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English Composition II: 0040

4 March 2026

## MA2 Proposal

Over the past decade, social media has become a major platform for political discourse and sharing public opinion. According to the Pew Research Center, about 76% of U.S. adults under 30 say they get at least some of their news from social media (Pew Research Center). One of the most widely debated ongoing issues is the controversy surrounding the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Platforms such as Instagram allow creators to present political arguments through short-form videos that combine spoken commentary, captions, visuals, and music, while audiences can respond through comment sections. This raises the question of how political creators on Instagram Reels use rhetoric to discuss the information surrounding the ICE controversy. To discover how political creators use rhetoric to discuss the ICE controversy on Instagram Reels, I will analyze 30 Instagram Reels and 300 associated comments for patterns in emotional appeals, credibility strategies, logical arguments, multimodal presentation, political framing, and audience responses within this discourse community.

### **Sampling Plan**

To gather a sample of Instagram Reels discussing the ICE controversy, I will first create a new Instagram account to reduce algorithmic bias. Then I will use Instagram's search and "Edit Interests" features to find relevant Reels. The search terms I will use are "ICE raids," "ICE deportation," "ICE," "ICE protest," "immigration enforcement," and "ICE controversy." I will also add "Politics," "I.C.E.," and "United States" in the "Edit Interests" section to encourage Instagram to show more relevant political content. After entering each search term, I will scroll through the results from top to bottom. A Reel will qualify for my sample only if it discusses

ICE, immigration enforcement, or related immigration policy debates. The Reel must also express a position, opinion, or interpretation of the issue, and it must not be an advertisement or a simple repost without additional commentary. If a Reel does not meet these criteria, I will skip it and continue to the next result. Using this system, I will collect 30 qualifying Reels. For each Reel, I will record the link, posted date, creator name, caption, number of likes, number of comments, and the creator's political bias.

After selecting the Reels, I will collect comments from each one using a public comment extraction tool called CommentGrid. The tool retrieves the first 15 comments on a Reel, and from that list, I will select the first 10 qualifying comments. This gives me room to exclude comments that do not fit the inclusion criteria while still maintaining the same number of comments per Reel. I will exclude comments that are unrelated to the Reel, consist only of emojis, are spam, or are GIF comments. If a comment does not qualify, I will replace it with the next comment in the extracted comments list that qualifies. Since Instagram's comment ranking algorithm prioritizes comments with higher likes and engagement counts, this method will allow me to analyze the comments most likely to be visible to viewers. Using this process, I will collect 10 comments from each of the 30 Reels, for a total of 300 comments.

### **Coding and Analysis Plan**

To answer my research question, I will analyze each Instagram Reel and its associated comments for rhetorical strategies and discourse patterns related to the ICE controversy. Since Instagram Reels combine spoken commentary, captions, visuals, audio, and audience interaction, I will analyze both the content made by creators and audience responses. I will count the rhetorical strategies used and categorize them into broader groups to identify patterns across the

discourse community. To analyze the rhetorical strategies in my samples, I will use the following coding categories.

1. Topics and Issues Discussed
  - a. ICE raids or enforcement actions
  - b. Deportation policies
  - c. Border security
  - d. Human rights
  - e. Government accountability
2. Emotional Appeals (pathos)
  - a. Emotions portrayed
    - i. Fear and threat
    - ii. Anger and outrage
    - iii. Sympathy and compassion
    - iv. Patriotism
  - b. Emotionally charged language
    - i. Injustice or oppression
    - ii. Danger/crime
    - iii. Struggle and hardship
3. Credibility and Authority (ethos)
  - a. Personal Experience
    - i. First-hand experience
    - ii. Second-hand experience (family/friends)
  - b. References to professional or institutional authority

- i. Government officials/agencies
    - ii. Experts, journalists, researchers
  - c. Moral or ethical arguments
    - i. Justice or fairness
    - ii. Law/constitutional values
- 4. Logical Appeals (logos)
  - a. Claims
    - i. Immigration enforcement is necessary/beneficial
    - ii. Immigration enforcement is harmful
    - iii. Government policies should change
    - iv. Government policies should remain the same
  - b. Evidence
    - i. Statistical data
    - ii. Laws or policies
    - iii. News reports/external sources
    - iv. No clear evidence cited
- 5. Multimodal Presentation
  - a. Audio
    - i. Emotional background music
    - ii. Dramatic background music
    - iii. Neutral background music
    - iv. No music
  - b. Visual

- i. Footage of ICE raids or enforcement
- ii. Footage of protests
- iii. News clips
- iv. Screenshots of social media posts
- v. Text overlays with claims or stats
- vi. Government documents/policies
- vii. Charts/infographics

6. Content Format

- a. Original commentary
- b. Reaction to news or media content
- c. Reaction to other political creators
- d. Compilation (multiple clips, images, or pieces of evidence)

7. Political Framing

- a. pro-ICE
- b. anti-ICE
- c. Right (politically conservative)
- d. Left (politically liberal)
- e. Center (unbiased/nonpartisan)

8. Comments

- a. Agree with the creator
- b. Disagree with the creator
- c. Other

## **Limitations**

This study has several limitations, especially in the sampling process. First, Instagram's search results and comment rankings are shaped by algorithms, so another researcher using the same search terms at a different time might not receive the exact same results. Creating a new account and following a set search process should reduce some bias, but it cannot eliminate algorithmic influence entirely. Second, because I am selecting only a small amount of qualifying Reels from each search, my sample will reflect content that Instagram makes more visible, rather than the full range of all possible Reels about the ICE controversy. In the same way, CommentGrid retrieves only the first 15 comments that are ranked the highest by Instagram's algorithm, rather than a perfect sample from every viewpoint. These limitations mean the sample is not perfectly unbiased, but they also make my research manageable and repeatable for other researchers.

There are also limitations in the coding process. Some categories, such as political framing, emotional tone, and political bias, require my interpretation and subjective judgment. Lastly, different political issues have distinct political discourses surrounding them, and while the results from my study will not represent all political discourse on social media, they allow for a detailed analysis of how political discourse behaves within a specific discourse community.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, I will answer the question of how political creators on Instagram Reels discuss information surrounding the ICE controversy and which rhetorical appeals are most used within the discourse community. Understanding these rhetorical patterns is important because social media platforms have become major sources of political information, especially for

younger audiences, and the ways that political influencers present information can influence the opinions and ideologies of viewers. By analyzing 30 Instagram Reels and 300 associated comments using my sampling and coding plan, this research will identify common rhetorical strategies, framing techniques, and audience responses that make up discussions about immigration enforcement online.

Works Cited

Forman-Katz, Naomi, Michael Lipka, Katerina Eva Matsa, Kaitlyn Radde, Chris Baronavski, Justine Coleman “Young Adults and the Future of News.” *Pew Research Center*, 3 Dec. 2025, [www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2025/12/03/young-adults-and-the-future-of-news/](http://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2025/12/03/young-adults-and-the-future-of-news/).

## Appendix A: AI Transparency Statement

I used Grammarly to review spelling and grammar. No AI-generated sentences appear in the body of this essay. All analysis and written content was developed by me.

AI Tool(s): Grammarly

Date of use: March 2026

URL: <https://www.grammarly.com/>