

SOCIALIZING FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION: A STUDY OF SOCIAL NETWORKING  
SITES' IMPACT ON FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

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The primary argument of this dissertation is that Social Networking Sites (SNS) are an increasingly important part of our writing students' personal, professional, social and civic lives, and, as a result, SNS continue to be important subjects for rhetorical study as well as potentially positive pedagogical tools in the first-year writing classroom. For this project I surveyed 107 and interviewed four first-year writing students at a mid-sized, Midwestern state university in order to listen to them discuss their use and views of SNS, as well as their views on the use of SNS as subjects for rhetoric study and as pedagogical tools in the writing classroom. In doing so, my goal for this project was to continue addressing how to responsibly, ethically, and effectively use SNS in the writing classroom in order to enhance students' rhetorical composition skills and considerations of audience in the writing classroom and beyond.

I began this project by engaging with and synthesizing the literature in the field of Composition and Rhetoric that considers the use of computer technologies, particularly SNS, in the writing classrooms, and the impact such use has on students and pedagogy in those classrooms. Engagement with this literature became the justification for this project and the foundation for the key considerations that made up the first chapter of this dissertation. In the second chapter I discuss my use of Grounded Theory and Actor-Network Theory as the primary methodologies that informed the methods of my study. By focusing on allowing the data derived from the participants' voices to lead the direction of inquiry, and by taking into account the fluid and reciprocal nature of the interaction between the participants, SNS, and participants' views

and uses of SNS in and out of the first-year writing classroom, I used Grounded Theory and Actor-Network Theory in an attempt to create a space where the participants and their views of and engagement in SNS primarily shaped this dissertation. In the third and fourth chapters I share and analyze the data from the participant surveys and interviews, respectively, in order to begin actively joining the conversations in the field regarding the use of SNS in the writing classroom. In the fifth chapter I conclude the dissertation by using the findings in the previous chapters to maintain the importance of SNS as subjects of rhetorical study; sharing lists of best practices and sample activities/assignments to consider when implementing SNS in the first-year writing classroom; and presenting suggestions for future projects regarding the study of SNS in the writing classroom.

For Mare, Jim, Brandy, Helen, and Blair.

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## CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE STAGE FOR SNS IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

In a way, I have come of age with social media. As a child, I grew up with computers finding an increasing presence at home and in school, and my formative years coincided with the foundations laid for web 2.0 and social media as we know it today. When I was an adolescent, I had access to dial-up Internet and email, and while I did not know many people online to utilize email, I would send a few here and there because of the novelty of sending electronic messages. As a teenager, I was an avid user of AOL's instant messenger with my friends at school. I spent hours at night chatting with my friends without speaking a word. Then, once I had my driver's license I was given a cell phone, and while it was primarily meant to be used for emergencies and checking in with my parents, my friends and I quickly established that texting with cell phones was an efficient way for communicating what we believed to be vital information. Within a decade, my friends and I had gone from writing each other hand-written letters and notes to instant messaging and texting, and the technology was quickly evolving to make these digital interactions more intuitive and engaging.

Upon graduating high school and beginning college during the 2004-2005 academic year, I was among the first to sign up for Facebook when it was released exclusively to college students that year. This was a completely new way of interacting on the Internet. Not only could I connect with my friends individually online, and provide a small blurb about myself via an instant messenger profile box, but I could also begin to more fully express who I was online by creating a page full of information about my interests. I could connect with other people I went to school with or shared similar interests with, but perhaps did not yet know. Since then, Twitter, Vine, Instagram, Pinterest, and seeming countless other social networking sites have come about and evolved along with the billions of people who use them and are affected by them from

moment to moment. Indeed, in the last ten years, social networking sites have become one of the most important and impactful aspects of the Internet, social communication, and worldwide interaction.

Today, as a frequent user of SNS for social, personal, and professional reasons, it is a personal goal to attempt to use SNS in the most effective and responsible ways possible for my given purposes, which include my use of SNS in the composition classroom as a pedagogical and rhetorical tool. Thus, this project comes about out of a continuous personal need to better understand SNS and their use in order to responsibly, ethically and effectively work with such sites in the writing classroom.

### **Justification for Project**

At the heart of this project is a deep respect for the power of literacies of technology and the impact such literacies have on individuals, personally, socially, and professionally. Cynthia Selfe asserts that there are:

moral and ethical obligations that responsible literacy educators and citizens have in connection with the current national project to expand technological literacy. The ways in which we define literacy... the literacy practices we support and teach in schools; the official literacy values that we recognize and inculcate as a culture... all of these are at stake in the current national project and they are therefore among our professional responsibilities to address. (*Technology* 19-20)

Therefore, it is vital that educators and citizens make every effort to continually develop such inclusive definitions and ethical practices to share with one another. It is also important to understand the role youth play in developing these definitions and practices. Indeed, Jonathan



Alexander contends that youth are writing on the web “in ways that are creative, dynamic, and boundary-pushing. The question is, are we paying attention? And what can we learn from the literacies with which such digital youth are playing on the web?” (*Emerging* 10). As teachers and scholars in the field of Rhetoric and Writing, it is important that we keep asking these questions, and observing the evolution of and our interaction with digital technologies. As social media become more interconnected with various aspects of our lives, we must strive to collaborate on creating tools and spaces that are safe and productive for all those who use such technologies today and in the future. It is with these concerns of developing definitions and practices for enhancing literacies, and of paying attention to our youth to do so, that I move forward with this project.

Today, our youth seem to be engaging in this web-writing, and literacy-defining on Social Networking Sites (SNS) more than ever before. According to a Pew Internet Project report from January, 2014, 89% of internet users between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine use social networking sites, 35% of all Twitter users are in that age range (“Social Networking Fact Sheet”). Moreover, because of SNS popularity, teachers are continually trying to incorporate them into the classroom. Yet, while such integration has the potential to engage teachers and students alike in critical activities regarding the use of such sites and their potential as rhetorical tools, there is also a potential danger in promoting the use of such sites without teaching our students to think critically about the consequences, both positive and negative, of SNS use.

Thus, it is the goal of this project to explore student relationships with social media—particularly social networking sites (SNS)—and the effects social media have on student views/values of composition and their composition methods. Specifically, using survey and

interview data, this project will explore how First-Year Writing (FYW) students at one university use and view their use of SNS outside of the classroom in order to better understand: (1) what role their SNS use plays in identity creation; (2) how the students' use of, and interaction on, SNS affects their understanding of audience and the rhetorical situation; and (3) how student views of their SNS use outside the composition classroom impacts teaching with and about SNS as composition tools.

## **Chapter Overview**

The remainder of this chapter establishes the necessary background information for the project and the following chapters. I begin by outlining the remaining chapters of this work in order to provide a sense of how the information in chapter one works within the context of the rest of the document. I follow the chapter outline by providing definitions of terms that I use throughout this work. Next, I provide a literature review in order to establish a conversation in which my project is meant to enter, and establish the key concepts that guide this project. I then share the research questions that help guide this project and briefly describe my research site. I conclude by situating myself as researcher within this project.

## **Terminology**

While many of the terms and concepts I discuss throughout this work will be relatively familiar to those who are most likely to engage with these chapters, the online landscape is quickly evolving. Therefore, it is important that I establish definitions of certain terms I frequently use, as I see them at the time of this writing.

### *Technology/Computer Technology*

It has become the norm today to refer to technology as only that which has to do with computers. However, while cell phones, tablets, aps, and the Internet are all terms that could fit under the label of technology, this label is not limited to objects that are tools of the digital realm. Indeed, pens, books, and the telegraph were each once the pinnacle of technology, and are still having an impact on how we communicate and interact today. As Dennis Baron asserts in *A Better Pencil*, the computer is simply the next in a long line of technologies that have “facilitated textual production,” and “as other writing technologies before it, the computer is allowing writers to develop new genres and encouraging readers to read in new ways” (329). Therefore, for this project I will make the distinction between Computer Technology (CT) and the more general concept of technology. I do this in order to establish that many of the potentially sound pedagogical implementations of CT have already been implemented effectively for older technologies. Furthermore, I make this distinction to acknowledge the potentially broader reach of CT in order to avoid underestimating the potential personal, social, and professional impact the use of such technologies can have on their users.

### *Social Networking Sites (SNS)*

Thanks to the sudden explosion of digital communication and interaction on the internet, the concept of SNS has potentially blurred since nearly every web page has a comments section, or is tied to another website that focuses on social interaction. Similarly, many cell phone/tablet apps allow or require their users to log in using social networking sites so as to allow the users to share their use of such apps with their friends and followers. However, for the sake of creating a narrow enough topic of conversation for those who participated in this project, my working

definition of SNS is: any website and/or mobile app that requires an individual to create an account for the primary purpose of creating an online profile and using that profile to directly connect with others and establish an online identity.

A defining characteristic of such websites is in their making space for all users with an account to create original content for the site in the form of some kind of post, which other users can see and respond to. Therefore, websites that allow the user to create a profile and use a comments section, but don't provide space for the creation of original content from all of its users would likely not fall into the category of SNS. For instance, news sites, fan sites, and personal webpages, would generally not fit under this definition of SNS because the owners/operators of those sites create the original content while the users of the sites are able only to respond via comments sections. Similarly, Wikis would not usually fall under this definition of SNS because, while the content is driven by all of the users on the site, the purpose of such sites is to collaboratively create and maintain content that meets the criteria of the users, and there is little response from users on the site outside of the modification of content.

Websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Vine, however, are some of the standard examples of the modern SNS. On each of these websites, users create and maintain personal profiles, while posting content that continually works to build individual online identities. Therefore, while there is inherently a social aspect to nearly all websites and apps found online, the social element of identity creation/maintenance, and interaction is the primary focus SNS.

### *Google/Google+/YouTube*

Google is a bit of an anomaly in the realm of SNS, because it has created an infrastructure where all of its major elements are tied together by its SNS, Google+, but many of its primary parts (e.g. Search, Maps, Drive, Mail, etc) were established before Google+, and are large enough to function independently of the SNS's social focus. Furthermore, YouTube, which is now connected to users' Google+ accounts, is a large enough entity to be considered a SNS in its own right.

Therefore, for the purposes of this project, I will make a distinction between Google+, YouTube, and Google. Throughout this work, mention of Google + will refer only to the pages directly confined to the SNS arm of a user's account, and the minor social elements that connect to the SNS account; for instance, in Google Search, users are able to like, or +1, webpages, which will show up on their Google+ account. However, the use of Google Search outside of the +1 function is not inherently tied to the social nature of Google+. Similarly, YouTube will be considered its own SNS, so any mention of it will be done as if it is an entity separate from Google+, unless otherwise stated.

Finally, reference to any other arm of the Google infrastructure that is not primarily tied to Google+, such as Google Drive or Gmail, will be referred to either by its specific name, or generally as Google.

### *The Rhetorical Situation*

Another term that needs a clear definition for this project, as it relates to interaction on SNS is that of the rhetorical situation. There are a number of theories regarding the rhetorical situation, and the rhetor's place within that situation. The stances range from Bitzer, who

believes that there is a knowable problem in which the rhetor can step in and solve for his/her audience (6), to Vatz's belief that the rhetorical situation is wholly subjective and acts more as catalyst for creation than as an object puzzle to be solved (161). However, I tend to align myself with Consigny who argues that, "the real question for rhetorical theory will become not whether the rhetor or situation is dominant, but how, in each case, the rhetor can become engaged in the novel and indeterminate situation and yet have a means of making sense of it" (179). Indeed, it is the ability to perceive of *and* change with the perceived situation that makes an understanding of the rhetorical situation such a critical skill.

The concept of the rhetorical situation becomes more complex when applied to interaction with FYW students and their SNS tendencies. Not only do students have to navigate the rhetorical situation of SNS in their personal and social lives, but they also have to know how to understand and engage in the rhetorical situation of any SNS used for pedagogical reasons within the FYW classroom. Ultimately, it is a goal of this project to help students understand that those two seemingly independent situations often overlap. Thus, unless otherwise noted, I will use the rhetorical situation to discuss this overlap between students' interactions on SNS in and out of the classroom.

### **Establishing the Conversation**

In order to lay the foundation for this project and establish its potential influence in the field and, more essentially, in future FYW classrooms, it is important that I provide some of the context for the academic conversation I am entering. As we continue to consider the role SNS can and do play in and out of the FYW classroom, considering issues of identity, rhetorical/audience awareness, civic engagement, and privacy are of paramount importance.

Indeed, as computer technology and SNS are integrated more into the lives of users, and more time is spent engaging with these technologies, it becomes more important to consider the impact these interactions have on users' establishing and maintaining their online identities.

Moreover, as incorporation of SNS becomes more prevalent in our day-to-day personal, social, and professional lives, it becomes increasingly necessary to build skills identifying when and where to use SNS appropriately, and responsibly, all while being able to understand who will be engaging with what is posted. To this end, it is also important to help students consider the large-scale social ramifications of their interactions on SNS, whether intentional or not, and to consider ways in which they can use SNS for active and positive civic engagement, should students choose to do so.

Of course, in order to ethically and responsibly engage with students in the classroom with SNS, the privacy of the students is of utmost importance. Thus with any discussion of SNS in and out of the FYW class, issues of privacy must always be on the minds of educators. From the potential for hacked accounts of students without their permission, to the students willingly engaging on SNS and all of the data tracking processes that go on online, there are a number of privacy concerns that students may not be fully aware of, and providing them with such information throughout the incorporation of SNS in the FYW classroom should be a priority.

What follows is a brief introduction to some of the key conversations that inform the formation of this project, which include issues of identity, rhetorical/audience awareness, civic engagement, and privacy, and how instructors can consider these ideas to incorporate SNS in the classroom in a pedagogically sound manner.

## *Identity*

Perhaps at the core of all these considerations of SNS use and their impact is the potential role SNS play in identity creation. With our increased interaction on SNS spaces, we are inevitably going to be further influenced by such spaces, not only when thinking about those we interact with, but when thinking about who we are individually. In “The Design of Web 2.0: The Rise of the Template, the Fall of Design,” Arola points to the design of interactive sites on the web as limiting user experiences and impacting how they create their online identity. Arola posits, for instance, that, “The visual dominance of the News Feed suggests its importance, and because it is so much larger than any other section of the page, it encourages us to understand others through their actions in Facebook. It also encourages us to understand ourselves in relation to the actions of others” (8). Thus, not only does our use of Facebook privilege following the lives of others in their day-to-day lives, but it similarly forces us to consider our own lives relative to the lives of those we are following.

In “Playing Around with Identity,” Wandel and Beavers discuss ways users connect to one another on Facebook, suggesting:

When my friends list is populated by people from different parts of my life . . . any pretending I engage in to find a self-concept happens in front of all of them. I am thus no longer radically free to engage in creating a completely fictive self, I must become someone real, not who I really am pre-given from the start, but who I am allowed to be and what I am able to negotiate in the careful dynamic between who I want to be and who my friends from these multiple constituencies perceive me, allow me, and need me to be. (92-3)



Thus, when interacting on SNS we are constantly considering our public image, and what to post and avoid posting in order to build or maintain that image. Indeed:

Because [the background of Facebook] remains static and is the same for every user, the interface fades to the background and users are encouraged to enact and understand identities through interaction with others, not through a tightly controlled representation. You are what you post and what others post about you.

(Arola 9)

As such, it is vital that we as students, pedagogues, and citizens are aware of what, how, and why we post and interact on SNS. By engaging in this project, I hope to gain a better understanding of how students are already considering these issues of identity in order to better shape pedagogical strategies that will enhance students' awareness of the potential for, and implications of, their identity creation and maintenance in SNS spaces.

### *Rhetorical/Audience Awareness*

Another primary topic regarding the use of SNS is its impact on users' awareness of rhetorical strategies and considerations of audience in personal, professional, social and civic situations. So often, the level of overlap that occurs on SNS surprises students, and calling attention to how and what they post about a party they attended can play a role in their future lives is tremendously important. Indeed, Maranto and Barton argue in "Paradox and Promise: MySpace, Facebook, and the Sociopolitics of Social Networking in the Writing Classroom," that SNS can produce significant opportunities for users to engage and rhetorically interact with a vast multitude of other users with myriad contexts and stakes. In fact, according to Maranto and Barton, "Users can search for others who share their labels or interests, and request to add them

as ‘friends,’” and “the most popular users are hubs for millions of others—swirling vortexes of shared interests and common goals” (43). However, if students in an FYC classroom are unaware of how to interact within these “hubs” based on various situational contexts, they will be at a disadvantage compared to those who do. So, by asking students about their interaction within these various spaces, and their myriad contexts, I hope to help organize data that can aid in the development of activities that show students how to recognize such situations, as well as demonstrating the most appropriate and effective means of engaging in those situations on various SNS.

Another similar potential concern regarding rhetorical and audience awareness is the possibility for limited connection with individuals and ideas with which users may not already be familiar. In “Online Language: The Role of Culture in Self-Expression and Self-Construal on Facebook,” DeAndrea, Shaw, and Levine assert, the primary function of Facebook is to “aide users in maintaining their already existing relationships” (430), and ongoing changes to SNS make such sites less likely to produce unique connections that provide users with opportunities to fully develop their rhetorical and audience awareness.

For instance, Google+ disrupts such connections by offering an addition to the Facebook friends list, which is called “circles.” With circles, an individual is able to place each of their friends in separate groups of people that share a particular interest or bond in association with the original user (e.g. family, friends, work associates, etc.). After a user’s circles are established, the user is able to post information to individual circles, which can only be viewed by people within the posted-to circle, which further limits the chance of exposure to new people and ideas. In “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Content Collapse and Imagined Audience,” Marwick and boyd assert that “Twitter flattens multiple audiences into one – a

phenomenon known as ‘context collapse’. The requirement to present a verifiable, singular identity makes it impossible to differ self-presentation strategies, creating tension as diverse groups of people flock to social network sites” (122). However, with the advent of Google+’ “circles,” this “content collapse” is mitigated as people are able to control what content is viewed by which people; thus removing most tension that would have been present, and creating a series of more homogenous environments.

In *Clueless in Academe*, Gerald Graff discusses the importance of entering the rhetorical conversation by considering potential audiences who may differ from us. Graff states, "in order to write a conversation into her text, Ellen needs to do something that can be hard for everyone but especially hard for young people: to imagine a person whose beliefs are different from her own" (160). However, for individuals to understand how to imagine and work with/around those with differing views, they must first be made aware that such situations and individuals exist in order to create such a “rhetorical situation” (Bitzer 6). Yet, if students are constantly interacting only with those with whom they agree or share common beliefs, fewer such situations present themselves, and students will likely have a more difficult time honing the skills needed for effective rhetorical expression.

Of course, as Eli Pariser shows in *The Filter Bubble*, proliferation of big data and the use of filters by the likes of Google and Facebook only exacerbate the issue of lack of exposure, as individuals using such sites are now shown a more narrow view of the Internet. Indeed, asserts Pariser:

Most of us assume that when we Google a term, we all see the same results—the ones that the company’s famous Page Rank algorithm suggests are the most authoritative based on other pages’ links. But since

December 2009, this is no longer true. Now you get the result that Google's algorithm suggests is best for you in particular—and someone else may see something entirely different. In other words, there is no standard Google anymore. (2)

This sort of algorithm expression creates what Pariser calls a “filter bubble,” which limits users' exposure to alternative ideas, views, and people, which potentially creates similar problems to those that may occur with the “circles” feature, and the “like” button. In fact, Pariser acknowledges this particular issue by stating that, because of the filter bubble, “we may now face what persuasion-profiling theorist Dean Eckles calls a friendly world syndrome, in which some of the biggest and most important problems fail to reach our view at all” (149).

By investigating the ways in which writing students interact with others of similar and differing views on SNS, and how they engage in discussion and debate on SNS, this project can potentially provide further insights regarding how SNS impact users' conceptions of audience, and the rhetorical strategies honed to effectively meet the expectations of the perceived audience(s). Furthermore, I hope this information can be used to develop strategies for teaching students how to enhance their audience and rhetorical awareness in such situations and spaces.

### *Civic Engagement*

Another topic of importance when considering the use of SNS and the reach of that use on a world scale, is that of civic engagement through SNS. For the purposes of this project, I mean civic engagement through SNS to represent engagement in activities and interaction on SNS for the purpose of activism beyond simple social interaction. In other words, posting about one's recent personal experiences, or liking/favoriting another person's post is not likely to

engage others in a cause or affect much social change. On the other hand, a phenomenon such as last summer's ALS ice bucket challenge, where individuals posted videos in which they had ice water poured on them and subsequently calling out others to do the same, raised awareness for the ALS association and helped raise about \$112 million in donations as of September 11, 2014, according to the ALS website.

One major consideration regarding this topic is that, despite the potential use of SNS for civic engagement (as demonstrated during the "Occupy Wallstreet" movement and the "Arab Spring"), we cannot expect increasing student use of technology and SNS to equate with an enhanced desire or ability to actively participate in civic activities. Indeed, Livingstone, et al assert in "Youthful Steps Towards Civic Participation: Does the Internet Help?" that, "young people's motivation to pursue civic interests depends on their background and their socialization, and it is not greatly affected by the amounts of time spent or levels of expertise online" (24). Unfortunately, it seems that the inequalities existent in our offline cultures continue to play a large role in on-line civic engagement. In fact, in "New Media and New Voters: Young People, the Internet and the 2005 UK Election Campaign" Mesch, et al claim, "socioeconomic and gender differences observed in offline participation seem to be reflected and reproduced in the low level of election-related Internet use by females and less-educated individuals" (46). Thus, "the internet instead provides a route to pursue already existing civic interests. And these already existing interests, it seems, may derive from social capital, and social expectations—in short, from opportunity structures of people's everyday lives" (Livingstone, et al 26).

Perhaps as a result of this apparent echoing of offline civic engagement, boyd asserts in "Can Social Network Sites Enable Political Action?" that we should think of SNS more as locations for analysis to better understand how/where change is occurring. She contends that:

Rather than fantasizing about how social network sites will be a cultural Panacea, perhaps we need to focus more directly on the causes of alienation and disillusionment. SNS are not going to make people engage, but they can make visible whether or not political operatives are succeeding in getting their message across. (244)

Furthermore, some (Alexander; Loader; Calenda and Mosca) argue that this many students, which includes the current group of FYW students, are actively engaged civically and politically, but the face of engagement is changing as the use of the internet changes the way we engage with one another at large. According to Gerodimos and Ward in “Rethinking Online Youth Civic Engagement: Reflections on Web Content Analysis,” “both politics and the way we participate in public affairs are changing, and this change is partly due to the nature of new media and online communication” (114). And, as Craig Watkins claims in *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social-Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future*, “Social-network sites are not merely a source of communication among the young and the digital; they are *the* source of communication (89). According to Gerodimos and Ward, “our analysis of online political content needs to adapt, especially when it comes to observing the younger generation,” because, “These young people, through practices such as sampling and remixing, are building their own culture online” (114-16). Thus, it is important for composition educators to consider ways of implementing SNS in the classroom as a means of helping students build these cultures in a productive and responsible way. But, in order to do that, we must have a better idea of how students view such interaction and engagement via their SNS.

Unfortunately, “young people are often positioned by even the most well-meaning public sectors sites not as citizens but as citizens-in-waiting (Buckingham, 2000; Qvortrup, 1995) and, it seems that while they wait to become fully fledged citizens, young people think of better things to do with their time” (Livingstone, et al 25). And with over five hours a day spent online (“Digital”), and 27% of that online time devoted to social networking (“Social”), failing to better teach students how SNS can be tools for civic engagement is a grievously missed opportunity.

Thus, by asking students their views on civic engagement via SNS, as I do for this project and will discuss in chapters three and four, we can not only build on our understanding of how and why students engage, but also work toward continued development of responsible and ethical means of promoting such engagement in the composition classroom.

### *Privacy*

Another consideration that relates to the concept of audience awareness is that of Internet tracking and data mining. As Mayer-Schonenberger and Cukier assert in *Big Data: a Revolution that Will Transform How we Live, Work, and Think*, “the internet has made tracking easier, cheaper, and more useful [...] amazon monitors our shopping preferences and Google our browsing habits, while twitter knows what’s on our minds. Facebook seems to catch all that information too, along with our social relationships” (150-51). And as Pariser asserts,

It’d be one thing if we all knew everything about each other. It’s another when centralized entities know a lot more about us than we know about each other—and sometimes, more than we know about ourselves. If knowledge is power, then asymmetries in knowledge are asymmetries in power. (147)

As a result, issues of privacy could be the most important matter for users when considering audience, since the audiences many users may not consider—the website itself and its corporate interests—may be the ones with the most power to impact users in the future. In this way, it is important to gain a better understanding of students’ knowledge of and views on internet tracking and data mining as it relates to what they post and don’t post, and how they interact on SNS.

In *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*, Cynthia Selfe references Martin Heidegger to discuss two issues regarding human understanding of technology when she states, “First it encourages us to understand and experience the world as a series of problems amenable to technological fixes” and it “encourages the intellectual habit of perceiving everything around us. . . as a ‘standing reserve’ (17) of resources that can be used to create, design, and manufacture technologies” (141). I would add a third problem, which is that when we focus on technology as perpetual solution, it deters us from seeing it as a potential problem that could be stripping us of rights, such as privacy, and skills, such as critical thinking.

By surveying and interviewing FYC students about their SNS posting tendencies and their considerations/concerns about their privacy in SNS spaces, as I do in this project, I attempt to reveal ways students perceive SNS themselves as potential audiences, as well as students’ considerations regarding the potential consequences of sharing information on such sites. Furthermore, this information can help determine the most responsible ways of incorporating SNS as a pedagogical tool and object of study in the composition classroom.



### *SNS in the (Composition) Classroom*

Of course, at the end of all these important considerations about the impact of SNS on its users, a final guiding consideration for this research project is how teachers can responsibly and effectively use SNS in the composition classroom. In “Digital Divide 2.0: ‘Generation M’ and the Online Social Networking Sites in the Composition Classroom,” Stephanie Vie argues that there is a divide between teachers and students with regards to SNS and that it is important for educators to become better educated about SNS in order to better educate their composition students about the importance of SNS and best practices for using such sites. Vie asserts, “Despite the challenges of using social networking sites in the classroom, they can provide many teachable moments for instructors who wish to talk with students about audience, discourse communities, intellectual property, and tensions between public and private viewing” (21). Given the potential myriad ways SNS can significantly affect their users’ personally, socially, and professionally, it is important to consider the ways SNS can be used to enhance students’ understanding of their world, without overemphasizing the need to use such sites, and potentially causing students to engage online when they are ill-equipped to do so.

One major pedagogical issue that is often cited in the interdisciplinary literature regarding SNS is that there is a danger of creating false, or *unreal* identities/communities among students. danah boyd argues in “Why youth [heart] social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life,” that “Teens often fabricate key identifying information like name, age, and location to protect themselves. . . . While parents’ groups often encourage this deception to protect teens from strangers [,] many teens actually engage in this practice to protect themselves from the watchful eye of parent” (131). Stuart Boon and Christine Sinclair expand on this in “A World I Don’t Inhabit: Disquiet and Identity in Second Life and Facebook,” by saying students

do this to avoid both parents *and* teachers: “It has been recorded that students do not like teachers or parents in “their” space, especially if they are making embarrassing attempts to be cool. Control is also an issue of some import” (102). This of course presents obvious problems when one considers the use of such sites in the classroom, but the problem goes deeper, as Boon and Sinclair make clear in their assertion that, “Indeed, Facebook seems to encourage us to create essentially false communities of superficial relationships. That is not to say that the medium is never used to maintain strong communities of meaningful relationships, but rather that these seem to be in the minority” (104). Considering SNS are already being primarily used for maintaining social relationships and entertainment—versus for informational or educational purposes—(Hew; Maranto and Barton; Ulusu), this begins to raise ethical dilemmas as one must consider what sort of identity/community-building one promotes through the use of such sites in the writing classroom.

On the other hand, it has been shown that using SNS in the writing classroom can be an effective method of enhancing engagement and success in the classroom. In the Fernandes, et al article, “The Writing on the Wall: A Content Analysis of College Students’ Facebook Groups for the 2008 Presidential Election,” the authors found that, when students engage in groups that are focused on particular goals (i.e. following and promoting the election of their candidate of choice), their interaction on Facebook switched from a focus on social networking and interaction, to that of political action, and the direct promotion of their candidate and political beliefs. This seems to indicate that, when given direction in SNS spaces, students are willing and able to focus their attention on achieving a non-social goal, or as Fernandes, et al assert, “Facebook [can be] used as venue where supporters can organize on a local level and exhibit

their support for their candidate as well as frustrations they have with the opposing candidate” (671).

In “The Effect of Twitter on College Student Engagement and Grades,” Junco, Heiberger and Loken similarly found that students are capable of focusing their use of SNS for less social purposes, when they discuss findings from research regarding the use of Twitter in the classroom. In the study, students were divided into a study group as students of twitter-framed courses, and a control group of students in courses where twitter was not implemented, to test for student engagement and performance. At the end of the study, it was found that the students in the twitter group were significantly more engaged, and had higher GPAs than their control-group peers (128).

Furthermore, Jane Mathison Fife discusses in “Using Facebook to Teach Rhetorical Analysis” how Facebook can be an important tool for teaching student critical analysis skills. Indeed, Mathison Fife asserts that since, “Facebook profiles are representations of the self, most features that can be seen as appeals to logos or pathos also have a strong reflection on the writer’s ethos. Even comments written by someone else on one’s wall gain a tacit endorsement by the profile owner if they are left instead of deleted” (558), and she continues by stating that analyzing such SNS interaction, “helps them to develop a more critical stance toward a popular literacy they encounter regularly and to appreciate its complexity” (561). Thus, Fife sees SNS as new venues for critical thinking, rhetorical analysis, and the building of metacognitive skills.

Similarly, Lindsay Sabatino discusses in “Improving Writing Literacies through Digital Gaming Literacies: Facebook Gaming in the Composition Classroom,” how many of the skills and practices that are required of participating in games on Facebook can be incorporated in the composition classroom to positively impact composition skills and considerations. Sabatino

asserts, “Facebook and its games are providing composition with an outlet to reach students in a new way and provide them with practices to see how these digital literacies inform composition literacies” (43). This project is meant to build upon the work of these scholars by gaining a better understanding of how FYC students engage in SNS spaces outside of the classroom and their preferences for engaging in SNS in the classroom, in order to aid in the development of in-class activities that effectively engage students when learning about or with SNS.

As Gergits and Schramer claim in “The Collaborative Classroom as the Site of Difference,” students, “are not “blank slates” with no-experience; they are not open to any and all instruction [...] their complex lives and beliefs color and sometimes impede whatever they learn” (190). They go on to state that:

Indeed, fruitful collaboration often starts with the recognition that difference is essential if a group wishes to generate truly original ideas rather than to rely on made-to-order compromises that satisfy no one. The problem lies not so much in resolving conflicts when they arise as in getting students to express their conflicting views openly and then deal with them productively. (190)

Therefore, instead of simply having FYC students sign on to a social networking site as a novel location for posting homework assignments and responses, we can begin to have students interact with one another to learn about, and embrace, one another’s interests, beliefs, etc. Such beliefs will more likely than not be quite different from student to student, thus expanding their networks to those with beliefs that differ from their own.

Thus, I ask the participants of both the survey and interviews about their views of SNS as pedagogical tools; in addition to asking them to describe any connections they see between composing in SNS spaces and composing in different academic and professional spaces. Using

data derived from such questions can provide a clearer understanding of how students approach SNS composition and make clearer ways educators can bridge any potential gap(s) between various forms of composition.

### **Entering the Conversation**

Of course, these are only a handful of the topics that can come up when considering the Internet, SNS, and the implementation of either in and out of the classroom. Issues race, gender, socio-economics, as well as the physical and physiological impacts of engaging in SNS in and out of the composition classroom are other important issues for consideration. However, given the population of participants I have studied, as well as time and project restraints, I have limited my study to focus primarily on the conversations outlined above. Furthermore, my discussion of the preceding topics is by no means meant to be comprehensive, but instead acts as a brief introduction to some of the major concerns I have had, and continue to have, as I made my way through this project.

### **Research Questions**

I hope to address the following five general questions regarding students' views and uses of various SNS, and to determine what differences there are between different types of users and the use of different kinds of SNS in order to help form more specific and more developed questions for ongoing research. My specific research questions are as follows:

1. How do students in first year composition courses use social networking sites (SNS), both in and out of the classroom?

2. How do students view their own use of SNS, personally, professionally, socially, and civically?
3. How do students view the use of SNS as rhetorical composition?
4. How do students view SNS and other users as (potential) audiences?
5. How do students view SNS as potential tools for teaching and learning about writing?

### **Brief Overview of Research Site**

Although I will provide more details for my research site in chapter 2, in order to further set up my project, I believe a brief overview of the research site is useful. For this project I chose a mid-sized, midwestern state university (to which I will refer as SU for the remainder of this document) as my data collection site. SU requires all students to enter a mandatory first-year writing program in their first year of attendance at the university. The university provides students with regular access to a number of CT, as it has campus-wide online access (both wired and Wi-Fi), PC, MAC and mixed computer labs in each building, a dedicated CT assistance program, as well campus and individual program presence on SNS.

There are three primary courses students can take (which will be referred to as Writing 100, Writing 101, and Writing 102 for the remainder of this work). Writing 101, which is a three credit-hour course, is the traditional first-semester writing course that most freshmen take. Writing 100 is a five credit-hour alternative to Writing 101, which provides students who are not as progressed with their writing skills more time to develop those skills before moving on to Writing 102. Writing 102 is the traditional second-semester course that most freshmen take. The program is set up in such a way that students are required to pass either Writing 100 or Writing 101, *and* Writing 102 in order to advance out of it.

Currently, the Writing courses at SU utilize a campus-wide, online, open-source learning management system in the classroom and the writing program neither encourages nor discourages the use of traditional SNS in the writing classroom. In general, the use of smartphones in class is discouraged, but students are to bring either a laptop or tablet to each class if the class does not take place in a computer lab.

### **Situating Myself**

In order to provide as much context as I can for my project and the data presented in the following chapters, it is important to situate myself as the researcher within this project. I am a twenty-eight-year-old white male from southwestern Ohio. I am from a working class family and am among the first in my family to graduate from college. I have experience teaching each of the standard courses of two, two-course First Year Composition programs at Wright State University and Bowling Green State University. I was also involved in researching and developing a summer developmental writing course for incoming freshman at Wright State University, and was a group leader and mentor to first-year graduate instructors teaching General Studies Writing—the first year composition program—for two years at Bowling Green State University.

I have setup accounts for and am active on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Tumblr, Instagram, and numerous other SNS for various academic and nonacademic purposes. I consider myself an active, but cautious user of social media. I log in and participate on numerous SNS on a daily basis—primarily Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and LinkedIn—but I am careful about how much, with whom, and what kind of information I share. I also attempt to be aware of and utilize the ever-changing privacy options for each of the SNS for which I have an account by

limiting public access to my personal pages, and controlling what posts I am tagged in and connected to.

I believe it is important to make my students aware of the advantages and tools associated with the use of SNS. As Selfe asserts, “the people described as illiterate in connection with technology are those with the least power to effect change in this system” (*Technology* 139). Furthermore, as a pedagogue, one of my primary goals is to make students educationally self-sufficient, by modeling critical thinking processes, engaged research on topics, and active use of tools and concepts to help build individual cycles of learning. Thus, I always try to provide students with opportunities to expand and share their knowledge of technology and SNS, and give them chances to engage with new or unfamiliar technologies, or providing them chances to engage with old technologies in new ways, in an attempt to narrow the technological literacy gap(s). However, while I do have various units in my courses that explore and analyze multiple SNS and their aspects, I try to be considerate of my students’ own preferences for or against SNS use and do not make signing up for any SNS mandatory in my classes.

My initial interest in this project stems from years of casual observation of my own and other’s use of SNS. Primarily, I have always been intrigued by the ongoing conversation about the lack of a “dislike” button on Facebook, and similar tools for disagreement on most SNS. This coupled with, or perhaps because of, a seeming tendency for individuals to primarily agree or reinforce the posts and comments of SNS connection has led to my desire to find more concrete data regarding debate/dissent activity on SNS.

Moreover, given the fluid privacy tendencies of SNS—and, indeed, of the internet in general—I believe that continually developing our critical eye regarding SNS and the development of enhanced audience awareness is vital for users’ emotional and physical safety; as



well as their emotional, professional, and social growth as individuals interacting in this increasingly public space. Indeed, I believe that without continually developing their own critical understanding, using SNS in the classroom proliferates SNS use without making students more aware, ethical, and responsible users, which is a dangerous proposition.

Finally, I believe we are in a unique time regarding social media. We are now around a decade into SNS being a part of our cultural interactions, and the early SNS such as AOL Instant Messenger, MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, have given us an idea of how such spaces are born, grow, reinvent themselves, or fade into obscurity. At the same time, there has been a recent boom of new SNS—such as Pinterest, Instagram, Vine, Snapchat, Pheed, etc—that have caught the attention of today’s youth, and created space for social interaction in a variety of new ways. Because of this, I move forward with this project out of a personal desire to expand on my experience with and knowledge of the first decade of SNS to better prepare myself and others for engagement with SNS during the ongoing evolution of the SNS landscape.

## **Remaining Chapters Outline**

### *Chapter 2: Methods/Methodology*

Chapter Two discusses the adopted methods and methodology that frame my research and writing of the dissertation project. I will provide more details regarding my research site and participants, including how I chose and recruited them, respectively, as well as a more in-depth description of the four interview participants. I will also discuss the process of the survey and interviews that I undertook with my participants, and how I analyze and interpret my findings. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of my justification for and use of grounded theory

and actor-network theory for my methodology, as well as an acknowledgement of my use of feminist theory as a general guiding principal in my work.

### *Chapter 3: Findings 1 (Survey)*

Chapter Three focuses on the more general quantitative data I collect via the survey of 107 Writing 102 students at SU. I present and analyze data provided by the survey participants in an effort to establish my own foundational knowledge of the student population and the students' use and views of SNS, and considerations of SNS as subjects of rhetorical study and as pedagogical tools. I also present three subsequent research questions that I address in chapters Four and Five.

### *Chapter 4: Findings 2 (Interviews)*

Chapter Four focuses primarily on the data gathered from the interviews of the participants in an attempt to deepen my own understanding of the foundations I laid in Chapter Three. By addressing more specifically my original five, and subsequent three, research questions, I use the analysis of data from the interviews to build on the survey data and to begin using that data and analysis to enter the broader conversations in the field.

### *Chapter 5: Conclusions*

In Chapter Five, I further connect my own data from both the survey and the interviews with the ongoing conversations in rhetoric and composition that I began discussing in Chapter One. Upon completion of this recap and furthering of connections, I establish lists of best practices and activities/assignments for using SNS in the FYW classroom. Finally, I draw

conclusions in an effort to continue answering and revising my primary and secondary research questions, and use these answers and modifications to calls for more research on the subject of SNS as rhetorical subjects of study and pedagogical tools in the writing classroom.

## **Conclusion**

We seem to take for granted that our composition students are sophisticated users of SNS, and, as a result, we run the risk of assuming our students are already fully aware of all of the implications of their online interactions. However, many of our students have not yet mastered online engagement, and perhaps more are not aware of the full range of positive and negative consequences that can result from such interactions. This can lead to use and discussion of SNS sites in the composition classroom that do not fully recognize and take into account these implications, thus promoting the uninformed use of one of society's most powerful, and consequential, social tools.

In his piece, "Tomorrow Will Not Be Like Today," Bronwyn T. Williams asserts, "It is important that we recognize how real and rich the experiences of many young people are in negotiating different identities in different social situations online" (683-4), and he continues:

The most important thing we can do is talk with our students about how and why they read and write online. What I'm advocating is not a lecture about how much better it would be to read a novel than a blog, but a respectful and extended dialogue about what sites they visit, how they make sense of the material on those sites, and what they write in any online setting. (Williams 685)

I believe that the more we know about the reach of SNS, and the more we know about our students' understanding of SNS, the better equipped we are to promote the positive use of such

important spaces. It is with this goal of establishing/continuing an open, informed, and honest dialogue between all involved regarding the responsible, ethical, and effective use of SNS in and out of the composition classroom, that I move forward with this research project.

## CHAPTER 2: USING GROUNDED THEORY AND ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY TO UNDERSTAND FYC STUDENT USE OF SNS

In “Citizens Navigating in Literate World: The Case of Digital Literacy,” Ola Erstad argues that, “in order to grasp more qualitative aspects of media use, we need to specify certain focus areas of media use” (102). Erstad continues by saying that, “in this way we get a better understanding of how specific groups of young people are engaged in using digital media for different purposes and the implications these ways of using social media have for their broader social and cultural lives” (102). It was with such ideas in mind that I chose the theories that frame my research, as I wished to engage in research that allowed the participants to create data that spoke on its own terms and establish itself within the contexts of larger conversations and networks. Thus, this research project, uses Grounded Theory and Actor-Network Theory in order to obtain data from FYC students that will aid in better understanding their use and views regarding SNS.

In this chapter, I describe the methodologies that frame this research project as well as the methods I employed in order to collect and analyze data on first-year composition students’ opinions and uses of SNS as compositional forms/tools and pedagogical tools used to teach writing. I discuss how Grounded Theory and Actor-Network Theory provided the framework for my project as I engaged in literature review, as well as survey and interview of first-year composition student participants. I also provide more background on the development of this project and its guiding research questions, a more complete description of the research site, and I address potential limitations and biases present within the project.

## Research Site

As mentioned in the first chapter, my research site, SU, is a mid-sized, residential campus, midwestern state university. According to the SU website, there are over 16,000 undergraduates enrolled at the main campus, with approximately 20% of the entering class classified as ethnic and racial minority students. SU has one hundred eighty-four specializations within numerous majors that are available in seven different colleges associated with the university. The most popular majors at SU are the various Education majors, Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies, and Sport and Fitness Administration/Management. The average ACT score for entering freshman is currently 22.6, while the average high school GPA is 3.31 for incoming freshman. The university has a four-year graduation rate of thirty-six percent and a six-year graduation rate of 58%.

Students are required to take at least two courses in SU's Writing program, SU's FYC program: either Writing 100 or 101, and Writing 102. All three courses implement a portfolio process at the end of the semester in order to evaluate students for their final grade. Writing 100, a five credit hour course, and Writing 101, a three credit hour course, are identical in terms of the portfolio requirements and goals for completion of the course, but Writing 100 provides students with more in-class time per week to further develop their writing skills in order to meet course expectations.

Writing 100 and 101 are graded on a "Satisfactory/No Credit" scale for completion, while Writing 102 is graded on an "A/B/C/No Credit" scale. The Writing website states that "because [the Writing program] views writing as a process that takes some students longer than others to master, students are not penalized in traditional ways (with D's or F's) if their writing has not reached minimal proficiency by the end of the term."

The Writing courses are capped to allow for no more than twenty-three students in each class, and are taught by full-time instructors, adjuncts, and graduate teaching instructors.

According the Writing website:

One of the missions of [SU] is to ensure that all students have the ability to communicate effectively. In order to help accomplish this, the University has established and developed the [Writing] Program. Designed around a set of nationally-approved learning outcomes, this program consists of a number of important parts which work together to produce a comprehensive, competency-based writing program grounded in current theory and practice.

The Writing website lists the following as the Learning Outcomes for all three of its Writing courses:

- Rhetorical Knowledge
- Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing
- Processes
- Knowledge of Conventions
- Composing in Electronic Environments
- Values Exploration

During the spring semester of 2014, there were approximately 2500 students enrolled in either Writing 100, 101, or 102. The majority of the Writing students in the spring semester are enrolled in Writing 102, since it is the second in the Writing sequence.

*Interview Participants*

For the interview phase of the project, I interviewed four FYC students, each enrolled in a Writing 102 course. For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, each of the participants elected to have a pseudonym to be called throughout this project. The participant's pseudonyms are Ralph, Dria, Quinn, and Nikki. Ralph, Dria and Nikki were eighteen at the time of the interviews and Quinn was twenty. Each of the participants was enrolled in Writing 102 for the first time and had taken Writing 101 the semester before. Each of the participants were enrolled at SU as college freshmen, except for Nikki who was a high school senior taking Writing courses as a "Post Secondary Enrollment Options Program" (PSEOP) student.

At the time of the interviews, Ralph was an Engineering major at SU. Ralph is an Ohio native and is an active, but not overly committed user of SNS. He primarily uses accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, but has others, though he does not use the others as much.

Dria was a student in the Honors College at SU. She was a microbiology major with a minor in chemistry, and she was considering double majoring with biology as her second major. She is a native of Ohio, and a graduate with honors from her hometown high school. She was an avid user of SNS, with accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and other SNS. She considered Twitter to be her primary SNS account.

Quinn was a student who waited a year after high school to enroll in college, and was undecided in his major, though he has since declared philosophy as his major. He is also an Ohio resident, and his hometown is only twenty minutes from SU. Of the four interview participants, Quinn is the least active on SNS. He only has a Facebook account, and uses it relatively infrequently.



Nikki, was a PSEOP student who went to a high school close to SU, she is also a native of Ohio, and she plans on attending Kent State University to major in Fashion Merchandising. Of the interview participants, Nikki is the one who is the most active SNS user. She has relatively high activity on her Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat accounts, but uses other SNS frequently as well.

### **Research Questions and Methods**

The questions I pose as the guiding frame behind this project were developed over the course of this research project. The first iteration of this project took place as a series of smaller activities in the Eng 7260: Research in Rhetoric and Writing course I took in my second year of doctoral work. Through these activities, I was attempting to answer questions regarding issues of constructive debate and dissent in SNS spaces. Indeed, this dissertation project began in earnest with a smaller pilot project, in which I developed a miniature survey that was administered to fellow graduate students in the Eng 7260 course. Some of the more specific questions that deal with argument and debate, which showed up in the final survey were originally developed for the pilot survey. However, after some work on the pilot survey, it became clear that I needed to perform work to address more foundational questions regarding general opinions and use of SNS in order to establish a framework for future research. Thus, I reframed the project by developing such foundational questions. The five primary research questions I developed to help frame this project are:

1. How do students in first year composition courses use social networking sites (SNS), both in and out of the classroom?

2. How do students view their own use of SNS, personally, professionally, socially, and civically?
3. How do students view the use of SNS as rhetorical composition?
4. How do students view SNS and other users as (potential) audiences?
5. How do students view SNS as potential tools for teaching and learning about writing?

In order to address my five research questions, I developed a three-phase research project so that I could collect a variety of both quantitative and qualitative data on the topic. The three phases of the project: an on-going literature review, a survey of first-year composition students, and one-on-one interviews of four first-year composition students, allowed me to collect more general data from the larger population of first-year composition students at SU, as well as more specific data from a smaller population of FYC students at SU. I Obtained HSRB approval to move forward with phases two and three in January of 2014. What follows is a more complete description of the three phases of this research project.

### *Phase One: Literature Review*

The first phase of the project was an ongoing literature review that took place throughout the project. During this phase I continually expanded my depth and breadth of knowledge regarding SNS, and its usage in and out of the college composition classroom. Throughout the literature review process, I performed research both in and out of the field of rhetoric and composition, including, but not limited to, research that reaches into social media, psychology, and mass communications. This aspect of the project served multiple purposes. First, it helped me expand my knowledge on the subject in order to help refine the rest of my study, as well as my approach to addressing the research questions. Second, continued research aided me in

positioning my findings in the contexts of Rhetoric and Writing as a field, and in developing a better sense of how to effectively incorporate SNS into the writing classroom. Finally, given the ongoing changes constantly taking place in the SNS landscape, continued research kept me up to date with changes in the conversation regarding SNS as composition, and SNS in the composition classroom that have come about during the duration of this project.

### *Phase Two: Survey*

The second phase of the study consisted of survey research for which I designed and administered a survey on “Social Networking Site Use,” between February and March 2014 that received responses from 107 FYC students attending SU during the 2013-2014 academic year (the survey is included at the end of this document in Appendix C). The survey was composed of thirty-nine questions that focus on students’ general usage and feelings regarding their usage of SNS in and out of the classroom. The survey consisted of multiple choice, yes or no, and short response questions, and was designed to take approximately twenty-five to thirty minutes to complete. In nearly all of the yes or no questions, participants were provided space to expand on the reasoning behind their yes or no response. I administered the survey online via the survey website SurveyMonkey.com. I distributed links to the website via email and by asking volunteer GSW instructors to inform their students of the survey and provide them with a link to the survey.

Following the initial page, which provide the potential participants with information regarding the project and survey, and then asked if the potential participants wished to partake in the survey, the first set of (five) questions consisted of demographic information such as race, gender, age, education, etc. The second set of (five) questions asked participants general

information about their SNS usage, such as which SNS they use, how long they have used them, for how long each day they use SNS.

The next set of (twenty-one) questions asked participants with whom they interact on SNS and the kind of content they tend to produce on SNS. For instance, one question asks, “Of the social networking sites you use, which one do you use most to interact with your friends?” while another asks, “How often are your posts on social networking sites primarily entertaining in nature?” The survey then asked participants a set of questions regarding their tendency to produce or consume content, and to make distinctions between producing and consuming content based on different SNS used. Finally, the survey posed (seven) questions that asked students whether or not they believe SNS use prepares them for various forms of interaction (e.g. academic/professional writing, other social interactions, etc), and whether or not SNS use is an accurate representation of our identities, then provided space for participants to provide any additional information they felt was necessary for understanding their use/views of SNS.

Through the survey, I gained a general understanding of how some students enrolled in FYW use SNS; obtained better understanding of their use of SNS; and determined how big a role SNS use plays in the development of their social and composition skills, and potential reasons behind the impact of SNS in such skill development. The survey provided me with new data that allowed me to engage in theoretical sampling, or “sampling based on the basis of concepts and by varying the situations to maximize differences” (Strauss and Corbin, 82), during the interview phase of the research. For instance, after initial analysis and coding of the survey data, I noticed that there was a significant difference in the audiences associated with different sites (e.g. Facebook was used to interact primarily with family, while Twitter and Snapchat were primarily

used to interact with friends), so in the interview phase, I made it a point to ask participants to confirm or deny, and further explain those various audience expectations as they each saw them.

One limitation of this phase of research is that this survey was distributed via email, and conducted online. This may skew my findings, as many of the participants who responded may be more technologically literate, and be more critically aware of their use and views regarding SNS, as well as the potential consequences of the use of such sites. Another limitation of this phase is the relatively limited sample size created by the participants. Of just over 2500 students enrolled in Writing 100, 101, or 102 in the Spring semester, 107 students responded, making the generalizability of the survey findings relatively limited.

### *Third Phase: Interviews*

The third phase of the study was the interview of four FYC students in one-on-one interviews, which covered multiple aspects of their individual use of and opinions on SNS. While some portions of the interviews purposefully overlap, the general topics of each interview are as follows: SNS Background, Audience and Identity, SNS Debate/Discussion, Review/SNS in the Classroom (the individual interview scripts can be found in Appendix E). In some instances during the interviews, I asked students to provide examples of their SNS engagement, by being audio-recorded verbally describing such interaction while demonstrating their typical SNS practices.

The first interviews, which took place near the end of February 2014, were designed to get a sense of each participant's use and general opinion of SNS. I asked students for their basic background and education information, and I asked them introductory questions regarding which SNS they use, how often they use the various SNS, and their preferences for how to pick/use

particular SNS. Finally, I asked participants to discuss SNS use in the classroom, and potential benefits/drawbacks of doing so; the best part(s) about SNS; and what their ultimate SNS would look like. Through these questions, I hoped to establish a baseline for each participant to work from as they engaged in the subsequent interviews.

For instance, one interview participant only used one SNS, Facebook, for social media interaction, so later interviews consisted of digging deeper into his use of Facebook and how he conceptualized that use, instead of how he interacts differently in different SNS spaces. On the other hand, another interview participant used a large number of SNS, but rarely used Facebook, so later interviews focused on how she approached multiple sites similarly and differently, instead of going as deep into her use of a single site. By getting a general sense of the participant responses regarding SNS, I was able to be more conscious of when certain questions were more relevant to a particular participant and pursue more depth on those questions with that participant in later interviews.

The second round of interviews, which took place around the beginning of March 2014, had questions meant to gain insight into same interview participants' understanding of audience and identity as these relate to SNS and their use. Questions focused on content consumption and production (both frequency and types), and if/how participant production and interaction on SNS changes based on whom they interact with, and whom they believe they interact with on their SNS. The last set of questions in this interview dealt with the participants' conception of their audience on SNS and their own identity on their SNS. This second interview provided insights into the ways our students may be approaching SNS as a tool of expression and identify formation and maintenance, as well as their level of audience awareness as they approach and interact on SNS. Given the focus on identity formation and audience awareness in many FYC

writing programs, I believe this set of interview questions has yielded valuable data for pedagogical development.

The third round of interviews, which took place during the end of March and beginning of April 2014, focused on participants' SNS debate and discussion practices. Early questions in this interview deal with the way students use the interactive features of SNS, such as the "like" button on Facebook and various other commenting features. Similarly, participants were asked to discuss their tendencies engaging fellow users on topics with which they agree and or disagree, and how this compares to their tendencies to agree or disagree in face-to-face interactions. Then participants were asked if and how their engagement on SNS prepares them for similar kinds of engagement in other, non-SNS, settings. With this third interview, I was able to expand on ideas of identity and audience formation through SNS as participants explained how their debates and discussions on SNS compare and contrast to those they have face-to-face. I was also able to better understand the potential influence one kind of interaction has over the other, which I will discuss in more detail in chapters four and five.

The fourth and final round of interviews, which took place in April of 2014, initially focused on expanding points participants made during earlier interviews, in order to gain a more focused understanding of participant insights after they had (potentially) developed their views over the course of the interview process. In an effort to have students consider this topic throughout the interview process, I ended each of the previous interviews with three questions regarding SNS use in the classroom. Then, in the fourth interview I asked participants about their personal use of SNS in the classroom: both instructor-controlled use and student personal use. In doing so, I attempted to prime students to consider the ways the primary topics of each interview can relate to overall topic of SNS in the classroom in order to provide more points for discussion

in the last interview. Ultimately, the goal of this portion of the interview was to gain a better sense of how students approach SNS as a classroom tool.

The last part of this fourth interview provided participants time to revisit any points for which they found in need of clarification or similar further engagement, to discuss any of the more interesting or important points they shared, and/or to describe any changes in thinking or opinion they have noticed since the onset of the research process. At the end of the last interview, the participants and I exchanged updated contact information and I laid out my plans for analyzing the data they provided as well as my plans for sharing that data with them during the drafting process of the fourth and fifth chapters.

One limitation of the interview research is that all four (4) of the interview participants were enrolled in Writing 102 at the time of the interviews. As a result, they have likely had more time and experience in the writing classroom, and with concepts of audience, rhetorical situation, etc, than the average student in the Writing program at SU, which could skew the data toward a more sophisticated and complex understanding of SNS interaction. However, this limitation was met purposefully in an effort to maximize efficiency by potentially reducing time spent developing definitions and understanding of key terms that are standard in the Writing program at SU.

## **Methodologies**

Joyce Magnotto Neff asserts in her work “Grounded Theory: A Critical Research Methodology” that “In grounded theory, the three main techniques of data analysis. . . require excursions into several sub-routines at the same time that the researcher is continuously pushing for integration of all previous analyses” (129). It is this perpetual process of circular growth



between modes of analysis that make grounded theory such an inviting frame for this research project. Because SNS and their users are constantly evolving with one another, it is necessary to employ a research methodology that is flexible enough to account for potentially swift changes in the research topic.

I moved forward with my research using what Charmaz refers to as “constructivist grounded theory,” in that I assume, “the relativism of multiple social realities, recogniz[e] the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and ai[m] toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings” (510). Thus, while, I use the foundational works of those such as Classer, Strauss, and Corbin to inform and guide my Grounded theory, I hesitate to, as Charmaz puts it “embrac[e] the positivist leanings of [such] earlier proponents of grounded theory” (510). Therefore, I have made numerous attempts to let my participants guide me through my progress with the research. From engaging in a pilot study to better develop my survey and survey questions, to using the participant responses in the full survey to shape how I would interact with my interview participants, I have made it a point to see and listen to my participants and provide the space for them to directly and significantly influence the shape of the research project. For example, when I completed a pilot study of this research and saw that my questions were initially too specific and dealt too much, proportionally, with argument on SNS, I realized that there was still much background knowledge needed from my participants before I could properly consider answers to more specific questions. Thus, the full survey became more an instrument to gain general knowledge about FYW student SNS views and tendencies. Indeed, I believe that one of the major strengths of grounded theory using a constructivist approach is that “it is durable because it accounts for variation; it is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or

further data gathered” (Charmaz 511). Furthermore, as Ian Dey asserts in *Grounding Grounded Theory*, “New evidence rarely overthrows the original theory—it shows how to adapt or modify it to take this evidence into account” (31). Thus, Grounded Theory never allows the researcher to be content with the idea of a static theory. Indeed, any new theory or adaptation of theory “is contrasted with demands for more rigorous verification of grounded theory, especially where it has been generated through qualitative research” (31). So, the grounded theorist must always be willing to maintain flexibility in the face of new data.

Thus, as I have worked through my research, I have of course encountered data from my review of relevant literature, surveys from over one hundred FYC students, and interviews with four FYW students that have shaped my preconceived notions and understanding of student interaction with SNS, and such shaping has helped me arrive at new questions to better inform findings and trajectory. Indeed, as I initially began this project, I was under the impression that current FYW students had all but abandoned the use of Facebook. However, after seeing the survey results, I found that a large percentage of students have a relatively active Facebook account. So after looking into the survey results more, I decided to include more questions about how Facebook specifically was being used in the interview phase of the project, which yielded important results about SNS and audience awareness. Furthermore, throughout my research process, I have used memo writing extensively as a means to collect my thoughts and help work my way through my ideas regarding the research. As Charmaz asserts, “this step helps to spark our thinking and encourages us to look at our data and codes in new ways. It can help us to define leads for collecting data—both for further initial coding and later theoretical sampling... Thus our codes take on substance as well as structure for sorting data” (517).

Moreover, my use of Grounded Theory as a primary methodological frame was chosen consciously in an attempt to reduce the intrusion of my (potential) biases. Through open-coding, memo writing, and maintaining contact with interview participants and collaborating with them throughout the drafting process, I believe I have been able to “not [speak] for [my] participant but rather enabl[e] them to speak in voices that are clearly understood and representative” (Strauss and Corbin, 56). One example of this is when I began the open-coding process following the initial interviews, it became apparent that I would need categories for how time was spent engaging on SNS, as different participants interacted for varying times and differing ways of interacting on computers versus smartphones, and the kind of interaction taking place in each space was slightly different. This also acted as a catalyst for providing more time and space to discuss such varying actions among participants in later interviews. It has been my goal throughout this project to attempt to be aware of my (potential) biases and keep them in check in order to allow my participants’ voices to be heard, thus providing more space for the data to speak for itself, and allowing me to see the data on its own terms.

Furthermore, throughout this project I have employed an Actor-Network Theory methodology because I believe that a Constructivist approach to Grounded Theory complements the use Actor-Network Theory well. Of course, in order to make my use of both theories work effectively, I must define terms that I will use from ANT. First, I acknowledge the term “actant” as described by Fenwick and Edwards as “that which goes into the network to enable [...] activity” within that network (10). However, in most networks, the line between the actant and the rest of the actors that work to figure that actant within a network, and thus give the actant agency, is often blurred and fluid. In this particular project for example, one may be inclined to name the students using SNS in and out of the classroom the actants, but without the actors of

SNS or the interactions in and out of the classroom, the students cannot be figured as having agency in that particular network, and vice-versa. As Latour states,

The task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst. This is why, to regain some sense of order, the best solution is to trace the connection *between* the controversies themselves rather than try to decide how to settle any give controversy” (23, emphasis in original).

Another important term I will use from Actor-Network theory is Latour’s definition of “translation,” which is “a relation that does not transport causality but induces two mediators into coexisting” (108). This definition is important to my project, and an important factor in my use of grounded theory, as I attempt to understand such translations between the actors in the network I am researching without bringing my own biases to attempt to define some kind of causality occurring within those interactions.

For instance, in the beginning of the study it was easy to assume that, because many FYW students often use SNS as primary modes of communication and expression, that they are savvy users of the technology who knowingly use the sites as tools, while being aware of the implications of those uses. In other words, it is easy to see FYW as the actants in the network between user and SNS actors. However, as the research progressed, it became increasingly clear that participants were not wholly aware of some aspects of SNS, or even some aspects of their own interaction with SNS. From not having a full understanding of the privacy setting, rules, and implications, to not fully appreciating their interactions on SNS as acts of composition, it became clear that students were not completely aware of the sway SNS have over their lives, and thus SNS themselves become more powerful actors within the network.

It is with this in mind that I conduct my research, while avoiding the inclination to define an actant or the specific causes of use and beliefs pertaining to SNS use. Instead, I move forward with a similar view to that of Fenwick and Edwards, that it is “not particularly necessary or helpful to distinguish between Actant and Actors” (10). Latour furthers this notion when he asserts that, “it is not the sociologist’s job to decide in the actor’s stead what groups are making up the world and which agencies are making them act” (184). Instead the job is to “build the artificial experiment. . . where this diversity might be deployed to the full” (184). Therefore, instead of trying to determine which players in this/these networks are actors and actants, one of the goals of this project was to simply trace the connections between SNS, students, and the classroom, in order to better understand those connections and determine how best to proceed in positively influencing those connections.

This desire to understand these connections helped me establish my five primary research questions as well as the questions laid out in the survey and interviews. I believe that by posing more open and general questions, the participants were more likely to reveal these “diversities,” which allowed me to draw a more accurate representation of the potential network(s) regarding their SNS use. Indeed, as Latour states, “as soon as we become better at focusing on what circulates [as opposed to where and how large a scale it circulates], we can detect many other entities whose displacement were barely visible before” (205). Indeed, by starting with more foundational questions in the survey and interviews (which can be found in the appendices), I created more space for the connections, and thus the dynamism of the network(s) present, between the participants, SNS and the classroom to reveal themselves.

Of course, when engaging in any kind of research it is nearly impossible to work without some localizing frames. Thus, in an effort to maximize the limited timeframe of this project, I

continued by framing the bulk of my work within the context of students of the Writing courses at SU. By doing so, I was able to proceed with more confidence that participants had a relatively similar grasp of and definitions for concepts commonly asked about during the study (e.g. audience, rhetorical situation, classroom structure, etc). Thus, the frame of the Writing courses acts as what Latour might refer to as “plug-in” (207), which may have helped students spend more time thinking about and sharing the deeper connection between their use and views on SNS as opposed to the developing and agreeing on the various definitions that lead to the discussion of those interactions.

### **Aligning Questions to Methods**

In order to better connect my methods to my research questions, I will now briefly explain how my methods and questions informed one another throughout the research process:

*How Do Students in First Year Composition Courses Use Social Networking Sites (SNS), Both In and Out of the Classroom?*

Perhaps the most foundational of my primary questions, this question was likely the one most informed by reviewing the relevant literature on FYW and college student engagement on SNS as well as engagement on SNS by individuals who were primary and secondary students at the time of the research, but are now near the age of current FYW students. By engaging in the literature review with the above question in mind, I was able to further develop the other primary questions and was better prepared to compose a survey and interview scripts that answered my primary questions. Indeed, in the survey and interview phases of this project I engaged participants frequently with questions about how they use SNS in the classroom and out of it,

and the similarities and differences in use of these spaces in each context. In fact, after determining basic background information, a large portion of the beginning of the survey, and nearly the entire first interview, focused on how SNS are used by FYW students.

*How Do Students View Their Own Use of SNS, Personally, Professionally, Socially, and Civically?*

Much of the literature review was spent with sources that discuss these kinds of engagement among users of SNS. Furthermore, in the survey phase of this project, multiple questions were devoted to asking students how they personally engage for these purposes on SNS and if/how the kind of interaction changes based on which SNS is used. Similarly, in the interview phase, the first half of the second interview focuses on the various ways the participants viewed the various ways in which SNS can be used for these purposes.

*How Do Students View the Use of SNS as Rhetorical Composition?*

While there are some works that attempt to address this question, the literature discussing SNS as forms of rhetorical composition is more limited, thus the bulk of my attempts at addressing this question occurred through the survey and interview phases of this project. In the survey, there were a number of questions that asked about the kinds of composition on SNS, how those compositions compare to one another, and how they compare to compositions made on SNS. Similarly, while some aspect of composition was addressed in each of the four interviews, the third interview contained a series of questions that asked participants to discuss the different ways they compose on various SNS and to compare those compositions to one another. Furthermore, participants were asked to consider if composing in those spaces informed their

consideration of rhetorical composition in other aspects of their lives (e.g. at work, in school, etc).

### *How Do Students View SNS and Other Users as (Potential) Audiences?*

Although the literature found on the topic of audience was more prevalent than that of SNS as rhetorical composition, much of the focus was on issues of privacy, and the SNS and the environment of the internet being potential audiences. Therefore, in order to further account for the myriad audiences at play in SNS, addressing issues of audiences and considerations of audience was one of the primary sections of the survey. There were a number of questions in the survey regarding who participants engage with on SNS, if whom they engage with changes based on the SNS being used, and if the content they produce and consume is impacted based on who they believe will be engaging with. Furthermore, most of the second half of the second interview dealt with the various audiences the participants consider during their SNS interactions.

### *How Do Students View SNS as Potential Tools for Teaching and Learning about Writing?*

The literature review brought up a number of conversations regarding student's use of SNS and their views on SNS being used as pedagogical tools, but the majority of these works are becoming dated by SNS standards. Most of the articles on this subject were published during the early years of SNS development, when there were still a relatively limited number of SNS and their use was limited more to interaction among users and smaller circles of family and friends. A number of sources discuss Myspace, which is, arguably, no longer a major player in the SNS landscape, and many of those that address Facebook address it at a time when contact with



anyone other than fellow students was limited, or in its nascent stages. Therefore, while these works provide important and useful foundational knowledge, and while the survey asks questions that can help flesh out responses from the interviews, the bulk of my attempts to answer this question came from the interviews, particularly in the fourth interview.

## **Limitations**

While I have discussed the various limitations of each of the methods used it is important to be aware that there are numerous limitations outside of methodological ones that exist and must be recognized. First, it is important to recognize that this study is being conducted within the confines of a dissertation project that comes with its certain time limitations and genre conventions that have undoubtedly influenced my approach to the research and framing of this study. It is also important to understand that the sample of participants should not be considered representative of all FYW students or programs. As previously mentioned, all of the participants in the survey and interviews were members of Writing 102, which is potentially useful in establishing a plug-in for interview participants, but does limit the generalizability of the findings, particularly those findings from the survey.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the demographic variation of the research site. Being a medium university in the Midwest United States does limit that various kinds of participants available to participate in the research study and these limitations must be considered. Of course, it should be noted that any study involving only one institution as its research site is going to encounter this limitation. Though, while such findings may have limited generalizability, as foundational work for generating and evolving research questions, such studies are still quite useful. Moreover, when coupled with other similar studies with various

dissimilar research sites and participant populations, such studies can enter larger conversations that help to reach greater levels of generalizability. As Sarah Warshauer Freedman asserts in “Moving Writing into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” that to:

move composition research forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I believe that our research will benefit by continuing to be inclusive—of diverse population of learners, taught by a diverse population of teachers, using approaches that allow for diversity of ways of learning—with new knowledge gathered from diverse sources and with diverse methods. (1050)

Thus, in the case of this research topic, if there is similar research performed within a diverse enough range of research sites, then there is a greater chance of coming to consistent terms of understanding and approaching SNS as rhetorical and pedagogical tools.

## **Conclusion**

In his work, “After ANT: complexity, naming and topology,” John Law argues:

So there is, there should be, no identity, no fixed point. Like other approaches, actor-network theory is not something in particular. But then again. . . neither is it simply a random set of bits and pieces, wreckage spread along the hard shoulder of the superhighway of theory. But how to *say* this? How to *talk* about something, how to name it, without reducing it to the fixity of singularity? (10)

By establishing the multiple aspects of the research site and participants, and by describing the various methods and methodologies I have employed throughout my research, I hope to have set up this project as one that is enacted with the goal of avoiding the reducing the data found to the “fixity of singularity.” I hope to have instead described a project that has employed grounded and

actor-network theories to allow for the flexibility and play between actors to provide space for further developing theory regarding the interaction between users and their social networking sites in the composition classroom.

In *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age*, Louise Starkey asserts that, “a culturally responsive teacher is familiar with beliefs and values held within the cultural communities to which their student belongs,” and that, “one aspect of an effective learning environment is that students feel that their cultural identity is valued” (30). There is arguably no current cultural community larger, or one that is so ever-present in so many lives, than the cultural community/ies created by SNS. Because of this, I will spend the remaining chapters discussing data created with participants in order to better understand FYW students’ opinions on and engagement with SNS, in an attempt to further develop effective potential learning environments that ethically and effectively incorporates SNS. In the next chapter, I will focus on findings from the survey phase of the research project.

### CHAPTER 3: SURVEYING THE FYC SOCIAL NETWORK LANDSCAPE

In the first two chapters I developed the background information necessary for establishing the reasons and frames for this project. In Chapter One, I provided a review of literature that reiterated the importance of rhetorical and pedagogical considerations of Social Networking Sites in and out of the composition classroom, and described how that literature, coupled with my own interest and experience on the subject, worked to build my primary questions for this project. I also detailed preliminary information regarding my research site and participants in order to provide an early picture of my study and its implications.

In Chapter Two, I described my research methods and methodologies in order to provide the methodological frame for my research project. I discussed the implementation of the survey and interviews of students at SU and my use of Grounded and Actor-Network Theories as frames, and I explored the ways those methods and methodologies were chosen to best address the questions I had for the project, all while providing commentary on the various limitations and considerations required of this project.

In Chapter Three, I begin to share and analyze survey data that I will use to continue answering the questions I addressed in the first chapter. Chapter Three uses survey data from 107 Writing students at SU to continue addressing the following questions:

- What SNS are students using outside of the classroom?
- Who are students interacting with on SNS and does the group of people they interact with change based on a particular SNS platform?
- What types of engagement do students partake in on SNS?
- What kinds of content do students produce on SNS and with what frequency do they produce and consume content?

- Do students believe their use of SNS prepares them for other kinds of writing and social interaction?

In a similar vein as Sheila Zimic and Folf Dalin (2011), I hope to continue the effort to take the “stereotypical images of young people’s online participation,” and replace it, “with a more nuanced understanding” (138).

My own considerations of and response to the data gathered in the survey helped inform the approach and process to the subsequent interviews that took place with four of the SU Writing students. In a similar way, by sharing and discussing the main findings from the survey and the refinement of questions and considerations for the research project, Chapter Three provides a general frame for discussing the views and uses of SNS and their impact on students, which I will expand on in Chapter Four, and added to the broader discussions taking place within the field of composition and rhetoric and beyond.

This chapter attempts to use student experiences and knowledge of SNS, which they revealed through the survey, to learn more about student engagement and composition in SNS spaces. Furthermore, this chapter works to uncover new questions for continued research on the topic of SNS as a subject of rhetorical study, which will be discussed at greater detail in Chapter Five, and attempts to continue developing ethical and effective pedagogical concepts and practices for using SNS as tools for teaching about composition and rhetoric. Namely, the goal of this chapter is to use the data provided by the survey to uncover the necessary background information about student SNS views and practices to determine how to frame composition class topics and activities that use those uses and views to enhance student knowledge about SNS, composition and rhetoric.

## **Survey Information**

For the survey itself, titled “Social Networking Site Use,” I used surveymonkey.com for online distribution. After sending an email to the Writing instructors at SU requesting their assistance, I found a number of instructors who agreed to share the link to the survey with their students and asked their students to complete the survey outside of class. By February 25, 2014, when it was closed, 107 students had completed the survey. The survey had 40 questions that ranged from simple ‘choose the most accurate answer’ questions, to extended response questions, some of which asked participants to expand on their own answers to shorter response questions (the full list of questions for the survey can be found in Appendix E). Participants were reminded that they did not have to take the survey; that once they started, participants did not have to finish the survey; and that their responses would remain confidential and had no bearing on their interaction or success in their Writing course, or work as students at large at SU. What follows is a description and analysis of the data from the participants’ responses to the survey.

## **Participant Demographics**

The primary population targeted for this survey was students enrolled in the Writing courses at SU. However, in order to get a better sense of the participants in the survey, and to have a better understanding of the limitations and implications of the survey results, I posed some initial demographic questions for participants, which included questions regarding gender, age, and ethnicity.

## Gender

Of the survey participants who responded to the question of gender (three participants skipped this question), 68.27% of students identified as female, 38.69% identified as male while .96% identified as transgender and 1.92% preferred not to answer. Thus, the large majority of participants in the survey identify as female, which should be a strong consideration when working through the rest of the survey results.

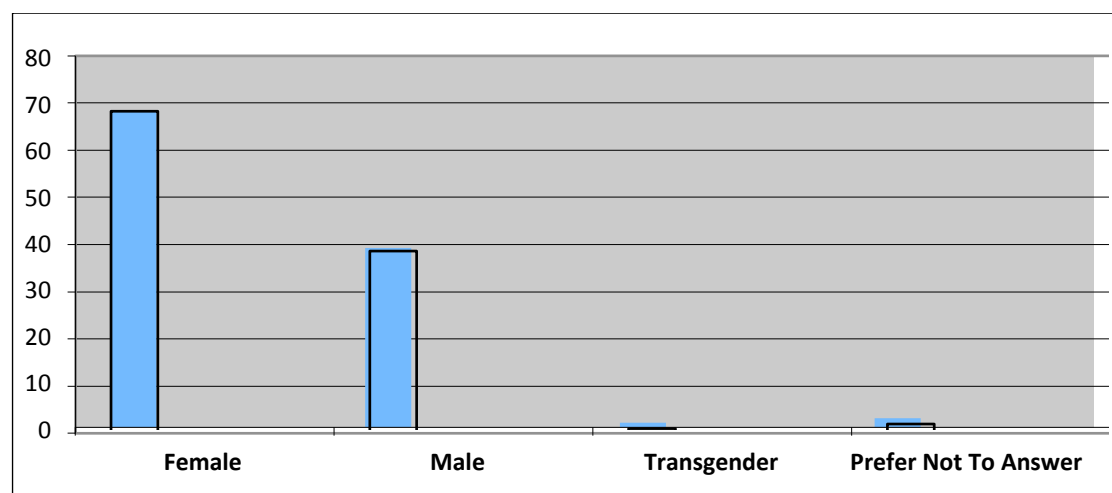


Table 3.1: Percentage of Participant Gender

It is important to take into account reasons why the female population responded in such higher numbers. While the percentage of female students at SU certainly outweighs that of the male population<sup>1</sup> (56% compared to 44%, respectively, according to the Institute of Education Sciences) the 68% of female participants is significantly higher. So, are female participants more comfortable talking about their SNS interaction? Do they feel they have more to share regarding their SNS use? Or, since students were made aware this survey by their Writing instructors in the class, are the female students more likely to participate because of the survey's connection to the Writing class? The answer could be any of these, or could include any number of other factors not listed here, but such considerations are important when shaping one's response to the rest of the data collected.

## Age

Another important consideration with regards to participant demographics is the age of participants of the survey. Of the one hundred five participants who responded to the question regarding their age, 93.34% were between the ages of eighteen and twenty one, with 2.86% participants falling in the twenty two to twenty four age ranges and the remaining 2.86 participants who provided an age range answered that they were twenty five years old or older.

Given this is a FYW course, which is usually made up of primarily freshmen; these numbers are not all that surprising. However, the fact that the majority of the participants fall between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two is important to remember when considering the other data from the survey. Not only could the age range play a role in determining the specific answers given, but it could have also impacted the level of experience and comfort the students have, regarding their use of SNS and their openness about that use. In fact, as Howard Gardner and Katie Davis assert in their work, *The App Generation*:

We may be straddling one of those fault lines in history when the definition of a generation needs to be recalibrated. If, in fact, our era is defined in terms of technology, then a generation may be quite brief: indeed, we should think of a generation as that era in which certain technologies rise to the fore and, in particular, when young people . . . come to employ particular technologies in a full, natural, seamless, “native” way. (51)

If this is the case, then the window of time that makes up a single generation could be much smaller than we have imagined it in the past, making it important to distinguish the idiosyncrasies of a particular age group in order to shape the classroom to best fit their needs, skills, and goals.



### *Ethnicity*

The ethnicity of the students who participated could also play a key role in the data that is collected. According to IES, 78% of undergraduates enrolled in classes at SU identify as White, while 10% identify as Black or African American, another 9% identify as one of a number of other minority ethnicities, leaving 3% with unidentified ethnicity. While my survey listed more choices for ethnicity for than the IES survey, and I asked participants to check all that apply, the breakdown for ethnicity fell into pretty similar patterns.

Of the 104 participants who answered specifically about their ethnicity, 50.98% identified as Caucasian and 45.19% identified as white, while 9.62% identified as African American and 6.73% identified as Black. There were also 7.69% who identified as Latino, while the remaining participants identified as one of the other minority ethnicities, or preferred not to answer.

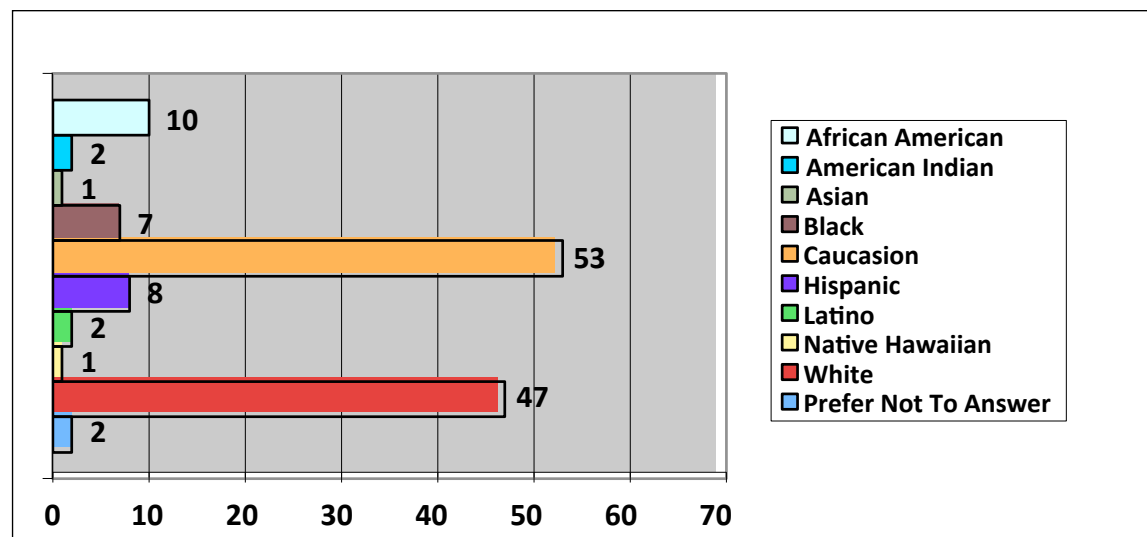


Table 3.2: Participant Ethnicity

Much like the matter of the age of participants, the numbers for the ethnicity of the participants is similar to the larger student population at SU, which is primarily White/Caucasian. However, the discrepancy between minority student representation and that of

White/Caucasian students must be taken into account when evaluating the data as there are issues of access, as well as cultural differences that could impact the SNS particular students use, as well as the ways cultural differences impact how the use of SNS are viewed. As Yuet-Sim D. Chang points out, it is important to invite students to problematize the notion of the “other” from multiple entry points, and to interrogate how this notion/construct shapes and reshapes our lived realities, both within the [classroom] and in the larger society” (162). Thus it is vital to recognize the ethnicity discrepancies in this research project in order to avoid seeing the data collected as ethnically all inclusive, since understanding and use of SNS are undoubtedly shaped by ethnic background, and recognizing this provides another “entry point” for students to problematize concepts such as the “other.”

### **SNS Usage information**

The next set of questions in the survey had to deal with which SNS students used, as well as general information regarding their usage of those sites, such as how long they have used them, which they use the most, and how much time they spend using SNS in a day. This information not only provides important information regarding which SNS are used and for how long but also offers an early glimpse into the range of social networking sites any individual student may use. Thus, the goal for this section of questions was to gain a better understanding of the role SNS plays in students’ lives and determine which sites are currently relevant to this population of SNS users.

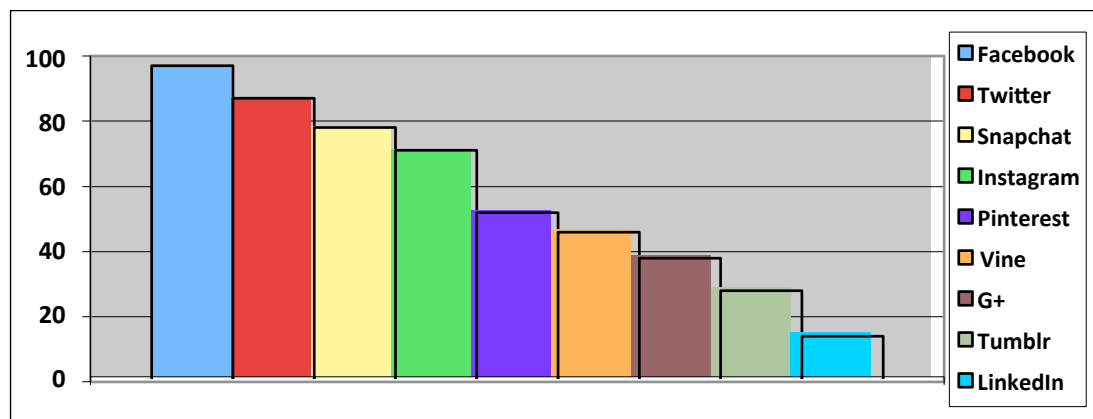


Table 3.3: SNS Used by Participants

The first direct SNS question listed thirteen different SNS and asked students to check all that they personally used, while providing space for participants to write in any SNS they use that were not on the list. The breakdown of the SNS used held close to expectations. One hundred four students answered the question. 93.27% Facebook, 83.65% use Twitter, 75% use Snapchat, and 68.27% use Instagram. Interestingly, only 36.54% of students claim to use Google +, even though 63.46% use YouTube, which is actually a SNS that shares its login information with the Google + format. Pinterest was the only other SNS used by at least 50% of the students, with fifty-two participants claiming to use the site. The rest of the SNS had fewer than 50% of students using them. Not surprisingly, two of the least used sites were LinkedIn and Academia.edu, with 13.46% and 0% users, respectively. The results from this survey are skewed higher than the results from a Pew Internet Survey that found lower numbers of Internet users using various SNS (Duggan, et al). However, one should note that the Pew survey set the age range of participants who would have made up the majority of SU student participants in my survey between 18-29, which could have had an impact on the numbers if those in the 22-29 age range are less frequent users of SNS. And this is not unlikely considering the use of SNS correlates negatively with the age of online adults.

Participants were also asked to name the one SNS they have used the longest and 103 participants responded. Of the students who responded, 70% said they had used Facebook longest, with the next closest SNS being Twitter with 9%. YouTube and Instagram were next closest with 6% and 2% students, respectively claiming to have used them the longest.

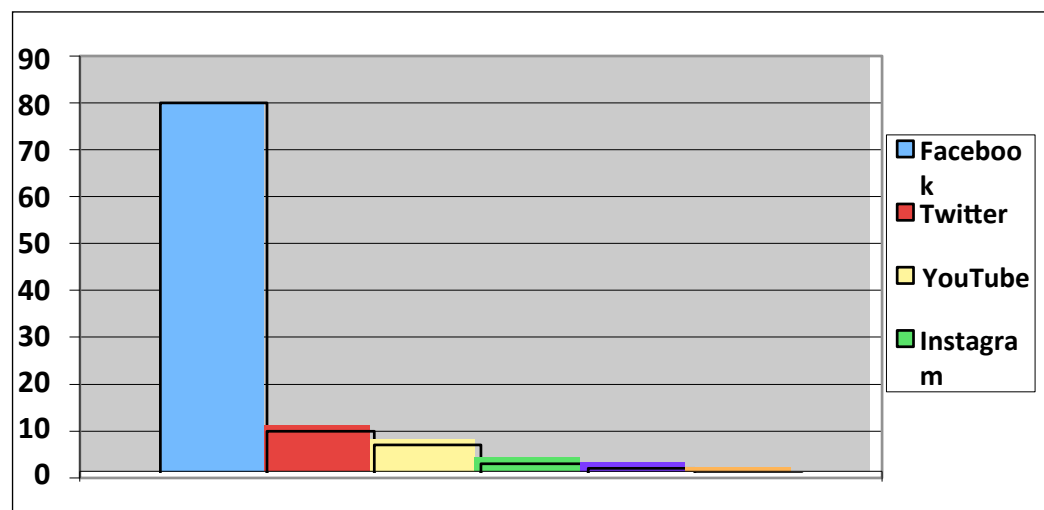


Table 3.4: Participants' Oldest SNS Accounts

When asked how long they had an account for the SNS they had used longest, responses were similar. Of the 104 students who responded, seventy-two 69.23% said they had had an account on their longest-used site for two to five years, 25% had an account for more than five years, while the remaining 5.76% had been on their longest-used account for less than a year.

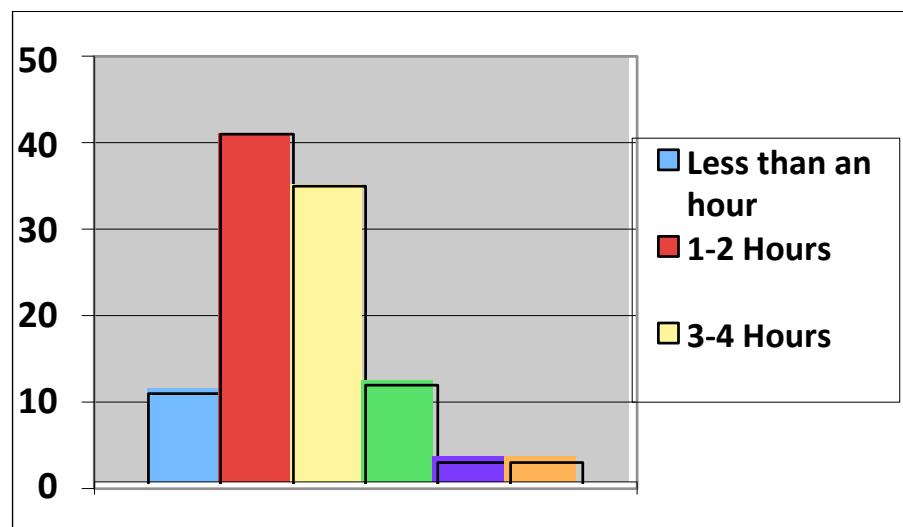


Table 3.5: Participant Daily Use of SNS

Students were also asked how many hours per day they spend on all of their SNS combined and with this question, there was some variation. Most participants fell within the one to four hour category, with forty-one students 39.81% spending one to two hours a day and 33.98% spending three to four hours a day on their SNS. This seems to agree with S. Craig Watkins' findings in *The Young and the Digital* that "On average, young people. . . spend about twenty-three hours a week online," and a "considerable portion of that time" is spent on SNS (61). However, 10.68% claimed to spend less than an hour on SNS, 11.65% spent five to six hours, and students 5.82% answered that they spend seven hours or more a day on their SNS. Obviously, a space that commands so much attention from our students is one that we should value as key aspects in our students' lives, and the better understanding instructors have of SNS, and the students who use them, the better equipped we will be to use them as effective tools, and to approach them as objects of rhetorical significance with our students.

The next set of questions dealt with which SNS students used the most, and more specifically, which ones they used most to interact with particular groups of people (e.g. friends, family, etc.). Not only does this set of questions give a better sense of which SNS the students are currently using, but it provides an opportunity to see how students are using the myriad SNS to engage differently, or with different audiences.

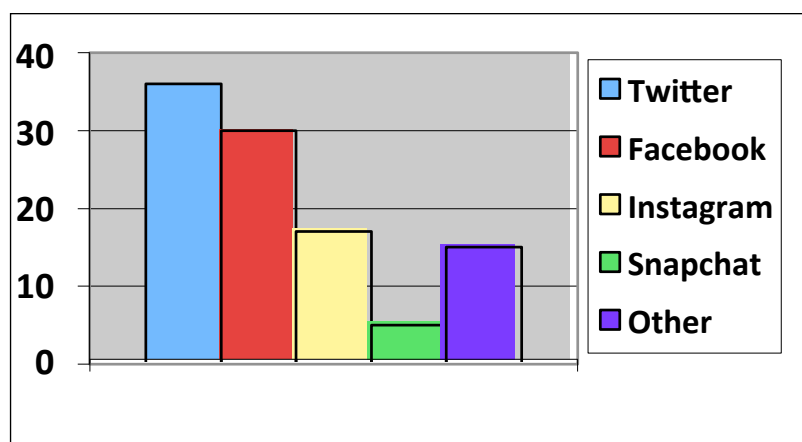


Table 3.6: SNS Most Used by Participants

First, participants were asked which SNS they used the most, and this is the point where Facebook begins to cede some of its dominance to some of the other SNS. When asked which SNS they used most, 34.95% answered Twitter, 29.12 said Facebook, 16.5% said Instagram, and 4.85% said Snapchat, while the remaining 14.56% responses stated one of the other social networks (including YouTube, Pinterest, and Google +). Here, the general use of individual SNS is more evenly distributed, with Twitter and Facebook sharing a slight advantage of use frequency, but many other SNS getting some attention for most-used.

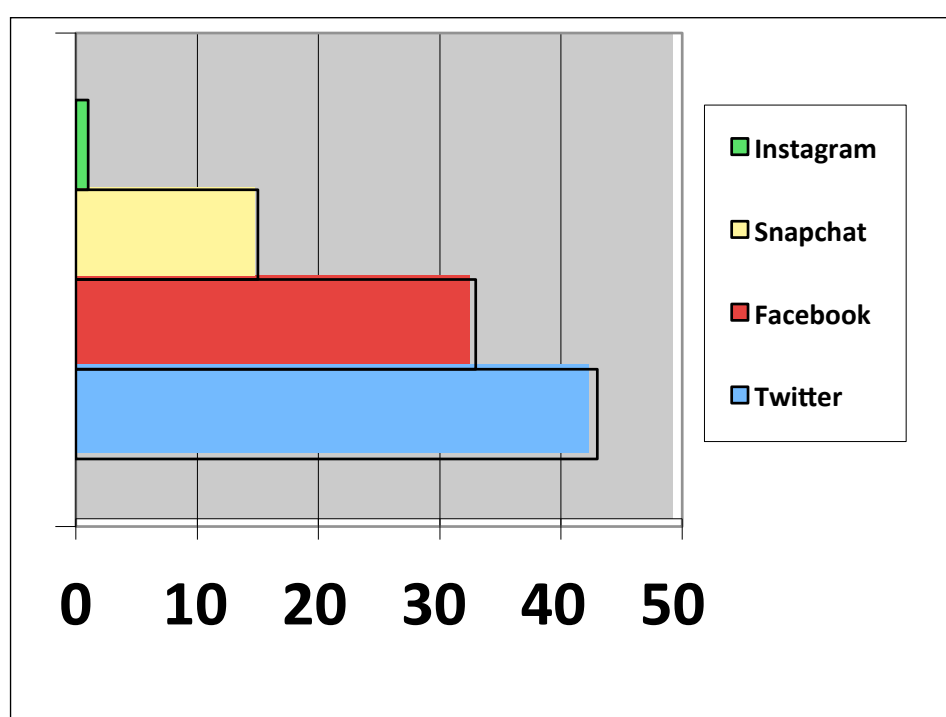


Table 3.7: SNS Most Used with Friends

When asked on which SNS they interacted most with their friends, students indicated that Twitter was the most popular platform. Of the ninety-nine responses to this question, 43.43% stated Twitter was the SNS they used most, while 33.33% answered Facebook. Snapchat as also a popular response with 15.15% students indicating they used it most for friend interaction, followed by Instagram with 7.07% responses. Given that Junco, et al (2010) found in a separate study that “using twitter in educationally relevant ways had a positive effect on student

engagement,” the fact that such a large portion of survey participants use Twitter is potentially positive in that any pedagogical use of Twitter would be done with a tool that many students are already familiar with.

When asked which SNS they used to meet new people, there was a much greater variety of responses, but out of the ninety-six responses to the question, Twitter and Facebook were still the dominant platforms, with 32.29% and 31.25% responses each, respectively. After these two platforms, students responded that they used Instagram and Tumblr most to meet new people with 11.40% and 8.33% responses apiece, respectively; and Tinder, Topix, and Hot or Not collectively made up another 4.16% responses. Interestingly, 12.5% of the ninety-six students who answered this question stated that they did use any SNS platform to meet new people.

Perhaps the most interesting of the questions regarding which SNS is used for a particular group of people is the one regarding SNS interaction with family. While students either favored Twitter, or split evenly between Twitter and Facebook for general use, and interaction with other groups of people, Facebook is by far the dominant platform when students interact with family. Out of ninety-nine responses to the question asking participants which SNS they use to interact with family most, 79.79% answered Facebook. Instagram and Twitter were the only other two platforms that garnered attention for this question, with 5.05% and 3.03%, respectively. In addition, when one considers that seven of the ninety-nine participants answered that they do not interact with family, Facebook’s dominance in this category becomes even more pronounced.

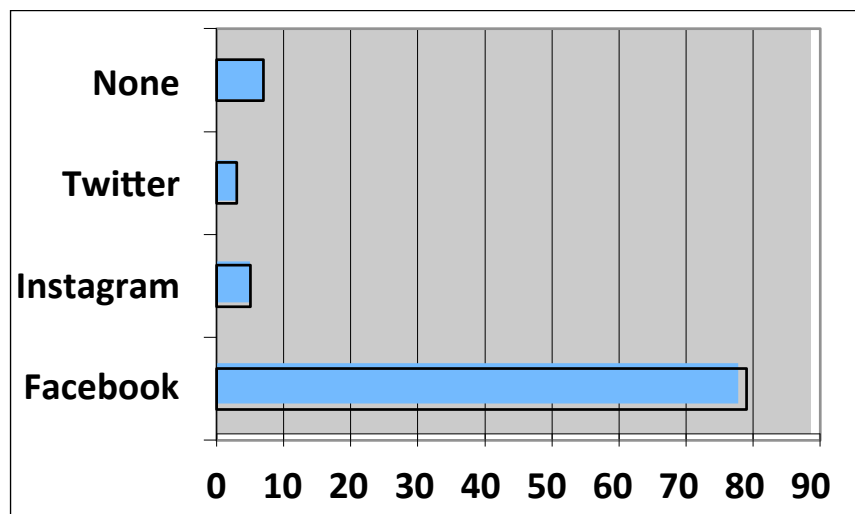


Table 3.8: SNS Used Most for Family Interaction

The fact that so many students use certain SNS to engage specific groups of people relative to the SNS used, that the SNS and intended interaction group appears to be so consistent for the survey participants indicates a fairly nuanced understanding of audience awareness, even if the students are not yet thinking of it in those terms. Marwick and boyd state that the “specifics of the imagined audience are more important in social media that involve greater interaction with readers than personal homepages” (3). In other words, because users of SNS must post and respond with other users, it is important to perceive and address specific audiences in order to successfully engage in SNS spaces. The fact that so many students appear to already be doing this through their use of various SNS spaces indicates a level of understanding of audience that could prove useful in the composition classroom.

### Purpose of SNS Use

Next, students addressed which SNS they used for specific purposes (e.g. entertainment, for news, etc). By looking at the answers to this set of questions my goal is to get a clearer idea of how students are already using particular SNS in order to determine which SNS could be used in certain activities or assignments in the classroom and how particular SNS could be



reappropriated as pedagogical tools that are used in ways familiar and relevant to composition students.

When asked about the sites used to stay up-to-date with current events and news, the trend of Twitter and Facebook use continued as 56% and 24% used those two platforms for news purposes, respectively. After those two, Tumblr and Instagram collected 6% of participant votes each and five other SNS each had 1% of participants vote for them, including LinkedIn and Vine.

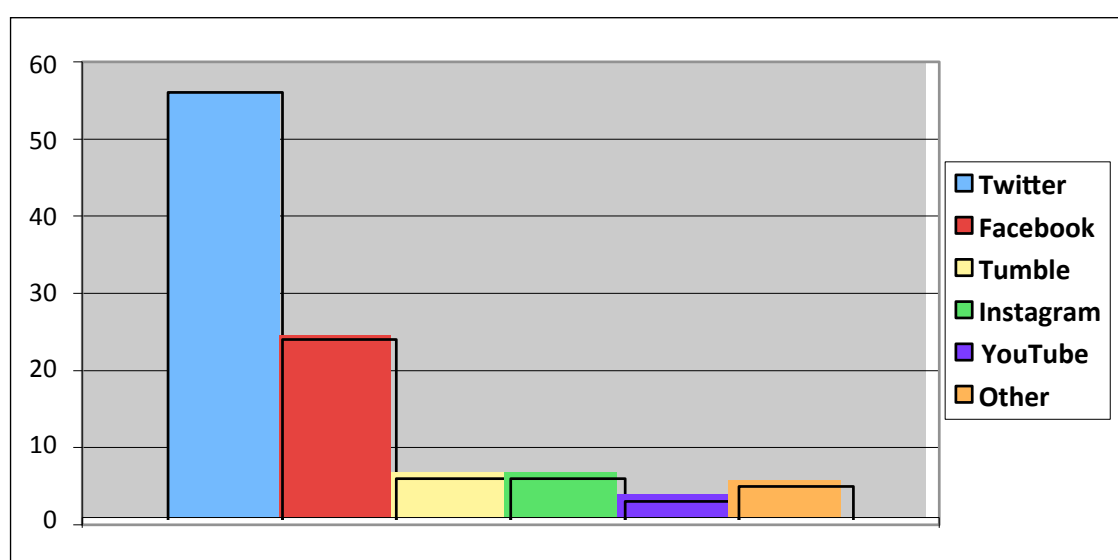


Table 3.9: SNS Used to Track Current Events and News

Students also answered what site they use most for Personal entertainment (i.e. activities such as watching videos, reading, looking at photos, etc) and this was the category that produces the most varied results and saw Twitter and Facebook with smaller percentages of use. The three most popular SNS for entertainment purposes were Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, with Instagram getting 20.02% and YouTube and Facebook getting 17.17% of responses. Then Twitter and Tumblr are next with 14.14% and 12.12% of the responses, respectively; and Pinterest, Vine and Reddit rounding out responses with 11.11%, 7.07%, and 1.01% of responses, respectively.

Responses to the question regarding the SNS they use most for academic/professional purposes also generated some interesting data. Although Facebook had the highest percentage of responses with 31.18%, there were a number of responses that were a little less common compared to answers to the previous questions. First, this was a question that received one of the highest percentages of responses claiming the participants did not use a Platform for the specified purpose, with 22.5% of students making this claim. Secondly, this is one of the few categories that had Google+ getting votes from the students, and it turned out to be the second most popular response to this question with 15.05% of responses.

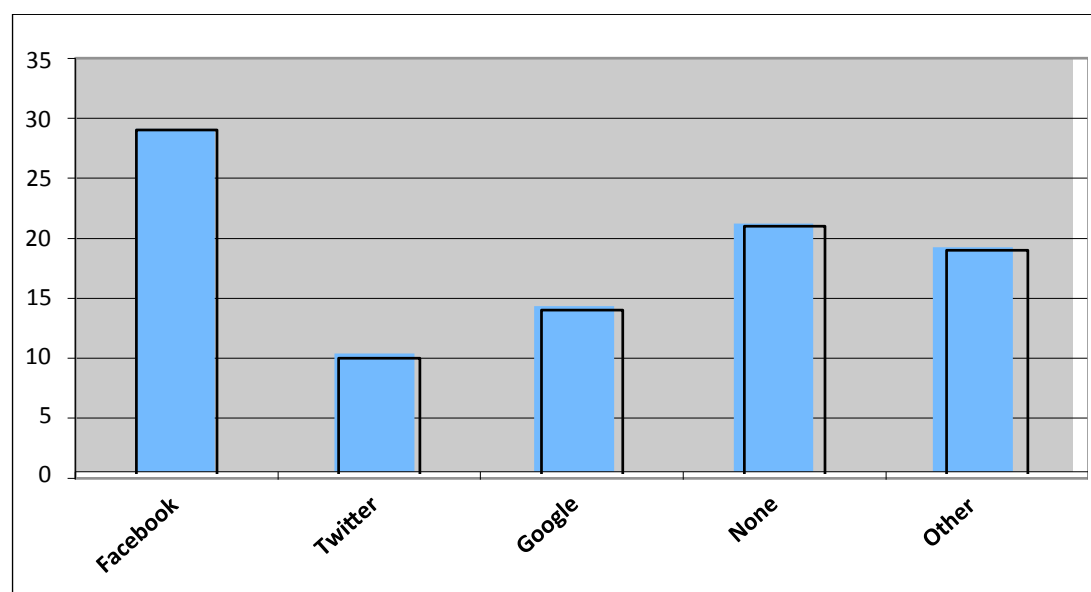


Table 3.10: SNS for Academic/Professional Use

### Content Produced on SNS

Another important aspect of students' SNS to consider is the kind of content they produce on their SNS. Therefore, the next set of questions asked dealt with this topic to determine how often participants of the survey produced specific kinds of content on their SNS accounts. For these questions, participants were asked to pick on of five responses ranging from "never" to "always."

The first of these questions asked “How often are you posts on SNS primarily persuasive in nature?” Out of the one hundred students who responded to this question, 39% answered “Not often” and 18% answered “Never,” making a total of 57% of participants who rarely use their SNS to produce persuasive content. Thirty-one percent of students answered they sometime produced such content, with 12% responding they often or always produced persuasive content on their SNS.

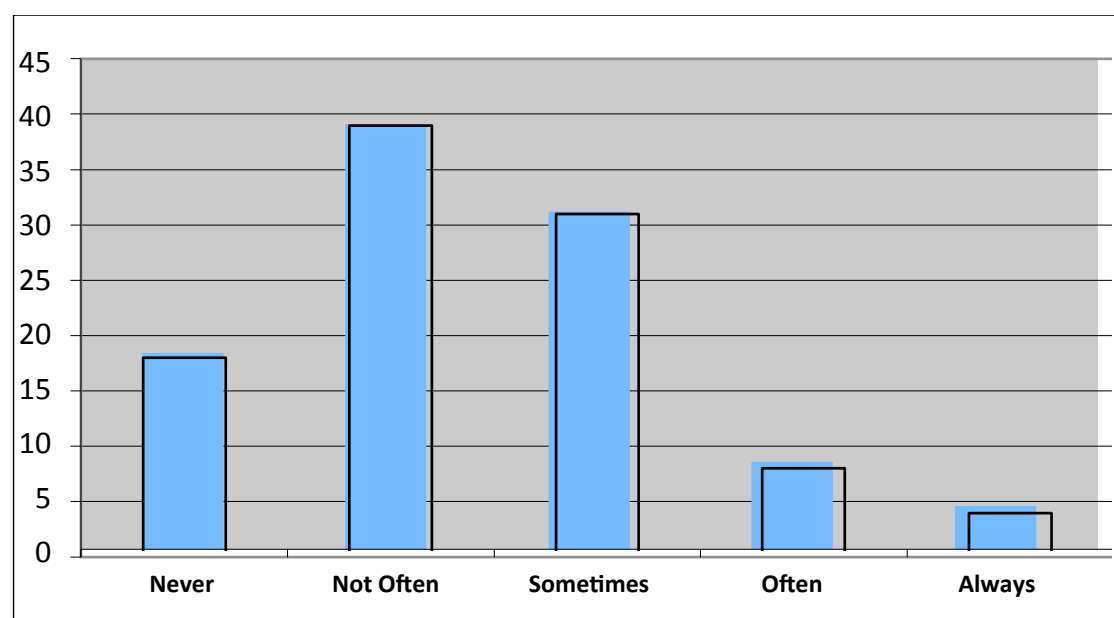


Table 3.11: Frequency of Persuasive Posts

Next, students were asked how often they produce content that is “primarily expressive?” and there was a clear shift in the frequency in content production. In fact, the percentage of “never” responses dropped from 18% of the students to 3% and the “not often” percentage dropped from 39% to 17%. And while the 33% of “Sometimes” responses was also a drop from the previous question, the rate of responses for “Often” and “Always” saw sharp increases. 38% of students answered they often produced expressive content, and 9% claimed they always produced such content.

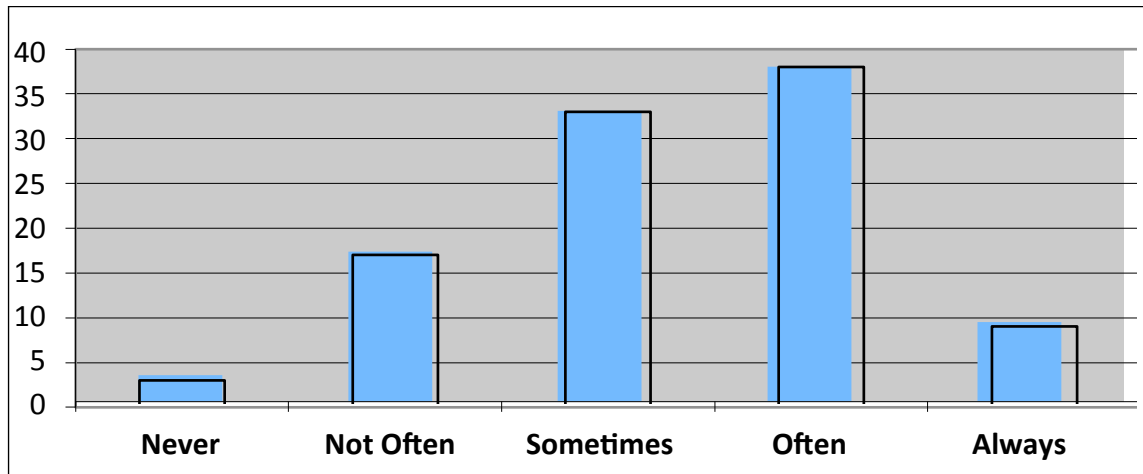


Table 3.12: Frequency of Expressive Posts

The next question regarding content production asked students how often they produced content that was “informative in nature” and it was here that responses started moving more toward the middle frequencies. Students who responded that they either “never” or “always” produced such content made up 4.04% of the responses each. 40% of students answered that they sometimes produced informative content, while 22.22% and 29.29% responded “Not often” and “often” to this question, respectively.

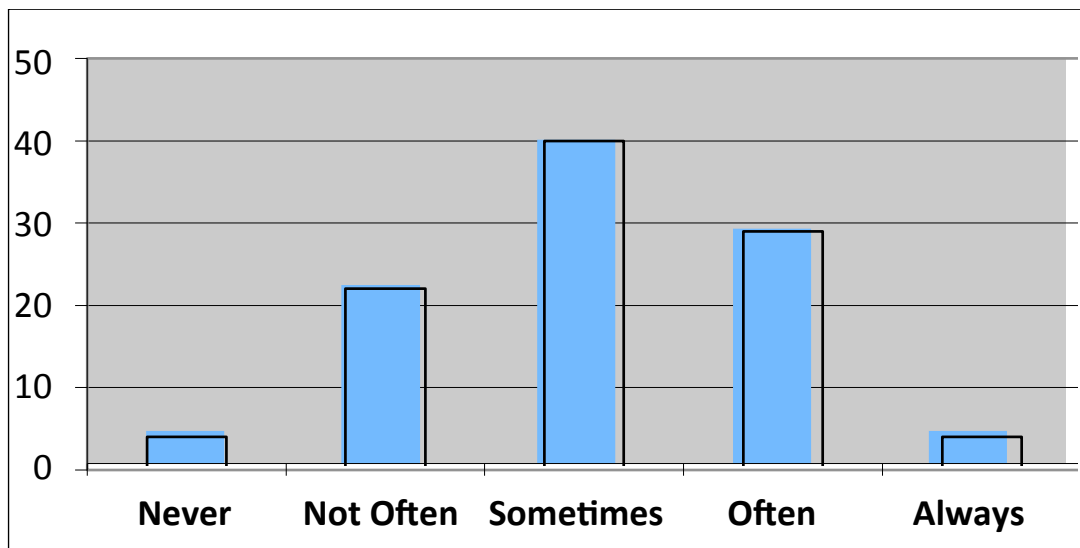


Table 3.13: Frequency of Informative Posts

The last of the content questions asked how often students produced “entertaining” content, which is the content students seem to produce most often. Indeed, while only 15% of

participant responded that their frequency of such posts is “not often” or “never”, 44% of participants answered they “often” produced such content and 13% said they “always” did. It should also be noted that this question garnered the lowest frequency of “sometimes” responses (28%) relative to the other questions.

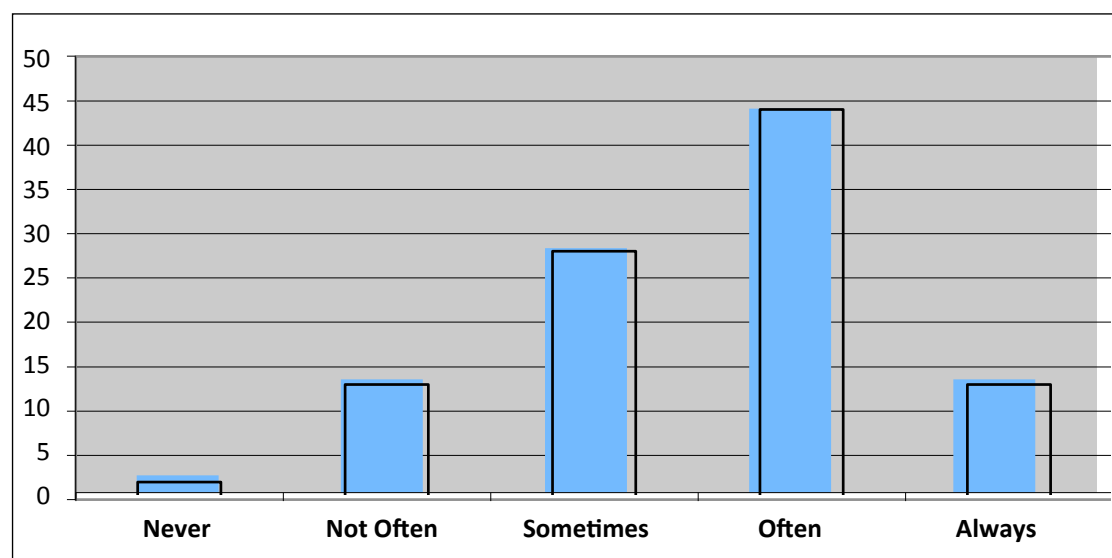


Table 3.14: Frequency of Entertaining Posts

## Content Production V. Consumption

Another important caveat to the SNS tendencies of students is the amount of content they produce versus how much they consume. So, for example, when students get online, are they primarily watching videos and looking at photos of their friends (consuming content), or are they creating and posting their own videos and photos (producing content)? Or, are they reading tweets while posting photos? A 2005 study by Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden found that “some 57% of online teens create content for the internet,” but it is important to understand the ratio of content production and consumption in order to determine whether our students see themselves as active members who produce the content that is being shared, or as more passive members who simply take in content that others are creating, or as a combination of the two.

Furthermore, it is important to investigate if there are certain platforms that students are more prone to use for production purposes versus those they use primarily for consumption. In other words, are students more likely to produce content for Instagram and consume it on Twitter, or does their content production/consumption remain steady regardless of SNS? By having more a nuanced understanding of our students' production and consumption habits, instructors could be better prepared to match particular SNS with particular activities based on student tendencies for production/consumption on those SNS.

When asked if students found themselves consuming or producing more content, the vast majority of students answered that they consumed more content. In fact, 59% of participants answered that they consume content more often, and 4% said they only consume content, compared to 6% and 1% of participants who answered they "produce content more often" and "only produce" content, respectively. Additionally, 17% of participants who answered indicate they produce and consume content equally, and 13% of the students answered that their production or consumption of content depended on the SNS they used.

When asked if their rate of consumption of content depended on the site used, fourteen students responded. Of those sites YouTube had the highest response rate with 21.42%, and Tumblr, Pinterest, Facebook, and Vine each had 14.28%. However, when asked if their rate of production of content depended on the site used, Instagram received the most responses with 30%, while Pinterest and Twitter both had 20% of the responses. Participants were also given a chance to state for which SNS they produce and consume content equally, and Twitter was the most popular response, with 41.66%. Facebook and Instagram followed with 16.66% of responses.

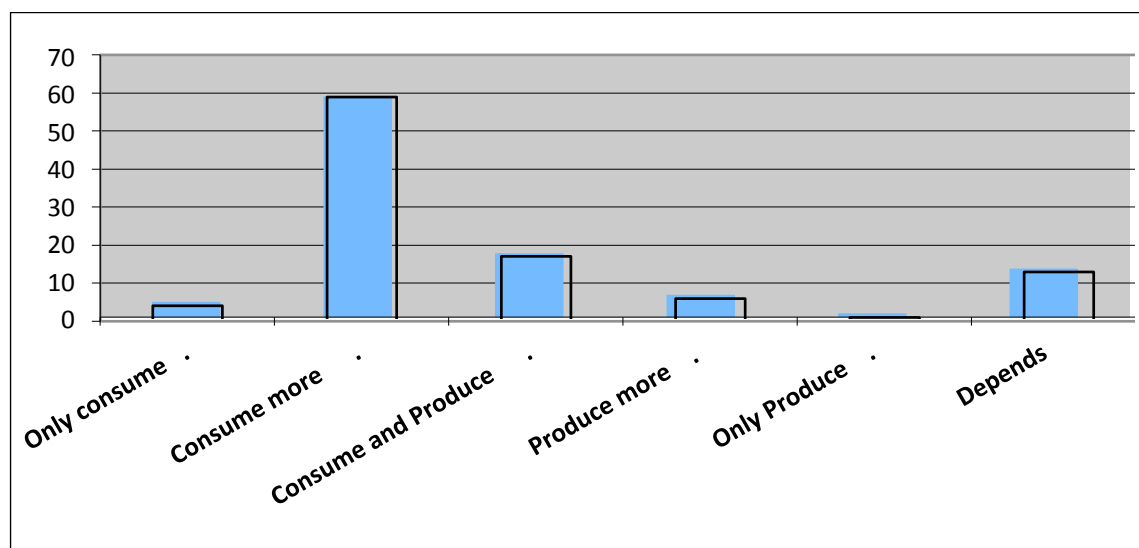


Table 3.15: Frequency of Consumption v Production

### Dis/Agreement on SNS

This survey also provided me with a better sense of how often students agree or disagree with fellow users on SNS and how often they take action on those agreements and disagreements. For these questions, participants were asked to answer by choosing a number on a scale between 1 (always) and 5 (never). By looking at responses to these questions, one may be able to get a better idea of how students view their interaction with others in online spaces, and to get a sense of how to shape classroom discussion of SNS dis/agreements based on how students already perceived such online interactions.

When asked how often they find themselves mentally agreeing or disagreeing with posts from SNS connections, the vast majority (67%) answered that they agree/disagree equally. Twenty-nine percent of students responded that they “often” agree with the posts they see, while only 2% and 1% of students responded that they rarely agree or never agree with posts, respectively, and another 1% answered they always agree with the posts from their connections.

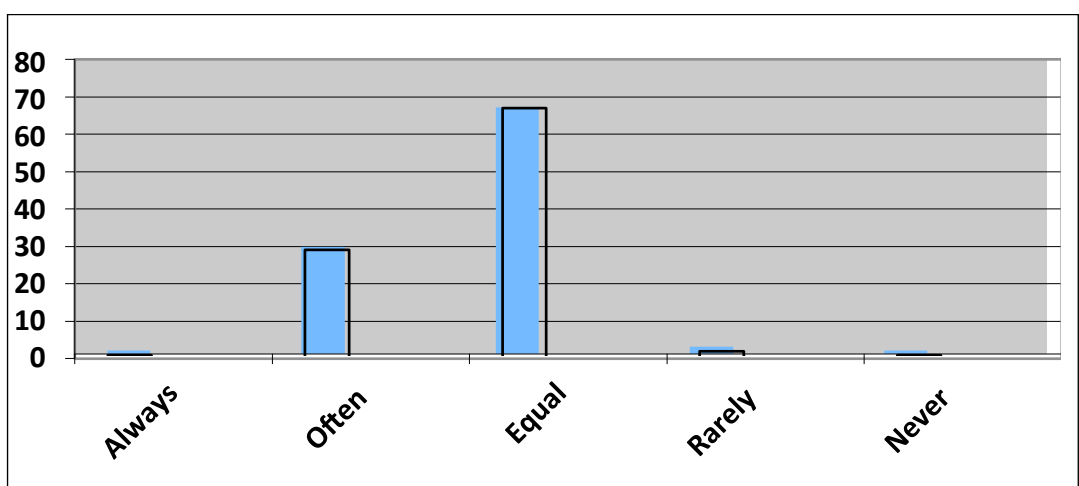


Table 3.16: Frequency of Mental Agreement on SNS Posts

There was a slight difference in response, however, when asked how often students found themselves agreeing or disagreeing with the comments on post from their SNS connections. The percentage of agree/disagree equally dropped to 65%, and the responses to “often agree” dropped to 25%, while the “never agree” responses dropped to 0%. The largest increase came with responses to “rarely agree”, which jumped to 8% of the responses, while those who responded with “always agree” rose to 2%.

The next question asked participants how often they used the “like” button on posts they agreed with. Of the ninety-nine students who responded, 52.53% answered that they “often” use the like button to respond to agreeable posts. 16.16% answered that they “always” use the like button in such cases, bringing the total of students who regularly use the like button to affirm posts to 78.69%. There were also 19.19% of students who answered they “sometimes” use the “like” button, while only 12.12% “rarely” use the “like” button and no participant answered they “never” used the “like” button.



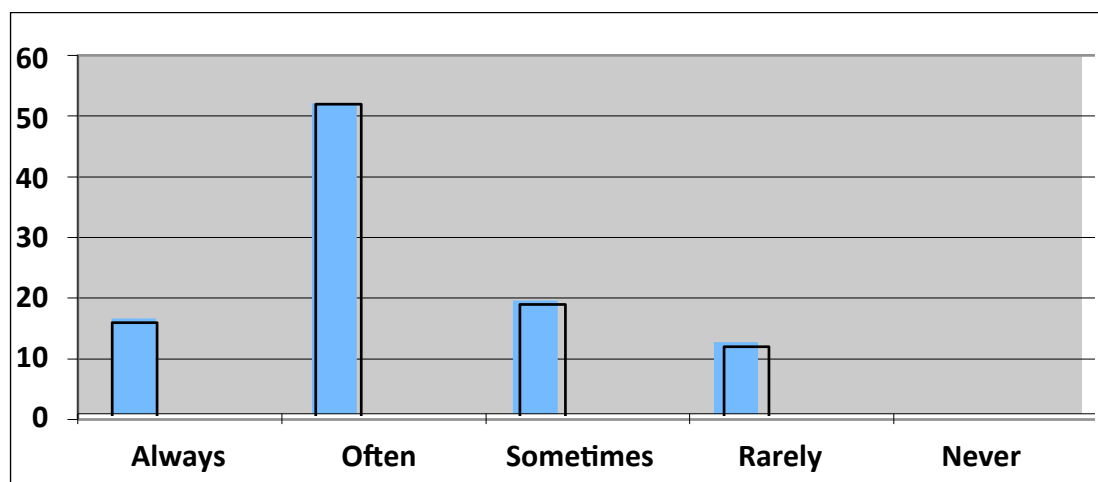


Table 3.17: Frequency of “Liking” Agreeable Posts

However, the numbers change dramatically when students were asked how often they commented on posts they agreed with. Now the numbers are almost inverted as 47% of participants answered they “rarely” comment, and 7% said they “never” comment. On the other hand, the number of students who “always” comment was only 2% and the “often” commenters were at 9%. Still, there were 35% of participants who answered that they sometimes comment on posts they agree with.

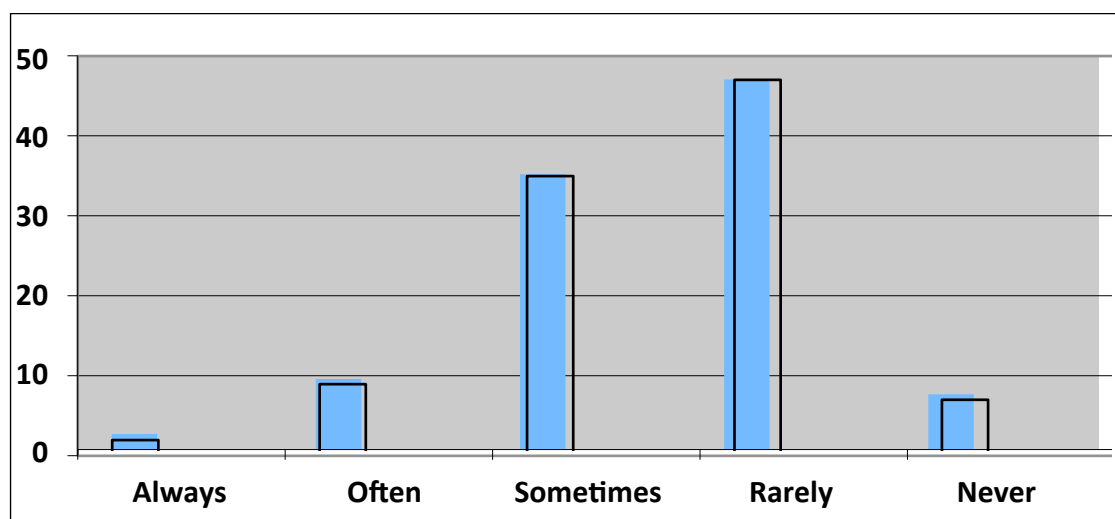


Table 3.18: Frequency of Commenting on Agreeable Posts

These numbers continued to move toward lesser engagement when participants were asked how often they comment on posts with which they disagree. Now, 48% of students

answered they “rarely” comment, and 29% answered they “never” comment, bringing the total percentage of those who infrequently comment on posts with opposing views to 77%. The number of “sometimes” answers dropped to 16%, while the percentage of students who either “often” or “always” comment on posts with disagreeable content stood at 4% and 3%, respectively, or 7% collectively.

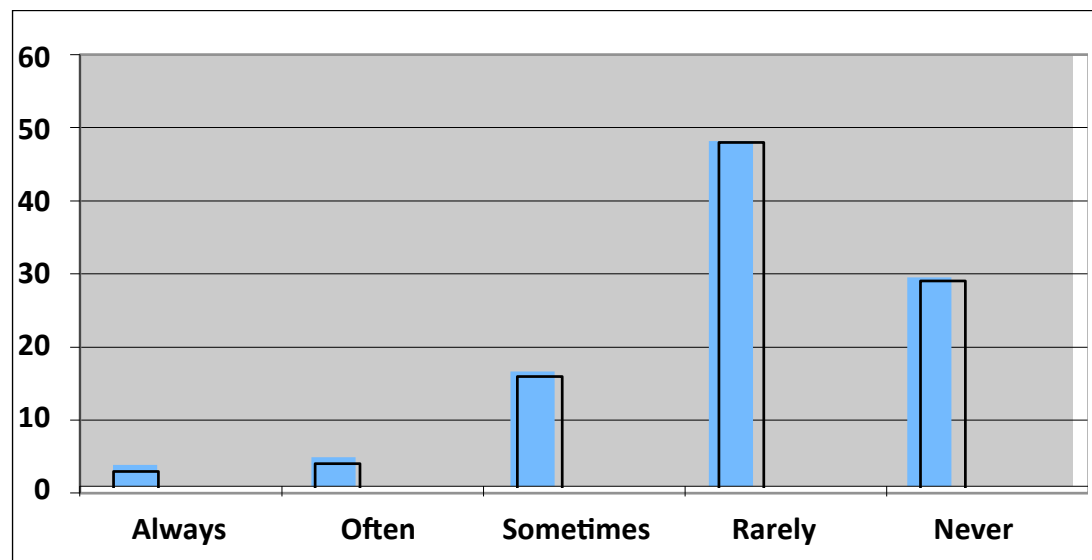


Table 3.19: Frequency of Comments on Disagreeable Posts

It is important for instructors to consider the amount of time students spend actively engaging on SNS through modes such as commenting, or posting their own content. Indeed, from a pedagogical perspective, such engagement is when real learning can take place, as a student is required to consider his/her own views and ideas and present them in a logical manner. Indeed, as Lester Faigley asserts in “Literacy Learning After the Revolution,” the:

more misleading either/or that Birkerts posits, however is that reflective thinking can occur only in acts of reading. I would like to let him in on a little secret that writing teachers know: college students often become more careful, critical, and appreciative readers after a semester in a writing course. (40)

As the survey data revealed, students appear to consider and even passively engage with multiple posts on their SNS through actions such as using the “like” button, or each SNS’s equivalent. More active engagement through commenting, on the other hand, tends to occur less frequently, especially when students are presented with posts they disagree with. This seems to minimize the students’ opportunities to grapple with new ideas, and learn how to rhetorically frame their own perspectives and beliefs. Thus, if students are provided more opportunity, education, and experience in the processes of actively engaging with their composition in SNS spaces, both individually and in response to others’ compositions, there could be an increased likelihood of them growing as critical readers, thinkers, and writers.

### **Student Views on SNS**

The last primary set of questions asked of students dealt with the ways participants viewed SNS as they applied to engagement, composing, and understanding others outside the frames of SNS themselves. For this set of questions, participants answered yes or no questions regarding their views on SNS and their impact on various other writing practices and understanding of others. Participants were also given space to elaborate on their yes or no response with a short answer. By engaging in a deeper investigation concerning student views on how SNS shapes their thinking and engagement outside of SNS, one may be able to gain a better understanding of the views on SNS students bring with them to the composition classroom. As a result, instructors could frame concepts and activities to build from those views in order to assist students in understanding how to successfully implement SNS as tools for composition and public engagement, which is what analysis of data in this and the next chapter will seek to establish for discussion in chapter five.

The first question of this set asks students if they considered their SNS as a primary location for “developing your understanding of others and their viewpoints. For this question, ninety students responded and of those responses, 72.22% answered “yes” while 28.89% answered “no.” For those who believed that SNS did act as spaces for developing such understanding, the reasons for the belief essentially broke down into two groups of responses: 1. That SNS provided interaction with a greater variety of people and so students had more access to different views, and 2. That people are more honest, or less filtered on SNS, which provide students with a greater depth of understanding of those with whom they interact. For instance, one student responded by saying, “I think it is a big part of understanding other’s viewpoints. People tend not have as much of a filter on the web and find it easier to speak their mind. Therefore, you are often exposed to other viewpoints of what people actually think.”

Interestingly, for those who answered the question in the negative, the topic of honesty was also brought up in response, though for them there were concerns that users were able to hide aspects of themselves online and they believed that they gained a better understanding of others through face-to-face interaction. One student stated, “I think it depends on the person. Most people use social media to over dramatize things and create a ‘social media’ personality,” and another participant said they gain understanding of others, “in person, not through a computer screen.”

Participants were also asked if their SNS interaction prepared them for writing in “academic” settings. In response to this question, students were pretty clear in their belief that SNS interaction did not prepare them for such academic writing as 75.28% answered in the negative, while 26.97% answered that it did.

The overwhelming majority of students who said they did not believe SNS interaction prepared them for writing in academic settings elaborated by stating that they felt this way because writing in SNS spaces was either too informal, less professional, or did not follow grammatical rules. In fact, one student admitted that, “I’m not using *correct* writing skills when writing online” (emphasis added), and another answered, “you don’t have to use actual grammar on social networking sites.” However, for those who believed SNS interaction can benefit academic writing, their reasons were less about grammar and “correct” writing skills, and more about development of ideas and content, as well as building off of others’ ideas and knowledge. Indeed, one student stated, “considering the wide range of people and backgrounds that you have to specify your comments to, I believe it forces you to be versatile and intelligent on how one words one’s comments.” Still, there were those who mentioned correctness and grammar, but those who did asserted that seeing the poor grammar online motivates them to write “correctly” themselves. For instance, one student wrote, “I read what other people write, it’s not grammatically correct, and I don’t want to be one of those people.” So there does appear to be some level of professional self-awareness among users of SNS, or at least an intrinsic desire to seem well-educated based on how they write in SNS spaces.

Another question in this set asked if participants thought their SNS interaction prepared them for writing/composing in “other social settings,” and this time the participants believed such interaction was useful for this purpose: 71.26% of students said yes and 29.89% said no. Interestingly, many of the responses in the affirmative for this question matched the reasoning for the affirmatives in the previous question regarding academic preparation, as many of the responses dealt with gaining better understanding of others’ ideas, and how to prepare for the finer aspects of discussion and argumentation. For example, one student stated, “writing towards

a wide culture helps one develop skills when talking to people of different viewpoints.” And grammar did come up again in response to this questions as a number of participants discussed how they felt more comfortable writing and interacting with worrying about grammar and writing rules. One student offered the view that, “people relate more to laid back and slang rather than academic writing.” And for those who did not believe SNS interaction was good preparation for other social composition, grammar was still the primary sticking point. The majority of elaborations noted that language or grammar on SNS was still poor and there was not enough genuine interaction to practice such skills.

When participants were asked a similar question, this time regarding preparation for professional settings, the responses swayed even more in the direction of the negative, with 88.24% answering no and only 14.12% answering yes. While the same issues of grammar and informality were still primary reasons for the negative responses, another interesting caveat came about in students’ elaboration to this response: many talked about SNS being a more relaxed or comfortable space compared to the professional setting. In fact, one student responded by stating, “Social networking to me isn’t for professional it’s for your comfort or how you feel,” with a number of other students noting the “casual” feel of SNS.

For the smaller group of students who thought SNS interaction could offer professional writing insights, there was less confidence in their stance in the elaboration, as many respond with “maybe” or “kind of” then offering more explanation. However, many of the responses discussed the ways in which SNS develop a sense of how to convey oneself to others. One student stated that they “learn tact, and how to address a mixed group,” while another student asserted that, “it helps me learn how to omit certain facts that would reflect poorly on me.” Others still discussed how it provides them with inside information regarding a potential field

they are interested in joining. For instance, one student said “I like learning about planes and I’m going to be an airline pilot,” while another said, “if I find the information I found useful in a professional environment.”

The last question regarding writing preparation dealt with whether or not students believe SNS should be used in the composition classroom, and for this question, there was a small move back to the middle as 70.11% said no, and the number of yes responses moved up to 33.33%. For those who believed SNS should not be used in the classroom, the similar arguments of informality and improper grammar continued to show, however, when students considered the classroom application of SNS, many brought up concerns about such sites being a distraction. One student claimed that SNS use “would be distracting and it’s meant for recreational use,” while another argued that “it’s too tempting for students to do other things on the sites instead of paying attention.” Of course, when a large portion of instructors believes that “participation in online SNS [is] appropriate for students but not for themselves,” it is not so difficult to see where students get the idea that there is a gap between the work done on SNS versus those in academic settings and that SNS are nothing but a distraction in the composition classroom (Vie 19).

However, for those who did believe SNS had some classroom value, the responses were a bit more varied. Not only were students considering the content of SNS as being beneficial, with statements such as “it gives big insight to the world of how our generation thinks and acts,” but many were thinking in pedagogical terms with responses, such as, “depends on the site, sights [sic] like Instagram and SnapChat, no. Sites like Tumblr might work because of its blog nature.” Others believed classroom use of SNS might engage students, as it “would be an easy way for students to relate,” and “because it would be different and then other students that don’t participate in class then will.”

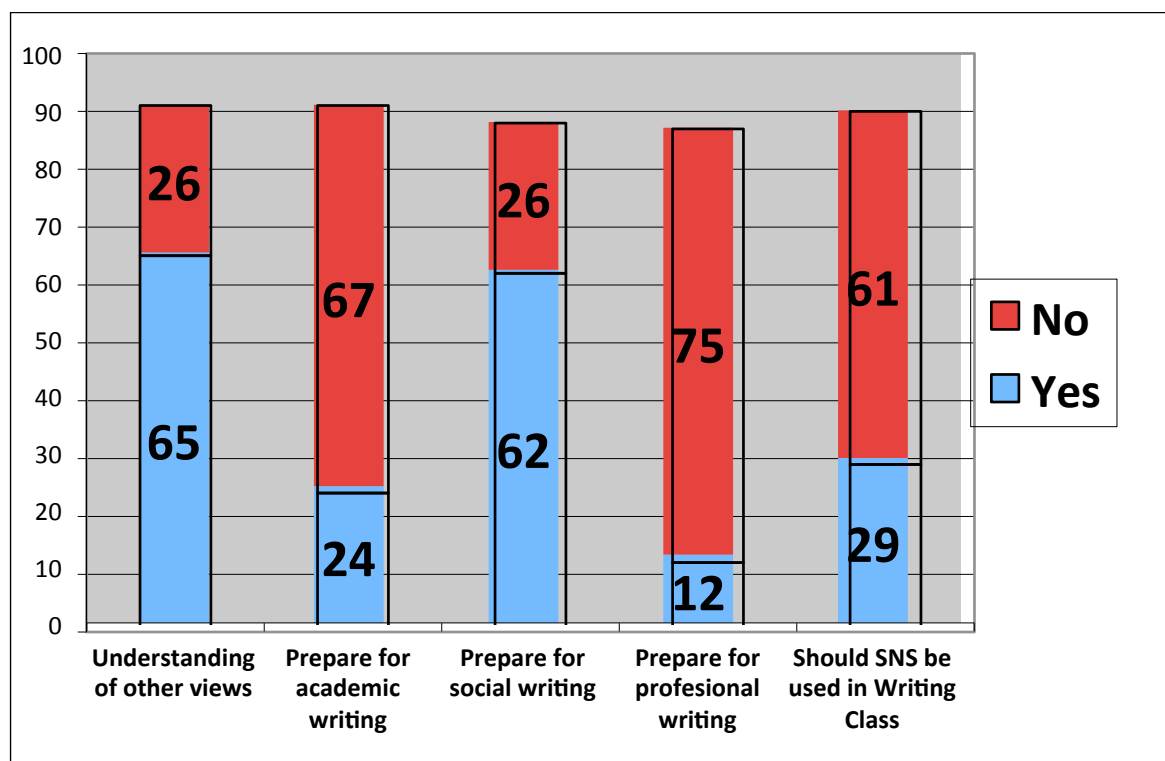


Table 3.20: Views on Qualities of SNS

The final question in the survey asked if the students believed “SNS are an accurate representation of our identities?” to which 56.32% said no and 4.13% said yes. For those who answered no to this question, the vast majority agreed that people can lie to create an online persona, that does not match the person’s identity in face-to-face interaction. One student stated, “People go online to live the life they cannot outside. People lie, over-exaggerate, and change their responses because they are able to hide behind a screen. It doesn’t show how a person honestly is face-to-face.” Thus these students appear to believe two things: 1. That the identity of a person is honest or real in face-to-face interaction, and 2. That a person can manipulate his or her identity to be something different and false compared to the in-person identity, when interacting on SNS.

On the other hand, those who believe SNS interaction does provide an accurate representation of our identities say so because they believe that the space created between people



by the computer provides room to be more honest, and that people post so much content about themselves that it gives a clearer picture of who they are. One example from a student states that, “most people never hold back when writing on their social media sites. I believe this reveals peoples true identities because they are sharing their true thoughts for everyone to see.” This seems to agree with Mimi Marinuccis’ assertion in “You Can’t Front on Facebook” that:

Facebook often facilitates what is best described as an integration of identities, and this integration of identities in turn functions as something of an inhibiting factor. Although inhibition is usually associated with inauthenticity, the integration of identities that occurs on Facebook can actually prevent us from intentionally misrepresenting ourselves. (73)

Another interesting aspect about the responses is that some participants stated that they themselves represent themselves accurately on their SNS, and either implied or stated that this was why others do the same. For instance, one student replied, “depending on the person and how much they value themselves and the social media, yes. I know my social media is a correct portrayal of myself.”

## **Analysis**

Student participation in the survey for this project has provided myriad points for analysis and consideration, and, while there are limitations to the scope and generalizability of the findings from the survey, there are a number of points and trends that the data does reveal, which do appear to offer opportunities for the development of introductory theories and questions for further research.

1. Twitter is undeniably the most popular SNS platform currently in use by FYC students, but there is a noticeable difference in SNS use depending on the purposes of or audiences engaged on SNS.
2. FYC students are primarily consuming content on their social networking sites. However, when they do produce content, the content is primarily expressive in nature.
3. When FYC students engage with other posts on SNS, they tend to “like” other users’ posts instead of commenting on posts, and they are less likely to comment on posts they disagree with than those they agree with.
4. Overall, FYC students do not believe SNS interaction acts as good preparation for writing in the professional or academic settings, but they do believe such interaction provides preparation for writing in other social settings.
5. FYC students generally do not believe SNS should be used in the composition classroom.
6. FYC students believe that they portray themselves accurately on their SNS sites, but are split on the issue of whether or not SNS generally present an accurate representation of our identities.

Furthermore, based on the survey, there are preliminary answers to my primary research questions that can help frame the analysis of data from the interviews. First, it seems students use SNS, not surprisingly for social purposes. Instead of using SNS for academic, professional or civic purposes, students are engaging with their friends, and meeting new people on SNS and using their sites primarily for means of self-expression or creating a digital identity.

Second, the survey suggests that students are aware of some of the professional and civic opportunities on SNS, particularly when it comes to meeting and engaging with people in professional spheres similar to their own, or their chosen field of study. They understand that there are spaces where they can become more informed about their chosen profession/field and see opportunities to network in those spaces. However, they primarily see their use of SNS as a way of building their social standing, and enhancing/maintaining skills they can use in other social situations.

In terms of their use of SNS as instances of rhetorical composition views of others as potential audiences, participants in the survey are aware that they are partaking in a variety of interactions on their SNS and are learning how to engage appropriately depending on the site they use and purpose of their interaction. When asked specifically about the work they compose and whether or not it prepares them for academic/professional writing and interaction, most students are adamant that SNS interaction does not provide them with such preparation, primarily citing the lack of grammar and proper writing expected in SNS spaces. However, there is a clear, if only intuited, understanding of audience as participants in the survey distinguished that they used specific SNS to interact with certain groups of people, and the sites used for specific groups of people were consistent for the majority of participants.

Finally, on the whole, the survey participants were often skeptical regarding the use of SNS as tools for teaching and learning about writing. While there were many participants who believed SNS could engage students in new ways, and teach them about audience, or seeing new ideas perspectives, the majority of the participants believed that the kinds of composition done on SNS, and the grammatical expectations, or lack of expectation, in SNS spaces differed to

greatly from the kind of writing done at the academic and professional level for their to be effective use of SNS in the classroom.

### *Pedagogical Implications*

As a result of the data analysis, there are some potentially exciting possibilities for consideration in terms of SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study. For instance, while the majority of the survey participants were not convinced of the pedagogical potential of SNS, a number of those skeptical cited reasons such as SNS being distracting, and the difference in formality between SNS composition and academic/professional writing. Of course, these two points of contention are not unique to SNS interaction and composition. The writing classroom is often filled with activities that bring in non-academic composition that could be seen as distracting, that work well in terms of teaching concepts of audience and rhetorical situation, from personal narrative, to fiction/poetry writing, to film critique. Furthermore, even in the realm of *academic writing* there is not as much consistency as students, or even instructors may think. In fact, Downs and Wardle assert, “asking teachers to teach ‘academic writing’ begs the question: *which* academic writing—what content, for what activity, context, and audience?” (556). So the prospects for teaching various forms of writing, both academic and less formal using a space/form of composing that the majority of students are usually far more familiar with to start with, seem positive.

There is also reason to be optimistic about the potential about using SNS to teach concepts of audience and the rhetorical situation as the survey participants already seem to demonstrate an initial understanding of these concepts through their current SNS interaction. While students may not consider, or at least not describe, their interactions on SNS as

demonstrating audience and rhetorical awareness, the fact that they choose to engage particular audiences, and consume/produce certain kinds of content on specific SNS indicates such considerations. In her introduction to *Understanding and Composing Multimodal Projects*, Danielle Nicole DeVoss informs students that:

The good news is that you have been reading, analyzing, and composing for years. Think of the magazine you read often, a job ad you once replied to, a Web site you've frequently visited, a book you discussed with friends, or a Facebook comment you recently made. (MM-5)

DeVoss, makes it clear to students reading her book that whether they have considered it to be the case or not, students are considering the rhetorical implications of the content they produce. This innate knowledge provides a valuable scaffold for these concepts and provides opportunity for the transfer of these concepts to various disciplines and outside the classroom.

Of course, any consideration of the use of SNS in the writing classroom must be tempered by the fact that there is a level of skepticism on the part of the students for such classroom integration. Whatever their reasons may be, a significant portion of the survey participants believe SNS should not be used in the classroom, and one must anticipate some pushback from students who may see such integration as negative. Therefore, any use of SNS in the classroom should likely be done with explicit justification and explanation of the benefits in an effort to compensate for any skepticism from the students. Furthermore, it is important to make sure students are provided a space in which they can bring their own experiences with SNS into the classroom, as allowing students the opportunity to demonstrate the value in their experiences in order to actively engage in the classroom enhances their agency (Marsh 2005; McCarthy 2002).

### *Questions*

Again, the scope and limitations of this study prevent application of these findings to composition students outside of this study, and the findings themselves were meant to be more general, in order to provide a frame for the interviews, and to establish bases for further research. The primary findings from the survey data provide some initial insight into how students use and see their use of SNS, and frames potential ways of incorporating SNS as topics for rhetorical studies, or as pedagogical tools in the composition classroom. These data and analysis do provide some new framing questions for the data and analysis to come in chapter four that can help to further flesh out understanding of student SNS use and views, and continue answering the primary research questions:

1. Do students' views regarding SNS audience and SNS use as rhetorical composition change as they become more experienced in the writing classroom, and consider the subject over time?
2. If their views change, do students' SNS practices change as a result?
3. Do students' views on SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study in the writing classroom change as they become more experienced in the writing classroom, and consider the subject over time?

### **Conclusion**

My goal for this chapter was to present data from the survey that can provide background information about student engagement with SNS. Moreover, I wanted to continue opening space for discussion regarding how to ethically and effectively implement SNS in the FYC classroom as topics for rhetorical study and tools for composition pedagogy. By getting a better sense of

how students feel about their own use of SNS in and out of the classroom, instructors should be able to better connect with students in the FYC classroom when discussing SNS, helping to legitimize SNS as an important topic of study and practice.

In this chapter I analyzed the survey data in order to further build on instructor understanding of student use of and views on SNS and the affect those uses and views has on student composition. By using the data to interact with the current literature on pedagogy, composition and SNS among today's FYC students, it is my hope that this chapter works to further develop our understanding of SNS as pedagogical tools and subjects for rhetorical study. Furthermore, I will use data analyzed in this chapter to help frame and support findings from the interviews of four SU Writing students, which I will describe in more detail in the following chapter.

#### CHAPTER 4: SPEAKING OUT ABOUT SNS IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

Throughout this project, the participants provided such valuable insights into their views and uses of SNS. In Chapter Three I shared some of the data those students provided by giving a glimpse at their responses to the survey I created in the spring semester of 2014. In their responses, participants created a snapshot of students at SU taking Writing 102 and helped me begin to answer and create a number of questions to establish responsible and ethical SNS pedagogy in the writing classroom.

Furthermore, students' responses to the survey, and my subsequent review and analysis of the responses, established a helpful frame as I prepared to interview four individual students in depth about similar topics regarding their SNS use and views. There were numerous ideas about consumption and production on SNS, and varying forms and responses to argumentation and disagreement in SNS spaces. For instance, the interview participants often revealed they believed there were distinctions to be made between liking, retweeting, and sharing of content, compared to simply reading content on SNS as different kinds of content consumption. There were also a number of considerations about the ideas of composition practices on SNS and the ways in which those practices correlate, or do not correlate, to writing, and the teaching of writing in the classroom. The participants often spent the first couple interviews sorting out their ideas regarding SNS as a pedagogical tool, before coming to the conclusion that it could be an effective tool if the instructor could avoid it being another distraction. Similarly, the participants found that the use of SNS as a subject of rhetorical study in the writing classroom could be beneficial after deciding that it could help students learn about concepts of audience, and the rhetorical situation. Many of the interview participant responses backed up the data found from



the survey participants, which will act a framing devise for the considerations of data provided by the interview participants for this chapter.

In “Citizens Navigating in Literate Worlds,” Ola Erstad asserts, “it is important to stress that digital literacy is related to *situational embedding*, that is, the use of technology within life situations. To understand such processes we have to look at different contexts where literacy is practiced and given meaning” (106). In this chapter, I provide excerpts from the interviews with my participants in order to provide glimpses into the various contexts in which FYC students use and view SNS. I use this chapter to continue addressing my five primary research questions:

1. How do students in first year composition courses use social networking sites (SNS), both in and out of the classroom?
2. How do students view their own use of SNS, personally, professionally, socially, and civically?
3. How do students view the use of SNS as rhetorical composition?
4. How do students view SNS and other users as (potential) audiences?
5. How do students view SNS as potential tools for teaching and learning about writing?

I also use this chapter to begin addressing new questions that arose out of my analysis of Chapter Three:

1. Do students’ views regarding SNS audience and SNS use as rhetorical composition change as they become more experienced in the writing classroom, and consider the subject over time?
2. If their views change, do students’ SNS practices change as a result?

3. Do students' views on SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study in the writing classroom change as they become more experienced in the writing classroom, and consider the subject over time?

By sharing and analyzing the interview data of the four participants, I use the following chapter to establish a more complete picture of the Writing 102 population at SU, as well as the ideas they have about SNS and its implications in the writing classroom in order to frame the major discussions in Chapter Five. These discussions include consideration of consumption and production on SNS, dis/agreement on SNS, and the follower/following ratio on SNS, as well as participant views on SNS as potential pedagogical tools. With such a picture, I am able to better provide enriched responses for my primary research questions, and conceptualize the types of pedagogical considerations that are more ethical, effective, and responsible in the writing classroom.

### **Review of Interview Method**

As previously stated in Chapter Two, the interviews took place between February and April of 2014. I interviewed Dria, Nikki, Quinn, and Ralph four times each, with one hour allotted for interviewing each time, although, the interviews general went ran around forty and fifty minutes each. I held the interviews in my office at Bowling Green State University, where participants and I worked alone. The interviews were semi-scripted in that I had an outline for each interview of general topics for discussion with a few introductory questions and an anticipated time for discussion of each topic. I gave participants a copy of each outline at least one day before each interview and gave them an opportunity to ask me for clarification or modification of the content, though none took me up on the offer.

## Interview Participants

The students Dria, Nikki, Quinn, and Ralph were coming in with varying SNS backgrounds. All four students had active Facebook accounts, though some were more active than others, and Facebook was Quinn's only active SNS account. Dria, Nikki, and Ralph were all three active users of Twitter and Instagram. Nikki and Ralph both also used Snapchat and Vine on a regular or semi-regular basis, but while Dria had a Snapchat account she did not use it frequently, nor did she state she used Vine. Nikki was also the only participant to discuss having a Tumblr account, as well as being an avid Pinterest user.

	SNS used	Primary SNS
Dria	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat	Twitter and Instagram
Nikki	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Vine, Pinterest, Tumblr	Twitter and Instagram
Quinn	Facebook	Facebook
Ralph	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat	Twitter and Instagram

Figure 4.1: SNS Used by Interview Participants

### *Dria: The Wildcard*

Dria was a very energetic participant who had a number of ideas about her and others' use of SNS, both in and out of the classroom. An avid Twitter user, Dria made it clear early that her mother plays an important role in her use of SNS by friending or following Dria on a number of platforms in order to monitor her engagement on those sites. At the time of the interviews,

Dria followed a number of people on twitter and had quite a number of followers herself. She often talked about the various funny accounts she followed, and how she considered herself a “wildcard” who’s personality, as a teenager, and SNS representation of that personality are in flux resulting in changes in what she posts and posts about on her SNS accounts.

*Nikki: The Queen of Tweets*

Nikki was very sophisticated user of a number of SNS who seemed to have a very clear sense of each SNS having a particular purpose. She admitted that Twitter was by far the SNS she use the most, but she was also quite active on Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, and Vine at the time of the interviews. Nikki also mentioned her mom being a presence on her Twitter account, though she made it clear that her mom follows her, but she does not follow her mom back on Twitter. Nikki was very conscious of the number of followers, likes, and retweets she gets and often discusses a number of ways to keep those numbers at what she would consider an acceptable range. Nikki was also quite aware of the movement of older generations on SNS and had an understanding of the impact such movement has on each SNS as it pertains to her own generation.

*Quinn: The Facebook Philosopher*

Quinn was a very contemplative participant. He would always take his time to consider each question and construct a very thoughtful response. Quinn was the exception in the group since he was the only one of the participants who only used Facebook. Furthermore, he was the only participant who only friended or accepted friend requests from only close friends whom he talked to on a regular basis in person. Quinn too, discussed family playing a bit of a role in the

early stages of his SNS use, but was the only participant who did not use Facebook to primarily interact with family. Quinn, a musician, often used Facebook book as a communicative tool with a small group of friends, often to share music ideas with his fellow musician friends.

### *Ralph: The Social Media Moderator*

Ralph was a very mellow participant who seemed to have a clear and comfortable understanding of his use of SNS. He admitted to primarily using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram regularly, but for different purposes. In terms of the three participants who held multiple SNS accounts, Ralph seemed to be least concerned with the number of followers, likes, and retweets he received, and was the only one of the three Twitter users who didn't have a specific idea of how many friends he had. Ralph also discussed the impact of his family on SNS, but did so less in terms of surveillance than any of the other participants, though, for Dria and Nikki, the worries about surveillance primarily stemmed from being followed on Twitter and Ralph made little mention of family connections on Twitter. Ralph had a very easy going approach to using SNS, and instead of concern over how many followers he had, was adamant about SNS being "big communit[ies], [where] you are connected with a bunch of people that you know or you may not know through this medium" (Personal Interview. 25 Mar).

### **Memoing/Coding**

Corbin and Strauss maintain in *The Basics of Qualitative Research*, "to reach these ends (of Grounded Theory) requires maintaining a balance among the attributes of creativity, rigor, persistence, and above all, theoretical sensitivity" (58). They continue by saying, "Though ordinarily a beginner cannot expect to make 'great' discoveries, with enough hard work and

persistence a researcher is capable of making contributions to his or her field of interest” (58). It is fitting that these words are written to introduce the section of chapters dealing with coding, as persistence is certainly a primary element of the coding process. Indeed, my coding process for the interviews was constant up to the completion of this chapter. Because the interview data was so closely related to that of the survey responses, and because there were a number of interviews that took place with four participants over the span of two months, the coding process was quite circular, which helped provide deeper understanding of how students view and use SNS. For instance, themes such as family as audience, professionalization on SNS, and perceived difficulty of reigning in SNS as a distraction or grammatical detractor in the classroom arose in the surveys and were reinforced on a number of occasions throughout the interview process.

As Corbin and Strauss point out, “the lines between each type of coding are artificial. The different types do not take place in stages,” which was certainly true in my case (58). In fact, Ian Dey, in *Grounding Grounded Theory: Guidelines for Qualitative Inquiry*, asserts that, “the division between open coding and axial coding needs to be treated with caution. We should not take this as an exhortation to categorize first through open coding and then consider connections between categories late in axial coding” (105). Luckily, I couldn’t help but avoid this as I constantly found myself going through small cycles of the three types of coding throughout nearly the entire interview and analysis processes. In fact, as I initially started the interview process, I had started open coding almost while I was performing the first interviews with each participant. By recognizing early on that participants were discussing similar topics in response to my question sets (such as the role of parents in their SNS use, or the importance of followers and retweets, and the concepts of passive and active consumption began to emerge), I would go

through the coding process in order to develop new or alternative questions in subsequent interviews that dealt with the topics the students seemed to be bringing up.

The memo work I performed during the interviews and following the interviews assisted much of the early coding during the interview process. For instance, as the early interviews with the participants were finished, I noticed a common theme between my notes on participants about Twitter being less formal and more in the moment than other SNS they used. This helped me reframe questions and pick up on other points made about the differences between, not only Twitter and other SNS, but each SNS as it compared to the others. Following the interviews, I continued the coding process, and had essentially worked my way into the latter two coding stages, as I had begun to see that the participants had provided data that indicated they were increasingly aware of audience, and were opening up to the idea of SNS in the Writing classroom, among other things. By this time, I had established many of the primary themes for the chapter, such as the impact of dis/agreement on engagement, the importance of the follower/following ratio, and concept of audience awareness as it connected SNS engagement and potential writing classroom considerations. The cycle of coding continued as I worked on the chapter manuscript and recognized other points that were related to the survey data. One example was the seeming tendency to avoid Facebook altogether from the survey respondents, while many of the interview participants seemed to indicate a slightly more frequent use of, or attention to, Facebook while admitting that such use was noticeably different than their use of other SNS.

### **Student Use of SNS as Spaces for Consumption and Production of Content**

One of the more important topics addressed with the survey data in Chapter Three was that of content production versus content consumption. It is important to understand how our students engage on their SNS sites and whether they see themselves as primarily producers or consumers of content. One of the great features of the internet is that it provides seemingly unlimited potential for creation of content, but if our students don't see the spaces they use online as useful for creation, and they get accustomed to primarily using SNS, and indeed the rest of the internet, as spaces for consumption, then we run the risk of allowing another media space to be created where a select few create the content, and thus the messages by which millions of people will be influenced. And this possibility does not seem far-fetched, as the analysis of data in Chapter Three revealed the students appear to primarily consume content.

However, as the survey data began to reveal and the following discussion of participant interview responses on the topic suggest, a grey area between content production and content consumption begins to emerge. The interview participants started to make a distinction between types of SNS consumption that fall somewhere in between consumption and production. There is the simple reading/viewing of content without response that the participants viewed as consumption that is more passive. Then there are acts such as liking, retweeting, and sharing posts, where users create a response to an original post, but are not necessarily creating new content themselves, which participants did not quite see as production, but viewed as a more active form of consumption.

Thus, it is continually important to understand how students conceive of consumption and production of content on SNS, and where they find themselves doing the most of each. In doing so, teachers may be better equipped to see why student produce in certain spaces and not



others, determine motivating factors for production in general, in order to foster production in new spaces and ways. In *The Filter Bubble*, Eli Pariser talks about Larry Lessig's claim that "code is law" (175). Pariser asserts, "if code is law, software engineers and geeks are the ones who get to write it" (175). But, if students view the most prominent spaces in which they interact online as spaces of consumption, then it seems their odds of engaging in content production are drastically reduced, much less their working to produce their own spaces for content production.

However, if teachers show students the ways online spaces such as SNS can be places for genuine content production, perhaps students will be more interested in and will gain the skills necessary for using such concepts to begin producing more content and promoting themselves professionally and academically in such spaces. It is with the goal of continuing to address my first research questions by gaining insight into student uses of SNS for content consumption and production that I opened each participants' first interviews with a discussion about content production and consumption, how the students distinguished between the two, and how often and where the students engaged in each. Unsurprisingly, each of the participants seemed to be in agreement with what constituted consumption and production generally. As Dria put it, consumption is "what you take in" and production is "what you put out there" (Personal Interview. 28 Mar).

However, the conversation usually varied some when the participants were asked what role things like favorites, likes, shares, and retweets played in the consumption and production conversation. For instance, when I ask about these different SNS options Nikki has a few different responses. She believes, "if you're retweeting that'd be production", and feels similarly about favorites, saying, "I would consider that production," that's kind of like putting your opinion on what you see there" (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). Interestingly, Nikki also "kinda"

considers the act of being tagged by a friend in a photo as a form of production. Still, Nikki makes it a point to clarify that “it might be more general [...] it’s not as unique [but is] more broad production” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr).

Dria, on the other hand, had a less certain response to the definition of retweeting. She says that retweeting is “consumption” but to others it’s production because you are “producing it for everyone else to see. It’s both? Is that possible?” and when discussing the ideas of liking or favoriting posts, Dria is still working through her definition of consumption. She states, “If I’m just liking it ... I guess it is some level of consumption,” but then goes on to claim that “the only time I really feel like I’m consuming is [...] if I take [an] idea for my own” (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). She then proceeds to give an example in which she follows a fitness account and would consider it consumption if she found a post on the account that she would use for her own fitness. However, after some discussion Dria does seem to settle into a basic understanding of consumption that is similar to Nikki and says there is a difference between simply scrolling through and reading content, and hitting the like or favorite button, where the latter “is acknowledging I’ve crept through it and I like it” (Personal Interview. 28 Mar).

Ralph seems to be in agreement with these considerations of the various practices, stating, “liking is almost like an acknowledgement that you saw it and you appreciated it” (Personal Interview. 8 Apr). Ralph continues by saying, “a share would be like, you would want everyone else that follows you or is your friend to see, as well” (Personal Interview. 8 Apr). So again, there is a sense, that there is a type of action typical of SNS that lies between production and consumption, where students are able to express themselves about an idea or post without creating their own content.

	Where more <i>production</i> happens	Where more <i>consumption</i> happens
Dria	Instagram Twitter	Twitter
Nikki	Twitter Instagram	Facebook Pinterest
Quinn	N/A	Facebook
Ralph	Instagram	Twitter Facebook

Figure 4.2: SNS Where Interview Participants Produce/Consume More

Quinn probably had the most nuanced way of discussing the differences between simply reading a post and performing actions such as liking it. He considered hitting the like button a form of “active consumption,” which seems to imply that simply reading through one’s newsfeed or wall could be considered more passive consumption (Personal Interview 26 Feb). Quinn goes on to state that, “active consumption is a form of production.” (Personal Interview 26 Feb). Indeed, in looking back at Dria and Nikki’s discussions of consumption, the concepts of active and passive consumption begin to fit with how they were describing favoriting and retweeting and this begins to tease out some of the nuance between the acts of production and consumption on SNS

By looking at how students use SNS as spaces for production and consumption, and getting a sense of how they view those uses and opinions of production and consumption, teachers can better conceptualize ways to incorporate various acts into classroom activities and open the classroom up to more detailed discussions regarding the rhetorical use of SNS for production and consumption. If teachers ask students to engage in discussions and think critically about what constitutes consumption and production, and the implications of the various acts on

SNS spaces, the students may get a better sense of the way SNS and other online spaces affect how they think and act outside of those spaces.

There were some small variations between the participants as well when it came to their rates of consumption and production and where they are doing each most. Quinn, only used Facebook for social networking and states that he “probably consume[s] more content than he produces” (Personal Interview 26 Feb). He makes it a point to clarify that because of the amount of content on one’s wall from other people at a given time, unless someone were to sign on, and produce content immediately before signing off, it would be difficult to produce more content. This could be an important consideration when thinking about the tendency for the majority of the students who replied to the survey considering themselves more consumers than producers of content.

For Nikki, her frequency of production and consumption was tied to which SNS she used. For instance, Nikki admits that, “on Facebook I’d say I’m more of a consumer because I don’t use Facebook as much,” and on Pinterest, she is “not creating [her] own pins, but [is] constantly repining” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). However, on Twitter and Instagram, Nikki finds herself producing often, asserting that, for Twitter I just put it all out there, same with Instagram, but I do have my security things different... so I don’t just throw random stuff out there to random people” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). When I ask what kind of content she produced on Twitter, Nikki states, ““twitter is like random metaphors that I get late at night, or random thoughts, opinions about things, things that bother me” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). And about Instagram, Nikki says she, “finds [her]self posting things about [her] school” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). It becomes apparent early with Nikki that the content she produces is usually quite personal and directly tied to things impacting her directly at a given moment.

For Dria, her rate of production and consumption has less to do with which SNS she uses, and more to do with her life outside of SNS. When I ask generally whether she finds herself producing or consuming more content, Dria responds, “Producing, I guess. It varies by day” (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). She then elaborates, “If I am really bored I am usually producing more than I’m consuming, or do both equally,” but “when I’m busy... I consume more.” She does state however, that she tends to “produce most on Instagram,” and that she “goes through phases on Twitter.” At the time of the second interview, Dria admitted to being “on a kick of just retweeting stuff lately.”

Ralph also says that he, like Quinn, was more of a consumer, stating, “in terms of Twitter and Facebook I tend to consume more. Well, I consume on all of them, but I produce a bit more on Instagram” (Personal Interview. 25 Mar). He says about Instagram, “you’re taking these pictures and the sole purpose is production” (Personal Interview. 25 Mar). But, for Ralph it is the connections being made and maintained that matters, and the rate of production and consumption is less important than whether or not the production and consumption are enriching the connections. For instance, Ralph asserts, “I think of just a big community, and you are connected with a bunch of people that you know or you may not know through this medium” (Personal Interview. 25 Mar). It is this sense of community that Ralph reiterates throughout his interviews, and his rate of production and consumption are simply manifestations of most efficiently maintaining such a community.

It is important for teachers to consider the possibilities for student production on SNS, and implications for such production, or lack of production. In Gardner and Davis’ *The App Generation*, they talk about the idea of “‘lock-in’ to describe the limited range of actions and experiences open to users when they interact with computer software” (142). Moreover, despite

the fact that so many of the SNS allow the user to upload photos, and videos, and various other forms of composition, the tools to create such works are not readily available on those sites. In turn, users spend most of their time reposting the work of others, or limiting themselves to textual production, with the one primary exception to these production/consumption tendencies being Instagram, where both Ralph and Dria admit they more content. Learning more about this aspect of how students use SNS, then, remains important for teachers who may consider using SNS for rhetorical study, and as tools to teach about the production of rhetorically sound multimodal content, as they must keep in mind the limitations and implications of such sites for production, and discuss those limitations and implications with their students.

### **Rhetorical Considerations of Dis/Agreement on SNS**

Another important topic from the survey was that of the dis/agreement with others on SNS, and the methods for doing so. By getting responses to questions about frequency of agreements and disagreements on SNS as well as questions regarding the differences in user responses to agreements and disagreements on SNS, the survey provided some useful early data that gave a sense of students tending to engage in acts of agreement more often than in acts of disagreement. Moreover, the survey participants revealed that the more work the students had to put forth to disagree, the less often they put forth the effort required to do so. It is important to get a sense of when and why students engage in acts of agreement and disagreement, though. As Peter Elbow asserts in *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*:

Methodological doubt caters too comfortably to our natural impulse to protect and retain the views we already hold. Methodological belief comes to the rescue at this point by forcing us to genuinely enter into unfamiliar or threatening ideas

instead of just arguing against them without experiencing them or feeling their force. (263).

Because argumentative writing is often a keystone skill in college, understanding the ways students see argumentation and debate playing out in their personal, professional, social, and civic lives outside the classroom is important. As teachers working to teach our first-year writing students critical thinking and rhetorical argumentation skills, understanding students' SNS dis/agreement tendencies could help lead to conversations about methodological belief and doubt and, in turn, enhance student concepts of argumentation and debate. Such understanding could begin helping students understand how to consider these issues more critically as they make their way out of the FYC classroom and into more advanced courses throughout their college careers.

Therefore, I spent a significant amount of time in the second interview asking questions about how often the participants agreed or disagreed with certain posts on their SNS. I listened to responses about the kinds of posts they tended to comment on, like, favorite, share, and retweet, as well as what they did when they found posts or posters they disagreed with. I also asked the participants how often each of these actions took place, and whether or not the rates and tendencies of their agreements on SNS were relatively similar to such rates and tendencies in face-to-face interaction. By engaging with the participants about these topics, I hoped to continue addressing my primary research questions regarding their use of SNS, the impact of SNS on their lives, as well as their views of SNS dis/agreement as it affected their considerations of audience rhetorical composition.

When it comes to the posts that the participants tend to agree with, there are generally three options for responding: users can like/favorite a post, share/retweet a post, or comment on a post. And throughout the interviews, it seemed as though the students' comments were usually

reserved for engaging with closer friends and family, while acts like favoriting and sharing, were more casual, with favoriting being something done more on a whim to engage with less important but interesting posts, and sharing being used to spread truly interesting or important information. For instance, Ralph maintains:

liking is almost like an acknowledgement that you saw it and you appreciated it.

And if you comment on it it's more of you have something to add or you have something to actually say. And you want to let that person know what you have to say [...] a share would be like, you would want everyone else that follows you or is your friend to see, as well. (Personal Interview. 8 Apr)

Nikki feels similarly and says as much about commenting versus liking when she states, "if you are going to comment on something you have to have something to say. So you're kind of showing how you feel about what they're posting. It's kind of more straightforward as opposed to a like" (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). She continues by saying, "favoriting and like would be less my opinion about things. If someone says 'it's such a nice day out' I'll probably just favorite it" (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). But then, about retweeting, Nikki states it is, "like giving that person a pat on the back [...] retweeting is only 140 characters so they must have had something good to say [to earn a retweet]" (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). So the different responses carry different weight. As Nikki puts it, "retweet, share, comment are higher than a like" (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). While Dria mostly agrees about the various levels of engagement in these actions, she admits that, "somedays, I feel very nice [...] and I will just comment on anything" (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). It becomes clear that each of the actions are used based on different criteria for engagement and carry different kinds and levels of SNS capital, but sometimes, the students are willing to divert from the traditional power structure of the actions and will simply



engage on a whim. These insights provide a useful glimpse into student agreement on SNS and could help teachers better understand the rhetorical moves students make to successfully engage the various audiences and dynamics with which students interact in SNS outside of the Writing classroom.

When it comes to disagreement though, the situation changes some, since no SNS has a button similar to the like/favorite buttons for content users find disagreeable. Therefore, when I asked students how they handle posts and users with which they disagree, there was a mix of responses. Nikki, who is quite liberal with the follow and unfollow button, states that she “would consider definitely an unfollow would be like a dislike button” (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). She continues by saying, “Obviously if people unfollow you that don’t like what you have to say, [or what] you’ve been saying, they don’t like what you’ve been retweeting, or maybe a picture would make someone unfollow you” (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). For Nikki, instead of trying to indicate displeasure with a single post, it is more common to look for trends of such posts and simply unfollow someone who begins to post things she does not like.

Ralph and Dria tend to follow the same method of simply ignoring posts they disagree with, as they see it as a waste of time or energy, or don’t want to look bad engaging in such an argument. Ralph, for instance, claims, “if it’s something I don’t enjoy, I’ll probably just blaze right over it. If it’s something that’s ridiculous, then maybe I’ll say something, or it won’t even be worth my time” (Personal Interview. 8 Apr). He goes on to say:

I don’t want to get into a social network battle or a twitter fight, because those are the worst [...] it’s embarrassing for both sides because no one ever wins [...] you don’t want to be those kids that are arguing in a crowded area. (Personal Interview. 8 Apr)

Dria, tends to simply ignore such posts unless they are specific attacks on family or friends. When she sees a general argument taking place and she is debating whether or not to engage with it, Dria says, “I just don’t because it’s too much work and I don’t like getting in the middle of it” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). Thus, it seems that participating in such arguments or debates tends not to happen as often as they could because the users would rather not expend the energy necessary in doing so, or they are concerned with looking bad in public as the result of a potentially negatively perceived interaction. However, Dria also makes it clear that, “If it’s something that someone shares or tweets and I feel strongly enough to defend them, I’ll say something. ... if you upset me with my family or my friends I almost have no filter” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). And she talks multiple times in the interviews about sticking up for herself and others on SNS and in public spaces. This response to what participants may see as personal attacks on themselves, friends, or family, offers a glimpse into important emotional considerations teachers must make when asking their students to engage in SNS in the writing classroom.

Ralph is also willing to consider engaging in such discussions and debates as well, though his reasoning is possibly more academic in nature. Ralph states that, “if it was something just absolutely ridiculous I would just be like ‘why. Why? And if they comment back and say why they did, maybe they’d have a justified answer, so they can represent their case” (Personal Interview. 8 Apr). Thus, Ralph is interested in a debate that could result in growth from hearing the other viewpoint getting representation that he may not have heard before.

It is interesting then that so few debates or arguments tend to take place on SNS according to the participants. It is important to consider the rates at which the participants believe they partake in such debates and arguments and the actually frequency in which such debates and

arguments take place, which could make for a fruitful next iteration of study on student SNS interaction. The rate students perceive such engagement occurring also creates the potential for pedagogically rich activities in which teachers ask students to consider opportunities afforded by engaging in such debates or arguments. As Baumlin states in “Persuasion, Rogerian Rhetoric, and Imaginative Play,” “I would call understanding a realm of plural selves or identities. For we achieve this attitude when we sympathize with another’s beliefs and worldview—when we role-play, in a sense, the life and values of another person” (115). While Baumlin is not talking specifically about SNS interaction here, SNS spaces offer users a unique opportunity for the kind of practices Baumlin is calling for. On SNS, users are able to see and engage with myriad views and beliefs on nearly any topic in real time, allowing users to construct a more dynamic understanding of others. Therefore, by addressing questions regarding student views of audiences that potential disagree with them, and the rhetorical considerations and moves necessary to engage successfully with such audiences, teachers could be better equipped to discuss such scenarios and actions with students in the Writing classroom.

Thus, by asking students to engage in SNS situations in which they must “sympathize with another’s beliefs and world views” as Ralph suggests can sometimes happen, perhaps students can enhance cultural concepts, or at the very least increase understanding of audience awareness for rhetorical engagement and writing (Personal Interview. 8 Apr). With this potential growth for understanding and conceptualizing multiple beliefs and worldviews in mind, instructors could create activities utilizing SNS that ask students to engage with real or imagined audiences, or to take on the role of someone with an alternative view and engage in SNS-like interaction from that alternative perspective. Because SNS play such a large role in so many of our students’ lives, engaging them in such activities with tools they are familiar with could

provide a rich opportunity for deeper understanding of others, and the spaces in which they engage with others.

### **The Rhetorical and Audience Considerations of Follower/Following Ratio**

Perhaps the most interesting discussion that came up during the interviews that had not initially been a point made during the survey was the importance of the ratio between the number of users someone follows and the number of followers that same person has. The basic rule of the ratio is to make sure that the user has more followers than the number of people following him/her. Nikki, Dria, and Ralph all recognized the ratio as being considered socially important as a general rule. While each of the three participants had a different take on the importance of the ratio, as well as what the appropriate ratio actually was, they each reveal in their discussions of the ratio, that there is a sense of social relevance that comes from having a good ratio.

Throughout the interviews, the participants (Nikki and Dria particularly) would often talk about number of followers they have and discuss those numbers and how they came to them. In fact, despite both Dria and Nikki stating that they personally weren't too concerned with those numbers, there was certainly a sense that the two took care in maintaining their ratio as they progress. Dria for instance, at the time of the second interview, had 1300 followers and 490 people whom she was following on Instagram. When I ask about the number of followers she has, Dria states, "I don't really care about my followers. I just have to have my following lower than my followers" (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). She explains, though that she is not concerned about her ratio because, "for me personally I'm like, oh, I have more followers. I've always had more followers than following, it's always been a big gap. So I've never had to worry about that" (Personal Interview. 28 Mar).

	Followers	Following
Dria (on Instagram)	1300	490
Nikki (on Twitter)	1422	425
Ralph (on Twitter)	450	445

Figure 4.3: Ratios of Interview Participants on Their Most-Used SNS

Nikki has a similar ratio to Dria, but her larger ratio happens on Twitter instead of Instagram. Nikki at the time of her second interview, Nikki had 1422 followers and was following 425 people. For Nikki, though, she puts in a bit more effort to maintain her ratio. She explains, “there’s an app now, (for checking who unfollows you) so I just go check whenever, but I don’t check daily, I check every four days/five days. It’ll say 13 people unfollowed you, and I’m like ok, but half of them are like suspended users” (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). And when it comes to maintaining how many people Nikki Follows, it seems that she tries to keep the number as low as she can get away with, without seeming rude to her followers. When she talks about her following number being 425 she starts, “see the ratio, it’s like not too many but it’s not like 20. So I’m not like a mean person because I don’t follow people but,” she’s being relatively selective (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). When I ask Nikki how low would be considered mean, she responds, “I say like 150. I’d say that’s so unfair to people” (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). But even that number would be a bit misleading in terms of her number of friends or followers, because, as Nikki explains:

Because if you level out the people. Like the real people that I know versus Kendall Jenner, all the celebrities that I follow and the fitness accounts that I follow and the poetry accounts that I follow. There’s probably a lot less people.

Real people as opposed the celebrities and of other accounts. (Personal Interview. 10 Apr)

So, when Nikki says a following number of 150 people, that includes the celebrity and extra accounts, which makes the number of people her age, or in her area, whom she follows much smaller.

In an effort to get a better sense of how strict her standards were, I ask Nikki, if there were another version of herself on twitter, would that user follow her? And her response said quite a bit about how difficult it may be to continue being followed by her. Nikki said, “I don’t know if she would follow me. I think she would follow me. It depends on if she knew who I was. If she was from (the area) I think she would know who I was. I think she would” (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). And in our last interview with one another, Nikki proclaims, “I haven’t really thought about (Twitter as much) lately and I’m getting kind of worried. I feel like I’m letting everyone down. I need to step it up” (Personal Interview. 1 May). When I asked if there was an expectation for her activity on Twitter, Nikki exclaims, “Yes! Like I have been missing in action and everyone’s probably wondering where I am cuz I’m not taking up their whole timeline. It’s weird” (Personal Interview. 1 May). But when I asked if anyone had said anything, she says, “no. so maybe it’s not that bad. But I think it’s bad” (Personal Interview. 1 May). After this comment, I ask again about if she were following herself would she be getting ready to unfollow and she says:

Right! Exactly. I’m getting’ down on myself. Gotta keep up with my standards [...] If I was following myself, would I be following myself right now? I would not be because I’ve not had anything good to say in like three days and that’s a long time. (Personal Interview. 1 May)

Clearly, Nikki has very strict standards for whom she will follow on Twitter, as she generally spoke to her own posts being funny and engaging, so for her to doubt at times whether she would have followed herself says quite a bit about the rigorous standards users have to meet to get followed by certain other users in SNS spaces. Indeed, providing snapshots of users such as Nikki to students in a writing classroom could provide interesting activities, for determining how to get followed by someone with such high following standards, in or order to practice thinking about audience awareness and rhetorical skills.

Dria also puts quite a bit of thought into maintaining her following number as well. But she seems less concerned with keeping it as low as possible, and more interested in avoiding passing a certain threshold. Dria explains:

it's never been a problem for me, but still right now I'm at 490 something for my followers and I'm like, 'I can't have 500 followers,' that's too many. So then I went through and tried to unfollow a bunch of people, but I'm like a hoarder and I'm like I 'wanna follow them.' (Personal Interview. 28 Mar)

So it becomes clear here that there is a legitimate conflict for Dria, as she is interested in following people for the engagement they provide her, but crossing that 500 following threshold is an important benchmark that is keeping her from following more people.

Ralph, whose own ratio is nearly one-to-one on twitter, sees the various tactics used to maintain the ratio and seems perplexed by them. He starts:

Some people are very crazy about that, like they care about their ratio of followers to people that they're following and they won't follow another person until they get another follower [or] two more followers [...] or people will go and unfollow a

bunch of people [...]people will follow like thousands people and wait until they get a bunch of followers and unfollow them all. (Personal Interview. 8 Apr)

Upon reflecting on these phenomena, Ralph exclaims, “it’s kind of ridiculous. At the same time, they’re kind of just playing the system” (Personal Interview. 8 Apr). Indeed, it seems many of the participants, and the users they know, seem to be quite savvy in maneuvering their way around their chosen SNS. A number of the tactics used to establish and maintain the ratio could have interesting rhetorical implications, particularly with considerations of ethos and what a given ratio means for the credibility of a user.

Of course, that leaves the question of why invest so much time and effort into the ratio in the first place? When I ask why the ratio is so important Dria, and Ralph had similar responses. Dria perhaps gets to the heart of the matter almost immediately when she states, “if you see famous people they only follow a couple people and they always have a ton of followers, so the ratio makes regular users look higher up, it gives them ‘perception of being cooler’” (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). Ralph offers a similar answer when he says, “it’s important to people because definitely popularity, [...] they believe that if they don’t have a lot of followers then they’re like irrelevant or they’re a nobody or something like that” (Personal Interview. 8 Apr). Thus, it becomes clear that the ratio carries with it a certain level of clout for certain users on their favored SNS.

By engaging students in the writing classroom on the topic of the ratio, teachers could create a space that provides students the opportunity to discuss the ratio with one another, figure out why it is so important to them, and figure out the various rhetorical moves that take place in order to establish a desirable ratio. Furthermore, this could be another opportunity for teachers to talk with students about the online persona they are building. Not only can teachers discuss with



their students the digital identity they are creating in order to establish their ratio, but they can also talk about the potential social, professional, and civic impact the students can have by amassing and interacting with a larger number of followers in various ways.

### *Favorites/Likes/Retweets*

Another aspect of SNS that became a prevalent topic of conversation in many of the interviews was the importance of receiving favorites, likes, and retweets, and this conversation often happened in conjunction with that of the ratio in terms of determining how one was performing as a user on a particular SNS. When I ask if the number of retweets was more important than the number of followers, Nikki responds, “Maybe. I feel like retweets get you followers so yeah in a sense. Just because more people are seeing your tweets” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). When I ask Dria about getting likes on her Instagram photos, she responds, “people ask me if I’m Instagram famous and I’m like no, not at all, but my sister she got like 140 likes on a picture in like ten minutes or fourteen minutes” (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). According to Ralph, “people think like ‘I got 100 likes on Instagram, I’m cool’” (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). It seems, much like having a large number of followers, getting a large number of likes, favorites and retweets is vital for certain social aspects of SNS.

Interestingly, the desire to receive a large number of likes leads to some practices on certain SNS that indicate careful attention to the perceived success of a user’s individual posts. For instance, Dria describes her sister saying, “And she deletes pictures if she doesn’t get over 100 likes, now it’s probably like 200 cuz she gets like 300 likes on any picture she takes now. She’s ridiculous,” Dria says, laughing (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). And Ralph had a similar story, explaining, “there is this girl on my floor who didn’t get a lot of likes, and she deleted the

photo and then reposted the photo and got a lot of likes and she was like ‘oh that’s better’, and I was like ‘what? It’s the same photo’ (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). As Ralph and Dria, describe it, this seems to be a pretty common practice among people they know, particularly on Instagram, perhaps because, as Dria, Ralph, and Nikki explain, many photos on Instagram are selfies, and pictures with friends and family, so a lack of likes on a particular photo may be seen as a lack of likes for the person.

Ralph details another kind of ratio that begins to take shape when people start to think about liking and favoriting posts. He describes conversations he has heard and had about people with a smaller number of followers getting as many likes as someone with more followers, and taking that into account when comparing responses to photos. Ralph states:

Some people are so concerned about ratio, like if they don’t have a lot of likes, this was a conversation on my floor, ‘well I got 100 likes on Instagram, but I have 1000 followers, so only like a tenth of my followers liked it. And then some kid was like: ‘well I have 100 followers on Instagram and 80 people liked it. It’s kind of ridiculous. (Personal Interview. 28 Mar)

And when I ask Ralph if those conversations were happening often, he says, “I feel like they are [but] only with Instagram though [...] it kind of like turns into a contest.” (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). So, it becomes apparent that the combination of follower to following ratio, in conjunction with the percentage of likes, favorites, and retweets becomes a seemingly large motivational factor for individuals as they attempt to develop social clout on their preferred SNS. Again, a better understanding of the reasons behind these being motivational factors, as well as a better understanding of the ways in which students engage to make these factors work in their favor, or

fail to do so, could have very real implications in the writing classroom, when it comes to understanding audience, and the rhetorical moves necessary to amass a large following on SNS.

### **Views on SNS as a (Potential) Rhetorical Tool**

Near the end of the interview process for each of the four participants, I asked a set of questions that was meant to bring together a number of different elements from previous interviews and topics of conversations in order to see if and how their views on SNS use had changed over the course of the interview process. Some of the questions were new, and some I had asked during multiple interviews to track responses throughout the process. While there were multiple questions asked during the final interview with each participant, the sum of the questions fall into three basic groups of questions:

1. Does SNS use help develop the user's understanding of others'?
2. Does SNS use prepare the user for other kinds of writing?
3. Should SNS be used in the writing classroom as a pedagogical tool and/or object of rhetorical study?

The student participants provided a number of interesting insights regarding these questions and some of the changes in responses they experiences sheds some light on ways we may consider thinking about SNS use with our students, as well as how we may consider teaching about it in future writing classes. The participants determined there are a number of ways that SNS can help them develop their understanding of others, from comparing individuals' online interaction to their in-person interaction to networking for professional purposes. They also found that SNS use can help them with considerations of audience, and knowing how to interact in certain ways depending on the SNS used and audience being engaged. Finally, while the participants were

initially cautious about SNS being a distraction in the writing classroom, or potentially harming their academic writing skills, most participants believed SNS could be effective pedagogical tools or objects of rhetorical study in the writing classroom.

*Does SNS Use Help Develop Understanding of Others?*

One of the key elements of conversation throughout the interviews is how the participants engaged with and responded to other users on their SNS. Louise Starkey argues in *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age*, that the “use of critical thinking has been identified as particularly important in the digital age as relatively quick access to a wide range of information means that the user needs the ability to critically evaluate the validity and relative value of information accessed” (57). I have been interested in exploring how the participants see SNS as developing their understanding of others and whether or not such critical thinking skills about themselves and others was taking place. So, by the end of the interview process, I was interested to see the ways the students felt SNS helped them understand those other users, if they did at all. In response to the question, Ralph provided a clear answer about others on SNS, saying:

yeah in a way ‘cause SNS kind of give people a sense of ‘I can do whatever I want’ and if you see people in that light, then you do get a good sense of who they are when you’re not face-to-face with them. If you’re not good friends with that person you can kind of figure out the type of person that they are on a SNS.

(Personal Interview. 8 Apr)

Much like some of the respondents to the survey that asked this question, Nikki, took a more introspective approach and considered how her views look to others and deduced that others must be doing similar things. Nikki states:

Yes. Because... if you care about how you're perceived through a social media, then you will get the connection that you're looking for. I care about what I post. That's how I've gotten so many friends. That's how I've gotten friends from different areas. That's how I know so many people. Through my tweets. Through their tweets. (Personal Interview. 10 Apr)

And Nikki made it a point several times throughout the interview process to talk about how important connecting with new people on Twitter was to her, often citing that as her favorite part about using SNS. So, for her, getting these new friends from different areas acts as a way for her to obtain a greater understanding of new people and places.

Dria takes a similarly introspective approach when answering the question. Although, as a result of her introspection, her answer perhaps reveals as much about her as a developing adult as it does about her as a user of SNS. Dria says, "in general, I don't think it's a way I necessarily understand people. But, when I first follow someone, I kind of put that personality with them" (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). She continues by stating, "sometimes I say stuff and I wonder if I come off differently. I've thought about that before. I wonder if I come off differently in person than here [...] But I don't know, I just kind of do whatever." And she finishes the thought by determining:

sometimes I think I might (come off differently) because I'm a weird person, and I do all this other stuff too, [...] but they don't know other things about me, or other things I think, or other things I agree with and sometimes I'll retweet things you wouldn't expect me to [...] sometimes that's why I think people might think I'm different or conflicting. But I'm a teenager. I'm 19. I am conflicting.  
(Personal Interview. 4 Apr)

Clearly, Dria is working through her ideas regarding identity both in online spaces and herself as maturing young woman. And through her considerations of how others may perceive her and her “conflicting” self on SNS, Dria begins to develop a sense that others may be conflicted as well and develop similar kinds of personas.

According to John Palfrey and Urs Gasser in “Reclaiming an Awkward Term: What we Might Learn from ‘Digital Natives,’” “the notion that there is a separate world, a separate set of online identities, makes little sense to many of those growing up immersed in digital technologies. For youth in a digital era, it all converges, by and large. It is not online life and offline life—its just life” (191). Indeed, Dria admits to this idea almost verbatim when she proclaims, “there’s so much more depth to a person than just what they put online. I kind of see it together. I don’t see it as separate entities. It’s weird. I think a lot it depends on the person” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr)? Of course, it is understanding this sense of depth and interconnectedness in terms of online and offline identities that is so vital for students to consider, and these kinds of conversations could play a key role in helping students develop a better sense of themselves as people, writers, and producers of content in myriad spaces in and out of the classroom.

### *Does SNS Use Prepare Users for Other Kinds of Writing?*

Another set of questions presented to the participants dealt with the various potential ways use of SNS may or may not prepare students for writing in other contexts (e.g. academic, professional, and social writing). In “Resistance, Power-Tricky and Colorless Energy: What Engagement with Everyday Popular Culture texts can Teach Us About Learning and Literacy,” Vivian Vasquez claims the “question we need to ask here is, how can we strike a balance

between creating spaces for [...] popular culture discourses in the classroom while at the same time making sure not to co-opt their interests” (211)? By looking at how students view SNS as tools for writing preparation in various contexts, teachers may be able to accomplish this balance by working with SNS where students already see their pedagogical value. The participant responses provide some insight into how we may begin to consider SNS as a pedagogical tool when teaching to writing in various contexts outside the classroom.

When I ask Dria about whether or not her use of SNS prepares her for writing in other contexts, her initial reaction is to say no, but after a little thought, she comes up with some ways in which SNS use could be beneficial. At first, Dria says, “no, because if [other students] use it the way that I use it... I don’t use it to intellectually talk with someone” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). So for Dria, thoughts immediately went to the specific kind of posts and conversations she has on SNS, and this kept her from seeing the benefit of SNS use on other kinds of writing. However, she does follow that thought up with another idea, saying:

but in some ways it does because its fast news fast stuff, it does open you up to a bunch of things you might not [have] heard of before, or if you don’t watch the news you’ll find it on Twitter, you’ll find it on Facebook, so it can help you in that way for educating you. (Personal Interview. 4 Apr)

Though Dria does make it a point to clarify that, “But on the foundations of writing, the basics, I don’t think it helps very much” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr), which coincides with what a large number of survey respondents stated in chapter three.

Ralph is more optimistic from the beginning about the chances of SNS being beneficial, offering a number examples, including stating that, “twitter has trained a lot of people to kind of get what they want to say out in a constrained amount of words” (Personal Interview. 8 Apr).

Ralph then goes on to consider future SNS that are built specifically for helping specific kinds of writers, asserting that, “some of my friends have posted things that they have written. If a social networking site was made for that, then yeah that could be beneficial” (Personal Interview. 8 Apr). So, while Ralph doesn’t think SNS prepares for academic writing “to an extreme extent,” he does seem to believe that there are some broader benefits for people professionally, and for writers specifically, if there were sites or groups developed with them in mind (Personal Interview. 8 Apr).

Nikki, the most prolific SNS user is adamant about the benefits of SNS from the start. Nikki asserts that, when considering if SNS could help with professional prospects and writing, “I think it definitely could just because if employers see how broad-minded you are or how creative you are with things that you say, it could be beneficial for you” (Personal Interview. 10 Apr). When I ask if SNS use prepares for other kinds of social interaction, Nikki states matter-of-factly:

Yeah. Because I’m not weird about anything because I feel like I can just throw it all out there. If I can throw it all out there on Twitter and have other people know about it before they speak to me in person, then sure, I can talk to them about that in person, too. I feel like it makes things so much easier and so much less complicated if people already know a little bit about you. (Personal Interview. 10 Apr)

Not only does Nikki see engaging on SNS as practice for talking about her ideas and interests, but she believes that because those ideas and interests are already out there, people feel less like strangers when she meets them in person for the first time.



Finally, I asked participants whether or not, and how, SNS use prepares them in their considerations of audience. I brought the topic of audience consideration up at multiple points throughout the interview project with each of the participants in an effort to gauge if and how they're responses changed over the course of the interviews. Interestingly, the participants were recognizing concepts of audience and audience-awareness early on, but were not necessarily connecting them to their SNS use, or writing, until later in the interview process. For example, there were numerous points throughout the interviews when participants would discuss certain people or groups they would interact with on certain spaces (e.g. family on Facebook and closer friends on Twitter) and I would ask if their interaction changed based on the space and people they were engaging with. They often admitted that their interaction did change based on the spaces and people, but it often was not until later interviews and multiple iterations of such questions that the participants began to connect such practices with the Writing course concepts of audience and the rhetorical situation. However, after making such connections, their interest and positive ideations regarding SNS use in the writing classroom went up.

Early on, in the first interviews, perhaps the most prevalent discussions that indicated audience awareness came from Dria and Nikki as they talked about their families, particularly their mothers, engaging with them on SNS. In *The Young and the Digital*, S. Craig Watkins states that, "Around the time many young people begin expressing an interest in social-network sites is also the time in their lives when they begin to desire greater autonomy from their parents" (37). Watkins asserts that, as a result, "Many parents see social sites as a way to peek into their children's personal communities in order to learn more about them" (37). Dria makes it clear that her mom is a very big part of her own SNS engagement. She states, "my mom has most of the social networking sites that I have, just so she can check over" my sister and me" (Personal

Interview. 7 Mar). Dria states this without indicating much of an issue with her mom's monitoring her and her sister, and actually expresses appreciation for the monitoring. For instance, Dria states, "My mom monitors me too, to make sure, cuz I'm still, to make sure I'm not misrepresenting myself" (Personal Interview. 28 Mar). It seems that Dria is still unsure of her being mature enough to handle online interaction on her own, and was happy to have her mom in the background to act as a final filter for her content.

When I ask where she would point people to see who the real Nikki was, Nikki states, "I'd probably point them to twitter, honestly. I wouldn't point them to Facebook because that's just me being some little fake kindergarten person for my family" (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). Nikki continues, "I mean grandma is on Facebook, I don't want grandma to see what I'm posting on Twitter" (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). Ralph also states that he engages in Facebook and Twitter differently because of family. He says that, "because not a lot of my family is on Twitter, I can talk with my friends like I would talk with my friends. On Facebook, I know that it's there, but it really doesn't affect too much. It's kinda just like if my parents were in the room" (Personal Interview. 25 Mar). And Ralph does clarify that, "I kind of have that relationship with my family and friends that it wouldn't really matter what I would post," but that he does engage a little differently on Twitter (Personal Interview. 25 Mar).

There were also some discussions from the participants about being aware of producing content that their friends and followers are aware of, because if those people did not understand the references they were making, then the power of the post is diminished. Quinn, for example, talks about how he, being a musician, often likes to respond to other people's posts in song lyrics, but he is conscious of whom he would do that with because he didn't want the references to be lost. Quinn states:

My problem is that everything I hear in a conversation reminds me of a song I know. So it's so tempting to respond to something someone says with a song lyric, even if I know full well they won't know, and it would just go whoosh (over their head), just so I can feel snide, but I try not to do that. Because I know certain people aren't going to get it, and I'm just going to look like an idiot. (Personal Interview. 7 Mar)

Interestingly, Nikki also brings up a similar situation regarding song lyrics in which she might hold back a post because her followers do not understand her reference. She states:

I'm definitely not gonna say things. Like something about the Beatles. I mean the Beatles aren't really around, I mean there are some people in my generation that listen to them or whatever, but generally no one's gonna look past that tweet, so sometimes I'm targeting people in my school. (Personal Interview. 4 Apr)

As one can see with Quinn and Nikki, the students have a fairly keen understanding of their audience and make it a point to deliver content to their audience that they consider to be appreciable for that intended audience.

The other major aspect of audience that the students consider throughout the interviews was that of the professional audience that might start to see their engagement on SNS when they begin to enter the job market. While none of the students states they are where they want to be in terms of professional representation of themselves, they do say they have either begun making moves to improve their professional representation, or have at least begun thinking about it as something they needed to do in the near future.

The participants do make it clear that there is a tendency to change the kinds of content posted depending on the SNS they use, and the students attempt to keep in mind

particular engagement strategies for professional purposes, too. Dria, for example says that if there were a SNS to avoid, “probably Twitter, because that one’s just so random I don’t even know what I say on there” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). Even Ralph, probably the most conservative poster of the three Twitter users, says:

I feel like my persona that I would want people to see is exactly what I’m kind of posting. Even if I would post something that would be iffy, everything can kind of, you can kind of monitor things, but at the same time you really can’t monitor everything. (Personal Interview. 25 Mar)

However, in an attempt to counteract the inability to “monitor everything” as Ralph says, Dria and Ralph both talk about attempting to take more steps in order to professionalize their SNS personas. Dria says, she has started to “display [her] professionalism on the internet” by “display[ing] awards, don’t post constantly, like adults” (Personal Interview. 4 Apr). Dria also says she “would have to clean it up, or delete it and make a new one,” in talking about her Twitter account. She admits that she is:

starting with (Facebook) because that’s the one I least use and it’s the one that I have stuff from forever ago and I don’t care to have that stuff anymore, or at least I can make it private to myself in case I want to see it later. (Personal Interview. 4 Apr)

Ralph, who does not seem to feel the need to clean up much of his SNS content is considering enhancing his professional SNS persona by creating a new SNS account. Ralph says, “I’ve been meaning to make a LinkedIn, because my business teachers have been saying it’s probably a good idea to get on it. And I probably will and that’s what I’ll use it, I’ll use it solely for a professional basis” (Personal Interview. 25 Mar). Interestingly, Ralph is the only participant who

mentions a LinkedIn account at any point during the interviews, and it appears he only considers it because of information a professor had given him.

On the whole, the participants make it seem as though they are aware of the implications of less-professional engagement on SNS (e.g. pictures of them partying, or their getting into personal arguments, etc.), and they each seem to keep themselves relatively in check as far as these issues are concerned. However, none seem to be in too big a hurry to take proactive steps to enhance their professional persona on SNS. Of course, as Dria says on numerous occasions, they are still teens, and in their first year of college, so the need for professionalization does not seem to have struck them at the time of the interviews. This of course makes it all the more important for teachers to enhance, as Victoria Carrington asserts in “New Textual Landscapes,” “Each [student’s] role as analyst of information from multiple sources must be focal as well as serious attention paid to ensuring that s/he is scaffolded towards effective and ethical production and dissemination of information” (24). By engaging with students in the classroom to obtain a more complete view of how students view their professional and academic selves on SNS, teachers may be able to sort out ways to initiate such scaffolding with in-class activities, such as discussing what material is considered professionally acceptable, or helping students build a rhetorically effective LinkedIn account.

### *Should SNS be Used in the Writing Classroom?*

The last question I asked each participant for each of his or her four interviews was “should SNS be used in the Writing classroom?” I did this not only to center the participants on the idea of SNS as a potential writing and pedagogical tool, but also in order to see if and how their views on the question changed over the course of the interview process. Throughout the

four interviews, each of the participants began the first couple of interviews with mostly general answers about the benefits and drawbacks of SNS in the Writing classroom that many of the survey respondents provided. However, by the third or fourth interview, most of the interview participants had begun to take their conversations about audience and various composition practices on SNS, and unravel ways in which they could imagine SNS as a pedagogical tool in the Writing classroom.

Quinn, for example, in his first interview gave general responses to the question, stating there could be issues with people “not paying attention” and overall, he states that use of SNS, “depends on whether or not there’s a better way to do what they’re trying have Social Networking do”(Personal Interview 26 Feb). Dria states as well that such use of SNS “can work either way if use correctly” (Personal Interview. 7 Mar). But as the interviews went on, the participants connected ideas we discussed with the teaching of Writing and started to see benefits of SNS in the writing classroom.

When I ask about the most important thing to consider when using SNS, Ralph responds:

I guess just consider your audience, your target audience, your followers, the people that are following you and just think, ‘would the majority of them appreciate what you’re posting? Do you want them to know that you’re breaking up with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or do you want them to know how you feel about a certain view or a certain event that happened? (Personal Interview. 24 Apr)

Then, Ralph thinks for a moment and proclaims, “and that kind of applies to a lot of things, like Writing papers” (Personal Interview. 24 Apr). When I ask Ralph how it helps similar

considerations when composing Writing papers, he answers, “I think it can help people establish or kind of change their writing styles based on the target audience” (Personal Interview. 24 Apr).

Nikki, as the prominent SNS user in the group, makes it clear by the end of the interview process that using SNS in the classroom is something that should happen. Even though Nikki had some reservations about interfering with the more popular SNS (she wanted to stick to using Facebook and Snapchat in the classroom), she ends up saying, “if people bring in social media I swear people are gonna jump on it. Everyone’s gonna be like I’m gonna go do this because it involves Twitter, it involves Facebook if it involves Instagram” (Personal Interview. 1 May).

When I ask Dria if the kind of conversations we had during the interviews would be beneficial in the Writing classroom, she responds:

oh for sure. I’m assuming considering how it made me think about it. I mean the first time probably after our first interview I didn’t really think about it, but as time went I think about it more and more. I catch myself wondering about that or seeing something from a different perspective because of this. Or, it also made me become aware of all the things I formerly picked up on but didn’t put a name to it.  
(Personal Interview. 18 Apr)

Dria concludes by saying, “I think a lot of people would have the same they would come to some kind of different perspective or awareness if they haven’t before.”

It is encouraging to know that once students have time to consider the various ways they use SNS, they seem to become more interested in the pedagogical application of SNS in the Writing classroom. Indeed, by the end of less than four hours of conversation, the students were already looking at SNS in ways they had not considered before, and they were welcoming novel ways of using SNS for academic purposes. Not only does such interest make it easier to bring

such sites and considerations into the classroom, but it also provides teachers with a potential application or activity that requires a smaller learning curve for most students since many are already so familiar with how to use SNS.

Jonathan Alexander points out in *Digital Youth* that “‘texting’ via cell phones,” as well as other forms of electronic media communication, “have their own developing ‘traditions’ of communication and literate practice—‘traditions’ that digital youth and e-savvy students are often at the forefront of constructing and disseminating” (59). From understanding the finer points of building and maintaining the follower/following ratio, to building a system of helping one another build their online personas with favorites and retweets, the participants of the interviews demonstrated various kinds of traditions that are being created by their generation. If teachers can get students excited about the prospects of using tools in the classroom that the students are already frequent and often savvy users of, that could open up the possibility of collaborative education opportunities that provide space for co-learning about Writing and rhetorical practices.

### **Analysis of Interview Data**

After working with these four first-year college students for nearly four hours each over the course of two and a half months, it became clear that they are each strong critical thinkers, who place thought into their daily interaction on SNS. While some of them are certainly more prolific and frequent users of a various number of different SNS, each of them have certain savvy in their use and/or consideration of their SNS. Analysis of the data allows me to expand on some of the initial findings from the surveys I outlined in Chapter Three. Those findings and considerations include:



1. The participants consider Twitter the most popular SNS currently available, with Instagram in at a close second. Other SNS are used, but they seem to be niche apps that fill in the gaps of the other two major SNS.
2. While FYC students are indeed consuming more content, the rate of consumption or production depends on various factors. Those factors include which SNS they are using, what time of day it is, and how busy the student is at the time s/he is using the SNS. The content produced is generally updates about the students' days, funny posts, or idea/facts the students believe others will find interesting.
3. There was also a distinction made between passive and active consumption in which passive consumption is simply taking in content without any major response or consideration, while active consumption would be engaging with content without producing any new content of one's own. For instances, performing the acts of sharing/retweeting or liking/favoriting posts could be considered acts of active consumption, which begin to blur the line between consumption and production.
4. Over the course of the interviews, participants did begin to find benefits of SNS interaction on writing and engaging in professional, academic, or settings social settings, but were still of the mind that SNS writing had the potential to harm students' grammatical writing skills.
5. The participants in the interviews generally believed that they represented themselves accurately on SNS, but they also believed they represented different parts of themselves on different SNS. In other words, in order to get a more complete picture of an individual, one would need to engage with the individual on all of his/her SNS.

Because of the findings in Chapter Three, I posed three new questions for myself to address in Chapter Four:

1. Do students' views regarding SNS audience and SNS use as rhetorical composition change as they become more experienced in the writing classroom, and consider the subject over time?
2. If their views change, do students' SNS practices change as a result?
3. Do students' views on SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study in the writing classroom change as they become more experienced in the writing classroom and consider the subject over time?

While I did not anticipate being equipped to answer these questions completely following the analysis of the interview data, I did expect the interview participants to provide a more complete picture of student SNS use that extended the survey data, and the participants have indeed revealed important ideas that help me continue to address these questions.

First, it does appear that as students gain more experience with concepts of writing, and as they consider the subject over time, their understanding of audience and rhetorical composition as they related to SNS audiences and composition do change. By the end of the interview process, participants have more to say about various potential audiences, as well as the implications of the various forms of engagement in which they participate. For instance, many of the interview participants talk about the ways in which employers may be viewing their interaction on SNS and how they feel the need to go back and edit their timelines in order to seem more professional. They also made it clear on a number of occasions that they spend most of their time on Facebook interacting with family, or simply posting pictures to save for future

use, and they indicate that they have far less interaction with family in other SNS spaces, and their engagement in those spaces changes as a result.

The survey acted as a great foundational tool for considering participant data from the interviews as it established a number of survey participant views that acted as confirmation of the beginning views of the interview participants. Indeed, both the survey participants and interview participants saw the potential for grammatical and structural interference in writing with the use of SNS in the Writing classroom, while also indicating some initial interest and acceptance of potential benefits of SNS as such pedagogical tools. However, while the interview participants seemed to initially replicate the more negative views on SNS in the writing classroom, their shift in these views demonstrates that there is room for such conversations about SNS between teachers and students in the Writing classroom.

However, despite the enhanced consideration of such topics and more personal reflection on SNS engagement habits, interview participants do not indicate, or appear to have, any changes in their SNS practices. Most of the changes the participants discuss are in taking future action to change the look of past engagement, or to reconsider current engagement in light of professional considerations on SNS. Of course, over such a short period, not many new habits have the chance to form, especially when taking into consideration the students were not reflecting on all of these ideas in such ways until near the end of the interview process. Thus, the survey and interview data indicate that changing student perceptions of SNS as rhetorical subjects and tools for writing can occur quickly and the results beg for more research to investigate the potentially changing SNS habits of writing students who have more time to let their changing views on SNS impact their SNS practices.

Finally, while students still express concerns over issues of distraction and the potential for interfering with the personal use of SNS as a result, by the end of the interview process, the participants do appear to be more welcoming to the idea of using SNS as an object of rhetorical study and as a pedagogical tool in the Writing classroom. Indeed, particularly when compared to the majority of survey participants, when I ask about the potential use of SNS in the writing classroom, some interview participants, Nikki for example, are quite enthusiastic about the pedagogical potential of SNS in the classroom, and answer in the affirmative that SNS use could be enhance student understanding of concepts like audience awareness and professionalism. They see it as a way to get students excited about writing activities, as something students were already familiar with, which would reduce having to learn a new system in new classes, and as a tool for presenting students with an interesting way of looking at different writing concepts.

## **Conclusion**

My goal for Chapter Four was to present data from the interviews of my four participants in order to build on the data presented in Chapter Three, and to continue shaping our understanding of student use and views of SNS as they pertain to audience, rhetorical skills, and writing. By creating a more nuanced understanding of students' SNS practices and their views on such practices, teachers have a better opportunity to create spaces in the classroom to use and discuss SNS in more effective and ethical ways that are more pedagogically sound. By coupling the data from Chapter Three with the interview data, as well as with current literature on pedagogy, composition, and SNS, this chapter can be used to continue to legitimize the discussion of SNS in the Writing classroom.

In "Students, the Net Generation, and Digital Natives," Chris Jones argues:

Teachers have been identified as being part of a generational group that is distinct from their young students, and it has been argued that the characteristics of the two generational groups are fixed and already known. By shifting our attention to the ways in which technologies open up the potential for new kinds of social engagement, the argument moves towards choice and the ways in which technologies might allow for new kinds of educational engagement. (43)

In an effort to continue bridging these perceived generational gaps, and continue building these “new kinds of educational engagement,” in my final chapter, I build on the data analysis from Chapters Three and Four to discuss its implications on considerations of the use of SNS in the writing classroom. I will provide some initial ideas for how to use the information in these chapters to continue creating effective and ethical activities that utilize SNS as rhetorical subjects and pedagogical tools in the Writing classroom, and to establish questions for future research on the subject of students’ use and views of SNS as objects of rhetorical study and pedagogical tools.

## CHAPTER 5: MAKING SPACE FOR SNS IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

As I have made my way through life as a college student and as an instructor of college writing, SNS have been a continuous presence for me in and out of the classroom. I remember as a freshman spending plenty of time in campus computer labs trying to find all of my high school friends who had just signed on to Facebook, and building my MySpace wall. In my last year as an undergraduate, classrooms were making more frequent use of and it was becoming more and more common to see students scrolling through their Facebook walls during class, or spending time in the computer labs between classes updating profiles and posting.

Then, as I began to transition into the world of graduate school, I found myself walking the line between student and teacher, and I remember teaching classes and seeing my own students trying to hide the fact that they were signed into their SNS instead of working on an activity or participating in a discussion. In many ways my experience with SNS as an undergraduate echoes the experiences of the undergraduates I was teaching, whether I initially realized it or not.

I also remember the dissatisfied feeling I got when I sat in on the first workshop for the department that discussed the use of Facebook in the classroom. As a Graduate TA in my second year of teaching, I was intrigued by the idea of incorporating something new into the writing classroom. However, as a student who was still grappling with the fact that Facebook had just recently been opened for access to the general public and who was unsure what that meant about his personal interaction with family and acquaintances, I was skeptical when the primary pedagogical suggestion from the individual running the workshop was to simply use Facebook as a space to meet with students and connect. I did not like the idea of so blatantly mixing school with personal life, and I was sure many of the undergrads who had just begun to sign up to the

SNS, and were just carving out a place for themselves in those spaces, would probably not respond positively to such implementation either. The pedagogue in me decided to keep SNS and classroom activities separate from one another.

However, as I finished my Masters in Literature and began the Rhetoric and Writing Doctoral program at BGSU, I began to use a greater variety of SNS, and I started to view my own, and others', use of SNS with a more critical lens. I began to see that the rhetorical moves and considerations we were discussing in the seminars were being played out in these online spaces. Fellow grad students, as well as the FYC students I taught in my own classes, were having debates on SNS. They were creating new kinds of content that entertained, and informed, and connected them to people with various perspectives on the world. I perceived the term multimodal composition for the first time, and after seeing classroom activities being built around analyzing websites, and witnessing the incorporation of digital tools to discuss audience, and rhetorical composition, I began to consider SNS as spaces with legitimate potential for expanding the discussion of rhetorical composition in the Writing classroom.

As I considered the idea of using SNS in the writing classroom, I began to further reflect on the ways in which I had seen instructors attempt to incorporate online technology, and SNS in particular, into the classroom: often without success. I also thought of the workshop I had attended and it occurred to me that in so many instances, the instructors using SNS in the classroom, or the workshop leaders discussing how to incorporate SNS in the writing classroom, often did so independently, without input from the students who would be working with these technologies in the classroom. This is problematic for at least two reasons. First, there are often discrepancies between how students use technology outside the classroom, and how instructors attempt to use the same technology inside the classroom, which can cause a disruption in the

students' ability and willingness to engage with such technologies as learning tools. Second, the use of SNS can be a deeply personal experience, and if certain Instructors incorporate SNS too heavily in the classroom, students may not fully participate for fear of having some of the personal element of SNS stripped from their experiences. Because of these and other potential issues surrounding the use of SNS in the writing classroom, I wanted to engage in a project in which the students' voices were foundational in creating an understanding of SNS use in and out of the classroom. I wanted to do so in the hopes that the project could assist in developing more ethical and effective means of using SNS as a positive pedagogical tool in the writing classroom.

As the previous chapters make clear, SNS is an important part of life for FYC students and their use is becoming ever more prevalent in the day-to-day interactions of society. In her Introduction to *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century*, Cynthia Selfe argues that awareness of what she calls a "new literacy agenda" is:

An integral part of educator's larger responsibility to understand the way in which our culture thinks about and values literacy. Perhaps even more important, this awareness is part of our ethical responsibility to understand how literacy and literacy instruction directly and continually affects the lived experiences of the individuals and families with whom we come into contact as teachers. (xix)

Over the last decade, SNS have become one of the primary avenues through which to shape literacy in the lived experiences of so many of our students and their families. Thus, it is as important as ever to pay attention to the ways in which students and SNS impact one another in order to develop ways of understanding SNS, while critically thinking about, talking about, and rhetorically using SNS to make a positive impact on the personal, professional, social, and civic lives of all who may be impacted by the use of SNS.



Therefore, it is with this goal of paying attention or, as Selfe describes it, remaining aware, that I proceed with the remainder of this chapter. I look back on the analysis of data in the previous chapters to further discuss the implications of students' views and uses of SNS in and out of the writing classroom. I begin by discussing ways in which these student views and uses of SNS could matter to writing teachers. I then discuss a number of potential best practices and activities that could incorporate SNS in the writing classroom to effectively and ethically engage students in thinking and conversing about writing, and the rhetorical use of SNS for various forms of composition. I conclude by discussing potential areas for future research regarding the use of SNS as objects of rhetorical study and as pedagogical tools in the writing classroom.

### **How Student Views on and Use of SNS Impact SNS as Pedagogical Tools and Objects of Rhetorical Study**

Throughout this project, student participants provided a number of insights regarding their uses and views of SNS, both inside and out of the classroom. They made it clear that SNS are an important part of their social lives, and that they are aware their use of SNS could have an impact on them personally, socially, and professionally. I began this project with five research questions. Analysis of participant responses to survey and interview questions allowed me to begin addressing these questions and consider the implications students' views of and uses of SNS, and the use of SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study. What follows is an attempt to return to my research questions to consider more fully their implications for writing students, in and out of the writing classroom.

*Implications of Student Use/Views on Use of SNS*

It is clear that the students who participated in the various components of this study are active users of SNS. Many of the students have numerous SNS accounts, and use those accounts in a number of unique ways. Outside of the classroom, students use SNS primarily as a means of connecting with friends, meeting new people, and expressing themselves or detailing events that are occurring in their lives. For many participants, SNS are part of the daily routine: they find themselves on their various accounts for multiple hours a day, and end up at least quickly checking their favorite accounts at multiple points throughout the day.

Each of the interview participants admitted that they do not follow traditional news much, but they stated that much of the national or international news they do hear about comes from what is trending on SNS. Their response also made clear that they get most of the personal and social news important to them from the posts of the friends, family, and acquaintances they follow or are friends with on different SNS. Furthermore, most of the interview participants stated that they share news that they find important, on both the personal and larger scales, with their friends and followers on SNS. However, few of the participants indicated that they partake in much direct activism in support of any civic causes on their SNS.

In the classroom, student use of SNS is far more limited. While students do sometimes use course management systems (e.g. Blackboard, Canvas)—which many students considered types of SNS—or sites like Google Drive, for academic purposes, most of those instances were at the request of the instructor, and use of SNS for those purposes did not last beyond fulfillment of the instructor's request. In most cases, student use of SNS in the classroom was relegated to getting on to check their walls and timelines between activities, when students felt they were caught up on work in the class or felt comfortable with the discussed material, or when they were

simply bored in class and no longer felt like paying attention to lectures or discussions. Students often described going to various lengths to try hiding their use of SNS while in class, from opening multiple windows on their laptops, to simply hiding their cell phone just under their desk or behind their computer screen.

It is important to consider the ways students are already using SNS if instructors wish to use SNS for pedagogical purposes in the writing classroom. Understanding how much and how frequently students use SNS throughout the day can help instructors understand the personal and social significance of SNS use with their students, which can help legitimize SNS as topics of conversation and objects of rhetorical study in the writing classroom. Indeed, if students see that instructors are taking the time to understand key aspects in their personal lives and help them make connections with their personal and academic/professional lives, students may be more inclined to participate such discussions and engage in critical thought about their SNS use.

Furthermore, for instructors who are interested in using SNS as pedagogical tools, but are unsure of whether or not to do so, knowing students' in-class SNS habits could be similarly beneficial. Indeed, by understanding that some students are going to be on their SNS in class anyway for social purposes, instructors may be able to create more productive spaces for those students by giving them a more engaging academic purpose for being on their SNS while in the classroom. Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz claim there is a:

paradox of being a freshman writer, of writing simultaneously as a novice and expert. In asking students to unravel puzzles and see the 'big picture' themselves, assignments [...] ask freshmen to develop expertise in new subjects and methods while still apprentices. When students are new to a topic, they often don't know what information is important or how different pieces of information relate to

each other. Everything is given equal weight. Without the benefit of experience, students overestimate or underestimate the importance of single source and have difficulty synthesizing sources to see the ‘big picture.’ (297)

However, instructors could take advantage of the fact that many students may have a sense of source credibility and synthesis from their interaction on SNS. Indeed, many of the participants admitted that they get much of their news information from SNS particularly Twitter and Facebook. In fact, 60% of survey participants stated Twitter was their primary SNS for staying up-to-date on news and 24% stated they used Facebook to do so. They also revealed that there are certain people to whom they do not pay attention with regards to certain information because those individuals are always simply forcing their opinions on others, which students see as damaging their credibility. Indeed, both Dria and Nikki admitted to unfollowing certain people during election season because of those peoples’ consistent posting of content that was biased, or overly persistent. If instructors consider these experiences in which students are indeed experts in discerning credibility, then they provide students with an opportunity to connect those experiences to the writing classroom in order to transfer those skills.

Of course, incorporating SNS as pedagogical tools could invite distraction for students who would not otherwise be on their SNS in class. However, by asking students to reappropriate their engagement on SNS in more academically productive ways in class, instructors could create a more open classroom environment where students and instructor collaborate to gain a better understanding of rhetorical SNS practices.

*Implications of Students' Views of the Use of SNS as Rhetorical Composition and Conceptions of Audience*

One of most encouraging confirmations to come from the data provided by the participants is that students within this population are quite savvy in their use of SNS, and, while they may not immediately connect their understanding of SNS with concepts, such as audience and rhetorical situation, taught in the writing classroom, they are inherently modeling such concepts. This is encouraging because it provides more scaffolding opportunities in the writing classroom, where the instructor can draw on specific student SNS interactions and considerations to teach about concepts important to rhetorical composition. Furthermore, it presents more opportunities for transfer in that students are given more indications that what they learn in the writing classroom has real-world application with personal, professional, and social implications. In their piece, “Tubing the Future: Participatory Pedagogy and YouTube U in 2020,” Geoffrey V. Carter and Sarah J. Arroyo assert, “the crucial concept [regarding meme creation] is that participants feel that their remixes and contributions actually matter and hold value for the loosely defined community that may emerge” (296). Carter and Arroyo go on to say, “this is so important for participatory pedagogy, as the responses, the remixing, the ‘tubing,’ are symbiotic with the event itself. Implications for the future of writing abound, particularly as participation in online video culture is becoming ubiquitous” (296). Thus, as these digital remixes, interactions, and compositions become more commonplace, it becomes more important for instructors to affirm that the work the students are composing has social value. Indeed, one need only to look at the enthusiasm in which Nikki discussed composing a video to put on YouTube for her English class to see that students can see the classroom and social value of composing multimodally for SNS. By making space for discussion, critical analysis, and composition of

such works, instructors can provide students the opportunity to connect their work inside the classroom to the work they are already composing outside of it, giving rhetorical and social weight to both.

Many of the participants in both the survey and the interviews indicated early on a basic understanding of audience awareness when it became clear that they primarily interacted with their families on Facebook, while mostly avoiding family interaction on nearly all other SNS. While there was then some variation among survey participants regarding whom they interacted with on other SNS, participants overwhelmingly (79.79%) used Facebook as the primary space to interact with family, while only 33.33% of survey participants used Facebook to interact with friends. Even the interview participants who stated some of their family was on other SNS, such as Dria and Nikki, indicated that they often either did not follow family in these other spaces, or they were connected but did not engage with family on the other SNS. Another aspect of audience awareness that came up for many participants was that of professional audiences that might find participants on SNS. Specifically, participants talked about the potential for future employers looking at their SNS in order to gain a better understanding of who they were as people and potential employees. They often admitted that they understood employers could have potentially equal access to all of their SNS, but most were convinced that employers would primarily go to Facebook first in order to gauge the participants' personalities and employability.

As a result of the participants' perceptions of these two audiences, and the perception/belief that most of their interaction with these two audiences would take place on Facebook, participants often indicated a substantial difference in the content they produced and the interactions they engaged in on Facebook compared to other SNS. Many participants indicated a more formal interaction on Facebook, as well as current or planned actions to prevent

and remove any posts or photos that would be deemed inappropriate to family or businesses. To contrast, many participants stated that they proceeded with more relaxed engagement on their other SNS and seemed consistently less concerned about engagement with those two audiences on those other SNS.

These perceptions of audience from the participants have important implications for discussion of audience awareness and rhetorical considerations of SNS in the writing classroom. First, such perceptions offer the instructor opportunities to engage students in activities that tie together conversations about audience and rhetorical situation taking place in the classroom with the actions students are taking on their SNS. For instance, the instructor and students could discuss the ways students perceive audiences on different SNS with the real and imagined audiences they would be writing to in various writing assignments in the class. Second, such perceptions provide an important chance for instructors to discuss the ways in students may not be fully considering issues of audience in real-world writing on SNS. Indeed, while students may be aware that it is possible for family and employers to see their interaction on other SNS, instructors could play a vital role in making it clear to students that such potential audiences have a far greater chance of seeing that interaction than students may perceive. Danielle Nicole DeVoss provides this kind of advice to her readers in *Understanding and Composing Multimodal Projects* when she writes:

Keep in mind that your composition will sometimes have a broader audience than your purpose or your assignment suggests or than you intended to reach. Because multimodal compositions often live online or in some portable electronic format, they typically can be publicly viewed or shared. [...] Even if you're creating your project for a specific group of people make sure your work is something you'd be

comfortable sharing with [...] friends, family members, or future employers, for example. (MM59)

With the added ability to sync multiple SNS, and various SNS becoming more popular to the general public, it is important for students to understand that their perceptions such as Nikki's that adults, "have to figure out Twitter first. And I don't think they can" may not be as accurate as they expect and that their interaction on all SNS could have important positive or negative consequences. Convincing students of the weight of their SNS interaction could go a long way toward legitimizing their rhetorical considerations of their SNS interaction and various acts of writing, in and out of the classroom. There are seemingly endless articles available now that tell the stories of individuals whose jobs were lost, or personal/social lives damaged as a result of an interactive misstep on their SNS. Also, those who visit Facebook on occasion are likely familiar with the shared posts from high-school teachers, which have a photo requesting that users comment on and share the post, in order for the teacher to demonstrate how quickly and how far a seemingly innocent, and assumed relatively private, post can travel on SNS. Sharing such pieces with students and coupling this with activities that ask students to reflect on past posts or engagement tendencies could provide them with a sense that they need to more carefully consider their SNS engagement, as well as the risks and impact of that engagement on their personal, professional, social, and civic lives.

Another aspect of audience awareness and considerations of rhetorical composition that took place in participant discussion of SNS was in the ways the participants gained and maintained followers, favorites, likes and retweets on their various SNS. Particularly in the interviews, participants made it clear that there were a number of ways in which users engage with others in order to accumulate these status markers. Indeed, interview participants Nikki and



Ralph discussed ways in which the timing of a post impacted how it was received, and even revealed that they, or others they knew, would delete and repost certain photos or posts in efforts to gain more likes or retweets. Nikki and Dria also talked about the importance of adding interesting or humorous captions to their photos on Instagram in order to make their posts stand out more. The level to which a textual post/tweet was considered visually pleasing was also discussed by participants: Nikki specifically mentioned considerations such as line breaks and limiting hashtag use in order to enhance the look of a post. Yet another common key factor that participants mentioned was the relatability of the post they considered. Indeed, many participants discussed the fact that they would not post about certain ideas or interests because they knew their friends or followers would not understand the references they made—such as Nikki avoiding posts about the Beatles (Personal Interview, 4 Apr)—which would limit engagement with the post, and, subsequently, their timeline.

Each of these rhetorical considerations, along with the various others that came up throughout the project, provides instructors with numerous examples and topics to relate to rhetorical composition concepts. In addition to a continued ability to discuss audience awareness, instructors could use student discussions of timing of their posts to relate to concepts such as *kairos*. Furthermore, the increasing importance of the visual elements of SNS composition makes conversations about visual rhetorics all the more relevant in the writing classroom. Indeed, in Carolyn Handa's "Introduction to Part Three" of *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World*, she states:

Words, clauses, or sentences are not the only elements that can be yoked in a faulty way; so can images and visual elements. Colors, fonts, line thickness—all connote feelings and attitudes. Mere punctuation marks can make statements. Typeface sets a tone. Visual elements on a page can be designed to function

metaphorically, to use repetition for emphasis, or to provide transitions. Designed elements can be coordinated with or subordinated to each other. For example, elements in a list can suggest that the parts of a list are equal or that those on the top are more important than those on the bottom. (225)

Therefore, when students are already discussing the visual elements of their multimodal SNS compositions (e.g. the visual appeal of hashtags and line breaks), it creates space for instructors to connect student work outside the writing classroom to major writing concepts being taught in the classroom. For example, instructors teaching units on visual rhetorics could draw on students' use of line breaks in their tweets to discuss the visual importance of white space, and the way the level of a text's visual appeal can impact the reader's perception of the content of a piece.

Participants also had multiple things to say about their engagement in dis/agreement on SNS that could have a significant impact on instructor considerations of SNS use in the composition classroom. First, many participants in both the surveys and interviews admitted that they tend not to engage in as many conversations that involve disagreement as they do conversations that involve agreement. Participants claim they are more likely to like, share, and comment on posts containing content, or written by individuals with whom they are more in agreement. Many of the interview participants stated that part of the reason for these tendencies was that there were not as many situations that came up where they saw posts with which they disagree, or that they simply do not spend as much time and effort reading those posts. Interviewees also indicated that in many cases they believed the individuals who usually post things with which they disagree are less likely to be persuaded into different views, and the

interviewees were not interested in publicly engaging in what would likely become a circular argument, which could result in them looking bad and losing followers or engagement.

Another intriguing aspect regarding the concept of dis/agreement on SNS was many of the interview participants' admission that they would temporarily unfollow or otherwise disconnect from individuals who continually posted content they found disagreeable. The participants consistently stated that the most recent situation in which this occurred was during election season when individuals would primarily post overly-partisan content leading up to elections, in which case the participants would unfriend or unfollow those individuals until the end of the elections when those users would go back to posting what the students considered engaging content.

Both of these aspects of dis/agreement on SNS provides content for consideration in the writing classroom, which instructors could use to enhance student learning experiences regarding effective methods of rhetorically considered argumentation. In "Cultural Criticism to Disciplinary Participation: Living with Powerful Words," Charles Bazerman talks about the importance of rhetorical critique, stating:

Criticism however is only the beginning of action. Action is participation, not a disengagement. Participation is the other side of rhetoric: the art of influencing others through language in the great social undertakings that shape the way we live. (240)

In the article, Bazerman is talking about the importance of rhetorical engagement in disciplinary research, and he goes on to say, "By taking discourse of professions and disciplines seriously, we will have the means to help students develop as active, reactive, and proactive members of their communities" (244). While Bazerman here is discussing the importance of rhetorical inquiry of

professions and disciplines, I believe the same thinking can be applied to instructor consideration of the online interactions of our students, including SNS engagement. If we take student engagement in these spaces seriously, and help them see the ways they can interact, debate, and dis/agree productively on their SNS, we can help them become “active, reactive, and proactive, members of their online communities. Not only do such situations establish opportunities for instructors and students to simply talk about the reasons behind their dis/engagement tendencies in the face of dis/agreements, but they provide more real-world scenarios in which instructors can draw upon to demonstrate alternative options for engaging in the composition of civil and productive debate and dissent texts.

### *Implications of Students’ Views on SNS as Potential Tools for Teaching and Learning About Writing*

The last of the five primary research questions this project explores understanding how students see the use of SNS as potential pedagogical tools and objects of study in the writing classroom. According to the most of the survey participants, as well as the interviewees in the each of their first couple interviews, there are certainly reservations about the use of SNS in the writing classroom. More often than not, participants were concerned that the kind of writing that takes place on SNS would interfere with learning how to engage in proper academic writing, and that grammar and structure in writing would be negatively impacted. Furthermore, participants often disclosed the belief that SNS in the classroom would invite unwanted distraction and keep students from properly engaging in the academic topic or activity at hand. Of course, such opinions are not difficult to understand when one considers the ways students currently use SNS inside the classroom.

The dichotomy between how students use SNS outside the classroom and how they use it in the classroom is important for teachers to consider if they are interested in attempting implement SNS in the classroom as a pedagogical tool. Over the past decade, as SNS use has increased among student populations, such use in the classroom has often been stigmatized, labeled as a distraction or disruption of classroom activities by instructors. For instance, Stephanie Vie reveals in “Digital Divide 2.0: ‘Generation M’ and the Online Social Networking Sites in the Composition Classroom,” that one teacher in her study claimed that SNS are “‘a student space,’” and that one student asserted, “‘I wouldn’t expect a teacher to actually use [these] sites’” (18). Vie goes on to say that, “many instructors resist what they see as the pervasive encroachment of technology, particularly computers, into pedagogy” (18). Still, SNS use is far more prevalent today and SNS are becoming more accepted as potential pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study. Yet, while students are engaging in various forms of composition when engaging on their SNS, students still do not associate SNS with academic activity or concepts they learn in the writing classroom. Instead, they reveal, as the research participants did, that they have bought into negative perceptions about the lack of academic potential for SNS. This of course, creates barriers when trying to introduce students to the academic and professional of SNS, which they will likely be using in their personal lives long after their college years and into their professional careers.

It is encouraging to note, however, that although they were in the minority of the survey participants, there was a portion of the participants who saw some academic/professional potential in using SNS. Indeed, 26.97% of respondents to the question of whether or not SNS composition prepared them for writing in Academic settings answered in the affirmative. Similarly, 14.12% of survey participants found that SNS composition prepared them for writing

in professional settings, and 33.33% believed SNS should be used in the classroom. Furthermore, as the interview process went on, each of the interviewees began to associate points of discussion about audience, critical thinking, and rhetorical awareness with their engagement on SNS and started to have a more positive outlook on SNS as potential pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study. Thus, it seems that by engaging students in conversations and activities that combine their use of SNS with rhetorical writing concepts, instructors may be able to help students make larger connections and see potential for SNS beyond personal and social engagement.

For instance, if a class were to engage in a conversation about ethos, pathos, and logos, by bringing up the use of hashtags such as #blacklivesmatter instructors could help students understand the impact of various rhetorical choices to create more complex audience responses and engagement that can initiate and grow important civic conversations. Similarly, students could look at the #occupywallstreet movement that has taken place in recent years to determine the various ways Twitter, and the use of hashtags and memes regarding the movement, have given it more credibility and spurred action among individuals who witnessed such engagement on SNS. Indeed, by seeing the ways users implement hashtags in conjunction with various other quotes, pictures, and articles, students can get a sense of how and when to implement various rhetorical choices to impact readers logically or emotionally or to enhance their own credibility, and to recognize when others are using such tactics and the impact they have on the students as readers of such content.

Therefore, for instructors interested in teaching about online writing production and interaction, and for those interested in SNS as a potential academic tool, it is important to begin having conversations with students to discern how they came to their conclusions regarding the

academic and professional use of SNS. Such conversations are just as important for instructors who are interested in using SNS, but may not be as familiar with such sites or how to implement them. In fact, according to Cynthia Selfe, such a situation may be even more fruitful than the alternative:

It is this lack of familiarity with technology [...] that can provide the intellectual perspective we need to begin making changes. [...] Moreover, the specific lessons we learn within the context of our own professional and personal expertise, we may be able to locate personal beginning points for initiating change. (134)

Thus, by working through implementation of technology that may be unfamiliar, instructors could stretch themselves and use their alternative perspective on technology to see ways in which such technologies can be all the more useful. One example could be found with an instructor who is not familiar with SNS use, but, given the nature of his/her profession is quite familiar with the importance of creating particular levels of professionalism, and determining spaces in which to engage with those particular professional levels. If the instructor engages in conversation with students about their views on SNS and begins to see that students use certain SNS for interaction with certain groups of people, this could provide an opportunity for the instructor and students to collaborate and help one another conceive of more ways and spaces to allow for personal and professional nuances to take place. The class could work together to find spaces like LinkedIn. When in the SNS, students could use their expertise with SNS to demonstrate how to navigate such a space and how various interactions takes place, while the instructor could use his/her professional expertise, to begin teaching about creating a professional public identity. In this kind of scenario, the students and instructor become co-

learners and co-teachers who work together to develop a deeper understanding of concepts new to both parties.

By revisiting the data analysis from the previous chapters it becomes clear that SNS use is an important part of FYW students' lives. Furthermore, by looking at the ways in which the data helps to address my primary research questions regarding student use and views of SNS and their views of SNS as potential pedagogical tools and object of rhetorical study, I addressed how and why SNS should continue to be considered for use in the writing classroom now, in 2015. Next, I turn my attention to best practices for considering use of SNS in the writing classroom, followed by brief descriptions of activities that could take advantage of SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study in the writing classroom.

### ***List of Best Practices of SNS Use in the Writing Classroom***

Based on the analysis of the data, it seems that, regardless how much instructors plan on using SNS in the writing classroom, there are certain basic considerations we should hold if we wish to incorporate SNS as pedagogical tools to enhance composition and rhetorical skills, and create a greater sense of audience awareness within our students:

- Talk with students about which SNS they are comfortable using in a classroom setting.
- Regardless of the SNS chosen, set guidelines for appropriate interaction between the instructor and students, as well as guidelines for appropriate interaction among students while using SNS in and for the class.
- Introduce the use of SNS with a detailed discussion of the privacy settings and guidelines associated with the SNS to be used in the class.



- Collaborate with students to determine criteria for determining how to productively use SNS in the class.
- Talk with students about positive self-representation on SNS.
- If it is possible, consider creating closed groups within the SNS to provide students space in the SNS to practice engagement without concern over how their personal interaction outside of the classroom will be affected.
- Provide opportunities for students to write about and discuss their personal SNS uses and views.
- Discuss how activities/assignments utilizing SNS have a direct positive connection to students' personal, social, professional, and/or civic lives and writing practices.
- Do not assume all students are familiar using any SNS (except, perhaps, Facebook) and be prepared to introduce students to basic applications of use for any SNS meant for use in the classroom.

While this list is not meant to be comprehensive, it is meant to take up participants' reported practices as a data-driven initial guide for how to begin considering and implementing SNS as pedagogical tools in the writing classroom with the students' existing uses and conceptions of SNS informing suggested approaches.

### ***Activities Using SNS in the Writing Classroom***

Using the considerations for implications of SNS as pedagogical tools and objects for rhetorical study, which I have addressed throughout this chapter and project, I have composed an introductory set of brief classroom activity descriptions detailing how instructors could begin to use SNS in the writing classroom. Much like the previous list of best practices, this is not a

comprehensive set of activities, but a starting point for instructors who are interested in the use of SNS in the writing classroom. Furthermore, provided these activities to address the implications for SNS in the classroom that resulted from my analysis of the data produced by the student participants involved in this research project. It is worth noting that different populations of students may benefit from engaging in various other potential projects and activities, as the skills, understanding, and rhetorical considerations of SNS will be as varied as the number of courses an instructor teaches.

### *Close Reading of SNS User Agreements*

Perhaps one of the most important goals instructors can have for the implementation of SNS as pedagogical tools in the writing classroom, is to help students understand the real-world implications of their online writing, interaction, and persona-building. One way to begin creating the sense of the potential weight associated with SNS use is to have students perform a close-reading and analysis of the user agreement for their most-used SNS, or the SNS that will be used by all of the students for an upcoming assignment/activity.

For this activity, ask students to read the user agreement of the SNS in its entirety, explaining that with many of the larger SNS there are multiple subsequent links that provide more information about privacy, user data, or monetary transactions that are not discussed in detail on the primary user agreement page. Ask students to take notes on the entire reading, but to pay attention to language used, repeated words, sentence length, visual presentation of information, and which information is present on the primary page compared to the information that is linked to separate pages. Have students list anything they found surprising, troubling, or helpful, as well as having them list any questions they had during their reading.

Upon completion of the reading students could be asked to write an analysis of the user agreement in which they discuss the significance of aspects in the agreement they were asked to take notes on and present their interpretation of why the authors of the user agreement present information the way they did. Another option, or a supplemental option following the close reading is to have an in-class discussion of the students' findings, and compare and contrast students' interpretations of the same user agreements. An alternative option could be to split students into groups and task each group with performing a close reading of the user agreement for different SNS, then compare and contrast their findings with those of the other groups, discussing similarities and differences and reasons for those similarities and differences based on the perceived goals of each SNS.

This activity not only provides students with a new genre in which to perform a close-reading but also gives students the opportunity to truly read the fine print of the user agreement for a SNS they have likely already signed up for and been using for years without having read said user-agreement. This will likely provide many students with a new perspective on the goals of the SNS creators, and force students to reconsider the ways they engage and compose on their SNS.

### *Close Reading of SNS Timelines*

Another way to have students look at their use of SNS is to follow Jane Mathison Fife's lead and have students perform a rhetorical analysis of their SNS ("Using Facebook"). Such an activity requires students to critically consider rhetorical choices made when engaging on SNS and the impact their SNS composition has on their online, and offline, personas. For this activity, students read through the public information and interaction presented by a single individual on a

single SNS. Instructors then ask students to take notes on the specific information the individual chooses to share on his/her profile page (e.g. interests, likes, dislikes, family, etc), and keep track of the topics the person posts about and comments on, time of day the person engages on the SNS most, and how frequently the individual engages on the SNS. Students might perform such a reading of an individual's timeline over the course of a day or a week, and then compose a SNS personality profile in which the students write about the type of person the individual appears to be based solely on his/her single SNS profile and interaction. As a companion activity to this initial profile close-read, once students have performed the first close-reading and have a sense of what information to look for and how, instructors could then ask students to perform a similar close reading of their own profile and interaction on their SNS from a month or year before and compose a similar personality profile of themselves.

Such activities speak to a number of things that enhance students' critical thinking about SNS engagement and rhetorical composition. First, it could help reinforce the importance of privacy settings on individuals' SNS, as many students will likely be surprised by just how much information they are able to find about an individual, and themselves, based solely on profile information and timeline engagement, which each individual gives freely when they compose in such spaces. Second, performing such tasks will help students see how easily others can form opinions about others based on their SNS interaction. Students will likely be particularly surprised by the kind of interaction they partook in a month or a year before compared to their more recent engagement on SNS. Finally, as Fife asserts, these kind of activities have "the added benefit of teaching teachers about an important literacy practice of college students that can easily be written off as a waste of time by those outside the social network" (561). Indeed such activities provide instructors more insight into the composing practices and rhetorical

considerations of their students in the online environments that are often most important to students.

It is important to note that if instructors choose to assign this activity to their students, they should make sure to clarify that students must choose to analyze someone with a public profile and that students should create a pseudonym for the individual the student is analyzing in order to protect the desired privacy of that individual. Students should be aware that sharing information given on a users' private profile is often a violation of most SNS terms of service. If the instructor or students are not comfortable performing such an analysis of another individual the instructor may choose to have students move directly into only performing a self-analysis of students' own profiles and interactions.

#### *SNS Historical Figure Profile Creation*

For this task, an instructor asks students to perform research on a deceased historical figure and then attempt to create a fake profile page for that person. Students could begin by engaging in a research project of the historical figure by finding out major activities the figure was involved in, the personal, political, social, and civic views and events the person was interested in, as well as the temperament and public/private engagement tendencies of the figure. Following this research, students are tasked with creating a fake profile page of the historical figure, then spending a week engaging on the SNS as they believe their chosen historical figure would if s/he were still alive today. Students could be asked to spend a week posting about, liking, sharing, and commenting on topics the historical figure would have found interesting today. Then, after a week of such interaction, the student might write a short essay describing

and defending the rhetorical choices made when the student chose to interact in certain ways on behalf of the historical figure.

By having students spend a week interacting on SNS as an historical figure, it provides students with the opportunity to see their own interaction on SNS from a new perspective. Through critically thinking about the rhetorical decisions that would have gone into the engagement choices of another person, students may walk away with a better understanding of the rhetorical considerations that go into their own SNS composition practices, and subsequently help them look at their other writing practices through a more critical lens. Specifically, because students would likely be posting on behalf of their selected figure to an imagined group of followers who would be different than those who follow the actual student's account(s), this activity could provide an enhanced opportunity for considerations of audience awareness.

In Danielle Nicole DeVoss' *Understanding and Composing Multimodal Projects*, she expresses to her reader, "With your purpose in mind and your audience profile under way, you are ready to think about the best way to connect with your audience. The benefit of composing multimodally is that you have options for communicating your message" (MM-58). Of course, maintaining the profile page of an historical figure is not inherently multimodal. However, because the students' historical figures would not have engaged in SNS interaction, having students reappropriate various forms of SNS interaction and compositions to fit the public interaction styles of their figure could stretch students into playing with multimodal composition. For instance, if a student were to create a faux-page for a well known public figure such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the student could take into account the fact that Dr. King would often travel to various locations in order to deliver speeches and sermons. Thus, if the student created a Twitter account for Dr. King and linked it to vine, the student could tweet Vine videos of people

marching for a civil rights cause and caption the vine with an appropriate 140 quote from one of King's speeches. In this way, the student would be able to present a single textual and audio-visual composition in order to spread Dr. King's message, all while using the location feature to advertise where the next demonstration would be taking place in order to further engage the audience. Such experiences could give students a deeper understanding of the potential of SNS and cause them to reflect on their own SNS writing habits and rhetorical choices as a result.

### *Finding Common Ground Among Fellow Students*

With a similar goal of having students try to reach a better understanding of friends, family, or followers with whom they may not normally agree, instructors could give students an assignment in which they must find a number of commonalities with an individual who holds differing views on issues that are important to each student. In this assignment, students would need to first find a fellow student within the class with whom they strongly disagree on a single issue that each student finds important, or with whom they generally disagree on a number of issues. After finding such a partner, the students would then need to read through the profile and posts of the their partner in order to find a number of interests or posts that the student agrees with, or to find nuances within the issue(s) of disagreement that allow for some common ground to be reached. Finally, the student would need to either engage the individual in a SNS conversation, or compose a mock SNS conversation in which the student and individual discuss the issue(s) until common ground was reached. If the students engaged in an actual SNS discussion, they could then collaboratively write a follow-up essay in which they discuss the various points of disagreement and common ground, as well as the methods they used for finally reaching a point of common ground on the topic(s). If students instead decided to compose mock

conversations, they could then come together and share their conversations with one another to compare and contrast how each believed the conversation would go, then work together to collaboratively compose an analysis of the two mock conversations.

The benefits of such an assignment are numerous. First, this assignment would provide students with a low stakes opportunity to engage in friendly disagreement on SNS, as being friendly and respectful would be one of the first rules of interaction during such an activity. It would get them used to the idea that such conversations can take place on SNS instead of seeing them as extreme and negative interactions that should be avoided. Second, such an activity would require that students know how to effectively present their position within the confines of the chosen SNS, each of which has distinct engagement characteristics (e.g. Twitter's 140-character limit).

Louise Starkey asserts in *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age* that, "learners in the digital age are able to connect and collaborate with people beyond their physical environment. They can connect a range of information or data and draw on a range of perspectives to collaboratively generate and critique new ideas" (24). With the idea of using a range of perspectives for collaborative generation of ideas in mind, this activity would also be beneficial in that it would provide students the opportunity to engage in a collaborative post-discussion analysis of the conversation, or mock conversation, which could provide them greater insight into their own rhetorical choices as well as provide them with a greater understanding that there are real people behind the online personas of people with whom they interact on SNS.



### *Viral Breakdown*

Another activity that promotes building audience awareness and applying it to rhetorical considerations of composition asks students to perform a rhetorical analysis of viral SNS content. Students could be broken into small groups (three to four) and each group could have to find a piece of viral content on SNS and try to determine the factors that led to it going viral. Groups could analyze videos on YouTube, Memes on Tumblr or Facebook, an extremely popular vine, or a Tweet with a massive number of retweets. After breaking down the content, groups could also be asked to find a piece of similar content (within the same genre) that was not able to go viral and compare the two pieces to determine if there are any factors that led to one going viral while the other did not. Following the groups analyses of their content, the groups would then present their findings to the class in order to determine if there were any commonalities between the content that went viral versus that which did not.

First, students could be drawn to this activity because they are likely seeing and engaging with viral content on a regular basis if they are regularly interacting on SNS, so the concept of viral content should be familiar and relatively interesting to them. As Mary E. Hocks claims in “Understanding Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments,” there is a call for:

Redefining literacy practice and attending to the political and social impact made possible by technologies as complex artifacts that can help transform our lived experience. Their approach to pedagogy suggests that students can work from within their diverse cultures and multiple identities using their own languages as well as their everyday lived experiences to design new kinds of knowledge. (351)

With this attempt to redefine what knowledge students bring to the classroom and help create in it in mind, this kind of assignment allows students to bring in their own experiences and

expertise as consumers, and perhaps producers, of viral content, to assist in developing rhetorical analysis criteria for such content. Such an assignment is also potentially productive because it asks students to go beyond simply being entertained by such content and critically consider what may have made content so popular, from rhetorical considerations of the author of the content, to the kairotic moment that made space for the content to become so popular. Furthermore, having students engage in this kind of critical thinking about other people's content on SNS provides an opportunity to begin discussion about the rhetorical decisions they can make regarding their own compositions, both on SNS and in their academic and professional lives, in order to make them as appealing as possible to their intended audience.

### *Tweet Reading Summaries*

The last kind of activity discussed here is one that is more of a course-long activity that asks students to share their thoughts on in-class work on their SNS throughout the semester. For example, if a course were to utilize Twitter over the course of the semester, the instructor could ask students to begin posting single-Tweet summaries of the reading they have to perform for homework for each class. This kind of assignment could be performed as an alternative to using a discussion board in class, and students could further be asked to reply, favorite, or retweet other students' tweeted summaries so many times per week or within the semester.

This is another assignment with a number of potential benefits. First, if students are indeed using Twitter for such an assignment, composing sufficient summaries within the confines of a 140-character tweet is no easy task. Students must determine the most essential information to share about their reading, as well how to present that information in order to convey the importance of that information within the character limit. Students will have to have a

strong understanding of the material as well as work on rhetorical decisions to remain concise in conveying their understanding.

The second potential benefit is that students are more likely to engage daily on SNS to present information and discuss topics outside of the classroom than they are to engage in such interaction on discussion boards. As Steven D. Krause stated in “When Blogging Goes Bad,” “Students (or anyone else) don’t just want to write, and certainly not in a blog space” (329). Krause also discusses the notion that is sometimes put forward of focusing on “fostering and nurturing an atmosphere where students can ‘learn’ instead of being ‘taught,’ where students can write not because they are being *required* to do so by some sort of ‘teacherly’ assignment but because they want to write” (329). However, today, students do want to write. They just want to write on SNS and, perhaps having students participate in this activity could provide them with more incentive to write in the classroom by giving them opportunities to practice participating in activities they are likely to engage in outside the classroom.

Lastly, by creating an activity in which students are engaging academically in writing for their SNS, instructors can begin making students comfortable with the idea of SNS as spaces for academic and professional writing and engagement. In order to remove the stigma of SNS as a non-academic disruption of the classroom, instructors must provide numerous examples of SNS as spaces for academic engagement, and such an assignment provides students with daily or weekly reminders of the academically productive potential of SNS in and out of the classroom.

## **Future Research**

As with any study, the scope of this project had certain limitations that should be taken into account. The first important limitation to consider is the population of the study. Because

this project engaged with participants from a specific group of college students—namely, first-year writing students in the second semester of the first-year writing program at a mid-sized, relatively rural, university in the Midwest United States—it is important to understand the data collected as representative of a small segment of a larger population of college students, and even of first-year writing students. Because of this it is worth considering in future research expanding the population of students, or engaging a similarly specific, but different population of college students, in order to continue building a more complete picture of the way SNS impacts and is impacted by college writing landscapes.

Furthermore, because of limitations of time, and my own direct knowledge and experience with SNS, this project took a particular shape that would have been different in the hands of a different researcher, or in my own hands under different circumstances. As a result of my need to complete the research, analysis, and drafting of a manuscript relatively quickly in order to finish the dissertation project for my program, I had to limit the scope of the project in order to make it manageable to complete within the allotted timeframe. Moreover, because I wanted to use this project as an opportunity to gain foundational knowledge about first-year composition student use and views of SNS, I had to limit the level of depth I went to on any individual topic in order to establish a larger breadth of knowledge on the broader subject. Thus, any future research I perform would be done in order to go into more depth on a particular topic or set of topics that surfaced as a result of the research completed in this project. Even with these limitations in mind, I find that this project has been a success, in that it has certainly helped me establish a foundational understanding of SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of study in the writing classroom, and it has given me a sense of how I can continue research moving forward.

Having completed this research project, I see how fortuitous it was to develop the three secondary questions that began to emerge between the survey and interview phases of the project. Those three questions (1. Do students' views regarding SNS audience and SNS use as rhetorical composition change as they become more experienced in the writing classroom, and consider the subject over time? 2. If their views change, do students' SNS practices change as a result? 3. Do students' views on SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study in the writing classroom change as they become more experienced in the writing classroom, and consider the subject over time?) Not only helped me frame parts of the interview process, but they helped me focus on specific points that aided in addressing my five primary research questions. Furthermore, as I consider the possibilities for future research, these three questions give me a strong foundation for addressing the topic of SNS in the writing classroom in potential future projects. Therefore, I turn to those three questions to frame possible future tracks for research.

*Do Students' Views Regarding SNS Audiences and SNS Use as Rhetorical Composition Change as They Become More Experienced in the Writing Classroom, and Consider the Subject Over Time?*

Having performed research in which I engaged with participants who were students in an FYC course and having established a set of foundational ideas regarding student use and views on SNS in and out of the writing classroom, an important next step in determining how writing experience factors into SNS use considerations would be to perform similar research projects with student populations in higher level writing classrooms. Not only would it be useful to see the data from a population of undergraduate English majors in the last year of their coursework,

it would be equally helpful to understand how graduate students in English programs conceive of their use of SNS in and out of the writing classrooms, both as students and teachers.

*If Their Views Change, Do Students' SNS Practices Change as a Result?*

An interesting aspect of this particular study was during the end of interview phase when the participants began expressing changing attitudes regarding the use of SNS in the writing classroom and when considering SNS as objects of rhetorical study. The students made clear they were seeing more connections between concepts, and began to hold a more favorable view of SNS as a pedagogical tool. However, they expressed that they did not perceive a change in their own SNS usage habits. I believe an important path to take for future research would be to perform a case study on an FYC student in which the researcher interviews the student throughout the year regarding his/her SNS views and usage while tracking the student's SNS engagement. The student could be asked to keep a daily/weekly log of basic SNS engagement, describing frequency and duration of use, types of engagement typically performed, and level of engagement with certain SNS, individuals, and ideas. The researcher and student could also meet monthly, or bi-monthly in order to provide the student time to demonstrate SNS engagement practices in order to see if and how they change over time. Such a project would provide even more nuance in the understanding of student views and use of SNS and their impact on writing. Furthermore, it would provide the researcher the opportunity to compare the student's perception of SNS writing and engagement practices with the researcher's perception of those practices, to provide a clear picture of if and how any changes of habit occur.

*Do Students' Views on SNS as Pedagogical Tools and Objects of Rhetorical Study in the Writing Classroom Change as They Become More Experienced in the Writing Classroom and Consider the Subject Over Time?*

To answer this question, it would be useful to survey and interview a single class of students and their instructor over the course of a semester in order to track how their views on SNS as rhetorical objects of study changes over time. The key element here is that the project would follow a single class of students and their instructor in order to track what the students are learning in the classroom and compare that to any shifts in thinking about the pedagogical and rhetorical potential of SNS. A useful, albeit considerably more difficult and time consuming, alternative project would track two classes: one where the instructor with interest or experience in the pedagogical and rhetorical use SNS in or out of the classroom, and one where the instructor does not have such experience. This study would be useful in the same ways the first version of the project would be, but it could also provide an opportunity to view how instructor experience and perception of SNS use in and out of the classroom impacts student views on the same subject.

Researchers could perform countless other projects and researchers are currently engaged in countless other projects investigating the pedagogical and rhetorical usefulness of SNS in the writing classroom. However, the previously mentioned future projects are natural next steps that one could take to follow this project, and they are considered as potential works that continue addressing the five primary research questions of this project, as well the three secondary research questions that this project helped develop.

## Conclusion

Now that I am at the end of this project, and have had an opportunity to sit with the data and my analysis of that data, I am able to establish a better sense of how this project, and projects like it fit into the landscape of study in the field of rhetoric, and computers and composition. As we scholars and teachers continue trying to understand the various literacies and pedagogies that are going to shape and be shaped by 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies and the individuals who affect and are effected by those technologies, it is important to strive for nuance and relevance. Indeed, the rapid pace of technological shifts and advancement results in nearly equally rapid changes in the way individuals work within the context of those shifts and advancements. In the mere six years since Stephanie Vie's "Digital Divide 2.0," MySpace and Facebook have gone from the premiere spaces for college students to interact, to being largely irrelevant, in the case of MySpace, or being reappropriated as a space to primarily engage with family and high-school friends, as in the case of Facebook. In their stead, myriad SNS have taken shape, creating larger variety and nuance for engagement among their users, and sites like Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, have taken the roles as the primary SNS for college students. However, as quickly Twitter has taken the lead among college SNS users, it seems to be in the throws of a similar fate as Facebook, as more adults are logging in to the space, forcing students to reconsider their use of the SNS as a primary space for interaction.

Because of such rapid shifts in technology and technology use, it is important for those in our field to remain knowledgeable about these changes in order for our understanding of their impacts on the field to remain relevant. Furthermore, it is vital that we instructors have some understanding of such technologies and their impact on personal, professional, social, and civic engagement, as well as their impact on various literacies in order to best equip ourselves to



prepare our students for effective and ethical rhetorical engagement in such spaces today, and to prepare them to think critically about understanding and adapting to the continuously and rapidly changing landscape of literacy and interaction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As I continued to transition from student to teacher at BGSU, I saw an opportunity to use my experience as both to engage in a project where I brought in other students to lend their voices to the discussion of SNS use in the writing classroom. I wanted to continue listening to our students to see how they conceived of SNS as rhetorical tools, and to get a better sense of how they use SNS in their daily lives in order to continue addressing how to implement SNS effectively and ethically in the writing classroom for those instructors who are interested in doing so. What I found was that our students are often voracious and intelligent users of SNS who are interested in finding new ways of using such sites to interact with friends, family, and a number of individuals with similar interests, passions, and goals. While students may not yet have the academic language to describe the rhetorical moves and considerations they are making on their SNS, they are indeed making explicit rhetorical moves and taking into account considerations of audience. Understanding that such considerations and moves are already taking place among our students on SNS and knowing how big a potential role SNS plays in the personal, professional, social and civic lives of our students makes the conversation about the of SNS as pedagogical tools and objects of rhetorical study not only legitimate, but important. The conversation is important to our students, to the field of English, and to a society whose use of social media shows no signs of slowing in the years to come.

This is why I want to continue talking with our students about SNS. I want to listen. I want to read and watch what they do. Because we instructors have the rhetorical knowledge to help students consider how to enhance their work and critically engage with the potential impact

their work has, and our students continue to develop new ways of composing and engaging with one another. Finally, students are doing their composing on SNS whether we pay attention or not, and while they may not yet have all of the words to talk about what they are doing, they want people to see what they have done. Or, as Nikki answered when I asked if there was anything she would like to say to conclude our interviews:

“Nope. But I will show you this [video I made]” (Personal Interview. 1 May).

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## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT



DATE: December 20, 2013

TO: Ken Hayes

FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [535570-2] Socializing First Year Composition: A Study of Social Networking Sites' Impact on First Year Students

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: December 20, 2013

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has determined this project is exempt from IRB review according to federal regulations AND that the proposed research has met the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. You may now begin the research activities.

Note that an amendment may not be made to exempt research because of the possibility that proposed changes may change the research in such a way that it is no longer meets the criteria for exemption. A new application must be submitted and reviewed prior to modifying the research activity, unless the researcher believes that the change must be made to prevent harm to participants. In these cases, the Office of Research Compliance must be notified as soon as practicable.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Kristin Hagemyer at 419-372-7716 or [khagemy@bgsu.edu](mailto:khagemy@bgsu.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.

## APPENDIX B: INSTRUCTOR RECRUITMENT LETTER



Dear GSW Instructor,

My name is Ken Hayes. I am a student in BGSU's Rhetoric and Writing Ph.D. program, and a group leader in the GSW program. I am moving forward with research for my dissertation project in which I intend to survey students in GSW classes about their opinions on and use of social networking sites in and out of the composition classroom. I will administer the survey (which will take students approximately 25 minutes to complete outside of class) via [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). I am asking for your assistance in my project by reading a brief (2-3 minutes) script introducing students to the survey and distributing the link to the survey via email and/or canvas within the first week or two of Spring '14 semester. I know that class time is valuable, especially early in the semester when there are a number of important new details to cover with students, but I believe student participation in this survey can help shed light on a method of communication and composition that will continue to have a profound impact on our classrooms. As such, I hope you consider assisting me in this project and I sincerely appreciate any time and effort made by you for this research.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the project or your potential role in it, please feel free to contact me via email ([kjhayes@bgsu.edu](mailto:kjhayes@bgsu.edu)), or phone (513-582-2703).

You can also contact my advisors:

Dr. Kristine Blair, via email- [kblair@bgsu.edu](mailto:kblair@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (410) 372-7543.

Dr. Lee Nickoson, via email- [leenick@bgsu.edu](mailto:leenick@bgsu.edu) or by phone- (419) 372-7556.

Finally, if you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or your students' rights as study participants, please contact HSRB:

Via email- [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (419) 372-7716.

I hope all is well and look forward to working with you in the future.

With Sincerest Gratitude,

Ken Hayes

## APPENDIX C: STUDENT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT



BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

## Student Recruitment Script

Ken Hayes, a graduate student in BGSU's Rhetoric and Writing Ph.D. program, is researching student use of social networking sites, and the impact that use has on student ideas of audience and writing. As students in a first-year writing course, you have a unique perspective on social networking sites, and Ken is hoping you will share that perspective by participating in a survey. The survey is on [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com), has 39 questions, and will take about 25 minutes to complete. You are not required to take this survey, the survey will be confidential, and your participation in the survey will in no way impact your standing in this class or any relationship you have with BGSU. That said, Social Networking Sites are obviously an important part of how we write and how we interact with each other today, and your participation in this survey could play an important role in understanding and shaping Social Networking Site use in and out of the classroom. You can access more information about the survey and take the survey by following the link to [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com), which I am giving you. Ken would like to express his thanks for any time and effort you spend participating in this research. If you have any questions, you can reach Ken at [kjhayes@bgsu.edu](mailto:kjhayes@bgsu.edu).

You can also contact Ken's advisors:

Dr. Kristine Blair, via email- [kblair@bgsu.edu](mailto:kblair@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (410) 372-7543.

Dr. Lee Nickoson, via email- [leenick@bgsu.edu](mailto:leenick@bgsu.edu) or by phone- (419) 372-7556.

Finally, if you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as study participants, please contact HSRB:

Via email- [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (419) 372-7716.

## APPENDIX D: SURVEY CONSENT DOCUMENT

(FINAL CONSENT FORM IS ON SURVEY WEBSITE SURVEYMONKEY.COM)

## Survey of Social Networking Site (SNS) Use

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Ken Hayes, from Bowling Green State University, Department of English as part of his dissertation. Your participation in this study will consist of completing one brief survey.

The following survey is intended to gain a better understanding of your use of, and response to, SNS. This survey will remain confidential and the risk of participation is no greater than that experienced in daily life.

Participation in this survey is voluntary. You do not have to respond to some, or any, of the questions if you do not wish to do so. You are free to quit the survey at any time. You can choose not to submit your responses at any time during the survey.

Deciding to take or not take the survey will not affect any relationship you may have with BGSU.

Deciding to take or not take the survey will not affect your grades in any of your courses at BGSU.

In order to protect your confidentiality you will not be asked your name. All data collected will be stored on this password-protected website. Data will also be saved on a password-protected hard drive, to which only I will have access.

By completing this survey, you consent to taking part in this survey. By completing this survey, you consent to the use of the data provided in future research.

This survey should take about 20 minutes. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me:

Via email at [kjhayes@bgsu.edu](mailto:kjhayes@bgsu.edu), or by phone at (513) 582-2703.

You can also contact my advisors:

Dr. Kristine Blair, via email- [kblair@bgsu.edu](mailto:kblair@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (410) 372-7543.

Dr. Lee Nickoson, via email- [leenick@bgsu.edu](mailto:leenick@bgsu.edu) or by phone- (419) 372-7556.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, please contact HSRB:

Via email- [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (419) 372-7716.

Finally, do not leave the survey open if using a public computer. Do not leave this survey open if using a computer others may have access to. Upon exiting this website, whether you choose to participate or not, please remember to clear your internet browser and page history.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

## APPENDIX E: SURVEY DOCUMENT

(FINAL FORMAT OF SURVEY IS ON WEBSITE SURVEYMONKEY.COM)

For the following questions, please check the most appropriate answers, and fill in where necessary:

With what gender do you most closely associate? (Please feel free to include your association if it is not listed)

Transgender	Male
Female	Other _____
Prefer Not to Answer	

2. Under what age group do you fall?

<15	16-18	19-21
22-24	25-30	31-35
36-40	41-45	46-50
51<	Prefer Not to Answer	

3. What is your highest education level? (Please check only one)

Some High School education  
 High School Diploma  
 GED  
 Some College Education  
 Associate's Degree  
 Bachelor's Degree  
 Master's Degree  
 Doctoral Degree  
 Prefer Not to Answer

4. With which ethnicity/ethnicities do you most closely associate? (Please circle all that apply)

African American	American Indian	Alaska Native
Asian	Black	Hispanic
Latino	Native Hawaiian	Pacific Islander
White	Other _____	

Prefer Not to Answer

5. In which General Studies Writing (GSW) course are you currently enrolled?

GSW 1100	GSW 1110	GSW 1110H
GSW 1120	GSW 1120H	Prefer Not to Answer
Other (please indicate) _____		

6. Which of the following social networking sites do you currently have an account for? (Please Circle all that apply)

Academia.edu	Facebook	FourSquare
Google+	Instagram	LinkedIn
MySpace	Pinterest	SnapChat
Tumblr	Twitter	Vine

7. Please list any other social networking sites you for which you have an account:

---

8. Which social networking site have you used the longest?

9. Approximately how long have you had an account on that site?

Less than a Month	1-6 Months
6 Months - 1 Year	1-2 Years
2-5 Years	More than 5 years
Prefer not to answer	

10. Which three social networking sites do you use most? (Please list in order of most used to least used)

1.  
2.  
3.

11. Approximately how many hours per day do you spend on all of your social networking accounts combined? (Please indicate one)

Less than 1 hour	1-2 hours	3-4 hours
5-6 hours	7-8 hours	More than 8 hours
Prefer Not to Answer		



*For Questions 12-17, you may use the same response for more than one question, but please limit your responses to one social networking site per response.*

12. Of the social networking sites you use, which one do you use most to interact with your friends? (Please list only one)

13. Of the social networking sites you use, which one do you use most to interact with your family? (Please list only one)

14. Of the social networking sites you use, which one do you use most to meet new people? (Please list only one)

15. Of the social networking sites you use, which one do you use most to stay up-to-date with current world events/news? (Please list only one)

16. Of the social networking sites you use, which one do you use most for personal entertainment (e.g. watching videos, looking at pictures, reading, etc.)? (Please list only one)

17. Of the social networking sites you use, which one do you use most for academic purposes (e.g. research, studying, etc.)? (Please list only one)

18. How often are your posts on social networking sites **primarily** persuasive in nature (i.e. to convince others of something)?

Never	Not Often	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-----------	-------	--------

19. How often are your posts on social networking sites **primarily** expressive in nature?

Never	Not Often	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-----------	-------	--------

20. How often are your posts on social networking sites **primarily** informative in nature?

Never	Not Often	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-----------	-------	--------

21. How often are your posts on social networking sites **primarily** entertaining in nature?

Never	Not Often	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-----------	-------	--------

22. Do you find yourself consuming (i.e. reading/viewing) more content or producing (i.e. posting) more content on your social networking sites?

I only consume content

I consume content more often

I consume and produce content equally

I produce content more often

I only produce content  
It depends on the social networking site

23. If your answer to question 22 was “it depends on the social networking site”, please list the social networking site(s) you tend to use more for consumption of content.

24. If your answer to question 22 was “it depends on the social networking site”, please list the social networking site(s) you tend to use more for production of content.

25. If your answer to question 22 was “it depends on the social networking site”, please list the social networking site(s) on which you tend consume and produce content equally.

26. On a Scale of 1 to 10 (1 being always agree and 10 being always disagree), how often do you find yourself mentally agreeing or disagreeing with posts from your social networking site connections?

27. On a Scale of 1 to 10 (1 being always agree and 10 being always disagree), how often do you find yourself mentally agreeing or disagreeing with comments on posts from your social networking site connections?

28. On a Scale of 1 to 10 (1 being always use and 10 being never use), how often do you find yourself using the “like” button, or the specific social networking site equivalent, for posts that you disagree with?

29. On a Scale of 1 to 10 (1 being always comment and 10 being never comment), how often do you find yourself commenting on posts that you agree with?

30. On a Scale of 1 to 10 (1 being always comment and 10 being never comment), how often do you find yourself commenting on posts that you disagree with?

31. Have you ever ended a social network connection (i.e. unfriended, stopped following, etc.) as the result of disagreeing with that individual?

Yes

No

**If you answered Yes to the previous question, please answer questions 32 and 33:**

32. Approximately how many times have you ended a social network connection as the result of disagreeing with an individual?

Once

2-10

11-25  
51-100  
Prefer Not to Answer

26-50  
100<

33. What was/were the primary topic(s) of the disagreement that caused the disconnection from the individual(s)? (Please Circle All that apply)

Politics

Religion

Language Use (In other words, the individual used language with which you disagreed and/or found offensive)

Personal

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer Not to Answer

34. Would you consider your social networking sites a primary location for developing your understanding of others and their viewpoints?

If yes, in what ways do your social networking sites develop this understanding?

If not, what would you consider your primary location(s) for developing your understanding of others and their viewpoints?

35. Does your interaction on Social Networking Sites prepare you for writing/composing in academic settings?

If no, why not?

If yes, how so?

36. Does your interaction on Social Networking Sites prepare you for writing/composing in other social settings?

If no, why not?

If yes, how so?

37. Does your interaction on Social Networking Sites prepare you for writing/composing in professional settings?

If no, why not?

If yes, how so?

38. Do you believe Social Networking Sites should be used in the writing/composition classroom?

If no, why not?

If yes, why?

39. Do you believe Social Networking Sites are an accurate representation of our identities?

If no, why not?

If yes, how so?

Please feel free to use this space to provide any other information you feel is necessary for understanding your use of, or response to, social networking sites.

Thank you again for participating in this survey!

I will continue my research on this topic by interviewing GSW students during the Spring 2014 semester. As with this survey, interview participants must be GSW students and must be at least 18 years of age. If you meet these qualifications and are interested in continued participation in this study, please contact me:

Via email at [kjhayes@bgsu.edu](mailto:kjhayes@bgsu.edu), or by phone at (513) 582-2703.

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW CONSENT

**Introduction:** My name is Ken Hayes. I am a student in BGSU's Rhetoric and Writing Ph.D. program. My advisors are Dr. Kristine Blair and Dr. Lee Nickoson. I am asking for your participation in a study to gain a greater understanding of your social networking site (SNS) use. All participants in the study must be at least 18 years old.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of SNS on student interaction and composition practices.

**Benefits:** This project could benefit students and instructors by increasing understanding of student use of SNS and their composition processes. This study could be used to enhance student use of such sites. This study could aid instructor use of SNS in the classroom. Participation in this study will benefit you by rewarding you with composition assistance throughout the duration of your participation.

**Procedure:** For this study, you can volunteer to participate in up to four one-hour interviews during the 2013-2014 school year. You will be asked questions about your thoughts on SNS. Questions will also cover your use of such sites. You will be asked to provide examples of your use of such sites.

**Voluntary participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. Your decision to participate, or not, will not impact your grades in any BGSU course. Your decision to participate, or not, will not impact any relationship you may have with BGSU.

**Confidentiality protection:** I will take the following measures to protect your confidentiality:

- \*All data will be stored on a password-protected hard drive, to which only I will have access.
- \*Your name will be changed when used to publicly express any data you may provide.
- \*The name of the university and the General Studies Writing course(s) in which you are enrolled will be changed when referenced publicly.

**Risk:** The risk of participation in this study is no greater than that experienced in daily life.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact me: Via email- [kjhayes@bgsu.edu](mailto:kjhayes@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (513) 582-2703.

You can also contact my research advisors:

Dr. Kristine Blair, via email- [kblair@bgsu.edu](mailto:kblair@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (410) 372-7543.

Dr. Lee Nickoson, via email- [leenick@bgsu.edu](mailto:leenick@bgsu.edu), or by phone- (419) 372-7556.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a study participant, please contact HSRB:

Via email- [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu), or by phone (419)-372-7716.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Informed Consent:**

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered. I have been informed that my participation is voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Name (Please  
Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW SCRIPTS

Interview 1 Script (1 hour) SNS Background	
Duration	Questions/Actions
5 Minutes	-Introductions -Discuss project -Inform student of HSRB and have student sign consent form
5 Minutes	Provide some background information: (Refer to Survey) age gender education history GSW course
5 Minutes	Defining terms: SNS Writing Classroom Content consumption Content production SNS use “in” class SNS use “for” class
5 minutes	Discussion of social Networking background: Refer to Survey How do you tend to access the sites? How often? Certain times of day? Certain events?
5 minutes	Are there any you no longer use? What makes you decide to start using a new SNS? What makes (would make) you decide to stop using SNS?
10 minutes	What are the benefits to using SNS in the writing classroom?  What are the drawbacks to using SNS in the writing classroom?  Should SNS be used in the writing classroom? Could you elaborate?
10 minutes	In general, what is the best thing about social networking sites?

	In general, what is the worst thing about social networking sites?
10 minutes	If you could create the ultimate Social Networking Site, what would it do? What would it look like? Who could Access it?
5 minutes	Conclusion: Is there anything you would like to add to anything we have discussed today?  Do you have any questions for me?  Schedule next interview.

<b>Interview 2 Script (1 hour)</b> <b>Audience and Identity</b>	
<b>Duration</b>	<b>Questions/Actions</b>
5 Minutes	Greet student. Discuss previous interview to provide opportunity for any necessary clarification of/change to the process. Revisit definitions of terms: SNS Writing Classroom Content consumption Content production Audience Identity
5 Minutes	Do you find yourself consuming or producing more content on you SNS? Does it depend? If so, on what?
5 Minutes	What is your favorite kind of content to consume on SNS? (entertainment, information, expressive, news, other?) Could you describe and/or provide examples of any/each kind of content you consume? Does the content you consume change based on the SNS you are on? Could you explain/elaborate?
10 minutes	What kind of content do you normally produce? (entertainment, general information, expressive, news, other?) Could you provide/describe examples of any/each kind of content you produce.



	Does the content you produce change based on the SNS you are on? Could you explain/elaborate?
5 minutes	<p>Do you use a certain SNS to interact with family?</p> <p>Do you use a certain SNS to interact with friends?</p> <p>Do you interact with different friends on different SNS?</p> <p>Do you use a certain SNS to interact with work or school associates who are not necessarily friends?</p> <p>If so, why use different SNS for different groups?</p>
10 minutes	<p>If you produce content for a SNS with multiple kinds of connections (e.g. family, friends, etc), do you usually have a particular person/audience in mind for the content you are producing?</p> <p>Allow for unscripted elaboration, definition, discussion</p> <p>When producing content for a single audience, what do you consider or do differently to reach the specific audience? Can you describe and/or provide an example?</p>
10 minutes	<p>Do you believe different SNS portray different versions of yourself?</p> <p>Do you try to portray yourself differently on different SNS?</p>
5 minutes	<p>What are the benefits of using SNS in the writing classroom?</p> <p>What are the drawbacks to using SNS in the writing classroom?</p> <p>Should SNS be used in the writing classroom? Could you elaborate?</p>
5 minutes	<p>Conclusion:</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to add to anything we have discussed today?</p> <p>Do you have any questions for me?</p> <p>Schedule next interview.</p>

<b>Interview 3 Script (1 hour)</b>
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SNS Debate/Discussion	
Duration	Questions/Actions
5 Minutes	Greet student. Discuss previous interview to provide opportunity for any necessary clarification of/change to the process. Revisit definitions of terms: SNS Writing Classroom “like” button “sharing” “commenting” Disagree/agree on SNS SNS use “in” class SNS use “for” class
5 minutes	In your opinion, what is the different between using the “like” button, commenting, and sharing on an SNS?
5 minutes	When you see a post that interests you, what factor(s) determine which action(s) you do or do not take? Does your agreement or disagreement with a post factor in to how you respond to it? (i.e. does it impact whether you like, versus comment, versus share, etc.?)
5 minutes	If you disagree with a post, are there ways for you to perform the equivalent of a “dislike”? If so, how often do you do/use this compared to using the “like” button?
5 minutes	Do you think your frequency of agreement/disagreement with others on SNS reflects your frequency of agreement/disagreement with others in face-to-face settings?
5 minutes	Have you ever needed to meet someone face-to-face because of a disagreement on an SNS?
5 minutes	Have you ever ended an SNS connection? If so, how often, and what was/were the primary reason(s)?
5 minutes	Would you consider your SNS a primary location for developing your understanding of others? How so or why not?
5 minutes	Does your SNS interaction prepare you for writing/composing in academic settings?
5 minutes	Does your SNS interaction prepare you for writing/composing in other social/professional

	settings?
5 minutes	<p>What are the benefits of using SNS in the writing classroom?</p> <p>What are the drawbacks to using SNS in the writing classroom?</p> <p>Should SNS be used in the writing classroom? Could you elaborate?</p>
5 minutes	<p>Conclusion:</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to add to anything we have discussed today?</p> <p>Do you have any questions for me?</p> <p>Schedule next interview.</p>

<b>Interview 4 Script (up to 1 hour)</b> <b>Review/SNS in the Classroom</b>	
Duration	Questions/Actions
5 minutes	Greet student. Begin discussion of earlier interviews
5 minutes	Before we begin with my questions, is there anything you would like to ask about, add to, or take away from any questions I have asked or answers you have provided in any of the previous interviews?
10 minutes	<p>Revisit some questions/answers of my choosing</p> <p>For elaboration, clarification, and synthesis</p>
10 minutes	<p>Have you ever gotten on your SNS accounts for personal use while in the classroom?</p> <p>How often? For how long at a time?</p> <p>Why would you say you get on during class?</p> <p>Do you think it is ok to use SNS for personal use at work?</p>
5 minutes	<p>Have you been in a class where the instructor used SNS for classroom activities?</p> <p>How effective was the use of SNS in the classroom?</p>
5 minutes	<p>What are the benefits of using SNS in the writing classroom?</p> <p>What are the drawbacks to using SNS in the writing classroom?</p> <p>Should SNS be used in the writing classroom?</p>

	<p>Could you elaborate?</p> <p>What is the best way to use SNS in the classroom?</p>
10 minutes	<p>What is the most interesting thing you have gotten out of our interviews so far?</p> <p>Is there anything you have learned about SNS or how you use SNS since we started our interviews?</p> <p>Is there anything you have changed in the way you interact on SNS since we started our interviews?</p>
5 minutes	<p>Would you like to add to anything we have discussed so far?</p> <p>Do you have any questions?</p>
5 minutes	<p>Closing comments.</p> <p>Update contact information for data review.</p>