Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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Exploring Critical Media Literacy Skills of Adults on Twitter During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic in the United States in the Spring and Summer of 2020

Date: June 1, 2021
Time: 10:30 am to 12:30 p.m.
Place: Remote

Abstract
This study explores the self-directed learning behaviors of adult users of the social media vehicle, Twitter, through the lens of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States during the spring and summer of 2020. The objective was to identify Twitter usage patterns to determine adults’ awareness and use of media literacy and critical media literacy skills with social media content they consume. This study, informed by two focus groups and six individual interviews, is based on a qualitative research design using a constructivist approach. The central question is how do adults use critical media literacy on social media when gathering information to make decisions? Five sub-questions support this central question:

1. How do study participants use Twitter to gather information on the Coronavirus pandemic? How are sources of information evaluated?

2. Do adults follow a variety of Twitter accounts to obtain a diversity of content and perspectives on the Coronavirus pandemic?

3. What motivates study participants to engage (click through, comment or share, seek information outside) with Twitter posts/Tweets about the Coronavirus pandemic?

4. How do study participants biases exist in the content presented to them on Twitter? Can they identify biases in Twitter?

5. How do study participants decode messages in Twitter posts? What critical media literacy skills do study participants use when using Twitter to gather information on the Coronavirus pandemic?

Findings include:
- Source credibility, trust, and accuracy were key characteristics people used to follow and engage with Twitter accounts regarding COVID-19 information guiding users’ self-directed learning as they researched on Twitter.
- Study participants’ knowledge of media literacy was lower than they thought or displayed.
- Respondents informed others of accurate information from Twitter about COVID-19 due to misinformation and disinformation.

Findings will help educators assess gaps in adults’ media literacy and critical media literacy skills with social media and determine the focus needed to improve awareness of social media messages. This research reveals gaps in adults’ knowledge of media literacy and critical media literacy and impacts of using those skills. Future research could include interventionist studies with pre-and post-tests on adults’ knowledge and usage.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Judith Cochran, Ph.D., Chairperson
Perry Drake, Ph.D.
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Paulette Isaac-Savage, Ed.D.