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'FEED'ING PERCEPTIONS

How Twitter has become the window through which students view their school

Twitter

Facebook

Instagram

http://www.twitter.com/

THE HARBINGER

Shawnee Mission East | 7500 Mission Road, PV KS, 66208 | April 29, 2013 | Issue 15 | www.smeharbinger.net



►written by Matt Hanson ►photo illustration by Jake Crandall and James Simmons

Freshman Henry Kircher follows 741 people on Twitter. While some of the accounts he follows belong to celebrities or news organizations, the majority are students at East — many of whom he hasn't even met.

Henry and his twin brother Charlie, who follows 480 accounts, use their huge Twitter feeds for more than entertainment; they use them to learn about their new school. By following a host of upperclassmen and school-affiliated accounts, the Kirchers have learned East traditions, what upperclassmen are like and which students have social status

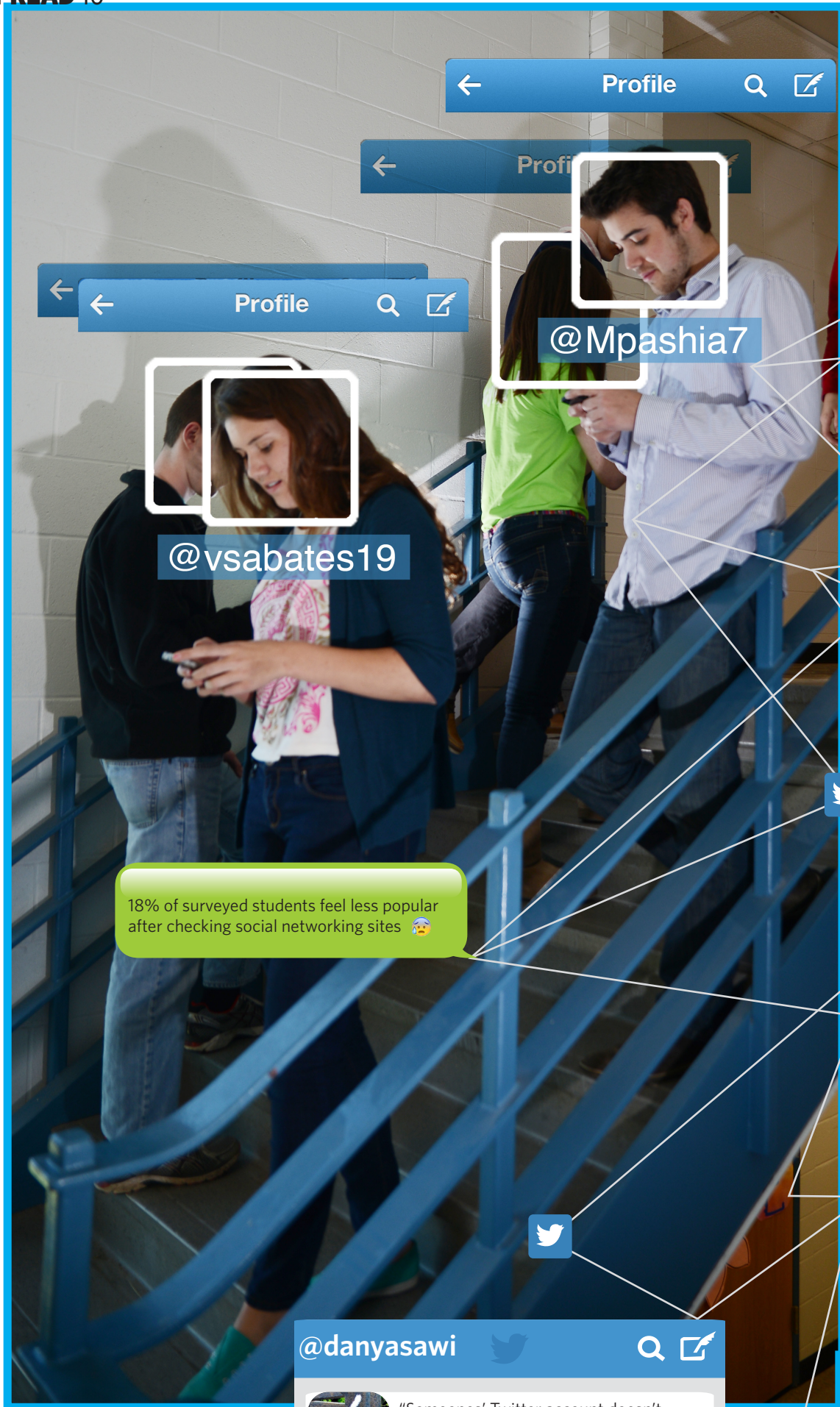
at East. As freshmen, Twitter has been a window through which they've viewed East.

The number of current East students following @TotalSMEastMove alone would put 31 percent of the total student body on Twitter. That percentage is still lower than the percentage of students on Facebook, but some students think Twitter is still a better source of information on their school and their peers than Facebook. One such student, senior Jackson Dalton, says that the more open posting atmosphere and the frequency of posts on Twitter have made it the best social

network for learning about East and its student body.

"[Twitter is] a collection of information about East that you can't really find anywhere else because [people are] a little bit more [open with posting]," Dalton said. "You can just find out so much about your school and its reputation just by a simple thing like Twitter. I think in a way it shows more about your school sometimes than actually going to school."

►continued on pages 16-17



@danyasawi

“Someones’ Twitter account doesn’t necessarily represent their personality as a whole because with social media you’re just given a little glimpse into that person’s life. The only things you see are the things they choose to tweet.” -junior Danya Issawi

18% of surveyed students feel less popular after checking social networking sites 🙄

THE SOCIAL NETWORK @EAST

Social media changes real life Social Networks at East

►*continued from cover*

The Kircher twins aren't the only students whose perceptions of East are shaped by its Twitter community. In a poll of 183 underclassmen, 96 (52 percent) said they were on the popular social network. Of that group, 33 percent said their ideas of how East students should think and act were often influenced by what they saw on Twitter.

“I just feel like the kids in our grade think the upperclassmen are cool and want to see how they do things,” Henry said. “Because someday we’ll be there.”

Sociology and History teacher Vicki Arndt-Helgesen, who has taught high school students for 38 years, sees Twitter as just a new vehicle for a perception-shaping process that she has always seen in high school.

“[Twitter is] both the same and different from what has always existed by a high school grapevine,” Arndt-Helgesen said. “It is same in the role that it plays. It is different in its broadness and the speed. I think then it has a capacity to shape the response, the belief, the party line more quickly.”

The influence Twitter has on some East students could change their behavior. In 2010, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that behavior change spread faster through online social networks with many overlapping ties (where individual members share more connections) than in clustered networks without overlapping ties (loosely connected clusters of individuals).

With many East students following some of the same accounts, such as @TotalSMEastMove and @SME_Positweets, the East Twitter community resembles more closely the first type of online network, and, according to study, would be more likely to change behavior of individual members of the community.

Dalton has seen this behavior-shaping effect in action and worries that Twitter could be negatively influencing them.

“At East, you’re already being shaped by lots of stuff,” Dalton said. “It feels like you become more of a stereotypical East kid even more so through Twitter. It molds you even more. What’s accepted on Twitter and what’s not accepted on Twitter... reaches even deeper to people.”

The Kirchers admit that they’ve already started to learn about the East stereotype — it’s the preppy, rich school, they say — from upperclassmen accounts and accounts like @TotalSMEastMove. Senior Nick Kraske worries that students like the Kirchers are getting the wrong idea about East from Twitter.

“An underclassman might see an attempt at humor by an older kid

►*written by Matt Hanson* ►*photos by Jake Crandall*

that has to do with drinking and think that’s what East is all about, when in reality they probably don’t know the person that well,” Kraske said.

@TotalSMEastMove co-founder and current senior Jack Kingsley* says that the account, which now has over 1,300 followers including over 550 current East students, was never meant to be taken seriously. Still, he thinks some students take the account’s satire of East’s stereotype to heart.

“It’s not meant to be serious at all,” Kingsley said. “It’s not meant to be a representation [of East] at all. People just take it as that.”

Just as he thinks Twitter doesn’t accurately represent East, Kraske also warns students that individual accounts don’t represent the people behind them. Both the Kircher twins and Dalton say they feel like peoples’ tweets say a lot about who they are, but Kraske says a lot of what East students tweet shouldn’t be taken seriously as a reflection of what they believe.

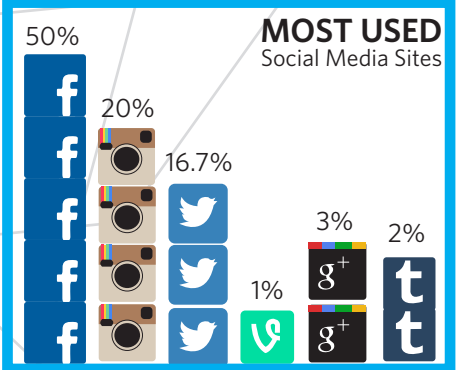
“I think it’s important to remember that... [a Twitter account] isn’t a holistic view of that person,” Kraske said. “I guess you could let it affect your perception of them, but it’s important to remember that you should try not to let it affect your perception of them until you actually meet them and understand what kind of person they are and not just what they’re putting out there.”

Senior Tyler Benschoter agrees with Kraske but warns that while a social network account isn’t a complete picture of a person, it will nevertheless be considered a representation of that person, whether that person intends it to or not.

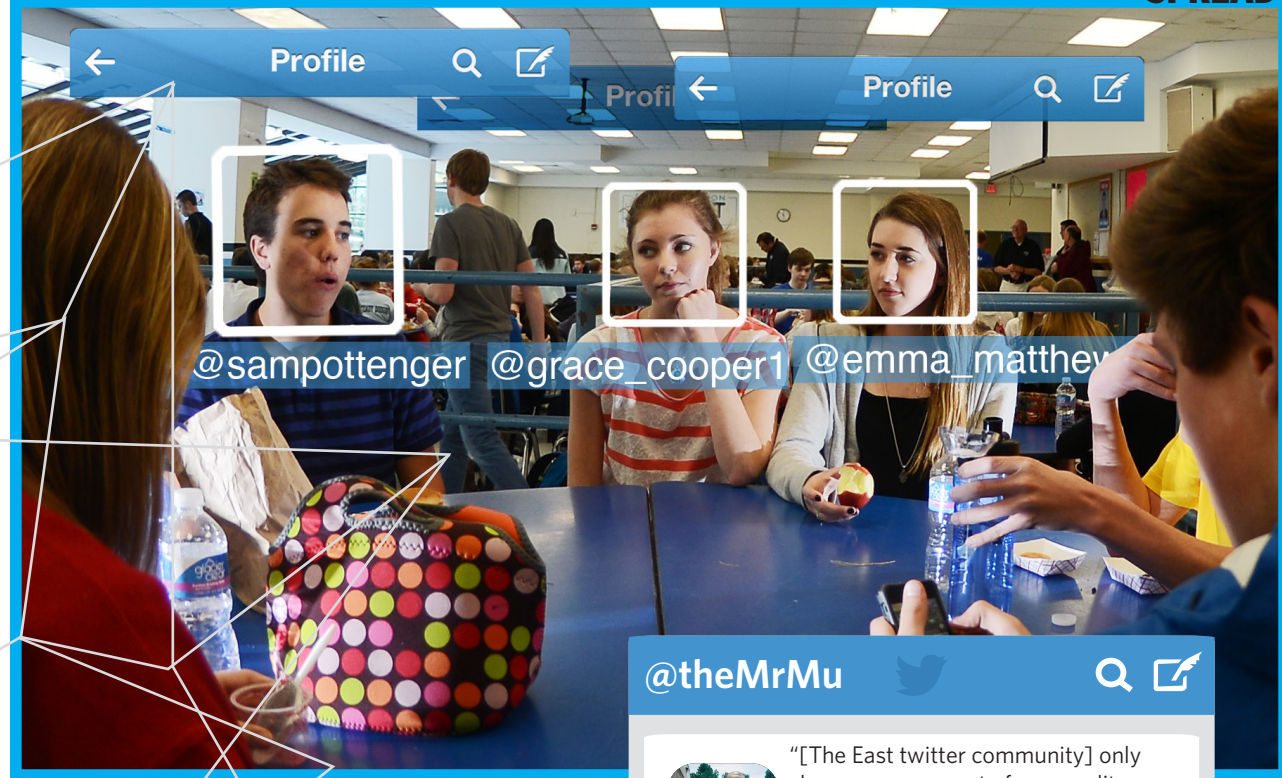
“This is what people see of you,” Benschoter said. “So if that’s what you put out there, that’s what people are going to know, and that is the reality.”

Arndt-Helgesen agrees with Benschoter. She adds that perceptions formed from Twitter, both of students and of social groups, don’t have to be accurate to have power. She says that if people believe that a perception is accepted by others, they will respond to it as though it is true.

“Reality is simply that which is created,” Arndt-Helgesen said. “So if we believe that that is the perception, if that becomes the shared reality, we still act on it as if it’s real. [Students hear that] to be considered popular at East, [they] must do these things, go to these things, wear these kinds of things. That may or may not be an accurate statement, but it has created the response... and so [students] respond to that.”



Above are the social networking sites the surveyed East students use during school.



@theMrMu

“[The East twitter community] only shows one segment of personality, usually people tweet about stuff that is very instantaneous and in the moment.” -David Muhammad

38% of surveyed students check social media two or more times a day 😊

@vwentz14

“I think some people’s twitter reflect a more humorous side and I think sometimes if someones trying to be funny it doesn’t represent what they’re about.” -senior Vance Wentz

21% of surveyed students feel more outgoing when using social networking sites 😊

*percentages taken from a survey of 192 East students