

Research & References

BrandWise Certification: Social Media Literacy, Digital Reputation & Personal Branding (Student Edition) and Professional Branding (Professional Edition) · Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

The BrandWise Certification brings widely accepted guidance about social media into one clear, age-appropriate course. Very little of it is new or secret. Its value is in organizing what public agencies, professional bodies, researchers and the platforms themselves already say, and teaching it in a way students can use. This page lists the 44 published sources behind the course and explains how it was developed, so parents, schools and reviewers can see exactly where the content comes from.

How the course was developed

An experienced curriculum team. The course was developed by a curriculum team whose members previously designed and taught social media literacy and digital reputation courses that earned national accreditation. Those earlier courses, and what the team learned delivering them to students, schools and organizations, served as a reference point for the scope and structure of this course.

Newly written for today's platforms. Every lesson, activity, scenario and assessment question in the BrandWise Certification was written new and checked against current platform features and current public guidance. Earlier material was used as a reference only, not copied.

Expert input. The course was shaped with input from education professionals, including a former director of education and curriculum for accredited programs, and from social media and digital marketing professionals who work with the major platforms every day.

The BrandWise Certification awards a Certificate of Completion issued by BrandWise, which anyone can verify online with its certificate ID. This page

describes the course's sources and how it was built; it is not a statement of accreditation for the BrandWise Certification.

Editorial standards

Every module follows the same rules:

- **Best practices, not opinions.** The course teaches widely accepted guidance and standards, not personal views.
- **Non-political and non-controversial.** No political examples, parties, public figures or hot-button issues, and no ranking of news outlets as good or bad.
- **Balanced.** The course acknowledges that social media has real benefits, and teaches students to use it well rather than fear it.
- **No statistic without a source.** Any number in the course is tied to a source on this page. Where survey data is older, the course uses careful wording (for example, "most hiring managers") instead of precise percentages.
- **Plain and age-appropriate.** Friendly, direct language, written in the second person, without scare tactics or lecturing.
- **Platform-neutral.** Platforms are named only to explain how a feature works or where a setting lives, never to praise or criticize a company.

How we choose sources

Sources are chosen in this order of preference:

- **Government and public agencies**, such as the Federal Trade Commission, the FBI, the Department of Justice, CISA and StopBullying.gov.
- **Professional bodies and national organizations**, such as the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Colleges and Employers, and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

- **The platforms' own help centers and policies**, for how features, settings and recommendations actually work.
 - **Peer-reviewed research**, used to support points that the consensus sources above already make, not to introduce new claims on the strength of a single study.
 - **Industry surveys and news reports**, used sparingly, dated, and described cautiously.
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Course design and assessment

- **Three pillars.** Social Media Literacy, Digital Reputation and Personal Branding (11 modules, Student Edition), or Professional Branding (12 modules, Professional Edition).
 - **A measurable learning objective for every module**, written with action verbs that describe what a student will be able to do.
 - **A consistent lesson structure:** a hook, a short reading, a hands-on "Try it," a realistic scenario with a discussion answer, and quick practice questions.
 - **Module quizzes** graded on our servers, so answers can't be looked up in the page.
 - **A 25-question final assessment** in which every question is mapped to a module learning objective, with an 80% passing standard. Every module quiz must also be passed before a certificate is issued.
 - **A verifiable certificate** with a unique ID and QR code that schools and employers can check online.
 - **A companion Advanced Parent Resource Guide** that follows the course module by module.
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Pillar 1: Social Media Literacy

Modules 1.1 to 1.3: how platforms work, spotting misinformation and manipulation, healthy and intentional use

- 1 TikTok. (2020, June 18). How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou. TikTok Newsroom.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.1, 1.3

Supports: Feeds are ranked by interactions, watch completion and “Not interested” feedback.

- 2 Mosseri, A. (2023, May 31). Instagram ranking explained. Instagram.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.1

Supports: Ranking is based on predicted actions; much of what appears in Reels and Explore comes from accounts you don’t follow.

- 3 YouTube. (n.d.). How YouTube recommendations work. YouTube Help.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.1, 1.3

Supports: Watch history is a main signal for recommendations; users can adjust and reset them.

- 4 Associated Press. (2025, January 7). Meta says it will follow X, replace fact-checking with Community Notes. PBS NewsHour.

Type: News report · **Used in:** 1.2

Supports: Platforms’ shift from professional fact-checking to community notes in the U.S.

- 5 Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151.

Type: Peer-reviewed research · **Used in:** 1.2

Supports: False news spreads farther and faster than true news, driven more by people than by bots.

- 6 Brady, W. J., Wills, J. A., Jost, J. T., Tucker, J. A., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2017). Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(28), 7313–7318.

Type: Peer-reviewed research · **Used in:** 1.1, 1.2

Supports: Emotionally charged moral language increases sharing.

- 7 Rathje, S., Van Bavel, J. J., & van der Linden, S. (2021). Out-group animosity drives engagement on social media. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(26).

Type: Peer-reviewed research · **Used in:** 1.1, 1.2

Supports: Posts criticizing other groups tend to be shared more.

- 8 Wineburg, S., & McGrew, S. (2017). Fact checkers outperform historians and students in evaluating online information. Stanford News.

Type: Research summary · **Used in:** 1.2

Supports: Lateral reading: checking what other sources say about a site or claim.

- 9 Federal Trade Commission. (n.d.). Family emergency scams. FTC Consumer Advice.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 1.2

Supports: Scammers pose as family members in an emergency, including with AI-cloned voices.

- 10 Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs. (2023, May 15). Scammers use AI to enhance family emergency scams.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 1.2

Supports: Verify a suspicious call by calling the person back on a number you know is theirs.

- 11 Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity. (n.d.). C2PA and Content Credentials explainer.

Type: Standards body · **Used in:** 1.2

Supports: Content credentials attach information about how an image or video was made, including AI generation.

- 12 Google. (n.d.). Search with an image on Google. Google Search Help.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.2

Supports: How to run a reverse image search with Google Lens.

13 Meta. (n.d.). Inauthentic behavior. Meta Transparency Center.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.2

Supports: Platforms prohibit fake accounts and coordinated efforts to mislead people about who is behind content or how popular it is.

14 Instagram. (2024, September 17). Introducing Instagram Teen Accounts.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.1, 1.3

Supports: Built-in teen protections such as time reminders and sleep mode.

15 Apple. (n.d.). Use Screen Time on your iPhone and iPad. Apple Support.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.1, 1.3

Supports: Downtime schedules and app limits.

16 Google. (n.d.). Manage how you spend time on your Android phone with Digital Wellbeing. Android Help.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.1, 1.3

Supports: App timers and bedtime mode on Android.

17 X. (n.d.). How to mute accounts on X. X Help Center.

Type: Platform primary source · **Used in:** 1.3

Supports: Muting is private: muted accounts are not told they were muted.

18 American Psychological Association. (2023, May 9). APA panel issues recommendations for adolescent social media use.

Type: Professional body · **Used in:** 1.3; course rationale

Supports: Teach media literacy; protect sleep and physical activity; watch for signs of problematic use.

19 American Psychological Association. (2023). Health advisory on social media use in adolescence.

Type: Professional body · **Used in:** 1.3; course rationale

Supports: Signs of problematic use that interfere with daily routines, sleep and activity.

- 20 Office of the Surgeon General. (2023). Social media and youth mental health: The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 1.3; course rationale

Supports: Benefits and risks of social media for young people; the value of healthy boundaries.

Pillar 2: Digital Reputation

Modules 2.1 to 2.4: privacy, judgment and context, what colleges and employers look for, recovering from a mistake

- 21 Federal Trade Commission. (2014). Net Cetera: Chatting with kids about being online.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 2.1

Supports: Posts can't be fully taken back and copies persist; use privacy settings; limit location sharing.

- 22 Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. (n.d.). More than a password.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 2.1

Supports: Multifactor authentication makes accounts much harder to break into.

- 23 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). What is cyberbullying. StopBullying.gov.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 2.2

Supports: Definition of cyberbullying; why it is persistent, permanent and hard to notice.

- 24 Olsen, J., & McCune, A. (2016, July 25). Bystanders can help limit hurtful effects of cyberbullying. StopBullying.gov.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 2.2

Supports: Bystander steps: don't spread it, respond calmly, check in with the person targeted.

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- 25** U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division. (n.d.). Citizen's guide to U.S. federal law on child pornography.
- Type:** Government · **Used in:** 2.2
- Supports:** Creating, sharing or possessing sexual images of anyone under 18 is illegal under federal law.
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- 26** Kaplan. (2024, January 30). Kaplan survey: College admissions officers and applicants' social media.
- Type:** Industry survey · **Used in:** 2.3, 3.4
- Supports:** How admissions officers view and use applicants' social media.
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- 27** CareerBuilder. (2017, June 15). 7 in 10 employers research job candidates online.
- Type:** Industry survey · **Used in:** 2.3
- Supports:** Employers screen candidates online, and what they look for.
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- 28** HR Dive. (2023, June 20). Most hiring managers check candidates' social media (reporting a ResumeBuilder survey).
- Type:** News report on industry survey · **Used in:** 2.3
- Supports:** Most hiring managers review candidates' social media.
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- 29** Federal Bureau of Investigation, Columbia Field Office. (2022, April 13). FBI Columbia warns of sextortion schemes targeting young boys.
- Type:** Government · **Used in:** 2.4
- Supports:** Don't delete messages; tell a trusted adult; report to law enforcement or the NCMEC CyberTipline.
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- 30** Federal Bureau of Investigation, Newark Field Office. (2022, April 13). FBI's Newark office warns parents of an increase in sextortion cases.
- Type:** Government · **Used in:** 2.4, 3.3
- Supports:** Prevention steps for families; keep evidence; report to the FBI or NCMEC.
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- 31** National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. (n.d.). CyberTipline.
- Type:** National nonprofit (congressionally authorized) · **Used in:** 2.4; Parent Guide
- Supports:** Where to report online exploitation of a child.
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Pillar 3: Personal Branding

Modules 3.1 to 3.4: what a personal brand is, building a consistent presence, growing a real network, turning your presence into an advantage

- 32** National Association of Colleges and Employers. (n.d.). What is career readiness?.

Type: Professional body · **Used in:** 3.1–3.4

Supports: Competencies employers look for, including career and self-development, communication and professionalism.

- 33** Federal Trade Commission. (2024, August 14). Federal Trade Commission announces final rule banning fake reviews and testimonials.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 3.3

Supports: Buying or selling fake followers or views to misrepresent influence for commercial purposes is prohibited.

- 34** National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. (2017, July 3). Use your NetSmartz: Tips for tweens. NetSmartz.

Type: National nonprofit (congressionally authorized) · **Used in:** 3.3

Supports: Talk with a parent or guardian about what happens online; be selective about who you connect with; report anyone who asks to meet in person.

Professional Edition: workplace sources

Additional sources used in the Professional Edition (12 modules, including 2.5 Professional Conduct & Company Policy). Sources above also apply where cited.

- 35** Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internet Crime Complaint Center. (2023, June 9). Business email compromise: The \$50 billion scam (Alert No. I-060923-PSA).

Type: Government · **Used in:** 1.2, 2.5, 3.3

Supports: Business email compromise caused more than \$50 billion in reported losses worldwide; verify payment requests through a known contact.

36 Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. (n.d.). Recognize and report phishing. Secure Our World.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 1.2, 2.5, 3.3

Supports: Signs of phishing, including urgency and requests for login details; don't click, and report it.

37 Federal Trade Commission. (2026, April 30). That job offer text is probably a scam. FTC Consumer Alerts.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 1.2, 3.3

Supports: Never pay to get paid or to get a job; unexpected job texts are a common scam.

38 Federal Trade Commission. (2025, July 15). FTC's Endorsement Guides: What people are asking. FTC Business Guidance.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 2.5, 3.2, 3.4

Supports: Employees who post about their employer's products should disclose the relationship in the post; listing the employer on a profile isn't enough.

39 National Labor Relations Board. (n.d.). Social media.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 2.5

Supports: Some employee discussions of pay and working conditions on social media are legally protected.

40 U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission & Federal Trade Commission. (n.d.). Background checks: What employers need to know.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 2.3

Supports: Employers using a background-check company must give notice and get written permission.

41 U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (n.d.). Harassment.

Type: Government · **Used in:** 2.2, 2.5

Supports: Workplace harassment is unwelcome conduct based on a protected characteristic.

Advanced Parent Resource Guide and safety resources

Resources named in the course and the Advanced Parent Resource Guide

- 42 National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. (2023, February 27). [NCMEC launches new service that can help you “Take It Down”](#).

Type: National nonprofit (congressionally authorized) · **Used in:** 2.4; Parent Guide

Supports: Free tool that helps remove explicit images of people under 18 from participating platforms.

- 43 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.). [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline fact sheet](#).

Type: Government · **Used in:** Parent Guide

Supports: Call or text 988 for free, confidential crisis support, 24/7.

Instructional design reference

- 44 Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. Longman.

Type: Instructional design · **Used in:** All modules

Supports: Learning objectives written with measurable action verbs at the right level of thinking.

Reviews, updates and corrections

Platforms change quickly. The course and this reference list are reviewed at least once a year, and sooner when a platform changes a feature the course describes. All web sources were accessed in October 2026.

See something outdated or inaccurate? Email hello@itsbrandwise.com and we'll review it.

