

# State FFA Association Use of Instagram to Promote Membership Diversity

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## Abstract

*While it presents many opportunities, the National FFA Organization faces a variety of obstacles toward achieving a more diverse membership. Research has recognized the role of social identity, or the way a person perceives belongingness to a larger group, in how individuals select groups for hopeful inclusion. Photos indicate who is part of a group and can elicit attitudes and emotions toward an organization. Recent statistics show teenager use of Instagram, a mobile photo sharing application, has increased while other social media applications have declined. This qualitative study analyzed the frequency and themes presented by state FFA associations through their Instagram accounts to promote a diverse membership through an ethnographic approach. A total of 434 Instagram posts featuring diversity were identified throughout the 52 state FFA associations. Of those, state FFA associations with a minimum of 25% overall diversity posts were further analyzed to determine themes. The most common theme within the diversity posts was “participation,” which included student involvement in contests, conventions, or conferences. This study illustrates variability in the diversity efforts of state FFA associations in their Instagram accounts, and the need to highlight and promote a diverse membership on a consistent and intentional basis.*

**Keywords:** diversity; inclusion; social media; Instagram; FFA

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## Introduction

The development of identity is a critical component of growing up, with the adolescent years (ages 14-17) being arguably the most turbulent during the identity development process (Ellithorpe & Bleakley, 2016; French et al., 2006; Kroger et al., 2010; Phinney, 1990). This turbulent time of development is amplified for people of color and underrepresented groups in terms of ethnicity, as well as for those defining their gender identity and sexual orientation (Ellithorpe & Bleakley, 2016). For individuals and organizations striving to guide or influence youth development, the challenges are great as “the contemporary lives of young people are complex, multi-dimensional, and intercontextual requiring individuals to manage complex demands in both real and virtual spaces” (Sandford &

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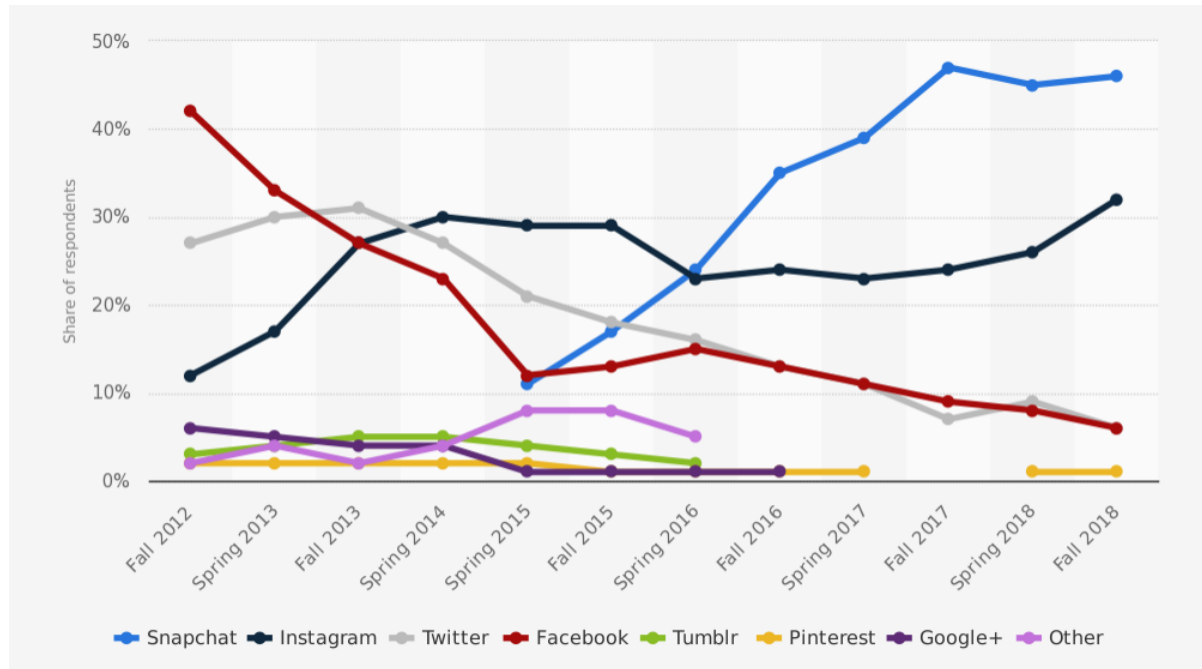
Quarmby, 2018, p.117). This major task of developing a stable identity in adolescence involves the incorporation of gender, sexual, moral, political, ethnic/racial, and religious/spiritual factors (Erikson, 1959; Kroger, 1995). The resulting identity encompasses self-definition, roles, relationships, personal values, and moral beliefs (Subrahmanyam et al., 2006). During this task of identity development, adolescents have long looked to mass media for information and examples (Mayhew & Weigle, 2018).

As adolescents seek to develop their identities, the influence of technology and media cannot be overlooked. U.S. teenagers currently spend an unprecedented amount of time engaged with media of all kinds: television and movies, streaming services, social media, video games, and music (Mayhew & Weigle, 2018). According to a 2015 study by Common Sense Media, 13- to 18-year-olds spend an average of 8.5 hours per day of electronic media use for entertainment, excluding time spent on schoolwork, and tweens (those 8–12 years old) spend an average of six (6) hours per day on entertainment media (Rideout, 2015). This behavior has important implications for the ways in which “young people negotiate and perform identity within different interconnected socio-spatial and digitalized contexts” (Sandford & Quarmby, 2018, p. 119).

Specifically, smartphone ownership has become a nearly universal element of teen life with 95% of teens having a smartphone or access to one. These mobile connections are in turn fueling more persistent online activities. Social media use amongst teens is prevalent, and photographs shared through platforms such as Instagram, Flickr, and SnapChat have become an important online social currency (Rainie et al., 2012) as photo-sharing practices are becoming increasingly common (Duggan, 2013). Until recently, Facebook had dominated the social media landscape among America’s youth – but it is no longer the most popular online platform among teens, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Today, roughly half (51%) of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 say they use Facebook, notably lower than the shares who use YouTube, Instagram or Snapchat (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). The most recent numbers reported on Statista, a market and consumer data provider, (Jaffrey, 2019) show that usage of Snapchat and Instagram by teens has grown while other social media apps have declined or remained unchanged (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Most Popular Social Networks of Teenagers in the United States from Fall 2012 to Fall 2018 (Jaffrey, 2019)*



Mayhew and Weigle (2018) argued the rise of the internet and social media in American culture has led to greater connectedness and also greater fragmentation. In essence, this greater ability to find and connect with peers who share a common interest, identity, or viewpoint also allows for seemingly bipolar feelings of solidarity and community. Mayhew and Weigle (2018) also stated that users co-create reality online, meaning they are constantly forming and being formed by the reality in which they engage, and being reinforced by that reality, for better and worse. Sandford and Quarmby (2018) contend with digital spaces now representing a fundamental part of young people's social experiences, there is also an increased blurring of boundaries between real and virtual spaces. For youth who identify as an ethnic or racial minority, online experiences may carry greater weight, as a venue to explore their identity within a mainstream culture that may not have varied representations of their culture or experience (Mayhew & Weigle, 2018). As such, young people's dispositions, tastes, and preferences to act in certain ways are likely shaped by, aligned with, their choices of social media platforms (Sandford & Quarmby, 2018).

Individuals and organizations should be aware of the ways in which adolescents respond to media messages and subsequently respond to meet their needs and preferences (Gorham, 2016). For the National FFA Organization, this awareness could be especially relevant. The mission of the National FFA Organization is to make "a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education" (National FFA Organization, 2018a, para. 1). The FFA has three different levels of involvement: the national organization, state FFA associations, and local FFA chapters. This organizational structure includes more than 700,000 student members and 8,600 local FFA chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (National FFA Organization, 2019).

Educational settings are stronger when they are more inclusive (Kirwan, 2004). While the FFA offers many opportunities, it also faces obstacles toward achieving a more diverse membership (Roberts et al., 2009). The issues the National FFA Organization faces regarding diversity and inclusion are complex, and solutions are not completely clear. For example, multiple scholars have pointed to cultural obstacles such as stereotypes, perceptions, and prejudices that have prevented diverse membership within FFA programs (LaVergne et al., 2012; Talbert & Larke, 1995; Warren & Alston, 2007). At the same time, a variety of factors play a role in perceptions influencing a more diverse membership within the FFA that deal not only with students, but also with other stakeholders. For example, as LaVergne et al. (2012) found, agricultural education teachers perceive benefits of diversity inclusion differently and offer inconclusive levels of acceptance to solutions proposed to increase diversity within agricultural education programs.

Common efforts to manage diversity in organizations have focused on targeted recruitment initiatives, education and training, career development, and mentoring programs to increase and retain heterogeneity in the organization (Roberson, 2006). In agricultural education programs, some schools have successfully implemented intervention strategies to increase diversity (Roberts et al., 2009). The National FFA Organization recognizes the issues of inclusiveness and diversity within its programs stating, “it is imperative that barriers be removed in order to engage all young people enrolled in agricultural education” (Crutchfield, 2013, p. 1). To promote diversity through inclusiveness, the National FFA Organization created a platform known as “We Are FFA” which encourages the celebration of diversity and inclusive activities promoting multicultural awareness (National FFA Organization, 2018b). With a vision “to build an empowered community and more inclusive organization where every person is respected, connected and affirmed,” the National FFA Organization seeks to create and deliver programming and resources to assist in removing barriers and creating opportunities for success for student members (National FFA Organization, 2018b, Our Vision section).

While the National FFA Organization utilizes a variety of social media platforms including Facebook ([National FFA Organization]; 381,815 likes), Twitter ([@NationalFFA]; 75,800 followers), LinkedIn ([National FFA Organization]; 15,279 followers), Instagram ([nationalffa]; 132,000 followers), and YouTube ([National FFA Organization]; 16,500 followers); the use of social media by state FFA associations and local FFA chapters is less known. To promote their activities through photos, many state associations have Instagram accounts. Instagram is a social media platform focused on mobile photo sharing. Further, Instagram allows for insight development about a program’s culture and activities through images (Hu et al., 2014). While other social media platforms tend to lead in overall user numbers, a recent market research report indicated teens prefer Instagram to Facebook or Twitter (Murphy et al., 2018). Given the importance of the visual image’s role in society, it is important to determine the messages these images emit regarding culture and perceptions (Rhoades & Irani, 2008) pertaining to diversity and inclusion within state FFA associations.

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks**

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social identity deals with a person’s perception of belongingness to a larger group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Tajfel et al. (1979) proposed that the groups (e.g. social class, family, teams, etc.) people belonged to was an important source of pride and self-esteem. These groups give the individual a sense of social identity; a sense of belonging to the social world. Tajfel et al. (1979) also proposed that stereotyping, or putting people into groups and categories, is based on a normal cognitive process; the cognitive tendency to group things together. In doing so, we tend to exaggerate the differences between groups and the similarities of things in the same group.

Social identity theory addresses three main concepts: (a) psychological processes that differentiate social from personal identity; (b) strategies to derive a positive social identity; and (c) how characteristics of various social structures determine which strategies apply (Mayhew & Weigle, 2018). This contrasts with occasions in which the term "social identity theory" is used to refer to general theorizing about human social selves and was never intended to be a general theory of social categorization (Turner & Reynolds, 2010). Unfortunately, students learn from an early age to identify and sort groups often by racial differences (Stitzlein, 2008).

The construction of a social identity is influenced by how individuals select groups for potential inclusion. Social identity theory posits people tend to organize and classify themselves and others into a variety of social categories including gender, age, race and organizational memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as they try to understand and question the expectations that society has surrounding one's group memberships (Ellithorpe & Bleakley, 2016). Social identity is influenced by impressions of ingroups, or one's own groups, in relation to outgroups, groups in which an individual is or does not feel included (Tarrant et al., 2006). Further, social identity theory predicts those who identify with an ingroup recognize the distinction and maintain boundaries by categorizing members of the outgroup (Blascovich et al., 1997). Any negative perceptions of those members in the outgroups may lead to increased positive perceptions of the ingroup and prejudices associated with the outgroup (Blascovich et al., 1997). As argued by Blascovich et al. (1997), "social identity theory suggests that the extent to which people are motivated to maximize the perceived difference between the ingroup and outgroups should also impact the initial ingroup / outgroup categorization of newly encountered individuals" (p. 1364).

### **Social Comparison Theory**

Social comparison theory, initially proposed by social psychologist Leon Festinger (1954), centers on the belief of a drive within individuals to gain accurate self-evaluations. The theory explains how individuals evaluate their own opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others to reduce uncertainty in these domains and learn how to define the self. Following the initial theory, research began to focus on social comparison as a way of self-enhancement introducing the concepts of downward and upward comparisons and expanding the motivations of social comparisons (Gruder, 1971; Schachter, 1959; Wills, 1981).

An individual's personal identity may be described through his or her selected organization as feelings of connectedness, meaning, and empowerment are often experienced (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Individuals tend to make selection of organizations based upon aspects of their identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In other words, one who sees himself or herself as a farmer will likely tend to join and seek association with organizations associated with farming, or an individual who sees himself or herself as an equestrian will seek organizations focused on or associated with horses. By making these kinds of comparisons, individuals confirm their beliefs about themselves and monitor how they align with the others they see (e.g. as good as or on the same level as). As such, a component of personal identity, self-concept, refers to one's personal identity associated with individual characteristics, and social identity, which encompasses group classifications (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Individuals seek to organize their environments. Social classification provides separation and order within the social environment and allows individuals to define others, which may result in stereotypes, and secondly enables individuals to locate himself or herself within the social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This process risks excluding some individuals. Racial ingroup members exercising exclusion and inclusion in regard to racial outgroup members heighten the outgroup's feelings of rejection or inclusion (Bernstein et al., 2010).

## **Identity Construction and Social Media**

User-participation and user-generated content are the two core tenants of social networking sites (Tredinnick, 2006; Rogers-Randolph et al, 2018). Gil de Zuñiga et al. (2012) found the act of seeking information through social network sites to be a predictor of one's participatory behaviors. While many factors aside from social media activity likely influence a person's probability to get involved within an organization or issue, the way the message is framed can impact levels of persuasiveness regardless of the communication medium, and thereby influence the likelihood the message consumer will become involved (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990). It is important to note, however, that participation is not generated based solely upon having a social media profile, but instead is triggered by careful planning to develop relationships (Waters et al., 2009).

The faces of people within organizations act as symbols of the organization's priorities, values, and brand and can help to establish connections between prospective members and the organization (Klassen, 2001). Pictures hold the power to produce attitudes, and organizations that present images of diversity aid in increasing underrepresented participants (Pippert et al., 2013). Such images can be used to counter bias, challenge stereotypes, and encourage understanding (Wolpert, 1994). Photos and videos are the most common forms of user-generated content in social media with over 300 million photos uploaded to Facebook and more than 95 million photos uploaded to Instagram on average each day (Stout, 2020). Through exploration of imagery discovered online, youth are more able to censor or ignore alternative opinions, and therefore, find it easier to accept norms that are intolerable to general society, for better or worse (Mayhew & Weigle, 2018).

As information increases with technological advancements, the role of the user has evolved. Social norms and identity are often constructed through interactions between individual members of one's own group as well as with those of different groups, including on social media platforms. These web-based technologies enable users "to extract information and data and reuse that information and data in flexible way" (Tredinnick, 2006, p. 229). While users of social media can engage in a variety of ways such as commenting and sharing, user-generated content assumes a higher degree of involvement and refers to content that has been created and distributed by internet users (Wardle & Williams, 2010). Mobile applications, such as Instagram, provide users with abilities to select and filter information which gives more power to the user.

In social media, content is created as needs arise and is viewed by users as a symbol of an organization's expertise and knowledge (Tredinnick, 2006). Further, users collect information via direct or indirect user-participation to add value to information they already have and to create new information sources that are useful (Tredinnick, 2006). Social media holds the potential to create community and helps to address the basic human need to belong (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Belonging to social groups has many advantages including social support and access to resources and helps to shape people's social identities (Bernstein et al., 2010).

As users gain more control in consuming and sharing information, organizations are prone to a more thorough evaluation than in the past (Tredinnick, 2006). To better understand how social media content reflected the National FFA Organization's brand, Rogers-Randolph et al. (2018) examined the social media conversations on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat during the 2016 National FFA Convention. Seven themes were identified (recognition, connectivity, appreciation, spirit, service, influence, and support) relating to the National FFA Organization's brand elements of who they are, who they serve, and the organization's personality. The authors recommended the organization elicit user-generated content to showcase their brand in the form of pictures and videos.

## **Instagram**

Instagram is a popular social networking service developed for smart phones and other mobile devices that allows users to share photographs and short videos (Gibbs et al., 2015). It allows users to take square shaped photographs similar in format to Kodak Instamatic photographs, rather than the more typical 3:4 aspect ratio of most smartphone images. It also allows users to apply a variety of photographic filters that alter the shading, temperature, feel, and presentation of the images. Users can also add a short description to their photographs and then post them online. These descriptions often take the form of hashtags, which allow users to insert their photo into a wider hashtag conversation (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Finally, photographs from Instagram can be shared across other social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Flickr.

Another important property of Instagram is that it is overwhelmingly deployed on mobile devices. This property is critical to reaching adolescents and be embedded within everyday practices. The “mediatization” (Krotz, 2009, p. 205) that Instagram affords is interleaved with the materialized practices associated with everyday embodied life. The cameraphone enables a form of intimate co-presence amongst friends and the particular property of the Instagram platform makes this form of presenting increasingly networked and visible (Gibbs et al., 2015). Through this platform, one can readily position oneself in a context that is subjectively and socially significant. Instagram and similar photo-sharing social media platforms thus form part of more general changes in the visual tradition associated with photography (Gibbs et al., 2015).

Given its prolific use amongst teens, Instagram plays an important role in the interaction rituals that comprise everyday life and likely plays a role in potential in the identity formation by adolescents (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). With social networking increasingly taking place online, Instagram has become a popular platform for self-presentation and public display. Instagram extends the ability to reach public audiences, through the use of hashtags providing the opportunity to enter and interact with taste communities comprised of like-minded individuals (Baker & Walsh, 2018).

Instagram’s visual nature may provide an advantage to the FFA as it seeks to increase diversity within its membership. As argued by Rogers-Randolph et al. (2017), the diversity of member demographics should be reflected in visuals and stories in social media. Previous work has shown that photos are important in social relationships (Van House et al., 2004). It is important for organizations to accurately produce and share content that is reflective of the student membership without misrepresentation (Reisberg, 1999). The content of photos shows who is part of a group (Van House et al., 2005). Hegde (2016) stated “Instagram presents a unique facet for studying diversity due to the assumed interconnection between individuals in group photos” (p. 2). Hegde (2016) added that although liking, commenting, and sharing of photos represent interactions in the social media world, it is important for the photos to tell stories of real people in the real world.

## **Summary**

Social identity is centered on group belongingness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and involves categorization and classification of social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). At the same time, in an effort to evaluate oneself, individuals compare themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). As a vital part of one’s social life and identity formation, social media affects people’s attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Lai & To, 2015). As such, having a strong online presence has grown in importance as people rely more on the internet for information (Rigby, 2008). Through social media, users can be more involved than was previously possible with more traditional one-way communication channels (Anderson-Wilk, 2009). As people, including the adolescent segment, increasing gravitate to this communication type, it is important for social media content to be accurate, consistent, and reliable

(White et al., 2014). Further, to ensure reinforcement of an organization's image and reputation, social media content should reflect the organization's vision, mission, and initiatives (Rogers-Randolph et al, 2018). Social media provides organizations the opportunity to share content on information, themes, and concepts which help to generate knowledge (Lai & To, 2015) and potentially contribute to identity construction in young people.

### **Purpose and Research Objectives**

Group involvement and membership within selected organizations is a reflection of an individual's personal identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Images promoted on social media have the potential to influence perceptions, attitudes, and likelihood for potential involvement on an issue or within an organization, and, when reflective of diversity, can help to increase student participation for people of color (Pippert et al. 2013). The public nature of Instagram makes the platform a pertinent topic for sociological analysis (Baker & Walsh, 2018). Instagram also presents a unique facet for studying diversity due to the assumed level of interconnection between individuals in group photos (Hegde, 2016). Given the expansion and growing use of Instagram by students who are of appropriate age for involvement in the FFA, the purpose of this study was to determine which state FFA associations featured diversity through their Instagram pages and what themes were present in the posts featuring diversity from June 1, 2017, to June 1, 2018. The study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. Identify state FFA associations with Instagram accounts.
2. Determine the percentage of state FFA association Instagram account posts featuring or promoting diversity.
3. Determine themes present in state FFA associations with at least 25% overall diversity posts on Instagram.
4. Identify the role of diversity within the state FFA associations with at least 25% overall diversity posts on Instagram as primary or secondary.

### **Methodology**

State FFA association Instagram accounts were the focus of this study. A case study approach was implemented to evaluate content posted by the aforementioned state FFA associations. Specifically, the researchers sought to uncover common themes presented within the content. Case studies begin when a specific case is identified, and may include entities such as organizations (Creswell, 2013). Case studies can also be used to understand specific issues or concerns (Creswell, 2013). Creswell's (2013) case study procedures were implemented within a bounded system resulting in themes based upon the case under investigation.

Researchers identified which state FFA associations had Instagram accounts and conducted an environmental scan of each association's Instagram presence through a review of photos posted to each individual account. The researchers viewed posts between June 1, 2017, and June 1, 2018, to identify relevant content. The National Education Association (2019) defined diversity as "the sum of ways that people are both alike and different" (para. 1). While the concept of diversity encompasses race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language, religion, sexual orientation, and physical ability (National Education Association, 2019), this study focused on the dimensions of race and physical disability. With this in mind, relevant content included any photograph with a person or persons whose race did not appear to be White, persons with physical disabilities such as wheelchair users, evidence of impaired physical mobility, or other images promoting diversity as beneficial to the membership which included posts that promoted Martin Luther King Jr. Day. In this phase of the study, the researchers viewed each state association's Instagram account and determined the frequency of photos

featuring or promoting a more diverse and inclusive membership. Percentages of posts promoting diversity were calculated for each Instagram account. As no additional data was collected about the subjects in the image, the potential for error of identifying race or physical disability existed. However, as those who viewed the image through their social media participation also who not have that additional information, the researchers felt confident that their data collection and analysis would be representative of social media participant perceptions of the image.

From here, the researchers analyzed state FFA association Instagram accounts that had diversity content within at least 25% of their total Instagram posts for thematic content. Because data were initially evaluated through an environmental scan, the researchers determined further analysis of accounts based upon percentages of diversity content, as opposed to raw count, would yield the most meaningful results. While most state associations had some presence of diversity within their Instagram posts, 10 state associations had at least 25% of total posts featuring diversity meeting the pre-established criteria set by the researchers. The state association Instagram accounts selected for further analysis due to their overall percentages of diversity posts were: Hawaii (80%), Louisiana (58%), California (42%), Connecticut (41%), Rhode Island (33%), Michigan (33%), Delaware (32%), Arizona (32%), Colorado (32%), and Maine (25%). Data were collected directly from each state FFA association's Instagram page, and each post featuring diversity was converted into an individual file for qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is useful for identifying, organizing, coding, and labeling themes within data (Patton, 2002). Images and text within the post were coded by the researchers according to the post's content.

To achieve trustworthiness, the researchers followed guidelines for transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability as prescribed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In order to achieve transferability, the researchers maintained a thorough database and description of data, which were categorized by topic and labeled with a description (Creswell, 2013). Peer debriefing was implemented to ensure credibility. Dependability was achieved as the researchers individually analyzed a sample of data, met to discuss discrepancies, and established inter-coder reliability. Lastly, to ensure confirmability, an audit trail was established and included the raw data and the code sheet was utilized to record and analyze data.

All researchers involved in this study were former FFA members and currently involved as volunteers with the FFA on state and national levels. Each of the researchers were interested in and aware of the issues of diversity within the organization and hope for the FFA to become a more diverse organization.

## Results

Objective one was to identify state FFA associations with Instagram accounts. An environmental scan revealed 47 of 52 state-level organizations (90.4%) had Instagram accounts (see Table 1). Objective two sought to determine the percentage of state FFA association Instagram account posts featuring or promoting diversity. Combined, the 47 Instagram accounts generated 2,946 posts during the timeframe of the study (June 1, 2017, to May 31, 2018) with 434 posts (15%) having content featuring diversity (see Table 1). While California led the group of state FFA associations in number of diversity posts ( $n = 60$ ), many other state FFA associations held higher percentages of diversity posts comparatively overall. Further, 23 associations had fewer than 10 total posts. Of those, nine associations (19% of the 47 accounts) had no diversity posts on their Instagram pages.

**Table 1***Characteristics of State FFA Association Instagram Accounts (N = 47)*

	Total Posts	Total Diversity Posts	Diversity Post Percentage	Total Followers
Mean Scores	65.02	9.06	0.15	2620
State				
Alabama	58	8	0.14	1270
Alaska	11	0	0.00	228
Arizona	28	9	0.32	1072
Arkansas	43	2	0.05	2352
California	143	60	0.42	13400
Colorado	19	6	0.32	1037
Connecticut	37	15	0.41	833
Delaware	77	25	0.32	1597
Florida	14	0	0.00	3483
Georgia	221	22	0.10	7130
Hawaii	15	12	0.80	1054
Idaho	33	8	0.24	1082
Illinois	135	9	0.07	2031
Indiana	218	21	0.10	5401
Iowa	71	2	0.03	3776
Kansas	70	7	0.10	2234
Kentucky	138	10	0.07	5617
Louisiana	48	28	0.58	1367
Maine	12	3	0.25	302
Maryland	107	24	0.22	1037
Massachusetts	42	5	0.12	551
Michigan	6	2	0.33	1403
Minnesota	199	6	0.03	3588
Mississippi	0	0	0.00	768
Missouri	17	1	0.06	2168
Montana	16	2	0.13	1065
Nebraska	34	0	0.00	1104
New Hampshire	49	1	0.02	500

**Table 1***Characteristics of State FFA Association Instagram Accounts (N = 47), Continued...*

New Jersey	86	17	0.20	836
New Mexico	55	6	0.11	1306
New York	16	0	0.00	1033
North Carolina	64	6	0.09	4985
North Dakota	18	1	0.06	676
Ohio	119	4	0.03	5138
Oklahoma	58	6	0.10	4780
Oregon	89	0	0.00	1141
Pennsylvania	41	3	0.07	3551
Rhode Island	12	4	0.33	214
South Carolina	45	7	0.16	1361
South Dakota	41	0	0.00	759
Tennessee	59	14	0.24	3010
Texas	113	18	0.16	18800
Utah	83	3	0.04	1864
Virginia	62	10	0.16	2313
Washington	204	39	0.19	1981
Wisconsin	26	0	0.00	1694
Wyoming	4	0	0.00	242

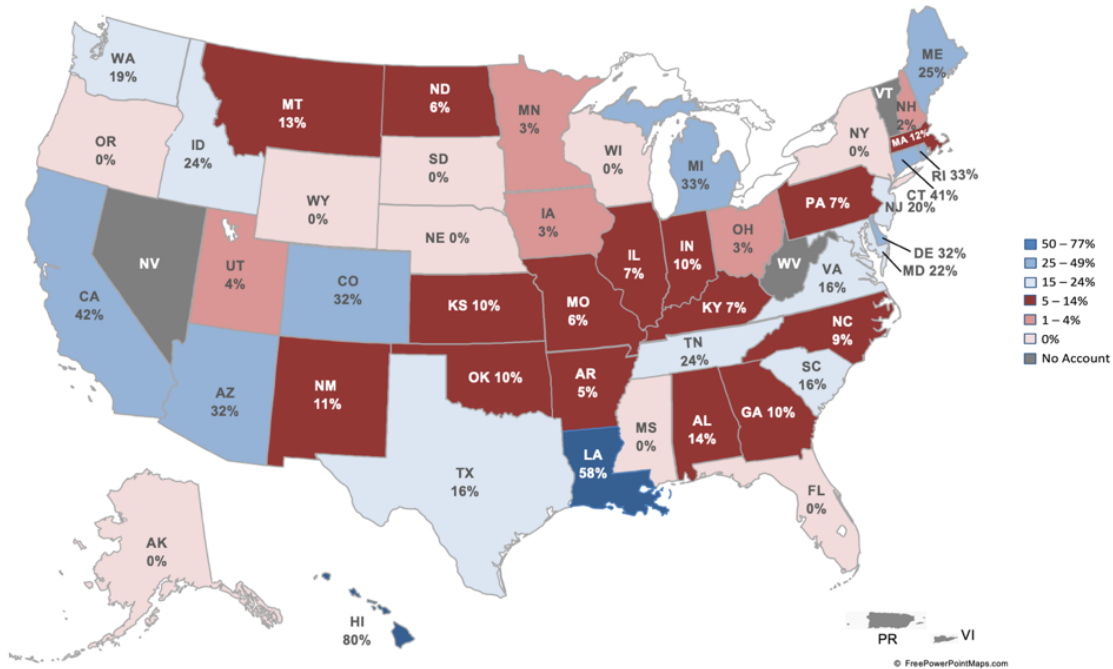
*Note.* Nevada, Puerto Rico, Vermont, Virgin Islands, West Virginia state FFA associations did not have Instagram accounts at the time of the study.

Figure 2 details which state FFA associations had Instagram accounts and the percentage of diversity posts by state. Many of the diversity posts included photos with National FFA officers or chapter members who were people of color with state officers. Consequently, states with people of

color serving as officers had higher percentages of diversity posts during the timeframe of this study. Additionally, some states posted infographics about diversity to celebrate national events such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Black History month versus posting on a more consistent basis.

**Figure 2**

*Percentage of Total Instagram Diversity Posts by State FFA Associations (M = 15%)*



Objective three was to determine themes present in state FFA associations with at least 25% overall diversity posts on Instagram ( $N = 164$ ). A variety of initial codes emerged within the data before being refined into broader thematic categories. Initial codes within the data included promotion of state FFA officers, community service activities, various leadership conferences, state and national FFA convention promotion, officer elections, visits to FFA chapters and chapter activities, media activities, expressing thanks to supporters and soliciting support from sponsors, contest results, holiday greetings, and team trainings. These specific codes were categorized into seven themes. Themes included: connection, excitement, participation, recognition, service, support, and teamwork. The themes most present in the data included: participation, (26.8%), recognition (23.2%), and excitement (21.3%). Table 2 indicates theme frequencies within the state FFA associations having the highest percentages of diversity within their total number of posts.

**Table 2***State FFA Association Instagram Diversity Post Themes of Top Associations (N = 164)*

Theme	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	Frequency Percent (%)
Participation	44	26.8
Recognition	38	23.2
Excitement	35	21.3
Connection	25	15.2
Support	12	7.3
Service	5	3.0
Teamwork	5	3.0

Participation was the leading theme (26.8%) within the dataset and was assigned to Instagram posts that featured any kind of general or non-specific participation within the organization. Examples of participation included posts featuring active participation in contests, state and national convention activities, leadership conferences, or general member experiences in activities at the chapter, state, and national levels. The Participation theme was often associated with activities taking place in real-time. Additionally, the Recognition theme (23.2%) featured Instagram posts that promoted or recognized the state FFA officers, shared state and national convention results, FFA state and regional officer election results, and career development event winners. The Recognition theme was present in many posts to follow participation activities and announce results.

Excitement (21.3%) was an additional theme that emerged highlighting celebration and sought to promote activities and events. For example, the Excitement theme commonly applied to celebrations associated with FFA week, posts created to promote and energize members for upcoming events like leadership conferences and state and national conventions, holiday greetings, posts created to wish luck to contest participants, and any other activities expressing celebration or excitement. Also present was the Connection theme (15.2%), which included content that promoted visits from state or national officers, visits with elected officials and governmental representatives such as commissioners of agriculture, state officer meetings with leaders of business and industry, or any other example of a person or groups of people meeting and connecting with others.

When a post was dedicated to expressing thanks to supporters or sought to solicit some kind of support for the organization, the Support theme (7.3%) was coded. For example, the Support theme was present in posts that featured information about fundraising opportunities, news about donations from companies or organizations, and chapter days of giving. Service (3.0%) was one of the two themes that arose the least frequently. Nonetheless, the theme included examples of various community service activities undertaken by FFA members. Service activities present within the Service theme included activities like park clean-up days and assisting at local animal shelters. The Service theme was present when FFA associations presented information about activities meant to aid organizations outside of the FFA. Teamwork (3.0%) was an additional theme that was least present and included references to team trainings or team formations. The Teamwork theme was present in posts that shared information about trainings focused solely on teamwork or teambuilding.

Objective four sought to identify the role of diversity within the state FFA associations with at least 25% overall diversity posts on Instagram as primary or secondary focus of the image (see Table 3). Diversity's role in a primary post meant the focus of the post was on a member of an underrepresented group, or the majority of members pictured within the post were people of color. Posts with diversity coded with a primary role commonly featured profiles or activities of state officers

and chapter members from underrepresented groups. These posts often included one or two individuals within the post. Secondary diversity posts featured members from underrepresented groups in the background or in the racial minority amongst a group of White members. Posts coded with diversity as a secondary role primarily included photos of larger groups in which the majority of those pictured were not people of color.

As detailed in Table 3, the state FFA association Instagram account posts being analyzed ( $N = 164$ ) varied regarding the role of diversity within their Instagram diversity posts. As Table 3 indicates, it was more common for states to feature diversity as a secondary role than a primary role. The California FFA Association Instagram account led the group in diversity as both a primary role ( $n = 17$ ) and secondary role ( $n = 43$ ). While it had no cases of diversity as a primary role, Louisiana followed California with secondary role diversity posts ( $n = 28$ ).

**Table 3**

*Role of Diversity within Top Association Instagram Diversity Posts (N = 164)*

State	Primary Role		Secondary Role	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
California	17	28.3	43	71.7
Hawaii	9	75.0	3	25.0
Connecticut	4	26.7	11	73.3
Delaware	1	4.0	24	96.0
Colorado	1	16.7	5	83.3
Louisiana	0	0.0	28	100.0
Arizona	0	0.0	9	100.0
Rhode Island	0	0.0	4	100.0
Maine	0	0.0	3	100.0
Michigan	0	0.0	2	100.0
Total	32		132	

### Conclusions and Implications

Central to social identity is an individual's perception of connection and belongingness to a larger group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). These selected groups or organizations are chosen based upon facets of the individual's identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). As individuals seek group belongingness, they may compare themselves to others within the group (Festinger, 1954). For their part, organizations' values and priorities can be symbolized by faces of people involved (Klassen, 2001). To demonstrate a commitment to diversity, organizations can present images to counter bias, challenge stereotypes, and encourage understanding (Wolpert, 1994). As the FFA seeks to increase diversity, it should be mindful to reflect a variety of member demographics (Rogers-Randolph et al., 2017) on social media, without being misrepresentative (Reisberg, 1999).

As adolescents strive to develop personal identities, they look for examples and information on social media (Mayhew & Weigle, 2018). Photo-sharing on Instagram is an informal, personal, idiosyncratic, and highly social practice (Gibbs et al., 2015) and plays a role in the social lives of many adolescents. The purpose of this study was to determine which state FFA associations feature diversity

through their Instagram pages and what themes were present in the posts featuring diversity from June 1, 2017, to June 1, 2018. The study was propelled by the need to understand how diversity within FFA membership was featured on Instagram, as images presenting diversity have the potential to show who is part of the group (Van House et al., 2005), establish connections between prospective members and the organization (Klassen, 2001) and subsequently increase racial minority student participation in organizations (Pippert et al., 2013).

The results of the study illustrated the tremendous variability in the presence of a diverse and inclusive membership by state FFA associations in their Instagram accounts. While the majority of state FFA associations had Instagram accounts, overall activity varied greatly from some associations sharing more than 200 total posts, to others with fewer than 10 posts total during the time period investigated. Of the overall posts analyzed for the purpose of this study, only 15% featured diversity, providing a clear example of inattention to the opportunities to increase racial minority student involvement using Instagram as a platform. As the state FFA associations focused primarily on the activities of their state officers in their Instagram posts, it is not surprising that those associations with people of color on their teams had higher instances of diversity on Instagram. Further, photos taken with chapter members also yielded examples of diversity beyond state officer teams, which suggests a more diverse membership is growing within local chapters.

From the analysis of the 164 diversity-related posts identified in state FFA association Instagram accounts during the one-year time frame, seven themes emerged from the data analysis: participation, recognition, excitement, connection, support, service, and teamwork. While efforts were not made to link these themes to the National FFA Organization's brand as was conducted by Rogers-Randolph et al (2018), similarities were apparent.

Participation was the number one theme within the top 10 state FFA associations featuring diversity content on their Instagram pages. This finding suggests that not only are members of color represented in activities of the organization, they are also often represented in non-specific and general happenings. It is encouraging that the recognition theme was the second most prominent theme with the FFA associations featuring diversity content. These images may suggest to potential members their opportunities to achieve and succeed within the organization as they see participants that look similar to themselves (Pippert et al., 2013). Additionally, the prominence of the recognition theme may denote a slight shift to greater involvement from members of color and potential for more racial minority student leadership in the future given the potential that recognition for achievements may be associated with leadership potential. The recognition theme could also lead to increased future diversity posts on social media overall as it implies achievement.

Because state FFA association Instagram posts are often associated with state FFA officers and their activities, the growth of underrepresented groups as student leaders will likely be reflected on the Instagram accounts. Of concern was the low degree of diversity posts featuring diversity as a primary focus, as even the top associations featured a diverse member as the primary focus only 19.5% of the time. While the prominence of diversity as a secondary focus suggests diverse members are involved in activities, implied also is the sense that members of diverse backgrounds may not be as successful as the White members. While this could indicate that racial minority students are not singled out at FFA activities, it could also imply that members of color are ignored. At the same time, though, the natural, cooperative, and clearly un-staged nature expressed in the images may suggest a chapter or association's authenticity.

## **Recommendations**

As social media use by adolescents continues to grow (Mayhew & Wiegler, 2018), the connection between identity development and social media use is worthy of further exploration. Specially for the FFA, an opportunity to promote values associated with diversity on Instagram and other social media platforms to adolescents who seek group belongingness may greatly benefit the organization's goal to celebrate diversity and promote inclusion (National FFA Organization, 2018b). These results provide a baseline for the examination of future efforts in Instagram and for using this social media platform for representing diversity and inclusion. Despite the potential associated with Instagram and social media platforms for promotion of diversity and inclusion in the FFA, those utilizing the platforms must be cognizant to share content that does not misrepresent the student membership (Reisberg, 1999). It is recommended that FFA associations take a genuine look at their efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, and recognize the potential social media holds for helping achieve this important organizational goal. Future studies should be conducted to examine any future changes in diversity promotion on Instagram. While the visual nature of Instagram provides a unique opportunity to study diversity due to the presumed interconnection between individuals and group photos (Hegde, 2016), other visually based platforms, such as YouTube, are also popular with adolescents. Therefore, future studies should investigate the promotion of diversity by state FFA associations on YouTube.

As stereotypes continue to be identified as an obstacle to a diverse membership in the National FFA Organization (LaVergne et al., 2012), Instagram provides an opportunity for state associations to visually demonstrate their commitment to diversity, and to engage with underrepresented people who may visit Instagram to look for signs of inclusion. Communicators should be cognizant of how the audience values media messages and create media to meet the needs of audience members (Gorham, 2016). To further encourage diversity and inclusiveness, state FFA associations should utilize Instagram to highlight and promote a diverse membership on a consistent and intentional basis.

Efforts to promote diversity and inclusion to enhance FFA's membership must be purposeful rather than convenient. The purpose of these efforts—especially those using social media platforms such as Instagram—must also move beyond promotion to understand the potential in influencing the formation of an identity and being an aid in helping students with their challenges in establishing their identity. Those new to organizations “are unsure of their roles and apprehensive about their status,” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 26). If new or potential members view Instagram and assign themselves to the outgroup, they will be less likely to get involved. Therefore, state FFA associations should take careful and thoughtful efforts to represent the organization as one more welcoming of diversity and encouraging of inclusion.

During chapter visits and other activities, state FFA officers are encouraged to take photos with members for sharing on social media. State FFA officers are the primary focus of association Instagram accounts and therefore can take an active role in helping to promote membership diversity. Additionally, as leaders for their associations, state FFA officers should make efforts to recruit and encourage underrepresented members to get involved in leadership positions and activities within the association to encourage members from underrepresented groups to strive for success. When possible, state FFA associations should strive to promote diversity within images through a primary, rather than secondary focus to demonstrate that FFA members of color are not just participants within a group, but leaders and achievers within groups. To this end, state FFA officers should receive training on social media and photo composition as it relates to achieving diversity and inclusion goals.

This study reflects a larger and well-known need within the FFA to promote diversity within its membership. While Reisberg (1999) noted the importance of producing and sharing content

reflective of student membership within organizations accurately and without misrepresentation, without providing images that appeal to diverse audiences, the FFA will continue to find itself seeking greater diversity without much improvement.

Few argue against benefits of diversity within organizations, and there is a multitude of evidence from the National FFA that a more diverse membership is desired (Crutchfield, 2013; National FFA Organization, 2018b). Within educational realms specifically, Kirwan (2004) notes educational settings are better when they are more inclusive as all students receive a value-added education when learning within a diverse environment. However, scholars for years have identified barriers and issues with diversity within the FFA, despite any apparent great advances (LaVergne et al., 2012; Talbert & Larke, 1995; Roberts et al., 2009; Warren & Alston, 2007). FFA associations should re-evaluate their efforts for diversity inclusion and exert more careful and thoughtful strategies to address the issue.

This study's findings are consistent with recommendations from Rogers-Randolph et al., (2018) in their analysis of social media content during the National FFA Convention in which the researchers recommended reflecting member demographic diversity in visuals. As similarities in the themes that emerged from this study and the Rogers-Randolph et al. exist, further consideration and research should be given to the potential existence of consistent themes in FFA-related social media activity. If these themes are stable, all levels of the FFA would have a foundation upon which to build their respective youth development programming, including efforts that assist in identity construction.

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