

Practicing Digital Activisms

Computers & Writing 2020 | Call for Interventions

May 14-17, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC



In *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, Castells (2015) suggests that in an information age shaped by endless digital iterations of images and words, “the fundamental power struggle is the battle for the construction of meaning in the minds of the people” (5). Such a moment requires us to be hyper-engaged in the diverse and often disconnected flows of information that move across digital spaces, always questioning which stories, essays, tweets, images, and videos tell us what is happening and which are aimed at misdirection. The digital and networked spaces that increasingly mediate so much of our daily lives have also become the spaces where acts of resistance begin or gain rhetorical velocity (Ridolfo & DeVoss). To that end, we invite scholars to join us in practicing, exploring, and engaging with the many behaviors that we have come to call Digital Activisms.

The Computers and Writing (C&W) community has often developed projects that practice digital activism and advocacy. These practices have evolved quickly in recent years, becoming central to political life around the world. Political candidates now use social media to mobilize supporters and to control the messages around their campaigns and administrations, often moving their own agendas

over and above what journalists can fact-check and analyze for readers. Similarly, and often in response to these powerful political messages, hashtag activism and digital pushes for social justice have become key tools citizens use to be more engaged in the social and political projects that shape their lives and communities.

Projects like #NoDAPL, #MeToo, #ArabSpring, #BLM, #BringBackOurGirls, and #WomensMarch--all developed by historically marginalized groups--have made

important justice issues apparent to a more globally diverse group of digital users than ever before. While some critiques from “influencers” and scholars alike have lobbed accusations of “armchair activism” at such initiatives, digital rhetoricians are aware that this work represents yet another way that a broad cross-section of the global population engages with issues of personal and public concern.

We believe that C&W scholars are poised to be leaders in analyzing, understanding, and using the digital tools that have been taken up for activist and justice-oriented projects. For example, [Ride2CW](#), [ART of Infertility](#), and [DressProfesh](#) illustrate the power of digital spaces to impact material matters. We also serve in positions that allow us to teach and learn from students about the intersections of technologies and justice, and about the complexities of “unruly rhetorics” in activist spaces (Alexander, Jarratt, & Welch). As a field, we have already argued against false assumptions of neutrality in technical work (Katz; Haas; Ridolfo), which holds true for digital communication. In *Algorithms of Oppression*, for example, Noble (2018) argues “that concepts like ‘big data’ and ‘algorithms’ are neither benign, neutral, [nor] objective The people who make these decisions hold all types of values, many of which openly promote racism, sexism, and false notions of meritocracy” (1-2). In solidarity with this work, we agree with [MacKinnon \(2012\)](#) that “It is time to stop debating whether the Internet is an effective tool for political expression and instead to address the much more urgent question of how digital technology can be structured, governed, and used to maximize the good and minimize the evil.” We challenge the C&W community to imagine and enact more justice-focused research, teaching, and community-engaged practices.

We welcome all kinds of examples and projects that explicitly practice, promote, and analyze digital activism toward social justice. Possible topics for proposals and projects might include (but will not be limited to) the following:

- What digital practices use the affordances and constraints of digital environments to achieve digital protests, digital activism, and digital interventions?
- How do the construction of social media profiles and related digital practices challenge issues related to embodiment, performance, access, inclusion, and ethics?
- In what ways can or do memes, videos, Facebook posts, images, tweets, video games, GIFs, or hashtags contribute to digital activism?
- In what ways might we be cognizant of access/ability while doing digital activism, and how do we avoid false impressions of digital spaces as necessarily democratizing media?

- How do the “isms”--slacktivism and hacktivism--interrogate the role digital spaces contribute to social movements and activist work?
- How do digital social movements use digital tools to do their work?
- What are the implications and intersections of digital ethics with doing digital activism?
- How does the relationship between digital literacies and digital activism affect our research, teaching, and community engagement?
- How do we ethically teach digital activism and digital literacies to our students and learn from them about the influence of digital tools and environments?
- How do notions of virality and adaptation influence the practice of digital activism?

Session Types and Submission Instructions

To make room in the program for broad participation AND robust audiences during sessions, we ask that presenters limit themselves to no more than two (2) roles in the session types listed below. (However, you may participate in as many other participant roles as desired.)

- **Digital Activism Showcase:** This session type will be used to highlight one or more activist or social justice-focused projects. 150-200 word abstract, 600 word proposal.
- **Panel presentations:** 3 to 4 presenters, 150-200-word abstract, 600-word proposal
- **Roundtable/Lightning Talks:** 5 or more presenters, 150-200-word abstract, 600-word proposal
- **Individual presentations:** 75-100-word abstract, 250-word proposal

We also invite proposals for the following contributions that will not count against the maximum of two (2) session roles:

- **Poster Presentation:** individual or collaborative presenters (1 poster per submission), 150-200-word abstract (presenters will be required to be present during a set poster session time, but posters will also be displayed throughout the duration of the conference)
- **Mini, Half-Day, and Full Day Workshops:** 150-200-word abstract, 600-word proposal AND outline of proposed activities that engage participants in digital tools or practicing digital activism. Proposals should describe an opportunity to learn digital applications or emerging technologies for writing, scholarship,

pedagogy, or community engagement. Please include details about activities as well as accessibility, material, and space needs.

Proposals are due October 1, 2019. Please include any content warnings and/or accessibility limitations that should ultimately be included in the program at the top of your proposal.

To submit a proposal, go to <https://candwcon.org/2020/> and create an account if you do not already have one.