The Effect of Social Media on Architecture Graduate School Selection

Principal Investigator: Lauren A. Matchison, RA, NCARB, Assistant Professor of Practice, School of Architecture, University of Southern California

Survey Participants: The survey was administered to the incoming 2014 class of graduate students at the USC School of Architecture. Survey participants included incoming graduate students pursuing degrees in Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Building Science, and Heritage Conservation. In total, 72 students participated in the survey.

Survey date: September 2014

Summary of Findings:

Social media is everywhere. This survey looked at whether prospective graduate students use social media as a tool to research architecture schools. As a way of understanding how schools can best present themselves to prospective students, the survey focused on which social media channels students are most likely to use and what they are most interested in learning.

Survey results indicate the majority of prospective graduate students do use social media to seek information about schools and that they deem information learned from social media to be reliable. Prospective graduate students overwhelmingly are interested in seeing the work of current students (90% of survey participants would like to see examples of student projects). Information about the studio environment was a close second. The data suggests that pictures, videos and text (in that order) describing student work and working environment are very desirable.

The major finding of the investigation was that the majority of students believe that social media has the power to influence the choice of graduate school.

Do you use social media?
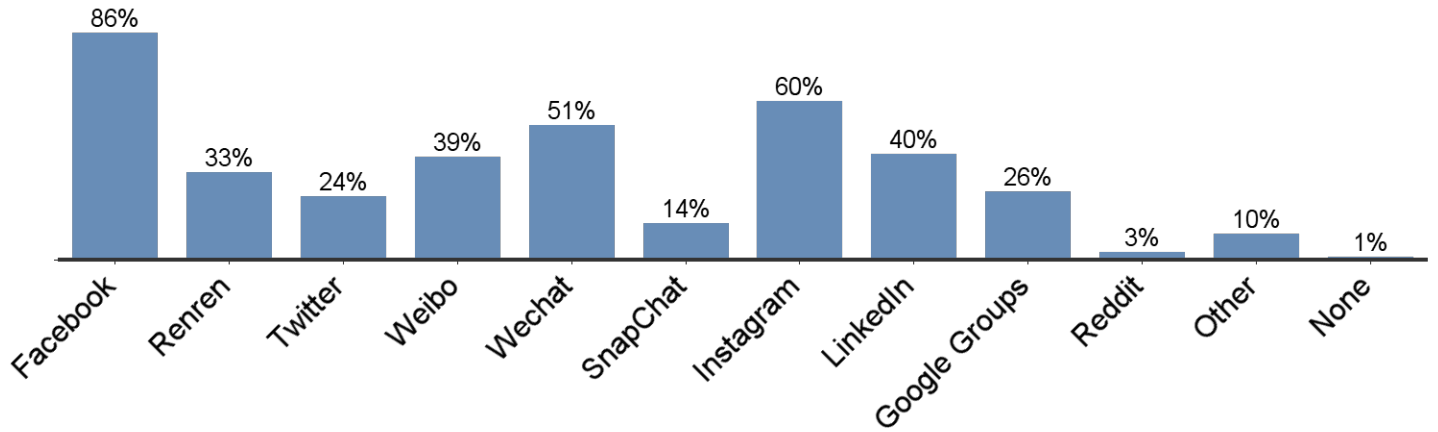
97%

3%

Yes　　　　　　　　　　　　　　No
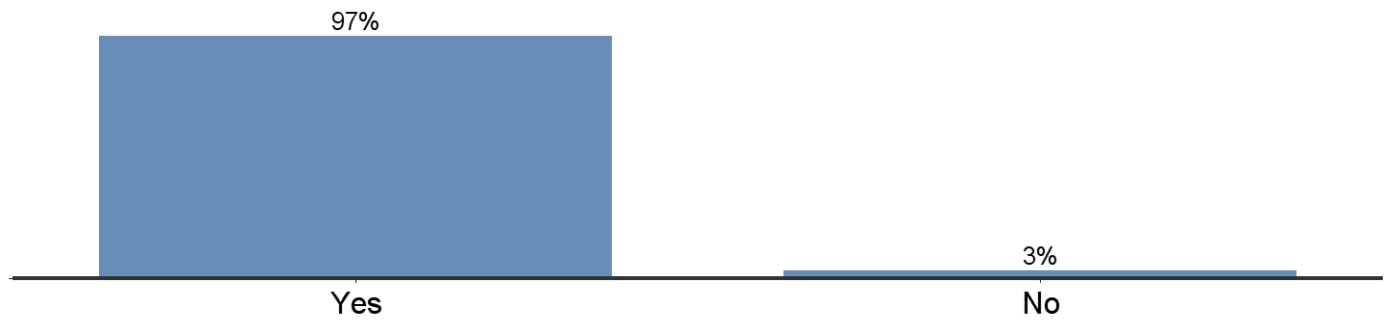
Clearly, the vast majority of prospective students use social media.

The average age of survey participants is 22 - 25. The gender of participants in the study is balanced at 51% male and 49% female.

n=70

**Which social media do you use? Please select all that apply.**

Facebook 86%, Renren 33%, Twitter 24%, Weibo 39%, Wechat 51%, SnapChat 14%, Instagram 60%, LinkedIn 40%, Google Groups 26%, Reddit 3%, Other 10%, None 1%

The top three social media choices for graduate students are: (1) Facebook (2) Instagram and (3) Wechat.

Cross-tabulation shows that domestic students are most likely to use Facebook, followed by Instagram. Whereas international students undisputedly prefer Wechat: 71% of international students use Wechat. Further, 58% of international students report that Wechat is their preferred social media channel. No domestic students report using Wechat.

n=70

How reliable do you think information posted in social media is <u>in general</u>?
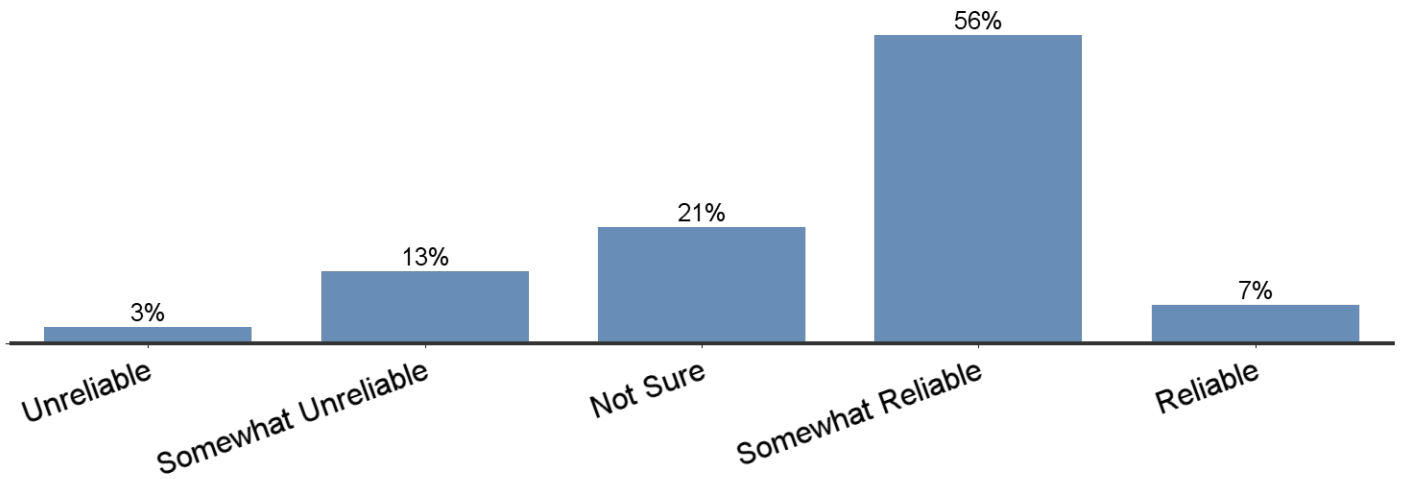
Reliability of information found on social media is of critical concern. While over half of participants believe that information found on social media is "somewhat reliable," only a handful of participants find it to be "reliable". This suggests that schools may want to focus on providing ways to communicate the official or legitimate affiliation of their social media pages, while still providing students with fresh, authentic images of what they seek (student work and student experience).

n=68

Which of these would you be interested in learning about through social media?
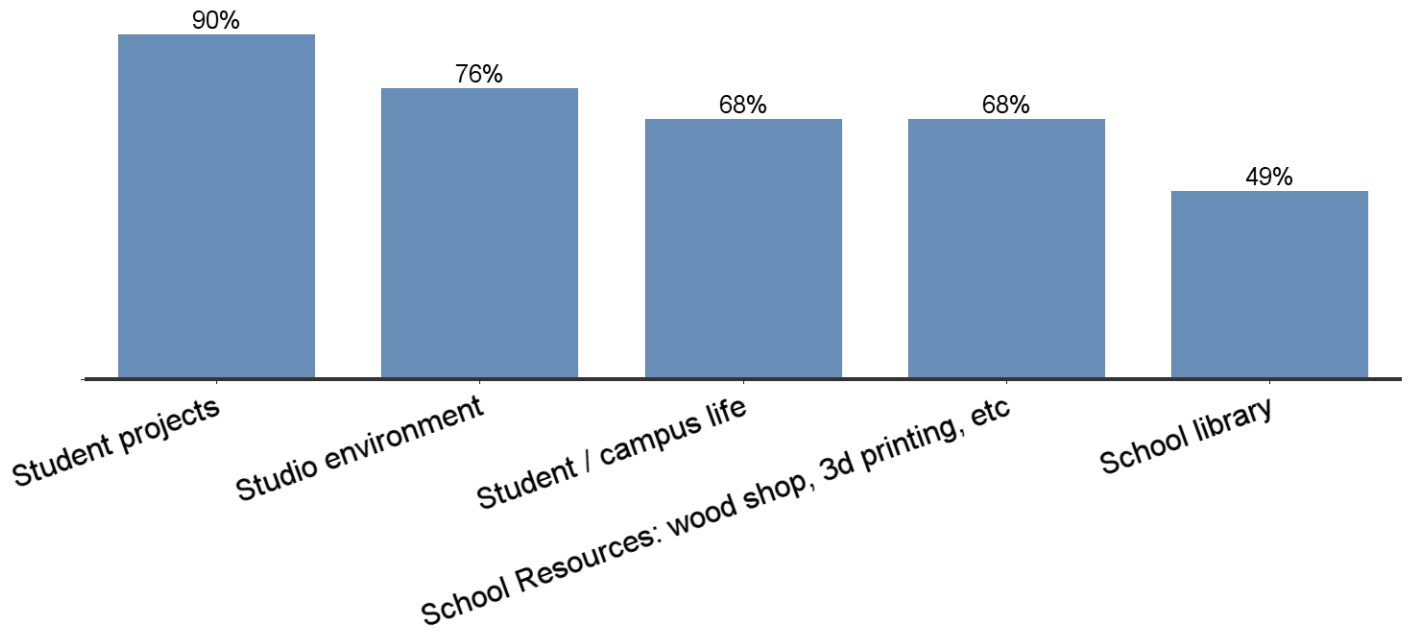
Prospective graduate students overwhelmingly are interested in the work of current students -- 90% would like to see examples of student projects. Information about the studio environment was a close second. The data suggests that pictures, videos and text that describe student work and working environment are very desirable.
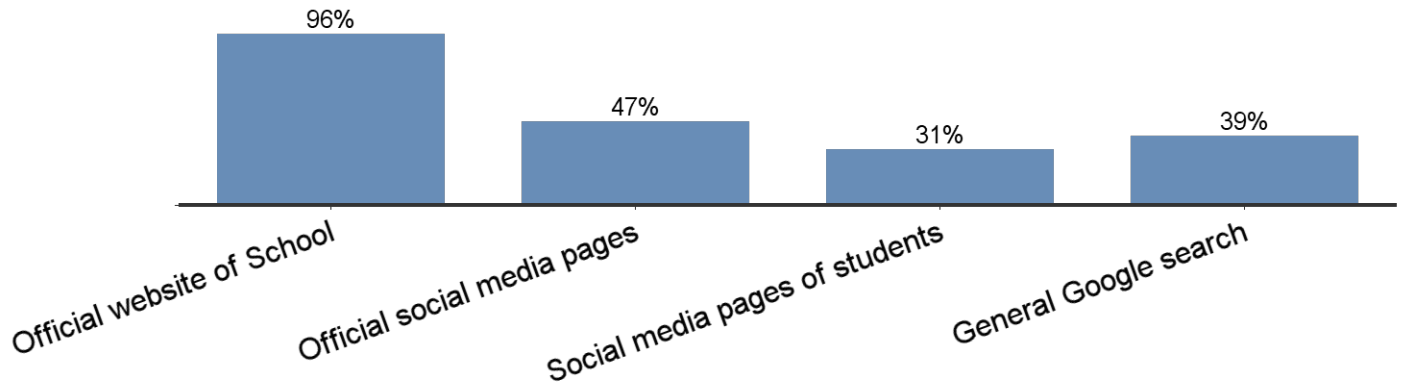
n=68

Do you think social media has the power to influence a person's decision about where to attend graduate school?
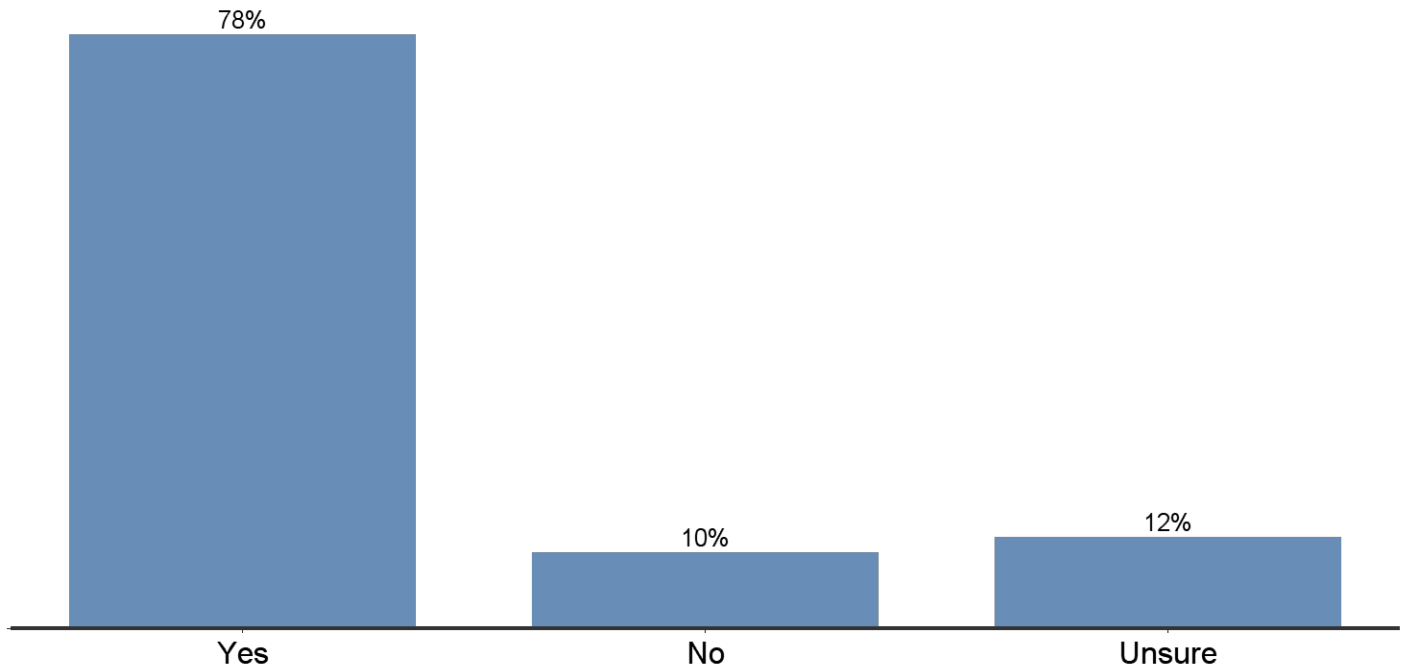
A whopping 78% of respondents believe that social media has the power to influence a person's decision about where to attend graduate school. This dramatically underscores the importance for Schools to operate in preferred media channels, providing reliable information that conveys student culture and student work to prospective students.

n=67

During your Internet research about the USC School of Architecture, which did you seek? Check all that apply.

96%	47%	31%	39%
Official website of School	Official social media pages	Social media pages of students	General Google search
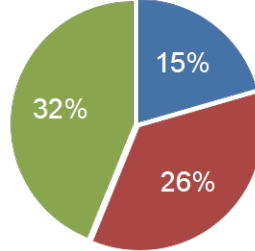
Almost all prospective graduate students report using a School's official website as a resource to research the School and its programs. 'Official' social media pages are also popular with almost half of the surveyed students.
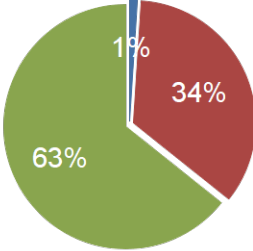
Given that 97% of participants use social media, it follows that an interested student would easily move from official website to official social media page given the opportunity to do so.

n=70

Now, please indicate how useful each source was in helping you make the decision to attend the USC School of Architecture.
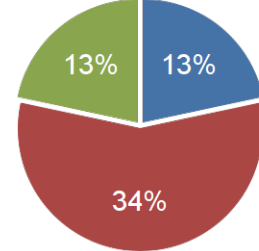
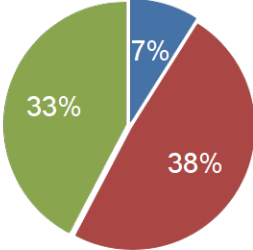Legend: ■ Not Useful ■ Somewhat Useful ■ Useful

Official website of School
- 1%
- 34%
- 63%

Official social media pages
- 15%
- 26%
- 32%

Social media pages of students
- 13% (blue)
- 13% (green)
- 34%

General Google search
- 7%
- 38%
- 33%

In general, the data suggests that information found online is useful to students when researching graduate schools.

n=70

What would you like to see more of?

Please rank the following in order of what you would like to see most. From 1 (most interested) to 3 (least interested).

■ 1   ■ 2   ■ 3

Text	Pictures	Videos

Text: 12%, 27%, 61%
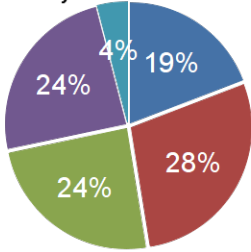
Pictures: 75%, 22%, 3%

Videos: 13%, 51%, 36%
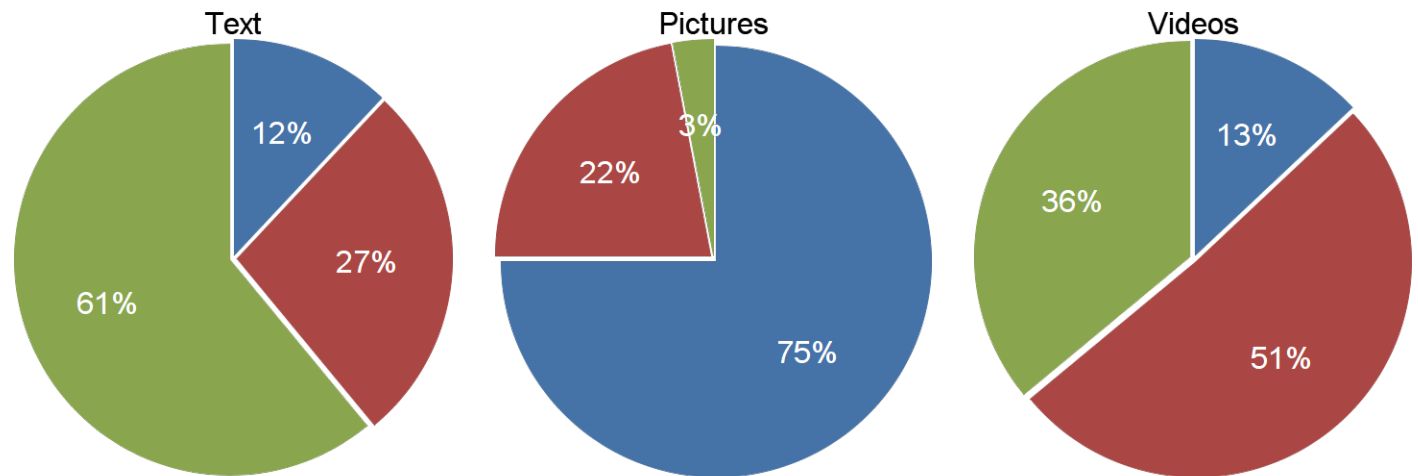
The clear first choice here is pictures. Generally, students most prefer pictures and secondarily prefer videos. The clear last choice is text.
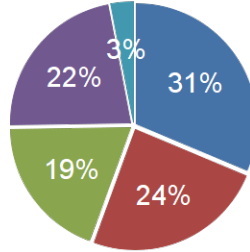
n=67

When you look at social media, whose opinions about the School are you most interested in?
Please rank the following in order of interest from 1 (most interest) to 5 (least interest)
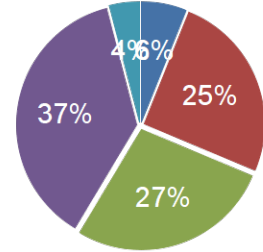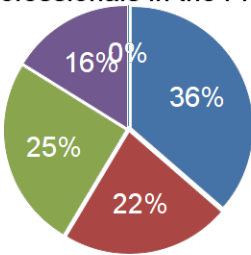
■ 1   ■ 2   ■ 3   ■ 4   ■ 5

Faculty / Administration

- 19%
- 28%
- 24%
- 24%
- 4%

Current Students

- 31%
- 24%
- 19%
- 22%
- 3%

Alumni

- 6%
- 25%
- 27%
- 37%
- 4%

Professionals in the Field

- 36%
- 22%
- 25%
- 16%
- 0%

Students report that, when researching a school, they are most interested in hearing the opinions of professionals in the field. Secondly, they are interested in hearing the opinions of current students.

This suggests that testimonials from practitioners (either local or renowned) are valuable information for schools to make clearly visible or accessible. The activities and work of current students is also appealing for a prospective student to understand what life might be like at a particular school.

n=67

Please estimate how much time you use social media each day:

	Percent	Count	Percent
Never		1	1.4%
Less than 1/2 hour		12	17.1%
About 1/2 to 1 hour		27	38.6%
About 1 to 2 hours		18	25.7%
More than 2 hours		12	17.1%
Total		70	100.0%

Are you an international student? If you are, where are you from?

Answer	Bar	Response	%
China		34	54%
Korea		1	2%
Indonesia		0	0%
Other		11	17%
Total		63	100%

Are you a domestic student? If you are, where are you from?

Answer	Bar	Response	%
East Coast		2	5%
Midwest		1	2%
Southeast		0	0%
Southwest		1	2%
West Coast		14	33%
Total		43	100%

What is your age range?

Answer	Bar	Response	%
18-21		1	2%
22-25		41	64%
26-30		14	22%
31 or older		8	13%
Total		64	100%

Are you male or female?

Answer	Bar	Response	%
Male		33	51%
Female		32	49%
Total		65	100%

Which Masters degree are you working toward?

Answer	Bar	Response	%
Architecture		40	62%
Building Science		7	11%
Heritage Conservation		3	5%
Landscape Architecture		15	23%
Other		1	2%
Total		66	100%