



Craft and Social Media: Sites of Knowledge Production and Consumption  
Kelsie Doty, Kansas State University & Denise Nicole Green, Cornell University  
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Textile crafts have become a space dominated by affluent and middle-class white women who have the privilege of time and money to participate (Clark, 2019; Saxena, 2019; Stannard & Mullet, 2018). In 2019, social media users pointed out that craft communities often discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, genderqueer, queer, intersex, agender, plus (LGBTQIA+) as well as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) (Saxena, 2019). On Instagram, knitters of color shared stories about how retail spaces like yarn stores would ignore their presence or treat them as amateurs (Saxena, 2019). Those in the LGBTQIA+ community and beyond have critiqued the biological essentialism of pink Pussyhats, used to represent women's solidarity at marches in 2017 (Compton, 2017). The above examples of exclusion, discrimination, and racism in the craft community led us to ask: Who produces knowledge for textile craft communities and how is it shared? In an attempt to better understand who is excluded from these processes.

**Methods:** In this project we explored fiber-centric epistemologies that fuel dual purposes of commodification and community building, to build off Susan Kaiser's (2012) circuit of style-fashion-dress. We used data gathered from 20 in-depth interviews with natural dyers from the United States. Natural dyes are an interesting subset of textile craft because of the way they intersect with aspects across textile communities. A natural dyer may dye yarn to sell to knitters or color and print fabric to sew into garments or quilts. To supplement the conversation further, we also used information gathered from social media and online websites relevant to fiber and textile craft communities.

**Communities and Commodities from Craft Knowledge:** People share textile craft knowledge in both physical and virtual spaces. Information is distributed in intimate social groups, one-on-one tutoring, informal conversations, and public-facing spaces like books, blogs, social media, open access online videos, paid classes (online and in-person), and guild meetings. Textile production is complex, with many transformative steps from fiber to yarn to textile. Communal mentality and reliance upon others are thus built into the foundation of knowledge production and sharing. Traditions such as knitting circles, quilt retreats, and weaving guilds build a community around shared interests of members (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007). While this form of knowledge sharing is "free" to all involved, it is limited in depth and only provides short lessons or troubleshooting. For an introduction to a new subject or a deeper understanding of a subject, crafters will often turn to in-person workshops. A workshop is a method of knowledge sharing that helps to articulate ideas of communities and commodity within a physical space. Workshops are a part of how artisans make a living by selling or "commodifying" knowledge they have developed about a craft. For nearly every participant in our study, they discussed how they supplement other forms of work, such as production dyeing or designing, with teaching workshops.

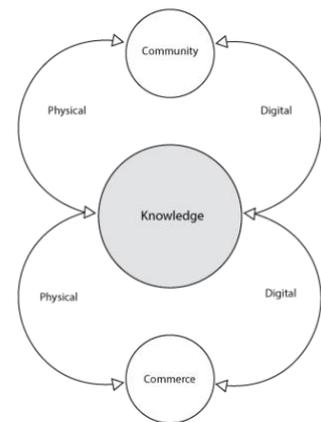
For textile craft communities, the internet has become a critical source of information. Social media, electronic books (e-books), online courses, blogs, podcasts, etc. are sources of

knowledge that are available to anyone with the ability to access the internet on a smartphone or computer. Through our interviews we found that individuals who produced knowledge sought ways to directly connect to other textile craftspeople and generate a profit such as selling access to digital ebooks. Other participants worked to foster community and commerce in indirect ways. These indirect ways included free and open access “how-to” videos and informational posts on social media. Through the distribution of free information, individuals and companies generate more knowledge for those interested in the subject, grow the community, and grow product demand. Individuals are physically interacting, reinterpreting, and sharing information instead of passively consuming. These communities build around a physical act in both physical and digital spaces.

**Proposed Theoretical Model:** While we kept in mind hegemonic systems of knowledge production, we inductively developed a theoretical framework to represent the idea of knowledge commodification and community building in textile crafts. At first, we framed our ideas around Susan Kaiser’s (2012) circuit of style-fashion-dress but quickly understood the importance of the development of a new model. Kaiser’s (2012) circuit of style-fashion-dress is the combination of Paul du Gay’s (1997) circuit of culture and Carol Tulloch’s (2010) theory of style-fashion-dress. The circuit of style-fashion-dress is meant to represent a fluid process of identity production divided into five sections (production, distribution, regulation, consumption, and subject formation), which revolves around a circle. Craftspeople produce knowledge through their exploration of the craft and then distribute and consume knowledge in digital and physical spaces. In our proposed model, knowledge produces community and commerce within physical and digital spaces (see Figure 1). However, it is critical to acknowledge that textile crafts have been and continue to be shaped by hegemonic power dynamics. Within textile craft communities, cisgender white women assert a large majority of the control over knowledge production. Due to the lack of inclusivity for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals in textile craft, there remains a vast gap in knowledge in the circuit of knowledge production in textile centric craft.

We argue that within a capitalistic society those who wish to make money from textile craft rely on the production of knowledge to help build community. Affluent and middle-class white individuals benefit from white supremacy and class privilege within a capitalist economic system where entrepreneurs require capital to thrive in the textile craft industry. As the production of knowledge is critical in the production of community, there is also a reliance on commerce. In capitalism, community and commerce have become interdependently centered on the production of knowledge for hegemonic groups. We hope through the creation of a theory around the way knowledge is created and shared in textile craft communities, we can better observe and dismantle how individuals are left out of communities. It requires a diverse array of voices at the center of the theory to produce knowledge that is more inclusive.

Figure 1. *Circuit of Knowledge Production in Textile Centric Craft*



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