www.xchanges.org
Volume 21, Issue 1
Fall, 2026

From Composition Classroom to Cloud: Digital Counter-Storytelling as Assemblage and Community Listening

Ambir Khadka

Introduction

Digital storytelling has transformed how marginalized communities narrate lived experiences, contest dominant discourses, and build collective resistance across networked environments. While Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholarship has established counter-storytelling as a powerful pedagogical and methodological practice within rhetoric and composition, comparatively less attention has been paid to how counterstories function within contemporary digital ecologies characterized by multimodal composition, networked circulation, and platform infrastructures. This article argues that digital counter-storytelling extends González's (2020) classroom-based framework by functioning as a distributed rhetorical assemblage constituted through multimodal expression, hashtag circulation, and community listening. Drawing on Nepal's September 2025 Gen Z movement, a youth-led political uprising that toppled the government, as an illustrative case, I demonstrate how counterstories emerge not merely as individual narratives but as collective rhetorical practices produced through circulation, interaction, and participation. Situated within *Xchanges*' 25th-anniversary Special Issue, this article revisits González's (2020) contribution to the journal by extending its classroom-based framework of CRT counter-storytelling into contemporary digital composing ecologies.

This article revisits González's (2020) framework by examining how digital counter-storytelling operates within rapidly evolving digital environments. While González (2020) emphasizes counter-storytelling as a classroom-based pedagogical and rhetorical practice, I extend his framework by theorizing digital counter-storytelling as a distributed rhetorical assemblage constituted through multimodal composition, networked circulation, platform infrastructures, and community listening. Rather than remaining confined to individual narratives, digital counterstories emerge collectively through hashtags, multimodal content, and the interactions among participants, technologies, and audiences. Eyman (2015) positions digital rhetoric as a form of rhetorical practice enacted through "the production of multimodal, new media, and other networked, digital texts" (p. 112), a perspective that reinforces understanding counter-storytelling as rhetorical action that creates, circulates, and contests meaning rather than merely representing experience. His characterization of digital rhetoric as interdisciplinary further highlights how these practices operate across technological, social, cultural, and rhetorical domains, creating conditions in which counterstories are continually circulated, remixed, and reinterpreted. Building on González's (2020) foundational insights, I argue that digital counterstories not only challenge dominant narratives and amplify marginalized voices but also function as participatory, transnational, and networked rhetorical practices whose meanings evolve through circulation, interaction,

and collective engagement. The Nepal Gen Z movement serves as an illustrative case for demonstrating how these processes extend CRT counter-storytelling beyond the composition classroom into contemporary digital composing ecologies.

In this article, I understand stories not simply as complete narratives but as rhetorical acts through which individuals and communities make sense of lived experience, construct meaning, and communicate perspectives. This article is a conceptual and reflective study that develops and extends González's (2020) framework of CRT counter-storytelling through assemblage theory and community listening. Rather than reporting findings from an empirical study, it synthesizes scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies, digital rhetoric, CRT, and assemblage theory to theorize how digital counter-storytelling functions within contemporary networked environments. Because this article is conceptual, it does not present a systematic dataset or empirical coding procedure. Instead, the Nepal Gen Z movement functions as an illustrative case through which existing concepts of CRT counter-storytelling, assemblage, and digital rhetoric are brought into conversation.

Critical Race Theory and Digital Counter-Storytelling

Critical Race Theory (CRT) counter-storytelling has emerged as a powerful methodological and pedagogical practice within rhetoric and composition, offering a means for marginalized voices to narrate lived experiences, challenge dominant discourses, and reframe knowledge production within academic spaces. Martinez positions counter-storytelling as both a narrative practice and a critical intervention, emphasizing that counterstories "serve to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege" while strengthening "traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (as cited in González, 2020, p.1). In this formulation, counter-storytelling operates not merely as narrative but as a critical method for documenting inequity and sustaining resistance.

CRT scholars further elaborate this framework by defining counterstory as both a method and a methodology that "empower[s] the minoritized through the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies" (Martinez, 2020, p. 3). Counterstories function "in opposition to narratives of dominance" (Merriweather Hunn et al., 2006, p. 244) and generate what Delgado as cited in Gachago et al. (2014) conceptualizes as alternative "counter-realities" rooted in lived experiences (p. 39). Storytelling is not external to theory but constitutive of it: "stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory" (Brayboy, as cited in Martinez, 2020, p. 439). These perspectives reinforce the centrality of narrative as a site of knowledge-making, resistance, and epistemological intervention. This emphasis on storytelling as lived experience can also be traced within [Nepali] cultural practices where narrative forms function as expressions of everyday life.

González (2020) situates counter-storytelling within graduate writing classrooms, showing how everyday interactions reveal the "force of power and privilege" (p. 2). His counterstory illustrates how linguistic and cultural knowledge can be dismissed,

exposing systemic inequities that shape academic spaces. More importantly, he frames this very dismissal and inequity as a pedagogical opportunity, urging instructors to "linger" in such moments, validating student contributions and fostering inclusive learning environments. Through this lens, counter-storytelling becomes both a critical methodology and a pedagogical practice rooted in listening, attentiveness, and relational engagement. It enables individuals to ". . . give them [the victims] a voice and reveal that other people have similar experiences," thus helping to recognize shared struggles, and thereby, to nurture connection and resistance (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 44). This communal aspect is further emphasized by Gachago et al. (2014), who argue that counterstories serve to "[build] communities among marginalized students, providing an alternative window into the world of students of colour [and those at the margins] and a space for healing" (p. 29). In this context, storytelling is not only an act of resistance but also a process of community formation and emotional engagement.

Although digital counter-storytelling frequently intersects with digital activism, the two are not synonymous. Digital activism encompasses a broad range of political practices, including organizing, advocacy, mobilization, and collective action, whereas digital counter-storytelling refers specifically to rhetorical practices through which participants narrate, circulate, and contest lived experiences and dominant narratives. Storytelling therefore operates as one important dimension of digital activism without exhausting its broader political functions. Maintaining this distinction allows this article to examine how counterstories contribute to digital movements while recognizing that digital activism includes practices beyond narrative expression.

Moreover, within digital environments, stories may take the form of videos, memes, hashtags, photographs, comment threads, or other multimodal artifacts that acquire meaning through their relationships with one another, their creators, audiences, and broader social contexts. Individual digital artifacts may not necessarily constitute complete stories on their own; rather, they become part of broader narrative assemblages through circulation, repetition, remixing, interpretation, and audience engagement. In this sense, a TikTok video, hashtag, meme, or image may not function as a story merely because it is a digital artifact; instead, it participates in storytelling processes when it contributes to the construction, circulation, or negotiation of shared meanings and experiences.

While González's (2020) framework is grounded in classroom-based narrative practices, storytelling has increasingly moved into digital environments with rocketing advancement in the field of science and technology and influence of emerging digital technologies leading to undeniable adoption of multimodal pedagogical approach. Digital storytelling, often defined as a "modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling" (Phillips et al., 2019, p. 1), incorporates multimodal forms such as images, video, and sound. As Gachago et al. (2014) argue, digital storytelling enables students to produce "stories that challenge social and racial injustice… usually not heard in the classroom," highlighting its potential as a form of critical pedagogy (p. 30). With the growing emphasis on literacy as reproduction and the fusion of text, images, and sound

in visual culture, traditional storytelling practices are increasingly evolving into multimodal forms that are more interactive and impactful (Boakye, 2022). This shift has contributed to the rise of digital storytelling as a popular and influential rhetorical and pedagogical practice. Moreover, multimodal storytelling expands how narratives are expressed, enabling individuals to communicate experiences through diverse semiotic resources. Eyman's (2015) conceptualization of text as a "communicative event" (p. 21) and his discussion of textual, contextual, cultural, temporal, intentional, and intertextual dimensions provide a useful framework for understanding how digital counter-stories circulate across multiple layers of meaning and rhetorical action. Consequently, digital counterstories operate across these layers, producing meaning not as static artifacts but as dynamic processes shaped by relationships among users, technologies, and discourses.

This shift is evident in transnational digital assemblage and activism. Baniya (2024), in analyzing disaster risk management, observes that "transnational assemblages were formed via networked connections and communications in the aftermath of the [Nepal 2015] earthquake" (p. 60) which helps us in making connections to how storytelling becomes embedded in global networks—I relate [digital counter-]storytelling as assemblage and community listening practice. Similarly, hashtag activism enables individuals to "assemble into a network based in shared memory" (Dionne et al., 2020, p. 122), transforming storytelling into a collective, networked practice.

The core functions of counter-storytelling—challenging dominant narratives, documenting lived experiences, and fostering resistance—remain intact. However, the mechanisms through which these functions operate shift significantly in digital spaces. By integrating CRT counter-storytelling with assemblage theory and community listening, this revisitation offers a framework for understanding [counter-]storytelling as a dynamic practice within contemporary digital rhetorical ecologies. In other words, the article argues that digital counter-storytelling extends CRT counter-storytelling beyond classroom-based narrative into distributed assemblages constituted through multimodal circulation, hashtag infrastructures, and community listening practices. As a contribution to Rhetoric and Writing Studies, I thus aim to extend González's (2020) classroom-based framework into contemporary digital composing ecologies where students and/or common people participate in multimodal, networked counter-storytelling practices.

Case Study Selection: Nepal's Gen Z Protest

The selection of Nepal's Gen Z protest is purposeful for several reasons. First, the movement relied extensively on digitally networked participation, making it an appropriate case for examining how counterstories circulate across platforms through hashtags, multimodal composition, and collective interaction. Second, the movement illustrates how local political struggles intersect with transnational digital circulation, allowing assemblage theory and community listening to be examined simultaneously. Rather than presenting the protest as representative of all forms of digital activism, I use it as an analytically productive case that demonstrates how digital counter-storytelling operates within contemporary rhetorical ecologies.

Assemblage theory provides the primary analytical framework for understanding digital counter-storytelling as a relational and emergent process shaped through interactions among human and nonhuman actors. Rather than treating counterstories as discrete narratives, this perspective conceptualizes them as dynamic formations constituted through users, platforms, algorithms, multimodal artifacts, and networked circulation. As Wang (2020) argues, digital activism adopts "a comparative materialist approach" consisting of "rhetorically charged material actants as it emerges, circulates, transforms, activates the public, and assemble[s] bodies across national, geopolitical, technological, and rhetorical borders" (pp. 242–243). Likewise, Baniya (2024) demonstrates how transnational assemblages emerge through "networked connections and communications" (p. 60) while emphasizing urgency and immediate collective response as defining characteristics of digitally mediated action (p. 61). Building on these insights—and on DeLanda's (2016) conceptualization of assemblages as relational formations—this article extends assemblage theory into CRT counter-storytelling by arguing that digital counterstories emerge through multimodal circulation, distributed participation, and community listening rather than through isolated acts of individual narration.

Community listening complements assemblage theory by providing the ethical orientation of this study. González's (2020) pedagogical call to "linger" in moments of difference foregrounds listening as a critical rhetorical practice. Extending this notion into digital environments, I understand community listening as attentiveness to how participants respond to one another, amplify marginalized voices, negotiate meaning collectively, and construct relationships through ongoing interaction. Gachago et al. (2014) similarly emphasize that digital counterstories create spaces for "communal sharing" and healing (p. 32), while Hubrig (2020) demonstrates how hashtag communities engage in community listening to build relationships and exercise collective political agency. Accordingly, this article focuses less on individual digital artifacts than on broader patterns of multimodal composition, hashtag circulation, repetition, remixing, and audience engagement through which digital counter-storytelling emerges as a networked rhetorical assemblage.

Throughout the article, I use Nepal's September 2025 Gen Z movement as an illustrative case because it demonstrates how digitally networked counterstories circulated across platforms through hashtags, multimodal composition, collective participation, and transnational engagement, making it especially well-suited for extending González's framework into digital rhetorical contexts.

From Classroom Counterstory to Digitally Networked Counter-Storytelling

González's (2020) counterstory foregrounds how classroom interactions reveal the often-subtle workings of power and privilege that structure academic discourse. In his narrative, the dismissal of linguistic knowledge is not an isolated incident but an example of how dominant epistemologies regulate whose knowledge is recognized and legitimized. Counter-storytelling becomes a reflective and disruptive practice,

documenting these moments while intervening in dominant frameworks of understanding.

In digital contexts, similar interventions occur, but the scale and mechanism of storytelling shift dramatically. Rather than functioning as singular, retrospective narratives, counterstories are produced in real time and circulate across platforms through hashtags and multimodal content. Hashtags, in particular, act as organizing infrastructures that connect individual narratives into broader discursive networks. As Dionne, Hatfield & Willingham (2020) emphasize, hashtags, e.g. #BlackatUARK used to mobilize digital counter-public memories of UARK (the University of Arkansas), "enable[s] ordinary people to assemble into a network based in shared memory . . . how people can harness the affordances of digital social media platforms to challenge dominant narratives" transforming storytelling into a collective, participatory, and "memorializing" process (p. 122). This transformation reflects a key divergence from González's (2020) classroom-centered model. While his framework emphasizes narrative as situated within institutional spaces, digital counter-storytelling extends these practices into networked publics, where stories are continuously produced, circulated, and reinterpreted. At the same time, the underlying purpose remains consistent: counterstories continue to challenge dominant narratives and make visible the marginalized experiences.

Gachago et al. (2014) reinforce this continuity by emphasizing that counterstories in digital contexts function as stories that challenge social and racial injustice that we usually see and hear beyond our regular classroom. This suggests that digital environments do not fundamentally alter the purpose of counter-storytelling but expand its scope and accessibility. Stories that might remain confined within classroom spaces can now reach broader audiences, fostering greater visibility and engagement. This is why I emphasize that my revisitation does not radically shift from but build upon and expand on González's (2020) framework of counterstories.

Counter-Storytelling as Assemblage

To fully account for the revisitation, it is necessary to move beyond viewing counterstories as discrete narratives and instead conceptualize them as assemblages. Assemblage theory enables us to understand digital counter-storytelling as a process constituted through relationships among multiple elements—users, platforms, technologies, and modes of expression. Wang (2020) describes digital activism, as a process in which meaning "emerges, develops, unfolds, and resolves, permanently reassembling the spatial relations" activating the public which again highlights the dynamic and relational nature of digital discourse (p. 245). Similarly, Baniya (2024) demonstrates how digital assemblages form through "networked connections and communications" (p. 60), particularly in moments of crisis or urgency. Also, Niraula's (2023) analysis of Nepali cultural texts demonstrates how rhetoric emerges through the interaction of verbal and nonverbal elements, including language, visual presentation, performance, and setting. Digital counter-storytelling thus operates through assemblages of multiple rhetorical resources whose meanings emerge relationally

rather than through text alone. These insights help emphasize that digital counterstories are not fixed texts but evolving formations shaped by circulation and interaction.

Interestingly, assemblage theory allows us to see how authorship itself becomes distributed. Whereas González's (2020) counterstory is centered on an individual narrative voice, digital counter-storytelling involves multiple contributors—even unknown to each other at times—who collectively produce and reshape narratives. A hashtag, for example, aggregates diverse experiences into a shared discursive space, where meaning evolves through accumulation rather than singular authorship. At the same time, this distributed authorship introduces complexity. Gachago et al. (2014) note that digital counterstories often contain "contradictory elements," reflecting the difficulty of resisting dominant discourses even within critical storytelling practices (p. 29). This highlights that digital counter-storytelling is not a unified or stable practice but one often characterized by tension, negotiation, and competing meanings. Assemblage, therefore, provides a useful framework for capturing these dynamics.

Multimodality and the Expansion of Cultural Expression

A key feature of digital counter-storytelling is its multimodality. Unlike traditional narrative forms that rely primarily on text, digital counterstories integrate multiple modes, including visual, auditory, and spatial elements. This multimodality expands how experiences are represented and communicated. For an instance, Vasudevan as cited in Gachago (2014) emphasize that "multimodal composing" or pedagogies allow for "new kinds of spaces for storytelling and story-listening," enabling narratives to be expressed through diverse semiotic resources (p. 31). This aligns with broader scholarship on digital [counter-]storytelling, which highlights how the integration of image, sound, signs and symbols, and text enhances both accessibility and affective engagement.

Multimodality also plays a crucial role in shaping the relationship between storytelling and identity. Gachago et al. (2014) further argue that there is a conscious awareness of the relationship between "modes, learning and identity," suggesting that the choice of modes is not neutral but reflects how individuals position themselves within broader social and cultural contexts (p. 32). In this sense, digital counter-storytelling becomes a site where identity is not only represented but actively constructed. At the same time, multimodality introduces new challenges. As Gachago et al. (2014) also point out, certain stories may rely on "emotional audience manipulation evidenced in production of digital stories by the more privileged [students]," particularly when creators use visual and auditory elements to intensify engagement (p. 29). This raises important questions about the ethics and implications of digital counter-storytelling, particularly in relation to authenticity and representation. While affective engagement can strengthen the impact of [digital] counter-stories, it can also complicate how narratives are interpreted. Although Gachago et al. examine these tensions within educational contexts, similar concerns extend beyond the classroom into broader digital environments where individuals, communities, organizations, and movements construct and circulate counter-narratives. Addressing these ethical concerns requires

approaching digital counter-storytelling not simply as the production of compelling content but as a relational practice grounded in accountability, community listening, and attention to whose voices are amplified, interpreted, and circulated.

Hashtag Circulation and Collective Meaning-Making

Hashtags among other numerous artifacts play a central role in the assemblage of digital counterstories. They function as both organizational tools and rhetorical devices, enabling narratives to emerge, circulate, and gain traction and visibility. Through processes of retweeting, reacting, sharing, and commenting, hashtags facilitate the rapid dissemination of stories across networks. Hashtags create such a binding force where individuals or groups take part in collective action and transnational engagement by acting with creation of new posts or spreading already existing ones through the ways mentioned beforehand. Similarly, Wang (2020) observes that hashtag campaigns can "materialize[d] in public spaces and yield[ed] material consequences," demonstrating how digital discourse intersects with embodied forms of activism (p. 247).

This capacity for circulation transforms the temporal and spatial dimensions of digital counter-storytelling. Stories are no longer confined to specific moments or locations but can be continuously revisited, reshaped, and amplified. As Baniya (2024) demonstrates, such amplification often involves "acting immediately without waiting for the government" or other forces (p. 61), highlighting how digital [counter-]storytelling becomes intertwined with real-time grassroot mobilization. In the meantime, hashtag circulation is shaped by platform infrastructures and algorithmic systems, which influence visibility, circulation, and engagement. This introduces new forms of inequality, as certain narratives gain traction while others remain marginalized. Understanding digital counter-storytelling, therefore, requires attention not only to content but also to the conditions under which stories circulate. Such attention involves developing critical awareness of how platforms prioritize, suppress, or reshape particular narratives through algorithmic systems, engagement metrics, and commercial logics. For communities engaged in counter-storytelling, addressing these inequalities requires strategic forms of digital literacy, including understanding platform affordances, diversifying modes of circulation, building alternative networks of visibility, and recognizing how marginalized narratives may be constrained by unequal technological infrastructures. In this way, digital counter-storytelling involves not only producing counter-narratives but also critically engaging with the systems that determine how those narratives become visible, heard, and sustained.

Community Listening and Digital Pedagogy

For me, a central contribution of González's (2020) framework is the emphasis on [community] listening as a pedagogical practice. His call to "linger" in moments of difference foregrounds the importance of attentiveness, responsiveness, and ethical engagement (p. 3). In digital contexts, this practice extends into what I believe can be understood as distributed digital community listening. Fishman and Rosenberg (2018) emphasize, "community listening arises from the recognition that none of us is ever

outside of our communities…we become better community members" (pp. 3–4). This relational understanding of listening becomes visible in the movement, where participants not only voice concerns but also respond to, echo, and rearticulate one another's expressions.

Fishman, Garcia and Rosenberg (2018) further note that "listening and action connect…, especially in response to signal imperatives: survival, reconciliation, peace…Listening and action are always already in constellation" (pp. 8–9). In the similar vein, community listening in digital environments involves engaging with narratives through interaction—commenting, sharing, responding, and amplifying voices. The idea seems repetitive, but it is intentional for more emphasis and to better elaborate the idea of digital community listening. Hubrig (2024) highlights how hashtags—e.g. #CripTheVote building communities of and affirming disabled identities "all while bolstering disabled people's collective political agency" through such practices—demonstrate how assemblages and community listening become a participatory and relational process (p. 50).

Gachago et al. (2014) further emphasize the role of listening in digital storytelling, particularly through communal practices such as story-sharing. They note that counterstories provide a platform for voices that are often silenced and create opportunities for dialogue and connection. This aligns with González's (2020) pedagogical goals while extending them into digital contexts. Equally noteworthy, community listening also has pedagogical implications. Digital [counter-]storytelling can function as a form of multimodal pedagogy, enabling students to engage with issues of identity, power, and difference. Gachago et al. (2014) argue that digital counterstories can foster critical pedagogy by encouraging students to reflect on their experiences and challenge dominant discourses. In this way, digital counter-storytelling can become both a research method and a teaching practice.

Nepal's Gen Z Movement and Networked Counter-Storytelling: An Illustrative Case

This article uses Nepal's September 2025 Gen Z movement as an illustrative case rather than as an empirical study designed to produce generalized findings. The case was selected because it provides a particularly productive site for examining how counter-storytelling operates within contemporary digital environments. Three characteristics make this movement analytically significant. First, the movement emerged through extensive interaction between digital platforms and physical protest spaces, demonstrating how contemporary rhetorical action unfolds across interconnected online and offline environments. Second, participants relied heavily on multimodal forms—including hashtags, short-form videos, memes, visual symbols, and comment-based interactions—that reveal how counterstories are composed and circulated beyond traditional narrative forms. Third, the movement demonstrates how local political concerns became connected to broader transnational digital networks through migration, diaspora participation, and globally circulating cultural symbols.

The analysis that follows focuses on publicly circulating digital artifacts and rhetorical practices associated with the movement, including hashtags, multimodal expressions, symbolic imagery, and patterns of interaction among participants and audiences. Rather than treating individual posts as complete narratives, this analysis examines how these artifacts became meaningful through circulation, repetition, remixing, and collective engagement. This approach aligns with the article's broader argument that digital counter-storytelling functions as a rhetorical assemblage in which meanings emerge and/or evolve through relationships among human actors, digital platforms, technologies, and cultural contexts.

The dynamics of digital counter-storytelling become particularly visible in Nepal's September 2025 Gen Z movement—one of the country's most significant youth-led public protests in recent years, marked by both desired political outcomes and complex, at times unsettling, aftermaths. The movement emerged amid growing frustrations among Nepali youth concerning political instability, corruption, unemployment, migration pressures, and entrenched political elitism. Government discussions surrounding restrictions on social media platforms further intensified these frustrations, transforming digital participation itself into a site of political struggle and rhetorical resistance. Rather than treating this movement simply as an example of digital activism, I examine it as an illustrative case of how counterstories emerge through networked rhetorical practices in which participants collectively narrate experiences, circulate grievances, and negotiate meanings across digital and physical spaces.

Unlike traditional protest movements organized primarily through centralized leadership structures, the Gen Z movement developed through decentralized digital participation and unfolded simultaneously online and offline. TikTok videos, Facebook posts, Instagram reels, memes, hashtags, and comment threads did not function as isolated texts; instead, they became interconnected rhetorical artifacts whose meanings emerged through circulation, repetition, and interaction. In this sense, the movement illustrates DeLanda's (2016) understanding of assemblage as a formation produced through relationships among heterogeneous human and nonhuman elements. Digital platforms, participants, visual artifacts, hashtags, audiences, and embodied protest spaces collectively constituted a rhetorical assemblage through which counterstories were produced and sustained.

Widely circulating hashtags such as #BolnaDeSarkar ("Let us speak, government") and #WakeUpNepal, alongside slogans like "Gen Z Won't Be Silent" and "Enough is Enough," condensed political grievances into repeatable and shareable rhetorical forms. As Viera (2017) explains, "as the material circulation of the text plays a role in reinforcing, negotiating, and building power, hashtags emerge as an influential form of grassroots movement" (p. 80). These hashtags functioned not merely as labels for an already existing movement but as rhetorical mechanisms through which the movement itself was assembled. By allowing dispersed individuals to attach their experiences and interpretations to shared terms, hashtags transformed fragmented expressions of dissatisfaction into recognizable collective narratives. In this sense, hashtags operated as connective rhetorical infrastructures that linked individual experiences with broader

public conversations. Their significance emerged through circulation: each repost, comment, adaptation, and visual representation contributed to the evolving meaning of the movement. From an assemblage perspective, hashtags became points of connection among participants, platforms, audiences, and political contexts, enabling counterstories to develop through relationships rather than through singular acts of authorship. Consistent with Baniya's (2024) discussion of networked assemblages, these practices enabled distributed publics to articulate shared concerns through connections among users, platforms, symbols, and communicative practices. Protest narratives therefore did not originate from a singular spokesperson or organization; rather, they accumulated through participatory circulation and collective uptake.

The rhetorical force of the movement also relied heavily on multimodal counter-storytelling practices. Consistent with Gachago et al.'s (2014) discussion of multimodal pedagogies, these practices created new possibilities for storytelling, participation, and collective engagement. Youth participants used humor, satire, remix culture, visual symbolism, and short-form video to critique political elites and express generational frustrations. For instance, memes and posts targeting "nepo kids" or "nepo babies," along with phrases such as "Your luxury, Our misery," functioned simultaneously as political critique, identity formation, and collective expression. These textual and visual artifacts operated as digital counterstories by reframing dominant narratives of governance, privilege, and development through everyday experiences of inequality. Their rhetorical significance did not exist solely within the individual artifact itself; rather, meaning emerged through sharing, remixing, commenting, and connecting these fragments with broader networks of public discourse.

The movement further demonstrates how digital counter-storytelling operates as an assemblage rather than as an isolated narrative act. A TikTok video criticizing corruption, for example, could be reposted on Facebook, transformed into meme formats, incorporated into hashtag conversations, and reinterpreted by different audiences. Meaning therefore emerged through circulation itself rather than through singular authorship. This process reflects Baniya's (2024) emphasis on networked connections and communication as constitutive elements of assemblage, while extending her discussion of digital networks into the domain of CRT counter-storytelling. Even visual artifacts, such as the circulation of the *One Piece* manga pirate flag—a symbol drawn from globally recognizable Japanese anime culture and associated with resistance and defiance—demonstrate how transnational digital symbols can become integrated into localized protest discourse. Such symbolic circulation expanded the rhetorical assemblage by connecting global cultural references with local political struggles. As Harvey (2025) argues, the *One Piece* flag "has transcended borders and languages to become a rallying cry and symbol for youth-led protest movements" (para. 5).

This distributed form of authorship also complicates traditional understandings of rhetorical agency. In González's (2020) classroom-centered model, counter-storytelling often begins with an individual narrator who draws from lived experience to challenge dominant narratives, although these narratives can also connect with collective

experiences and broader communities. Nepal's Gen Z movement demonstrates how counterstories can additionally emerge through networked participation, where rhetorical agency is distributed across individuals, platforms, technologies, and audiences. As Shapiro-Perl (2017) maintains, the transformative potential of digital storytelling lies in "its capacity to effect personal and social change in both storyteller and witness. It allows us to listen deeply to each other, across the divides of neighborhood, class, race, and culture, allowing us to connect as people" (p. 178). This emphasis on listening across differences becomes particularly visible in the circulation of protest narratives, where participants not only express concerns but also respond to, amplify, and rearticulate one another's experiences. Within this context, "Gen Z" itself became a rhetorical identity assembled through shared grievances, digital participation, and multimodal circulation rather than a fixed demographic category.

The movement also highlights the transnational dimensions of digital counter-storytelling. Many protest narratives addressed issues such as migration, brain drain, and limited economic opportunities alongside concerns about corruption and political instability. As these narratives circulated through diasporic networks, digital storytelling connected Nepali youth inside and outside the country through shared rhetorical spaces. Digital counter-storytelling therefore functioned not only as national protest discourse but also as a transnational assemblage shaped by mobility, migration, and digital circulation. As Baniya (2024) suggests, networked communication enables connections across geographical and social boundaries; in the Nepal Gen Z movement, globally circulating forms—from hashtags to symbolic imagery—intersected with localized political demands, producing layered counter-narratives that were simultaneously digital, cultural, and political.

At the same time, the movement reveals tensions within digital assemblages. Platform algorithms amplified certain narratives while marginalizing others. Some protest messages became highly visible through viral circulation, while others disappeared quickly within rapidly shifting feeds. Competing interpretations of the movement also emerged, with political actors, media organizations, and online [and offline] participants attempting to redefine its meaning. These tensions demonstrate that digital counter-storytelling is not unified or stable but continuously negotiated through circulation and contestation. This tension mirrors broader shifts in [Nepali] socio-cultural rhetoric, where meaning is continually negotiated across changing contexts. Similarly, digital counterstories within the Gen Z movement are not stable narratives but evolving formations shaped by competing discourses, platform dynamics, and collective participation. As Gachago et al. (2014) note, digital counterstories frequently contain contradictory elements, reflecting the complexity of resisting dominant narratives within digital environments.

From Composition Classroom to Cloud: A Pedagogical Approach

The Nepal case does not represent all digital activism; rather, it demonstrates the theoretical possibilities of digital counter-storytelling as assemblage. These developments also invite writing instructors to rethink how counter-storytelling is taught

in rhetoric and composition classrooms. Expanding on the connection between composition studies and critical counterstories, Bhusal (2024) argues that integrating critical counterstories into composition classrooms enhances the significance of composition studies while also providing a stronger foundation for the practice of counter-storytelling. Building upon this claim, I assert that rather than limiting counter-story assignments to print-based narratives, instructors might encourage students to analyze and compose multimodal counterstories through hashtags, short-form videos, memes, collaborative digital archives, and other networked platforms. For instance, students might examine how digital communities use hashtags to construct collective identities, analyze how visual and auditory elements shape the rhetorical impact of public narratives, or create collaborative digital projects that center community experiences and ethical representation.

Such assignments enable students to explore how rhetorical action emerges through circulation, remixing, audience interaction, and community listening while fostering critical reflection on platform affordances, algorithmic visibility, digital ethics, and the politics of representation. These considerations become increasingly significant as emerging technologies such as generative artificial intelligence complicate traditional understandings of authorship, creativity, and originality. As Khatiwada and Khadka (2026) argue, GenAI requires educators to rethink plagiarism and creativity not simply as questions of textual ownership but as complex processes involving human judgment, ethical engagement, and collaborative meaning-making. In this way, digital counter-storytelling becomes not only an object of scholarly inquiry but also a pedagogical practice through which students critically examine and engage with contemporary public rhetorics.

Conclusion

This article has revisited González's (2020) framework of CRT counter-storytelling by examining its transformation within digital environments. González (2020) demonstrates that counterstories function to expose and challenge dominant narratives while documenting the persistence of inequity and fostering resistance. His emphasis on narrative, pedagogy, and [assembling and] listening remains foundational for understanding storytelling as both a methodological and educational practice.

Besides, this study has shown that digital environments significantly reshape how counterstories are produced, circulated, and engaged with. By theorizing digital counter-storytelling as an assemblage, this article highlights how narratives now emerge through networked interactions, multimodal expression, and transnational circulation. As Baniya (2024) and Wang (2020) demonstrate, transnational digital assemblages operate through dynamic processes of connection, transformation, and mobilization, expanding the scope and impact of storytelling and activism. This transformation does not replace González's (2020) framework but extends it. The core functions of counter-storytelling—challenging stock stories, amplifying marginalized voices, and fostering cultural survival—remain central. However, digital environments introduce new dimensions of

scale, speed, and participation, transforming storytelling into a collective and iterative process.

The integration of insights from Gachago et al. (2014) further underscores the pedagogical potential of digital counter-storytelling. Their emphasis on multimodal pedagogy and community-building highlights how digital storytelling can function as both a tool for resistance and a space for learning. By enabling students to create and share counterstories, digital pedagogy fosters critical engagement with issues of identity, power, and difference. For writing studies, these developments point to the need for reimagining pedagogy in relation to evolving rhetorical ecologies. Students are no longer confined to producing traditional academic texts but are active participants in digital networks where meaning is created collaboratively. Recognizing digital counter-storytelling as a legitimate form of scholarly and rhetorical practice aligns with *Xchanges'* emphasis on student-driven research and pedagogical innovation.

Ultimately, [digital] counter-storytelling remains a vital practice for understanding and challenging structures of power. As González (2020) suggests, it invites participants to "witness, examine, and interrogate" lived experiences within systems of inequality (p. 4). In digital contexts, this invitation becomes collective, networked, and ongoing, reaffirming storytelling as a central site of resistance, connection, and knowledge-making in contemporary rhetorical life. Writing classrooms must therefore recognize digital counter-storytelling not merely as social media participation but as sophisticated rhetorical, multimodal, and community-based composing practices. As a revisitation, this article responds directly to *Xchanges*' 25th anniversary invitation to engage archived scholarship from a contemporary standpoint. Revisiting González's (2020) framework through digital rhetoric and assemblage theory reveals new possibilities for understanding counter-storytelling in an increasingly networked world.

References

Baniya, S. (2024). *Transnational assemblages: Social justice and crisis communication during disaster*. National Council of Teachers of English & The WAC Clearinghouse. https://wacclearinghouse.org/books/swr/assemblages/

Bhusal, P. C. (2024). (Re)sourcing critical counterstories in the composition classroom. *The Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*, 8(1). https://journalofmultimodalrhetorics.com/8-1-bhusal

Boakye, S. J. (2022). *Digital literacy readiness of first-year composition students* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at El Paso]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing

DeLanda, M. (2016). *Assemblage theory*. Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474413640

Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical Race Theory: An introduction*. NYU Press.

Dionne, T. J., Hatfield, J. E., & Willingham, G. (2023). #BlackatUARK: Digital counterpublic memories of anti-Black racism on campus. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 53(2), 121–137. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2022.2095425

Eyman, D. (2015). *Digital rhetoric : theory, method, practice*. University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.3998/dh.13030181.0001.001

Fishman, J., & Rosenberg, L. (2019). Guest editors' introduction: Community writing, community listening. *Community Literacy Journal, 13*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.25148/clj.13.1.009085

Fishman, J., García, R., & Rosenberg, L. (2025). Introduction. In J. Fishman, R. García, & L. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Community listening: Stories, hauntings, possibilities* (pp. xx–xx). The WAC Clearinghouse. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2025.2531

Gachago, D., Cronjé, F., Ivala, E., Condy, J., & Chigona, A. (2014). Using digital counterstories as multimodal pedagogy among South African pre-service student educators to produce stories of resistance. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 12*(1), 29–41. https://academic-publishing.org/index.php/ejel/article/view/1677

González, C. L. (2020). Emerging through critical race theory counter-storytelling in a rhetoric and composition graduate studies context. *Xchanges*, 15(1), 1–6. https://xchanges.org/emerging-through-crt-counter-storytelling-15-1

Harvey, L. (2025, September 19). *Gen Z protesters are uniting behind a manga pirate flag*. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/19/asia/one-piece-flag-indonesia-nepal-protesters-intl-hnk-dst

Hubrig, A. (2025). Crafting crip space through disabled political advocacy: #CripTheVote as community listening. In J. Fishman, R. García, & L. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Community listening: Stories, hauntings, possibilities* (pp. 93–115). The WAC Clearinghouse. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2025.2531.2.04

Hunn, Lisa R. Merriweather, Talmadge C. Guy, & Elaine Mangliitz. (2006). Who Can Speak for Whom? Using Counter-Storytelling to Challenge Racial Hegemony. In Adult Education Research Conference (pp. 243-250). Retrieved from https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2006/papers/32

Khatiwada, R., & Khadka, A. (2026). Rethinking creativity and plagiarism in the age of generative AI. *The Spectrum*, 4(1), 103–126. https://doi.org/10.3126/spectrum.v4i1.92920

Martinez, A. Y. (2020). *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*. NCTE.

Niraula, S. (2023). Shifting Rhetoric of Teej Songs in the Context of Consumer Culture in Nepal. *SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts & Humanities*, *5*(2), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3126/sjah.v5i2.57494

Phillips, H. N., Condy, J. & Tiba, C. (2019, November 7-9). Digital Storytelling: Student Vulnerability during the Process and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning One Year Later [Conference Session]. 16th International Conference on Cognition and Exploratory Learning in Digital Age (CELDA 2019), Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town 8000, South Africa. DOI: 10.33965/celda2019_201911L024

Shapiro-Perl, N. (2017). The Digital Story: Giving Voice to Unheard Washington. *Deep Stories: Practicing, Teaching, and Learning Anthropology with Digital Storytelling*, (M. Nuñez- Janes, A. Thornburg, A. Booker, I. Penier, S. Pack, & A. Leverton, Eds.). De Gruyter. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbkjvdr.15

Vieira, K. (2019). What Happens When Texts Fly. *College English*, 82(1), 77–95. https://doi.org/10.58680/ce201930306

Wang, Z. (2020). Activist rhetoric in transnational cyber-public spaces: Toward a comparative materialist approach. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 50(4), 240–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2020.1748218