

MEMING AND ENTHYMEMING: PERSUASION
IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

by

TAYLOR PARRISH

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Abstract

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Taylor Parrish, MA

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Supervising Professor: James Warren

While rhetoric as a field of study has existed for several millennia, social media can prove to be a difficult medium to analyze rhetorically. This thesis examines some traditional elements of rhetoric, including the rhetorical triangle as well as the canons of rhetoric, and weaves them together with the narrative paradigm theory, as posited by Walter Fisher in his 1987 book *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Together, rhetoric and the narrative paradigm provide some useful tools for analyzing the world of social media, helping users to more accurately ascertain the veracity of posting; however, there are some additional themes that arise in an examination of social media that would not likely be considered with either rhetoric or narrative constructs. These themes include: brevity, instant feedback, collectivity, constant self-performance, and audience control. This sort of analysis and equipping can prove useful for social media users but also for students or instructors of composition, as this opens up the opportunity to build bridges between students' experiences in communication in the digital world and academia.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Social media has become such a ubiquitous part of our daily lives and social interactions that it can prove quite difficult to step outside the accepted norm of use and question its purpose and impact. This questioning process is made especially difficult by the ever-changing landscape of social media, which has swiftly become a global phenomenon with platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and SnapChat. Further complicating this discussion, even reluctant users are at times pressured into usage despite their concerns about social media due to its ubiquity, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to “opt out.” The importance of the smartphone’s proliferation during this same time period cannot be overstated, as these social media platforms developed into simple, easy-to-use apps that are accessible from a handheld device twenty-four hours a day. These apps have been demonstrated to be highly addictive, and frequent users often experience “FOMO” (fear of missing out) when they are absent from their social media profile(s) for too long.

Although any social media user could likely benefit from moments of introspection and examination regarding their own social media usage and its impact on their lives, weaving in thinkers such as Aristotle, Chaïm Perelman, Kenneth Burke, and Walter Fisher may be of particular interest to those in the world of digital humanities, composition studies, and rhetoric. However, just as the history of social media is inextricably intertwined with real-world factors, discussions on social media also necessitate the inclusion of influencers, hashtags, memes, and celebrities, so exploration of social media’s impact and utility cannot be neatly placed into any one subject area. This intersectionality, I assert, may be much to the delight of Fisher, who writes, “The narrative paradigm is a fabric woven of threads of thought from both the social sciences

and the humanities. It seeks, like any other theory of human action, to account for how persons come to believe and behave” (98).

To date, a specific consideration of social media’s role as a possible intersection between rhetoric and narrative theory has not been undertaken; thus, this particular strand of thought could potentially open new lines of exploration. Traditional rhetoric lays the foundation for even modern studies and concepts of rhetoric, creating the rhetorical triangle of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* and enumerating the canons of rhetoric. Walter Fisher pushes against some of the teachers of rhetoric in his assertion of the narrative nature of humans and his resulting narrative paradigm theory. In an attempt to bring these two theories together and situate them in a contemporary way, I assert that a combination of the tenets of rhetoric combined with narrative paradigm theory opens up opportunities for analysis, understanding, and meaning-making in an increasingly digital world but do not manage to completely address the complicated types of persuasion that occur in social media. In order to address those specific qualities, I will also contribute and identify some themes visible in social media contexts. In order to situate social media within existing theoretical constructs, I will first explore the traditional concepts of rhetoric and examine the ways that rhetoric converges with and diverges from narrative paradigm theory, then addressing some themes that arise in a consideration of social media that would not surface in either rhetoric or narrative paradigms alone. Utilizing that groundwork, I will then examine specific social media posts and users to identify the ways that various media demonstrate or defy these ideas, revealing some themes about social media that support the necessity for these considerations. I will then build upon those conclusions to extrapolate some implications for both social media users as well as instructors of composition.

Chapter 2

Traditional Rhetoric and Narrative Paradigm Theory

There are thousands of books, articles, theses, and dissertations on the subject of rhetoric. Undertaking an analysis of all existing scholarship on rhetoric would be impossible; however, some of rhetoric's core ideas/elements appear in many/most analyses and histories of rhetorical study. Often, histories of rhetoric begin with the Greeks, usually starting with the sophistry of Gorgias and then seeing the origins of rhetoric in Plato and Aristotle (as seen in the histories provided by Gray-Rosendale and Gruber [see page 1], Miller [see page 1], and Eyman [see pages 13-14]). These histories then trace the codification of rhetoric by Cicero in the Roman Empire a couple hundred years later. In the third century C.E., Augustine ponders rhetoric as a tool to communicate Christian messages, a work upon which Thomas Aquinas expounds nearly a century later. Rhetorical histories then extend through other prominent names, such as Erasmus, Philipp Melanchthon, John Locke, Rene Descartes, and Francis Bacon, as well as countless others. This rich and diverse history sees a resurgence in interest and thought in the area of rhetoric in the 1950s and 1960s with the invaluable work of Chaïm Perelman and Kenneth Burke. Of course, this history is far from exhaustive, and it continues to be enriched by contributions from those both inside and outside the field of rhetoric, such as Stephen Toulmin's model of logic presented in his 1958 book *The Uses of Argument* and Carl Rogers' contributions to the field of psychology that later developed into the Rogerian method of argumentation in the 1970s textbook *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*. In this chapter, I seek to examine the similarities and differences—the convergences and divergences—of rhetoric and narrative paradigm theory, as put forth by Walter Fisher in his 1987 book, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Once that framework is established, I will

examine the ways that this framework proves helpful in examining social media and seek to codify some perhaps surprising ways that social media defies this framework and demands a unique consideration.

Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* remains the cornerstone of most discussions of classical rhetoric. Aristotle's definition of *rhetoric*, "an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (37), has stood the test of roughly two millennia. While Aristotle taught on numerous aspects of rhetoric, the main ideas I want to consider here are his three "modes of persuasion" or "artistic proofs" used to convince audiences, which are *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. I also want to consider Cicero's five canons of rhetoric, including invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Additionally, interwoven throughout the long history of rhetoric are ideas regarding audience. These elements reappear thinkers and rhetoricians throughout time. For purposes of clarity and concision, I will rely heavily upon Aristotle and Burke as some of the most prominent figures in rhetoric's rich history.

Aristotle said, "Of the *pisteis* [means of persuasion in public address] provided through speech, there are three species; for some are in the character [*ethos*] of the speaker, and some in disposing the listener in some way, and some in the speech [*logos*] itself, by showing or seeming to show something" (p. 38, I.2.3). He goes on to emphasize *ethos* in the context of the speech itself, saying,

[There is persuasion] through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly...And this should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person...rather, character is almost, so to speak, the most authoritative form of persuasion. (p. 38-39, I.2.4)

Regarding *pathos*, Aristotle taught that "[There is persuasion] through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion [*pathos*] by the speech; for we do not give the same judgment when grieved and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile" (p. 39, I.2.5). He

also taught, “Persuasion occurs through the arguments [*logos*] when we show the truth or the apparent truth from whatever is persuasive in each case” (p. 39, I.2.6). He goes on to explain that rhetoric is similar to dialectic and to delve into syllogisms (a deductive argument in dialectic consisting of a major premise, minor premise, and conclusion [1.2.8]) and enthymemes (rhetorical syllogisms [1.2.8-22]). His teaching on this subject laid out the rhetorical triangle: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, meaning message, speaker, and hearer, respectively.

Two millennia later, Burke works from this same paradigm, stating, “In its essence communication involves the use of verbal symbols for purposes of appeal. Thus, it splits formally into the three elements of speaker, speech, and spoken-to, with the speaker so shaping his speech as to ‘commune with’ the spoken-to. This purely technical pattern is the precondition of all appeal” (271). This rhetorical triangle has retained its validity and value and has been taught to students for two thousand years. It continues to serve as the basis for both creating and analyzing rhetorical arguments today. Burke also introduces new, important concepts to the rhetorical conversation—concepts such as identification and consubstantiation. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke explains:

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so.

Here are ambiguities of substance. In being identified with B, A is “substantially one” with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (20-21)

He also writes, “For substance, in the old philosophies, was an *act*; and a way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” (21). Burke maintains an acute awareness of the tensions inherent in these concepts of identification and consubstantiation, and he describes beautifully,

In pure identification there would be no strife. Likewise, there would be no strife in absolute separateness, since opponents can join battle only through a mediatory ground that makes their communication possible, thus providing the first condition necessary for their interchange of blows. But put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric. (25)

Burke also argues that “we are clearly in the region of rhetoric when considering the identifications whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant in some social or economic class. *‘Belonging’ in this sense is rhetorical*” (28, emphasis added) and that “[i]dentification in itself is a kind of transcendence” (326). In these quotes, it is easy to see the significance that Burke places on identification and consubstantiation. Robert Prus also argues that “Burke envisions identification as a primary element of persuasion. In developing identification, Burke explains, the objective is for speakers to establish a thorough connectedness with the mind of the other; to express one’s ideas in ways that more completely correspond with the viewpoints and thoughts of the other” (26-27). In fact, Prus writes of Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives*, “Burke’s primary objective is to establish the pervasive nature of rhetoric or persuasive endeavor in the human community and, thus, extend the boundaries more conventionally ascribed to rhetoric” (26). Thus, in many ways, Burke extends the scope of rhetoric beyond what is articulated by classical rhetoricians, enabling us to see similarities between Burke’s ideas of identification and consubstantiality and those of Fisher’s narrative paradigm theory. These concepts of “mediatory ground,” “belonging,” and “identification” introduce the exigence for social media as a medium for communication and persuasion, which I will examine in more depth in Chapter 3.

Fisher presents his theory as both a subset of and counter to traditional rhetoric.

He lays out the “presuppositions that undergird the narrative paradigm” to be:

(1) Humans are essentially storytellers. (2) The paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communication is ‘good reasons,’ which may vary in form among situations, genres, and media of communication. (3) The production and practice of good reasons

are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character along with the kinds of forces identified in the Frenzt and Farrell language-action paradigm. (4) Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives... (5) The world as we know it is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation. In short, good reasons are the stuff of stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reasoning-valuing animals. The philosophical ground of the narrative paradigm is ontology. The materials of the narrative paradigm are symbols, signs of consubstantiation, and good reasons, the communicative expressions of social reality. (64)

Because of his view that every act of communication is in some way a narrative, he subsumes much of rhetoric's characteristics and redefines them under his paradigm. He asserts that "to view communication through the perspective of narrativity is to focus on message, on the individuated forms that constitute it, and on the reliability, trustworthiness, and desirability of what is said—evaluated by using the tests of narrative rationality. Whatever the genre of the discourse, the narrative paradigm allows one to view it as rhetoric" (143). However, it is worth noting here that Fisher's ideas align with those Burke puts forth in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, wherein he writes, "In any case, note that once you treat instruction as an aim of rhetoric you introduce a principle that can widen the scope of rhetoric beyond persuasion. It is on the way to include also works on the theory and practice of exposition, description, communication in general" (77).

Fisher asserts that Aristotle "reinforced the idea that some forms of discourse are superior to others by drawing clear distinctions among them in regard to their relationship to true knowledge" and draws out that Aristotle viewed "[o]nly scientific discourse" to be "productive of true knowledge, because it was the only form of discourse in which reasoning could be...necessarily valid" (7). He goes on to explain that for Aristotle, "[d]ialectic discourse could lead to knowledge but only probable knowledge, based on expert opinion. Rhetoric, founded on contingent reason, was appropriate for 'untrained thinkers'" (7). In Fisher's estimation, the work of Plato, Aristotle, and their contemporaries

shifted the meaning of *logos* from a general term that encompassed “story, reason, rationale, conception, discourse, thought” to a more specific term, referring “only to philosophical (later technical) discourse” (5). He believes that his narrative paradigm helps to shift the definition of *logos* to its original meaning, with communication “imbued with logos and mythos” (20). He states that in the traditional form of argument, “unless one deduces a conclusion from recognizable premises or infers a claim from particulars, one presumably does not argue” (158). On the contrary, he says,

Common experience tells us, however, that that we do arrive at conclusions based on ‘dwelling in’ dramatic and literary works...The [rhetorical] consequences [of fictive forms of communication] are results of inferential processes; some dramatic and literary works do, in fact, argue if that term is given its conventional broad meaning: to show, prove, or imply. (158)

Perhaps this “dwelling in” also ties to Burke’s concepts of identification and consubstantiation, as narrative forms seem to allow us to more naturally identify with and see from the perspective of another. In this way, narrative clearly possesses persuasive ability; however, Fisher’s push toward using the “broad meaning” of *argue* to refer to “show, prove, or imply” addresses the persuasive nature of narrative more than the argumentative nature of narrative. I will revisit definitions of *argument* further in the following section.

The Artistic Proofs: *Logos*, *Ethos*, and *Pathos*

There is a perceivable tension in Fisher’s book, however. As he pushes against rhetoric and its tenets, he simultaneously reinforces them in slightly altered language and in a vastly different cultural setting (from the fourth century B.C.E. to the mid-1980s). For example, he writes, “I do not mean to say that knowledge is unimportant in communication. I do mean, on the other hand, that it is ultimately configured narratively, as a component in a larger story implying the being of a certain kind of person, a person with a particular worldview, with a specific self-concept, and with characteristic ways of

relating to others” (17). In this quote, one can hear echoes of Aristotle’s *logos* (in knowledge being communicated), *ethos* (in “being of a certain kind of person”), and *pathos* (“with characteristic ways of relating to others”). These three appeals are so foundational in rhetoric, and for purposes of organization and clarity, I have separated them for discussion below; however, it worth noting that they are not entirely discrete. *Logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* are interrelated and often dependent upon one another, providing a multifaceted lens through which to view argumentation and persuasion. In this way, *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* behave in much more flexible and supple ways than the discrete discussion below may insinuate.

Ethos

One difference between Fisher’s concepts and those of Aristotle is that Aristotle situates all three elements of the rhetorical triangle entirely within the context of the speech, which can be seen in his explanation of *ethos*, for example. Aristotle emphasizes that the speaker should come across as a person of good will, explaining that “[There is persuasion] through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence...And this should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person” (38-19, I.2.4). Fisher, on the other hand, suggests that character is constructed and evaluated socially. He argues that “rhetorical experience is most fundamentally a symbolic transaction in and about social reality” (17). Further, Fisher writes:

Central to all stories is character. Whether a story is believable depends on the reliability of characters, both as narrators and as actors. Determination of one’s character is made by interpretations of the person’s decisions and actions that reflect values. In other words, character may be considered an organized set of actional tendencies... Coherence in life and in literature requires that characters behave characteristically. Without this kind of predictability, there is no trust, no community, no rational human order. (47)

It is worth highlighting here that Aristotle also states that “character is almost, so to speak, the most authoritative form of persuasion” (39, I.2.4). Thus, I think, Aristotle and Fisher would agree that character is of the utmost importance, although they would likely disagree about the ways in which that character or *ethos* is constructed. Burke asserts that Cicero “equates the perfect orator with the good man, and says that the good man should be exceptional in both eloquence and moral attributes” (49). He also writes, “If, in the opinion of a given audience, a certain kind of conduct is admirable, then a speaker might persuade the audience by using ideas and images that identify his cause with that kind of conduct” (55). Here we see that although in some ways the extension of character or *ethos* beyond the context of the speech alone is a temporal issue, the belief that one’s character affects one’s ability to argue and persuade dates back to the first century B.C.E. As modern, well-connected citizens with immeasurable information available to us on a pocket-sized device, it would be difficult to base an evaluation of a speaker’s character entirely on a self-contained speech without any consideration of the “coherent” and “characteristic” behaviors and tendencies enumerated by Fisher. On the other hand, a preconceived view of a person’s character before a speech can prevent a hearer from agreeing with, or at times even listening to, the valid arguments of the speaker. Fisher summarizes,

Ethos, in Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric, is a kind of proof that establishes a speaker’s intelligence, integrity, and goodwill. Credibility, in recent communication research, is a function of an audience’s attribution of such traits as expertise, trustworthiness, and dynamism to a source...Character, as I have conceived of it in this book, is a generalized perception of a person’s fundamental value orientation. (148)

Fisher’s statement points back to “value orientation,” which aligns with his insistence throughout his book that values are the most persuasive element of communication, which differs somewhat from Aristotle’s conception of *ethos* as “establishing a speaker’s intelligence, integrity, and goodwill.” Whereas an examination of the role of the speaker

reveals the ways that Aristotle's definition of *ethos* and Fisher's ideas of character both converge and diverge, it is slightly more complicated to examine the constructs and roles of *logos*/message and *pathos*/hearer/audience.

Logos

Aristotle introduces *logoi* by stating, "Persuasion occurs through the arguments [*logoi*] when we show the truth or the apparent truth from whatever is persuasive in each case" (39, I.2.6). He further instructs, "I call a rhetorical syllogism an enthymeme, a rhetorical induction a paradigm. And all [speakers] produce logical persuasion by means of paradigms or enthymemes and by nothing other than these" (p. 40, I.2.8), although he later teaches that paradigms (proof from examples) "are most appropriate to deliberative oratory, enthymemes more suited to judicial; for the former is concerned with the future, so it is necessary to draw examples from the past; the latter is concerned with what are or are not the facts, which are more open to demonstration and a necessary conclusion, for the past has a necessity about it" (p. 243, III.17.5). Although Aristotle clearly recognized the necessity for proving one's case differently in different circumstances, the art of persuasion did not long remain restricted to his narrow definition of ways to induce logical agreement. A couple of millennia later, in 1950, Burke discusses the idea of persuasion further, arguing that "[p]ersuasion involves choice, will; it is directed to a man only insofar as he is free" (50) and explores preceding rhetoricians' views of persuasion, saying:

Thus, in Cicero and Augustine there is a shift between the words "move" (*movere*) and "bend" (*flectere*) to name the ultimate function of rhetoric. This shift corresponds to a distinction between act and attitude (attitude being an incipient act, a leaning or inclination). Thus the notion of persuasion to attitude would permit the application of rhetorical terms to purely poetic structures; the study of lyrical devices might be classed under the head of rhetoric, when these devices are considered for their power to induce or communicate states of mind to readers, even though the kinds of assent evoked have no overt, practical outcome. (50)

Burke also writes, “Here is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (55). Shortly after Burke’s writing, in 1958, Toulmin published his book, *The Uses of Argument*, in which he “conceives argument as a movement from data, to warrant, backing for the warrant, to reservations, and to conclusion” (Fisher 44). Additionally, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s 1969 *The New Rhetoric* explores “the study of the methods of proof used to secure adherence” (1). And, to bring the conversation all the way to the current millennium, the 2009 textbook *Perspectives on Argument*, which is intended to teach composition to college freshmen, defines *argument* as “making a claim (expressing a point of view on an issue that is communicated by the arguer) and supporting it with reasons and evidence to convince an audience to change the way they think about the issue” (5). In tracing this line of thought through some of the most influential thinkers and writers in the realm of rhetoric, it becomes clear that even persuasion, agreement, and argument can be difficult to narrowly define in the long history of rhetoric.

In the realm of *logos*, Fisher seems to diverge further from existing rhetorical theory than did his thoughts on character. Fisher emphasizes values and good reasons to be the stuff of persuasive argumentation. He argues that “a reason is good if it is tied to a value, and a value is reasonable if it is tied to a reason. Given this view, there is no way to distinguish the merits of competing good reasons” (107). Additionally—importantly—he argues, “This conviction derives from the belief that rhetorical communication is as laden with values as it is with what we call reasons. Humans as rhetorical beings are as much valuing as they are reasoning animals” (105). Once again, though, the ways that the narrative paradigm is interwoven with rhetoric can be seen, as

Fisher seemingly struggles to explain his concept of “good reasons” without relying on rhetorical terminology:

I propose that good reasons be conceived as those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical. By “warrant,” I mean that which authorizes, sanctions, or justifies belief, attitude, or action...The term “good reasons,” I should stress, does not imply that every... “good reason”—is as good as any other. It only signifies that whatever is taken as a basis for adopting the rhetorical message is inextricably bound to a value—to a conception of the good. Needless to say, good reasons are not necessarily effective, persuasive reasons. (107)

Additionally, he writes, “One establishes one’s rationality in special fields by knowing and using the warrants indigenous to that field and adhering to the particular rules of advocacy followed in it” (120). In these passages, we can see the ways that Fisher cannot fully extricate himself from rhetorical concepts, as he relies heavily on warrants to enable him to explain his narrative paradigm. However, admittedly, the intentions behind Fisher’s logic seem reasonable: “the logic of good reasons is important because it renders open and intelligible the grounds and valuing of interpreter-critics. And by doing so, it acknowledges and encourages awareness of the contingent character of rhetorical communication and provides information that enhances discourse on truly fundamental matters” (110).

In some ways, then we see that Fisher is essentially pointing toward warrants—“the justifying reason or ground for an action, belief, or feeling” (“warrant, n.1”), which often remain hidden in argumentation—to get at the heart of what is persuasive in argument. In Aristotle’s teaching on epideictic rhetoric, he says, “let us speak of virtue and vice and honorable and shameful; for these are the points of reference for one praising or blaming” (p. 75-76, I.9.1). He goes on to instruct how to employ these topics and says, “Consider also the audience before whom the praise [is spoken]; for, as Socrates used to say, it is not difficult to praise Athenians in Athens. And one should

speak of whatever is honored among each people as actually existing” (p.79-80, I.9.30). Thus, we hear Aristotle instructing his listeners to really consider the values of the culture and address those specifically when attempting to praise (or blame) an individual, demonstrating an awareness of the importance of values in trying persuade, even if those values cannot be neatly fit into a syllogistic or enthymematic structure. On the other hand, Fisher enumerates the following components in the logic of reasons: one considers whether “‘facts’ are indeed ‘facts’” and are “confirmed by consensus or reliable, competent witnesses;” one considers “whether relevant ‘facts’ have been omitted” or “distorted or taken out of context;” one “assesses the various patterns of reasoning, using mainly standards from informal logic;” one “assesses the relevance of individual arguments”—that they are both “sound” and are “all the arguments that should be considered in the case;” and “one makes a judgment as to whether or not the message directly addresses the ‘real’ issues in the case” (108-109). However, he goes on to say that the following “components [are] needed to transform the logic of reasons into a logic of good reasons”:

First is the question of fact: What are the implicit and explicit values embedded in a message? Second is the question of relevance: Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon?...Third is the question of consequence: What would be the effects of adhering to the values—for one’s concept of oneself, for one’s behavior, and for one’s relationships with others and society, and to the process of rhetorical transaction?...Fourth is the question of consistency: Are the values confirmed or validated in one’s personal experience, in the lives or statements of others whom one admires and respects, and in a conception of the best audience that one can conceive?...Fifth is the burden of transcendent issue: Even if a prima-facie case exists or a burden of proof has been established, are the values the message offers those that, in the estimation of the critic, constitute the ideal basis for human conduct? (109)

It is worth noting that Fisher draws upon another work of Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, to support his logic of good reasons, enumerating Aristotle’s concept of “practical wisdom” (*phronesis*) as parallel to his own paradigm. He concludes, Possession of practical wisdom and use of the logic of good reasons yield intelligence in pursuit of proper and prudent conduct in those spheres of life that are not strictly matters

of science or art. The specific sort of intelligence Aristotle marked as intrinsic to practical wisdom is that concerned with action where 'truth' is 'in harmony with correct desire'...The domain of practical wisdom and the logic of good reasons is, then, ethical and effective rhetorical performance. (119-120)

He always returns to his insistence on values, stating explicitly that "*values* are more persuasive" than "the *individual form* of argument" (48). In many ways, Fisher's insistence on the revealing of values seems to foreground explicitly what more traditional rhetoric would acknowledge always already functions in the background of argumentation.

Whereas warrants demonstrate the closely held beliefs that underlie one's reasoning, Fisher's emphasis on values seems to centralize values as the turning point of the entire conversation. Perhaps these areas of clear overlap actually lend credibility to each idea, as they so naturally incorporate one another that they cannot be neatly separated from one another.

Pathos

If rhetoric involves finding the available means of persuasion in a given audience, there are implications for the ways that persuasive arguments should be structured and attributes of both speaker and audience (which sounds remarkably like *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, respectively). Rhetorical evaluation typically involves a consideration of one's audience and a discussion of the universal audience. A rhetor's universal audience can be assumed to be rational, educated men, or per Fisher's paradigm, "all persons are seen as having the capacity to be rational under the narrative paradigm...Under [which], all are seen as possessing equally the logic of narration—a sense of coherence and fidelity" (68). Fisher compares his ideas regarding audience to those of Perelman, writing:

Perelman sees people as arguers; I see them as storytellers. Perelman's view of rationality is that an argument is as good as the audience that would adhere to it. Narrative rationality, as I have described it, takes an argument to be as good as its coherence and fidelity. Nevertheless, Perelman's overall theory of rhetoric would seem to grant, as the narrative paradigm insists, that arguers tell stories and storytellers argue. (97-98)

However, it is worth noting that Fisher supposes that both *coherence* and *fidelity* as imagined in his book are qualities that can be evaluated according to the narrativity that all people possess. He believes that “we acquire narrativity in the natural process of socialization” because that narrative “is a feature of human nature” (65). In some ways, then, it seems that Fisher sees within his own theory the overlap of narrative with rhetoric and the difficulty to extricate the two. I would argue, though, that Fisher himself sensed this, stating,

My assumption does not seriously disturb the customary view of rhetoric as practical reasoning, but my conception of good reasons maintains that reasoning need not be bound to argumentative prose or be expressed in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures. I contend that reasoning can be discovered in all sorts of symbolic actions—nondiscursive as well as discursive. (57)

Interestingly, though, Fisher’s ideas of coherence/fidelity, character, and values seem to tie closely with the rhetorical triangle and its three points of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. The ideas wrapped up in the concept of *logos* arguably include aspects of coherence and fidelity; those wrapped up in *ethos* arguably include character; and those in values would seem to include the concepts of *pathos* as well. In many ways, the effectiveness of rhetorical argument or narrativity would seem to appear the same: effecting a change in belief and thus in behavior on the part of the hearer/audience. Fisher sees “good reasons” to be the stuff of coherent narratives; however, he writes, “I take good reasons to be those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical” (57). In Fisher’s reasoning, one can see the lack of clarity that coincides with his attempt at separating his paradigm from more traditional views of rhetoric.

Consistently, it seems difficult to extricate rhetoric from narrative and vice versa. In her chapter “Principles for Propagation: On Narrative and Argument,” Judith Summerfield contends for the complexity of narrative writing and discusses its place in

the composition classroom. She writes, "Narrative is inherently dialogic. The narrator plays a particular version of the tale, always in relation to what is told and what is not told, to those who are there and not there" (159). This type of communicational decision-making can also be referred to as rhetorical in that the speaker is situating their argument (or narrative, as it may be) in whatever way they desire and feel will allow them to make their point and achieve their persuasive goals. Additionally, in her quote, one can hear the same three inescapable rhetorical elements as have been addressed before: "narrator" as speaker/in the position of *ethos*, "a particular version of the tale" according to "what is told and what is not told" as the speech/as *logos*, and "to those who are there and not there" as the audience/*pathos*. Thus, it seems that though the rhetorical triangle reincarnates under various names but remains conceptually the same. Additionally, in their chapter "Classical Rhetoric: The Art of Argumentation," Fahnestock and Secor argue that although many discourse theories state that "narrative and argumentation are separate, even antagonistic domains," they believe instead that "[a]n opposition between argument and narrative does not exist in the classical system where narrative serves multiple functions" (114). They state that "narrative as a mode of arguing needs to be taught in all complexity" and that "narrative deserves a position of prominence as one of the generic skills of argumentation" (116). Here we see that while Fahnestock and Secor seem to view rhetoric and narrative as discrete in many ways, they also see their interrelatedness and the value of teaching rhetoric and narrative together in a classical context. Perhaps, as Prus asserts,

because rhetoric is social activity in the most basic terms, the analysis of persuasive interchange is not just about rhetoric in abstract terms. It is about human group life much more fundamentally and comprehensively. The subject matter of rhetoric revolves around culturally-enabled life-worlds and human relations. It revolves around people talking, remembering, acting, interacting, observing, defining, anticipating, generating, performing, cooperating, contesting, and making adjustments within the theaters of the other. To ignore these matters is to restrict the authenticity of one's analyses of rhetoric. (51)

This idea of rhetoric as situated culturally and socially introduces the concept of this important act of communication—whether rhetorical or narrative—occurring in the context of community. I will revisit these ideas again in Chapter 3 on social media.

Rhetorical Canons

While perhaps not as central to the teaching of rhetoric as the artistic proofs, the five classical canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) have been part of the instruction of rhetoric for thousands of years. The five canons were codified by Cicero in his *De Inventione* in the first century B.C.E. and have now been taught to students of rhetoric for centuries and continue in perpetuity in speech classes as well as composition and rhetoric courses at the university level even today. The freshman textbook I referenced earlier includes the following:

In classical times, invention, or gathering material and creating ideas, was one of the five canons of rhetoric. These canons identified the important aspects of building an argument that every orator of the time needed to know. Besides invention, the canons included: arrangement, or organizing the material in an argument; style, or using the appropriate language to explain it; memory, or committing the ideas in a speech to memory; and delivery, or making good use of voice and gestures. (Wood 380)

Of course, their purpose and utility has shifted over the course of the interceding millennia as rhetoric has shifted from an entirely oral art to being a largely written form.

Eyman's book, *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice*, proves particularly helpful in attempting to provide a succinct overview of the history and definitions of rhetoric. Eyman discusses Aristotle's definition of rhetoric and writes, "The practice of rhetoric was originally concerned with the methods one could use to construct a successful persuasive oration," pointing out that "these methods were developed preliteracy" (14). Rhetoric has a complex history between the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans and modern conceptions of rhetoric as often taught alongside composition, but for my purposes, I will here shift gears to consider the educational shifts taking place

in the late 1800s in America. During this time, rhetoric shifted from oral to written (in the form of composition classes), as noted by James Berlin,

The English department was a creation of the new American university during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Its prototype appeared at Harvard...Its initial purpose was to provide instruction in writing...Although the rhetoric course originally included speaking as its major component, by the third quarter of the century its main concern was writing instruction. (20)

Due to this shift, the rhetorical canons of memory and delivery became less relevant. As Wood's textbook states, "Three of these canons, invention, arrangement, and style, are important to writers as well as to speakers of argument" (380). Instead, the canons of invention, arrangement, and style became the basis for teaching in the field of rhetoric and composition. Berlin explores the historical shifts that underlie the movement toward an expanded population in universities:

The "new" university had arisen to provide an agency for certifying the members of the new professions...The old university had been elitist and had prepared students for the three major professions: law, medicine, and the church. The new university encouraged a meritocracy, opening its doors to anyone who could meet the entrance requirements (a growing number, due to the new free high schools), offering upward mobility through certification in such professions as agriculture, engineering, journalism, social work, education, and a host of other new professional pursuits. (21)

Around this same time, higher education began an era of increased inclusion of women.

Patsy Parker notes, "In 1870, women accounted for only 21% of the undergraduate population. By 1890, the percentage had climbed to 47" (7). This increased diversity helped to further this shift from oral to written rhetoric in order to accommodate a perceived propensity toward different argumentation strategies by gender, which certainly influenced the ways that rhetoric was taught in this "new" diverse university classroom.

These massive shifts required adjustments to content as well as pedagogy, and the old tradition of oral rhetoric gave way to composition classes. In this new meritocracy, teachers sought equitable, gradable writing prompts for students; therefore, the first three canons grew in importance, but over time even arrangement and style became less

valuable than the all-important invention. The important aspects of writing a rhetorical composition became well-researched arguments with well-organized reasons and evidence in order to effect persuasion. However, Fahnestock and Secor defend the importance of style, stating, "The classical perspective on argumentation required facility in the use of language to integrate the appeals, to deliver layers and nuances of persuasion in single propositions...Composition courses tend to treat style in a way that deemphasizes its connection with rhetoric" (116). However, they argue that "[e]very writing course should include a language curriculum that would teach students to identify and employ linguistic choices that promote rhetorical effectiveness" (116-117). We should emphasize, in Fahnestock and Secor's opinion, the instruction of style and language in composition classes in order to truly equip writers with the tools they need to "make one language decision over another" (116).

Fisher certainly agrees with the importance of style. He notes that there is a persuasive function found in aesthetic and poetic writing that cannot be easily evaluated as a traditional rhetorical argument. Fisher points out that "dramatic and literary works argue" by "the process of suggestion" (161). He also writes, "Aesthetic proofs function outside the realm of regular argumentation in that they are neither general principles that become the bases for deductions nor real examples that are used as bases for induction" (162). Fisher anticipates the resistance of rhetoric against these claims, asserting, "What will be argued here is that a rhetorical interpretation of a work arises whenever the work is considered relative to an audience's response," and his proposal is that "we focus not on authorial techniques or specific individuated forms but on audience response, the mental moves that will be made by auditors or readers in interpreting a work" (161). Fisher quotes Fenelon, "Poetry differs from simple eloquence only in this: that she paints with ecstasy and with bolder strokes" (160), and he also references Perelman and

Olbrechts-Tyteca's *New Rhetoric*, in which we read of their concept of "presence": the process by which a speaker makes 'present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent but what he considers important to his argument, or, by making them more present, to enhance the value of some of the elements of which one has actually been conscious'" (159). He then goes on to list some of the "discursive, stylistic techniques used to achieve presence" (159). This, I suggest, would fall into the realms of style and delivery, as the sort of influential, aesthetic, emotional, evocative language referenced here does not fall neatly into a clear-cut category of argumentation. Further, I would also suggest that what Fisher describes in his chapter "Argument in Drama and Literature" is remarkably similar to empathy or Burke's concept of identification, although he does not explicitly state it to be so. Thus, we see in Fisher's paradigm an emphasis on very different elements of the rhetorical canons. He seems to eschew the heavy reliance on invention as the true stuff of argumentation and instead leans into aspects of style and delivery to persuade one's audience.

Applicability to Social Media and Surprising Themes

Aristotle's original model of the *pisteis* or artistic proofs—*logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*—continues to hold up as a valid method of both the creation and analysis of argument after thousands of years. Additionally, the five rhetorical canons enumerated by Cicero—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—have shifted tremendously as rhetoric and technology have changed over the years. Whereas classical rhetoric required all five canons, composition narrowed the field to largely the first three; however, the movement toward digital/online argument shifts the importance to the later canons, especially style and delivery. The three proofs undertake different names and forms in Fisher's paradigm but still appear in subtle ways; however, in Fisher's estimation, while

character, fidelity, and good reasons form the reasonable/rational aspect of argument, *values* are truly the most persuasive element of communication.

Weaving these two theories together allows for a rather thorough examination of a discourse as a socially situated, potentially persuasive form of communication; however, in some surprising ways, social media defies the elements of both paradigms and demands additional consideration. I will continue to expound upon the following themes and address them as they arise in the specific examples I examine later, but I will introduce them here before delving into social media in Chapter 3.

Brevity

By its very nature, social media limits the length of texts unlike anything that rhetorical or narrative theory could have previously imagined. Some platforms, such as Twitter, which will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, impose a character count that limits each post, but even for media that allow for longer posts, there is an expectation or understanding of immediacy. The temporal constraint of constructing an immediate response behaves as somewhat of a self-imposed limitation, so even if the medium itself does not restrict length, users will often self-regulate their post length to accommodate the behavioral norms of social media usage.

Instant Feedback

The immediacy referenced when discussing brevity demonstrates another element of social media: the opportunity for instant feedback. Social media platforms allow for immediate audience feedback on an enormous scale and in a wide variety of available responses on each medium, including options such as Facebook's "thumbs up" or "like," angry face, or crying emoji and Twitter's retweet, favorite, or tweeted response. This possibility for instant feedback has created a marketplace for posts, allowing them to "go viral," or spread at a pace that is metaphorically comparable to an epidemic. As soon

as a user posts, their audience's response can be easily quantified by the count of responses. This sort of temporal proximity between the one who posts and the one who responds is a phenomenon that could never have been imagined, especially in a time of print literacy, where readers are at a remove from writers and vice versa.

Collectivity

The accumulation of the aforementioned responses illustrates the theme of collectivity. There are multiple aspects to the possibility of collectivity, as social media platforms allow for an accretion of contributions, allowing for collaboration and performance in ways previous that could not have been envisioned previously. Other aspects to collectivity include posts that may occur among many different users or in the work of a single user whose contributions grow and collect meaning over time.

Constant Self-Performance

All symbolic action involves elements of self-performance, but social media—and on a larger scale, many forms of digital communication—allows for constant self-performance. This constant self-performance includes traditional rhetorical activities, such as choices as to what gets shared, what does not get shared, and how to frame a given situation, but these elements combine with the usage of photographs (which can be staged or candid, filtered or unfiltered), memes, hashtags, and emojis and are even further complicated by sponsorships or other commercial factors.

Audience Control

All four of the previously mentioned themes occur within the context of one's audience on social media. The capacity to follow, block, approve, or deny others gives social media users unprecedented control over the makeup of their audience. In so doing, social media users are in some ways able to construct their own ideal audience,

which can maximize their persuasive effect. This constructed audience can further inform the degree and type of self-performance.

Chapter 3

Analysis of Social Media and Incorporation of Themes

How, then, can we apply both the rhetorical-narrative paradigm discussed in Chapter 2 and these aforementioned themes to social media? Fisher's book was first published in 1987, clearly preceding the advent of social media; however, there is a renaissance of interest in storytelling and narrative, as they are now almost-daily parts of many Americans' lives through social media. As Jessica Richmond asserts, "Since the existence of human language, storytelling has fulfilled the same basic needs: to communicate feelings and share experiences. Today, traditional storytelling has evolved to digital storytelling, the act of telling stories via the technology of computers" (18). In their article "Ethos, Pathos and Logos in Facebook User Networking: New 'Rhetor' of the 21st Century," Berlanga-Fernandez, Garcia-Garcia, and Victoria assert that

Each user intervening in the social networks acts in order to communicate with diverse persuasive aims (convince, seduce, please, move, be interesting, etc.); rarely do the users just «share their life», and when they do, it is with the aim of prompting certain responses amongst friends-users within the social network, an intention with a certain degree of persuasion. (129)

They go on to argue, "The results point to the use of rhetoric by social network users in the way that rhetoric has been used throughout history: as a social tool. Rhetoric has found new channels and unsuspected dimensions on this social network (in fact on all social networks)" (133). If in fact these assertions hold true, social media users make rhetorical moves—either consciously or subconsciously—to elicit responses or emotions from their friends and/or followers, which Berlanga-Fernandez, Garcia-Garcia, and Victoria would seem to define as having a persuasive effect.

In this section, I will specifically discuss Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat as avenues for digital storytelling and persuasion. In order to clarify the uses of each of these platforms, I will here provide a brief explanation of each. Then I will

consider hashtags as an opportunity for change, and finally, I will look at ways to apply the rhetorical and narrative tools and social media themes discussed in my prior chapter to individual instances of social media communication.

Social Media Platforms

Facebook

Facebook began on Harvard's campus, as dramatized by the 2010 film *The Social Network*, and now boasts nearly 1.5 billion daily active Facebook users on average for June 2018. According to Facebook's page, "Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them." People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them. Facebook allows users to post pictures and status updates, create and organize events, find new "friends" via search functionality, request recommendations, create or join groups of like-minded individuals, message other users, comment on or "like" other users' posts, and more. Berlanga-Fernandez, Garcia-Garcia, and Victoria note that there is *pathos* inherent in even the terminology of social media platforms, stating, "That is the reason for naming them 'friends' (along with the semantic depth of the term) all those who enter the micro-network even briefly" (131). Facebook has a character limit of more than 60,000 characters per status update, so status updates certainly provide ample opportunity for depth of story or statement. According to Pew Research, "Roughly two-thirds of U.S. adults (68%) now report that they are Facebook users, and roughly three-quarters of those users access Facebook on a daily basis. With the exception of those 65 and older, a majority of Americans across a wide range of demographic groups now use Facebook." In order to

“friend” someone on Facebook, a user must send a request, which the person must then accept. There are additional levels of privacy settings that can be quite complex, but it is important to note that Facebook friendship can only occur after a request has been sent and accepted.

Twitter

Twitter began in 2006 as an SMS-based communications platform. As Amanda MacArthur notes in her piece “The Real History of Twitter, In Brief”:

The reason Twitter imposes a character limit on tweets is that Twitter was originally designed as an SMS-based platform. In its early days, 140 characters were the limit that mobile carriers imposed with SMS protocol standard so Twitter was simply creatively constrained. As Twitter eventually grew into a web platform, the 140-character limit remained as a matter of branding.

In 2017, however, Twitter decided that the 140-character limit was no longer relevant in the smartphone age and it increased the tweet limit to 280 characters over minor protestations. Most tweets, the company explained, hover around 50 characters; when people needed more characters, they simply sent more tweets. The character increase was designed to help Twitter users spend less time condensing their thoughts and more time talking.

Twitter introduced the idea of hashtags to allow users to contribute to and/or follow user-generated trends on social media. The *OED* defines “hashtags” to be “(on social media websites and applications) a word or phrase preceded by a hash and used to identify messages relating to a specific topic” (“hash, n.3”). Twitter also allows a user to “retweet” someone else’s tweet (with or without adding one’s own commentary to the retweet), and it tracks the number of likes and retweets. According to Pew Research, “close to half (45%) [of Americans in the 18- to 24-year-old age group] are Twitter users.” Twitter offers the option for users to set their profiles to “private,” in which case other users have to request to follow; however, if a profile is set to “public,” anyone can follow. Jessica Richmond notes in “Digital Storytelling” that

As a medium for sharing, Twitter provides users (both storytellers and readers) with unique features, including literacy that is born of our everyday lives, delivered in real-time, and limited to 140 characters in one post. Twitter also provides users with the

opportunity to collaborate using a shared hashtag, a tool to index a story or theme so that others may follow and contribute. (19)

Twitter is often referred to as a “microblogging” site, which emphasizes its purposes as a medium to share stories, as it refers back to “blogging” (the shortened form of “weblogging”), which involves utilizing the Internet as a sort of journal or diary.

Instagram

Instagram arrived to the social media scene a bit later than Facebook and Twitter. Instagram began in July 2010 when Mike Krieger (one of Instagram’s co-founders) posted the first-ever Instagram and has since grown to upwards of 800 million users (as of September 2017). Instagram is a platform specifically for sharing pictures and brief videos, both of which can be posted with or without captions and/or locations. Further, Instagram offers users the ability to edit and/or apply a filter to their pictures and videos before posting by utilizing some basic, user-friendly editing capabilities. *TIME*’s piece on Instagram’s sixth anniversary, penned by Raisa Bruner, refers to “fastidiousness when it comes to composition, precision, and editing” and calls Instagram “the social media tool that defines the millennial generation.” According to Pew Research, “71% of Americans in [the 18- to 24-year-old] age group now use Instagram.” According to Instagram’s self-description, the creators have “focused on simplicity and inspiring creativity through solving problems with thoughtful product design. As a result, Instagram has become the home for visual storytelling for everyone from celebrities, newsrooms and brands, to teens, musicians and anyone with a creative passion.” Instagram is similar to Twitter in its profile settings: a user can set their profile to “public” or to “private.” In the case of the former, anyone can follow, but if a user selects the latter, a user must first send a request and be approved in order to follow.

Snapchat

Snapchat is the most recent social media addition of the four platforms discussed herein—started in 2011—but is certainly outstanding because Pew Research notes that “[s]ome 78% of 18- to 24-year-olds use Snapchat, and a sizeable majority of these users (71%) visit the platform multiple times per day.” According to Gary Vaynerchuck’s *Huffington Post* piece entitled “The Snap Generation: A Guide to Snapchat’s History,” Snapchat’s success can be attributed almost entirely to the fast adoption rate of teens. Vaynerchuck writes:

But, let’s be honest: what *really* makes a new social network become popular fast?

Teenagers.

There are two things that are very true when it comes to teens. One, it’s not cool to hang out at the same club as your mom. And two, you want to lock your room.

Snapchat solved both those things. Parents were starting to join Facebook in droves, so teens were looking to leave and looking for somewhere to go. And, the disappearing photos function was essentially the same thing as a “do not disturb” sign on your door, except much more effective. Both these things led to Snapchat’s extreme and sudden user growth. Just a year after launching, Snapchat hit 10 million active users.

In that same piece, Vaynerchuck explains that “[a] Snap is the main functionality of the app and is what the disappearing photos and videos are called. You send these directly to friends in the app. They last anywhere from one second up to ten seconds after being opened, then the ‘snap’ disappears.” This, he points out, is different from a Story, “which is a collection of Snaps put together to create a...Story. Unlike direct Snaps, these can be viewed by anyone who follows you.” According to Snapchat’s support page, “By default, only ‘Friends’ you’ve added on Snapchat can contact you directly or view your Story.” In the interest of full disclosure, Snapchat will be the least-discussed medium in this project; however, it is mentioned in a tweet that I will discuss later, and I will also further address the addition of filters—a key element of Snapchat’s appeal—to pictures. These issues will be addressed later in this chapter.

Digital Storytelling, Shame, and Delivery

This shift toward “digital storytelling” is not in and of itself imbued with any sort of moral values. As Bailey Parnell states in her TED Talk, “Social media is neither good nor bad. It’s just the most recent tool we’re using to do what we’ve always done: tell stories and communicate with each other.” However, even the discussion of digital storytelling is not as straightforward as it might seem. Daria Dayter writes of reporting stories as they happen in one’s life, “This ambient, unfolding narrative is composed of many fragmented and ephemeral pieces of information that over time give us a feel for the individual sharing his/her life events with us and, eventually, add up to a comprehensive picture” (26). Dayter also asserts that “The episodic quality of storylines is a feature of the eyewitness microgenre. Life events are reported as they are unfolding and the teller does not have an opportunity to process them according to a narrative template and present a packaged story” (24). There is a clear—and potentially concerning—connection between the idea of presenting events as they occur without “an opportunity to process them” and “present a packaged story” and the realities of social media users presenting themselves on social media in real time (or close to it). Presenting ideas, emotions, events, and/or images without processing time may result in posting without consideration of the potential reception or ramifications of the post. On the other hand, though, an artificial packaging of one’s story, life events, or even appearance can present a falsely depicted self—one that is so heavily edited that it may bear little to no resemblance to one’s actual life.

Notwithstanding the complex possibilities of presenting without processing or over-editing to the point of artificiality, it is also easy to find fault and cast shame toward others online. Monica Lewinsky’s TED Talk examines online shaming from a unique perspective: as “Patient Zero”—in her estimation—of cyberbullying. She says,

A marketplace has emerged where public humiliation is a commodity and shame is an industry. How is the money made? Clicks. The more shame, the more clicks. The more clicks, the more advertising dollars. We're in a dangerous cycle. The more we click on this kind of gossip, the more numb we get to the human lives behind it, and the more numb we get, the more we click. All the while, someone is making money off of the back of someone else's suffering. With every click, we make a choice.

As a renaissance of interest in the matter of storytelling develops thanks to social media, much current scholarship about this storytelling and crafting of one's narrative is accessible to the masses through TED Talks like hers. In Brené Brown's TED Talk on vulnerability, she posits that "Maybe stories are just data with a soul." Brown goes on to enumerate the ways that her research emphasized the importance of vulnerability over and over. She also says in her talk, "The more afraid we are, the more vulnerable we are, the more afraid we are. This is what politics looks like today. There's no discourse anymore. There's no conversation. There's just blame. You know how blame is described in the research? A way to discharge pain and discomfort." Unfortunately, a large amount of the conversation on social media often involves blame or shame, which points to the themes of instant feedback as well as self-performance, as social media users are able to respond not only to posts but to others' comments on posts. In these situations, it is sadly common to see strong language and rude comments that most would be unwilling to say in a face-to-face conversation.

I argue that this online culture of blame and shame act as a reversal of the classical canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) and further as a reversal of the most important aspects of composition (invention, arrangement, and style): delivery—or perhaps the perception of the delivery—becomes one of if not *the* most important element of the communication. Here, we must acknowledge the vast temporal disconnect between the delivery style of ancient Rome, as explained by Aristotle, and that of modern social media. Aristotle states that the first part of the speech to be considered is "the facts from which a speech has a persuasive

effect,” and the second part is “how to compose this in language” (p. 194-195, III.1.3). He goes on to explain:

[T]hird is something that has the greatest force but has not yet been taken in hand, the matter of the delivery...delivery was late in coming to be considered...It is a matter of how the voice should be used in expressing such emotion, sometimes loud and sometimes soft or intermediate, and how the pitch accents should be intoned...and what rhythms should be expressed in each case. (p. 195, III.1.3).

He goes on to compare delivery to acting and related performance. Obviously, the social media platforms considered here largely preclude consideration of any sort of verbal performance, as the posts are usually either visual or written in nature. Eyman seems to agree with this renewed-but-different emphasis on the creative delivery of social media posts, asserting that “contemporary attempts to connect the rhetorical cannon [sic] to digital texts and performances has lead [sic] to revival of theoretical work on memory and delivery” (15). Being able to improvise in a particularly striking, sharp, funny, or ironic way is often valued above a thoughtfully presented position that is less creatively worded. Furthermore, it is doubtful that the typical social media user would invest the time and energy to carefully read and consider claims, reasons, and evidence thoughtfully provided by another. Instead, as J.C. Howard points out that with the influence of social media “a culture would be developed in which tools that encourage brevity are created, which in turn creates a culture that rewards brevity and eschews in-depth discourse.” (13) Instead, preference is shown for comments that are creative enough to gain widespread appeal, even allowing them to go viral.

Platforms such as Facebook will allow for longer entries, but Twitter’s restrictive character parameters actually characterize the medium, as Twitter is known for the brevity of its users’ tweets, although the character limit doubled from 140 characters to 280 characters in late 2017, as noted earlier. Troublingly, though, tweets often elicit responses pointing out a lack of completeness or thoroughness despite the clear

restrictions on length, as can be seen in these 2018 tweets by Ed Stetzer (although he incorrectly refers to Twitter's limit as a 280-word tweet, when the limitation is actually 280 characters, including letters, spaces, and any punctuation or symbols) and Jared Wilson.



Figure 3-1 Examples of satirical tweets, demonstrating stereotypical responses which point out the types of reasoning that social media users seem to expect.

Admittedly, Twitter users will occasionally post a thread of tweets in order to more fully explain an idea or stance, but normal usage dictates that a tweet remain within the 280-character limit. This presupposition that an argument will be more fully fleshed out by the arguer or, to return to our prior definition, that the claim will be supported by reasons and evidence demonstrates an underlying expectation that social media platforms such as Twitter act as a rhetorical or argumentative medium. However, social media can fulfill rhetorical as well as narrative functions but can also exceed the reach of either of those two categories. In the world of social media, traditional concepts of universal audiences are both enriched and complicated by one's ability to simultaneously shape one's own audience (in approving or denying followers/friends) and risk the possibility of having a social post go viral or be shared in unintended ways. Further, each platform varies widely, as the reach of each individual person can vary drastically based upon their audience, making a big-picture consideration of multiple platforms even more challenging.

Memes

Another important aspect of conversation via social media is the meme.

Interestingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines meme in two different ways: “A cultural element or behavioural trait whose transmission and consequent persistence in a population, although occurring by non-genetic means (esp. imitation), is considered as analogous to the inheritance of a gene,” and “An image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations. Also with modifying word, as Internet meme, etc.” According to the *OED*, Richard Dawkins originated the first usage with his 1976 *Selfish Gene*, in which he writes, “The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun which conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. ‘Mimeme’ comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like ‘gene’. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*.” This usage remained the only one until 1998, at which point it ceased to be used in reference to a social trait passed along by culture and began to be used exclusively to refer to Internet memes.

Current meme usage often involves both image and text. In an article by Nicki Lisa Cole entitled “What Makes Memes So Catchy?” she writes:

According to Dawkins, what makes a meme a meme, or something that is successfully spread, copied, and/or adapted from person to person, are three key things: copy-fidelity, or the possibility of the thing in question to be accurately copied; fecundity, or the speed at which the thing is replicated; and longevity, or its staying-power over a period of time. For any cultural element or artifact to become a meme, it must fulfill all of these criteria... memes that capture the popular zeitgeist are those that are most successful because they are the ones that will capture our attention, inspire a sense of belonging and connectedness with the person who shared it with us, and encourage us to share with others the meme and the collective experience of viewing it and relating to it.

These elements of capturing the popular zeitgeist and giving a sense of connection with those among whom the meme is shared likely contributes to the “viral” patterns in which

memes are spread. In order to clarify and illustrate some memes that have gone viral, several are shown below.



Figure 3-2 Examples of memes that have gone viral.

The text portion of these memes is often changed to situation-specific commentary, but certain elements remain the same in each usage. In Figure 3-2(a) above, the meme usually references a small success or victory, while (b), typically referred to as “condescending Wonka,” usually phrases a commonly held view in a snide or snarky way. Figure 3-2(c), (d), and (e) are even more formulaic than those. The man in the image in 3-2(c) is known as “The Most Interesting Man in the World” from Dos Equis beer TV commercials, and the meme borrows his catchphrase, “I don’t always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer Dos Equis,” and reappropriates it, typically to some sort of activity or comment that is highly relatable: “I don’t always _____, but when I do, _____.” The

image in (d) is a character from the animated television show *Futurama* and follows the same sort of fill-in-the-blank formula, “Not sure if _____ or _____,” typically demonstrating an element of suspicion. Finally, Figure 3-2(e) depicts a declaration of taking on activity with great enthusiasm or ambition but always in the same pattern, “_____ all the _____.” Although the exact wording may be changed to apply to any particular situation, the image and the impression and/or formula of the text must remain intact for the meme to retain its communicative power. The rampant usage of memes in social media helps accentuate some of the factors that are examined in this thesis: brevity, as humor and succinctness are of the utmost importance in delivery, and instant feedback, as memes are able to both provide as well as function as instant feedback.

Keywords, Hashtags, and Hashtag Activism

As defined previously, hashtags are “a word or phrase preceded by a hash and used to identify messages relating to a specific topic” (“hash, n.3”). Alan Jacobs writes in his book *How to Think*:

This [the deployment of keywords as a way to indicate group affiliations] is true across the political and social spectrums, and can be seen in its purest (i.e., most extreme) form in the deployment of certain social-media hashtags: #RINO [Republican In Name Only], for example, or #cuckservative [a combination of cuckold and conservative], or #intersectionality, or #whiteprivilege. Often these hashtags will be deployed as one-word replies to the tweets or posts of others. Hashtags like this do a lot of work. (91-92)

Hashtags thus serve not only a utilitarian purpose, allowing similar ideas to “trend” or “go viral”; they also provide context and background and even fill in missing elements to stories, as I will discuss in my consideration of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. The hashtags themselves also fulfill some of the characteristics of social media discourse, including brevity, the opportunity for instant feedback, and their collective nature, as described below.

Hashtags can be used on virtually any social media platform, but they gained popularity on Twitter, which, as mentioned earlier, is regarded as a microblogging site—

an avenue for the telling of short stories. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says, “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.” Why do stories matter, and how they can make this sort of difference? Fisher would here argue that narrative is more universal and efficacious than other forms of persuasive communication, asserting:

First, narration comes closer to capturing the experience of the world, simultaneously appealing to the various senses, to reason and emotion, to intellect and imagination, and to fact and value. It does not presume intellectual contact only. Second, one does not have to be taught narrative probability and narrative fidelity; one culturally acquires them through a universal faculty and experience. Obviously one can, through education, become sophisticated in one’s understanding and application of these principles... Third, narration works by suggestion and identification; argument operates by inferential moves and deliberation. Both forms are modes of expressing good reasons, so the differences between them are structural rather than substantive. (75)

Throughout his book, Fisher seems to vacillate between his insistence that narrativity is inherent or essential and his stating that it is culturally acquired.

The current (at least, as of the time of writing) #MeToo and #TimesUp movements are incredible examples of both Adichie and Fisher’s arguments here. With the courage of many voices chiming in, victims began to share their stories of sexual harassment and abuse, including in the explosive Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse scandal and the indictment of the former USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar. As Eliana Dockterman reported in *TIME* Magazine, “Last year [in 2017], that rallying cry was #MeToo, and as the hashtag went viral, with survivors sharing their stories of sexual assault and harassment, hundreds of alleged abusers lost their positions of power.” In this case, there was tremendous emotional but also argumentative power in the preponderance of stories from victims. Their arguments were not carefully laid out according to rhetorical tradition, but the fidelity and coherence insisted upon by Fisher for persuasive stories proved incredibly moving and persuasive precisely *because* of the

sheer volume of them via the collective nature of the medium. Movements such as these are typically lumped into the category of “hashtag activism,” which suggests that little or no action is taken to actually effect change but that users are instead content to simply use a hashtag and feel a sort of smug satisfaction that they have helped to further a cause or create change. And, of course, the #MeToo movement is in no way perfect.

Dockterman goes on to write:

Even as hundreds of wrongdoers are fired from their jobs, investigated by police and, in the rarest of cases, actually sentenced for committing the crime of assault or rape, the women who lead #MeToo will never be able to declare victory... There will be no one moment that solves all the problems of sexism and the abuses that accompany it in any industry. For activists, including survivors, the past year has sometimes felt just, and often discouraging. But if revolutions come all at once, societies change slowly. That’s a cause both of frustration and ultimately—actuarially, even—of real hope.

I believe that online social movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp exemplify Jacobs’ ideas about the “work” done by hashtags, Adichie’s premise about stories’ healing power, as well as Fisher’s assertion about the appeals. Sexual assault/abuse/harassment victims (a group comprised of largely but not entirely women) sharing their stories in solidarity with others “empower,” “humanize,” and “repair...broken dignity” for those who share, but importantly, they also “[work] by suggestion and identification” to enable those who have not had similar experiences to hear stories, identify with victims, and—through appeals to “the various senses, to reason and emotion, to intellect and imagination, and to fact and value”—enable identification, consubstantiation, and empathy, which will ideally lead to action and change. They can also provide context to a tweet with very little explanation—allowing for brevity—and provide modes of collectivity. In many instances, survivors elected to share their stories in brief with little or no detail, but the very inclusion of the #MeToo hashtag provided the necessary information to fill in the blanks.

The tidal wave of change moves slowly and imperfectly; however, it is worth noting that these victims and survivors might never have spoken out without a forum or

mediatory ground—social media—that allowed them to share their stories. Their sharing did indeed “empower,” “humanize,” and “repair [their] broken dignity,” as Adichie describes. Perhaps the effectiveness (in the sense of persuasion and change) of these stories relates back to the importance Fisher places on values. He even argues that the function performed by values is “to determine the argument’s outcome” (111). The #TimesUp movement actually establishes a fund for victims of sexual harassment or assault in Hollywood to be able to pursue legal recourse against the perpetrator(s), and that fund creates a space for real change to occur in the world, affording victims the ability and option to take a stand against powerful individuals and institutions with far greater monetary resources. Thus, the action does not remain limited to a social media platform—no, instead, change can be implemented in the real world.

Thus, it is worth noting that both hashtags and memes, which are often the raw material or currency of digital social interactions, rely upon connectedness and sharing. Further, interactions involving hashtags and/or memes demonstrate “code-switching” or “the ability to move between various dialects and levels of ‘correctness’” as the social situation dictates (David Foster Wallace qtd. in Jacobs, 144). Certain hashtags or memes would only be funny or appropriate—or, if you will, persuasive—with certain friends or groups. The ability to navigate and select appropriate memes for one’s audience is a necessary step in their communicative ability. Although communication via hashtags or memes may seem thoughtless, shallow, or simple, there is actually a great deal of rhetorical work that goes into correctly reading one’s audience and tailoring the meme or hashtag appropriately.

Performances of the Self

On the other hand, though, there is tremendous concern over several aspects of social media. For one, the chasm between the online self and the “real” self can be

immeasurably vast. The constructed persona that is demonstrated online may or may not bear any semblance to one's actual life. The disconnect between the performativity of crafting one's own self for the purposes of demonstration to others is an element of great fascination in our current cultural moment specifically because of the "always on" nature of social media. While rhetors have always had a sense of performativity in communication, the constant connectedness of social media takes that performativity to a new level of intensity and ubiquity. This unclear demarcation between the performative and the real is worth noting in the context of influencers and Internet fame, as the perceived *ethos* or narrative of these individuals may not truly align with their real lives. Zizi Papacharissi writes, "In this manner, performativity enables both everyday doing and the rhetorical construction of a personal narrative of the self...It is through strategies of play that individuals mix public and private to deconstruct, reconstruct, and transform performances in search of an authentic sense of self" (1991). Papacharissi goes on to state,

Performing a networked self requires the crafting of polysemic presentations that make sense to diverse audiences and publics without compromising one's own sense of self. Understood within the greater paradigm of the ongoing, reflexive storytelling project of the self, networked selves assemble via practices of authorship, listening, and redaction (Papacharissi and Easton, 2012). (2001)

Thus, it seems that Papacharissi would perhaps separate narrativity from performativity, while insisting on elements of coherence and fidelity similar to those of Fisher. Without clear criteria to evaluate the performative self, a social media user can portray or perform a "self" they aspire to or desire without actually embodying that reality. Curated images, quotes, and stories that appear to demonstrate a person's "perfect" life cause great concern, as observers see and internalize the perceived perfection of others and compare that to the shortcomings and disappointments that one inevitably encounters in life. In order to explore the types of rhetorical and narrative constructs discussed in

Chapter 2, I would like to examine two specific instances of this sort of relationship between the digital world and the real world, including Kylie Jenner's tweet about Snapchat and Lin-Manuel Miranda's tweets that are now being published as a book.

Social Media Influencers

Jenner is an avid user of social media to promote Kylie Cosmetics, her line of makeup and beauty products, which has catapulted her to become the youngest person on Forbes' 2018 list of "America's Richest Self-Made Women" with a net worth of approximately \$900 million. She has expressed her appreciation for social media due to the ways it connects her directly with her customers/followers (commanding an impressive 112 million Instagram followers), and she is Snapchat's most followed person—so much so that they even created a filter just for her to celebrate her birthday. However, in February 2018, Jenner tweeted, "sooo does anyone else not open Snapchat anymore? Or is it just me... ugh, this is so sad." She later replied to her own tweet, "still love you tho snap ... my first love," perhaps attempting to put a more positive spin on her post. Tweeting such a short statement as well as a short response—both of which lacked correct capitalization and punctuation—demonstrates brevity, in showing that these tweets were constructed hastily. Whether they were actually constructed hastily or whether they were instead intentional choices made in this self-performance, it would be impossible to know for certain.



Figure 3-3 February 21, 2018 Tweets by Kylie Jenner

However, according to a subsequent Bloomberg article (published one day after her tweets) about the incident,

Shares of the Snapchat parent company sank 6.1 percent on Thursday [February 22, 2018], wiping out \$1.3 billion in market value, on the heels of a tweet on Wednesday [February 21, 2018] from Kylie Jenner, who said she doesn't open the app anymore. Whether it's the demands of her newfound motherhood, or the recent app redesign, the testament drew similar replies from her 24.5 million followers.

Although this story occurred in the immediate wake of her tweet, I believe it is also worth noting that Jenner has begun to rely more heavily upon Instagram than Snapchat in her communication with her followers. This is especially noteworthy because Instagram is able to quantify users, views, and likes in ways that Snapchat cannot, and the ability to quantify one's reach impacts the demonstrable value of their communications, as discussed further below.

However, it is worth pausing here to consider the element of filter usage. In this story regarding Jenner's tweet and its impact, several themes regarding social media appear, including brevity and instant feedback, but the most nuanced theme is that of constant self-performance, especially when considered through the concept of filters.

“Photo messaging app Snapchat features a range of filters that can transform users' selfies with accessories and special effects. Filters overlay a wide selection of animated tricks onto users' faces, which range from transforming the person into a dog, to giving them a flower crown, to turning them into a zombie” (Palmer). Instagram, too, offers filters, but these filters usually impact the tones or focus of the image. They can bring out particular colors, direct the viewer's aim to one particular area, blur anything the user wishes to hide, brighten a picture that came out too dark, etc. These filters add a layer (both literally and metaphorically) to the consideration of these types of posts, as these filters can be used for a humorous effect but can also be used to alter the subject's appearance, disguising, for example, whether the individual is tired or well-rested or whether they are wearing makeup or not. These filters can also exaggerate particular popular features, such as making one's eyes look notably larger or increasing lip size. In so applying a filter, the user actually distorts their image, presumably to impact audience reception.

Returning to the consideration of the impact of Jenner's passing opinion about a social media platform, we see another interesting facet of social media: the role of “influencers.” *The Atlantic* published a March 2017 story by Bianca Bosker about Amber Fillerup Clark, whom Bosker references as the “perfect mother and social-media influencer.” Bosker writes, “Not so long ago, Fillerup Clark was a broke student in Provo, Utah. Today, at age 26, she is the equivalent of internet royalty: a ‘relatable influencer,’ someone whom hundreds of thousands of women trust as a friend and whom companies pay handsomely to name-drop their products.” Influencers can earn thousands of dollars per post, although the exact figure depends on how many followers the influencer has. According to CNBC,

Entrepreneur Kylie Jenner makes an estimated \$1 million per sponsored post on her Instagram, which makes her the highest paid celebrity influencer on the social media

platform, according to the 2018 Instagram Rich List compiled by Hopper HQ, an automated Instagram scheduler. Jenner is followed by singer Selena Gomez, who gets \$800,000 per sponsored post, and star soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo, who earns \$750,000. Together, these and other up-and-coming stars contribute to the \$1 billion influencer market, which is expected to double in value by 2019.

Interestingly, many of these influencers tend to rely upon social collateral afforded them by other opportunities, such as Jenner's *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, Gomez's stint on the Disney channel and subsequent singing career, and Ronaldo's long soccer career. So then, what are the persuasive forces operating here? In my opinion, the very existence of social media influencers points to the incredibly persuasive force of *ethos*, as followers take action based on the words, actions, recommendations, etc., of those they follow. And because of the structure of social media, those audiences have elected to follow those individuals, and there is always some available, ready, and willing to receive these appeals. Furthermore, thanks to online shopping on handheld devices, there is the opportunity for immediate action in the form of purchasing powers with an immediacy never before possible.

In the case of Jenner's beauty line, it is difficult to ascertain the exact source of the persuasive action. Perhaps her followers are simply that influenced by her recommendations, relying entirely on the *ethos* of the Kylie Jenner name. On the other hand, perhaps whether something more like Fisher's narrative paradigm is at work here, and Jenner's consistently flawless appearance presented alongside her mind-boggling wealth tells an appealing story. Further, it may be that her followers look at that narrative and experience a sense of Burke's identification or consubstantiation, aligning their lives and beauty regimen with hers. For those who consume her posts without a consideration of the performativity of social media, an Instagram like the one below which advertises a self-tanner (noted with the brief hashtag *#ad*) can be extremely influential, causing an emotional reaction in the reader/consumer/audience in making them believe that in some

way—even just this one small way—they can have a life like Jenner’s lavish lifestyle. We see here the return of Burke’s concepts of identification and consubstantiation in the reader’s desire to identify or align his or her “self” with that of Jenner. However, what is really at work here? It would be challenging to explain the phenomenon of influencers with the traditional rhetorical triangle. In the sorts of persuasion that occur within the realm of influencers, *ethos* certainly bears the majority of the persuasive weight; however, the *ethos* here is established over time—in a narrative format. A single tweet or post from Fillerup Clark or Jenner alone would likely seem unsubstantiated and unwarranted, but they have established a particular version of the “self” in their posts over time. In this, we can see a different approach to the theme of collectivity. As opposed to many different contributors, we see an “accumulating” effect of many contributions from a single source over time.



Figure 3-4 August 2, 2018, Instagram post from Kylie Jenner advertising Bondi Sands self-tanner.

Conducting a thorough rhetorical and/or narrative analysis of social media can seem a daunting—if not impossible—task. As we have been considering through the lens of the brevity theme, how can an argument be built or a narrative be constructed via an image or in 280 characters or fewer? Despite the fact that traditional elements of traditional rhetoric or narrative may not be presented clearly for analysis, employing the rhetorical triangle in analysis stands the test of time and provides a valuable first step for analysis here. That analysis can be complicated, however, by the constructed nature of digital performances of the self. Specifically, the very existence of social media influencers indicates the importance of *ethos* or character (for rhetoric and narrative paradigm theory, respectively), but an online persona requires an additional level of consideration. For example, Fillerup Clark, mentioned earlier as a well-known influencer, makes her social media presence her livelihood, but also employs a nanny, carefully curates her image, and travels frequently in order to post pictures of interesting and beautiful places. That lifestyle is vastly different from that of the average Instagram user, and without a thorough consideration of the very construct of an “influencer,” it can be difficult to see Fillerup Clark’s life as something tidied, edited, and sponsored instead of viewing it as pure reality. The same can be said of Jenner, who has a net worth that puts her in the top one percent in the entire world. When she posts pictures of herself in midriff-bearing clothes, revealing a small waist and toned stomach just a few months after having a baby, and/or sitting on one of her luxury cars, it can be difficult to examine the sorts of invisible constructs that impact the message of her image. Her lifestyle is unlike others of her same age. At twenty-one, she is not finishing up college or wondering how to pay off her student loans; instead, she is able to coordinate her outfit with her Lamborghini. While performances of the self have always existed, the around-the-clock,

constant nature of social media adds a new element to these performances, as they can be proliferated and/or consumed at any time of the day or night. Posts can even go viral while the one who posted it sleeps, and they can wake up to new levels of compliments, purchased merchandise, or hateful comments—and everything in between.

This consideration of the performativity of social media is not intended to denigrate those who make their living as influencers; instead, the aim herein is to encourage an increased depth of thoughtfulness in considering what undergirds the posts. Indeed, despite the fact that they put a particular image or performance of themselves out on social media, Fillierup Clark and Jenner are actual human beings who can still be hurt by the sorts of negative and even cruel things that others comment on their posts or message to them directly, demonstrating again our theme of instant feedback. As we considered earlier, the sorts of mean-spirited comments that users are often willing to make online—but certainly not in person—speak to the divorce between the online and the real that seems to be occurring today. Jacobs states, “Everyone agrees that confusions about whether a conversation is private, or public, or semiprivate (e.g., a conversation at a restaurant table), coupled with what has been called the ‘online disinhibition effect,’ contribute to the dysfunctional character of much online discourse” (81).

There is a challenging tension found in any attempts at assessment, as Aristotle seemed to be fond of clear-cut lists, but Fisher repeatedly insists that humans are, by nature, storytellers, that narrative is our native tongue, and that because of this inherent or essential narrativity, we can easily assess a narrative because we’ve been socially conditioned to do so. This results in Fisher’s provision of many descriptive qualities of narrative but lack of the sort of evaluative structure that can be found in rhetoric. According to Fisher’s paradigm, the values that underlie the narrative are truly the

persuasive elements, which aligns with the function of warrants in traditional rhetoric. However, in the case of influencers, there are layers of difficulty in uncovering meaningful narrative when the narrative is intentionally constructed as a commercial. This is especially important in trying to excavate underlying values, as in most cases, commercials are designed specifically to draw upon those deeply held values.

Furthermore, as a vast percentage of influencers' followers do not know them personally, there is a gap between the knowledge of the performance put forth on social media and knowledge of the person. This can lead to a sense of community without any sort of true knowing. Here, we should note Fisher's insistence on community in the ability to accurately communicate. He quotes Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*: "The process of communication is not mere action, a purposeful activity, a setting-up of signs, through which I transmit my will to others...it is a living process in which a *community of life is lived out*" (95, emphasis added). This insistence on community is seemingly the key to accurate communication, which is reasonable in real-world relationships; however, the mediation of the Internet in the creation of those communities can easily distort the entire idea of community. The distortion of community is perhaps an extension of the performativity of the self, as one is always making choices about what to present and to whom. Social media provides a venue for further distortion of that "to whom" in that an individual has the opportunity to actually construct their own audience, approving or rejecting followers or friends and/or deciding carefully whom to follow in order to narrow the field of those to whom one presents their message or image. In doing so, a user may intentionally restrict those with whom they have opportunity to engage, perhaps limiting their audience to only like-minded individuals, thereby reducing the potential for conflict or disagreement. This would, to return to a prior point from Burke, remove the opportunity

for rhetoric, as the two would already be experiencing that “pure identification” in which there is no strife or disagreement.

However, social media can also simultaneously do the exact opposite of that, widening the horizons and potential encounters of the user. A social media user may learn from the words or experience of another, such as the massive story-sharing moment that occurred with the previously mentioned #MeToo movement. Whereas one or two stories may be explained away as inconsequential or coincidental, thousands of shared stories with striking similarities present a non-invasive way to educate others who may have been unaware of these types of situations—or at least the preponderance of them—in the past, demonstrating the effectiveness of the collective nature of social media. Social media also opens up the opportunity for one to give or receive advice, especially in groups with some sort of commonality. For example, there are many Facebook groups of, say, students at a particular university, mothers of young children, gamers, those who enjoy working out, etc. In those groups, it is common, accepted behavior for a user to openly state that they are having a problem with x or y or are unsure of how to handle z. In those groups, others are often willing to offer suggestions, ideas, and solutions but also encouragement and solidarity via the instant feedback offered by social media. In this way, online communities can be true communities, allowing for a connection and even, at times, vulnerability that might not happen in a face-to-face interaction. Thus, although there are undeniable real-world implications and consequences for comments and images shared via social media, there are also important positive opportunities as well. There are quite literally countless instances of social media being used for negativity, but I would be remiss to ignore the ways that social media also creates unity and space for goodness in ways that were not possible prior to the advent of social media.

Social Media as Both Persuasive and Positive

On the other end of the spectrum from influencers are those who do not set out to sell a product but end up, perhaps somewhat accidentally, doing exactly that. The two instances considered here are Lin-Manuel Miranda, who is famous for his musicals *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*, and Brandon Stanton, who is known for his photography in *Humans of New York*. Miranda, who has a reputation for being indefatigably positive and encouraging, began tweeting “good morning” and “good night” messages to his followers, encouraging them to remember their worth and value, challenging them to spend less time on devices and connect with others, and exhorting them to disregard what others may think of them because he [Miranda] loves them just the way they are.



(a)



(b)

Figure 3-5 Examples of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s “G’Morning” and “G’Night” tweets: (a) September 14, 2018 G’Morning Tweet by Lin-Manuel Miranda and (b) August 27, 2018 G’Night Tweet by Lin-Manuel Miranda

These tweets were interspersed among his other tweets, including messages about his shows, friends of his, pictures of his children (always with their faces hidden) and wife, etc. His followers loved these encouraging tweets so much that, due to popular demand, he is publishing them as a book that will be illustrated by his friend Jonny Sun. As

reported by Broadway World, “The man is non-stop! Lin-Manuel Miranda announced his latest project today on Twitter. He is going to be releasing a book of his famous good morning and goodnight tweets!” Interestingly, these tweets were free to read when they existed only in the realm of Twitter, but users felt so uplifted by and drawn to their message that they proclaimed their willingness to pay to purchase them in a more concrete form, even despite Miranda’s protestations (see Figure 3-6(a) below). Given that his tweets went out to his two million followers, there was/is no way to tailor those comments to each individual person, so he did not include detailed evidence as to why each person is worthwhile; instead, he connected with a value—that each person matters for who they are—in the allotted 280 characters or fewer, demonstrating again the theme of brevity. His followers responded immediately with great positivity and thankfulness for his messages, so it seems likely that this instant feedback helped to encourage the series to continue. In Miranda’s case, certainly his *ethos* paved the way for his “G’morning, G’night! Little Pep Talks for You and Me,” as such cheerful tweets might have either been regarded as sarcasm or been picked apart (as can be seen commonly on Twitter), but coming from a source of known positivity and creativity, his tweets were received warmly. This series of tweets again demonstrates the idea of collectivity over time, creating a series of thoughts that were cohesive both with each other and with his *ethos* as an immigrant’s son who speaks often of his love for Puerto Rico, openly admires and adores his attorney wife, is eternally self-deprecating, and looks lovingly at seemingly everyone (as has become a popular Internet meme, with the original tweet by Dana Schwartz seen at Figure 3-6(b) below).



Figure 3-6 (a) July 17, 2018, tweet by Lin-Manuel Miranda announcing his forthcoming book, “G’morning, G’night! Little Pep Talks for You and Me,” and (b) June 13, 2016, tweet by Dana Schwartz.

It would be naïve to assert that there is no amount of performativity to Miranda’s social media presence; indeed, as discussed at length here, there is always some level of performativity to the narrative one puts forth online. In this way, though, Fisher’s reliance on character and fidelity are helpful tools in evaluation, so it seems worthwhile to here turn back to a consideration of Fisher’s principles. He says that that his narrative paradigm is “a philosophy of reason, value and action” and that “[h]uman communication is tested against the principles of probability (coherence) and fidelity (truthfulness and reliability)” (47). If the message is consistent—consistently positive, in the case of Miranda—that fidelity, the hanging together of the message, helps to undergird the veracity of both the message and the speaker.

Another positive use of social media involves the blog, Facebook page, and Instagram profile “Humans of New York” (often abbreviated to “HONY”), which is created and maintained by Brandon Stanton. He says of his project, “Humans of New York began as a photography project in 2010. The initial goal was to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers on the street, and create an exhaustive catalogue of the city’s inhabitants.” He goes on to

state, “Somewhere along the way, I began to interview my subjects in addition to photographing them. And alongside their portraits, I’d include quotes and short stories from their lives.” Although these quotes vary in length, they are often quite short and at times seem to even seem to lack context, which aligns with our consideration of brevity. Stanton has also visited several other countries in order to provide glimpses into the lives of those living in various situations around the world. His social media presence generated enough interest that he ultimately published his photographs into two separate books, demonstrating again the concept of collectivity over time. In a trajectory that is very similar to that of Miranda’s, Stanton has now released two *New York Times* bestsellers, *Humans of New York* (2013) and *Humans of New York: Stories* (2015)—taking what was once digital and free to anyone and publishing it in a material way.

While many of his photographs could be viewed as a visual argument and examined as such, Stanton’s voice very seldom appears in any of HONY’s social media. The stories and voices he depicts hail from a wide range of backgrounds, races, socioeconomic levels, ages, etc. Sometimes, Stanton shows the speaker’s face; in other instances, he shows only their hands or their shoes, carefully omitting the face of the speaker. Some examples of HONY’s Facebook posts are included here:



(a)



(b)

Figure 3-7 Example Facebook posts from Humans of New York: (a) August 16, 2018, post and (b) June 17, 2018, post.

The HONY Facebook page has approximately 18 million followers, many of whom take the time to comment on the pictures/stories that Stanton posts, allowing for instant feedback both to the original post as well as to each other. Stanton typically does not follow up the subject's story with additional questions or comments, instead allowing the person's picture and story or comment to stand alone. When these stories are tragic—as they often seem to be—the HONY “community” will often post comments asking how to help that person. The HONY community has funded students to attend school, sick people to receive care, captive children to be freed from bonded slavery, and much more—simply by sharing the compelling stories of people sharing their struggles. I think there are two aspects to the type of collectivity demonstrated here. First, there is a sense of collectivity in that everyone experiences some kind of hardship or struggle, but people

often work to hide those struggles, perhaps out of a sense of performativity, so there is a sense of community and collectivity in realizing that everyone deals with something. Secondly, there is a sense of collectivity in being part of a community that rises to the occasion to make a difference in someone's life, as the HONY community has done on multiple occasions.

The rhetorical triangle alone does not hold up well as a means to analyze the total impact of these stories, as they are provided without context or even a name, so it would be impossible to verify anything they share; however, the subject's very inclusion in the HONY project seems to contribute to the *ethos* of the storyteller. Many of the stories effect an emotional reaction in the reader, so there is absolutely some *pathos* at work here, but not every story generates the same emotion in all followers. Further, the message of each story—if one exists—varies tremendously. Instead, these narratives are compelling both on an individual level and on a big-picture level in that Stanton seems to reveal the humanity of others that might be easily obscured without the honesty of his photography and the subjects' eye-opening stories. Stanton used a visual medium to communicate narratives—narratives that at times are able to change the perceptions or beliefs of those who follow the HONY project, at least if the comments section on his posts are to be believed. Here again, the sharing of these stories seems to effectively illuminate underlying values, and those values are indeed effective in persuading others to action, as can be seen from the massive amounts of assistance HONY has been able to provide to people both inside and outside the United States.

The HONY movement seems to accurately illustrate Fisher's narrative paradigm in that the stories he shares appeal widely to his audience and cause enough of a reaction to inspire people to give their money to help others. Somehow the effects of sharing those individual stories accumulate to create a much larger impact than any one

individual would be capable of accomplishing alone, pointing once again to the theme of collectivity in social media. Perhaps, then, HONY's success and impact can be explained by a combination of elements: collectivity, instant feedback, *ethos*, and appeal to values.

While these examples obviously make up the tiniest sliver of the activity occurring on social media sites, I believe that these demonstrate ways that combining traditional rhetorical theory with Fisher's narrative paradigm and then considering the themes addressed herein provide a thorough analysis of social media. The themes of brevity, instant feedback, collectivity, constant self-performance, and audience control surface repeatedly in considering social media and its persuasive effects. By making that which is already implicitly occurring in social media explicit, we can better equip social media users to understand and discuss social media.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: Pedagogical and Social Implications

Why, then, does this matter? How does an esoteric conversation about persuasive forces at work in social media impact the world? In short, this type of evaluative structure and metaliteracy matters because our mental health and, by extension, our very lives may be at stake.

Impact and Importance

Beyond the concern over followers' inaccurate perceptions of influencers and celebrities, this is an issue that can affect all social media users, as they may perceive their peers or friends to have a perfect life, perfect spouse, perfect kids, perfect house, perfect job, etc. Perhaps this perception can be attributed to the sense of constant performativity of the self when posting but an acceptance of others' posts as unfiltered truth. There is a troubling increase in depression, anxiety, and suicides that seem to find root in comparison to the stories shown on social media and the perceived disconnection between those stories and one's actual life. As Allison Graham argues in her TED Talk, "What do we present, really, when we are on Facebook? We present an idyllic life, perfect parenting, great relationships. We hardly ever give any bad news or copy about ourselves because that doesn't make for a lot of likes." Sirin Kale, a reporter for The Guardian, discusses a study conducted by the marketing firm Hill Holliday on Generation Z (those who have been born since 1995). This study demonstrated that members of this demographic are showing a propensity toward leaving social media. Kale quotes several of the teens, who stated, "You start doing things that are dishonest...Like Instagram: I was presenting a dishonest version of myself, on a platform where most people were presenting dishonest versions of themselves...Framing a picture and posting it on there is not a five-minute thing...It takes hours of deliberation." Another stated, "It's a

competition for who can appear the happiest...And if you're not happy and want to vent about it on social media, you're attention-seeking." Leslie Bilby, a part of Hill Holiday, says that hyper-connected teens are "becoming overwhelmed with the responsibility of maintaining their social sites and with upholding the somewhat inflated persona many have created on these sites, where they are constantly seeking approval via the amount of likes they get for any given post," demonstrating not only the existence of but the reliance upon the instant feedback allowed by social media (Kale). This may seem sensationalized, but Kale's data backs this up: the Hill Holiday study finds that "41% of the Gen Z teens surveyed by Hill Holliday reported that social media made them feel anxious, sad or depressed." Additionally, in Graham's talk, she points out that in conversations with high schoolers, they taught her something new, saying, "We wait until 5:00 before we post our Instagram pictures because that's when we know all of our friends are out, and we we'll get the most traffic."

Metaliteracy

In their piece "Teaching Metaliteracy: A New Paradigm in Action," Witek and Grittano actually employ social media to teach metaliteracy, which they define as "critical awareness of why we do what we do with information" (190). They consider this metaliteracy to "the foundation for what it means to be information literate today" because in their estimation "[m]etaliteracy promotes critical thinking and collaboration in a digital age, providing a comprehensive framework to effectively participate in social media and online communities. It is a unified construct that supports the acquisition, production, and sharing of knowledge in collaborative online communities" (190). This type of metaliteracy is important to the evaluation of what is presented online.

I assert that this provides an opportunity to teach students how to use multiple paradigms in order to thoroughly analyze the content and comments they see (or are

recipients of) online and to be thoughtful constructors of information and comments as well. Further, because of many teens' immersion in these various media, they already possess "a rich and different set of literacy practices and background that is often unacknowledged or underused by educators" (Considine, Horton, and Moorman 471). This presents an opportunity for educators to help build this metaliteracy as well as metacognition (or "thinking about thinking") and "code-switching," as defined earlier.

Positivity, Encouragement, and Empathy

In reflecting back on some of the prior points/examples herein, it seems worthwhile to explicitly instruct students in the possibilities of positivity—especially in encouragement, kindness, and empathy. The Internet has become a sort of echo chamber of cruelty and negativity. As Lewinsky addressed in her TED Talk,

Cruelty to others is nothing new, but online, technologically enhanced shaming is amplified, uncontained, and permanently accessible. The echo of embarrassment used to extend only as far as your family, village, school or community, but now it's the online community too. Millions of people, often anonymously, can stab you with their words, and that's a lot of pain, and there are no perimeters around how many people can publicly observe you and put you in a public stockade. There is a very personal price to public humiliation, and the growth of the Internet has jacked up that price.

Lewinsky also states, "The shift begins with something simple, but it's not easy. We need to return to a long-held value of compassion -- compassion and empathy. Online, we've got a compassion deficit, an empathy crisis." This lack of empathy perhaps exists as part of a self-performance or out of the desire to craft a sharply worded, brief response. Sadly, as discussed in Chapter 3, this sort of cyber-bullying and intentional meanness is becoming a standard characteristic and almost a trademark of the Internet. It is true that too often, the negative voices tend to be the majority, but as Jen Hatmaker writes in *Of Mess and Moxie*,

There is no scarcity in creativity. The world always needs good offerings. We cannot have too much beauty. There is no such thing as too much wisdom and literature and story and craftsmanship. There is room for you. Don't be intimidated by successful

makers; be inspired by them. Creativity doesn't divide but multiply, finding new expressions in everyone inspired by someone else's gift. (99-100)

I posit that this desire for "good offerings," "beauty," and "wisdom and literature and story and craftsmanship" among a never-ending litany of online negativity paved the way for Miranda's forthcoming book and Stanton's *Humans of New York* books, as they managed to appeal to others' hunger for positivity—so much so that they were willing to pay money for comments and pictures that were once available for free, just so that they could see them easily as needed. This provides an opportunity to explicitly show students that there is a space in the world for positivity and empathy and that, just maybe, the aspect of collectivity already at work in social media creates space for just such a thing.

Conclusion

Although social media posts often lack elements that would lend themselves to a clear rhetorical analysis, combining a narrative approach with a rhetorical one can help provide a thorough and thoughtful consideration, especially when the themes at work in social media are considered as well. This type of awareness and metaliteracy is growing increasingly necessary in a digital world, providing a pedagogical opportunity to explicitly peel back the layers of the social media worlds in which students are already involved and facilitate cognitive connections to long-standing theoretical frameworks. While such an exercise may seem limited to the intellectual realm, the statistics of depression, anxiety, and suicide that are tied to social media usage demand that we address these issues and equip social media users with tools rooted in proven methods of analysis and comprehension. Utilizing traditional rhetoric in conjunction with the narrative paradigm provides a well-rounded framework for the careful consideration of social media posts and equips users to engage in meaningful dialog in ways that might not be otherwise possible. Engaging the themes considered here along with the more traditional aspects opens up new ways to consider and explore social media, increasing metaliteracy and

metacognition and, hopefully someday, also positively impacting the mental health of social media users.

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Biographical Information

Taylor Parrish graduated from Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, with a BA in English in May 2006. After several years in the professional world, first as a technical writer and then as a legal assistant, Taylor decided to return to the world of academia and pursue a graduate degree. She then graduated from the University of Texas at Arlington with an MA in English in December 2018.

Taylor is married and has two young children and a very busy life! She finds herself especially interested in composition and rhetoric and the continued applicability of argumentation to a modern world. She is currently employed as the Graduate Thesis Coordinator in the Office of Graduate Programs at Abilene Christian University, and she will begin teaching freshman composition classes there as well in 2019.