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### The Overlooked Consequences of a Digital Footprint

As of 2015, 3.2 billion people use the internet world-wide (Davidson). Content is posted online every single second, and the trail left behind by one's online activity is known as a digital footprint. Today, the vast majority of society has a digital footprint. Being active online can be beneficial in many ways, whether just by staying connected with friends and family, or by promoting a personal brand or company. However, digital footprints can also have many consequences, which most people never consider. Online posts can have much broader effects than what is intended. Information is spread in an instant, is available to anyone, and cannot be taken back. Not only can digital footprints easily ruin one's reputation, but paying too close attention to one's appearance online can also damage one's ability to communicate effectively. A digital footprint can be very damaging because content on the internet can be seen by everyone, posts are spread quickly without the possibility of removal, and focusing too much on a digital footprint can lead to a lack of social skills.

Digital footprints often cause problems because it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that something posted online is not a big deal or that a tweet is just a tweet. Today's generation seems to be reckless with social media accounts, thinking either their account is private, or that no one important will see what they post. Teenagers often post pictures of themselves at parties, clearly drunk or high, students frequently put down their teachers, and children can be seen complaining about their parents. If asked about it, they may respond by saying, "It's just a tweet;

who cares?’ Little do they know, people everywhere are watching. University admissions officers are scrutinizing profiles, friends and parents are paying close attention, and even potential bosses may be aware of content posted online. A nationwide study conducted by Harris Interactive shows that 34% of hiring managers chose not to offer someone a job due to concerns they found on social media (Kryder). It is not a myth: certain content on social media can negatively affect one’s odds of getting a job. A study by Kaplan Test Prep found that 30% of admissions officers discovered content online that hurt an applicant’s chances (Singer). Schools and employers are watching. A tweet about a student’s dislike of a class will not be looked upon favorably by these institutions. Harmless posts can quickly turn into the reason for being denied from a school or passed on for a job. With the rising popularity of the internet, these consequences are only becoming more realistic. “For an increasingly internet-savvy public, ‘images’ reflected by this social media mirror may prove very important in sizing up not only the credentials, but also the character of professionals” (Greysen, Kind, and Chretien). Today, everyone is quick to make judgments. People may determine a stranger’s character based on a 140 character tweet. It is crucial to avoid posting content that could potentially create a negative spotlight. Digital footprints can have a tremendous impact on one’s reputation-- many people are watching, and one mistake could be critical.

Not only are digital footprints available for anyone to see, they are also not easily erased. Unlike some footprints that are quickly washed away, a digital footprint is not going anywhere anytime soon. However, many people think that their posts will not be relevant even a day later. This is the mistake that Ohio State quarterback, Cardale Jones made. In 2012 he tweeted, “Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain’t come to play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS” (“Ohio”). Originally, Jones probably never thought twice

about this tweet. However, after realizing the mistake he had made, Jones deleted the tweet. Still, the damage had already been done. The tweet had been seen by thousands of people and would be seen by thousands more. The tweet resurfaced three years later when Jones led the Buckeyes to a national championship victory. Jones learned the hard way that content posted online spreads quickly and cannot be taken back easily. With just one click, his post could be seen by people around the world. For the rest of his life, Jones will be remembered for this tweet. Digital footprints do not come and go. Despite what many think, deleting something even a few moments later cannot take back the damage that is done. In a matter of seconds, inappropriate content can be displayed around the world. Digital footprints are dangerous, as one instance of a lack of judgment can lead to serious repercussions.

On top of damaging one's reputation, a digital footprint, if given too much attention, can actually destroy social skills. Many teenagers care more about the ratio of their twitter followers or the number of likes they get on an instagram picture than actually having meaningful conversations with others. While society is preoccupied with trying to appear "cool" online, it is missing out on key social skills. Many people do not realize that communication is not just about the words coming out of one's mouth. In reality, 93% of all communication is nonverbal. Facial expressions, eye-contact, tone, and posture all play a large role in communicating ("Impact"). "Understanding the nonverbal aspects of communication is crucial because in social situations we need to modify our behavior in response to the reactions of others" ("Impact"). While sitting at home on their phones scrolling through social media, kids are failing to learn these critical forms of socializing. Anyone can hide behind a screen and have conversations that they could never have face-to-face. Behind a screen, body language does not need to be read. While some may get away with poor social skills in high school, that will not be the case in the future. Many

jobs require the ability to work with others or communicate with co-workers and bosses. Some may have to sell ideas and products to others. With the number of students that have trouble conversing with peers and teachers, this generation could be in trouble. It is no coincidence that this generation filled with weak communicators is full of people who spend hours online everyday. The desire to maintain an impressive digital footprint is hurting society's ability to communicate effectively face-to-face.

Although the internet can be a valuable tool, digital footprints can be alarmingly dangerous as content spreads quickly to everyone, and as too much time spent enhancing a digital footprint can hurt communication in person. As the internet becomes an integral part of society, it is becoming less and less safe. One lapse of judgment can soon be the talk of the school, or even worse, end up on an admission officer's or employer's computer screen. Content spreads like a wildfire, and once it is out there, it cannot be taken back. Therefore, one must consider the ramifications of a post before displaying it for all to see.

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