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# Using Twitter to Promote Civic Education

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Creating Democratic Citizens: Using Twitter to Engage in Civic Education

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Maine Regional School Unit #3

University of Maine at Farmington

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**Creating democratic citizens: Using Twitter to engage in civic education****Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Twitter could be used to support civic education in a rural, low-income school district in Maine. Twitter was used in the classroom to supplement and enrich a unit on the Civil Rights Movement and also to inform students about the political process. Findings indicate that Twitter can effectively be used to engage students, inform about the political process, and enrich content when used with purposeful instruction. Recommendations for educators include long-term implementation of the tool, on-going feedback from students, and purposeful implementation into curriculum.

“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely.

The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.”

-Franklin D. Roosevelt

## Introduction

Public education in the United States is a unique organization compared to most other countries, as few countries in the world offer free education to all of their citizens regardless of race, ethnicity or gender. This is a beautiful, and truly democratic, concept. However, the American public education system is under constant scrutiny to compete with a variety of test scores on a global level. Since the global recession of the last decade, institutions of higher education have also been tasked with creating graduates who can be more productive to the global economy. Furthermore, social studies curricula is globalizing its focus as well. Journell (2014) states, “In the United States, courses on civics or government are often marginalized in most states’ social studies curricula in favor of courses in United States or world history.” Because of these pressures, American schools more than ever are focused on test scores and skills, losing sight of what the institution, and social studies curricula, were established to do: provide a well-rounded, liberal arts education in order to create productive, democratic citizens.

Social studies education has been one of the areas in public education that has been focused on the least with recent reform movements. Social studies is not directly assessed on nationwide, high-stakes tests like the SAT, whereas math and English are. The Common Core has released their math and language arts standards, and though many states have adopted these in the transition to a proficiency-based system, there are no social studies standards that are independent of ELA standards. In the state of Maine, social studies is the only core content subject not tested at the secondary level. As social studies seems to fall through the cracks, so does the focus of a social studies curriculum. Standards that have been adopted by the state do little to promote the real purpose of what a social studies education should do: help prepare

Maine students for democratic participation.

The neglect of a proper social studies curriculum is happening at a critical time for our students. Thomas Jefferson said, “I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society by the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.” Never has the world been so connected with increasingly intertwined economies, constant global crises, and a variety of technology and social media. Globalization creates both many challenges and many opportunities. It is the job of educators to make sure American students are prepared for a world where they can buy things from China online, read developing stories from the Ukraine, and watch actual revolutions start in the Middle East on Twitter. The purpose of this research study is to explore how Twitter could be used to promote civic engagement in social studies classrooms.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Studies Classrooms and Civic Education**

One of the most important tasks of a social studies curriculum is providing students with a civic education. “Civic Education in a democracy is education in self government. Democratic self government means that citizens are actively involved in their own governance; they do not just passively accept the dictums of others or acquiesce to the demands of others” (Branson, 1998, para. 2). While secondary and post-secondary schools are feeling pressure to compete in a globalized world, McIlrath, Lyons, and Munck (2012) argue that it is exactly this globalized world which increases the need for teaching civic education. Furthermore, a study of how civic

education was taught in 38 countries by Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, and Losito (2010) reported that most teachers and principals not only regarded the development of these skills most important, but also regarded the understanding of political institutions and concepts as important. These include the study of human rights, as well as newer topics covering social and community cohesion, diversity, environment, communications and global society.

Studies found that teaching these concepts to students at a secondary and post-secondary level can help increase students' feelings of connectedness and community (Edwards, 2012; Lee, 2014; Lin, 2013; Montgomery, 2008). Specifically cited in these studies were the efficacy of using current events and technology. Conversely, studies have also found that a growing number of Americans, as a whole, are becoming less knowledgeable about politics and government which is creating citizens who are more distrusting of politicians and apathetic about the direction their country is headed (Journell, 2014). Therefore, civic education seems more important than ever.

Not only can providing students with a civic education promote feelings of connectedness, but it can also help academic achievement (Camicia & Dobson, 2010; Lee, 2014). Camicia and Dobson performed a study where preservice teachers and elementary students wrote in partner journals to one another about current events. The study found that elementary students showed growth in their writing, while both groups reported increased engagement through the activity. In Lee's study, students created digital news stories about current events. Researchers found using this medium helped student achievement. Multiple studies showed that technology could be a powerful tool in shaping a civic education (Lee, 2014; Montgomery, 2008). From these studies, it is clear that technology could be an effective tool to



enhance civic education.

Though the state of Maine does mandate students take one year of “government,” many states in the nation favor enforcing multiple years of U.S. history, rather than a civics course. Journell (2014) makes the argument that not providing students with a chance to become “civically literate” can deny students the ability to put these historical events into context. Further, he argues that this can be rectified by using U.S. history curriculum to discuss contemporary political issues such as the Electoral College, political compromise, and federalism, as exemplified throughout American history to reinforce these ideas to students.

### **Social Studies Classrooms and Social Media**

There is evidence to support the use of technology, such as social media, as a tool for engagement and achievement in education. Several studies have shown evidence of the high proportion of people who use social media in their personal lives (Chen & Bryer, 2012; Hansen, Childress & Trujillo, 2010) and also how social media can be effective in an educational setting. Both studies also found that Facebook is not an effective tool for educational purposes; however, the Junco, Elavsky, and Heiberger (2013) study found high levels of engagement and achievement when students were required to use Twitter in a first-year college class. Social media has been found to be most effective in the classroom setting when applied in an educationally relevant way and implemented with strong pedagogical methods (Junco, et al., 2013; Lee, 2014).

Recently, there has been an increasing, though admittedly still limited, amount of research using social media in social studies classrooms. Multiple studies have found that Twitter can be politically engaging (Journell et al., 2013, 2014; Park, 2013). These studies cite strengths

of the tool such as ability of the users to follow stories and events easily through the use of “hashtaging,” the limitation on characters providing quick comprehension and response time to events, and the ease of communication with and connectivity to people all around the world.

There appears to be little research citing specific pedagogy on how to make this an effective tool in classrooms to promote civic engagement.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

American public education is under constant pressure to increase testing scores and create productive workers for a globalized economy. Through these pressures, it can be easy to lose sight of the underlying principle behind public education in a democratic society. Providing students with a civic education is critical to their development, can help foster feelings of connectedness to their community and the global community, and can also help increase academic achievement. There is also an increasing body of research to support the efficacy of social media, specifically Twitter, in American classrooms. In this study, civic education in today’s globalized world will be explored, specifically: How can Twitter be used in secondary social studies classes to promote civic education?

## **Research Design**

### **The Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to investigate how social media tools, specifically Twitter, can be used to encourage young adults to participate in their democracy. This is an important initiative as young adults (aged 18-24) tend to be the group least politically active in the United States. Journell et al. (2013) elaborated on the issue of civic disengagement of American youth,

by stating that even though individuals from this age group turned out in the 2008 presidential election at a higher rate than ever before, still less than half voted, compared to the 67% turnout rate for those aged over 30. Recent research has been able to show a connection between civic participation and Twitter. This research study will add to the body of research by attempting to engage secondary social studies students in civic participation using Twitter. This research will directly benefit students, as they become more aware of how to be informed about their democracy, and how to appropriately participate in their democracy.

### **The Research Question**

The research question for this study is how Twitter could be used to promote civic engagement in social studies classrooms in order to enhance a civic education. This is an important topic because the body of research tells us that civic education is critical to help young adults develop into productive democratic citizens, and yet it is widely excluded, or of low-priority, in modern American classrooms. Lin (2013) states, “It is important to examine the development of civic engagement amongst young people because these specific kinds of dispositions are likely to translate into his or her adulthood” (p. 1). This study will approach this topic by gauging how interested students are in civic participation and then attempting to positively enhance this using Twitter to engage students about topics related to civics, most notably, current events. Necessary data to address this question will include information related to student perceptions of civic engagement, their interest in this topic, how prepared they feel to participate in their democracy and how this interest and/or participation has grown as a result of their experience using Twitter as a tool in class. Hopefully in shedding light on how this tool could be used to engage students in becoming civic participants, it can empower more young

adults to be informed, active members of the American democratic system and also give teachers strategies to help replicate this in their own classrooms.

### **The Central Concepts Related to the Investigation**

The body of research related to social media and civic engagement is constantly developing as technology changes and also becomes more accessible. There is a large body of research related to using social media in the classroom. The results of these studies are varied depending both on the pedagogy and also the type of social media used in the study. Research points to Twitter as being more reliable in terms of positively engaging students in an educational setting and also in helping to promote student achievement.

The research cited in this study concerning civic education all pointed to this being a crucial element in helping American citizens develop into participants in their democracy.

Journell (2014) states:

The obvious concern behind this lack of political knowledge is that poorly informed students ultimately develop into politically illiterate citizens. Throughout the political science literature are studies suggesting that Americans, as a whole, are becoming less knowledgeable about politics and government, less interested in how government works, and more distrusting of politicians and other public officials. Moreover, levels of political apathy and distrust are consistently higher in younger Americans (those under 30), especially among those from lower-socioeconomic households. (Journell, 2014, p. 56)

Ultimately, this information should be alarming for all members of our democracy. If our country is going to continue to be the beacon of freedom for the world, then we must ensure that future generations can, and more importantly want to, carry this torch.

There is a more limited, but growing, body of research directly concerning the use of Twitter in social studies classrooms to engage students in civic education. Studies suggest that

Twitter can be an effective tool in engaging students, who are traditionally left out of the voting process, in the political process (Journell, Ayers, & Beeson, 2013). Because Twitter limits the amount of characters that members can use, the information can be processed, shared, and commented on very quickly, thus becoming more engaging for students than traditional news stories (Park, 2013). Studies suggest that with the ability to connect our classrooms instantaneously to the world, and allow students to interact with such a variety of people, that Twitter can be an engaging tool to promote civic literacy and participation.

### **The General Approach of the Investigation**

Investigation of the research topic will be done through the use of quantitative surveys given to students on regular intervals throughout the research timeframe. This is different than other studies cited in this study because none of the other studies directly asked students about their perceptions of their own civic engagement and how Twitter may or may not have had an influence. This study intends to generate data from students on how prepared they feel to participate in their democracy and whether or not Twitter has positively impacted that readiness. The issues around using social media in the classroom are multifaceted. It is impossible to predict what other users may or may not post which may be educationally significant. Also, the ability to monitor that students are using the tool productively can be a challenge. The project does rely on the basic premise that students will participate, and that their parents will allow this tool to be used with their children for educational purposes. In order to address these weaknesses, transparency from the researcher to participants, their families, and the school community as a whole is critical. The researcher will also have to make sure that district policies surrounding use of technology are adhered to faithfully by all students.

### **The Method of Inquiry**

The research topic in this study will be addressed with an action research approach, specifically a participatory action research (PAR) approach. Creswell (2011) describes the purpose of PAR as a way to “improve the quality of people’s organizations, communities, and family lives,” a process that “promotes egalitarian and democratic aims” (Creswell, 2011, p. 583). This approach is different from other research cited in this study because the teacher is the main orchestrator of the project, rather than outside participants. This approach is appropriate because it is being conducted by a teacher to gather information about how to improve the way schools in Maine, and other places, choose to design their social studies curriculum and will also be used to inform professional teaching practices by the researcher.

The weaknesses of an action research project, like this one, are that these projects are intimate and also open-ended, meaning that students will be collaborators in the direction the research takes, and also that the focus of the research may change as data is continuously collected and analyzed. Transparency with students will be key to keeping them as willing and genuine participants in this project. Adherence to the fact that the intent of this project to is help create citizens who are engaged members of their democracy, thus promoting sustainable social change, will help the focus of the research remain ethical and relevant.

## **Research Methods**

### **Setting**

Data will be collected using Google Forms, on my Maine Google account. This account is password protected, and will only be accessed from my personal computer which is also password protected. This is appropriate for the types of questions I am asking because it is a convenient way to poll students about their experiences using Twitter in the classroom, especially because the research project is also focused on technology in the classroom.

### **Sampling/Participants**

The participants in this study will be students from my senior history classes who are willing to participate. All participants will be given a questionnaire administered three times throughout the study. The sampling strategy is appropriate because the study is trying to gather information from students about how effective Twitter is in engaging them in civic participation, therefore, the opinions of all participants will make the data more credible. This sampling strategy is effective because Google Forms will collect and store the data electronically in one place as quickly as students complete the questionnaires. If all students who participate fill out all the questionnaires, then there should not be sampling bias. Issues that might arise are students not putting forth honest effort to complete the questionnaires or failing to complete all surveys. Errors that might occur are derived from any errors I might make in compiling the data, or potential glitches in Google Forms operating correctly. All students enrolled in my seniors history classes will be offered the chance to participate in this study.

## **Methodology**

The research topic in this study will be addressed with an action research approach, specifically, a participatory action research (PAR) approach. This approach is appropriate because it is being conducted by a teacher to gather information about how to improve the way schools in Maine, and other places, choose to design their social studies curriculum and will also be used to inform professional teaching practices by the researcher. This method is being chosen because it is more flexible than other potential approaches, which is something that is extremely important in the classroom as teachers must adapt to many potential variables every day. The flexibility of this approach, and also that the research is being done to improve the lives of participants, make this choice of methodology a benefit to this research project.

The weaknesses of an action research project, like this one, are that these projects are intimate and also open-ended. Meaning that students will be collaborators in the direction the research takes, and also that the focus of the research may change as data is continuously collected and analyzed. Transparency with students will be key to keeping them as willing and genuine participants in this project. Adherence to the fact that the intent of this project to help create citizens who are engaged members of their democracy, thus promoting sustainable social change, will help the focus of the research remain ethical and relevant.

## **Operational Measures**

For this research study, three different questionnaires will be used to gather feedback from students. Questionnaires and questions on the instruments are all originally created by the Primary Investigator. Most of the data from the instruments is quantitative in nature, though there are two open-ended questions on the third and final questionnaire. These forms will be created



on Google Forms by the Principle Investigator and, therefore, should be a reliable way to collect the data from students. The tool is reliable in gathering student perceptions of Twitter because it was created by the Principle Investigator specifically for this task, and questions were tailored for these specific students.

The purpose of the study is attempting to prove a connection between Twitter and civic engagement in high school social studies students', the data gathered in this study from students attempts to elicit student perceptions of how well Twitter engages them in this process. Questions were designed on the instrument specifically to gauge from students how likely they are to participate in their democracy both before and after engaging with Twitter throughout the study. Because the research methodology is action-research, there is the flexibility to adapt the questionnaires as the study progresses to insure that the instruments used are appropriately gauging the perceptions of the participations in relation to Twitter and their future civic engagement.

### **Data Collection**

At the beginning of the unit of study on the Cold War, students who choose to participate will be given the first questionnaire. All students at Mount View High School have access to laptops and there is Internet connection at the school. Therefore, there is no preparation necessary in order to provide students access to technology. Students will, however, need to set up their own Twitter accounts with their school email addresses and allow their teacher to follow them. At this time, students will take the first questionnaire. The purpose of the first questionnaire is to gauge what students typically find engaging in my classroom, how often they pay attention to politics and current events, and also how likely students feel they are to

participate in their democracy. After the first questionnaire is completed on Google Forms by all students, the Principle Investigator will analyze the initial data to see how informed students feel about American politics, how likely they feel they are to vote in the upcoming presidential election, and how much they feel like they already know about the potential candidates. From this data, the Principle Investigator will structure what accounts on Twitter will best inform them and which relate most significantly to what will be studied in relation to the Cold War, the relationship the United States has with specific countries because of this era, and also how the candidates for the 2016 presidential election are reacting to these related current events.

For the next two weeks, students will sporadically be directed to use Twitter to follow specific hashtags, particular news stories and also political figures from around the world to enrich their study of the Cold War and current U.S. foreign policy. Participants in the study will be asked to Tweet about current events issues and also attempt interaction with others. After two weeks of using Twitter to inform, engage, and interact about these contemporary Cold War issues, students will be asked to complete the second questionnaire. This instrument will be used to gather feedback from the students about what they think is most engaging about this unit of study (Twitter, lecture, group work, etc.), if they feel more likely to participate in the 2016 presidential election, and also how they think Twitter could be used to better enhance the unit. After this second questionnaire, the Principle Investigator will tailor the next two weeks using Twitter in order to better engage them with this material.

After two more weeks of using Twitter to follow current issues and candidates, and implementing the adjustments suggested by students, the participants will complete the final questionnaire. This questionnaire will be very similar to the first questionnaire, in attempts to

gauge if students felt more likely to participate in their democracy, most notably the 2016 presidential election. There will be a final open-ended question asking students for feedback about whether or not they felt Twitter engaged them with the historical material and also with political events, and then finally, how effectively they felt Twitter was used in the classroom.

### **Data Analysis**

Most of the questions posed to students are quantitative in nature, either having a set amount of choices to choose from or being on the Likert Scale. On the first questionnaire, the data will need to be categorized based on how likely students feel they will be to participate in their democracy and how informed they feel they are about American politics. From this, I will need to tailor what accounts we are going to follow on Twitter based upon how well-informed students judge themselves to be coming into the study. Therefore, inferential statistical analysis will be used for most of the data collected. For the action-research part of the study (taking the information from the questionnaires to shape how Twitter will be used in the classroom), thematic analysis will be used to pull from what the majority of students feel about the use of Twitter thus far and how to use it more effectively in the future.

### **Expected Findings**

Based on prior research on using Twitter to increase engagement in the classroom and also, specifically, using Twitter to promote civic engagement, I believe that the data will support that most students will be more likely to vote in the upcoming 2016 presidential election and also find Twitter as an engaging way to learn about U.S. politics. My findings will support prior research done in this field of study and hopefully enhance prior findings with specific pedagogical strategies that can be used in social studies classrooms in order to promote

democratic participation. There is prior research that also supports that students are generally interested in politics anyway (Journell, 2014), however I believe further exposure to current events in conjunction to historical topics they are studying, while utilizing a social media tool, will prove to be more engaging for students than the methods used previously.

### **Potential Issues and Weaknesses**

As any educator knows, there are a multitude of issues that can arise in the classroom on a day to day basis, especially when it comes to engaging all students in a meaningful and relevant way. Encouraging students to genuinely interact with political issues on Twitter will be a potential barrier. A significant issue that might surround this could be distraction with other topics to follow on the social media site. It will be my responsibility to monitor what students are looking at on Twitter while they are in my classroom. However, I cannot require that students participate in the study, so it is up to me to ensure the material I ask them to view and interact with is as engaging as possible. Because of issues surrounding access to Internet at home for my students, they will not be required to do any Twitter activities at home. Another potential barrier is students forgetting their laptops, or having them taken away for violation of school policy, which happens from time to time, as well as computer issues that require IT support. If these circumstances arise, I plan on partnering students up so they can at least follow along for the time being.

The major limitation and weakness of my study is because of the nature of social media, I cannot always predict with certainty what information, if any, will be posted by the accounts I choose for my students to follow. When studying current events, it is impossible to predict what will happen and what credible news stories will be available. Also, while performing research

with students, I have to rely on the fact that they will be present for class, have access to technology and also that they will genuinely participate. These are difficult factors to control. I will attempt to mitigate the burdens research, as previously stated, by designing my unit to be as engaging as possible and by having a solidified plan for how to use Twitter to enhance our study of the Cold War, relating the Cold War to current U.S. foreign policy and relationships with other countries, and also to inform students about the presidential candidates for the upcoming 2016 election.

### **Research Narrative**

I chose this particular research topic because of my particular students. They are all seniors in high school, and most are either of age to vote, or very close. In contemporary education, a significant focus has become creating real learning experiences for our students. In my district, one of our missions is to create an educational experience that connects students to “the real world” and also their community. For me, as a social studies educator, that means educating my students about civic participation and motivating them to exercise their democratic rights.

My students are typically low-income, and live in rural Maine. Beyond that, they belong to a strange little district which is a collection of eleven small towns where the only thing that pulls them together is the Mount View complex. Research supports that people who are the most unlikely to vote are low-income, live in rural places, and come from the youngest age group. This knowledge became the driving motivator behind not only my research, but my personal mission as an educator.

I chose action research for this project almost by chance, meaning that I created a rough idea of the research design in my head, and then happened to read the definition for action research and realized that was exactly what I had begun planning. Participatory action research is designed to improve the quality of people's lives, which is exactly what I set out to do with my students in this project. Once I realized that action research was the best fit for what I intended, however, I did panic a bit because I am someone who really likes to plan. As a teacher, however, this particular format fit extremely well for my purpose. As any teacher knows, the best laid lessons plans often go astray, and the same is true for any research done with your students.

Though I was excited to conduct research with my own students, and I believe most of them were excited to be a part of this project as well, I most certainly underestimated how consuming the process could be. Teaching mostly seventeen and eighteen year old students, I believed that they would naturally take to social media, or at least willingly explore it when given time in school to do so. The research surrounding utilizing Twitter in the classroom states that the best results occur when there is educational relevance and strong pedagogical methods, but mostly stop short when describing what these might be. Therefore, as I went into this project, I did not know exactly how to engage my students, and was mostly hoping that Twitter could do it for me. They are teenagers, after all. I was wrong.

My original intention was to align my research with a unit on the Cold War. I intended to tie in current events surrounding current issues between ourselves and the former Soviet Union, including the crisis in Ukraine and also the Syrian revolution. I also intended to pull in politics by looking at all of the current candidates for the 2016 presidential election, what their stances were on these current issues, and have the students follow them on Twitter. Several problems

arose with this plan; namely, by the time I was ready to begin my research, we were already mostly done with the Cold War unit (I had developed my research design months prior), and, to be honest, my students were pretty burned out with the content.

From there, the realities of action research, or really just teaching while researching, became very real. The plan I had come up with was thrown out the window, and so I learned the first lesson about this process, which you never quite believe people when they tell you this repeatedly until it happens: things go wrong. As a first step, students all set up Twitter accounts that were to be used for school purposes only. Honestly, getting the IT Department's support for this was not easy, so setting very concrete expectations of my students was a very important step. They were all reminded of the district policy for appropriate Internet use, were all given written expectations of how Twitter will be used in the classroom, and were all required to let me follow them so that I could see their activity. Students were given a list of accounts that they were required to follow; these included the major presidential candidates at the time (we began this toward the middle of January), the Republican National Committee, the Democratic National Committee, President Barack Obama, The State Department, the United Nations, and several national and international news sources. Students were also allowed to pick one teacher approved "fun" account to follow.

The first questionnaire was given after Twitter accounts were set up and before we began any real educational experience on the social media site (see Appendix E). The purpose of this questionnaire was to gauge how prepared students felt thus far for participating in their democracy, and how Twitter might be able to support that. My major goal initially was to try and connect Twitter to motivating them to want to vote. It felt as though this was the most tangible

area where I could demonstrate real impact. Of course after analyzing the first round of data, I once again learned the lesson about things going wrong. Almost all of my students reported that they either were already absolutely going to vote or it was more than likely.

From here, we began working on understanding students' political identities. There was a distinct difference between my honors students and my general level students in this capacity. My honors students typically felt that they knew where they feel on the political spectrum, whereas my general students typically did not. We went through several political spectrum tests and then discussed where the major political candidates might fall on the same spectrum. From here, students were asked to go check out a candidate and tweet a reaction to the activity. My honors students, for the most part, went and explored candidates and mostly all tweeted. My general-level students did not take to tweeting, or "exploring" on Twitter as easily. At this time nationally, the first caucuses and primaries were occurring. We used this opportunity to discuss the nominating process and to carefully follow these nominating contests. Initial informal feedback from students was that viewing current events on Twitter helped reinforce direct instruction for this content.

The Maine Caucus took place the first weekend of March. Leading up to it, we focused on balancing the events surrounding the election and also introducing content for our next unit, which was the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. One theme that will emerge from my conclusions of this study was the difficulty of attempting to balance the enrichment Twitter provided to our unit, and also covering the content in the time allotted. After the Maine caucus, the second questionnaire was given (see Appendix F). The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather feedback from students about how informational and engaging they found Twitter



thus far, and how it could be tailored to better meet their needs in the future. Based on this feedback, I realized that I needed more concrete lesson plans tying Twitter to the content.

For the final phase of the research, students were exposed to many different current events surrounding civil rights in their country today. Articles included modern examples of grassroots movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #OscarsSoWhite; controversial topics like the Confederate flag; modern government actions like the recent ruling on gay marriage; different past and present civil rights leaders like Representative John Lewis; the policy positions of the remaining candidates for president on civil rights; and, relevant hashtags like #Selma51, which celebrated the 51st anniversary of the famous Selma March. After several weeks of utilizing Twitter in this way to support what we were learning about the Civil Rights Movement and in following the presidential candidates, students were asked to complete the final questionnaire (see Appendix G). The goal of this questionnaire was to gauge how informational and engaging they found Twitter, which specific activities they found most informational and engaging, and their experience as a whole.

To summarize, I utilized a combined unit over the political process and the Civil Rights Movement while supplementing Twitter as a tool to inform and engage my students with topics. My intentions were to make connections to the importance of exercising democratic rights and also make connections to how the Civil Rights Movement was still being fought today, by utilizing tools like Twitter. My findings were both relevant to my study and also to my experience as a teacher.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

The research question for this study is how Twitter could be used to promote civic engagement in social studies classrooms in order to enhance a civic education. Previous studies support that social media, including Twitter, can be engaging for students when applied in an educationally relevant way, with strong pedagogical methods. The major themes that emerged from this study are that Twitter can be an engaging tool for high school students in the classroom, Twitter can be used to inform and engage students about politics, Twitter can create feelings of connectedness and lead to deeper understanding of social studies content, and that specific instructional planning is most effective for use in the classroom.

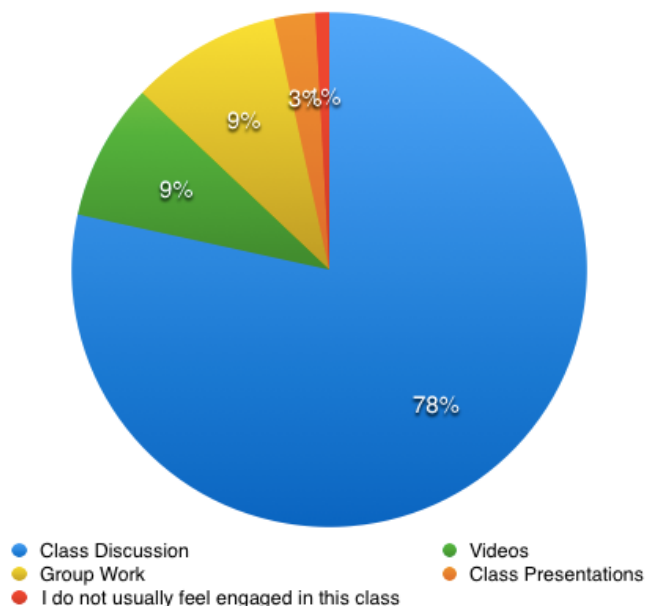
#### Engagement in the Classroom

Student engagement was a constant variable measured by each questionnaire given in this study. Prior to any experience on Twitter in the classroom, students were asked what

instructional techniques they typically felt engaged them in my social studies classroom. Of the 55 students who participated in the study, seventy-eight percent cited class discussion/direct instruction, nine percent cited group work, and nine percent cited videos.

Students were then introduced to Twitter over the course of the next few weeks and then were asked in

What Types of Things Usually Engage You in This Classroom?

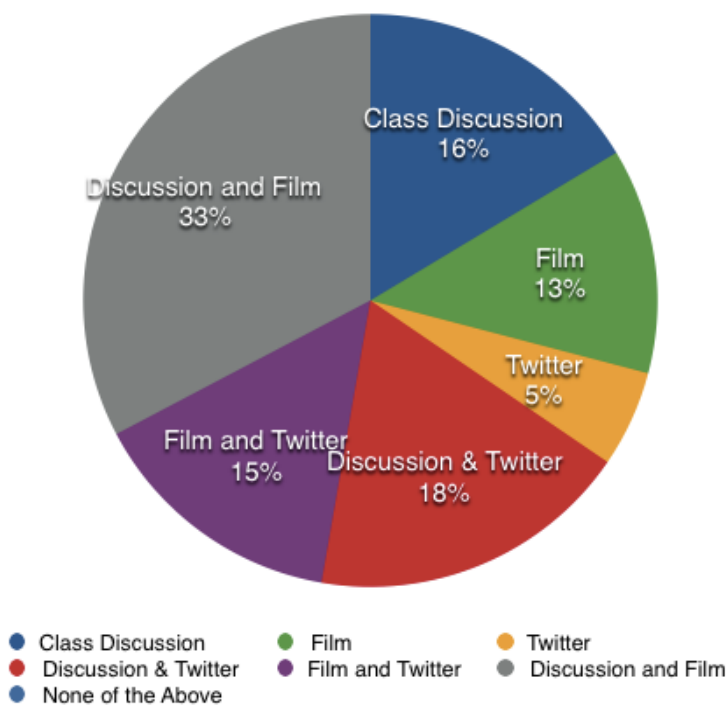


Questionnaire #2 how engaging they had found Twitter thus far. This question was asked using a Likert Scale, one being “not at all”, and five being “extremely.” The students who responded at a three or above totaled at eighty-three percent. Students were also asked if they wanted to use Twitter more or less than we currently were in the classroom. All but one respondent answered that they either wanted to use Twitter the same amount in the classroom or more. In response to the open-ended question about how to tailor Twitter to be more engaging, a common theme that emerged from the responses was that students enjoyed the way we had used Twitter thus far in the classroom and many students were engaged with the activities thus far.

In the final questionnaire given at the conclusion of the Civil Rights Movement unit, students were asked to once again provide insight into what they found engaging about our

classroom, with the options changed to reflect Twitter as a tool. After we completed our unit using Twitter, the number of students who found class discussion and film the most engaging fell slightly from eighty-seven percent to sixty-two percent. Students who found some combination of either Twitter, Twitter and class discussion, or Twitter and film to be engaging landed at thirty-eight percent. While only three percent of students found Twitter engaging by itself,

After Using Twitter, What Engages You Most in the Classroom Now?



thirty-five percent found it

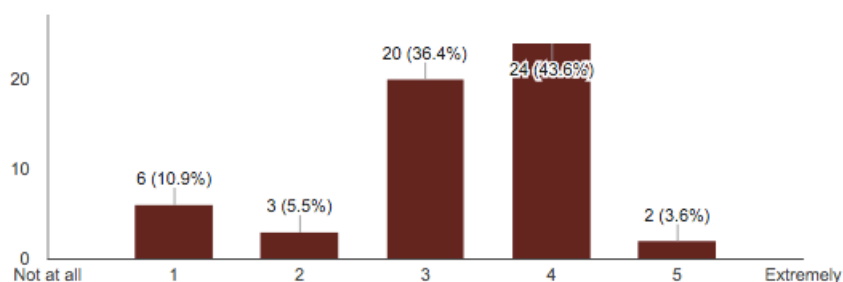
engaging along with the other

two most popular instructional

methods, class discussion and

film.

How engaging have you found Twitter thus far? (55 responses)



It can be concluded from this student data that Twitter can be used as a tool to engage students, especially when used as a supplement to other classroom techniques that students find engaging already. This data supports the conclusions reached by the Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger (2013) study that social media can be an effective tool to engage students. Though it does not further research in this area, this preliminary data does confirm that Twitter can be an engaging tool for students in a social studies classroom.

### **Informing and Engaging with Politics**

The second theme that emerged from this study was the Twitter can be an effective tool for both informing students about politics, and also engaging them in the political process and political participation. At the beginning of the study, students were asked how likely they were to vote in the upcoming election. Almost all students who would be eligible for the 2016 presidential election reported that they planned on voting in the upcoming election in November.

After the Republican and Democratic Maine state caucuses on March 5 and March 6, respectively, 11% of students reported that they went to caucus and 34% reported that they would have, but had other obligations. In the final questionnaire, 84.4% of students reported that they found Twitter to be a useful tool to help them become more interested in politics. Not only did a vast majority of students view Twitter as a way to help them become more interested, but 71%

also viewed it as a tool to help them become more informed about politics and the political process. More specifically, 87% of students stated that they felt as though they better understood the importance of voting because of the unit we studied and how Twitter was used to supplement this content.

These findings do support the previous research surrounding this topic. There are multiple studies that show technology in general could be a powerful tool in shaping a civic education (Lee, 2014; Montgomery, 2008), and an increasing amount showing Twitter, specifically, can as well (Journell et.

al., 2013, 2014; Park, 2013). This is supported by the significant amount

of students who viewed Twitter as an effective tool to inform and

interest them about the political process, the current political

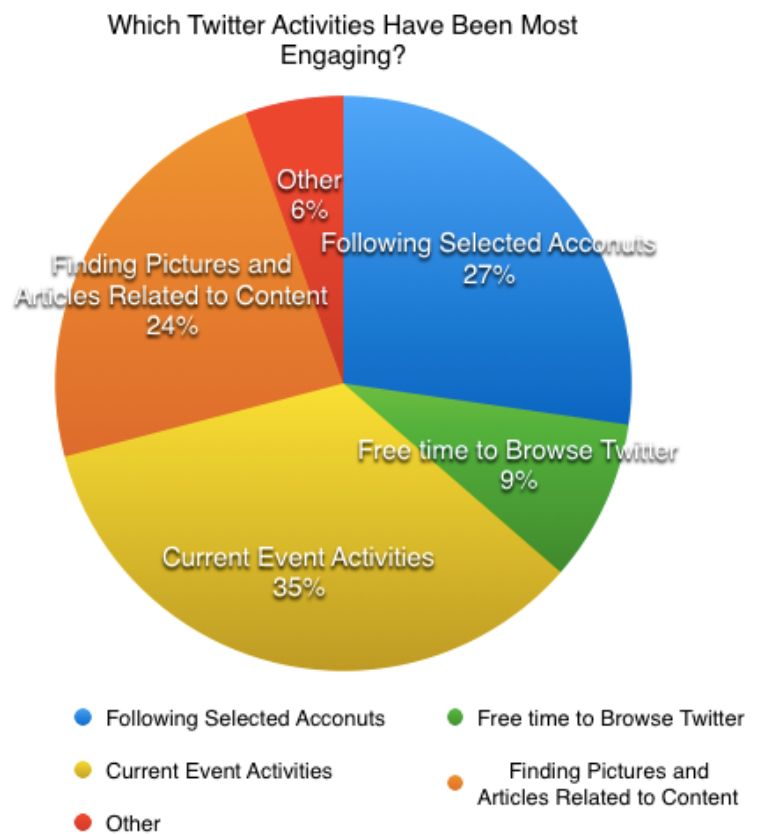
climate, and also the importance of participating in their democracy.

Though the percentage of students who turned out for the caucus is

low, turnout in general is low for nominating contests and turnout

rates for people of this age group

has historically been notoriously low as well. The fact that Twitter interested and informed a vast



majority of students about the political process and this current election, and that 44% of students either did caucus or said that they would have, may indicate that students could be more likely to vote when exposed to this as a tool.

As a tool to for political engagement, 66% of students cited that they found following the current political candidates as one of the most interesting things about the way Twitter was used in this study. When asked to prioritize the activities they found most engaging, 27% chose it as the most interesting thing about our utilizing of Twitter. Once again, this supports past research that Twitter can be an effective tool for political engagement. Qualitative responses in this study supported this as well. One student stated, “When the idea of using Twitter was first introduced to us, I was unsure if I was going to like it. Once we started using it, though, I really enjoyed following the candidates and being more informed about political issues. It was a pleasant surprise.” This feedback also supports a specific way that Twitter can be used to support civic education. By tailoring the accounts students are follow, educators can engage and inform students. Specific tools for utilizing Twitter are where the gap in research exists, and following specific political candidates and organizations can help students become more informed and engaged about politics.

### **Connectedness and Understanding of Content**

Previous research surrounding a civic education has found that teaching civic engagement can help provide students with feelings of connectedness and also can lead to higher levels of academic achievement (Camicia & Dobson, 2010; Lee, 2014). There are studies that support that technology can be used to promote feelings of connectedness and community (Edwards, 2012; Lee, 2014; Lin, 2013). It has also been found that technology can help academic

achievement by using current events (Lee, 2014; Montgomery, 2008). In this study, 56% of students reported that one of the most engaging things about Twitter was the ability to interact with their peers in a different way.

More telling were the qualitative findings, which support that Twitter can be used to promote feelings of connectedness and also understanding of content. While neither of these were an explicit goal of the study, they did coincide with several studies. In an open-ended response question where students were asked what else they enjoyed about Twitter, students cited that they enjoyed seeing other classmates' points of view, responding to other peoples' tweets about current events, sharing about current issues that are occurring, and following popular hashtags. The second theme that emerged from the qualitative responses was that some students felt as though Twitter helped them better understand the content. One student stated, "Being able to use Twitter in History really helped me get a better understanding of what goes on because it was in simpler form." Another cited that the way current event articles were used to supplement our learning with Twitter as the best way they learned during our Civil Rights Movement unit. Based upon these student responses, it was clear that Twitter can be an effective tool for helping students feel more connected and also perhaps help them more clearly make connections with content.

### **Pedagogy for Best Use**

Research shows that social media can be an engaging and effective tool for helping students learn. The data from this study support these prior findings. Prior research also states that social media is most effective when applied in an educationally relevant way, implemented with strong pedagogical methods (Junco, et. al., 2013; Lee, 2014). However, there is little

research, if any, on what methods might be most effective. This study attempted to expand upon how Twitter could be used as an effective tool.

The major feedback from students after several weeks of using Twitter in the classroom was that they needed more time to learn and explore the tool, more connections to what we were learning, more current events, more interaction with peers and others, and more structure with the tool in the form of purposeful integration into the lesson. Based upon student feedback, lessons were created with more purposeful integration of Twitter with the content. Results of this study found that students found the following things the most engaging about Twitter: following the presidential candidates, having current events easily accessible on the newsfeed, interacting with other students to see what their opinions were on topics, having a different way for their teacher to present information to them or show them things. In regard to specific activities that were integrated into lessons, students found the following most engaging: activities involving current events (35%), following selected accounts (27%), finding and posting articles and pictures about the lesson (24%), free time to browse Twitter (9%), and other.

Based upon this feedback, it is clear that Twitter is most effective when purposefully integrated into the content. Current event activities were always pre-selected by the teacher and tied directly to the content covered that week. All accounts that students were permitted to follow were pre-selected by the teacher and directly related to the content being covered that unit. When students were asked to find items on the internet, there were always meaningful ties to what was being covered in the lesson that day. Qualitative student responses reinforced these conclusion as well, "If you do use Twitter next year, do more with posting articles and responding to peers because that's how I learned best." Another student stated, "I never used Twitter outside of class,



but I did enjoy its use in class, because it was a constructed use.” Therefore, because a significant amount of students asked for more structure after the second questionnaire, and as a majority of students found the above strategies most effective, it can be determined that purposeful integration and pedagogy can make Twitter the most effective in the classroom.

## **Discussion**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, almost all students were engaged by the use of Twitter in the classroom. Most students felt that Twitter was an effective tool to interest them in voting, become more informed about politics, and inform them about the political process. Students felt most engaged when Twitter was used with purpose and with well-developed lessons created by their teacher. Many students reported feelings of connectedness and better understanding after using Twitter to enhance content. At the conclusion of the study, all students but one responded that they wanted to continue using Twitter in the classroom. Almost 50% reported that they enjoyed utilizing it as we had been in our class. When students were asked how Twitter could be a more effective tool for them in the future, 18% cited more interaction with peers, whereas 35% desired more actives with current events.

When reflecting on the research study in its entirety, there are a number of things that should be mentioned. When the literature review was started in the summer of 2014, there was very little published about Twitter as a tool for the classroom. For social studies classrooms, there was almost nothing. As this project developed, the body of research on Twitter as a tool for social studies classrooms grew significantly. It is extremely apparent that this is a growing

field of study in the world of education.

There were numerous difficulties that arose during the course of this research study. The most significant, as almost every educator feels every single day, was the constraints of time. Integrating Twitter as a classroom tool is a process that requires much more than simply two or three months. As with any classroom routine, it took a while for expectations to be established, for students to learn how to use the tool, and for students to fall into a rhythm of using it regularly. Simply registering all the students with accounts, allowing time for them to find and follow each other, and find and follow the other accounts they needed to took multiple class periods. The largest time constraint, however, was having enough time to figure out what engages students. Obviously, all groups of students are different and each student is different. Taking the time to elicit feedback from them, then analyze that feedback and apply it to new lessons took weeks. As mentioned before, not all students naturally took to Twitter and began firing off hundreds of Tweets. It takes time for students to feel comfortable, not just with the medium, but also with expressing themselves in this way for educational purposes. Finally, it cannot go without saying that the integration of Twitter into lessons also took additional prep time. While the Civil Rights Movement and presidential campaign content naturally had a large presence on Twitter, appropriate items still had to be found and strategized into lesson planning.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations from this study are three-fold: long-term implementation, purposeful integration into content, and on-going feedback from students. As mentioned previously, it takes a significant amount of time to figure out how to make Twitter an effective

tool in the classroom. Twitter needs to be used frequently and with clear expectations in the classroom. This helps students understand the tool better, understand the purpose and expectations of activities, and helps them find their voice with the medium. Secondly, even though this generation is arguably more comfortable with social media than generations that have come before, that does not mean they will naturally take to social media as an educational tool. Carefully planned lessons while utilizing Twitter to enhance content have the most success in engaging, informing and connecting students. The final recommendation is that on-going feedback from students provides the best guidance for how to make Twitter engaging for students themselves. As with other classroom routines, students need to practice giving feedback and understand teacher expectations. As there is no clear-cut template for how to ingrate Twitter in the classroom; student feedback can be the best tool for providing insight for meaningful implementation.

### **Implications**

The implications of this research are that more research needs to be done on specific strategies to meaningfully integrate Twitter in the classroom. As this study was done for a social studies classroom, it does not provide as many specific strategies for teachers of other content areas as it might for social studies educators. The other significant implication is that districts in the state of Maine should reassess their policies surrounding technology in the classroom, specifically the ones that involve personal electronic devices. Administrators and policymakers should consider that personal learning devices such as personal laptops, tablets, and cell phones can be powerful devices to engage, inform, and connect students in their school districts. In the district this study was completed in, it was not easy to get permission to

complete this project because of fears of using social media in the classroom. However, this district did have 1-to-1 laptops at the high school level, which is not common in the state. This research project would have been significantly more difficult to complete if students did not have the ability to use their own devices, or if the district did not provide laptops for all students at the high school level.

### **Personal Learning Reflection**

Personally, I found this project to be a natural mirror of what teaching is: trying new strategies to engage, inform, and promote academic achievement, and then adjusting your game plan based upon the feedback you receive from students. Action research really complemented what my project tried to achieve. As a person, I suppose the most significant impact on me is the feeling of completion and, to some degree, success. As a professional, the impact feels a bit more significant. Perhaps its the pleasant nostalgia that occurs at the completion of a phase, like graduate school, and a similar feeling that occurs at the end of every school year, but I do feel like this had a profound impact on me as a teacher.

What I learned as an educator is that implementing new practices in the classroom can be reinvigorating, challenging, time consuming, and rewarding. Developing my own plan for research, at first, was really terrifying. I tend to be someone who simply likes to be told what to do, and then tries to execute it to the best of my ability. Throughout the project, however, I felt far more tied to the process because it was my own idea, created with my passion, and it involved kids with whom I was invested. Being someone who likes being told what to do, and having a set plan, action research terrified me as well. However, I believe it was the most

effective way to execute research with students, at least for this project, because it allowed for flexibility.

Overall, I wish that I had at least two more months to really be able to present significant findings. Because the feedback process takes so long, and I have such limited time with my students (40 minutes a day, barring inevitable interruptions), and there is still so much content to get through, I really felt as though we had just started hitting our stride with figuring out how to make Twitter an effective tool. Though I am satisfied with my findings for now, I certainly am interested to see how else I can utilize Twitter with my students in the future.

The most significant data point I walk away from this project with is that all of my students responded that they thought my students next year should use Twitter in the classroom. However, the most important consequences are not as easily quantified with the aforementioned statistics. As a person and a professional, like my students, I have really enjoyed the feeling of connectedness Twitter has provided. Relationships with your students are critical for a positive learning environment. Twitter provided a different way to not only introduce students to content and current issues, but also to communicate with each other. It was fun for me as a teacher to be able to present information to them in a different way. I really enjoyed thinking of what my next tweet would be, or finding interesting things to share with them using this medium. As more students developed their voice, it was really awesome to see them tweeting on their own. I logged on to Twitter on a snow day once and saw several students tweeting current events. One night myself and several students live-tweeted a Republican debate. When one of my students returned from a trip to Italy, one of the first things they did was get on Twitter and respond to some of the opinion polls we had created in

their absence.

Though I definitely feel like Twitter is still a developing tool in my classroom, and it definitely did not reach all of my students like I hoped it would, I am satisfied with where my classroom is at the moment. The group I was really trying to target was my general-level students, and I think that is where I really need to focus my efforts next year. One finding I did not write about was the incredible difference between how much my honors students took to using Twitter rather than my general-level students. I definitely need to figure out more effective strategies for engaging those students. I am very glad that I chose this particular topic for my research study. I hope that I can continue to have my district's support in continuing to use this tool in my classroom. It has most definitely been effective in engaging my students in a different way about topics and skills that are critical to their development as democratic citizens. I am excited to see where this all goes in the future in my classroom.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A - Parent Consent

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Katelyn Ross and I am your child's teacher for their senior social studies class, American Studies II. This year as part of my masters program in Educational Leadership at the University of Maine at Farmington I am conducting a research project on how to use Twitter to engage students in civic participation. I believe that the most critical obligation that I have to your child is preparing them to be active and informed participants in their democracy. To this end, I have constructed a research design with the goal of helping students learn about past and current events using Twitter as the facilitator for this activity. Through our study of the Cold War, student will be asked to use Twitter to follow current events in the Ukraine and Syria while also following significant candidates for the United States presidential election in 2016. For my part, students will be given three different questionnaires throughout the process asking them about their knowledge and interest in political activities and also how Twitter could be used to engage them both in the classroom and in investigating these events. There will be no punishment, nor detraction from the quality of your child's education if you or your child chooses to not participate in this research project. Students can drop out of this study at any point without penalty. Their Twitter activity will be monitored by myself, as they will be required to set up a school account and will only be allowed to "follow" accounts that I deem appropriate to this exercise. I will not be eliciting personal beliefs from students, simply attempting to gauge how Twitter can be used as a tool to engage them in civic education.

Thank you for considering to allow your child to participate in this project. I believe that it could help them become more interested in what is going on both within their country and also throughout the world. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or my advisor Christopher Strople, if you have any questions or concerns. Dr. Strople can be reached at [christopher.strople@maine.edu](mailto:christopher.strople@maine.edu).

Thank you again,  
 Katelyn Ross  
 Mount View High School  
 (207) 568-3255 ex. 1229  
[kross@rsu3.org](mailto:kross@rsu3.org)

By signing this you give your consent for your child's participation in this study.

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

**Appendix B - Student Permission Form  
(students who are younger than 18)**

I am doing a study on the importance of civic education and how Twitter can be used to engage students and perhaps make them more likely to participate in their democracy. This is a very important topic to me because I see it as a critical part of my job as a social studies teacher to help you become both interested in and informed about what happens in your country.

If you agree to be in this study, you will use Twitter as a tool to engage and inform you during our Cold War unit. We will use Twitter to investigate past and current events occurring between ourselves and the former Soviet Union.

There will be no penalty for not participating in this research study. Your grade will neither be positively impacted nor negatively impacted by this ongoing activity. The risks involved are that you might be exposed to things on social media that make you uncomfortable or that you find upsetting. The benefits are that you possibly might become more interested in current events occurring in the world and the role American politics plays in those events.

If you sign this paper, you are assenting to participate in these Twitter activities and to offer your opinions in the three questionnaires that I will be asking you to fill out. You may cease participation at any time if you wish. If you have any further questions you may contact me, or my advisor Christopher Stropole at [christopher.stropole@maine.edu](mailto:christopher.stropole@maine.edu).

Thank you again,  
Katelyn Ross  
Mount View High School  
(207) 568-3255 ex. 1229  
[kross@rsu3.org](mailto:kross@rsu3.org)

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

**Appendix C - Student Consent  
(students who are 18 and older)**

I am doing a study on the importance of civic education and how Twitter can be used to engage students and perhaps make them more likely to participate in their democracy. This is a very important topic to me because I see it as a critical part of my job as a social studies teacher to help you become both interested in and informed about what happens in your country.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to use Twitter as a tool to engage and inform you during our Cold War unit. We will use Twitter to investigate past and current events occurring between ourselves and the former Soviet Union.

There will be no penalty for not participating in this research study. Your grade will neither be positively impacted nor negatively impacted by this ongoing activity. The risks involved are that you might be exposed to things on social media that make you uncomfortable or that you find upsetting. The benefits are that you possibly might become more interested in current events occurring in the world and the role American politics plays in those events.

If you sign this paper, you are consenting to participate in these Twitter activities and to offer your opinions in the three questionnaires that I will be asking you to fill out. You may cease participation at any time if you wish. If you have any further questions you may contact me, or my advisor Dr. Christopher Strople at [christopher.strople@maine.edu](mailto:christopher.strople@maine.edu).

Thank you again,  
Katelyn Ross  
Mount View High School  
(207) 568-3255 ex. 1229  
[kross@rsu3.org](mailto:kross@rsu3.org)

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

**Appendix D - Administrator Permission Form**

Dear Dr. Austin,

As you are aware, I am working to get my masters in Educational Leadership from the University of Maine at Farmington. As the final piece, I am required to conduct a research project and have chosen to pursue using Twitter to engage students in civic education. Research will begin pending IRB approval in December, and will conclude with a symposium presentation in May on the Farmington campus. Research will be conducted using consenting students from my senior American Studies II class. For this research, students will be asked to used Twitter throughout the unit we will study on the Cold War to research past and current events surrounding lingering issues from the Cold War, most notably the civil wars currently going on in the Ukraine and Syria.

What I am asking:

- Permission to use Twitter with my students, with access unimpeded by the IT department.
- Permission to issue three questionnaires to students asking about their knowledge of current political events and how likely they feel they will be to participate in their democracy, and how Twitter can be used in our classroom to facilitate this.
- Permission to gather data from our students and then publish in a public forum at the Farmington campus.

I will:

- Inform parents of the nature of my study and gather consent forms from the parents of students who are less than 18 years old.
- Inform students of the nature of my study and gather consent forms from them.
- Inform both parties that participation is voluntary and will not impact their grade.

I will not share identifying information about specific students involved in the study. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my advisor at UMF, Christopher Strople. Dr. Strople can be reached at [christopher.strople@maine.edu](mailto:christopher.strople@maine.edu).

By signing this form you are consenting for me to gather information from students on their perceptions of civic participation and the use of Twitter in this process.

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

**Appendix E - Student Questionnaire #1**

1.) What things usually engage you in this classroom?

- Class discussion (direct instruction)
- Group work
- Videos
- Online activities
- Class presentations

2.) Thus far, to what degree has this class helped you become invested in politics or current events in the United States?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3.) How well informed do you feel about American politics?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4.) How often do you watch or read the news?

- Never
- Occasionally (few times a month)
- Often (every week)
- Every day

5.) How likely do you think is it that you will vote in the Maine Caucus in March?

- I cannot vote in the caucus because of my age.
- I will not vote in the caucus because I am not interested.
- It will not likely vote in the caucus.
- I will likely vote in the caucus.
- I will absolutely vote in the caucus.

6.) How likely do you think is it that you will vote in the 2016 presidential election?

- I cannot vote in November because of my age.
- I will not vote in the election.
- It will not likely vote in the election.
- I will likely vote in the election.
- I will absolutely vote in the election.

7.) Thus far, how informed do you feel about the potential 2016 presidential election?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

**Appendix F- Student Questionnaire #2**

1.) Did you go caucus this past weekend?

Yes

No

I wanted to, but I had other engagements

I won't be 18 before Election Day in November

2.) How engaging have you found Twitter thus far?

1

2

3

4

5

3.) In what ways can we make Twitter a better tool for the classroom? (check all that apply):

More structured time on Twitter (instructions, goals, etc.).

Look more at politicians and politics (candidates, articles, what's happened, etc.).

Look more current events to put things into context (learn more about what's going on in the world).

Look more at things related to what we are learning about (Black Lives Matter movement, etc.)

More time to explore Twitter in general (follow hashtags, read through newsfeed, etc.).

4.) Would you like to use Twitter more or less in the classroom?

More

Less

Stay the same (every now and then to supplement what we are doing)

5.) Open-ended: How can we make Twitter a better classroom tool for you?

**Appendix G- Student Questionnaire #3**

1.) Based upon Questionnaire #1, most of you told me that class discussion and film engaged you most in this class. What engages you the most in this classroom now?

- Class discussion
- Film
- Twitter
- Class discussion and Twitter
- Film and Twitter
- Class discussion and film
- None of the above

2.) Did you find Twitter a useful tool to help you become more invested in voting?

- Yes
- No

3.) Did you find Twitter a useful tool to help you become more informed about politics?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe not, but could be a useful tool in the future

4.) What have you found engaging about Twitter (check all that apply):

- Following the candidates
- Having current events easily accessible on the newsfeed
- Interacting with classmates and seeing what other people have to say about things
- Having a different way for Ms. Ross to present information and show you things
- Other

5.) What Twitter activities have been most engaging for you?

- Just following the accounts we have been (candidates, news sources, each other) to see what's going on
- Free time to browse Twitter
- Choosing current events related to what we are learning about and responding to the articles
- Finding pictures and articles about what we are learning and sharing them with classmates

6.) Would you like to continue using Twitter in the classroom?

- Yes
- No

7.) How could we make Twitter more engaging for you in the classroom?

- More interaction with peers
- More current events to tie history to my life



I think we've struck a good balance  
No more Twitter would make Twitter better for me

8.) Do you feel like you better understand the importance of voting after studying these two units (Cold War and Power of the Presidency and the Civil Rights Unit)?

Yes  
No, I already understood these concepts  
No, these units did not help me

9.) Should I use Twitter again next year with the seniors class all year?

Yes  
No

10.) Anything else you'd like to add (this question isn't required, don't respond if you don't have anything to say):