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WRIT 2500

Project 2 Part D

For our community campaign, Trisha and I developed a Twitter page called "DU Have An Opinion." We formulated this campaign for students and faculty within the DU community to engage with controversial topics that gain attention on campus. Due to the fact that the DU community is made up of students with varying backgrounds, countries, cultures, races, genders, and religions, we wanted a topic that could be engaged with from many different viewpoints and perspectives. We chose to focus this particular campaign on the immigration ban, because it is timely, controversial, and pertinent to students within the DU community. In each step of our campaign, from coming up with the idea, to planning, and finalizing of our project, we were inspired by events in the DU community and specifically by our classroom readings and discussions. We envisioned our Twitter page as an online community that would allow students and faculty to become informed, express their opinions, and question current events that have significance within the DU community and beyond.

Although it is impossible to predict the future of writing or know what new medium will sweep the market next, the affordances of Twitter distinguish it and make it unique to other mediums. On Snapchat, personal messages disappear once you open them and after 24-hours for a Snapchat Story. This makes it difficult to look at archived information from friends or to build a user identity with a profile. Instagram uses primarily photos and videos, so it has limited potential. Facebook has the ability to use multiple different forms of media, but can become congested with the volume and length of posts. Twitter maintains a balance between serious news, lighthearted memes and gifs, and commentary from a primarily youthful audience. In

addition to these affordances, Twitter's character limit allows it to fit a society that values brevity and real-time information.

We selected Twitter to be our campaign medium because of its diverse affordances. On Twitter, users can post anything that fits into the 140-character limit. It is possible to publicize personal thoughts or provide links to external media (Instagram, YouTube, News outlets, etc.), which allows for the flexibility to offer many different perspectives and opinions. In the "Antislavery, Civil Rights, and Incendiary Material" article, Thomas C. Leonard references a scrapbook, *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, written in 1839 that "changed the context so that the news could be read another way" (120). By reframing news sources, pictures, videos, and perspectives from the DU community and putting them together in a string of discourse on our Twitter page, we hoped to allow audiences to read various sources and evaluate them in a new context. Although tweets cannot be physically burned, they could be considered "incendiary material" because similarly to anti-slavery publications, tweets "illuminate the complex ways that texts are read when social relationships are renegotiated" (115). In addition, the atmosphere is fast-paced and tweets can be posted in real-time. Our Twitter page is meant to spotlight divisive topics through the lens of students and faculty, allowing for people to consider these texts as complicated issues with multiple meanings. Our goal is not to offer reinforcements for a single ideology or to push a political agenda, but rather, to offer a variety of facts and viewpoints, and encourage audiences to reach their own conclusions.

Throughout the course of our campaign, we tweeted thirty-six different times. The "Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin" article mentions, "Twitter moves at an extremely rapid pace with hundreds of thousands of tweets being posted every minute. With many users tweeting

simultaneously, there is always activity in the timeline, making the overall pace of the competition move quite quickly" (233). Because it is a fast-paced and highly saturated medium, we decided to tweet multiple times and use a variety of mediums for each tweet because our audience would have a higher likelihood of seeing at least one of our campaign tweets. As mentioned in the "Black Lives Matter – Epistemic Positioning, Challenges and Possibility" article, social media has more "speed and variety of responses" than traditional media (81). With each post, we tried to include variety to make tweets visually appealing and interesting. Rather than using text alone, we included tweets with text, hashtags, pictures, gifs, memes, links to Youtube videos, and polls.

We found Twitter to be an incredibly effective choice for this campaign because it includes the ability to post multiple forms of media and it is an inherently conversational medium. We used a hashtag to unify many of our tweets (#DUHaveAnOpinion). We included this hashtag in all of our tweets, character limit permitting. Using a hashtag is effective because it allows us to link our tweets back to our main account. In doing this, there is a higher likelihood of gaining higher visibility for a greater number of our tweets. If a user was to stumble across just one tweet with our hashtag, they would have the possibility of encountering our account and all of our tweets. Using a hashtag also creates a higher likelihood that tweets could be seen by a larger audience. In the "Black Lives Matter – Epistemic Positioning, Challenges, and Possibilities" article, the hashtag "#BlackLivesMatter" is exemplified as a rhetorical tool. When people engage in action under the banner of the hashtag, "people agitate in their local communities for social and political change" (80). The hashtag is used to influence people to join a particular side of an issue and can be incredibly persuasive by encouraging people to speak up or take action. Hashtags can trend on Twitter, linking to a large group of people who use the

same hashtag. When a hashtag shows up on Twitter's "trending" page, it can gain popularity and as a result, power of persuasion. This can be duplicated on a smaller scale when multiple people within an isolated community engage with a hashtag and their friends or users within their community see them posting under the same conversation topic. In addition, the majority of Twitter accounts are public, meaning that tweets on these accounts can be linked by hashtag, retweeted, responded to, and "quote tweeted," which increases their circulation to larger audiences. The "Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin" article points out that "Retweeting also accommodates the kinds of comments and interjections that are central to the audience's participation" and explains that audience members show their approval of tweets by retweeting them and by adding their own commentary (233). The topics featured on our Twitter page have importance in the DU community, but they are also significant to the community at large. Using hashtags, retweeting, and commenting, DU students, faculty, and community members can engage with our Twitter page.

Because of the possibilities for interaction and circulation, we decided not to make our campaign specific to a single topic. Instead, we picked a name, "DU Have An Opinion" that can extend to any and all topics that have importance within the DU community. Keeping our campaign open-ended allows it to be flexible and shift with the interests and engagement of the DU community. As Anderson refers to as an "imagined community," our Twitter page transcends face-to-face communication. Imagined communities "created unified fields of exchange and communication" (44) while separating people physically to allow them to share opinions, questions, and comments in a safe and respectful community. Instead of personal attacks and dominating opinions from a few individuals, the screen offers a separation between people and offers a buffer for communication. This allows marginalized groups to have a voice

and an equal opportunity to communicate their thoughts and opinions. However, we recognize that because we created this account under the University of Denver's name, the primary followers or interested parties would be people who have a connection to DU. Due to the fact that the members of this community also share physical space on the DU campus, it is possible for this group to form a "real" community in addition to the online, "imagined" community. It may even be likely that members of this group could meet up with each other through on campus events or in classes. The potential of a "real" community lies in reality that Twitter users are attached to their name, their photos, and their real lives via their online identity. This affordance makes it probable that students and faculty who interact within the imagined community of Twitter could form a real community in a more tangible environment. This affordance can extend beyond the immigration ban and apply to a multitude of issues on DU's campus, giving people the opportunity to interact through the screen or in the flesh.

Students on the DU campus, as a representation of society at large, have conflicting religious, political, and social views. In the article, "Human Rights Rhetoric – Traditions of Testifying and Witnessing," Twitter, like witnessing and testifying, has "a particular place in speaking back to power, in creating counter-discourses, which denormalize dominant discourses and offer alternative worldviews" (209). Our virtual community is founded on the idea of questioning, deliberating, and engaging with controversial and complex topics. While some communities aim to ground themselves in similarity, we aim to foster conversation through differing opinions and perspectives. As a result, we expect at least some conflict between opinions and ideas. One of the models for our campaign is the freedom of speech wall at DU. While the aim of this wall is similar to our approach, we also know that the free speech wall on our own campus has had its share of controversy. In a letter from Chancellor Chopp called

"Racial tensions" addressed to the DU community, she says, "Our aspiration is nothing short of a robust, engaged community where conflicting ideas are discussed and considered with open minds and genuine intentions." This is similar to Te Nahisi Coates's vision of "a constant questioning, questioning as ritual, questioning as exploration rather than the search for certainty" (34) in *Between the World and Me*. Like the free speech wall on DU's campus, through this page, we aim to support conflicting opinions as an avenue for discussion and deliberation in an effort to allow students and faculty to recognize the importance of exploring social and political issues.

Although it gives the possibility for dialogue, like the free speech wall, our Twitter page poses the opportunity for chaos. Several incidents have led DU to create stricter guidelines for the free speech wall, and the same measures may need to be taken to ensure that our Twitter page remains a respectful community that is conducive to learning without blaming or spreading hateful speech. In her "Racial tensions" letter, Chopp pointed out, "In the last few weeks, we have witnessed an escalation of messaging on the 'free speech wall' outside Driscoll Student Center that directly speaks to the racial tensions in our nation." Our diverse opinions as a college community are a reflection of the diverse backgrounds, races, ethnicities, genders, and religions that DU students possess. It is this diversity of character that allows the DU community to engage with important societal concerns and analyze how external measures impact our student body and faculty. Although University guidelines and regulations will most likely be necessary like the free speech wall (specifically because our account is attached to DU's name), this can contribute to the use of this Twitter page as a community where people feel safe and respected. To avoid misuse of a medium meant for discussion and debate, the University's involvement can

contribute to this Twitter page's potential to consider other peoples' opinions and to question, rather than provide definitive conclusions about controversial topics.

The free speech wall is a tangible medium on DU's campus and it allows for real person interaction. On our Twitter page, we included photos of community events and opportunities to extend beyond the reach of our virtual community. We posted a photo of a flyer found in Sturm for a "Mesa Immigration Research RoundTable" hosted by a professor from CU Boulder. This event took place on March 3, the same week as our Twitter campaign. We also included a flyer for an "Islam in the United States" class offered this coming Spring quarter through DU. Similarly to the "BlackLivesMatter – Epistemic Positioning, Challenges, and Possibilies" article, we envisioned our Twitter page to "create rhetorical possibilities for material change" (79). By linking up with the University of Denver community, we are able to provide resources to students who have varying desires of interaction. Twitter allows for people to have a digital conversation without the stress that can sometimes result from classroom discussions or community forums. Twitter also allows information to be communicated to give students a chance to contribute in real-world events in the DU community. We chose to post the fliers for the community event and class near the end of our campaign to give people the opportunity to first interact with our Twitter page. However, near the conclusion of the topic, after a myriad of quotes, articles, photos, and perspectives were posted, we provided these real-world events as an extension of our campaign in order to keep the conversation going even after our Twitter page switches topics.

Through the formulation of our campaign, we ran into several difficulties. Part of our campaign was providing insight from our community, so we interviewed DU students and faculty from multiple departments. However, their quotes were often lengthy and wordy, which

posed a challenge in consolidating our tweets to fit Twitter's 140-character limit. We also aimed to provide diverse and varying opinions and most of our interviews were anti-immigration ban, so we had to work to find news articles and external sources that supported the ban in order to provide an unbiased network of ideas and opinions. In creating our Twitter page, we also had to carefully consider the order of our tweets. We wanted to provide variety – including lighthearted memes, gifs, and photos in conjunction with emotional, political, and opinionated quotes, videos, and articles from news outlets and the DU community. However, these challenges gave us the ability to more thoroughly explore the Twitter as a medium and use its affordances to our advantage through the culmination of our campaign.

In creating and posting through the course of our campaign, we have learned about the medium's diverse affordances and its ability to convey a message and enact change. Like in *Between the World and Me*, our Twitter page encourages DU students and faculty not to descend into their own dream, but rather "be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world" (108). The topics we chose to be featured on "DU Have An Opinion" cannot be solved overnight, and do not have a simple solution. As McCluhan notes, "our human senses, of which all media are extensions are also fixed charges on our personal energies" (11). A medium organized and stimulated by human interaction is characterized by conflict and disagreement. But, rather than avoid the problems that plague reality, we aim to provide a community for DU to participate in and explore more than a single narrative. By presenting popular topics and multiple perspectives of an issue on our digital platform, we are building a community that encourages questioning, civil discourse, and participation for those who choose to engage.

Works Cited

Chopp, Rebecca, et al. "News & Updates." Racial Tensions | Office of the Chancellor |

University of Denver, University of Denver, 6 Oct. 2017,

www.du.edu/chancellor/news/racial-tensionsoct6-2016.html. Accessed 11 Mar. 2017.

*Please note: with the exception of the letter from Chancellor Chopp (listed above) all of the articles/books referenced in this paper are from syllabus readings that we read and discussed during class. Due to the familiarity with these readings throughout the course of this class, I chose to only mention them by name and reference their page number. Please let me know if you would like me to generate these readings into a more formal list of citations.