

EDITORIAL FOR SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE ROLE OF COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION IN PROMOTING ACTIVISM AND REVOLUTIONARY WORK AROUND THE WORLD

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Technology has drastically changed the way people communicate. Gone are the days of waiting for a response via email or sitting at a desk to use a desktop computer. Portable technology such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones afford users the ability to be connected to their social media communities 24 hours a day. Apps give people the power to manage practically every aspect of their life, and social media applications such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat give people the power to create community and share their lives via pictures, posts, and videos. Social media has rewritten the definition of community building and changed the way people organize and protest. As hashtag activism continues to grow (#metoo, #62milliongirls, #timesup, #Oscarssowwhite, #lovewins), the need to understand *how* and *why* people use Computer-mediated Communication (CMC)



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is key—considering the polarizing political climate around the world. As Freelon, Mcilwain, and Clark (2016) suggest, it is important to “understand both the strategy and potential success” (p.15) that social movements have when using social media and the web as part of their organizing strategies.

This special edition focuses on the uses of CMC for community organizing in countries where revolutionary action and social and political activism remain hidden or confined in limited digital or real spaces. Emphasis is given to how social transformation happens in social spaces, and the collection further examines whether in rare “revolutionary times” substantial opportunities for shifts in power relations emerge that enable the subversion of cultural and social norms (Cocks 1988). The collection’s interest in exploring social transformation and social change arises from the need to understand the processes by which social change can be materialized within the spatiality of social life, and to study how spaces of imagining and theorizing can/do shape or displace the future(s) of power relations. According to Butler (1990), the possibilities for social transformation are produced by instabilities within the present social order and by the possibility “of failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction” (p.141). It is in these processes of uneven development and the production of settled and fluid social spaces that opportunities for social and possibly political change arise in the shifting of social spaces—from the present to the future spaces of transformation of which we dream (Robinson, 2000).

The collection also seeks to explore the ways in which the Internet can propagate genuinely new, nonracist, nonsexist, and non-classist ways of being and identity construction that effectually critique hegemony, where minority or dominated subjects assimilate this digital media to their own cultural and political space, while moving beyond the reduction of the other. The editors also pose the question Judith Butler (1990) herself asks: “What makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony” (p. 139) and thus fail to carry within them the potential and possibility for social transformation, and for the genuine shattering of oppressive social relations and cultural practices?

The three research articles in this collection represent the challenges activists face when using CMC as part of their social movement strategy.

With serious attention being paid to sexual assault and new hashtags being created weekly, women, via CMC, have a platform to engage with supporters and detractors. In their article “Women Veterans’ Advocacy Use of Social Networking: Curating and Responding to Trolling,” Cassandra Branham and Stephanie Vie examine how online trolling affects women veterans’ ability to create and maintain their own narratives regarding their experiences in the military. The case studies in this article highlight the vitriol that women veterans experience in cyber space and discuss how women veterans navigate such hate as they advocate for each other. This piece also adds to the special edition’s interest in how activism remains hidden and sometimes confined to digital spaces.

Anjana Narayan and Shweta Adur’s article “The Making of the Dalit Human Rights Movements in the Digital Age” examines how leaders of the Dalit movement use CMC to bring international attention to the conditions of Dalits in India. Katherine Bridgman’s article “Overcoming the Limitations of Shared Digital Spaces: Twitter in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011” investigates how activists used Twitter to build transnational communities and start a revolution that crossed the geopolitical borders of Egypt. Both articles represent the CMC’s ability to shift the power dynamic of a society. Bridgman’s discussion of the Egyptian Revolution and Narayan and Adur’s discussion of the Dalit Movement also demonstrate the important role CMC can play in providing a voice for communities that have long been silenced by government policy and cultural practices.

Collectively these authors and their work represent a shift in how activists organize, communicate, and create social movements. ■

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Kimberly C. Harper is an assistant professor of Technical Writing in the English Department at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (North Carolina A&T). She earned her Bachelor of Arts in English from North Carolina A&T and a Masters of Technical & Scientific Communication from Miami of Ohio. After working as a technical communicator for several years, she later earned a PhD in Technical and Professional Discourse from East Carolina University. Her dissertation examines the treatment of African cultures in post-secondary Humanities textbooks through the lens of document design, critical discourse analysis, and rhetorical theory. Her research interests include the rhetoric of document design, textbook curriculum, Hip-Hop studies, medical discourse, and tactical technical communication. Prior to joining the faculty at North Carolina A&T she was the Director of the Foreign Language Institute at Albany State University. She was responsible for developing foreign language programming for the ASU student body and surrounding communities. While at ASU she also directed a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant that promoted the humanities to high school students via the students of Albany Civil Rights Movement. Currently she is the Director of the Technical Writing Concentration at North Carolina A&T. Her goal as an educator is to create an environment that encourages students to experience education as a practice of freedom that helps them realize their own potential.

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