

Be true to yourself and be true to others: building a healthy digital community.

## Description

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Life is about finding out who you are and realizing your true purpose. We all go through the pain of growing up and the fear of facing the real world. As adolescents, we spend our time and energy figuring out how we fit in. Making decisions on what we wear, what we listen to, and whom we choose to be friends with is about how we want this world to see us. In the digital era, this self-portrayer or self-

presentation has become a more vital part of life. It is fast-paced, and you get instant likes or dislikes. Therefore, this instinct to “fit in”™ to this mainstream of trends has become more desirable, shaping how we view ourselves. We are literally connected to this digital world. How you choose to present yourself is no longer an issue for oneself but an issue for us all as a community.

As soon as we connect online, we become active participants and share a sense of community online. A “sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’™ needs will be met through commitment to be together”• (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Basically, a community is built on this mutual understanding of trust that we will take care of the well-being of the members and each other. There is an underlying agreement, as Floridi describes “the rights and responsibilities of the parties subscribing to the agreement are the terms of the social contract, whereas the society, state, group, etc. is the entity created for the purpose of enforcing the agreement (Floridi, 2010)”• Setting standards, from self-preservation to characteristic of the community which members share and represent the same values. Along with ISTE standards for students and educators to “improve their communities, “foster a culture of respectful online interactions”, and curate the digital profile they intend to reflect”• (ISTE Standards for Coaches 7).

Education is more than just transmitting knowledge and skills but teaching students how to interact and engage in the world and learning character traits to become responsible members of society. It is more than just learning rules and regulations but also role modeling moral and ethical values we teach so that students choose to do the right things over what is popular. Wikipedia defines “honesty”™ as “a facet of moral character that connotes positive and virtuous attributes such as integrity, truthfulness, straightforwardness, including straightforwardness of conduct, along with the absence of lying, cheating, theft, etc.”• Honesty takes courage; however, honesty without respect and a sense of community serves no purpose. “Students need to put a “face”™ to their postings, and realize that they are interacting with real people, not just inanimate laptops or smart phones”• (Riddle & Miller, 2013). Being true to yourself and being true to others for the well-being of yourself and others makes you a responsible member of the community.

The problem with “honesty”™ arises because we “internally presume that what is presented is true”• (Harris & Bardey, 2019). In the Custard.com study, only 18 percent of men and 19 percent of women reported that their Facebook page displayed “a completely accurate reflection”• of who they are. Most commonly, participants said that they only shared “non-boring”• aspects of their lives (32 percent) and were not as “active”• as their social media accounts appeared (14 percent). Instagram users present themselves in an appealing way. “As a result, users may engage in a variety of virtually deceptive behaviors to counteract enhanced social insecurities. This appeals to young people between the ages of 18 and 29 specifically, who represent over one-third of Instagram users”• (Harris & Bardey, 2019). Also, recent studies by Counts and Stecher (2009) attempted to compare this ideal online self-presentation with the actual personality. The result indicated that people hope to show personality traits through their online profiles and that users are able to create profiles they feel match their desired self-presentation.

Furthermore, “analyzing data of 10,560 Facebook users, we find that individuals who are more authentic in their self-expression also report greater Life Satisfaction. This effect appears consistent across different personality profiles, countering the proposition that individuals with socially desirable personalities benefit from authentic self-expression more than others”• (Bailey, Matz & Youyou, 2020).

According to psychologists, “social interaction and feeling a sense of belonging to a community are two of the most important predictors of psychological and physical health” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). More and more students will spend time online and make friends online. Probably their sense of belonging in an online community is much greater. So, we must create a safe, healthy online “ecosystem” promoting authentic interactions online (Floridi, 2010). Building a healthy community requires all members to be healthy. Our efforts to encourage students to interact and reflect themselves honestly online will empower them and, in turn, will build strong, healthy digital communities.

## References

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## Date Created

October 31, 2022

## Author

admin