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Thesis of
Monique Cole

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

Nova Southeastern University
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

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COMPOSING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: USING SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN

AN ASSEMBLAGE AND CIRCULATION FRAMEWORK

A Thesis

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Requirements of the Degree

Master of Arts in Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

Monique Cole

Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

Department of Communication, Media, and the Arts

Nova Southeastern University

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ABSTRACT

Social media is changing the landscape of composing and information distribution. As Americans are engaging with more social media platforms, composition and rhetoric scholars should consider the importance of enhancing digital literacy skills when utilizing social media, especially with the spread of misinformation across social media platforms. The thesis argues for integrating social media into composition classrooms to help students become stronger critical composers and consumers of information. The project is informed by scholarship on social media in rhetoric and composition, assemblage, and circulation. By combining assemblage and circulation theories, I develop a Social Media Interaction Framework that views social media texts from their construction through distribution. Through the framework, I offer learning objectives, three learning activities, and teaching considerations that provide guidance for instructors on how they can implement social media in the classroom.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Literacy, Assemblage, Circulation, Rhetoric, Multimodality

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Situating the Exigency: Why Social Media?

The ways in which individuals are communicating, composing, and consuming information is changing. As technology evolves, writing evolves with it, leaving many technology affordances subject to examination, utilization, and criticism by a number of composition, rhetoric, and digital media scholars (Alexander & Rhodes, 2014; Arola & Wysocki, 2012; Brooke, 2009; Dobrin, 2011; Gries, 2018; Johnson-Eiola & Selber, 2007, 2017; Lanham, 2007; Lutkewitte, 2013; Medina & Pimentel, 2018; Selfe & Selfe, 1994; Sheridan et al., 2012; Walls & Vie, 2017; Yancey, 2004). In the field of composition and rhetoric, technology in education is embraced. For example, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (2015) lists technology as one of its principles for postsecondary teaching of writing, by voicing that "sound writing instruction emphasizes relationships between writing and technologies." The principle helps make students aware of how they can utilize various forms of technology when composing, which comes with understanding rhetorical affordances and limitations. Additionally, the principle is meant to extend students' knowledge of different types of texts that utilize different modes of communicating. The field's relationship with technology only grows as scholars examine the various ways technology can be utilized by academics, composition instructors, writers, and creators.

This thesis focuses on the technology domain of social media and how it can be utilized in the composition classroom to increase students' digital literacy skills. Social media is highly utilized and has changed the landscape of composing and information distribution. According to Pew Research Center (2021), since 2005, usage of social media by 18–29-year-olds has jumped from 7% to 84%. The surge of usage is parallel with the development of various networking apps

and platforms that accomplish certain communication goals. Additionally, Pew Research Center has found that daily around 72% of Americans engage with a variety of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and more, to "connect with one another, engage with news content, share information and entertain themselves." With content being continuously added on various social media platforms, individuals supply or contribute to endless amounts of information within seconds. Additionally, each platform comprises differing demographics, interfaces, and social cultures that can impact how user content is perceived by others who use the app.

With the increase of social media use by 18–29-year-olds, instructors should view social media as instrumental when trying to educate students on how to become more digitally literate to engage with the world around them. When social media is utilized in the composition classroom, knowledge has the opportunity to flourish, due to the development of new curriculum and more strategies to help create understanding. Yancy (2004) talks about the evolving nature of the field of rhetoric and composition by voicing that "we have a moment," when developing revised curriculum for the 21st century. Her model of composing is based on three key expressions that build connections between the "writing outside of school and that inside," therefore, creating more "thoughtful, informed, technologically adapted writing publics" (p. 308). While Yancey is not referring to social media in her keynote address, the key expressions in her model of composition—"circulation of composition," "canons of rhetoric," and "deicity of technology"—provide direction for applying social media in the composition classroom (pp. 311–312). The first element, "circulation of composition," views the movement of texts, whether that be "across contexts, between media, [or] across time," which can help students understand different "conventions" or "genres" when composing (pp. 312–313). The remaining expressions

regard understanding the role of rhetorical cannons and seeing how literacy is affected by changes in technology. When developing curriculum that involves social media, instructors can have students grapple with these expressions by considering how the rhetorical canons play a role in the development and circulation of social media texts. Additionally, students can consider how rhetorical motives affect their roles as consumers or producers of texts.

Yancey's (2004) moment has become even more relevant as social media grows in association with communication issues dealing with the presidential elections, social injustice, global pandemics, and social media influencers. These concerns have led to larger conversations about digital literacy, "fake news," and how individuals navigate and make sense of information online (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Barthel et al., 2016; Bradshaw, 2020; Chen, 2013; Enrenfeld & Barton, 2019; Grieco, 2017; Hindman & Barash, 2018; Miller & Leon, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2020; Shearer, 2018; Shearer & Mitchell, 2021; Wineburg et al., 2016).

Within the discipline of rhetoric and composition, I am arguing for how social media can be used in composition classroom to increase students' digital literacy skills. My area of focus is driven by the exigency of the need for educating students to become stronger critical composers and consumers, especially when dealing with information presented in online settings. According to the American Library Association (ALA) (n.d.), digital literacy is "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills." The definition recognizes being able to thoughtfully create and evaluate other texts. For these actions to happen, students engage in comprehending information distribution, identifying different factors that can influence the credibility of the information, and determining the meaning of the information. Additionally, students must be able to navigate how to use the technology.

Project Background

To conceptualize how social media can be integrated in the postsecondary composition classroom to help students build stronger digital literacy skills, my thesis develops a Social Media Interaction Framework. The thesis pulls concepts from a theoretical framework methodology. The methodology was picked to connect the reader with "existing knowledge" that demonstrates "understanding of theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic" (Sacred Heart University Library, n.d.). As a graduate student in a Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media master's program, I recognize that the field consists of multiple theories and multidisciplinary ties that help keep our practices alive and flourishing. My gravitation in the program toward multimodal pedagogy and experience in using social media have played a huge role for inspiring the development of my thesis. This thesis pulls both my interests together and leaves room for future growth. While social media and multimodal composing are two large concepts that laid the building blocks when developing the foundation for the project, I recognize the need to break down these concepts further. Therefore, my thesis focuses on building a framework that integrates multimodality, assemblage, and circulation. By recognizing how these theories relate to social media text production and circulation, I then produced learning objectives and activities that utilize social media and can help students become more critical producers and consumers of digital literacy. Throughout the thesis, the following question is explored: How can educators use social media within the composition classroom to deepen students' understanding of the principles of assemblage and circulation to develop stronger digital literacy skills?

The Social Media Interaction Framework brings together assemblage and circulation to help explain composing strategies and information consumption on social media. The ideal

audience of my work are postsecondary composition instructors, with limited to extensive use of social media applications in a classroom. The assemblage and circulation sections of the framework allow students to critically engage with social media texts as producers and consumers. To highlight how both theories are currently being studied in terms of social media and digital literacy, the literature review section of the thesis explores how social media has been utilized in the composition and rhetoric field, as well as assemblage and circulation theories. The overall goal of my thesis is to develop a Social Media Interaction Framework and activities that utilize concepts from assemblage and circulation with the purpose of helping students become stronger critical composers and consumers of information, especially on social media.

Why Assemblage and Circulation?

The assemblage part of the framework is inspired from the variation of social media platforms and interfaces. These social media platforms consist of the continuous production and circulation of information in the form of texts that are used to create meaning and engagement. The variation creates a unique learning environment for understanding how, at a theoretical level, students rhetorically move when creating or receiving information. The assemblage part of the framework is heavily influenced by Johnson-Eiola & Selber (2007, 2017), Kennedy (2016), and Prins (2012).

The circulation part of the framework was inspired by the speed information can travel on social media, alongside the ease of users being able to readily react to texts by sharing information or contributing to an ongoing conversation. While the assemblage part of the framework focuses more on the creation of texts, the circulation section looks at the movement of texts beyond publication. Circulation highlights a new set of concepts aimed at acknowledging external factors that can interfere with how users engage with and distribute texts. The

circulation part of the framework draws inspiration from Dobrin (2011), Gries (2018), Sheridan et al. (2012), and Yancey (2004).

The Social Media Interaction Framework is designed to have students thinking about factors involved with the construction and distribution of social media texts, alongside information consumption to develop stronger digital literacy skills. To translate the concepts to application, I propose the following learning objectives that are utilized during the three activities. The learning objectives that pull from the assemblage side of the framework include: 1) identify the source of the information being used in a social media text, 2) recognize the role of editorial point of view during textual curation when creating a social media text, and 3) acknowledge how sociopolitical factors play a role in the creation and interpretation of social media texts. The last three objectives revolve around the circulation part of the framework, which seeks to recognize the effects and factors associated with how the text is distributed and interacted with on social media. The learning objectives inspired from the circulation part of the framework are: 1) understand the role rhetorical velocity has on a social media text's movement; 2) recognize the effects of interface design on the creation, distribution, and user interaction with a social media text; and 3) demonstrate ethical considerations associated with the engagement, consumption, and distribution of social media texts. Overall, the Social Media Interaction Framework contributes to the ongoing conversation within the composition and rhetoric field about increasing technology use in classrooms. The development of the framework enhances the value of the postsecondary composition classroom by adding theoretical thought into social media's connection with the field to strengthen students' digital literacy skills.

Literature Review

Social Media's Application in the Composition and Rhetoric Field

Social media are defined as new technologies and applications that utilize the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies and allow users to create and participate in various communities through functions such as communicating, sharing, collaborating, publishing, managing, and interacting. (Mao, 2014, p. 213)

To understand how social media can be implemented in classrooms to help students develop and strengthen digital literacy skills, it is important to both define the term and highlight its affordances and limitations. The definition I use comes from Mao (2014), who highlights some of the rhetorical moves users take when operating social media as creators, consumers, or distributors of information. The actions of "communicating, sharing, collaborating, publishing, managing, and interacting," is a valuable part of Mao's definition that guides my literature review because part of my thesis is geared toward looking at the various moves participants can take when utilizing social media (p. 213). These actions require different skill sets, which can be examined for how they play a role in digital literacy instruction.

In communication scholarship, social media has been defined broadly as "a practice, or set of practices, for using media socially," that "does not rely on any particular medium" (Humphreys, 2015, p. 1). Social media is also defined as "the world's largest cocktail party, where people can listen to other talking and join the conversation about any topic of their choice" (Kerpen, 2011, p. 6). While I am looking at social media at large for my thesis, these definitions by Humphreys and Kerpen are too focused on the action of being social and do not consider the means in which the socialization takes place. Mao's (2014) definition recognizes actions being done by users on social media platforms and acknowledges that communication requires access

to the Internet, which rules out old media being viewed as social media. Additionally, her explanation aligns with other interpretations of the term by communication scholars (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kim, 2016). Another reason I chose Mao's definition was because of her recognition of participation and creation on social media at large, important because I am not examining just one social media platform. My thesis looks at how social media can play a role in both developing and strengthening students' digital literacy skills, rather than focusing on a specific platform. Mao's emphasis on "various communities," leaves the term open for interpretation.

Of these definitions, my interpretation is that social media users can contribute to and gain information from multiple digital public spheres that contain a range of options for circulation and creation depending on the app's interface and operating system. According to Pew Research Center (2021), social media platforms are also used by differing demographics that vary in age, race, gender, economic status, income, and community, which creates a mixed bag of information being consumed, added, and perceived due to differing backgrounds and user experience. Focusing on a range of social media platforms also acknowledges the changing nature and growth of both social media and scholarship. By exploring social media at large, I establish a theoretical framework that is inclusive to many of the social media apps that exist, while expanding their relevance when applied to new social media platforms. The choice not to focus on a certain platform was done intentionally, due to the risk of certain platforms becoming outdated or no longer utilized by a larger number of users.

To develop a stronger understanding of how social media can be utilized in the postsecondary composition classroom, the following literature review examines underlying themes associated with social media implementation pertaining to digital literacy both in

scholarship and application in classrooms. The goal of conducting the literature review is to further highlight the need for a more unified approach in teaching digital literacy skills through the implementation of social media with the development of a Social Media Interaction Framework that utilizes the theories of assemblage and circulation. It serves as the foundation for providing learning objectives that are interwoven in classroom activities to heighten student understanding of digital literacy.

Social Media and Digital Literacy

Mao (2014) says that social media "allow users to create and participate in various communities" (p. 213). But what helps guide user actions on each platform? Social media platforms are created with a certain intent. Due to the diversity of social media mission statements, what it means to be "social" by the platform creator varies, which is also subject to different interpretations by users of the platform. For example, Facebook's (2021) mission statement is to "give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together." Their mission is invested in connection through user features that enable people to be social by joining in different communities. In comparison, Twitter's (2021) mission statement "is to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly without barriers." While social media mission statements vary in purpose, they can be viewed as a starting point to further investigate their capabilities and limitations for informing students about digital literacy.

While social media applications may have been created with good intent, there is always a chance that a user can engage in activity that can be malicious or unethical. As more Americans turn to social media for their source of news information (Grieco, 2017; Shearer, 2018) composition and rhetoric scholars should consider the implications associated with the shift in medium of information consumption, especially the spread of misinformation. For

example, Ehrendel & Barton (2019) look at the implications for the composition classroom

regarding the role of online public spheres and "fake news." One of the actions they examine is

"the blurring of the line between journalism and social media chatter" (Ehrendel & Barton, p. 2).

The authors state that due to the rise in "citizen journalism," which deals with sharing

information by an individual over a news organization, there can be "unfiltered access to

information" (Ehrendel & Barton, p. 4). Information being shared can lack or contain media bias

or provide a different perspective of a situation. Stories are no longer solely being controlled by

corporate news organizations but by individuals who have access to raw resources to generate

and share information and who might traditionally be marginalized. However, due to the blurring

lines between what is considered professional journalism compared to civilian journalism, there

is a risk for confusion and the "health of the public sphere" (Ehrendel & Barton, p. 3).

Another example of misinformation circulating on social media can be found in Allcott

and Gentzkow's piece (2017), where they studied the role of "fake news" distributed on social

media during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. They mention that the increase in "fake news"

has been attributed to lowered "barriers to entry in the media industry," social media being

"well-suited for fake news dissemination," a "declining trust in mainstream media," and the "rise

of political polarization" (pp. 214–215). In sum, Allcott and Gentzkow extend Ehrendel and

Barton's (2019) work because there is a focus on the connection between "fake news" and the

increase of information being produced by social media users who lack a journalism background.

A real-world example of Allcott and Gentzkow's idea at play, especially in regard to political

polarization, can be seen when the spread of misinformation on social media became further

escalated during the 2020 U.S. presidential election, which also took place during a global

pandemic (Doughton, 2020). Former President Donald Trump engaged in the spread of

misinformation about both the election and pandemic when to try to sway voters into keeping

him in for a second term. The most prominent event that demonstrates the negative effects of

misinformation can be seen at the end of Trump's presidential career when his words potentially

sparked his supporters' raid of the U.S. Capitol, which left five people dead (Healy, 2021;

Subramanian, 2021). After the event, Trump was banned from prominent social media platforms

like Facebook and Twitter. While 58% of U.S. adults believe that the decision for the platforms

to ban him was correct, 41% disagree, some viewing the act as a form of censorship (Mcclain &

Anderson, 2021). While banning Trump was a huge step taken by big social media companies,

the war on misinformation continues to be fought through companies recognizing the problem

and trying to implement solutions, like misinformation labels or removal of content, to respond

to public criticism (Facebook, 2020; Instagram, 2019; Pappas, 2020; Roth & Pickles, 2020).

I argue that while social media companies are trying to navigate the storm of

misinformation and malicious social media use, part of the responsibility for producing stronger

digital literacy skills happens in composition classrooms. Students can be informed on their own

social media habits through enhanced digital literacy skills, including looking at the creation,

distribution, and consumption of social media texts. A starting point for understanding the role of

digital media skills and social media is Gleason and Gillern's (2018) examination of social media

helping develop "digital citizenship for secondary school students" (p. 1). In their article,

Gleason and Gillern propose a digital citizen model "that is student-centered (e.g., as opposed to

teacher-directed), emphasizes participation via strategic creation, curation, and circulation (e.g.,

rather than passive acquisition of information), and grounded in authentic sociocultural practices

of young people (e.g., rather than normative uses of technology" (p. 3). Gleason and Gillern's

model synthesizes different "theoretical points" associated with digital citizenship like students

being able to engage with technology in a "safe, ethical, and legal" way (pp. 1, 3). Their approach takes a more civic engagement route, as they reference other scholars who associate a connection between the use of social media with the formation of digital citizenship (for example, they cite Greenhow et al., 2009; Krutka, 2014). The digital citizen model can serve as a foundation for scholars to emulate when considering social media implementation in classrooms. This project accepts and expands such a challenge by incorporating more of a digital literacy perspective regarding navigating misinformation.

Social Media and Activism

Social media is also being studied for its creation of social change. An example of this type of scholarship can be found in the work of Medina & Pimentel (2018), who find that "For many communities of color, social media has provided a space in which to mediate and create for the purposes of activism, critique, literacy documentation, and culturally relevant storytelling" ("Introduction," para. 5). Marginalized individuals are now provided a space to raise their voices and contribute to conversations that can inspire change.

A major research trend in the area of social media examines how hashtags can bring a heightened sense of awareness to an idea or issue, often in the form of hashtag activism (Alexander & Haner, 2017; Colombini & Hall, 2017; Dadas, 2017; Gin et al., 2017; Gleason & Gillern, 2018; Gray & Holmes, 2020; Gries, 2018; Hayes, 2017; Medina & Pimentel, 2018; Norris & Rodriguez, 2019, Potts, 2017, Walker & Laughter, 2019; Walls & Vie, 2017; Williams, 2018). Due to social media's "accessibility and broad, circulatory reach," hashtags can play a role in "swaying public sentiment" due to their ability to "influence media coverage and incite social change" (Colombini & Hall, 2017, p. 92). For example, Hayes (2017) analyzes how a public relations campaign by the New York Police Department that began on April 22, 2014,

backfired when it became a platform for criticism and protest against the NYPD. The main purpose of the campaign was to encourage people to share photos of them interacting with the NYPD by using the hashtag #MyNYPD to generate positive responses highlighting the men and women who serve for the department. While the department did get some positive responses, they also got an overwhelming response from people using the hashtag to spread images of police brutality and negligent police activity. With social media providing a platform to marginalized voices, individuals can advocate for social justice and challenge a dominant narrative (Hayes, 2017; Medina & Pimentel, 2018; Monty, 2015; Walker & Laughter, 2019). However, hashtags are not always a solution for solving problems. Dadas (2017) acknowledges that bringing increased attention to an issue might not work due to lack of consideration toward "the full range of repercussions that might result from an increased media focus" and, therefore, "require a critical awareness of audience, context, and purpose" (pp. 24, 31). When events or movements are simplified to achieve "brevity" and "decontextualization," which are concepts associated with increased rhetorical velocity, certain details have the chance of being left out.

Another example of disrupting narratives on social media can be found in Walker and Laughter's (2019) piece, where they highlight that social media can be used "as a tool for activism, identity formation, and inclusion" (p. 60). Additionally, they argue that social media can create "counterspaces" that enable marginalized voices to gain "cultural wealth" that can cause a rupture or change in public discourse (Walker & Laughter, pp. 62–63). They support their claim by comparing social media to a "fishbowl" that generates a "critical discourse." The main situation that Walker and Laughter examine is when Representative Maxine Waters utilized Twitter as her platform of defense against the comments made by Fox News commentator Bill O' Reilly. The authors also examine hashtags like #ITooAmHarvard, #BlackWomanatWork, and

#Neverthelessshepersisted. According to Walker and Laughter, each instance where something new is added, like a hashtag, comment on the situation, or movement of the social media post to another platform, a new heterogeneous nodule is created to the existing rhizome because a different response that is resistant toward the current message is contributed. Through their research, Walker and Laugher demonstrate how composition educators "can help future generations mark where microaggression discourse can be challenge and more inclusive discourse initiated" (p. 66) to "initiate micro-kindness techniques to propagate more inclusive discourses online" (p. 73). In sum, when microaggressions are recognized and challenged, students have the opportunity to enhance their digital literacy skills by becoming more cognizant of how to communicate with others in more mindful ways.

Lastly, democratic action through social media does not just have to take place using a hashtag. Sparby (2017) argues how more research is needed, especially with the rise of online aggression. She seeks to understand how composition teachers can develop "a critical awareness to digital social media use" that "can help users become more ethical digital citizens," who are "more fully aware of their digital identities" while navigating a social media interface (Sparby, p. 85). Sparby supports her argument by providing the results of her case study where she examined two threads on 4Chan, both created by individuals who identify as transgender. While one faced polarizing responses when they encountered the "memetic wrath" as response to her thread, the other one was able to "ruptured the collective identity" and opened a "constructive dialogue" between other 4Chan users (Sparby, p. 85). While the more positive thread still contained problematic language and some 4Chan members did not provide the user the proper respect, they were able to create a productive dialogue about being transgender, which is a rare occurrence in the 4Chan community. Sparby's case study highlights how a teacher can use social media to help

their students see how technology can be used with and against them when developing a "digital identity" and identifying opportunities of "democratic participation" (p. 95). Democratic participation and digital identity are important concepts because they help students become more mindful of what they should be posting on social networking sites.

I argue that composition instructors can implement social media in the classroom to help enhance students' digital literacy skills. While previous scholars have examined social media's ties with digital literacy, writing, and activism, the scholarship acts starting point to further analyze its capabilities as being utilized by postsecondary composition instructors. More research needs to be conducted on social media and its connection with composition to help build an understanding of how it can benefit an academic setting. The thesis expands upon the current conversation of social media usage in the classroom by creating a Social Media Interaction Framework, which consists of the theoretical lens of assemblage and circulation to increase student's digital literacy skills.

Social Media: Assemblage and Circulation

When developing my thesis, I looked at how individuals use social media both as consumers and producers of information. When it comes to enhancing digital literacy, a solution that Dadas (2017) talks about acknowledging "the practices of remix and rhetorical velocity," which consists of understanding how "online arguments can be repurposed quite rapidly" (p. 32). Dadas's solution is interesting, as it shifts the conversation from larger topics of activism and the public sphere into theoretical concepts of assemblage and circulation. The following section breaks down how each theory—assemblage and circulation—can be used as a lens when analyzing the creation and distribution of a social media text. To help build a transfer from theory to application, the section also briefly outlines learning objectives that pertain to the Social Media Interaction Framework.

Viewing Social Media Posts as Texts

To begin breaking down assemblage's connection with social media, it is important to identify what the theoretical concept is and what it consists of. I define an assemblage as a multimodal text that draws upon previous created texts to meet a communication goal (like to solve a problem, persuade, or inform), and is influenced by the creator and cultural context. My definition is heavily influenced by Johnson-Eilola and Selber's work (2007, 2017). To Johnson-Eilola and Selber (2007), "assemblages are texts built primarily and explicitly from existing texts in order to solve a writing or communication problem in a new context" (p. 381). For them, assemblages are "constructed from the conceptual, linguistic, and sociopolitical forces active in several different locations" (p. 381). Their definition provides insight about the connection between assemblage and social media texts because it considers culture, space, and time. When

breaking down their definition, the word "text" is broad and needs explanation to help situate when applying the term to social media use.

Social media texts are typically multimodal,[1] which means that they can consist of various modes. For example, on TikTok or Instagram, users can produce short videos that usually include some type of visual or aural mode that can involve pictures, graphics interchange formats (GIFs), stickers, animations, or music clips. Conversations about multimodality's connection to developing stronger literacy skills can be attributed to the New London Group (NLG) (1996). The NLG consisted of "literary scholars" who called for the expansion of the "instruction from 'literacy' to 'multiliteracies'" to be able to represent "the practices needed to consume and produce the diversity of multimodal communications we encounter in everyday life" (Sheppard, 2019, p. 390). The different modes—linguistic, spatial, aural/oral, visual, and gestural—provide the communicator additional insight about communication choices to consider both when composing and consuming texts.

To help provide more direction for what a social media text is and expand upon Lutkewitte's (2013) definition, I look toward Takayoshi and Selfe (2007). They define multimodal texts as "texts that exceed the alphabetic and may include still and moving images, animations, colors, words, music, and sound" (p. 1). Their definition breaks down the different components that can be built into a multimodal text to create meaning. The nod toward different modes of communication like aural or visual in Takayoshi and Selfe helps support my idea of what a social media text is by acknowledging the role of multimodality. Knowing what a social media text consists of is the first step toward understanding how social media posts contain assemblages that users are able to manipulate or analyze. When breaking down a social media

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[1] Multimodal composing is defined as "communication using multiple modes that work purposely to create meaning" (Lutkewitte, 2013, p. 2).

text to identify its' components, students can engage in digital literacy skill sets like locating and evaluating information. They can also utilize critical thinking skills and increase their knowledge on how to navigate the technology.

As a social media text is being created, the creator draws upon previous texts to help construct new meaning. The creator's identity plays a role in the creation of the text and their choices are key factors when putting together the assemblage. The resources being used to create the text are not always new or original to the creator, but the final product is often meant to produce a new meaning. To Johnson-Eilola and Selber (2007) the components that go into making an assemblage come "primarily" or "explicitly" from "existing texts" (p. 381), which means that 100% originality of the raw components that go into the text's creation do not exist. Johnson-Eiola and Selber's idea of the lack of complete originality is echoed by Yancey & McElroy (2017), who say that assemblage consists of the "use, reuse, and repurposing of materials, especially chunks of texts, in order to make something new" (p. 4). In sum, assemblages incorporate the works of others and make connections through the reuse of previous texts to achieve desired meaning within a given context. The actions that Johnson-Eiola and Selber and Yancey and McElroy describe make up the various moves creators engage in when working with texts in the composition classroom. When examining assemblages in classrooms, students can learn how social media texts are composed and distributed. While students may be used to creating academic assemblages, such as academic papers that interweave the ideas from scholars within their discipline, they might not immediately realize how they are also creating assemblages for their social media feeds.

To help students transfer knowledge from theory to application is the act of textual curation. Kennedy (2016) describes textual curation as "Arranging, intenterconnecting, and

recomposing" as "essential process for curatorial writing" (p. 180). To Kennedy (2016), the act of curation can "help prepare students for writing on the open web" because it "helps students negotiate composition in live environments that includes contributors they do not know and who encounter the text in multiple temporalities" in digital environments (p. 177). Kennedy talks about how through the act of curation, students engage in multiple moves when managing information or developing digital texts. I argue that by being able to sort and make meaning of social media texts, students can understand how to locate, interpret, and circulate texts in meaningful ways.

As students work to understand the act of curation when putting together a social media text, they should also consider their role as the creator. The influence of a creator's actions when creating a text is explored in Prins (2012). According to Prins, writing is a "craft." The word "craft," "implies a maker, tools used to shape materials into an object, a user or users for that object, the time it took for the maker to learn how to use the tools and work with the materials, the time it took to make the object, relationships between the maker and thing made as well as between maker and users" (Prins, p. 152). Prins's definition puts the relationship between creator and text in unison, providing a more of an insightful way of thinking about composing by considering factors that go into working with a text. By recognizing the factors that go into a text, students can understand how the assemblage was curated and apply that understanding to their social media productions. They are also able to see the importance of their movements by recognizing how their relationship and identity can influence the text.

Lastly, the theoretical lens of assemblage can establish an understanding of the role culture plays when creating a social media text. As time progresses, different communication mediums become more prominent in day-to-day communication resulting in the creation of new

genres, ways of composing, new literacies, and social conventions. Assemblages do not exist in a vacuum; they exist in a culture. One of the factors that can affect how the text is created is style. Style does not just consist of "a system of signs" that make up a "performance," but "also as the grounds of signifying upon more and more of our social, cultural world" in terms of organization (Brummett, 2008, p. 3). Style fluctuates over time, creating different perceived meanings due to people's associations or expectations. To Johnson-Eilola and Selber (2017), assemblages can serve as "connect[ions] with other peoples and other times," which "involves deterritorializing and reterritorializing" (p. 225). Additionally, assemblages are material objects that are being assembled "over and over again, in our own meaning systems" (p. 225). Johnson-Eilola and Selber explains how texts change over time as individuals interact with them. While some texts "maintain their identity," others can "mutate" taking on new meaning as they are "taken apart" and "put back together" (Johnson-Eiola & Selber, p. 227). An example of social media text changing over time is a meme, which is "an amusing or interesting item…or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 2). The creation often involves overlaying text over an animated or still visual to create a new meaning. For example, in 2021, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders and his mittens became a viral meme when the photo of him attending Joe Biden's presidential inauguration was either photoshopped, placing him in various locations, or paired with text. As assemblages relate to digital literacy, I argue that acknowledging cultural influence on a text can help students engage in critical thinking to recognize the factors attributed to culture that influence information consumption and production. While culture can influence a social media text for entertainment, like the Bernie Sanders example, it can also play a role in more serious decisions by influencing undecided voters heading to the polls. The concept of social media and presidential elections is a

topic Brower (2018) references at the beginning of his chapter, when he reflects on watching his Twitter feed during the presidential debate between Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump. To bring assemblage theory and culture together, students can look at culture's role in social media assemblages by applying knowledge of the rhetorical situation to the post.

The process of understanding the composing process of a text invites the opportunity for students to understand how meaning is created through identifying rhetorical aims. The Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) (2019) refers to "composing" as "complex writing processes that are increasingly reliant on the use of digital technologies," and outlines rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, processes, and knowledge of conventions as the four main outcomes for a first-year composition course. Part of what postsecondary composition is aimed at doing is guiding students through the writing process to carefully consider different steps and choices being made to create the final product. Therefore, it makes sense why scholarship regarding social media gravitates to looking at rhetoric (Arola, 2010; Beck, 2017; Colombini & Hall, 2017; DeLuca, 2015; Gries, 2015; Hayes, 2017; Head, 2016; Monty, 2015; Shepherd, 2015; Sheridan et al., 2012; Vie, 2018; Walls & Vie, 2017).

While the list of scholars who have studied social media in terms of its rhetorical capability is plentiful, Head (2016) serves as an example of application of building the connection between social media and rhetoric in classrooms. Head discusses how Kenneth Burke's identification theory can help students better comprehend how to "understand, analyze, and appeal to their potential audiences in both their social networking, in their academic writing, and in their everyday communication" (p. 27). To further his argument, he says that "Facebook and other social media sites demonstrate so much user generated text and communication that students are familiar with, these sites can be used as a bridge to rhetorical analysis, particularly

with audience awareness and appeal" (p. 28). Head illustrates that when students recognize how rhetoric can apply to a social media setting, they can become more aware of how they compose in social media spaces. Head's scholarship can support the idea that students can enhance their digital literacy skills by understanding how rhetoric works on social media. Another example of social media in an academic setting is present in the work of Hayes (2017). Hayes voices that the "Rhetorical analysis of tweets in response to various hashtags can encourage students to think more critically about constructing their Twitter text. . . since a few concise words must convey the entire message" (p. 132). Having students view social media posts rhetorically can result in them considering how rhetoric plays into the creation of assemblages. Social media platforms grant new modes that can strengthen one's message or achieve one's goal. In sum, acknowledging the rhetorical aspect of social media texts can help make students more cognizant of the role culture plays because they can become more aware of the factors that influence how they compose and interact on social media platforms. Hence, students can become more mindful of what they produce and consume.

The assemblage lens can help students understand the factors involved with the creation of a social media text. While explained in greater depth in the Social Media Interaction Framework section, the three main learning objectives associated with the theory are the following: 1) identify where the source of the information is coming from, 2) recognize the role of editorial point of view during textual curation when creating a social media text, and 3) acknowledge how sociopolitical factors play a role in the creation and interpretation of the social media text. These three learning objectives frame the assemblage part of the framework to help students understand how to create and break down a social media text to determine if the information is factual or is presented in an ethical way.

Social Media and Circulation

Transitioning from understanding the composing process of a social media text through assemblage, the second aspect of my thesis examines social media by using the theoretical lens of circulation. I define circulation as the movement of a text through time and communication mediums, which can be accelerated or slowed by the creator and external factors. My definition draws inspiration from the works of Dobrin (2011), Gries (2018), Sheridan et al. (2012), and Yancey (2004). When defining circulation, Dobrin considers the factors that play a role in the movement of texts in a space: "Circulation, particularly in new-media, computer-mediated enhanced system of circulation, shifts the focus of writing away from the producer of writing itself and the systems in which it circulates" (Dobrin, p. 58). Dobrin is concerned about the movement of texts from places and spaces rather than the process involved in the text's creation. Dobrin argues circulation is a way to understand "the movement of writing" to help propel the field of composition forward (p. 57). Dobrin's argument is now more evident as time has progressed with the increase of technology leading to new genres and literacies that can be analyzed and go beyond traditional academic standards, such as social media. Gries's (2018) extends Dobrin's work as she discusses how circulation plays a role in how we understand writing "as we shift from a culture dominated by orality and literacy to one supplemented by electracy" (p. 11). Furthermore, Gries enhances Dobrin's claim regarding the importance of recognizing circulation's role in composition studies, especially with the increase in digital media. To Gries, "Circulation—conceived here in terms of spatiotemporal flow as well as cultural-rhetorical process—has always been important to studies of rhetoric and writing. . . Circulation has helped cultivate new understandings about how rhetoric unfolds and acquires force in an increasingly digitally networked and globalized world" (pp. 3, 8).

Gries (2018) is voicing that circulation provides new insights in how meaning is sought due to culture and technology. Circulation deals with the larger picture of how a text moves and changes over time and space. Gries breaks down circulation further in her introduction by providing different insights that circulation has brought to the field of composition. First, to Gries, circulation has helped to draw "attention to writing's dynamic movement and fluidity," which relates to Dobrin's (2011) idea of movement (p. 14). Dobrin and Gries both focus on how circulation plays into networks and ecologies, an area of study that goes beyond the scope of this project. However, the important part of the insight is the recognition that information is now being transmitted beyond print making it less static by flowing to various locations with the help of the internet.

The idea of "fluidity" can serve as a starting point to understand some of the current issues facing digital literacy skills on social media platforms. To help further explain the phenomenon of fluidity, I turn to Chen (2013), who identifies social media as emerging "sites for civic discourse and opinion formation that allow for spontaneous discussions" (p. 74). The type of fluidity present on social media platforms "reduces the ability of technology and service providers to control the nature of public discourse" (Chen, p. 74). Because everyone who has a social media account is technically a content creator, information circulation is more likely to take place at a higher rate which can prove problematic to users trying to navigate and make sense of the content being posted. The increased movement on social media can be attributed to the creation of social media networks that are more "dispersed, fluid, and informal, thereby generating great potential for a message to circulate broadly, thereby finding a sizable audience" (Dadas, 2017, p. 20). Dadas confirms that the control over time and space has become less linear

and more complicated with people communicating asynchronously or synchronously, which means that they are partaking in the actions corresponding to the circulation of content.

Another impact of circulation that is addressed by Gries (2018) includes the "reconfigur[ing] theories of writing, rhetoric, and publics to account for discourse's networked, distributed, and emerging aspects" (pp. 14–15). The insight by Gries extends Yancey's (2004) third key expression in her framework involving the "circulation of composition" (p. 312). Both Yancey and Gries are acknowledging how new forms of media are influencing the field of composition, which requires new lenses to view the composing process. My thesis extends the conversation of circulation by focusing specifically on how social media can be viewed through the lens of assemblage and circulation. Therefore, my thesis expands off Dobrin's (2011) and Gries' (2018) ideas to build on a solution to the exigency of developing stronger digital literacy skills through recognizing the rhetorical impact circulation has on the individual when creating, interacting, or circulating a text within social media spaces.

The first step of understanding how circulation plays a role in social media is by picking up from where the assemblage part of the framework left off, which is acknowledging the rhetorical and cultural impact of social media texts. While the assemblage section focuses on rhetoric broadly, the circulation section moves past publication, focusing on rhetorical velocity. For Sheridan et al. (2012), circulation is a factor involved in the composing process when making rhetorical choices beyond creation of a text. While creator control can lessen once a text is published, rhetorical velocity is a factor creators can consider to elevate the circulation speed of their work. Rhetorical velocity can be used to examine the effects of a text when distributed but can be considered by the composer when assembling the piece to achieve their communication goal. According to the authors, "Rhetorical velocity refers to the way rhetors

strategize about the potential recomposition and distribution of a text," which includes "the direction, speed and momentum with which compositions circulate" (Sheridan et al., pp. 67, 79). In sum, Sheridan et al. attribute different factors, like timing, access to resources, skill set, creator choices, or motivations to the text's rhetorical velocity. From their definition, rhetorical velocity helps show students how texts can move and how creators of the texts can make certain choices paired with outside factors that help the movement of a text, either to speed up or slow down, in a certain context. In an environment like social media where information can be rapidly shared, rhetorical velocity becomes a noteworthy feature. Understanding rhetorical velocity is important because it relates to fluidity. Students begin to consider not only the factors that would be taken into consideration within a digital space but also the cultural impact of their work over time.

After students understand the impact of rhetoric velocity during the production and distribution of a social media text, their focus can then shift to factors that challenge how the text is produced, perceived, or interacted with. The examination of interfaces is important because it shifts the focus away from the creator and onto the space in which the text is being transmitted. The interface design can be either beneficial or limiting to a creator because it plays in role in how a text is created, displayed, and interacted with in the composing space. For example, Dobrin (2011) explores composing spaces and movement of texts. He and says that "Writing requires the material space onto/into which writing is inscribed, and it requires cultural, historical, political space to occupy" (Dobrin, p. 56). In relation to the benefits and constraints of composing space, Dobrin goes on to talk about how writing can be "contained by a container." The container can limit the writing by confining its space or "possibility" (pp. 56–57). An example of a container on social media is when a creator can only include 280 characters when

composing a tweet. When writing is confined or limited by factors like an interface design or creative resources, the creator can lack the power to fully express the idea. In the case of social media, the interface can sometimes pose problems that contribute to the spread of certain ideas or the transmission of misinformation. According to Selfe and Selfe (1994), "computer interfaces, for example, are also sites within which the ideological and material legacies of racism, sexism, and colonialism are continuously written and re-written along with more positive cultural legacies" (p. 484). Like a double-edge sword, interfaces can be functional while also being filled with advantages and constraints. By not looking critically at the interface of social media platforms, students can fail to recognize how built-in factors can prohibit or limit representation of ideas, or even expose them to false information. Additionally, by understanding how social media platforms act as containers, students can understand how to rhetorically design their messages to meet the conventions of the space to enhance the text's effects, such as increase its rhetorical velocity to achieve communication goals.

Currently, interface design is being called into question by lawmakers and the general public over the regulation of information on social media (Barthel et al., 2016). Facebook and Twitter have been called out for not monitoring information being distributed on their sites. They have also been criticized censorship with the ability to restrict other uses from sharing a post or even blocking its content if the platform detects inaccurate information (Vogels et al., 2020). Labels that try to prevent the spread of "fake news," which are marked as containing inaccurate information, can become frustrating to users believing that their free speech right is being impeded or that the system's algorithm is misreading a post.

Yet, social media's ability to interfere with how or what individuals say is not always something that is considered by its users. In an interview conducted by Brooks (2020) with

Dustin Carnahan, an Assistant Professor of communications at Michigan State University, Carnahan comments that "When it comes to the First Amendment, people often forget that freedom of speech refers to governmental restrictions on speech and does not apply to private entities such as companies." Carnahan provides insight on the power differential in social media spaces, which is that social media companies try to maintain the upper hand of information being put on their website through terms and conditions. While social media users may be under the impression that they can put whatever they want online, they are contained by the boundaries set in place by the social media platforms. Just as much of an impact an occupant has on the space, the reversal is also true. Therefore, social media sites can act as a starting point for students to examine the challenges and affordances of interface design when it comes to text production and distribution. By being more critical of technology, instructors can "learn to recognize—and teach students to recognize—the interface as an interested and partial map of our culture and as a linguistic contact zone that reveals power differentials" (Selfe & Selfe, p. 495). Although they were writing as early as 1994, Selfe and Selfe recognize how technology users become more digitally savvy when they also recognize how digital spaces can be influenced by culture and design.

Scholars have studied the role of interface design pertaining to social media text production and its connection to students who are more aware of technology (Adams et al., 2020; Arola, 2010, 2017; Bakke, 2020; Beck, 2017; DeLuca, 2015; Edwards, 2018; Gin et al., 2017; Gleason & Gillern, 2018; Glotfelter, 2019; McGee, 2018; Potts, 2017; Shepherd, 2020; Sparby, 2017, Vie, 2018; Vie et al., 2014; Walls, 2017; Wuebben, 2016). For example, scholars like Gin et al. (2017), Arola (2010), and Gray and Holmes (2020) have examined how other social media layouts and their features contribute to how the user navigates and identifies themselves on the

platforms. Additionally, Shepherd (2020) has looked at how the lack of choice in Reddit's design has contributed to user experience, since form of interaction on Reddit includes actions like upvoting, downvoting, and commenting on other users' content. Within his discussion of how user interface affects user interaction on Reddit, he continues Arola's (2017) work by mentioning her views of "content and design" being rhetorical and how the lack of choice for the user to choose their design is "problematic" ("Why Reddit," para. 2). Due to the lack of choice due to the interface design, users can become limited when creating and interacting with social media texts.

By studying social media interface design and rhetorical velocity, I argue that students can recognize the ethical implications associated with circulation. While the final learning objective falls under the circulation part of the framework, it is meant to also tie to the assemblage section by considering the consequences of users' actions on social media. The ethical implications section is meant to tie concepts from assemblage and circulation to help students become more critical and ethical consumers and producers when engaging and distributing social media texts.

Upon understanding circulation and the exigency to digital literacy skills, the next step is to establish a way for instructors to make the transition from theory to application through the use of social media in composition classrooms. The circulation part of the framework proposes the following learning objectives to help facilitate the transfer of knowledge when breaking down the different components that go into a text's circulation: 1) understand the role rhetorical velocity has on a social media text's movement, 2) recognize the effects of interface design on the creation, distribution, and user interaction with a social media text, and 3) demonstrate

ethical considerations associated with the engagement, consumption, and distribution of social

media texts.

Social Media Interaction Framework

The Social Media Interaction Framework utilizes the concepts associated with the theories of assemblage and circulation to build an understanding for how students can use social media in more rhetorically aware and digitally literate ways. I establish this framework to provide a foundation for the proposed activities that help students strengthen their digital literacy skills. It acts as the liaison between the theoretical concepts and classroom application. The Social Media Interaction Framework consists of six learning objectives, three from assemblage and three from circulation. The following sections discuss how each objective relates to its respective theory and is incorporated in the learning activities I outline in the section that follows.

Assemblage Learning Objectives

I argue that assemblage, as a theoretical lens, can apply to examining the production of social media texts to develop stronger digital literacy skills. Assemblages are multimodal texts that draw upon previously created texts to meet a communication goal, like solving a problem, persuading an audience, or informing an individual, which is influenced by the creator and cultural context. The following section will break down how the three learning objectives, that were created based on the findings in the literature review, are incorporated in the three learning activities. These learning objectives include: 1) identify the source of the information being used in a social media text, 2) recognize the role of editorial point of view during textual curation when creating a social media text, and 3) acknowledge how sociopolitical factors play a role in the creation and interpretation of the social media text. Following an explanation of the learning objectives, the activities will be defined in greater detail in the next section.

Learning Objective #1 - Identify the Source of the Information Being Used in a Social Media Text

To help enhance students' digital literacy skills when navigating the information being used in social media texts, all three activities have students identify where the information comes from and how it is being used in social media texts. The learning objective seeks to cover the actions mentioned in American Library Association (n.d.) definition, which to "find" and "evaluate" the information. When situating the word "identify" within the objective, students determine the source of the information or its components, like visuals, to assess the text's level of credibility. The process of identification consists of fact-checking the information presented in a text. For example, students could see if a social media text cites credible sources or uses photo credits if taken from another creator. Some actions a creator of a text can take to increase their credibility can include tagging an account or providing a link to the website that hosted the information to create the text. In addition to identifying the information, students also engage in evaluation by considering if a creator utilizes rhetorical tactics—ethos, pathos, logos—to increase the text's credibility. For example, students can see if the creator displays his/her credentials somewhere on the profile or generates content that lacks grammatical errors.

For the first activity, students are encouraged to choose texts that have gone viral or have received a high level of engagement. The second activity asks students to look at the credibility and source of information used in social media texts from a credible news source, like the Associated Press (AP), and then a social media account that can be considered less reliable but may be verified[2] due to a large following and engagement with their content. Social media

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[2] Some social media platforms offer users an option for their account to become verified. The verification symbol, often in the form of a blue and white check mark displayed next to an account name, makes the account "easy to spot" and provides a sense of "authority." The

accounts that are anonymously run can be more questionable because they often are independently run by an individual(s) who do not publicly affiliate with a mainstream news source. The professional background of the individual(s) who run the accounts are not always disclosed. The examination of social media texts that come from accounts that are not mainstream news sources adds an extra challenge in trying to find the original source of the information. In the third activity, students get the chance to create their own social media text to meet a communication goal. As they create their text, students are asked to consider where they are getting their information and whether that information is properly cited and used appropriately.

Learning Objective #2 - Recognize the Role of Editorial Point of View During Textual Curation When Creating a Social Media Text

The second learning objective scaffolds beyond locating the source(s) of information being used in the social media text. Because social media posts should be recognized as texts designed to meet a communication goal, the learning objective revolves around students understanding how editorial choices made by the creator of the social media text play a role in their perception and understanding. By viewing social media posts as texts, students can engage in textual curation (Kennedy, 2016) by viewing writing as a craft (Prins, 2012). In all three activities, students explore textual curation and writing as a craft by examining the role of editorial point of view. Therefore, the learning objective has students consider the rhetorical moves and choices that went into making the social media text, alongside the role of identity and culture. To help students situate the text to undercover the purpose of the editorial point of view, students consider how the framing of the information can sway, enhance, or limit their

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verification can make the account more "trustworthy" because it establishes "the authentic presence of a notable public figure, celebrity or global brand" (Cooper & Newberry, 2020).

understanding or perception of the topic. Students should question both the components that make up the text and the creator. For example, students can pay attention to the presentation of information through word choice or visuals. To help further situate the idea, consider the following scenario. A student might choose to examine a social media text by a news source that leans more toward right-wing politics. The student finds that the social media text covers a political event featuring a left-wing politician and frames the story by making the main image an unflattering photo and contains word choice that has a negative connotation. By recognizing that factors like identity and culture play a role in text creation, students can become more aware of how they can be presented with just one side of a story.

Recognition of the role of editorial point of view plays heavily within the first two activities. Students analyze how social media texts are put together and identify factors that can sway their attention. These factors can include creator credibility, stylistic techniques, or media bias. As Lanham (2007) notes, "Attention is the commodity in short supply," and individuals struggle to navigate the information economy (p. xi). The influx of new information, in the form of words, visuals, and sounds, are being met with the reduced amount of human attention to "make sense of it all." When students break down social media texts by examining editorial point of view, they can recognize how information is being framed, which contributes to how it is being perceived. In the first two activities, students get the chance to reflect on the role of the editorial point of view in the shoes of the consumer in activities one and two. However, the third activity shifts from having students viewing social media texts as consumers to producers and distributors of content. The third activity is unique because students become aware of their ideas or feelings about their topic and what they want to achieve when creating the social media text. Through creating and distributing their texts, students should be actively thinking about the role

of the editorial point of view. At the end of the activity, students reflect on how their creative choices and identity played a role in influencing the text.

Learning Objective #3 - Acknowledge how Sociopolitical Factors Play a Role in the Creation and Interpretation of the Social Media Text

As students move from identifying sources of information to understanding how they engage in the curation of social media texts, the last objective involves understanding how culture plays a role in meaning creation. While the literature review mentions style, another component of identifying culture is understanding how sociopolitical factors can influence a social media text. Due to its participatory nature, social media feeds contain texts that are designed to meet a communication goal, like to inform, entertain, persuade, or call people to action. These users create texts with varying experiences, cultures, intentions, and identities. To help students understand a text's objective, instructors can compare social media as being the digital version of the Burkean parlor.[3] The example of the Burkean parlor can relate to social media usage because individuals are constantly engaging in ongoing conversations over various platforms at different times of the day all around the world. By situating social media as a place for ongoing conversation, students can consider how sociopolitical factors play a role in the production and distribution of social media texts. In other terms, how do the texts play a role in conversations involving topics like human rights, politics, or the environment?

By making students more aware of the role of culture and sociopolitical in the creation and perception of social media text, the objective has students consider the effects of the actions

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[3] Burke's (1941) parlor metaphor involves an individual entering a hypothetical parlor where a "heated discussion" is taking place. After listening for a bit, the individual decides they have heard enough of what is being said to feel comfortable enough to engage in the conversation. Others contribute to the conversation at the same time, either engaging in acts that are supportive or counteractive to the individual's perspective. After a while, the individual departs but the conversation continues.

of other users and themselves in the digital public sphere. By considering the effects of posting

on social media, students become more critical and mindful social media users. Additionally, the

objective can make students more strategic about how various modes have their own

"affordances" and that a combination can help build "rhetorical strength" due to the cultural

conventions (Sheppard, 2019, p. 382). For example, a student chooses to examine a text

advocating for women's rights. To begin considering the sociopolitical factors that played a role,

the instructor should encourage the student to analyze the text and its interaction. These actions

could include looking to see if the text contained a hashtag to understanding if the audience

showing acceptance of the message. Instructors can go a step further and have students think

about some of the implications a text can have on others. For example, if a political candidate

shares a text containing altered statistics about a social issue, what effect can the text have?

To summarize, all three objectives seek to help students understand how to identify how

creators make choices to try to achieve the intended meaning or communication goal(s). The

objectives build recognition of creator intent through creating and deconstructing assemblages.

Students consider how the meaning built into social media texts, since "assemblage refers to and

sanctions the makingness that textuality affords and its use, reuse, and repurposing of materials. .

. in order to make something new" (Yancey & McElroy, 2017, p. 4). By recognizing the social

aspect of composing, students can then transition into understanding the role of distribution.

Circulation Learning Objectives

Transitioning from the assemblage part of the framework, the circulation section provides

an opportunity for students to examine the movement of a social media text beyond its

publication. While the assemblage part of my framework focuses on information consumption,

editorial point of view, and sociopolitical factors of textual creation, the circulation aspect is

meant to highlight the effect of text distribution and user interaction with the text. Circulation is the movement of a text through time and communication mediums, which can be accelerated or slowed by the creator and external factors. Like the assemblage part of the framework, the following section breaks down the three learning objectives and explains how they are incorporated in the three learning activities. These learning objectives include: 1) understand the role rhetorical velocity has on a social media text's movement, 2) recognize the effects of interface design on the creation, distribution, and user interaction with a social media text, and 3) demonstrate ethical considerations associated with the engagement, consumption, and distribution of social media texts.

Learning Objective #1 - Understand the Role Rhetorical Velocity has on a Social Media Text's Movement

The first learning objective recognizes how rhetoric plays a role in social media texts by educating students about rhetorical velocity. Students get the opportunity to work with the concept when participating in all three learning activities. The activities show students how rhetorical velocity plays a role in the text's acceleration, which can either involve the text speeding up or slowing down, through the eyes of both a consumer and producer. The objective was developed for two reasons: 1) make students more cognizant of the factors that can influence the speed and movement of a text, and 2) to educate students about different moves they can take to help increase the reach and interaction with their own social media text(s) to meet their communication goal. The learning objective can make students more aware of the speed information can travel on social media, which can be helpful and harmful depending on the content. By recognizing the role of movement, students can become more mindful in what they

choose to circulate or utilize rhetorical velocity to achieve their communication goal, like raising awareness about an issue.

In the first activity, students examine a social media text that has gone viral or experienced a high level of engagement. For Gries (2015), "a thing is commonly said to be viral when it is perceived as being socially contagious due to its capacity to garner mass attention and spread via word of mouth and media" (p. 2). According to her definition, texts that go viral travel rapidly and are exposed to a multitude of people over a certain period of time. The first activity asks students to identify what contributed to the rhetorical velocity of a social media text by examining its components and method of distribution. Students also consider how others have interacted with the text, like if they have shared it or ended up challenging the original message. Additionally, they focus on identifying how they consume information on social media and contribute to the text's velocity. While the first two activities are designed to help students understand how rhetorical velocity works in a social media setting as a consumer, the third activity has students see the concept at play with the social media text they create. Students are asked to monitor the movement and engagement of their social media texts after publication through tracking the post's analytics, such as shares, likes, comments, or views. To help make sense of the data collected, students are tasked with reflecting on the different factors that contributed to the level of engagement or audience response.

Learning Objective #2 - Recognize the Effects of Interface Design on the Creation, Distribution, and User Interaction with a Social Media Text

As students understand how a social media text moves and is interacted with past publication, their focus shifts to the second learning objective which involves them recognizing factors beyond the user's control that can contribute to the overall effect of the text. The learning

objective can help students enhance their digital literacy skills by becoming more critical of the

technology by recognizing how interface design, and things like algorithms, level of usability, or

censorship, can play a role in the consumption and distribution of information. For example,

Hindman & Barash (2018) outline the Knight Foundation's study looking at how "fake news"

transmission took place during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Over the course of the study,

they analyzed "more than 10 million tweets from 700,000 Twitter accounts that linked more than

600 fake and conspiracy sites." As a result, the study found that part of the problem was

associated with Twitter bots who often circulated incorrect information at certain times in

clusters compared to humans who are more spontaneous with posting. External factors that go

beyond a users' control generate opportunities for critical thinking by recognizing how the

interface design can play a role in the creation and circulation of their texts. By being more

critical with technology, students can enhance their digital literacy skills.

In the first two activities, students must consider how the interface design plays a role in

how a text is circulated by considering different allowances and drawbacks from various social

media platforms. For example, students are asked to consider how users are engaging with a

social media text when using a particular platform. Activity two extends upon the idea of

interface design by having students consider how their social media feed is constructed to

provide certain information. Students get the opportunity to reflect on how they consume news

or information on social media and about different limitations that the creator of the text could

have faced when putting the text together. They can assess whether the interface design limits

their exposure to certain information, like if their account resembles an echo chamber that

produces similar content and lacks contrasting messages. In activity three, students get the

opportunity to see how the social media interface plays a role in the creation of a text and how it

further affects a text when it is distributed and circulated. For example, students are asked to consider if the interface provides an advantage or disadvantage when trying to accomplish the communication goal. Additionally, students are asked to think about how the interface could be modified to be more inclusive to certain communication goals or individuals. According to Neff et al. (2011), "The goal of gathering these insights is either to improve current processes and technologies or to create new ones that are based on actual user behaviors and goals" (p. 18). When students can identify affordances and barriers that the interface presents, they can develop new strategies for presenting information or creating new interfaces that work to resolve current issues.

Learning Objective #3 - Demonstrate Ethical Considerations Associated with the Engagement, Consumption, and Distribution of Social Media Texts

The final learning objective ties together both sections of the Social Media Interaction Framework. The main premise behind the objective deals with students employing critical thinking skills to become more mindful about how they are engaging and consuming social media texts.

In the second learning objective within the circulation part of the framework, students are analyzing how individuals are engaging with the social media text. The extension that third learning objective provides is looking more closely at the rhetorical strategies being used by audience members to respond to the content. The difference between the second and third learning objectives is that the third objective works to build students who can properly engage in the digital space through building awareness of the ethical creation and circulation of social media texts. DeLuca (2015) argues that "The rhetorical work that digital citizens engage in these spaces demonstrates how even the mundane composing practices of social media spaces can be

viewed as rhetorically significant forms of digital civic engagement" ("Drawing Conclusions," para. 2). Her argument furthers Gleason and Gillern's (2018) concern about social media acting as rhetorical spaces that foster digital citizenship. In activities one and two, students consider factors that can influence how an individual interacts with a social media text. While the assemblage section looks at rhetorical moves to understand adherence to cultural conventions and identity in the creation stage, the circulation section views rhetorical action in terms of user engagement when the text becomes published and engaged with by other users. Some of the factors that students can think about can include the framing of information, biases, method of sharing, citation of the original source of information, and the account's ethos.

Students should be questioning aspects of the text that makes it credible before sharing it to more people or hitting one of the reaction options, if given. According to Monty (2015), participants who used social media to complete school-related activities were noted to use less profanity and were more critically aware of what they were posting due to a heightened sense of awareness of their audience (p. 136). By becoming more aware of how the audience plays within the third activity, students consider how their usage of the information influences the creation of a social media text. For example, students are asked to consider how they represent information or others' ideas when composing social media texts. Students in the third activity consider larger issues of appropriation, copyright, language use, and information accuracy to become more mindful of what they are posting or sharing on social media.

Teaching Resources

After establishing a theoretical foundation for my project, the following section provides

three activities for composition classrooms. These activities provide students the opportunity to

apply the learning objectives presented in the Social Media Interaction Framework through

observation, analysis, experimentation, presentation of findings, and reflection. By translating

the objectives into real-world composing spaces, students can become more digitally literate.

While each activity utilizes certain components from the learning objectives in the Social Media

Interaction Framework, I have also generated learning objectives specific to each activity.

Learning objectives tailored to each activity help heighten instructor understanding of what

students should be getting out of the tasks, which can help with assessment when checking

student understanding. Additionally, each activity presents real-world applications to help

students see how the lesson can translate to other courses or future actions outside a classroom.

Teaching Activities

Activity #1 - Examining a Social Media Text

Learning Objectives:

- Identify different rhetorical choices the creator of a social media text took to help
  navigate the user's attention.

- Identify factors that contribute or take away from the text's credibility.

- Understand the different components involved with the movement of a social media text
  through analyzing the components associated with rhetorical velocity.

According to Arola et al. (2014), "[o]ne of the best ways to begin thinking about a

multimodal project is to see what has already been said about a topic you are interested in. . . as

well as how other authors have designed their texts on that topic" (p. 40). In this activity,

students examine a social media text that has gone viral or has received a high level of engagement. The text does not have to be from a specific social media platform. If the instructor prefers a certain social media platform, they are welcome to assign students to look exclusively at that platform. Additionally, instructors have the option of choosing the text for the student or having the students locate the example on their own.

The goal of the activity is for students to see how the social media text generated attention or engagement, whether it was good or bad. For example, one type of social media text could be a call to action for users to contribute to a fundraiser or petition. If the social media text results in the goal being fulfilled, it can demonstrate a high engagement that is positive. However, a text that receives more dislikes or negative comments over positive responses could be viewed as having high engagement but does not support or agree with the creator's message or goal. Students might consider one of the following as their chosen text: 1) a text that contains a sensational headline containing a "fake news" story to sway public opinion; 2) a text that seeks to call people to action over an issue by using imagery, testimonials, or factual information; or 3) a meme created to comment on a cultural phenomenon or a real-world event.

Students apply the assemblage part of the Framework by considering different actions the creator took when designing the social media text. These factors can include the source of the information, user credibility, editorial point of view, or adherence to platform conventions. From the circulation part of the framework, students learn about rhetorical velocity to understand different rhetorical moves that the creator engaged in that caused the text to go viral, like the use of a hashtag or their method of distribution. Additionally, students are challenged to think about how different social media interfaces affected how the text was created, distributed, and interacted with by the creator and other users.

Instructors can have the students present their findings in the way they see fit, such as a presentation or essay. The flexibility in format allows the instructor to choose the best method that fits into their curriculum and instruction time. Either way, the findings should present a visual aid of the social media text students choose to examine. Students should also provide a detailed explanation that makes a connection with user engagement and learning objectives. After presenting the findings, students should conclude with a reflection on how the assignment has influenced their social media habits dealing with the production and interaction with social media texts.

The real-world applications for the activity include:

- Students being more mindful of how to perceive social media texts that have gone viral or receive a high level of engagement.

- Students being able to recognize factors involved with rhetorical velocity that they can apply when creating their own social media texts to achieve a communication goal.

- Students being more critical of social media texts they interact with by applying digital literacy skills before further contributing to the spread of information or engaging with a social media text.

Activity #2 - News Consumption: Social Media Edition

Learning Objectives:

- Define and identify the skills associated with digital literacy.

- Explain why digital literacy skills are relevant to today's society regarding news consumption.

- Understand ethical concerns surrounding media bias.

According to the American Library Association (n.d.), digital literacy is "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills." The activity is designed to have students consider how digital literacy skills can be strengthened by analyzing their news consumption on social media platforms. The activity includes two parts, which can be performed as an in-class activity or done on the student's own time for homework.

Part One: Have students examine three different social media news accounts for factors that contribute to media bias. Instructors can choose the accounts ahead of time or have students identify the accounts. Greater diversity in social media platforms and accounts may lead to richer discussion and insights because a variety of conventions are being examined. Once the accounts are selected, students should examine features of the news feed to see the types of texts being posted. For example, a group of students decides to look at CBS news' Instagram account. The students begin by scrolling through the account feed to get a sense of the content being posted and then choose two texts to analyze in more detail. Some of the factors that students consider when examining the text can be word choice for main graphics or captions, visuals used, the portrayal of information. From their findings, they should discuss where they feel the source falls on a media bias scale.[4] Students must provide evidence to back up their claim(s). The final test students should preform is identifying where the news source falls on the media bias scale to check their original guess. Additionally, they should think about how the social media platform contributed to the ways news is presented, such as different creative choices the user(s) took to frame and distribute the story.

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[4] While instructors can use a media bias scale of their choosing, the scale that I recommend for the project comes from Ad Fontes Media (2021). Students should review the scale after making their case about where the account would rank from the analysis.

Part Two: Ask students to examine a social media text from a user-generated account that is not a credible news source but is verified or has a large following. Again, instructors can assign certain texts/platforms or have the student pick. For example, one type of text students can pick is an informational infographic created by an Instagram user that is not a professional news organization. After selecting the social media text, students should identify components of the text that help boost or take away credibility, such as if the creator cites where they got the information or creates posts that lack grammatical errors. They also should consider the ethical considerations of how the text portrays information. This can include the use of the design elements, citations, word choice, or means of distribution. Finally, students can reflect on the impact these types of texts have on today's society. For example, you might ask students how news graphics on social media contribute to the spread of information?

From the assemblage part of the framework, students analyze how a creator of a social media text establishes their credibility and presents information to an audience. Students also consider how media bias is attributed to editorial point of view. From the circulation part of the framework, students assess how a text was crafted to be circulated on the social media platform. They consider how the interface design of the platform allows a user to present information compared to other communication mediums, like print or television.

The real-world applications for the activity include:

- Students being able to identify media bias in the news sources they consume.

- Students being able apply digital literacy skills to real-world examples found on social media.

- Students being able to apply their digital literacy skills to other composition projects that involve research.

Activity #3 - Assembling a Social Media Text

Learning Objectives:

- Create a social media text by engaging in textual curation.

- Understand and analyze rhetorical velocity at play in real time.

- Recognize how creating and circulating the text contributes to achieving communication goals.

The third activity provides students the opportunity to create and circulate their own social media text. Students should design a text to achieve a communication goal, like to solve a problem or to create more awareness around an issue. From the assemblage part of the framework, students consider how they curate the information for their text, such as how they are citing sources to formatting the information. They should be able to explain the rhetorical choices they took to meet the end communication goal. From the circulation part of the framework, students then distribute their social media text to a selected platform.

After posting, students monitor the engagement of the social media text by tracking the number of likes, comments, and shares. Through observation, students are encouraged to identify factors that contributed to the acceleration or slowing of the text's rhetorical velocity. At the end, students should discuss methods of distribution and different limitations that the social media platform provided and use their analytics and experiences to back up their claims. For example, maybe a student was able to achieve a higher engagement with the post because they used the Instagram Highlight feature to redirect people's attention to the main post. Students present their findings and experience with the activity in an essay format. The essay should include the following components: an image or screenshot of the social media text, an explanation of the communication goal that inspired the creation of the text, and an overview of the level of

engagement with the text. Additionally, students should describe the process they engage in when creating and distributing the text. It is encouraged for students to make connections between their actions and the learning objectives. The essay should also include a section where the student reflects on how the activity went, alongside key takeaways. For example, a key takeaway could be that the student became more aware of the importance of assessing a text's credibility before sharing it with others.

Instructors should keep in mind that the distribution stage might be problematic because some students may not be comfortable with sharing the text to their personal account. To help resolve a potential issue, the social media account could be personal, or it can be affiliated with an organization if approved by them. For example, a student could create a text for a club on campus they're part of.

The real-world applications for the activity include:

- Students will be more mindful and purposeful when creating a social text.
- Students will be able to consider different factors that can help circulate their ideas to their target audience.
- Students will be able to judge the effects of their text and reflect on how they will engage with social media in the future.

Conclusions and Final Considerations

To conclude, I provide some final insights to composition professors who are considering implementing social media into classrooms. These suggestions were created from different patterns detected when reviewing scholarship for the literature review. These suggestions are meant to make instructors more cognizant of the following barriers of social media implementation.

Instructors Have to Consider Privacy and Ethical Concerns When Implementing Social Media in the Classroom

A potential concern for social media implementation in higher education settings is a concern for privacy and ethics due a blurring of personal and academic boundaries (Lin et al., 2013; McEwan, 2012; Mina, 2017; Neier & Zayer, 2015; Vie, 2015, 2018). Instructors can navigate the concern for a student's sense of privacy by thinking through which social media platforms will create an engaging environment for both student and educators. Vie (2018) states that "clear boundaries" should be set between the student's "personal and pedagogical uses" of the social media site to reduce resistance against using some social media platforms (p. 66). Privacy is a factor that instructors must consider when developing activities that involve social media, since some platforms can publish information in a public domain, especially when it comes to the third activity. Students who value their privacy might not want to use their personal accounts.

To navigate the concern for privacy, I designed the activities to be broad. For example, for the third activity, students can pick a platform of their choosing, either using their account, an alias account, or creating the text for an outside organization if applicable. When it comes to the circulation part of the framework, I turn to Lin et al. (2013) who suggest that instructors can

create a hashtag that is unique to the course to help filter content for individuals to see without having to follow one another. Privacy concerns should be acknowledged when trying to bring in the circulation aspect of the framework because they can act as a barrier by allowing fewer people to access a social media text.

Another option to help reduce privacy concerns can be to look at higher education institutions that have adopted guidelines about social media use in classrooms, which can provide instructors guidance when developing and executing curriculum (Gammon & McGranahan, 2015; Neier & Zayer, 2015). My belief is that if social media use becomes more normalized in higher education, institutions will be inclined to develop policies and procedures to aid instructors wanting to use the platforms in the most ethical and professional ways.

Instructors Have to Consider the Digital Divide Both in Access and Knowledge

The digital divide can take shape in the forms of access and knowledge. Vie (2008) defines "Digital Divide 2.0 – where students are often more technologically adept than their professors" (p. 10). According to her definition, students are often more knowledgeable in how to operate technology which can create a learning gap between student and instructor. However, Neier and Zayer's (2015) study findings challenge the Vie's notion of the digital divide by recognizing that students sometimes do not meet the ideal of being a "digital native," and educators cannot assume that their students are tech-savvy. Various social media platforms can generate different levels of understanding for both students and professors. While it is commonly thought that students are savvier with technology, that might not always be the case. My recommendation for navigating the digital divide is for instructors to treat social media implementation as a form of experimentation that both students and instructors can learn more

about through trial and error when using the application. The activities can always be tweaked depending on the level of knowledge of a platform.

Another concern that instructors can run into are students that refrain from using social media, which means that these students can lack access to the platform(s) necessary to complete the activities. Instructors can navigate the problem of a student not having access to social media by encouraging collaboration with other students through the development of peer groups to complete the activities. Group work can also provide an opportunity for discussion and exchange of viewpoints.

Instructors Should Recognize That Other Instructors Might Have a Negative Perception About Using Social Media in the Classroom

The last challenge instructors should consider is a negative perception of social media usage in classrooms due to general disinterest or failure to associate the technology with academic standards. Wall and Vie (2017) address the stigma of social media in education when they mention that "Too frequently, social media is dismissed as non-academic, unworthy of sustained attention by researchers" (p. 11). With my thesis, I believe that social media can provide a sense of familiarity to students when trying to understand the composing process. By ignoring the rise in social media usage or dismissing it from academic settings, the growth of the field and teaching instruction aimed at enhancing students' composition and digital literacy skills become limited.

When instructors view social media instructors as a resource over being a distraction, students can be more open to working with it in the classroom. For example, Mao (2014) found that students want schools and instructors to "adopt an open-minded, innate approach that embraces the natural characteristics of social media to enhance teaching and learning rather than

banning, rejecting, or applying them in a "harsh" way" (Mao, p. 220). For social media implementation to work, instructors must be open-minded. Additionally, West (2017) states that students can have difficulty with associating social media to higher academic due to "prior experiences in settings where instructors, parents or authority figures enforced negative narratives of social media" (p. 416). Students not exposed to different styles of writing or are given one narrative that social media is negative or unprofessional can be problematic. Students may fail to see how social media can be used in a higher education environment to improve their writing and digital literacy skills. While a positive mindset can aid professors in implementing social media in an educational environment, students still need to be made "aware" of how social media and composition concepts are connected to form a transfer of knowledge (Head, 2016; Monty, 2015; Westerman et. al, 2015). To help instructors see how social media pertains to digital literacy skills, I built an entire theoretical framework is utilized during the three learning activities.

Conclusions

The main goal behind the development of the thesis was to strengthen the argument for implementing social media in the classroom. As social media evolves, students will be presented with new ways of consuming and producing information. The work of the thesis recognizes the current challenges of information distribution in an online setting and grapples with how social media can be utilized to improve digital literacy skills. By establishing a connection between social media and the theories of assemblage and circulation, I developed the Social Media Interaction Framework that provides a lens to examine social media texts in the composition classroom to enhance students' digital literacy skills.

While the activities in this project are at the development stage, in the future, the project can be applied to composition classrooms to see how the Social Media Interaction Framework and learning activities could increase students' digital literacy skills and social media usage. Additionally, specific platforms can be explored more in depth to access composing features. My thesis is meant to provide insight on the current conversation of social media examination in the field of rhetoric and composition. It works to build and highlight the works of other scholars but recognizes there is still much that is left to be said about social media pertaining to digital literacy skills.

My takeaway from the project as a scholar was recognizing the importance of building an understanding of proposed concepts through thoughtful curation of scholarship and personal experience. My project showcases how social media can be academic and can be used to achieve a learning outcome, like increasing digital literacy skills. While social media presents instructors obstacles, it also offers opportunities for students to understand learning concepts. I encourage scholars reading my thesis to experiment with social media to establish a sense of purpose for its academic viability in the field.

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