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Education for Democracy in the Social Media Century

Ryan T. Knowles*[a], Steven Camicia[a] & Lorissa Nelson[a]

* Corresponding author
Email: Ryan.Knowles@usu.edu

a. Utah State University, USA

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ABSTRACT

Social media has provided challenges and opportunities for education for democracy. There have always been structural elements of communication that are hidden and perpetuate inequalities. Social media has accelerated and empowered these hidden structures through algorithms. In this argumentative essay, we examine how critical media literacy can uncover hidden power structures and support education for democracy. Critical media literacy can help students identify exclusionary, inaccurate, missing, and polarizing elements of social media while examining and discussing issues and events. Seen through this lens, social media provides opportunities for education for democracy. Critical media literacy and education for democracy provide opportunities for increasing civic engagement and renewal.

KEYWORDS
Social media; democracy; civic education; critical media literacy

INTRODUCTION

Move fast and break things. Unless you are breaking stuff, you are not moving fast enough.
Mark Zuckerberg

Breaking News – Breaking Through – Breaking Bad – Breaking Point? Technological innovations are moving at a breakneck speed, bringing with them social connectivity like we have never seen before. These advances have changed the very foundations of our communications, our politics, and even our civil society. Because of this, young people are increasingly engaging in civic life online and, while beneficial, this open access comes with heightened challenges to both their personal relationships and, more generally, to democracy itself.

Students need to develop opinions, share those opinions with others, and have opportunities for dissent with their peers and with their teachers. These essential components of *education for democracy* allow students to participate in meaningful conversations on the more salient issues of our times (Camicia & Knowles, 2021). Among other things, it gives students a chance to discuss how power relations can distort discourse from the way inquiries are presented, to the verbal volley of a discussion, and even to their recollection of these discussions. This imbalance often reflects and confirms biases including those about race and gender. The meteoric rise in use of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and Snapchat has opened up a powerful avenue to deliver a barrage of political messaging to young people without these discussions of power imbalances - without the recognition of biases. In our era of connectivity, students' everyday lives include discussions about politics and political ideology. Young people today have to make political decisions on a daily basis. Should they repost that meme with the questionable political messages? Should they maintain online friendships with friends and relatives who post content with views contrary to theirs? These are the decisions that previous generations were only faced with on occasion, yet most youth today are bombarded throughout their day as they check their multiple mobile devices. How does the ever-present task of political and social decision-making impact their well-being?

We are not suggesting that social and political messaging of previous eras was less serious, less polarizing, or easier to cope with. We do not discount or minimize the bombardment of ads on TV, newspaper, radio, and other community outlets. However, there are striking differences within social media that run deeper than just how often these ads are seen or how lethal the issue might be. The charm of social media is that it is social, meaning that the average person can interact by uploading their original content and connect with a wider circle of people who like the same stuff. Less charming, however, is the inherent manipulation of content exposure that social media companies employ in order to make those like-minded connections: specifically, we are talking about algorithms. Algorithms are problem-solving operations that follow a step-by-step set of rules; in the case of social media algorithms, these steps connect users to content they will probably like by curating their exposure to new content based on their previous clicks. The election cycle of 2010 and 2012 provides a simple yet

powerful example of the influence of a social media algorithm. Facebook users had the option to indicate whether they had voted. Facebook then randomly displayed and *I Voted* post to one group but nothing to the control group (Sunstein, 2017). This social pressure of simply seeing that an online friend had voted increased the likelihood of voting, resulting in an estimated increase of 340,000 actual votes. Using linguistics identification software, Facebook also identified user posts with positive and negative tones (O'Neal, 2016). The company was able to influence the tones of user posts by sending either more positive or negative updates to their feed, as expected users seeing more positive posts tended to post more positive updates themselves while negativity followed seeing more negative updates. Facebook successfully showed that manipulating their algorithm could impact a user's emotional state.

Teachers working toward education for democracy are seeking a model to teach critical media literacy that is based on academic scholarship. Critical media literacy is often defined as a response to the shifting forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies that focus on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation (Goering & Thomas, 2018; Kellner & Snare, 2007). As we incorporate more technology into our everyday lives, scholars such as Stoddard (2014) argue that we should also include media education as an integral part of teacher preparation, curriculum and standards, and academic research. This inclusion can become a transformative pedagogy that opens up classrooms to challenge the shifting winds of society and explore misconceptions about biases and neutrality (Funk, Kellner, & Share, 2016). Race, class, gender, and identity are projected through the lens of both the media and the individual user. Students need to understand how to negotiate these meanings and process competing narratives in this ever-shifting landscape of social media and civic involvement.

The sections below review relevant literature to identify the challenges and opportunities provided by social media. Instead of vilifying or glorifying social media, we argue that educators must help students navigate the complexities of online platforms. Subsequently, we provide a framework for how critical media literacy can be utilized to promote digital citizenship in the classroom. We accomplish this by building on Choi's (2016) framework of ethics, media and information literacy, participation/engagement, and critical resistance.

Challenges

Social media is a fast and furious way to spread information to as many people as are willing to see it, regardless of its validity or reliability (Jaeger, 2021). In this revolutionary new arena, youth civic engagement is challenging because the process favors the flashy headlines, not the dull truth. In Schradie's (2019) powerful study titled *The Revolution that wasn't: How digital Activism Favors the Conservatives* we can see how efficient some alt-right conservative groups have become at exploiting the fears of their followers to promote ultra-conservative ideologies. Under the banner of digital activism, they created a vast new informational ecosystem that provides an online platform to groups that have typically remained outside the mainstream media. In 2022 the Pew Research Center released a study exploring the most popular alternative

social media sites including Parlor, Rumble, Telegram, and Truth Social (Stocking et al., 2022). The study found that approximately 6% of Americans regularly use sites like these as their source of news. While this is a small percentage of our population, the base is loyal. These new platforms have become a haven for users who either feel unwelcome or have been banned outright from more established social media platforms. Over a third of users report contributing money to their causes. Top user accounts often promote pro-Trump, pro-American, and religious themes, and often use language associated with conspiracy theories. Many users report freedom of speech as the reason they prefer alternative platforms and they are broadly opposed to censorship-even when that news is false or offensive. Furthermore, about 52% report seeing news they would not have seen on mainstream outlets. The understanding that posts on these platforms could be false does not dissuade users from supporting and reposting this novel information. In a society where the discursive terrain can shift dramatically, education for democracy requires educators to be responsive to new developments like alternative social media platforms in order to guide students in critically consuming that discourse.

In theory, a society with access to a platform where anyone can share their views has the potential to strengthen democracy. However, we have seen the repercussions of what happens when people with inherently anti-democratic agendas exploit that platform. By its very nature, social media is available to both these groups. And because of that, within minutes students can find content that depicts their world in dramatically different ways. For example, students may be inclined to trust information that comes from a seemingly reputable source. However, groups like Prager University (PragerU), which is not an accredited academic institution (Georgetown University Factsheet, 2020), feign credibility with misleading titles and credentials to imply that their messaging carries some academic legitimacy – it does not. Instead of granting credentials and degrees, PragerU creates short videos to be shared online. Many of these videos carry anti-Muslim rhetoric and promote conspiracy theories. For example, their videos claim that President Kennedy would be a Republican today; the Democratic Party fought against civil rights while supporting the confederacy and the Klu Klux Klan; and the Republican Party freed the slaves. This reshaping of our country's historic narrative ignores the realignment of political party ideology that has occurred over the last hundred years. Basically, political parties change their platforms over time and power relations shift as well, so the names of our political parties are less important than how their values align with their historical counterparts. This is a well-known phenomenon taught in most secondary social studies classes. However, with over 3 billion views, PragerU content creators do not consider, nor do they present, those basic facts, rather they omit salient context to provide powerful yet misleading information for contemporary political gain. The intent of this channel is to promote loyalty to the Republican Party through content that seems innocuous but often contains conspiracy theory language, and ignores the news cycle to focus on divisive content aimed at swaying the young swing voter toward the right. Context matters. Authorship matters. When students are exposed to political information on social media, it is important that they understand the motivation behind that

content production. Who is benefiting from their viewership? It is important for educators to help students ask the important questions for themselves.

Algorithms make money for advertisers and for content creators. They do this by funneling viewers to content which is related to their previous likes, clicks, and visits. Companies buy more ad space on content with more activity, so content creators are incentivized to create something that attracts those views. As viewers, we pay with our time. We watch the ads and enjoy the content that speaks to us. The more content that speaks to us, the more of our viewing time social media gets. Through this funneling process, viewers begin to see so much content that aligns with their worldview that it builds a false sense of one-sidedness; they believe that their worldview is the only reasonable one. For example, viewers trust that the results of a Google search will yield an unbiased cache of objective information. However, in *Algorithms of Oppression*, Noble (2018) demonstrates how problematic narratives such as racism can be reinforced when algorithms create a narrow view of reality for users. For example, Noble points out that a simple Google search for “black girls'' brings up results that reify sexually explicit stereotypes.

Clearly, content of nefarious intent is attractive to many users, but an equally problematic issue is that of algorithms exposing users to an ideological echo chamber. Sunstein’s (2017) *#Repbulic: Divided Democracy in the age of Social Media* shows how sites like YouTube and Facebook harvest personal preferences such as political convictions. They then categorize users into political groups and share this information with other social media companies and even provide it to political candidates. Based on your clicks and time spent on viewing political posts, your news feed suggests material designed to engage you even further. This increases your viewing time and therefore increases their ad revenue. Sadly, Baksh and colleagues (2015) found that Facebook users tend to avoid engaging with content from their online friends when it differs from their ideological views. Here we can see that users will come back time and time again if the platform gives them what they want, unfortunately too often what users want is to hear and see themselves reflected in online content and they prefer not to be challenged with ideas unlike their own. This leaves individuals without the exposure to the diversity of others’ perspectives and leaves no room for generating real civic understanding.

Is the other side as extreme as we think? Well, what we think depends largely on where we get our online news. An individual’s perception of those with differing political perspectives is greatly influenced by the sources they consume. Since news sources reside in a unique discursive plane, the framing and tone of narratives and counternarrative can lead their viewers to have wide gaps in their perception of the other. In their study, Yudkin et al. (2019) calculated the *perception gap* between how radical each side, Republican and Democrat, perceived the other to be. They found that exposure to certain media sites correlated with respondents believing the other side to be more radical than they actually are. Sources such as Breitbart, Drudge Report, Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Slate, Huffington Post, New York Times, Washington Post, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or Fox News were among the news

sources whose viewers reported higher perception gaps when compared to people who do not get their news from these platforms. Put simply, across the political spectrum the news source we consume has a direct relationship on how radical we believe the other side to be.

Social media's ability to create echo chambers where extremist positions are fomented has one very dangerous reciprocating effect: the easy dismissal of anything not aligned with your preconceived ideas as *fake news* or *alternative facts*. Working in concert, an algorithm that only shows you content aligned with your worldview and the encouragement from that content to consider opposing ideas as *fake* or *alternative*, grows an ecosystem where extremism flourishes. According to Thomas (2018), mainstream media has played a role in extremism by the frequent use of two corrupting norms. First, journalists do not acknowledge their own biases, rather they portray a façade of objectivity and neutrality. Secondly, coverage of debates, events, and even panels are frequently framed as including "both sides''. When presented as dualistic and not multifaceted, individuals find themselves needing to choose a side. This false constraint of neutrality and binary constructions limit an individual's ability to consider the full spectrum of perspectives.

Communities in a democracy suffer when voices and perspectives are excluded through this binary structure because communities are constrained by a limited number of perspectives. Funk et al. (2016) posit that popular media's way of presenting these corrupting norms actually serves to reinforce preset ideologies and reify the power of the dominant group. For example, a debate about climate change that considers "both sides" might discuss the existence of scientific data, while ignoring the consensus of worldwide scientific research. A more productive and nuanced debate could take the "What should be done to care for our planet?" approach. With the second approach viewers and participants are encouraged to consider a wide range of positions instead of being faced with a false binary. Consider how a non-binary approach could change the conversation on gun control. Media outlets often present an extreme false dualistic ultimatum when it comes to the second amendment: let everyone have any gun they want or repeal all gun rights for everyone. Of course, there is a wide range of possibilities that exist in the in-between. Often referred to by politicians as *common-sense gun laws*, these less click-able discussions allow civic discourse to take place while the more engaging 'choose a side' debates paralyze viewers from more deeply understanding the nuances of an issue.

Opportunities

Considering the stated challenges, the popular criticism of social media is understandable. However, this same venue provides never-before imagined opportunities for meaningful civic engagement. In fact, political scientists have shown correlations between participating online and political engagement in general, specifically in the online worlds of participatory culture, political consumerism, and civic engagement (Kann, Berry, Gant, & Zager, 2011). There are clear opportunities for educators and students to use social media in productive ways. Young people are increasingly participating in civic discourse by displaying campaign materials, learning about and engaging in protests, contacting or working for a candidate, boycotting, and even donating

money (Dalton, 2008; 2016). The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE, 2019) found that during the 2018 election cycle, 42 states had increased in political turnout by the youth and in 31 of these states, that increase was in the double digits when compared to the previous midterm election. This shows that students are civic minded and when given the opportunity will participate in politics. Educators may consider that, given these findings, we may best help our students by shifting our classroom mindset from "How can I encourage my students to engage civically?" to something that reflects their current participation level, something like "How can I rethink my lessons to support my students' ongoing civic engagement?" It is clear, social media has become a new arena for young people to navigate their social and political world.

We have seen in recent years how social media can be a powerful tool for mobilizing large groups of people in political movements that are important to them. Kann and colleagues (2011) posit that social media provides access to participation in these movements with a low threshold for civic engagement. This heightened engagement on both sides has the potential to affect the foundation of national policies and politics. For example, the Black Girls' Literacies Collective created social media content showing authentic black girlhood to build counternarratives that challenge racist, sexist, and classist media narratives, (McArthur, 2016). Hashtag movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #Concernedstudent1950, #MeToo, and #NoDAPL provides scaffolded levels of participation for social media users – from tagging a post or applying a temporary profile filter to joining a march or other event. Beyond individual participation, online forums provide students with access to civic discourse, students can discuss, deliberate, and act in solidarity with movements they support.

As educators we cannot be experts on the evolving landscape of social movements, but this kind of online civic engagement does not require us to be that. By curating a culture of critical civic engagement in our classrooms, we can support our students as they take advantage of the opportunities that interest them.

Critical Media Literacy through Digital Citizenship in the Classroom

In the wake of recent elections, the global pandemic, and social justice movements, the salience of media literacy-especially social media literacy-is undeniable. Educators who want to promote democratic education in the classroom must provide these opportunities as a part of the curriculum in order for their students to develop an understanding of how to best engage in online civic discourse. This has resulted in a proliferation of resources like books, articles, and shareable lesson plans aimed at supporting teachers as they navigate the politically charged issues of "fake news" and "alternative facts" in our politically charged environment. In preparing for writing this, we took a deep dive into these sources and synthesized a few suggestions for in-classroom practices. Many of these resources have adopted the four-criteria structure put forth by Choi (2016) that includes focusing on ethics, media and information literacy, participation and engagement, and finally critical literacy. By organizing classroom practices into these four criteria, educators who are teaching toward education for democracy can help

students explore the multifaceted, complex world of online civic engagement. As to be expected, these criteria will most likely not be taught in isolation; it is up to the educator to consider, perhaps even guide students in considering, which of them are most applicable to the activity at hand. This can encourage students to understand these skills as tools to be used as they engage in civic discourse and social media.

In addition to the criteria listed below, a variety of tools and suggestions for teachers can be found in two key books: *Unpacking Fake News: An educator's guide to navigating the media with students* (Journell, 2019) and *Critical Media Literacy and Fake news in Post-Truth America* (Goering & Thomas, 2018). These resources provide a more in-depth look into online civic engagement than can be included in this article. Educators who are interested in developing a better understanding of critical media literacy and online civic engagement would benefit from the suggestions in these sources.

Ethics

Beginning with a discussion about the ethics of social media can be an effective way to engage students. Choi's model focuses initial discussions by highlighting how social media users can responsibly engage with others online by first considering what is appropriate, safe, and ethical. Of course, the discussion itself hinges on evaluating sources and evidence, however this must be done through the lens of the inherent bias of the media platforms themselves. An example pointed out by Addison (2018) is how social media includes an array of commodified platforms. These sites exist to generate profit. Some sites hide their agenda while others advertise it as their mission. Generating income through social media sites is not inherently bad, these funds often further a social cause or create job opportunities. On the other hand, sites may be using nefarious or divisive content as a way to generate income, regardless of negative social impact. The goal for educating for democracy is to help students critically examine how that commerce impacts the civic discourse and social justice on each platform. Education for democracy includes an examination of the mechanisms of communication that influence what perspectives are included and what perspectives are excluded. We are not suggesting that issues be restricted, rather we advocate for teaching how to recognize what voices are being marginalized so students can increase the inclusion in the discourse. To foster this inclusion, the commercial intentions of online platforms should be an essential part of our inquiry, discussion, and debates. Helping students ask questions like "How do the financial goals of the platform intentionally or unintentionally exclude counternarratives?" or "What kinds of topics are included and excluded based on this platform's earning potential?" or "Who benefits most from the architecture of the platform?" and "How is this platform's ability to affect social justice influenced by their financial needs?"

Because identifying truth and facts in online discourse is much harder than we believe it to be, Hicks and Turner (2018) suggest discussing various types of evidence with students: scientific law, statistical data, expert opinion or opinion of noteworthy people, and anecdotal evidence from a person's lived experience. Including lived experiences connects well to

education for democracy through the counternarratives that challenge arguments that may be inaccurate or unjust. Examining different types of evidence not only gives ample material for students to discuss but it can increase recognition of marginalized voices and support critical inclusion. This ethical dimension focuses upon inclusion and social justice by expanding recognition of marginalized perspectives.

Analyzing evidence from online content such as videos, memes, reels, infographics, and clickbait headlines can create a tangible way for students to engage in relatable conversations. However, these conversations should include a focus on the common pitfalls of each type of evidence. For example, it is common to see scientific or statistical data used to *prove* a stance. It makes sense that these data sets are carefully selected–dare we say cherry picked–to support that position. While researchers and statisticians would rarely claim that their work proves something, that does not stop the media and online users from using language that suggests the definitive answer lies within. Students should be exposed to ways in which statistics can be presented and manipulated to support a variety of opposing claims. A recommended next step could be to evaluate the substance and counter evidence, keeping in mind the limitations of each source of evidence. Hicks and Turner (2018) suggest the MINDFUL framework for readers and writers in social media. Students are encouraged to **M**onitor what they read and write, **I**dentify the claim(s), **N**ote the evidence, **D**etermine the framework and mindset, **F**ocus on the facts, **U**nderstand the counterargument, and **L**everage their response.

Some other ways of discussing ethics in the classroom include using visuals such as graphic organizers and storyboards to map an underlying narrative. Students would produce a series of visuals that focus on the emotional context of the author's message within online discourse and content. Through this process, students develop a more objective mindset as they unpack the perspectives, motives and even biases of the content creators. Moving from identifying a simple narrative, Armendarez (2018) suggests presenting a series of common narratives used by a variety of media sources such as the American hero, the American family, true love, science and technology, coming of age, crime and the trial, success and prosperity, human quality, and diversity. As students practice identifying elements of these narratives, they learn to understand the motives behind their usage. This deeper understanding helps students build the necessary background knowledge needed to make better sense of the information they encounter in the media.

Media and Information Literacy

As digital citizenship, critical media literacy, and online civic education appear more frequently on the educational radar, it can be tempting for educators to overlook the real gap in access to technology for many of our students. Most educators interested in these topics are social media users with decent access to some of the latest technology. It can be easy to overlook the reality that many students today still do not have reliable internet at home, do not have a smartphone, or perhaps have limited data plans. If educators want to provide learning about the online environment, the exposure to that environment needs to happen in class. This narrows the

digital gap that so often is present along racial and class divisions and reduces the exclusion of students with restricted internet access (Choi, 2016; Shelley, et. al., 2004). By providing this shared experience in class, more students will be able to fully participate in classroom discussions on the topic, practice social media literacy skills, and engage in civic and political life online.

More than just providing all students with the same baseline for discussion topics, teachers should consider how the lack of access may impact students' online skills and awareness. Outside of class, both lack of access and lack of interest can limit what students are exposed to online, thereby limiting their awareness and their ability to process multiple perspectives. Within the classroom climate, teachers should help students evaluate content from a variety of sources. For example, teachers could share coverage of a news story from a few different sources (McGrew et. al., 2018), like CNN, Fox News, and NPR. Careful to avoid presenting a false binary, teachers should present multidimensional views, arguments and counterarguments, and narratives that have rich potential for civic discourse. Reviewing the homepage of each source can provide valuable clues that help students identify biases and motivations. Purposeful instruction can empower marginalized communities when it acknowledges these digital access gaps. Addressing the reasons for and consequences of these gaps affords students the opportunity to consider inclusive and exclusive discourses in democratic communities.

Promoting students' media literacy involves education that includes contextualizing information in a relevant, useful, and powerful manner. Teachers would be wise to put aside their personal preferences and instead open up opportunities in the classroom for students to explore and critically evaluate materials that are already in their orbit or are useful to them. Most students have an abundance of experiences that can serve as a base for exploration. In fact, Lewis (2018) recommends starting with students' offline lived experiences as a base for telling powerful stories about their school, neighborhoods, or teams/clubs. Armed with this narrative, students can use existing online resources to enhance their expression and share their stories. This model builds on the assumption that students already are engaged in civic and political activities and turns the classroom into a support center for their pre-existing activities.

Participation/Engagement

Today's youth are already political actors and social media can be an effective place for them to develop their civic participation. However, not all online civic engagement is created equal. Terms like "slacktivism" (McClennen, 2018) have developed to describe token online gestures of political participation that are perceived as ineffective or passive – like reposting and article, temporary profile filters, or posting a one-time show of support for flavor-of-the-day global concern: #SuperficiallyConcerned. However, a one-time act of support does not feel superficial if it is directed at local issues or individuals. Simple acts like 'liking' a friend's post can feel very connecting and supportive to the receiver. These acts of support can help users find like-minded peers, understand complex issues, and even challenge their previously held beliefs when the

conflicting beliefs are held by a valued friend. Simply put, engaging in social media discourse can help students understand issues in a deeper way when they seek to understand those in their social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Civic engagement in young people typically manifests in four main ways (Choi, 2016): political engagement associated with voting and opinion polling; education on economics that teaches how to be careful consumers; social community building such as gaming, entertainment, or special interest clubs; and personal empowerment engagement including acts of leadership or ownership. These four themes of participation and engagement take into consideration that the online environment is actually a community within itself wherein students will naturally orient themselves into interest-based groups. With so many nuances to what draws a student to one of these communities, it is unreasonable to think that teachers could predict how students will align themselves. Instead, teachers should support students' learning by finding ways to help them engage in both their natural interest groups and even some outside of their comfort zone.

The *share* is one of the most straightforward ways users can engage in online civic activity. Users simply see something they like and with the click of a button it appears on their feed so their circle of friends can see it too. As we discussed previously, the social media algorithms track everything online, including shares. Once again we find ourselves needing to critically consider the impact each online act, in this case a *share*, will have on what else we see on our feed. To help prepare students to make better informed decisions about what they share, Endecott and colleagues (2018) provide students with a framework to consider before deciding to share posts. The simple formula is Belief + Truth = Knowledge. This is based on the idea that you can never really know if something is false. On social media, it's easy to conflate belief with knowledge. However, the facts that we personally are aware of are most likely to omit some context and/or power relations, so things get complicated. Instead of focusing on absolute truths, students should concentrate on credibility. By seeking out a broader understanding of topics, students can better assess truth. Websites such as snopes.com and other online fact checkers can add important context and help verify the validity of the claims. Also, students might look to experts in that field and/or influential people to see if they believe the information to be true. Now that they've established the validity of their information, students can apply the steps of the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) framework which are to develop compelling questions, apply disciplinary concepts and tools, evaluate sources using evidence, and to communicate questions and take informed action. As with any new skill, going through these steps will take time at first but become more automatic with practice. The benefit students get from putting distance between that initial impulse to share and the actual act is a broader perspective on the topic and a better alignment with their own beliefs.

Critical Resistance

Critiquing the existing power structure by questioning inequality, power, organization, and ideology is the focus of online civic engagement for critical resistance (Choi, 2016; Coleman,

2006). This perspective recognizes that social media platforms are not neutral spaces for users to participate in civic life. Rather, as we mention in the introduction, companies like Meta (parent company for Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, and even Google rely on algorithms that curate a unique experience for what each user sees on their feed. Even subtle changes in these algorithms have been shown to influence a person's mood and how they feel about certain issues (Bucher, 2017). Schradie (2019) points out that special interest monies often co-opt services on social media platforms and use that influence to push their preferred agenda. Additionally, Addison (2018) explains how social media platforms are first and foremost a business. The entertainment and civic discourse within are a means to an end, specifically that 'end' is profit. However, these online spaces are woven into the fabric of our everyday lives; they have a great impact on a person's mood and perspective and have become a primary means for society to pass on values and behaviors that align with neoliberal institutional structure. As a result, active citizens must demand that their push for profit be tempered by an even greater desire for democracy. With the recent addition of paid subscribers to Meta's platforms, it remains to be seen how this further commodification of an open source will impact its users and the civic discourse within. When considered through the filter of historical media manipulation, Woodson, King, and Kim (2019) draw comparisons between how social media is currently being used to control and coerce to how mainstream media treated African and African-descended people during the emancipation proclamation, as well as to the Red Scare in the 1950's, and even the Black Lives Matter movement. In these cases, the media used its reach to reify racial codes and to discredit Black intellectuals and activists. Furthermore, their research supports that even today social media continues to allow their platforms to be used to demean and discredit people of color in their struggle for recognition. Their analysis shows purposeful media disruptions and fake news, while not new, have the potential to be amplified on these far-reaching social media platforms.

Understanding misinformation and the motivation behind its production is a main focus of critical resistance. Rather than focusing on finding credible sources, critical resistance seeks to pull the curtain back on fake news and examine how and why it is successful. Segall and colleagues (2019) provide example discussions on topics for students including internet privacy, Brown vs. Board of Education, immigration, as well as a few more abstract examples of misinformation. In this discourse, the researchers noted that the participants employed a notable degree of motivated reasoning and confirmation bias employed as mechanisms to defend and reaffirm previously held beliefs. For example, during these discussions students often defended their original perspective using misinformation, while challenging verified evidence and classifying it as fake news. Likewise, Journell and Clark (2019) found the same pattern of behavior in their analysis of political memes. These memes, they argue, are a near-perfect vehicle for perpetuating our preexisting opinions. Memes are images, usually something eye-catching, that are reproduced by users but with a new caption with the intent to make us feel or think something. Because users see these images so often, they feel familiar.

Unfortunately, this familiarity gives users a false sense of truthfulness, students believe that because they see something often it must be true. So, a familiar image that carries a bias-confirming message is going to feel very comfortable to the student and is more likely to be accepted into their schema confirming their perspective. Funk and colleagues (2016) offer more direction to students by providing a list of questions to help evaluate sources. In the list of questions below we can see many of the same components as those suggested under the Ethics heading. However, the last three questions differ in that they focus specifically on the struggles for a seat at the table of power and privilege which is typically only open to the dominant power group.

- Who are all the possible people who made choices that helped create this text?
- How was this text constructed and delivered/accessed?
- How could this text be understood differently?
- What values, points of view, and ideologies are represented or missing from this text or influenced by this medium?
- Why was this text created and/or shared?
- Who does this text advantage and/or disadvantage?

It can be a tricky lesson, but an expert teacher could help their students understand how misinformation can be used by a variety of people to push a variety of agendas. Teaching how online content, such as political memes, are created and shared helps students see misinformation as part of the human condition rather than labeling it as a one-sided endeavor (Segall et al., 2019). The goal of this endeavor might be best focused on how misinformation targets already marginalized communities. One way to help students feel this lesson is to incorporate ethnographies and counternarratives which take students along on the journey of working-class people as they produce knowledge and literacies. An examination of the ways that people and perspectives are marginalized by society and media can help students better understand and create a more equitable social media landscape. Morrell and colleagues (2013) suggest a few classroom activities that support literacy and highlight the voices of marginalized communities. For example, one classroom teacher used several novels that explore the urban experience of Black and Latino people in America. Students then compared these stories with the narratives that mass media depicts. This exercise helps students critique the social forces of the dominant narrative and gives them the opportunity to study resistance to oppression and neocolonialism.

CONCLUSİON

Social media has great potential. It can serve as a low-threshold resource that provides a robust platform for civic engagement and discourse. But this is all new. The field is still developing so as a society we are still working out the opportunities and challenges. We are approaching 25 years since Facebook first came out and in that time it has yet to be determined if social media will act as a support to democratic social movements or if it will simply further entrenched

ideological divides that support systematic oppression to a new generation. Because of this, any model of education for democracy must include, and must be adaptable to, the changes in technology, social media, and other innovative forms of civic engagement. Simply put, educators must play a role in helping future generations adapt to the complexities of the day's civic engagement to promote democracy.

This essay hopes to frame social media as a medium for civic engagement. The major limitation of this article is that social media is dynamic. Therefore, scholars should continue to develop these ideas within the ever-shifting landscape. A major implication for practice is that teachers do not necessarily have to have superior working knowledge of social media in comparison to their students. Indeed, this will be difficult. Instead, teachers can work with students to learn new platforms, develop their understanding, and navigate the challenges and opportunities with students.

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