

Chapter 4. How Might We Develop Our Students' Skills in Writing and Rhetoric via Emerging Media While Working With Our Community Partners to Build Capacity?

Chapter 4 walks through a series of media analysis projects that build capacity in the use of emerging media. Through media analysis, students learn to leverage media platforms strategically to advocate with and for community organizations. Students take an active role in working with rhetoric, writing, and media studies theories as they conduct research with communities and produce new knowledge that will benefit their partners. Media analysis creates opportunities to relate to, participate in, and apply course material to real-world needs. Emphasizing active knowledge construction over the passive transmission of information, students take ownership of the complex concepts they encounter and can transfer that knowledge to school, workplace, and community contexts. Media analysis helps writing students frame themselves as participants within a research community. It also asks students to examine and participate in timely methodological issues with tools pertinent to current scholarship in the disciplines of writing studies, rhetoric, new media, communications, and the field of engaged scholarship.

Community Partner Report Components

The media analysis projects described in this chapter can be edited and combined into a more extensive community partner report. It is not necessary to complete all of the media analysis projects for the report. The report can be tailored to the specifications of the community partner and presented near the end of the semester. The media analysis projects that might be used in the report are as follows:

- **Design question analysis**—Community-engaged projects are based on a community-driven desire to build capacity or create change. This activity guides both students and partners in developing the design question to frame inquiry around a community-identified goal.
- **Social media analysis**—Learning to leverage social media platforms to advocate for and with local community organizations provides students a meaningful way to engage in the public work of composition. In this analysis, groups objectively observe and describe the state of their community partner's social media platforms.
- **Comparative media analysis**—Drawing from the section “Nonprofit Ex-

amples of Excellence” in *Social Media for Social Good: A How-To Guide for Nonprofits* (Mansfield, 2011), students create a list of social media examples that are tailored to the organization’s needs. By locating three comparable social media accounts, groups explore potential media strategies and possibilities for community partners to employ.

- **Golden circle analysis**—Sometimes called “knowing your why,” (Sinek, 2011, p. 50) the golden circle is an effective tactic to get a bird’s eye view of an organization; as popularized by brand strategist Sinek (2011), the golden circle can be used to help map an organization’s why, how, and what.
- **Social object rhetorical analysis**—Drawing from contemporary social theorists Cetina (1997, 2001, 2007) and Engeström (2005), this analysis invites students to examine how communities connect through shared objects and helps students consider how the concept of social objects can be applied to their community partner’s communication strategy.
- **Organizational storytelling**—Storytelling is a way for an organization to humanize itself. This analysis activity guides students in numerous ways to tell stories that elicit a strong sense of pathos while engaging deeply with the organization’s audience on a personal level.

Each project is described in more detail in the next sections. At the end of the semester, students revise and edit their media analyses and combine all that is useful into one report that they present to their community partners at a meeting or event. The community partner report offers our partners new approaches to engaging their audiences via emerging media.

Design Question Analysis

An analysis of the design question, also called the research question, frames inquiry around a community-identified goal and works to structure the project. The design question analysis can be conducted during the first meeting with the community partner. Before the first meeting, community partners can identify an area of interest or issue to investigate. (For more about the process of locating partners, please see Appendix C: Locating Community Partners.) Then, at the first meeting with community partners, we can begin by asking the community partners to tell us about their organization at large, including its origins. We can continue the conversation by asking our partners to explain the research issue they have identified and a little about what is at stake for them. Once the primary issue becomes more evident, we can develop a design question that guides our research for that issue.

One way to do this is to put the issue into a question format. This may take a few attempts to get right. A design question, for our purposes, is a clear statement about a phenomenon of interest, a condition to be improved upon, an issue to be explored, or a question that exists in theory or practice for the partner’s field or

organization. Since our partnerships are based on a community-driven desire to build capacity or to create change, this question should originate from the community partner. We can then work with them to refine the question. There are many kinds of questions we can develop, such as the following:

- “**What is**” questions describe a phenomenon, issue, or behavior and refer to what it currently looks like (or looked like in the past).
 - **Example** (*mapping relevant content*): What is an editorial calendar, and how can it be used as a tool to identify the best days of the year to connect with our audience about our mission? This type of project could include research on best practices and the development of a scheduling calendar to keep the organization on track with posting timely and relevant content to social media channels.
- “**What works**” questions seek to find evidence for the effectiveness of particular strategies.
 - **Example** (*building trust with an influencer*): How can we increase trust and credibility for our nonprofit by cultivating a relationship with a media influencer? This project could include examining what happens when the nonprofit partners with an influencer (someone who can persuade others to support the nonprofit’s programs) and then tracking audience engagement over a certain number of weeks.
- “**What if**” questions look at visions of what could be done and explore new strategies.
 - **Example** (*strategizing with video*): What if we boost our fundraising efforts through the use of video via a YouTube channel? This project could include research about how organizations can invest in video and strategy development and employ video as an ongoing means of communication for social good (not merely as a one-off campaign).

Design research with community partners involves studying how something works. Sometimes the initial questions are too vague or broad in context. Using a question format, both parties can determine if the research needs to be refined or narrowed down in order to be useful to the partner. An initial research question does not need to state how to do something, offer a vague or broad proposition, or present a value question. We do not need to indicate how we will work together to answer this question at this point—we only need a clear statement about what the research project encompasses. Once a generative research question is agreed upon by all parties (community partners and student groups), the research question can then be further refined and narrowed to create a feasible project and can work toward meaningful impact for the community partner.

To better understand the intent behind the project, we can also ask our community partners to tell us more about the purpose behind this project. For example, the deeper meaning of the project might be to find out how to share knowledge effectively, how to connect to a community or demographic, how to reach

potential donors, or how to promote a successful event. We can also use this time as an opportunity to discuss any background context about the project, including upcoming events or deadlines.

Lastly, we can ask the following: Who are the potential stakeholders or audiences for this project? Who benefits from this research/project? How many different kinds of stakeholders are there? (Usually, there are multiple stakeholders.) How do they each benefit?

We can wrap up this discussion focused on what, why, and who by reiterating the three takeaways from this session:

- What—Our research question is _____.
- Why—Our purpose for pursuing the project is _____.
- Who—Our potential audiences/stakeholders for this issue are _____.

Below are example responses from the Juvenile Justice Center that resulted from this question-based process during a past community partner project. The Juvenile Justice Center provides an array of services to youth and families who enter its program through the Philadelphia Family Court, the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, and Community Umbrella Agencies, agencies designated by the city of Philadelphia to provide case management services.

Q: What is the issue?

A: We have lost the funding we previously had to run the organization and are trying to obtain donations. We want to let people know about the different services we offer for youth and families who enter the Philadelphia Family Court system, the Department of Human Services, and Community Umbrella Agencies.

Q: What is the purpose of the project?

A: We want people to know about the services we offer and the impact we can have on the lives of the youth who go through our programs. Doing this may allow someone to find the Juvenile Justice Center and use it for all it offers. Others may find the Juvenile Justice Center and feel compassion for the stories we tell and the work we do through our foster care program, therefore deeming it a worthy cause for them to support us financially.

Q: What are some possible ideas for projects?

A: Developing a more robust online community through social media channels could be an idea. A video or video series that showcases the Juvenile Justice Center's services could help us reach our audience and potential donors.

Q: What are some of the foreseeable challenges?

A: One challenge we face in this project is our inability to photograph or video the children being served by the Juvenile Justice Center. We are not able to feature them without parental consent. Also, how can we draw people in to become donors while not making it seem like we are only asking for money? Also, how can we raise awareness so that children can benefit from the services of The Juvenile Justice Center?

Q: What is the project's Design Question?

A: How might we create a short video for The Juvenile Justice Center website that promotes conversation and encourages active members in the Philadelphia community to advocate on behalf of the Juvenile Justice Center?

By working through guiding questions together, the student group and the community partner can arrive at a project that meets the partner's vision. While this student group originally wanted to film multiple videos, they decided to focus on just one video highlighting the different services that the Juvenile Justice Center offers youth and families. The partner could use this video on the organization's website and social media channels. In a project evaluation, Jeanine Glasgow, Executive Director at the Juvenile Justice Center of Philadelphia, said, "The group did a great job capturing the goal of the project, that featured a video that provided an overview of the programs we provide for families. I wish we had a few students for an entire semester to be on site."

Social Media Analysis

Learning to leverage social media platforms to advocate with and for local community organizations provides students a meaningful way to engage in the public work of composition. Media scholar Howard Rheingold (2007) proposed,

By showing students how to use web-based tools and channels to inform the public, advocate positions, contest claims, and organize action around issues that they truly care about, participatory media education can draw them into positive early experiences with citizenship that could influence their civic behavior throughout their lives. (p. 102)

Bridgette Wessels (2018) similarly argued, "The development of a more networked organisation of civic life and the increased use of social media to raise awareness,

connect and mobilise people around civic issues has ushered in a communicative civic-ness” (p. 3). As these scholars have noted, working with social media can be a generative and motivating way to develop students’ writing, rhetorical, and civic participation skills. However, writing scholars David Dadurka and Stacey Pigg (2011) acknowledged that

we have only begun to show how social media can play a dramatic role in academic contexts and what value they hold for teaching students how to acquire literacies that will benefit their professional and civic lives in college and beyond. (p.17)

The assignment to complete a social media analysis can be an entry point into teaching students how to be critical of technology and how to apply analytical frameworks to that technology. While some students may feel comfortable using digital platforms in their work with communities, other students need detailed instruction to fully engage with the range of affordances involved in the application of digital tools. For example, some students do not necessarily know (or have not considered) what the terms “social web” or “social networks” technically denote, nor are they always able to articulate that these things are primarily designed “for user-generated content” (Manzini, 2015, p. 81) or for what Wessels (2018) called “the creation and sharing of information, ideas, and other forms of expression through digitally supported networks” (p. 2). While students most likely know how to use Facebook and Instagram for their personal use, they may not yet know how to apply social theories of engagement to these platforms. This activity helps foster understanding of how the social web’s community-building power can be applied to cause-based organizations.

In the social media analysis activity, groups observe and describe the state of the community partner’s social media platforms. The results of this activity can be included in the more extensive community partner report and lays the foundation for future media analysis. This social media analysis project gives both university and community partners an objective evaluation of “what is.” The research reveals the current state of a partner’s various social media platforms. Gaining a clear perspective on the partner’s platforms helps locate opportunities to support the partner in connecting with its audience.

We begin this activity by examining each social media platform and taking detailed notes on each of the platforms in use by the partner—including the partner’s Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram channels, among others. This is known as a social media audit and is used to consider the organization’s metrics in order to “assess growth, opportunities and what can be done to improve . . . social presence” (Barnhart, 2020, para. 7). Students can examine each platform both qualitatively and quantitatively. We do not need access to analytics software or our community partner’s login information to do this work; students can gather all the information needed for the analysis by closely observing their partner’s social media channels and interactions. Students can record the data they col-

lect from each platform in a spreadsheet or use a ready-made template from the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative. (The template is available at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LWYs5TilhMXr9flv4dFAZP6L6A-iUAUtYvnhm5J-o3ZA/edit?usp=sharing>. To use the template, students will need to make a copy or download it as an Excel spreadsheet.)

Once the audit is complete, students can then summarize their findings by using the following guiding questions focused on a few key areas:

- **Platform tactics**—Examine the number of followers for each platform. Is the same content being used on different platforms, or is the content tailored to each platform? How so? How frequent are the posts? On what days and times do the posts on each platform occur?
- **Content**—What is the conveyed message on each platform? What kind of information is shared on each platform? What types of posts are used—informational, promotional, relatable, or interactive (such as polls or a call-to-action)? What kinds of media (video, links, text, image, etc.) are shared? Is there a cohesive message across all platforms? What is it? Does the over-arching message differ between platforms? Which ones? How so?
- **Audience interactions**—Social media interaction is about building relationships. Relationships are not built in a single conversation or transaction. Instead, they are built over time. In *Storytelling in the Digital Age: A Guide for Nonprofits*, Julia Campbell (2017) asked, “When you post a photo, video, or link, does anyone respond? Or are there crickets? Engagement metrics are useful in figuring out what your community values and what types of stories resonate” (p. 171). What types of audience interactions do you see on each platform? Are all interactions directed to the organization, or does the audience ever speak to each other? What kinds of conversations do they have? How would you categorize them? How many different kinds of interactions are there? (How many replies? How many retweets?) What is the estimated ratio between “listening” (replies, retweets) posts vs. “talking” posts (posts in which the organization shares information about itself)?

When the audit sections (platform tactics, content, and audience interactions) have been thoroughly examined, students write up the findings in a concise, organized report. The goals are to arrive at a clear awareness of how our community partners are currently using social media platforms and to identify opportunities for future action. This activity is not overly concerned with value judgments, suggestions for new practices, or ideas for the organization—those will come later. The goal here is simply to articulate, in an impartial way, what is happening on the partner’s platforms. If a student group is implementing a social media change or campaign project during the semester, it is recommended that they use this analysis tool to track or demonstrate changes over time (such as weekly) to ana-

lyze engagement. This analysis can be used for any platform, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, and others.

Here are some tips for students to use in writing the analysis:

- Give some thought to the organization of the analysis.
- Write in clear, concise, complete sentences.
- Use neutral/objective/descriptive language rather than subjective/judgmental language.
- Include and caption screenshots or images where applicable.
- Use statistics and data visualizations to illustrate points.

Comparative Media Analysis

When completing the comparative media analysis, students locate three or more mentor accounts and explore potential media strategies and possibilities for community partners to employ. This research allows student groups to better identify with community partners by locating mentor accounts or exemplary accounts. In *Rewriting Partnerships: Community Perspectives on Community-Based Learning*, Shah (2020) reported that her interviewee Sarah Gonzales advised that students could ask, “What are three good websites we should look at that show work similar to yours?” (p. 79). By creating a resource of at least three comparable accounts, students can better understand the discourses of a particular nonprofit field and learn more about the context of the community partner’s organization, leading to a more productive project and relationship.

Comparative media analyses can also be employed to provide valuable tactics used by other successful organizations. Drawing from the section “Nonprofit Examples of Excellence” in *Social Media for Social Good: A How-To Guide for Nonprofits* by Mansfield (2011), students can create a list of exemplary accounts and content. Mansfield suggested creating lists for concrete phenomena of interest, such as best nonprofit LinkedIn groups, best examples of “text to give” campaigns, and best use of nonprofit e-newsletters. The more specific and focused the lists of mentor accounts are, the more helpful they will be in producing examples and suggestions tailored to the organization’s needs.

For example, in fall 2020, a student group worked with Chenoa Manor, a nonprofit animal sanctuary in Avondale, Pennsylvania. Chenoa Manor incorporates Buddhist ideals into the care of its animal residents and the education of visitors. When tropical storm Isaias destroyed some fencing on the sanctuary property in August 2020, Chenoa Manor had to halt its youth and educational programming due to safety risks. The nonprofit found itself in “desperate need” of fundraising to repair the downed fences. In their comparative media analysis, students researched three leading animal sanctuaries that have been effective at fundraising and connecting with their audiences about animal rights issues—The Kangaroo Sanctuary, Black Jaguar White Tiger Foundation, and Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. In their analysis, the students examined each foundation’s fund-

raising and audience engagement tactics in order to plan a successful fundraising campaign with Chenoa Manor.

Once the media analysis is complete, students can present their findings to the community partner for further discussion. Not only can a comparative media analysis drive the next phase of research in a project, but community partners can also refer back to mentor accounts when they are in search of inspiration or ideas for effective strategies of engagement. This analysis asks three things:

- Who are the three best mentor organizations for this situation?
- What are they doing that is exemplary?
- Why are they effective? (What is the evidence?)

When selecting mentor accounts, it can be helpful to consider three to five organizations that are similar to the community partner and that use digital media effectively as it pertains to the research question. Usually, the community partner will already know who some of their competitors or inspiration are. Students can take these suggestions into account when choosing the mentor accounts. Groups can also determine the mentor accounts by finding them mentioned in books, articles, case studies, online sources, hashtag searches, and active social media accounts. How did the group choose the top organizations (via case studies, hashtag search, direct competitors, media influencers, followers, word-of-mouth, etc.)? Students can discuss which methods were used to select the mentor accounts.

In writing the analysis, it can be helpful to organize it into sections that focus on three areas:

- **Strategy**—In this section, students discuss each mentor account, one at a time. How is this account demonstrating the phenomenon of interest (such as innovation or audience engagement)? What, specifically, does the account do? How is it doing it? (Students can include screenshots or images to illustrate claims, if necessary.)
- **Effectiveness**—Why are these practices effective? According to whom? What theory was used to define effectiveness? What is the evidence? Students can demonstrate an argument or cite sources from the course readings and use evidence to back up claims.
- **Summary**—Students can summarize their initial thoughts about how the community partner could benefit or borrow from some of these strategies and practices. What are the three main takeaways that might benefit the community partner? What tactics would be most beneficial to them as they move forward?

Golden Circle Analysis

The golden circle, or “knowing your why,” is an effective tactic to get a bird’s eye view of the community partner organization. According to Sinek (2011), the golden circle helps to visually map an organization’s why, how, and what. In examining

how inspiring leaders communicate, he claimed, “Every company knows what they do. Some companies know how they do it. Few companies know *why* they do it” (Sinek, 2011, p. 1). According to him, inspiring leaders work from the inside-out, starting with (a) the why, followed by (b) the how, and finally (c) the what.

Most organizations have a mission statement that is relatively easy to find. However, does that mission statement align to the organization’s why, how, and what? Some organizations are quite clear about all three. Others focus most of their attention on the “what” to the extent that they neglect to refine their purpose—their reason for being there in the first place. When researching with a community partner, we need to deeply understand their “why”—their *raison d’être*. We can discover this by asking the following questions:

- Why is there a need for this organization to do this work (locally, historically, culturally)?
- Why do people want or need this organization’s content, product, or service?
- Why do people care?
- Why does the organization’s content, product, or service benefit others?

Sinek (2017) has also claimed, “When a company has a strong WHY, it inspires trust and loyalty in its customers, clients, employees, and supporters, all of whom will cheer you on in your cause” (p. 118). For example, campaign contributors want to hear where the fundraised money is going. But first, they want to know *why* they need to donate money in the first place. Why should they be a part of this cause or movement? Why is this going to change lives? Justin Rosenstein and Katie De Carlo (n.d.), writing on behalf of Asana, a work management platform, claimed that “without an answer to the question ‘why,’ it’s difficult to know which feature to develop, what markets to first enter, how employees should collaborate with one another, or how to make the millions of micro-choices required to build an organization” (para. 5). Putting the cause front and center creates a road map for further action. When working with community partners, we must be clear about the beliefs and values that drive them. For example, we worked with Young and Involved Philadelphia to rewrite their mission statement so that it aligned with their “why.” After much drafting, we arrived at a clear and concise mission statement that described the motivation behind their cause “to promote active citizenship and emerging leadership among young Philadelphians” (Bojar, 2016, p. 87). The golden circle analysis assignment asks student groups to answer the following questions from the perspective of their community partner:

- **The why**—Why do we do what we do? What is the purpose, cause, belief, or idea that drives or inspires us? What difference do we want to make in the world?
- **The how**—How do we do our work? What methods do we employ? What actions set us apart from others?
- **The what**—What is our function? What content, product, or service do we offer the world?

Additionally, it is important to determine if everyone agrees on what the various components are. It often takes a couple of tries to create an accurate road map. Conducting a golden circle analysis for our partner Birchrun Hills Farm helped the organization understand the strong family values and traditions behind its small dairy farm. Since only some of this information was accessible via the web, students needed to learn more about the community-based organization through an interview-based discussion. In that interview, they gained a clearer understanding of Birchrun Hills Farm's mission and vision. Their findings included the following:

- **The why**—We believe farm-raised food makes communities stronger and more sustainable.
- **The how**—We use traditional methods to operate a small dairy farm with a herd of 80 Holstein cows, grow crops, and run a community-based creamery and cheese aging facility.
- **The what**—We produce farm-to-table award-winning raw milk cheeses.

After determining these answers, we drew a why/how/what diagram. A why/how/what diagram is drawn as three concentric rings with the “why” in the center, the “how” in the middle, and the “what” on the periphery, as displayed in Figure 4.1. Students can draw and label their golden circle illustrations on a white board to share with the class. Sometimes after a discussion, groups find that they need to revise their circles or switch the position of the partner's “how” and “what.” Groups can then use design software to create a visualization of the golden circle that can be included in the analysis report.

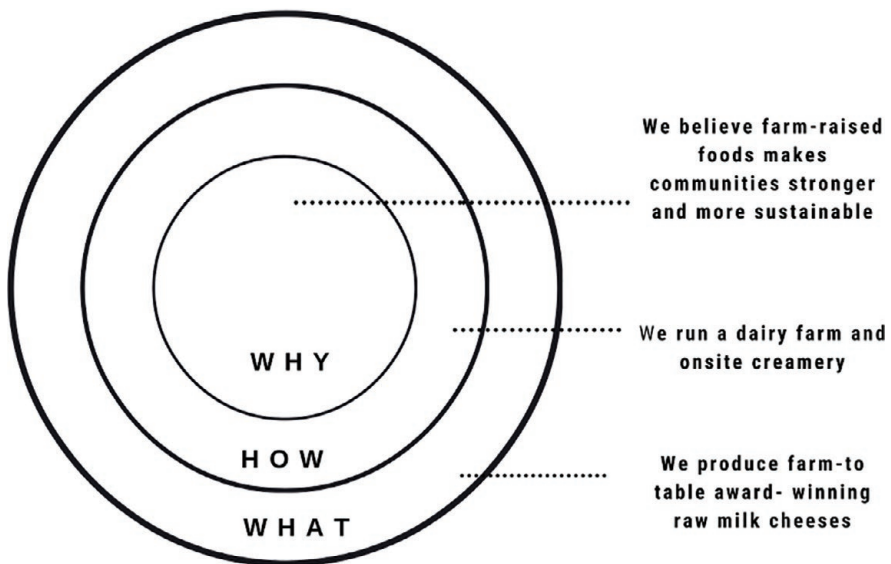


Figure 4.1. Birchrun Hills Farm Golden Circle

When we write up the golden circle analysis summary, we discuss the partner's mission and its relation to their golden circle (i.e., their why, how, and what). Community partners might not be aware of Sinek's (2011) golden circle, so students will need to keep the audience in mind and explain the concept in their own words.

Social Object Analysis

To understand what makes an engaging social web experience, we can ask what makes the “social web” social in the first place. The social web is defined by how people connect and interact with one another—for example, via social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Each social networking site features one or more social objects. In this activity, we will examine social objects—what they are, what they do, what they ask users to do, and how they bring people together. Looking at the nature of social objects gives us a way to write and design for a more engaging social web experience.

Connecting Through Shared Objects

As a general rule, a social network portrays connections or relationships between people. It usually shows people making connections with other people, building networks with each other, and engaging people within online communities. However, some contemporary social theorists and practitioners claim that something vital is missing from this picture—the reason why people are connected in the first place—the objects themselves. Drawing from contemporary social theorists Cetina (1997, 2001, 2007) and Engeström (2005), we can look at how people connect through shared objects. As Cetina (2007) has noted, social objects “mediate ties between humans” (p. 371). The argument here is that the object is the thing that links people together.

A classic example is a “water cooler conversation,” a conversation that occurs near a tangible object around which people meet and connect at the workplace. Another social object is coffee. People have been meeting “for coffee” since 1475, when the first coffeehouse opened in Constantinople. The social, according to some social theorists, exists in *the way* things are connected. On the web, social objects abound. People go to Instagram to share images, people go to YouTube and Vimeo to share videos, and people go to Facebook and Twitter to share links and status updates. As a result, social networks consist of people connected by these shared objects (in these cases, the social objects are the images, the videos, and the updates). Engeström (2005) has explained that “social networks consist of people who are connected by a shared object” (para. 3). These objects have rhetorical agency, meaning they exist to persuade users to perform actions. When a site or service is designed around shared objects, it will help to facilitate a shared experience for the user.

Object-Oriented Practice

When it comes to object-oriented practice, practice is not about rule-based routines, literacy, or even skills. Practice, according to Cetina (2001), is understood in terms of a “relational dynamics’ that links subjects and objects” (as cited in Schatzki, 2001, p. 13). In other words, practice is the performance of an activity with, through, or by an object. When we write and design for the social web, it can be helpful to understand our audience’s object-oriented practices within specific social media sites.

When people are using the social web, they don’t technically interact with other “people.” Instead, people’s interactions are mediated through a site’s social objects. For example, on Flickr, a photo-sharing site that came on the scene years before Instagram, the primary social object is the photograph, and members comment, reply, rate, and converse around photos. On Flickr and other social networks, objects often are nested within one another. Take, for example, the 365 days group on Flickr, which in itself contains millions of photographs. Here, people connect around a particular kind of photograph—the self-portrait or selfie. Nested subgroups exist for people who like to connect through portraits in bathrooms, or portraits on public transportation, or portraits just in silhouette, or portraits of hair.

The effectiveness of a social network depends on the effectiveness of its nodes—its hubs of convergence. Networks depend on their nodes. Nodes are indicated where several people or things come together from different directions to meet. In the Flickr example, nodes are found both in the image and in the textual comments. Nodes are also present in the larger community itself, which revolves around themes and variations of self-representation. Other nodes reflect people connecting on technical issues, such as Photoshop effects or camera equipment. Examining nodes, or points of convergence, helps bring to light what is important to community members. That is why Flickr (the company), continually evolves by examining points of connection, such as tagging, favoriting, and group pools of photographs, to reflect what its users have deemed important, even among its now over two million groups. Here are some equivalencies to remember: *object-oriented design = better user interaction = better engaged community*. To summarize:

- People interact with objects
- Objects are often nested
- Effectiveness depends on nodes – its hubs of convergence
- Nodes reflect what members value

String Theory Experiment Activity

This activity puts theory into practice. The concept of social objects and relational practices can be very abstract. To make the concepts more concrete, in my

classes, I introduce this short, hands-on activity. My reading of Clara Shih's (2011) *The Facebook Era* inspired this activity; I adapted Shih's description of the reciprocity ring into an experiment with social objects. Shih's reciprocity ring builds from Mark S. Granovetter's (1973) well-known theory of the strength of weak ties within social networks. In Granovetter's research, he questioned the idea that the amount of overlap in two people's social networks corresponds directly with the strength of their relationship. Instead, he theorized about the power of weak ties. According to Granovetter (1973), an "emphasis on weak ties lends itself to a discussion of relations between groups and to an analysis of segments of social structure not easily defined in terms of primary groups" (p. 1360). The hands-on activity I developed demonstrates how a social object, in this case, a "status request," brings people together, as pictured in Figure 4.2.



Figure 4.2. Students at the whiteboard conducting the string theory experiment.

The steps in this activity are as follows:

1. Participants write their names and a tangible “status request” on sticky notes. Some examples of tangible status requests include asking for an umbrella, a ride home, a snack, a babysitting job, a futon, or an internship.
2. Participants place their sticky notes in a circle on a whiteboard or a table.
3. Participants survey the requests. When participants can contribute to requests, they write their names and how they can help on a new sticky note. Participants place their contribution notes below the original requests.
4. Participants then connect (with string) the status requests that have received responses to the people who offered contributions. The strings, in this case, show points of connection between the object (status request) and the people who offered a helpful contribution. Strings (or ties) go from the inner ring where students first posted their request to the various people from whom they received contributions.

This activity makes visible how objects themselves can be social; it demonstrates how objects facilitate the concept of sociality. It also allows us to physically observe specific social phenomena, including the amount of “overlap” within the activity and which objects are the most “social” by connecting the most people. This exercise makes visible how the social object, here the status request, mediates ties between people. People are not interacting directly with other people in this exercise. People interact with the social objects, the status requests. This activity helps students understand that social objects are rhetorically persuasive. Social objects prompt participants to perform activities. These activities are relational in nature—the more interactive the social object, the more opportunities for connection.

Social networks are a combination of strong and weak ties. If we take a look at our connections through one of our social media accounts, such as Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook, chances are, not every one of our followers will be a close friend or relative. It is even possible that there are people in our network we have never physically met in real life. What percentage of people in your networks would you categorize as a strong tie vs. weak tie (or loose connection)? The number of our strong tie relationships does not expand very much. Our best friends, closest acquaintances, and family grow at a relatively slow pace. However, our loose connections, our weak ties, can expand at an accelerated pace as we make connections and add new people to our social circle. Weak ties create “ambient intimacy”—defined by Leisa Reichelt (2007) as “being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity of intimacy that you wouldn’t usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible” (para. 3). Randi Zuckerberg, former director of marketing at Facebook has said, “What makes Facebook so powerful is that an individual can share content with his or her friends, who in turn share it with their friends—and in just a short time, a large number of people can come together around a common interest in a truly global conversation” (as cited in Plastrik, et. al., 2014, p. 28).

Relational Practice

Social objects are designed to make demands on their users. When it comes to social media, through social objects, users perform all kinds of actions—users post, comment, link, follow, and like, to name a few. These are relational practices. We think of relational practices as chains of activity made possible through interaction with the objects themselves. These practices are easy to spot, as they are often associated with verbs. Verbs can point the way to which relational practices are happening through social objects. On Facebook, we used to be “fans” of things. We would click a button and become a fan. However, a fan is a noun. *To like* is a transitive verb (because it has a direct object). In February 2009, Facebook turned on the like button, and user’s likes, interests, and activities turned into social objects virtually overnight. What this means is that on Facebook, we can now associate with our “likes.” We assemble around them. One day I had been a fan of the pinball page on Facebook. Then the next day, I was linked to *everyone* on Facebook who also had an interest in pinball. Suddenly, I was part of a community of practice. This could be the moment that Facebook started to take social object theory to heart; the company redesigned its platform to turn the act of liking into a social experience, a way to build communities of practice.

Successful platforms such as Facebook are continually encouraging sociality and building communities through the creation of knowledge cultures. Although these ideas have been circulating for quite some time, they are not particularly well-known or understood. In their article “Digital Social Objects: Getting a Grip on Interaction,” Michael Rander and Dan Wellers (n.d.) observed how social object theory can give the user an advantage and noted,

At a time when few companies even know what digital social objects are, companies can gain a significant competitive advantage simply by understanding how social objects work and how to use them strategically to help their customers coalesce into a community. (para. 11)

Many successful social enterprises take social object theory to heart, watching for what encourages sociality and experimenting with how to best facilitate it. Putting this theory into practice is one of the best ways to support our community partners as they build their online communities of practice.

Relational Practices Activity

When we write and design for the social web, it is important to understand users’ relational practices within a specific social media platform. Mapping relational practices give us a way to gather evidence about why some social web services succeed while others don’t, with success based on how effectively a site’s social objects bring people together. In this case, the phenomenon of

interest is object-oriented practice. We want to know how online communities come together, how they make knowledge, and how they attribute value through their interaction via a platform's social objects. To assess this, we might choose the microblogging site Twitter and look at its status updates as an object-oriented practice. Twitter (n.d.) has claimed that it aims to “use the positive power of Twitter to strengthen our communities through our platform, people, and profits” (Our Mission section). What makes Twitter powerful? *How* does it strengthen communities? People go to Twitter to answer the question “What’s happening?”; consequently, the object-oriented practice, in the case of Twitter, revolves around the status update.

To map the relational practices used on social media networks, students can complete the following steps:

1. Choose a social object (such as a status update) on a specific social media site (such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram).
2. Attend to the practices associated with the object. What actions do users perform with or through the object? What does the object persuade users to do? Create a list of verbs associated with the object on the site. For example, here are some practices that occur through the status update on Twitter:
 - People tweet.
 - People retweet.
 - People tag and hashtag.
 - People link.
 - People reply.
 - People mention.
 - People favorite.
3. Label the practices and sub-practices associated with the object, as illustrated in Figure 4.3.
 - Sub-practices:
 - People link to photos
 - People link to websites
 - People link to videos
4. Continue labeling practices and sub-practices of all social objects on the site.
5. Discuss, based on the findings, how successful the individual objects are at bringing people. How does the audience construct knowledge, meaning, and attribute value through these practices? How could more interaction be encouraged? Are there missed opportunities for connection? How could a stronger community of practice be facilitated through the platform's social objects?








Social objects do rhetoric	People broadcast <ul style="list-style-type: none">to potential millionsor just 1 or 2	1,923 following 1,189,158 followers	3 following 2 followers
	People browse (through trending topics)	Trending Topics Follow Friday TGIF beer summit RIP Sir Bobby Robson Harry Potter	
	People favorite	 bilhd still crazy after all these years 10:57 AM Jan 22nd from web	
Objects persuade users to "do" things	People follow/unfollow	 alberteinstein Follow	
	People link (post links) <ul style="list-style-type: none">to websitesto photos/videos	Ashton Hits 3 Million Twitter Followers, But Who's Still Counting? - http://bit.ly/u4rOo about 19 hours ago from bit.ly	
	People read <ul style="list-style-type: none">In real timeIn archives	 brightnewmedia Follow Friday @felthings Labor of love or the next big, felt, thing? less than 20 seconds ago from web	
People connect via transitive verbs <ul style="list-style-type: none">favoritingtaggingreplyingtweetingretweeting	People reply/mention	 brightnewmedia Follow Friday @felthings Labor of love or the next big, felt, thing? less than 20 seconds ago from web	
	People retweet	 GuyKawasaki RT @chrisbrogan Why you're the captain of the ship now: http://bit.ly/ZoCtc about 1 hour ago from web	
	People search	 Q- search	
	People tag	 tedtalks Today's talk, from TEDGlobal 2009 last week: Elaine Morgan says we evolved from aquatic apes #TED about 4 hours ago from web	
	People write or tweet to <ul style="list-style-type: none">InformSolicit feedbackRespondShareExpress opinion, reaction	What are you doing? <div></div> <div>Latest: observing what people do with updates, people broadcast, favorite, un/follow, link, read, mention, reply, retweet, reply, search, tag, tweet about 2 hours ago</div> <div>update</div>	

Figure 4.3. Mapping object-oriented practices on Twitter

Knowledge Cultures

The Uniform Project was a powerful example of how a social object can ignite a community and ultimately create a general knowledge culture “in which specific knowledge cultures are embedded” (Cetina, 2007, p. 369). As outlined by The Uniform Project (n.d.-a), Sheena Matheiken set out in May 2009 to wear one dress for 365 days to raise money for the Akanksha Foundation. That year, as The Uniform Project also noted, the project became a global platform for sustainable designers and hand-crafters to showcase their work through clothing donations to the project. During its second year, The Uniform Project (n.d.-b) shifted gears to serve as a platform to host various pilot projects from around the world. Community members told Matheiken that they, too, wanted to wear a dress for a set amount of time to raise money for various causes. Matheiken saw this as an opportunity to grow the project and the cause.

We can understand more about knowledge cultures by looking at object-oriented practices via the interactions of The Uniform Project's users with the social object. In this case, the social object begins with the dress itself. However, there are a variety of ways that interest in the dress generated participation. This phenomenon is what Engeström (2005) called "social gravitational pull" (para. 6). The dress is the more significant social object that draws other social objects toward its center. The force of its gravitational pull keeps all the other objects in orbit. Here's a step-by-step description of how that happened:

1. First, people commented on Matheiken's daily posts about her dress. These comments were necessary for community building—they were a kind of cultural capital or social asset.
2. People asked to be involved and join Matheiken in her endeavor. There were a variety of ways they could do this. Fans of the project could buy copies of an identical dress, or they could buy the dress pattern to sew it themselves. Others got involved by sending vintage accessories to Matheiken to accessorize the dress. In the second year, people worldwide hosted similar 365-day dress projects themselves that Matheiken, in turn, featured and promoted on her website and social media platforms.
3. Finally, people donated money to the campaign.

A knowledge culture revolves around what people deem significant, meaningful, and valuable. People found a lot of value in Matheiken's project. It wasn't necessarily what Matheiken did that interested them—it was *why* she did it. It wasn't so much the dress but what the dress stood for. For different people, it meant different things. Fashionistas, educators, environmentalists, students, and sustainable designers all loved what Matheiken was doing and why she was doing it. People believed what she believed. They took her cause, and they made it their own. They, in turn, shared the cause with more people. This is an example of how a powerful knowledge culture is born.

When one group in the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative began working with Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, it became clear after conducting a social object analysis that their object was the lemonade stand itself. Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation exists to help organize the raising of money to help find a cure and to help families who have been affected by this disease. The group found that the lemonade stand itself was the social object. In this case, the lemonade stand was about empowering people to help cure childhood cancer. Whether a participant was hosting a lemonade stand or simply buying a glass of lemonade, everyone could participate in the cure. The lemonade stand was the thing that people connected around. People were coming together due to a common goal: to cure childhood cancer. When we worked with Alex's Lemonade Stand, we worked to build a stronger community of practice centered around the lemonade stand, i.e., curing childhood cancer. We focused on conveying a strong social object (via an email campaign)

that worked not only to connect people but also to keep people coming back to participate in the cure.

Knowledge cultures revolve around “object worlds” (Cetina, 2007, p. 371). This is because people create knowledge through object-oriented practice. By interacting with social objects, users come to know, create knowledge, make meaning, and create value together. When it comes to the object-oriented practice of social media, people talk a lot about how to build engaged communities online. They *should also* be talking about how to build robust knowledge cultures. Understanding an organization’s knowledge culture is the key to writing, designing, and strategizing for the social web. Through studying successful practices, we begin to understand what works. We begin to understand how an audience creates a knowledge culture through its object-oriented practices via the social web. Such an understanding can help bridge an essential gap between (a) the more formal and technical aspects of design and (b) the social and cultural aspects of how objects engage users and build communities.

Drawing from Cetina (1997, 2001, 2007) and Engeström (2005), we can look at how people connect through shared objects. Students can discuss their partner’s social object and the performative verbs that relate to it. How does the audience create a knowledge culture through its object-oriented practices via the partner’s platforms?

Organization Storytelling Analysis

At the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative, one of the most frequent requests we receive from communities is a collaboration in “telling their story.” What does it mean for an organization to tell its story? In *The Shape of Design*, Frank Chime-ro (2012) acknowledged that

narrative is such a fundamental way of thinking that there are even theories that say that stories are how we construct reality for ourselves. We use them to describe who we are, what we believe, where we are going, and where we came from. (Chapter 7, para. 2)

A story, for a nonprofit, is a way for an organization (a nonhuman entity) to *humanize* itself. By leading with a heartfelt story, the organization can elicit a strong sense of *pathos or feeling* while engaging deeply with its audience personally. In our work, we encounter both “capital S” Stories and “small s” stories. If the organization’s *Story* is not in place, we have observed that the organization will have an uphill battle with its content and engagement strategies. If the Story is set, the organization’s content seems to work from a method of alignment and seems to fall into place more easily. Thinking through the “capital S” Story is some of the most crucial work an organization can do. When we work with an organization on storytelling, our previous media analysis work with that organization, spe-

cifically the research we conduct to find the organization's golden circle and the organization's social object, should point to the partner's capital "S" Story.

Having a conversation with the community partner about its mission, its "why," or its social objects might be exactly what that partner needs to take the organization to the next level, especially if it is a new nonprofit. This was the case in the examples of Life After Life and Young and Involved Philadelphia. Once the overarching story is determined internally, the question becomes how to communicate that story externally. Usually, this involves sharing the story on the organization's website or social media site in a narrative format through text, image, audio, or video. This larger story is one that everyone at the organization knows; it becomes part of its culture. For example, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (n.d.) tells a compelling story of how the organization originated. In 1904, Ernest Coulter was a court clerk in New York City who was shocked when he saw the number of young boys who came through the courtroom for sentencing. Coulter thought that if these children had adult role models in their lives, they would be less likely to get into trouble with the law. By sharing this story on its website, the organization creates a personal connection to the audience and shows how one person can make a lasting difference in a child's life, as Ernest Coulter did.

Stories = Change

Many organizations want to collaborate on projects that focus on smaller stories that they share on social media platforms each day—not necessarily their larger, overarching Story. For these smaller stories, we still employ research on the golden circle and social objects, but we also include work on organizational storytelling, inspired in part by Joe Lambert, founder of StoryCenter, an organization in Berkeley, California, that runs public workshops on storytelling. Lambert (2013) has defined storytelling as a moment of change. This means that a story, any story, is about a time when *change* happened. As Lambert (2018) argued, "As you become clear about the meaning of your story, you can bring your story to life by taking us into that moment of change" (p. 59). Perhaps it is a pivotal change. Maybe it is a new perspective or insight:

Was there a moment when things changed? Were you aware of it at the time? If not, what was the moment you became aware that things had changed? Is there more than one possible moment to choose from? If so, do they have different meanings? Which most accurately conveys the meaning in your story? Can you describe the moment in detail? (Lambert, 2018, p. 59)

According to Lambert (2013), in his digital storytelling workshops he asks participants to construct and share stories in an immersive way to take the audience to that moment of change, and he has noted that, "compelling storytellers construct scenes to show how change happened, how they dealt with it, what they were like before the change, and what they are like after" (p. 60). He has

shared with readers a model of narrative storytelling that taps into metaphors for the human experience, including cycles of growth and transformation. Lambert (2013) also claimed that “addressing certain kinds of stories as part of the passage through life’s stages is the oldest of narrative practices” (p. 11). Lambert (2018) argued that by being told in a way that invites empathy and reflection of shared experience, “the right story can inspire someone to get up and act, to change their position, to get others involved in a cause” (p. 143).

In *Storytelling in the Digital Age: A Guide for Nonprofits*, Campbell (2017) claimed, “Nonprofits should be using their stories to motivate the reader or the viewer to do something” (p. 72). By sharing heartfelt stories, partner organizations can inspire a call-to-action—as Campbell (2017) has put it, “the action you want a person to take after being emotionally triggered by a story” (p. 72). Calls to-action are clear and direct requests for the audience to take action, such as signing up for a newsletter, listening to a podcast, donating to a cause, signing up to attend an event, double-tapping, commenting on a post, tagging someone, or clicking the link in the profile. Campbell (2017) argued that “nonprofits should always be viewing their communications through the eyes of the donors” (p. 74). She suggested making the audience the “hero” of each smaller story or post and speaking directly to the audience, as illustrated in this example: “Because of your support, we were able to provide one hundred meals to homeless veterans this winter” (Campbell, 2017, p. 74).

Many nonprofit and community-based organizations that we work with, however, do not always feel comfortable asking for money through social media posts. Getting to know the partner organization and its values is key to building solid relationships—and this entails not constantly pushing a so-called “best practices” agenda if it doesn’t suit the partner. For example, in Ellen Cushman’s (2013) work “Wampum, Sequoyan, and Story: Decolonizing the Digital Archive,” Indigenous stories are viewed as “epistemological centers of knowledge making” (p. 128). Cushman (2013) examined how the Cherokee stories within the digital archive invite both the storyteller and the listener to “create and hold on to the legacy of knowledge as placed and located beings who, through a series of storytelling practices, honor their experience with and in the lived experience of the Cherokees” (p. 129). Listeners of the stories are asked to “pick up, hold on to, teach others, and pass along what they are told” (Cushman, 2013, p. 129). Obviously, this is a very different kind of audience call-to-action than the one described by Campbell (2017), driven by reciprocity. We must be attuned to our partner’s value systems and meaning-making practices. Our goal in organizational storytelling is to tell stories on our partner’s terms.

Story Generators

Nonprofit consultant Vanessa Lockshin (2016) has acknowledged that telling stories consistently can be a formidable challenge for nonprofits, and she has suggested that busy organizations can “foster collaboration to make storytelling eas-

ier” (p. 96). Lockshin has suggested that when working with nonprofits, it can be helpful to create custom-made story collection forms using software from Google Forms or Typeform, which are widely-available tools, and that these forms can be used to collect a variety of stories from various stakeholders. The partner can then share the stories in newsletters, social media, and on the organization’s website. In a November 2020 workshop called Organizational Story Mining, Lambert argued that organizations should have a “story gathering, production, and distribution mechanism to highlight the lives, accomplishments, and unique contributions of members of your team, your audience, your clients, and your stakeholders.” He promoted a question-driven story collection tool. Lambert’s tool asks four general questions (that can be further tailored to the organization), with an emphasis on the moment of change:

1. Tell us about your background in the subject/experience? Or conversely, why did you choose to talk about this experience?
2. What has been your unique relationship to the subject? How has it affected your life/life experiences?
3. Share an experience you had with the subject. Conversely, take us back to the moments/scenes of the experience. How has it changed you?
4. If someone new were to ask you to sum up what makes you interested or passionate about the subject/or sharing this experience, what would you say were the main lessons you have to share?

At the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative, our storytelling generation mechanism includes weekly takeovers organized by student groups. Groups create content out of first-hand accounts of everyday occurrences both in and out of the classroom because these are relatable and believable stories. We try to take stock of what is happening around us. We try to show the real story, even if it is messy or complicated. Over the years, we have developed a story generator. Our story generator is a valuable heuristic that showcases multiple ways to tell stories. Most stories can be told in more than one way. The story generator helps to determine the best way to tell the story at hand. It can be used to create a variety of content—from long-form articles, to blog posts, to social media campaigns, to takeovers, to single social media posts. Each genre of storytelling listed here that can result from our story generator is illustrated with an example:

1. **Exposé**—An investigative piece that presents facts that may surprise or shock the audience. The writer incorporates compelling facts, statistics, anecdotes, or quotes to tell a true story. An example: “What Katie Didn’t Know”
2. **Historical**—A piece that tells the story of a person, place, or thing in the past. The writer usually tells readers something substantial they didn’t already know in an exciting fashion. An example: “The Core of Discovery”

3. **How to**—A piece that provides guidelines for tangible or intangible actions. The writer often orders actions sequentially in a step-by-step fashion. An example: “For Many Reasons: Blood and Chocolate Pudding”
4. **Informative**—A piece that provides logical information on a specific subject. This kind of piece provides information for information’s sake. The writer employs expository writing, anecdotes, facts, or figures to inform readers about a subject. Writers should cover the basics—who, what, when, where, and why. An example: “Can Social Media Save Lives?”
5. **Interview**—A piece that often appears in Q & A format, but not always. The content may have breadth or depth, but usually not both. The writer may also edit the questions and narrate the interviewee’s answers. An example: “Rashida”
6. **Inspirational**—A “feel good” story. The focus of the piece is the inspirational point that the writer wants to make. An example: “Charity: Water – What We Learned in India”
7. **Personal experience/Reminiscence**—A human interest piece that features an engaging story many people can relate to or would want to read. An example: “Connecting Appalachia to the World Beyond”
8. **Personal/Professional opinion**—A piece that shares a personal or professional point of view on a subject of consequence to many people. An example: “My 10 Years of Blogging”
9. **Photo story**—A piece that uses a graphic approach to storytelling. Such a piece uses a lead photo that hooks the reader and sets the tone for the visual story. The writer may supply additional text or captions. An example: “Gift of Life”
10. **Profile**—A piece that offers a prose sketch focusing on one or more aspects of someone’s personality or life. The writer may interview others who can offer insights (children, spouse, neighbors, colleagues); the writer uses each interview as a time and place of reference. An example: “The Butcher Chef”
11. **Review**—A piece sharing insights into a book, film, gadget, service, or program. The writer describes their experience in either an objective, subjective, positive, or negative light. An example: “The Social Singularity”
12. **Roundup**—A piece that serves as a collection of information tied together by one theme. Writers may organize the piece around numbers or lists. An example: “10 Uncommon Superfoods from the World of Ultra-Endurance”

To support our community partners in telling engaging stories (their larger story as well as smaller related stories), students write a summary of the organization’s current storytelling strategy using the following prompts:

- What is the organization’s Story?
- Where is the Story told (blog, social media, newsletter, website, etc.)?

- How is the Story told?
- Does the Story align with the organization's "why"?
- Does the Story have a moment of change? Describe this.
- Could the moment of change be expanded upon? How so?
- Does the Story invite the audience to consider issues?
- Is the Story honest, authentic, and in the first person?
- What media does the organization use to tell smaller stories (video, images, text, audio)?
- How is the audience invited to participate?

Community Partner Report

The community partner report offers our partners new approaches to engaging their audiences via emerging media. At the end of the semester, students revise and edit their media analyses and combine all that is useful into one report to present to their community partner at a meeting or event (Figure 4.4 shows students sharing a community partner report in a meeting with Foi et Joie Haiti).

The report will include a variety of sections depending on which media analyses are included. Descriptions of the possible sections follow.

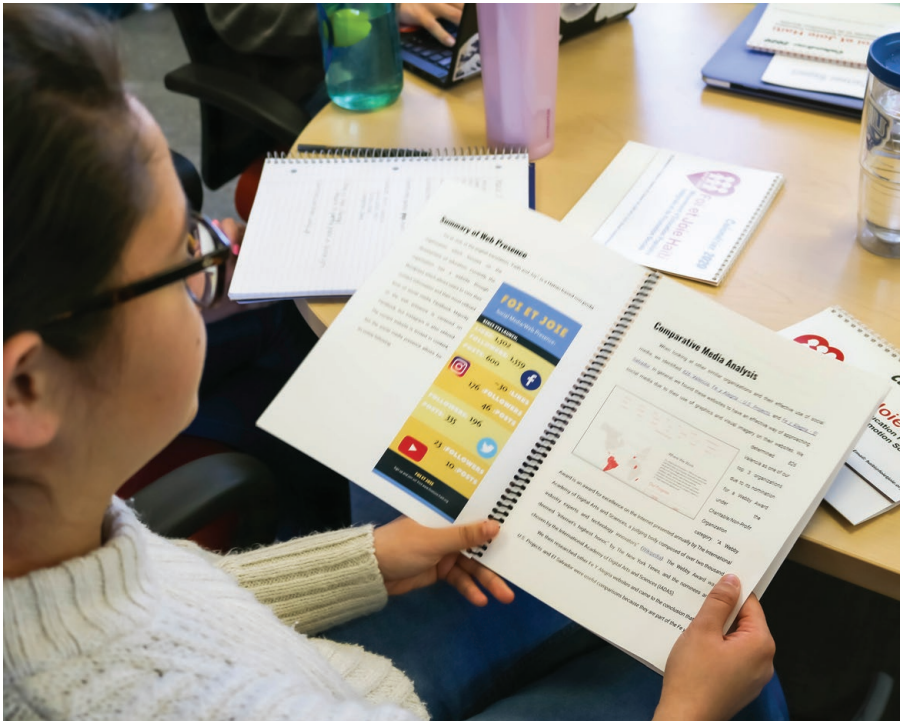


Figure 4.4. Sharing a community partner report

Summary of Overall Web and Social Media Presence

This section is usually 200-400 words long and includes images, data visualizations, and screenshots. It uses background research to discuss how the community partner is rhetorically using its website; its blog; and its Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram accounts to connect with its audience. The goal of this section is to help the partner see the current state of affairs, such as its use of platforms, the number of posts per platform, the number of followers on each platform, the number of accounts being followed by each platform, audience engagement averages, typical days and times of posts, and other relevant metrics. The report should not provide critiques or suggestions, just facts with no judgment.

Comparative Media Analysis (Mentor Accounts)

This section is typically 200-800 words long and includes images, data visualizations, and screenshots. It asks: What are the top three mentor accounts that provide the most useful examples for the community partner? How were the mentor accounts determined (for example, through word-of-mouth, case studies, hashtag searches, knowledge of direct competitors, media influencers, or number of followers)? This section contains the following sub-sections:

- **Strategy**—Students discuss each mentor account. They should consider the following questions: How are the accounts demonstrating innovation, engagement, or the phenomenon of interest? What are the accounts doing? How are they doing it?
- **Effectiveness**—Students should consider the following: Why are the mentor accounts effective? What is the evidence? In their responses, students should demonstrate an argument or cite sources from the course readings or elsewhere to back up claims.
- **Summary**—In this section, students consider how the partner could benefit from or borrow some of these ideas, strategies, and practices for this project. They should be as specific as possible when referring to the mentor accounts.

Golden Circle Analysis

This section ranges from 200-400 words long and includes images, data visualizations, and screenshots. In this section, students should connect the partner's mission statement to its golden circle—its why, how, and what. Students should describe the organization's why, how, and what from the perspective of the community partner. They should also include a graphic illustration of the partner's golden circle.

Social Object Analysis

This section is 200-400 words long and includes images, data visualizations, and screenshots. Drawing from contemporary social theorists, we can look at how people connect through shared objects. The argument here is that the object is the thing that links people together. Students should discuss the community partner's social object/s and the performative verbs that relate to it. They should consider this question: How can the organization create a knowledge culture through the use of social objects?

Organizational Storytelling Strategy

This section should be 200-800 words long and include images, data visualizations, and screenshots. To support our community partners in telling better stories (their larger Story and smaller stories), students should develop a summary of the partner's current or proposed storytelling strategy. In creating this summary, the students should rely on the organization's responses to the story generator question prompts used in the organizational storytelling strategy assignment, which focus on the organization's "moment of change."

Conclusions & Suggestions

This section is normally 400-1000 words long and includes images, data visualizations, and screenshots. In this section, students aim to answer the following questions: Based on the overall analysis, what suggestions do you have for the community partner moving forward? How can the partner employ the comparative media analysis, golden circle analysis, social object analysis, and organization storytelling analysis to connect deeply with its audience about its mission? Students should be specific in their suggestions. They should also adhere to the following recommendations for writing reports and memos: "If you are making a recommendation, say, 1) what needs to be done, 2) who should do it, 3) when and where it should be done, 4) why it should be done, 5) how it should be done" (Garner, 2012, p. 129). Students should provide a concrete example for each suggestion they make.

Works Cited or References

Students should cite all work in either APA or MLA style. They should use parenthetical citations in the text as needed.

A Few Words on Tone

The tone of the report should be knowledgeable and engaging. Bryan A. Garner (2012) has suggested writing in a professional yet relaxed manner "as if speaking

directly to the recipient of your document” (p. 99). In these reports, students should always try to remain objective, neutral, or positive in their tone, rather than judgmental. Here’s an example:

- Judgment: This dish tastes awful.
- Objective: This dish tastes salty.

Finding the right tone in the report is essential and will determine how the information comes across to the partner. Table 4.1 provides some favored expressions to use in reports.

Table 4.1. Terms to Frame Language in Reports

Terms we avoid	Terms we favor
Client	Community partner
Help	Collaborate, Co-research
Assist	Support
Work for	Work with, Co-create
Problems	Opportunities

For example, if we want to suggest that the organization implement a new Twitter strategy, we would not say, “Organization XYZ has a better handle on their Twitter than you do. You should probably check it out and take some notes.” Instead, we could ask, “Have you considered adding more images (or asking questions in your tweets) to promote audience engagement? We have seen success when other organizations implement those practices. Here are a few examples of other organizations similar to yours that have had success with this tactic.” As seen in this example, the tone of the report should be supportive and engaging rather than negative or condescending. By intentionally framing their language in this way, students become active participants in creating a culture of community-building.