

Chapter 2. Flipping the Table and Redefining the Dissertation Genre with a Digital Chapter

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I remember the moment I decided to do a digital chapter. First of all, I was swamped trying to figure out how in the world would I complete my dissertation in time? I was having a meeting with my dissertation chair, at the time, at the local Starbucks about what I wanted the dissertation overall to focus on. I knew one of my chapters would focus on embodied rhetorical practices (Mckoy, 2019) at TRAP Karaoke, reviewing #Tees4TheTrap, and I knew simply writing about these practices would not be enough. We talked a bit about our best course of action, then it hit me, “What if I did a digital/video chapter instead of writing it?” I asked. My dissertation chair looked at me, turned their head, and shook it to affirm that we were indeed on to something. I knew I would need to produce a work that was far more visual as it would better showcase the rhetorical practices I would identify and found myself relying on in my analysis. I also knew I wanted to put my voice over and editing skills to use. Thus, birthing the idea to do a digital chapter as a part of my dissertation, and not as a supplemental piece to my completely written dissertation.

Now that I’ve finally completed my dissertation and two years on the tenure track as an Assistant Professor, I’ve been able to better reflect on and seek to answer the questions regarding my process and how I completed the chapter. What went into it? How did I complete it? What was the recipe used to create such sauce—the digital chapter? While I am grateful for these questions and the continued want by colleagues and other scholars to learn from my process, I’ve come to realize so much of the process was innate for me. Well, not necessarily innate, but more so a process that came from my various experiences inside and outside of my formal scholar training. Radio production, social media management, and establishing networks were some of the tools that were most pivotal to my chapter’s production that I learned outside of the academy and long before I began my Ph.D. studies career. My life experiences and lessons were not and are not necessarily tied directly to my academic experience(s) and career. Yet, I learned to implement these tools when it came time to produce the digital chapter. However, I still see there exists a process that I used to complete the chapter, and it is important that I take the additional space to unpack some of those processes and what I’ve learned from them myself. In unpacking a bit of my methods, I also offer a bit of a personal assessment for other students to follow when taking on non-conventional methods of knowledge-making practices.

When I initially considered composing this chapter, I wanted to solely focus on what it is I did—action items. In a way, offer a step-by-step guide to my audience on how they too could finesse their way into curating a digital chapter. More specifically, I wanted to speak only to graduate students, as I always have an investment in how we support the work of graduate students. But in my planning stage, I realized can't nobody do what Temp does. I got my own set of skills that's been bestowed upon me and really, ain't no way I could provide a step-by-step manual of sorts on how I curated the digital chapter. I also realized that graduate student Temp had access to so many other resources (financial, emotional, social) at my reach, and it is critical I acknowledge my own set of privileges in that. However, what I can do is speak to how I used methods that included so much of myself that they felt all too naturelle. This is what I want to inspire other scholars to do. While I am speaking more to graduate students and/or early career scholars in this piece, I think there is space for everyone to learn here. Especially for those that hope to mentor scholars who plan to take on nontraditional forms of publications and scholarship. I want scholars to dig into their "tool kit" and think of the skills they already working with and what they can offer to those around them—including the academy.

In this chapter, I move to unpack three key areas of focus that went into the development of my digital chapter. First, I will provide a working definition for digital methods to offer a better contextual understanding of my approach to my dissertation project. Next, I will detail the importance of identifying one's current skill set and its limitations. As scholars move to produce non-traditional scholarship, understanding their own positionality in the grand scheme of things can offer a way of understanding how to move forward effectively and efficiently. I partner this area close to my working definition for digital methods because my definition is rooted so much more in the understanding of one's knowledge that may have been obtained outside of the academic space. Furthermore, this move of identification is also one of self-advocacy. One does not advocate for the use of non-traditional methods or going against the status quo without first understanding the barriers they gone run up against. Then, I will speak more specifically to my methods for completion of the digital chapter, which I earlier identified as innate. In doing so, I hope that scholars can see how their own experiences and life lessons can be made more apparent in their own studies and approaches.

In using my methods as a point for entry and analysis, I also somewhat offer a behind the scenes look into the existential labor that went into completing the digital chapter. This area will also offer examples of unforeseen circumstances that arose during my process which can arise for anyone. Also, to stay in line with digital scholarship, I will include a digital supplemental resource, my digital chapter's bloopers. Finally, I will move to conversations about general execution and how these methods can contribute to making our field more inclusive. As this chapter focuses more so on lived experiences and a fairly new style of scholarship, the citation practices may in fact be limited. However, I will ensure the chapter

highlights some of the key pioneers (Carson; Ball; Smith; Banks) that have laid the foundation to produce digital and non-traditional scholarship. Furthermore, if you ain't picked up on it yet, I will rhetorically reject Standard American English throughout this piece. I use this rhetorical move, as I did in my dissertation and other scholarship, to highlight key areas for emphasis, but also to show my true self. Codemeshin' is one of the very astute ways I showcase who I am as a scholar and a Black woman. So yea, these forms of be, is, y'all, and many others is damn intentional.

Ok, So What Is/Was This Digital Chapter?

So, you tellin' me that you don't know about the *#IssaTrapDissertation* digital chapter?! I mean if not, it's cool. I promise I ain't judging. First, my digital chapter is available via East Carolina University's dissertation database. They call it "The ScholarShip; East Carolina University's Institutional Repository." While I have considered placing the chapter on my professional site, I understand that there may be a time when I wish to change my site's name or something of that sort. So, I see it as best I leave the chapter hosted on the university's server—that I ain't gotta pay for. If you haven't seen the digital chapter, you are able to download the chapter from the repository and watch at your leisure. I promise it is mad entertaining and educational.

But check, the digital chapter was curated to showcase my theory, Amplification Rhetorics (AR) in action at a TRAP Karaoke. The event serves as a space for Black individuals to come together and celebrate all the greatness that is Black. On their social media sites, TRAP Karaoke describes their events as being like going to church and hearing "Back that Ass Up."¹ In the digital chapter, I highlight AR as identified in trap music, in addition to the showcasing of *#Tees4TheTrap*. I felt it was best that I produced a digital chapter for my dissertation because I did not think it would be possible to highlight the various Black rhetorical practices as seen and showcased at TRAP Karaoke with only traditional written composition.

I conducted interviews, captured audience interaction, and broke down the lyrics as heard in trap music. By simply writing these ideas and discoveries, I feel I would have dismissed the authenticity of the TRAP Karaoke space andddd, I wanted to be sure that the voices of those I interviewed were heard loud and clear. I ain't want to misinterpret what they said, nor attempt to identify the best practice to place their responses in SAE format. In other words, folks was talkin' how they wanted to talk and I wanted to be sure I captured that essence. 'Cause what we not fixin' to do is bad transcriptions of my people sharing their narratives, only for their areas of emphasis to be excluded and overlooked. This approach to dissertation publication, in the digital, is one of the many ways I hope we can enact change in not just the field of technical communication, but academia overall.

1. . . . Taken over for the 99 and the 2000 . . .

Why Digital Publishing?

Also, as you move forward in this chapter, you will see the primary focus here be on digital methods, yet I want to take a moment to focus specifically on digital publication. To begin, the term “publish” can be loaded and defined in several different ways. Due to the scope of this chapter, I wouldn’t necessarily really be able to unpack such tangled terminology, however, I do think it important to discuss the distinction between digital methods and digital publication. I understand that there can be some overlap in the terminologies, but we must acknowledge digital publishing as a tool to change academia overall. I mean if we being all the way 100, digital publication is what has brought to light many of the injustices faced by Black individuals at the hands of police. How? ‘Cause the evidence of reckless police behavior was captured and published across various social media sites, making the videos go viral. Now, I identify digital publishing as works produced with the intent of being shared through virtual sites and/or composed using technological tools. Digital publishing is not simply the taking of an article and placing it on a website, it is the interaction of digital processes and technologies, in tandem with traditional composition practices. Thus, leading to the publication of a work which we can identify as digital. In implementing digital publications into more of our academic composition practices, this can lead to the “creation of new formats made possible by digital technologies, ultimately allowing scholars to work in deeply integrated electronic research and publishing environments that will enable real-time dissemination, collaboration, dynamically-updated content, and usage of new media” (Brown et al. para. 6). This type of publishing is to include composition practices as showcased on social media websites, such as Twitter, all the way to multi-modal journal publications. Yet, before one can even jump to do some digital publishing, they got to stop and understand digital methods.

Advocacy for Digital Methods and Assessing Your Skill Set

While assessing one’s skill set, there is a reflective moment of what does it mean to really implement digital methods. So before we get too far, imma offer y’all my working understanding of digital methods. *Digital Methods* are processes, or a process, for moving to create knowledge and gain access to result(s) through a variation of two (or more) virtual communicative spaces. These means include, but are not limited to social media, technological software adaptations, virtual professional networks, virtual stores or commerce, and video and audio platforms. I came to create this definition based on my lived experiences and exposures. From being a member of the academy, but also navigating the world of radio production, I’ve learned that there are various ways to enact digital methods.

Look, I understand that my working definition is thick as hell, it is crucial to recognize its formation. So I wish to break down the definition a bit more.

Defining Digital Methods

First, digital methods “*are processes, or a process, for moving to create knowledge and gain access to result(s) . . .*” We think of research methods in a way that should only garner specific results or answers and not actually a way of *creating* insight. Just ask yourself, what if we considered the method the *result*? Much like Sarah J. Tracy, I believe that we enact research methods in our day-to-day life. As she mentions, “We ask questions, listen to stories, watch others, participate in meetings” (2) and much more. Given in her text she explicitly refers to qualitative research, I think her sentiments ring true for quantitative and mixed methods. Employing digital methods could also be considered one variation of a multi-method approach (Brewer and Hunter xiv) to research. This is where we see a combination of research methods working “in concert” (xiv), or jointly, with one another. This is different from mixed methods as the varying methods applied remain a part of their own category, per se. Furthermore, digital methods operate in a circle rather than linear in principle.

The choices we make while utilizing digital methods are often time reliant upon the feedback, as in additional digital interaction amongst other people, processes, and interfaces, or potential results that we may foresee. This constant digital interaction comes as a result of living in an update culture—a culture that requires the constant need to “reread, edit, and update texts in digital environment . . .” (Gallagher 32). Digital methods are taken up in virtual spaces that have various external influences that cannot always be mitigated. So we may plan for $a+b=c$, but as we utilize digital methods, “ $a+b/3-xy=c$ ” can quickly become our equation. Digital methods must be adaptive and work alongside the other processes and variants as found in the virtual space. If we think of digital methods in their adaptive and ever-changing way, we can better analyze, not just the answers we gain from enacting various processes, but also what we learn while in the midst of doing them, aka, when things go wrong and we gotta change the approach or else we are stuck to be SOL. As the old saying goes, we don’t take losses, only lessons. Digital methods, and their usage, are always a lesson. Hence, leading to the ability to create knowledge through our method process and gain access to the questions we seek to answer.

Next, these processes are enacted “*through a variation of two (or more) virtual communicative spaces*.” This second portion comes out of the need for interaction between types of individuals/communities/automated systems in different types of virtual spaces. My primary thought for this definition was to suggest this communication would happen through means which were connected exclusively through technology, but then I realized paper and pencil are also a type of technology (Hertz; Wardle and Downs 694; Baron), but that’s a conversation for another day. Point is, I am speaking specifically to virtual spaces to draw connections. I’ve also mentioned two spaces, at a minimum, because we need to recognize that in virtual spaces, we too become a part of the digital. Thus meaning, it is

imperative we recognize our role in being a part of the virtual spaces' formation. You are the user of a digital interface, on a virtual platform. The real-life *you* ain't your virtual you (Koles and Nagy 5) or VID (virtual identity) (Kokswijk 5).

Our virtual identities are just as important to the use of digital methods because they alter the very way we communicate with other individuals in virtual spaces (Ribeiro 293) and/or utilize digital automated systems that are made available in virtual spaces. On the most basic level, someone that is not outgoing in a face-to-face environment may find themselves being more willing to engage on a broader level in a virtual space. Why does this matter? Because traditional research methods such as interviews and even observations require someone to place themselves, oftentimes physically, in a space to interact with other individuals on a more personal level. Removing the need to interact face to face, as mentioned in this example, in order to complete one variation of a research method can lead to an expansion of individuals and other data points to be included in one's research. In all, digital methods can allow research to take place and garner results for individuals that may be disabled, lacking institutional resources, and support.

While we as scholars and researchers may not peep it off rip, some traditional methods for conducting research can indeed act as barriers to knowledge access. As I will later discuss, conducting research requires resources, money, time, technology, etc. When you do not have the allocated resources to conduct efficient research, not only do you potentially lose the opportunity to broaden your understanding of a specific area, but your field of study also loses the chance to place your research in conversation with others. I'll use myself as an example here: one of the nontraditional methods I later discuss would be the way I used social media and my audio engineering background to develop a social media campaign. If I did not have access to the appropriate type of microphone and editing software, I would not have been able to create a piece of work that I am able to reflect on and be proud of today. From a more traditional standpoint, say you are to interview various participants for your study, which requires time and possibly travel. What happens when you are working full time, in addition to pursuing your Ph.D., and without a car? For many of us, our research methods are built out of our resource availability. This highlights the importance of digital methods serving as a key point for access and creation of knowledge. Advocating for digital methods is work that we still out here havin' to do. Why? I don't damn understand, but luckily, we see the field of TPC looking to nontraditional digital methods to move forward in broadening the way we make knowledge in different communities leading to better acceptance and understandings of new epistemologies.

Advocating for Digital Methods

Now that we done established this working definition, let's go into advocating for digital methods through self-assessment. Now I know it may make more sense for some for me to discuss this call for advocacy at the end, but I am instead bringing it

to your attention early because it provides additional context for the research methods I used. Basically, advocacy here is used to understand where you comin' from, what's been done before you, and how you can move forward with the skillset(s) you've identified yourself to have. It's important here that I note I ain't trying to suggest that y'all get up here reinventing the wheel, yet, I am saying understand that there are various companies that specialize in the sale of tires and wheels. There is a foundational principle that is used, then each company works to make their wheel better based on their knowledge and skill set. This is how you should approach digital methods. Digital methods are not a one size fits all approach to scholarship and they require the usage and implementation of the knowledge as possessed by the scholar(s) that so choose to take up digital methods. Scholars such as A.D. Carson, Adam J. Banks, Sidone Smith, and Cheryl Ball have all used and/or made the call for digital methods in our scholarship. There is even the *Kairos* journal, that is dedicated to publishing digital and multimodal scholarship ("About *Kairos*"). The use of digital methods is the key way that we can see an expansion and decentering of university² acquired knowledge in academic scholarship.

This decentering leads to an assessment of one's skill set. The first step in assessing your skill set is to ask yourself how far are you willing to go? Completing any type of nontraditional scholarship requires a tenacity that is not always attributed to the same level of traditional scholarship. If that were the case, there would not be a debate concerning if the work completed is nontraditional or not.³ So before even digging too deep into the tool kit, be reflective in what you 'bout to run up against. Next, it is important that a scholar takes a moment to reflect on what they feel is their most valuable set of knowledge that they can lean on when utilizing digital methods. And to be clear, I am speaking on, again, the knowledge that is not necessarily attached to an institutional or higher education place. The place is the physical, while space is what you curate that physical place to be. For myself, this meant leaning on my experience navigating social media, which I obtained through my lived experience as a Millennial attached to her phone, in an effort to connect with fellow researchers and members of the Black community that was most interested in trap music. This also meant utilizing the skills I obtained at my Historically Black College/University (HBCU), such as networking, relationship building, and marketing—which I did not learn in the classroom, but rather as I served a part of other organizations on campus.

2. To be clear, in this context I mean the institutional university. You know the formal higher education joint. We not talking about decentering the university of life. In fact, we are moving to center lived epistemologies.

3. I very well believe the work I am speaking to in this chapter, digital methods, should be much more widely received and accepted. However, I think it is important to acknowledge that utilizing digital methods does include additional labor that we may not find in traditional research methods, as will be discussed. To be clear, this is not me saying traditional research methods are not labor-intensive...just not on the same level as digital methods, in my opinion.

Understanding your own value and what you bring to your scholarship is one of the most powerful tools that I believe many early scholars overlook. We are trained to believe that things must go a certain way. Be completed a certain way. Yet, in the process of attempting to adopt practices that very well may not fit with our own identities, we also risk losing what makes us great as researchers, scholars, and teachers. This further amplifies why it is important that we see digital methods as a part of the conversation on research methods and not always one that is separate. Finally, assessing your toolkit means that you are able to identify what the hell you gon' need help with. It's easy to figure out what you gettin' at, it's even harder to figure out what you don't know. I use this same model when I discuss using one's Blackness to impact the future of higher education, but I believe the difference here is that identifying what you need help with may assist you in identifying the holes in your scholarship, but also where you can draw on outside resources and your fellow allies.

As mentioned, understanding your skill assessment can shift your methods from ordinary to extraordinary, especially when aiming to utilize digital methods in your scholarship. But another harsh reality, it can save you a shit ton of time. Ain't nothin like trying to learn something as you go wasting time, energy, and resources. I mean we all been there where we done tried to do something we knew we weren't familiar with, but we worked to learn how to do it. Yup, that's digital methods for many. Yet, the trick is negotiating when that approach is not worth the trade-off. I will give my own example of this happening below.

#IssaTrapDissertation Methods

While I think there may be a universal understanding of what a “traditional research method” is, I think it is worth slightly unpacking what makes a research method “traditional”. In my research, I think of traditional methods as those that are rooted and derived in academic/scholarly practice. They are assumed to be theorized only by extensive frameworks and tend to assume the audience which will receive the information or take part in the methods are one dimensional. Traditional research methods do not always consider how different communities may not only read the results from a study but how other communities may seek to take up and implement said research practices. Now, this is not to say that I believe we should burn all the traditional research practices to the ground, no. Especially considering that I still implemented traditional research methods in my dissertation project, such as surveys, questionnaires, ethnography, archival, etc. (Mckoy 53). Instead, I am saying that it is important to take up nontraditional methods that are far more rhetorical and driven by new ways of learning and understanding the world around us—even when those ways are not our own.

So while the traditional methods all up in my diss were true in offering the insight and knowledge that I needed to complete my analysis, they were not the

methods that I used which were based out of the definition I've provided for digital methods or considered non-traditional. The methods I will focus on in the sections comin' up will be 1) the use of social media to engage in a virtual campaign, 2) the implementation of an e-commerce store to forge research funding, and 3) overall network building and growth through the virtual space. While all three of these methods rely on or overlap with one another for their success, they each required different processes to provide and lead to suggested and needed outcomes. As well as offering new ways of understanding how each method can shift the way we conduct research and produce and transfer knowledge.

As you move through this next section, it is my hope and aims that you receive it as if you and I are having a conversation, outside, on the porch—or wherever you like to talk to folks. I offer this approach to sharing the methods I utilized as I wish to draw on the rhetorical power of narratives and storytelling as told by Black women (Baker-Bell; Richardson; Jones) as a means of epistemological practice for understanding digital methods.

#IssaTrapDissertation Virtual Campaign

Now since this chapter is on digital methods, I'm 'bout to jump over breaking down my dissertation and some of the specifics. Yet, if I was on an elevator and someone asked me what my diss was on I would give 'em two key points. First, the use of Amplification Rhetorics (Mckoy 28), a theory I developed, is important to ensure the field of technical and professional communication is more diverse and inclusive. Next, I developed a digital chapter to serve as a part of my dissertation and not as a supplemental text—which in some cases are overlooked and thought to not necessarily be needed in the grand scheme of things to highlight Black rhetorical practices in action. It's that second part there that *really really* matters to the digital methods and the social media campaign, fam.

The use of a social media campaign as a research method was beyond pivotal to not just the digital chapter's creation, but the overall dissertation. I knew using my social media was gone be important out the gate. Mainly 'cause my sites of study, TRAP Karaoke and HBCUs, were heavily on display all through social media, especially TRAP Karaoke. TRAP Karaoke is a user-generated concert experience that gives folks space to be unapologetically Black as fuck (Mckoy 24). They, TRAP Karaoke, came up on social media. It started in New York and became an international phenomenon. I attended a TRAP Karaoke event in Summer 2017, while I was preparing for my comps. I called myself goin' to the event to detach, I ain't think it would become my dissertation project. I decided to focus on the Black rhetorical practices that happen at TRAP Karaoke, such as, performing at TRAP Karaoke, being a crowd participant, and wearing what is referred to as a #Tee4TheTrap. I knew these were elements that would not be effective if only written about, so I was just like "I'm 'bout to do a digital chapter."

In planning for the digital chapter, I knew while it fit into the grand scheme of my dissertation project, it also needed to be able to stand on its own 'cause I made the argument that we need to start reconsidering just who our audience is for our dissertation. The digital chapter was more so #ForTheCulture and members outside of the academy than it was for my dissertation committee. With this in mind, I knew I would want various elements. I wanted the chapter to be entertaining yet informative. And since the chapter would focus on TRAP Karaoke, I had to also provide a lesson in trap music. Essentially, spittin a lil bit of history to help folks better understand why TRAP Karaoke and not Black Karaoke, which I later discussed in the digital chapter with TRAP Karaoke founder, Jason Mowatt. So I thought, "What better way to bridge the gap between my audiences than to reach out to prominent trap musicians T.I. and 2 Chainz." In hindsight, I believe I made this move 'cause I really wanted my digital chapter to be remarkable—initially. But as my project moved on, I realized that in interviewing and including T.I. and 2 Chainz in my project, I would be exemplifying my theory, Amplification Rhetoric, as I would offer the space for these artists to speak to their experiences in the trap music scene, which is heavily influenced by lived experiences, which impact the way people move about and enjoy(ed) TRAP Karaoke.

I completed a social media blitz, recorded a commercial, and did essentially a social media campaign to gain the attention of T.I. and 2 Chainz, all the while sharin' what my work was about to onlookers. T.I. Tuesdays and 2 Chainz Thursday. Every Tuesday and Thursday, we blitzed and bombarded the social media accounts of T.I. and 2 Chainz, in addition to, The Shade Room and TRAP Karaoke's social media pages and profiles. There was folks that were out there learnin' 'bout my work through my social media campaign. People would see threads of comments from my followers tagging my work on the feed of these artists and blog pages, leading people to want to investigate more about who I was. I turned my old blog Instagram account into my "academic" Instagram and used it to leverage my outreach. In addition, I made my personal Instagram account public, providing people the opportunity to see who I really was, away from the academic persona that many may have assumed me to have. Often, we fail to recognize that even as we move between our lives in academia and outside of it, people are only offered certain pieces of who we are and that's ok. Yet, in order to be most effective in my social media campaign, it was important that I displayed my authentic self on various levels. I also developed the hashtag #Is-saTrapDissertation and #DrMckoy2019 to thread all my work together across all social media platforms. This resulted in not only my connecting with T.I., 2 Chainz's team said nah, but I was also able to identify research participants and spread additional knowledge about technical communication to those that may not have been most familiar prior to. Digital methods in practice is one way that we can disseminate information to various communities in a way that is quick and coherent. It allows onlookers to see the research process happen

in real-time, offering new ways of understanding the context of research as it is presented at a later time.

Securing the Bag

While it may be something we may not generally consider when it comes time to knock out some research, funding can in fact play a major role in our ability to complete research. For my project, I needed to have funding to support travel and equipment needs. While I do not make claims to have a formal training in marketing, I do however know how to come up on a coin. I have had a job since I was 15. So securing the bag has never really been a problem, yet this project required I secured the bag in a different way.

While enrolled in my doctoral program, I decided to wear tee shirts that would display my speaking topic as I traveled for conferences. This way, folks could clearly identify who I was and if they wanted to follow me on to my talk. This was how I branded myself early in the game. Even if people ain't know my name, they would remember having seen a Black woman in an HBCUs Matters shirt. I decided to borrow this same idea of branding and open a store to sell T-shirts to offset the costs for my dissertation. Again, the goal was to mainly help find a way, so I was not having to take the major hit to my pockets in order to get the project done. While I am sure there were other funding opportunities available, I dead ass ain't have time to apply to them. I had less than a year to get my dissertation completed.

The external funding packages/fellowships take mad time to apply for and the money typically does not hit ya pocket immediately. I needed *right now* money to pay for right now expenses. Some of those items included additional camera equipment, travel funds, hotel stay, yes all that. However, what I learned was there are several ways I can support the funds needed for the project. So instead, I decided to go ahead and sell T-shirts. By selling the T-shirts I knew that people would learn what my project was about, but also be willing to spread additional awareness about the project by wearing the shirts. I had already established myself individually from wearing the T-shirts. So this was simply an extension of who I was to secure funding. I hit up my home girl that I met at my first TRAP Karaoke, DeElva Dash, and requested that she would make the shirt and I will place them on sale on my personal website. Very simple. The hashtag I established, #IssaTrapDissertation is what they said. I had people in other countries wearing the shirts, which would, by default, lead to those outside of the US to investigate the hashtag created and used on the T-shirts.

This model for securing funding is surely one that I will continue to use as I grow as a researcher. Yet, I think it is important that I acknowledge that selling T-shirts, or any kind of merchandise, is not as easy as it appears on the surface. Any attempts to obtain funding that does not match the traditional way of doing things requires so much more additional work. You see, it won't just 'bout what the shirts said. It was also about the quality of the shirts, the product availability,

delivery time, pricing, etc. Not to mention, keeping up with all the coin so folks that were purchasing my items could see where their money went was just as important. As shown in Figure 2.1, all money was accounted for, and I still had to come out of pocket in some space. But I am still just as grateful for the people that helped me secure the funding needed for my project. While this approach was stressful, it also gave me better insight into how digital methods can be constructed and or built out of mad different approaches. 'Cause I was also able to learn where my outside audience was coming from by who was purchasing and rocking the T-shirts. In other words, I learned who else was in the room to hear what I had to say. As a result, I made sure to keep these audiences in mind when I edited by dissertation and continued to build my virtual network.

Item	Description	Cost
Equipment Rental	DJI Ronin	155.15
TRAP Karaoke Tickets	December Show/ Participant Interviews	60.00
Hotel	Raleigh, NC TRAP Karaoke	100.00
Hotel	Atlanta, GA / TRAP Music Museum (December)	75.00
Gas*	December (Greenville→ Atlanta GA) Roundtrip & City Travel	125.00
Gas*	Interview T.I. (Greenville → Durham)	\$45.00
Gas*	Interview with Jason Mowatt (Greenville→ Raleigh)	\$45.00
Caption Service	Captioning Service for Digital Chapter (Rev.com)	\$73.00
Audio Recording Software	Adobe Audition Recording Software	\$75.00
Travel Costs**	Travel Costs for D'Andra Drewitt (Food, Gas [Elizabeth City→ Greenville], Equipment Needed)	\$165.00
	Item (s) Total	\$918.00
	Shirt Purchases & Donations	\$770.00
	Shirt Production Costs and Shipping	-\$390.00
	Total Following Shirt Production Cost	\$380
	Out of Pocket Costs (Total Following Shirt Production and Item Total)	\$538

Figure 2.1. Financial report for dissertation. One asterisk (*) indicates items were rounded up to the next dollar. Two asterisks (**) indicate funds were used from money received via the Drewitt Donation Fund.

Network Building and Virtual Growth

Look, I ain't even gone hold yall, I really ain't think having and growing a solid virtual network mattered when it came to completing my research. Yet, I was shown to be wrong as hell. There ain't no way I could have completed my digital chapter without the backing and support of the people on social media. It wasn't just about these people connecting me with two artists that were in the trap music scene, it was also 'bout me finding other ways to produce and share my scholarship. When I got stuck on how to do something, like caption my digital chapter appropriately, I reached out to the people on social media. Whenever I was questioning if something would make sense or not, I'd send out snippets of the chapter to my people that I connected with online to get their feedback. That digital network made the chapter come to life.

Furthermore, establishing a solid network also led me to connect with other scholars that share the same research interest. Some that have even gone viral, such as Dr. Corey J. Miles (@CoreyMiles_), Dr. Frederick V. Engram Jr (@VanCarlito2003), Taylor Smith (@SmiffTaylor_), Jalisa Jones (@Jaesofamous) and many more. These individuals would interact with my tweets and offer insights for other ideas I hadn't even yet considered. Miles would oftentimes share scholarship that would point to conversations around Hip-Hop, trap music, and Black culture. Many times, he and I exchange ideas about the need for us to fill in the gap for scholarship we wish we had while we were dissertating or just in general as Black scholars, including his latest publication, "Black Rural Feminist Trap: Stylized and Gendered Performativity in Trap Music." Engram, whom I connected with through Smith and author of "An Act of Courage: Providing Space for African American Graduate Students to Express Their Feelings of Disconnectedness," engage in thoughtful conversations around Black student experiences and what it means to acknowledge these experiences in our scholarship and through our mentoring opportunities. Then there is Smith, an HBCU and College Access Advocate, has grown to become a wonderful friend and confidant that I am able to reach out to and express my moments of confusion in my scholarship. She has been a guest on many great Black podcasts, such as "Let's Talk Bruh" and continues to shine light on the ways we can shape and alter higher education for generations to come. Not to mention she always gasses me up. Finally, Jones, an unapologetic powerhouse and currently pursuing her own Ph.D.—fingers crossed she will be done by the time this chapter is published—always shows me and points to ways of being real and true about our words. She has gone viral many times for expressing the thoughts many of us have but may not have the ability to communicate to an outside audience. She has kept me on my toes and constantly reminds me to stay true to the work I produce. These connections that I've further elaborated on, along with many others, have helped push me to become a better researcher, scholar, and teacher.

While I know it may seem miniscule to have spent time elaborating on these four specific virtual connections, it is important that we look to the relationships

we formulate while completing research as important to the research itself. The way I see it, research methods should be applicable in many different aspects of your academic career. Digital methods take shape in one space yet continue to blossom and live on even after you've completed your research. The ability to formulate strong and supportive relationships is important as they are the very relationships that will carry you on in your academic career

What Does This Mean for the Academy?

Well, I mean, hell it can mean a lot of things for the academy. Yet, I think I can sum it up in this way: Digital methods is/are the tools needed to dismantle traditional methods of data collection and research curation. Digital methods challenge just how we define methods, but they also challenge how many of us make understanding regarding the world around us. In my opinion, digital methods allow for a far more explicit embedding of the author in the actual research process. As a result, we get to have access to various ideas and ways of understanding the author as a person . . . and not . . . just . . . an . . . author. Yea, we sometimes read scholarship and forget that the author is an actual person too. This matters. Therefore, we have #CiteBlackWomen and #DecolonizeYourSyllabus as major talking points, because we cannot and should not separate the author from the work they produce. Whether the author is a graduate student or professor that's been in the game for decades, these types of insights matter to the way the author produces a text and interprets their own research. Utilizing digital methods is one way that we can see this happen. And to add a bonus for understanding Digital Methods behind the scenes, I've included a video of behind-the-scenes footage at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/5fs5514hqfh5xoy/Trap%20Dissertation%20BTS.mov?dl=0>

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