AN EXAMINATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY

SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO PREPARE AND COMMUNICATE THE ANNUAL SCHOOL

DISTRICT BUDGET IMPACTS THE PASSAGE OR FAILURE OF THAT BUDGET

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**Abstract**

Social media has been implemented as an effective means of two-way, interactive communication for entities such as business and politics. Both business and politics recognize that social media has great potential to communicate, engage, and involve the public. Business and politics were early adopters of the use of social media. By contrast school districts have not been early adopters of social media. They are late adopters. In fact, this study illustrates examples of school districts that are adamantly resistant to the use of social media and will not allow it onto their campuses. These districts have great concern and fear of potential bullying and unchecked criticism of the school district. Therefore they want nothing to do with social media. The school districts that are early adopters (compared to other school districts) have demonstrated that fear factor issues can be addressed and managed. These districts have also demonstrated that social media, used wisely, can actively engage their respective communities in two-way, interactive conversation of unprecedented richness, candor, transparency and effectiveness. Furthermore, these districts have demonstrated that a strong relationship exists between the use of social media and the passage of school district budgets.

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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

Public schools are facing unprecedented fiscal and political challenges. During these times and well into the foreseeable future school leaders will be required to possess, and be able to utilize, strong and effective communication skills in order to inform, involve and engage their respective constituencies.

The recent recession has resulted in significant revenue shortfalls for public schools as a result of decreases in multi-year state aid to education (Golas & Gwyer, 2010). In addition, research has demonstrated that a tentativeness of the local taxpayer to contribute more in the form of local property taxes has existed for many years (Lewis, 1996; Reed, 2001). Alan S. Dornfest, Tax Policy Specialist, agreed, "The public continues to express resentment toward this [property] tax and politically powered groups whittle it away with demand for exemption or other favored treatment" (Dornfest as cited in Kent & Sowards, 2008, p. 34). The tentativeness is particularly acute in times of recessions and fierce competition for limited resources, as is the case with the current and future New York State economy. This dilemma, coupled with increases in public school expenses, specifically in retirement (New York State Employee Retirement System, 2010; New York State Teachers Retirement System, 2010), health insurance benefits (Skowronski, 2010) and salaries for school employees, exacerbates the challenge of gaining community support to provide a 21$^{st}$ century public school education for all children.

In addition, the economic environment in New York State is currently being addressed by a new Governor, Andrew Cuomo. Governor Cuomo stated in his inaugural address that: "When it comes to education funding…we're number one in spending but thirty-four in terms of results; that has to change" (New York State Government, 2011, para. 30). Governor Cuomo also claimed that public schools already have enough money in their existing budgets to support public school education without reducing faculty and staff while, at the same time, not requiring

an increase in local property taxes (Freedlander, 2011). Money already exists, he stated, in reserve accounts in school district budgets to do all of this (2011). These claims are being challenged by the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) and the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS), among other professional organizations. However, these statements, and others like them, whether justified or not, tend to erode public confidence in their schools. In addition, the governor's proposed two percent property tax cap, to begin in 2012, will increase the financial constraints and pressures felt by school districts for many years to come (New York State Association of School Business Officials, 2010). This is likely to influence taxpayers when they decide at the polls what level of funding schools may be granted (New York State Association of School Business Officials, 2010).

The federal government intervened to financially assist the states during the 2009-10 and 2010-11 years of the recession. Federal aid provided financial assistance to the states in the form of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 and the Education Jobs bill of 2010. The ARRA federal dollars effectively returned the public schools to the status of level-funding in 2010-11; the current year state aid figure was the same or similar to the subsequent year's state aid figure. However, it is unlikely that the federal government will continue this practice of assisting the states with additional financial relief of this nature. Therefore, the third consecutive year of reductions in state aid to New York State public schools is now being realized. "If newly elected Governor Andrew Cuomo has his way, New York State's public schools will go a third year without any additional state aid and without providing any significant mandate relief, forcing cost increases onto the backs of local property taxpayers" (New York State School Boards Association, 2011, para. 1). The impact of these state aid reductions is anticipated to be severe (2011). The New York State School Boards Association has estimated that the state aid reductions could result in teacher layoffs in 2011 (Heiser, 2011). "Had

Governor Cuomo's property tax cap proposal been in effect this school year [2010-11], school districts could have been forced to lay off more than 13,000 teachers, according to a NYSSBA analysis" (Heiser, 2011, p. 1).

Statements such as those spoken by Governor Cuomo certainly indicate a lack of confidence by the highest state-level leader toward New York State public schools. In addition, the recession is causing angst and uncertainty among taxpayers who are acutely aware of the dire economy. This sentiment leads the public to be cautious of supporting increases in local property taxes (Dornfest, 2003). In addition, increased academic requirements instituted by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), federal legislation enacted during the George W. Bush administration, followed by additional mandates from the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative, federal legislation enacted during the Barack Obama administration, will add to the financial stress that school districts are facing.

> A number of states initiated cost studies to identify the monetary resources needed to meet NCLB requirements, and these studies indicated that there are new and substantial costs associated with NCLB; the costs are greater at the district level than at the state level; and implementing the requirements will cost states and districts more than the increase they received in federal funds (Sunderman & Orfield, 2006, para. 35).

Additionally, Cooper states in reference to the RTTT initiative, "Most schools, however, will receive far less money as the state implements major curriculum changes and overhauls the way students and teachers are evaluated" (Cooper, 2010, para. 4).

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the use of social media by school districts to prepare and communicate the annual school district budget impacts the passage or failure of that budget. A study of the social media phenomenon through a qualitative research methodology was conducted. The implementation of social media as an innovative and

contemporary communication tool was examined through interviews with superintendents of schools and communication specialists (or those serving in the role of communication specialist) at ten public school institutions as well as with Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) personnel and personnel of state level educational agencies.

**Research Questions**

The following three research questions will guide this study:

1: How does the school district implement the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?

2: How does the school district measure the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?

3: Is there a relationship between the public school districts use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget and the passage or rejection of the budget?

This is a qualitative study of why ten different public school districts have chosen to use social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget with their respective communities. The methods of inquiry include data elicited from sixteen personal and/or telephone interviews with primary decision-makers [School Superintendents, Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) District Superintendents, and Directors of Communication] who utilize social media to communicate with, inform, and involve their respective communities relative to preparing and communicating the annual school budget. School districts were identified as users of social media by contacting BOCES District Superintendents, BOCES Communication Specialists, the New York State Council of School Superintendents, and the New York State School Boards Association.

**Definition of Terms**

Throughout this paper, several terms which may be unfamiliar to readers are used and abbreviated. Definitions are provided below to clarify for the reader the intent of the researcher when the terms or abbreviations are used in context.

*Board of Cooperative Educational Services*- BOCES services are designed to be a cost-effective way for school districts to perform operational, management, and other shared educational functions. If these services are performed within statutory and State Education Department guidelines, most are 'aidable'. That is, the district is eligible to receive BOCES aid over and above other forms of general state aid.

*Communication Specialist*- A school or Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) employee who plans and conducts various types of communications programs designed to create and maintain favorable public relations for schools, both internally and for the community at large. Plans, designs, implements, and maintains specific types of communication based upon school strategies and objectives.

*Facebook* - The most popular social networking site. Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, the site is free and derives revenues from advertisements. Using the search facilities, members can locate other Facebook members and 'friend' them by sending them an invitation, or they can invite people to join Facebook. Facebook offers instant messaging and photo sharing, and Facebook's e-mail is the only messaging system many ever use. The 'Wall' is an area of a member's Facebook page that others post messages to, and third-party applications support photos and videos (PCMag.com, 2010, para. 1).

*Friendster* - The first social networking site. Launched in 2002 by Jonathan Abrams,

members are typically teenagers or young adults in their 20s, depending on the country in which they live (PCMag.com, 2010, para. 1). It is the most popular social network site in Asia (Shih, 2009, p. 216).

*Generation Y*- See Net Generation

*Going Viral*- A type of online marketing that affects customers with an advertising message which passes from one customer to the next (2009, p. 99).

*Google*- The largest Web search engine and one of the most influential companies in the online world. In addition to searches, Google offers a large variety of Web-based software for individuals and companies that range from office applications to multimedia to communications and social networking. Google was founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin, two Stanford University students. (PCMag.com, 2010).

*LinkedIn*- A business-oriented social networking site that enables users to connect with colleagues, look for a job or business relationships and get answers to industry questions. LinkedIn users invite people they know and trust to become "linked in" to them, and the business connections of invited users are in turn linked. Officially launched on May 5, 2003, there are now more than 35 million members in 200 countries (PCMag.com, 2010).

*Millennial Generation* - See Net Generation

*MySpace* - A major social network site on the Web, especially for teenagers and young adults. MySpace makes it easy for users to create a personal profile page, which can be enhanced and turned into a multimedia Web page. MySpace users invite "friends" who can create their own MySpace pages, providing a chain of friends that results in the largest group of linked people on the Internet (PCMag.com,

2010).

*Net Generation-* The Net Generation was "born between 1977 and 1996 inclusive. This

generation is larger than the baby boom generation" (Tapscott and Williams,

2008, p. 46). For the purpose of this study, the Net Generation, the Millennial

Generation and Generation Y will be synonymous with one another (Qualman,

2009). The commonality of all three Generations results from the fact that they

grew up during the 1980s and are largely the parents of today's elementary

students. This generation also grew up not knowing what it is like to live without

the Internet. They are accustomed to communicating in bits of information on

Twitter and interact collaboratively on Facebook.

*New Media -* The different forms of communicating in the digital world, which includes

publishing on CD-ROM, DVD and, most significantly, the Internet. It implies the

use of desktop and portable computers as well as wireless, handheld devices.

Every company in the computer industry is involved with new media in some

manner (PCMag.com, 2010).

*New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) -* Professional

organization comprised of Superintendents of Schools and Assistant

Superintendents of Schools.

*New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) -* Professional organization

comprised of New York State school board members.

*No Child Left Behind-* No Child Left Behind, commonly known as NCLB, is the US

education act which was passed in 2002. Under the act, an additional $4 billion

per year is made available to support initiatives in schools. Programs funded

under NCLB include mandatory state-wide testing from grades 3 - 8 in math and

reading, and Reading First, an early literacy initiative.  This act was passed under

the George W. Bush presidential administration.

*Race to the Top*- A 4.35 billion dollar United States Education Department program

designed to spur reforms in state and local district K-12 education.  It is funded as

part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and was announced

by President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2009.

*Social Media*- The online form of communicating, which includes blogs, micro blogs

such as Twitter, social networking sites such as Facebook and podcasts

(PCMag.com, 2010).  Social media allows people to share information, thoughts,

ideas, opinions, and knowledge in an interactive, two-way manner (Merante,

2007).  Social media can be characterized as: "online applications, platforms, and

media which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and the sharing of

content" (Universal Maccann International, 2008, p.10).  Social media allows for

both public and semi-public interaction between individuals to "view and traverse

their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd &

Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

*Tagged*- Refers to text file that contains identification fields (the tags) embedded within

the words, sentences and paragraphs.  The tags are also text, but are contained

within unique start and end symbols; typically the less-than and greater-than

characters (< and >), although other symbols have been used (PCMag.com, 2010).

Tagged is a newer network site meant for teens (Shih, 2009, p. 217).

*Transparency* - The free flow of information within an organization and between the

organization and its many stakeholders, including the public (Bennis, Goleman,

O'Toole, 2008, p.3).

*Twitter-* A very popular instant messaging system that allows a person to send brief text

messages up to 140 characters in length to a list of followers.  Launched in 2006,

Twitter was designed as a social network to keep friends and colleagues informed

throughout the day.  However, it became widely used for commercial and political

purposes to keep customers, constituents and fans up-to-date as well as to solicit

feedback (PCMag.com, 2010).

*World Wide Web* (www) **-** An Internet-based system that enables an individual or a

company to publish itself to the entire world.  The major service on the Internet,

the World Wide Web is the world's largest online shopping mall and the world's

largest source of information, news and commentary.  The "Web" is made up of

"Web servers," which are computers that store and disseminate "Web pages" to

anyone with an Internet connection (PCMag.com, 2010).

*YouTube* - A popular video sharing Web site that allows people to upload short videos for

private or public viewing.  YouTube is another Internet phenomenon with

meteoric growth like Amazon.com, Yahoo, Google, MySpace and Facebook.

YouTube provides a venue for sharing videos among friends and family as well as

a showcase for new and experienced videographers (PCMag.com, 2010).

*Tube Mogul* **-** Videos are streamed to users from the YouTube site (www.youtube.com)

or via blogs and other Web sites.  YouTube provides code that can be embedded

in any Web site page to view a specific video (PCMag.com, 2010).

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The research that is available relative to social media and school district budgets, as of

the time that this research was conducted, is limited.  Even by soliciting the assistance of two

professional Library Media Specialists to conduct their own independent searches for data

related to this topic resulted in limited useful research information. However, a significant amount of data exists on the topics of social media and business, social media and politics, and social media and demographics. The literature review for this paper focuses on these areas as well as an investigation into the relationship between social media and school governance. It is intentional that, other than the relationship between social media and demographics, all other areas of the literature review (business and politics) involve the practices, strategies, and even tactics implemented by businesses and politics in order to inform, engage, and/or influence others through the use of social media. Therefore, one of the primary limitations of this study is the lack of academic research regarding social media and its relationship to school district budgets.

This study is meant to be rich and deep in information, hence it is a qualitative research paper. Even though sixteen different individuals were interviewed representing ten different school districts, the sample is still relatively small. This is one of the limitations of qualitative research. Therefore, the reader must draw his or her own parallels to the relationship of the findings and their implications for other school districts.

The researcher will attempt to be complete, thorough, fair, and accurate in reporting the findings. However, there is always a level of subjectivity relative to what should be included in the study and what should not be included. This is also a limitation as not every piece of data could possibly be included.

Another limitation of the study results from the fact that the researcher is a superintendent of schools, a baby boomer, and a relatively low level user of personal and professional social media. The researcher's technological learning curve for this study is steep. Therefore, the researcher is limited in his technical knowledge in social media technology as well as in its applications for informing, engaging, and involving people in two-way, interactive

communication via social media.  In addition, this researcher is not a communication specialist.

Therefore, the skills associated with engaging, involving, and communicating the annual budget

to the public has been developed based upon years of experience and consulting with

communication experts, not through formal communication education or training.

The study is also delimited in that it focused on only ten different school districts and

sixteen superintendents, district superintendents, and/or communications specialists.  The sample

size is relatively small, and thus the findings cannot be generalized to larger groups of school

districts.  The districts in this study range from high need, rural and urban school districts to low

need, suburban school districts.  All of the respondents indicated that wealth of the district was

not a determining factor in district access to social media.  However, the larger, wealthier,

suburban schools may have a different vantage point when it comes to understanding the value

of utilizing "cutting edge technology".  Additionally, these different communities may place

varying values and a different level of emphasis on the use of social media by the school district.

**Significance of Study**

Today's pressing social, educational, and economic issues need to be expertly and

effectively communicated with the public of each respective school district in New York State in

order for taxpayers to better understand the problems, concerns, and challenges of funding public

education.  "Our public schools deal with the two things people care most about; their children

and their money.  So it's no surprise that schools are under the public microscope… in ways

almost no other organization can imagine" (Bush-Suflita, 2010, p. 3).  The impact that the school

budget has on student learning needs to be keenly addressed particularly as the district

communicates its annual budget with the public.  Traditional means of school generated

communication such as newsletters, budget presentations, information in student backpacks,

flyers, and budget hearings have their place, but are one directional and of limited effectiveness

(Stein, Rogan & Partners, 2008).  School districts must recognize and utilize the emerging communication solutions that are available to them, such as social media.  Social media provides new tools for collaboration, communication, and interaction.  It changes norms, practices and processes and reaps the rewards (McAfee, 2009).  The years of experience in the use of social media as a communication and marketing strategy by business and politics should serve as examples and prototypes from which school districts can learn.

Schools have a need and obligation to connect in a meaningful way with their communities in order to present and communicate budgets during increasingly challenging economic and political times (Farrar, 2008).  "Social media provides a strategic solution that allows districts to connect all of their constituents; that can not only grow with districts, but it can further that growth and jump-start progress; that truly bridges the digital divide" (Stein, et al., 2008, p. 7).

It is clear that in order for local school districts to gain public trust, a close, open, more candid, interactive and transparent relationship must be established (Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, 2008).  Old and tried communication efforts have typically failed to create this kind of relationship.  The traditional school district budget forums, budget presentations, and budget newsletters, while serving a useful purpose in the past, are one directional and lack an interactive component (Farrar, 2008).  Typically, unless a major issue arises in a school district, the forums and presentations attract remarkably few people (McCormack, 2010).  Even budget development meetings are sparsely attended.  Competition for scarce resources will be fierce in the near and foreseeable future.  It is the property tax that funds the local share of public school education.  The property tax is often regarded as the "most hated" tax (Brunori, 2003).

Social media, as it relates to the world of business and the world of politics, is rich in peer reviewed, scholarly research.  The data is abundant relative to both business and politics and

clearly indicates that the use of social media is integral to their existence. In other words, neither business nor politics would exist in their current state absent social media communication solutions. These entities are highly dependent on how and when they use social media (Marken, 2009).

However, the same is not true for education. School districts rely much more on "newsletters, flyers, and town halls" in order to communicate with their public (Stein, et. al., 2008, p. 5). This limits their reach to specific and constrained geographic and demographic boundaries. The difference between the implementation and use of social media in business and politics and that in the field of education is striking. The field of education has yet to embrace social media and, in fact, remains reluctant to implement social media even when it recognizes the potential benefits of its use to connect to the community (Stein, et. al., 2008). A reticence to embrace social media exists among school districts that business and politics resolved years ago.

Evidence of the impact that social media has on the budget development and communication process for school budget votes, is limited. In addition, few school districts have implemented social media for the purpose of developing and communicating the annual school district budget. Therefore, this research draws data from sources that use social media for the purpose of communicating with, informing and actively engaging people. In this case, business and politics are the primary sources demonstrating the influence of social media for the purposes stated.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Public school districts are currently operating in a world that is undergoing a communication transformation driven by a new and powerful technology medium called social media. Social media has swept the globe at lightning speed and is rapidly being adopted in most developed or developing countries (Neilsen Wire, 2010). While the Net Generation, those who were born in 1977 or later, is an early adopter of social media, other generations are not far behind. Every age group identified by the Pew Internet and American Life Project is quickly expanding their use of this new and user-friendly technology (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2010).

> Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google continue to break traditional geographic and demographic barriers. This rapid growth in social media provides both challenges and opportunities for communicators. It can extend the classic one-way 'push' model that many school systems are comfortable with into more of an online dialog (Dahlkempter & Franke, 2010, p. 2).

The challenge for school systems is to create and maintain this new, less formal, two-way, interactive relationship with parents and community.

The arrival of social media in our school districts coincides with unprecedented economic challenges. The economic downturn of our country and state is creating serious financial dilemmas for many American citizens, businesses and companies. Schools are also feeling the devastating effects of our national and state recession. State aid to school districts is no longer a reliable source of increasing revenue as New York State schools have realized a decrease in aid to education for three consecutive years, 2010 through 2012 (Golas & Gwyer, 2010). Federal stimulus dollars have expired after two consecutive years of serving as a 'bailout' for the states (2010). New York State, along with 25 other states, has embarked upon a systemic overhaul of

its public education system called Race to the Top (RTTT).  This massive federal education reform initiative funnels 696 million dollars to New York State (Golas & Gwyer, 2010).  As large as this monetary value may appear, it is not enough to fund full implementation of RTTT by local school districts.  Therefore, it is anticipated that school districts will need to generate local dollars in order to fully fund RTTT mandates (Sunderman & Orfield, 2006, para. 35).

Unemployment rates in the United States and New York State are 8.8 percent (Hall, 2010,) and the underemployment rate is almost eighteen percent according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.  The local taxpayers and voters are financially stressed.  Education is recognized as a way for America to recover from its seemingly steadfast recession.  However, the local taxpayer is unlikely to permit school districts to raise taxes even as the expense of operating schools is increasing significantly.  State and local school budgets are experiencing dramatic increases in mandated contributions to the Teachers Retirement System (New York State Teachers Retirement System, 2010), the Employee Retirement System (New York State Employee Retirement System, 2010), and health insurance (Skowronski, 2010), not to mention increases in salaries.  In addition, in New York State, it is anticipated that a tax cap may be implemented for all local governments, including public schools, and reductions in future state aid to education will continue (New York State Association of School Business Officials, 2010). In a recent presentation to school board members and district level administrators, Joe Natale, Director of Advisory Solutions, New York State School Boards Association, stated:

> We are experiencing the largest state aid decrease to schools in many years.  The schools in New York State have seen a five percent decrease in state aid during 2009-2011.  This represents a decrease of over 1.1 billion dollars in state aid to public schools within this two year period (Natale, 2010, p. 9).

Peer-reviewed, scholarly research relative to the use of social media in school districts, particularly involving the development and communication of the annual district budget, is limited. Therefore, in conducting the literature review for this study, focus was directed to four different but relevant social media relationships; social media and demographics, social media and politics, social media and business, and finally social media and schools.

**Social Media and Demographics**

A new generation of parents is now enrolling their children into public schools. Seventy-four percent of all Americans who were below the age of 50 were regular users of the Internet (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009). This age group includes the Net Generation (born between 1977 and 1996) and defines the segment of the American population most likely to be parents of all school age children. Therefore, according to Pew statistics, the large majority of all parents of public school children are users of the Internet (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009). More specifically, the Net Generation comprises a majority of the parents of today's elementary students. They are also prolific users of social media. The authors of *Wikinomics* coined the term "Net Generation" and contend that this age group is creating a world that interacts with one another in a way unlike any other (Tapscott & Williams, 2008).

"They are larger than the baby boom generation and through sheer demographic muscle they will dominate the twenty-first century …internationally the Net Generation is huge, numbering over two billion people" (Tapscott & Williams, 2008, p. 47). The uniqueness of this generation is that they are the first to grow up never knowing what the world was like without the Internet and they prefer to communicate predominately and almost exclusively on social media sites (Tapscott & Williams, 2008). "Indeed, 96 percent of them [Net Generation] belong to social networks" (Childs, Gingrich, & Pillar, 2010, p. 22). Also, since they grew up with social media, they know how to interact with others and communicate collaboratively (Palfrey &

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Gasser, 2008), which may contrast with their parent's generation (Tapscott & Williams, 2008).

"This behavior is different than that of their parents, who grew up watching twenty-four hours of television a week" (Tapscott & Williams, 2008, p. 47).

The Net Generation has defined a new manner in which to communicate and a culture that goes with it. They are no longer restrained or constrained to a time or place while they communicate with one, a dozen, hundreds, or even more people within a matter of seconds (Childs, Gingrich, & Pillar, 2010). Their minds are very active as social media allows them to be connected 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Also, since these young adults are the authorities on social media they have become societal change agents as social media is dramatically altering virtually every institution in our society (Small & Vorgan, 2008). These young adults are now the experts that their parents and other older adults turn to when questions of technology and social media arise (Tapscott & Williams, 2008). Social media on the web reverses traditional roles where the young adult is now the teacher, and the parent, grandparent and other adults are the learners. The Net Generation is accustomed to searching the web for answers, information, entertainment, literature, directions, and most other things (Tapscott & Williams, 2008). They compare products and services on the web and consult with their peers before they buy products, trusting a friend's advice and comments over advertisements (Childs, Gingrich, Pillar, 2010; Shih, 2010).

**Social Media Tools of the Net Generation**

The Net Generation is adeptly attuned to social media for social, entertainment, and cultural reasons; therefore, social media will be a part of our society for a long time (Tapscott & Williams, 2008). The Net Generation has been raised in a digital world and as a result of social media options this generation is well versed in communicating in quick, short bursts (Twitter) and with two to three minute videos (YouTube). The Net Generation has spent many hours on computers and personal electronic devices. This does not necessarily mean email. Even email, while a communication staple for many, is losing popularity due to the advent of social media. Emails are one directional and not a two-way means in which to communicate and, according to the Net Generation, antiquated (Qualman, 2009). Social media, however, is all about two-way, interactive conversation (Breakenridge, 2008; Shih, 2009). This is the preference of the Net Generation and will follow them until another change occurs. They far prefer to communicate via social media.

> An Apple iTunes director was surprised when he recently hired a technician who was very much an early adopter of social media. The 22 year old had rarely, if ever, communicated with or used email. Via his iPhone he had always communicated with his friends either by instant messenger, text, phone call, or comments within Facebook. I believe that he is not alone and this is a trend we will continue to see with the next generation, commented the director (Qualman, 2009, p. 47).

Friendster, created in March of 2002, was a pioneer in online social networking (Shih, 2009) and the first social networking site to gain world wide attention and use by the Net Generation (Tapscott & Williams, 2008). Eventually, Friendster declined in popularity and was replaced by Facebook and MySpace (Shih, 2009). "Now, MySpace is taking a backseat to Facebook. MySpace is dwindling in use, becoming less popular and seems to be catering to

teens and music" according to Barbara Bradley (2010), Director of Communications and Research, New York State School Boards Association at the 2010 NYSSBA Annual Convention, held in New York City (p.3, slide 7). It is likely that yet another site will edge out Facebook at some time in the future. However, while sites may change due to competition or advanced technological options, it is predictable that, regardless of the operating vehicle, social media will continue to be with us for decades to come (Tapscott & Williams, 2008). Currently, the most popular social networks of the Net Generation are Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and LinkedIn. They instant message frequently and with incredible quickness and dexterity (Tapscott & Williams, 2008).

The Net Generation exemplifies traditional research that indicates that "sixty percent of learning is visual" (Childs, et al., 2010, p. 22). "For most individuals and businesses, it is the online video opportunities that track the most interest and the most attention because the ability to attract and identify eyeballs is huge" (Marken, 2009, p. 11). "Online viewing is changing one of the entertainment/marketing communities most traditional (and profitable) means of reaching the market" (Marken, 2009, p. 11). Marken (2009) goes on to say that social media in the form of online video will "quickly eliminate conventional TV as rapidly as they killed print media. When given the choice between video and text, the eye quickly moves to video" (p. 11). The benefits of short video telecasts are profound, hence the remarkable popularity of social media sites like YouTube. Theses video sites serve as marketing, presentation, and learning tools for companies and institutions like schools.

In order to live in this digital environment it is understood that strategies and tactics cannot be perfected. Social media creates an environment for the Net Generation that makes their very life dynamic, fluid, and always changing. There is little stability which is fine with this generation of users. The Net Generation is ever more willing than any other generation to

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listen, watch, record, share, and distribute their experiences and interests and then give them to their friends, parents, relatives, and community members for full disclosure. They are willing to live both their professional and personal lives in public (Cooke & Buckley, 2007). They use social media profusely, liberally, and frequently. Google's co-founder, Sergey Brin stated (as cited in Tapscott & Williams, 2008, p. 274) that websites that serve the needs of social media "represent a whole new ecosystem on the internet".

The Net Generation accepts uncertainty and ambiguity but at the same time gives high priority to having their social needs met within their work environment. A Harvard Business Review study recently revealed that "among high potential young leaders, individual responsibility, social and enjoyable colleagues, and a congenial workplace are the most important factors impacting loyalty to employers" (Leader-Chivee, Hamilton, & Cowan, 2008, p. 41). They want to be connected to one another as well as to the business. Workplace satisfaction is often times dependent upon the availability of a strong, collegial social environment. Social networking provides job satisfaction for the Net Generation. Socially satisfied workers are more productive and more motivated to work hard and smart. Social networks help to satisfy this need in the business world (Leader-Chivee, et. al., 2008).

Karen Kleinz, associate director of the National School Public Relations Association, believes that school districts should make policies and decisions to embrace technology and social media as a means in which to communicate with their respective constituencies. Kleinz states (as cited in Melton, 2010, p.4), "This generation of parents and those coming behind them – this is how they communicate. Districts need to learn how to use social networking effectively now". Eric Jacobson public information coordinator with Education Service District 112, Washington, states (as cited in Melton, 2010, p.4), "A lot of school districts use their Web sites to give good information to the community, but a lot of people don't check the Web site or don't

know how to find what they're looking for. With Facebook and Twitter, you have the ability to link to the Web site and give people a quick way to access information". The strategy is to use social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook to capture the interest and attention of the viewer and drive them back to the website. The internet increasingly provides opportunities for school districts to reach not only its parents but the public as well according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2009). "The importance of social media lays in the interaction between consumers and the community and in the facilitation of asynchronous, immediate, interactive, low-cost communications" (Miller, Fabian, & Lin, 2009, p. 306).

**Social Media and Politics**

Users of social media, and particularly the Net Generation, have also made a significant contribution to our nation and the world through their commitment and dedication to local, regional and national politics. Never before in the history of our country has the youth of America acted in such a coordinated, effective, and powerful fashion as during the 2008 Obama-McCain Presidential election (Gagnier, 2008). Levy (2008) quotes, "… coffee shops, university libraries, and local campaign headquarters across the nation, a movement is taking place, tearing the veil between politics and young American voters. It is called 'New Media' and it is changing the political landscape for good (p. 14).

Young voters continued to engage heavily in the political debate on social networking sites in 2008. The youth of America convincingly assisted in influencing the outcome of the 2008 presidential election. In 2008, approximately 22.4 million Americans between the ages of 18-29 voted in the presidential election. This was an increase of one million voters as compared to the same age group voter participation in 2004 (+2 percent) and an increase of 6.5 million (+11 percent) compared to the 2000 presidential election. At the same time that the youth participation in voting was increasing the total of all other age groups decreased by 2 percent

since 2000 (Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009). The combination of these two factors, youth voters increasing while all other voter participation decreased, made the youth participation even more of a factor in the outcome of the Obama – McCain election.

Youth found a new way to communicate effectively and expediently during the 2008 presidential election, and they did not have to leave their dorm rooms or homes to do it. Social media has liberated and empowered youth to make their voices heard in a dynamic and meaningful manner (Smith, 2010, para. 2). The old paradigm of political involvement, particularly among youth, changed dramatically during the Obama-McCain presidential election and has created a new and distinctively powerful dimension in digital communication.

Social media was the vehicle that the Net Generation used to become integrally involved in this presidential political campaign. The political process now, and well into the foreseeable future, will include Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, and other means of social media (Israel, 2009). "Built into these applications is an awareness of group activity and networked communications" (Levy, 2008, p.14). "That's how you organize people for politics, advocacy groups, or anything where you want to build groups of people and create community awareness" (Levy, 2008, p. 15). Groups of people, through technology, can grow rapidly and become thousands of people in short order, depending on how attractive and captivating the issue is (Israel, 2009). During the Obama-McCain election young voter participation, the Net Generation, increased heavily (Smith, 2010). Brian Solis of TechCrunch, referred to this phenomenon as the "staggering galvanization of a younger generation of first-time voters who truly made an impact and a difference" (Solis, 2008, para. 5).

William Laurent, a renowned independent consultant in data, governance, and information technology strategy, agrees with Solis and Levy. He states:

Social networking is making democracy even more democratic. Elected officials who

ignore the grassroots momentum of social networking and refuse to harness its potential

may not only govern worse, they may find themselves out of office. In the past few

years, we have witnessed Web-enabled social networking reshape the way politicians

manage and run their campaigns (Laurent, 2009, p. 40).

Barack Obama embraced social media during his presidential campaign. Wallsten (2009) found

that political videos, going viral, and bloggers played a crucial role in the Obama campaign.

"Going viral means a type of marketing that affects customers with an advertising message

which passes from one customer to the next like a rampant flu virus" (Palka,et al, 2009, p. 1).

According to Eric Qualman (2009), Obama understood that social media had widespread

appeal to the youth of America. He also realized that the costs associated with this

communication medium were far less than television, radio, newspaper, or any other effective

method of communication. Ultimately, by the time he was elected, Obama had 5.1 million

"friends" as followers on his Facebook page compared to less than 1 million friends on

McCain's Facebook page (Qualman, 2009). Social media blogs were also strongly identifying

Obama over McCain during the election with 500 million blog postings mentioning Obama and

150 million mentioning McCain ("Web 2.0 and the Internet Delivered the Vote for Obama.",

2008).

Another significant difference between the Obama and the McCain campaigns in the

2008 election was the use of YouTube as a social media video tool. As the race approached

November, the discrepancy in the number of times people looked at YouTube sites in reference

to the two candidates became increasingly pronounced. The YouTube *BarackObamadotcom*

channel had over 20 million views compared to the *JohnMcCaindotcom* channel with just over 2

million views (Qualman, 2009). One video, *I Have a Crush on Barack Obama,* received 11.5

million views prior to the 2008 election alone (Qualman, 2009). McCain's campaign targeted an older audience and did not use social media sites extensively as they chose a more traditional style and strategy to run their race (Needle, 2008). Arianna Huffington (2008), of the Huffington Post Web site stated, "The McCain Campaign wasn't nearly as proficient or ambitious in tapping social networks like Facebook and other services" (as cited by Needle , 2008, para. 8). San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newson (2008) feels that politicians in general are behind the times in understanding Web 2.0 services and new media. He stated:

> Last year I ran for re-election and looked out at this big rally, and said to someone, 'Who are these people?' and was told 'Those are your friends on Facebook' and I said, 'What's that?' … Now I'm obsessed with Facebook (as cited by Needle, 2008, para. 12).

The Barack Obama campaign was able to develop engaging relationships through social media. Video-streaming played a major role in this effort (Qualman, 2009). The Obama campaign staffers were successful in convincing people to watch video on YouTube and in attracting media coverage. "Obama campaign-related videos garnered 14.5 million hours of viewing on You-Tube, according to Democratic political consultant Joe Trippi. He estimates that amount of time would have cost $47 million to buy on TV or about half the amount that the McCain campaign received in public financing" (Needle, 2008, para. 4). Interestingly, to buy TV time means to interrupt games or shows that people are already watching, creating a repeated annoyance and disruption. Conversely, the internet requires people to self-select in order to watch You-Tube. Therefore, the viewer is choosing to watch the political video as opposed to having to watch the TV 'commercial'. Furthermore, the "online political videos posted on the internet by members of the public and candidates for office can gain widespread popularity when they are passed from person to person via email, instant messages, and media sharing websites" (Wallsten, 2009, p. 41).

Yet another strategy that the Obama campaign was able to capitalize on was the use of quick, creative, original video footage of various events that people were eager to see but was not available on the national television networks (Carr & Stelter, 2008). For example, video footage titled *Four Days in Denver* was produced and delivered via the social media site YouTube. It was created with low-cost video equipment, taped by Obama staffers, and instantaneously broadcast on the web. The audience related to the reality and authenticity of the video footage and logged on for more. The video included coverage of the candidate developing his acceptance speech with staffers and family watching in the background. "We're constantly experimenting with videos, said Joe Rospars, Mr. Obama's new media director. In fact, the most popular videos on BarackObama.com were not TV ads; but biographical and web-only spots" (Carr & Stelter, 2008, p. 2).

Andrew Heyward, a former president of CBS News who consults for the Monitor Group commented, "The idea that something can be seen more online than on TV, and arguably have more influence that way, is a tipping point" (as cited in Carr & Stelter, 2008, p. 2). Heyward was referring to NBC's Saturday Night Live impersonation of Sarah Palin by Tina Fey, which was viewed over 50 million times. YouTube videos mentioning either Obama or McCain have been viewed 2.3 billion times, according to the measurement firm Tube Mogul (2008).

> Tube Mogul allows users to track any video they want and provides daily data on the number of times a video was viewed, the number of comments the video received, the number of ratings that were given and the overall ratings score. As such, Tube Mogul is an excellent resource for scholars interested in studying the rise, spread and impact of online political videos (Wallsten, 2009, p. 49).

Pew Research Center found that 39 percent of registered voters had watched campaign videos online (Pew Internet and American Life Project - Who's Online, 2011). According to Brian Solis of TechCrunch:

Online tools such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter contributed to the netting of record breaking campaign funding. The Obama campaign outspent McCain nearly three-to-one, which was testament to the capabilities of technology and the corresponding impact of sociology let loose on the Web. The Obama campaign leveraged multiple technology platforms and social immersion strategies to engage constituents directly, raising an astounding $660 million in campaign contributions (Solis, 2008, para. 4).

Solis (2008) also discovered that Obama's use of social media was more than pushing information and messages out to the public. Social media was used to actively listen to both his supporters and opponents who allowed his campaign to develop strategies and plans to address his adversaries. Tools such as Facebook provided the opportunity to create and develop themes based upon how all people were thinking. "For the first time, the U.S. President can cultivate grassroots communities directly where people create, discover, and share information online" (Solis, 2008, para. 21).

The Net Generation has effectively utilized a means of communication that is foreign to many older adults (Tapscott & Williams, 2008). Beyond the Net Generation, others were also using social media during the election of 2008.

Three-quarters of Internet users went online during the 2008 election to take part in, or to get news and information about the 2008 campaign. This represents 55% of the entire adult population, and marks the first time the Pew Internet and American Life Project have found that more than half the voting age population used the Internet to connect to the political process during an election cycle (Smith, 2009, para. 1).

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Compared to other media options, the internet has become a predominate means of political information and communication. Among the entire population, the internet has reached the distribution numbers of the newspaper industry for election news (Smith, 2009). Television remains the primary means in which election information is received but social media is gaining ground (Smith, 2009).

The use of social media impacted voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election resulting in the highest voter turnout since 1908 and the very highest youth participation ever (Qualman, 2009). Social media engages the voter in two-way involvement in all phases and aspects of the election campaign. Free social media tools provide timely information, active participation, and are cost effective. Politicians now recognize the potential influence of social media, if utilized properly, and its implications for informing and educating people (Small & Vorgan, 2008, p. 24). Future political elections will be technology rich and will focus on those who can communicate with social media (Israel, 2009, p. 206).

> Just like businesses, politicians and governments need to keep up with advancements in social media; otherwise they will be left behind. Successfully leveraging social media in politics pays big dividends – we need only look at Obama's 2008 victory. Obama would not be president without the Internet (Qualman, 2009, p. 87).

The election of the first African American to the position of President of the United States would not have happened without the use of social media (Qualman, 2009) and largely the result of a young generation of Americans using social media skillfully and effectively (Qualman, 2009). However, as remarkable as this United States Presidential election of 2008 was, it is apparent that the political activism that is occurring in the Middle East and other Arab countries is equally profound and nation-changing.

In Egypt a young generation of digitally savvy activists has successfully ousted a tyrannical dictator during the early part of 2011. Their political activism was facilitated by their use of social media. "In less than two months, this generation has already wrought political change on a scale not seen since the end of the Cold War" (Ghosh, 2011a, p.34). According to Hassan Nafaa, a political science professor at Cairo University, "These young people have done more in three weeks than their parents did in 30 years. They are the Internet generation… or the Facebook Generation… or call them the Miracle Generation" (as cited in Ghosh, 2011a, p. 34).

In truth, this generation for some time was also referred to as the lost generation by their elders. They were not thought to be politically astute or active. This young Arab generation fully realized their limited economic and political prospects, but was thought to lack political motivation and will to press for change against their dictatorships that were backed by powerful armies (Ghosh, 2011a). The youth of Egypt organized, communicated, rebelled and ultimately protested largely through their astute use of social media, typically Twitter and Facebook. For example, in one case in Egypt, a young businessman named Khaled Said was beaten to death by the Egyptian army for no apparent reason, then a Facebook page entitled, 'We are all Khaled Said' was created (Ghosh, 2011a). This served as the theme for much of the Egyptian revolution. The creator of the Facebook page was Wael Ghonim, the Google employee who became the driving force behind the revolution (Ghosh, 2011a). Ghonim recently stated (as cited in Ghosh, 2011a) that the Egyptian revolution would not have occurred without Facebook. Now, "Ahmed Khalil, scion of a wealthy Egyptian business family…, is part of the 'Revolution Friends' Facebook group that is exploring ways to channel the revolutions momentum into a civic awareness campaign" (p.37).

In Egypt, the activists used social media:

…they put up Facebook accounts and posted on Twitter.  Nour (activist) spoke out

against the regime on YouTube video.  Others exhausted their thumbs sending out text

messages.  'Tell your friends.  Look what is happening in Tunisia.  This is how people

change a country' (Ghosh, 2011b, p. 39).

Over 10,000 protesters attended the now famous march in Tahrir Square which,

ultimately, helped topple the government (Ghosh, 2011b).  Social media has been used by young

tech-savvy rebels and has fueled uprisings that are now taking place in Algeria, Libya, Morocco,

Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain to name a few (Ghosh, 2011b).

**Social Media and Business**

Social media has required the world of business to make dramatic and immediate change.

"By inventing more casual modes of interaction and thereby making possible new categories of

lower-commitment relationships, social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn

are fundamentally changing how we live, work, and relate to one another as human beings"

(Shih, 2009, p. 43).  The business world recognized early in the digital era, soon after Facebook

was created in 2004, that to maintain or grow market value means to adopt and adapt social

media strategies of communication.  *Socialnomics*, provides multiple case studies of businesses

and companies that have recognized this phenomenon and consequently embraced it as a means

of communicating with and influencing existing and potential customers and clientele (Qualman,

2009).  Qualman (2009) also illustrates businesses and companies that have neglected, or

intentionally decided not to adopt social media.  A primary theme of this literature is that we no

longer must find many of our needs; they are now finding us.

Businesses and companies all over the world have turned to social media for various

solutions to corporate problems and to develop greater capacity and productivity (Israel, 2009).

These companies have found that social networking benefits contribute to improved internal and

external communication and employee satisfaction.  In addition, these companies have found that social networking improves the mentor/mentee relationship, creates knowledge leaders, improves alumni connections, and reduces the employee turnover rate (Leader-Chivee, et. al. 2008).  At Best Buy, the use of social networking reduced the employee turnover rate from sixty percent to eight and a half percent since the advent of an online workforce community (Leader-Chivee, et. al. 2008).

Childs, Gingrich, and Pillar (2010) continue this conversation in their article, *Gen Y Has Arrived*, by stating, "Social Networking tools are how they communicate and connect, and they are how our government organizations need to recruit and hire. … the federal government still uses multi-page narrative for 20-plus page questionnaires" (p. 23).  The authors advise the federal government to reach out and subscribe to social networks to solve their problems of hiring over 600,000 workers in the next three years to help "repair the financial sector, fight two wars, address climate change, and fill positions left by baby boomer retirements" (p. 23).

In the study, *Networking the Ways to Success,* Childs, Gingrich, and Pillar (2010) review the many advantages and some of the disadvantages and concerns that social media bring to corporate America.  Their contention about social media is not a matter of whether it should be embraced but rather a matter that a shift to social media in the corporate world is inevitable. They state, "While many employers view social networking as a threat to productivity and block access to popular sites, some visionaries have figured out how to leverage powerful social media tools and online communities for efficiencies and competitive advantage" (Childs, Gingrich, Pillar, 2010, p. 41).  "Of course, we are still in the early days of social network marketing.  There are tremendous opportunities and possibilities but also serious challenges and limitations" (Shih, 2009, p. 103).  The following is only one of many examples of how business has addressed these

challenges and capitalized on social media sites in order to strengthen their company and in many cases generate greater profit margins.

Starbucks created the web-based "My Starbucks Idea".  The idea is for users to submit their suggestions on how Starbucks can improve.  The customer's ideas are then posted on social media sites in order for Starbuck consumers to vote on them.  Next, Starbucks created an "Ideas in Action" social media campaign to demonstrate that the company was implementing some of the ideas.  This empowers Starbucks already web-savvy customers, and adds a personal touch and customer ownership feel to the business (Balwani, 2009).

The list of corporate companies that benefit from strategic use of social media sites continues with Cisco, GM, H&R Block, HP, Adobe, Best Western, HSBC, Intel, Southwest Airlines, and many more (Uhrmacher, 2008).  "It is no wonder companies of all shapes, and sizes, product/service categories, will drop an estimated $1.4 billion on social media communications this year" (Marken, 2009, p. 10).

Small business has also embraced social media as a means of communication and increasing market growth (Shih, 2009).  A recent study titled, The Small Business Report 2009, "shows that social media usage by small business owners increased from 12% to 24% in just the last year, and almost 1 out of 5 actively uses social media as part of his or her marketing strategy" (Porterfield, 2010, pg. 1).  The growth in the use of social media by small business is expected to continue in the future (Shih, 2009).

According to The CMO Survey from Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and American Marketing Association, "Within one year, social media is expected to be 10% of  all marketing budgets and 18% in 5 years" (The CMO Survey, 2010 para. 22).  The survey (2010) indicates that it is currently at 6% of all marketing budgets.  The director of the survey, Christine Moorman (as cited in Porterfield, 2010) describes:

Even though many are still experimenting and learning how best to use social media tools, these results indicate that marketers think social media marketing is here to stay and will play an increasingly important role in their work in acquiring and retaining customers in the future (pg. 4).

The 2010 Marketing Trends Survey released by Anderson Analytics and Marketing Executives Networking Group found that "72% (of the respondents) said that they work for companies that are planning social media initiatives in 2010" (Marketing Trends, 2010, para. 27).

**Informing the Public: Print Media**

One casualty of the emergence of social media has been the time honored daily and weekly newspaper (Israel, 2009). According to the Newspaper Association of America, advertising revenue for newspapers across the country declined 18.1 percent, advertising sales fell 18.4 percent, classifieds sank 30.9 percent, and online advertising dropped 3 percent during the third quarter of 2008, alone (Business Analysis and Research, 2008). The print media, at one time, was a powerful influence on virtually all aspects of life in the local community, city, state and country. "In 2008, it was estimated that traditional newspapers would see a drop of 23.4 percent in revenues. The newspaper industry's unwillingness or inability to diversify its revenue base since the start of this century has hitched it to the fates of the retailers, car dealers, real estate brokers and employers who are struggling to keep their heads above water in the worst business conditions since the Depression" (Mutter, 2008, para. 22). Among the United States metropolitan daily newspapers to shut their doors and close since 2007 include, The Tucson Citizen, Rocky Mountain News, Baltimore Examiner, Kentucky Post, Cincinnati Post, King Count Journal, Union City Register-Tribune, Albuquerque Tribune, and others (Business Analysis and Research, October 2008). "In essence, the traditional news business model [is] broken" (Israel, 2009, p. 186).

**Informing the Public: Audiovisual Media**

Television and radio have also been dramatically impacted by social media. Stevens describes the challenge of this medium,

The first film was a recording of theater production, and film isn't theater. The first TV production was a radio program, and we know that television isn't radio. But when the Web came along, newspapers thought it was a place to put text and still photos; radio news thought it was a place to put audio files (and text scripts of audio files), and television news treated it as a place to put videos (and text scripts of video stories). The Web is its own medium (Stevens, 2006, p. 66).

The web has made traditional forms of communication much different. This medium has been experimenting with ways to maintain their economic and social standing ever since the news became reported by anyone with an electronic device; typically a computer or the cell phone (Israel, 2009). "The modern means in which newspapers, TV, and radio can operate with success are as follows: solutions-oriented stories, real time information, participatory communication, personalization of current events, and multi-media stories" (Stevens, 2006, p. 66).

One of the most notable examples of how social media has changed the way in which people are informed took place on January 15, 2009, when US Airways Flight 1549 conducted an emergency landing in the Hudson River.

An observer of the incident, Janis Krums took out his iPhone and captured one of the year's most memorable photos. He used TwitPic, a new Twitter to integrate a photo with his Tweet. Never intending to become the most famous citizen journalist of modern times, Krums posted, 'There's a plane on the Hudson. I'm on a ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy'. Without Krums, Twitter, and Twitpic, Janis Krum would have an

interesting story to tell his friends.  Instead the world got to see what he saw, and the

press got to see the value of the new breed of citizen journalism and their network of

choice" (Israel, 2009, p. 201).

 Big media learned that to survive they must now pay attention to another way in which to report.

**Marketing with Social Media**

Another influence affecting all businesses is the downturn in the local, national and

global economies.  The global recession and negative economy enhances social media as a viable

and cost-effective marketing and communication option for businesses.  "As we battle a global

recession, corporations are looking for new ways to sell their products and engage their

consumers.  Many have turned to the Internet, with social media in particular, to market their

goods" (Balwani, 2009, para. 1).  "This year, nearly 60% of marketers cut their marketing

budgets in response to the recession, according to B to B's 2010 Outlook: Marketing Priorities

and Plans survey" (Maddox, 2009, p. 20).  In response to the recession, businesses are

substantially increasing online marketing strategies that cost less and are more cost effective than

traditional marketing strategies (Shih, 2009, p. 208).  "…social networking further democratizes

who can start and run a business" (p. 208).

Another example of a company using social media as a viable marketing strategy is

ProForma.  "ProForma is now spending a 'couple of million' dollars to create a custom software

system for its database marketing efforts.  It is also increasing its online marketing, including

search engine marketing, microsites, and social media" according to marketing manager at

ProForma, Melissa Banning (as cited in Maddox, 2009, p. 20).  Marcy Shinder (as cited in

Maddox, 2009), VP-brand management at American Express OPEN, and B to B's top Marketer

of the Year, agreed that social media is the wave of the future, "Spending time on Twitter … was

my personal secret weapon in 2009."  She now is an avid user of Facebook (p. 20).

JoAnn Atkin defines "new media", another term for social media, in her article, Lost in Translation: New Media/Old School Lesson, to include three characteristics; interactive, digital in format, and distribution (Atkin, 2009, p. 1). The primary differences, however, from other forms of media schemes, are two way interactive communications. This is realized in all different aspects of "new media" to include online games, chat rooms, and even online communities. Within the past few years it would be a rare individual, business, or other endeavor that has not been influenced by social media (Atkin, 2009). Cooke and Buckley (2007) agree as they state, "We are currently undergoing a new media revolution. It is based around social computing" (p. 273). They go on to say, "a whole new generation of consumers for whom online is becoming the lead medium and convergence is increasingly the norm" (Cooke and Buckley, 2007, p. 273).

Social media has a profound impact on how we conduct our business lives (Shih, 2009, p. 203). Communication is no longer limited to the office. With the advent of the cell phone, and its many applications, people conduct business communication virtually anywhere (Israel, 2009, p. 181). "Even if they aren't physically in the office, thanks to advances in wireless technology, today's workforce can still be productive by 'plugging in' to the day's business activities happening at the office (or around the world) via cell phones" (Atkin, 2009, p. 3).

Social media has created a business environment that is both exciting and dangerous (Israel, 2009). A true paradigm shift has occurred. "Paradigms are mental models that constrain our thinking and are often based on assumptions so strong that we don't notice them. New paradigms cause disruption and uncertainty, even calamity, and are nearly always received with coolness, hostility, or worse" (Tapscott & Williams, 2008, p. 285).

Much like the decline of the print industry (Israel, 2009) other firms have been slow to embrace social media as an inevitable yet powerful addition to their business plan. These slow

adopters underestimate the impact of social media, and by the time they realize their mistake, if they ever do, it may be too late (Israel, 2009). "The opportunity for customers or competitors to get the jump on new innovations in your area of business increases daily. And with the speed at which these communities move, the time to act is now" (Tapscott & Williams, p. 287).

"The slow adopters fail to realize the impact of social media and do so at their own peril" (Qualman, 2009, p. 183). A business that has many social networks which are created by people other than the company itself is John Deere (Qualman, 2009). A search performed within Facebook in August 2008 for 'John Deere' reported that "a) more than 500 groups are dedicated to John Deere, b) more than 10,000 users are in the top-10 groups, c) all groups were developed by the John Deere community instead of John Deere corporate headquarters, d) their chief competitor Caterpillar had a page in the top-10 listings, and e) a group called *John Deere Sucks!!* is ranked in the top 10" (Qualman, 2009, p. 183).

Users, or customers, will take personal ownership of a product or brand about which they feel strongly (Israel, 2009). They do not need permission of the company to start a Facebook site to praise, support, or degrade the company, taking control of the brand name and the perception that others have of that brand (Shih, 2009). In John Deere's case, there are 10,000 users in the first 10 groups alone. "It was not until June 2009, that John Deere started its own fan page on Facebook in order to attract and control the attention that was being given to informal, consumer sites. John Deere now has over 65,000 fans" (Qualman, 2009, p. 184). Generally, consumers will have both good and bad comments about most companies. "The beauty of social media is that it will point out your company's flaws; the key question is how quickly you address these flaws" (Qualman, 2009, p. 185).

Business needs to be quick to react to market changes as well as customer needs and wants. Therefore, business needs to be, nimble, flexible, and agile, while anticipating changes

necessary to maintain a competitive edge.  Shih (2009) advises, "Pay careful attention to the

emerging social networking trends in your industry around sales, marketing, recruiting, and

innovation" (p. 204).

**Word of mouth.**  Business has long recognized that people frequently will rely on the

opinion of a friend or trusted one in order to make shopping and purchasing decisions (Shih,

2009; Israel, 2009).  Neilson (2009) reports (as cited in Childs, Pillar, & Michael, 2010) 90

percent of people trust completely or somewhat the recommendations from people that they

know where 14% trust advertisements.  Facebook and LinkedIn are examples of social media

that allows for friends and strangers to easily communicate instantaneously about product

satisfaction and recommendation for purchase (Qualman, 2009, p. 40).  Qualman (2009) warns

that: "…companies need to continue to pay more time listening to their customers and less time

creating the next award winning, but-no-customer-getting, 30 second television commercial.

Consumers are taking ownership of brands, and their referral power is priceless" (p. 97).

Now, with the use of social media tracking strategies, business can follow online

conversations that others (consumers) are having about them (Israel, 2009; Shih, 2009).  These

conversations are easy to follow and might contain valuable information (Israel, 2009).  "They

leave a digital fingerprint of who they are, who/what they like/don't like, what they do/don't do,

where they go/don't go and when they do all this stuff.  Once you're on the web, nothing is

private for them or you" (Marken, 2009, p. 11).  The information that businesses want from

social media is unique, based upon customer desires, and information.

It's no wonder companies of all shapes, sizes, and product/service categories will drop an

estimated $1.4 billion on social media communications this year.  By 2012 the

investment should double.  It's also the most undiluted, most direct and most cost-

effective means of learning about customers-business and consumer (Marken, 2009, p. 9).

As much as business knows about social media there is yet a great deal that is not understood. In fact, business is only at the very beginning of the learning curve of how social media can be used to help find their customers and market their services and products (Shih, 2009). Among the lessons learned is the power of word-of-mouth. The customer is much more inclined to be influenced by a friend or fellow worker than any other means (Doyle, 2007; Shih, 2009). In a survey conducted by eMarketer, in order to examine what would make a customer feel confident enough to purchase a certain product, the respondents chose a "friend's recommendation" 76% of the time; the highest response (Doyle, 2007, pg. 60). "Word-of-mouth, even in this age of mass communications and multimillion dollar advertising campaigns, is still the most important form of human communication" (Gladwell, 2002, p. 32). Furthermore, Shih (2009) states, "Due to the transitive trust and decentralized distribution, word of mouth is the most-effective and least-expensive kind of marketing that exists" (p. 97). Companies can monitor the conversation that customers are having about them and then adjust their marketing strategies accordingly (Israel, 2009).

Doyle (2007) found that customers of companies, when surveyed about what influences them the most when making a purchase, indicated the following:

1. a friend's recommendation (76 percent);

2. previous experience (68 percent);

3. newspaper (22 percent);

4. advertisement (15 percent); and

5. company's website (eight percent) (Doyle, 2007, p. 60).

"In other words, most of our customers will consult a friend prior to making a decision about a certain purchase" (Doyle, 2007, p. 60). Doyle (2007) further concluded that "this type of promotion is called word-of-mouth marketing, and can take place between any two or more connected people via a social network" (p. 60). The author suggests that word-of-mouth is a marketing tool that is often neglected or overlooked by companies. Additionally, those companies that do utilize word-of-mouth marketing are doing so based upon assumptions, beliefs, or instinct and tend to do the right thing but do not know why. While this may work for them in the short-run, in order for these companies to make calculated adjustments to changing marketing trends, they must know the reason behind the effectiveness of word-of-mouth marketing (Doyle, 2007; Shih, 2009).

In a separate study Marken (2009) found that: "People who purchase note that: 74% choose companies/brands based on others' customer care experiences shared online. They may like your news release but they make their purchasing decisions based on peers" (p. 12).

**Opinion leaders (influentials).** Modern technology makes it easier and more efficient to identify social networks (Shih, 2009, p. 66). The next step in Doyle's process is to then identify the "opinion leaders" of each social network.

> Opinion leaders help others within their social network, through word-of-mouth
> influence, to make decisions on the purchase of products. In the marketing business,
> software exists which help companies to identify the opinion leaders and their
> connections within the social network (Doyle, 2007, p. 64).

Marketing efforts focused on opinion leaders allows for a more effective and efficient means of allocating time and effort. It creates word-of-mouth promotion of the product or service (Shih, 2009). Since the customer is in control of preference and purchasing choice, it stands to reason that traditional means in which to market is no longer as effective or efficient as

word of mouth marketing strategies using social media (Shih, 2009). For example, "By appending an advertising message to every outbound email, 'Get your free email at Hotmail', the service signed up over 12 million subscribers in its first one and a half years" (Palka, Key, & Dietmar, 2009, pg. 172). The effectiveness of word-of-mouth marketing is profoundly accentuated by social media. These technologies provide new and better ways in which to conduct word-of-mouth marketing (Palka et al., 2009).

It has been determined that seven to twenty percent of the total customer base of a company is controlled by an opinion leader (Doyle, 2007). Consequently, businesses that understand social media, can identify the influentials, and then create word-of-mouth marketing strategies. The companies will then recruit these influentials to endorse their products through word of mouth methods.

> Social network analysis, although well proven in other disciplines is only starting to be applied with rigor to solve marketing problems. The initial results are proving to be valuable. As we see a growth in the use of this approach, I have no doubt that it will see the emergence of new marketing disciplines that focus on marketing to the social network and the influencers (Doyle, 2007, p. 64).

Berry and Keller (2003) agree with Doyle (2007) in that people who influence the dissemination of ideas are critically important to identify and understand. Berry and Keller (2003) argue that "there is a group of people who are responsible for driving trends, influencing mass opinion and selling a great many products. These are the 'Influentials'… 10 percent of Americans determine how the rest consume and live by chatting about their likes and dislikes" (Berry & Keller, 2003, p. 23). These authors used survey data to argue that "the most influential people in America are often everyday people. They are in one's own neighborhoods and are active in civic organizations, charities, and religious institutions. The premise is that marketers

who understand these dynamics can focus their resources on these individuals in order to influence everyone else" (Berry & Keller, 2003, p. 24).

Gladwell calls these people "connectors."  He says that "Connectors are important for more than simply the number of people they know.  Their importance is also a function of the kinds of people they know" (Gladwell, 2002, p. 46).  He goes on to describe the "connector" as:

> …people whom all of us can reach in only a few steps because, for one reason or another, they manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches … their ability to span many different worlds is a function of something intrinsic to their personality, some combination of curiosity, self-confidence, sociability, and energy (p. 48-49).

Connectors have a large number of people whom they know (Gladwell, 2002).  They can effectively and quickly get the message out and they are typically trusted to have accurate information.  They are central to the flow of information and ideas within their relatively large social system.  Gladwell (2002) believes that each of us is part of many different social networks which connects us to a larger social network.  "Sociologists, among other academics such as communications experts, are using social network analysis to study the flow of information within the networks and examine the pivotal role played by some individuals in spreading ideas" (Cooke & Buckley, 2008, p. 275).  Social media creates the opportunity for the social networks to reach the 'tipping point' (Cooke & Buckley, 2008).

> Social media is all about people.  Between 2009 and 2010 internet traffic will quadruple and it won't stop there.  The amount of emails that you can't get to in a day will grow significantly in the next few years.  Within a short span of a year, the promise of the blog has already begun to disappear as the Tweet takes its place.  140 characters at a time seem to appeal to the customer.  Short, concise, quick, immediate messages are the hoice of preference (Marken, 2009, p. 10).

Tony Blair (2008), former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom describes this phenomenon this way: "The way in which information is exchanged so quickly has forever changed the way in which people want to consume information. They demand that things be condensed into 20 second sound bites. With complex problems, this is exceedingly difficult, but to be an effective communicator and leader you need to be able to condense complex items down to the core and be able to do this quickly" (as cited in Qualman, 2008, p.190).

**Social Media and Schools**

Technology has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of school communication strategies, but, for the most part, the messages continue to be one-way, from the school or district to the intended audience (Stein, Rogan & Partners, 2008). Schools continue their traditional communication practices of sending information to their constituencies in the form of newsletters, reports, calendars, and flyers (see Figure 2). Often these communications are still being sent home in the student's book bag. Needless to say, these methods of communication are grossly ineffective by modern day standards and fail to provide interactive, two-way parent and public involvement.

Figure 2: Traditional Communication Patterns
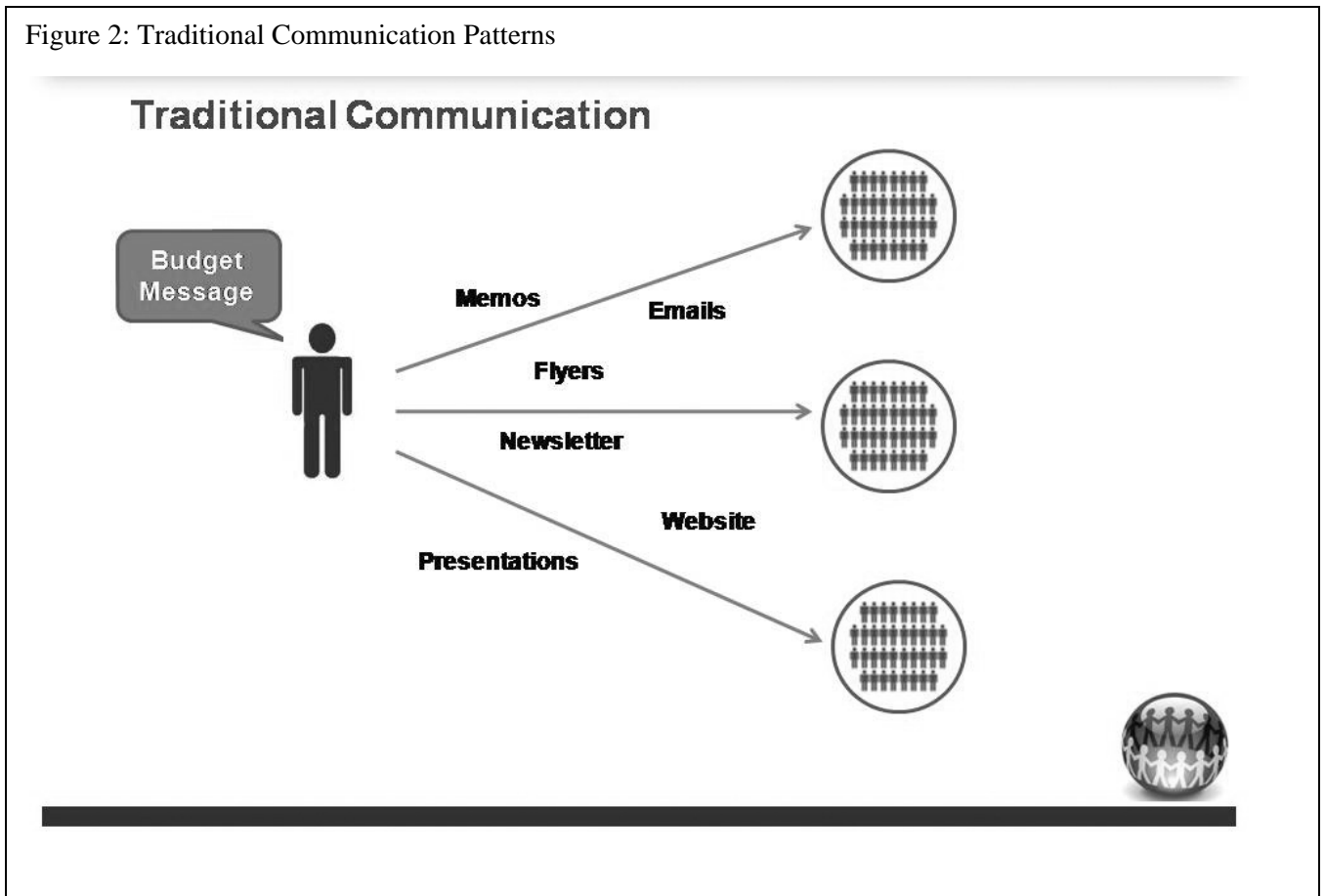
The new challenge for school districts in using technology for communication purposes is to "translate and make effective use of all the operational data that is available through the online communication systems and tools they have implemented" (Dahlkempter & Franke, 2010, p. 2). Social media has become of more interest to school districts as they attempt to interact with their public in two-way meaningful conversation. The level of sophistication and maturity of school districts in the use of the Internet is continuing to increase, bringing greater demands on communication strategies and practices. In fact, 96 percent of the respondents in a 2010 survey conducted by Stein, Rogan and Partners (2008) say connecting and communicating with the district communities is a particularly significant issue, and 86 percent say it is important in relation to all other district initiatives (Stein, et. al., 2008).

Evelyn McCormack (2010) is the Director of Communications at the Southern Westchester BOCES in New York State.  In her address at the New York State School Boards Convention in New York City she stated,

> Social media for communication purposes is not a luxury anymore; it is a responsibility for all school districts.  Schools need to be the first and best source of information about all district educational issues.  We cannot communicate to 21$^{st}$ century parents and communities without 21$^{st}$ century technology (McCormack, 2010, p. 12).

According to McCormack (2010), it is wise for a district to embrace social media, recognizing that non-participation is unavoidable.

Dahlkempter and Franke (2010) indicate that school districts are faced with three key challenges in creating effective on-line communications practices:

1. considering the current and foreseeable economic downturn, school districts need to creatively consolidate the many school functions into fewer systems;

2. districts need to effectively and efficiently utilize the rich and plentiful data that will be generated by two-way on-line communication; and

3. education funding will remain under pressure for years to come. Districts will need to use social media and other online methods to engage more stakeholders in an effort to align public support with the educational mission of the twenty-first century (Dahlkempter & Franke, 2010 p. 10).

Most school superintendents will agree that technology must become embedded in the very fabric of the educational structure in order to strengthen functions that range from academic achievement to open communication with the community and everything in between.  Also, most of these superintendents will also admit to feeling uncomfortable, ill-prepared, and uncertain as technology leaders (Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010, p. 1).

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Superintendents are the gatekeepers for the use of social media in schools. They can facilitate the effective implementation of social media or they can keep the gate closed and allow no social media presence in the school district. "For example, in a nationwide survey of 455 technology decision makers, CoSN found that visionary technology leadership – and the community support fostered by district leaders- made the difference in districts that were able to bolster their technology plans, budget and implementation" (Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010, p. 2). Kevin Case, Superintendent of the Inman Unified School District in Kansas states (as cited in Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010, pg. 2): "The superintendent must have the vision and then it's the superintendent's job to put the support and resources, both financial and personnel, in to reach that vision".

Superintendents recognize that the evolution of technology has now reached the most complex and challenging "wave" of implementation, as seen in Table 1 (Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010, p. 2). The First Wave of implementation is infrastructure (Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010 p. 2). This includes the physical supports for applied technology; the fiber, power, wiring, hardware, and software. This is the beginning of the technology implementation process and many schools in New York State have relatively strong infrastructure (Strang, 2011, personal communication, March 15, 2011).

The Second Wave includes the numerous operating systems for student management, business operations, human resources functions, communications functions, and many other similar operations. School districts are at various stages of implementation of the Second Wave. As new software and systems develop it is easy for school districts to quickly find themselves outdated unless they have a strong technology plan and quality leadership for implementation of the plan (Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010).

A growing body of data and commentary is pointing to the critical need for districts to take a strategic approach to closely and continuously connect each and all of their constituencies – administrators, teachers, staff, parents, taxpayer coalitions and the media (Munkittrick, 2009, p. 2).

The Third Wave of implementation is the most complex and challenging. This Wave actually changes the schooling paradigm. This is where systemic change occurs. This is where true integration of technology is realized in student learning, administrative functionality, professional development, curriculum development, and communications with the public (Munkittrick, 2009). School districts have a challenging time reaching this higher level of technology into their daily and long-term operations. This wave is where social media is implemented as an integral means of the total communications plan of the school district (Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010). This higher level of technological complexity is necessary to create an effective and interactive relationship with the public.

Education lags behind every other major industry in using technology effectively as a tool for productivity, learning, communications, and creativity. With districts under pressure to improve student achievement and modernize educational practices, superintendents must be at the vanguard of technology leadership to reach this new frontier (Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010, p. 2).

Table 1

*The "Third Wave" Challenge*

| School district name | Wave 1 Infrastructure | Wave 2 Supportive and enabling applications | Wave 3 Transformative applications |
|---|---|---|---|
| Brentwood CSD | Strong evidence | Strong evidence | Evidence |
| Brasher CSD | Evidence | Evidence | No evidence |
| Crary City Schools | Evidence | Evidence | Limited evidence |
| Harris CSD | Evidence | Evidence | Limited evidence |
| Madrid CSD | Evidence | Evidence | No evidence |
| Salmon CSD | Strong evidence | Strong evidence | Evidence |
| Scanville CSD | Evidence | Evidence | No evidence |
| Seaway CSD | Evidence | Evidence | No evidence |
| Shiner CSD | Strong Evidence | Strong Evidence | Evidence |
| West Pierrepont CSD | Evidence | Evidence | Limited evidence |

**Key:** *No evidence* exists that this Wave is present in the corresponding school district.
*Limited evidence* exists that this Wave is present in the corresponding school district.
*Evidence* exists that this Wave is present in the corresponding school district.
*Strong Evidence* exists that this Wave is present in the corresponding school district.

Stein, Rogan and Partners (2008), an independent market research firm, conducted a

study on how, when, and with what frequency school districts intentionally connected with their

communities regarding issues of mutual concern.  This quantitative study reached

superintendents, principals, and information technology specialists in order to solicit their

opinions on this issue.  The findings indicated that while the digital divide between school

districts and communities was narrowing, an increasingly alarming concern was discovered

which they labeled the 'digital disconnect' (2008).  Evidence of the 'digital disconnect' is

demonstrated by the fact that ninety-six percent of the participants firmly believed that

connecting the school district and the community was essential for the progress and betterment

of education in each of their respective communities.  Supporting this data were results that also

indicated eighty-six percent of the same respondents believe that it is critical for the school and

community to be connected in order to advance district initiatives.  These initiatives included

increasing student academic achievement, supporting school budgets, and advancing capital

projects, among many others.  The Stein et al. (2008) study indicated the benefits of school-

community connections with "business owners, prospective residents, education professors,

prospective employees, homeschoolers, and out-placed students, for example" (Stein, et. al.,

2008, p. 3).  However, while indicating this need and desire for open school-community

connections, only eight percent indicated that they felt they were doing an excellent job (2008).

The respondents actually contradict themselves in this study by admitting that only 53

percent of their districts have a strategic solution or plan to connect with their communities.  The

data indicates 5 key components missing in districts:

1. they lacked a deliberate and thoughtful method or strategy to identify and
   communicate with key school and community constituencies;

2. they indicated that they have not addressed the need to develop community
   connections to gain the necessary support to pass school budgets or other
   key initiatives;

3. a district-wide educational vision was missing;

4. all communication was one way; school to community.  There was no
   opportunity for systemic two-way communication; and

5. they did not utilize technology for communication purposes (Stein et. al.,
   2008, p. 2-3).

Even the respondents that indicated that they did have a strategic solution and plan for connecting with their communities did little more than disseminate information. They lacked a planned and strategic two-way communication strategy and their technology solutions were mostly limited to emails and websites. Certainly, they were all struggling to reach the K-12 school community and the notion of reaching the breadth of the entire community was never realized. The schools surveyed have found that they do not reach beyond the traditional means of one way communication (Stein et. al., 2008, p. 5).

The respondents acknowledged that it is becoming increasingly important for school districts to connect with their respective communities as they are the entity that provides direction and support for the school. Therefore, connection with the community is crucial for the success of the school. This is true for budgetary purposes as well as for creating a vision and community values for the school, whether formally written or understood based upon behaviors and traditions. The respondents believed that effective communications with the community brought a sense of community pride, a sense of community togetherness, and a positive community image. They also firmly believed that technology was a critical solution to create the type of school that they desired and essential for connecting the community (Stein et. al., 2008).

Limited resources are creating significant challenges for school districts to operate quality programs for students. Local, state and federal revenue sources are not anticipated to be able to provide districts with adequate revenue to maintain the current level of education for our children let alone a 21$^{st}$ century education. According to Stein et al. (2008), a district's success will be measured by how well the public is informed on educational issues. The level of quality in a two way dialogue between the public and the school is essential to gain public support and trust for the school. "Although district leaders need effective communication solutions that all users will understand, appreciate, and support in the face of the pressures, leaders continue to use

sub-optimal and less-than-strategic ad-hoc solutions" (Stein et al., 2008, p. 7). Furthermore, the authors assert that "… a strategic solution for connecting communities is now essential… Until districts can build these bridges, optimal education will remain an aspiration" (p. 7).

One of the few documented examples of a superintendent of schools who has developed a technology-based strategic solution for connecting his district and community is illustrated in the following case study. Superintendent of Schools Geoffrey Zoeller was challenged with presenting a capital project bond to the voters of his school district as a result of finding aging school buildings in his new school district at Westwood Regional School District in Bergen County, New Jersey. Zoeller embraced technology in order to connect the community during the ten month campaign and recognized that the school district had historically been communicating to the public in very traditional means such as newsletters, community meetings, parent conferences, press releases, and the district website. Zoeller capitalized on data which supported a digital approach to presenting a building proposition (Farrar, 2008). "Speak Up 2007", an annual national project facilitated by *Project Tomorrow* found that ninety-one percent of parents use email to communicate with their teachers. Eighty-three percent of parents have a desktop computer (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2008). Zoeller developed his campaign strategy to take advantage of these data. By utilizing social networking strategies, Zoeller conducted two-way communications with his entire public. "It enabled us to keep our parents involved, our students engaged, and our community closely informed," according to Zoeller (as cited in Farrar, 2008, p.5). Even voter registration went online with absentee ballots distributed to recent graduates being conducted by email (Farrar, 2008).

A recent study conducted by *Education Week* indicated that eighty-eight percent of the one hundred twenty five superintendents surveyed in five southern states had not sought or participated in any form of technology professional development during the past three years.

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Systemic reform with the use of technology will only occur if there is strong and committed leadership at the top. "As the world becomes ever more technology intensive, superintendents should be expected to model innovative uses of technology and to empower educators, parents, students and the community with technology solutions" (Krueger, 2008, p. 8).

The two-way communication uniqueness that social media provides school districts is, as of yet, an untapped and boundless phenomenon. Generally speaking school districts are quite far behind other systems in the use of social media to communicate and dialogue with its public. The literature review in this study clearly demonstrates just how far behind public school districts are. A need exists for school districts to communicate more effectively, become more transparent in their operations, and respond to community wants and needs in a timely manner (Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, 2008). In one of the few national research reports conducted relative to school district use of social media, researchers found that 50 percent of the respondents (school districts) of their study were still without a website/content/community management solution. The school districts that reported no social media presence cited as inhibitors a lack of knowledge, lack of funding, lack of time and resources, and more pressing immediate needs. The study also found that while:

> …ninety-six percent of the respondents indicated that connecting with the community is a particularly significant issue, only 8% of the respondents felt that they were doing a very good job of this. Additionally only six percent of the superintendents and assistant superintendents felt that they were doing a good job of connecting with the community (Stein, et. al., 2008, p. 2).

If school districts wish to communicate with this new generation of parents and other social media oriented parents and community members, implementation of quality social media options must be considered. Beyond simple implementation is the need to keep the social media

sites active, current, attractive, and relevant to the viewer.  Part of the strategy is to keep the

viewer coming back for more information and to engage them in two-way communication.

These data provide a profound message to school districts wishing to communicate effectively

with present and future parents, as well as with all district residents.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

**Introduction**

The methodology section of this qualitative study focuses on what and how the data for this paper was gathered in order to address the three research questions. In particular, this study focuses on the use of social media in the budget presentation and communication process for public school districts. "The research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations from the meaning of data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

This study explores the extent to which social media was utilized to prepare and communicate the annual school district budget with the voters of the ten selected school districts. The interview process was the most reasonable and effective methodology for eliciting deep and rich data which then could be used to address the research questions and provide insight to future research and studies. "…a researcher might observe what appears to be a pattern and then see if the pattern is repeated in interviews and in written documents or if the pattern was the same at different times" (McMillan, 2009, p. 296).

This chapter is organized into the following sections: Introduction, Research Questions, Design, Population and Sample, Instrumentation, Administration, Procedures, Reliability and Validity, and Ethical Safeguards.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the use of social media by school districts to prepare and communicate the annual school district budget impacts the passage or failure of that budget. A study of the social media phenomenon through qualitative research methodology was conducted. The implementation of social media as an innovative and

contemporary communication tool was examined through interviews with superintendents of schools and communication specialists (or those serving in the role of communication specialist) at ten public school institutions as well as with Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) personnel and personnel of state level educational agencies.

**Research Questions**

Given the absence of data relative to the use of social media for the purpose of school district budget preparation and communication, the following questions were explored:

1. How does the school district implement the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?

2. How does the school district measure the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?

3. Is there a relationship between the public school districts use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget and the passage or rejection of the budget?

These three research questions focus on the experiences of ten school districts. Nine school districts are from various parts of New York State and one school district is from the state of Oregon. All districts use social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the budget. This research is intended to discover the extent to which the use of social media is a factor in the preparation and communication of the annual school district budget as determined by the professionals who hold the position of school district superintendent and communication specialist. Given the context that the ten selected school districts were early adopters, in comparison with other school districts, of the use of social media for the purpose already stated, the qualitative research interview process was the most effectual methodology for eliciting deep

and rich data that would reveal useful and interesting insight for immediate application as well as future research and feasibility study.

**Design**

This is a qualitative study. A qualitative design was used to gain rich and deep data relative to the research questions. Social media is a communication phenomenon which has yet to be scientifically explored as it applies to preparing and communicating the school budget to residents of the school district. This is the focus of this qualitative research study.

> Qualitative research is multi-method in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 31).

"It tends to be more open-ended because parameters and a mapped research direction … unfold during the course of the investigation" (p.70).

**Population and sample.** Interview respondents were selected by asking the BOCES Superintendents and BOCES Communication Specialists to identify school districts that implemented the use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual school budget during the 2009-10 school year. Additionally, the Director of Communications of the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA), and the Executive Director of the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) were asked to identify school districts that were using social media for the same purpose. "Qualitative methods usually achieve a collection of rich data and details from a small sample so that the depth of understanding of a phenomenon is increased" (Flores, 2009, p.106). This study explored the use of social media, board policies and administrative procedures relative to the use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual school budget in ten different school

districts.  Furthermore, other information such as school district websites and social media sites, were researched, studied and interpreted in this study.

Numerous searches were conducted on the topic of the use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual school district budget.  Considering the newness of social media and the fact that school districts are not typically early adopters of new technology, the search results generated little helpful information.  Therefore, state-level educational leadership organizations were contacted in order to solicit their assistance in identifying school districts for this particular study.  The state-wide organizations, BOCES, NYSCOSS, and NYSSBA provided expert information which resulted in identification of the school districts that were studied.

While primary interest in the selection of school districts was originally limited to New York State, the process for the selection of sample districts ultimately resulted in the discovery of a district in a west coast state that has utilized social media extensively and expertly to prepare for and communicate the budget vote propositions.  Therefore, the study was expanded to include a school district in another state than New York.  The positions of Superintendent of Schools and Communications Specialists were chosen to be interviewed in each of the ten selected school districts due to the fact that they are the decision-makers and experts in the two areas of study, social media and school district budget preparation and communication.  The selection of these particular experts is intended to create a sample of those who already understand and have implemented the use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual school district budget.

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Sage Colleges (Appendix A), letters of invitation (Appendix B) to participate in the study were generated and distributed to each of the sixteen selected participants.  Informed consent forms (Appendix C) were also sent to

each of the participants of the study.  The scope and purpose of the study was outlined in the

informed consent form.  Interview questions (Appendix D) were forwarded to each of the sixteen

participants once they accepted the offer to participate in this study.  This allowed the participant

time to process the questions prior to the interview.  Informing the participants of the questions

prior to the interview was intended to facilitate the depth and breadth of the responses.

Additionally, providing the questions prior to the interview allowed the participant with the

opportunity to opt out of the study prior to the interview if he/she so chose.  In this study no one

opted out.

When identifying school districts that were using social media for the purpose of budget

communications, the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) was

requested to send a question to all public school superintendents in New York State.  The single

question was distributed to each of the 690 school districts through a communication service that

is provided to superintendents by the New York State Council of School Superintendents

(NYSCOSS).  The communication device is a Listserv called the Superintendents Resource

Bank.  NYSCOSS personnel sent the question to superintendents and respondents reply to the

NYSCOSS office.  The information is then emailed to the person who submitted the request.

The question that was submitted for the purpose of this study was, "A superintendent would like

to know which school districts implemented some form of social media (i.e. Facebook, twitter,

etc.) in order to prepare, develop, and/or communicate their annual school budget with their

community in 2009-10".  A total of nine superintendents representing the nine school districts

included in this study responded in the affirmative.

**Instrumentation.**  Qualitative instrumentation was used in this study.  Sixteen interviews

were conducted and ten public school districts were included.  Each of the sixteen interviewees

responded to questions that were presented to each of them via telephone or in person.  The

questions for the interviews with the superintendents, communication specialists BOCES

personnel and school boards personnel were created to ultimately respond to the three research

questions upon which this study is based.  The nine interview questions were designed to

determine who the change agent in each of the districts was, what strategies were used, does

social media foster transparency, how is social media measured, roles and responsibilities in the

use of social media, and does social media influence the budget vote?

A standardized, open ended interview methodology was used to ensure that the

predetermined questions were asked to each of the sixteen interviewees included in the study.

This allowed for greater accuracy and consistency in the interview process and also contributed

to both reliability and validity of the study.  This also allowed for increased quality of responses

to the questions and provided organization for more accurate and precise interpretation of data.

Researcher bias is addressed through the process of triangulation as a means of data

analysis.  Confidentiality was maintained throughout the entire interview process.  The

participants were assigned pseudonyms and the names of the districts were changed.  The

researcher possesses the codes used to create the name alterations and stores them in a secure and

locked container.

**Administration.**  Interviews were conducted between January, 2011 and February, 2011

depending on the availability of the participants.  Nine interviews were conducted by telephone

call and seven were conducted by personal interviews.  All interviews were digitally recorded.

Participants consisted of Superintendents, District Superintendents, and Communication

Specialists (or those serving in the role of Communications Specialist), and were selected based

upon their position in the school district.  Sixteen different interviews were conducted.  Review

of public documents involving social media policies and procedures were conducted.  Creswell

(2009) states, "Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as

interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source" (p. 175).  Also,

Patton (1990) contributed, "[q]ualitative methods consist of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-

depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents" (p. 10).

**Data collection procedures.**  The data that were collected and analyzed were the result

of personal, one-on-one interviews with each of the participants.  The goal was for the interviews

not to exceed one hour in length.  Two of the interviews exceeded the one hour goal.  In addition,

each school districts comprehensive communication plan (if available), acceptable use policy,

other related policies, websites, social media sites, and any other relevant documents or sites,

were collected, coded, analyzed, and included in this study.

**Data analysis procedures**.  Document analysis provided the study with district practices,

purpose, procedures and policies relative to the subject being studied.  The evidence retrieved

from the documents provided data that was stable and accurate (Yin, 2009).  The interviews were

intended to be semi-structured and semi-formal.  The questions were designed to be interesting,

relevant, open-ended, yet engaging.  This approach elicited factual and useful data and stories

that accurately depicted why and how social media was used in order to prepare and

communicate the annual school district budget.

Once the interviews were transcribed and document data was collected, it was then

organized and cross-referenced by coding the key points of information into categories.  A

coding process was used to identify concepts.  Multiple perspectives within each finding were

shown and supported with participant statements.  Responses to the interview questions were

clustered and categorized by topic.  Finally, researcher interpretation of the data was developed

and determined.

**Reliability and validity.**  Creswell (2009) states:

Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study (p. 191).

This process was used in the study. In qualitative research such as this, three sources for data collection increases the validity of the study (Merriam, 1998). In this study, internal validity was controlled by examining evidence from multiple respondents to identify themes based on converging perspectives of participants (triangulation). As advised by Streck (2009), the services of transcriptions were used in transcribing the sixteen interviews. In this particular case, two different transcriptionists were employed. The transcriptionists were provided with the digitally recorded audio interviews. A process called 'member checking' was also used in order to verify the content and accuracy of the transcripts. Names of individuals, institutions, and school districts were provided with pseudonyms and coded in order to maintain high levels of confidentiality. As a result of analyzing various documents, emerging themes or patterns were noticeable due to repetition and frequency of occurrence between the interview transcriptions and the collected documents.

Prior to beginning the data collection process, the questions were further defined by the development of interview questions. The interview questions were then shared with multiple professionals and experts in order to validate them as appropriate and effective. The professionals and experts who reviewed the questions included an assistant superintendent of schools, a superintendent of schools, a director of technology, two school principals, a communication specialist from a technical university, a school business official with an expertise in technology, a director of human resources with an expertise in social media, a director of technology of a public school, and a Sage Graduate School advisor, among others.

Member checking was also conducted in order to create a greater level of validity as well as reliability. This practice involves providing the opportunity for the information gathered from the interviews to be reviewed by the participants in order to ensure accuracy. Additionally, the executive coach for this researcher served as a peer debriefer. He was asked to review data and evidence gathered in order to help clarify the information so that interpretation of data was valid. The transcripts were then coded to determine emergent themes for analysis by the researcher.

**Ethical Safeguards**

The highest ethical standard was ensured in this study by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects at the Sage College. Participation in the survey was voluntary and based on non-experimental design and self-reported perceptions. Participant data, including district name, and email addresses, were maintained strictly confidential and were destroyed after the completion of the study. Further participant safeguards were provided as the summary data was presented and published.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

**Introduction**

Three central research questions direct the findings of this study. A combination of sixteen superintendents of schools, communication specialists, and personnel from the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) were interviewed. The first question to be addressed was how does the school district implement the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget? Secondly, how does the school district measure the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget? Finally, the most comprehensive question of this study focused on the relationship between the public school districts use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget and the passage or rejection of the budget

A presentation of the findings stemming from each of the three central research questions is detailed in this study. Within each of the central questions common research themes appear. An analysis of the themes that were discovered as a result of this study is provided in this chapter. Also included in this chapter are the findings resulting from why ten different school districts chose to use social media in order to prepare and communicate their annual school budgets with their respective communities. There is little existing research to support the effectiveness of the utilization of social media for the preparation and communication of the school budget. Additionally, few school districts have implemented the use of social media for budget development and communication purposes. Why then did the ten school districts in this study implement the use of social media for budget communication purposes? Each of the ten school districts interviewed is an early adopter of social media as a strategy to present and communicate their respective annual budgets with their communities.

This chapter includes the qualitative analysis of the research questions. Findings based upon the interviews of the participants are provided within the framework of each of the three specific research questions. Background information of the participants is provided, followed by an analysis of the research questions.

There is substantial data and research available in the fields of business, politics, and other such entities to support the utilization of social media for the purpose of communicating, engaging, and better understanding the public. Business and politics embraced social media early. Therefore, they have experience with its capabilities and uses. They also recognized that social media allowed for better understanding of people's wants, needs, interests, habits, priorities, and desires. Business and politics learned early that social media was an unprecedented form of instant two-way, interactive communication. Education was not an early adopter of social media, as compared to business and politics, and in many cases continues to block its on-campus access. Consequently, education is now in its infancy stages relative to the acceptance and implementation of social media for communication purposes. A few superintendents of schools, communication specialists, and other educational leaders have recently accepted social media as integral to their communication and information plans, strategies and practices.

**Background Demographic Information**

A BOCES communication specialist found that school districts are just now beginning to implement social media for budget communication purposes. "Last year was really the beginning for a few of the districts that I am working with to get started with social media in preparation for the budget votes. But they have a long way to go" (D. Latimer, personal conversation, February 8, 2011). This year, a few more school districts initiated the potential uses of social media for informing and engaging the public in budget deliberations. Parents and

community members are increasingly adopting and using social media so they are more apt to

follow their school district on sites such as Facebook or Twitter.  Table 2 provides key data

relative to each of the ten respective school districts included in this study and Table 3 aligns the

district pseudonyms with the basic district demographic data.

Table 2

*School District Data*

| School District | Type of district | Location | Student population (K-12) | Socio-economic status ( %) | Per Pupil Expenditure ($) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brentwood | Suburban | New York | 5100 | 5 | 11,190. |
| Brasher | Rural | New York | 1900 | 29 | 7,725. |
| Crary | Urban | New York | 2100 | 59 | 10,547. |
| Harris | Rural | New York | 1950 | 23 | 11,140. |
| Madrid | Rural | New York | 2350 | 40 | 10,500. |
| Salmon | Urban | Oregon | 40,000 | 56 | 11,131. |
| Scanville | Suburban | New York | 2980 | 16 | 8,056. |
| Seaway | Suburban | New York | 2000 | 15 | 12,400. |
| Shiner | Suburban | New York | 9,900 | 10 | 9,700. |
| West Pierrepont | Rural | New York | 2,300 | 24 | 15,000. |

*Note.* All school districts have been provided pseudonyms. *Socio-economic status* is determined by the percentage of students in each district who receive Free/Reduced Lunch. *Per pupil expenditure* is determined by dividing the total budget of each school district by the number of students in that district.

Table 3

*Participant Demographic Data*

| Participant name | Gender | Position | District name | Type | No. of students represented | Date interviewed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carson, Debbie | Female | Communication Specialist | NA | Board of Education | NA | 2/8/11 |
| Baytovin, Mellissa | Female | Communication Specialist | Seaway | Public school | 2000 | 3/29/11 |
| Briggs Richard | Male | Superintendent | Crary | City school | 2100 | 2/7/11 |
| Carr, Pauline | Female | Superintendent | Harris | Public school | 1950 | 2/7/11 |
| Cartmill, Mark | Male | Superintendent | Salmon | Public school | 40,000 | 2/7/11 |
| Eon, Mark | Male | Communication Specialist | Brentwood | Public school | 5100 | 2/8/11 |
| Heroe, Jack | Male | Superintendent | West Pierrepont | Public school | 2300 | 2/7/11 |
| Judd, Tina | Female | Communication Specialist | Brasher | Public school | 1900 | 2/7/11 |
| Latimer, Deana | Female | Communication Specialist | BOCES | Public school | 80,000 | 2/8/11 |
| Patterson, Paul | Male | Superintendent | BOCES | Public school | 80,000 | 1/31/11 |
| Pincher, Doug | Male | Superintendent | Madrid | Public school | 2350 | 2/7/11 |
| Sheldon, Chris | Female | Communication Specialist | Harris | Public school | 1950 | 2/4/11 |
| Spadacinni, Carol | Female | Communication Specialist | Shiner | Public school | 9900 | 2/14/11 |
| Streit, Christopher | Male | Superintendent | Brentwood | Public school | 5100 | 2/7/11 |
| Strong, Sandra | Female | Superintendent | Salmon | Public school | 40,000 | 2/10/11 |
| Tobago, Melinda | Female | Superintendent | Scanville | Public school | 2980 | 2/8/11 |

**Participant demographic information.** Tables 2 and 3 illustrate various data about the school districts and individual participants contained in this research. Of particular note is the size of the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). BOCES is a catalyst that provides assistance to component school districts to create shared programs and services for children from all component districts regardless of enrollment, income or tax base. With an emphasis on collaboration and cost containment, BOCES helps to alleviate some of the financial burdens placed on local taxpayers. The shared services aid, or BOCES aid, enables districts to avoid some of the growth in property taxes that would have otherwise been required. In this particular case, the BOCES that is part of this study consists of 80,000 students who attend 23 different component school districts.

Tables 2 and 3 also contain one school district from the state of Oregon. This district is much larger than any of the other school districts in this study. This speaks to the historical composition of the school districts in New York State versus regionalization in other states. The Oregon school district implemented unique social media strategies but was very consistent with the New York State schools in its social media presence and use. The use of social media is universally applied regardless of the size of the district.

Other than the school district from Oregon, school districts in this study are geographically located in various parts of New York State, from Long Island to the western part of the state, from the southern-most counties to North Country counties, and from suburban to rural and city school districts.

Interestingly, Table 3 shows that of the 16 participants interviewed nine were male and seven were female. Of the superintendents interviewed seven were male and three were female. Of the communication specialists interviewed, seven were female and one was male.

**Research Questions**

  **Research question 1**: **How does the school district implement the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?**

  In all but one of the school districts studied it was apparent that the communication specialist, or the person in charge of communication, was the person responsible for implementing social media as one aspect of the district's communication strategies and solutions. A person with communication specialization was necessary in nine of the ten school districts interviewed in this study to move the use of social media forward and ensure that implementation occurred.  Of the sixteen individuals interviewed as part of this study, fifteen indicated that the person responsible for leading the district toward the implementation of social media, and therefore the change agent, was the person in the district who was primarily responsible for district communication.  Typically, this person was called the communication specialist.  The responsibility for communication in the districts studied ranged from a person who had part-time responsibilities for public communication, to a district which employed an entire communication department of six to eight people.  In nine of the ten school districts interviewed communication specialists were employed.  Nine of the ten districts included in this study were from New York State.  All but one of the New York State districts employed a part-time or full-time communication specialist as a shared service from their local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES).  As one superintendent stated:

    The BOCES provides a professional service of trained communication specialists for us

    at an affordable rate.  We receive BOCES aid on the service and all the training is done

    by the BOCES.  Without this service being made available by BOCES, and the BOCES

    aid, we would not have our communication service.  Ultimately, it takes the

    superintendent of schools to recognize the need for the service and to recognize the need

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to use social media as part of the service (R. Briggs, personal communications, February 7, 2011).

It is important to note that the ultimate decision-maker in each school district for the implementation of social media for budget communication purposes was the superintendent of schools.  He/she assumed the role of gatekeeper, controlling whether social media was a viable option for the district or not.  There were also key people in each district who had influence on the superintendent.  For example, in the Harris Central School District:

Our open-minded superintendent of schools who values communication and transparency was prompted by a PTA member, who is an active user of social media, to communicate electronically with parents and community.  Although the superintendent herself is not interested in personal social media, she was visionary enough to embrace its use for the district and did not hesitate to launch a Facebook account (C. Sheldon, personal communications, February 4, 2011).

The implementation of social media into a school district requires a superintendent of schools who is knowledgeable of social media and understands its effectiveness as a means of two-way, interactive communication.  It is not necessarily required that the superintendent be an expert in the use of social media.  However, the superintendent must be able to envision the merits, advantages, and potential that social media may bring to the district.  The superintendent must also be able to envision the disadvantages and possible liabilities of the use of social media in budget communication in order to anticipate and prepare for specific issues and challenges.

In nine out of ten (90 percent) school districts studied, the communication specialist was the expert in the use of social media.  Therefore, the superintendent must have trust and confidence in the district communication specialist.  However, the role of the superintendent is critical.  The superintendent must possess or develop vision, commitment, determination, and

support to make the implementation and effectiveness of the use of social media for budget

communication purposes, or for any other purpose for that matter, a reality.  The communication

specialist of the Chester River BOCES stated:

> The biggest obstacle for school districts getting into social media is a lot of
>
> superintendents right now are not social media users themselves so therefore they don't
>
> really understand it and they easily dismiss it.  They don't understand that it is not going
>
> to become a cesspool of sniping at them.  Fear is a big aspect of not getting into social
>
> media.  It always goes back to 'Can you turn off the comments in Facebook' (D. Latimer,
>
> personal communications, February 8, 2011).

The District Superintendent of the Chester River BOCES believes that the

communication specialists are moving districts toward implementation and use of social media.

> I think social media is a direction that we have to pursue.  The communication specialists,
>
> they're really educating a generation of administrators who aren't familiar with social
>
> media tools.  I did a class with aspiring superintendents.  The majority in the room did
>
> not have a Facebook page.  I think that communication persons are the change agents.  In
>
> places that don't have communication specialists, I think it is being driven by newer
>
> administrators…How are tomorrow's leaders going to communicate with the public if
>
> they don't use social media (P. Patterson, personal communications, January 31, 2011)?

*Strategies for implementation.*  The use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or any other

social media option is of limited effectiveness unless it is used as part of the school districts

overall strategic communication plan.  A social media presence without having a comprehensive

communication plan is akin to falling into the old trap of, 'If you don't know where you're

going, any road will get you there.'  Social media is a tool, a very powerful tool.  When used

appropriately, strategically, and wisely, social media can become an essential component of the overall communication strategies and solutions for a school district.

The districts that were interviewed identified strategies that they felt were successful for implementation of social media into budget preparation and communication efforts. Doug Pincher used the strategy of posting school news and stories on Facebook. He also used Twitter for posting shorter messages of up to 140 characters on the district website. He felt that Facebook and Twitter were effective social media tools that could be used to drive viewers to the district webpage by teasing them with summary information (D. Pincher, personal communication, February 7, 2011). Chris Sheldon agreed. In her case, Facebook was used to drive people to the website for more in depth information about all posted topics. Her strategy was to use Facebook to create a conversational tone and a general sense of community between the schools and the public. Conversational lead-ins on Facebook introduce the news or topic with an embedded link to access the additional information on the district's webpage. Sheldon's belief is that while websites are essential, people are only visiting them if they need something specific. By utilizing Facebook and Twitter, the lead-in may prompt further reading, but if not, at least a 'snippet' of information was delivered to the news feeds of each of their fans. Collectively, those 'snippets' will help build a story and perception of the district (C. Sheldon, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

According to Mark Eon, people will not necessarily log on to their school district website simply on their own volition. They are not likely to go to Brentwood.org without some prompting or help. They need to be 'driven' there. Therefore, the strategy in this district is to push out information in order to pull people into their district website. Social media acts as an effective means in which to encourage people onto the website. A communication specialist can push information to people with Facebook and Twitter that will generate their interest and 'drive'

them to the district website.  The website is the districts best and most complete source of information (M. Eon, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

Likewise, one of the main strategies in Mark Cartmill's school district is to push traffic from Facebook back to the district website where they provide a wealth of resources and a significant amount of district history.  Archived information and historical budget information that helps people make an informed decision can be found on this district's website.  According to Cartmill, that was one of the main advantages of Facebook and Twitter; to attract people's attention, start conversations, and direct them to the district webpage.  The website is where the school-community conversation happens.  For events, however, Twitter is particularly effective. By sending out short pieces of information, Twitter is very useful in helping to generate participation at these events, or to remind people to vote, or to encourage people to register to vote (M. Cartmill, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

Tina Judd utilizes a 'Budget Vote Countdown' on social media sites.  This strategy builds intrigue and anticipation for the budget vote and generates voter and community interest (T. Judd, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Prior to the annual budget vote Richard Briggs utilizes Survey Monkey to ask a series of questions of the voters.  This provides valuable feedback from the voters, makes them active participants in the budget process, helps them to think about budget issues, and reminds them of the date, time and location of the vote.  In addition, they will feel connected to the budget process (R. Briggs, personal communication, February 7, 2011).  Video is a very powerful means by which to reach the public according to Tina Judd.  She particularly likes to use YouTube.  Ms. Judd tells a compelling video story about the school district and places it on social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube.  She believes that the length of the story should be relatively short, one to three minutes in length for most stories.  Others can be up to three or four minutes.

She tries to make the story factual, informative, and sincere, emphasizing tradition and heritage, in order to make it heartfelt.  She also believes in including comments from the opposition as well as the proponents.  This builds credibility with the public (T. Judd, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Pauline Carr uses short videos created with iMovie and iPhoto.  Her district purchased a flip camera to facilitate the use of video sharing so now the public is offering links to live-streaming of their board meeting budget presentations.  They are also currently developing a Budget Priority Survey that will be promoted through Facebook and include a link to the electronic version of the survey (P. Carr, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Sandra Strong conducts community events with touch pads.  She provides a series of presentations to groups of community members in an effort to inform and engage her community about the budget.  Ms. Strong will address only a few topics at a time.  Throughout the presentation she will ask questions.  Each community member will share their opinion with a touch pad.  The results of their touch pad responses appear immediately on the screen without personal identification.  The event is carried on video-streaming to those who are not in attendance.  This practice helps generate conversation and discussion.  These meetings are conducted two to three times per year (S. Strong, personal communication, February 15, 2011).

The communication department at Shiner Central Schools operates a blog called *The Communicator*.  Community members with a question or concern about any aspect of the district may address the communication department through this blog.  The communication specialist will provide a response within 24 hours.  All questions and answers are posted on The Communicator and left up for anyone to read (C. Spadacinni, personal communications, February 14, 2011).

Finally, Carol Spadacinni also video streams all of the district's budget development board of education meetings and their budget community forums.  In fact, for the budget community forums they allow people to view from home on video streaming and invite their active, real time participation, just as though they were in the room.  This means that people can participate in the forums (and board meetings) without having to be present.  She contends that many people can't get out in the evenings or simply don't want to get out. But they want to participate.  Video streaming allows for this to happen (C. Spadacinni, personal communication, February 14, 2011).

Table 4

*The Top Five Social Media Strategies Used by the Ten School Districts*

| School district | Measures with social media analytics | Link social media to webpage | Interactive webcam of meetings or presentations | On line surveys | Interactive use of blog |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brentwood | X | X | X | X | |
| Brasher | | X | X | | |
| Crary | | X | | X | |
| Harris | X | X | X | X | |
| Madrid | | X | | | X |
| Salmon | | X | X | X | |
| Scanville | | X | | | |
| Seaway | | X | | | |
| Shiner | X | X | | X | X |
| West Pierrepont | | | X | | |
| Total implementing each strategy (%) | 30 | 90 | 50 | 50 | 20 |

The most frequently used strategy by the ten school districts, as shown in Table 4, was the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube) to direct the viewer to the district webpage. Ninety percent of the districts utilized the strategy of posting short messages or pictures to the social media site of choice, thereby encouraging the viewer to log on to the districts most complete source of online information, the district webpage. Half of the districts utilized webcams in order to video stream meetings or presentations to the viewer at an off site

location, typically the viewer's home. This strategy allowed interactive participation by people who were not in attendance at the meeting.

On line surveys were used by fifty percent of the districts while blogs and social media analytics were utilized by twenty and thirty percent of the school districts, respectively. It is interesting to note that while blogs were the least popular social media strategy among the ten school districts, one of the two districts that used blogs felt that this strategy was particularly effective as it was their primary means of social media use.

*Transparency.* The superintendents, communication specialists, and other participants in this study felt that it was important for the budget process to be transparent; to fully disclose all things budget or budget related. All sixteen of the people interviewed for this study indicated that transparency was one of the primary reasons for implementing and committing to social media. They felt that transparency was one of the primary benefits of its use. One of the earlier adopters of social media was Superintendent Christopher Streit of the Brentwood Central School District. Dr. Streit's comments on this issue follow:

> We were scared of social media at first. Everyone was hearing about the negative uses of Facebook and how kids are bullied, and we will lose control of our message, and how people can post negative comments about us. It was not until we brought in a consultant on the topic that we gained confidence to try Facebook and Twitter in order to communicate with our public. He [consultant] convinced us that we could maintain a high level of control; that there were risks but the benefits outweighed the negatives. And the primary benefit was transparency with the public (C. Streit, personal communications, February 7, 2011).

An interesting perspective on the issue of transparency was that of Christine Sheldon, communication specialist of the Harris Central School District. As communication specialist for

the Harris Central School district, Ms. Sheldon stated, "Many districts lack of transparency is not because they are trying to be elusive, but it's simply a matter of people not actively participating in the process until decisions are already made. Using Facebook to disseminate information allows districts to interactively include people in the process throughout" (C. Sheldon, personal communications, February 4, 2011). The Harris Central School District is the only district in their county at this time, to use social media for preparing and communicating the budget to their community.

Deanna Latimer is the Director of Communication at the Shine Central School District (CSD). Deanna is also a parent of a child in the district and an active community member. Deanna states, "Single-handedly, the best thing that we ever did for communication purposes was to institute *The Communicator*" (D. Latimer, personal communications, February 14, 2011). *The Communicator* is a blog that the communication department at Shine CSD operates. If a person from the community or any school has a question or a concern about any aspect of the district, they are able to address the communication department through this blog. They will receive a response within 24 hours. All questions and answers are posted on *The Communicator* and left up for anyone to read.

> The website traffic went from 15,000 unique visitors per month before *The Communicator* to 88,000 unique users per month now. *The Communicator* was so successful that it won a National Public Relations award. *The Communicator* uncovers real questions. Yes, things are written from time to time that we do not like or puts the district in a bad light. However, wouldn't you rather hear about this stuff than not? This blog really gets an accurate picture of what people are thinking (D. Latimer, personal communication, February 14, 2011).

A budget related post from the *Communicator* follows in Figure 1:

Figure 1.  Sample Post for *The Communicator* Blog of Shine Central School District

**☺ COMMENT**

Posted on May 10, 2010

Please answer the following questions in advance of the upcoming budget vote: 1. Are there regulations regarding what faculty members can/cannot say to students about the upcoming budget vote? 2. If so, who dictates such restrictions (the district, the state education dept?). Thank you for your answer.

**RESPONSE**

Several years ago the district received directives from the State Education Department concerning the promotion of the budget - namely that we may advocate for residents to vote but may not ask them to vote "yes."

*Figure 1*. This figure is an authentic blog entry from the social media site of the Shine CSD.  It exemplifies the on going, interactive, transparent communication options of the district.

Transparency was a common theme articulated from each of the people interviewed. Many of the superintendents not only advocated for transparency, they lived it.  Some of the posts on their district blogs and Facebook accounts were not very complementary of their districts or them.  However, all negative or disparaging comments were posted for all to see.  The superintendents and communication specialists felt that by posting and displaying both positive and negative comments, the public would understand that communication was, indeed, open, honest, and factual; transparent.  Few people like to read negative comments about themselves or their school districts.  However, by avoiding the temptation to weed out negative comments, the public builds trust and assurance that communication is honest, accurate, factual, and the district is being transparent.  This practice helped establish and maintain trust with their respective communities.

Social media provides better transparency.  Before, a person had to come to the school district and go to the library to sit down and listen to the budget presentation.  Now the school can reach out to those people who may not be so willing to do that and that's a really important thing because those people will still come and vote but they don't want

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to come and listen to a budget presentation (P. Patterson, personal communication, January 31, 2011).

*The fear factor.*  When Facebook was developed in 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg, the purpose of this form of social media was to connect fellow classmates through an interactive, two-way, social experience on the Internet.  Initially, Facebook was intended for social purposes only.  For the most part this is the manner in which students used Facebook.  Of course, when dealing with an unstructured, open, unsupervised, somewhat autonomous social experience like Facebook, some college students (as well as others), will exploit its intentions in unflattering and sometimes illegal ways.  "He started Facebook as a way for people on college campuses to communicate with and keep track of one another- and occasionally poke each other and leer at each other's pictures…" (Grossman, 2011, p. 57).

Facebook moved off campus and into a "Risk-style forced march campaign to conquer the world" (Grossman, 2011, p. 61).  In 2005 it expanded to high schools and foreign schools, in 2006 to workplaces and eventually to anybody (in the world) over the age of 13.  Its growth was astonishing" (Grossman, 2011, p.61).  In 2006 Facebook had 12 million users, in 2009 it had 350 million users, and it currently has over 500 million users. By 2012 it is projected to have a billion users.

"Facebook is the largest and fastest growing online social networking site in the world" (Shih, 2009, p. 214).  For all of the benefits that it has to offer society, it can have a serious downside for public schools.  Many superintendents are not willing to even attempt to address the downside of the use of social media options, like Facebook.  Facebook has grown so fast in such a short period of time it has caught public schools and superintendents off guard.  The first reaction and clearly the reaction that persists in today's public schools is to ban Facebook and other forms of social media.  Social media, and particularly Facebook, is seen by school

superintendents as a real problem and a safety issue.  The pervasive strategy by public schools is to keep social media out of schools in order to protect the children and the families.

Social media in schools and Facebook in particular, have a bad reputation.  Facebook is perceived to be responsible for many of our societal ills.  Perceptions regarding social media and in particular, Facebook, are pervasively negative and, more specifically, dangerous.  Instead of viewing Facebook as an opportunity to share appropriate information and pictures with selected friends, teens frequently share private issues, thoughts, and feelings with hundreds of 'friends'.  The more 'friends' that a teen has the more popular that person is perceived to be, even though the teen may not really know even half of the people he/she 'friended' on Facebook.  As a society people, in addition to teens, have a difficult time stopping themselves from sharing willingly, compulsively, and permanently their most inner and private thoughts, feelings, and pictures.  These social issues create a conflict between social media and public schools.

Facebook communication is often conducted in the absence of the recipients.  People can be quite brave in making negative and hurtful comments about classmates on Facebook and in the safety and privacy of non face-to-face settings.  The next day or sometime after the comments have been posted, however, the consequences of unchecked, safe negative comments about classmates become very real when facing the subject of the Facebook conversation in the school hallway.  Bullies love Facebook.

In addition, Facebook is perceived to be addictive.  In fact, "European Psychiatry recently published a case of a woman who lost her job due to Facebook addiction, and the authors suggested that it could actually become a diagnosable ailment" (Grossman, 2011, p. 72).  Teen drinking parties are posted on Facebook.  Sexual predators use Facebook to lure, groom, and eventually connect with underage youths.  Drugs are trafficked through Facebook.  Pornography was the number one source of information sought through Facebook until recently.  Facebook

allows for students to cheat on homework, quizzes and tests.  Matrimonial lawyers attribute

Facebook as a primary source for online divorce evidence.  The list of negative consequences

associated with Facebook and social media is seemingly endless.  Given this set of facts it is no

wonder that superintendents of schools say 'NO' to Facebook and other forms of social media.

One of the ten school districts in this study used YouTube in order to display the district

budget presentation.  In this case, there was no opportunity for two-way communication.  While

this district did use social media, the use was very limited.  Another district implemented

"…district-controlled internet resources for official communication.  The only access we provide

for internet social media is our cyber-safety and cyber-bullying programs which teaches the

dangers of internet social media and generally advises children  to avoid them" (Herman S.,

email communication with NYSCOSS, January 25, 2011).  The following response that came

from Samantha Sherry, superintendent of the Scanville Central School District, characterizes

other similar positions from school districts as elicited by the NYSCOSS survey: "Scanville had

to remove Facebook due to the excessive bullying that was occurring.  We also had teachers

posting on Facebook during the day and during scheduled class times.  The district may visit this

type of social media in the future but it does come with a lot of grief" (S. Sherry, personal

communication, January 25, 2011).  The response to the NYSCOSS listserv question indicates

that the large majority of school districts are not using social media for budget communication

purposes.

Even school districts that agreed to be subjects of this study were, initially, skeptical

adopters of social media as a communication strategy for budget communication purposes.  For

example, the Crary Central School District did not use any form of social media for budget

communication purposes for their first budget vote on May 18, 2010.  They ultimately decided

against the use of Facebook and Twitter even though the district's communication specialist as

well as the BOCES communication specialist each strongly recommended its use prior to the first vote. The district was unaware in the early stages of the budget development process that a small group of anti-tax individuals was forming. The work that was done by these people was "professional, savvy, and attention-getting. They had a compelling story and they told it on Facebook. They attracted over 1000 fans" (T. Judd, personal communication, February 7, 2011). The first budget vote was defeated on May 18, 2010. The communication specialist stated that the superintendent was "apprehensive" of using Facebook. The superintendent admitted that, "Social media played a role in the defeat of the first vote; a significant role" (R. Briggs, personal communication, February 7, 2011). Mr. Briggs went on to say:

> The negative agenda of their (oppositions) Facebook page got strong attention. It was effective. People agreed with their perspective. They said that taxes were too high and people agreed. We got far more 'no' votes than in any other annual vote. I attribute that to their use of Facebook (R. Briggs, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

The superintendent's apprehension of using social media was reduced after the defeat of the first budget. Facebook and Twitter were both used by the district for the second and successful vote.

The Brentwood Central School District superintendent of schools also admitted that he was "scared of using social media until Will Rogers provided us with a day of training on its use" (C. Streit, personal communication, February 7, 2011). The Chester River BOCES communication specialist stated:

> The biggest obstacle to using social media is the superintendent. They do not understand it. They are afraid of it; fear it. They are afraid of negative comments and want the comment option turned off. This, of course, does not work" (D. Latimer, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

Debbie Carson is the communication specialist for the New York State Bureau of Officers (NYSBOO):

> Many districts are afraid of the criticism that is possible coming from the blogs and social media sites. Districts and superintendents are too sensitive to criticism. Posting comments of people who are critical of the district is a good thing. People trust you if they know you are posting everything, not filtering (D. Carson, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

The Harris Central School District communication specialist addresses the issue of managing the apprehensions that districts have about the negative side of social media:

> A district managed Facebook page that is run by professional communicators is not going to produce the evils that people associate with the use of social media in their personal lives. The idea that not having a Facebook page as a district-managed communication tool will protect your students from cyber-bullying, inappropriate exchanges between teachers/students, pedophiles, pornography, etc. is false. The students out there using technology in their own lives is where the danger lies. It isn't likely to happen on your pages. They aren't built to support this use and you are monitoring in the unlikely event that inappropriate exchanges happen (C. Sheldon, personal communication, February 4, 2011).

> There's still a concept out there among superintendents that having a Facebook page is a bad thing. They think that having Facebook is a sign of, I don't know, low morals or something or they think that the only thing that there will be are pictures of drunkenness or debauchery; there's no good purpose for it, therefore, they're going to stay away from it (Paul Patterson, personal communication, January 31, 2011).

This superintendent also stated:

We need superintendents who are with it. The majority of school districts have no social

media presence at all; they actually fear it so they keep it out. There is still a feeling that

school districts should not use social media like Facebook because it might be harmful.

We need to get over this in a hurry. Communication specialists get it. We need more

communication specialists and more tech-savvy superintendents" (P. Patterson, personal

communication, January 31, 2011).

**Summary to question 1**. The key to implementation of social media in a public school

district is the superintendent of schools. Based upon the data collected on this particular

question, it is the superintendent who is the gatekeeper for social media in the school district. It

is not required for him/her to be an expert in social media; however, the superintendent must be

convinced that social media will provide value to the district. The communication specialist is

the change agent. The communication specialist is the expert in the field. Each of the ten

districts who were a part of this study implemented social media in a manner which was unique

to their specific needs. No two districts implemented the use of social media in the same

manner. One common strategy among six of the districts was to use social media in order to

drive the viewer to the main district webpage where the rich information is contained. Finally,

all of the sixteen participants in the study stated that the use of social media lead to greater

transparency for the school district.

**Research question 2: How does the school district measure the effectiveness of the**

**use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?**

*Measuring for effectiveness of social media.* The Brentwood Central School District is

the district, among those studied, that most intensively measures the use of social media for

budget communication purposes. According to the district communication specialist the use of

social media was being measured as follows:

We joined Facebook on April 8, 2010. From that day through the day of the budget vote on May 18, 2010, 68 percent of our posts were budget-related. Almost all of the posts included a link back to the district's website for more information, which is the primary way we have used social media. During this time period, Facebook.com was a referral source for 560 visits to our site. This represented about 9.6 percent of all new visits to our site. These visitors spent an average of one minute, 25 seconds on our site, and viewed an average of 3.03 pages. We had 284 Facebook users who 'liked' our fan page by the day of the budget vote, about six weeks after starting the page. The district joined Twitter on January 6, 2010. From that day through the budget vote, about 41percent of all Tweets were budget-related. As with Facebook, most of these included links back to the district website. During this time period, Twitter.com was the referral source for 493 visits to our website, which represented about 6.5 percent of all new visits to the site. These visitors spent an average of two minutes, 38 seconds on our site, visiting an average of 2.38 pages while they were there (M. Eon, personal communication, February 9, 2011).

The information and data collected by Mark Eon is interesting in that the district began the use of social media (Facebook and Twitter) only 6 weeks before the school district annual budget vote. These data are readily available from Facebook.com. These data allow the district to routinely monitor the volume and frequency of social media use.

Another measurement illustration demonstrating the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the budget is again from the Brentwood Central School District. The district conducts a series of community budget forums leading to the budget vote. The forums begin in January and are held once or twice a month until May of each year. During the 2010-11 budget development year the district implemented an interactive webcam

strategy in order to gain more involvement and participation among the community. During the January community budget forum the district communication specialist commented:

> We had a peak of 145 people participate in this web cast and we had about 110 people
> still logged on at the end of the webcast. We provided a survey to the people who
> participated; 46 people participated. We surveyed them about the highest source of
> budget information for the district and the results were broken down evenly between the
> website and news articles (M. Eon, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

While Brentwood measures the use of social media quite frequently and rather specifically, other school districts in the study also reported that they measure the use of social media in a variety of different ways. Some collect information on the number of unique users that visited the site within a specified period of time. A report from Facebook.com regarding visitor activity may be gathered at any time. "With just 1900 students, our community is fairly small and we are already up to 537 unique visitors. We see this as a measure of its success. We launched for last year's budget season" (Chris Sheldon, personal communication, February 4, 2011).

The communication director of the Salmon Public School District admitted that measuring the use of social media as a means to prepare and communicate the school budget or to use it for general communication purposes is in its infancy stages:

> Very few school districts even use social media, let alone measure its effectiveness. We
> are in the beginning stages of measuring for effectiveness. This is, as of now,
> unchartered territory. We must be able to defend the use of social media. We are
> beginning to track staff time on what it takes to keep it fresh and current. Measurement is
> more of a separate activity/phenomenon. We do need to determine effectiveness so that
> when asked we can justify our time on it and its impact with our communication effort.

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We will need to be able to answer the critics. At this point we do not collect a great deal

of data. Social media is currently holistically accepted, but we need to support its use

with members of the community and at this time we do not do a good job of that (M.

Cartmill, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

The communication director of the Chester River BOCES speaks about measuring the

effectiveness of social media by school districts in the following way:

Schools are not big on measuring. This involves time and cost. It's very hard to sell by

going back and measuring. We are not doing a good job with this. However, there are

some basic metrics out there and one of the most obvious is how many people actually

are following you on your feeds. Website numbers are enormous and we have good

metrics on that. We use Google Analytics to give us data. We don't just count hits and

things like that because that is not a good indicator. We tend to look at unique visitors.

Some of our districts have over 30,000 unique visitors in a month which tells us this

school website is very well trafficked. You can go deeper and find out what pages people

are bookmarking and entering. The homepage tends to be far and away the top page (D.

Latimer, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

Exit surveys are a means of gathering information directly from the voters, normally on

the day of the vote. After voters leave the polls they are asked to complete a form which is

called the exit poll. The poll may ask a variety of questions. Typically the questions relate to

issues of governance, budget, forecasting, opinions, etc. It is also typical to ask voters where

they received their information about the budget. They are given choices of the local newspaper,

school web site, budget newsletter, meetings, word of mouth and others. Often one of the final

questions on the poll asks the voter if he/she voted yes or no on the school budget. In the

Brentwood Central School District exit polls have been administered for years. Once the results

of the exit polls are in, they then cross-tabulate the results and determine trends.  For example, they will compare where the voter received his/her information with how he/she voted; yes or no:

> What we found in Brentwood are people who cited their primary source of information as being school related, overwhelmingly voted 'yes' on the budget.  Conversely, those who cited that their primary source of budget information came from mass media, friends and neighbors were more likely to vote 'no' (M. Eon, personal communication).

The communication director at the Chester River BOCES explains this phenomenon this way:

> We all know bad news and controversy sells.  The newspaper will typically have a spin on their news toward the negative if it involves school budgets.  Bad news and controversy sell and a lot of times misinformation sells.  So people who are tuning in and getting their primary source of information from those channels are more likely to vote 'no'.  This is the biggest thing to get schools to understand.  The communication equation is to control your own message and do a good job of telling the whole story (D. Latimer, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

*Roles, responsibilities, and costs.*  In a New York State Council of School Superintendents survey distributed to 690 sitting school superintendents in January of 2011, the question was asked, "Do you use social media in order to prepare and communicate the school district budget to your community?"  Only nine school districts responded in the affirmative.  This data demonstrates that New York State public school districts are reluctant to implement the use of social media.  Most school districts in New York State do not, as of the time of this study, implement social media as part of their overall communication plans, strategies, or communication solutions.

Do personnel roles and responsibilities change when incorporating social media into the communication practices of a school district? What are the costs of implementing social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the budget to the community? These questions were posed to the sixteen participants. The participants were unanimous with their views on the subject of cost, where the expense of implementing social media solutions ranged from cost neutral to money saving. No district claimed an increase in costs. Some districts had to become creative in supporting their vision to implement social media, but it did not increase costs. "We felt it was a priority so we substituted time devoted to other things to create time to get social media up and running" (M. Baytovin, personal communication, February 22, 2011). A BOCES superintendent stated:

> People need to be more in tune with social media. Last week I was in a budget presentation with a component school district via a webinar. There were 130 participants. They had never before had 130 people at a budget hearing. We simply utilized existing equipment and personnel. There was no additional cost. However, if we did the same thing by asking people to meet in a central location there would have been costs. We actually saved money on this one. Everyone knows that we can't keep adding and spending, but who says we can't change (P. Patterson, personnel communication, January 31, 2011).

Several of the other participants addressed setting priorities. They felt that if it was important and added value and effectiveness to their budget presentation and communication efforts, then priorities would change without increasing costs. One communication specialist stated it this way:

> Absolutely there is no cost, just join in the conversation. I think it is more a matter of prioritizing whatever your capacity is in terms of the staffing to develop and manage

social media communication tools. You can't do everything in one day a week but you can certainly take this on (D. Latimer, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

The superintendent of schools at the Brentwood Central School District used social media to reduce the use of paper in the district and to go 'green'. "We are well on our way to being paperless. No memos, no letters. Everything is paperless. Kids handouts no longer go home" (C. Streit, personal interview, February 7, 2011). The superintendent's leadership on using social media and saving paper resonated with others. The communication specialist in the same school district stated that social media "costs significantly less than all the newsletters that we once did. Newsletters require labor, postage, paper, printing and time. And the news is a week old before it gets home. I'm not aware of any additional costs" (M. Eon, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

A communications specialist in the Salem School District agreed:

> Saves us money. The district is more and more tech savvy. No more paper. Cuts down on phone usage for mundane questions that turn into conversations. When was your last telephone conversation that was a few words long? When was your last email that you answered in a few words? Get the point? Saves time (M. Cartmill, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

**Summary to question 2**. Of the ten districts represented in this study none measured for the effectiveness of social media with any great precision. Perhaps the newness of social media to the world of education, or a perceived lack of measuring devices available for districts, or the notion that schools do not typically measure for effectiveness on new programs, are some of the possible reasons that the schools lacked measurement devices. This does not mean that measurement did not occur among these districts relative to the use of social media as it applies to school budgets. Some measurement was taking place. However, even in the rare cases that

measurement was conducted, the sophistication of the measurement was limited as was the time, resources, and urgency dedicated to this function.

**Research question 3: What is the relationship between the public school districts use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget and the passage or rejection of the budget?**

*The opposition's use of social media.*  A motivating factor that caused at least two school districts to implement social media as a solution to prepare and communicate the school budget was in reaction to the opposition's effective use of Facebook.  Of the ten school districts interviewed, eight districts had not yet experienced an opposition group that was communicating to the public with social media.  However, of the two school districts that did experience oppositional groups, one district's experience was significant.

The Crary Central School District began its 2009-10 budget campaign without utilizing social media as a means in which to communicate with its public.  The District relied on the traditional and time-tested communication methods of budget flyers, budget presentations, budget newsletters, and stuffing elementary school backpacks with budget information. Unbeknownst to the superintendent of schools or the part-time communication specialist, a small, but active anti-tax group had created a Facebook page in order to sabotage the school budget vote.  It worked, the first vote failed.

The opposition had developed a convincing argument against passing the school budget. The argument was then video recorded and portrayed as part of a video presentation that was shared with the community (and the world) via Facebook.  The district did not have a Facebook page or any other social media access.  According to the Crary Central School District Superintendent of Schools:

The opposition's use of Facebook contributed significantly to the defeat of the first

budget vote. We did not have a social media presence for that vote.  So, many people had

negative data and misinformation as a result of a taxpayer who used Facebook against us.

An individual in the community actively used Facebook and created an anti-budget video

called An Eye on Crary (R. Briggs, personal communications, February 7, 2011).

The anti-tax citizen responsible for the video created a professional-looking Facebook

account, posted misinformation about the district, and made it available for anyone with a

Facebook account.  He created an on-line rumor mill and quickly attracted hundreds of people as

'friends'.  "Digital word-of-mouth is a very powerful communications tool", (T. Judd, personal

communications, February 7, 2011).  The video contained such messages as 'Vote Yes for

change, No to taxes'.  It also contained vast amounts of antigovernment documents.  They had

Facebook and the district did not.  They were all over it.  It was quite savvy on their part.  Now

we have Facebook.  Without Facebook the district could not even be part of this conversation"

(R. Briggs, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

School districts often lack the confidence to establish a presence on social media sites.

They feel or believe that allowing social media access will subject students to harmful

information.  They also tend to believe that social media sites will bring unfettered criticism to

the district or persons in the district.  Therefore, districts will not establish a social media

presence or, if they do, they will want the site to be void of negative or critical comments.  In

other words, if districts implement the use of social media then they will censure the information

before it goes to the public.  However, this is a strategic mistake according to D. Latimer,

Director of Communication of the Chester River BOCES.

If we try to squash the critics and avoid criticism of the district, or district decisions, then

people will recognize what we are doing and turn to other mechanisms to make their

point.  Plus, people know what you are doing if there is no criticism.  They know that you

are filtering the information.  So, now you are no longer the source of their information,

they don't trust you.  They will turn to people who have established sites where they can

learn the "real story".  They will rely on other sources of information and your source is

no longer visited.  The school opponents are using social media better than schools are.

Schools are afraid of criticism so they will not use social media or they will filter it, and

both are strategic errors (D. Latimer, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

The District Superintendent of the Chester River BOCES agreed:

Our opponents are using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.  In fact, in some places they

are using social media much better than the school districts, and that is the problem.  If

we don't get out proactively with a message that resonates with the voter, in a manner

that voters relate to, social media, then we lose.  Districts block social media and our

opponents use it.  It's like fighting a battle without all of your weapons.  I will say this,

using social media allows for the pot to be stirred a little bit.  But the fact is people who

are opposed are stirring the pot anyway and for us to just stick our heads in the sand is

silly (P. Patterson, personal communication, January 31, 2011).

Of the sixteen respondents, fifteen, representing 94 percent of the districts studied,

indicated in the affirmative when asked if there was a relationship between the public school

district's use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget

and the passage or rejection of the budget.  It is interesting to note that there were different ways

in which the respondents based their opinions.  The districts that had not experienced a recent

budget failure seemed somewhat less emphatic with their affirmative responses.  The districts

that had lost a budget vote or came close to losing a budget recently were adamant in their belief

that the use of social media by their opponents and the lack of social media presence by the district was a primary cause of their defeat, or near defeat.

Districts that had passed budgets recently typically responded to this research question in a similar manner to Mark Eon, Communication Specialist of the Brentwood Central School District:

Yes, I believe there is (a relationship between the use of social media and the passage or defeat of a budget). We have close to 600 Facebook followers, or friends. Many of our 'friends' have dozens, if not hundreds, of their own 'friends'. They have organizations that they are following, too. We use Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, etc. There's a huge audience out there and Facebook can reach them" (M. Eon, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

The superintendent of schools of the Brentwood Central School District felt that the use of social media helped them pass their budget. "I think the use of social media improved our voter attendance. Last year we had a 2.5 to 1 ratio of positive support for the budget, which was one of the highest in the immediate area" (C. Streit, Brentwood CSD, February 7, 2011). Christopher Streit felt that social media also helped to engage more people in the conversation of the budget and how it impacted student learning. He had an interesting perspective regarding the benefits of social media to communicate with his community. In the past, the local newspaper was in control of informing the community of public comments and people's opinion about the budget. This would be done through letters to the editor, editorials, news articles, and newspaper blogs. The school district had limited involvement in shaping this conversation.

So, I thought why should we let them (newspapers) have all the fun? If we do our own social media spots or our own blogs, people would be allowed to comment to us directly

and ask us questions directly.  And that seems to diffuse a lot of nonsense" (C. Streit, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Mark Cartmill, Director of Community Relations and Communications of the Salem Public Schools, had a unique perspective as to how social media impacted the outcome of the public vote.  He emphasized that social media is two-way, interactive conversation.  He also stated that very few school districts in his west coast state even allowed social media in their schools, let alone implemented it for the targeted purpose of passing budgets.  He used social media to listen to people.

> You could tell by the tenor of the social media conversations and discussions that there were mostly highly supportive people out there.  It was more of a real time discussion so it stayed a little more civilized and a little more human, and that was great.  We also listened to the negative.  The negative people put out their own information on Facebook, negative information, anti-bond measure information, giving the proponents a good chance to respond and learn from their comments (M. Cartmill, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

D. Latimer, Communication Specialist of the Chester River BOCES has "no doubt that social media plays an important role in passing budgets.  However, it is a greater issue than just that.  Social media helps us get informed consent" (D. Latimer, personal communication, February 8, 2011).  Today, a proposition to increase school district spending is often an unpopular event.  Sometimes the most that a district can hope is for voters to come to the realization that even though they don't like an increase in taxes, they can support one.  In order to gain the support of taxpayers, it requires regular and consistent communication with the public over time on many relevant educational issues.  Therefore, when it comes time for the budget vote, they are already accustomed to getting their best and most accurate school district

information from the district's web page (D. Latimer, personal communication, February 8, 2011). Latimer believes that it is really informed consent that districts want:

> More and more we want people to reach the conclusion that, 'While I don't necessarily like the budget, I can support it because I saw, read, and understand what you went through in terms of making tough decisions and choices and I felt included because you listened. And there is no better tool for listening to the public than social media (D. Latimer, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

Melissa Baytovin, communication specialist of the Seaway Central School District, "Yes, there is a relationship. I believe there is more likely to be a relationship if the budget vote goes bad. The negative is much stronger than the positive" (M. Baytovin, personal communication, February 16, 2011).

*Summary to question 3*. Of the sixteen participants interviewed, fifteen (94 percent) believed that the use of social media does influence the outcome of a school budget vote. Those most convinced about the correlation between social media use and the passage or failure of a budget were the two school districts included in this study that experienced the oppositions use of social media. However, even those districts that did not experience organized opposition to the budget responded affirmatively to this question. A common theme among the districts was the role that leadership played in making social media effective in a school district. The commitment of the superintendent toward the use of social media leads to its success.

**Concluding Observations**

Without exception all sixteen of the people interviewed for this study advocated for school districts to use social media as a means of communicating with their community relative to school budgets. The participants offered the following advice to districts who may wish to begin implementation of social media for budget preparation and communication purposes.

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Craig Streit implemented social media in his district by simply doing it. He felt that it takes too long to go through the policy development process and the planning process before beginning. He warns districts to be prepared to take the criticism as it comes, not that there is much of it. He believes that we need adventuresome superintendents who are willing to take calculated risks in order to implement social media. He believes that the way in which school districts communicate with their community must improve and social media provides the vehicle for this improvement. People are on the websites and they are active users of social media. Therefore, in order to reach all of our public we must use their communication medium, social media. In Christopher Streit's case, he believes that in order to demonstrate transparency and to build trust all comments that are posted on social media, such as Facebook, should not be edited. In other words, he does not believe in removing negative comments from the district Facebook account. By resisting the temptation to remove negative comments (from Facebook), actually facilitates people to voice true feelings, even if they are oppositional. Posting the few oppositional comments that are occasionally posted demonstrates that the district is open to listening to what people have to say. He believes that this is what creates a true sense of openness (C. Streit, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Critical to attracting people's interest is the need to create an attractive, informative, and useful website. Mark Cartmill believes that a well-designed website is essential to keep people coming back for more information. He believes that before the social media structures are in place, the district must have a quality destination for people to go. Facebook and Twitter are wonderful tools but they are best utilized in order to drive people to the district website, the best and most complete source of district information (M. Cartmill, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Cartmill goes on to say that  the real key to maintaining strong lines of communication is to  keep the district 'friends' alive throughout the year.  He believes that the district communication strategy is to keep those visiting the district website actively engaged in district news and events by keeping the content fresh.  "Keep those people well fed so that when you do come back to ask them for something, they don't feel like you've just gone away and then you're only coming back with your hand out" (M. Cartmill, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

District leadership in the use of social media is critical to its effectiveness and use, according to Mark Eon.  District leadership must make a strong commitment to provide comprehensive and timely information about the district budget; its content, impact on education and impact on taxes (M. Eon personal communication, February 8, 2011).

Whether a district wants to be on social media sites or not is really not the issue.  Chris Sheldon believes that most, if not all districts, are already on social media.  The real issue for districts to consider is whether the district wishes to control its message or allow others to control it.  Sheldon believes that the district should be proactive and develop a strong communication plan with social media a central part of it (C. Sheldon, personal conversation, February 4, 2011). Mark Cartmill agrees.  He believes that the district should make the use of social media an integral aspect of the overall district communication plan.  It should be a seamless part of the ongoing conversation that districts have with their community (M. Cartmill, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

The creation of policies associated with district use of social media is of critical importance.  Therefore, the district should create guidelines that spell out the acceptable use procedures necessary to support the policy (C. Sheldon, personal conversation, February 4, 2011).  Social media policies need to be carefully written and well communicated to all within

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the district.  However, policy development should not be allowed to delay implementation.

Implementation should begin without waiting for policy and procedure to be completed before

implementation (T. Judd, personal communication, February 11, 2011).

There is a difference between a communication specialist and a technology specialist.

The communication specialist should be in charge of a districts social media effort.  This

responsibility does not belong to the technology department.  Melissa Baytovin advocates for

only two to three people to be responsible for posting to her districts Facebook or Twitter

accounts and to ensure they are people who have strong interpersonal and communication skills

(C. Sheldon, personal communication, February 4, 2011).  For the sake of consistency and

accuracy, the district is wise to establish one central person responsible for social media posts.  A

single voice, as opposed to multiple voices will best represent districts (M. Baytovin, personal

communication, February 16, 2011).

Also, social media should not be used as a first level of trust.  Social media is a valuable

tool for two-way, interactive communication.  It should supplement and even be a big aspect of a

districts communication plan.  However, it is not a substitute for active personal involvement in

the community (S. Strong, personal communication, February 9, 2011).

**Summary**

Public schools continue to be economically stressed.  There are limited resources for

most governmental functions, education included.  The 2011-12 year brings the third consecutive

year of decreased state aid to public schools in New York State.  The public schools have

responded by reducing expenses in personnel, programs, transportation, and many other budget

categories.  Some school districts in New York State have no place to go for more budget

reductions other than personnel, resulting in increases in average class size and program

reduction and/or elimination.

As New York State continues to reduce aid to schools and local budget reduction options diminish, it will be the local taxpayer who will be making even more of a significant decision when he or she goes to the polls to vote on the annual school budget.  The use of social media by school districts will become essential as a means of two-way, interactive, digital communication with parents and the community.  Social media, as a tool for communication, will become an expectation for school districts to expertly and effectively utilize.  Chapter Five contains a presentation of the analysis of findings associated with the relationship between the use of social media to prepare and communicate the budget and the passage or rejection of that budget.

**Chapter 5: Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter contains the purpose statement, research questions, background information, an analysis of the findings, implications for practitioners, and recommendations for future research. This study examines the extent to which the use of social media by school districts to prepare and communicate the annual school district budget impacts the passage or failure of that budget. The research questions addressed in this investigation are:

**1**: How does the school district implement the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?

**2:** How does the school district measure the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?

**3**: Is there a relationship between the public school districts use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget and the passage or rejection of the budget?

**Background**

Social media is the fastest growing and most preferred communication solution for business, industry, and other similar entities in the United States and around the world (Shih, 2009). The field of business has reached sophisticated methods, strategies, and techniques designed specifically to communicate with targeted populations of people (Shih, 2009). Their primary motivation is to communicate with people in order to influence them to a particular brand, product, or market (Marken, 2009). Business was an early adopter of social media and now has experience and expertise in using this communication phenomenon to build multi-million and even multi- billion dollar entities.

In addition, the use of social media is credited as being largely responsible for the election of the first African-American president of the United States, Barack Obama in 2008

(Qualman, 2009, p. 87). Also in the political realm, in 2011, an Egyptian nation rebelled against a tyrannical dictator who ruled by subjecting his citizens to oppression and fear for decades. Through the use of social media, Egyptian rebels forced the dictator to abandon his rule as the promise of a new democracy now unfolds. Several other Middle East countries are following the example set by the radical Egyptians in using social media to communicate in order to overthrow tyrannical leaders (Ghosh, 2011).

The literature clearly demonstrates that business and politics have learned to use social media in order to create unprecedented change within their domain. Public schools, however, have been reluctant and resistant to capitalize on the use of social media to communicate the annual school budget with their communities (Stein, Rogan, & Partners, 2008; Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010). In January of 2011, over 690 public school districts in New York State were surveyed by the New York State Council of School Superintendents with the question "Does your school district use social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?" Only nine school districts replied in the affirmative. The response to this question makes it quite clear that public school districts in comparison to the fields of business and politics are collectively slow adopters of the use of social media. In fact, many school districts continue to ban the use and presence of social media on public school campuses throughout New York State, even today (Bush-Suflita, 2011).

**Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study are based upon the responses generated from the sixteen educational professionals selected to participate in this research. Explicit connections between the literature review of this study and the findings are provided in order to support the conclusions. The analysis of the data is detailed as it relates to the three research questions.

In the field of technological innovation, use, or adoption, public schools are followers of other entities such as business and politics. Public schools are late adopters to the use of social media and lag far behind the other entities mentioned. Public schools avoid taking risks in the adoption or implementation of social media. Those few school districts that are on the 'cutting edge' of the use of social media for the purpose of budget communication with the community are risk-takers and innovators. The small number of districts currently using social media is poised to be leaders in the transformation of information between public schools and their communities. Essential to their emergent role will be refinement of the continued uses of social media, exploration of future social media uses, and the need for measurement in order to determine the effectiveness of social media.

The superintendent is the gatekeeper for the use of social media in the school district. Vision, direction, persistence, knowledge and leadership are required attributes for a superintendent to assume the risk of adopting social media. However, the communication specialist is the change agent for the implementation and use of social media in the public schools. It is his or her knowledge, creativity, foresight, and interpersonal skills that facilitate the adoption of social media as a communication strategy in school districts. Interestingly, the communication specialist in several districts also assumed the role of advisor or consultant to the superintendent of schools.

Districts must embrace the use of social media in order for it to be effective. It is necessary for the decision-makers in the district to be thoughtful, deliberate, well-organized, and well-planned in order to implement and use social media effectively. In most cases, the leadership comes from the superintendent of schools and the change comes from the communication specialist.

Eight of the ten (80 percent) districts that were part of this study contracted

communication specialist services from their BOCES. These communication specialists are

well-trained, receive ongoing professional development in communication, and their services are

BOCES aidable. Being BOCES aidable means that the net cost to the district for this position is

based upon the aid ratio assigned to the district. In most cases, by contracting BOCES services,

the district costs for communication are lower than actual costs.

The relationship between the superintendent of schools and the communication specialist

was noted as key to the success of the use of social media for communication purposes.

The use of social media for the purpose of communication was not yet a formal aspect of the

district communication plan for any of the districts studied in this research. However, several of

the participants felt that it should be.

None of the districts felt that they were measuring the use of social media effectively.

However, all of the participants felt that measurement of the use of social was important.

Fifteen of the sixteen respondents for this study advocated for school districts to use social media

as a means of communicating with communities relative to the school budget. The

superintendents also recognized the effectiveness of the use of social media by the taxpayers who

were in opposition to the school budget.

The opposition demonstrated in various school districts the power of their use of social

media. Two of the school districts (20 percent) studied faced organized oppositional groups that

utilized social media in order to encourage a negative vote on the school district budget. One of

the ten school districts (10 percent) in this study experienced a budget defeat largely as the result

of the oppositions use of social media; more specifically, Facebook.

All of the respondents indicated that the use of social media is or can be cost neutral.

One communication specialist viewed the approach to marketing the school budget as asking voters for informed consent. This strategy recognizes that some voters are increasingly reluctant to vote yes on school budgets. Therefore, districts should understand this and approach the voter in a manner that recognizes their position but asks them for informed consent. Informed consent means that a voter may not like the budget but realizes it is in the best interest for all concerned to approve it.

An unintentional finding was that of gender. The gender of the superintendents in this study was predominantly male (70 percent) as compared to female (30 percent). The gender of the communication specialist was predominantly female (88 percent) as compared to male (12 percent).

**Research question 1: How does the school district implement the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?**

One of the key findings of this study was how the use of social media can lead to an increased level of transparency between the school district and the community. The school districts in this study used social media to provide the communities that they served with a high level of transparency. In nine of the ten (90 percent) school districts in this study, information and data about the budget was distributed quickly and comprehensively via multiple means of social media. The use of social media allowed the school districts in this study to communicate with their communities in a two-way, interactive, digital manner.

These communication strategies increase the school district's level of transparency. The use of social media for transparency purposes is consistent with the literature. "Certainly, transparency is enhanced when an organization's leaders are committed to it. But even when leaders resist it, transparency is inescapable in the digital age. The new transparency is not an option" (Bennis, Goleman, & O'Toole, 2009, p. 43). Warren Bennis (2009) goes on to say that

"Transparency is one evidence of an organization's moral health" (p. 42). This study finds that as superintendents face and overcome the "fear factors" of social media, transparency within the school district is likely to increase.

All ten of the school districts included in this study were early adopters in the use of social media for preparing and communicating the school district budget to each of their respective communities. The superintendents of these districts were also committed to the highest levels of transparency. "Candor and transparency become widespread only when leaders make it clear that openness is valued and will be rewarded. Openness happens only when leaders insist on it" (Bennis, Goleman, O'Toole, 2008, p. 8).

This study defined the role of superintendent of schools as the gatekeeper for the implementation and use of social media in preparing and communicating the budget to the community. These superintendents were open for change and viewed the use of social media as a critically important strategy for communicating the budget. The superintendents embraced their role as advocates for the use of social media. They set the vision and tone for the use of social media for communication purposes. The literature supports this finding. It is the superintendent who must have the vision, make the commitment, and provide leadership and financial supports for the implementation of social media into a school district (Empowering the 21$^{st}$ Century Superintendent, 2010). None of the superintendents in this study proclaimed themselves to be the internal district expert relative to the use of social media but in varying degrees they did possess an understanding of the imperative importance of its use. Therefore, the superintendent is the one person in the district who can open the door for the use of social media and, therefore, functions as the gatekeeper.

The districts in this study embraced social media as an effective means in which to communicate the school district budget. Beginning with the superintendent of schools, the

districts were committed to the use of social media.  Even though barriers for its implementation

existed, these districts could see beyond those barriers to the highly effective two-way,

interactive model of communication that business and politics realized several years ago.  Social

media provides a strategic means in which to connect all of its constituents (Stein, Rogan, &

Partners, 2008).

The position of communication specialist became apparent as an important role for the

implementation and use of social media for preparing and communicating the budget to the

community.  Of the ten districts interviewed, nine districts employed at least a part-time person

who served in the capacity of communication specialist.  Of the nine districts that had some form

of communication specialist position or service, eight districts employed either their own

communication specialist or obtained the serves from the local BOCES.  The communication

specialist was the change agent in nine of the ten districts studied.  The communication specialist

was the social media expert and worked closely with the superintendent in its use for

communication purposes.  McAfee (2009) and Dahlkempter and Franke (2010) support this

finding.  In each of their studies they independently state that districts must recognize and utilize

the emerging communication solutions that are available to them.  They must be able to adapt

and adjust to make these solutions appropriate for the district.

The relationship between the communication specialist and the superintendent of schools

was viewed as critical to the success of communicating with the public through social media.

The superintendent must be able to trust the communication specialist with important

information.  This relationship creates a paradigm shift for many superintendents.  Leaders in all

walks of life need to maintain pace with changes in leadership roles.  Qualman (2009) cites

several examples, one of which is how President Obama used social media to be elected into the

White House.  This example illustrates how leaders must be able to change and adjust in order to

effectively take advantage of the benefits of social media. Qualman (2009) also indicates that Mr. Obama was not necessarily an expert on the use of social media, but he was wise enough to listen to those who were.

The superintendent of schools is generally somewhat familiar with the topics and content of those decisions for which he/she is responsible. For example, most superintendents are familiar with curriculum, instruction, budgets, negotiations, transportation, operations, and the many other areas of responsibility upon which decisions are made. In the case of social media, however, many superintendents are still in the dark. Additionally, the superintendent is often unaware of the communication uses and potential of social media (Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, 2010). While they may have heard of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, few superintendents have had personal or professional experience with them. Therefore, the superintendent must rely heavily on the advice and counsel of others, like the communication specialist, in order to make decisions.

The districts in this study did not create short or long-range communication plans prior to the implementation of social media. They viewed social media as another communication strategy and simply integrated it into their existing communication practices. Eight of the ten (80 percent) school districts in this study anticipate including the use of social media as a component of their communication plan in the near future.

Each of the districts used the forms of social media that best met their respective interests and needs. For example, the Shiner Central School District utilized a blog called the Communicator as their primary social media strategy. Madrid focused on the use of short iMovie videos and iPhoto pictures that they posted on YouTube. Harris Central School District and the Brentwood Central School District used Facebook and Twitter to drive people to their website. Brasher Central School District created 'events' on Facebook. Crary Central School

District preferred to use surveys prior to the budget vote in order to inform and communicate with the community. Strategies and methods of the use of social media were varied based upon the wants, needs, and expertise of the district.

**Research question 2: How does the school district measure the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?**

Districts have yet to understand the potential benefits of conducting measurement strategies in order to test the effectiveness of the use of social media for preparing and communicating the school budget. Of the ten districts interviewed, none had expressed satisfaction with the degree of measurement that had been conducted. This could be a result of the 'just do it' implementation practices of school districts or the fact that districts tend not to measure new practices very well. Another explanation for the lack of measurement of the effectiveness of social media could be from the sense that the use of social media in school districts is so new that measurement has yet to surface as a priority at this time. The Brentwood Central School District was the most advanced of all the districts studied, in measuring for effectiveness. This district began the initial phase of using social media analytics to track and analyze those who access the district website by counting "unique visitors". The district also can determine which social media strategies yield the greatest community interest and activity. They know how long each visitor stayed on a particular site and how many pages the average visitor viewed. These are only a few of the data that Brentwood measured. These data were made available to the Brentwood district as a result of their use of Google Analytics. Compared to business and politics, Brentwood and the other school districts have limited measurement practices.

The importance of measuring for the effectiveness of the use of social media is illustrated by the work of Kirby and Kawashima-Kinsberg (2009). During the 2008 Presidential Election,

data were increasingly important in order for the Obama campaign to listen to their constituents and make appropriate and strategic adjustments.  In this case, these authors cite how the Obama campaign was able to draw large scale interest from the Net Generation.  School districts need to use social media in order to listen to their respective constituencies and make appropriate and strategic decisions to address their changing needs (Kirby & Kawashima-Kinsberg, 2009).

Exit polls were used in 60 percent of the districts who participated in this study.  Thirty percent of the districts simply placed their exit polls online and encouraged voters to complete them at their convenience.  Another 30 percent of the districts combined the traditional paper and pencil exit surveys with online survey response options.  Brentwood discovered an interesting finding based upon the analysis of their exit poll results.  Voters who cited that their primary source of information was derived from district generated or district created communication sites were more apt to vote in favor of the budget.  Voters who received their information from the local newspaper and other non-district sources were more inclined not to vote for the budget.  This has serious implications for school districts and reinforces the strategy for districts to be the first and best source of their own information.  However, according to a Pew Internet and American Life Project survey (2010), most people still derive their school district information from the local newspaper or local television channel first.  These data provide a challenge for the school districts to communicate with a wider community audience.

**Research question 3: Is there a relationship between the public school districts use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget and the passage or rejection of the budget?**

Of the sixteen respondents to this question, fifteen (94 percent) indicated that the use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget has a direct impact on the passage of the budget.  However, various reasons were given as to what the link

actually was between the use of social media and the passing of the budget.  The Brentwood

Central School District communication specialist felt that the districts social media audience is

now very large.  Brentwood has over 600 Facebook unique users and each user has hundreds of

friends.  Therefore, the district reaches thousands of people through Facebook alone.  The

Brentwood superintendent, through social media, can now join a conversation that had

previously been under the exclusive control of the print media.  Newspaper articles, letters to the

editor, and editorials were always controlled by the newspaper editors.  Now, with the advent of

social media, the school district can reach people immediately and with their own version of the

story line.  Brentwood is actively pursuing the data that they generated from Google Analytics.

Those who receive budget information from district generated communication first are more

likely to be in favor of the school district budget.  Social media, as described by Israel (2009),

has outpaced traditional forms of mass information dissemination industries.

The opposition's use of social media was the primary motivating factor for two of the ten

school districts to begin the use of social media.  In the Crary Central School District and the

Brasher Central School District people who were in opposition to the district budget used social

media as a means of communicating with the public in an effort to defeat the budget.  In the case

of the Crary Central School District the strategy worked; the first vote was defeated.  "They

(opposition) had Facebook and the district did not" (R. Briggs, personal communication,

February 7, 2011).

The work of Qualman (2008) supports the use of social media in order to address or

counter those who may be critics or oppositional of businesses and companies.  "The slow

adopters fail to realize the impact of social media and do so at their own peril" (p. 183).

Furthermore, Israel (2009), advocates for organizations to create a social media presence in order

not to underestimate the effectiveness of oppositional people or groups.

This is one of the more compelling reasons for a school district to create and maintain an active, interesting, and relevant social media presence. Whether a district wishes to be on social media or not really does not matter due to the fact that the district probably already is. In other words, if the district does not have a social media presence in the district's name, it is likely that someone else does. Therefore, it is essential that each school district create its own social media presence as opposed to allowing someone else to create the district site and post as they wish.

**Conclusions**

It is predictable that the tide is about to turn on the use of social media by school districts for communicating the annual school budget. The implementation of social media is a major initiative for progressive school districts that take seriously the responsibility of communicating with staff, parents, faculty, students, and community in a two-way, interactive, and transparent basis. Within the next few years school districts will increasingly engage their communities in communication through the form of social media. The financial and political stakes will be too high for school districts to ignore the importance, necessity, and obligation to create and maintain regular and meaningful communication with their stakeholders within the means in which these stakeholders have accustomed to communicate; through social media.

The United States economy already has shown signs of recovery during 2010 and 2011. However, education funding will predictably be one of the last social entities to realize financial benefits from any such recovery. Taxpayers are reluctant to increase taxes now and will remain reluctant into the foreseeable future. Therefore, school districts will need to be able to engage their communities in meaningful and rich conversation in order to establish district priorities in finding and using scarce resources, determining which educational programs they can live without, and gaining support for the annual school district budget. Aligning public support will be essential as school districts strive to provide a high level of educational programming to our

next generation of students in preparing them with 21st Century college and career readiness skills.

The use of social media in the United States and around the world by all age groups over the past several years has grown remarkably and it is not slowing. The school district stakeholder's use of personal computers, cell phones and computer tablets has driven the adoption of social media to the more open, progressive and technologically savvy school districts.

What all of this means is that public schools must collectively change the way in which they communicate with their parents and community. Schools must develop new ways to capture, engage, and involve their constituencies in meaningful dialogue in order to connect them to the issues facing public education. By integrating social media as an integral component of the school districts strategic communication plan, public schools can give the community both an individual as well as a collective voice in a true partnership in the education of their children.

Social media is a communication solution that most public schools have yet to accept, let alone embrace. However, the social media component of the communication world outside of the school setting is evolving at a rapid pace. Facebook alone has over 500 million users world-wide and continues to grow. Current research and practice on effective and safe means in which to reach the public through social media is and has been available to whoever is interested. Schools must commit to the use of social media if they are to keep pace with the rest of society and communicate effectively with their parents and communities, most of whom are social media users. Social media is normative among the younger parents of today and is becoming a communication staple for all other age groups within our communities. School districts must change from the 'newsletter in the backpack' practices of communication to the two-way, interactive digital communication designs of the 21st century.

This study first considered how the school district implements the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget. The change agent in the use of social media for budget preparation and communication purposes in the school districts studied was predominantly the communication specialist, not the superintendent of schools. It was the communication specialist, in most cases, who brought the initiative forward to the superintendent for his/her consideration or who followed the vision of someone in the school district who suggested that the school district use social media for communication purposes. In some cases that was the superintendent. In other cases, it was a parent, PTO member, or board of education member. The change agent in the use of social media, however, was the communication specialist.

In most cases, the role of the superintendent was consistently that of the gatekeeper. Typically, the superintendent had the vision of social media as a communication tool, or allowed someone else's vision to move the district to the use of social media. In one case, the superintendent permitted the use of social media for communication purposes, and then abandoned its use quickly after the unfettered use of social media by school personnel resulted in an issue or problem for the superintendent. Therefore, it was typically the superintendent who controlled the decision as to whether or not social media would be permitted to be implemented.

The school districts found interesting and surprisingly different uses of social media for communication purposes. The preference of one district was not even a consideration of another district. For example, one district's primary use of social media was a very successful blog, with Facebook and Twitter as a less used means of communication. Another district was heavily involved in video and YouTube and still another district preferred short but frequent podcasts. The most common strategy for implementation of social media was the use of Twitter and

Facebook to drive the user to the district website where the most comprehensive information was contained.

The second research question addressed measurement**.** How does the school district measure the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?  None of the school districts were satisfied with the manner in which they measured the effectiveness of the use of social media.  Even the district with the most sophisticated measurement practices felt that they were largely inadequate and much work needed to be done in this area.  Most districts utilized no means of measurement.  Other districts simply counted their friends or unique hits on a website.  They acknowledged that this was inadequate but none of the districts made it a priority for improving in this area.

The roles and responsibilities of district personnel in the use of social media did not change appreciably.  They continued to communicate the same kind of information to the community that they always had, but the means of communication did change.  The news and information was immediately delivered in a manner in which the viewer was ready to participate, Facebook, Twitter, and the district webpage.  Timeliness of disseminating news improved.  The quality of news coverage improved.  Video helped the news and information become more attractive and attention-getting.  Parents and students were more likely to view the district website when pictures of students were attached.

The cost of social media did not increase expenses and in some cases expenses were reduced.  Districts claimed that moving from the print medium to digital communications reduced costs in paper, printing, labor, postage, and time.  The other benefit associated with the change was timeliness of delivery.  The print medium required time.  Often it required days or even weeks for news or information to be broadly disseminated.  Social media is instantaneous.  Another cost saving strategy is the webinar.  People can attend conferences and workshops

without leaving their school districts. Webinars help districts avoid the costs of transportation, rooms and meals. One superintendent claimed that a webinar done well is just as beneficial as personal attendance at an event. A communication specialist felt that digital means of communicating information was also a time-saver in that the alternative, the phone, often resulted in off task conversation.

The third research question was perhaps the most significant. What is the relationship between the public school districts use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget and the passage or rejection of the budget? The respondents overwhelmingly felt that the use of social media contributed to the passage or failure of the school district budget. The most emphatic responses about the positive relationship of the use of social media and the budget result came from those people in school districts where an anti-budget group used social media. In one district, an anti-budget activist used social media to defeat the budget. The district was not part of the conversation due to the fact that the district had not implemented social media access. Another district whose budget narrowly passed also faced an anti-budget group that used social media in order to sway people to a "no" vote. The remainder of the school districts felt that social media contributed to the passage of their budgets.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research is necessary to examine the extent to which the use of social media by school districts to prepare and communicate the annual school district budget impacts the passage or failure of that budget. Research relative to this issue is limited at this time. Further study is needed in order to better understand the impact that the phenomenon of social media has on the outcome of school district budget votes.

First, it is imperative for school districts to be able to track and measure information that allows them to know and understand community feelings and perceptions about the school

district.  Understanding the influence that social media has on the community, through reliable and accurate metrics, allows the district to define its presence, determine its reach into the community, and  better understand its influence on stakeholder groups.  Knowing this information then allows the district to channel its efforts and communication in the most effective manner.

Social media metrics will allow a school district to know and understand how many people it is reaching with its message, the number of followers or fans it is attracting, the number of viewers, how long they are on a site, which sites and pages are generating the most interest and activity, how many people like the information enough to forward it to others, the number of unique visitors, and many other concrete, useful and informative pieces of information.

In addition, further research into social media metrics would result in a deeper investigation and better understanding of the value of social media for school districts.  For example, the actions that people take as a result of the information that the district provides would be valuable to know.  How many people actually did something with district generated information?  Did the information make a difference?  This is one of the most important measurements because it demonstrates how the districts use of social media resulted in people taking some kind of action.  Additionally, some social media metrics actually measure sentiment and influence.  This information would be valuable to a school district.  It would allow the district to join a rich and informative conversation with its community; a conversation that rarely occurred in the past.

Some of the more common social media tools for measurement purposes are Google Alerts, Lexicon, Google Analytics, Radian6, Alterian, Twitter followers, Facebook Fans, and Sysomos.

This study concluded that few school districts measure the use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the school district budget to the community. It would be valuable to know more about the methods and strategies that could be used to measure the use of social media.

A second recommendation for further study is the use of social media for the purpose of listening. One of the great benefits that business and politics derive from the use of social media is listening to their customers and constituents. This presents a multi-dimensional question for future study in the field of education. How can public schools best listen to their communities through the use of social media? The field of business listens to their customers constantly. They want to know what their customers are saying and thinking relative to their business, products, and practices. Facebook provides an analysis tool called Lexicon. Lexicon tracks the frequency and sentiment of a particular key word across Facebook wall posts, status messages, and comments. Twitter has a similar feature at http://search.twitter.com. By entering the name of a business or brand, a person is able to learn what people are saying. An interesting and valuable study would be to investigate the impact that listening through social media could have on a school district budget vote. Business and industry have sophisticated ways in which to pay close attention to their customers and clients. Schools could benefit by doing the same.

A third reason for further research is meant to address an unintentional finding of gender imbalance. The gender of the superintendents in this study was predominantly male (70 percent) as compared to female (30 percent). The gender of the communication specialist was predominantly female (88 percent) as compared to male (12 percent). As the superintendent is the gatekeeper for social media presence and use in school districts that were subjects of this research and the communication specialist is the change agent, further study is necessary to

determine the conditions that cause this gender imbalance. Why are there significantly more male superintendents and significantly more female communication specialists?

Further research would be valuable in order to address how social media impacts our democratic practices. This is the fourth area of further study. Could social media be used in order to improve the democratic process in relation to the school district budget vote? In other words, could social media be used to increase voter participation in the annual school district vote by allowing community members to cast their votes electronically? What would be the implications of this change? Would the democratic process be improved or hindered? Conceivably, online voting could address several rather cumbersome issues that face present school district voting practices. Would there be a need for absentee ballots? Would the elderly, those who are physically less mobile, those who travel, or those who just do not wish to go to the local gymnasium and stand in line, be more apt to vote if they had an online option? Could social media improve the democratic process? "Social networking is making democracy even more democratic" (Laurent, 2009, p. 40).

A fifth area for further research follows. This study focused on the extent to which the use of social media by school districts to prepare and communicate the annual school district budget impacts the passage or failure of that budget. The study intentionally did not delve into social media and its potential impact and implications on student learning outcomes. However, this would be an interesting and valuable study. In these times of scarce resources, strong political pressures, and high academic expectations, a study to determine the effectiveness of the use of social media on instruction and learning would be valuable. Can social media solutions eliminate the need for textbooks? Could all textbooks be found on a single Kindle? Today, state level testing is a multi-million dollar business that is entirely dependent upon paper products and the delivery of these papers to every region of the state. Could social media serve the test-taking

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purposes of the state, thereby saving millions of dollars and allowing for an entirely different type of test taking experience for students and teachers? Could teachers implement social media as a primary means in which to teach and test? Could students use social media as a primary means in which to learn?

The sixth area of further research involves the superintendent as the gatekeeper for the use of social media in a school district. It is the superintendent that either allows for a social media presence in the school district or stands for banning the use of social media in the school district. A study to investigate why a few school superintendents embrace the use of social media in their school district and why other superintendents ban the use of social media in their school district would be of value to the field of educational leadership. What are the factors that result in the superintendent's decision not to allow a social media presence in the school district? Are the reasons based upon fact or fear? Social media takes down the walls of superintendent control of information and opens public comment on district issues, policy, procedures, and practices. Is it the fear of loss of control that results in some superintendents avoiding and resisting the use of social media? Are superintendents fearful of negative comment and criticism that social media threatens to bring upon the district? Or is the fear factor one of lack of knowledge and awareness as to how to protect children from predators, bullies, and solicitors? This particular issue creates a complicated dilemma for some superintendents in their genuine quest to create a balance between the uses of social media for the purpose of gaining higher levels of transparency while, simultaneously, aspiring to the highest levels of commitment to keep children safe.

The seventh and final area of further study would address the impact that professional development could have on the implementation of social media in public schools. Further study in this area could also apply to social media use as provided through superintendent preparation

programs. The superintendent is the gatekeeper for the use of social media in public school districts. As stated on several occasions in this study, it is the superintendent who determines the presence and use of social media in the school district. In addition, both the literature review and the findings of this study demonstrate that only a few superintendents permit the use of social media in the public school district. Therefore, future study to examine the extent to which professional development, specifically designed to create awareness and to develop knowledge for superintendent leadership, focusing specifically on the school districts use of social media would be of value to the field of education.

**Implications for the Superintendency**

An acknowledged need exists for the school district to be able to connect with its community in a two-way, interactive, digital means. This is particularly essential in order to satisfy the communication demands of the Net Generation, the newest generation of parents entering their children into school districts. As well, all other identified demographic groups have the same or similar expectation that school districts will inform and engage the community in a meaningful way about school affairs. Like business and politics, it is imperative for the school district to be able to engage its public in a meaningful way to facilitate communication in an ongoing, continuous basis, as opposed to seasonal communication efforts isolated to budget times.

As resources become increasingly scarce, political rhetoric becomes more intense, and academic standards continue to rise, school districts must become more calculated, savvy, and effective at engaging their communities in conversations that result in ongoing support for public schools. The success of a school district is completely dependent upon the support of the local community. Therefore, engaging with the community is of critical importance to inform, listen, and actively communicate with the very people who can keep public education healthy. This

means communicating with those who are directly impacted by the immediate value of public schools, as well as those who are less directly related to the school including: business, senior citizens, and non-parents.

One of the most urgent issues facing educational leaders and school districts today is the community expectation of quick, accurate, and timely information provided in the way in which people of the 21st Century communicate: digitally. Newsletters, flyers, brochures, letters, and memorandums are obsolete, slow, inefficient, and costly. Even school leaders who rely on email and the school website are missing communication opportunities by failing to fully satisfy the public's expectation for open communication. School leaders must recognize that the continued use of sub-par, ineffective communication tools like those mentioned will lead to frustration on the part of a community that is growing more accustomed to the use of social media. People expect to communicate digitally, interactively, and with immediacy.

Furthermore, greater transparency of all aspects of the school district, including the budget, is an expectation by all generations. People want their school districts to be open, honest, candid, and forthright. They want their information to be seamlessly provided. They want to be able to respond to posted information, and they want to hear other people's comments and opinions about district news and issues. This requires communication strategies, methods, and devices that support this expectation of transparency. Social media, if used strategically and carefully, addresses all of these issues.

**Figure 3: Social Media Communication**
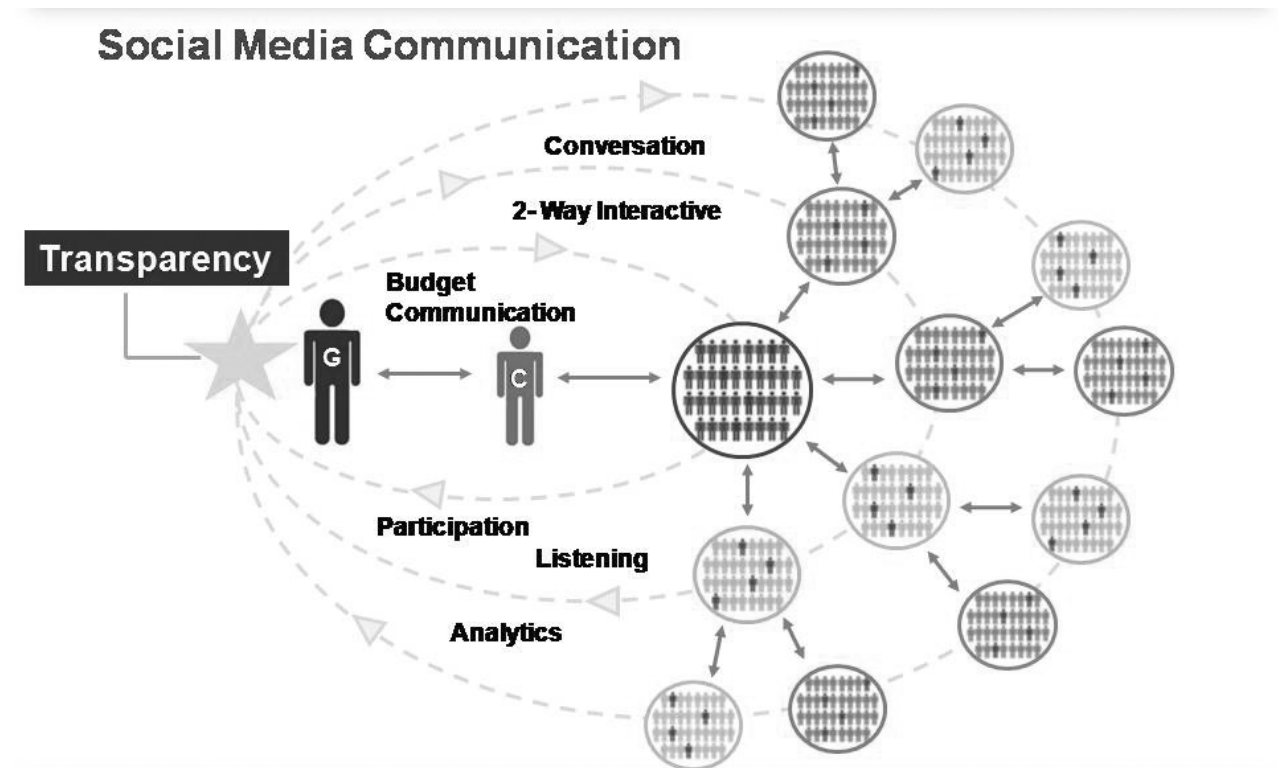


*Figure 3.* This chart illustrates the role of the superintendent as the gatekeeper for the use of social media and the communication specialist as the change agent for the use of social media in the school district. The chart also illustrates the communication pattern that social media provides, a pattern that is conversational, two-way, and interactive. The chart also demonstrates how the communication includes active participation with the community as well as the opportunity for the school district to listen to its community. Finally, social media provides the opportunity for the district to analyze the conversations that are occurring about it. The colored representation of people contained in the circles of the chart represents the opinion leaders; ten percent of Americans who influence others.

This study indicates that the role of the superintendent of schools in this quest to satisfy the public's expectation for open, two-way, interactive communication is that of the gatekeeper. (see Figure 3). The superintendent either allows social media into his/her district and supports its success of he/she restricts or bans its presence. The change agent is the communication specialist or a person who assumes this role. It is the communication specialist that is primarily responsible for the implementation and day to day operation of social media in the school district. Furthermore, in districts where the use of social media has been successfully

used, it has been the result of a strong relationship between the superintendent and the communication specialist.  In addition, districts that have experienced the greatest success in implementing and using social media for communication purposes have also had superintendents who not only permit the use of social media but more importantly embrace its use.

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**Informed Consent Form Cover Letter**

Dear Educator,

      I am a doctoral candidate at Sage College of Albany in the Educational Leadership Program. I am conducting research in order to examine the relationship between school districts use of social media to prepare and present the annual budget and voter approval or rejection of the budget. Participation involves completing an interview which asks questions of decision makers in each of the school districts about their use of social media for budget preparation and presentation purposes.

      If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you may do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. There is minimal risk involved with this study based on the subject matter that is being investigated and your position in the school district. The researcher will take all precautions to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. Participation in the interview will be voluntary.

      The benefit of your participation results in adding to the literature in the area of the use of social media for the purpose of budget preparation and presentation for public school districts. In addition, this will help you and other school leaders to understand the impact of this phenomenon as it applies to public school districts. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please e-mail me at huntld@sage.edu. In addition, if you have any concerns about this research please feel free to contact my doctoral chairperson. Her name is Dr. Ann Myers, Director Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, Sage Colleges. Her e-mail address is myersa1@sage.edu.

      All results of the research will be made available in a summary format to the school leaders involved in the study and will be presented at the Sage College Doctoral Colloquium in the fall of 2011.

      Please sign the attached consent form, and return to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope. Thank you for your time.

Douglas W. Huntley

Doctoral Student, Sage Graduate School

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**To:** School leader or staff member name,

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled**: A study to examine the relationship between the use of social media by school districts to present and prepare the annual school budget, and voter approval or rejection of the budget.**

This research is being conducted by **:**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Ann Myers

Student Investigator: Douglas W. Huntley

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the relationship between the use of social media by school districts to present and prepare the annual school budget and voter approval or rejection of the budget.

The methods of inquiry include data elicited from approximately twenty personal and/or telephone interviews with principal decision-makers [School Superintendents, Communication Specialists, or those serving in the role of Communications Specialist] who utilize social media to communicate with, inform, and involve their respective publics relative to preparing and presenting the annual school budget. Interview respondents will be determined by asking BOCES Superintendents, BOCES Communications Specialists, the New York State Public Relations Association (NYSPRA) Director, the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) Deputy Director of Communications and Research, and the Associate Director of the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) to identify school districts that are implementing social media for the purpose of preparing and presenting the annual school budget.

**Research Questions**

**Question 1: How does the school district implement the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?**

**Question 2: How does the school district measure the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the annual school budget?**

**Question 3: Is there a relationship between the public school districts use of social media for the purpose of preparing and communicating the annual budget and the passage or rejection of the budget?**

As part of the research, through the process mentioned, I have selected you for a 45 minute interview so that I can investigate why and how your school district implements the use of social media for the purpose of preparing and presenting the annual school budget. The interviews will be audio taped using a digital recorder to better help the researcher capture the essence of the interview. All digital recordings will be destroyed after the research is completed. The researcher will not share the recordings with anyone else and your identity will be kept

confidential.  **This interview is voluntary and you can opt out at anytime without penalty by the researcher or your school district.**

The benefit of your participation is that your input for this project will add to the literature in the area of the use of social media to prepare and present the annual school district budget.  In addition, the research will help you to better understand the use of social media for the stated purpose.

There is minimal risk involved with this study based upon the subject matter that is being investigated, and your position in the school district, should you agree to participate and if you are selected.  The researcher will take all precautions to maintain the confidentiality of all participants.  Participation in the interview if you are selected will be voluntary.

The interview, and the information I receive from your school district, will be confidential.  All interviews will be coded by the researcher as School Leader 1, School Leader 2, etc.  All interviews will be audio taped for the purpose of keeping an accurate account of the conversation, and will not be used in public.  The researcher will be using an audio tape and create a file on his computer where your audio tape will be filed during data collection and other interviews.  The file will be labeled as confidential and only the researcher has access to the computer used during the study.  All audio files will be destroyed upon completion of the study and by no later than June, 2012.  Please place your initials here to indicate your permission.  _____

**I understand that I may at any time during the course of this study revoke my consent and withdraw from the study without any penalty.**

I have been given an opportunity to read and keep a copy of this Agreement and to ask questions concerning the study.  Any such questions have been answered to my full and complete satisfaction.

**I, _____, having full capacity to consent, do hereby volunteer to participate in this research study.**

**Signed: _____**

**Research participant:** This research has received the approval of The Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to insure the protection of the rights of human subjects. If you, as a participant, have any complaints about this study, please contact:

Dr. Susan Cloninger                                        (518) 244-2226
Sage Graduate School                                    clonis@sage.edu
45 Ferry Street
Troy, New York 12180

# Appendix C

## Interview Questions

1. Who was the change agent in initiating the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the school budget? What was the reason for the change?

2. *What strategies does the school district employ when using social media in order to prepare and communicate the school budget? (Examples: use video, use Facebook apps, link to Twitter, conduct surveys and polls, track website activity, part of communications plan, use social media to drive user to web page,)* What types of social media does the district most prevalently utilize? *(Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, YouTube, other)*

3. *Does the use of social media provide for greater transparency with the public in the budget development/communication process? If so, how?

4. What have been public/staff responses to the use of social media for the purpose of presenting and communicating the budget?

5. *How does the school district measure the effectiveness of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the school budget? (Examples: exit survey results, budget vote outcome, voter turnout, number of online hits, number of 'friends', etc.)

6. How does the use of social media during budget preparations and communications change the roles and responsibilities of district personnel? Are more personnel necessary to manage this function?

7. Is there a relationship between the use of social media by the school district to prepare and communicate the school budget and voter approval or rejection of the budget?

8. Do non-school groups or individuals exist in your school district that utilizes social media in association with the school budget? *(Example: Does the PTSA or a Tax Pact Group or an individual use social media to influence others relative to the annual budget vote?)*

9. In these economic times all expenses are being closely scrutinized. Are the costs associated with the implementation of social media solutions affordable to your school district?

10. What is your advice to districts that wish to begin implementation of the use of social media in order to prepare and communicate the school budget?

11. Do you have any final thoughts on social media that you would like to address in this interview?