CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THE DIGITAL CLASSROOM: AWAKENING ACTIVISM THROUGH INSTRUCTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA WRITING

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of English

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May, 2017

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THE DIGITAL CLASSROOM: AWAKENING ACTIVISM THROUGH INSTRUCTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA WRITING

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCION

This past week, I entered my composition classroom and slowly walked to the desk where I begin my instruction almost every day. As I began to rustle through my black leather bag, I glanced up at my students and observed as every head was perched at a forty-five-degree angle facing downwards and each student's index finger or thumb rested on their screens as they quickly swiped up through their various social media timelines. This phenomenon is not unusual in many college classrooms, or even in my own life, as I find myself often swiping through my own menial social media interfaces when boredom strikes. These small media interactions, which take up much of our time, are fascinating to me.

As an instructor of writing, I find myself wondering if these small moments of literacy can be used to better serve my students when they live in a world where their reading and writing mostly come from these small flickering screens. The place of media in our everyday lives has changed drastically. A research study conducted in 2014 at Baylor University finds that students use their phones about eight to ten hours a day; female college students used their phones ten hours a day while the male participants used them eight hours a day (Goodrich). This research also found the time students spent on Facebook was about 36.8 minutes a day (Goodrich). Another study conducted by Alabama State University shows the highest accessed sites were Instagram with 29% of students using it, followed by Snapchat 24%, and Facebook 23% (Knight-McCord,

Clearly, et. al). These statistics all demonstrate the immense use of social media by college students and that most of these students use social media to perform many literacy practices that we advocate in the composition classroom.

Students are reading and writing on social media platforms in ways similar to what some instructors want them to do in the classroom. Students are sharing media, commenting on media, and pushing likes on media, which projects it into the realm of the "viral." Students are able to participate in communities which sometimes allow regular citizens' critiques or statements on social issues to reach a larger base to make real change. Often, with this high use of social media, students are now able to access this same information immediately, which leads to a more informed populous. But, information projected from these various media outlets and sometimes random online users are rarely unbiased and can sometimes lack credibility.

The current obsession with media credibility has direct ties to social media's astronomical effect on news. According to a recent Pew Research study, 68% of Americans are receiving some form of news update from their social media platforms (Gottfried and Shearer). The information era, while giving us updates on global and local situations some may have never been otherwise aware, comes at a cost. Now the internet is brimming with click-bait news articles from various privately hosted websites. Many of these sites exist with various biases and unknown origins. These inconsistencies in media are sometimes addressed in the composition classroom when critical media literacy is studied, but what about our students' various social media practices? How do we integrate their use within the composition classroom? First, we need to look at the importance of having social media in our classroom.

The necessity of social media in the classroom comes first from the understanding that writing is changing, and that our students are writing in this new space often (as seen from the statistics above). From this understanding, I believe, classrooms should reflect the active environments our students participate in. Often, students are making complex rhetorical discussions when moving through these spaces even if they do not know it. Depending on the social media used— Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram—students sometimes post, respond, and share in seconds, which means, the rhetorical questions are passing through their thoughts even quicker. They are addressing questions of audience, tone, genre, style, and visual composing constantly and quickly. Not only are students addressing rhetorical areas by they also discuss popular culture, news, and political situations which are often read and responded to instantaneously.

Our culture's quick media access has greatly changed the way we partake in political and rhetorical discussions. By receiving information instantly, we now respond to media sometimes when information has not been fully informed. I argue that our political engagement with this material has moved from sometimes passive to active when social media allows users to share, comment, like while discussing all forms of political media. Often, Facebook and Twitter have become battlegrounds for the political climate. This is done both by every day individuals and by large groups such as ISIS. Political campaigns and media about them are rampant on Facebook and Twitter feeds. When we see how much political propaganda is slewed across various social media sites,

instructing on these spaces becomes a crucial component that is missing from the composition classroom.

When students are unable to address propaganda and digital identities in the classroom that they see in their everyday lives, how do they learn to criticality analyze these messages? My belief is that critical pedagogy's teachings and instruction on digital writing can be used in conjunction to help prepare students for decoding and deconstructing digital propaganda with the hopes of fostering participation and push-back through social media. By using critical pedagogy's core teachings and digital instruction, teachers can create a classroom where students can recognize and debunk propaganda used in online media while also introducing them to the ways that digital mediums can aid in resistance. Helping students to decode online media while understanding its power can foster student's critical thinking in a digital world. Students understanding the importance of rhetoric and propaganda in writing on social media and learning how to dissect this form of this writing implores them to develop into more active online citizens.

This type of citizenship allows students to participate more in their digital environment. This participation came be seen in all types of internet media. Though social media activism can often come in the form of hash tag movements, students are also engaging in all types of rhetorical areas of the digital realm. The digital realm has students question the way they view the propaganda of war, which is often masked in propaganda from writers whose online identity allows them to be anonymous and masked. As a reader, we have no idea who the writer is or what biases they hold—unless we are able to deconstruct the texts through rhetorical analysis. This identity crisis which

is present often in the internet can often hinder democratic ideas. Not only do students become less aware of humanoid bots who wish to push propaganda or online users who "troll" political new sites, but they must also be aware what this non-human and human interaction does to their own identity. As citizens of a digital realm, how has the computer or mobile screen changed their engagement in these online communities? This idea should be discussed thoroughly by a teacher who wishes to welcome students to a digital perspective of their citizenship online.

In *Empowering Education*, critical pedagogy exponent of critical pedagogy Ira Shor writes that students "are starved for meaningful contexts, for intellectual and emotional pleasure in the life of the mind." Shor goes on to state that schools continue to teach "many students that education is a pointless ritual wrapped in meaningless words" (83). Shor's theories hit on the idea that classrooms should be centered around "meaningful contexts" that students can use to further their education to areas beyond the classroom. This is especially true for classrooms where students' 21st century interactions with technology are disused for traditional composition classrooms with lectures and no digital components from the social media world in which they actively participate.

Shor's theories of bringing meaningful context into the classroom add to my belief that bringing media students observe on daily bases into the classroom is a crucial component to the composition classroom. Shor cites the National Institute of Education's 1984 statement that the more time and effort students put into their own education process the more satisfaction they feel with their educational experiences and are then more likely to continue it into their adult life. The NIE "urge faculty to use more 'active modes of teaching' instead of the familiar lecture method" (21-22). All of Shor's ideas

point to education as a social model of learning, and bringing social media platforms and contexts into the classroom expands on the social model.

This can allow students to "codevelop" their learning in classroom. Shor explains that codeveloped classrooms nascent when students begin to actively participate in their learning process. This participation in developing the classroom, led by a democratic teacher, allows student to "shake free" from their "learned withdraw" from civic life. An empowering classroom should provide students with experiences which they can reflect into their own life outside of academia. This reflection becomes particularly important when looking at students' political engagement and activism. Though often called arm-chair activism or now "slacktivism," social media activism allows more people to be involved with political content right from their fingertips.

The push-back against social media activism is large in some parts of academia. Malcolm Gladwell in his article "Why The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted" discusses this change activism has taken in the face of the social media revolution. Historical activist movements call for what Gladwell describes as "high-risk" activism, which possesses an actual danger to the protesters acting in the movement. When I ask my students their ideas after reading this article, the classroom is often split. Some students believe that Gladwell is correct is his argument while others believe forcefully in online movements. Gladwell brings to light the importance research has shown relationships play in activism. The research demonstrates that activists who had closer connections to other activists were more likely to continue to participate in movements they believe in. This leads Gladwell to the conclusion that social media cannot foster these close connections; therefore, the activist movements fall apart quickly in its absence.

Though his insights come from his own personal experience with social media, some people differ on their beliefs of social media's ability to foster meaningful relationships. Though several studies show social media relationships do not create connections as deep as physical ones, I believe social media relationships start online and move to the physical world. Nowadays, people are meeting and interacting online at an enormous rate. Activist groups are using Facebook's event program to coordinate protests on a larger scale. Though these connections may seem distant at first, these large group meetings bring together individuals who believe in a similar cause. Jonathan A. Obar, Paul Zube, and Clifford Lampe from Penn State University released a study which surveyed 53 different advocacy groups. These groups all stated that social media was used every day at their organizations. But, there is still a constant tug between these two visions of social media activism.

For example, Columbia University journalism professor Todd Gitlin metaphorically compares social media activism to "wisps of oxygen" which get people excited and then wear out (qtd. in Lee). In the same article published by The Dartmouth (University), April Reign, who created the viral hashtag #Oscarssowhite, believes that such positions come from a place of apathy. She states that one can clearly witness the millennial movement of hashtag activism. But is this really a divide between the old and new forms of activism? A separate and interesting approach finds itself in neither of these crossroads. The third option calls for social media activism to be viewed solely as a tool. This facet combines both ideas to form a belief that while social media cannot be true "high-risk" activism, it can become a tool which facilitates the spreading of ideas through sharing and the movement of groups through organization.

Therefore, the view of social media activism through this work does not only seek to view it as a perfect approach to activism. In juxtaposition, I want my students to question social media as a tool for activism as much as they understand the benefits. Only then can students critique and use social media activism outside of the critical classroom. Social media activism cannot become a tool for students unless they understand the purpose and flaws of its use. The purpose of this research is to explore, through student work, observation, and research, the ways that instruction on social media activism can enhance the composition classroom and students' understanding of online writing. The question I hope to answer lies in this purpose. Will students, when given a rhetorical two-and-a-half-week unit on social media activism in my composition classroom, learn how to address the rhetoric involved in this new digital activism? The theoretical approaches of this research are founded in critical pedagogy's approach to activism in rhetoric and in the college classroom. Currently, the United States finds itself in a political whirlwind. The media is rife with political protest, poverty, war, climate change, the refugee crisis, the #NoDAPL movement, the #Blacklivesmatter movement, #Notmypresident, and so many others.

It is not as if these issues are new and suddenly emerging. Many of these issues have lingered in American history since the beginning and currently have bubbled and ruptured in the current state of our country. The need for students who can navigate this turbulent civic discourse is needed now more than ever. The question lingers, how can digital rhetoric and critical discourse help students confront these issues? These two bodies of theory have helped me to uncover the persuasion and power in contemporary propaganda, and I give these theoretical tools to counter this power to my students in

hopes that they will become critically aware that activist writings in digital spaces are both practical, powerful, and conflicting.

Chapter II will discuss the scholarly work used when undertaking and researching for this thesis project. This chapter begins with addressing the equality of the three theories used and how each has influenced my ideological approach to this research project. The theoretical analysis begins with an explanation of critical pedagogy and how this theory approaches instruction in a democratic classroom. After discussing the impact of critical pedagogy, the chapter moves into theory of digital writing and multimodal texts. Then, the chapter explains the importance of understanding and instructing students on how to rhetorically analysis these types of texts. The section also discusses the issues critical pedagogy historically had with technology and the move to digital writing. After discussing critical pedagogy and digital writing, the chapter discusses the theories found in the rhetoric of activism. These theories all helped me to create the social media activism unit used for my teacher research.

In Chapter III, the background of teacher research and my approach to it in terms of my research methods is discussed. The methodologies section to explains how I organized and the methods used to conduct my research. The teacher research background explains the importance of quantitative and qualitative data in researching if questions teachers have about instruction are working. I used teacher research methods to revaluated my students' growth through this research study. In the methodologies section, I discuss the social media activism unit I have created to judge my research question. This social media activism unit and the methods I use within it are how I collected my data for this research. After this chapter, the results of the data collection are given.

In Chapter IV, the research study results are listed and plotted. This chapter first goes through each survey question and lists graphs on the changes the answers students input underwent from the entrance survey to the exit survey. After each graph, the demographics that students identified are given in numbers and percentages. After the survey questions graphs and demographics, student writing is list under various organized categories of information. These categories come from subjects I found most fluently in results of student writings. This data, survey results and student writing, is analyzed further for understanding in the discussion chapter.

Chapters V and VI work as the conclusion of my research study on social media activism in the first-year composition classroom. Chapter V analyzes all of the data results presented in Chapter IV. This discussion attempts to find an answer in the numbers and student writing. First, the survey questions and demographics are compared for understanding the difference in answers from the beginning of the study and the end. The student writing analysis follows the same order of the results and looks to the students' own words to find if students benefitted from learning objectively about social media activism. After, Chapter VI provides the implications this study has found and the next steps that could be made. It ends with my hopes for how this study can help future composition instructors hoping to discuss and deconstruct social media activism in the classroom.

CHAPTER II

THOERITICAL FOUNDATIONS

My introduction to social media activism has its grassroots in three distinct theories of study. For me, these theories came together to form a conglomeration of ideas which led to my desire to research social media activism and digital rhetoric's effect on the first-year classroom. Each theory forms a pedagogical foundation for my research—no theory more important or more useful than the others. At one point in my graduate studies, each of these foundational theories changed my view of teaching, culture, and composition theory, and they eventually led me to my research question. I also believe these theories have shaped the intention and focus of my research.

Beginning with critical pedagogy, I needed a theory which has constructed itself in the public sphere. Critical pedagogues are "public intellectuals" and "public activists" (Kincheloe 10), who need to learn more diverse languages for the digital audience. Critical pedagogues are instructors who engage in social activism far behind the reaches of the classroom (Kincheloe 11). It felt natural when studying critical pedagogy when implemented in productive and revolutionary ways in digital texts and activism. Both theories viewed the teaching of writing as more than just a means to instruct students into the academy. Even digital compositionists were noticing the ways political activism found itself in multimodal spaces (Palmeri 2). These three theories used simultaneously showed that digital composition theory was not turning its back on traditional

composition, but using the insights of critical pedagogy and the rhetorics of activism to develop a new narrative on what it means to be a compositionist (Palmeri 3).

Critical Pedagogy

The first theory, critical pedagogy, laid the foundation for my understanding of the need of critical analysis in the classroom. This theory creates the questioning basis of my study which seeks to always be critical minded first. This theory also forms the pedagogical approaches I take throughout my research. Critical pedagogy was born in the 1960s from Paulo Freire's work in Brazil and The New Frankfurt School in Germany. Both were seeking more liberated techniques for education. Paulo Freire's work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, gained popularity when published in 1967 and soared even higher when the English translation hit in 1970. Freire's work with improvised learners introduced pedagogy as a new structure between student, teacher, and society. Freire believes that many of the oppressed are truly fearful of freedom but he believed that the balance of theory and practice create praxis and thus push for educated action. Freire's rejection of the "banking" method—where students are passive learners—forms the foundations of critical pedagogy.

After moving to the first world, critical pedagogy influenced "pedagogical practice, teacher education, sociopolitical and educational scholarship" across North and South America (Kincheloe 12). Currently, critical pedagogy has come to a crossroads, but the theory has left its mark. Its foundations resonate in most critical thinking aspects of academia. Critical pedagogy believes knowledge is transformative and that it allows student and teacher to create ideas together. This brings into play the codeveloping theory which Shor discussed in his work about critical pedagogy. Cultural pedagogues

understand that complex knowledges are at play in the current sociopolitical climate and that if we are to be concerned with social justice, we must be constantly transforming and developing. For critical pedagogy, praxis becomes astronomical. The classroom should be assessing social justice and the larger culture of democracy and students and teachers' roles in this form of practical education. This theory comes from a place of "complex multilogicality" which seeks to push and question the assumed "natural social world" (Kincheloe 13). It addresses the ideology that all "facts" are constructed through dominate communities and "sociopolitical forces" (Kincheloe 13). Critical pedagogy acknowledges that all researchers, however unmediated, accept a set of ideological beliefs. The critical researcher moves forward with this knowledge into critical complexity.

A critical researcher using these multifaceted pedagogical methods understands that social and corporeal worlds are too diverse for research to only find only one, true answer. That research is, in fact, "unpredictable, dependent upon context, and influenced by minute fluctuations" (Kincheloe 14). That developing knowledge will transform depending on the instructor and the student and the period and location. As a critical researcher, I accept that other teachers may find a multitude of diverse results different from my own. These dissimilar results will only build upon our understanding of social media activism in the classroom. This creates layers of information which paint a lively picture of the first-year composition classroom—a disheveled and complex picture. Critical research accepts these complicated nuances and uses them to broaden the understanding of instruction that engages students' lives outside the classroom.

This evolving pedagogy is critical of other theories, which hesitate to question the power structure, and seeks to "directly address the needs of the victims of oppression" and the activism needed for it (Kincheloe 19). For Kincheloe, this human suffering does not have a purpose and is a phenomenon which is socially constructed (20). Again, this problematizing finds itself at the core of critical pedagogy. These complex issues critical pedagogy had and still has with the internet. As much as composition instructors are using digital tools in the classroom, the internet and social media are complex and divisive. Most people with access to these digital tools are from first-world countries were internet access is a common occurrence. The oppressed are often silenced from the so-called virtual "global intelligence community" (McCormick 76). Though social media activism seeks to aid in the struggles of these oppressed groups—for example, the Sioux tribe with the Dakota access pipeline protests—it often finds itself struggling to bring a voice to those struggling to even have clean water and electricity. Technology, often, helps the rich and forgets the poor.

This struggle has led to trepidations by the critical community in fully accepting technology into pedagogy. The internet was supposed to improve research and democratic change, but many find the change stagnate (McCormick 79). This critical vision of the democratic nature of the internet and technology is important when researching the use of activism in this digital climate. One must look objectively at the way that social media has changed our communication. But some critical pedagogues would ask why the changes the digital era were supposed to bring have had no impact on some of the most important issues still facing many oppressed people today. As much as some countries have democratic reign of the internet, many others are dealing with

governments which restrict access and use of the internet. As much as internet technology promotes itself as free and democratic, it still often serves the rich and ostracizes the poor (McCormick 81).

This unglazed view of the internet and access to it lends itself to an objective look at social media, a look which is important to acknowledge when researching activism which takes place in a questionable space (the internet). Many other critics are quite open about their distrust of the digital environment entering the classroom. To research social media's effect and importance in the first-year classroom, views similar to these are important to address. Though these voices are prominent in this theory, there are still critical instructors who seek to incorporate communication technology in the classroom.

In the new digital era of instruction, critical instructors understand the vast "information systems" in mass society that act as schooling for our students and the general audience. Social media can produce forms of cultural knowledge. Our students embrace this knowledge. The new terrain for critical pedagogy should aid students in understanding the larger role social media plays in their social and individual lives. I want students to critically question if social media is shaping our political and cultural climate. A critical pedagogy of social media invites students to analyze, critique, and produce the knowledge about themselves and the world around them. It is a pedagogy that equips students to become informed students. An important piece to critical pedagogy is the transformative aspect of "mapping the ways political meaning are made in both schools and sociocultural locales" (Kincheloe 26). A changing critical pedagogy becomes "holographic hermeutics" that explores the way the dominate social forces entrench themselves onto the individual through oppression (Kincheloe 26).

Current critical theorists write that we are deep within a digital communication revolution which uses tools to create collaborative literacy and transformative knowledge building (Suoranta and Vadén 143). The issues that have been explored within critical pedagogy—class, gender, race, and popular culture—all have potential for further analysis in social media. Early in critical pedagogy, technology was seen as dangerous when not used ethically, and some might still view it as such. Herbert Marcuse from The Frankfurt School believed differently from his colleagues and stated that we look instead at what we can make of technology for social change (Suoranta and Vadén 144). This ideology can be seen in critical pedagogies which seek to explore new and emerging tools for critical input in digital communications. This new critical and digital pedagogy transforms students into active citizens in the new techno democracy. This digital democracy allows "open and free rational discussions in various web fora" (Suoranta and Vadén 145).

The movement of critical pedagogy into digital spaces allows instructors to enhance students' "technoliteracies" (Suoranta and Vadén 145). The use of critical pedagogy's essence for critique and reflection on social media will allow students to actively engage with discussion on the use of social media activism both digitally and physically. Students can grasp an understanding of social media so they can interact with its complex land of sources, biased values, and capitalist nature. Both teacher and student will learn and will co-create a revolutionary understanding of how social media activism is changing the sociopolitical nature of protest in our current culture. From this comprehension, content will be formed. Student and teacher will leave their classroom more critically aware of digital technologies' potential in pushing for social change.

Without this consciousness, it can become a daunting challenge to address technologic morality and enormity of our actions on social media. (Suoranta and Vadén 160).

Digital Writing and Multimodal Composing

When writing moved into the digital realm, it completely changed the way composition theory addressed the needs of writing instruction. Important questions were raised on how to responsibility respond and teach these "changing textual landscapes" and how they affect our students and classroom (Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, et al vii). Compositionists wanted to be effective and active in understanding how students and we can address writing in new media morally and responsibly. Writing on new media forms is vast and difficult to pinpoint. We would have to deconstruct, much like the flow of an academic essay, how the writing in these spaces takes shape. Jay Bolter in the first edition of *Writing Space* addressed the idea that the written book would no longer be the center of knowledge. But this change would not destroy literacy; in fact, this change would only end the legacy of print literacy and reign in a new era of writing and reading in electronic technology (qtd. In Wysocki 1).

Gunther Kress, in his book *Literacy in the New Media Age*, believed this transformation was occurring because of "social, economic, communicational, and technological change" (qtd. In Wysocki 1). The framework which had held together years of print literacy was being unhinged by social changes taking place. Digital writing changes the economic uses and purpose of writing. The meanings are being changed by the way image, sound, and audience are shaped by technology's new forms of communication. Though some may disagree with Kress' explanation of these changes, we can all agree that writing is constantly changing.

This draws the attention of teachers of writing everywhere because we often wish to understand the practices of writing that our students use socially, politically, economically, educational, religiously, and in a vast array of other spaces. As we recognize and understand these constant changes, we seek to change our pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing. Many theorists of new media believe that instruction on the purpose and techniques of digital writing is very much a need for instructors of first-year composition. They also believe that these new media texts need to be defined and understood for their creation and production to bloom in the writing classroom.

Similar to critical pedagogy's theory and practice, digital writing theory also finds itself in service to creating a place where students learn that their writing makes an impact inside and outside of the classroom, that students can learn to analyze and question the world while understanding that they can transform it. A classroom isolated from digital communication can be seen as disconnected from the real realm of writing. This digital communication used in both the academy and work place plays with structures of power and politics. These ideas are not new and have been discussed in many works on technical communication and business writing. The impact digital writing has on us and our students outside and inside the classroom is an important aspect to understanding the way current writing now functions. There have been some fascinating studies on new media creation and understanding the rhetoric used in that space (Wysocki 6). Many theorists agree that the rhetorical decisions students make to impact their writing also take place in multimodal composing. This multimodal composing is what students interact with on a daily basis with social media platforms.

In line with digital writings links to visual, hyperlinked, and transformative text spaces, social media is a ripe place for rhetorical analysis. Students make traditional rhetorical decisions every day when interacting with social media and various digital writings. Students are also dealing with questions of identity and self-expression through their social media platforms. These decisions become huge questions when intertwined with activism. Now, our identity and views become expressions of what we share on our social media sites. Activist movements have used digital writings as a new arena in which to spread their message. The rhetorical strategies that digital writing has given composition theory directly aid in the investigative techniques taught to students. Whether exploring social media activists' use of images and video to push rhetorical views, or exploring the way online power and politics play a role in the digital communications we share, online activism is growing rapidly and various digital writing theories have the clues to unlocking how to comprehend this digital trend.

Another facet of digital composition is multimodal composing. This process involves the creation of texts that remix alphabetic texts, images, videos, and audio to generate new writing forms. Many of our students find this form of text a constant in the digital age, but many may not equate this form of composition as writing. Literacy has transformed from a previous linear text-based form to creative texts which work with and within multiple modes. This form of writing/creation/design is the new norm for our students' digital generation. As writing instructors, we must move to meet the needs of a students whose new forms of media transcend beyond alphabetic texts (Palmeri 5). We must push past the fear of new technologies some previous composition theorists

described while also being critical of the "overexuberance" of these same forms. (Palmeri 6).

Jason Palmeri, an assistant professor of English and affiliate faculty member in interactive media studies at Miami University, writes in his book *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy*, that this remixed form of composition moves us beyond the critic. Instead of critiquing and pulling away from the internet or digital movements because of their democratic flaws, we seek to search for the jewels in the damaged safe. As a digital and multi-modal compositionist, I may have found this diamond, though very flawed. Social media activism combines the political enthusiasm seen in critical pedagogy within the multi-modal and digital writing world. But, Palmeri also warns us not to be dismissive of our past composition history. Critical pedagogies critiques of technology and the internet are not blameless. They should be taken into account when a first-year teacher instructs on topics like social media activism. Because for Palmeri, and many current composition theorists, we have moved beyond the age of "camps" and into a place of multi-modality. A place many of these different camps would find themselves intertwined.

Palmeri also quotes composition theorist Patricia Dunn. Dunn reveals that many early scholars advocated for and used multimodal writings teaching strategies—such as critical pedagogy's own Paulo Freire (qtd. in Palmeri 6). While many previous scholars wished to move past our composition war days and transcend into digital pedagogy, Palmeri seeks to build upon our history. For me, Palmeri's approach to multimodal and digital texts mirrors the way my research hopes to address these new forms of text. Critical pedagogy's foundation in questioning the social and political power structure

meshes well with this form of multimodal texts. My research pushes students to write not just a text that seeks to create and design but a text which seeks to subvert the power structure while doing so. My deconstruction of these various forms—text, video, sound, image—in multimodal texts builds upon the theories brought to composition by critical pedagogy.

This new multiform text also brings about the importance of discussing rhetoric in the aspects of this diverse media form. Kati Fargo Ahern, an assistant professor at Long Island University Post, uses the metaphor of "invisible writing" for the rhetoric used in digital and multimodal texts. This theory asks for students to find the invisible writing in auditory and visual compositions. Ahern writes that our students, often referred to as "digital natives," may not *see* that blogging, social media, and digital forms as writing. That these students must understand the invisible in academic writing and all the other various forms of text they interact with; that these various forms all are contingent, historical, social, and political (Ahern 82-3). When students understand all forms of unfamiliar rhetorical situations, they can potentially move across these different genres—"from scholarly journal articles to social media or online, multimodal texts" (Ahern 83).

Mass media and politics are using these remixed forms constantly to persuade the general population. Social activists are also using these various multimodal forms to spread documented footage of their story. The understanding of multimodal composition is essential to aiding students in the understanding of the new media they come into contact with on a daily basis. The understanding of this remixed form of composition, students are able to better critically engage with social activist material (Palmeri). Similar to critical pedagogy, multimodal composition desires to apply and adapt rhetorical theory

to compose and deconstruct new media texts. Students will not only need to understand the techniques of traditional argument but the persuasive tools used in multimodal texts. This understanding of the creative and rhetorical process of multimodal texts will allow students to create and critique the various persuasive forms they see and use in multimodal texts.

Activism and Rhetoric

Activism movements are deeply ingrained in American history, as far back as The Boston Tea Party and The Underground Railroad. Large activist movements that formed in the 1960s and 70s for civil rights, the environment, and anti-war protests still find huge relevance in the current culture. Often, moments of history erupt, some more than others, with a change of political consciousness. The current political climate is turbulent, and we see activist movements sprouting up across the globe. Regardless of which political party, or dictator is in power, there is a necessity for a deeper understanding of what needs to be done. As our students become active citizens, they need to develop a critical comprehension about issues that affect every citizen of this planet. When students learn about activism, they become more critical, exercise skills in debate, and learn ow events are organized. Students often use Aristotle's rhetorical criticism to deconstruct and understand activist movements. These skills give students cultural capital: the ability to move up the social latter. Remixing politics and protest in the composition classroom is not just a mere diversion from teaching, but lends teachers the possibility to integrate important material occurring outside the classroom to rhetorical criticism and writing happening inside the classroom.

Students getting involved in activist movements can be seen throughout universities. Student organizations across campuses often coordinate events to raise awareness and money for various causes they are passionate about and even organize sit-ins to demonstrate issues happening at the university (University of Missouri 2015; Clemson 2016; and others). The rhetoric students learn in English, Composition, and Communication courses comes from Greek civic discourse. Even thousands of years later, rhetoric is attempting to decipher politics and politicians. Our classrooms sometimes find rhetoric difficult to connect to areas outside of the academic. Activism is a profound way to connect the composition classroom to issues students are often thinking, discussing, and doing outside of the classroom. This idea of rhetoric in practice is a large part of what many compositionists want students to gain from their classroom. This theory feeds into critical pedagogy's desire that students explore and use critical civic discourse in their daily lives.

Activism asks us not to only philosophize the world issues but to move to action—to make change. Currently, our students are witnessing a huge eruption in activism through television, friends, family, and enormous amounts on social media. Many of our students are where we can search and find activist movements we may know of or discover through classroom discussion and writings. Our students' writings could serve as witness to an era of civil discontent. Often our diverse students give us direct understanding about social justice and the stifling issues affecting the United States and many other nations. Their stories and hope for change are the precise reason why I chose to take a study on the effect of social media activism in the composition classroom.

Giving students the ability to understand rhetoric's use in activism is to give rhetoric a task. For a "rhetoric for social change is to speak power to truth" (Artz 54).

This truth and social change taken as civic action often connects our students to their community. This same connection forms when our ideas take action. Rhetoric is theoretical, and thus ethereal, and cannot move as activism without ideas. The exciting part of activism in the first-year writing course is that students do not just use theoretical ideas to create political commitments; they bring their own political commitments to influence their own theory. Again, this classroom becomes centered around students and their political ideas and actions. It also should be a classroom situated to helping students learn to become "rhetorician-activists" (DeBlasis 170). These skills would assist students in debunking mass-media propaganda. Having students understand the rhetoric used in news media allows them to gain power in political arena. With the current political climate and rampant use of falsified news, rhetoricians are needed to "make visible that the way messages are framed" towards and audience will influence how they feel about that message (DeBlasis 171). Students, and citizens, need to understand how rhetoric is used in the daily political media they consume. Students need instructors who will teach them the rhetorical techniques so they can reassess the way that activism takes place in the social media world they so frequently visit.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Teacher Research

The type of research method used throughout this study is teacher research—research collected from my own classroom while instructing. Though teacher research has varying definitions and various issues within it, this is the definition I have given the qualitative method used based on theories within the field of teacher research. The three key points of teacher research are that is it often non-quantitative, most teacher research involves teachers and their own classroom, and the goals and purpose of teacher research are generally in the same area. From the beginning, teacher research has sought to push back against "scientific" quantitative research on dominating educational research. This push back has gained momentum in the various social sciences to show more incorporation of classroom life and practice into research (Lankshear, et. al 3-4).

Many teacher-researchers and scholars on the practice agree upon the concepts undergirding teacher research. The two main purposes of teacher research to enhance the teacher's role as a professional and that teachers engaging in research will "contribute to better quality teaching and learning in the classroom" (Lankshear, et. al 4). The first purpose, the professional role of the teacher, discusses the way teaching should be "recognized and lived as a *professional* engagement" (Lankshear, et. al 4). Teacher researchers do not follow a prescriptive formula for instruction; they engage in research which has given them expertise and skills to push for educational goals which have been democratically established. Teacher researchers combine their shared knowledge from

experience, networks, and their informed decision-making to promote their classrooms learning objectives. When this is done successfully, teachers begin to see growth in student achievement and in their own expertise—leading to teacher satisfaction (Lankshear, et. al 5).

The second purpose of teacher research lies in the ways it can improve classroom instruction. There are different ways this can happen. First, through their own research teachers can learn different techniques they use in their own teaching. These techniques can be dissected for understanding and accountability. Teachers can make informed decision to improve student learning by understanding techniques they use that may not be helpful to students. Second, teachers can use this new-found information to not only improve their own classroom but share their research findings in hope of assisting other teachers who will implement these same techniques in their classrooms. Kincheloe, an important critical pedagogue, saw that this form of research has a way, again, to push back against the domination of "standardization" in curriculum. Often, this curriculum is given to teachers by "experts" in a "top-down" manner which does not consider the school's diversity, background, community, and settings. For Kincheloe, many instructors are told, across the same grade levels, to teach the same content and assess their students the same way—disregarding these previously stated school differences (Lankshear, et. al 5).

Again, Kincheloe believes this standardized form of assessment and approach to education "subverts" democratic education in several different spaces. It, first, continues the level-playing field myth that all schools communities are the same and can be evaluated the same way. This approach also takes teachers out of the equation and instead

opts for “professional knowledge” of what student needs are (Lankshear, et. al 5). Additionally, the domination of curriculum that has placed technical standards at its core confines the activity of learning to “mastering” “predetermined content and subverting the development of analytic and interpretive capacities” (Lankshear, et. al 5). For Knicheloe, “reductionist way of seeing teaching and learning’ directly threatens to democratic practice of education (Lankshear, et. al 6). Teacher research allows instructors to challenge the ways that standards dominate educational culture. Knicheloe argues that teacher research is also needed so teachers can begin to understand the “implications of the technical standards” and many other important facets of researcher culture (Lankshear, et. al 6). Though Knicheloe pushes for non-quantitative teacher research, this theory has been disputed.

Though qualitative research methods have proven viable in the social sciences as a way of including the historical and social parts of educational research, quantitative education research must not be completely excluded. There are, in fact, many promising implications of this form of research. Often, very useful patterns and trends can be learned from observing quantitative data. But, quantitative data must not be seen as “truth” and “proof” with the exclusion of the social world; this world cannot be “reduced to numerical abstractions” (Lankshear, et. al 7). My research seeks to combine these two research methods to find patterns while also including the important social and historical aspects of classrooms, schools, and communities. My research was conducted with the hope of finding data which could demonstrate whether my unit on social media activism could help students better understand, objectively, the way this form of activism is affecting the way they interact with various forms of digital and multimodal writing. This

research was collected so that I could attempt to understand if, why, and how this form of instruction worked. This study used quantitative and qualitative methods to collect my data to discover the ways this unit worked and did work.

Methodologies

As with most social science research, my study used qualitative methods to determine if my two-and-a-half-week unit on social media activism was efficient enough to help students understand the rhetorical use and effectiveness of this type of activism. Teacher research methods were used to conduct this study because I believe they worked well to interpret this type of data. I believe observational research provided the best data format to understand my students' comprehension of this complex subject matter before and after my specific instruction on it. The design of this ethnographic research was created to analyze and understand the students' perception of their grasp on social media activism before they began specific instruction on it and then tested their understanding of it as we completed the unit. This design was formed in hopes of gaining an understanding of the knowledge students obtained or did not obtain during the two-and-a-half-week study period.

The methods used to collect data began with a student entrance survey. The survey was a questionnaire which asked students their preexisting knowledge of social media activism (Appendix B). My classroom contains computers so students were able to access a survey created using Qualtrics via our classroom homepage. I left the classroom so students could take the survey in private. The classroom computers are lined in four

rows with each row of computers facing away from each other. Unless intentional, students cannot easily see other students survey answers. These survey questions were created to gauge students' previous experience and understanding of social media activism. I wanted to assess my students' access, understanding, and perception of digital activism. As a phenomenon which had become normalized in their generation, I was interested to see their understanding about this cultural topic. This entrance questionnaire would act as the basis for my data analysis. The same questions would be asked at the exit to compare student growth. After the entrance survey, students were given three readings assignments and discussion questions to answer on the readings to prepare for an in-class discussion on the topic.

For the readings, I used three very different views on social media and activism. I wanted the students to have an objective view of social media activism. The first reading by Bijan Stephen, "How Black Lives Matter Uses Social Media to Fight the Power," addressed social media from a historical standpoint. Stephen addresses the change social media has been for movements by comparing how civil rights activists had to get information out the old-fashioned way. The article also addresses the usefulness of social media to activists and the dangers. The article remains fairly objective about a controversial topic. Second, I had students read "Changing the Facebook of Social Activism" by Mark Pfeifle. This article addressed slacktivism—an important concept my students needed to understand from the critics of social media activism. The article states that social media has already reinvented social media activism though the importance of the people behind those movements can never be stated enough. Pfeifle's article gave my students both sides of the argument in social media activism so they could attack the

subject head on. These two articles set the stage for students to discuss the argument surrounding social media activism.

The final article students read was "Filter Bubbles" by Eli Pariser. This article discusses the way social media algorithms filter which news and information we receive on social media. That all the information we view is prescribed for us based on our past reads, likes, and shares. Pariser asks friends to take pictures of their Google search of the same term all across the globe and find they all show different answers. The article states that a prescribed information feed gives us one-sided views of the issues. I wanted students to read this critique of social media filters so they could understand that this issues can affect how we understand political issues. I felt this issue was important to discussing argument and activism in a rhetoric classroom.

Student came to class after reading and writing about these readings to an open discussion on social media activism. I used the discussion questions to guide the classroom and student discussion involvement. The class was fifty minutes and students were allowed to discuss any opinions or questions they felt about social media activism. I recorded important statements students made on their discoveries during class. Students' homework and statements in class were used to measure the growth of knowledge after the first assignment of the unit. Using critical pedagogy's techniques, we as a class built our definition and position on social media activism. We dissected what we want to learn and what we felt we know already about social media activism. This discussion would lead us to our next step in the two-and-a-half-week unit.

The third step in my instructional unit was to have the students watch a documentary on social media activism. The documentary *#chicagoGirl: The Social*

Network Takes on a Dictator tells the story of an American girl with Syrian parents who began working with activists in Damascus during the Syrian revolution. Only a freshman in college, she worked with hundreds of activists on the ground in Syria spreading information about the Assad regime. The documentary seeks to discover the most effective way to fight a dictator—social media activism or war? The film being only an hour and thirteen minutes gave us ample time the second class day to discuss the implications of the film and write a short response. Student reflective writings on the film were recorded to see if students felt they had gained more critical knowledge of social media activism from the documentary.

Following the second day of the film, I had students prepare for an in-class essay on social media activism. The students could bring notes and any readings they wanted for writing the essay. The essay asked students to assess their previous presumptions about social media activism and discuss anything new they learned during the unit. If students felt they learned nothing new from the unit, they could discuss the most important aspect of understanding social media activism and how they felt about it. This final in-class essay would become the largest piece of my data collection. The student essays were only graded for participation as was all other aspects of the study. The essays were studied for patterns in context and language about the unit and social media activism. These patterns were used to assess the research's core question on the impact of instructing social media activism in the composition class.

The final component of my research is an exit survey using the same questionnaire as the entrance survey. Through analyzing the two surveys at the different stages of the research study I graphed the various answers I received from my students to

find if they were gaining valuable information from the unit. This graph combined with the analysis of the students writing allowed me to interpret the data collected. The student writing was combed through for patterns on the students' rhetorical and contextual understanding of social media activism. Pieces of student writing are presented in the results section for further understanding of the research results. These various analytic techniques gave me a way to measure the changes or consistencies in student knowledge. Ultimately, this data collection was analyzed to best represent and comprehend the results.

Each survey answer ranked itself along a five-point scale leading with "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Students could answer "neither agree nor disagree" if they chose to. The questionnaires students answered before and after the social activism unit were organized according to students' gender identification, race, and age. After organizing the students by gender, the data was plotted per the students' answers to each question. Instead of analyzing each student's data, the data was graphed according to the percentage each answer received along the five-point scale. This data was analyzed first using no personal identifiers and then by the three indicators the survey asked for. These results were used to see if any personal identifiers presented the data differently. This type of variable could demonstrate some potential issues within the social media activism unit.

Next, the in-class discussion and short documentary reflection was analyzed to measure student growth from the entrance exam. This data was examined for context and language patterns and compared to the other results found. These writings were organized by the students' identified sex, race, and age. The students' in-class essay writing was

also analyzed for the context and language patterns present. The writings which matched and differed from the results found were analyzed for various context and language patterns. The essays were also categorized by the students' identified sex, race, and age. These results were placed next to the survey results and were used to interpret the data. Notable student writing is included in the results section to demonstrate these research findings on a concrete level. This mix of survey, discussion, and student writing data was interpreted to find if students gained critical awareness of social media activism.

Sample Size and Procedure

This research was done during my final graduate semester in a composition II course I instructed at my university. The course has twenty students who acted as subjects in my social media activist study. My university is open enrollment and located in the rustbelt of Ohio. My students range in ages from eighteen to twenty-four and 40% of my students identify as male and 60% of my students identify as female. Out of my twenty students, one of my student identifies themselves as "black" and one identifies herself as "mixed"; the remainder of my students identified themselves as "white."

Figure 3.1 Gender ratio of students

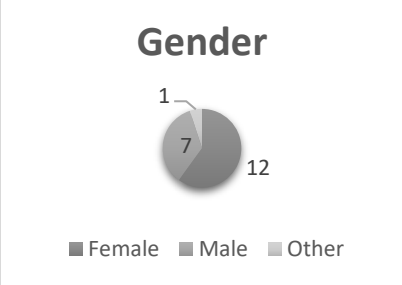


Figure 3.2 Age ratio of students

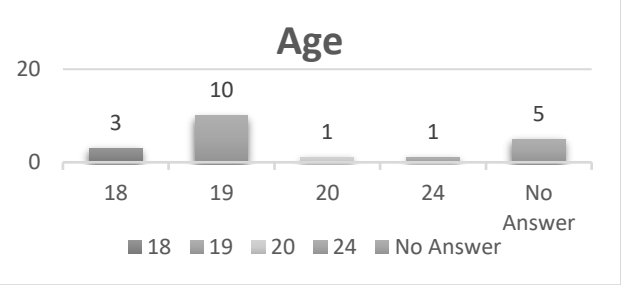
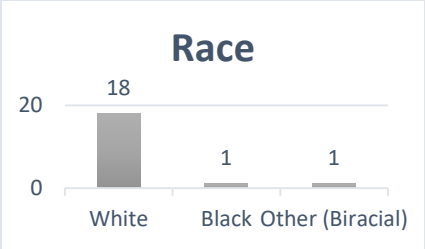


Figure 3.3 Race ratio of students



The sample size is average for a composition II class at my university. Though the sample size is not large, this study, based in qualitative and quantitative teacher research, demonstrates the experience I had with my own students in my class. This means, of course, that teachers who replicate this research may find different results than this research study collected.

The procedure for collecting my sample size began with getting consent forms signed from my students before the unit began. Though students were provided with an overview on where I will use their writings, surveys, and discussion (conferences, thesis work, future publications), I attempted to not give the students too much information on my research's purpose. I wanted students to take the entrance survey so the data could be interpreted from their answers with as few influences from me over the data. After collecting the students' entrance surveys, additional data was collected from students' reflections from the *#chicagoGirl* documentary. Black pen was used to erase student names and information and pseudonyms were given to student writings. All data with student information and pseudonyms was kept in a locked drawer along with the students' signed consent forms. All correct sample procedures directed by the Institution Review Board were carefully followed to verify all parts of my research were controlled.

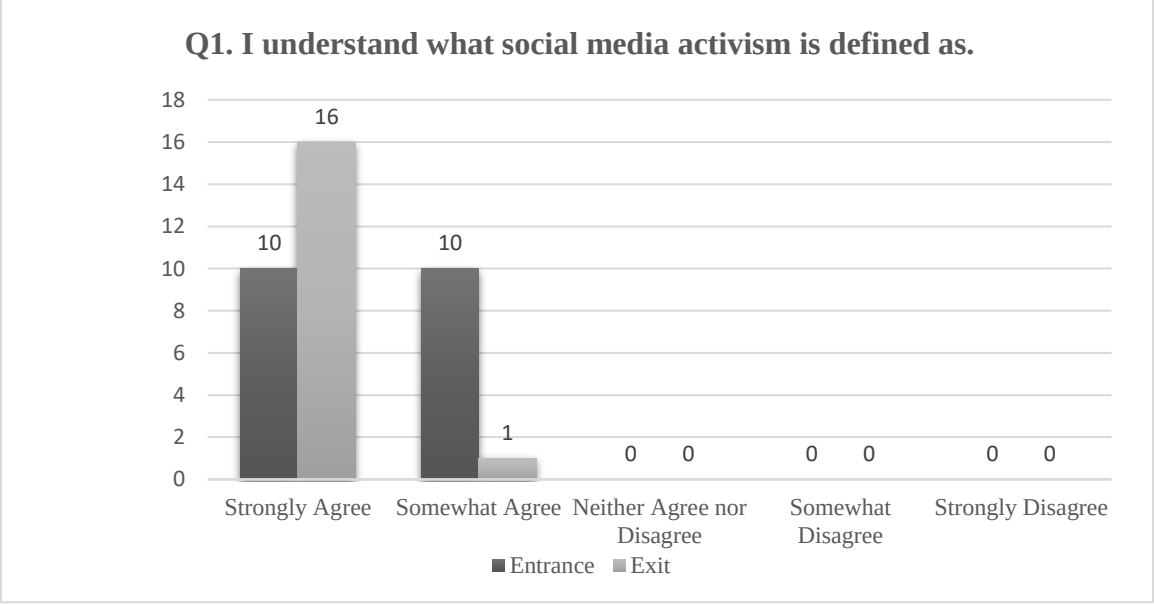
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Survey Results

The entrance survey was given at the beginning of my class before we began any coursework or readings on social media activism. The day of the entrance survey, no students were absent, so data was collected from a full class with twenty students. The exit survey was given at the end of class after our final day of the social media activism unit, eleven days after the entrance survey. Two students were absent, so seventeen responses are record in this data set. The survey data collection is show as follows:

Figure 4.1 First question on the entrance and exit survey.



Entrance Survey Results

For question one of the social media activism survey (Figure 4.1 above), of the ten Strongly Agree entrance survey answers, five students identified their gender as female (50%), and five identified their gender as male (50%). In the same Strongly Agree answer data set eight students identified their race as "white" (80%), while one student identified their race as "black" (10%), and one student identified their race as "mixed" (10%). In the same question category, two students stated their ages as eighteen (20%), three stated their ages as nineteen (30%), student stated their age as twenty (10%), one student stated their age as twenty-four (10%), and four students chose not to answer (40%).

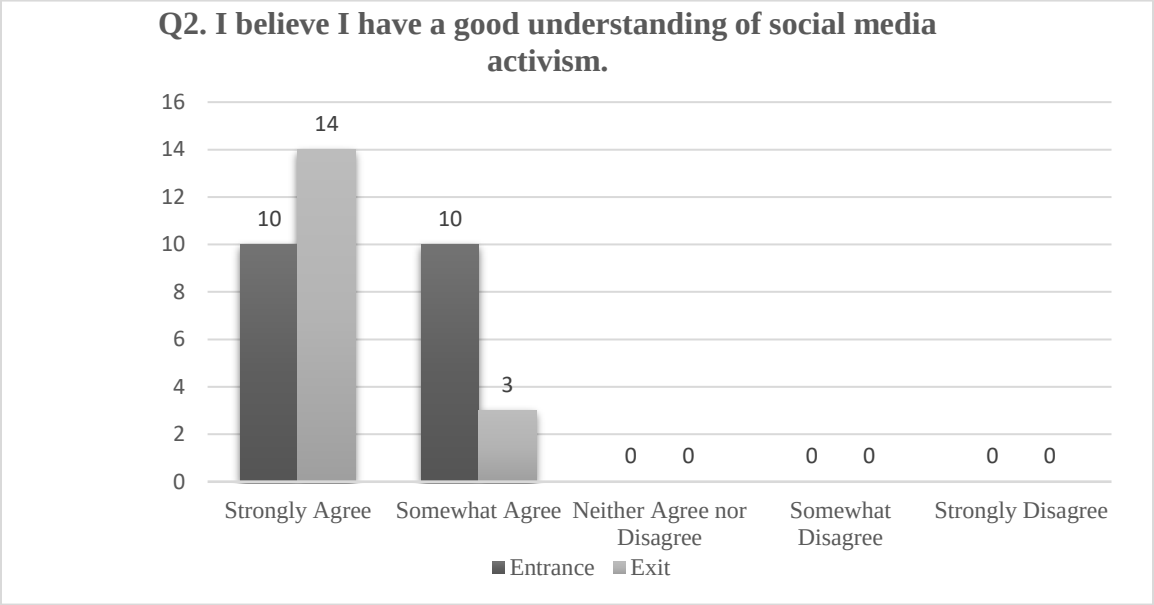
For question one of the survey (Figure 4.1), of the ten Somewhat Agree in the entrance survey answers, seven students identified their gender as female (70%), two students identified their gender as male (20%), and one student identified their gender as "other" (10%). In the same answer category, all ten students identified their race as "white" (100%). In the Somewhat Agree data collection for question one, one student identified their age as eighteen (10%), seven students identified their age as nineteen (70%), and two students chose not to answer (20%).

Exit Survey Results

For question one (Figure 4.1), of the sixteen Strongly Agree answers in the exit survey, nine of the students identified themselves as female (56%), six students identified themselves as male (38%), and one student identified themself as "other" (6%). In the same data set, fourteen students identified their race as "white" (88%), one student identified their race as "black" (6%), and one student identified their race as "mixed"

(6%). The student ages ranged from five students stating their age as eighteen (31%), seven identified their age as nineteen (44%), one student identified their age as twenty (6%), one student identified their age as twenty-four (6%), and two students chose not to answer. Only one student chose Somewhat Agree for question one of the exit survey, she identified herself as "white," female, and nineteen years old.

Figure 4.2 Second question on the entrance and exit survey.



Entrance Survey Results

For question two of the social media activism survey (Figure 4.2 above), from the ten Strongly Agree answers in the entrance survey, six students identified their gender as male (60%), and four students identified their gender as female (40%). In the same Strongly Agree entrance survey answer data set, eight students identified their race as "white" (80%), while one student identified their race as "black" (10%), and one student identified their race as "mixed" (10%). In the same data set, three students identified their age as eighteen (30%), four students identified their age as nineteen (40%), one student identified their age as twenty (10%), and two students chose not to answer.

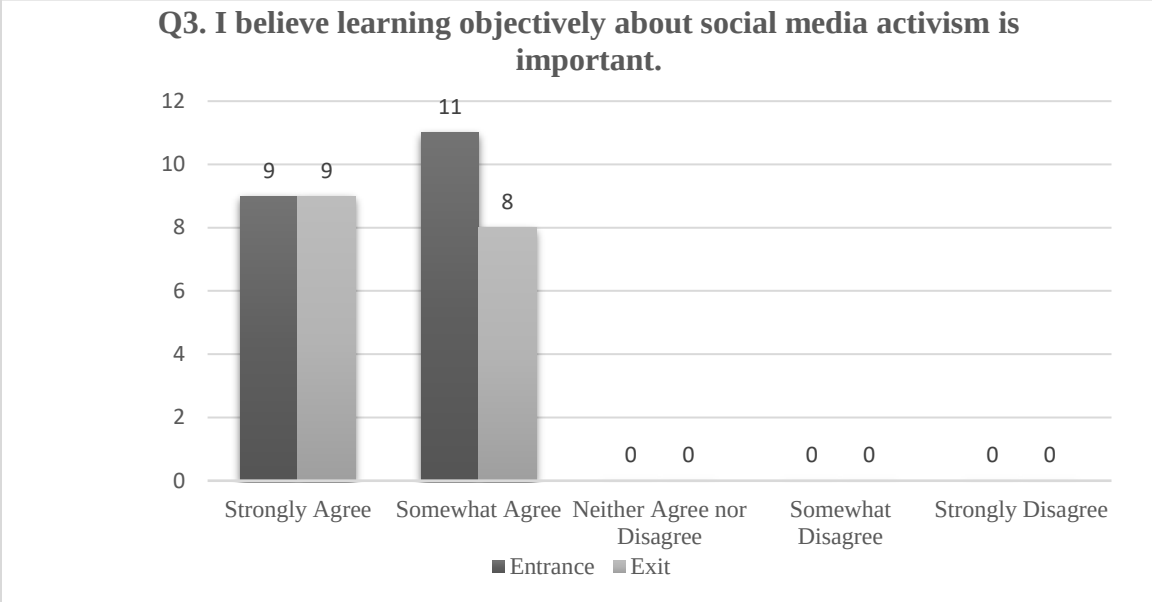
For question 2 of the survey (Figure 4.2), from the 10 responses in the Somewhat Agree entrance survey data, 8 students identified their gender as female (80%), 1 student identified their gender as male (10%), and one student identified their gender as “other” (10%). Of the same data set, 10 students identified their race as “white” (100%). The age ranges of the data set identify as 6 students stated their age as 19 (60%), 1 student wrote their age ass 24 (10%), and 3 students chose not to answer (30%).

Exit Survey Results

For question 2 of the student exit survey (Figure 4.2), from the 14 students who selected Strongly Agree, 8 identified themselves a female (71%), 5 students identified as male (36%), and 1 student identified their gender as “other” (7%). From the same data set, 12 students identified their race as white (86%), 1 student identified themselves as “black” (7%), and 1 student identified their race as “mixed” (7%). The students ages in this data set are as follows: 5 students listed their age as 18 (36%), 7 students listed their age as 19 (50%), 1 student listed their age as 20 (7%), and 1 student chose not to answer.

For question 2 of the exit survey, 3 students selected Somewhat Agree as their answer. The gender identifiers of this data set were 2 females (67%) and 1 male (33%). The students all identified their race as white. The students ages were 19, 24, and one chose not to answer.

Figure 4.3. Third question on the entrance and exit survey.



Entrance Survey Results

For question 3 of the student survey (Figure 4.3 above), of the 9 Strongly Agree entrance survey results, 6 students identified their gender as male (66.6%), 2 students identified their gender as female (22.2%), 1 student identified their gender as "other" (11.1%). Of the same data set, 7 students identified their race as "white "(77.7%), 1 student identifies their race as "black" (11.1%), and 1 student identifies their race as "mixed" (11.1%). In the same data set, 1 student identified their age as 18 (11.1%), 5 students identified their age as 19 (55.5%), and 2 students chose not to answer (22.2%).

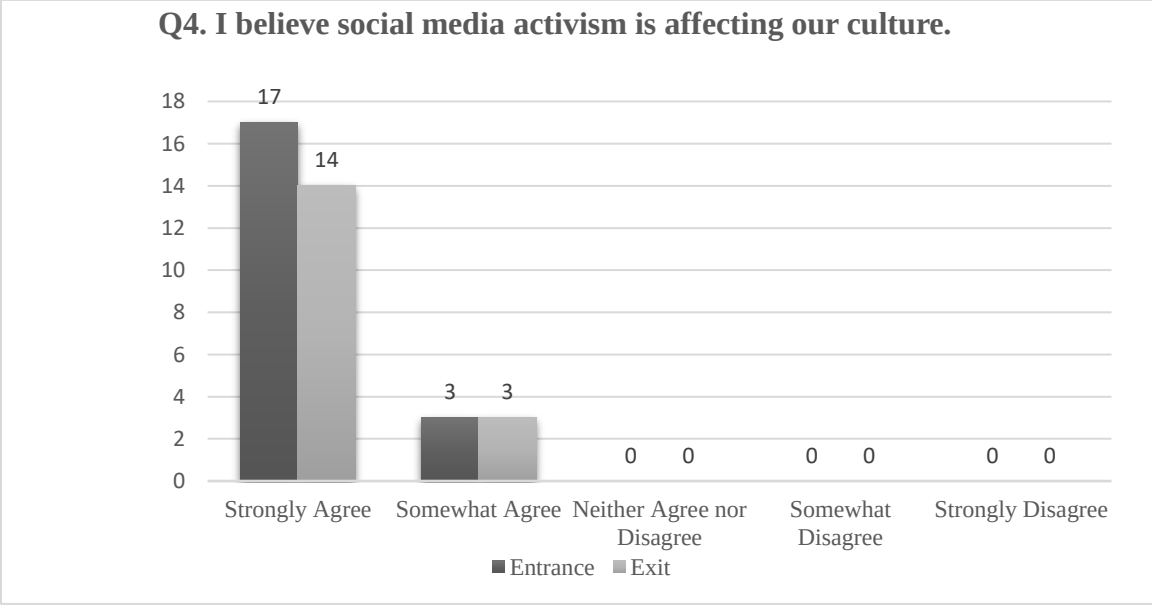
For question 3 of the student survey (Figure 4.3), of the 11 Somewhat Agree entrance survey answers, 10 of the students identified their gender as female (90%), and 1 student identified their gender as male (10%). Of the same data set, all the students identified their race as "white" (100%). For age, 2 students identified their age as 18 (18%), 5 students identified their age as 19 (45%), 1 student identified their age as 24 (9%), and 3 students chose not to answer.

Exit Survey Results

For question 3 of the survey (Figure 4.3), of the 9 exit survey answers in the Strongly Agree category, 5 of the students identified their gender as male (56%), 3 students identified their gender as female (33%), and 1 student identified their gender as "other" (11%). Of the same data set, 7 students identified their race as "white" (78%), 1 student identified their race as "black" (11%), and 1 student identified their race as "mixed" (11%). The ages students who selected Strongly Agee for question 3 ranged from 3 listed at 18 (33%), 5 listed at 19 (56%), and 1 listed at 20 (11%).

In the same exit survey for questions 3, 8 students selected Somewhat Agree as their answer. These 8 students identified their gender as 7 females (87.5%) and 1 male (12.5%). All of the students in this data set identified their race as "white." The ages of the students in the Somewhat Agree data set for question 3 are 2 students at 18 (25%), 3 students at 19 (38%), 1 student at 24 (12.5%), and 2 students chose not to answer.

Figure 4.4 Fourth question on the entrance and exit survey



Entrance Survey Results

For question 4 of the student survey (Figure 4.4), of the 17 Strongly Agree entrance survey questions, 10 of the students identified their gender as female (58%), and 7 identified their gender as male (41%). In the same data set, 15 students identified their race as "white" (88%), 1 student identified their race as "black" (5%), and 1 student identified their race as "mixed" (5%). The ages ranges of the Strongly Agree data set, 3 students identified their age as 18 (18%), 8 students said identified their age as 19 (47%), 1 student identified their age as 20 (6%), 1 student identified their age as 24 (6%), and 4 chose not to answer.

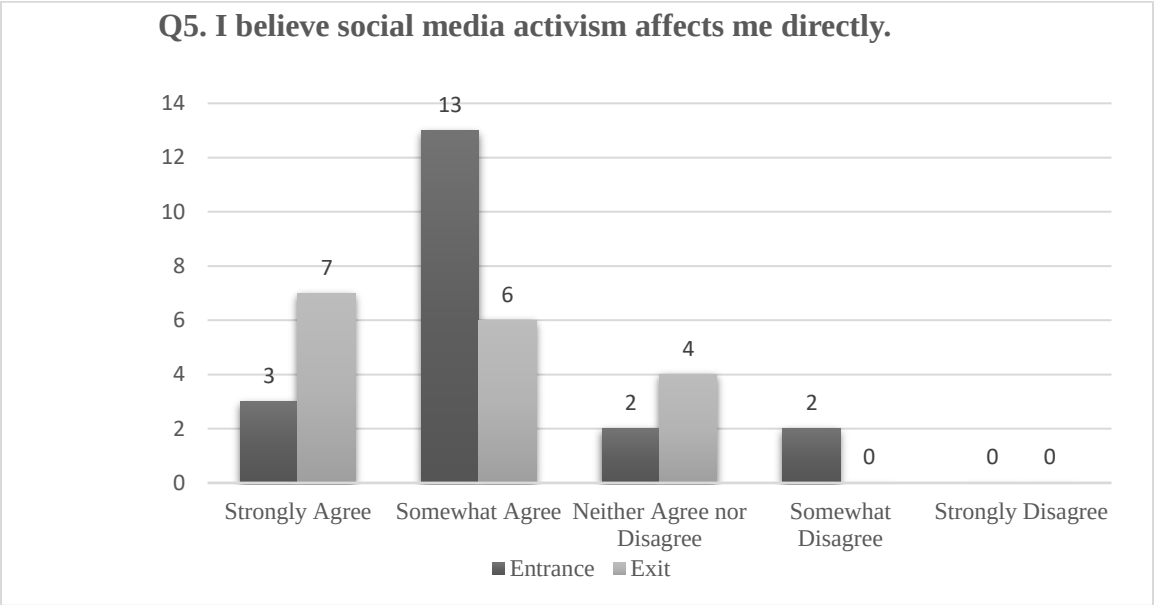
For Figure 4.4, of the 3 Somewhat Agree entrance survey answers, 2 students identified their gender as female (67%), and 1 student answered as "other" (33%). Of the same data set, all the students identified their race as white (100%). For the ages, 2 students identified their age as 19 (67%), and 1 student chose not to answer.

Exit Survey Results

For question 4 of the survey (Figure 4.4), for the 14 Strongly Agree answers for the exit survey, 8 of the students identified as female (57%), 5 students identified as male (36%), and 1 student identified as "other" (7%). Of the students in this data set, 12 identified their race as "white" (86%), 1 student identified their race as "black" (7%), and 1 student identified their race as "mixed" (7%). Five students identified their age as 18 (36%), 7 students identified their age as 19 (50%), 1 student identified their age as 20 (7%), and 1 student identified their age as 24 (7%). In the same question of the student exit survey, 3 students selected Somewhat Agree as their choice for question 4. Those students selected their identifiers as followed: 2 select female for gender (67%), and 1

selected male (33%). For their race, all the students in this selection category listed "white." The only student who listed their age stated it as 19.

Figure 4.5 Fifth question on the entrance and exit survey



Entrance Survey Results

For question 5 of the student survey (Figure 4.5 above), the data is extremely varied. For the entrance survey, 3 students selected Strongly Agree as their response. One students identified as a "black," male, and 20 years old. Another student identified as "white," male, and 19 years old. The third student identified as "white," female, and chose not to give her age. Of the same data set, thirteen students chose Somewhat Agree on the entrance survey. Of the Somewhat Agree data set, eight students identified their gender as female (62%), four students identified their gender as male (31%), and 1 student identified their gender as "other" (8%). For the same data set, twelve students identified their race as "white" (92%), and one student identified their race as "mixed" (8%). For ages, the students in the Somewhat Agree category, two identified their ages as

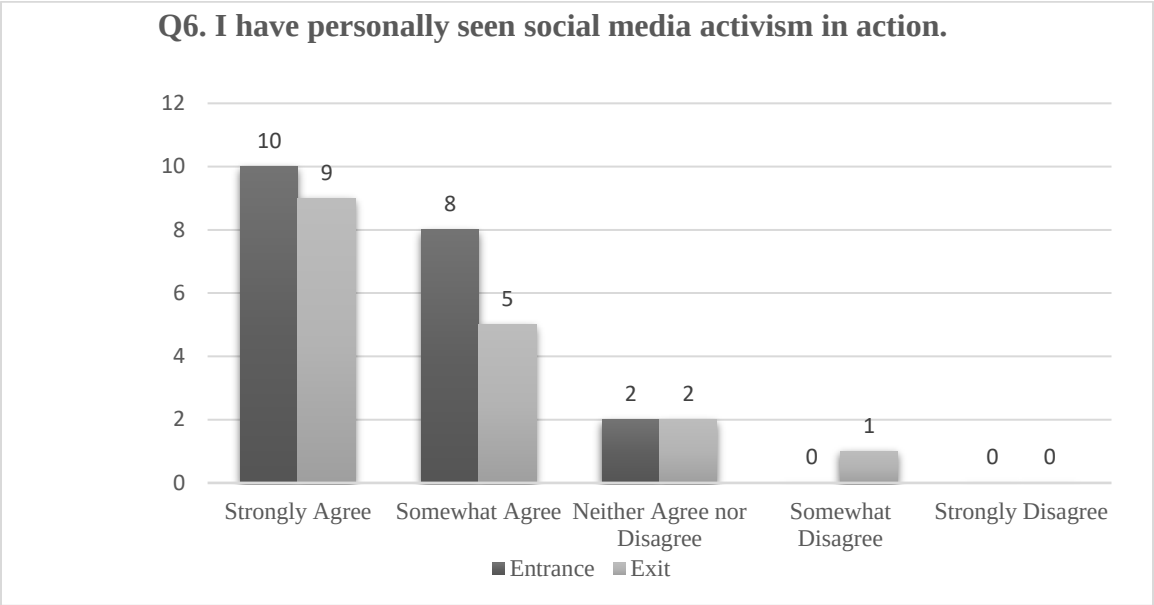
18 (15%), seven identified their ages as 19 (54%), and three chose not to answer. For the entrance survey's Neither Agree or Disagree category two students answered. One student identified as female, "white," and 19 years old, while the other identified as female, "white," and chose not to list an age. The two remaining students chose Somewhat Disagree on the entrance survey. One student identified as female, "white," and 18 years old, while the other student identified himself as male, "white," and 19 years old.

Exit Survey Results

For question 5 of the survey (Figure 4.5), the exit survey seems to have moved to a more evenly distributed range. Seven students selected Strongly Agree for question 7 of the exit survey. Of these seven students, four students identified their gender as male (57%) and three identified their gender as female (43%). Of this same data set, five students identified their race as "white" (71%), one student identified their race as "black" (14%), and 1 student identified their race as "mixed" (14%). The ages of the students were identified as: 2 at 18 (19%), 3 at 19 (43%), 1 at 20 (14%), and 1 chose not to answer. Also for question 5 of the exit survey, 6 students selected Somewhat Agree as their answer choice. Five of those students identified their gender as female (83%), and 1 student identified their gender as "other" (17%). These six students all identified their race as "white" and their ages ranged from two students at 18 (17%), two students at 19 (17%), one student listed 24 (17%), and one student chose not to answer. The last four students answered question five with Neither Agree nor Disagree. Two of the students identified their gender as female (50%) and two of the students identified their gender as

male (50%). All of the students identified their race as “white.” Three of the students listed their age as 19 and one student listed their age as 18.

Figure 4.6 Sixth question on the entrance and exit survey



Entrance Survey Results

For question 6 of the social media activism survey (Figure 4.6), 10 students selected Strongly Agree as their answer for the entrance survey. Of those 10 students, 5 students identified their gender as male (50%), 4 students identified their gender as female (40%), and 1 student identified their gender as “other” (10%). Of the same data set, 8 students identified their race as “white” (80%), 1 student identified their race as “black” (10%), and 1 student identified their race as “mixed” (10%). 2 of the students listed their age as 18 (20%), 5 listed their age as 19 (50%), 1 student listed their age as 20 (10%), and 2 students chose not to answer.

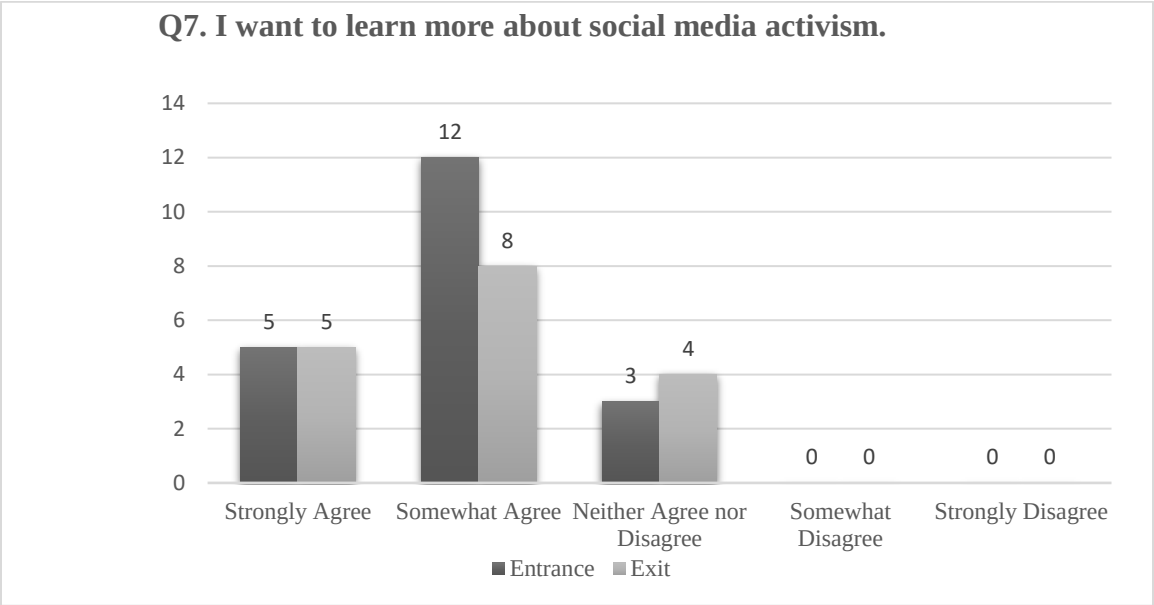
For question 6 of the entrance survey, 8 students answered Somewhat Agree. Of those 8 students, 6 identified their gender as female (75%), and 2 identified their gender as male (25%). All the students identified their race as "white" (100%). 1 student gave their age as 18 (13%), 5 students identified their age as 19 (63%), and 2 students chose not to answer. For the entrance survey, 2 students answered Neither Agree nor Disagree and identified themselves as female, "white," and 24 years old and as female, "white," and chose not to answer.

Exit Survey Results

In the exit survey results of question six, nine students selected the choice Strongly Agree for the survey. Of these nine students, four identified their gender as female (44.5%), four identified their gender as male (44.5%), and one student identified their gender as "other" (1%). Eight students identified their race as "white" (89%) and one student identified their race as "black" (11%). The ages of the nine students varied. Three students listed that they were 18 (33%), four students listed their age as 19 (45%), one student listed their age as 20 (11%), and one student chose not to answer. Also for question six, five student selected Somewhat Agree in the exit survey. Of these five students, four listed their gender as female (80%) and one listed their gender as male (20%). For these same students, four identified their race as "white" (50%) and one identified their race as "mixed" (20%). These students gave their ages: two students at 18 (40%) and three at 19 (60%). In the same answer category, two students selected Neither Agree nor Disagree to question six. These students both identified their gender as female and both identified their race as "white." One student listed their age as 24 and the other

student chose not to answer. One student answered question six of the exit survey with Somewhat Disagree. This student identified himself as 19, “white,” and male.

Figure 4.7 Seventh question on the entrance and exit survey



Entrance Survey Results

For question seven of the entrance survey, five students selected that they Strongly Agree. Of these five students, two identified their gender as female (40%) and three identified their gender as male (60%). Of these same students, three listed their race as “white” (60%), one student identified their race as “black” (20%), and one student identified their race as “mixed” (20%). In this same data set, one student listed their age as 18 (20%), two students listed their age as 19 (40%), one student listed their age as 20 (20%), and 1 student chose not to answer. Also for the entrance survey of question seven, twelve students selected Somewhat Agree. Nine of these students identified their gender as female (75%) and three students identified their gender as female (25%). These

students all identified their race as “white.” Of these same data set, two students identified their age as 18 (17%), seven students identified their age as 19 (58%), one student identified their age as 24 (8%), and two students chose not to answer. For question seven, three students selected the Neither Agree nor Disagree category. Of these students, one identified as female, one identified as male, and one identified as “other.” In the same data set, all of the students identified as “white,” and only one student gave their age: 19.

Exit Survey Results

For the exit results of question seven, again, five students selected Strongly Agree. Of these students, four listed themselves as male (80%) and one student listed herself as female (20%). Of the same data set, three students listed themselves as “white” (60%), one student listed himself as “black” (20%), and one student listed herself as “mixed” (20%). In the same answer category, one student listed their age as 18 (20%), two students listed their age as 19 (40%), one student listed their age as 20 (20%), and one student chose not to answer. Also, for question number seven of the exit survey, eight students stated that they Somewhat Agree. Of this answer set, six students listed their gender as female (75%), one student listed their gender as male (12.5%), and one student listed “other” as their gender (12.5%). Additionally, four students selected Neither Agree nor Disagree for their exit survey answer to question seven. Of these four students, three students identified their gender as female (75%) and one student identified his gender as male (25%). All of the students identified their race as “white.” The ages of the students were: one student listed as 18 (25%), two students listed as 19 (50%), and one student chose not to answer.

Student Essays

Student writing collected from the in-class essay demonstrated interesting results. The final day of the social media activism unit the class had 17 students who after being read the In-class essay prompt were given fifty minutes to complete the essay. The results listed below (Table 4.1) demonstrate a language analysis of the words repeated most in the student writings.

Table 4.1 Frequency of specific word use in the students' writing

Word:	*Frequency of Use:*
culture	17
Activism/activists	176
social media/social media's	307
voice/voices	8
politic/politics/political	16
protest/protester	63
change/changing/changed	54
news	53
slacktivism	3
twitter/tweet/retweet	27
Facebook	32

After discovering common word frequency in students' essays, the essays were combed through for common strands of thought and themes. These common ideas often used core frequency words found; for example, "voices" was found in student essays and

often corresponded with ideas like “social media gives us, a voice." In the following section, students’ essays are organized based on these common themes found.

Student Writing Defining Social Media Activism:

One of the first common themes found was student’s defining social media activism before delving further into the topic. The process of defining the term for the in-class essay was done as a class at the beginning of the unit; students were also asked to define this term for the in-class essay. The results of student’s definitions varied showing how different student’s conclusions formed through this unit. Students’ definitions explored the idea of connection through social media activism. Not only did they define aspects of social media activism, like protest, raising awareness, and support, but students also explored the way we are connected globally, and able to share our movements. In Student Excerpt 1, the student discusses social media activism as a technology and media tool to spread awareness about a cause. This connected theme is common among the other students, like Student Excerpt 5, who mentions the communication of activist groups through social media. Their writings and word use suggests they grasped some varying concepts involved in activism and social media usage. It is interesting that the student built some differing definitions from examples explored in the readings and the documentary. This is shown in Student Excerpt 3, when the student discusses the use of social media activism to end tyranny—a subject discussed often in the documentary. Examples are also shown when the students discussed Black Lives Matter, like in Student excerpt 5.

Student Excerpt 1:

"Social media activism is the use of online communities to spread the awareness of a cause or help those in need. This new form of activism has many benefits that were previously impossible through older means of communication. Quick information spreading, protesting from secure locations, and connecting massive groups of people are some of the vital aspects that have made social media activism so important."

Student Excerpt 2:

"There is no true definition of "social media activism," but we, as a people, can define it by what we see in it. Movements, protests, arguments, or even negative things like bullying and shooting someone down because of their opinion are all things that are a part of the social media activism package. I define it as something that will cause a spark within the people."

Student Excerpt 3:

"Social media activism is a term sparked by actions in recent years regarding people uniting over a specific cause. It has been used in organized protests, charities, and even political revolts. Social media activism has made the use of social media more impactful than just simply going online to see what your friends are up to. It is now a gathering place for people in war torn nations to band together and unite against their tyrannical leaders."

Student Excerpt 4:

"To me, social media activism is protesting or showing your beliefs through social media, the Facebook, Twitter, everything. Instead of going out and physically protesting, you do it behind your computer, tablet, or smart phone."

Student Excerpt 5:

"Social media activism to me consist of more than just sitting in front of a laptop and retweeting the popular hashtags that roar 'Black Lives Matter.' It's the use of social media with the intent to support, raise awareness and communicate with those who share your views, to bring about tangible change to that of which is of your group's concern."

Student Writing About Social Media Activism Changing our Culture:

Another common theme was students' discussion of social media activism changing our culture. This theme was discussed in class and found in the unit's readings. The students all seemed to agree that social media activism was changing our culture. The students' opinions on social media activism's effect on culture all remain the same; however, their ideas about the positivity of this change vary. Student Excerpts 6 and 7 discuss the way social media activism has changed the way we protest and share our experiences to a larger audience. Both students generally seemed to state that this a positive change—we see Student Excerpt 7 using the word "powerful." In contrast, Student Excerpts 8 and 9 discussed the negative effects, they feel, social media activism has caused. Student Excerpt 8 explores slacktivism and the idea that people are no longer going out to participate in physical protests, and Student Excerpt 9 explores the idea that social media, in general, is wrecking our communication and relationships.

Student Excerpt 6:

"The new information I have learned from the documentary has allowed me to realize how much social media activism is changing the way people around the world are protesting today. I think it is already changing our culture and will continue to drastically change it."

Student Excerpt 7:

"Anybody with a phone that can take a video is a very powerful person. I think in this day and age social media is definitely changing our culture. We can sit behind a computer or phone and read millions of posts online from around the world."

Student Excerpt 8:

"Social Media is definitely changing our culture. It has both provided a way for people to share their message, but has also created what people call slacktivism. Slacktivism is basically the lazy way of supporting a movement by not actually going out and supporting the movement. An example would be "liking" a page on Facebook and saying you are an avid supporter."

Student Excerpt 9:

"I do believe social media is affecting our culture by changing the way we interact with and communicate with one another. People today communicate less and less in person and more and more online. In dating we are seeing the rise of hookup culture instead of people meeting people in person. People meet people using tinder now. I feel traditional relationships are the way to go and that the traditional family is the backbone of our society and way of life."

Student Writing About the Social Media Activism Unit:

Another common theme students discussed from the prompt was terms and ideas they learned from the social media activism unit. Many students state that they had never heard of social media activism or understood the extent to which social media plays a role in activism. Students also wrote about pieces of the unit which they felt they learned the most from—especially the documentary and class readings. The following student

excerpts show some different feelings students had about studying social media activism in our class. The student excerpts demonstrate that students gained some good contextual knowledge from the various components of the social media activism unit. Many students explained that they had never heard of social media activism before the unit and now see it more in their everyday social media interactions (Student Excerpt 13, 15). Students also explored the preconceived ideas they had about social media activism before the unit and the awakening they had after learning more. Students also discussed the documentary and the impact it had on their view of social media activism.

Student Excerpt 10:

"Social media activism was something I was not totally familiar. I would have described it more as social media rants or someone's ability to post anything they want on Facebook and Twitter. I knew it was used for people to voice their opinions and be heard. What I did not realize to what extent people are using social media in activism. The documentary #chicagogirl really opened my eyes to the broad spectrum of how social media activism is taking place."

Student Excerpt 11:

"The documentary that we watched taught me a lot about social media activism. I learned that you can get a group of people together within a matter of hours and start a revolution" (Student 4).

Student Excerpt 12:

"After watching The Chicago Girl and reading some articles for homework, I have really learned that Social Media Activism has been around for quite some time now, and it has been used amongst us to the best of our advantage. Even back in Martin Luther King Jr's

time he made a statement saying for the police to beat them up in the light of television, showing that instead of backing down in what they were standing for, they would let law reinforcement to try to stop them over the views of others from their living rooms."

Student Excerpt 13:

"Before reading more on social media activism and watching Chicago Girl I did not really think much of it. Since talking about it I notice it everywhere on my social media accounts. On twitter, I see hashtags all the time and on Facebook I am always seeing people sharing articles and videos of all sorts of issues and topics. After watching to documentary on Chicago girl it kind of opened my eyes a little."

Student Excerpt 14:

"Honestly, social media activism was not a term I was familiar with until this class. Social media activism has now become a very relevant concept, for I realize how much it impacts everyday people."

Student Excerpt 15:

"I have never really given much thought to social media activism before taking this class. This is probably because I have never really been involved in a movement that I felt strongly enough about. Before, I simply thought of social media activism as retweets about political topics that I saw in my Twitter feed. Now, however, I see it as something different. I have learned from our readings and the documentary that people use social media for a variety of reasons such as organizing rallies, and communicating with their fellow activists. It is now really a communication device that is used to bring awareness to the public. When a video of police brutality or a picture of an impoverished country is posted online, it can have thousands of views and shares within hours."

Student Writing on Differing Views of Social Media Activism:

Students also wrote about the different views they have of social media activism. They often discussed their previous view along with other opinions gained from the readings, class discussion, and the documentary. Students opinions differed on the impact of social media activism and how their view has changed since beginning the unit. Student's views on social media activism differed greatly in their writings. Student Excerpt 16 and 20 both discuss the need for social media activism to move beyond the computer screen to achieve the movement's desired goals. Other students, like in excerpts 17 and 19, wrote that they viewed social media activism very positively and that it was responsible for some great social movements in our time. Student Excerpt 18 also showed the balance of these two views. The student discussed the view of social media activism as both positive and negative; it can be a great tool for movements but can also create easy ways for people to selfishly feel involved.

Student Excerpt 16:

"My previous views on social media activism have changed – but only slightly. I used to think it was pure laziness of people just sharing click bait on the likes of *Facebook* and *Twitter,* but am now aware it is much greyer than that. I am now aware that this issue is not simply black and white, and in certain situations, such as the case of the Syrian war, it is vital to the civilians to organize protests and show the world what is happening in the country. However, I also still feel that much of the recent online activism in America has been extremely lazy. If you want to push a social change in this country, you will need to do far more than share the latest main stream media "news" and deliver more than just a rant on *Facebook*, or even signing an online position."

Student Excerpt 17:

"My views on social media activism have now changed to realize that it is bitter sweet. I used to only see it as the negatives of people fighting over Trump, creating drama, spreading rumors and lies. For a period of time, I did think that it was only bringing more good than bad to us but the truth is, it is so positive for today's society. The documentary changed my view on this because it showed me actual proof of situations and people that social media and activism in beneficial and crucial for to make their movement."

Student Excerpt 18:

"There are several views one can take when analyzing the effects of social media activism. The first one being that social media subtracts from revolutionizing movements and waters them down to a view count on a screen. This is often described as being reflected in narcissism in the way people only involve themselves in good cause pages and feeds to make them feel better about themselves. Besides sharing an article or looking at a news report once in a while; nevertheless, they do nothing else to support the cause that it is conveying. Another view one can take from social media activism is that although social media is not a means of protests in itself, it is a fantastic conductor to do so."

Student Excerpt 19:

"Social media activism is the spark for some to most of the greatest movements of all time. This term can be described as social media being used as a spread for news and movements going on all around the world. It plays a huge role in everyday which most people do not even realize."

Student Excerpt 20:

"Even though social media has made great strides in making people realize that there are problems, it will not fix them. Simply retweeting or hash tagging something will not change the world. To me, if you really want something to happen you have to get out from behind your computer and go out into the world. There are so many things you can do to help a cause such as volunteering or physically attending a protest. You can help change the world but you will need more than a computer to do it."

Student Writing Reflecting on Their Own Use of Social Media Activism:

An additional common theme from the prompt was students discussing their own use of social media activism. Students also discussed the impact social media activism has on them. Students also noted stark contrasts in who certain students use social media activism or do not. Students reflections differed on how social media activism affects them directly. In Student Excerpt 22, the student calls themselves a "lazy activist" who shares with movement they are passionate about then "moves on." In contrast, Student Excerpts 21, 23, and 24, all discussed the students personal experience with social media activism. Student Excerpt 21 wrote about their experience with the gay rights movement, while Student Excerpt 23 discussed the solidarity they felt when joining movements on issues related to mental illness. Additionally, in Student Excerpt 24, the student writes about their experience with Black Lives Matter after Trayvon Martin was murdered. All of these students discussed the different movements they experienced within social media activism.

Student Excerpt 21:

"Social media activism has personally affected me by being able to connect with anyone I could possibly need to. From gay rights movements, which help me support my cousin,

too opening my eyes on political campaigns, to staying connected with my family all over the United States, and even with my family in Canada. While I am not involved in a movement as large as the revolution against Damascus, it is still beneficial and positive for me. I have a feeling of comfort in knowing that I can be connected to anyone around the world in a matter of seconds."

Student Excerpt 22:

"Even though social media activism hasn't really affected me personally I'm more of a "lazy activist" just share a few things then go one. But I know social media activism is real, I know it's serious, and I know how big it is."

Student Excerpt 23:

"Because of social media I was able to give myself an outlet and a voice to others suffering similar situations and since then I find myself an advocate of mental illness and PTSD. You can't save the world but putting your voice and a story out saved me so I like to do the same for others."

Student Excerpt 24:

"I have firsthand experience with social media activism due to the death of one of my fellow peers in high school Trayvon Martin. Though we feel he did not receive the justice he deserved, social media activism allowed us to gain nationwide support for our efforts and that is a prime display of the power that social media has in activism, the cultural phenomena that have occurred based on people taking to the internet their efforts and beliefs."

Student Writing About Voice:

A small, but interesting, theme I found in student writing was exploration into the way social media activism gives movements a voice. This theme was not discussed in the prompt, so students wrote about this idea on their own. Both students felt that social media activism was positive and gave groups a power way to spread their message without violence.

Both students discussed the way social media activism gives you a voice behind the screen. Student Excerpt 26 even "simplified" social media activism into the word voice alone. The student writes that social media activism has become a "voice of the people."

Student Excerpt 25:

"Social media activism is the world we live in now. Why fight on the street when you can have a bigger voice behind a screen? This isn't for the people who harass or have Twitter fingers, but for the people who really want to make a difference and put their own lives in jeopardy every day to show people what is really going on in the world. For the people who aren't afraid to show people what the big picture really is. Like they said in the documentary, social media activism is so much better than going out and picking up a weapon. Let your mind and your power be the weapon."

Student Excerpt 26:

"Social media activism simplified with all of its components is a voice. The voice of the people."

Students' Final Thoughts on Social Media Activism:

The final strands of thought collected explored ideas that are interesting and open room for more exploration. Students, on their own, gave some final thoughts on social

media activism. These different excerpts give some perplexing thoughts how students are approaching the topic of social media activism. These final student thoughts give a powerful message on what students want from social media activism. In Student Excerpt 29, the student calls to others to change the lazy activist side of social media activism. They want us to stop ignoring calls for social justice we see on our social media feeds. Student Excerpt 27 states that social media activism cannot be confused with just sharing online petitions; they write that it needs to be used to organize protests—not just to share or rant online. Student Excerpt 28 and 30 both discuss the way ordinary citizens obtain information; the choice rests in what they wish to do with it.

Student Excerpt 27:

"The era of social media activism is just beginning to come to complete fruition and more and more protests are being organized online throughout the world. These protests have the power to shape the world – and should not be mentioned using the same term as sharing a poorly written article by someone who somehow managed to get a degree in journalism. Not only that, but the fact that someone thinks their online petition will be taken seriously baffles my mind. We are not all special snowflakes asking for a change to fit our personal agenda, we are Americans and as such should stick up for what we believe in rather than ranting online or only reading headlines and sharing them."

Student Excerpt 28:

"Social media activism is highly effective in uniting people across many platforms. It allows a common person to become part of a movement and have their voice heard, even if it is typed and posted online. People rely on social media today and use it to obtain multiple levels of information. Alaa and Black Lives Matter both use social media as a

stage in which to coordinate protests and gatherings. Their efforts have helped millions and wouldn't be possible without social media."

Student Excerpt 29:

"It has become so easy nowadays to scroll past the video showing children dead on the ground in Syria. I believe it needs to change because I know that I have not yet been affected directly by social media when I know I should have. There are so many things we, and I, can help with, but it is all on social media, therefore people just scroll past it without a second thought. It is called "social media ACTIVISM" for a reason, act upon it."

Student Excerpt 30:

"Social media activism is forcing people to open their eyes and to stop believing that the world is only full of sunshine and roses. Whether people decide to continue to ignore it or to do something about it, is entirely up to them."

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Survey Results

Question 1: Defining Social Media Activism

The survey results showed some interesting findings about the social media activism unit my students and I worked through. The demographics of question one show fairly even distribution of gender, race, and age. When looking at the entrance and exit data on question one of the survey (Figure 4.1), we can see the students, before beginning the unit, were evenly divided on strongly agreeing and somewhat agreeing that they understood how to define social media activism. After our unit on social media activism, fourteen students stated that they strongly agreed that they understood the definition of social media activism versus one student who still selected that they somewhat agreed. This change demonstrates that the social media activism unit was successful in helping students better define this subject, though further study would need to be made to verify these results with other students. These results are also shown in the student writing results section.

Question 2: Having a Good Understanding of Social Media Activism

As with question one, the distribution of the demographics for the answers to question two are fairly even. Also, students were split down the middle evenly when taking the entrance survey. For both Strongly Agree and Somewhat Agree, ten students

selected each choice. In the exit survey, we see a jump in the data. Four more students selected Strongly Agree after the social media activism unit was taught. In the exit survey, only three students selected that they Somewhat Agree with question two's statement. From these results, it can be concluded that students may feel they have a better understanding of social media activism after the unit. In looking at the student writing results, we see students are engaging in deeper discusses of social media activism with a better understanding of the multitude of opinions and information on this topic.

Question 3: Learning Objectively about Social Media Activism is Important

The information collected from question three is tricky. The Strongly Agree category remains the same on the entrance and exit survey. The fact that I had two different number of responses may have affected this. The data is somewhat evenly distributed; half the class believes learning social media objectively is important while the other half may not feel as strongly. However, the students who identified their race as anything other than white and students who identified their gender as anything other than female or male both selected that they strongly agreed for the entrance and exit survey. More research would be needed to see if there is a connection to this data. For this discussion, the students were pretty even on their thoughts on the importance of studying this topic. This must be considered when replicating this study.

Question 4: Is Social Media Activism Affecting our Culture?

After analyzing the survey data received from question four, it seems a majority of students do believe that social media activism is affecting our culture. The only change we see in the answer to this question seems to be with the absence of some students, though further research is needed to verify these findings. One of the biggest reasons I

wanted to present students with a social media activism unit was that I believed it was affecting our culture and it seems the students also agree. This is also discussed further in student's writings.

Question 5: I Believe Social Media Activism is Affecting Me Directly

Though this question mostly stayed within the same numbers in the entrance and exit survey, the data shows that students actually selected more evenly than before. In the entrance survey, more students stated that they Somewhat Agree that social media activism directly affects them. In the exit survey, students seem to be leaning more towards the Somewhat Disagree category. This data should potentially show that students feel, after watching the documentary, that social media activism is actually farther from them than they imagined. Though some students discuss their own personal use of social media activism in the student writing data, many students stated that they had not personally experienced social media activism.

Question 6: I Have Personally Seen Social Media Activism in Action

Similar to question six, students seem to have moved more towards the Somewhat Disagree category after the social media activism unit. This may be, as stated before, because of the documentary and discussion of large activism groups that students feel out of reach. After watching a girl, the same age as many of my students, lead the social media activism movement in Syria, many of my students may feel that they have not "truly" seen social media activism in their life, if we consider activism as a concept that takes place off the screen.

Question 7: I Want to Learn More About Social Media Activism

The survey data for survey question number seven also gives some interesting information. Though the Strongly Agree category remained the same, one more student moved to the Neither Agree nor Disagree category. The data seems to show that there was no drastic movement on whether students wish to learn more about social media activism. Potentially, students felt they had learned enough with the unit. Or, students may feel it a subject which is uninteresting to them. But, the student writing data seems to also show that some students felt they already understood a great deal about social media activism. Potentially, many students were better able to define it and discuss it on a more critical level after the unit.

Student Writing

Frequency of Word Use:

In the frequency of word use table (Table 4.1), we can see some common patterns in the topics discussed in the social media activism unit. Though *activism* and *social media* were the two most frequently used words, there were some interesting concepts the students discussed which I felt were not discussed in the social media activism unit. One of the ideas frequently cited was *news*. Though we discussed social media as a broadcast tool for activists, many students discussed the way social media is changing news. Understanding how social media has changed the way people get their news seems to be a large topic for discussion among students and in current events in the United States. It makes sense that students would link activism with media and news media; many of the activist stories we read are released through the news we receive on our social media platforms. Another word, *change*, was used often in the students' papers. It seems they may be seeing some change in the way we receive and move against or with information.

Politics was also discussed in many student papers on social media activism. Though activism and politics seems to be naturally linked, this unit attempted to always look at all forms of social media activism evenly. However, the political nature is an important component of this subject.

Student Writing Defining Social Media Activism:

The students' definitions of social media activism varied greatly. While some students described it as a technology tool used to "organize" and bring people together for a cause, some students felt social media activism was just a way of sitting behind the computer while attempting to protest. One student even stated that there was no real definition for social media activism. Though social media had many definitions and could not be contained in one. In instructing on this unit, I wanted students to not only read diverse scholarship but to form their own opinions on what social media activism is defined as for them. I do feel that the student writing successfully shows that students learned to define social media from this unit. More research will need to done to see if this stays with them well after the unit.

Student Writing About Social Media Activism Changing our Culture:

Many students discussed the way social media activism is affecting our culture. One student discussed the way social media activism is changing protesting. Some students discussed this same concept with communication. Students stated that social media activism uses greater communication to organize protests. Some students believed that social media lacks communication and that social media activism was making activism groups less connected. Malcolm Gladwell discusses this in his piece against social media activism. He discusses SOURCE that suggested true activism needed

meaningful relationships to succeed. This was published in 2010, though, and things have changed drastically. Students also discussed the different way social media activism uses the computer and technology and how this changes our cultural uses of social media. Some students believed this technology change creates slacktivism and the belief that you can make change by being active in activist groups online. These views show the different ways social media activism is changing our culture.

Student Writing About the Social Media Activism Unit:

Overall, students seemed to discuss the social media activism unit fondly. Many students described their lack of understanding about the full range of uses in social media activism before the unit. Also, many students discussed the unit either changing the way they view social media activism or their view staying the same. Some students also stated that they learned using the media for activism had been around for a long time like when the civil rights movement used television to spread the word of the brutality they faced. Students also discussed how they began to notice social media activism more in their daily lives after discussing it in class; that social media activism had now become a "relevant concept." This awareness was what I wanted the students to gain from the unit. I believe the students show in their writing that not only were they able to define social media activism but that they recognized the impact and prevalence of it in our social media platforms. In the end, the student writing about the unit seems to show that students gained various perspectives throughout the unit while also gaining awareness of the amount of activist propaganda they often see.

Student Writing on Differing Views of Social Media Activism:

Student views on social media activism varied greatly at the end of the unit. One student noted that before they viewed social media activism as lazy but now see that there is a grey area when discussing social media activism. Many students discussed this same idea, in reference to the power social media can wield. That even though we use the power of online activism—real change comes from real high-risk activism. Many students felt that social media activism was positive but still had its faults with the idea stated previously.

Another interesting view some students discussed is the way that social media activism affected the current election. Two students even mention that social media activism had a direct effect on they voted for in the primaries. This type of impact social media activism has on politics and elections shows the power this type of activism has. One student also believed that social media activism was weakening some activist movements by making the movements more about shares and followers than the cause itself. Another student noted that even with social media activism's power, it will not fix things. In contrast, other students could not stop praising the success social media activism has brought to movements like Black Lives Matter. These students used words like "game-changer" and spark to describe the impact of social media in activism. Again, these varying views are important for a balanced approach to studying social media activism. I believe the student writing on their views of activism shows the readings and documentary showed multiple different arguments for social media activism.

Student Writing Reflecting on Their Own Use of Social Media Activism:

For the In-class writing, I asked students to reflect on their previous use and interactions with social media activism. Many students discussed how Black Lives Matter

used social media activism to show the mistreatment of African-Americans in the United States. Many students mentioned how they could support groups or movements they felt strongly about. One student even mentioned that social media activism can cause protests to become violent. Another student discussed that social media activism during the election forced them to look deeper at critical issues. One student called themselves a lazy activist but felt it gave activists a voice. One of my students even discussed their direct involvement with Trayvon Martin and the power social media activism gave them in their attempt to seek justice for his murder. The student reflections on their use of social media activism made me, as the instructor, even more aware of the amount of students who are seeking to make a difference through social media activism.

Student Writing About Voice:

Only three students discussed voice in their writings, but I found this anomaly interesting. The three students who discussed social media activism as a voice for the people or a system that allows for people who are not normally heard to be heard all identified as non-white and labeled their gender as something other than female or male. These identifiers could have an impact on how social media activism helps the voices of disadvantaged groups be heard. Since my sample size it so small, this may not be the case. Another study must be conducted to see the potential connection of identifiers and social media activism impact.

Students' Final Thoughts on Social Media Activism:

Many students noted, though they are not all shown, that we are only at the beginning of the era of social media activism. Many students ended their final thoughts on this unit with a message about the need for more follow through in social media

activism, that though social media is highly effective at uniting people for a common movement, the next steps after we are made aware of these uses need to change. Some students said that they were unsatisfied with their own reaction to images of Syrian children dying on social media. I believe these final thoughts show great depth and complexity from my students. I believe that students felt, after the unit, even with differing views on social media activism, that it is forcing people to see the reality of other situations around the world. My students all seemed to come away from the unit hoping to change the way we respond to activism we see online. This view, I believe, shows that students are interested in social media activism and the impact it has on our culture.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS

After analyzing and discussing the data, the data seems to show that students not only enjoyed the social media unit but learned from it as well. Though further research is needed, the students in my Midwestern composition II course seemed to show some deep and critical thoughts on social media activism and its effects on our culture. I believe more research is needed on the actual effects understanding how to navigate and critique social media activism students witness online. The survey seemed to show that students did learn how to understand the various arguments for and against social media activism in current cultural discussions. Reading though the students' writings, almost every student discussed that though we may not understand now, social media activism is affecting our culture and it just at the beginning of its rise.

For my research study, there were some limitations which I believe should be addressed when replicating this study. First, the study needs to be done over a longer period to see if the students were actually able to use what they learned from the unit into practice. Some students noted that they were now more aware of it, but were they able to verify its credibility? Second, there was some major student resistance from one of students who felt social media activism was only for "liberals." The next time I complete this unit, I hope to provide some resources which show social media activism works in all politic arenas. Another limitation is the population size and location of my university. These factors could definitely change the results if the study is replicated. This study may provide different results if instructed in a more diverse student population.

Overall, with the turn of composition studies to digital classrooms and discussing the rhetoric used in these spaces, discussing social media activism in the first-year classroom is important. My students throughout this unit showed growth in not only critical knowledge about online activism, but of online media itself. As I stated in my reasons for my research, students did seem to show an understanding of the power social media activism has while also being critical of its use. This makes students more aware, as they themselves noted, and, therefore, better able to participate in the new political space social media creates. As a class, we really codeveloped our various definitions, views, and arguments for and against social media activism. Not only did my students learn a great deal about social media activism, but I also learned new and interesting perspectives from my students and their own experiences. This codeveloped topic has allowed me to also hope for more realistic activism from social media movements.

I believe this research study, again, showed the importance of discussing social media activism and its power over our political culture. Even if that lesson is placed in a larger unit about social media, this topic is just beginning to show its effects on our students and ourselves. To be more critically aware, we need students who are aware and suspicious of online agendas which cannot be controlled. Facebook is attempting to try to join with Twitter in helps of blocking articles deemed "fake news." The issue is, digital freedom is important to our democratic web space. Instead of blocking "fake news," students need more instruction on deconstructing social media and social media activism.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Office of Research Administration
Akron, OH 44325-2102

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Date: November 17, 2016

To: Melissa Perkins; William Thelin,
Department of English

From: Sharon McWhorter SM

IRB Number: 20161108

Title: Awakening Activism Through Instruction on Social Media Writing

Approval Date: November 17, 2016

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for review. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

- [x] **Exemption 1** – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.
- [ ] **Exemption 2** – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.
- [ ] **Exemption 3** - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.
- [ ] **Exemption 4** – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.
- [ ] **Exemption 5** – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.
- [ ] **Exemption 6** – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact the IRB to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

- [ ] Approved consent form/s enclosed

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1 I understand what social media activism is defined as.

- ❍ Strongly agree (1)
- ❍ Somewhat agree (2)
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ❍ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ❍ Strongly disagree (5)

Q2 I believe I have a good understanding of social media activism.

- ❍ Strongly agree (1)
- ❍ Somewhat agree (2)
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ❍ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ❍ Strongly disagree (5)

Q3 I believe learning objectively about social media activism is important.

- ❍ Strongly agree (1)
- ❍ Somewhat agree (2)
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ❍ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ❍ Strongly disagree (5)

Q4 I believe social media activism is affecting our culture.

- ❍ Strongly agree (1)
- ❍ Somewhat agree (2)
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ❍ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ❍ Strongly disagree (5)

Q5 I believe social media activism affects me directly.

- ❍ Strongly agree (1)
- ❍ Somewhat agree (2)
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ❍ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ❍ Strongly disagree (5)

Q6 I have personally seen social media activism in action.

- ❍ Strongly agree (1)
- ❍ Somewhat agree (2)
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ❍ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ❍ Strongly disagree (5)

Q7 I want to learn more about social media activism.

- ❍ Strongly agree (1)
- ❍ Somewhat agree (2)
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ❍ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ❍ Strongly disagree (5)

Q8 I identify my gender as:

Q9 I identify my race as:

Q10 I identify my age as:

APPENDIX C

IN-CLASS ESSAY PROMPT

In-Class Essay: Social Media Activism

- What is social media activism? What do you define it as?
- What roles has social media played in online activism?
- What where your previous views on social media activism? Have they changed?
- What have you learned about social media activism from the documentary and the readings for homework?
- Do you believe social media is changing our culture? How?
- Has social media activism affected you directly? How?

Make sure to write for the full time given in class. The essay should introduce the idea of social media activism and then connect the ideas asked in the previous questions. The essay should have an introduction and weave these ideas into a conclusion. I will let you know when you have 5 minutes left to wrap up your ideas.