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TL;DR - Communicating in the Age of Social Media

Julia L. Czekaj

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TL;DR - Communicating in the Age of Social Media

Abstract

This thesis uses a literature review and post analysis to explore Facebook and Twitter as methods of communicating. This thesis examines social media history, genre, and rhetorical aspects.

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First Advisor

Ann M. Blakeslee, Ph.D.

Second Advisor

Steve Benninghoff, Ph.D.

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Julia L. Czekaj

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Ann M. Blakeslee, Ph.D.

Supervising Instructor (Print Name and have signed)

Steve Benninghoff, Ph.D.

Honors Advisor (Print Name

signed) _____

Marcy K. Ramsey
Department Head (Print Name and

Rebecca Sipe
Honors Director (Print Name and

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TL;DR—COMMUNICATING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

“Imagine the kind of family you might see in a modern American sitcom: loving parents trying to maintain a family unit with a teenager engrossed in text messaging, a college-aged child who is always chatting online, and various wacky relatives who spend their days sending ‘funny’ emails to the family.

“This is an admittedly exaggerated stereotype but one we see every day in movies, TV and advertising because most of us can relate to parts of it. Between mobile devices and the Internet we can be more connected today than ever before, but there is still a feeling that the technology can also act as a barrier between us. When I want to share with someone it should be as simple as deciding who I want to share with and what I want to say. It should feel more like a human conversation.” (Hicks)

Introduction

Social media is not a platform of expression that is going to disappear in the near future. Understanding writing on the various platforms as well as communicative practices between social media users can lead to a more cohesive experience and successful spreading of information. Facebook and Twitter’s inclusion as written communication platforms which influence the socio-political environment also maintain their relevance to a vast audience. Social media will continue to evolve and change—Facebook and Twitter alone have changed drastically since their respective launches in 2004 and 2006, and they will continue to do so to stay relevant and interesting.

In a way, personal social media accounts are a highly selected and scripted summary of a person’s life and interactions with others through the internet. Facebook hosts personal photographs from the original poster (OP), which may be ‘tagged’ to another person’s account through facial recognition or through user identification.

Facebook also keeps track of users' birthdays, friends, events, locations, and private messages to exist effectively as a form of personal communication. The vast number of ways that users can interact with each other through social media—either personally or publically—has advanced instant communication and interaction since the beginning of the internet.

The interactions among internet-based genre systems range from retweets on Twitter, to twitter screenshots on Facebook, to links to outside sources on both Facebook and Twitter, and so forth. Users can direct their audiences to outside sites that support their opinions, videos to pass the time, or to another social media platform—among other things. This alone can prompt linking of different genre systems that support the personal interactions of a Facebook user or the public interactions of Twitter. This multi-modal communication is inseparable from the evolution of user-based social media platforms.

The varied and layered uses of language have evolved to encompass different genre aspects and interactions in each post or tweet. This social media-developed language is fundamental to the genre conventions of Facebook and Twitter, becoming part of popular culture and written communication after debuting on these sites. Understanding these language variations and interactions is critical to understanding how social media platforms have affected language and communication at the personal and public level in the past thirteen years and eleven years since the creation of Facebook and Twitter, respectively.

Using Facebook for the personal sharing of information is the most common usage, while verified Twitter accounts are most common in the public-oriented social media platform of Twitter. These separate, yet interactive, platforms encourage the

spreading of information—personal and public—to followers and friends as a way to further connect people. Social media can be used to inform, misinform, connect friends, connect strangers, and influence public opinion on current issues, among other things. The use of social media in today's culture directly influences written communication, language and style, and user-interaction in an instant-communication model.

Whether a user sends messages through Facebook Messenger or Twitter's DM, posts memories to their Facebook wall, or only retweets other poster's tweets, they are still interacting with hundreds of people and their followers on a day-to-day basis. This vast spreading of information and user-interaction continually influences social media development and creation—leading to more connected platforms and groupings of followers at a never-before-seen level of audience reach. This will continue to develop in the coming years, whether to the further success of current social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, or to their detriment as they follow the path of Myspace. Facebook and Twitter as social media platforms have drastically influenced user-interaction, communication, and the spreading of information—and misinformation—through these emergent internet-based genre systems in the past decade.

Thesis Question

Questions this thesis will address are: How have popular social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter affected internet-based genre conventions? How have popular social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter affected written language? What roles do Facebook and Twitter play in modern written communication and user-interaction in an instant-communication model? How have Facebook and Twitter adapted with user-

centered design to remain relevant to user-interaction and communication? What are the elements needed for a social media platform to be successful?

These questions are addressed partially through a literature review and partially through the analysis of social media posts and interactions. The literature review focuses on the rhetorical aspect of social media as a newer and emergent genre existing within and throughout written communication. The literature also focuses on user-centered design and the technology of writing. The social media analysis is used to strengthen arguments about the relevance and roles of social media in modern culture and communication. The analysis also provides examples of social media-developed language, how social media influence the socio-political environment, how social media can reach large audiences with information and misinformation, and how social media functions.

Understanding variations of writing, internet-based genres, and how internet-based genre systems interact is crucial to understanding the modern use of written language in American culture. This thesis will explore the development of the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter in order to understand user interactions with and communication on both sites. The usage of language and genre conventions on each platform contribute to their continued success and prevalence in modern culture—ranging from being used as news-sharing websites, personalized accounts of life, and mass communication. The importance of social media is evident, and ignoring the platforms as simply existing on the internet or by use of millennials means ignoring life that now is to a great extent tied to and controlled by mass media corporations.

Social Media History

Before examining the influence social media has had on writing and written communication, it is necessary to understand how social media has emerged and evolved as a significant method of communication. In this section, I will explore the timeline of social media and the founding of Facebook and Twitter. This section will answer the questions: How and where did social media platforms start? and What role do Facebook and Twitter play in modern written communication and user-interaction in an instant-communication model?

A Social Media Timeline

Internet based writing is fundamentally technological given the platform, but the internet was not the first platform for social media. Tom Standage's book, *Writing on the Wall: Social Media—the First Two Thousand Years*, gives a background on the development of social media and the way humans have communicated through writing over the past two millennia. Standage writes about the slow movement of developing written communication models, as people have always fixated on what was fastest, or easiest, for them to do, especially when communicating. Standage states, "The Romans had the technology needed to make a moveable-type printing press....But slavery meant that human copyists were cheap, so there was little incentive for anyone to devise a press" (Standage 31). The printing press for the Romans took too much time, energy, and resources to become the mainstream form of communication. This, of course, changed with the invention of the Gutenberg printing press, spreading the written word to a larger

audience and making writing more accessible, though still not accessible to the audiences inherent with social media (Standage).

Standage covers the distribution of text and knowledge dating back from Cicero and the Romans, through the invention of the printing press, multiple revolutions, the rise of mass media, and eventually the internet. The most basic interpretation of social media is communication shared among people—something that the internet has expanded beyond ever seen before. The internet opened communication to the largest audiences ever seen on a personal and public level, and writing evolved with it.

The internet as we know it was originally designed to easily share information, albeit, among scientists. Tim Berners-Lee, a British scientist who wrote the original programming behind WorldWideWeb, said that ““It was always designed to be a social medium...I wanted it to be the medium by which I could share ideas with people, so it was very much supposed to be a collaborative medium”” (Standage 223). This is the same idea reflected in Pat Thomson’s essay on the academic uses of social media as a tool for scholars to share information and collaborate in an accessible manner. Berners-Lee’s WorldWideWeb program was eventually reprogrammed and readapted into browsers that the general public now recognizes as the internet.

The technology needed to write electronically on social media is vast. Writing online for social media is dependent on the past invention of the internet, the various upgrades that have come about since the early 1990s, and the creation of the multiple social media platforms most popularly used since the early 2000s that are still in use today. Writing online can also imply several different styles of writing technology—

including coding such as HTML or CSS, which is what enables users to use the platforms.

Among the first iterations of ‘social media’ on the internet were weblogs, later called blogs. Standards developed by blogs are still used in social media, which demonstrates their relevance to this topic of historical social media. Blogs followed four standard aspects: they contained “a series of personal entries” which were “displayed in ‘reverse-chronological’ order” under which readers were “invited to leave comments beneath each entry” (Standage 226). Lastly, early blogs utilized “easy-to-use, automated publishing tools that provided reverse-chronological entries and commenting as standard features” (Standage 226). These blogs were among the first uses of conventions still used in the genre of social media. Further information on genre conventions can be found under the Genre Conventions subheading.

The Facebook and Twtr

Facebook was first launched as a social media website in February of 2004. The platform was originally called “The Facebook,” and was exclusive to Harvard students. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, was studying psychology at Harvard University and developed the site as a way for fellow students to connect. “Within 24 hours, 1,200 Harvard students had signed up, and after one month, over half of the undergraduate population had a profile” (Phillips). The site was renamed as “Facebook” in August of 2005, after it had expanded to all other universities in the United States. In September of 2006, the site was accessible to anyone with a registered email address—it

had expanded into popular culture non-exclusive to college students, widening its user base and thus relevance (Phillips).

On August 9, 2011 Facebook launched Messenger—an aspect of the social media website that allows users to send and receive messages to individuals and groups. The Messenger function has since expanded to allow the sending of text, pictures, stickers, gifs, emoticons, money, and file attachments as well as take photos and play games. Facebook Messenger is also available as an app for Android and iPhones, broadening its accessibility beyond users with laptops or computers, and allowing for international communication between Facebook friends (Protalinski). If one person in the chat has the app, and the other does not, the messages can still be sent through SMS or Facebook.

Facebook Messenger changes one of what used to be a fundamental need for instant communication—a phone. Facebook Messenger can, in some cases, replace the need for a text service, as most of the aspects between the two communication systems are similar. In fact, in an updating message from Facebook in 2010, the platform stated that “Relatively soon, we’ll probably all stop using arbitrary ten digit numbers and bizarre sequences of characters to contact each other. We will just select friends by name and be able to share with them instantly. We aren’t there yet, but the changes today are a small first step” (Hicks). Messenger, however, relies on internet access, either through WiFi or through data use. The usage of Facebook Messenger is also different in that it saves previous chats—and they continue to update whether typed on a phone, a laptop, or a desktop computer. Messenger saves the full history of messages between people, but will clear the messages in a conversation between two people if another member is added to the group. These user-centered changes to the platform speak to the adaptability of

Facebook—the main reason why the platform is still in use thirteen years after its launch. This idea of user-centered design is discussed here as it relates to the adaptability necessary for social media platforms to evolve and maintain relevance. For more in-depth discussion of the user-centered design of Facebook and Twitter, see *Style: User-Centered Design* within the Rhetoric section.

Twitter launched as a social media platform in 2006, two years after the initial launch of Facebook. The idea for Twitter, then named “twtr,” was developed by Jack Dorsey and Evan Williams, and was founded as SMS-style communication. The platform was meant to be similar to texting, but based on groups of friends being able to view each other’s status updates. The first tweet, sent by Dorsey read “just setting up my twtr,” and was sent on March 21, 2006 (MacArthur, “The Real History”).

The soft launch of 2006 turned into a more well-received launch in 2007 when the platform was “embraced by the influential and tech-savvy attendees at South by Southwest Interactive, a technology conference” (Standage 232). After the wide-spread reception of Twitter, users began to use it more primarily as a communication device, as well as a way to find and spread information. As of 2013, Twitter had over 200 million active users, who sent a collective four hundred million tweets a day. This speaks to the relevance of Twitter as a social media platform and communication tool in modern society.

Genre and Conventions

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, genre is “characterized by a particular style, form, or content” (“Genre”). Thus, genre as an aspect of writing is useful

for understanding the differing natures of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Genre can also be expanded to include mapping of genre sets and systems, which provide further understanding of the ways in which different social media platforms interact and influence each other. This section explores genre as a concept, genre conventions of Facebook and Twitter, how genre sets and systems are formed, and how genre systems influence social media interaction. This section is meant to answer: How have popular social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter affected internet-based genre conventions?

Social Media as a Genre

Writing and genre cannot be separated. Writing tends to follow conventions, changing to fit within given genres. So, while social media-developed writing practices are not typically accepted in academic writing—where “Standard English” is heavily favored—within the genre of social media or internet writing, they are accepted and even necessary for the writing to adhere to the conventions of this new genre.

Kerry Dirk, in her chapter, “Navigating Genres,” from the book, *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing Volume 1*, discusses the origins of genres and how to use them for various situations. As she explains, all writing corresponds to a genre—or it works to create a new one. The idea of genre is that,

...when something new happens that requires a response, someone must create that first response. Then when that situation happens again, another person uses the first response as a basis for the second, and eventually everyone who

encounters this situation is basing his/her response on the previous ones, resulting in the creation of a new genre. (Dirk 252)

This is a prevalent idea in writing research, which is applicable to social media users, who may utilize similar but adapted messages depending on the site they use. The picture they post to Instagram may undergo several edits before posting, and will almost always contain hashtags in the description to increase findability of the post. Instagram is primarily designed for mobile use, and relies on the idea that the image conveys the majority of the message. While users can add comments on their own or others' images—as well as add hashtag descriptions in order to broaden their possible range of viewers—the main method of communication is through posting images. Instagram is discussed here because it is owned by Facebook, so it is simply an extension of the larger corporation. While the designs of the platforms are different, the money and information generated from both platforms go to the same place, and accounts can be linked to further drive up the follower count and range.

The message crafted on Facebook has no character limit—and Facebook will even automatically add a 'read more' option when posts become too long in length—while the Twitter message may need severe editing or may be posted in numerical order among several tweets. Understanding even this aspect of the genre may affect whether a user utilizes Facebook or Twitter to share information.

Dirk goes on to say that a writer must "...determine what action you are trying to accomplish. Are you trying to receive an A on a paper? Convince a credit card company to remove a late fee? Get into graduate school? If you don't know what your goal is for a particular writing situation, you'll have a difficult time figuring out what genre to use"

(Dirk 260). This idea directly relates to rhetorical purpose, but is included here as it relates to choosing a genre in order to accomplish this purpose. This idea of correctly choosing genre for a purpose is an idea easily seen on social media. The personalized aspect of Facebook encourages a more personalized approach to writing, a convention not as prevalent on the more publically-based Twitter. Whatever purpose a social-media user is trying to accomplish will determine the platform they host their information on, and thus have a direct effect on their genre choice. Understanding the genre and genre conventions of each particular social media platform will increase the number of followers, friends, retweets, likes, etc. one has on each platform.

Genre Conventions

Genres inherently form genre conventions, and Facebook and Twitter are no exception. Twitter, as a platform, does not allow tweets longer than 140 characters, ensuring that these snippets of information are short and fairly easy to comprehend. While the social media platform has developed genre-specific conventions to work around the character limit, this is an integral part of Twitter as a whole. A successful tweet has to utilize conventions—such as hashtags, user-centered replies, or commented-upon retweets—to convey a message within 140 characters. Other conventions include referring to other users by their Twitter handle, using acronyms to shorten words, modifying tweets, and including pictures or gifs to convey reactions.

Twitter is characterized by its aspect of ‘microblogging,’ meaning that brief messages or status updates from friends and contacts can be viewed in a reverse-chronological order. One of the unique aspects of Twitter as a social media platform is

the 140 character limit. Since the platform was originally designed for SMS communication, and 140 characters was “the limit that mobile carriers imposed with SMS protocol standard,” the constraint remained even after the platform moved online (MacArthur, “The Real History”). The original thought behind making Twitter a mobile platform was based on the instant messaging that could be accomplished away from computers. The thought was that users could post a status immediately, from wherever they were, and receive comments or text message responses to their phones.

Other conventions of Twitter include the symbols used to alert other users of current tweets. Users can include the @ symbol when tagging another user in a tweet, often as a way to send both the tweet and an additional message to another user. Hashtags are used on the Twitter platform to identify the subject of a tweet, allowing people to search through hashtags to find tweets within their interests. Retweets function to essentially quote another person’s tweet while automatically giving credit to that person. Additionally, users can add their own messages, user-callouts, or hashtags to the original tweet, spreading the availability and wide-spread reach of the tweet. More about Twitter conventions may be found under Style: User-Centered Design within the Rhetoric section.

Social media, such as Twitter, uses writing conventions often not taught in formalized education, but conventions which still hold value in modern life. Refusing to follow the conventions of social media sites result in unsuccessful postings that do not reach the intended audience, or reach anyone outside the user’s direct followers.

Similarly, Facebook posts follow conventions, though there is wider variety of writing styles when there is no character limit. About writing, Plato's Socrates says "...this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves" (Plato). Incidentally, this is a convention Facebook relies on. Facebook prompts users to re-share personal information, such as past posts, pictures,

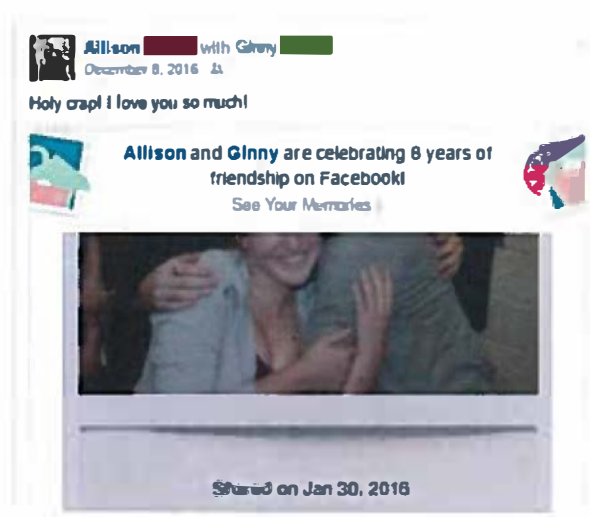


Figure 1

and friend anniversaries, prompting users to remember former interactions they had on the website, as seen in Figure 1. This also regenerates content that may have been forgotten amongst other posts, bringing them back to the forefront of a user's wall or newsfeed. This is a genre convention because it prompts users to remember past

interactions surrounding one or more users tagged or mentioned in a post—reminding both of them of their shared past. Figure 1 even includes the quote "See Your Memories" as a link, because in this case, Facebook has accumulated posts and interactions between these two users over the course of eight years. This is a genre convention not found on other social media platforms due to Facebook being an ideal place to store and share photos, allowing communication of memories.

Other Facebook conventions include commenting on posts, 'liking' posts, and posting emoji or stickers to convey reactions or emotions. Certain Facebook interactions,

such as birthday messages, are very specific to the genre. Birthday messages are aided by Facebook's reminder system, a convention not often seen on other social media platforms. More about stylistic choices of Facebook conventions may be found under *Style: User-Centered Design* within the Rhetoric section. Understanding the genre conventions of a social media platform is essential to successfully posting on the platform and reaching other users.

The many interactions on internet-based social media platforms have helped to develop constraints and conventions on each of these sites that may be unique to the site or exist across the internet. The usage of hashtags to spread information in the form of links, the various uses of capitalization, and the prominent use of written sarcasm are a few examples of writing conventions prominent on both Facebook and Twitter.

Genre Sets

The various ways that users interact on the internet, between original posts, comments, reaction images or gifs, 'likes,' or any of the other various ways that social-media based interactions occur, have changed the way people communicate and interact in the age of social media. User and artifact interactions can happen instantly over social media, with hundreds of people getting notification of another person's post, prompting them to interact with the original post. Additionally, posts can interact with and link to other posts, which can form genre sets.



Figure 2

When two or more artifacts with a similar subject interact, they form a genre set. These are artifacts that influence each other and exist within the same subject, but may exist within different genres. Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff wrote about the interaction of genre sets, though not particularly focusing on

internet-based genre forms. The internet, however, is ideal for studying genre sets, and the later systems they form, given the vast amount of interaction and reliance on context. “Genre sets are more bounded constellations of genres that enable particular groups of individuals to accomplish particular actions within a genre system” (Bawarshi and Reiff 88). This may take form on Facebook with links shared to news pages, as seen in Figure 2. Ginny’s post on Facebook represents the second genre in the set, with the first being the news site wxyz.com which posted the original article. When more than two genre artifacts interact, or when they are influenced by artifacts outside their set, they exist within a genre system.

Genre Systems

When multiple texts, encompassing multiple genre sets interact, they form genre systems, according to Bawarshi and Reiff. Of these systems, they say, “a genre system includes genres from multiple genre sets, over time, and can involve the interaction of

users with different levels of expertise and authority, who may not all have equal knowledge of or access to all the genres within the system” (Bawarshi and Reiff 88). This is something that is particularly true of genre systems found on the internet. Since anyone can post them, and facts do not need to be checked, these sets are diverse in their understanding of the public issue. People are prompted to write through their desire to change other people’s minds or share their opinions, exhibiting exigence, but they may approach it differently depending on their mindset. Multiple people may share similar, yet subtly different information that both interacts with other artifacts in the genre system and influences the creation of further artifacts.

These genre systems can expand through the internet, such as how an infographic can be posted on multiple social media sites and then retweeted to other users. In Figure 2, if this post were shared again on Twitter, the posts would now form a system. Alternatively, the system encompasses other news sites, posts, and information related to the subject, measles in Ann Arbor, even if they are not linked together over social media. News pages inherently contain information from other sites and contain sources for users to check the information. The news page and the Facebook link may have comments from other users on each—further influencing a reader’s understanding of the information presented.

The set exists within the system. The more followers or friends one has, the larger the potential audience for any genre artifact in a system. A genre artifact shared on multiple platforms—such as the tweet shared on Facebook in Figure 6—also gains a larger audience. Given the interaction between social media sites, an astute poster may link multiple platforms using click-through links or screenshot images to connect their

audience to several artifacts in the system. This works because some viewers may only interact on one social media platform, such as having a Facebook account but not having a Twitter account, which would otherwise restrict their access to this artifact. The multi-modality of these posts increases their chances of reaching large audiences with their message. This can easily spread both information and misinformation within the system, requiring the viewer to take the time to further research the issue before coming to conclusions—which does not always happen. Instead, information is often re-shared or ‘liked’ within a genre system, increasing the topic’s popularity and audience reach.

Rhetoric and Social Media

At its core, rhetoric is the way we communicate. In this thesis, it is categorized by six key aspects: the Rhetor, Audience, Purpose, Exigence, Style, and Context. This rhetoric section is divided up using these aspects as they relate to social media. This section is meant to answer: How have Facebook and Twitter adapted with user-centered design to remain relevant to user-interaction and communication? Further questions are asked and answered within the individual aspects that form rhetoric.

The Rhetor

The rhetor in a rhetorical situation is the person or group of people who frame the rhetorical situation. Essentially, the rhetor may be understood to be the initial poster or instigator of the rhetoric. The rhetoric crafted on social media could range from links, to photographs, to personal updates or anything else that could move the rhetorical situation forward (Grant-Davie).

A rhetor on social media may include the OP, the users who comment on other posts, the users who retweet or share posts, or even users who steal other posters' content and claim it as their own. These are all examples of user interaction and rhetorical crafting of information on social media platforms. While the OP would most conventionally be considered the rhetor, the commenter or sharer who spreads the content may also be a fundamental piece in the post reaching the intended audience. Therefore, given this widely-connected and dependent form of communication, social media posts rely on interaction from multiple rhetors before they may be considered successful writing.

The rhetor will be discussed throughout this section on rhetoric, but is first defined here. The rhetor is essential to social media postings and to making decisions about social media. The rhetor may also be named the poster, OP, or user throughout this thesis.

Audience

The first thing to consider when writing is audience. Successfully communicative social media posts must consider their audiences in order to be well-received and acknowledged through 'likes,' shares, and retweets. Writing for an audience may include considering the impact or consequences of a post, understanding their purpose for posting to this particular audience, and using language and information understood by their audience. This section answers the question of how social media users adapt their writing to their audience in order to make successful posts.

Audience, as defined by Grant-Davie, is the group or person who can affect the outcome of the rhetorical situation. In the case of Facebook, the audience of a post may be personal friends while the audience of Twitter posts may include complete strangers. A public Twitter account that successfully utilizes hashtags may reach a wide range of people who are interested in the subject that the hashtag describes. This may mean tens or thousands of individuals are reached by a single person's thought or message. When crafting social media posts, the writer must be cognizant of the wide range of potential consequences that could result from one Tweet. Influential users of social media platforms are granted higher power to reach individuals than personalized accounts by people without a celebratory spotlight. Therefore, the audiences between different social media users may vary dramatically.

While Twitter tends to exist in a public field, Facebook is primarily within the personal field of writing. Typically, a Facebook post is more personal and individualized to the user. This is because in order to 'friend' another person on Facebook, a user must accept that person as a friend. Facebook also makes the 'unfriend' option easy to use. Often, people only friend their actual friends, relatives, or acquaintances on Facebook, which drastically changes the potential audience for this site. This means that the social media platform itself is better suited for personalized status updates because the audience is invested in the user's life. Facebook also publicizes personal information to the audience, including their birthday so friends can post messages on that user's wall. Sites such as Twitter—in which a public profile may be followed by anyone—mean that a person often has followers they do not personally know. This could change the level of

comfort they have with sharing personal information. Understanding the personal or public aspects of an audience will affect the content of a Facebook or Twitter post.

When considering writing for audience, a user should understand their purpose. While this section may belong under Rhetorical Purpose, it is placed here due to its connection to adapting writing to audiences. As Anthony Friedmann, author of the book *Writing for Visual Media*, points out, “Very often you write for others, not for personal reasons or for artistic reasons...” (Friedmann 18). Writing is essentially written to be read by an audience. This is especially true of public social media, in which posts and statuses are crafted for audiences ranging from one person to millions. Twitter, in 2016, became a prime example of mass communication through short tweets as U.S. Presidential candidate, Donald Trump, used the platform to reach voters. While some users post tweets to communicate with their friends, or a low number of followers, others can use Twitter to inform or misinform millions of people, their audience, on a global scale. A Twitter user’s audience depends largely on their follower count and their verification credentials. Verified accounts on Twitter are designated by a checkmark within a blue badge located next to the Twitter handle. Verification proves that the user is who they claim to be, which often increases their follower base. More on verification can be found under Context: Fact or Fiction?

When choosing language or information to share, a poster should also consider their audience’s understanding. Friedman says, “The educational level of an audience governs the vocabulary you can use, the general knowledge you can assume, and the kind of argument that will be readily understood” (Friedmann 26). Friedmann’s view is primarily directed at academic writing, but this same principle may be applied to social

media writing as it relates to specialized language and information. A Facebook user may post private accomplishments to their wall, because they trust their audience will receive it well. A Twitter user may use specialized hashtags or acronyms to lower their word count, because they trust their audience will understand their meaning. Friedmann's view of audience and clear communication, therefore, shows that writing should be audience-driven, not rhetor-driven. If the audience cannot understand a piece of writing and its purpose, then that piece of writing fails to communicate clearly and effectively.

Purposes: Public and Private

This section differentiates between a user's purpose for posting on Facebook or Twitter by exploring the public and private uses of the platforms. Social media is "a platform for making new connections, sharing information, initiating and conducting joint work and giving and getting support" (Thomson), so the purpose for a platform often follows these aspects.

The internet exists, for the most part, for public interaction and communication. Thomas G. Goodnight defines public writing as, "a community tradition of deciding and discussing priorities, constraining and protecting habituated prejudgments, and indulging and confronting common problems" (Goodnight 429). While Goodnight's definition focuses specifically on social problems being addressed by the public, social media may also be considered to exist in public written communication. Goodnight starts his definition by stating that public writing is a 'community tradition,' something that is widely accepted through internet social media platforms. Communities have formed on sites such as Facebook—specifically including group pages, fan pages, and group

messaging. These communities often share traits and interests, which directly influence the content they generate. Online-formed communities may narrow the audience and purpose for user's posting. Online communities may also form among academic uses for social media, with Thompson claiming, social media may be used to promote academic writing, using blogging as a "bridge" between conventional academic outlets and mainstream radio and newspapers" (Thomson).

Social media may also be private, or semi-private, however. In this instance, internet-based social media platforms embrace personal troubles and interactions. According to C. Wright Mills, a personal trouble is a problem that affects the life of only one or a few individuals. These problems can be resolved by personal involvement. When a problem affects the lives of many individuals, however, it may be a public issue. "Much private uneasiness goes unformulated; much public malaise and many decisions of enormous structural relevance never become public issues" (Mills 12). Particularly on more personalized social media accounts, such as Facebook and blogs, people share their individual struggles and tribulations. Facebook in particular embraces this form of writing. Due to the make-up of an individual's Facebook friends, an individual may share personal details knowing that the majority of the people who will view the post are friends, family, or acquaintances and thus trusted with personal knowledge. Further, most individuals on Facebook have high privacy settings to prevent their personal griefs from being shared through search engines. The ability to quickly share personal troubles or good news with the people that one cares about makes Facebook an attractive option for personal writing. One wall post can, hypothetically, inform almost all of an individual's closest friends and family about news in their life. While this is also possible to do on

Twitter, the more public aspect of the site prevents most users from sharing overtly personally identifiable information on this social media platform.

On the other hand, Twitter is a good way to share what may seem to be a personal issue that actually reflects a public issue. To determine further whether or not an issue is a public one or a personal trouble which happens to affect many people, Mills clarifies by saying, “To formulate issues and troubles, we must ask what values are cherished yet threatened, and what values are cherished and supported, by the characterizing trends of our period” (Mills 11). Twitter’s public platform allows users to share personal grievances about public policies, world news, or the state of the world with a potentially wide-range of followers. In this instance, users may share their personal feelings about a public problem—adding an individualized component to a known issue. When multiple Twitter users contribute their personal troubles and interact with each other on these topics, this may become part of the public consciousness.

Exigence of Social Media

Keith Grant-Davie defines exigence as “what the discourse is about, why it is needed, and what it should accomplish” (Grant-Davie). Exigence is basically the starting point of writing; something needs to be changed and framing it as a rhetorical situation is the first step to writing about it. In the case of writing on social media, exigence could range wildly between platforms and individuals. People use Facebook Messenger to contact friends and family, send information through group chats, or just to send stickers and laugh. Alternatively, people use Twitter as a social media platform to share

information about the world, to interact on a public level, and to interact with people they do not know personally.

Grant-Davie defines constraints in a rhetorical situation as “all factors in the situation, aside from the rhetor and the audience, that may lead the audience to be either more or less sympathetic to the discourse, and that may therefore influence the rhetor’s response to the situation” (Grant-Davie). Constraints when reaching the audience of a Facebook post may include the security settings of a Facebook user. If privacy settings are high and a user only accepts actual friends or relatives as Facebook friends, then their message will automatically reach a lower number of people than a public account or a news-platform on Facebook. Likewise, a Twitter user with a low number of followers automatically has constraints placed on their ability to reach a wide range of people.

Due to the nature of Facebook’s “friending” system, most people interacting on personal Facebook accounts know each other. This individualized audience and user interaction of Facebook is displayed through the commenting and tagging systems. While the majority of personal posts lend less weight to the public or political aspect of social media, personal posts are a large influence on the continuation of Facebook and drive communication at a personal level.

An example of posting personal interactions as exigence can be seen in Figure 3. In Figure 3, Ginny was tagged on Facebook in an unseen picture. The tagging system alerted her that she was mentioned in a post. She then liked and commented on the post to show appreciation—using both text and no ending punctuation, as is common when ending a sentence with emoji. Her second comment included the informal abbreviation of Christmas—indicating familiarity with the viewer, and showing the time relevance of the



Figure 3

notice timing. The commentary on this post happens within three minutes—12:06 am to 12:09 am—meaning the photo was taken at an earlier time, since it appears to be daylight. Using reaction images is another common form of user interaction, embracing the ‘show, don’t tell’ style of communication. This Facebook post, therefore, demonstrates several different aspects of social media-developed writing practices in response to a personal exigence. Ginny and the OP interact with each other in a public setting—though they essentially hold a written conversation between them—using individual understandings of internet-based writing practices.

While Twitter has many verified and public accounts, personal accounts are also used by a vast number of people and so contain examples of personal exigence. Various ways to contact other users exist on the Twitter platform, meaning that it can truly exist as a social media site, especially among users who know each other. Symbols such as the

initial post. The reply from the OP, Sara, starts with three crying while laughing emoji and ends with the popular acronym ‘lol’ in order to convey the humor she feels at the situation. Again, the OP assumes that Ginny understands the emotion behind her reply. With this post, it is also relevant to

@ symbol allow users to tag other users, effectively sending them the tweet. One way to use this symbol is as a mention, meaning the @username is embedded in the tweet (MacArthur, “Understanding Basic Twitter Lingo”).



Figure 4

Figure 4 uses the @username approach to mention and tag other users. The OP mentions two other Twitter handles in the caption, alerting them that they have been tagged. The post itself was then retweeted by one of

the mentioned handles to appear on a separate page. The tweet uses another common substitution for words-in-a-row style communication: reaction gifs. The gif—or moving image without sound—included in the tweet is originally from the movie *Zoolander*. Incidentally, knowing the origin of the gif is not crucial to understanding the meaning of the message—that the OP is excited about the trip and wanted to convey that excitement in only 71 characters. The use of a reaction gif, like the reaction photo of Figure 3, decreases the number of characters needed to make a point, assuming that the users tagged in the tweet understand the meaning.

Like Ginny’s Facebook conversation in Figure 3, this tweet is an example of private interactions, and personal exigence, within the public interaction. This tweet is public, but it is essentially of no interest to other Twitter users outside the three involved in the original post. This could have been as easily sent to the two other users through

private messaging of some nature, but the OP made the decision to publically post it to their account, widening the potential audience despite the personal nature. While Figure 4 was not a successful public post, it was a successful personal post since the two Twitter users tagged interacted with the post. Figure 4 demonstrates personal interaction as an exigence for Twitter postings. For socio-political exigences and more public tweets demonstrating exigence, see Figures 7 and 8 under Context: Fact or Fiction?

Style: Social Media-Developed Writing Practices

Social media and the internet have aided in the development of different language constructions to convey ideas or emotions that may be missing in these interactions otherwise. Since social media is so often used for informal communication, users developed their own specialized constraints to use in informal postings or updates. These conventions include, among others, using all capital letters to indicate anger or excitement and the complete disuse of capitalization to convey apathy or informality. Writing designed for the internet may also use emoticons or stickers—prominently found on Facebook—or keyboard-formed emoticons found in comments or original posts on social media sites such as Twitter, Tumblr, Reddit, and 4chan: “Emoticon creativity reaches a zenith on the comment boards of websites...One might express disapproval with a Ծ_Ծ (using the Kannada letter for the unvoiced, aspirated, retroflex consonant [ʈʰ]), or anger with a (ʘ°ʘ°) ʘ — (a pictogram of someone flipping a table over)” (Johnson).

Emoticons, or emoji, are often purported to ruin the English language, but the usage of the graphics often emphasizes rather than replaces the written word.

There's good reason to think that emoji are more like gesture than language. When you crunch the numbers...the face, hand, and heart emoji are by far the most popular—not the emoji that represent noun-like items. Furthermore, the vast majority of emoji are used beside words, not all by themselves in extended emoji-only stories. People aren't using emoji as a substitute for language, they're using it as an addition to it. (McCulloch, "A Linguist Explains Emoji")

Even the internet needs words in a row, in some cases, in order to function as a communicatively-successful platform. The use of emoji, however, is prominent in social media with the 'like' button on Facebook represented by a thumbs-up symbol and emoticons often used in place of words on Twitter in order to stay under the 140 character limitation, which can result in a large departure from standard written English.

Additional social media-developed writing practices include purposefully misspelling words, such as doge—a meme based on a dog which became widely popular in 2013, though the first instances of the misspelling occurred in 2005 and 2010 (NovaXP)—for humor or effect. Abbreviating or forming acronyms for words are also common practices. The substitution of "u" for "you" is a commonly recognized abbreviation, as is "lol" for "laugh out loud," but the usage of "TL;DR" may be less well-known outside social media platforms. The use of this acronym for "too long; don't/didn't read" was first noted in the early 2000s, earning a spot on urbandictionary.com in 2003 (McGraw-Herdeg). In an updated word meaning, the usage often indicates the user will give a helpful summary or short phrasing of longer content that can be found elsewhere, often provided in a link for the truly curious.

Other examples of writing found primarily among social media users include the use of written sarcasm. Sarcasm is rampant on social media, and may or may not include punctuation to mark its difference: “lack of punctuation, especially a question minus its question mark accompanied by all-lowercase, often conveys disingenuous deadpan snark, a sort of ‘I already know the answer to this question but I’m just going to say it anyway. I might be hoping you’ll laugh, but I’m definitely not asking you for it’” (McCulloch, “A Linguist Explains How We Write Sarcasm”). Sarcasm in particular has its place in tweets, with many following various sarcastic language conventions in order to convey humor.

While there may be many reasons for the various forms of writing that have been adapted for the internet and social media platforms, one question that remains is ‘Why?’ The answer is fairly simple: human expression. Speaking aloud offers multitudes of ways to indicate tone, emotion, or humor, but internet posts rely primarily on the written word, images, and emoticons: “in person, we’ve got many kinds of silly voices and goofy facial expressions. So as long as people are understanding them, why not have the broadest possible menu of ways to type” (McCulloch, “A Linguist Explains How We Write Sarcasm”). Variations on typing words in a row can lead to a complex understanding of modern language adaptability and communicative interactions based in social media and among users. Changing the conventions of academic written English can create tone in an otherwise static message, which allows for a great deal of flexibility and differences in writing practices. Understanding the writing conventions of various social media platforms is required to truly understand the message a user is sending.

Style: User-Centered Design

These sites are also influenced by individual settings and interactions on each platform. A Facebook user can individualize their notifications, their security, and their mobile access. They can update their profile picture, cover photo, and personal information, as they desire. They can choose which friends' posts they see on their wall by blocking users or by following users. Internet-based social media platforms continue to change and evolve with the current times; they need to or they will become defunct and users will leave the sites. Social media platforms unable to adapt to a wide range of fast-moving users, such as Friendster, are replaced by newer technologies and communicative platforms.

Written communication often relies on visual design—particularly social media. Social media platforms depend on their design, with Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms each using unique interfaces. Internet-based genres, such as news websites, opinion websites, pop-up ads, and other forms of communication also depend on unique designs to catch and hold viewers' attention. This section will address the questions: What do Facebook and Twitter do to stay relevant to users? How do Facebook and Twitter rely on their users to determine their design and updates? and What do Facebook and Twitter do to hold their users' attention and generate site traffic?

Arola, Sheppard, and Ball, the writers of *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*, wrote a section of their book on “Reporting on the Final Project.” From this section, came questions such as: “What were the key design choices you made? How did you make use of emphasis, contrast, organization, alignment, and proximity? What shaped your decisions about how elements of your project were arranged?” (Arola,

Sheppard, and Ball 133). Holding an audiences' attention long enough to convey a message is particularly challenging, yet necessary, in the modern age. This is particularly true in digital communication, where there are expectations of brevity and skimmability. When social media platforms fail to capture and retain attention on a long-term basis, such as Myspace, they become defunct and close. Design, therefore, is critical for internet-based genres, which must be adapted and updated to maintain relevance. Two platforms that have done well to consistently update their design and stay current are Facebook and Twitter. Both are text-heavy social media platforms—unlike the image-driven platform of Instagram—which rely on “friends” or followers to spread content.

In some cases, however, design updates by social media platforms do not go well. Complicated updates can slow loading times, leading users to leave the site. In November of 2010, Facebook announced a service that leaned more towards emailing. The service provided Facebook users with an @facebook.com email address, but the system was not widely received. This aspect of the platform was meant to combine emailing, texting, and instant messaging (Protalinski). While Facebook Messenger was embraced by the general public, most people did not use the @facebook.com email function. Just four years after the email platform was first introduced, Facebook discontinued the service. In early 2014, Facebook announced that the email service would be cancelled shortly, and that all emails sent to users' @facebook.com email address would be forwarded to their primary email address (Hamburger). The social media site alerted users about the change in their Facebook email account, citing the low usage and inconvenience of multiple email addresses as the main reasons behind effectively deleting their email service. Initially, the company had stated in their announcement post that, “It seems wrong that an email

message from your best friend gets sandwiched between a bill and a bank statement. It's not that those other messages aren't important, but one of them is more meaningful" (Hicks). However, users stated that the email function was missing key aspects of usability, effectively ending its launch before it began.

Facebook has several other effective user-centered features which have kept it as the world's largest social media platform for years. Standage writes, "in 2006 Facebook introduced a 'news feed' giving users a reverse-chronological list of all of their friends' recent activity on the site: messages posted, status updates, changes to profile information, new links or photos posted, and announcements when new friendships were established or relationships ended" (231). The user-centered design of the site has worked to maintain its popularity and prevalence in current culture, despite setbacks such as the Facebook email function.

The inclusion of commentary and reverse-chronological ordered entries are standard practices of web-based social media like Facebook and Twitter. The Facebook wall posts entries from most recent to oldest, and allows other users to use a variation of the original 'like' button or leave comments and replies on any post, link, picture, etc. Twitter may also show posts in the reverse-chronological order, but when searching through a hashtag, users may re-order the posts by the most popular—meaning the tweets with the most user-interaction and, presumably, relevance. Social media in a user-centered model is based on the sharing of personal information, thoughts, and history in a timely manner, meaning that the platforms constantly update to show the newest and most recent information. This sharing of personal information, the reverse-chronological

order posting, and comment functions are all key aspects of social media platforms and the writing they host.

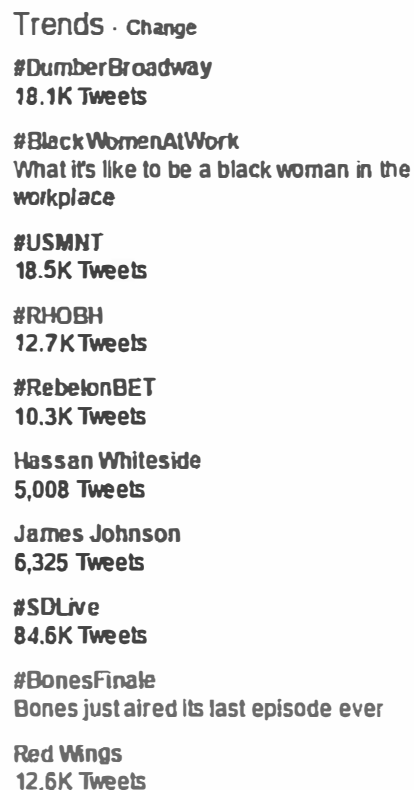


Figure 5

For Twitter, user-centered design takes the form of user interaction through symbols. Hashtags are commonly used on Twitter to facilitate conversation between users. Hashtags function as links, allowing users to click on a hashtag and see all the corresponding responses to that particular hashtag—often sorted by popularity or by most recently posted. Organizations also often use hashtags specific to them. For instance, a conference may use a particular hashtag which all the attendees are encouraged to use. This is done to narrow the possible search feed if one were to want to review the tweets later by grouping them under a searchable hashtag. Hashtags may also trend—meaning that a large number of people are tweeting that particular hashtag at a given time, as seen in Figure 5. The “Trends” function of Twitter lets users know exactly which trends are popular, and links users to tweets using each hashtag. Trending tags can be found on the left side of a Twitter page and update frequently. In a way, this functions as a way of informing the viewer of what trends are important to pay attention to and understand. The hashtag itself functions as a link, directing users to similar posts. Under the hashtag, Twitter provides the approximate

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number of tweets containing this particular hashtag, letting users know exactly how popular the hashtag actually is. This is one way that Twitter works to keep the site up-to-date and informative.

Other ways the platform is designed for users to interact include retweeting and direct messaging. Direct Messages, or DMs, are the private messages sent through Twitter. In order to send a DM, both users must follow each other. Retweeting is a form of sharing another user's tweet. If the retweet and commentary by the user retweeting exceeds 140 characters, then users may post a Modified Tweet, which they indicate with MT. Similar to citation styles, this informs the audience that the tweet has been changed—which is sometimes seen with [...] in English literature—while still giving credit to the OP.

Users may also interact by tagging other Twitter handles using the @ symbol at the beginning of the tweet, indicating that the message of the tweet is 'in reply' to another person, or is initiating a conversation. This variation of the @ symbol makes the message semi-public—only the followers of both parties will see the reply. Users may also place the @username embedded in a tweet for a mention or with a period before the @username to make the reply public. All these functions indicate the platforms acknowledgement of user interaction as the core of Twitter—allowing for easy interaction and communication among users and advancing the usability and user-centeredness of the social media platform.

Context: The Socio-Political Reach of Facebook and Twitter

*“A...widely expressed concern about social media is that the ease with which anyone can now publish his or her views online, whether on Twitter, on blogs, or in comment threads, has led to a coarsening of public discourse. Racism, sexism, bigotry, incivility, and ignorance abound in many online discussion forums....the history of media shows that this is just the modern incarnation of the timeless complaint of the intellectual elite, every time technology makes publishing easier, that the wrong sort of people will use it to publish the wrong sorts of things.”
(Standage 243)*

The potentially wide reach of a user’s tweet or Facebook post can quickly and concisely disseminate information or misinformation, influencing public opinion and shaping dialogue. This section, within the field of rhetoric, is meant to answer the question: Where do Facebook and Twitter belong in the socio-political environment, influencing and informing public opinion with information and misinformation?

A persuasive piece of rhetoric can influence a large number of people even if it is not factually correct or verified. These artifacts and genres can be shared over time, and can influence the further generation of more artifacts in a genre system, as discussed previously. The more artifacts that exist surrounding a public issue, the more attention it gets. The more attention a public issue gets, the higher the perception of importance assigned to it. Highly ranked public issues then end up in Party platforms and spark heated debates between political parties.

An interesting phenomenon concerning the sharing of news over Twitter occurred shortly after Donald Trump announced cuts in the Environmental Protection Act. Immediately following the announcement, the social media personnel for the Badlands National Park Service (NPS) caused the Twitter account to go ‘rogue’ and began

tweeting facts about the environment. The Badlands account is verified—as are all the official National Parks Twitter accounts—so followers were baffled to see a break from the usual tweets posted by the account. This sparked a sudden influx of unofficial alternative organizations, including Rogue NASA, AltUSForestService and even BadHombreLands NPS (Davis). These “rogue” accounts began posting climate change information, in direct opposition to the gag order placed on the Environmental Protection Agency by the U.S. government. These accounts quickly gained followers; the unofficial National Parks Service account gained over one million followers. The original posts by the Badlands NPS account were deleted soon after posting, but the phenomenon they sparked caused the creation of over 80 of these alternative, or rogue, Twitter accounts within days (Davis). Screenshots of the original posts and the following created posts of these accounts quickly circulated on both Twitter and Facebook, garnering them even more attention. Figure 6 directly references the creation of these alternative Twitter accounts, showing their immediate prevalence and wide-spread nature. Figure 6 also demonstrates the use of multiple layers of socio-political context in one Facebook post.

An example of socio-political context shared on social media (Figure 6) comes in the form of a screenshotted tweet on Ginny’s Facebook wall. Ginny, the OP, found the photo on a page she followed, “Living Blue in a Red State.” This organization has Facebook and Twitter accounts, and it shared the Tweet on both in order to gain a larger audience.



Figure 6

As a highly referential and political post, the OP expects the audience to either identify with or disagree with the post. The tweet references the Women’s March on Washington on January 21, 2017, the “rogue” Twitter accounts of the National Parks Service, the proposed scientist march on Washington in protest of anti-global warming statements made

by the current executive branch, and the art exhibit created by Shia LaBeouf that was meant to last the full four years of the current presidency. The art exhibit later closed. The tweet further refers to Donald Trump as Darth Orange, which is both a referential comparison of Trump to Darth Vader and a reference to his spray tan. Figure 6 is a prime example of the multiple layers of socio-political context that may coexist in one post.

Having so much information embedded in one tweet—and later Facebook post—also showcases the use of a limited word count to make vast comparisons and statements. This particular post takes a clear side in current U.S. politics—using the phrases “the resistance” and “Darth Orange,” as well as their organization’s name. The original tweet is meant to be humorous, as well as comment on the political atmosphere. Figure 6 cannot be removed from its socio-political context without losing all meaning, but it can

use that context to quickly inform viewers about multiple events surrounding U.S. politics in January, 2017.

Context: Fact or Fiction?

Social media is an excellent tool for quickly spreading information and news to a wide audience. On the other hand, social media is also an excellent way to spread misinformation and misguide large audiences. Facebook's news feed algorithm controls what users see on their feed, allowing them to see what they want to see. Twitter's use of verified accounts can lead users to trust sources that spread misinformation. This section will explore the ways that Facebook and Twitter spread fact and fiction.

Facebook spreads news to users through an algorithm that ranks the news the social media platform believes each individual user will find the most useful or interesting:

“Facebook's news feed algorithm has shaped not only what we read and how we keep in touch, but how the media frame stories to catch our attention. From the start, savvy publishers have gamed the algorithm's quirks to concoct viral hits. In response, Facebook's engineers are constantly tweaking the code in ways that disadvantage some types of posts while boosting others.” (Oremus)

This means that the news that each individual sees on their Facebook wall is almost precisely tailored to fit their interests. This means that users essentially only see what they want to see, and share what they agree with—further influencing their followers' opinions on a news issue.

Where this can easily go wrong, however, is when individuals are inundated with information that only validates their current beliefs and views. Information that challenges an individual's viewpoint is necessary for growth and learning; without this, a Facebook user may come to believe that 'everyone' holds the same views as they do, since that may be all they see on their wall. Additionally, the algorithm that sorts through Facebook's news could easily spread misinformation if not checked properly. Facebook users tend to share news items that agree with their personal opinions and beliefs, meaning that news can travel quickly through groups of Facebook users, relying on their friends or friends of friends to continue spreading news that may or may not be factual.

Twitter as a platform is an excellent communicative device for news agencies (Figure 7), official organizations, and prominent figures. The quick and broad ways news and commentary about news can travel on Twitter is primarily influenced by who posts and who reads the original post. While news posted by an unverified account can reach



Figure 7

large audiences, a tweet by a verified account will typically reach more. The very rhetorical structure of verification of sources demands that the user trust the verified account—which can lead to consequences after sharing factual or fictional

information with the public. Figure 7 is from the Fox & Friends, an extension of Fox News, Twitter account. The tweet uses strong language to imply the Democratic Party's contempt and "trash-talking" towards the Republican Party, though the linked article itself does not fully support this implication. Since the tweet was posted by a news agency, viewers may automatically trust the tweet's statement without checking the facts. As a result, their views of the new leader of the Democratic National Committee may be influenced.

One aspect of Twitter that verifies the legitimacy of the account is the use of the checkmark encased in a blue cloud. This demarcation indicates that the account is actually the person or organization it claims to represent, meaning the account gains trust from viewers. This can lead to an accumulation of power held by a single person or organization—as their tweets carry more weight, and typically reach more followers, than an unverified account. Verified organizations on Twitter, like NASA, gain viewers and



Figure 8

followers from this status—making the spreading of mass information easier.

Celebrities and political figures also often have verified accounts, like Donald Trump, for instance. The example of Figure 8 is from Trump's personal Twitter account, with all tweets originating on March

20, 2017, in reverse chronological order. In all four tweets, Trump advises readers to be suspicious of news sources and spreads distrust in the political system. In the last tweet, Trump uses “Fake News” as an adjective describing CNN, a typically trusted news source. He then pits this news agency against Fox news, a typically right-leaning news source. Trump uses “Fake News” as a noun in his oldest tweet, stating that “everyone knows” a story is fake news. The tweet does not link to additional background knowledge informing the reader of the verification of Trump’s statements, relying on the verified status of his account to promote trust in his outreaching tweets.

No matter the truth or lack thereof behind Trump’s tweets, they all fared well among a public audience—garnering over sixty thousand ‘likes’ each time. This is despite the fact that Trump made no effort to add hashtags or mention usernames to gain a wider audience. The verification of the account and the celebrity nature of the OP mean these tweets already reach a wide enough audience and will be spread without additional effort by the OP.

While this idea relates directly to rhetorical audience, it is placed here because of its influence within its context. In this case, this tweet should not be removed from the context of questioning fact and fiction even though it is posted by a verified Twitter account. This speaks directly to trusting an account—which stems from ethos. It also speaks to exigence, purpose, and addressing a specific audience. All of these aspects of rhetoric interact and influence the context, which is particularly relevant for this example.

Rhetoric and Genre Coming Together

Figure 9 demonstrates all discussed aspects of rhetoric and genre conventions within social media. Understanding all of these interacting aspects is necessary for understanding the impact and influences these posts may have within the public view.

The various aspects of the tweet will be named in the order in which they appear in the thesis. This tweet demonstrates genre systems, the rhetor's position, writing for an audience, purpose, socio-political exigence, style as user-centered design, and fact versus fiction context.



Figure 9

Genre Sets and Systems: The OP, Caroline O., commented on a news article they posted from the online site vox.com. The inclusion of a link forms a genre set. This tweet uses Donald Trump's Twitter handle and acts as a call-out post against his own tweets calling CNN "fake news." The link and tagging Trump's Twitter account place this tweet within a genre system, along with Figure 8. This means that this tweet exists within a larger context than demonstrated by one tweet and news article. Figure 9 exists within all aspects of this political topic. This demonstrates the wide reach and varied make-up of genre systems.

Rhetor: The rhetor of this post is Caroline O., the owner of an unverified Twitter account. Other rhetors include the 35 users who shared the Tweet, the 574 users who retweeted the post, and the 1.2 thousand users who liked the post. An additional rhetor is the writer of the linked news article. This demonstrates the necessity of multiple rhetors in social media who advance the range of a post.

Audience: The original post garnered decent attention, meaning other people—not just those following the OP—found the tweet relevant and relatable. Figure 9 gained attention and broadened its audience due to publically mentioning a verified account. Additionally, though the OP is not verified, the tweet gained enough attention to be retweeted by a verified account—widening its audience beyond people searching through mentions. This demonstrates the ability of a post to reach a wide range of people.

Purpose: This tweet's purpose, and intended outcome, is to inform an audience about the vox.com article and to publically call out Donald Trump. This tweet references Trump's usage of "fake news" (Figure 8) to deflect attention, particularly around allegations of collusion with the Russian government. The purpose is socio-political in nature and the OP is clear on their views. This demonstrates purpose for posting this content and the intended outcomes.

Exigence: This post's exigence was most likely the writing of the vox.com article. The Tweet was crafted in order to share this article with a wider audience. The OP's understanding of the article determined their comment while publically mentioning Trump. Figure 9 demonstrates socio-political exigence as the topic is political in nature and appeals to the public.

Style: User-Centered Design: Showing user-centered design, Figure 9 uses a variation of tagging a user in a post. A tweet can be made public, instead of semi-private, by placing a period before the username, such as `.@username`; anyone on Twitter can see this reply (MacArthur, “Understanding Basic Twitter Lingo”). This tweet does not contain hashtags, which are designed to broaden the audience. This tweet can be considered successful, having gained 1.2 thousand ‘likes’ and 574 retweets. The use of `.@username` demonstrates the user-centered design of Twitter, as does the user-interaction of ‘likes’ and retweets.

Context: Fact or Fiction?: This Tweet forms a prime example of the spreading of fact and fiction through social media. Trump’s account is verified, which adds weight and trust to his post. The OP of Figure 9 is unverified, but the post was retweeted by at least one verified account. Figure 9 and Figure 8 directly contradict each other—though both could be assumed true due to Twitter’s conventions. Figure 8 calls news agencies to question by labelling them “fake news,” a diversionary tactic to reduce trust in the media. On the other hand, Figure 9 links their argument to a news article—citing their sources. Both examples have verification, or truth, within them, but both cannot be right. So which is truthful versus which *seems* truthful? The platform itself does not answer this question, leaving fact-checking to the user and audience. This is a prime example of typical fact versus fiction posts, leaving users to question what is real versus what they want to believe.

These six components of rhetoric interact within a genre system. This demonstrates the conjoined aspect of rhetoric and genre within social media. The components of rhetoric are undeniably intertwined with the genre, meaning that every

example of a social media post may be examined in this way. All components of rhetoric and genre are necessary for a successful social media post, as demonstrated in Figure 9.

Conclusion

This thesis asked and answered questions about Facebook and Twitter, comparing and contrasting them within the realm of social media. This thesis discussed how Facebook and Twitter have affected genre conventions of social media, their impact on written language, their role in written communication and user-interaction, the adaptability of their user-centered design, and what elements were necessary for Facebook and Twitter to succeed.

These questions were answered by first discussing the history of Facebook and Twitter as social media platforms. This was done to understand how Facebook and Twitter were formed, how they evolved, and to show their potential path in the future. Then, genre and genre conventions were explored to explain where Facebook and Twitter belong and how they are situated within written communication. Genre received a separate consideration due to the many aspects of genre and genre interaction in relation to social media.

The largest section of this thesis dealt with the various aspects of rhetoric as they relate to social media. Facebook and Twitter's rhetoric was addressed by exploring the rhetor, audience, purpose, exigence, style, and context of various Facebook and Twitter posts. Many of the aspects of rhetoric are fluid and interconnected, but were separated for clearer understanding. Furthermore, the majority of the examples offered were also

applicable to sections they were not ultimately included in. This is because rhetoric is comprised of all of the aspects discussed, and cannot be separated completely.

This thesis focused only on Facebook and Twitter, pointing to a need for further exploration of various social media platforms. The thesis was written as both a literature review—focused on the academic aspects of studying rhetoric and genre—as well as an example analysis—focused on various aspects of Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook and Twitter have had definite and significant impacts on all aspects of genre and rhetoric discussed within this thesis. These two social media platforms demonstrate persistence of successful social media, indicated by their longevity and adaptability. These markers are what make Facebook and Twitter the platforms they are and what allow them to continue to be relevant. Social media platforms belong firmly within the field of written communication, as demonstrated by Facebook's and Twitter's genre and rhetorical features.

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