Understanding Student use of Social Media: Education and The Possibilities for Civic Engagement

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

This study focused on the way in which students engage with political and social issues through their use of social media. The study used a mixed methods design as emblematic of the pragmatic approach to conducting research. The design consisted of a survey followed by a series of focus groups, with questions for the focus groups influenced by the results of the survey. The results from the research suggested that students do not generally engage with political and social issues on social media, and that, in some instances, students view such engagement negatively. Using a framework of critical theory, including critical global perspectives, critical pedagogy, and critical theory of technology, the results indicated the need for educational approaches that encourage students to value the political and social possibilities of social media, which are, as yet, unrealized by conventional use.
Dedication

This dissertation is primarily dedicated to Lizzy Single, who dealt with the stress and difficulties of a Ph.D. by supporting and encouraging me – and never holding my mood against me. My work is also dedicated to my parents Robert and Patricia, who gave me the freedom and support to do something a little different.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want... We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity... The aeroplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men - cries out for universal brotherhood - for the unity of us all. Even now my voice is reaching millions throughout the world - millions of despairing men, women, and little children. (from *The Great Dictator*, Charlie Chaplin, 1940)

Context of the Study

In 1940 the world was in the throes of war. Hitler had militarized the Nazi party and invaded Poland, setting off a catastrophic series of political and social escalations until the world was engulfed in war. As was the case with the preceding Great War, the threat of military action incited technological development, with necessity birthing key innovations and inventions that would forever change global society. In this speech from *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin reaches the climax of his critique of fascism and points to the attitude towards technological development that suppresses human experience under the weight of mechanized warfare and systematic ideology. Chaplin sees potential in the technological developments that connect people, but cries out for them to be exploited for positive change rather than the orchestration of domination.
The world is now more globalized than ever (Pike, 2008), and, as a result, the social complexity inherent in interconnected communities and nations presents society with many challenges (Osler & Starkey, 2003). The Internet has replaced the radio as the dominant form of communications technology, and created a web of interconnections that provide individuals with instant connection to potentially vast audiences in almost any place on earth (Glassman & Burbidge, 2014). Seventy years since Chaplin released *The Great Dictator* the call is still the same; the nature of the technologies that bring people together can and must be used for positive social interaction. Communications technologies can provide the means with which younger generations successfully navigate the social complexity of diverse global communities, and work to break free from injustice, oppression, and inequality wherever they find it.

Set in the context of globalization, this dissertation explores how students engage with political and social issues through agency afforded by social media. The study discusses the complexities of globalization, the values of incorporating global education and global citizenship into social studies curricula, and the interactive and communicative capabilities of social media. Using critical theoretical perspectives, the study seeks to examine the gap between the potential of technology and current models of education that attempt to prepare students for life in a socially complex world.

To set the stage for this study, this chapter briefly discusses the major components of the dissertation. First, there is a summary of the literature on
education in the context of globalization, followed by a short discussion on the impact of the Internet and the challenges facing educators as a result of these developments. Second, the statement of the problem establishes the importance of establishing global perspectives in education and the potentials offered by the Internet and social media supporting the integration of global perspectives into the learning process. This is followed by an explanation of the purpose of the study, highlighting the way in which the research attempts to address the challenges outlined in preceding sections. Third, a brief discussion of the research questions providing guidelines for the study is followed by an introduction to mixed methods research and the structure of the design used in this study. Fourth, a discussion of the theoretical framework outlines how this study is positioned within a broad critical perspective, and the specific theories informing the interpretation of the findings. Fifth, terminology central to the dissertation is defined, as well as the limitations and delimitations of the study. Lastly, the significance of the study suggests areas that the dissertation and its findings may contribute to existing areas of academic and social interest.

**Globalization and education.**

According to Myers (2010), globalization is “presently...the most powerful concept for explaining the functioning of the world system and the development of a global society” (p.103). Held (1991) defines globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local
happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (p.9). Such social transformations require a recalibration of individual and community dispositions, where perspectives that are nationalistic and exclusive become more outward looking and inclusive. During the latter stages of the 20th century, scholars and educators (Case, 1993; Hanvey, 1976; Pike, 1998; Pike and Selby, 1988) viewed education as a way to imbue individuals with skills and attitudes appropriate for life in a world of political, economic, and social complexity. Global education and global citizenship are models of such an education.

As an educational model, global education outlines how schools and, in particular, social studies curricula should promote, and actively incorporate, a global perspective, promoting an outward-looking and inclusive attitude towards community and learning (Osler & Starkey, 2003). In its earliest conception Hanvey (1976) highlights the core tenets of global education as: 1) perspective consciousness, 2) state of the planet awareness, 3) cross-cultural awareness, 4) knowledge of global dynamics, and 5) awareness of human choices. Such a conception of education provides the substrate upon which social responsibility can be nurtured in students. More recently, scholars such as Merryfield (2001) and Subedi (2010; 2013) have sought to reconceptualize global education to suit the more globalized nature of the world in the 21st century (Merryfield, 2001), with a call to approach social studies curricula, and education in general, in a way that includes and celebrates the complexity of social diversity (Subedi, 2010).
This perspective is central to global citizenship education, which improves upon the theoretical nature of global education by addressing the need for participation and activity. Schultz (2007) highlights three approaches to global citizenship: 1) the neoliberal global citizen, 2) the radical global citizen, and 3) the transformationalist global citizen. Each conception of global citizenship incorporates an action toward an intended change, for example, the transformationalist global citizen engages in social justice in order to address issues of oppression and marginalization. A sentiment echoed by Banks (2008) who states that “an effective and transformative citizenship education helps students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values needed to function effectively within their cultural community, nation-state, and region and in the global community” (p.129).

John Dewey (2009) addresses the importance of political and social participation in education, stating that Americans seem to view democracy as passive and self-perpetuating, rather than working to uphold its values. Education for global citizenship seeks to remedy the passivity of students, but does so with the global community in mind. Considering Dewey’s concerns, Osler and Starkey (2003) focus on the social studies curriculum and state that “[e]ducation for citizenship is one response to the political and social realities of globalization” (p.243). A point supported by Stromer-Galley and Wichowski (2013) who suggest that: “[t]hrough the very practice of participating in politics, individuals learn how to be effective members of the citizenry, regardless of their prior education or experiences” (p.169).
Networks and the Internet.

A chief factor in establishing and increasing the interconnectedness of the international community is the Internet and the networks it supports. Lian (2007) states that "[i]n today’s world of globalization, technology is one of the popular means used to facilitate and define human communication" (p.61). Building on this conception, Castells (1989) highlights the role that networks play in connecting locations and reorganizing the socio-construction of space and time. Castells' (1996) theory of the Network Society suggests that the major interactions of modern society are completed and mediated through information networks, themselves supported on a substrate of communications technology. According to Castells (2001):

the definition...in concrete terms of a network society, is a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks.... It’s about social networks which process and manage information and are using micro-electronic based technologies (p.4).

As a result, Castells suggests that networking mediates the processes of production, experience, power, and culture (Harengel & Haxhixhemajili, 2011). Castells (1996) argues that real power exists, exercised in the technological information networks spanning the globe, no longer confined to the physical localities. Consequently, individuals and communities have the opportunity to
"interact with diverse, geographically dispersed people, using a variety of technological tools" (Ertmer et al., 2011, p. 251).

According to Wellman et al., the technological transformation of society through the Internet has caused a “move from densely-knit and tightly-bounded groups to sparsely-knit and loosely-bounded networks...this move...has profound implications for how people mobilize and how people...relate to each other in all forms of societies” (2003, p.4). According to Kellner (2003), this shift into the Network Society, poses "tremendous challenges to educators to rethink their basic tenets, to deploy the emergent technologies in creative and productive ways, and to restructure education to respond constructively and progressively to the technological and social changes now encompassing the globe" (p.52)

Fortunately, there are opportunities presented by the Internet that promote the civic engagement and global perspectives central to global education and global citizenship. Such opportunities are highlighted by Stromer-Galley and Wichowski (2013) who state that:

[t]he Internet...offers a number of characteristics that invite the possibility for increased political participation generally, and political conversation specifically. The unique characteristics of the Internet enable citizens to produce, comment on, edit, remove, and recommend portions of a global dialogue. (p.170)

Taking advantage of the Internet in this way provides social studies educators with the opportunity to promote a more contemporary curriculum of global education that takes advantage of diverse social interaction, access to
marginalized voices, and knowledge outside the dominant ideology. Such an opportunity supports the goal of developing engaged and critical global citizens. Similarly, Jakubowicz (2009) suggests that the Internet can provide the connectivity and sociality for educational approaches such as global education and global citizenship to develop “creative synergies that are generated in interaction and dialogue, such that priority is given to multicultural rather than monocultural engagement.” (p.17). Given that 95 percent of US teens access the Internet (PEW, 2012), the need to develop education and curriculum that encourages students to engage critically and constructively with the global community has never been more important.

**Statement of the Problem**

Bourn (2010) highlights the issues faced by today's students and presents a series of questions that researchers should consider when attempting work in this field:

> Students today live in global society – a society where they cannot ignore global interdependence and global inequalities. How are today’s students going to understand and to respond to the freedoms, problems and responsibilities they are inheriting? How are today’s students going to find their individual roles in a global society? And where do they start? (p. 18)

This challenge is emphasized by Subedi (2013) who states that “critical, controversial, and complex aspects of global knowledge quite often are absent from the school curriculum” (p.621). Consequently, it is necessary for social studies
curricula to reflect the complexity of the global society in which students live, framing their understanding in the developments, conflicts and contradictions of social history. Castells (2012) highlights the capacity for the Internet, specifically social media, to afford controversial and marginalized voices room to be heard. Indeed, according to Pike (2008), the Internet, in the form of social networks, access to information, and instant communication, provides a framework for global education to “play a critical role in expanding young citizens’ understanding of the responsibilities, and potential pleasures, of living in a global community” (p.35).

There is much research on the subject of the relationship that youth have with modern communications technologies (PEW Internet and American Life Project, World Internet Study, 2007; 2009; 2011; 2013). The increased influence of online social networks and social media is evident in the younger population as more youth are treating the Internet as a venue for social interaction (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill and Smith, 2007). According to Borondo, Morales, Losada, and Benito (2012)

[on]line social networks have gained an enormous influence among the global population over the last years. There are several types of these web applications, each with its own purpose, such as Facebook for personal relations, YouTube for sharing videos or Twitter to exchange text messages (p.5244).

Addressing the Internet as a social venue, Bakardjieva (2013) suggests that it has the potential to develop a "critical consciousness that would enable the actors of everyday life to understand their conditions within a larger social and political
context, and to undertake concerted action” (p.63). Consequently, social media provides opportunities for students to engage with political and social issues on a global scale. Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001) suggest that information and social interaction on the Internet can foster civic engagement, trust, and life contentment in younger generations.

Given these possibilities, it is important to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between student use of the Internet and their engagement with wider communities. If education is to adjust to the social complexity of the Network Society, then it is important to investigate the potential for social networking sites to provide students with a social platform from which they may learn and participate, informed by a social studies curriculum that incorporates the democratic and inclusive ideals of pedagogical frameworks such as global education and global citizenship.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitatively driven sequential explanatory mixed methods study is to investigate the way in which students engage with political and social issues when using social media and social networking sites. The results inform a perspective on the potential pedagogical opportunities of the Internet and social media as a means of incorporating core values of global education and global citizenship into social studies education. It also raises questions about the way in
which social studies prepares students to live in a complex global society and the potential role of communications technology.

This study examines quantitative data obtained through an Internet survey, and qualitative data from conveniently sampled focus groups with questions developed after an initial analysis of the survey data. In the quantitative phase of the study, the survey questions address the characteristics of student activity on social media and social networking sites in relation to political and social issues through three separate variables – the type of activity, the amount of activity, and the geographic reach of the activity.

**Research Questions**

The main guiding question for this study is: How do students engage with political and social issues through their use of social media? This is explored through questions that seek to obtain details regarding the characteristics of participant use of social media, such as the devices used to access the sites, the students’ preferred sites, the role that social media plays in their information access, as well as some demographics. In addition, the study examines how students’ responses regarding their social media use reflect three separate variables:

1. The type of activity: the study provides a number of different activities commonly associated with social networking sites and social media in general, as identified by the PEW Internet and American Life Project’s Internet and Civic Engagement Survey instrument (2012). These activities are identified in order of complexity and the time required of the student to complete the action. These activities are: "liking" or
promoting things others have posted; sharing or re-posting things that others have posted; sharing a link sourced by themselves; posting an original thought of their own; encouraging political action in others; and engaging in online discussions through the messaging facilities of the particular site. Further questions identify actions of protesting and offline political activity and their relation to the students' use of social networking sites.

2. The amount of activity: the study asks the students to identify how often they engage in the identified activities when using social media or social networking sites. The amount of activity is scored using a likert-type scale of "never", "rarely (25% of the time)", sometimes (50% of the time)”, “often (75% of the time)”, and “always (close to 100% of the time)”. Scores range from 0 for never, to 4 for “always (close to 100% of the time).

3. The geographical reach of their activity: the study looks to identify the communities to which the students’ political engagement pertains. In order to do this, four options are identified for this purpose; students will be asked to identify whether their political activity relates to local, state, national, or global communities.

Further questions related to the research and the survey results are addressed in the focus groups. These questions address the students' thoughts regarding the findings from the survey, as well as more general and subjective opinions on social media and political engagement. The focus groups are used to triangulate findings from the survey and provide room for further exploration of the topic.
Methodology and Research Design

This study is conducted using a quantitatively driven sequential explanatory mixed methods approach. The purpose of mixed methods research designs is to build upon the synergy and strength that exists between quantitative and qualitative methods in order to understand more fully a given phenomenon than is possible using either quantitative or qualitative methods alone (Creswell, 2007; Morse & Niehaus, 2009).

Perspectives on different approaches to research created a schism in the field of research philosophy (Evans et al., 2011). During the latter half of the 20th century, the conception of differing notions of the nature of reality and epistemology led to what are commonly referred to as the Paradigm Wars (Gage, 1989). In this philosophical conflict, proponents of philosophies generally associated with quantitative approaches waged war with those who espoused philosophies linked to qualitative approaches (1989). Primary disagreements between the two camps are built upon the objective universal truths sought by those employing quantitative methods, opposed by the subjective, multiple truths of those who engage in qualitative research methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

However, proponents of mixed methods approaches to research in social science (Creswell, 2003, 2007; Gage, 1989; Greene, 2007; Guba, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Morgan, 2007; Morse & Niehaus, 2009; Tashakkori, 2010) argue that there is an advantage to incorporating the two approaches into a single study. Consequently, a researcher can look to exploit the distinct advantages of both
quantitative and qualitative methods to best answer the question they are researching in their study. Such a position is espoused by proponents of mixed methods research who ground their approach in pragmatic and transformative philosophies (Creswell, 2007; Tashakkori, 2010; Philstrom, 2008; Morgan, 2007; Felizer, 2010). For the purposes of this study, applying the philosophy of Pragmatism to the process of mixed methods research in social sciences provides the researcher with the opportunity to conduct the study by creating a design that specifically suits the problem being researched. Such an approach to research design stems from pragmatic philosophy whereby individuals encounter problems and apply experience in order to best address a specific problem (Evans et. al., 2011; Burke Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Traditional approaches to mixed methods research designs seek to exploit the different sets of advantages espoused by social scientists for the two different research approaches. According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) the advantages of quantitative research methods are “large sample size, trends, [and] generalization” (p.77). Other beneficial aspects of quantitative research methods include the potential for faster data collection as well as less time-consuming data analysis (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In contrast, qualitative research methods seek to take advantage of researcher bias and individuals’ subjectivity on the basis that there is a “relative truth of multiple realities” (Felizer, 2010, p.8). Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) state that an educational researcher may choose to use qualitative research methods if they “wish to obtain a more complete picture, for
example, of what goes on in a classroom or school” (p.421) than can be achieved by quantitative methods. According to Niaz (2008) the two different approaches can “live together” (p.290). This is backed up by Burke Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004) who state that “qualitative and quantitative research used together produces more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice” (p.19).

Consequently, for the purposes of this study, a mixed methods approach was the appropriate way to research the topic of student political engagement and social networking technology, due to the need for generalisable data on student use of a popular medium of communication, as well as "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to better understand their engagement with political and social issues. Using a non-random sample population of students, recruited through email and classroom visits, an initial Internet survey gathered data in line with the research questions and their attached variables. Subsequent focus groups were built on questions arising from the primary analysis of the data obtained through the Internet survey. Descriptive statistics were used to identify any trends in the data obtained through the survey. For analysis of the qualitative data, typology analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) permitted the coding and the generation of themes that expand on the survey data.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

For the purposes of this study, two sets of theoretical perspectives serve as the foundation for the exploration of the data: a critical theoretical perspective and
the Fifth Estate theory. According to Jensen (2013) "(t)heories can be thought of as frames...which enable certain interpretations while discouraging others" (p.49). The study is situated broadly in critical theory, with the notion of social critique and action informing the purpose of the study. However, within critical theory, the study is framed by the perspectives of several theoretical positions for the development of interpretations, which, moving from broad to narrow, include: the critical global perspective, critical theory of technology, and critical pedagogy. The use of critical global perspectives provides the educational context for the study and room for reaction to, and development of, the calls for a relevant and globally-minded curriculum outlined by scholars of global education and global citizenship (Banks, 2003; Osler and Starkey, 2003). Critical theory, realized in Kellner's critical pedagogy (2003; 2010), and Feenberg's (2005) critical theory of technology, provides opportunity to interpret the findings in a framework that challenges and explores the potentials of socio-technological interaction. Finally, Dutton’s (2009) Fifth Estate theory is incorporated as a means of exemplifying the notions of critical theory as they are realized in the context of the Network Society.

**Critical global perspective.**

According to Subedi, a critical global perspective “reevaluates how we have come to know the world and asks us to consider the socio-political context in which we have come to understand what constitutes an ethical global imagination” (2010,
Critical global perspectives have their aim in transforming curriculum to reconfigure the way in which diverse viewpoints are represented and included in the education process (Subedi, 2010). As with critical theory in general, critical global perspectives address issues regarding the way in which complex social interactions, such as gender, sexuality, and ethnicity are mediated, but recognizes the increasingly global nature of these interactions (2010). Consequently, for the purposes of this study, the critical global perspective highlights the aims of educational responses to globalization and provides scope for raising questions related to the role that communications technology could play in facilitating education that incorporates complex and controversial social interactions.

**Critical theory of technology.**

Given the central role of technology in this study, it is important to apply critical theory to the technology itself. For this purpose the critical theory of technology outlined by Feenberg (2005) is suitable. According to Feenberg, technology is developed and shaped in terms of the biases and features of the society in which it is situated; "the technical code is the rule under which technologies are realized in a social context with biases reflecting the unequal distribution of social power" (2005, p.47). Feenberg points to the democratization of technology as a way to shift the balance of power away from the accepted biases. The social networking sites, supported by the Internet, provide the framework for
such democratization, and reflect the capacity for political and social engagement afforded by the current state of advanced communications technology. Indeed, Feenberg describes such a notion by stating that "the Internet opens fantastic new opportunities for human communication" (2005, p.62).

Consequently, the weight of Feenberg’s critical theory of technology in relation to this particular study rests on its dedication to interpret the world “in light of its potentialities” (2005). With this study in mind, the theory provides insight into the potentiality of social networking sites, and the democratic affordances they provide for students. Such an approach brings together the theories outlined in this section; those of critical global perspective, Kellner’s (2003; 2010) critical pedagogy, and Dutton’s Fifth Estate (2009), and provides students with the technological foundation from which an exploration of the findings of the study can take place.

**Critical pedagogy.**

In his 2003 article *Toward a Critical Theory of Education*, Kellner outlines his take on critical theory of education, and situates it in the technological transformations of the Information Age. According to Kellner and Kim (2010), “schooling has become a quasi-monopoly of control and dissemination of knowledge by established powers as a form of cultural and ideological domination, which controls knowledge to strengthen the interests of the dominant class” (p.4). With
this and other new challenges facing students at the start of the new millennium, Kellner proposes a critical theory of education that builds on and synthesizes "perspectives of classical philosophy of education, Deweyan radical pragmatism, Freirean critical pedagogy, poststructuralism and various critical theories of gender, race, class and society." (2003, p.52). Kellner applies this approach to the current conditions of the educational climate which, according to Luke and Luke, (2002) fails "to take account of the rapidly expanding technologies of information and communication, mutating subjectivities and cultural forms, and the demands of a networked society and culture that require multiple literacies, more flexible subjects, and inventive skills and capabilities" (In Kellner, 2003, p.60).

Consequently there is a need to establish alternative pedagogies that account for the challenges outlined by Kellner above. Following the critical theory paradigm, Freire (1970) outlines how education in the critical theory paradigm can be used to interrupts the "banking" model of education whereby students are indoctrinated with information from the dominant discourse. Freire's alternative pedagogy sought to replace the banking model with a model that encourages students to look away from the elites for their information and learn from each other; avoiding discourse that marginalizes and exploits those who do not fit mainstream ideologies. Kellner's (2003) critical theory of education seeks to exploit this Freirean concept by examining the current systems of education based in the industrial era techniques of print technology and didactic teacher-student relations, and instead, taking advantage of information age technology to promote democratic participation and
social and political interaction between diverse communities. Using the network enabled communities in such a way promotes the Freirian education and interrupt the power structures and social norms.

Similarly, Deweyan education is built on problem solving as a means to encourage experiment based learning, where knowledge is derived from experience (Dewey, 2009). According to Kellner, the processes of problem solving and experimentation are crucial to the development of a critical theory of education as they encourage the bravery to address the challenges of everyday life (2003). Incorporating the central tenets of Deweyan education could support the development of the Freirean notion present in Kellner’s critical theory of education. Kellner incorporates the democratic underpinnings of these critical approaches to education and encourages the need to develop an alternative pedagogy that takes advantage of advanced communications technologies and moves away from sole reliance on print based media and exploits the interactive nature of modern technologies to enhance the opportunity for democratic engagement.

**The Fifth Estate.**

Situated in the theory of a Network Society, Dutton’s (2009) theory of The Fifth Estate highlights the power afforded networked individuals through their use of widely available digital communications technologies. Dutton's theory builds on the historical conception of ’estates of the realm’. These estates each held a
proportion of the power in society, and were identified in England and pre-revolutionary France as the clergy, nobility, and commons (Fitzsimmons, 2003). In the mid Eighteenth Century, Edmund Burke interpreted by Carlyle (1905) identified the press as a fourth estate. Dutton explains, "Since then, radio, television and other mass media have been enfolded with the press into the Fourth Estate, which has become an important independent democratic institution" (2008, p.2). Given the well documented (Heidegger, 1977; Castells, 1989 & 1996, Wellman, 2001; Rogers, 1986) societal transformations at the hands of the advances made in communications technology, Dutton argues that a new estate has emerged, and, whilst it resembles the fourth estate in many ways, there are key differences that require its recognition as a fifth estate. The use of the Internet and related communications technologies that enable individuals to exploit networks and access alternative sources of information provides the foundation upon which this fifth estate is built. According to Dutton (2008) this exploitation of networks enables individuals to "move across, undermine and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutions, thereby opening new ways of increasing the accountability of politicians, press, experts, and other loci of power and influence" (p.3).

As a result, the fifth estate provides individuals with the propensity to enhance their communicative power and access networks beyond traditional institutional arenas. This is evidenced in an individual's capacity to consult global networks for information before consulting a particular organization traditionally responsible for the distribution of said information (Dutton, 2008). Consequently,
individuals who exploit the communicative capacity of the Internet and their established networks, "can hold the established estates - the government, but also the media - accountable at any time" Dutton (2013) claims such power in the hands of individuals makes society more pluralistic and more democratic. The Fifth Estate theory provides this study with a framework within which student's use of social network sites in relation to political or social issues can be interpreted in terms of their potential exertion of the power afforded them by the Network Society.

Definitions and Terms

Cosmopolitanism: Derived from the Ancient Greek word cosmopolites, meaning “citizen of the world”. The word is currently used in scholarship related to the field of this study "to capture the interconnectedness of peoples and carve out a new normative approach to preparing future global citizens" (Prior McCarty, 2011, p.7)

Globalization: Al-Rodhan, and Stoudmann (2006) outline their definition for globalization as the process whereby global integration arises from the interchange of worldviews, products, ideas, and various other aspects of individual cultures.

Global Citizenship: The view that issues of justice, the environment, and civic obligations, under globalized conditions, are key determinants of what it means to be a global citizen (Dobson, 2003). This position is shared by other contemporary scholars (Dower and Williams, 2002; Noddings, 2005; & Winn, 2006).
Network: In its most general sense, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a network as "a group or system of interconnected people or things" (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/network). The author understands this definition to include the notion of social networking among individuals and groups, as well as the notion of the connections between devices and computers over local and Internet supported communications platforms. Given this definition, the role of the "network" in social media can be understood as the substrate upon which social media is supported.

Political: The author recognizes the meaning of political as relating to or consisting of anything relating to the government, or interest in public affairs as defined by both the Oxford English Dictionary and The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary.

Social Media: According to boyd (2009), the term is most frequently used to describe software that provides communities and individuals with the opportunity to gather together, communicate, collaborate, and/or play.

Social Networking Sites: refers to the websites and applications designed to support the characteristics of social media as outlined in the definition by boyd (2009) described above.

Delimitations

1. The study will be conducted on a university campus. As a mixed method study, the population offered by the university in question provides enough by way of sample numbers to conduct the study.
2. The study seeks only information regarding student use of social networking sites and social media as opposed to other Internet functions, tools, or applications. Whilst there is room for students to interpret their own understanding of what may count as a social networking site, the study does not address the use of non-social technologies such as search engines or online shops.

**Limitations**

1. Despite the identification and use of the research site for reasons of generalizability in the population, the use of only one site in the study means the researcher cannot guarantee the broader generalizability of the quantitative findings.

2. As with many surveys, there is the risk of non-response error. This error can occur from the differences between results of those who respond to all, some, or none, of the questions (Dillman, 2000).

3. The qualitative phase of the study, in the form of follow-up focus groups, will provide data that is open to interpretation and bias. As with any qualitative data, such a characteristic is seen as both a strength and weakness when analysis and interpretation are considered. In this instance the limitation is understood to be the introduction of researcher bias in the analysis of the data. In qualitative research, absolute objectivity is not possible, and subjective values of the researcher are found in the interpretation of the data. Worthy of note is the international nature of the researcher, as is the potential for socio-economic and cultural differences between the participants and the researcher. These may have contributed to misunderstanding and misrepresentation in the qualitative data as the intended meaning of the focus group participants may not be accurately understood by the researcher. However, a process of member checking with focus group participants allowed for any misunderstandings or misinterpretations to be addressed appropriately.

4. Similarly to the interpretation of qualitative data, the researcher’s positionality had ramifications for the study. Given the privileged world in which the researcher and the research existed, there is the risk of
exclusivity in the findings. As a result, the generalizability of the findings was situated solely within the world of the researcher and the study participants.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is framed by the increasing interconnections between individuals, groups and cultures as a result of the process of globalization and the advancements in communications technology. Consequently, it is positioned to raise questions regarding the role of technology in individual, group, and cultural interactions. Given the research on social network site usage among youth (PEW Internet and American Life Project, 2012), the study attempts to contribute to the understanding of the way in which social media and its use are situated within the political and social issues surrounding globalization and the experiences of youth.

In terms of education, this study is conducted partially in response to increased academic interest in the use of technology in classrooms and distance learning (boyd, 2009; Merryfield, 2000; Scheidet, 2003; Kim & Bonk, 2002; Varma & Linn, 2012), and partially in response to the call for approaches to education and curriculum, traditionally associated with social studies, that promote critical perspectives on global mindedness (Bourn, 2010; Dower & Williams, 2002; Hicks, 2003; Case, 1993; Hanvey, 1976) and issues of human rights and social justice (Banks, 2003; Sunal & Christensen, 2002; Asgharzadeh, 2007; Clarke, 2006; El-Haj, 2007; Langan, 2008). Knowledge surrounding the extent to which students use social media and social networking sites can benefit educators, particularly social
studies teachers, as they look for ways to exploit the technology in both their instruction and content development.

The findings contribute to knowledge of the way in which education can prepare students to engage in a socially complex, and technologically enabled society. In addition, the findings provide justification for adapting social studies curricula to reflect the diverse communities in which students live preparing them to engage constructively. Methodologically, this study adds to the literature surrounding mixed methods research procedures and highlight the potential for sequential explanatory designs to successfully connect quantitative and qualitative data within the study and integrate the data through appropriate analysis.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter presents literature surrounding the topic of investigation. By providing a review of literature on key topic areas related to the areas of study, this chapter helps situate the research questions and their findings in a particular context. In order to appropriately situate an exploration of the way in which students engage with political and social issues through social media, this chapter reviews literature on globalization, technology, education, and political engagement. Firstly, the chapter outlines literature on the socio-technological manifestation of globalization, and the resulting complexity of social interaction. Secondly, a review of literature on social responses to globalization highlights the key areas of global education, global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism, as educational models that prepare students for the challenges of globalized society. Thirdly, literature that explores the development of the Internet and communications networks provides the technological context for the study. This is followed by a more detailed review of research on the effects and affordances social media. Fourth, the literature surrounding political engagement in a technologically enabled society provides a more detailed context and reflects the central aims of the
investigation. Finally, literature that presents critical perspectives on global education, technology and the Internet, provides the context for the theoretical framework used to interpret the findings of the study.

**Globalization**

According to Al-Rodhan, Nayef and Stoudmann (2006), globalization refers to the process of integration that has resulted from the exchange of culture, ideas, and products. In recent history, this process has been incited by advances in technology, specifically transport and information communications technology. The development of the Internet evolved from the reorganization of society around information (Castells, 2001). Consequently, with advances in transportation facilitating movement of people, and greater social diversity, and the Internet facilitating global interaction, globalization has created a more complex world (Banks, 2008). According to Bădulescu “we now live in a ‘global society’ in which we can no longer avoid other individuals and alternative ways of life” (2012, p.1). Consequently, it is necessary to reconsider the relationships formed between individuals, communities, and cultures as a result of living in a world of instantaneous communication and interaction. (Bădulescu, 2012). With this in mind, Reimers suggests that:
Globalization, the result of increased and accelerating integration across nation-states resulting from trade, travel, and telecommunications, requires increased capacity for people to understand global affairs, to have the ability to work productively across cultural divides, and to recognize and address global challenges (2013, p. 56).

The following section explores the technological conditions of globalization and the responses by educators recognizing the requirements outlined by Reimers (2013) above.

**The Information Age.**

The development of communications technologies, specifically those that have augmented society into webs of interconnected individuals, institutions and networks have created a world in which information is a prime commodity (Castells, 1989). During the second half of the 20th century, Bell (1973) recognized the shift from manufacturing towards knowledge based on technology and information, and suggested that society had moved into a “post-industrial” age. The idea of a post-industrial society is synonymous with that of the ‘Information Age.’ According to Duff (1998), the premise of the Information Age builds on the idea of information flows and the increasing commodification of information. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) shape the movement of information into global networks, and consequently have a profound effect on social organization (Webster, 2006). According to Webster, social organization falls increasingly under the influence of “information networks that may link together different locations within and between an office, a town, a region, a continent, indeed the entire world” (2002,
p.17). Castells states, “the ongoing transformation of communication technology in the digital age extends the reach of communication media to all domains of social life in a network that is at the same time global and local, generic and customized in an ever-changing pattern.” (2007, p.239).

Building from the information age theory, that identified information as the defining characteristic of contemporary society, and the commodity upon which they are increasingly dependent, Castells developed the concept of the “Network Society” (1996). In this iteration, society gives priority to information flows, upholding information’s status as a prime commodity, but rather than identifying the use of information as new to society, Castells suggests that the networks upon which the flow of information is supported are new to society (2000, p.21). As a result, the reorganization of a society existing on a substrate of global networks means that future social development requires an understanding and exploitation of networks—emphasizing to some degree, the importance of research in the area of education and the Internet.

**Social implications.**

In 2003, 93% of all public instructional classrooms reported having access to the Internet, an increase from 3% in 1994. In 2008, 97% of public schools had one or more computers located in instructional classrooms of which 98% of these had Internet access (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The continued development of communications technology, specifically the seemingly unhindered pervasiveness
of the Internet, has supported the increased interconnections between individuals and communities across the world (Mitra, 2001). Harth (2010) stated, “[w]hile we remain physically distant from ‘others’, such distances are regularly bridged with rapid transit or instantaneous communication.” (p.69). As a result, students are exposed to diverse opinions and comments on a range of topics and now able to interact with individuals from different cultures. This capacity for global interaction and exposure means that, “for better or for worse, what happens in one country increasingly ripples across the planet and affects people in other countries” (p. 69).

Developments in global infrastructure and flight technology facilitated greater migration of peoples, which, according to Banks (2008), “has never before in history ... been so extensive, so rapid, or raised such complex and difficult questions...” (p.132). As a result, in a world that is increasingly “globalized, interconnected and interdependent” (Ho, 2009, p.1), individuals find themselves interacting with people from other nations and cultures. Friedman (2005) likens globalization to a “flattening” of the world, where people, businesses and nations are more connected than ever before. The complex issue of increased movement of people results from a number of different circumstances: in some cases multinational corporations provide global opportunities for job seekers and their families, whilst in others, individuals and groups are “displaced by war, political instability or dire economic conditions” (Osler and Starkey, 2003, pp.243).

Migration, on the scale described by Banks (2008), inevitably presents challenges...
for individuals within socio-political boundaries, where a cosmopolitan social make-up comes into play.

The result of migration, both historical and continuing, and the impact of globalization and technology, has led to greater cosmopolitanism in urban areas (Rohlen, 2002), and a more interconnected world. Scholars (Hicks, 2002; Ho, 2009; Pike, 2008; Warwick; 2008), exploring various ways of approaching the challenges presented by the increased global-interconnections, call for an understanding and implementation of citizenship education as a way of responding to the increasingly diverse social milieu. Whilst subtle differences exist between the traditional notions of global citizenship espoused by the various scholars, citizenship theory can be mobilized as an avenue through which the social complications presented by globalization is ameliorated.

As a consequence, pressure on governmental institutions, as well as other larger social institutions, fosters productive social discourse among the diverse populations competing for cultural and political accommodation (Jakubowicz, 2009). However, the danger looms that, without bridging the divisions between individual cultures in multicultural communities, “political movements based on ethnic, religious and narrowly nationalist ideologies threaten democracy and challenge existing political and social structures” (Osler and Starkey, 2003, p.243). As a result, individuals need to acquire and develop dispositions of openness and respect for difference (Prior McCarty, 2011), helping culturally diverse communities move away from the concerns outlined by Osler and Starkey (2003) above. In
accordance with this aim, Hansen (2009) suggests that for individuals to develop dispositions of openness and respect for difference, they must also develop the “ability to dwell meaningfully in a space of often paradoxical transitions, of openness to the world and loyalty to the local.”

Responses to Globalization

The conditions created by globalization have led a number of scholars from various fields to find ways of ameliorating the challenging aspects of living in a global society. Scholars from the fields of social studies education, global education, global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism, have outlined curricula and frameworks of citizenship that exploit the conditions of globalization, and provide students with skills to participate constructively in global society.

Global Education.

Gibson, Rimmington, and Landwehr-Brown (2007), identified the effects of globalization as “increased interdependence, interconnectedness, and cultural diversity” (p.11). Because of these tightened bonds between people, nations, and cultures, many scholars (Gaudelli, 2003; Hanvey, 1976; Merryfield, 2001; Pike and Selby, 1988) call for an education that addresses these issues and develops appropriate skills for functioning in a globalized world. Responding to the changing social climate, various scholars (e.g., Hanvey, 1976; Pike & Selby, 1988) developed global education throughout the latter half of the twentieth century (Hicks, 2003).
Traditionally, the social studies curriculum is seen as the most appropriate vehicle for supporting the aims of global education (Merryfield, 2001; Osler & Starkey, 2003). Hanvey (1976) conceptualized global education in five elements: perspective consciousness, cross-cultural awareness, knowledge of alternatives, state of the planet awareness, and knowledge of global dynamics. Case (1993) argued that global education should incorporate a substantive dimension, that includes global systems, events, and issues; and a perceptual dimension that relates to empathy and open-mindedness. Gaudelli (2003), alternatively, defined global education as a curriculum that:

that seeks to prepare students to live in a progressively interconnected world where the study of human values, institutions and behaviors are contextually examined through a pedagogical style that promotes critical engagement of complex, diverse information toward socially meaningful action (p.11).

In his review of global education approaches around the world, Pike (2000) asserted, “the big ideas of global education and its overall purpose as an educational reform movement are largely consistent” (p.25). A number of scholars (Case, 1993; Gaudelli, 2003; Hanvey, 1976; Hicks, 1990, 2003; Pike, 2000; Pike and Selby, 1988) view global education, in its various iterations, as consisting of several core tenets best reflected in Pike and Selby’s (1988) model:
• Systems Consciousness: acquire an understanding of the systemic nature of the world.

• Perspective Consciousness: recognize that worldviews are not universally shared.

• State of the Planet Awareness: understand global environmental and social issues, such as human rights and justice.

• Involvement Consciousness and Preparedness: recognize that actions have ramifications for global future.

• Process Mindedness: create an awareness of personal development and capacity for new ways of seeing the world.

Approaches to democracy, citizenship, cosmopolitanism, human rights, and critical pedagogy echo the central ideas of global education (Banks, 2003). More recently, global education scholars made attempts to reconceptualize global education to suit the social complexity of life in the 21st century. Merryfield, addressed this challenge, arguing that “students must examine the origins and assumptions that underlie the mainstream ... framework that divides the world in ‘us’ and ‘them’ and analyze alternative frameworks for understanding people and the planet past and present” (2001, p.3). Sensoy (2010) supported this idea, citing the discourse of oppression and “backwardness” of Middle Eastern cultures in social studies curricula as part of a historically rooted mainstream conception. Subedi suggested decolonizing curriculum to make space for marginalized global voices “can work towards developing a more equitable global society” (2013, p. 636).

Decolonizing the social studies curriculum, particularly in the representation of history, allows global education to become “truly global”, where “students learn
from the experiences, ideas, and knowledge, of people who are poor, oppressed, or in opposition to power” (Merryfield, 2001, p.6). As will be discussed, the Internet provides the opportunity for the realization of Merryfield’s (2001) “truly global” global education.

Global Citizenship.

Some theories and approaches espoused by scholars (e.g., Banks, 2003; Pike, 2000; Hicks, 2003) seek to understand and improve the nature of society and participation under the strains of globalization by focusing on citizenship education, in both local and global contexts. Concepts of citizenship have existed for millennia. Initially, citizenship was a mark of belonging maintained by defining oneself against perceptions of the “other”, and formed out of an exclusionary mindset still prevalent today (Kingwell, 2000). Citizenship education can be a “powerful organizing principle through which individuals learnt their rights, responsibilities, and duties within a civil society” (Hicks, Tiou, Lee, Parry, and Doolittle, 2002, p. 93). Indeed, imbuing students with the organizing principle of citizenship is a duty traditionally charged to social studies educators in democracies across the world (p. 93) and remains a keystone in the developing the notion of political participation.

However, the impact of globalization has seriously challenged the idea that citizenship is fixed to nationhood. Pike (2008) cited two reasons for this: “the increasing influence of supra-national bodies and the transformation of societies by increased cross-border migration” (p. 40). The difficulty facing many communities,
of various sizes, is how to extend the notion of citizenship to encompass communities that are becoming increasingly culturally diverse and encourage the political activity required to enact change and representation for all populations. In the context of education, Ho (2009) highlighted this difficulty stating, “educators are regularly faced with the challenge of supporting diversity, creating a unified national community, and promoting global perspectives ...” (p. 285). Whilst Ho’s research was conducted in the Singapore education system, the battle between “ethnic diversity and national unity” (p. 285) is a common issue in many nations. According to Kellner and Kim (2010), “education today tends to be confined to schooling, that is, getting instruction as job training, or indoctrination into established value systems and practices” (p. 3). Considering this critical perspective on education, and the need to address issues of diversity and citizenship, Kellner and Kim (2010) stated that education should “make possible decentralized and interactive communication and a participatory model of culture and democracy, with multiple voices and an expanded flow of information, thus creating a new field for the conjuncture of education and democracy” (p.4).

**Cosmopolitanism.**

According to Reimers (2013) Cosmopolitanism is the humans are bound together by shared values and commonalities. These values and commonalities transcend “other socially constructed aspects of our identities such as nationality, religion, or ethnicity” (p. 57). The Ancient philosopher Diogenes the Cynic, remains
well known for his declaration of world citizenship as opposed to that of his local origins. Nussbaum (1994) stated that Diogenes “insisted on defining himself in terms of more universal aspirations and concerns” (p. 4). Drawing on the Stoics, Nussbaum’s (1994) conception of cosmopolitanism outlined that individuals do not abandon their local connections, but situate themselves within a series of concentric circles that define and encompass relationships from those closest to those farthest away:

The first one is drawn around the self; the next takes in one's immediate family; then follows the extended family; then, in order, one's neighbors or local group, one's fellow city-dwellers, one's fellow countrymen — and we can easily add to this list groupings based on ethnic, linguistic, historical, professional, gender and sexual identities. Outside all these circles is the largest one, that of humanity as a whole. (Nussbaum, 1994, p. 5)

For an individual, the largest of the concentric circles, the one that includes humanity as a whole, is the most difficult position to reach, however, in achieving a connection with the largest group, an individual can become truly cosmopolitan.

Parker and Mitchell (2008) troubled the simplistic and ordered nature of these circles. Whilst they agreed with the need to address the complications inherent in balancing nationalistic citizenship with cosmopolitanism, they also urge the questioning of the simple binary (p. 800). They have claimed that to be truly cosmopolitan an individual “may not fit neatly into the spatial models of affinity that have been constructed in some contemporary and ancient literatures” (p. 800), which highlights the problematic nature of Nussbaum’s simple binary. Indeed, for
many immigrant communities, their local community is just as hard to identify with as the universal human community – sometimes even harder.

Whilst Parker and Mitchell (2008) problematized the relevancy of Nussbaum’s concentric circles in the modern digital age, the notion of social interaction and political participation on differing scales is viable as individuals move between local networks and global networks. Current communications technology facilitates an individual’s movement between local and global networks, providing individuals with the possibility to engage with the global network more often and with more confidence than others who may be more proximally limited.

The capacity for meaningful interaction on both a global and local scale, highlights the need for education that prepares students for the dynamic nature of global society, as well as exploiting the networks established between international and local cultures. Osler and Starkey (2003) summarized this effectively, “[w]e have characterized education for cosmopolitan citizenship as incorporating the local, national, regional (for example, European) and global dimensions of citizenship education” (p. 343).

The drive for a cosmopolitan or global idea of modern citizenship entails several key characteristics, most of which have been summarized above. Many of the core tenets of the global or cosmopolitan citizen, as well as the key aims of global education, are incorporated into the UNESCO (1995) Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Democracy. Osler and Starkey (2003) highlight the relevant sections of the model as:
• accepting personal responsibility and recognizing the importance of civic commitment;
• working collaboratively to solve problems and achieve a just, peaceful and democratic community;
• respecting diversity between people, according to gender, ethnicity and culture;
• recognizing that their own worldview is shaped by personal and societal history and by cultural tradition;
• respecting the cultural heritage and protecting the environment;
• promoting solidarity and equity at national and international levels.

Frameworks such as this support the aims of educators and academics (Banks, 2003; Merryfield 2001; Pike 2008) who espouse the call for a global dimension to both education and wider social and political life. Indeed daily interactions occurring between diverse communities on both local and international scales justify this position. The exploration of ways to develop an appropriate pedagogy that reflects inclusive and critical ideals, such as the aims of global education, global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism, should also include an exploration of technology’s potential for enhancing social interaction and providing a platform for education.
Technology, Networks and Society

In his discussion of the foundations of, and need for, a critical approach to pedagogy, Kellner (2003) situates his work in the shifting social climes of global technological revolutions. He states:

[A]s the new millennium unfolds, the human species is undergoing one of the most dramatic technological revolutions in history, one that is changing everything from the ways that people work to the ways that they communicate with each other and spend their leisure time. (p. 1)

For Kellner (2003), the way in which technology has become part of everyday life, led to a general conception of current society and an “information society,” espousing the ideas of Bell (1973) and Castells (1989; 1996) above. However Kellner emphasizes the challenge that such a technological revolution poses for educators, with many having to “rethink their basic tenets, to deploy the emergent technologies in creative and productive ways, and to restructure education to respond constructively and progressively to the technological and social changes now encompassing the globe.” (p. 1).

The development of networks is central to the technological and social changes facing society. Acknowledging this, boyd 1(2007) stated that "[y]outh are growing up in a society shaped strongly by networks... networks of information, networks of people, networks of objects" (p. 2). Brey (2000) discussed the possible benefits of these networks to culture and society, highlighting access to information...

\[\text{[danah boyd chooses not to use uppercase for the first letters of her first and last name]}\]
and information dissemination among others. Echoing the benefits outlined by Brey (2000), Castells (1989, 1996, 2001) suggests that networks serve an important function for both institutions and individuals, given the access to, and dissemination of information, since power rests with those who are in the networks, whereas exclusion from the network renders one powerless. The value of information access is a theme echoed by scholars examining the effects of what is commonly termed the "digital divide," summarized by DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001) as "inequality between 'haves' and 'have-nots' differentiated by dichotomous measures of access to or use of the new technologies ..." (p. 1).

The Internet.

The communicative power of the Internet and the subsequent development of the World Wide Web act as a significant force in globalization. The idea of a “web” highlights the role that the Internet plays in creating and sustaining global communications and information networks. The spread of the Internet and the World Wide Web means the relationship an individual has to the rest of the world has changed. According to Shadbolt, Hall, Hendler and Dutton:

"[d]uring the past 20 years, humans have built the largest information fabric in history. The World Wide Web has been transformational. People shop, date, trade and communicate with one another using it. Although most people are not formally trained in its use, yet it has assumed a central role in their lives." (2013, p.3)

According to Castells (2003), the Internet, as a medium of communication, permits, for the first time, the communication of many to many on a global scale.
 Formerly, traditional social interaction, and construction of social meaning, occurred in the space of place, bounded by physical geography, rules, and social hierarchies. In this traditional sense, “space is the expression of society” (Francke and Ham, 2006), where space is the “time-sharing of social practices” (Castells, 1989, p. 441) and simultaneous social practices are brought together in a particular space. These social practices occur within historically determined forms, functions, and meanings (Francke and Ham, 2006). Under the power of the Internet, this notion of space as containing simultaneous social practices, extends through networks to bring together and include formerly disparate communities. boyd (2005) stated, "[t]echnology connects people beyond the physical restrictions of place" (p. 200). As a result, the social and political difficulties associated with diverse communities move to the forefront.

According to Dutton (2013), the variety of uses the Internet provides, brings to prominence a number of important issues, such as "the future of privacy, freedom of expression, [and] the quality of news and entertainment ..." (p. 1). Brey (2006) discussed some of the perceived negative effects of the Internet on culture and society, such as false information, information overload, and harmful communication. Such negative perspectives of the Internet reflect the fact that it is as a key area of research for social scientists. Loader and Dutton (2012) acknowledged the dichotomized opinion of the Internet, stating that "[T]here has always been an ample amount of utopian and dystopian rhetoric surrounding the
Internet” (p. 610). However, the authors then focus on their concerns explaining that

with the Internet’s growing social and economic significance, there have been rising concerns over the real and potential implications of the Internet in reinforcing socio-economic inequalities, reducing personal privacy, and undermining such traditional institutions as the press and public diplomacy (p. 610).

Loader and Dutton expanded upon this point and justified the need to engage in further research into the Internet’s effects on society, by stating that "[t]he Internet is no longer a futuristic innovation that might shape social and economic development, but a clearly central aspect of contemporary network societies." (2012, p. 610).

In the early 1980s, de Sola Pool (1983) foresaw the idea of the democratization of information access. He viewed Internet-based networks as 'technologies of freedom' - summarized by Dutton (2008) who saw the Internet as empowering individuals to "network with people, information, services and technologies in ways that follow and reinforce their personal self-interests" (p. 5) and boyd (2005), who asserted that "technology is developed to help educate and empower" (p.206). However, despite boyd and de Sola Pool's notion of democratic empowerment, Dutton offered up the more sinister notion of the Internet as a medium of control:

This is illustrated by e-government initiatives that enhance existing institutional arrangements; or in the dystopian vision of a ‘surveillance society’ where pervasive networks of CCTV cameras and other digital means are used to monitor and control citizens’ behavior (2008, p. 5).
However, despite the latter Orwellian vision of the Internet enabling government supervision of the population, Dutton remained positive in his summary of the effects of the Internet. Quoting the Oxford Internet Institute’s 2007 survey of UK Internet use, Dutton states that for the UK population:

The Internet was the first or second most common place users would first choose to go for information across a range of tasks, such as looking for the name of their MP, getting information about taxes or looking for information about local schools. People increasingly go to the Internet, rather than to a place or institution (2008, p. 12).

In a similar fashion, Jensen (2013) viewed the Internet as a tool users can exploit for "communicating about and co-constructing a shared reality of social ends and means" (p. 47). Though slightly more abstract than descriptors mentioned above, Jensen maintained the central understanding of the Internet as a medium, tool or resource, through which users can communicate with others or source pertinent information regarding public life.

Social networks.

Brey (2006) acknowledged the benefit of the Internet for culture and society in its capacity for developing and maintaining social relations, communities, and social organizations, sentiments echoed by various other scholars (Dutton, 2008; Jensen, 2013; Bakardjieva, 2013; boyd, 2005, 2009; Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2008). The term social media represents the interactive nature of the Internet and its connective capacity. According to boyd (2009) "[i]t is often used to describe the collection of software that enables individuals and communities to
gather, communicate, share, and in some cases collaborate or play” (p. 1). boyd and Ellison (2007) explore usage of the Internet as an opportunity to engage with others through social media, specifically on social network sites, defining them as:

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (p. 211).

According to Morales, Losada, and Benito (2012), online social networks have gained enormous influence throughout the global population. Indeed, according to Peluchette and Karl (2010) social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, rank just behind search engines as the most commonly visited sites on the Internet.

The 2011 Oxford Internet Study, conducted as part of the 2011 World Internet Study, collected and analyzed data related to the Internet and its usage from individuals in the United Kingdom. The study showed that, usage of social networking sites plateaued at around 90% for youth aged between 14 and 24.

Findings such as this are reflected in other studies, such as the PEW Internet and American Life Project (2013), that revealed 95% of youths aged between 12 and 17 use the Internet, with 81% of those using the Internet being active on social networking sites. The study, conducted in tandem with Harvard’s Berkman Center (2013), shows that, of those who use social networking sites, 94 % have profiles on Facebook. Similarly, a study on youth and Internet usage by Raacke and Bonds-
Raacke (2008), revealed that 87% of a sample of college students used social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace. Whilst this study, as well as others, focused on the college-age student population, the impact of such data supports the claim of high usage among younger populations.

As discussed above, social network sites form one of the central aspects of Internet use among the younger population. boyd (2008) stated that "[s]ocial network sites became critically important to them because this was where they sat and gossiped, jockeyed for status, and functioned as digital flaneurs" (p.5). According to boyd and Ellison (2007), "social networks, such as MySpace, Facebook, Cyworld, and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices" (p. 210). The authors continue by stating that, in general, the sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but some allow strangers to connect with each other "based on shared interests, political views, or activities" (p.210). According to Miller, Parsons, and Lifer, "[m]any students view the sites as a way to maintain existing relationships or to form new friendships" (2009, p. 377).

Data from the PEW Internet and American Life Project (May, 2013) it show that despite a drop in Facebook popularity, the number of profiles and users remains higher than many of the other social network sites. Some researchers account for the drop in Facebook users as evidence of growth in other types of social media sites that may be more accessible on mobile platforms and tailored to specific types of interaction, such as Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest. According to research
conducted by Common Sense Media (2012), a growing number of youth incorporated sites like Snapchat, Instagram, Vine, and Tumblr, due to these sites' facilitation of their activity of choice of posting photos.

The figures on social networking and youth usage, inherently justify research that explores their activity. Indeed Miller, Parsons, and Lifer (2009) highlighted three "immediate" questions with regard to youth social network site use: "(1) what are students visiting these sites for; (2) how often do they actually visit these sites; and (3) how much time are they spending during their visits?" (p. 35). In their study on Facebook and political engagement, Conroy, Feezell, and Guerrero (2012) discuss the relevance of social networking in relation to civic engagement and claim that "[N]ew media is a growing force in the study of civic engagement" (p. 3). However, some studies have shown that recent trends indicate a decline in youth political participation. Rice, Moffett, and Madupalli (2012) found that whilst "[y]ounger voters have frequently been at the center of movements for political and social change ... their energy rarely makes its way to the voting booth at the levels that many anticipate" (2012, p. 257). Consequently, an examination of the ways in which students approach political and social issues through a medium with which they are proven to be linked becomes even more important.

Political engagement.

According to Curtis, Baer, & Grabb; Eckstein (2001), Shofer & Fourcadse-Gourinchas (2001), and Tilly (1984) “[p]articipation in voluntary organizations and
political activities affords opportunities for people to bond, create joint accomplishments, and collectively articulate their demands” (as cited in Haase, Wellman, Witte, & Hampton, 2002, p. 293). Considering the role that the Internet has played in political engagement, Castells (year) highlighted some key areas that an effect can be noticed:

Twenty-first century social movements, purposive collective actions aiming at the transformation of values and institutions of society, manifest themselves on and by the Internet. The labor movement, a survivor of the industrial era, connects, organizes, and mobilizes with and on the Internet. And so do the environmental movement, the women’s movement, various human rights movements, ethnic identity movements, religious movements, nationalist movements, and the defenders/proponents of an endless list of cultural projects and political causes. Cyberspace has become a global electronic agora where the diversity of human dis-affection explodes in a cacophony of accents (p. 138).

According to Quintelier and Vissers (2008), studies that examine the relationship between political participation and the Internet conducted on adult populations are based around two hypotheses: that the new tools will allow individuals to play an active role in public life, or that Internet use will reduce their real life interaction. Quintelier and Vissers used this statement as a justification for their study into the effect of Internet use on young people. Using a representative survey of 16-year olds in Belgium, the authors investigated the relationship between their Internet use and their political and social participation. The study found that teens who engaged in more frequent Internet use did not participate in offline political activity more frequently. However, the study did suggest "that certain activities (i.e., chatting with unknown people, blogging and contributing messages to
discussion groups, purchasing or selling things, following the news, and forwarding political e-mails) do affect youth's political involvement in a positive way." (2008, p. 13). Quintelier and Vissers added a caveat to their findings stating that young people as a specific group socialized within the Internet display low levels of political engagement, potentially as a result of their inability to vote (Quintelier, 2007).

According to Conroy, Feezell, and Guerrero (2012) some controversy exists regarding the way in which the Internet affects political engagement among its users. They cited Nie (2001), Putnam (2000), and Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) as scholarship representing the negative effect of the Internet: one that "erodes engagement and demobilizes citizens" (p. 3). However, they also mentioned Cho et. al. (2009), Rojas and Puig-i-Abril (2009), Mossberger et. al. (2008), and Shah et. al. (2005) as the optimistic voices outlining the Internet's capacity to "increase political participation" (p.3). Loader and Dutton (2012) highlighted the role the Internet has played in political engagement:

Perhaps one of the most prominent manifestations of the use of the Internet for free expression has been in the political domain of protests and social movements. Whether it has been the Arab Spring, Occupy movements or los Indignados, observers have been quick to foreground the role of social media in these large-scale demonstrations (p. 613).

In a similar fashion, Margetts (2013) stated, “[t]he Internet opens up new channels for collective action and political participation, with some evidence to suggest that the use of the Internet for non-political purposes is actually generating new forms of political participation” (p. 432). The use of social media in politically
charged or unstable environments demonstrates the potential it offers for political engagement as outlined by Loader and Dutton (2012) and Margetts (2013) above.

Monroy-Hernandez, Kiciman, boyd, and Counts (2012) examined the role social media plays in the lives of individuals living in armed conflict environments. The authors prefaced their discussion by stating "social media have emerged as a communication channel people use to connect with others and get information in extraordinary moments of crisis" (p.515). Bruns, Burgess, Crawford, and Shaw's (2012) examination of the role of social media in flood-hit communities; Starbird & Palen's (2011), study of its role in earthquake-hit communities; Chong and Lee's (2010) study into social media and terrorist attacks; and Al-Ani, Mark, Chung, and Jones's (2012) study into its role in revolutions all demonstrate the power of the Internet in times of crisis. Monroy-Hernandez, boyd, Kiciman, De Choudhury, & Counts (2013) analyzed Twitter use in the Mexican Drug War in an attempt to understand how citizens used social media as a resource for practical and social purposes. They discovered that information flow to be one of the key strengths of social media; it "creates an alternate “user-generated” channel of communication that can address weaknesses in information flow" (p. 518).

boyd (2005) highlighted the power of social media, specifically social networking sites, to support political engagement and stated that "technology offers the potential to access more diverse audiences...[and] provides a public forum in which people can express different political views" (p. 200). However, despite this capacity to engage, boyd also mentioned that the expression of an individual's views
does not necessarily guarantee that they are heard. Considering this, Bakardjieva (2013) asked, "is the Internet helping users achieve higher degrees of emancipation and equity, build capacity, and take control over their lives as individuals and citizens?" (p. 61). The emancipation offered by the Internet is an aspect that relies on its democratic nature, something that boyd (2005) suggested is critical in communities of cultural diversity:

As we consider how technology can be used to engage people in democracy, it is important to encourage diverse groups to connect and affect one another without overwhelming individuals. People must be able to find personal significance in the process. To be successful, technology must support people in negotiating their identity, relationships and community as part of the political process (p. 208).

This perspective on the development of communications technology, a central aspect of boyd's research, suggests an overlap of technology, globalization, and education. boyd (2005) stated that technology is developed to educate and empower individuals. Jensen (2013) echoed this, stating that aspects of critical theory have "been associated with the Internet to suggest avenues of cultural resistance and social change" (p. 51). Indeed Bakardjieva (2013) also highlighted this use, stating that "critical consciousness ... would enable the actors of everyday life to understand their conditions within a larger social and political context, and to undertake concerted action toward challenging and transforming oppressive relations" (p. 63). For many Internet users, the notions of social change and cultural resistance, inherently positive characteristics of the Internet, are rooted in its capacity for political engagement. McLeod, Scheufele and Moy (1999), Shah, Kwak,
and Holbert. (2001) and Cho, Shah, McLeod, McLeod, Scholl, and Gotlieb. (2009) find that interpersonal processes, such as discussion, central to learning and action, perhaps give legitimacy to claims of the Internet’s positive effects on civic engagement and participation.

Advancements in communications technology that permit individuals to develop their networks through various social media platforms, among various other methods such as email, phone, and video chat, demonstrate these interpersonal processes. Feezell, Conroy and Guerrero’s (2012) research supported these assumptions, finding that "participation in online political groups strongly predicts offline political participation by engaging members online" (p. 2). Caroll (2006) saw similar results in his study in the Blacksburg Electronic Village, and found that "people who used the Internet for civic purposes tended to become more actively involved in their community" (p. 67).

Participation and engagement in political and social matters relies on the individual partaking in some activity. Jensen (2013) sees such action as an individual's most basic use of modern technology: "any instance of communication can be considered an action, occurring in context and for a purpose" (p. 51). Consequently, modern communications technology provides individuals with the capacity to take action on issues of shared interest in a community merely by communicating. Such a position requires the pursuit of lines of questioning regarding what individuals do with technology, as stated by Bakardjieva (2013), who suggested a need to investigate use, users, offline context, and “embeddedness”.

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Indeed, such questions regarding the relationship between society and technology have long been asked; Katz (1959) suggested that we should not only ask what media do to people, but also what people do with media.

**Digital Citizenship.**

In examining the relationship between the social implications of globalization and the possibilities afforded to individuals by the Internet, some scholars (Crowe, 2006; Ribble, 2009; 2012) have attempted to identify meeting points between the general themes of citizenship and their relationship to an individual’s use of the Internet. According to Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2008), the model of digital citizenship can be understood as the norms and values that individuals must know in order to make appropriate and effective use of the Internet and related technology for political engagement. Indeed Hicks, Tiou, Lee, Parry, and Doolittle (2001) posited the notion that current conceptions of what it means to be a good citizen must stipulate that an individual is an active online participant, performing digital practices with a political purpose. Such an idea combines the digital political engagement called for by scholars such as Loader and Dutton (2012), with the models of citizenship and responsibility outlined in global education, global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism by scholars such as Case (1993), Gaudelli (2003), Ho (2009), Osler and Starkey (2003) and Pike (2008).
Critical Perspectives

Critical theory can be defined both broadly and narrowly in terms of philosophy and social science. Critical Theory developed in the first half of the twentieth century through the work of philosophers at the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer (1982) stated that Critical Theory is a social theory that seeks to critique and change society as a whole. Horkheimer expanded on the notion of change by stating that a theory must seek “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (1982, p. 244) if it is to be counted as critical.

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/), the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School "provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms"

However, philosophers such as Kellner (2003) later recognized a broader sense of the term critical theory. This broader sense embraces philosophies and theories that seek the same ends as the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Kellner, 2003). Theories such as critical race theory, feminist theory, and gender theory, seek to emancipate a specific population from their perspective of social oppression, and all incorporate the core aspects of critique as outlined by the notable figures of the Frankfurt School (2003), as well as key components of perspectives espoused by global education (see Subedi, 2010).

As a result, a theory that adheres to the core tenets of the critique of ideology and oppressive social structures can be said to be critical in so far as it upholds the
normative position of seeking to make changes to the existing structures (Kellner, 2003). According to Feenberg, “where...society is organized around technology, technological power is the principle form of power in the society” (2005, p.49). Consequently, adopting a critical perspective on the advances and penetration of modern communications technologies help develop critical responses that contribute to models of global education, global citizenship and cosmopolitanism outlined above.

**Critical global perspectives.**

According to Kirkwood-Tucker (2004), critical approaches to teaching and learning about global issues remain on the periphery in school settings. Subedi (2010) saw this as unfortunate “considering the unprecedented global, cultural, and political changes that have taken place in the world” (p.4). In response to these changes, Keinrich (2010) suggested that “with a critical global perspective, students have the capacity to generate a greater quantity and quality of solutions to the world’s pressing issues” (p.72). Myers (2010) highlighted a possible social studies curriculum of global history, global civics, and 21st century skills as a method of providing students opportunities make global connections and achieve cross-cultural understanding.

In this conception, global history focuses on the root causes of globalization and moves beyond traditional Western-centric historical narratives that have biased the way in which students come to know the world. Brayboy (2006) espouses the
need to critically examine the mainstream discourse in an attempt to decolonize it and leave space for marginalized communities to participate. Approaching knowledge production and social studies education with the aim of breaking up the one dominant discourse, and replacing it with a multitude of diverse epistemologies, reflects the world-mindedness called for by Merryfield (2008).

A curriculum of global civics promotes global citizenship and works against the “broader social inequalities of gender, race, and class” that are marginalized by current notions of national citizenship (Myers, 2010, p.112). By incorporating 21st century skills into the curriculum, Myers argued that students are brought into the “real world” (2010, p.112), where the acquisition of knowledge and technology has replaced traditional economic drivers of labor and capital. This approach positions students against the mainstream discourse in education that fails to account for the multiple voices present in a global society. According to Ukpokodu (2010), an approach that is critical, problem/issue based, and questions mainstream perspectives on global issues, becomes transformative, engendering commitment to change in local and global contexts. A critical global perspective highlights the transformative potential of a global education positioned in the context of 21st century globalized society.
Critical theory and the Internet.

The relationship between technology and critical theory has its roots in Marx’s response to the process of deskilling labor to require management for efficiency by outlining the emancipatory effect of the process of technological rationalization controlled by the working class (Feenberg, 2005). The early critical theorists (Adorno, 1951; Marcuse, 1964) developed a critique of technology based on the dystopian view of it being a means of top-down control appropriated by social elites, a means to reproduce the rule of the few over the many. However, today this view seems abstract and technophobic, with younger scholars more at home understanding technology as a means for struggle and contestation (Feenberg, 2010).

According to Feenberg “the Internet is an example of the co-construction of technology and society in action” (2010, p.18) and creates a new social and technical context, within which spaces of social interaction can interrupt the one way broadcasting of dominant discourse through sanctioned media. Feenberg (2012) saw this conception underestimated by scholars who do not recognize the opportunities for resistance, democratic participation, and emancipatory change afforded individuals by the Internet and social media. By connecting disparate users, the networks of the Internet revive the public sphere with discussion and debate, and provide communities with the chance to recognize and articulate their rights (Feenberg, 2003; 2005). For Feenberg, “discussion lies at the heart of a democratic
polity ... any new scene on which it unfolds enhances the public sphere” (2012, p. 5).

According to Margetts (2013), the Internet has commonly been linked with Habermas’ theory of the public sphere, organized around the principle of a network where individuals communicate information and opinions. In this conception, citizens can “express their opinions, and deliberate and formulate some kind of common view” (Margetts, 2013, p.423). This notion, is echoed by Bakardjeiva, in her suggestion that the Internet has the potential to develop a "critical consciousness that would enable the actors of everyday life to understand their conditions within a larger social and political context, and to undertake concerted action" (2013, p. 63). Such a critical consciousness combined with new channels for active participation, can provide individuals and communities with the tools to define and express their own context in the face of oppressive entities exploiting networks for domination.

In an exploration of the capacity of the Internet to meet the demand for an empowering tool, capable of facilitating social development and democracy, Kellner and Kim (2010) found that the Internet could fulfill this role, though individuals do not always take full advantage of this fact. Consequently, there remains the danger that the Internet remains a “play-pen in the capitalist fun-house” (p. 30). However, in adopting a critical approach to education that recognizes the complexities and challenges of living in a network society, individuals and communities are provided a means of social transformation. In their research into the relationship between critical pedagogy and YouTube, Kellner and Kim (2010) found that the social media
site “gives individuals moments of self-expression, personal empowerment, and transformative agency … [and] exhibit the values of personal autonomy, virtuous citizenship, political participation, and social justice in our everyday lives” (p. 30).

Giving individuals the means with which to recognize oppressive conditions, interact meaningfully with the global community through self-expression, and exploit the technologies for constructive dialogue and social action provides the foundation for the formation of responsible and active citizens (Margetts, 2013). Furthermore, adopting critical pedagogy in this manner satisfies Castells’ (1996) requirement for social development; since networks are so ingrained in social life, future social development can only occur through their use. Recognizing the need to develop education as a means to live productive and successful lives in an age of global networks, Castells argued

…before we start changing the technology, rebuilding the schools, and re-training the teachers, we need a new pedagogy, based on interactivity, personalization, and the development of autonomous capacity of learning and thinking. While at the same time, strengthening the character and securing the personality (2001, p.278).

In response to this call for a new pedagogy, Kellner and Kim (2010) outlined their view of a critical pedagogy to “help enable students to become active subjects of emerging media technology and for students and citizens to use new media for progressive pedagogical and political goals” (p. 30). By merging critical pedagogy and the potential of the Internet, individuals can employ social media as a means of socio-political change, “since transformative uses of technologies require a clear
educational and progressive vision” (p. 30). Salter recognized this potential as a renewal of the public sphere whereby individuals are able to influence governmental policy and enable social movements and groups to use the Internet effectively (2004).

Conclusion

This chapter presented literature that frames the investigation of the way in which students engage with political and social issues on social media. The literature on globalization highlighted the need for education, and, in particular, the social studies curriculum, to adapt to, or prepare students for, the social complexity of globalization. Consequently, the chapter provided a foundation for exploring the way in which students approach political and social issues as emblematic of their existence in a socially complex world. Research into the effects and affordances of technology, in the form of the Internet and social media, demonstrated the potential of social media to provide a foundation for political engagement and global interaction. This information provides context for investigating student social media usage in the form of the type, amount, and geographic reach of their activity. Consequently, it allows for the interpretation of the medium’s suitability for providing students opportunities to enact tenets of global education and global citizenship. Finally, literature presenting critical theoretical perspectives on the use of technology and the role of global perspectives, highlights the way in which the theoretical framework of critical global perspectives, critical theory of technology,
critical pedagogy, and the Fifth Estate, is appropriate for interpreting student interaction with political and social issues, and social media.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In order to investigate the way in which students engage with political and social issues through social media, and explore the issue in terms of education and increased social complexity, an appropriate research design is needed. This chapter describes the research methods used to gather and analyze the data for this research project. This project centers on a mixed methods collection and analysis of data gathered from undergraduate students attending a university in the mid-west United States of America. The data are collected through an Internet-based survey instrument and follow-up focus groups. The following sections include background on the development of mixed methods philosophy and resulting approaches to conducting research. A discussion of the design chosen for this study highlights the sample selection, data collection methodology, and the methods employed in the analysis.

Mixed Methods Background

Starting in the 1970s, social science researchers engaged in scholarly debates regarding the value and significance of the paradigmatic perspectives that informed
their approaches. These debates are generally considered to have begun with the introduction of philosophical postmodernism (Evans et al., 2011), and are known as the paradigm wars, with scholars divided into camps associated with either qualitative or quantitative data collection methods (Gage, 1989).

According to Mackenzie and Knipe, the term paradigm is used to represent the “philosophical intent or underlying theoretical framework and motivation of the researcher with regard to the research” (2006, n.p.). The authors continue by citing well-known philosophical paradigms that regularly inform research, these include, but are not limited to: Positivism, Interpretivism, Transformative, and Pragmatic. These paradigms outline the researchers epistemological and/or ontological beliefs, and inform the method of data collection necessary for accomplishing the aims of the intended research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Methods of data collection fall into either qualitative or quantitative categories, which can be understood as

adjectives for types of data and their corresponding modes of analysis, i.e. qualitative data - data represented through words, pictures, or icons analyzed using thematic exploration; and quantitative data - data that is represented through numbers and analyzed using statistics (O’Leary, 2004, p.99).

Some researchers moved to integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches into a single structured and formalized approach to collecting data. According to Tashakkori (2010) this integrated approach, commonly known as mixed methodology, is “intriguingly paradoxical in that it is not new and it is not old” (p.287). Tashakkori (2010) explains that it is not new because of numerous
examples of research conducted throughout the last two centuries where early researchers conducted mixed research informally and without notions of distinct and incompatible paradigms (Bergman, 2012). But it is also not old because it is only in the last 20 years, with the provision of a vocabulary and process description by a second generation of mixed method scholars (Tashakkori, 2010), that the approach has been formalized as a distinct approach to research. As a result the approach now has “unique philosophical, methodological, and analytic foundations and an emerging set of quality standards” (ibid, p.287). Consequently, mixed methods “could be construed as constituting a third methodological movement following quantitative and qualitative approaches” (Evans et al., 2011, p.276).

With the formalization of mixed methods as an alternative to the strict choice between qualitative and quantitative approaches, a community of scholars and researchers from various fields supported the notion of being able to integrate the two approaches in a single research study (see Harrits, 2011; Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Indeed, according to Tashakkori (2010) “[d]espite considerable variation in background and perspective, this community shares a fundamental tenant that a strict qualitative–quantitative dichotomy is not necessary or productive for answering research questions” (p.288). Table 1 outlines the major paradigms, the methods of data collection most commonly associated with each paradigm, and examples of the tools with which these data collection methods are conducted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Methods (primarily)</th>
<th>Data collection tools (examples)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positivist/Postpositivist</td>
<td>Quantitative. &quot;Although qualitative methods can be used within this paradigm, quantitative methods tend to be predominant...&quot; (Mertens, 2005, p. 12)</td>
<td>Experiments, Quasi-experiments, Tests, Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive/Constructivist</td>
<td>Qualitative methods predominate although quantitative methods may also be utilised.</td>
<td>Interviews, Observations, Document reviews, Visual data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>Qualitative methods with quantitative and mixed methods. Contextual and historical factors described, especially as they relate to oppression (Mertens, 2005, p. 9)</td>
<td>Diverse range of tools - particular need to avoid discrimination. Eg: sexism, racism, and homophobia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic</td>
<td>Qualitative and/or quantitative methods may be employed. Methods are matched to the specific questions and purpose of the research.</td>
<td>May include tools from both positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Eg Interviews, observations and testing and experiments.</td>
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</table>

Table 1. “Paradigms, methods, and tools” *(Mackenzie and Knipe, 2004, n.p.)*

Quantitative data collection methods.

Quantitative approaches to research have their foundations in positivist paradigms and advocate the use of objective scientific methods in a particular study. Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) summarize this position as one in which social observations are treated “as entities in much the same way that physical scientists treat physical phenomena” (p.14). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie
(1998) and Nagel (1986) the quantitative position advocates that educational researchers should eliminate their biases, staying emotionally detached from the objects of study and using empirical tools to justify hypotheses. Despite a variety of differing methods, quantitative research consistently makes use of its characteristic strengths, which, according to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) are “large sample size, trends, [and] generalization” (p.77). Other beneficial aspects of quantitative research methods include the potential for faster data collection as well as less time-consuming data analysis (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). These characteristics and potential benefits reflect the quantitative approach’s reliance on numerical or categorical data with mathematical, tabulated and/or graphical analysis. For instance, Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) state that correlation studies “often analyze data using scatterplots and/or correlation coefficients” (p.365).

However, knowledge produced from quantitative results can be too abstract, with individual experiences increasingly lost as the sample sizes grow (Harrits, 2011). Compared with mixed methods research designs, a purely quantitative approach is lacking in methods that seek to account for, or discover detail and explanation in occurring phenomena (Feilzer, 2010; Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007). Likewise, a mixed methods approach offers human perspective on, and raises new questions about, the statistical data gained by purely quantitative measures in the form of narratives or case studies (Galt, 2008).
**Qualitative data collection methods.**

In contrast to quantitative methods, qualitative research methods embrace researcher bias and subjectivity on the basis that there is a “relative truth of multiple realities”. (Feilzer, 2010, p.8). Qualitative methods of data collection are generally informed by interpretivist/constructivist paradigms (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). According to Patton, (1990) qualitative research is characterized by the use of small samples, the desire for, and production of details, and the in-depth nature of the process. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) outline five broad methods for conducting qualitative research: observations, interviews, content analyses, ethnographies, and historical studies. The authors explain that an educational researcher may employ any of these methods if they “wish to obtain a more complete picture, for example, of what goes on in a classroom or school” (p.421) than can be provided by quantitative methods.

When compared with mixed methods research approaches, purely qualitative approaches lack the generalizability that comes with the addition of quantitative measures. Hesse-Biber and Burke Johnson (2013) sum up this stance by stating

[a] qualitative researcher, whose research goal is to get at lived experience and is comfortable with an ‘interpretative’ methodology that assumes there are ‘multiple realities,’ might decide to deploy [a] [mixed methods] design by following up a qualitative in-depth interview component with a survey, with the goal of generalizing his or her qualitative findings (p.105).
Similarly, Luyt (2011), explains how the addition of alternative methods to a pure paradigm, as occurs in mixed methods research, “may increase our confidence in findings through consistency...[and] new explanations, questions, and even hypotheses are able to emerge as a result” (p.297), providing the researcher the opportunity to identify trends.

**Mixed methodology data collection methods.**

Given these contrasting worldviews approaches to data collection, describing the mixed methods research approach is difficult as there is much disagreement over terminology and definitions, and the ability of designs to mutate due to their inherent methodological flexibility (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). According to Hall (2012), during the last 20 years, mixed methodology research has been established as a third methodological approach, along with qualitative and quantitative approaches, most commonly associated with Transformative, and Pragmatic philosophical research paradigms.

Overall, mixed methods designs can be described as an approach to data collection that usually, but not always, looks to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods (Morse and Niehaus, 2009). In their article on the nature of mixed methods, Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) state that “[m]ixed methods research is formally defined here as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (p.17). Mixed-
method research incorporates the different approaches in separate phases of data collection, either concurrently or sequentially.

Focusing on the mixed-method approach, Morse and Niehaus (2009) explain that “[t]he defining characteristic of mixed methods research is that it involves a primary core method combined with one or more strategies drawn from a second, different method for addressing the research question by either collecting or analyzing data” (p.14). Indeed Hall (2012), referring to work done by major mixed methods research scholars, states that the term ‘mixed methods’ is now more commonly held to mean the “use of two or more methods in a research project yielding both qualitative and quantitative data” (p.1). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the structure of a mixed-methods design contains both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the form of a primary component, followed by a supplementary component that seeks to add answers or detail to the study (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007; Morgan, 2007; Morse, 1991; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003).

**Research Design**

For the purposes of this study, a pragmatic perspective informs the research design. According to Creswell “pragmatic researchers focus on the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the research problem” (2003, p.11). For the purposes of this study, whilst theoretically informed by transformative philosophy in the form of critical theory, the pragmatic approach means that data collection and analysis methods have been
chosen that are “most likely to provide insights into the question with no philosophical loyalty to any alternative paradigm” (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006, n.p.).

A quantitative core component (QUAN) is used to determine generalizations and identify trends regarding the characteristics of student social media usage and their political and civic engagement. A supplemental qualitative component (qual) provides inherently richer data that affords a level of detail that supports, questions and explains findings in the initial quantitative phase. Qualitative data is suited to this role due to its capacity for "thick description" outlined by Ponterotto as the "adequate 'voice' of participants; that is, long quotes from the participants or excerpts of interviewer-interviewer dialogue. Again, a sense of verisimilitude is achieved as the reader can visualize the participant-interviewer interactions and gets a sense of the cognitive and emotive state of the interviewee (and interviewer)." (2006, p.547)

According to Morse and Niehaus (2009) in a sequential, quantitatively driven design (QUAN > qual), “the core component is measurement or...experimental [and] the supplemental strategy is to provide explanation or ...description” (p.31). This particular model of mixed methods research is the Explanatory Design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). The explanatory design is a “two-phase mixed methods design” (ibid, p.71). The overall purpose of this design is that the qualitative data set explains or builds on the initial quantitative data set (Creswell, Plano-Clark et al. 2003). According to Morse, (1991) this type of mixed methods design is generally used when a researcher needs qualitative data to explain significant, non-significant,
outlier, or surprising results. Figure 1 depicts the key components of the research design and their related processes. The figure shows the relationship each step has to the next, and highlights the way in which quantitative data informs the conclusion directly, as well as providing the foundations for a qualitative exploration of the results that then also informs the conclusion.

**Figure 1.** Diagram representing the sequential explanatory research design.
Sample.

In selecting the sample population, a population that has generalizable characteristics was sought in order that the data generated could identify trends with the possibility of wider social application. Consequently, a large research university in central Ohio was selected. As of autumn 2013, the university in this study had a total undergraduate enrollment of 44,000 students of which male and female are roughly equally represented, with only 1,400 more male than female students. However, the majority of the participants came from the university's college of education due to access practicalities. Education is a field in which women are represented more than men, for instance a study by the U.S. Department of Education found that in 2008, 76% of public school teachers were female. Consequently, a post hoc Chi-squared analysis was used to test for the effect of gender in the sample population.

A total of 3,350 students at the university are foreign, and represent 73 nations. Along with the socio-economic generalizability, the university boasts a relatively high level of racial and cultural diversity with students identifying in White, African American, Asian and Pacific American, Hispanic, Multiracial, American Indian and Alaskan Native categories; together non-white identifiers make up 20 percent of the undergraduate population. Despite the diversity, the university is still a predominantly white institution. As representative of many colleges in the United States, the university was deemed a worthy site to access a non-random sample that could provide generalizable data. Furthermore, the high
number of enrolled students suggests planned survey return rates of 100-150 was not difficult to obtain at below the average return rate for survey research of 15 percent as stated by Survey Gizmo (2010). The researcher accessed the non-random sample population being used for the survey using official university email lists and classroom visits. Using an official university listserv, the researcher sent out a mass email containing the survey link and details of the research study. A number of visits to undergraduate classrooms helped promote the study and ensured participation.

For the purposes of the focus groups in the supplemental qualitative phase of the study, the sample population was more purposefully selected; individuals were selected through initial contact made when visiting classrooms. The initial analysis of the quantitative data yielded from the survey in the first phase of the study provided the Questions for the focus groups. McMillan and Schumacher (1994) describe this process as a way of learning the central phenomenon of the study. Due to the sequential nature of this mixed methods design, maximal variation sampling, used as a way of representing what Creswell describes as the "complexity of our world" (2002, p.194), meant that the researcher sampled individuals from as large a population as practically possible. The researcher asked students to express their interest and then selected for participants from those willing at random. For the purpose of this study, the two focus groups included up to four participants in each group to maximize the data output and minimizing the complications of the transcription process.
This study is situated within the privileged world of technology access, cultural capital, and the social and political norms of the “western world”. Consequently, the sample reflects this privilege as a result of practicality for access and the prevalence of participants within the paradigm of western privilege. In order to generate data from outside the discourse “western” privilege, purposive sampling would have been necessary.

**Quantitative phase.**

For the purposes of this study, the quantitative phase was conducted through an Internet survey. According to Ebel (1980), the development and subsequent use of a survey instrument is dependent on human response. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) explain that survey research studies deal with the opinions of a large group of people on a particular subject, and the responses to the survey questions are “coded into standardized categories for purposes of analysis” (p.390). Consequently, survey research can be said to be both an inexact yet valuable approach to research (Mitchell, 2013). According to Fowler (2009), the inexact nature of survey research derives from the potential variety in the interpretation of the questions by the research participant, and their subsequent articulation of a response. Fowler (2009) states that, because of the ambiguity of operational processes, feedback, and inference, the answer given by the respondent may not reflect the intention of the original question.
Field test of survey instrument.

This study used a field test with an appropriate population sample to minimize the threats to the validity of the intended survey instrument. Given the eventual population of undergraduate students necessary for this research project, the target sample for the field test is a group of university faculty and graduate teaching assistants. According to Radhakrishna, (2007) using a group of experts, with specific knowledge of the topic or target research population, can greatly improve the validity and reliability of a survey instrument. In this instance, university faculty and graduate teaching assistants were deemed to have expert knowledge of undergraduate student reading levels, vocabulary, comprehension, and attitudes.

The sample group of experts was selected through convenience; using existing relationships with the researcher, they were asked to volunteer as participants for the preliminary field study. Recruited through email, the sample population for the field test was asked to complete the survey and then reflect on what they had read with prompts provided by the researcher. The questions sent to the field test participants as a guide included.

- Was any question unclear or difficult to understand? If so, which one(s)?
- Do you think any question was inappropriate for an undergraduate student to answer? If so, which question(s)?
- Were any of the instructions difficult to read or understand?
- Do you think most undergraduate students would be able to answer these questions? Why/Why not?
• Any additional comments that you would like to provide?

The participants were encouraged to return their responses to these questions via email along with any other suggestions they believed relevant to the development of the survey instrument for the second phase of the project. Any concerns were then evaluated and, if necessary acted on as a way to improve the instrument. The responses to the questions above proved to be positive and indicated good levels of validity; the survey does provide data that pertains to main research questions.

**Survey items.**

There are three main questions that guide the quantitative phase of this research:

1) "What type of activities are students performing on social networking sites in relation to political and social issues?" Defined by the complexity and time involved with the various activities generally afforded by social networking sites and Twitter. For example, “liking” someone else’s post is deemed less complex and time consuming than posting original content.

2) "What is the geographic reach of the student political activity?" Defined by whether the political or social issues represented in the students activity relates to different geographically and socially defined communities. In this case, the communities are local, state, national, and global.

3) "What is the amount of student political activity on social networking sites?" Defined using a five-point Likert-type scale representative of the estimated amount of action usage in relation to political and social issues, with scores of 0 for “never”, 1 for “rarely (25% of the time)”, 2 for “sometimes (50% of the time)”, 3 for “often (75% of the time)”, and 4 for “always (100% of the time). A survey by Junco (2011) made successful use of these Likert-type items and informed the selection for this study.
Survey items that do not directly address these variables are aimed at developing background information central to the research questions or the research topic, such as “do you consider yourself to be politically active?” and “where is your first resource for information on political or social issues?” Some questions deal in activities that are passive and pertain only to geographic reach since activities such as group membership cannot be framed in terms of complexity or how often they are used. Other items present in the survey deal with demographic details, which provide variables that afford opportunities for further analysis descriptive statistics. Outlined below is the categorization of the items in relation to their subject and the variable for which data will be gathered. For instance, the subject of questions 12a, 12b, and 12c is protesting, and the questions address the type of activity, and the geographic reach. Where possible, c questions ask for further details regarding the subject. For example, on the subject of protesting, question 12c asks for a brief description of the political or social issue that was being protested. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the questions and their variables.
Table 2. Breakdown of survey questions and their variables.

The items used in the survey were partially adapted in vocabulary and layout from questions used in a survey conducted by the PEW Internet and American Life Project (2012), which researched civic engagement in online environments. References to particular social networking sites as examples are mentioned in line with recent research and trend data on youth Internet usage. For the purposes of this study, recent research conducted by the PEW Internet and American Life Project (2013) indicates that appropriate social networking sites to use as examples
are Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Plus and Twitter. Given the age of the sample population the social networking site LinkedIn was deemed as inappropriate, as its target population are people in professional occupations (LinkedIn.com, 2013). Consequently, the sites used in the examples come from research done by Common Sense Media (2012), which suggests that young people are using photo friendly sites such as Vine, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Instagram.

**Data analysis.**

The quantitative data collection of the study was carried out using Qualtrics web-based survey software. Qualtrics allows participants to submit their responses electronically through the comfort of their Internet-ready device of choice. As per Ohio State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, using the Qualtrics service provides the ability to password protect the participant responses and consequently uphold participant confidentiality.

Before the statistical analysis of the quantitative survey results occurs, an initial screening of the data was necessary. Screening helps to identify incomplete surveys and remove them from the statistical analysis. The process of statistical analysis took advantage of the various background data collected and the responses pertaining to the three avenues of inquiry regarding social network site use and political engagement. Using basic descriptive statistics, the analysis provides details on the characteristics of individual answers, and demonstrates general trends in the responses that will inform the focus group discussions. In terms of findings, the
quantitative data provides generalizable descriptive data that explores the way in which students use social media to engage with political and social issues in relation to the three variables and the various background questions.

**Qualitative phase.**

The supplemental qualitative component of this study is carried out in the form of focus groups. Focus groups originated in sociology (Merton & Kendall, 1946). The use of focus groups to conduct qualitative research has become increasingly acceptable over the past decade (Smithson, 2008). Barbour defines focus groups as “either a naturally occurring or researcher selected group convened for the purpose of discussing a specific research topic” (1999, p.19). Similarly, Powell and Single (1996) define a focus group as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on the research topic from personal experience.

According to McDaniel and Bach (1994), focus groups are conducted for purposes such as market research and the development and direction of political campaigns. The data collection potential afforded by incorporating focus groups into a particular study is characterized by their capacity to generate constructs and data for product development. The data can then be used to develop models and evaluate new programs and products. Consequently, they are generally assumed most useful for learning about opinions and attitudes, as well as generating recommendations (Smithson, 2008). Increasingly, they have been used to gather in-depth views and
opinions of homogenous groups of people for social science research (Winslow, Honein, and Elzubeir, 2002). Considering their value in social sciences research, Sagoe (2012) summarizes some general characteristics of focus groups, which include: organized discussion, and interaction (Kitzinger, 1994), collective activity (Powell and Single, 1996), and social events (Goss and Leinbach, 1996).

However, some researchers define focus groups in terms of interviewing. For example, Hughes and Dumont (1993) characterize focus groups as in-depth group interviews. Importantly, and for the purposes of this research project, there is the need for a distinction between the group interviewing and focus groups. Morgan (1997) makes this distinction by stating that where group interviews are based on traditional interviewing techniques conducted in a group, focus groups rely more on group interaction than the questioning strategy of the researcher.

According to Barbour (1999), one such advantage is the capacity of focus groups to access and collect data from groups who can be hard to reach such as the "disadvantaged or disenfranchised" (ibid). Another advantage, outlined by Sim (1998), highlights the levels of spontaneity and candor that can be achieved from respondents by focus groups that may be unattainable by traditional interview methods. Gibbs (1997) channels these advantages into a key distinction between focus groups and group interviews that is characterized as the insight and data produced by the interaction between participants.

For the purposes of this study, two focus groups of four participants will be conducted. The themes of the focus groups were decided after the initial analysis of
the quantitative data set obtained through the survey in the first phase of the study. For the purposes of accurate data collection, the focus groups will be video recorded to track the conversation as it moves from participant to participant. Whilst the focus groups are heavily influenced by the results of the survey, the procedure does not follow a structured format, with the research suggesting topics for discussion rather than following a pre-determined line of questioning. The benefit of such an approach is its flexibility of adjusting to the conversation as it develops. However, some limitations occur in the distinct line of questioning and the lack of propensity for new lines of inquiry to emerge. Other limitations reflect the nature of qualitative research with meaning attached by the researcher. In this study, the meaning may contain the biases and worldviews of the researcher and override the intentions of the focus group participants. However, member checking, as used in this study provides the opportunity to minimize any confusion of misinterpretation.

**Data analysis.**

According to Merriam (1998), the analysis of qualitative data is carried out at the same time as its collection. This provides the researcher with the opportunity to drive the collection of the data into meaningful areas and make the most of the advantages of qualitative methods. The data gathered from the focus groups will be analyzed from the transcriptions of the digital video recordings. Using Lofland and Lofland’s (1995) typology analysis, the data from the transcriptions will undergo coding for the identification of categories and themes. From these themes,
connections and can be made in the hope of constructing some meaning connected with the purpose of the study. In line with traditional qualitative analyses, the typology analysis will include several steps, outlined in figure 2 (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007):

![Figure 2. Steps in qualitative data analysis.](image)

Using this analytical process, an understanding of the way in which students exploit the tools and actions afforded them by social networking sites to engage with political and social issues can be achieved. The focus groups provided an opportunity to explore background and supporting detail pertinent to the results from the survey. Examining the themes and the various categories, helped to
develop an understanding of the dispositions students have towards civic engagement. Fulfilling its role as a supplementary phase, the analysis of the focus group data through typology analysis provides more detail to compliment the general trends identified by the data obtained in the quantitative phase. In order to maximize reliability and validity, the focus groups participants provided feedback on, and approval of, the representation of their thoughts in the findings chapter.

**Study Rigor**

To verify whether the results achieved in the study contribute to the research question, and whether the findings apply to the wider community, the researcher incorporated several methods for addressing rigor in the study. Common methods of ascertaining study rigor address issues of validity and reliability in quantitative data, and issues of trustworthiness in qualitative data, identified for this study as credibility, transferability, and dependability.

**Instrument Validity.**

Issues of validity and reliability are most often associated with quantitative research approaches and are rooted in positivism (Golafshani, 2003). Validity refers to “the extent to which a measure, indicator or method of data collection possesses the quality of being sound or true as far as can be judged” (Jary & Jary, 2005, p.714). Pierce states the validity of “information is its relevance and appropriateness to
your research question and the directness and strength of its association with the concepts under scrutiny." (2008, p. 83).

There are several types of validity most often used to address studies. Face validity addresses whether the questions used seem like a reasonable way to obtain the information for which a researcher is looking (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). This study used literature from the field to ascertain ways to gather the appropriate information. The main areas surrounding the way in which the students use social media for engaging with political and social issues created the framework for the investigation, and appropriate literature informed the construction of the survey. As a result of the preparation for the study, the survey items satisfy the criteria of face validity.

Content validity addresses whether any key areas of the content under investigation have been excluded from the study, in other words, that all the appropriate areas pertaining to the study are included in the study and covered by items in the survey instrument (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). This study made use of experts to assess content validity for the study. Firstly, teaching assistants, lecturers and professors helped assess the study in terms of language/vocabulary and the appropriateness of the line of questioning for the sample population through a field test of the survey instrument. Secondly, professors familiar with the content area provided insight into the method the survey. Finally, professors with experience in conducting survey research provided insight into the survey design, to make sure that content was represented appropriately.
Given the nature of this study, issues of internal validity were not addressed, as the research did not investigate causal relationships. However, the researcher did address issues of external validity. External validity deals with the extent to which the content can be generalized to the wider population (Creswell, 2002). In order to assess the external validity of the study, the researcher relied on the use of focus group interviews to reflect the general attitudes of the target population towards the content under investigation. The relationship between the survey data and the focus group data also provided opportunities for triangulation, discussed in more detail below.

**Instrument Reliability.**

According to Peirce (2008) reliability addresses “the degree to which the questions used in the survey elicit the same type of information each time they used under the same conditions” (p. 84). For the purposes of this study, the variety in item type meant that formal methods of calculating reliability could not be conducted over the entire survey. As a formative survey, in order to test reliability, an analysis of individual responses from the field survey sample of five participants yielded clear consistency in their responses. For example, an individual’s lack of usage was found to be consistent in all of their responses, likewise the use of simple activities was consistently more frequent than the use of complex activities. As a result, the survey was deemed to have reliable characteristics. Any data that demonstrated unreliable characteristics could be explored in the focus groups.
Credibility.

For qualitative data, the credibility, transferability, and dependability of data address the same issues as those addressed by validity and reliability in quantitative data (Golafshani, 2003). Credibility refers to the truth value of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and addresses the extent to which the data represented “presents such accurate descriptions or interpretation of human experience that people who also share that experience would immediately recognize the descriptions” (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 34). This study made use of member-checking as the primary method of assessing the credibility of the data. Peer examination provided further opportunity to assess the credibility of the data, allowing the researcher to limit misinterpretation in coding the data.

Transferability.

Transferability addresses the applicability of the data; the degree to which the findings can be generalized or applied to other contexts and reflects issues of external validity in quantitative data (Krefting, 1991). However the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research maintain subjective reality over objective truth, limiting the relevance of generalizability. Consequently, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that in order to satisfy application to various contexts, methods of transferability should provide enough data to allow comparison of findings between contexts. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used contemporary research
in the topic area to provide wider demographic data for comparison with the study data.

**Dependability.**

Dependability of qualitative data reflects the consistency addressed by reliability in quantitative data. For qualitative data, consistency refers to the extent to which the findings would be repeated if the research were conducted with the same subjects in a similar context (Krefting, 1991). For the purposes of this study, the researcher addressed the dependability of the data by adopting a code-recode approach to the coding process, checking for any discrepancies between the coding instances. The researcher also made further use of the process of triangulation to address dependability as well as credibility.

**Triangulation.**

This study made use of triangulation as a way of addressing validity, credibility and dependability. Denzin defines triangulation as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (1979, p. 273). The combination of various methods allows for multiple perspectives to provide greater accuracy, and researchers can do this by collecting different kinds of data related to the same phenomenon (Jick, 1979, p. 602). This mixed methods study permitted triangulation of the findings through the use of survey data, focus group data, and the theoretical perspective of the researcher, as shown in figure 3. Similarly, the use of member-checking as a strategy for the assessment of the credibility of the focus...
group data permitted further triangulation between the researcher, the focus group
data, and the focus group participants, shown in figure 4.

Figure 3. Representation of triangulation with the whole study.

Figure 4. Representation of triangulation with the qualitative data.
Advantages and Disadvantages of Sequential Explanatory Designs

According to (2002), there are several acknowledged advantages and disadvantages of the sequential explanatory mixed methods designs. This design is considered to be suitable for individual researchers since the design is broken down into two distinct phases at two separate times (Creswell (2002) and Moghaddam, Walker, and Harre (2003). Similarly, the sequential nature of the design allows for the adjustment and greater flexibility of the second qualitative phase so as to optimize the line of inquiry; yielding greater detail in the resulting data (Morse, 1991).

However, according to the same scholars (Creswell, 2002; Moghaddam, Walker, and Harre, 2003) the design does suffer from some drawbacks – namely, the time requirements necessary to complete the study. With two separate phases, albeit one supplementary, there is extra time needed for data collection and data analysis in both quantitative and qualitative methods. An additional limitation is outlined by Morse (1991), who suggests that if the data collected in the quantitative phase does not yield data with obvious trends, the value of the supplementary qualitative phase becomes increasingly dependent on the line of questioning.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, this study used a mixed methods research design to develop an understanding of the ways in which students engage with political and social issues through social media, exploring the issue in terms of education and the social complexities surrounding globalization. The research focused on the question “how do students engage with political and social issues through social media?” In order to answer this question, the study gathered details around their usage of social media: their preferred sites, and the devices they use for access. The survey also gathered demographic details, and students’ understanding of their political activity. The study also gathered data on their use of social media through three variables: 1) the type of activity, 2) the amount of activity, and 3) the geographical reach of their activity. This chapter is organized by the methods used to gather the data. It presents the quantitative data collected through the Internet survey. Descriptive statistics that provide measures of central tendency present the results from the various questions exploring background issues such as general conceptions of personal political activity, or the specific social media sites used. A presentation of the data gathered on the three main variables of the survey follows:
the type of activity, the how often the activity is used, and its geographic reach.

Figure 3 shows the structure of analysis for each survey finding presented in this chapter.

![Flowchart of data discussion structure](image)

*Figure 5. Organization of the data discussion in this chapter.*

A sequential explanatory research design uses the initial findings from the survey to inform the areas of discussion in the focus groups. Consequently, the qualitative data provides explanation and further detail on the quantitative findings. The data analysis mirrors the research procedure: a survey finding presented first, with a brief discussion and interpretation, followed by the related qualitative finding that supports, contradicts, explains or elaborates the particular survey finding. Further discussion of relationships with existing literature and theoretical interpretation closes each subsection.
Data Collection Summary

This mixed methods study collected quantitative data using an Internet survey that was active for student participation over a three-week period. During this time, the researcher visited various classrooms to promote the study, and distributed the survey via email. In total, 120 students took the survey. Initial screening of the data showed that every question had been answered by at least 114 students, at a drop out rate of up to three percent, with some respondents skipping certain questions.

A series of focus groups followed the Internet survey, where participants discussed results from the survey, with particular emphasis on surprising or significant items. The focus groups also presented the opportunity to extend the exploration of the topic by providing further explanatory information pertinent to the research topic. A total of three focus groups were conducted with each group lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour. In order to explore the qualitative data, the study made use of Typology Analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995), using coding and the identification of themes to categorize the data in line with the survey findings. Following the aims of the typology analysis approach, analysis of the focus group transcripts produced categories, themes and sub-themes. Survey items pertaining to the context of student political and social activity on social media and the three study variables formed the major areas of discussion in the focus groups, providing categories that permitted grouping for further coding of themes and subthemes. For the purposes of maintaining anonymity for the participants, the
proceedings were transcribed using pseudonyms: Richard, Henry, George, Charles, William, Elizabeth, and Matilda.

**Context of Usage: Demographics, Access, and Sites.**

For the purposes of this study, which investigated the relationship between student social media use and their engagement with political and social issues, the survey sought to identify demographic data, and key aspects of student social media use pertaining to the research question, yet not covered by the three variables. These survey items established trends in the students’ use of social media, their use of specific technologies, and their self-conception of their political activity. Table 3 highlights some of the themes and sub-themes that arose from coding the qualitative data. The categories used for the coding reflect survey items and allow for the development of the prominent themes and sub-themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student perceptions of political activity</td>
<td>Lack of interest</td>
<td>Personal background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Priorities</td>
<td>School work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Age-related issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Use</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Dominance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk to expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Ubiquitous connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Impulse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Convenience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Coding of qualitative data related to non-variable usage.*
Gender in sample population.

The study collected data on student gender in order to provide further details for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>114</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Descriptives for gender.

Table 4 shows the frequencies for gender in the sample population. Of the respondents to the survey, 26.7% were male, and 68.3% were female. This does not reflect the gender distribution of the university as a whole where men make up a slightly larger proportion of the population. The prevalence of women as participants in this study could indicate a difference in propensity for participation between the genders. However, for the purposes of this study, any indication of differences between the genders could have implication for the construction of meaning. In terms of education, any differences in the way in which women and men engage with political and social issues through social media, could emphasize the need for gender specific accommodations. In order to ascertain if there were any
significant differences in reporting as a result of gender, the researcher ran several chi-squared tests in a post hoc analysis presented at the end of this chapter.

**Student social media access.**

The high percentages represented in previous research regarding youth and social media usage were confirmed in this study as 99% of students who took the survey indicated that they used social media. The Oxford Internet Institute found that 90% of youth participated in social network usage, and similarly the PEW Internet and American Life Project found the proportion to be at 95%. Such a result provides justification for research into the subject of social media, since it is a phenomenon that has become firmly embedded in their lives (boyd, 2009).

Concerning the manner in which they generally access social media, the students were presented with five options: Cell/Smartphone, Tablet, Laptop Computer, Desktop Computer, and Other. Of these responses, by far the most commonly used devices were the cell/smartphone (89%) and the laptop (95%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Devicesa</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cell Phone/Smart Phone</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop Computer</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desktop Computer</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5. Device usage. Percentage of students accessing social media through the listed devices.*
The mobility of the devices, particularly the cell/smartphone, highlights the preference students have for convenient social media connectivity. The data suggest that the students may generally be engaging with social media in informal circumstances, and exploit the instantaneous nature of the technology (Castells, 1996). Consequently, the use of mobile devices may be a defining factor in the high percentage of social media users, since they allow ubiquitous access for students (boyd, 2007; Mishra, 2009). These data demonstrate student preference for high levels of accessibility and its potential effect on social media usage, confirming the importance of investigating student use of social media. The mobility of devices used to access social media also raises important issues regarding the relationship between global education and the affordances of social media given the potential exposure to wide audiences through a statistically popular medium (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Responses in the focus groups reinforced these findings from the survey. Highlighting the benefits to social media of the mobility of devices, Henry and William stated

it’s really accessible, so it’s just right at your fingertips and your – if a thought just pops into your head, you don’t have to wait to get home. It’s not like you need to wait to get home or anything (Henry, March 26, 2014).

the fact that smartphones have only been around for the past few years, there’s definitely a significant difference between having to wait until you get home to your computer before you find out what’s going on, rather than the moment something – like something happens in Afghanistan and you know 20 seconds later on your phone (William, April 2, 2014).
Henry and William’s comments explain the high percentage of social media usage through cell/smart phones by highlighting its convenience and accessibility. William in particular suggests that the connectivity offered by a smartphone allows individuals to be current and up to date with issues as they develop. The global nature of the information networks provides the opportunity for individuals to be informed on global issues as they occur. Such affordances may provide explanation for the prevalence of mobile device usage. The data for this study also aligns with literature on the topic through the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2013) and the World Internet Report (2011), both of which indicate high mobile device usage. However, some of the focus group participants pointed out some potential dangers in having such constant and instant accessibility:

I mean obviously there’s drawbacks because some people post something or whatever before they really know about it, and then so that skewed point of view from the beginning just gets carried on by everyone who sees the post and is like, you know, “oh, this is happening.” (Richard, March 26, 2014).

I think that it might lead people to posting things or capturing things without really putting as much thought behind it as they would if they had to go home and log on to their, I don’t know, computers. It’s easier to get caught in the moment I think if you just bust out your phone and comment on something. (George, March 26, 2014).

It’s more of just an impulse. Like you see something, “oh, I think people would want to know about this”, or “this was funny, I wanna tell someone about it”. If you don’t really think it through when you’re just posting it on the go, you might either regret it later, or yeah, just wish you hadn’t done it. (Elizabeth, March 26, 2014).
These comments reflect student’s concerns about the way in which social media accessed through mobile devices, particularly cell/smart phones, can have some drawbacks regarding the content being shared and comments posted. The literature highlighted a number of benefits regarding the use of social media through mobile devices (Bruns, Burgess, Crawford, & Shaw, 2012; Castells, 2012), whereby individuals can communicate in real time regarding events or occurrences. However, the comments of the students would indicate that, in terms of civic engagement, they prioritize the need for more consideration from users regarding their content, and worry how it could be perceived by others.

Considered participation is paramount to online engagement, and context is key (boyd, 2009); without appropriate contextualization of comments, the danger for misinterpretation increases. From the perspective of global education, the core elements of perspective consciousness and multiple perspectives work to imbue students with consideration for the experience of others and the understanding that their point of view is not universally shared (Hanvey, 1976; Merryfield, 2001). The data from the survey and the comments above indicate that there would be space for global education to improve political and social communication in a culture of instant and constant connection to social media. Incorporating core tenets of global education and global citizenship in the learning process would provide students with the skills to consider the implications of their actions, the event or occurrence to which they are reacting, and construct their comments and postings appropriately.
Social media site usage.

The survey asked students to enter the names of the social media sites that they use most regularly. Figure 4 shows the responses to this question.

![Social Media Providers](chart.png)

*Figure 6. Chart showing the percentage of students using various social media providers.*

Despite students reporting eight total social media using providers, the vast majority (87%) use Facebook most regularly. This finding was confirmed in the focus groups where, without direct reference by the researcher, the majority of student responses related to their use of Facebook as opposed to any of the other
social media providers mentioned in the survey responses. This notion reflects the
development of human relationships with specific technologies outlined in the
literature review, where the technology moves into the background of everyday usage, eventually becoming unrecognized as a distinct technology, but fully
incorporated into the lives of individuals (Glassman & Burbidge, 2014). The
dominance of Facebook as a social media platform raises important questions
regarding how the types of actions provided users by Facebook influence the
manner in which students engage with political and social issues. In the case of this
study, the data suggest that Facebook, in line with literature on the pattern of
human–technology relationships (Glassman & Burbidge, 2014), has become
integrated into the experiences of these students, and is, for them practically
synonymous with the idea of social media.

I know, I went from MySpace to Facebook and it got huge … I don’t have a Twitter account personally. (Charles, April 2, 2014).

I think because Facebook is so – it’s the forefront and you can share a lot. (Elizabeth, March 26, 2014).

These comments exemplify the beliefs the students have towards the
dominance of Facebook among social media users. Analysis of the qualitative data
revealed concepts used by the students such as “posting”, “wall”, “commenting”,
were used throughout the discussion on social media, but all were mentioned in the context of Facebook.
In terms of critical theory of technology - in which there is recognition of bias inherent in the design and implementation of technology - that so many students (85%) engage with one distinct medium indicates the possible threat of exposure to a dominant discourse that may push other perspectives aside. Furthermore, the affordances provided students by Facebook, are monitored and developed by paid employees, and so subject primarily to corporate interest. Henry expresses this concern by stating:

I think that by there only being one, since Facebook is obviously the majority, I think Facebook constructs its own way of how it wants other people, the users, to express themselves, and they don’t. By having only one option like Facebook, with the majority, that’s like controlling and it’s limiting on how to express yourself as a user I guess, so. (Henry, March 26, 2014).

Critical theory of technology highlights the capacity for technology to be used for democratic purposes (Feenberg, 2005), specifically as the open and communicative nature of the Internet affords individuals the ability to interact through geographic and social boundaries (Pike, 2008). However, given the prevalence of one particular and distinct model of technological architecture, the danger that the ideals of democratic interaction fall under the influence of corporate intentions develops: the manifestation of technological oppression against which critical theory traditionally works (Feenberg, 2010). Consequently, students, as users, must be made aware of such issues, and use the technology in a way that continually calls into question the ideals and purposes of the “technical code” (Feenberg, 2005) with which they are afforded agency.
**Students and their political activity.**

For the purposes of framing the responses to the survey within the context of civic engagement, the survey asked “generally speaking” whether the participants believed themselves to be politically active. This question provided a means through which the various activities could be evaluated in terms of their potential for civic engagement. As shown in table 6, the majority of the students (73%) indicated that they did not consider themselves to be politically active.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you consider yourself politically active?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6. Responses to the politically active question.*

Given other research into youth and civic engagement shows a low level of engagement among youth (Rice, Moffett, and Madupalli, 2012), such results are unsurprising. The result does however set the stage for questioning why most teens do not consider themselves to be politically active and subsequently provides a frame for interpreting the way in which they engage with civic issues in social media. Political and civic engagement are key social manifestations sought by global education and global citizenship (Shultz, 2007). In particular, global citizenship seeks to promote a sense of responsibility and awareness of issues pertaining to the
various spheres of human existence within, and with, the environment (Noddings, 2005). Discussing the fact that 27% of respondents considered themselves politically active, some focus group participants responded with the consistent theme of apathy:

There’s just a lot of political stuff out there and you can – and it’s difficult to sort through what’s actual legitimate information versus what people are just saying. I think the fact that you just have to sit there and sort through it all to be considered educated and politically active is a lot of hard work, so I just personally don’t want to do it. That’s just me. (Elizabeth, March 26, 2014).

It’s not that I don’t care about political stuff. It’s that – I don’t know. It doesn’t interest me enough to want to go out and do a bunch of research on it. I guess just when election time comes round, I learn enough to know who I want to vote for. That’s about it. (Matilda, March 26, 2014).

I think that’s just the nature of our generation to be completely honest. I think a lot of kids nowadays are so into other things, and so involved in their own lives; maybe not selfish but in a sense, sort of. You know, not really worried about the world around them, and politics is sort of outside their realm of interest. (Richard, March 26, 2014).

These explanations suggest a general apathy towards civic engagement among the student population, and support the finding from the survey that around a quarter of students (27%) consider themselves politically active. The lack of self-identification as politically active among the students taking the survey suggests that room for the incorporation of educational models that nurture the skills and dispositions necessary to create informed active citizens. According to Richard, family background is a potential indicator for lack of engagement:

I don’t know. I guess one of the things is I wasn’t really brought up in a really
politically active family in general, so I think that has a lot to do with it, so I've never been too interested in politics or too knowledgeable about it which I'd like to change (Richard, March 26, 2014).

For Richard, his upbringing was a key factor in his disposition towards political issues. Richard explains his disinterest in civic matters with the lack of motivation from his family. Richard’s statement may indicate that engaging with issues of public life was not among the priorities for his family, or, indeed in his education. One of the focus group participants, Henry, highlighted the role that education, or a lack thereof, plays in developing students

I think it could be a lack of education about political stuff also. In school we are not really taught too deep about political stuff, uh just like the surface. You know like some history class or some economic class or something like that, there's not too much politics in classes in high school, until college. I’m sure you could find one and then groups on campus, but before that I think it is a lack of educational preparation... (Henry, March 26 2014)

In terms of critical global perspectives, education provides the avenue with which teachers and students can explore civic issues. Henry highlighted the way in which curriculum does not focus on conversations linked with the realities of their social lives (Subedi, 2010). Reflecting social complexity in the school curriculum provides an opportunity to explore traditionally marginalized knowledge in a way that critiques oppression, marginalization, and other aspects of social inequality, inspiring students to take interest in the civic sphere (Merryfield, 2001). The data discussed in this section, especially Henry's experience, indicate that this potential is largely untapped.
The literature suggested that social media does have the power to influence and create change in society (Bakardjieva, 2013; Haase, Wellman, Witte, & Hampton, 2002), however, the absence of a belief in their own political activity suggests that first, engaged dispositions must be encouraged and developed in the students before the fully transformational potential of social media can be exploited.

However, George indicated that social media doesn’t necessarily fulfill the promise outlined by scholars in the literature:

My perspective, I didn’t consider myself politically active. It’s just because I guess, in my mind, being politically active, you really have to put effort out there. I wouldn’t consider passively posting something onto a website to make you “politically active”, so people might be, I don’t know, putting a high standard on if you are or if you’re not politically active. (George, March 26, 2014).

In this statement George raised questions regarding the legitimacy of social media as a vehicle for political activity. He saw political activity as something that is exhibited in the offline world, and did not associate the notion of being “active” with his use of social media, which he considered passive. For George, the high level of “effort” he associated with being politically active could indicate a barrier to his recognition of social media as a tool for engaging with political and social issues. If other students shared this sentiment, it may provide an explanation for the low number of students considering themselves as politically active (27%). This indicates that there is a gap between the civic potentials of social media outlined by scholars such as Bakardjieva (2013), Bennett, Wells, and Rank (2009), and Margetts (2013), and the students’ perceptions of political activity. In terms of aligning the
civic potential of social media with the notion of civic engagement, global citizenship education provides students a model for understanding their role within a global society and the skills to recognize and engage with social complexity.

**Source for information on political and social issues.**

The survey asked students to identify their main sources for information and news on political and social issues. The survey presented them with four options: news corporation websites, social media, online newspapers, and other (for which they were given the opportunity to identify their sources).

![Figure 7. Sources of information on political and social issues](image_url)
As Figure 5 shows, the major sources for information on political and social issues were social media and news corporation websites, with the larger proportion identifying social media as their information source for social and political issues. Given the high percentage of students that engage with social media (99%) and the fact the majority of these students cite social media as their primary source for information of political and social issues (39%), distinct opportunity exists to realize a technologically enabled critical pedagogy. The nature of social media as a “horizontal” medium of communication that can encourage and support free expression among users (Dutton, 2009) highlights the importance of Kellner’s (2003) critical pedagogy. Inspired by Freire’s (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed, Kellner highlights the capacity for social media to afford alternative voices space to be heard. Such a notion would suggest that social media provides students with the opportunity to engage with issues that are not sanctioned by mainstream institutions, such as state departments of education.

However, the nature of social media as an open environment for sharing and posting information and their sources, calls into question its suitability as an information source. This is a point that arose in the focus groups:

I think it’s a little scary because a lot of times on Facebook – I mean you’re not really getting the full picture. Obviously, if someone’s posting something on Facebook they’re really vehement about it, so they want you to see their point of view and don’t really care about other people’s point of view. I think it’s dangerous ‘cause then you’re only hearing one side of the story, then it’s biased. (Richard, March 26, 2014).
I think it depends on where from social media they're getting it. ‘Cause if they're getting it from their friends then obviously it’s not very reliable ... (Elizabeth, March 26, 2014).

Richard and Elizabeth highlighted the potential for information found through social media to be unreliable. The students in the focus groups were concerned about the medium’s susceptibility to bias and exploitation. The potential for bias was also discussed by Henry, who saw it as a deterrent to engagement:

Because when you see - I mean I personally skip over. I don't really read over people that post just because don't like to listen to what they're doing ‘cause I know it's biased and it's usually not the 100 percent truth. If it's not your view, I could see you just skipping over it also just because you don't want to read stuff that opposes your view. (Henry, March 26, 2014).

Henry highlighted the potential for bias to preclude engagement. By facilitating public declaration of views, the social media format does not necessarily require or invite discussion. For Henry, understanding the bias in others’ views meant he avoids engaging with someone who doesn’t share his opinion. Consequently, it raises the question of the suitability of the technology for facilitating debate and sharing in line with the constructive and critical ideals discusses in the literature (Bakardjieva, 2013; Dutton, 2013; Margetts, 2013). However, Henry’s quote also raised the question of his lack of desire to engage with the views of others.

The presence of bias could provide social media users with the opportunity to enter into critical discussion and exploit the complexity of global diversity for the
development of a more inclusive social discourse and curriculum. Such a position adheres to goals on critical global perspectives and their role in confronting issues of social bias and neo-colonial representation in national curricula (Subedi, 2010). Processes of decolonizing knowledge and valuing social complexity require skills and communal support engendered by educational practices and curricula that seek to challenge normative values (Merryfield, 2001; Subedi, 2013). Social media permits the publicizing of biased viewpoints, but current attitudes, indicated by Henry’s words, may suggest that students are not interested in engaging as they do not have the dispositions and/or desire. Incorporating the values of global education into the social studies curricula, specifically those outlined in critical global perspectives, could provide students with the desire and the skills to develop the presentation of biased viewpoints on social media into a forum for critical discussion.

Critical theory of technology recognizes the democratic potential of technologies such as social media, allowing the oppressed space for expression, but concedes that the nature of the technology as a connective medium promises well or ill as those who use it promise well or ill (Mumford, 1964). Elizabeth continued from voicing her concern about the reliability of information sourced from other users to explain that the medium of social media is also a platform for news corporations:

... but there are a lot of legitimate companies that have Facebook pages and Twitter pages and they post relevant and credible information. (Elizabeth, March 26, 2014).
The presence of companies and corporations on social media reflects the popularity of social media among youth. This study indicates that 98% of students use social media, providing corporations with a wide audience. Elizabeth highlighted the ways in which news corporations exploit the popularity of social media. George also discussed this point:

I think they tailor it to being shareable. They create titles and pictures that will capture your interest and make you want to click that link, and then you have gone from searching your pages on Facebook to their website. I think that it’s only natural that Facebook, social media, might be first, but right afterwards would be where the links take you. (George, March 26, 2014)

George’s interpretation indicates that, for many students, social media is their first resource for information on political and social issues, as a natural consequence of the development of social media. According to George, news organizations exploit the presentation style of many social media platforms by providing tag lines and images that encourage further investigation. Despite implications of advertising and the commercialization of news as an attempt to draw website visits, it is coupled with the potential benefit of accessing multiple sources of information. Consequently, it would appear that social media provides an entry point for students to access primary information sources.

In terms of critical theory of technology, the presence of corporations and institutions on the social media platform is oppressive. The power that corporations and institutions have in being able to adapt to the social media platform and advertise the content on their websites threatens the democratic potential of the
medium outlined by scholars such as boyd (2007) and Margetts (2013). When asked a question regarding the motivation behind Facebook, Richard stated “I think it’s just all about money” (Richard, March 26, 2014). This comment confirms the need for a critical perspective in engaging with a platform as open as social media. Kellner’s (2003) critical theory of education sought to provide students with the skills to recognize the relationship between oppressor(s) and oppressed in a technologically enabled society. By understanding the prevailing conditions of information dissemination and its various sources, students have the opportunity to construct meaning through reasoning with value laden sources.

**Study Variables: Type, Amount of Use, and Reach of Activity**

In addition to the survey items concerning details of the social media sites, devices, demographics, and political activity, this study investigated how students engage with political and social issues through social media using three variables:

- The type of activity
- The amount of use for each activity
- The geographical reach of the activity

By ascertaining the types of activities with which students engage, this study sought to investigate the different aspects of social media currently used by students. Knowledge of these activities and their popularity among students can highlight key areas for the intervention of educational and pedagogical perspectives. Likewise, knowledge of the how often the students perform each activity adds
further detail regarding the social media activities that currently provide the most common source for student expression in relation to political and social issues. By investigating the geographical reach of the activities, the study explored the capacity for students to reach different communities, from local to global. A better understanding of this variable can help inform considerations on the propensity for social media to support interaction with diverse global communities, and experience the complexity of multiple perspectives. This section explores the findings in relation to these three variables.

Table 7 displays the major themes and sub-themes that arose from the focus group data. The categories used to initiate the coding corresponded to the survey items that explore the variables used in this study. The results of the coding, as shown in this table, highlight the relationship between the survey results and the focus group reaction, as will be discussed in this section.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of activity on social media</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Speed of use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Simple/complicated actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Less/more thought required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impulse</td>
<td>Less consideration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reactionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frustration with others</td>
<td>“Trolls”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opinionated people</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aggression</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unwillingness to engage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audience/Public image</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Potential employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of activity on social media</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Speed of use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Simple actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consideration</td>
<td>More output = less sincerity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soap-box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of perceptions/Public image</td>
<td>Unfashionable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“That person”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic reach of the activity</td>
<td>National dominance</td>
<td>Mainstream relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bigger audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mobility of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local ir/relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Bigger stories”</td>
<td>“Trending”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>News providers on social media</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local ir/relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Connectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Important issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Coding of focus group data related to the variables.
Type of activity.

The survey asked students to identify their engagement with eight general activities traditionally associated with social media usage as used by the PEW Internet and American Life Project (2012). These activities require varying time demands, ranging from the time it takes to click a “like” button, to the time it could take to research and construct a post, or engage in a discussion.

- Membership of groups pertaining to political or social issues
- Following political or social figures
- Liking/promoting political or social content posted by others
- Reposting/sharing political or social content posted by others
- Posting/sharing political or social content sourced personally
- Posting original thoughts on political or social issues
- Encouraging others to take action on a political or social issue
- Engaging in discussions regarding political or social issues
- Protesting political or social issues

Students were asked to identify which of these activities they perform when engaging with political and social issues through social media. Table 8 shows the percentage of students engaging in each activity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Elected Officials or other public figures</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking/promoting content posted by others</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reposting content originally posted by others</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting links to content sourced by individual</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting own thoughts</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging others to act on a particular issue</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in discussion</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protesting</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 8. Percentage of students engaging with political and social issues by activity.*

*Liking/Promoting activity.*

The results showed that the activities most students perform were “like/promote material related to political and social issues that others have posted” (73%) and “posting your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues” (68%). It is possible that high numbers of students engaged in these actions since these activities were the least time consuming, and, consequently, required less thought in comparison with the less popular activities. General functions of liking or
promoting content posted by others require few actions – ranging from one click on Facebook, to two clicks on Twitter, the two most common social media sites.

When discussing this issue in the focus groups the consensus among the participants was that these activities were the most common due to their simplicity. William, Charles, George, Henry, Richard, and Matilda all agreed that the simple nature of the activity was a direct factor in its popularity. For example:

Especially the first one, liking, promoting, sharing, it’s a click of a button. You do it on accident sometimes. It’s not – you really have no – you have to go deeply look to see what somebody has liked or stuff like that, so it’s not doing something that you really hold – there is no consequence to doing it. (William, April 2, 2014).

Yeah for this first one, I just think again that – at least personally, if I liked or promoted something for a certain issue, I don’t think I would think of myself as especially politically active just ‘cause I did that. (Charles, April 2, 2014).

Both quotes highlight the idea of simplicity and inconsequentiality students associate with the most popular activity. Though unsurprising given the simple nature of the task, it does call into question the value of the activity as a means for engaging with political and social issues. Based on data from the survey and the focus groups, it could appear that this particular activity, if not assigned any meaning by the students, is not in fact a viable method of engaging with political and social issues. The values of global education and global citizenship require individuals to reflect on their role in a global society and the potential effect their actions can have on others (Merryfield, 2001). Consequently, an activity to which students associate little meaning may not provide a suitable platform for the aims of
global education. Focusing on the most simple activity may not be the best way to judge the entire social media platform, however, the reductive nature of the task, which requires little to no meaning, strips the activity of any potential value to political or social engagement.

**Posting activity.**

Posting their thoughts was the other activity that yielded a high participation rate. Again, the students that participated in the focus groups indicated that the activity was most likely popular as it was convenient:

I mean it goes back to being impulsive. If you have it right on your phone and somebody's talking about something in class or you see something and then you automatically thought about it, you're like, “oh, I can post this,” but you could end up regretting it later. (Elizabeth, March 26, 2014).

I think maybe the posting your own thoughts, all these things that are easy, people do. Because it is easy, even if it is a form of political activism, they might not think of it as that. That might just be “Oh, this is Facebook. I post what I think”. (George, March 26, 2014).

Both comments highlight the potential simplicity of the activity, and that it may be used in a reactionary or casual manner. However, the participants also seemed to recognize the flaws in the process. As pointed out by Elizabeth above, there is the chance that impulsivity could strip a comment of meaning by depriving individuals the time necessary to consider their words. Other participants highlighted similar issues:
No they’re just – they saw the issue. They either strongly agree, or strongly disagree, and they want everybody else to know, so they just put whatever they thought – and then they just probably kept scrolling after that. (Charles, April 2 2014).

With posting your own thoughts, I think when people see political or social issues, they feel like it’s a beacon for them to post their own thoughts if like that kind of makes sense. (William, April 2, 2014).

William and Charles indicated that messages posted on social media can generally be reactionary or merely a re-establishment of a particular point of view. These two quotes suggest that social media sites do not always provide the kind of constructive, discursive space that many scholars in the literature suggest (Bakardjieva, 2013; boyd, 2005, 2009; Dutton, 2008; Jensen, 2013; Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2008). Instead, these quotes indicate the frequency of impulsive comments that may lack considered or constructive argument.

However some of the participants had mixed or contradictory views on the use of this activity. According to Henry:

I could split it. I could say they split up into two categories. There’s the ignorant ones that just have a set view that they, and they post five-word posts, like, “there goes Obama again and his Obamacare.” … Then there’s the five-page posts from the people that are completely following this person and the campaign. (March 26, 2014).

Henry indicated that those users who reflect the model described by William, Charles, George, and Elizabeth, individuals who post reactionary and impulsive comments, reflect a strongly held belief with no invitation for discussion. But he also suggested that users exist who do think about what they post, and will post lengthy
and considered comments on a particular issue of importance to them. Questions still remain regarding the nature of the post, regardless of the length, as long posts can be just as opinionated and closed-off as shorter ones. However, the suggestion that some construction has gone into the formation of the post would indicate some potential for the medium as a vehicle for political and social engagement in line with literature on the topic (Conroy, Feezell, and Guerrero, 2012; Rojas and Puig-i-Abril, 2009).

Despite this, Richard had a more positive opinion of posting:

It depends on the person. I definitely have – most of my friends that post anything about [a particular issue] do appear knowledgeable to me, but again, I don’t know too much so I can’t really – if they’re saying something completely wrong, I wouldn’t really know. For the most part, it looks like they put some thought into it because if they post about it they care about it, and they’ve probably done some research about it. I would say a lot of ’em are somewhat knowledgeable at least. (March 26, 2014).

This quote emphasizes the potential for posting to be a considered practice. Richard mentioned that some users may have done research into the content of their post, and highlights the fact that some people express views on things that mean a lot to them. This indicates that some users do see the medium as a vehicle for expressing their views on issues about which they feel strongly.

However, Richard expressed doubt over his opinion as he admitted limits to his own knowledge and awareness. Whilst he saw the posts written by others, he stated that he was not adequately informed to question or confirm the information and opinions put forth by others. This suggests a wasted chance for engagement. In
some respects, Richard’s self-perception reflected the low percentage of students who consider themselves as politically active (27%). In this case, the data gathered from the survey, the comments on the reductive nature of posting comments, and Richard’s acknowledgement of being uninformed, highlight the space in which global education and global citizenship could be used to develop students with dispositions that encourage considered engagement, and the desire to be informed.

**Protesting on social media.**

The activity where the fewest students engaged was “protesting political or social issues” (16%). The nature of protesting political and social issues requires a certain amount of social and political engagement and a desire to enact change (Castells, 2012). Such a notion falls well within the critical paradigm, where social transformation can lead to a more just and equal society (Kellner & Kim, 2010). Those students who indicated that they used social media to protest political and social issues were given the opportunity to describe some of the issues that they had protested about. They included
- Rape
- Abortion laws in Spain
- Issues of regional independence in Spain
- Danish dolphin slaughter
- Human trafficking, educational issues, feminist issues
- The Keystone XL Pipeline and the noxious fossil fuel industry
- Women’s rights to choose birth control and abortion
- Oil spills, Fracking, the Russian occupation of Crimea
- Sexism, rape culture
- Obamacare
- Building permits in local town
- The abortion bill in Texas
- Florida’s stand your ground law
- Political issues in the Middle East
- The Olympics in Russia
- Legalization of gay marriage

These issues represent a wide spectrum of political and social concern, with both local and global communities represented, as well as issues that transcend national boundaries. These issues demonstrate students are connecting with represent contemporary political concerns and cultural consciousness. With this in mind, the data suggest that those who feel strongly enough about an issue to protest, are likely to be connected with wider communities, and happy to identify themselves as politically aligned to the aims of the cause. For instance Henry and William state

If you’re not prompted and you’re protesting, then yeah, you’d feel – I feel like that person would feel really strongly just to bring it out of nowhere and force it upon people. Unless it’s within a debate. (Henry, March 26, 2014).
They’re actively trying to get other people involved, trying to do something about the issue. Whereas it is not them going out and going door to door and doing something in real life doing it, but they are doing more than the average person (William, April 2, 2014).

Consequently, the data indicated a potential in social media to allow individuals the opportunity to voice protest on issues related to the global community. This reflects certain aspects of the literature that present research on social media and activism (Castells, 2012). In terms of critical theory of technology, the notion of exploiting social media to protest political or social issues exhibits the democratizing potential of the technology. It affords individuals the opportunity to engage critically with a global community (Kellner & Kim, 2010).

However, the percentage of students engaging in protesting activity through social media (16%) was lower than the proportion of students that consider themselves politically active (27%). This may suggest a difference in the conceptions students had of identifying as politically active, and the activities they associated with protesting. For instance, when discussing the low percentage of students that use social media to protest, Henry remarked that “People don't want to start fights” (Henry, March 26, 2014). Similarly, George states “If someone – when you say protesting, that’s a label, that is, you are being political, you are identifying yourself with a cause” (George, April 2, 2014).

Both Henry and Richard agreed that generally, protesting is seen as quite an aggressive form of expression. Such a conception may prevent individuals from participating in any kind of concerted action through social media, as they must
balance a social life and their public persona with any potential political expression (Castells, 2012).

The data may also indicate that social media does not facilitate protest in a way that many students believe to have a meaningful impact. Whilst students in the focus groups all indicated that social media was potentially a good way to raise awareness about an issue, some participants questioned the viability of social media to facilitate genuine protest:

I feel like if you go out – if you're outside of – say it's abortion. If you're outside of an abortion clinic or something and that's where your’re protesting, I feel like people see that as a much stronger action than you just posting a link, so I feel like it doesn’t ‘cause I feel like people just brush it off like “oh you posted a link”. (William, April 2, 2014).

I’d agree that it was good at spreading awareness and such, but again, like someone – I just don’t really think it’s protesting, I can get how you could apply it, but really – its not having the action that I associate with protesting. (Charles, April 2, 2014).

These comments suggest that the students do not regard social media as a platform that facilitates genuine protest. The data also indicated that students view protest as actions that take place offline. Whilst social media can raise awareness regarding certain issues, spurring individuals to take part in physical interactions makes the difference. Literature on the recent social movements in nations such as Tunisia, Yemen, and Egypt, as well as the Occupy Wall Street movement, suggest that social media has played a vital role in coordinating protest and raising awareness, and informing on key issues (Ahmed, 2009; Castells, 2012; Dutton, 2011). The students seemed aware of this relationship, Matilda stated “well that’s
like the Occupy Wall Street thing. That was organized on Facebook and Twitter, wasn’t it?” (Matilda, March 26, 2014). Similarly, Elizabeth also stated “I think most people don’t necessarily engage with it on social media because they wouldn’t follow it up on the ground” (Elizabeth, March 26, 2014).

Elizabeth’s comment reflected the low rate of student interest in political and social issues evinced by much of the data in this study. It also confirmed an awareness of the connection between physical place and social media regarding protest. Both the literature and the data from this study suggest that combination of physical presence and networked organization maximizes the potential of the protest. Similarly, recent literature (Castells, 2012; Monroy-Hernandez, Kiciman, boyd, and Counts, 2012) has highlighted the power for social media to organize and support offline activity as found in the various Occupy movements and uprisings in countries in the Near East.

*Social media’s influence on student offline activity.*

The survey asked students to identify if their interaction through social media had ever prompted them to take part or engage in any offline activity. Again, the data showed that the percentage of students who said they had engaged in this activity to be relatively low (23%). This aligns with other results from the survey that indicate a generally low level of engagement among students, as well as a low level of self-identification as politically active. In this case, the relatively low level of offline activity as a result of interaction on social media could suggest that the
students are not engaged with, or informed about, the political or social issues enough to feel the desire to commit to offline activity. This deduction, echoed in the low levels of group membership, indicated that the majority of students may not feel comfortable in identifying themselves publicly with particular causes.

When asked to describe the offline activity that they had taken part in as a result of their online interaction, the students provided the following answers:

- Presidential candidate rally
- I've been to 2 presidential rallies at OSU; I was notified through Social media
- I have created a discussion group for people to talk about issues that affect them
- Presidential rallies
- Students United for Public Education
- Rally in support of gay marriage
- Presidential rally
- Animal rights and environmental awareness
- Obama rally
- Teachers union rally
- School board protest
- Levies
- Romney campaign
- National and state elections
- Undergraduate presidential campaign
- Parades and door-to-door campaigning
- Protesting against the president of the College of Charlestown, SC
- Events surrounding autism and special education
- Rally for Obama
- Door-to-door campaigning for county positions

These activities raise questions regarding the geographical reach of the issues with which the students are engaging. It is clear that, given the location of the
university, and the state in which it is situated, political visits from mainstream political candidates affected the offline political activity of the students. Attending a rally becomes significantly easier if a rally is held where you live. Therefore convenience is an important criterion of offline activity. Whilst few of these activities can be identified acts of protest, the presence of political campaigning, both national and more local, is emblematic of social media’s capacity for raising awareness and organizing activity in the offline environment.

**Student group membership and “following” habits.**

Other activities that exhibited lower usage among the students were “belong to one or more groups that are involved in political or social issues” (25%) and “following elected officials, candidates for office, or other political figures” (38%). These activities could be described as passive, meaning that they are completed once and no further action is necessary once the individual has initiated membership or commenced following. The low percentage of students who engaged in these activities may demonstrate the lack of desire to commit to, or identify oneself with, a particular political or social issue. It may also indicate that such activity is not particularly popular when compared to following celebrities or being a member of a social media group set up for particular businesses, institutions or celebrities.

During the focus groups, when discussing group membership and following William stated
I think it’s just because a lot of people who follow stuff or join groups is because it’s their friends page or their friend told ‘em to, or there’s some sort of incentive, like “oh, follow this and get a free Subway, or you get this whatever” – there’s not – you can’t really do that with social or political issues. It’s just whether you want to follow, so the I think it falls into the same category as the first thing where only 28% of students consider themselves – it’s the same thing. They just don’t deem it as necessary. (April, 2nd, 2014)

William’s comment suggests that group membership on social media is so passive that it is not something generally connected with political or social issues. He refered to incentives for group membership, which echo the concerns felt by other focus group members about the presence of corporations on social media. Groups set up by businesses that have an economic interest in attracting more customers, potentially undermine the critical capacity of the medium, since, as William stated, there may be no incentive to join a group that represents a particular political or social cause. Consequently, the data might imply that the critical potential of social media outlined by scholars in the literature (Jensen, 2013; Kellner, 2003; Kellner and Kim, 2010) may be subject to domination by corporate interest. However, Charles brings up a different issue with regard to group membership:

It might be because – I feel like if you are political, you’re openly prepared to talk about that and debate, or if your friend doesn’t agree, you’re ready to engage. I feel like if you’re not really, but you do feel a certain way, you don’t really want to click that button and have Facebook tell all your friends, “Hey, this is how this person feels,” because then it opens the door. Other people feel the need to tell you why they think you are wrong. (April 2, 2014).
Charles highlighted the difficulty some individuals may have in publicly aligning themselves with a particular cause by following a well-known social or political figure, or joining a group aligned with a particular political or social cause. Considering the democratizing potential of technology, as outlined by Feenberg’s critical theory of technology (2005, 2011), the notion of democratic potentiality exists only when space is made for the many to exploit the technology against dominant institutions that represent a powerful few. The possibility of a lack of engagement and willingness to publicly identify with a particular cause or support a particular issue is counter to the sharing space created by social media and damages the potential for the technology to support critical global perspectives. The literature for this study highlighted the ways in which social networking permits individuals to engage and share with others of a similar disposition (Bakardjieva, 2013; boyd, 2007; Margetts, 2013); however, it is possible that the low levels of group membership demonstrated by the data indicate a fundamental obstacles, such as public profile and disinterest in civic matters, to the creation and maintenance of groups on social media engaged in political and social issues.

Discussion and posting links on social media.

For the two activities “engage in discussions through posts or messages that relate to political or social issues” (53%) and “posting links to information on political or social issues for others to read” (49%) the number of students who engaged in these activities fell in the middle in terms of participation. Discussion is a
central aspect of constructive civic engagement (Margetts, 2013). Indeed, aspects of critical theory, as it pertains to the social world, rely on the notion of active discussion. Kellner and Kim (2010), saw potential for constructive exchanges on social media platforms. Their research suggested that some individuals engage in critical discourse using the affordances of social media as a medium for self-expression, however, their research also acknowledged the infrequency of such engagement. Likewise, the data from this study regarding the number of students taking part in discussions, confirmed the need for the development of students who are more willing to engage in discussion on political and social issues, especially given the suggestion by researchers that social media can facilitate such discussion (Salter, 2004).

Discussing this topic in the focus group, William remarked that 53% of students participating in discussion on social media was high:

I feel it’s pretty high for online. ‘Cause I feel like most people see somebody post something and you know if you post anything back to them then you have basically just signed a contract saying, “I’m gonna deal with you posting back 50 times”. (April 2, 2014).

This quote reflects the theme of apathy characteristic of the responses from the focus groups. William seemed to indicate a level of commitment required to engage in discussion on social media, reflecting the general sense of apathy when it comes to engaging in with political or social issues online. However, with approximately half of all students engaging in some form of discussion around civic
issues it is possible that social media has helped students engage in constructive interaction.

When asked about the suitability of social media to facilitate discussion

William continued

It can be, but I feel like sometimes it gets convoluted because lots of people are either saying the same thing or they’re misinformed and they’re using incorrect facts. There’s usually one person trying to correct them and say that those facts aren’t true, and you lose the chain. (William, April 2, 2014)

During the same conversation, Charles concurred with William:

Yeah, I’ve rarely seen a Facebook conversation where it’s been a civil discussion … It’s always like, “do you guys realize that we can all see what you’re saying right now?” I think that might make people avoid just posting, engaging in discussion or whatever because it can get out of control sometimes. (Charles, April 2, 2014)

William and Charles’ remarks support the notion that discussions about political and social issues through social media are relatively common, as suggested by the 53% figure reported by the survey data. However, their opinion of the quality of this type of engagement is clear: both William and Charles suggested that engaging in discussion on social media can be “convoluted” and become an exercise in fact checking, or lack civility and “get out of control”. In a different focus group, Mary shared similar sentiments:

Part of it is also that you could start having a discussion with someone about whatever, and then other random people could see it and start commenting, and you’d be like, “I don’t want to hear what you’re talking about all this crap. I don’t care about it, I was talking to this person.” (March 26, 2014)
Mary highlighted the potential for the platform to confuse protracted discussion in a way that some of the literature for this study viewed as a positive characteristic of social media: the ability for social media to support diverse opinion and disparate individuals into a conversation (Bakardjieva, 2013). The public nature of the discussions, mentioned by Mary and Charles, suggested that the presence of spectators and unwelcome contributions from other users complicates the conversation. Furthermore, William suggested that discussion online is not necessarily subject to the same “rules” of offline discussions:

Well I feel like it’s because it’s all the friends of the people who posted it, so if friend A posted on it, friend B disagrees with friend A, they might not know each other offline, and there’s not that – there’s not those social rules that exist in real life. Like if the three of us were talking right now, and he said something I didn't agree with, I wouldn't just yell at him and tell him he’s stupid, I would be like “I disagree”, but on the Internet, since you don’t have to deal with that in person, people feel free to say whatever they want. (April 2, 2014).

According to William, by engaging in discussion online, the space in which the discussion takes place is potentially stripped of certain aspects key to offline discussion, and constructive discussion is potentially sidelined by the behavior of individuals who revel in the unaccountability of the Internet. In terms of critical global perspectives, the space for discussion could permit the sharing of diverse experiences from a wide user-base. However, the difficulties mentioned by the focus group participants suggest that the current structure of the discussions is not ideal to support difficult or controversial conversations.
Amount of use related to political and social issues.

Quantifying how often they engaged in the common activities of social media can help to generate a better understanding of the way in which students engage with political and social issues on social media, The engagement of students in activities for civic ends could provide insight into the suitability of social media for engaging with political and social issues, and highlight the current state of student interest and action in civic matters, as mentioned in the literature (Rojas and Puig-i-Abril, 2009).

This study scored the amount of use for six of the activities identified in the “type of activity” variable:

- Liking/promoting political or social content posted by others
- Reposting/sharing political or social content posted by others
- Posting/sharing political or social content sourced personally
- Posting original thoughts on political or social issues
- Encouraging others to take action on a political or social issue
- Engaging in discussions regarding political or social issues

The survey used a Likert-type response scale of “Never”, “Rarely (25% of the time)”, “Sometimes (50% of the time)”, “Often (75% of the time)”, and “Always (close to 100% of the time) to score the students’ responses. Another study into the amount of activity on Facebook made use of a similar scale, with percentage of time used as a way of quantifying the amount of usage and providing respondents with a universal frame of reference (Junco, 2012). These activities commonly associated with social media usage, represent actions to which an idea of amount of use can be
applied. Some activities, such as membership and group affiliation, are long-term, passive activities which are difficult to quantify.

**Findings indicating low usage.**

The results demonstrated that for all of these activities, the amount of use is positively skewed towards “rarely (25% of the time)”. The usage options were scored on how much student use the activities, with “Never” having a value of 0, up to “Always (close to 100% of the time)” having a value of 4. Using these values to calculate the mean amount of use for each activity, the overall mean for students engaging with civic issues through activities afforded them by social media was derived.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like/Promote</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.039</td>
<td>.490</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Own Thoughts</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.939</td>
<td>1.084</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repost</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.907</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage Others</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.929</td>
<td>1.205</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.943</td>
<td>1.409</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Links</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.929</td>
<td>1.219</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9. Mean amount of usage for each activity.*

The low mean scores (0.71 – 1.23) and positively skewed distributions of all activities (0.490 – 1.409) shown in table 9 demonstrate that students rarely use
social media to engage with civic issues. The descriptive statistics for the amount of usage also reflect and support the results for the popularity of the activity type. The most popular activity of Liking/Promoting is also the least positively skewed activity (0.490). The low amount of activity suggests students do not generally use the functions of social media to express themselves in terms of political and social issues, and this begs the question: for what do they use it? In order for technology to be realized within a critical paradigm, agents need to exploit the affordances for transformational goals, aimed at democratizing the power of technology in its broadest sense (Feenberg, 2005). In this case, the affordances of the technology are well documented in the literature (boyd & Ellison, 2007), however the data gathered regarding amount of use suggests that, overall, students were generally not exploiting the critical affordances of the technology. This reflects the concerns of Kellner and Kim (2010), who, whilst identifying the communicative power inherent in social media, noted in their research that individuals prefer to engage in material related to mainstream entertainment, as opposed to entering into constructive social discourse.

In terms of critical pedagogy, the interaction among individuals and groups founded on the desire for knowledge and learning outside of dominant ideology, relies on engaging with peers as alternative sources of information (Freire, 1970; Kellner, 2003). However, issues that pertain to the aims of critical theory are based in the civic environment, reflecting ideas such as social justice and equality, and the
lack of activity on social media with regard to such issues indicates a potential weakness in the platform for critical engagement.

During the focus groups, William addressed the issue of low usage of activity:

I would say that that’s probably true because I feel like everybody knows that – you post things, you’re like "Hey, this is going on," but you don’t want that to be the only thing you post ‘cause then everybody dreads seeing that you posted something ... beyond that you just post pictures of your family or say this is what’s going on. (April 2, 2014)

William also highlighted the concern that engaging in activities related to political and social issues too often risks damaging existing relationships an individual has on social media platforms. This suggests that for the vast majority, political and social issues are not the main focus of their social media use, and that there is a negative connotation attached to those users who often engage in political and social issues through social media. Such a notion raises questions regarding the priorities of the individuals who use social media and their disposition towards participating in the global community. These are questions that global education can answer; by incorporating critical global perspectives and the values of global citizenship into the curriculum, students would be given the opportunity to prioritize their relationship to the global community and the role they can play in creating a more inclusive and equal environment.

However, George found a second layer of criticism regarding high amounts of activity related to political and social issues
Yeah – if you’re just flooding it, then who cares? You’ve posted 45 political posts. You must not really care that much about any of them in particular – you’re just trying to appear political. (March 26, 2014).

George associated a high amount of activity with less meaning, suggesting that a lower amount of activity naturally indicated more considered action. The difficulty in acknowledging George’s point is that much of the data from the survey and the focus groups indicated that students are not particularly active or considered in their use of social media. For all of the activities the mean frequencies are skewed towards never, shown in the following figure:

![Figure 8. Percentage of students and how often they use the activities.](image)
Regarding the students’ amount of use for each separate activity, Figure 6 demonstrates that all of the activities had means positively skewed towards “Never”. However, despite the low amount of usage, as indicated by the mean score for each individual activity, the data showed that a small number respondents engaged in certain activities very often.

*Activities with high usage.*

The activities for which respondents indicated their participation was “Always (close to 100% of the time)”, were:

- Posting original thoughts on political or social issues (2%)
- Encouraging others to take action on a political or social issue (1%)
- Engaging in discussions regarding political or social issues (1%)

The type of activity variable “posting original thoughts on political or social issues” was also one of the activities with a report of highest usage, with two percent of students indicating that they post an original thought on civic matters close to 100% of the time when using social media. Given the high rate of usage among the sample population (98%), the notion that close to every time an individual uses social media, they are apt to make a post about a political or social issue is extremely encouraging in terms of the values of democratic engagement and critical pedagogy.
Similarly, the other activities for which some students indicated a completion rate of “Always (close to 100 percent of the time)”, are also activities that are more commonly associated with civic engagement within the paradigms of critical pedagogy and global citizenship. Admitting to “Encouraging others to take action on a political or social issue” indicated that an individuals feel strongly enough about an issue that they attempt to raise awareness about the issue and enact a change. This suggests that social media may have the capacity to support a key aspect of critical pedagogy and fulfill a central tenet of the critical theory of technology, whereby the very nature of the technology itself is exploited for democratic means (Kellner, 2003). However, since there were engaged students, it also suggests that, whilst at present the data show low participation and amount of activity, the opportunity for various communities to forward their own causes and reach out to communities still exists within the boundary of mainstream discourse (Brey, 2006; Castells, 2012).

In addition to encouraging others, which may take the form of a single, unanswered persuasive post, one percent of students indicated that they “always (close to 100% of the time)” engaged in discussion related to political and social issues. This would suggest that for this small proportion of students, discussion of political and social issues made up a significant part of their social media usage. Since discussion is central to any constructive exchange of ideas, given the complex nature of society, engaging with diverse communities requires a considered level of discussion. By completing these activities, these students also indicated a high level of political engagement, whereby they have taken advantage of the opportunities
afforded them by social media. Though some individuals indicated that they participated in these activities in relation to civic matters on a regular basis, the amount of use was still generally low, indicating that these individuals were well in the minority (1-2%).

According to Richard:

Yeah. I think a lot of people want to have those conversations in person. I think a lot of people may feel a little awkward not having the face-to-face about something serious. You don’t want to just go through the web and do it, over the computer. You want to have that conversation because then you can really get your thoughts out and be able to have a real discussion. I think people just don’t think social media is a lot of times the right platform to do it. (March 26, 2014).

This quote summarizes some of the main limitations of social media. The focus group participants conveyed a sense that discussion and interaction on political and social issues through social media can at times be clumsy and convoluted. Richard indicated that engaging in difficult conversations is something that people prefer to do in person. This does not preclude the medium as a vehicle for raising awareness or communicating ideas, but it implied that the idea of a shared space for critical conversations and discussion, as envisioned by scholars in the literature (Bakardjieva, 2013; Jensen, 2013) is perhaps not viable.

**Geographic reach of student social media use.**

The survey collected data on the geographic reach of students’ activities. If students engaged in any activity related to political or social issues, they were asked to identify if the issues were related to local, state, national, and/or global
communities. Despite many issues having overlapping significance, for example, gay marriage is an issue that resonates in both local and global contexts; the main point of this particular variable was to see if students made that connection.

For each activity present on the survey, those students who indicated that they did engage with political and social issues using a particular activity had the opportunity to identify the community or communities to which the activities generally pertained. Table 9 presents a summary of all activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership.</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following elected officials or public figures.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking, Promoting, Sharing.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reposting links that others have posted.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting links.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting own thoughts.</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging others to take action.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in discussion.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protesting.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10. Percentages of students completing activities in relation to different geographic communities.*
As shown in table 10, students engaged in political and social issues related to the national community most frequently using the activities afforded them by social media. The mean percentage of students that selected “National” as the community to which the civic issues pertained, was nearly thirty percent higher (89%) than the next most common communities of “Global” (60%) and “State” (60%).

The architecture of the technological networks supporting the Internet and social media stretches over the world, cutting distances between individuals and permitting instantaneous connection with geographically scattered people and locations (Harth, 2010). However, the dominant presence of issues related to the national community among the students’ responses is unsurprising given some of the literature (Nussbaum, 1994). Given the literature on globalization and the redistribution of people across national borders (Banks, 2003), the notion of national boundaries is becoming more complex; migration has led to the existence of global communities within national boundaries, complicating issues of identity and the notion of citizenship (EL-Haj, 2007). However, the data suggested that national discourse still dominates the political and social world with which students make their connections. When discussing this point in the focus groups, William stated:

Yeah. That seems about right because obviously national; you’re usually friends with people form your country, so those are the people you probably share the same interests with, and those are where most issues arise that everyone’s gonna care about. (April 2, 2014)
Though less explicit, Elizabeth similarly suggested “everybody will hear about things going on at the national level no matter where you’re from. (March 26, 2014).

Henry suggested that television broadcasts still play a significant role in steering national discourse regarding political and social issues:

‘Cause mainly what you see on newscasts, like CNN, that’s a national television station, so they’ll give the national issues which are the big issues of the nation (Henry, April 2, 2014).

When asked if he thought that television still played a role in disseminating key issues, he replied

TV does, yeah. Along with social media. I think that national issues just because it’s – Facebook allows you to be friends with more than just one town, so if you’re posting something about your local town, no one is going to care. (April 2, 2014)

Henry clearly recognized the way in which social media disregards the limitations of physical geography and brings communities and individuals together over great distances. However, Henry also indicated that issues pertaining to the local community are somewhat sidelined by the more prominent national discourse.

Osler and Starkey (2003) cautioned educators on the dangers of promoting national identity among students, since, in times of global interconnectedness and social complexity, nationalistic ideologies can threaten members of those communities who do not fit the mainstream discourse.

Given the plurality of communities in national boundaries, and the communicative possibilities of the Internet (Dutton, 2013), the entry of political and social issues pertaining to global communities into conversation and interaction
would be expected. When asked about the presence of global issues on social media, Richard responded

    Yeah. I see a lot about the whole Ukraine situation these days. Every once in a while, there’s some really big event, but on the regular day to day stuff, it’s more just the national. (April 2, 2014)

The data would suggest that mainstream conversations are still made up of political and social issues that pertain to the national community. In terms of critical global perspectives, the data indicate that communities that fall outside of national consciousness are potentially subject to marginalization in terms of civic engagement on social media. The educational models of global citizenship and global education seek to connect individuals to knowledge representative of the global society (Merryfield, 2001; Pike, 2008). Global education seeks to develop a more outward looking and inclusive disposition in the attitudes of individuals, recognizing that the primacy of nation is in decline as a result of transnational corporations and institutions, as well as the social diversity of communities (Banks, 2008). Similarly, global citizenship encourages the global perspective, while encouraging a level of civic responsibility. The data suggested that students recognize the primacy of national discourse, leaving work for global education as it seeks to imbue individuals with a more global outlook, and global citizenship as it seeks to encourage individuals to engage with societal issues as responsible and active citizens.

Despite the dominance of national political and social issues (89%), the data showed that students do connect to matters pertaining to the global community
(60%) as much as for state (60%), and more than local (47%). This might indicate the potential for social media to benefit from the global nature of the information networks that support the Internet. As students connect to social media, they are also connecting to a global web of information movement that is not subject to national boundaries (Castells, 2001). The task for global educators and proponents of global citizenship, is to determine if connection to global networks can support the kinds of meaningful and critical conversations necessary to generate outward-looking and inclusive perspectives. In the discussion groups, William and Charles both expressed opinions on this point:

Because – I mean, I have a few friends who are really into the stuff with Russia and everything, and the social media really helps them connect to that stuff, but the rest of my friends don’t really care. If you do want to talk about that, you can find other people who have posted similar thing and have the conversations with them – and they could be from anywhere. (William, April 2, 2014).

Yeah, I would say it facilitates – it makes it easier to figure the global stuff out. With national and global issues, they are probably the ones that are the biggest headline, breaking news, so it doesn’t surprise me that they would be the most popular. (Charles, April 2, 2014).

The literature confirmed that scholars and philosophers have long considered the relationship individuals have with the rest of the world (Nussbaum, 1994). Rather than adhering to the concentric circles of expanding allegiance outlined by traditional cosmopolitanism, the data suggested that individuals’ interaction with different communities is far more complex, echoing the sentiments of Parker and Mitchell (2008) who stated that these relationships are in flux and
constantly shift depending on the structural forces of the global economic climate and the influence of different social actors. The data showed students connect more frequently with global issues than local issues.

In terms of the different activities, the national community was selected by 97% of the students who engaged in the activity of group membership. This suggests that students were more inclined to identify with mainstream discourse that was recognizable in the context of national issues, such as the major political parties, large charities, and national institutions, as opposed to joining alternative or marginalized civic groups. Following elected officials or public figures was the activity that reported the lowest percentage of students selecting the global dimension (32%). Given the prominence of national discourse, it is understandable that elected officials from other nations or multinational organizations are perhaps not readily recognized by students. However, this result highlights once again the role of global education in raising the awareness of students beyond the national discourse and generating a curiosity that leads them to actively seek information on political and social issues that may be bypassed by mainstream national conversation. Consequently, the incorporation of global citizenship would provide a model for which educators could generate the idea of social and political activity in students as part of the responsibilities of citizenship. The challenge becomes undoing the apparent hegemony of national discourse, represented by the high percentages reported for the national community in the survey.
Given the high percentage of students that use social media (98%), the percentage of students engaging on some level with global issues through social media (60%) could be interpreted as indicative of globalization and the potential for experiencing the social complexity of the world. It would also provide a firm foundation for the development of a curriculum that incorporates critical global perspectives, whereby the students use the global reach of social media to investigate the various experiences of communities otherwise not discussed in curricula.

**Post Hoc Analyses**

According to Klockars and Hancock (2000), a post hoc analysis is undertaken after the primary analysis of the data in order to ascertain any patterns not specified in the study research questions. Specific survey items measured certain categorical variables (for example, gender, political activity, and activities used) and permitted the examination of possible trends and associations between these items using contingency tables and Chi-squared ($\chi^2$) analyses. For the purpose of this study, Pearson’s $\chi^2$ analysis provides the opportunity to measure how likely any differences between the findings for the two sets being analyzed arose by chance. This particular analysis is particularly suitable as it is relatively free of assumptions and robust, meaning it is not subject to parametric conditions and can withstand the effects of outliers. The $\chi^2$ analysis relies on ratios and is consequently free from bias in the sample population.
For the purposes of this study the unequal distribution of gender (males n = 32; females, n=82) among the participants provided an opportunity to test for patterns. Using responses collected for the item on self-reported political activity (“Do you consider yourself politically active?”), the contingency table (table 11) shows the frequencies of men and women who reported if they were politically active.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politically Active</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Politically Active</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Politically Active</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Politically Active</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. Contingency table reporting odds ratios for politically active and gender
Using the data in the table 11 it was possible to calculate the odds ratio for males and females reporting as politically active. The odds ratio is a measure of effect size and describes the strength of association between gender and identifying as politically active. In this instance the odds of a male participant identifying as politically active was twice as high as for women. Calculations reveal that for this sample the odds of a male participant identifying as politically active was 0.6, compared to the odds of a female participant identifying as politically active at 0.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>2.387a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 12. Chi-Square test for “Do you consider yourself politically active?”

However, the result of the $\chi^2$ analyses suggests that there is no statistically significant association between gender and identifying as politically active: $\chi^2 (1) = 2.387, p > .05$. Consequently, the analysis showed that the odds ratio between gender and identifying as politically active, calculated in this study, would only occur by chance in the wider population. This revealed that gender does not have a statistically significant impact on whether an individual identifies as politically active.

In order to further develop the analysis of other potential trends based on gender, the researcher performed additional chi-squared tests for associations between gender and each of the social media activities identified in this study. Table
12 summarizes the results of these tests by providing the chi-squared test statistic, significance levels and odds ratios for each activity. Contingency tables for each activity can be found in the appendices to this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.836</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Figures</td>
<td>1.685</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protesting</td>
<td>3.045</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline Activity</td>
<td>1.746</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like/Promote</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reposting</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.842</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting Links</td>
<td>0.787</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting Thoughts</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging Others</td>
<td>0.514</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 13. Chi-Squared results, odds ratios, and sig. levels for all activities.*

The results of the tests for association between use of each of the social media activities and gender all resulted in significance levels greater than .05, indicating that there are no statistically significant associations between gender and use of a particular activity. This finding indicated that if any of the odds ratios
between men and women engaging in the activities identified in this study were found in the wider population, it would be more due to chance that any association.

Consequently, in terms of the guiding question for this study (how do students engage with political and social issues on social media?), this post hoc analysis indicated that gender does not have a significant effect on the way in which they engage with political and social issues on social media.

**Additional Qualitative Findings**

The data gathered in the focus groups offered further details to the data gathered through the survey. Additional to providing more detail, the analysis of the qualitative data raised several broad themes.

**Prominence of Facebook.**

The transcripts from the focus groups made it clear that the students frequently conflated the notion of social media with Facebook. When discussing their use of social media, students frequently referred to particular aspects of Facebook as examples of their use, or referred to Facebook generally when discussing social media. Despite the study and its line of questioning making every attempt not to promote a particular social media provider, questions emerged regarding the extent to which this is possible given that the researcher is a Facebook user and may have injected bias into the questioning, and the prominence of Facebook in mainstream consciousness.
Consequently, the dominance of one particular medium highlighted the way in which critical theory of technology is necessary when considering the role of technology in shaping the social world. Critical theory of technology evaluates the development of technology and the democratic affordances it offers people. For the purposes of evaluating social media, which scholars suggested can support critical engagement (Bakardjieva, 2013; Jensen, 2013; Margetts, 2013), the presence of corporate interest and the dominance of a particular corporation threatens the democratic potential of the technology. Feenberg (2010) highlights the way in which social media provide spaces of interaction that break broadcasting’s monopoly on opinion formation. If the spaces of interaction are threatened by corporate interest and expression is tailored through a particular framework, then social media’s capacity to sustain free and open discussion is perhaps untenable.

Public image.

Throughout the focus group discussions, students frequently made reference to the public nature of social media. Phrases such as “you don’t know who will see that”, “people don’t want to read that”, and “other people read that stuff” all demonstrate that students were aware of social media’s capacity to reach an audience. Upon coding the responses relating to this theme, a general tone of negativity emerged. When referring to the posting of links or comments related to political or social issues, the focus group participants invariably used the public nature of social media as a reason not to engage. Comments such as “people get
tired of it” indicated that expression of views on political or social issues is not valued or considered constructive by users, rather, it was seen by some as a social media faux pas. However, one student, George, suggested that his reluctance to engage with political and social issues on social media was a result of his intentions to become a teacher. George made it clear that, his hopes for employment and the divisive nature of most issues the public nature of social media justified his choice not to engage with political or social issues.

According to the literature (Bakardjieva, 2013, boyd, 2005; Feenberg, 2011; Jensen, 2013), the public nature of social media creates a discursive space for engaging with wider communities. Critical pedagogy (Kellner, 2003; Kellner & Kim, 2010), suggests that this public space can be used as a way of critically examining social relationships and evaluating inequality and issues of social justice. Such a space also reflects key aspects of critical global perspectives, through which alternative histories and ways of thinking are incorporated in mainstream discussion, especially in educational forums (Keinrich, 2010; Subedi, 2010). Consequently, the general apprehension regarding the public expression of political or social opinions does not fulfill the potential of the public space created by social media.

Priorities.

Coding the transcripts for the focus groups revealed that when engaging in political and social issues, the students displayed a general sense of apathy. Codes
related to *trending*, where particular stories or ideas become increasingly popular, and incentivized engagement, suggested that the opportunity to express or engage with political or social issues was not prioritized among students. In line with the theme of public image, the identification of students’ prioritization of different activities on social media, demonstrated that maintenance of public image itself was a priority. Such a focus reflects the understanding that most people engage on social network sites such as Facebook to maintain existing relationships (Miller, Parsons, and Lifer, 2009). However, ss Henry, one of the focus group participants, mentioned, education should perform a fundamental role in preparing students to take part in the wider social world, providing them with the skills to navigate social complexity, and the desire to inform themselves of critical issues affecting their world. Global citizenship education provides a framework for developing students’ perspectives and sense of responsibility (Pike, 2008; Osler and Starkey, 2003; PriorMcCarty; 2011). Emphasizing global citizenship, therefore, could provide students with a way to re-align their priorities towards the political and social sphere of life, whereby they are inclined to take an interest in public life and act on that interest in a critical and constructive fashion.

**Conclusion**

This study used a mixed methods design to investigate the way in which students engage with political and social issues through social media. The findings inform an understanding of the potential for social media to act as a platform for
global education and global citizenship, and question whether students are best prepared to exploit social media for learning in a socially complex environment. The findings suggest that whilst social media may not always support the kinds of interaction necessary for demonstrating key values of global education and global citizenship, there remains a limited potential for constructive engagement. However, the findings also indicated that students need to develop an understanding of the value of civic engagement and the skills to put it into practice, if the potential of social media is to be exploited at all. The next chapter revisits these findings and their implications, provides concluding thoughts on the success of the study, and suggests directions for future study.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

My sense of the holy, insofar as I have one, is bound up with the hope that someday, any millennium now, my remote descendants will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law. In such a society, communication would be domination-free, class and caste would be unknown, hierarchy would be a matter of temporary pragmatic convenience, and power would be entirely at the disposal of the free agreement of a literate and well-educated electorate. (Rorty, 2005)

Introduction

The American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty devoted the latter stages of his career attempting to define the ways in which philosophy as a discipline could be brought out of the esoteric world of abstract academia, and into the daily considerations of social, cultural, and political interaction (Roth, 2011). Consequently, Rorty (2007) explored philosophy as cultural politics. The quote that opens this chapter emphasizes Rorty’s aim of moving away from deliberation over traditional philosophical topics of ontology and epistemology, and towards the possibilities for human interaction.

Rorty’s “sense of the holy” reflects, to a large extent the guiding themes of this study. Firstly, the world is socially complex and individuals should be imbued with skills of inclusiveness and outward-looking perspectives in order to enjoy and
navigate the complexity. Secondly, that technology could provide the means with which individuals freely communicate and share their experiences in an equal and constructive environment. And finally, education can be central in developing individuals who have the socio-historical knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary to make decisions in the best interests of diverse communities.

This study focused on the way in which students engage with political and social issues through social media. The results inform perspectives on the potential use of social media as a platform for social and political engagement, its viability as an opportunity for students to employ the skills and dispositions central to global education and global citizenship, and the level to which students have already attained those skills and dispositions. The study used a mixed methodology approach, combining an Internet survey with follow-up focus groups that elaborated and explained the findings of the survey. In order to explore the central aim of the study, the survey contained items exploring key background information related to the topic area, and items addressing three variables: the type of activity, the amount of activity use, and the geographic reach of the activity.

This final chapter provides a summary of the research and concluding remarks on the study. The chapter presents a brief summary of the findings and discussion of the broader themes followed by a discussion deriving implications for education in line with the aims of the study. Finally, a conclusion highlights some of the limitations and successes of the study, and suggests potential future research in the topic area.
Summary of findings

Findings related to context data.

A number of the survey items asked students for information regarding their gender, device usage, sites used, and sources of information, as well as details regarding their current political activity. These items provided context for their social media usage and helped provide context for discussion of the variables and the topic as a whole. The survey found that 99% of all students used social media, and that the vast majority preferred using mobile platforms for access, with 95% using laptops and 89% using smartphones. Such findings reflect those in research by the PEW Internet and American Life Project (2013). Data from the focus group highlighted the convenience of mobile devices, and the ubiquitous nature of the connection. In terms of particular social media use, the survey indicated that 87% of the students used Facebook, nearly 40% more than the next most popular forum, Twitter, at 49%. The dominance of Facebook as a social media provider was well documented by the Commonsense Media Project (2012) and The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2013), as well as by scholars such as boyd (2009). Emphasizing the dominance of Facebook as a social media medium, the focus group data showed that participants frequently made reference to Facebook and/or Facebook-related activity for examples, without prompting.

Only 27% of students considered themselves politically active, and discussion of this finding in the focus groups suggested that family background and
education may play strong roles in creating politically active individuals. The data from the focus groups also confirmed the general lack of political engagement, highlighting other priorities and concern over family and peer relationships as other considerations for the low level of activity. The low level of students identifying as politically active was reflected by research conducted by Longo, Drury, and Battistoni (2006), and Quintelier and Vissers (2008), who found the need to introduce educational interventions to enable students to connect with political issues. Similarly, Galston (2001) and Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins (2002) found that political apathy was not uncommon among youth, and cited the need to implement educational measures to promote interest in the public sphere among students. The survey revealed that the largest percentage (39%) of students cited social media as their first resource for information on political and social issues, with 36% citing online news sources. Focus group data suggested that the prevalence of social media provided motivation for many companies to create profiles in order to connect with a larger audience. The use of social media as a primary source of information on political and social issues reflects the “media-fostered consumerism” outlined by Langman (2005), whereby homogenization of culture has led to the transformation of news into entertainment, increasing profit motive among those in control of information dissemination.
Study variables: type, amount, and reach of activity.

In order to develop answers to the research question, how do students engage with political and social issues through social media? The study identified several variables to complement the background information. These variables (the type of activity, the amount of activity, and the geographic reach of activity) combined with the information gathered regarding the general characteristics of technology use and political activity, provided adequate detail to address the research question.

Type of activity.

The survey sought to identify the popularity of the different activities commonly offered by social media sites and their use in relation to political and social issues. Using research from the PEW Internet and American Life study (2012), this study presented participants with a number of different activities. The survey data showed that the more popular activities tended to be the simpler activities, for example, the single click actions such as “liking” and “promoting” garnered a 73% response rate. The data from the focus group suggested that the popularity of these activities was due to their simplicity, particularly the lack of consideration required to engage. Participants identified “posting own thoughts” concerning political and social issues as the second most popular activity. Data from the focus groups suggested that this activity does not necessarily require a lot of consideration, and the participants of the focus groups generally believed that few of the posts were
constructed in a thoughtful manner. Rather focus group participants indicated that the posts they saw tended to be reactionary or impulse posts.

The fewest students reported engaging in protesting, with only 16% of students stating that they engaged in some form of political or social protest using social media. In explanation, the focus group participants admitted discomfort in publicly aligning themselves with single issues, as well as the perceived notion of aggression commonly associated with the activity of protesting. However, some focus group participants viewed social media as a poor platform for meaningful protest and considered that to be a reason for the low participation rate.

Passive activities such as group membership and following prominent political or social figures also received low participation rates. Data from the focus groups indicated that social media groups, aligned with certain social or political issues, were perhaps drowned by a sea of commercial groups run by companies and corporations. Students also identified their preference to not publicly align themselves with any particular political or social issue as another factor in the low popularity rating for these activities.

The survey found that 53% of students engaged in discussion over political or social issues on social media; however, focus group participants questioned the quality of discussion. Highlighting the often convoluted and frustrating nature of online discussion, students also suggested that the public nature of online discussion frequently exposed participants to “trolling” and offensive behavior by anonymous individuals.
**Amount of activity.**

The study investigated how often students engaged in social media activities in connection to political and social issues. The survey found that, overall, the amount that students performed any activity in relation to political or social issues was low. Using descriptive statistics, the mean usage score for all activities confirmed of usage being skewed towards the “never”. Data from the focus groups suggested that many of the participants were rarely active in terms of political and social issues as they regarded an abundance of this kind of activity negatively. Most considered that too much activity indicated an unconsidered approach to political and social issues, with good intentions lost in the barrage of activity. This conception suggested that for the students, amount of use may not be the best indicator of quality interaction. However, some participants held that the low amount of usage resulted from concerns over public image and peer pressure, indicating that they did not want to be associated with frequent activity in relation to political and social issues in a public space.

**Geographic reach of activity.**

The survey sought to identify the geographic reach of the political and social issues with which the students engaged. For each activity students selected from local, state, national, and global, as the communities with which the civic issues pertained. The survey found that the national community dominated the political and social issues with which the students engaged. For all activities, 89% of students
selected the national community, with the global and state communities both selected 60% of the time. Local was the least popular selection at 47%. Data from the focus groups supported these findings, and suggested that national issues dominated much of political and social discourse. Some participants indicated that television remains a significant influence on public discourse, highlighting the role of the media in generating and maintaining interest in particular issues.

Despite the dominance of national issues, the survey data indicated that global issues were still well represented in student activity on social media. Data from the focus groups supported this finding and suggested that the connective capacity of social media as a global communication network, made it easier for students to connect with international communities and individuals.

**Conclusion.**

How do students engage with political and social issues through social media? The data from this study suggested that whilst practically all students used social media, they are not particularly active in terms of engaging with political and social issues. This lack of activity was reflected in the literature (Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012; Longo, Drury, & Battistonoi, 2006). Background data collected showed the importance of a mobile connection, and that Facebook dominates student use and consequently frames much of their political and social interaction through its activities. The study indicated that students tended to use the simpler, less constructive activities in reactionary or impulsive ways. Activities perhaps
more suited to critical engagement with political and social issues were hindered in part by limitations of the technology, and in part by confusion, but also occasionally by disrespectful or offensive interaction. Data from the survey showed that, the amount of activity was relatively low, with most students indicating that they never or rarely engage in activities related to political or social issues. The study also showed that the majority of the students’ political and social engagement pertained to the national community, but also, that global issues were more frequently represented and engaged with than local issues.

**Discussion of Findings**

The study demonstrated that close to 100% of students use social media. This aligns with much of the research on youth and social media (Common Sense Media, 2012; Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2009; PEW, 2013). The embeddedness of social media among youth justifies studying its effects, capacities, and possibilities. Given the concerns of critical theory of technology, highlighted by Feenberg (2005) as inherent coded bias that permits domination of the many by the few, investigations into the role of social media are justified by the need to protect youth from exposure to threats of ideology and oppression. Castells (1996, 2001) highlighted similar concerns in relation to the potential for technology to support the dominance of institutions over the lives of people. These concerns find greater credence given the apparent dominance of Facebook as the social media provider of choice. However, Castells (2001) also pointed to exclusion from global information
networks as sentence to marginality. Through social media students access a global communications network that supports the unbounded flow of information, but, simultaneously, their presence on social media exposes them to intentions and ideologies of controlling corporations and governments (Castells, 2001).

Feenberg (2005), and Kellner (2003, 2010), both viewed the Internet, and particularly social media, as providing a space through which the free exchange of ideas can flow between individuals. Such a space, according to Kellner and Kim (2010) could encourage civic participation and provide an opportunity for a re-configuration of civic interaction, whereby individuals have the opportunity to access and engage with diverse and conflicting opinion outside of mainstream discourse. Dutton’s (2009) theory of the Fifth Estate emphasized this point, whereby the Internet provides the opportunity for “networked individuals” to circumvent authoritative institutions for pertinent information. The Fifth Estate allows people to avoid mainstream discourse and seek out information that does not fall under governmental or institutional sanctions. Such a notion is reminiscent of Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy, technologically reimagined by Keller (2003), and conceiving of the Internet and social media as enabling individuals to learn by interacting with each other.

This study demonstrated how, students may not be exploiting the critical potential of social media as imagined by scholars such as Kellner and Kim (2010), Jensen (2013), Bakardjieva (2013), and Margetts (2013). Similarly, the pervasiveness of social media among the student population, with the preference for
mobility and the ubiquity of connection, along with the apparent dominance of Facebook, demonstrated the ever-present risk of domination by those that benefit from its use. Castells (2004) suggested that this threat of domination and marginality has led to the formation of social groups under pressure to express themselves in the face of technologically established and maintained norms. The Occupy movement, a protest movement in opposition to oppressive corporate practices, and the various uprisings in North Africa and the Near East provide manifest examples of groups exploiting the connective capacity of social media for such critical means.

In a world of increasing social complexity and interconnectedness (Banks, 2003; Pike, 2008), competing and contradictory ideologies often threaten national and global concerns. Osler and Starkey (2003), warned against the threat of a prominent national discourse used to engender patriotic sentiment, subsequently risking global cultural and ideological isolation. This study showed that national discourse takes precedence over the diversity of global concerns and the idiosyncrasies of local issues. The students referenced the presence of national media, particularly on television, corporatized to serve institutional and commercial interests, as a contributing factor to the prominence of national issues filling mainstream consciousness.

As stated in the literature for this study (Gaudelli, 2003; Hanvey, 1976; Harth, 2010; Merryfield, 2000, 2001; Mitchell & Parker 2008; Pike, 2008) global education and global citizenship provided frameworks of engagement that
emphasize a more outward looking and inclusive perspective towards global engagement. The prominence of national issues among students engaging on social media highlighted the fact that youth are yet to exploit the global reach of social media. The data showed that, the majority of interaction over political and social issues on social media occurs within national boundaries, evincing the need for the development of global perspectives in students.

Mitchell and Parker (2008) suggested that extending the active nature of citizenship to a global perspective provides students with a model for engaging with the complexity of global issues, generating a sense of responsibility and ownership for human actions that impact the global community rather than the aims of an individual nation. This notion complicates the traditional idea of cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum, 1994), where the shifting scale of social relationships, afforded by social media, mirrors the movement of information on global networks (Mitchel & Parker, 2008). Students now have the capacity to develop ties with communities based on specific phenomena, such as video games or books, rather than geographically defined commonalities. Reimers (2013) highlighted this conception of human interaction and outlined the notion of cosmopolitanism as emphasizing shared values and commonalities over traditional, socially constructed groupings such as race, nationality, class, and gender. Social media permits the development of global commonalities among communities and individuals, realized through affiliations based on shared interests and experiences. The study suggested that students have the capacity to realize these global communities since 60% of them indicated that
the political and social issues with which they engaged extended to the global community. The question for global citizenship and global education becomes how best to take advantage of student realization of global commonalities.

**Implications**

The implications for this study are wide ranging. As stated in chapter one, the results of this study inform different yet connected areas. Understanding the way in which students make use of social media has implications for the potential incorporation of the technology into education. The results of the study inform perspectives on the suitability of social media as a medium to support global educational aims of critical global perspectives and global citizenship. Similarly, student use of social media also has implications for the way in which the social studies curriculum prepares students for engaging with political and social issues, and the potential benefits of critical global perspectives and global citizenship. Finally, the study has implications for understanding the risks of engaging in online environments and the need for students to develop skills with which to navigate social media without threat exploitation, oppression, or marginalization.

**Social media and global education.**

Social media is pervasive. Its pervasiveness engenders risk and reward for those who are prepared to accept the limitations and explore the possibilities. The theoretical framework for this study, couched in various corners of critical theory,
has led to an interpretation of the findings that explored both the risks and possibilities of social media.

Global education seeks to promote a pluralist and global perspective among students (Ukpokodu, 2010) and social media relies on communications networks that span the globe, linking previously unconnected places and people. For the purposes of global education, the possibility of broadening students’ experiences by incorporating globally relevant and diverse information is exciting. Given the pervasiveness of social media evinced in this study and others (Raake & Bonds-Raake, 2008; Stromer-Galley & Witchowski, 2013), there is justification in attempting to capitalize on the global nature of the phenomenon. The capacity to access information instantly, without having to rely on news agencies for up-to-date stories, and to communicate with individuals from different cultures makes social media an ideal tool for global education and the development of global citizenship. Students are able to share stories, protest issues they care about, raise awareness over concerns, and debate these issues in an open, public forum. Such a concept is reminiscent of the public sphere initially conceived of by Habermas (1989) as a space for informed individuals to gather and discuss pertinent social issues with the purpose of developing a progressive social discourse. With social media, students have the opportunity to take part in a global public sphere, where the technology allows them to be informed active participants in an open and public space. Such a space could promote constructive discourse with diverse communities. By engaging in a constructive space students will also be able to develop their competency for
dealing with civic matters as the necessary skills are “best acquired through practicing civic engagement” (Longo, Drury, & Battistoni, 2006).

Extending critical social and political concern beyond local and national boundaries conforms to the idea of global citizenship put forward by scholars in the literature for this study (Jakubowicz & Union, 2009; Noddings, 2005).

However, as Kellner and Kim (2010) found in their study into social media and its pedagogical opportunities, the possibilities are not yet fully realized since individuals engaging in critical and constructive engagement on social media are in the minority. Similarly, this research study showed that social media does not currently fulfill the potential for supporting a global public sphere that many scholars have suggested (Bakardjieva, 2013; boyd, 2005, 2009; Castells, 2012). Survey data for this study indicated an emphasis on the less constructive activities and a low amount of usage in relation to political and social issues. Furthermore, focus group data show that discussion of political and social issues on social media often ends in offensive, confusing, or convoluted exchanges. However, this is not to say that scholars have come to the wrong conclusion. This study shows that some students do engage with the critical aspects of the technology; there are those students who engage in discussion, who protest, who are moved to offline activity as a result of their social media use, and who engage with political and social issues that pertain to global communities. Whilst this is encouraging, these students were in the minority.
Caroll (2005) and boyd (2007) show that youth are more likely to adapt to and incorporate new technologies than adults, owing to their naturally heuristic approach to technology use. Consequently, educators face a distinct challenge in attempting to adjust their pedagogy to suit current technological developments. According to Day and Lloyd (2007), the affordance of online technologies in learning environments is “maximized when the focus is moved away from the inherent properties of the technologies to the opportunities for learning provided by the total context in which the technologies are embedded” (p.1). Consequently, it is important for educators to shift focus primarily towards the perspectives and dispositions encouraged by the model of global education. Such a focus could encourage students to apply a globally minded heuristic approach to their social media use.

It is up to educators to encourage students to exploit the possibilities of social media for the aims of global education and global citizenship. Currently, students do not use social media to suit the perspectives of global education and the engagement of global citizenship. Whilst there is evidence that social media, though limited, can sustain engagement, whether it is truly capable of supporting the kinds of interaction and engagement required of global citizenship is unclear. Until students begin to incorporate tenets of global education into their use of social media, the possibilities are unknown. Currently, their use of the technology in this way is flawed. Teachers must first inculcate students with the curiosity, respect, critical disposition, and foundation of knowledge necessary for them to best exploit
social media for global citizenship. Until then, social media represents merely a starting point for engaging with the global community, as opposed to acting as the primary vehicle for extended discussion and interaction.

**Social studies.**

The literature discussed the role of social studies in preparing students to participate in society (Merryfield, 2001; Osler & Starkey, 2003). As this study found, in line with literature on the topic (boyd, 2007), social media has become a central part of the students’ participation in society. However, as discussed previously, the relationship between students and social media does not currently demonstrate the kind of engagement central to global education and global citizenship. Consequently, the social studies curriculum represents an opportunity for teachers to create the foundation of knowledge, and global dispositions, necessary for students to participate as global citizens through social media. This study showed that students’ priorities and concerns may not be aligned with the inclusive and outward-looking priorities of a global citizen. Public image, and lack of perspective and discussion skills, may leave students ill-equipped to deal with complex social and political issues through social media.

The social studies curriculum is central to developing in students a sense of curiosity about the state of the world and the historical context of civic engagement and the social complexity in which they live (Merryfield, 2001; Ukpokodu, 2010). Social studies helps students make more sense of the world around them and
provides the foundation of knowledge with which they can engage with social complexity (Subedi, 2010). Social media could support the aims of social studies as it allows students to connect with diverse communities and individuals from disparate global locations (Kellner & Kim, 2010). As discussed earlier, such a web of communication allows individuals to develop relationships unrestricted by physical geography; rather, it permits the recognition of shared interests and concerns. Consequently, a social studies curriculum that emphasizes diverse human experiences and shared concerns becomes all the more relevant to the needs of students who are permanently connected to global social networks. Moreover, the representation of marginalized and controversial knowledge is crucial in providing students an appreciation and understanding of those communities and individuals who are not included in mainstream social studies discourse (Subedi, 2010, 2013), but now have a voice through social media.

Adopting a critical global perspective to social studies provides students with an understanding of the complexity of human interaction and the power structures within which they currently live their lives. By understanding political and social history through a critical lens, students can develop dispositions that prepare them for difficult conversations (Kellner, 2003). Similarly, critical pedagogy emphasizes the value in encouraging students to develop a pragmatic approach to learning about social complexity (Kellner, 2000, 2003) The pragmatic approach promotes inquiry and problem solving over the search for Truth (Rorty, 2007). For students engaging with social complexity through social media, inquiry coupled with critical
global perspectives could enable them to learn and appreciate the diverse experiences of the global community. Emphasizing inquiry could also promote the bravery to engage in controversial or difficult discussions (Kellner, 2003).

By incorporating critical global perspectives into the social studies education, students may begin to prioritize social and political issues as a result of a more relevant understanding of their relationship to the rest of the world. Consequently, their approach to social media may begin to reflect the ideals of critical and engaged individuals who have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in diverse and complex global interaction.

Using social media as a source for alternative information and the experiences of others, represents the opportunity for educators to frame instruction within a critical pedagogy that takes advantage of global diversity to inform students' understanding and perspectives on themes of social justice, equity, and oppression. Such an approach to instruction aims at promoting engagement among students, and could provide them with the skills necessary to manage interaction over political and social issues on social media. By emphasizing a critical approach to social studies education, valuing complexity, diversity, and the bravery to ask difficult questions, students will be better equipped to maximize the opportunities afforded them by social media.
Dangers of the networks.

However, this study has shown that the critical approach must also be promoted when dealing with social media as an entity and technological system in its own right. The prevalence of social media among the students who participated in this study, along with their predilection for Facebook over other sites, demonstrated the capacity for technological domination. As the literature for this study indicated, technology has inherent biases that favor those who control and create it (Feenberg, 2005). Since society is increasingly reliant on the networks of communications technology, the need to be connected to these networks is also more important (Castells, 2001, 2012). However, these networks are also subject to bias and domination (Castells, 1996, 2001, 2012; Feenberg, 2005, 2010; Kellner, 2000, 2003). The literature for this study identified information as the prime commodity of a globalized society, and control of information networks is in the domineering interests of institutions and corporations (Bell, 1973; Castells, 1996; Dutton, 2013).

The students who participated in this study reported that business interests and advertising were commonplace on social media, begging the question of who ultimately benefits from social media usage. Consequently, despite the potential benefits associated with participating on social media, the risk of exposure to corporate or institutional interests also exists. Awareness of the risks of engaging with social media therefore should be coupled with the understanding of the benefits it offers. Adopting a critical approach to social media usage could help
students understand their relationship with technology and allow them to focus on the possibilities for active global citizenship and global interaction. Kellner (2000) suggested that appropriate usage of technology can provide the framework for a “globalization from below”, in which he calls for “radical critiques of dehumanizing, exploitative, and oppressive uses of new technologies in the workplace, schooling, public sphere, and everyday life ... “ (2000, p. 310). If students are able to critique social media, then there is every chance that the technology could be transformed to suit civic ends as opposed to capitalistic ends.

**Future Research**

The study made use of a non-random sample population, and, as such, the findings are perhaps not as generalizable as they could be. Given the global nature of social media, research that consisted of comparative data would help provide color to the sketch provided by this study. Studies that incorporate a larger pool of quantitative data, perhaps of individual usage data from tracking on social media sites, combined with focus groups or interviews with more geographically and ethnically diverse participants would help yield more generalizable results, and a diverse array of perspectives on the topic.

A study into the dominance of Facebook as the social media provider favored by the participants in this study would also contribute to the discussion surrounding the way in which youth engage with political and social issues through social media. By developing an understanding of the specific affordances associated
with Facebook, and the attractiveness of the site to youth, a better understanding of the relationship between youth and the outlet of their political and social expression could be achieved. Investigating the way in which Facebook limits or enables their engagement and expression could yield insights into issues of digital literacy and critical theory of technology.

Finally, the most important perspectives in studies into social media use are from those who use it the most. This study and others (OXIS, 2011; PEW, 2012, 2013; Stromer-Galley & Witchowski, 2013) demonstrated the high levels of usage among youth populations. Consequently, an action research study that incorporates the voices of students into the research process, from the design through to the interpretation and conclusions, could provide valuable insights previously untapped by researchers viewing the population purely as a sample.

**Conclusion**

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed methodology to investigate the way in which students engage with political and social issues through social media. The study is limited, to a certain degree, in the form of its use of a non-random sample and the consequent imbalance of gender in the study. However, post hoc analysis in the form of a Chi-squared test, demonstrated that the effect size of gender, on reporting was not significant within the sample.

Analyses of the collected data inform perspectives on the pedagogical possibilities for global education, global citizenship, and the role that social media
could play in supporting the intentions of critical global citizens. The research carried out in this study shows that there is the possibility for social media to support global citizenship, but students need to be better prepared in order to realize its full potential. Consequently, adapting the social studies curriculum to emphasize global, critical, and controversial content, presented through narratives of human experience and shared concerns, could provide the shift in disposition that students need to become more engaged with the political and social complexity around them.

Chaplin’s speech from *The Great Dictator* (1940), discussed in chapter one, provided context for the investigation into the way in which technology has a role in supporting peaceful global interaction to bring people closer together: “the very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men – cries out for universal brotherhood” (1940). This study demonstrated that social media has the capacity to perform this role, and that Chaplin’s (1940) desire for human interaction to exploit those aspects of technology that benefit everyone is possible. Just as Chaplin realized the importance of the relationship between human interaction and technology, other scholars have made the same connection. Foremost among them is perhaps Castells, whose summary to *End of Millenium* (1998) provides an apt summary for this study:
There is nothing that cannot be changed by conscious, purposive, social action, provided with information, and supported by legitimacy. If people are informed, active, and communicate throughout the world; if business assumes its social responsibility; if media become the messengers rather than the message; if political actors react against cynicism, and restore belief in democracy; if culture is reconstructed from experience; if humankind feels the solidarity of the species throughout the globe; if we assert the intergenerational solidarity by living in harmony with nature. If all this is made possible by our informed, conscious shared decision ... we may ... be able to live and let live. (Castells, 1998, p. 360)
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## Appendix A – Contingency Tables for Post Hoc Analyses

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<th>Group Member</th>
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<tr>
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<td>% within Gender</td>
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<td>% within Gender</td>
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*Table 14. Contingency table for gender and group membership.*
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*Table 15. Contingency table for gender and following figures.*
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Protest</td>
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<tr>
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<td>% within Gender</td>
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*Table 16. Contingency table for gender and protesting*
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Table 17. Contingency table for gender and offline activity.
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Like/Promote</td>
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*Table 18. Contingency table for gender and liking/promoting.*
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Repost</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Count</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>% within Repost</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>% of Total</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Repost</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 19. Contingency table for gender and reposting.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Links</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Post Links</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
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<td>% of Total</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Post Links</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
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<td>% of Total</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Post Links</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 20. Contingency table for gender and posting links*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Thoughts</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<td>% within Post Thoughts</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
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</tr>
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<td>% of Total</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>% within Post Thoughts</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Post Thoughts</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21. Contingency table for gender and posting thoughts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encourage Others</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Encourage Others</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
</tr>
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<td>% within Gender</td>
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</tr>
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<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
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<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
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<td>% of Total</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Encourage Others</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
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<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
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<td>71.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 22. Contingency table for gender and encouraging others.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Discussion</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
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<td>% of Total</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Discussion</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
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<td>% of Total</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Discussion</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
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</tr>
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<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 23. Contingency table for gender and discussion.*