miller, 2013). Although Facebook, Google, Yahoo, and others have asked for greater transparency about domestic spying from the US government in an effort to alleviate the bad publicity they have received from the PRISM revelation, questions remain about how much was shared, how much access was given, and how willing the companies have been to turn over information (Auerbach, Mayer & Eckersley, 2013). Participation in the PRISM program is especially disquieting in light of research
showing that NSA domestic surveillance programs have produced little actionable information (Schneier, 2013; 2014). The PRISM imbroglio crystallizes concerns about large Internet companies that possess a great deal of information about their users. Even when expressing a desire to “not be evil” (an unofficial Google company philosophy), these companies can easily cite market forces and other outside pressures to throw users under the bus.

Students are not particularly bothered by the fact that sites like Facebook mine users’ personal data to obtain advertising revenue (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). I believe one reason is that youth are not fully aware of how advertisers are using this information. This concern is not limited to youth. Many adults don’t seem to completely understand how their online activities are tracked for advertising and marketing purposes. This lack of clarity is no doubt due in part to the reality that companies like Google don’t want to divulge trade secrets; however, such practices keep users uninformed about how their information is being used. Furthermore, sites and services like Facebook and Google are so ingrained into our online experience that it would seem difficult if not impossible for users to leave or switch to a competitor. Indeed, a number of sites and services (like Diaspora) have been developed with the idea to give users more control over their privacy and to provide more transparency. Unfortunately, these sites dwindle with a tiny user base and haven’t yet been popular with those outside of the tech geek set.

Changes to these marketing and privacy dynamics are unlikely in the near future. Therefore, it is critical for student affairs professionals and other educators to familiarize themselves with these issues and dynamics, not just to make appropriate choices about tools to use with students but also to teach students about the trade-offs of using these “free” services. There is no federal oversight of companies like Facebook and Google, and that’s likely a
good thing, because those who should be exercising oversight are actually worse actors than the technology companies themselves (PRISM being an excellent case in point). Luckily, youth report high levels of confidence in their ability to manage their privacy settings and take steps to shape their reputations, and the majority of teen users keep their Facebook profiles private (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). We can use this preexisting knowledge to help students develop even stronger privacy knowledge and skills. As we learn more about these processes and help educate our students, we can become greater advocates for our Internet rights and perhaps even develop effective methods for oversight, to the benefit of society at large.

Student affairs professionals can help students by becoming familiar with both the technical and the psychological aspects of privacy and communicating these distinctions to students. Technical aspects of privacy include such matters as privacy controls on sites like Facebook as well as the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Psychological aspects of privacy involve how both educators and students perceive online privacy. Research by Wang and colleagues (2011) found that Facebook users regretted posts they made containing sensitive topics (such as alcohol and drug use, sex, religion and politics, and profanity), content with strong sentiment (offensive comments and arguments), and lies and secrets. The researchers discovered the following reasons people made posts they later regretted: (1) they wanted to be perceived favorably, (2) they didn’t consider their reasons for posting or the possible consequences, (3) they misjudged cultural norms in their friend circle or circles, (4) they posted when in an emotionally charged state such as anger, (5) they didn’t think about the audience that would see the post, (6) they did not foresee how their post would be interpreted by their intended audience, and (7) they did not understand how the Facebook platform works (Wang et al., 2011). These causes
suggest areas for discussion and education with students; however, adopting an adult normative perspective in these conversations would likely backfire. Educators are encouraged to learn about these processes and to open up a broader discussion with students about their understanding of privacy. Begin by learning where students are coming from, then lead them through learning the necessary information.

Students may be unaware of how some of their posts could be deleterious to their future employment or educational plans. For instance, they may not be aware that 26 percent of admissions officers and 37 percent of company hiring managers use social media to screen applicants (CareerBuilder.com, 2012; Kaplan, 2012). The fact that online content can be permanent (that is, impossible to delete) can also cause long-term problems for students. In late 2012, the online news site Jezebel engaged in the public shaming of teens who posted racist tweets after Obama’s reelection. The original post identified only the teens’ Twitter accounts, but a commenter on that post uncovered and shared some of their personal information, like their high schools. Responding to this comment, the author of the original Jezebel post wrote a new story posting the teens’ real names, their high schools, and the phone numbers to their high schools and encouraged readers to call and complain to administrators about the teens’ online behavior. In this case, Jezebel used its considerable power and influence to attempt to ruin these teenagers’ future job and educational opportunities. In fact, the editor of Jezebel was quoted as saying, “And I think there’s something larger at play here, and we’re going to see this kind of story over and over again until it’s innately understood that the line between ‘online’ and ‘in real life’ is basically nonexistent” (Hill, 2012). Not only does this statement show a lack of journalistic ethics, but it also highlights the worldview that Jezebel has chosen to espouse: that young people have no right to make mistakes nor the right to have
their online mistakes forgotten. Just after the article was published, top hits from a Google search of the names of some of the teens showed the article labeling them as racist. Unfortunately, potential employers and college representatives may view the racist tweets not as a mistake of youth but from an adult framework of well-developed moral and ethnic identity development.

A growing legislative movement aims to protect youth from their own developmentally normative mistakes. “Right to be forgotten” legislation allows youth to erase online content they have posted. In 2012, the European Commission included a right to be forgotten in the draft updates to the Data Protection Directive, and in 2011, Representative Edward Markey proposed amending the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act with the Do Not Track Kids Act, a bill that would have required sites and services to provide an “eraser button” for online content. While the 2011 Do Not Track Kids Act bill was unsuccessful, Markey and other sponsors reintroduced it in late 2013 (Govtrack.us, 2014). Signed just before the Do Not Track Kids Act was introduced, California bill SB568 gives minors the right to remove information they’ve posted online. While there are certainly limits to these legislative efforts—for instance, they don’t grant youth the ability to delete information posted about them, only information posted by them—such efforts are a good first step to helping support development by allowing youth the freedom to remove content they might not post later in life. In the meantime, however, it will be up to educators to help students learn about online privacy from a youth-normative perspective.

The issues raised by university and employer monitoring of social media, the permanence of online content, and others’ willingness to engage in a mob mentality and ruin a student’s reputation show the need for teaching not just about privacy, but about civil discourse and ethical and moral online decision making. While it may be difficult to cover these topics comprehensively, educators have the responsibility to at least touch on and model
these constructs. Chances are that most students will not be receiving much information about privacy, civil discourse, or ethical and moral online decision making in their courses, and when they do, instruction will almost always be from an adult normative perspective. Therefore, student affairs professionals have an opportunity to instruct students in ways that are both youth normative and helpful for their lives after college. At the very least, issues that arise on social media, such as what happened with the teens in the Jezebel story, can be used as teachable moments. Perhaps with time, higher education institutions will agree upon and adopt learning outcomes that include the effective use of social media in students’ post-college lives.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking sites (SNSs) and services are the most popular category of social media. SNSs typically allow users to create profiles and to add and interact with a group of friends (boyd, 2007; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that between 67 percent and 75 percent of college-aged young adults (who may not necessarily be enrolled in college) use social networking websites (Jones & Fox, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010). The most popular social networking website among US college students is Facebook. Research shows that anywhere between 79 and 99 percent of college students use Facebook (Hargittai, 2008; Junco, 2012b; Junco, 2013b; Matney & Borland, 2009; Smith, Rainie & Zickuhr, 2011). Data collected by the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) found that 90 percent of college students used Facebook, with 58 percent using it several times a day (Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald & Vockley, 2011). A study of a large sample of college students published in 2012 showed that 92 percent of students used Facebook and reported spending an average of more than one hour and forty minutes a day on the site (Junco, 2012b); however,
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data collected using computer monitoring software measuring actual Facebook use showed that students really spent only twenty-six minutes per day on the site (Junco, 2013a; 2013b).

Because of its popularity with college students, its dominance among SNSs, and the amount of research available on the site as compared to other SNSs, much of the research and examples in this book will focus on Facebook. It is worth noting that the SNS landscape can and does change quite rapidly. The case of Myspace is a perfect example: an early competitor to Facebook, the site is now used by only 7 percent of teen social media users (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). In May 2013, the national news media propagated the myth that youth were abandoning Facebook for other platforms, in a misrepresentation of Pew Internet and American Life Project data showing that teens were actually diversifying their social media portfolio while maintaining Facebook as the site they use most often (Madden, 2013; Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). Although some teens are becoming dissatisfied with Facebook because of “increasing adult presence, the high stakes of managing self-presentation on the site, the burden of negative social interactions (‘drama’), or feeling overwhelmed by friends who share too much,” it is still too early to tell whether this dissatisfaction will fuel a desire to abandon the site in favor of others (Madden, 2013). As explained in chapter 8, whatever replacement for Facebook eventually emerges, it will have to include affordances similar to Facebook’s (allowing youth to connect and share with each other) as well as address users’ dissatisfactions with Facebook.

Facebook

Throughout history, processes repeat in societies, institutions, and other social ecosystems. Processes involved in the development of any given phenomenon tend to be replicated in further
applications of the system. In the case of Facebook, for instance, understanding its history as an exclusive network for Ivy League students helps us understand how students use Facebook today and how Facebook has developed features that allow for specific affordances. Facebook’s initial exclusivity to Ivy League schools helped drive its adoption when it became available to students at non-Ivy League colleges and universities. Furthermore, its exclusivity to college students was a driving force in building a large user base before being opened to the general public.

Mark Zuckerberg conceived Facebook when he was an undergraduate at Harvard University. Zuckerberg created Facemash, the predecessor to Facebook, in 2003. Facemash culled the online pictures of Harvard College students and made them readily accessible online. The interface was much like the then-popular website Hot or Not and, like that site, asked users to rate which of two Harvard College students pictured was “hotter.” The site was very popular and received more than 22,000 photo views in the first few hours after it went live. Harvard administrators quickly shut down the site, and Zuckerberg was called before the Administrative Board on charges of breaching security, violating copyright, and violating individual privacy, charges that were later dropped (Kaplan, 2003).

After the Facemash incident, Zuckerberg created the first iteration of Facebook, which launched to Harvard College students in early 2004. As with Facemash, thefacebook.com was very popular with Harvard undergraduate students, with more than half of them signing up within the first month. Clearly, Zuckerberg had stumbled onto something that students were craving—a unified and online facebook, which had not yet existed at Harvard (Harvard houses had issued their own paper “facebooks,” directories with student pictures, since the 1980s), and a way for students to have an exclusive and seemingly private off-campus network to connect with their peers. Later, Facebook
was launched at other Ivy League schools and was slowly rolled out to all colleges and universities, to student fanfare similar to that at Harvard. The site expanded to high school students in 2005 and then to the general population in late 2006. Since then, it has become one of the most popular online destinations in the English-speaking world.

An example of how Facebook’s history has influenced its current state is the use of real names on the site. Facemash was created by uploading the pictures of Harvard College students, and then the first iteration of Facebook focused on actual offline identities. Because of Mark Zuckerberg’s insistence that users engage online with their real names, as well as his focus on making users share as much as possible, the culture of Facebook is one where users typically use their real names. Even though it is open to everyone today, Facebook has less of a problem with fake and “creepy” accounts than its early rival Myspace, which was also open to all. Interestingly, Facebook’s current business model is predicated on encouraging people to share as much as possible and mining data to push advertisements tailored specifically to each user. Facebook does this through advanced predictive modeling that presumably takes into account a large number of variables, including a person’s interests, the interests of their friends, the interests of the friends they interact with the most, the topics of the posts they comment on or like the most, and so on.

**Google+**

Google+ is Google’s social networking service and was developed as a direct competitor to Facebook. Google+ launched as invitation-only in June 2011. At the time, the reaction from the technology sector was that Google+ would be a “Facebook killer” because of both its focus on user privacy and the rate at which users were signing up for the service (DeRosa, 2011; Vaughan-
Nichols, 2011). Google+ offered compelling features, such as the ability to easily place those you follow in “circles” and to share selectively with those groups. Another unique feature of Google+ is the “hangout,” which allows as many as ten users to simultaneously engage in video chats (and also simultaneously watch YouTube videos). The hangout feature has been used effectively for educational communication for research meetings, distance education cohort meetings, and professional development opportunities like the live video chats hosted by Ed Cabellon (2014). However, Google+ has not lived up to the “Facebook killer” label; while users originally registered at high rates, user engagement on the site is low, with many users visiting the site only three times a month (Ingraham, 2013).

MICROBLOGGING

Microblogging sites are similar to longer-form blogs; however, their content is typically much shorter, such as short sentences, individual pictures, or links (Twitter, 2014). The most popular microblogging service in the United States is Twitter, with more than 200 million active users (Wickre, 2013).

Twitter

Twitter was the brainchild of Jack Dorsey and was conceived during a brainstorming session held by the board members of Odeo (a podcasting company). At the time, Dorsey proposed a service by which users could use text messaging to communicate with a group of friends (Twitter, 2014). Twitter was first used as an internal service by Odeo employees and then was launched publicly in July of 2006. Twitter’s popularity exploded during the 2007 South by Southwest Interactive (SxSWi) conference, when daily tweets tripled from 20,000 to 60,000 (Twitter, 2014). The
SxSWi conference focuses on emerging technologies and is known as a place where technorati congregate to share new ideas and technologies and have an all-around good time. If a technology is able to capture the attention of conference goers, it has a great chance of being successful. Indeed, a number of start-ups have been catapulted to success thanks, in no small part, to their adoption and adoration at SxSWi. Twitter is probably the most famous of these start-ups, but some other notable services launched at SxSWi include Foursquare, Storify, GroupMe, Ushahidi, Foodspotting, and Flavors.me. Of particular interest in the development of Twitter is the fact that like Facebook, Twitter’s popularity boost came from use by an “exclusive” group—in this case, well-to-do technology industry members.

Twitter allows users to share short (140 characters or less) messages (tweets) with their followers—people who have chosen to receive these messages in their Twitter feed. Users subscribe to the posts of others, and the timeline is a real-time running archive of what is being posted by those you follow. Like Facebook, Twitter allows users to share images. Because of the restricted number of characters, url shorteners are often used when sharing links. In contrast with Facebook, these links are inserted into the text of the message, and no preview is provided. Therefore, Twitter users must ensure that they provide enough context when posting urls. The differences relative to Facebook can often be described as shorthand versus long-form writing. Indeed, to the uninitiated, the “language” of Twitter often seems confusing and the stream overwhelming because of its constantly running nature. If a user follows many other users who post frequently, the user’s stream may move rather quickly (and while the stream doesn’t move automatically, requiring a user to click or refresh a page to see new tweets, the Twitter feed can still be overwhelming).

Twitter also allows for the use of hashtags: keywords that are preceded by a # sign and are clickable based on the interface used
to access the site. Hashtags have been such a popular feature of Twitter that Facebook, Google+, Instagram, and Vine have also adopted them. Figure 1.3 shows an example tweet that uses a hashtag. In academic settings, hashtags have been used to aggregate tweets around conferences, workshops, and other events. Following a conference hashtag allows those in attendance to communicate about conference content but also about social events; it also allows those not in attendance to follow along and

Figure 1.3. Anatomy of a tweet showing a hashtag.
Source: Ann Smarty, Teksocial, and the New York Times
learn about what is being discussed. In other words, nonattendees can have some experience of what being at the conference is like and therefore are afforded a low- to no-cost method of professional development. Another noteworthy affordance of Twitter is the large number and wide variety of applications that can be used to access the service. Mayo (2012) found that only around 24 percent of users access Twitter through Twitter.com, the rest accessing the site through mobile and other third-party applications and services. TweetDeck, one such application, was so popular that Twitter ended up buying it in 2011.

Like Facebook, Twitter is more likely used by youth. Pew Internet and American Life Project data show that 31 percent of those 18–29 and 24 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds use Twitter, compared with 19 percent of 30- to 49-year-olds (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). Of particular interest, multiple sources show that African American youth are more likely to use Twitter than white youth. In 2011, 31 percent of African American teens used Twitter, compared to 12 percent of white teens (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2011). In 2013, 39 percent of African American teens used Twitter, compared to 23 percent of white teens (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). Hargittai and Litt (2011) found that African American students and those with greater Internet skills were more likely to use Twitter, while students with parents who had less than a high school degree were less likely to be Twitter users.

**Tumblr**

Tumblr is the second most popular microblogging platform in the United States in terms of traffic (Alexa, 2013a). While Tumblr is a very popular website in the United States and the second most
popular microblogging site, very little research has been conducted on the Tumblr user experience. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that while 16 percent of all online adults used Twitter, only 6 percent use Tumblr (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Tumblr is most popular among 18- to 29-year-olds, with 13 percent saying they use the site (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). A study using computer monitoring data found that of the thirty-one minutes students spent on social networking websites daily, only four minutes were spent using Tumblr (Junco, 2013b). Some have speculated that there is a geographic or cultural leaning in Tumblr use toward those in northeastern cities such as New York; however, this speculation may be fueled by the fact that Tumblr user demographics skew toward the urban and educated (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

In terms of affordances, Tumblr has features very similar to Twitter. Users can post short blogs, follow the microblogs of other users, and post multimedia content. Unlike Twitter, Tumblr does not limit posts to 140 characters. Although Tumblr’s use by college students is currently limited, it is helpful for student affairs professionals to be aware of the patterns of Tumblr use at their institutions; if Tumblr use skews toward those in urban settings, we may miss a significant part of the minority student experience if we do not consider the site in connection with our social media intervention strategies (Junco, 2013c).

**IMAGE AND VIDEO SHARING**

**Instagram**

Instagram is an online photo-sharing service that enables users to take pictures with their mobile devices, add a variety of filters, and post those pictures to a stream. Perhaps one of the early draws of Instagram was the ability to easily apply photo filters (see figure
1.4), which made poorer-quality mobile phone pictures more interesting and artistic. As with Twitter, one can follow the Instagram stream of other users and see the photos they post in real time. Also as with Twitter, one can use hashtags to aggregate pictures under a common theme. Unlike Twitter, Instagram allows users to “like” and comment on pictures. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 13 percent of Internet users overall used Instagram (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). In another study, the Pew Internet and American Life Project and Berkman Center for Internet and Society found that 3 percent of teens used Instagram. Teen Instagram users expressed excitement about the platform, noting the absence of “drama” such as is found on Facebook as well as the opportunities for creative expression (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). As is true for Tumblr, little research has been conducted

Figure 1.4. An example of an Instagram photo with filter. Creative Commons License: catepol—http://i-am-cc.org/instagram/catepol/237350.
on users’ experience of Instagram—so there’s also little research on Instagram that has been conducted in education settings.

**Vine**

Vine can be best thought of as “Instagram for video clips”—although in order to compete with Vine, Instagram added the ability to share videos. Vine was founded in June 2012 and was quickly acquired by Twitter in October of the same year (Vine, 2014). Vine is accessed through a mobile application that allows users to post short videos of up to six seconds. The app interface easily allows users to start and stop recording and instantly publish the video to their feed. Given the emergent nature of Vine at the time of this writing, it is unclear as to its penetration among college students. Vine is so new to the social media scene that even the latest (as of this writing) Pew Internet and American Life Project and Berkman Center for Internet and Society report did not include Vine as a social media site in their questions (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). Vine is certainly an app to watch in the near future, as its ability to easily share short videos allows for creative educational opportunities.

**Pinterest**

Pinterest is an image- and video-sharing service that allows users to aggregate content in theme-based pinboards. Like Twitter and Instagram, Pinterest allows users to follow other users. Pinterest users can also like content as well as “repin” it to their own boards. Users can upload pictures to their pinboards via their computers or mobile devices or through web links. In February 2014, Pinterest was the twelfth most visited site in the United States (Alexa, 2013b). As such, it is a more popular web
destination than Instagram. However, while Instagram was used by 11 percent of respondents in the Pew Internet and American Life Project and Berkman Center for Internet and Society study, only 1 percent reported having a Pinterest account (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). Pinterest is more popular among college students. Unpublished data collected on more than four hundred college students using computer monitoring software showed that 26 percent used Pinterest at least once during the monthlong data collection period (Junco, 2014). As is true for Tumblr, Instagram, and Vine, little research has been conducted on the Pinterest user experience or on the use of Pinterest in educational settings. However, the penetration rate of Pinterest among college students might lead to more research interest in examining the service as a learning tool compared to other image platforms.

**SnapChat**

SnapChat is a mobile photo- and video-messaging application that allows users to set a limit on how long a recipient can view a photo or video before it is “deleted” from the mobile device. A unique feature of SnapChat is the ability to doodle and to add text to picture and video, which gives users the ability to easily create memes. While SnapChat gives the illusion of increased privacy because pictures are automatically deleted, there are a number of ways to bypass this feature. Recipients can take a screen capture of the message (as easy as pressing the home and the power buttons simultaneously on an iPhone or the volume down and power buttons simultaneously on newer Android devices). While SnapChat will inform the sender if a screencap is taken, the privacy breach has already occurred. Further, there are other technical (running SnapChat in an emulator) and nontechnical
(taking a picture of the phone screen with another camera) ways to thwart the perceived privacy of the app.

SnapChat was developed by Stanford student Evan Spiegel as part of one of his design courses. Spiegel said that he created the app to help bring fun back into online communications, because people had been hyperfocused on presenting spotless online identities. He theorized that SnapChat would allow people to get back to their truer selves without the pressure of possible career and educational ruin (Colao, 2012). The app launched in September 2011, and by May 2012 it was processing about 25 images every second (Gallagher, 2012). SnapChat’s popularity continues to increase, and data collected by the Pew Internet and American Life Project and the Berman Center for Internet and Society showed that teens who used SnapChat were very excited about it (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). As is true for Tumblr, Instagram, and Vine, at the time of this writing no research has yet been published on the user experience or outcomes of SnapChat use. The provocative nature of SnapChat—many media mentions note the affordances of SnapChat as a safer alternative to sexting—is likely to spur more research on the platform in the near term as compared to Tumblr, Instagram, and Vine.

DEVICES

While social media sites started as web-based platforms, the increased availability and affordability of smartphones and the availability of tablets has led to a concomitant increase in the use of mobile platforms to access these sites. Smartphone ownership has increased dramatically in a few short years: in 2013, 37 percent of teens in the United States owned a smartphone, compared to 23 percent in 2011 (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi
& Gasser, 2013). Additionally, 23 percent of teens owned a tablet computer. Almost three quarters (74 percent) of all teens 12–17 reported at least occasionally accessing the Internet on cell phones, tablets, or other mobile devices (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi & Gasser, 2013). Interestingly, especially for issues related to digital inequalities, 25 percent of teens reported that their cell phones are the primary way that they access the Internet, a percentage that rises to 50 percent for teen smartphone users (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi & Gasser, 2013). Some of my earlier research found that African American students were less likely to own a cell phone than white students; however, African American cell phone owners sent more texts and spent more time talking on the phone than white cell phone owners (Junco, Merson & Salter, 2010).

There are at least two principal ways that accessing social media on mobile devices can alter the user experience and by extension how students use these sites: (1) While mobile applications for social media have overlapping functionality with their web-based components, mobile applications also have additional functions providing supplementary affordances. The Facebook application allows users to post pictures directly from the mobile applications (and from the devices that youth typically use to take pictures). Instagram, on the other hand, is primarily a mobile service with very limited web-based functionality. (2) Access patterns are different on mobile devices. Students tend not to spend as much time logged in and interacting with social media when they are on mobile devices as when they are using computer-based applications. Often, students will check social media on their phones briefly throughout the day. Research has found that accessing Facebook in different ways (logging in fewer times for longer amounts of time versus logging in frequently for shorter amounts of time) is differentially related to student outcomes with students who log in frequently for shorter amounts of time
having more positive outcomes (Junco, 2012a; 2012b). As more research is conducted, it will be important to learn how data from mobile use of social media can enhance our understanding of how students interact with these sites.

DIGITAL INEQUALITIES

Many educators make the mistake of assuming that “all of today’s students are technologically savvy,” to the detriment of educators’ work with students. While it is indeed the case that many college students use social media, we must pay special attention to those who don’t for various reasons. In one analysis, boyd (2007) distinguished between two types of youth who don’t use social media: those who are disenfranchised and those who are “conscientious objectors.” Conscientious objectors are youth who choose to refrain from social media use for personal or political reasons. Student affairs professionals should be particularly concerned about those students who don’t use social media because they are disenfranchised as a result of their socioeconomic or racial or ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, the mere fact that students use social media does not mean that they use social media in ways that are beneficial for their academic and developmental outcomes. The distinction between access and use is extremely important when considering digital inequalities. These inequalities persist over time and can have far-reaching effects for students.

Digital inequalities can impact the college admissions process. Take for example, Kaplan’s (2012) survey of college admissions officers. In this survey, 26 percent of admissions officers admitted visiting an applicant’s social networking profile, and 27 percent reported Googling an applicant to learn more about them. What is most disturbing is that 35 percent said that they found something online that negatively impacted a student’s application; however, there was no follow-up conducted to
examine what kind of things the admissions officers found online that would negatively impact the application. Admissions processes are typically standardized at each institution in order to remove as much bias from admissions decisions as possible. For example, admissions officers at public institutions can’t base an admissions decision on an applicant’s religion. Therefore, such “off the books” evaluations using social media are incredibly problematic. An admissions officer reviewing a student’s Facebook profile might find out the student is Muslim, and while the officer might not make a decision based on this fact, the reality is that information not shared by the student on the application is being considered as part of the admissions decision.

Even if reviewing social media profiles and Googling students were to be made a standard part of the admissions process, there is no way that admissions officers could evaluate student social media profiles fairly. First, there is a lack of resources. Admissions offices barely have enough staff to keep the machinery of recruitment and the traditional evaluation process going, let alone to review the Facebook profiles of all entering students. Even if admissions offices had the necessary resources to evaluate every applicant’s Facebook profile, the process would still be inherently unfair. Some students have the requisite skills (and forethought) to hide their profiles from admissions officers or to create ideal-self profiles that highlight their most positive attributes. Unfortunately, having these skills is related to sociodemographics such as parental education, household income, and race and ethnicity. For instance, Hargittai (2010) found that women, African Americans, Latinos, and those whose parents had lower educational attainment had lower levels of Internet skills even when controlling for Internet access and experience. Furthermore, those with higher levels of Internet skills engaged in more types of activities online.
Research has also revealed differences in how students from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds and from lower socioeconomic statuses access social media. In an early study, Hargittai (2008) found that Latino students were less likely to use Facebook than Caucasians and Asian Americans and were more likely to use Myspace. Women were also more likely to use Myspace than men were, and Asian American students were more likely to use Facebook but less likely to use Myspace (Hargittai, 2008). Furthermore, Hargittai (2008) found that students whose parents had a college degree were more likely to use Facebook than students whose parents did not have a college degree. However, the social media ecosystem has changed dramatically since that study was published, with participation on Myspace dropping to an all-time low of 7 percent of teen social media users, while Facebook adoption has reached 94 percent (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). More recently, Hargittai and Litt (2011) found that African American students and students with greater Internet skills were more likely to use Twitter, while students from lower socioeconomic levels were less likely to be Twitter users. The Pew Internet and American Life Project also found that African Americans were more likely to use Twitter; however, the researchers did not find differences in use based on socioeconomic status (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

There are gender and race/ethnicity differences in the use of image-sharing social media sites. An analysis of user profiles by Chrzan (2012) found that globally, 83 percent of Pinterest users were female. Pinterest is more popular among female Internet users in the United States as well, with 25 percent of women using Pinterest compared to 5 percent of men (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Pinterest is more popular among wealthier individuals and those with greater educational attainment (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Female college students in the United States use Pinterest
more than male students: unpublished computer usage data show that 35 percent of the female students in the sample used Pinterest during the monthlong study period, while only 12 percent of the men did so (Junco, 2014). There is a similar pattern with Instagram: women were significantly more likely to use the service than men (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Additionally, African Americans and Latinos were significantly more likely to use Instagram than whites (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

Studies have shown that while access has begun to equalize across groups for some social media sites and services, how students use the sites varies by sociodemographic characteristics. Muscanell and Guadagno (2011) found that men were more likely to report using social networking websites to make new friends while women were more likely to report using the sites to maintain current relationships. Furthermore, they found that men were more likely to play games on social networking websites while women were more likely to post public messages, send private messages, send friend requests, and post photographs (Muscanell and Guadagno, 2011). My own research shows that even though time spent on the site was the same across groups, women were more likely to use Facebook for communication, African Americans were less likely to use Facebook to check up on friends, and students from lower socioeconomic levels were less likely to use Facebook for communication and sharing (Junco, 2013c).

These sociodemographic differences highlight some of the ways that youth who may already be at a disadvantage are disadvantaged further by their lack of social media skills. In my research, the differences in how Facebook was used by members of minority groups was related to their understanding of the cultural norms and mores of the site as well as to their level of skill. Students with higher levels of skill are more able to do things like enable privacy settings so that their profiles are not searchable. And because not
all students are sophisticated enough to hide their profiles from admissions officers (or to create ideal-self profiles), they are at the mercy of admissions officers looking for an easy way to make their applicant pool smaller. Facebook-stalking and Googling applicants thus can be seen as discriminatory admissions practices similar to other banned forms of discriminatory practices.

Affluent students have more parental input into what they post online and have a more thorough understanding of how their online self-presentation might affect their college, career, and interpersonal prospects. Indeed, research has shown that the interpersonal benefits accrued from technology use vary by socioeconomic status. Zhao (2009) found that seventh and tenth graders from schools in middle- and high-income suburbs were more likely to use instant messaging (IM) than those from schools in lower-income urban areas. At the time of the study, IM was used for communication and connection with a peer group, helping youth build and strengthen friendships. Zhao’s (2009) research then suggests that youth from areas of lower socioeconomic status are at a disadvantage when using IM for building social capital (an issue that will be discussed in further detail in later chapters).

Knowing that Facebook’s and Twitter’s early development and popularity were sustained by members of exclusive communities (Harvard students and SxSWi attendees) helps us to understand the cultural environment of these sites. Additionally, understanding that there is variability in how sites are accessed and used based on background characteristics allows educators to have a more complete understanding of how all students use technology. Even if there were equal access and use by all members of society, sites like Facebook and Twitter have a history of being analogous to exclusive country clubs that extend membership only to societal and cultural elites. It is no surprise that when we examine differences in how these sites are used, we find that
students from minority racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are at a disadvantage. The following section builds on this framework of digital inequalities and examines how these inequalities affect education and how they are perpetuated through educational systems.

**Digital Inequalities in Education**

Some studies of elementary or high school students or of both have found academic benefits from using educational technology (Shapley, Sheehan, Maloney & Caranikas-Walker, 2010; Suhr, Hernandez, Grimes & Warschauer, 2010; Tienken & Wilson, 2007). On the contrary, other studies find technology use and academic outcomes to be negatively related in primary and secondary schools (Aypay, Erdogan & Sozer, 2007; Waight & Abd-El-Khalick, 2007). Research on technology use in higher education helps to resolve these conflicting findings: Bliuc, Ellis, Goodyear, and Piggott (2010) found that students who used discussion boards as tools to seek answers—instead of improving their understanding of a topic—were using them in ways that encouraged reproduction and task completion rather than deep learning; those students also had lower final course grades. Rizzuto, LeDoux, and Hatala (2009) discovered a positive relationship between the use of a course management system for required actions such as posting comments and course test scores. Related research has found that students who were provided lecture slides via a course management system had lower exam scores than a control section, possibly due to decreased attendance (Weatherly, Grabe & Arthur, 2003). In other words, it’s not whether technologies were used as part of the educational process, but how students used those technologies, that made a difference in outcomes.
Although research on college students has focused on institutionally supported technologies like learning and course management systems, a small number of studies have found substantial benefits in incorporating social media (Junco, 2012a; 2012b; Junco, Elavsky & Heiberger, 2012; Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2011). For example, my research has found that specific uses of Facebook, such as checking to see what friends were up to and sharing links, were positively related to overall grade point average (Junco, 2012a). In a related study, certain Facebook activities predicted more of the variance in student engagement than time spent on the site (Junco, 2012b). Specific Facebook activities such as creating or RSVP’ing to events, commenting, and viewing photos were positively predictive of engagement, whereas playing games, posting photos, using Facebook chat, and checking up on friends were negatively predictive. In controlled classroom experiments, using Twitter for educational purposes both increased student engagement and improved overall student first-semester grade point averages (Junco, Elavsky & Heiberger, 2012; Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2011).

Unfortunately, research on digital inequalities in education has shown that the benefits obtained by using educational technology are distributed unequally across gender, race, and socioeconomic status. However, a majority of this research has examined high school students. Brown, Higgins, and Hartley (2001), Milone and Salpeter (1996), Pisapia (1994), and Warschauer, Knobel, and Stone (2004) found that public school students in areas of lower socioeconomic status were more likely to use computers for academic practice and quizzing, while students in areas of higher socioeconomic status were more than three times as likely to be learning how to program computers. In their review, Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) found that students from lower socioeconomic levels as well as those from minority ethnic and racial backgrounds were at a disadvantage because of how they used
technology in school and because they were less likely to own a computer. These disadvantages translated into negative impacts on academic achievement (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010).

In summary, digital inequalities work in two ways: they may begin at an early age and be perpetuated throughout a student’s schooling so as to put some students at an educational and, by extension, a socioeconomic disadvantage; or socioeconomically and educationally disadvantaged youth may be more likely to suffer from these inequalities. For students, the chances of being successful in today’s workforce increase with the ability to use computers and other information and communications technologies. This is especially true for social media, as they are increasingly used as platforms to find employment and for career development. In the case of Facebook, research has found the use of the platform to be related to behavior supporting future employment potential, such as the building and maintenance of social capital, student engagement in academic and cocurricular activities, and possibilities for peer-to-peer learning (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2011; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014; Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison & Weigel, 2009; Junco, 2012b). Therefore, inequalities in Facebook usage may put students at an “engagement disadvantage,” which would affect their social integration, and by extension their persistence towards graduation (Tinto, 1993).

Unfortunately, relatively little work has been conducted on digital inequalities, presumably because most researchers, like society at large, conclude that all youth are born with these digital skills. Prensky (2001) is credited with coining the term “digital native.” From his perspective, all youth, because they spend time around technology, have equivalent access and skills. As has been reported in this section, nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, adopting the “digital native” myth is dangerous for student affairs professionals, as it misses the goal of ensuring success for
Introduction

all students, especially those who have been traditionally underserved or underrepresented in higher education. Not only is the “digital native” myth contradicted by the reality of digital inequalities, the word *native* can be (and has been) used in derogatory ways, increasing social distance and emphasizing inequalities. It is imperative that student affairs professionals actively and consistently consider the assumptions they are making about student technology use and take steps to ensure that digital resources are inclusive. Student affairs professionals can do so not only by communicating information through multiple online venues, but also by developing programming that serves to level the digital “playing field.”

CONCLUSION

Social media sites and services are incredibly popular among college students. Even with the high adoption rates of sites and services such as Facebook, it is helpful to keep in mind that not all students are on these sites and that there are differences based on sociodemographic characteristics in the ways these sites are used. These differences in access and use are of great import when thinking about how to meet students where they are on social media and when developing effective social media programs and interventions. It is essential to understand the research that has been conducted on these sites that relates to issues of importance for student affairs professionals—namely student development, student engagement, and student success (covered in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5). Chapter 4 reviews how social media can be and have been used in student affairs to improve student engagement, implement programming, and improve communication between students and student affairs professionals. While most of these interventions are focused on the most popular social media sites as of this writing, it will be crucial to consider how the principles
of online engagement can be applied to emerging technologies, an issue that will be covered in chapter 8. Furthermore, chapter 5 will outline the ways that social media can be used effectively to promote formal learning, processes relevant to all educators. Other chapters will explore how to assess social media interventions to see whether they are effective (chapter 6) and how social media can be used for professional development (chapter 7).

**Practical Tips**

1. Question media reports of social media use by critically evaluating the research on which they are based.
2. Be aware of the differences in outcomes between social media access and use.
3. Understand and communicate the costs of using “free” sites and services like Facebook and Twitter.
4. Recognize that while social media are popular among many students, there are those who are at a disadvantage because of digital inequalities.
5. Take steps to ensure that you do not propagate digital inequalities in your work with students.

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