



Black College Students Undermining the Power of Social Media When Preparing for The Competitive Job Market: Gap in Curriculums

Dr. Tia Young, DBA

Professor

College of Business

Bowie State University

Email: tyoung@bowiestate.edu

tiayoungrobin@yahoo.com

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5331-3217>

USA

ABSTRACT

This study explores why Black college students are not utilizing social media to prepare for career advancement after graduation. The research suggests students are oblivious to how using it irresponsibly can impact careers. The issue is vital because; 1) There is a disparity of Blacks getting access to white-collar jobs despite having a degree, 2) Recruiters use social media to weed out prospects, and 3) There is a gap in college curriculums that fail to teach students to brand themselves professionally. The sample was one hundred Bowie State University students, instrumentation was an open-end survey, and the framework was empirical probability.

Keywords: Historically Black Colleges, social media, professional branding, recruitment, curriculum design.

Introduction

Social media has become a lifestyle and a common way for the world to interact and communicate (Rowan, Martinez-Aleman, Gin, Gismondi, Lewis & Knight, 2016). There are 306.6 Million people in the United States (Census Bureau, 2020), and 223 Million have social media accounts (Tankovska, 2021). The world has become accustomed to using social media for entertainment, networking, communicating, marketing, branding, advocacy, researching, information sharing, business transactions, and job opportunities. Although social media serves many purposes, the problem is, that if college students, particularly Black students, are not using these social platforms responsibly, the repercussions could be catastrophic when seeking employment in the competitive job market. Black college students are the focal point of this study because of the disparity in getting access to jobs after graduation. According to a report by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce (2021), despite the increase of Blacks earning bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees, they are still less likely to be hired for positions they qualify for compared to Whites. Also, because recruiters use social media to screen and weed out candidates, Black students must have a positive social media presence. Blount, Wright, and Hall (2016) suggest students should be taught to understand today's recruiters' hiring practices and then become forward-thinking about how they use social media and the negative impact if posted content is unprofessional or inappropriate. Research indicates that knowing recruitment practices is particularly important for Black college students pursuing internships, jobs, and career advancement since their unemployment rate is higher than other ethnic groups. A report from the "Economic Policy Institute" by Williams and Wilson (2019) concluded, the unemployment rate for Blacks is twice

that of Whites at 6.4% vs. 3.1%, and that Blacks with college degrees are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed compared to Whites at 3.5% vs. 2.2%. Because of the employment disparity, understanding why Black college students use social media for entertainment versus professional purposes is an opportunity to pave the way for change.

Significance of the Study

Black college students are disadvantaged in getting equal access to jobs and white-collar managerial positions after college; therefore, misusing or not using social media for professional branding could hinder career advancement. Ellen Huet, a reporter from San Francisco, interviewed former Executives from Facebook and published an article on it entitled, "Facebook's Hiring Process Hinders Its Effort to Create a Diverse Workforce." In the editorial, Huet disclosed; Facebooks employment processes intentionally keep underrepresented backgrounds at a disadvantage because hiring decisions are made by a committee of high ranking White and Asian tech experts that work for the company and make the decisions based on 1) the college a prospect attended, 2) who in the company may know or vouch for them, and 3) their prior experience having already worked for a top tier tech company.

Hiring processes like at Facebook puts underrepresented groups such as Black college graduates at an even further disadvantage. Facebook may not be the only company making hiring decisions this way. It is also possible that not using social media responsibly or for professional purposes is a hindrance. If Black college students are not positively representing themselves on social media, they are increasing the chances of being overlooked for opportunities despite their education and skillset.

Students must be made aware that recruiters today rely on social sites to screen and weed out prospects. Considering

the barriers Blacks experience in getting access to jobs, the students must be mindful that hiring managers spend time assessing, analyzing, forming opinions, and looking for reasons to hire or not hire individuals based on what they see (Nyangeni et al., 2015). Using social media to check candidates' backgrounds even before an interview has become common practice for recruiters. The data in this study makes it possible to confirm that Black college students are not using the powerful platforms of social media for professional purposes; they engage on social sites for entertainment and are fearless in posting inappropriate content regardless of the repercussions. Understanding why students exploit social media the way they do will make it possible to offer counsel on bridging the gap in college curriculums to better prepare students for career success after graduation.

There is an abundance of available research exploring college students' use of social media as a tool to communicate with family, friends, and professors in hybrid and online learning. On the contrary, there is a lack of research on why Black college students do not use social sites for professional branding as preparation for the job market. It is possible to think students may not know how to use social media

Literature Review

The research for this study made it possible to explore the many dynamics, perspectives, perceptions, and experiences of why Black college students do not use social media to enhance their chances of more positive hiring opportunities. It is indeed a reality that recruiters rely on social media to screen, weed out prospects, make hiring decisions, and form opinions based on what they see. An article found on Wrady, Michel & King Attorneys and Counselors website broadcast that employers and recruiters find ways to use social media to screen candidates and make hiring decisions without obvious bias (2018). The article suggests hiring managers have found savvy ways to work around privacy laws using social media to investigate candidates without breaking governance for the protected categories; race, age, gender, color, religion, national origin, and freedom of speech (2018). A recruiter or hiring party can view a person's social media profile, form an opinion based on the content they view, and selectively discard that candidate. It is clear that college students, particularly Black college students, must be mindful of what they post and share on social sites if the goal is to acquire gainful employment. According to Williams and Wilson (2019), this matter is serious because 40% of college-educated Blacks have to work jobs that do not require a degree because they are not getting access to or hired for White-collar positions. Also, when looking at top-tier companies such as Amazon (2021), Blacks account for 26.5% of their workforces, only 10.6% in managerial positions, and their salaries are less than their White counterparts despite performing the same job duties. The literature review supports that Blacks are already at a disadvantage in the job market; therefore, using social media

professionally. According to an article by Sree Sreeniv in *The New York Times* (2021), people cannot separate using social media for personal purposes from professional because once content posts, it becomes public and can be used as a "weapon." The data in the study also supports that students are unclear about the distinction.

Nevertheless, because recruiters use social media to investigate prospects and form opinions based on what they see, students have to brand themselves positively on those sites if their objective is to secure a job or advance professionally. This study examines Black college students' perceptions and use of social media.

The purpose is to understand and explain why students are underutilizing social media sites as platforms for professional marketing and branding. Based on this, there is an opportunity to bridge the gap in research so colleges can teach students the power of social media, its influence on perception, and the possible impact on career advancement. A social media professional branding curriculum would enable students to develop online profiles aligned with academic excellence, business etiquette, and job readiness in preparation for career success.

responsibly could be helpful versus not using it professionally and being further overlooked for opportunities.

Black college students looking to advance professionally after graduation must be conscious of the caliber of content they share and engage in on social sites. It is crucial that these students positively represent themselves online as a strategy and tactic for bringing attention to themselves as competent and qualified professionals. According to Nick Morrison's article in *Forbes* (2020), after researching 300,000 students who graduated between 2017 and 2018, Black college graduates were twice as likely as Whites to be unemployed after graduation or working part-time, volunteer, and unpaid positions. Presumably, if Black college students are not using social media responsibly, this could justify the hiring disparity. The only way to understand this was to take a deeper dive into the review of the literature.

An article published in *Fortune* by Donnelly (2017) took a look at Fortune 500 companies. Only 15 of those 500 firms reported a demographic representation of their employees which could mean they lack interest in improving their diversity inclusion practices. Christian Weller's (2019) article, *"African Americans Face Systematic Obstacles to Getting Good Jobs,"* supports the issue that employment barriers are a reality for Blacks. The article explains that it takes Blacks longer to find jobs, especially good-paying positions, than their White counterparts (Weller, 2019). Weller also stated, Blacks are the last to be hired and, during economic downturns, the first to be fired (2019). Suppose Fortune 500 companies are finally ready to improve their diversity and inclusion practices by hiring more Blacks for white-collar managerial jobs. In that case, Black college students could increase their chances of being recognized,

contacted for an interview, and hired based on having a professional social media presence.

Social media platforms Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, were created as mediums for people and companies to network, communicate, keep in touch, market, brand, and share information. Although companies and organizations primarily use these social sites to market and brand products and services, they also abuse having access to these forums to screen and recruit candidates. According to Blount, Wright, and Hal, educators should possess an urgency to teach students the value of using social media responsibly because recruiters make hiring decisions based on content prospects' posts and how they present themselves online (2016). On the contrary, the argument could be that students do not care about the implications or long-term repercussions of posting inappropriate content and using social media irresponsibly (Curran, Draus, Schrager, & Zappala, 2014). The reality is students should be aware employers actively screen candidates by examining their photos, interactions, videos, use of language, writing skills, and grammar of posts (Nagel, Remillard, Aucoin, & Takenishi, 2018). The fact that recruiters pre-judge candidates based on social media etiquette and professional presence can make people uncomfortable. According to Sreenivasan (2021), it is vital to carefully consider what gets posted on social media before posting it.

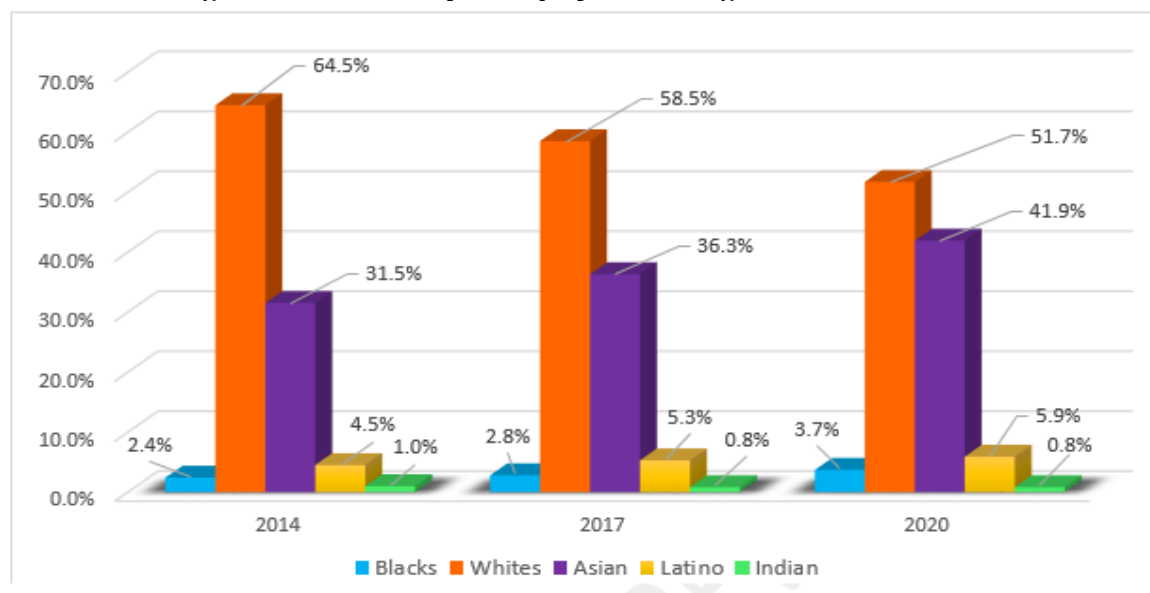
A former IBM executive, Michael Gee, was hired by the company in the 1980s when the firm was committed to improving diversity and inclusion practices. In 2018 he published an article in the *Harvard Review* entitled, "Why Aren't Black Employees Getting More White-Collar Jobs." Gee reported that few Blacks had been hired into managerial jobs at IBM since the '80s, that hiring practices had not improved since then, and Blacks still represent less than 8% of their white-collar Workforce (2018). According to Jacob Demmitt's report in *The Business Journals*, 85% of Blacks employed by Amazon work in unskilled non-managerial positions (2015). A

supporting article by Khorram and Rooney (2020) in *CNBC* stated that although Amazon has made efforts to increase the percentage of Black employees, most of those staff work in the distribution centers and not in white-collar managerial or executive-level positions. As with IBM, the data suggest that Amazon may not be as inclusive as the company could or should be when hiring Blacks for white-collar management, executive-level positions. Suppose Amazon were to become more inclusive in its diversity practices for upper-level jobs. In that case, Black college students must be ready since they will most likely be screened based on their social media profiles.

As with IBM and Amazon, the research suggests Google also has diversity and inclusion issues. A report by Joseph Johnson (2021) in *Statistica* made it clear that Google did not improve its inclusivity much between 2014 and 2020 (Figure 1). In those six years, there was a 1.3% increase of Blacks from 2.4% to 3.7%; a 1.4% rise for Latinos from 4.5% to 5.9%; a 0.2% decrease of Native Americans from 1% to 0.8%, yet a 10.4% increase for Asians from 31.5% to 41.9%, but a 12.8% decrease for Whites from 64.5% to 51.7%. Regardless of the increase or decrease in employees, the percentages of White and Asian employees, by far, outnumber other ethnic groups. Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans are underrepresented at Google.

An article by Sara O'Brien in *CNN Business* stated that Google's Black employee population was meagerly low and that the company struggles with retaining them because they feel excluded (2018). Donnelly (2017) spotlighted Google's diversity and inclusion stagnancy by disclosing that even though the percentage of Black employees is in the single digits, only 1% are in tech positions. Donnelly also stated that 91% of Google's staff are White and Asian. Based on the data, Google is doing a poor job with diversity and equal access to opportunities.

Figure 1. The diversity of employees at Google from 2014 to 2020



In addition to Amazon and Google, Apple has also demonstrated ill diversity and inclusion practices in hiring Blacks. According to an article in *Reuters* (2016) by Deborah Todd, Apple's Workforce in 2016 consisted of; 9% Blacks, 56% Whites, 19% Asian, 12% Hispanic, and 4% other ethnic groups. Five years later, and according to data on Apple's website (2021), the Workforce consisted; of 9% Blacks, which was no change since 2016; 47% Whites, which was a 9% decrease; 27% Asians, which was an 18% increase; 14% Hispanics, which was a 2% increase, and 4% for other cultures which was no change (Apple.com, 2021). The data support there is a disparity of Blacks employed at Apple. Once firms like Amazon, Google, and Apple are ready and willing to be more inclusive, Black college students should be prepared by having professional social media profiles to increase their chances of being recognized, interviewed, and hired.

In examine Facebook, another top-tier company, it is apparent they also have inequitable hiring practices. An article in *USAToday* by Guymm (2020) revealed although Facebook as a company grew between 2013 and 2018, Black employees never exceeded 4% of their Workforce, including the 3.4% categorized as senior leaders. According to Elizabeth Gravier (2021) in an article in *CNBC*, the social media maven is not doing a good job with diversity and inclusion; Blacks and Hispanics combined only account for 8.4% to 9% of their Workforce. Gravier also revealed that Facebook recognizes its diversity and inclusion issues and has committed to doubling its female, Black, and Hispanic Workforce by 2024 (2021). Facebook's vow to become more inclusive could indicate that technology and other notable companies are ready for change. If so, this could be an opportunity for more Black college graduates to secure White-collar jobs. The literature review supports this undeniable reality that Blacks are underrepresented in the job market in managerial positions, including at Fortune 500 companies. Once companies decide to revamp their diversity practices, having a positive social media presence could be a catalyst for Black college students to get hired.

Research suggests a double-edged sword when it comes to social media and how people and recruiters use it. All students in the study use social media, which supports it has become a lifestyle, and they are not intimidated by it. In 2021 it is nearly impossible for a person to get a job interview if they are not on social media (Morgan, 2017). According to Jonathan Segal in *HR Magazine*, recruiters have become reliant on social media to conduct background checks on candidates and investigate if they are a good fit for positions (2021). It is controversial that employers view candidates' online profiles to gain a synoptic perception of that person's personal life (Reinsch, Ross, & Hietapelto, 2016). Perhaps, having conflicting feelings about recruiters relying more on social media to screen candidates versus depending on a resume, curriculum vitae, skills, education, qualifications, or experience can be uncomfortable. The challenge is determining how and why separating personal from social

media's professional use can be confusing (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). There may be a disconnect between students' reality about content they post, how they are perceived, and the impact on their careers. It is also possible students are so distracted with freedom of expression, fun, and the entertainment perks of social media that they struggle to leverage the sites for professional branding.

A study entitled "*Demographic Differences and HR Professional's Concerns over the Use of Social Media in Hiring*" surveyed 112 Human Resources Professionals to learn more about online hiring practices (Albert, DaSilva & Aggarwal, 2010). The research challenged the lawfulness and privacy concerns of social media screening. The outcome was that younger Human Resources managers with the least years of experience were more concerned about social media hiring practices than tenured employees who preferred traditional resumes, background checks, and filtering out social media information unrelated to jobs (Abert, DaSilva & Aggarwal, 2010). The results of that study indicate that as generations change, technology, mindset, and processes change. Also, how hiring professionals think and make decisions has changed.

Acquiring some understanding of race and disparity in the job market adds value to this research.

A study in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, entitled "*Whitened Résumés: Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market*" (2016), tested discrimination stemming from ethnic names and cultural references on resumes. Resumes were created for Blacks and Asians and submitted to 1,600 available entry-level positions throughout the United States. In the experiment, select resumes removed all references of ethnicity; however, the skills and educational qualifications remained identical. The purpose was to observe if whitewashing would result in more interviews. The conclusion was that 25% of the Black candidates with whitewashed resumes received callbacks, while only 10% got calls when they left the ethnic details intact (Kanga, DeCellesta, Tilcsika, and Junb, 2016). The whitewash resume undertaking could suggest and confirm that unclouded discrimination exists in corporate hiring. If this is the case, Black candidates, including Black college students, must positively brand themselves on social media and be mindful of their portrayal. According to Spencer (2018), a heaping 70% of employers use social media to gather information about prospects before inviting them for an interview. Recruiters use social sites to intentionally look for discrepancies between a candidate's social media posts, the job position, and personal life (Spencer, 2018). Content posted on social sites becomes public information. Suppose Black college students do experience discrimination when applying for jobs because of their ethnicity. In that case, having a polished and professional social media presence could increase the chances of being considered and contacted for a job if the company's objective is to support an increase in diversity and inclusion.



To prevent students from social media pitfalls, Rosenberg et al. (2016) suggest integrating social media branding into college curriculums as a way to prepare them for the job market. Without the knowledge, many students will remain in the dark and continue to miss out on professional opportunities because of their posts on social media. Students must develop a growth mindset and envision social media as platforms for more than entertainment and fun, but as an excellent way to promote a professional presence, skills, education, and qualifications for white-collar jobs after graduation. Trying to understand the power of social media and the fact that recruiters use it to look for pertinent information that prospects may not have disclosed on a resume, job application, or during an interview can be perplexing (Meneyse, 2019). The reality is that at the click of a button, recruiters create a perception or judgment about a candidate based on what they see and determine whether the person is suitable for a job opportunity regardless of skills, experience, qualifications, human capital, or value they can add to a company.

Exploring the types of marketing classes offered at academic institutions may explain why students are not using social media for professional purposes. Since this study examines Bowie State University students, taking a look at their existing marketing courses is necessary. The University offers marketing courses, including a Social Media Marketing class, but the learning objectives teach students how to aid organizations to promote products and enhance their brands. None of the marketing classes integrate learning outcomes that enable students to develop a professional social media presence in preparation for career advancement. There is an opportunity for Bowie State University and possibly other institutions, especially HBCU to fill the void by creating a social media marketing course for online professional branding. Students would have the chance to develop professional social media profiles and make a marketable online presence as a strategy toward career success.

When assessing other Historically Black Colleges (HBCUs), Howard University offers a Social Media & Integrated Marketing course. Still, it focuses on the history, theoretical uses, and legal and ethical issues of social media (Howard University, 2021). The University does not offer a

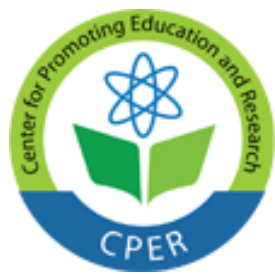
course that supports students' professional branding through social media. Morgan State University does not provide a Social Media Marketing class or any marketing classes specific to teaching students how to brand themselves online with the objective of professional growth after graduation. Instead, the University offers marketing courses that are theoretical or that teach students concepts and strategies to help organizations reach mass markets. (Morgan State University, 2021). Morehouse College (2021) offers marketing courses specific to companies' strategic brand management. Still, none of the mentioned HBCUs teach students the importance of professional branding using social media.

When assessing predominately White Ivey-League colleges, Harvard University (2021) provides marketing courses; however, the only type related to social media is their Social Media Management class which focuses on theories and management practices. The course teaches students to understand social media's power and how companies can leverage social platforms for business and branding success (Harvard University, 2021). This particular class teaches students to evaluate companies in crisis, conduct research, identify issues, and develop social media strategies for success. Yale University offers digital marketing, marketing strategy, and pricing classes, to name a few, but they all focus on helping organizations (Yale University, 2021). Yale does not offer a marketing class specific to social media marketing that prepares students for career success. Princeton University does not have a Marketing major, nor do they promote or provide information about any marketing classes that the school may offer. However, the Princeton University Keller Center advertises social media marketing internships for students to help organizations achieve online branding success (Keller Center, 2021). Based on this literature review, neither HBCUs nor Ivey League colleges offer a marketing class that teaches students the power of social media and its use for professional branding to prepare for career advancement after graduation.

Although the course could benefit students at any academic institution, it is especially crucial for Black college students since they are disadvantaged in getting access to jobs. Below is a portfolio (Table 1) of marketing courses offered at the most notable HBCUs and Ivey League universities.

Table 1. Marketing courses at Black colleges and primarily White Ivey League universities

| Bowie State University Marketing Courses | Morgan State University Marketing Courses | Morehouse Marketing Courses |
|---|--|--|
| MKTG 231 - Principles of Marketing | MKTG 331 - Principles of Marketing | HCOM 351 Professional Communication |
| MKTG 330 - Consumer Behavior | MKTG 333 - E-Marketing | HBA 360 Principles of Marketing |
| MKTG 334 - Salesmanship | MKTG 335 - Consumer Behavior | HBA 462 Marketing Research |
| MKTG 335 - Retailing | MKTG 336 - Retail Management | HBA 463 Marketing Management |
| MKTG 337 - Advertising | MKTG 337 - Marketing Channels Management | HBA 464 Principles of Professional Selling |
| MKTG 341 - Entertainment Marketing | MKTG 338 - Professional Selling | HBA 466 Special Topics in Marketing |
| MKTG 350 - Fashion Marketing | MKTG 340 - Global Marketing | HBA 467 Strategic Brand Management |
| MKTG 420 - Social Media Marketing | MKTG 346 - Social Marketing | HBA 468 Principles of Advertising |
| MKTG 430 - Marketing Research | MKTG 345 - Services Marketing | HBA 475 Advanced Professional Selling |



| | | |
|--|---|---|
| MKTG 431 - International Marketing | MKTG 420 - Marketing Research Systems | HBA 476 Customer Relationship Management |
| MKTG 432 - Procurement Mgmt | MKTG 431 - Advertising & Marketing Communications | |
| MKTG 438 - Marketing Strategy | MKTG 465 - Special Topics in Marketing | |
| | MKTG 495 - Strategic Marketing Management | |
| Harvard University Marketing Courses | Yale University Marketing Courses | Princeton University Marketing Courses |
| 1059 - How to Price anything | MGT 505 - Introduction to Marketing | <i>No marketing courses could be found.</i> |
| 1905 - Purpose-Driven Marketing | MTG 555 - Pricing Strategy | |
| 1908 - Business at the Base of the Pyramid | MGT 556 - Customer Analytics | |
| 1916 - Creating Brand Value | MGT 857 - Digital Strategy | |
| 1935 - Business Marketing & Sales | MTG 558 - Consumer Behavior | |
| 1945 - Consumer Marketing | MTG 559 - Marketing Strategy | |
| 1952 - Retailing | MGT 859b - Strategic Marketing Leadership | |
| 1971 - E-Commerce: Strategy, Growth, and Analytics | MTG 575 - Social Media Analytics | |
| 1985 - Decision Making Under Uncertainty | MGT 650 - Customer Insights and Applications | |
| 6932 - Entrepreneurial Marketing | MGT 851 - Strategic Market Measurement | |
| Digital Marketing: A Strategic Perspective (Online Course) | MGT 852 - Listening to the Customer | |
| Marketing MGMT and Digital Strategy Online Course | | |
| Strategic Brand Marketing (Online Course) | | |
| Strategic Marketing Management (Online Course) | | |

Theoretical Framework

The advancement theory is the framework for this research. It narrows the gap in available data about why Black undergraduate college students are not using social media for professional branding. This framework involves moving concepts forward to provide greater clarity through data analysis (Penrod, 2007). The objective is that this study can advance the research to improve college curriculums. The problem is that Black college students are not using social media to prepare themselves for the competitive job market after graduation. Also, colleges offer marketing and social media courses; however, none prepare students to brand themselves online, so they are poised to be viewed by recruiters and hiring decision-makers as skilled, qualified prospects that can do the job. Thus, the advancement framework is appropriate because it adds to existing research and aims to close the gap in available information on this critical topic.

Methodology

Mixed-method was the approach to this research. As supported by Creswell (2019), integrating qualitative and quantitative data is an opportunity to understand better the research problem versus relying solely on one method. The mixed-method application for this research made it possible to explore perception, lived experiences, and assess factual data. The qualitative process made it possible to examine qualities and characteristics versus numerical values (Leedy, 2016) and entailed phenomenology. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenology explores commonalities and lived experiences of participants in a study based on the phenomenon. The aim was to investigate how and why

students use social media, and the way to do this was to explore views, perceptions, behavior, experiences and encounters using social sites. The quantitative process, on the contrary, involved grouping data from the sample and analyzing the findings as variables. The combined methods made it feasible to gather critical data that helped explain why Black college students use social media the way they do.

Sample & Instrument

The sample was one hundred Black students at Bowie State University's College of Business. Fifty-five students were seniors, forty were juniors, four were sophomores and one freshman.

The protocol was a ten-question open-end survey. The use of open-end questions was intentional to allow participants to elaborate on their responses. All questions were carefully composed to minimize and deter bias. The questions were pilot tested and modified before the final selections and survey distribution via Blackboard Survey.

Central Research Question

Why do Black college students use social media for entertainment and fun and not for professional development in preparation for career advancement after graduation? The three related sub-questions were:

R1: What are students' experiences and perceptions of using social media?

R2: How do marketing and social media curriculums at colleges aid students with online professional branding as a way to prepare for career advancement after graduation?

R3: How can colleges motivate students to use social media responsibly?

This study made it possible to identify core perceptions of the students related to how they use social media and why they use it the way they do. It became clear that colleges can do more to teach students about the power of social media and its repercussions on career advancement if not used responsibly for professional branding. There is an evident gap in college curriculums not offering social media marketing courses that support students in developing a professional online presence.

The problem is that colleges provide courses that teach students how to help companies achieve marketing success yet are not educating students on how to brand themselves to become suitable candidates for White-collar managerial positions.

Data Collection

Once participants' surveys were complete, Blackboard populated the data into an Excel file. Cross-referencing the data three times against the original survey submissions was the protocol to confirm accuracy. The information was then transferred to Nvivo software for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were carefully sorted into groups by participants and questions.

Next, a search was done to explore word frequency for each survey question. The queries made it possible to identify the most commonly used words and themes based on responses. Next, the data were put into nodes and organized by themes, carefully compared, and each question underwent the same process. Finally, the data underwent analysis applying a quantitative statistical approach.

Prevalent Themes That Emerged

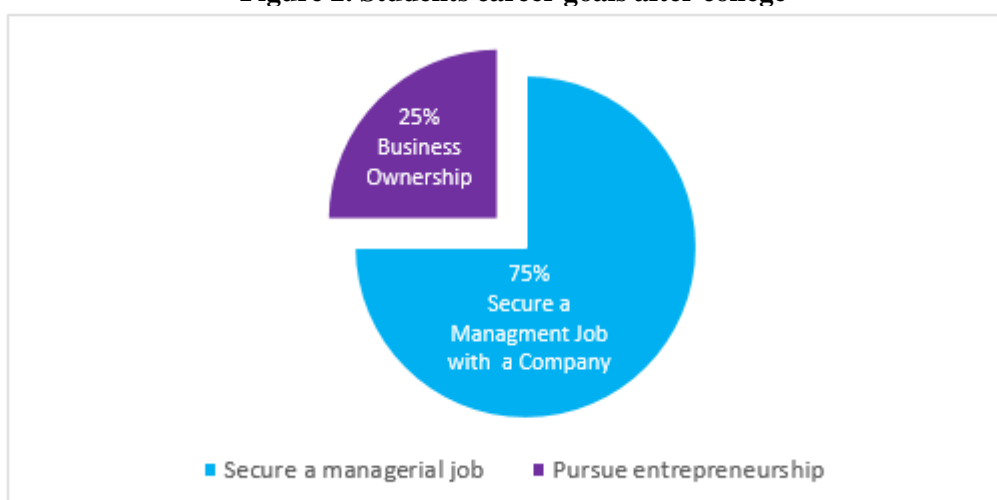
1. Students presume a college degree is a ticket to managerial job opportunities and professional advancement after graduation
2. Students perceive that social media is for fun, socializing, and entertainment
3. Student's favorite social media site is Instagram

4. Students use social media primarily for videos, photos, making posts, and current events
5. Students spend 3-5 hours a day on average on social media
6. Students rarely use social media for professional branding
7. Students believe offering college courses on social media professional development, paired with a guarantee of getting a job, would entice them to use it more for professional purposes
8. Students are aware that recruiters use social media to screen candidates
9. Students want to rethink how they use social media in the future
- 10) Students are confused about how to separate personal from professional use of social media

It is time to examine the data collected from the surveys. All 100% of the students believe that a college degree will help them advance professionally or secure a dream job after graduation. This data could suggest or confirm that Black college students rely on a college degree for career growth, an increase in income, and economic independence. It appears that the students are in college because they believe and are banking on a college degree for professional advancement and a better quality of life.

Students also seem to have a clear vision of the career paths they want to pursue; 75% will seek managerial positions with existing companies, and 25% entrepreneurship (Figure 2). All students were clear about their decision to either secure an executive job or pursue business ownership after graduation. Since students' objectives are to advance professionally after college, some marketing and positive presence must transpire online. Of the students, 99% have active social media profiles. The challenge is the level of professionalism exuded from students on the sites. Social media is powerful, and perception is inevitable.

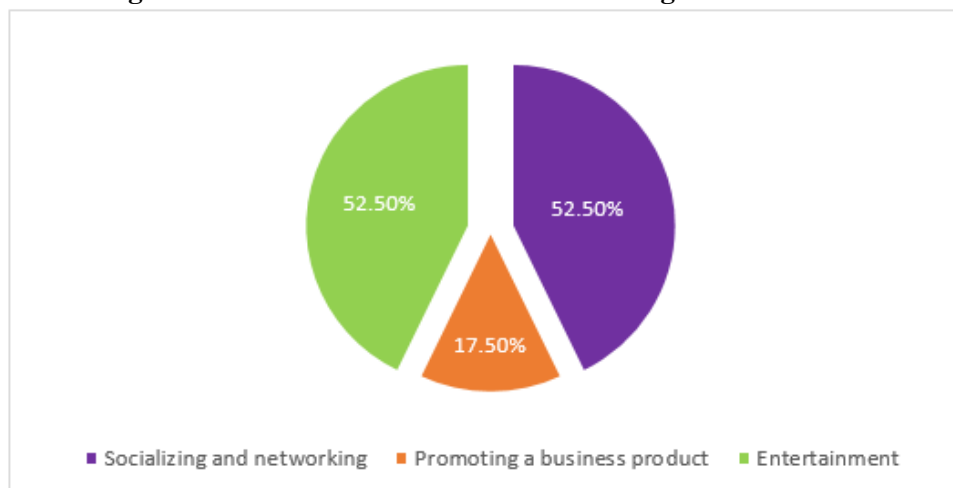
Figure 2. Students career goals after college



When asked to reflect on what comes to mind when thinking of social media, the responses varied; 52% mentioned socializing, networking, and communicating, 52% said entertainment, and 18%, mentioned promoting business products, services, and events (Figure 3). The totals do not sum

up to 100% because, for 22% of the students, a combination of things came to mind. No students mentioned professional branding or career advancement and could suggest this is not an automatic mindset. There is an opportunity for students to shift from a fixed to a growth mindset.

Figure 3. What comes to mind when thinking of social media?



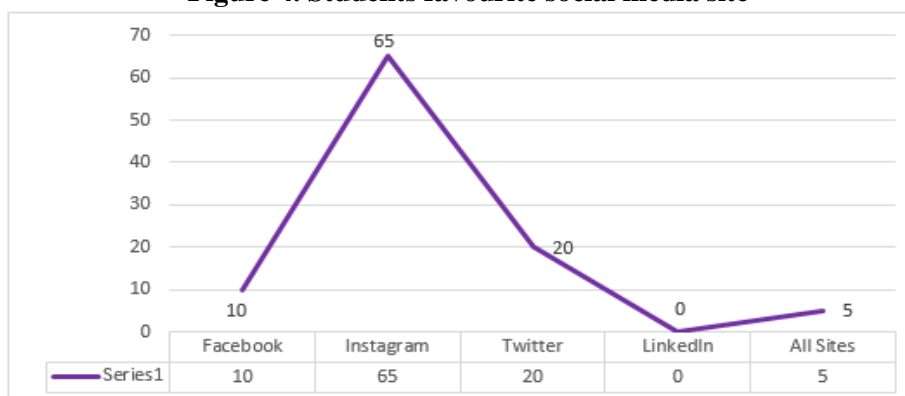
The popular social media platforms available to students are; Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Each site is a medium for connecting people, culture, current events, business, and entertainment. For example, Instagram allows people to "create, connect, communicate, discover, and share" (Instagram, 2020). Twitter is known for its entertainment and hot topics (Twitter, 2020). Facebook empowers and brings people together (Facebook, 2020), and LinkedIn specializes in job postings, recruitment, and business networking (LinkedIn, 2020). The commonality amongst the social sites is, providing a platform for socializing, networking, promoting, and bridging the gap between people and information.

When asked to disclose their favorite social media site, 65% chose Instagram, 20% Twitter, 10% Facebook, and 5%

did not have a preference (Figure 4). It was intriguing to learn that no students mentioned LinkedIn as a site they like or use for professional branding and networking. It may be easy to think or assume students want to use LinkedIn since their objective is to secure a job or advance professionally after graduation.

The findings, on the contrary, confirm this is not the case. Again, this supports how critical it is to understand why college students use social media for entertainment rather than vehicles that prepare for career opportunities after graduation. LinkedIn could most support the career advancement of all the social sites available to students, yet it is perplexing that they are not using it.

Figure 4. Students favourite social media site



To fully understand why students use social media the way they do, it is also essential to explore their perceptions and experiences. Students that prefer using Instagram over other social sites shared reasons why it was their favorite. Someone said, "I like Instagram simply because it is user-friendly and

allows you to search for topics easily. It is also concise and offers access to important news and entertainment." Another person exclaimed, "I like Instagram because it allows users to upload stories; Twitter does not offer this feature. Stories give a more personal experience." One student shared that they like

"Instagram because of the tools it offers, and it is the most popular for people my age." Another said, "It is the easiest to use, and the pictures speak a thousand words. It is the easiest way to connect with your peers these days as well." Someone else responded, "It is my place where I can connect with people my age." Based on this information, it is apparent that Instagram is the go-to site because it appeals to the average college-aged student.

Twitter was the second favorite of the social media sites. Students shared information such as: "I like Twitter the best because there is little to no censorship. I don't necessarily mean; not safe for work content, but you see more raw material and true opinions." Someone else stated, "My favorite social media to use is Twitter. I love Twitter mostly for comedy. I enjoy laughing at people's funny tweets." One student said, "My preferred social media site is Twitter because it is usually faster to pass out new information. I also found out it is quite easy to reach organizations and corporations. I also like that they incorporate videos, pictures, and other media into their business model." There was a consistency in the responses that students enjoy Twitter because it is fun. Twitter has mastered creating a fun experience for users. According to this student,

"My favorite social media site to use is Twitter. Twitter is a place of fun and some learning. When I get on Twitter, I either see funny content or content I relate to."

"It's like a journal where people say how they feel, yet there is still a place for pictures and promotion. It's all-around wonderful."

Facebook came in third place. When exploring students' perception of Facebook, it was intriguing that the site was not the most popular or preferred choice, although some students do use it. One student shared, "I like Facebook to connect with more people and to laugh or connect with friends from my past and present." Another stated, "Facebook is more family-oriented to me than the other social sites, and I am a family-oriented person. It is easy for me to log in to Facebook and see what my family is up to." One student explained, "My favorite social media site to use is Facebook since I have many followers compared to other sites." The responses suggest that students view Facebook as a platform for keeping in touch

with friends and family and building a following. No students made mention of using Facebook for career development.

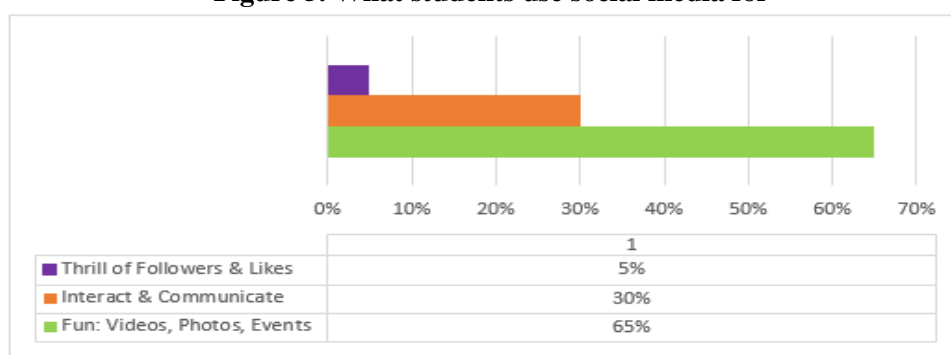
In assessing LinkedIn, no students mentioned it as their preferred or favorite social media site. Only one student had an active LinkedIn profile. The fact that students do not use LinkedIn is alarming, especially considering it is a recruiter haven. Recruiters worldwide use LinkedIn to advertise job opportunities, seek talent, network with other professionals, and share business information and hot topics. LinkedIn is also a powerful platform for accessing business contacts, publications, workshops, conferences, training, and events. It is a forum where professionals can promote themselves and their skillsets for opportunities.

Now that it is clear why students like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, it is essential to explore further what they use social media sites to accomplish.

Based on the survey data, 65% use social media for fun, watching videos, photo sharing, and keeping abreast of current events; 30% use it to interact and communicate, and 5% use it for the thrill of building a following and earning 'likes' (Figure 5). The survey data supports that most students are intrigued with social media for reasons unrelated to career promotion; they are interested in it for entertainment. The problem is that recruiters review and discard prospects based on what they see.

The reality is that qualified candidates could be overlooked for job opportunities because their social media profiles and presence are not professional. According to Ilies (2018), "In a society dominated more than ever by a competitive environment, self-development can play a key role in gaining the wanted job or internship program for students and young professionals." The article supports that if a person wants recognition as a professional, their online presence must be in alignment and demonstrate professionalism. Students must learn to use social media for much more than fun. Suppose students are not taking advantage of social media platforms for professional development. In that case, colleges can be proactive in incorporating this learning into curriculums to better poise students for success in the Workforce after graduation. Higher-learning institutions should be held accountable to provide students with the necessary education to make them aware of the value of professional self-promotion through social media.

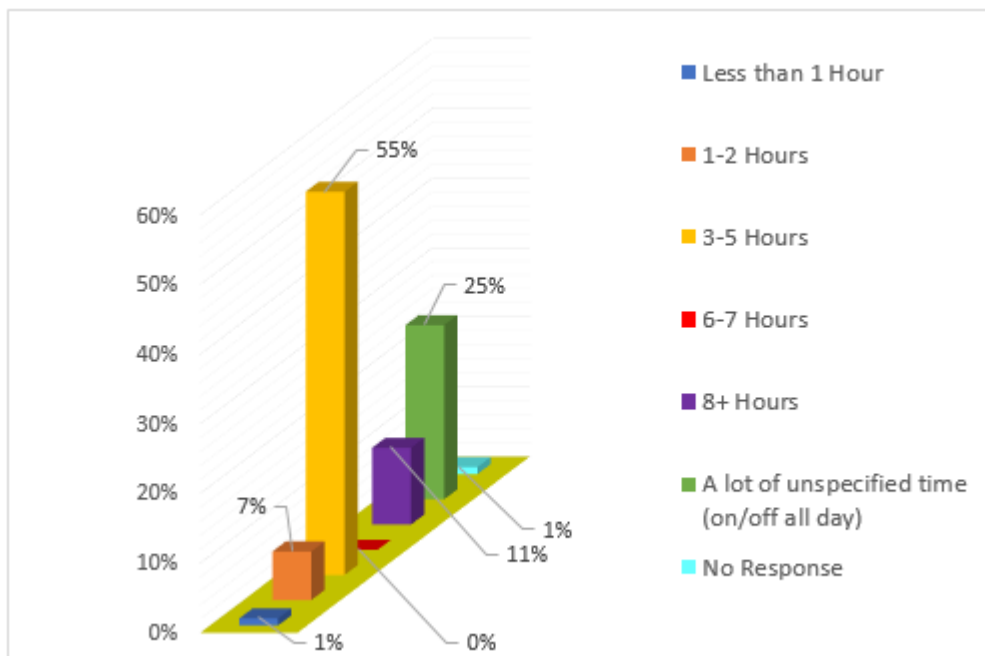
Figure 5. What students use social media for



There was a probe to explore how much time students spend on social media. The survey data made it possible to determine students have adapted to using it as a lifestyle and spend significant time daily interacting, searching, having fun, sharing information, and posting content (Figure 6). The majority of students, 55%, spend 3-5 hours each day on social

sites; 25% admit to spending an abundance of unspecified time, on/off all day; 11% more than 8 hours, 7% spend 1-2 hours, 1% less than an hour, and 1% did not answer the question. The data suggests students are addicted to social media and actively engage on social sites every day for pure entertainment.

Figure 6. Daily time spent on social media

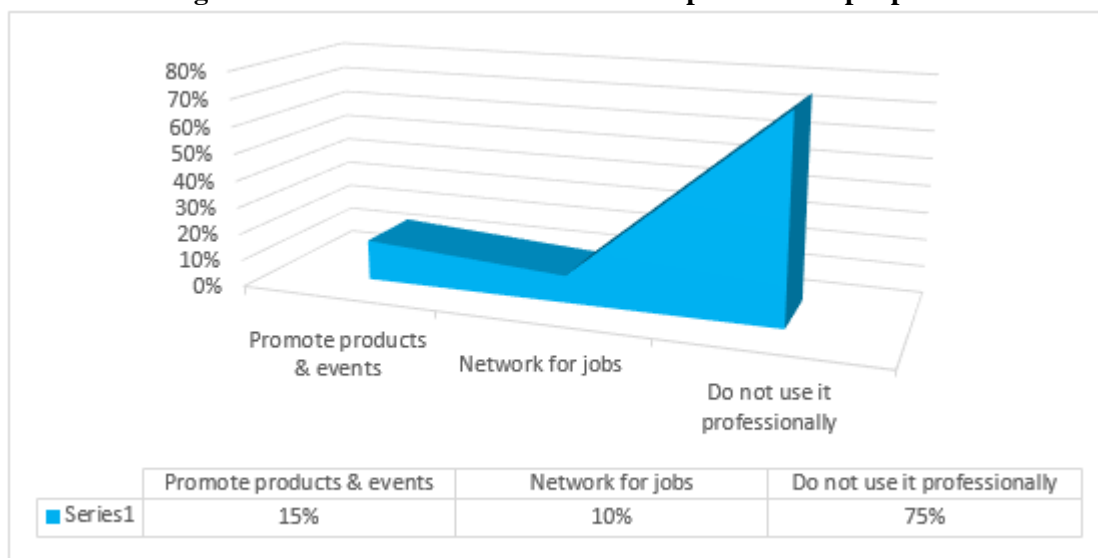


When students were asked if they ever used Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn for career development, advancement, or job opportunities, the responses were alarming.

The data revealed 75% have not, 15% at some point did use it to promote a product or a business, and the remaining 10%, used it a few times to network for a job (Figure 7). The data suggests students do not understand the power of social media when it comes to professional

networking and job opportunities. The research also suggests students are not taking advantage of social media platforms like LinkedIn to brand and market themselves professionally. An initiative to teach students the value of being more engaged professionally on social media and how to use it responsibly for career growth could help more Black college students secure job opportunities and White-collar positions when they are available.

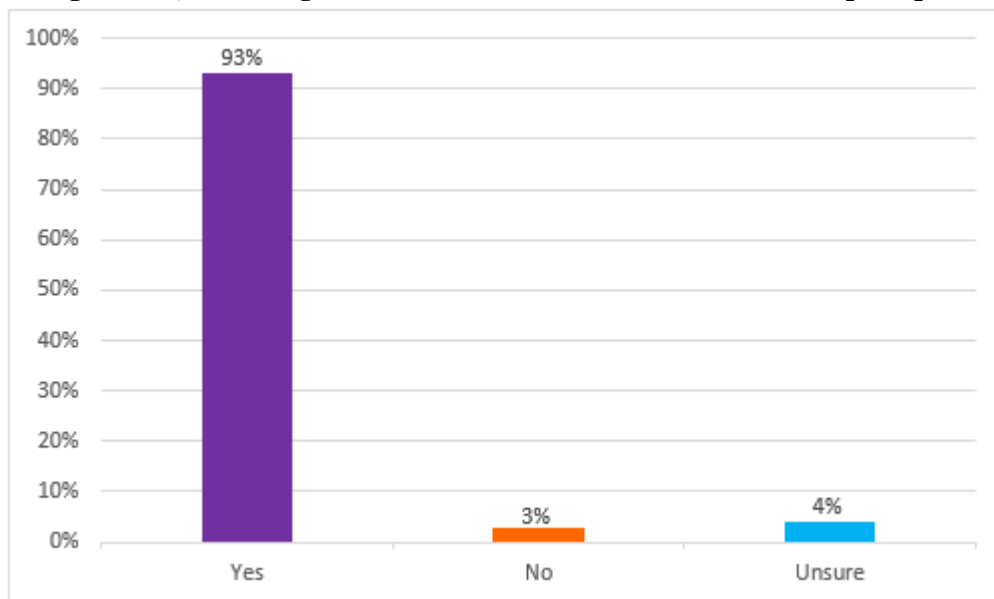
Figure 7. Student use of social media for professional purposes



The research further probed student's views on the power of social media and its impact on perception. The question examined if students' thought the content they post on social sites influences how people perceive them. The feedback was as follows; 93% believe social media influences perception, 3% did not, and the remaining 4% were unsure (Figure 8). It is alarming that most students understand the power and influence of social media yet do not use it for professional purposes to prepare for career advancement after graduation. Maybe students do not care about how they are perceived on social media or may not understand the severity of the impact on their careers. One student shared, "I believe

an image goes a long way. The image a person portrays on social media can either help or ruin their career." Another stated, "Post content that's going to build your brand and highlight you in the way you want to be seen," adding, "People often don't realize that what they post on social media can greatly affect them in their real-world life. For example, jobs are now researching the social media profiles of potential candidates to see how they are behaving and carrying themselves outside of the workplace." Thus, there is an opportunity to instill in students the importance of professional branding if their objective is career advancement and professional growth after earning a degree.

Figure 8. Questioning if students believe social media influences perception



The survey explored students' views about whether they think recruiters use social media for hiring decisions. The majority of students, 80%, said yes, that they believe recruiters rely on social media to make hiring determinations, 13% do not think recruiters depend on it, and 7% were unsure (Figure 9). The survey then examined perception as it relates to social media and its influence on career development. One student informed me,

"I believe what you post on social media represents who you are and what you stand for. So if you post positive and inspirational things, then people will think highly of you. If you post pictures in professional business attire, it will show business professionals and managers that you care about your business."

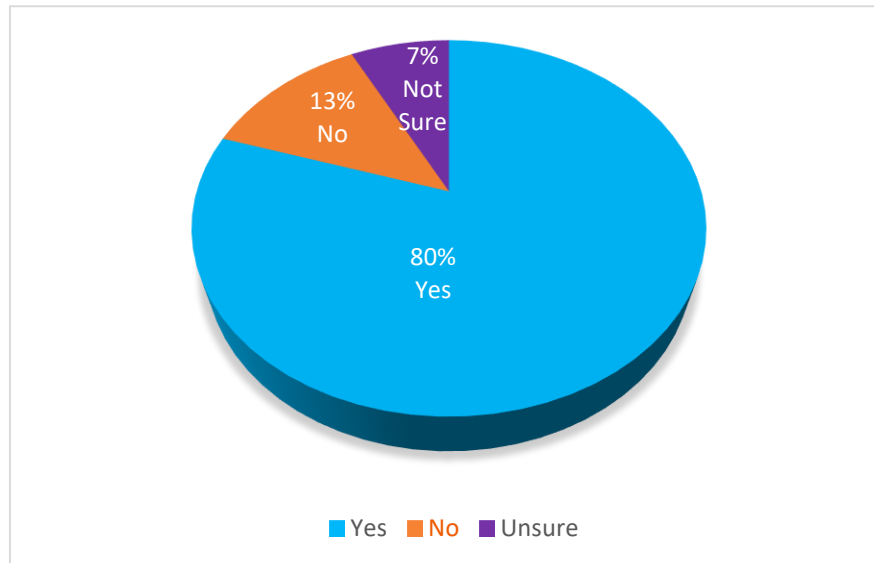
Someone exclaimed, "I feel that you should be mindful of what you do post for future jobs. They now look at people's social media to see who they truly are outside of the Workforce." Someone else stated, "I believe that your social media is a direct reflection of yourself. People tend to get personal on social media, and it can cost them career opportunities. I have personally seen how social media can regress an athlete's image. With that being said, it isn't all bad either, and people can use social media to boost their image."

Students seem to understand they are judged based on what they post on social media, including being pre-judged by hiring professionals. Most of the feedback from students was consistent with what this student claims,

"I am aware most companies do check new employee's social media sites for posts that may be controversial. I believe some social media posts can affect a job opportunity depending on the level of the job a person is applying for."

On the contrary, a student alerted, "I believe that social media is just a place for fun, and everything should be taken with a grain of salt. So, using it for career development may not be the best idea." Another student recommended, "People should have a personal Instagram and a professional one. The personal one should be for friends and family and kept private while the professional for business and networking." And one student exclaimed, "I feel like people should keep a personal and business page separate because it can give people mixed feelings and assumptions." Thus, although the data repeatedly suggest students understand the impact of social media on career growth, it is still unclear why they do not use social sites for professional branding.

Figure 9. Students perception on whether recruiters use social media for hiring decisions



The survey queried what it would take to motivate students to use social media more for professional branding. The results varied; 35% said training and college courses, 30% were unsure, and 20% said the guarantee of getting a job because they were not confident people get hired for jobs posted on social media. Also, 10% said if job positions were more readily available on Twitter and Instagram, the remaining 5% said incentives or rewards would motivate them (Figure 10). A student made an impactful statement,

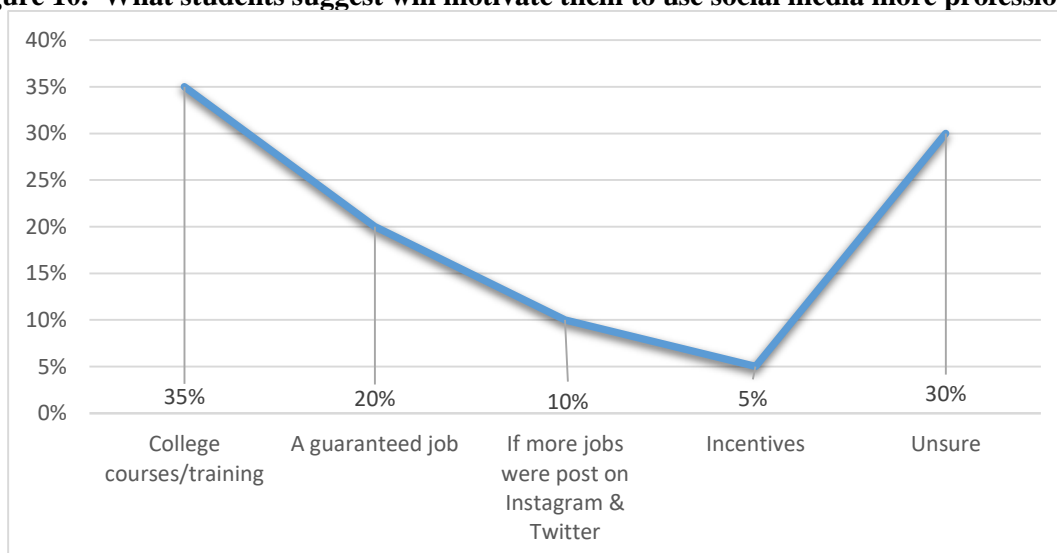
"In my opinion, if schools offered more Social Media Marketing classes, students would be more enticed to use social media for career and professional development. Students need to know how social media can benefit them and their professional endeavors. But, for now, social media is still viewed as a form of entertainment."

Another student said, "Offering training courses to promote fluidity on each site." One also stated, "Taking

courses in which it is taught. How to use it efficiently can be a game-changer for students. I did not know its importance before taking the survey."

The data suggests students could benefit from college curriculums that teach them how to use social media for professional branding in preparation for the competitive job market after graduation. The data could also suggest that students may not take social media seriously for professional and career use because they do not believe or have not witnessed people getting hired for jobs posted on social sites. The students seem to have little faith that jobs are secured when blindly applying for them online. Is it possible students perceive that jobs posted on social sites are a publicity stunt. If this is the case, the question becomes, how can students be convinced otherwise. There is an opportunity to explore this question in future studies.

Figure 10. What students suggest will motivate them to use social media more professionally



Students reflected on whether the survey stimulated additional thinking about their use of social media. Based on feedback, it was easy to determine that making students aware of social sites' influence on career advancement can change their mindset toward using them more responsibly. The feedback was as follows; 85% plan to re-evaluate how they use it in the future, 10% said it did not invigorate new thinking, and 5% did not respond (Figure 11).

The data made it possible to determine that the process of asking students probing questions about the use of social media aroused their mindset and curiosity related to how they currently use it and can use it more responsibly in the future. One student shared, "I never really thought of social media from a professional standpoint before." Another claimed, "The survey made me want to be more cautious with what I post because social media could very well be the first avenue my employer goes to learn about me. I also want to create a brand, and my social media should reflect the image I want for my brand."

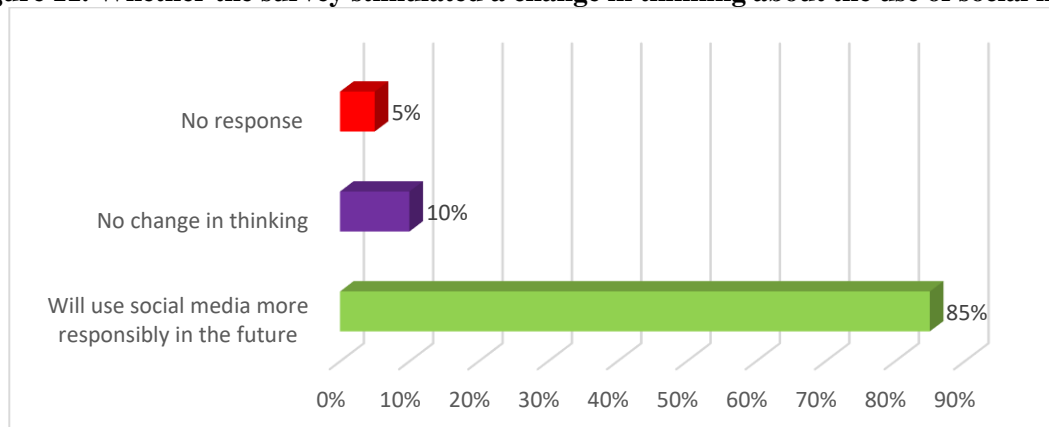
Another student emphasized,

"The survey has made me rethink the amount of time I spend on social media, why I use it, and other potentially more beneficial uses. I think social media can be used for business and networking, but most students like myself waste too much time on it being unproductive."

On the contrary, someone said, "The survey did not affect my perception or use of social media."

The feedback could suggest that students' instincts do not automatically align with how social media could impact their future. The data from this study, without question, indicates students are aware of the negative repercussions of not using social media responsibly. Still, they do not seem to understand the severity and impact of getting access to jobs and careers. Therefore, higher learning institutions have a tremendous opportunity to develop courses that teach students the importance of and how to brand themselves professionally using social sites for career advancement.

Figure 11. Whether the survey stimulated a change in thinking about the use of social media



Limitations

The restricted sample size, a single University, non-inclusion of Black students that attend White Universities, narrow demographics, and geographic region are limitations in the study. A larger population or sample size, expanding the demographics, covering a broader geographic area, and including a diversity of institutions could help further understand the experiences of Black college students using social media for professional branding. Conducting a survey of this nature on an expanded or different population could sway the outcome. Also, future research addressing the other limitations in this section could change the results.

Conclusion

Understanding the experiences and perceptions of Black college students and their use of social media was fundamental to this study because how they use it can impact their ability to secure gainful employment or advance professionally after graduation. This research made it possible to confirm that black college students rely on getting a college degree for professional growth. These students are in college to earn the necessary accreditations to secure managerial and

executive-level positions. With career advancement comes financial independence, improved economics, and access to a better quality of life. There is, however, a historical concern regarding the disparity of Blacks hired into executive positions. Despite having college degrees getting access to White-collar opportunities continues to be a barrier. The research supports the reality that Blacks do not get equal access to jobs and managerial positions regardless of education. As a strategy to increase the chances of getting a job, it may be beneficial for Black college students to develop a professional social media presence before graduation. Establishing a professional social media presence is an opportunity for the students to market their skills, professionalism, qualifications, and job readiness. Having a positive social media presence is imperative because recruiters entrust accessing social sites to conduct background investigations and weed out candidates based on what they see versus human capital, eligibility, and capability. Therefore, if students are not using social media responsibly, it may inhibit their ability to achieve career growth and financial independence.



This study took a deep dive into exploring why Black college students use social media the way they do. It was not difficult to conclude that although students understand the power of influence through social media, they still choose to use it fundamentally for entertainment, fun, and often carelessly. Yes, students do understand the repercussions of not using it responsibly. However, they do not comprehend the severe impact their use of social media can have on getting access to a job or professional advancement after graduation. What does stand out is that students seem to be conflicted about separating personal use of social media from professional; they were unclear about how to do it. The data also made it possible to determine students do not know how to use social media for professional branding and prepare for career advancement.

There is an opportunity for colleges and universities, particularly HBCUs, to design a social media marketing class that prepares students for professional online branding and career success. A course of this nature could require the following student learning objectives: demonstrate an understanding of the power and influence of social media, illustrate online business etiquette, employ mastery of social media profiles, establish a professional online presence, implement a social media strategy for career advancement, prepare to pursue opportunities, and utilize social sites to network and connect with recruiters and business professionals.

Although it is impossible to predict or guarantee that Black college students will get access to more white-collar jobs after graduation, even if they took a social media preparedness course, a class like this could still better equip

them for success. Academic institutions should be accountable for providing students with professional development tools to succeed in a world consumed by social media and its influence on professional advancement. Black college students have historically experienced a disparity in getting equal access to executive-level jobs after graduation. Because of this, it is critical to teach them how to use it for professional branding to increase the chances of securing a job and decrease contrast. Overlooking the opportunity to develop curriculums that can prepare students for social media branding toward career advancement is a disservice. Teaching Black students the power of social sites, and the potential impact on their futures, careers, and job security should be a call to action. Students must be clear that recruiters rely on social media to view profiles, form an opinion, screen, and weed out prospects based on what they see.

A college graduate's career could depend on social media use; therefore, they should have a growth mindset to brand themselves professionally.

In conclusion, expanding students' way of thinking to recognize social media as more than platforms for fun, entertainment, socializing, freedom of speech and uncensored expression would be a step in the right direction to get them to use it more for career advancement. However, if there is no action toward addressing the issue, Black college students will continue to use social media irresponsibly and remain disadvantaged in the Workforce.

Definition of Terms used in this article are as follows:

Social Media: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

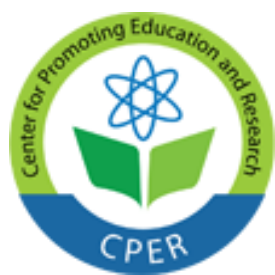
White-collar Jobs: Management and Executive level positions.

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