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Interrogating Hierarchies: Academic Use of Social Media for Public Scholarship

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored five literacy academics' experiences with utilizing social media as scholarly practices and the factors that influenced their experiences over time through a participatory culture lens. The research questions investigated the experiences that contributed to their decisions to participate, in what ways, and on what platforms. Our interpretive phenomenological analysis surfaced six themes that have implications for digital scholarship and contextualized scholarly identities.

In the academic tradition of the field of education, university faculty are deeply engaged in the rigorous process of conducting and publishing research in peer-reviewed journals. This tradition is rooted in the foundational work of early educational theorists like John Dewey (2001/1916), who emphasized the importance of empirical research and reflective practices in education. Despite the robust tradition of peer-reviewed research in education, significant challenges remain in ensuring that these findings are accessible to the public and effectively reach practitioners. One major issue is the paywall barrier, where many peer-reviewed journals require expensive subscriptions, limiting access to only those affiliated with institutions that can afford them (Tennant et al., 2016). This restriction often excludes teachers, administrators, and policymakers who could greatly benefit from current research. The peer review process can take six months to a year or more to complete with multiple rounds of revisions and editing, therefore, further delaying research to practice opportunities (Björk & Solomon, 2013). Many university academics leverage the affordances of social media (SM) as a more democratic way of connecting with lay audiences (Iloh, 2018; Waheed et al., 2021).

At a time when SM transcends its initial role of personal connectivity, academics navigate the convergence of personal, professional, and public spheres within these digital and physical landscapes. Traditionally, academic scholars share findings and educational implications of their research in journals published by professional organizations or institutions of higher education and education conferences, hoping their research will reach teachers and inform new practices. However, the ways of participation in public scholarship have become diverse as more and more scholars choose to engage online through various SM. This study explores the multifaceted experiences of scholars engaging in SM, considering the evolving nature of academic participation and its impact on their identities and scholarly endeavors.

From Facebook to Instagram, to Twitter/X, SM platforms offer affordances that enable academics to not only disseminate information but also foster interactions, collaborations, and community. In addition to these platforms, websites, podcasts, and video-sharing have become embedded in academic life as sites of research and/or places to discuss and promote research. Sharing research that will improve PK-12 classroom practice highlights the central focus of literacy education faculty. Some academics embrace digital scholarship (Pearce, 2010; Weller, 2011) and SM to increase public engagement with their work (Greenhow & Gleason, 2014; Moran et al., 2012). By drawing on SM platforms and digital sites to share scholarship, academics extend their book and journal scholarship to the public.

Scholars approach this public, digital landscape with varied perspectives and experiences---some embracing the integration of personal and professional realms, while others strive to maintain intentional separation. Among our own institutions and experiences, we have witnessed a range of public scholarship engagements and wanted to know more about the factors that shape academics' use of SM.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to *describe the lived experiences* of literacy academics (faculty, researchers) using SM (blogs, social networking sites, media sharing) as part of or in the service of their work. This research describes specific academics' perceptions of the phenomenon in their particular contexts:

1. What are the academic scholars' experiences related to the phenomenon?
2. What factors have influenced their experiences of the phenomenon?

Understanding the phenomena of using SM for public scholarship may inspire scholars to consider diverse ways of expanding their academic impact in online spaces through various SM platforms.

Literature Review

As SM becomes a more active part of many people's daily lives, academics utilize SM for various purposes. Previously, academics engaged in SM for personal reasons and began incorporating SM tools into their teaching to share lectures, presentations, and class videos (Deeken et al., 2020; Manca & Ranieri, 2016a). Across a continuum of public scholarship, Kezar et al. (2018) identify SM as a way to promote scholarly work, while Iloh (2018) finds SM as a lever in dismantling the hierarchical structures that limit scholars' work in what makes accessible to a wider audience, particularly for scholars that are traditionally marginalized. Furthermore, many academics seem open to using SM platforms for collaboration purposes, to position themselves competitively within their scholarly community, to develop or maintain their reputation in their content areas, or to keep track of

research (Iloh, 2018; Manca & Ranieri, 2016a; Veletsianos et al., 2019; Waheed et al., 2021). For many scholars, their personal and professional lives are weaved together in the same SM platforms (Veletsianos et al., 2019).

Because of the reciprocal relationship between producers and consumers of academic SM content, there is an expectation for accurate and credible information about these types of exchanges in the same manner as if the scholar planned to speak at a conference (Waheed et al., 2021). Audiences are spread from inner academic circles and personal connections within the related field (Deeken et al., 2020; Carter & Nguyen, 2022). Open access platforms can dismantle hierarchical boundaries and produce an open commentary between all stakeholders, thus showing how academic SM constantly evolves (Carter & Nguyen, 2022). Changes in SM behaviors also correlate with academics' perceptions of how their peers and employers, both current and future, view their posts (Veletsianos et al., 2019). Scholars increasingly leverage the participatory nature of SM for professional purposes, developing a digital presence to engage in public scholarship (Greenhow et al., 2019).

While SM's design supports a participatory culture and a democratic platform to foster dialogic engagement for developing new meaning, some academics prefer to be more monologic, sharing important research in a more public platform than peer-reviewed journals. Jha and Verma (2023) explored user engagement on SM platforms; their assessment explained how to differentiate one-way and two-way communication. They used one-way communication to refer to communication that aims to persuade stakeholders through honest messaging and used two-way communication to refer to the active conversation between the information sender and receiver. In this study, we highlight monologic engagement to refer to the one-way communication that aims to curate and showcase information; while dialogic engagement refers to the two-way communication that seeks responses and interactions through shared communication (Kent & Taylor, 2021)

Although we advocate using SM as a democratic way of sharing scholarship, we also acknowledge that, unlike peer-reviewed journals, Lupton (2014) warns that SM lacks formal quality control mechanisms, which can lead to the spread of misinformation or oversimplified interpretations of complex research. Without the oversight of journal editorial teams, sharing research findings online requires careful consideration of issues, such as confidentiality and intellectual property rights (Manca & Ranieri, 2016b). There is also a learning curve for the effective use of SM, as our participants noted, which can limit the dissemination's effectiveness (Veletsianos, 2016). Until an academic user has a following, their work may not be seen or followed. SM platforms often favor content that is more sensational or emotionally engaging, which can disadvantage the dissemination of rigorous academic research (Gruzd & Goertzen, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The affordances of Web 2.0, or "participative web," provide a platform for a participatory culture (Murugesan, 2007, p. 34). Jenkins (2009) described tenets of participatory culture theory in terms of environment and membership. Social media platforms have relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others, and informal mentorship in which the most experienced users share what they know with novices (Jenkins, 2009). The members in this environment believe that their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with each other (Jenkins, 2009). Forms of participatory culture include *affiliation* in formal and informal groups and platforms, types of *expressions* in creative form, such as mash-ups and fan fiction, *collaborative problem-solving* to address a challenge or develop new knowledge, and *circulations* involving the flow of media content through choices of podcasts, blogs, video, etc. (Jenkins, 2009).

Embracing the participatory culture, the low barrier of SM participation, and its ability to spread (Jenkins, 2009), brings the opportunity to create an educational space for more democratic participation and culture, as Dewey (2001) noted. Although web communication occurs in digital spaces, individual SM participants share information in the online community and seek knowledge with others who connect through similar interests (Dewey, 2001). These digital collaborations and communications rely on a democratic and participatory culture, directly influencing teaching and learning (Jenkins, 2009). Dewey (2001) describes how children often replicate adult actions and become an apprentice to those behaviors. In an academic landscape, new scholars often look to more experienced scholars for ways to disseminate and showcase research. Since scholars unite under the goal of furthering research, developing connections to other academics with similar interests, opening a dialogue with them, and exploring others' perspectives creates a symbiotic relationship. Engaging within these spaces requires a democratic perspective so all parties enter knowing they are valued as equals.

Methodology

We engaged in an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Nizza, 2021) to examine the lived experiences of academic SM users to make sense of their personal experiences in how they engage in SM, including how that engagement influences and affects them. The experiences of the participants and their sense-making were reciprocally entwined through close-up examinations of the phenomenon (Smith & Nizza, 2021). Therefore, IPA researchers suspended previous thinking about SM use so that they developed an understanding of the participants' lived experiences and how they made sense of them. The researchers

aimed to understand the essential qualities of the phenomenon as the participants conveyed their experiences with SM. This dual sense-making process is "double hermeneutics" and highlights the process of interpretation in analyzing the data (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 51).

Data Gathering

This qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study was designed to construct meaning through narrative descriptions of how academics utilize SM. Participants included five university-based literacy scholars identified and purposefully recruited as active users of SM to share research and evidence-based practices. We collected data from interviews and observations of academics engaging with SM spaces. The semi-structured interview protocols were piloted and revised to include follow-up questions and probes to provide interviewees with the space to articulate their SM experiences as professionals in academia. (See Appendix.) We conducted and recorded via video conferencing, and recordings were transcribed for analysis. Each participant received a copy of the transcriptions to approve or request changes.

Table 1. Academics' Information

Academic	Position(s) at time of interview	Primary Social Media Engagements
Cassie	Assistant Professor	Twitter/X; Professional Website, LinkedIn, Instagram
Sarah	Assistant Professor	*Ethical ELA* (non-institution affiliated website), Facebook, Instagram
Melanie	Professor	*The Reading Forum* (institution-affiliated website); Twitter/X
Chea	Visiting Assistant Professor	*Literacy in Place* (non-institution affiliated website, YouTube); Facebook; Instagram; Twitter/X
Lindsay	Assistant Professor	*Classroom Caffeine* (institution-affiliated podcast)

Notes: We focus on the first name of the participants to humanize the data gathering, analysis, and findings to center the person and not the institution. Primary social engagements are defined as the social media sites the academics most discussed in the interviews; they may have other engagements not indicated here. In this table, we combine Twitter and X to indicate the language the participants used during the interviews. We note non/institution affiliation to indicate if the social media site has direct support from an institution, such as

support of graduate assistants, funding, originating or developed with colleagues at the same institution.

Data Analysis

Using an IPA protocol (Smith & Nizza, 2021; Smith & Osborn, 2003), each researcher engaged in a close analysis of a transcript, taking exploratory notes, and developing experiential summary statements for each participant. To organize the analysis, the researchers labeled actions according to the factor(s) influencing the participant, such as motivation, beliefs, audience, and temporality. The collection of personal experiential statements was then clustered into Personal Experiential Themes (PET) through collaborative analysis. Factors were consolidated after a critical analysis to identify common themes. See Table 2 for an excerpt.

Table 2. Personal Experiential Themes (PET) Excerpt – Chea

Experiential Statements	Quote from Transcript
Theme 1: Identities shape motivations	
a. Connecting self to research	"My research, especially my dissertation research, is like a living thing and something that continues to affect." "...it is my identity, but I don't think that I realized that it was going to be my research focus until I got to Austin and was in an urban focus program with only one other rural person in it."
b. Realizing motivations for open-access publishing	"I think even in my academic publishing I tend to publish in like small affiliate journals that are open access anyways you know, so that when I hear things like it [open access] doesn't matter."
c. Finding your passion	"As someone who's written a dissertation. I highly recommend that you choose something that absolutely speaks to you, it to your heart in a way that like nothing else does because you're going to spend a lot of time with other people either interviewing or. You know, whatever your data collection is like and then you're going to spend a lot of time writing about it."

A collaborative audit by other team members determined the sturdiness and plausibility of the experiential statements. Using a collaborative clustering process (see Figure 1), we looked for connections and differences between and among the experiential statements across cases working toward a more interpretive account of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). Researchers developed themes and organized them so the analyzed data could be traced throughout the process from initial exploratory notes and quotes to the group's interpretive, experiential themes' final structure. See Table 3 for an excerpt of a Group Experiential Theme (GET).

Figure 1. Collaborative Clustering of Personal Experiential Themes for Group Themes

Table 3. Group Experiential Themes (GET) Excerpt

Group Experiential Theme RQ1/C: ***Beliefs about public audience drive the nature of relationships and communications***	
Cassie	"So I think that some of my greatest barriers are perhaps related to my own personal reactions and understandings of, um, how others engage with some of the things that I post."
Sarah	"I recognize that my expertise and my knowledge are limited, so I have curated, and this is something I have done deliberately, I've curated a network of people in my social media spaces who help me be a better teacher and, in many ways a better human being—people who I trust deeply, so I don't think of [social medial] that way [as work]. I think it's personal, just a way of being with others and that drives how I engage."
Melanie	"And rather than get into a discussion on Twitter, here is a resource that people might wanna look at that has a perspective that supports gradual release of responsibility. So it's those kinds of things [posting resources] that, um, I think that's more productive than saying to

	somebody, 'I think you're wrong and then saying, well, no, I think I'm right.'"
Chea	"The thing that I'm most proud of is finding the text and creating a resource [video, contest, blog] that teachers can use, to directly impact the lives and identity building of the students in their classrooms."
Lindsay	But one thing I think we're learning is that Facebook and Twitter aren't necessarily the main currency of teachers…I also think there's the potential for different audiences/folks who will listen to the show [podcast] and then go to the website. They may or may not be engaged in a space like Instagram."

During the analysis, we questioned how the SM user pushed back against hierarchies, paywalls, and barriers to their academic research. Through this interrogative stance, the researchers discovered the participatory nature of the SM user, their audience, and the research (all key roles), which highlighted how the dissemination of information in SM spaces can benefit both the SM user as an act of service and the public audience because of the timeliness of the information.

Findings

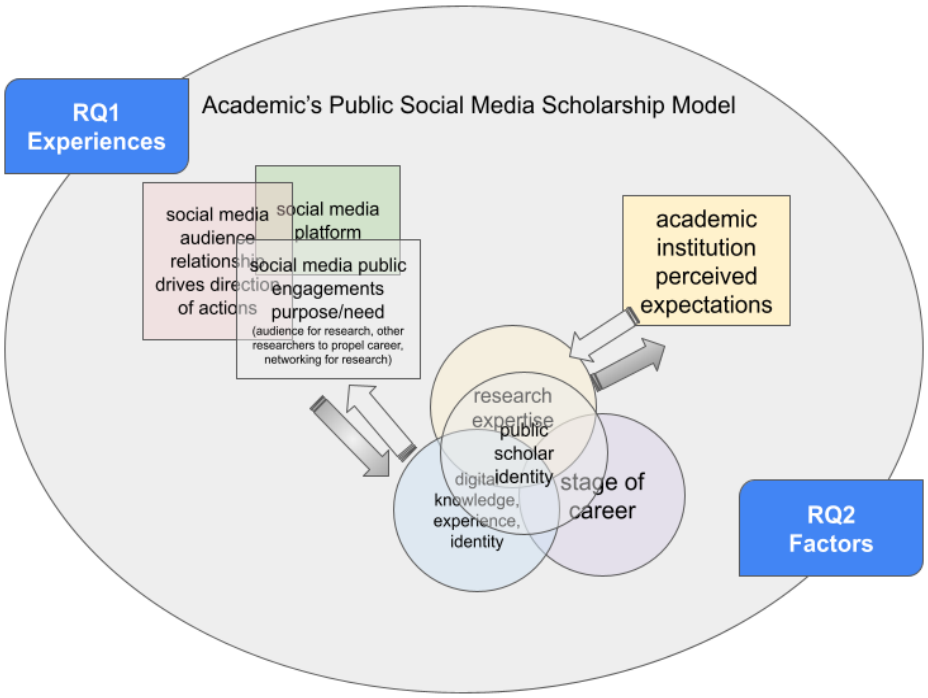
As the researchers theorized about academic public SM scholarship, the researchers constructed a model to try to capture the overlapping experiences and factors (i.e., research questions), which either shaped or were shaped by the academic. The model (Figure 2) includes shaded arrows, which show the possible directions of impact. For example, academia's perceived traditions put pressure on all of our participants to publish in traditional ways (e.g., peer-reviewed journals). The institution is also interested in its public reputation and success, so our participant's public success can shape, to some extent, the institution, and certainly has some implication for reappointment and promotion, which also reflects the significance of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009), as it indicates the significance of the online successfulness as a SM academic regarding both academic and career benefits.

Web 2.0 supports the construction of social membership through individual SM users' affiliation in formal or informal groups. This affiliation can influence and be influenced by people's identities. As we theorized about our participants' public scholar identity, we noticed interactions among the researcher's line of research (e.g., Sciences of reading, rural education advocacy), their digital knowledge and expertise (e.g., website, platform use, content creation), and the stage of their career (e.g., assistant to full professor). Thus, we created circles that overlapped with transparent shading to show the various dimensions of the participants' identities that shaped their SM engagements and research. Finally, the researchers created overlapping rectangles, also shaded, to indicate the overlapping

relationships between the SM audience and the academic. Our participants' engagements with SM platforms, audiences, content medium (e.g., podcast, website), and purposes (network with colleagues, workshop with teachers, mitigate misinformation) shaped and were shaped by the academic's public scholar identity.

The model resulted in six (6) themes. A detailed discussion follows in the next section. For research question one (RQ1)—What are the academic scholars' experiences related to the phenomenon—we identified the following group themes: A. Social media public engagements are informed by academics' purpose/need; B. Social media platform decisions informed by digital knowledge experiences, research expertise, and access to support/resources (GA, funding, time); and C . Beliefs about public audiences (what they need, what types of relationship academics want) drive the nature of relationships and monologic or dialogic engagements. For research question two (RQ2)—What factors influenced academic scholars' experiences of the phenomenon?—we identified the following group themes: A. Beliefs about academic institutions' expectations of the scholar factor into their actions; B. Stage of career and career trajectory factor into sustained or shifted engagements; and C. Identity: Personal beliefs/motives about personal and public selves shape and are shaped by digital spaces, which factored into platform and content decisions).

Figure 2. Academic's Public Social Media Scholarship Model



RQ1: What are the academic scholars' experiences related to the phenomenon?

This research question explored SM engagements. The findings revealed several overlapping experiences that shaped our participants' public scholarship, including their personal and professional purposes, their knowledge and expertise (or access to support) of platforms, and their beliefs about audience needs and engagements.

A. Social media public engagements are informed by academics' purpose/need. Academics' SM engagements align with their research purpose and perceived affordance of SM for their research goals and/or position in the academy. Traditionally, academics viewed research as a static, deliverable product, primarily aimed at disseminating findings and facts. Their goal was to make valuable resources accessible to the academic community through journals and books so that professionals and interested public audiences could engage in a democratic discussion of related issues. The academics in our study wanted to work within these traditions and stretch the traditional work to reach their intended audiences. The emphasis was on public access to their research.

Chea's approach exemplified this transition in academic engagement with SM. While she published articles in non-open-access journals, she created a platform to serve classroom teachers with accessible resources. Her SM work complemented traditional publishing by delivering content via YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, aligning with her role in academia as a provider of resources to educators. At the time of the interview, she used SM for place-based rural scholarship to the restrictive place-limited approach of journal publishing. Chea's work focused on dismantling stereotypes about rural literature and confronting the issues tied to dominant deficit narratives. She strived to challenge prevailing stereotypes through culturally sustaining practices, offering a nuanced perspective that traditional publications may not readily provide. Academics' use of SM opens up spaces for democratic education where audiences can learn from each other through dialogue in digital spaces.

Unlike the above academics, Lindsay followed a similar path, offering open-access content and developing podcasts where scholars discuss their work. This multidimensional approach allowed teachers to access research in their preferred mode, humanizing scholars and bringing their wisdom directly to the public. Lindsay's commitment to public accessibility highlighted her desire for every publication to be freely available.

Melanie, on the other hand, focused on the fundamental goal of making peer-reviewed work accessible to the public. Her website served as a repository of

trusted research sites and references, presenting peer-reviewed content in its original form, and enhancing public access. While she did not create new content, her dedication to ensuring access to quality research was integral to her SM scholarship stance.

The academics also displayed a conscious effort to connect with their intended audience uniquely and intimately that traditional publishing could replicate. This digital proximity involved associating with teachers, parents, and politicians, shaping the tone of engagement to align with the audience's needs. This perceived intimacy was a paradoxical departure from the distant nature of traditional scholarly communication. In this way, Web 2.0 makes the modern ways of communication possible through the participatory SM platforms where the academics can engage in civic engagement online.

In summary, the intersection of academia and SM represented an extension of traditional scholarship. Embracing the participatory culture, academics like Chea, Lindsay, and Melanie utilized SM to bridge gaps, target specific audiences, and make research accessible while democratizing digital social space, humanizing scholars, and challenging stereotypes. This transformation underscores the importance of digital proximity in connecting with the public and signifies the evolving landscape of scholarly communication.

B. Social media platform decisions are informed by digital knowledge experiences, research expertise, and access to support/resources (GA, funding, time). Although academics in this study shared the goal of making research accessible, the decisions on which SM platforms they utilized depended on specific factors, such as their prior experiences using SM platforms, research expertise, and access to resources, such as funding, GA assistance, and time arrangement. Relationships developed when seeking technology mentors or inviting others to their platforms that were often mutually beneficial. A spirit of reciprocity exists among many of the academics in this project. Lindsay sought scholars with experience and developed expertise to aid her work, but instead of them acting as mentors, they joined the project and walked alongside her. By utilizing the graduate assistant's technological expertise, she nurtured the relationship by giving them an opportunity for meaningful work while also nurturing her project, thus showing the reciprocal nature of her work. Initially, she embraced a network of people whom she sought out to fuel her podcast *Classroom Caffeine*. Since her podcast developed a wider reach, people now respond to her and seek her out to showcase their research; the reciprocal relationship with researchers created a two-way channel for furthering her podcast. Similarly, Sarah approached her SM presence as a reciprocal relationship with those who interact with her content–Open Write and VerseLove–and her ideas. Through a shared network with other teachers, she learned from them while also teaching them new approaches to writing pedagogy. By inviting people she trusts to learn from and grow alongside, she highlighted a democratic approach

on her *Ethical ELA* website, which valued both the audience and her expertise. In contrast, Melanie's relationship with digital platforms was more of a presenter's role who showcased information for an audience but did not interact with responses.

The experience with SM platforms and curating a digital identity varied across the participants. During her time at Michigan State University, Cassie developed expertise in curating a digital identity through university workshops, encouraging doctoral students to develop their digital presence. Both Chea and Melanie recounted how they found mentors to help guide them through the SM landscape. Melanie described how her husband helped her navigate technological landscapes where she did not feel like an expert, and he was able to help her grow her online presence. For Melanie, the mentors she found helped her use her time wisely–instead of "reading the manual." She spends her time and energy on research and furthering her interests, rather than spending hours researching how to use certain features within a SM platform. Chea explained how she leans into the graphic design experience of a volunteer to help situate multimodal content on platforms, tying them to one another by capturing a specific design theme.

Funding appeared the least among the interviews, and a juxtaposition exists between Cassie and Lindsay. Cassie wielded X, formerly Twitter, and her website to showcase who she was as a researcher and felt it impacted her ability to obtain grants, which led to a financial implication for her work. Even though her work did not specifically fund her research, her online persona gained the trust of those in charge of funding, and she was aware of how her online presence could impact public perception. However, as previously mentioned, Lindsay's podcast helped support opportunities for graduate assistants.

C. Beliefs about public audiences (what they need, what types of relationship academics want) drive the nature of relationships and monologic or dialogic engagements.

Beliefs inform actions and how people choose to interact with the world. We found that academics' beliefs about public audiences inform their purposes in content generation, and influence their ways of engaging with audiences. Online engagement in Web 2.0 can take different forms with various stances. Some academics preferred monologic engagement to curate and showcase information, while some of them favored dialogic engagement that seeks democratic interactions through shared communication. Within a continuum from monologic to dialogic, Lindsay and Melanie were closer to the side of monologic engagement; Sarah and Chea were located to the side of the dialogic engagement; Cassie was somewhere in the middle. These characteristics were shown in their relationship with the audience, which was driven and shaped by their beliefs about public audiences.

Sarah addressed in the interview that nobody wants anything standing in the way of their work. She believed that the purpose of writing was to share with the audience and make connections with peers, and that having people interact in

democratic discussions benefited both the writer and the reader. Her perception of the reciprocity of mutual witnesses between writers and readers was reflected in her design of the website, *Ethical ELA*, a virtual space where authors can share resources, interact with each other, communicate ideas, discuss issues, and connect with fellow educators. On *Ethical ELA*, both Sarah and her audience, fellow writers, benefit from having a community of mutual witnessing of writings and reader responses to support each other, which she considered to be a way of service for educator authors.

Like Sarah, Chea discovered writer witnesses and peer connections are important, too. Her empathy with people in rural areas catalyzed her belief that her audience in academia should be provided access to see the real world outside the "ivory tower" of academia. This belief informed her dedication to changing the dominant deficit narratives about rural people through her blog, *Dr. Parton's Literacy in Place*, where she posted about rural stories and interacted with audiences who were concerned about what was going on outside of metropolitan areas. Reaching out for dialogues empowers human agencies to critically reanalyze the unjust stereotypes constructed for ideological oppressions, which Chea has been doing to help reconstruct social understanding of the rural communities.

Cassie leveraged SM platforms to increase her visibility and create opportunities for academic collaborations. She set up a personal website to serve as a literacy space to facilitate opportunities to communicate with her peers in the discipline of literacy education. Even though her website was not featured in getting responses from her audience, her growing visibility did bring her chances of collaboration through personal contacts. Besides her website, she also engaged on various SM platforms, like Facebook, to celebrate the accomplishments of her peers, which kept her active in the field of literacy.

Melanie and Lindsay chose monologic engagement and devoted themselves to showcasing their research and studies to a broader audience, which was informed by their belief in democratizing professional content and making them tangible and accessible to anybody interested. Melanie maintained a repository of research on *The Reading Forum*, which functioned as a digital library where audiences can look for what they need. Melanie respects the audience's beliefs and believes that her job is not to persuade anyone to believe the same ideas as hers. Hence, she kept a distance from the audience by strategically avoiding arguments online. Similarly, Lindsay provides public access to her expertise in education without getting personally involved in conversations. Her belief in bridging information gaps in education encourages her to participate in the podcast, *Classroom Caffeine*, where she delivers hopeful messages to other educators. She also set up a page on Twitter/X to promote *Classroom Caffeine*, through which she tries to humanize the researchers and make research tangible and accessible for classroom practitioners.

In summary, academics' belief in the public audience informs their choice of the engagement style online. All our participant academics share the goal of making research more accessible to their audience and most of them also intend to promote a democratic environment online for dialogic engagement. However, their perceptual nuances on whether personal connection is necessary in virtual space further determine where they are in the continuum from monologic engagement to dialogic engagement.

RQ2: What factors influenced academic scholars' experiences of the phenomenon?

In the age of Web 2.0, internet users can develop their idiosyncratic styles of online engagement. This research question (RQ2) explored specific factors that have influenced academics' SM use. The findings revealed several influential factors related to the academics' beliefs about academic institutional expectations, beliefs about how the academics' stage of career and career trajectory shaped their SM use, and beliefs about how the academics' personal and public selves shaped their engagement in digital spaces.

A. Beliefs about academic institutions' expectations of the scholar factor into their actions. The data uncovered how the academics in this study utilize SM because of their beliefs about their academic institution's expectations. These professional expectations include conducting current research with traditional publishing, creating positive publicity for the academic institution, and engaging in collaborative service. A few participants voiced their beliefs about academic institution's publishing expectations. Through the spreadability feature of Web 2.0, Cassie found it beneficial to promote her works online. Cassie mentioned, "Some people might use [social media writings] for a promotion of their work." She also brought up the importance of up-to-date "reading and writing" in her field of study. Melanie also noted the need to provide accurate information, especially since most social media posts do not have to undergo a peer-review process. Melanie explained, "There's inaccuracies by the time you've heard about it from multiple people; you're not getting the most accurate information yourself." Addressing politicized information, Melanie pointed out the need to fight misinformation in open-access, digital spaces. Lindsay agreed that academics hold a responsibility to publish "verifiable truths from differing perspectives." She replied, "We cannot just let misinformation and disinformation kind of run away with SM platforms."

Not only should academics' research studies be accurate, but also academic discourse should be accessible, which enriches the participatory culture by presenting more academic resources in a digital space for professional interactions and peer feedback. All the academics in this group mentioned research accessibility to a broader public audience in open spaces. They have created spaces to promote

open access while still "following the rules" in terms of copyright. Cassie, Melanie, Sarah, and Chea share anything they have published in open-access platforms directly on their sites. For work published behind paywalls, they send those individually upon request. Lindsay uses her podcast as a narrative way to share research directly from the source of the research through her interviews. The podcasts often end with the authors inviting the audience to contact them for featured publications, which expands digital participation to involve more professionals in the same area. This group now seeks to publish in more open-access journals so that research is more accessible to the general public. Lindsay also mentioned, "I feel that public access is really important, and so I also wanted that to become a part of my research.*"*

The data also highlighted the universities' expectations and, in some cases, support for faculty to represent the university in a positive light or to promote the university profile in public spaces. For example, Cassie's institution offered professional development in curating a public digital profile. Lindsay was able to engage graduate assistants to help develop the podcast, and Melanie's website was developed in collaboration with colleagues, therefore their work explicitly drew on their institution's resources and name to various degrees.

B. Stage of career and career trajectory factor into sustained or shifted engagements. The academics in this study noted their tenure and advancement are, in part, based on the university's traditional expectations for publishing peer-reviewed work in traditional academic outlets. Their beliefs are shaped by this understanding, as well as their career rank and experience. Because they are at different points in their career, their actions are shaped by university expectations for reappointment and promotion.

In just the last two years, 2022 and 2023, the collective traditional productivity for the four assistant professors included one book, three book chapters, and 23 refereed journal articles. Additionally, Lindsay included several manuscripts in review and projects in progress on her published curriculum vitae. This output of traditional work demonstrates adherence to university norms and expectations.

They contribute to what Lindsay and Chea refer to as "public scholarship", meaning the scholarship that may or may not be peer-reviewed or research-based and mainly consists of their SM work. For Chea, this includes her YouTube channel, *Reading Rural YAL*, which houses over 88 book reviews, summaries, and teaching ideas for current books that represent rural representations. Lindsay's podcast series is in Season Four. By season's end, it will exceed 100 episodes. Sarah created her *Ethical ELA* "in the spirit of teacher support, inclusion, and reciprocity" and focuses on the questions about and experiences with "ethics of teaching," sparking questions around practices of reading and writing. She created space for professional development opportunities in conversations with teachers.

The assistant professors perceive/know that numbers count. On June 14, 2023, the second anniversary of her website, Chea posted "the numbers" related to her SM scholarship and engagement with others with the following post that highlights her work, the work of guest contributors, and the interactions of the audience through "words in support of rural books, teachers, students, and communities."

The impact of traditional publications counts and is typically measured by the number of reads, downloads, and citations. Social media can increase awareness, readership, and access to publications that are open access or have restrictive paywalls. As of September 2023, Sarah's website had over 600,000 views, over 200,000 unique visitors, over 700 posts, and almost 75,000 comments, indicating that people not only view content, they also participate through engagement in democratic interactions. Cassie uses SM, specifically X, to bring awareness to her work and the work of other scholars who share a passion for inclusive education that honors "children's cultural, linguistic, and multimodal ways of knowing." Increasing readership of her work and others contributes to the core purpose of traditional measures of impact through the reach of peer-reviewed publications.

Melanie is a well-respected, well-cited, tenured full professor whose Google Scholar index shows over 7,000 citations with 2,444 since 2018 (at the time of this writing). Because she is considered an expert in the field and is an often cited researcher, her beliefs about SM are focused on a changed understanding of a broader audience in the digital age. She is aware that educators and policymakers turn to the internet to find information, and she wants them to find high-quality information to make informed decisions and/or find high-quality resources. She began her website with goals that included engaging practitioners and getting peer-reviewed research into a public space. Therefore, she convened a group of over 100 scholars to brainstorm responses to inaccurate and misrepresented information. She garnered university support for a SM project resulting in *The Reading Forum* website. She received release time and, like Lindsay, engaged some graduate assistants to help with this work.

C. Identity: Personal beliefs/motives about personal and public selves shape and are shaped by digital spaces (and this is factored into the platform and content). Our academic SM users have different ways to achieve their goals on the internet. They choose the internet and SM platforms for various purposes and shape the digital space by taking actions to engage, promote, curate, educate, and advocate, thus exercising their democratic participation (Dewey, 2001). Further, they are influenced by digital space, the environment, context, and community where our academics dwell. Digital space as well as the specific SM platforms constantly reinforce the participatory culture through the features, affordances, and functionalities that are deliberately designed to democratize social interactions by

promoting dialogue (Jenkins, 2009). These features include posting, curating, sharing, direct messaging, and tagging.

Sarah, Chea, and Cassie used SM to make connections with like-minded educators, through which they built a virtual community where their peer followers can feel safe to share, discuss, and interact with each other. Chea tries to engage people in dialogues that have the purpose of decomposing stereotypes. On her website, *Dr. Parton's Literacy in Place*, she engages viewers to hear rural stories and see the perspectives of rural communities. The ability to set up the website and edit it for sharing stories enables her work to be efficiently promoted, and the affordances on her website, like curating her posts and responding to the articles in the comment zone, have given her access to communicate with her audience to shift and transform the current narratives and stereotypes of rural populations.

Additionally, Sarah addressed her integrated identity on and offline and shared that she would not intentionally differentiate her personal and virtual identities. Her activities online are public and personal at the same time. On her website, *Ethical ELA*, followers and viewers can share their writings and contribute to the website as content co-creators. The idea of open writing brings writers and authors together to meet each other and write together, which forms a democratic digital community where scholars, authors, and writers can find their allies for creation, curation, and publication.

Cassie has a webpage that functions as her digital portfolio. Even though the affordances of comment and response were not designed on the website, her peers in the field of education can still benefit from the educational resources shared on the website and find adequate information on Cassie's work and research interests if they need expertise on one specific educational issue or a co-author for a project that might use her expertise. Cassie has also been active on Twitter/X, celebrating her peers' achievements, and tweets and retweets on issues she is concerned about. Cassie's various activities online have brought her visibility and opportunities for research, conference presentations, and publication. For her, becoming a SM user, and exploring those social affordances, opens a door of friendship, profession, and tremendous support.

Lindsay and Melanie's activities online are inclined to one-way information sharing and curation. They share a common interest in filling in the information gap and disseminating professional perspectives and knowledge to a broader audience on SM. The affordances of sharing and posting in digital space allow them to share their expertise, which in turn shaped their belief in serving people through enlightenment. Lindsay bridges the public to the professional content in education, and Melanie is dedicated to getting accurate information out on the internet to reduce the influence of the misinformation out there. Social media platform affordances of sharing and curating, gives them a way to apply their expertise in their curation in digital space online for the viewers and audiences in need.

Discussion and Implications

This study explores the academics' experiences with SM, examining the convergence and divergence of personal, professional, and public spheres in light of traditional publication/scholarship expectations. The findings highlight the evolving participatory culture among these academics and the impact of such engagement on their personal and professional identities. The SM platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X, provided affordances for their users to post, share, and most importantly, interact with each other. Even though the specific ways interactions happen differ among those apps, academics can always find a digital space to engage in dialogue. On Facebook, people can send direct messages, and respond to posts in the comment zone. On Instagram, people can send out a reel video, post visuals, like a post, and respond to any content shared on the account they follow; On Twitter/X, people can find more textual content and react and interact with each other.

Social media has transcended its initial purpose of personal connection and is now deeply ingrained in academic life. Previously, scholars primarily used SM for personal reasons but gradually incorporated it into their teaching methodologies to share educational resources, such as lectures, presentations, and class videos (Deeken et al., 2020; Manca & Ranieri, 2016a). However, the academic community's relationship with SM remains multifaceted, with some scholars viewing their personal and professional lives as interconnected and self as unextractable, while others prefer to keep them separate or work intentionally to keep them separate.

These academics have embraced SM platforms for various professional purposes, including collaboration, competitive positioning within their scholarly community, reputation development, and research tracking (Manca & Ranieri, 2016a; Veletsianos et al., 2019; Waheed et al., 2021). For our participants, the boundaries between their personal and professional lives blur on the same SM platform, reflecting perhaps the changing nature of academic engagement (Veletsianos et al., 2019), but we found this to be a personalizing and humanizing form of scholarship because of the virtual community building academics nurtured through affiliations or the formalizing of groups on their platforms (Jenkins, 2009). Chea and Sarah, in particular, did not want to compromise their identities and interests for the traditional scholarship path but took a very personal and personalized approach to scholarship that would likely exist and persist without the university. The groups or followers of our participants created collaborative problem-solving spaces to address challenges and develop/shape/refine new knowledge. Across all participants, we observed an interdependence overlap of

personal, professional, and public spheres that motivated and/or shaped the academic's work, if not, being.

Notably, SM engagement within academia varies in terms of interactivity. Some academics engage in one-way information sharing, focusing on disseminating professional knowledge and perspectives to a broader audience online (Carter & Nguyen, 2022). This engagement can bridge hierarchical boundaries and foster open commentary among stakeholders, illustrating the evolution of academic SM. We discussed this as democratic and dialogic. Our findings demonstrate that the affordances of SM platforms enable these scholars to share their professional insights more efficiently than through traditional means, and in a more personalized way – a way that nurtures community and even friendships with the public and certainly among other academics engaging in SM spaces. There is an ethical imperative that each participant discussed to some degree. Two examples include Lindsay and Melanie who highlighted the diverse uses of SM in academia. Lindsay uses her expertise in education to bridge the public to professional content, while Melanie focuses on countering misinformation with her scholarly knowledge. Both leverage the accessibility of SM platforms to propel accurate, informed literacy information.

Scholars are increasingly harnessing the participatory nature of SM to engage in public scholarship (Greenhow et al., 2019; Jenkins, 2009). Participatory culture is characterized by support for creating and sharing one's work with others, and that form of work extends beyond traditional journal publications into innovative forms in spaces where the academics believe their contributions matter (Jenkins, 2009). In addition, in most cases, some type of informal mentorship took place where an experienced or knowledgeable academic passed knowledge to novices or those otherwise without access to the people, ideas, and knowledge. Therefore, the academics' work mattered in this way and also cultivated a degree of social connection with SM participants. The academics, to some degree, really cared about what their followers thought about what they created in the SM spaces.

Academic participatory culture entails a level of "double work" as academics must not only cultivate traditional scholarship but maintain a digital presence, a form of mentorship, and social connections beyond their institution and professional organizations through SM. In some ways, academics are always working and/or redefining their work when they cannot extract themselves from a physical space and stay continuously engaged in digital spaces. The participative web, or Web 2.0, provides the platform for this culture, facilitating various forms of academic engagement that have some consequences. While our study did not uncover an in-depth exploration of trolls or negative aspects of SM engagement, this risk exists, and academics do attend to their persona, public perception, their university’s public image, and their brand/research line in light of these consequences. Notably, an academic's SM engagement is increasingly associated

with their career trajectory and rank within their field, adding a layer of complexity to their digital presence.

Academic SM engagement has transformed the way scholars interact with their professional and personal identities. While some academics blur the lines between these realms, others keep them separate. The participatory culture emerging within academia illustrates a profound shift in the way scholars engage with their fields and the public. Social media's diverse affordances enable scholars to build their reputations, connect with a wider audience, and contribute to the ever-evolving landscape of academic engagement. However, navigating the intersection of personal and professional identities in the digital age remains a dynamic challenge, shaping the future of scholarly communication and interaction.

Limitations

Interpretive phenomenological studies can have as few as four (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) to 12 or more participants when working toward data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Smith et al. (2022) suggests five to 10 participants to allow for detailed case analysis. Our study included five white women who work in academia and provided us the opportunity for detailed analysis. Some of the SM users declined the invitation to participate in the study; therefore, our sample size is not representative of all SM users. Next steps would be to include participants from diverse backgrounds to speak to varying experiences related to identity (gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, etc.).

Conclusion

Qualitative studies create space to surface motivations, intentions, tensions, and the stories surrounding an academic's decision-making, specifically when hierarchical factors prevent access and responsiveness. The ubiquity of SM across many dimensions of education invites celebration and critique, particularly in definitions of scholarship, so the scholars who are engaging with and leveraging SM publicly have something to say about why and how they use it – and this has the potential to inform the ways other literacy scholars incorporate SM into their research, teaching, and services. Scholarship is not only landing in the feeds of other researchers but our participants are reaching practitioners, and how they do this is rather remarkable.

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Appendix

Exploring Academic Research and Social Media Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What motivates you to engage in professional social media? What is your expertise in the area of social media? How did you get started?
2. Who do you follow as a mentor in online spaces?
3. How do you streamline your purpose on social media (i.e. focus on one research topic) or how do you broadly interact with all areas related to professional interests?
4. How do you use social media for professional and personal reasons and do conflicts ever arise between the two purposes? How do you handle those?
5. Is content generation for a blog or social media platforms part of the professional workload/expectations for your positions or is it completed primarily on personal time?
6. How do you manage your time for using social media posts/site for your professional, daily/weekly schedule? How do you make time for social media for both receiving and producing social media and engaging in conversation (reading, consumption, production)?
7. What are your feelings or attitudes towards engaging in social media professionally? Describe a specific example of this feeling/attitude.
8. What are possible barriers to your participation on social media for academic purposes? How do you overcome those barriers?
9. How do you leverage one social media platform to support others? For example, sharing across platforms and/or using content in more than one "space"?
10. What are your concerns about being taken out of context? What is your perspective regarding "haters" or "trolls"?
11. How do you decide which of your publications you post and publicize, particularly when it comes to publications found in a paid journal?
12. How do you incorporate popular social media trends (i.e. reels, podcast, stories, etc.) to market your academic work?
13. How do you set goals related to social media metrics? If not, how do you know when you are "successful"?