School communications 2.0: A social media strategy for K-12 principals and superintendents

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School communications 2.0: A social media strategy for K-12 principals and superintendents

by

Daniel Dean Cox

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
Scott McLeod, Co-major Professor
Amy Hutchison, Co-major Professor
Joanne Marshall
Jan Westerman-Beatty
Mike Book

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2012

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DEDICATION

Gone, but never forgotten.

I dedicate this dissertation in memory of my parents:

Elaine Clara & Doyle Dean Cox
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.” (Proverbs 3:13-14)

Like most doctoral candidates, this journey had its beginnings many years ago. From the time that I was just a toddler, my Aunt Carolyn would say to me over and over again, “Daniel, some day you’re going to be a doctor!” Her words of favor and encouragement have been a huge blessing in my life. Along with my mom, she has been one of my biggest supporters. I am forever grateful for your love, support, and the value on education that you instilled in me.

I also deeply appreciate the guidance and support of the five members of my Program of Studies committee. Dr. Scott McLeod, a national expert in the field of social media, helped me focus the scope of this project and assisted in identifying some of the participants for the study. I have appreciated his guidance, suggestions, and reflective questions throughout the Capstone and dissertation process. Dr. Amy Hutchison and Dr. Joanne Marshall provided great feedback on my writing and the research findings. Joanne also has been a source of encouragement as I consider a potential career in higher education one day. Dr. Jan Beatty and Dr. Mike Book, Co-Directors of the Certificate of Advanced Studies: Superintendent Licensure Program, pushed me to new heights as a school leader. Thank you all for your help along the way.

This study would not have been possible without the 24 remarkable school administrators from across the United States and Canada who were willing to share their social media experiences with me. I learned so much from all of you about the beneficial
impact these tools have had upon each of you personally and professionally. I hope that your stories inspire a new generation of school administrators to embrace these technologies as they lead schools of the future.

Over the past three years I have been blessed with some outstanding co-workers. First, I want to thank my assistant principals: Steve and Mike. It has been an honor to serve alongside each of you as we work to make our school better every day. I also have been blessed with a tremendous staff. The kind words of support and encouragement have made this road so much easier. Thank you for all that you do!

I also want to thank three additional colleagues in the Great Plains ISD. Margaret, Debbie, and Peg each offered to serve as peer reviewers and helped ensure that my writing and the findings were clearly presented for the reader. Margaret, a teacher at North, put her own research background to good use and thoroughly analyzed each draft that I sent her. It made me a stronger writer and I am very appreciative.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my younger sister, Dr. Elizabeth Cox Brand. I am so proud of you and all that you have accomplished. Thank you so much for all of your love and support through the years. Who would have thought that two kids from the small town of Westgate, let alone from the same family, would one day grow up and earn doctorates? We did it!
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple-case study was two-fold: 1) to describe, analyze, and interpret the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, podcasts, and online videos with stakeholders as part of their comprehensive communications practices, and 2) to examine why the principals and superintendents have chosen to communicate with their stakeholders through social media. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 12 principals and 12 superintendents purposefully selected from four regions of the United States and Canada were conducted. Social CRM served as the framework for the study. Findings revealed four themes that applied to both groups: 1) Social media tools allow for greater interactions between school administrators and their stakeholders; 2) Social media tools provide stronger connections to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world; 3) Social media use can have a significant impact on a school administrator’s personal and professional growth; and 4) Social media use is an expectation; it’s no longer optional. Implications for practice, for boards of education, for educational leadership programs, and for expanding the definition of Social CRM are included.

Keywords: social media, blogs, Twitter, social networking, podcasts, online video, effective communication, schools, principals, superintendents, stakeholders, Social CRM
CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW

In late October of 2007, researchers at Johns Hopkins University released a study that labeled approximately 2000 high schools across the United States as “dropout factories” for graduating fewer than 60 percent of the students who enrolled as freshmen four years earlier (Balvanz, 2007). The report generated a firestorm of reactions from school officials who denounced the study’s simplistic formula for determining graduation rates, from parents and students who were concerned about the quality of education at their recently-labeled schools, and from the media who seized upon a polarizing story that hit hardest in urban areas.

North High School (pseudonym), located in a Midwestern state, was among the schools who found themselves on this infamous list. Although it would later be determined that the graduation rate was actually above 60 percent, few citizens paid attention to that fact. North had a reputation for being a tough, urban high school and the Johns Hopkins study simply reinforced that stereotype. School and district officials attempted to control the damage in the local media, but the traditional ways in which they responded did little to change the court of public opinion.

The following year, the Great Plains Independent School District (pseudonym) received another unwanted distinction as five of its schools were named “Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools” by the Department of Education of the Midwestern state as defined by No Child Left Behind standards of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act’s State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Phase II (Midwestern State Department of Education, 2011). Combined with the growing list of schools identified as “Schools in Need of Assistance” and the district’s label as a “District in Need of Assistance,” it further
perpetuated a negative image in the minds of stakeholders and citizens across the local region regarding the quality of education in the Great Plains ISD.

Since the beginning of the 2008-09 school year, multiple initiatives were implemented by a new superintendent of schools in the Great Plains ISD to combat the stereotypes, raise student achievement scores, and create a more favorable image for the district. The superintendent orchestrated the implementation of a district-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program, professional learning communities for teachers, and interactive whiteboards in every classroom, as well as career interest academies at the two comprehensive high schools. Still, the educational benefits of these initiatives gained little traction in the local media. District officials communicated the new changes through the school district website and traditional formats such as the local newspaper, school newsletters, and word of mouth rather than a comprehensive approach of using multiple social media tools such as blogs, Twitter, social networking sites, podcasts, and online video in addition to traditional formats.

One new initiative immediately captured the attention of local stakeholders as well as a statewide audience when it was unveiled in April of 2010: a standardized dress code for students. The proposal, geared at creating a safe learning environment focused on academics and free from the distractions of immodesty and gang influences, met with resistance from approximately 30 percent of the stakeholders who were surveyed by the Center for Social and Behavioral Research at one of the Midwestern state’s universities (City Newspaper, 2010b). Opponents quickly organized themselves and created a Facebook page called “Take Back Our Schools” (City Newspaper, 2010a). They sought to galvanize support for their opposition, defeat the proposed policy through the court system, recruit potential candidates
who could unseat incumbent board members in the next election, and oust the superintendent. District officials stuck to traditional forms of communication in response to the standardized dress code issue rather than availing themselves of social media tools that might have provided quicker, more in-depth responses to the questions and concerns raised by the public.

A second hot-button issue that was introduced in August of 2011 involved a change in the Great Plains ISD K-12 mathematics curricula. The decision was made to switch from the traditional approach to the investigations approach using the Connected Mathematics 2 Program (CMP2). Implementation of CMP2 began in the elementary schools in August, while secondary school teachers prepared to begin in the second semester.

Central office administrators invested many hours informing and training teachers regarding the rationale behind the change and how to use the new materials with students. Two stakeholder groups, parents and community members, received little to no information about the curricular change. Throughout the fall the lack of information led parents of elementary students to conduct their own searches on the Internet, which yielded an abundance of negative blog posts, reviews, and the like. As secondary school teachers made the switch in January of 2012, the pressure from parents at all levels intensified. District officials attempted to address the concerns with informational meetings at selected school buildings, information posted to the Great Plains ISD website, and six brief video testimonials from elementary teachers. However, the lack of a comprehensive communications approach that included social media tools hindered the efforts once more.

As the frustrations regarding the change in the mathematics program were unfolding, a third polarizing issue also was made public through a traditional communications approach.
The superintendent recommended to the school board to begin instrumental music instruction in the sixth grade rather than in the fifth grade. The announcement in February of 2012 came after more than 18 months of discussions, research, and site visits by a music task force composed of teachers and administrators. Parents expressed their frustration through petitions, the “Take Back Our Schools” and similar social networking sites, and the blog section of the city newspaper even though the net result of the change would lead to a 45 percent increase in overall music instruction in the middle school years (City Newspaper, 2012). Once more, district officials missed an opportunity to provide quick, in-depth information and responses in a transparent fashion that could have assuaged the concerns.

At the time of the dropout factory story (2007), this researcher served as an assistant principal at North High School. He was familiar with social media tools, but was not using them either personally or professionally. None of the other members of the administrative team at North, other building administrators across the district, or administrators at the district headquarters used them professionally either.

Now serving as a middle school principal in the Great Plains ISD, he contemplated how the dropout factory story, standardized dress code, mathematics program, music program, and other potentially divisive situations might have unfolded had the central office administrators or the superintendent actively responded to the events via a combination of social media tools and traditional formats. A quick response through social media paired with traditional communication formats might have proved helpful in sharing the thought processes behind the respective decisions as well as providing supporting information to back up the decisions. Additionally, a comprehensive communications strategy that included the use of multiple social media tools might have fostered a stronger bond between the school
district and its stakeholders; one that could have allowed district administrators to “get ahead of” the potentially polarizing issues and lessen the impact of the negative stories.

The recent adverse situations faced by the Great Plains ISD are not unique. Countless schools and districts around the country recently have faced negative circumstances. Across the Midwest over the past 12 months newspapers have reported stories about students being bullied, athletes being hazed by teammates, school business managers misappropriating funds, teachers engaging in misconduct with students, and school administrators bringing controversial groups to perform assemblies for public school students. A school district’s timely, transparent response to these issues, or lack thereof, could help to determine whether the impact of the stories is minimal or damaging.

The ever-expanding social media landscape has increased the opportunities for people to communicate with one another at any time and in any location. Smart phones, iPads, and other technology devices permit a constant flow of two-way communication and information at home, walking down the street, or vacationing overseas. As the interconnectedness continues to grow, the methods of personal and organizational communication have had to transform as well.

Gone are the days when organizational leaders, including school administrators, controlled the image they wanted to convey to customers and stakeholders. The rise of social media tools has allowed individuals to share their positive and negative experiences dealing with a particular company or organization with the whole world. These sharing experiences empower individuals to challenge the traditional ways in which corporate employees communicate their products and services.
For example, for many years United Airlines included the tagline, “Fly the Friendly Skies.” The skies did not seem so friendly to Dave Carroll and the members of his band, Sons of Maxwell, as they saw their Taylor Guitars being tossed out of their United Airlines plane and onto the tarmac in March of 2008. After nine months of failing to persuade United officials to pay for the damage done to his equipment, Dave informed the company that he was prepared to write three songs about his experience and post them online. United executives remained firm that they would not compensate him (Scott, 2011).

Dave wrote and recorded a song that he posted on YouTube on July 6, 2009, titled “United Breaks Guitars.” The song went viral and within four days it had 1 million views. Less than two weeks later it had climbed to 3 million views. All the while, executives at United chose not to respond. However, employees at Taylor Guitars jumped on the scene right away and posted their own response video that quickly earned the company positive accolades. In the two-minute video, the company president offered his support for Dave, provided packing tips for guitar owners, and encouraged anyone who had a damaged guitar to contact his service department to get it restored. Bob Taylor, the president of Taylor Guitars, understood the potential benefits of acting right away, stating, “When luck turns your way, you can’t squander it” (Scott, 2011, p. 13).

Two months later Dave Carroll finally met with officials from United Airlines. They offered him an apology and compensation (which he declined). Publicly, however, company officials did not respond. They still had not come to understand the dramatic changes that have occurred in the way people now communicate with one another. They also failed to realize the negative impact the simple video was having on their corporate image. Ultimately United Airlines officials did make use of Dave’s first video; it is now part of their customer
service training (Scott, 2011, p. 15). As of January 2012, “United Breaks Guitars” and the two follow-up songs have been viewed a total of more than 13 million times.

Across the Middle East governments have fallen, partly a result of the use of social media tools. The ability for citizens to rapidly communicate with one another, reach large audiences, share first-hand accounts of government abuse, and expose themselves to minimal levels of risk all quickened the fall of long-time dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya (Houston, 2011). Social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr provided instant access worldwide to the stories and images taking place. The speed at which information sharing occurred caused the discontent to grow and spread faster than any government could contain.

Just as corporate and government employees are learning that social media can be far more powerful than they realize, so too, are school officials. School administrators often face the same types of communications issues and crises as other organizations. Online newspapers allow stakeholders to easily, and often anonymously, post negative and inaccurate information regarding school programs, curricula, and staff. Parents who are upset at a particular district decision can create a Facebook fan page to unite like-minded citizens in a movement to oust school board members and/or the superintendent. Students can secretly record video footage of ineffective teachers and post it on YouTube to embarrass or humiliate instructors.

Social media tools could provide school employees with myriad opportunities to share their successes on a frequent basis with stakeholders in the fashion that the stakeholder prefers. The immediacy of the sharing could be a powerful tool for schools to proactively shape their public image. Frequent blog posts, recurrent tweets, engaging social networking
site pages, and consistent podcasts and online videos could permit stakeholders to access information at their convenience about the school in general as well as the specific programs taking place. It could become a “win-win” situation. An added bonus is that stakeholders could access and share the information from the blogs, tweets, social networking sites, etc. without incurring further costs.

Just as the invention of the printing press did not replace handwritten forms of communication, neither will the invention of social media tools replace the traditional ways in which schools principals and superintendents communicate with stakeholders (Carr, 2012). Social media will complement those existing formats, however, as well as serve as a catalyst for changes in the way that information is shared back and forth between school officials and the varied stakeholders.

**Statement of the Problem**

Little research exists that describes the experiences of school principals and superintendents who utilize multiple social media tools with stakeholders as part of their comprehensive communications efforts. Officials in corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies have begun to develop and implement social media strategies much faster than their counterparts have in K-12 schools. They recognize that their employees and the general public utilize social media as one of their primary methods of finding, sharing, and creating information. Brian Solis, award-winning author and prominent blogger, defined social media as follows: “Social media is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-
to many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers” (Solis, 2010).

Previous studies have looked at the utilization of specific social media tools by school principals and superintendents (Engebritson, 2010; Hew, 2009; Stock, 2009). Each focused on a particular tool, such as the usage of blogs or podcasts by school principals. However, none examined the experiences of school principals and superintendents who utilize multiple social media tools through which to communicate with the school’s stakeholders. Thus, it is important to examine their experiences to learn how a comprehensive social media strategy for K-12 school administrators could be implemented.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to describe, analyze, and interpret the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), podcasts, and online videos with stakeholders as part of their comprehensive communications practices. Additionally, it examined why school principals and superintendents have chosen to communicate with their stakeholders through social media. This study held significance for school administrators who recognized the need to develop a comprehensive communications strategy for their respective organizations.

**Research Questions**

Scant peer-reviewed literature exists that describes the experiences of school principals and superintendents who have been utilizing multiple social media tools as part of their comprehensive communications efforts with their stakeholders. Additionally, little has
been written about the reasons why school administrators have embraced these alternatives. The lack of literature led to the development of the two guiding research questions:

1. What are the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), podcasts, and online videos to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members?

2. Why are school principals and superintendents choosing to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members through multiple social media tools?

The answers to these two research questions could address the void in the literature and could assist in the development of a proposed comprehensive communications strategy for school administrators.

**Theoretical Framework**

The fields of communications and marketing are filled with differing theories that describe the interactions between individuals. In searching for a theoretical framework upon which to guide this study, the researcher initially selected Market Orientation (MO) and Relationship Marketing (RM) due to a desire to explore, in addition to the experiences of the administrators, the relationship that exists between a school administrator’s use of social media tools and the school’s attraction and retention of students and staff members. After a thorough search, several articles were located which offered the initial framework for the proposed study.
Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2010) defined market orientation as “a set of beliefs that puts customers’, i.e. students’, interests first, in order to gain a competitive edge in the highly competitive global environment” (p. 205). The increase in school choice is one example of why a school principal or superintendent would want to put customers’ (i.e. students’) needs first and engage with them and their parents through social media tools. Market orientation is often thought to “underpin the development and implementation of successful relationship marketing strategies in any organization” (Helfert, et.al., 2002). Such strategies are crucial as school and district officials work to retain existing students and attract new ones.

Relationship marketing has traditionally been applied to industrial and service markets, but increasingly has been applied to higher education settings (Helgesen, 2008). It is also appropriate for application to the K-12 setting. Al-Alak (2006) defined relationship marketing as:

A set of marketing activities or actions that attract, motivate, and enhance existing and potential students’ relationships as well as students’ parents, relatives, friends, reference groups for the benefit of all sides concerned, emphasizing on retaining existing students until their graduation, and attracting further students (p. 4).

As such, RM is based on the premise of creating a lifetime relationship with the customer (Helgesen, 2008). The types of items communicated by school administrators through social media tools likely could attract, motivate, enhance, and/or retain existing and potential relationships among all stakeholders, including students.

After rethinking the breadth of the initial research proposal, the researcher chose to narrow the scope to the two research questions previously stated. In light of the
modification, further investigation was conducted to determine if there might be an alternate framework that included the use of social media tools in the relationship and communication process. The search led to Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and subsequently to Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM). SCRM was selected as the theoretical framework for the study.

Customer relationship management grew out of the precepts of RM in the 1990s as a way for businesses to forge long-term relationships with customers through two-way communication (Askool & Nakata, 2010). CRM has been used in the fields of marketing, business, and quite frequently in Information Technology. So far, no commonly accepted definition of CRM has been determined (Askool & Nakata, 2010; Pedron & Saccol, 2009). Pedron and Saccol (2009) did find that there are three approaches to CRM: as a philosophy, as a strategy, and as a tool (p. 38). The definition of the CRM philosophy captured this researcher’s attention because of its focus on relationships, trust, and two-way communication, which are paramount between school administrators and their stakeholders. Pedron and Saccol defined the CRM philosophy as “…a deep understanding of what relationship means and of all implications related to establishing a relationship (such as trust, common objectives, increasing value on both sides, etc.)” (p. 38).

Social CRM, also known as “collaborative CRM” and “CRM 2.0”, emerged out of CRM between 2007 and 2008. It caught on due to the exponential growth of social media and technology devices (Greenberg, 2010). Through SCRM, employees at corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies have used social media tools as a vehicle to establish and maintain relationships with their customers and stakeholders.
Greenberg (2010) provided a definition of SCRM that once appeared on a CRM 2.0 wiki page. Although no longer available at that wiki, the definition has lent itself toward a broader audience than just businesses. It stated:

CRM 2.0 is a philosophy & a business strategy, supported by a technology platform, business rules, processes and social characteristics, designed to engage the customer in a collaborative conversation in order to provide mutually beneficial value in a trusted & transparent business environment. It’s the company’s response to the customer’s ownership of the conversation (p. 413).

The use of social media tools to establish and maintain relationships with customers (the stakeholders of the school) and engage them in collaborative conversations in a trusted and transparent environment provided a better framework upon which to build this study. This researcher has observed and experienced that principals and superintendents often find themselves engaged in collaborative conversations with stakeholders regarding a broad spectrum of issues such as curricular changes, extracurricular offerings, finances, and facilities. High levels of transparency and trust are expected in such discussions.

**Significance of the Study**

This study contributed to the knowledge base by examining the manner in which multiple social media tools are being used by school principals and superintendents as part of their comprehensive communications strategy with stakeholders. It focused on the experiences of school principals and superintendents who have incorporated blogs, microblogs (e.g., Twitter), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), podcasts, and online videos into their comprehensive communication with stakeholders.
The growing demand across the country for increased levels of accountability combined with the expansion of charter schools, voucher systems, and open-enrollment legislation as well as increased opportunities for students to transfer from schools deemed “failing” by the state or federal government have created an expectation of higher levels of transparency and increased communication from school officials. School principals and superintendents must continue to find ways to promote their educational programs, recruit and retain quality staff, and engage the community in support of the local schools. A comprehensive social media strategy could assist school officials in accomplishing those objectives by providing them with opportunities to share the information in the manner and the time that the stakeholder prefers. A comprehensive social media strategy would also allow for sharing a deeper level of information that traditional formats are not able to do.

Summary

This qualitative multiple-case study described, analyzed, and interpreted the experiences of school principals and superintendents who currently utilize at least two social media tools to communicate with their stakeholders. Using a constructivist approach (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006), it focused on how the use of blogs, microblogs (e.g., Twitter), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), podcasts, and online videos complemented the already existing forms of communication used by the school administrators when engaging with their stakeholders.

Chapter 2 presents a thorough review of the literature on effective communications practices in schools and nonschool settings. After outlining effective communications in
general and with different stakeholder groups, multiple forms of social media and the ways in which they are used in school and nonschool settings are presented.

Chapter 3 details the methods, theoretical perspective, and epistemology chosen for this study. It describes the selection of participants and the regions in which they live and work. Subsequently, the data collection methods, analysis, and research steps used in the study are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the researcher’s positionality in the study, the limitations, and the delimitations.

Chapters 4 and 5 reveal the findings from the study and provide the areas for future research regarding a social media strategy for school principals and superintendents.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In an era of higher levels of accountability for student achievement, tighter school district budgets, and increased options for parents regarding school choice, the importance of effectively communicating and marketing school programs and successes to the community as a whole has never been more important. School employees, like business employees, have begun shifting their communications and marketing practices in order to develop relationships with their current and prospective customers and to provide them with the content they seek at just the right time (Scott, 2010). Balancing the traditional face-to-face communications approach with stakeholders while incorporating the emergence of social media options has provided a wealth of new opportunities for school officials, though these up-and-coming technologies likely will complement the existing forms of communication and marketing rather than replace them outright (Carr, 2012).

Officials at corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies have begun to use social media tools such as blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, podcasts, and online videos in order to more fully engage with customers and more effectively meet their needs (Handley & Chapman, 2011; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittendon, 2011; Scott, 2010 & 2011; Scott & Halligan, 2010; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). This movement away from one-way communication practices toward a two-way dialogue with stakeholders has signaled a shift in marketing and public relations practice (Scott, 2010).

Aside from several articles by school public relations specialist Nora Carr (2001a; 2001b; 2010a; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c), little research has been conducted on the use of social media tools by K-12 public school officials as part of a communications strategy. Additionally, little research has been conducted that examines the impact upon the school
administrator who uses social media tools with stakeholders. This study sought to understand the ways in which a comprehensive social media strategy could aid school administrators in enhancing their formal and informal communication with stakeholders and in becoming more approachable to each of the stakeholder groups.

The rest of this chapter describes effective communication with three different groups: parents, staff, and the media, followed by the use of social media by organizations. The chapter concludes with a look at the use of blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, and podcasts and online videos in a general setting and then a school setting.

**Effective Communication**

Research conducted by the National School Public Relations Association (Bagin, 2008) revealed that parents received information about the schools from their own children, email or the school website, other children, the secretary, and teachers (in that order). The school principal ranked sixth as a source of information for parents, followed by other parents, the media, and newsletters. These findings revealed that word of mouth served as an important source of power in delivering messages to stakeholders. What we do not yet know is the impact of using multiple social media tools by school principals and superintendents as part of an overall communications program.

In general, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the NSPRA have encouraged school officials to remember the maxim that “people beat paper just about every time” as they consider their communications efforts with stakeholders (2000, p.11). Practices such as one-to-one and face-to-face communication ranked at the top of the list of suggested effective communication techniques, followed by small group and large group
discussions or meetings. The least effective means came through traditional forms of advertising such as newspapers, radio, and television as well as billboards, pens, give-aways, etc. (p. 11).

Effective organizational communication typically has been designed to bring about one of three main objectives: increase awareness; shape perceptions and attitudes; and influence behavior (Carr, 2007, p. 39). Now that more than 70 percent of citizens no longer have children in public schools (Carr, 2011a), school administrators must be ever more vigilant about impacting these three areas. Since it would not be practical for a school administrator to meet with all stakeholders face-to-face or one-on-one, it is important to understand how the use of multiple social media tools could assist in that endeavor. Reaching out to stakeholders through social media tools and sharing information in a manner that increases awareness, shapes attitudes, and/or influences behavior in a friendly or conversational way could be very powerful. The ability of the stakeholder to access it at any time through social media could make it that much more powerful.

**Effective School Communication with Parents**

All school employees have made use of certain communication strategies such as parent/teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, sending home a weekly or monthly newsletter, and parent/teacher association or booster club meetings. Conferences, parent organization meetings, and back-to-school events have provided rich opportunities for school officials to engage parents in face-to-face discussions either in a one-on-one, small group, or large group format. These discussions have allowed stakeholders to clarify areas of
uncertainty regarding school procedures, to ask questions, and to express frustration or appreciation (NAESP, 2000).

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the face-to-face communication with parents at school, staff should create a welcoming environment. Clearly marked entrances and a friendly greeting by the secretary could provide a good start (NSPRA, 1997a). The NSPRA (1997a) further recommended that staff members refrain from the use of acronyms with which parents may not be familiar and convey a genuine desire to involve the parent in the education of his child.

Interacting with parents over a cup of coffee or a light meal could provide for a more highly-valued exchange for the parent than communicating through print media or electronic communications (Carr, 2006a). Generating higher levels of parental support for schools also could have the direct impact of improving student achievement. Edward Moore, Associate Director of the National School Public Relations Association said, “Communication excellence goes hand in hand with student achievement” (Carr, 2007, p. 39). Research conducted by Carr indicated that parents who have been more engaged, involved, and informed with the school have students who have performed at higher levels.

According to NAESP and the NSPRA (2000) hierarchy of communication, the most effective of the non-face-to-face practices was communication with stakeholders by telephone. Carr (2010b) noted that phone numbers may often change as some parents attempt to stay one step ahead of bill collectors. This issue has made communicating with parents more challenging but no less important.

Mass communication service providers, such as Blackboard Connect™, have offered school officials a means by which to communicate with all stakeholders in an efficient
fashion. A school official could call the Blackboard Connect toll-free telephone number, record a message for a selected stakeholder group (e.g. parents of sixth grade students), and then select the day and time to send the recorded message. The message could be recorded in multiple languages so that all parents could receive the information in their native tongue rather than strictly in English. Through Blackboard Connect™ 5, released in mid-2011, the message could also be sent as an email, text message, Facebook post, tweet, and/or RSS feed, which could substantially increase the likelihood of getting the message conveyed to the intended stakeholders.

Delivering the message to parents in their native tongue could send a strong message of respect, cultural sensitivity, and a desire to fully integrate the non-English speaking parent in the affairs of the school. The message could be even more powerful if the classroom teacher or building administrator recorded it in his own voice rather than having an interpreter perform the service. Support for the school could increase tremendously among the different language groups as a result. By the year 2023, the majority of children under the age of 18 will be minorities (Carr, 2010b). Although not all minorities are multilingual, this statistic lends additional credence to school employees reaching out in more than one language to their stakeholders.

Home visits have become another powerful communication practice that school administrators and teachers could employ to strengthen the ties between home and school. Carr (2010a) found that home visits have become increasingly more difficult as more families find themselves in temporary housing or homeless shelters due to the economic downturn. In communities where parents might not be comfortable with a teacher or administrator coming to their home, meetings could take place at a local community center,
house of worship, or coffee shop. A short meeting with parents on “their turf” prior to the start of the school year or early in the school year could pay big dividends down the road as issues arise in which the teacher or administrator would need the support of the parents (NAESP, 2000).

Written forms of communication with parents, such as classroom or building-wide newsletters, have served an important role. The newsletter likely has been the one regular source of communication between the school and the home. It has offered a way to keep all parents and stakeholders abreast of the latest programs, events, and challenges taking place at the school. It also has served as a way to build support for the school. Finally, it has provided a way to increase participation and involvement by parents and the community as a whole (NAESP, 2000).

NAESP (2000) recommended that the school newsletter adopt a simple name that does not keep changing, place the important news first, and address topics of interest to parents and stakeholders. The font should be similar throughout the newsletter and easily readable. It also should have a good balance of white space. If included, pictures should be crisp and clear. All email addresses, phone numbers, and links should be double-checked to make sure they are still accurate.

In the Great Plains ISD, school principals have been expected to send their printed newsletters by the twenty-fifth of the month to be certain that it arrives at stakeholders’ homes prior to any events taking place at the start of the next month. Electronic versions of the newsletter have been expected to be uploaded to the school’s website prior to the first of the month. Additionally, each school principal has been expected to have at least three
people proofread the newsletter for any spelling or grammatical errors prior to having it duplicated, mailed home, and uploaded to the web.

**Effective School Communication with Staff**

Studies conducted by the NAESP and the NSPRA (2000) revealed that the school secretary provided the most information to the general public, followed by custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers. Teachers and school building administrators ranked sixth and seventh. This ranking highlighted the importance of communication with the entire staff rather than just sharing information with the teachers. All staff members play an important and vital role in communicating school information to the public.

Given the high level of interaction that all staff members have had with the community at large, it has been important to ensure that they are well-informed. A knowledgeable staff could assist with educating the general public about the successes of new curricular approaches, the need for renovated or new buildings, and the like (NAESP, 2000). Savvy school administrators have created an atmosphere in which all staff has felt valued, respected, and part of the “team.” The staff members who are more eloquent and dynamic should be invited to speak at community functions, luncheons, and similar gatherings to promote the school and the student learning taking place. Doing so showcases the staff talent to the community (NSPRA, 1997b).

Staff members have yearned for increased levels of communication from within the organization (Glassdoor, 2011). Carr wrote that “effective communication requires three key strategies: engagement, transparency, and a commitment to getting to staff first with the good news and the bad” (2011d, p. 44). Internal staff communication could come through one-on-
one conversations with employees, departmental or whole-building meetings, school email, or social media tools.

Conversely, if the school administrator does not effectively communicate with staff, it could lead to the public perceiving that money spent on new curricular materials, buildings, etc. has been wasted (NAESP, 2000). Internally, a lack of communication could lead to secrecy, rumors, and mistrust. Externally, it could create misunderstandings, non-support, and suspicion of the local school administrators (Bagin, 2010b). In essence, community relations could be summed up as the grand total of all interactions between school officials and the outside world (NSPRA, 1997b).

The staff bulletin has been one of the most common and most traditional ways that a building administrator could communicate with the entire staff. Everyone receives the same message at the same time. The format of a staff bulletin could be as straightforward as a list of bulleted items. An alternative would be to create one modeled after a newspaper; one that included short articles, staff celebrations, funny quotes and sayings, and pictures of events and activities that have taken place in the building. Emailing it to the staff or posting it on a principal’s blog could provide staff members with a communications tool that could be stored and referred back to as necessary by individual staff members. The electronic format even could provide a simple and efficient way to search through previous bulletins to find an item of interest.

In school buildings with large staffs \((N=50)\), a group of teacher leaders typically would meet once a week to engage in two-way communication with the building administrator(s). This group, frequently identified as department heads or team leaders, would discuss issues and would provide input on decisions affecting the school community.
Later in the week, the members of the group would meet with their team or department to share the information and discussions that took place. This arrangement has aligned with research that indicated employees preferred to receive information from a direct supervisor (NAESP, 2000).

All-staff meetings have been a second traditional way to effectively communicate with staff. A brief meeting at the start of the day once a week or a lengthier after-school meeting once a week has provided an effective two-way communication channel for staff and the administrator. All staff has heard the same message, has been given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, and could contribute new ideas to the discussion.

Given the fact that the school secretary has been identified as the number one source of information about the school to the general public (NAESP, 2000), school administrators must keep the secretary updated. Furthermore, secretaries often have been more accessible and less intimidating for many stakeholders. Some school principals and superintendents have scheduled a daily 10-minute session with their secretary for this very purpose. This practice has allowed the secretary to respond to questions from staff or the public with the most accurate and updated information. It also has provided more continuity in the message that has been delivered as the principal or superintendent conveyed the specific “talking points” he or she wanted the secretary to share with employees, students, parents, and community members.

Regardless of how the information has been disseminated to the staff as a whole, the school administrator must be sure to communicate with them prior to sharing any “big” news with the public. It could be very damaging to the relationship between the administrator and the staff for them to hear about important news from students or community members first.
One saying that has proved helpful is this: “Remember to go in-house before you go out-house” (Carr, 2011d & NAESP, 2000).

**Effective School Communication with Media**

Establishing a positive relationship with the local news media has been an important piece of the overall strategy of effectively communicating with employees, students, parents, and community members. Larger newspapers often have an education reporter assigned to the local schools; smaller newspapers do not. Radio stations and television stations typically do not either. It has been important for school principals and superintendents to seek out the local media outlets that do in order to make a connection with them.

The key to effective communication with the media has centered on developing a personal relationship with a local reporter. At the request of a teacher or administrator the reporter could come to the school to attend a program, see an innovative learning activity take place, or serve as a guest speaker (NAESP, 2000). Through time and exposure to the positive day-to-day teaching and learning taking place at the school, story ideas could develop that could assist the school in promoting the educational and extra-curricular programs to stakeholders and the surrounding communities. What has yet to be learned is how a public school principal or superintendent could use social media tools to accomplish this goal.

School personnel should keep in mind that the media primarily has been interested in getting the story and has not been as concerned with the impact the story could have on the school’s image. Their goal has been to sell papers or garner additional viewers. Reporters have looked for stories that are new, different, timely, unusual, and affect a large number of
people (NAESP, 2000). The task for the school personnel has been to find ideas that fit these criteria while assisting with the positive image the school wants conveyed.

Periodically school teachers, building principals, and/or central office staff have had the opportunity to take part in radio or television interviews. In order to increase the chances of an effective interview, NAESP (2000) has offered three preparation tips: develop message points; put them in clear, memorable language; and practice. The audience needs to be able to identify the main points and remember them.

**Effective Use of Social Media by Organizations**

Officials at corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies have dramatically increased their use of social media as a way to communicate within the organization and with potential customers. According to one study, nearly 90 percent of nonprofit organizations have been experimenting with social media (PR Blotter, 2009). They have recognized that employees and the general public use social media as one of their primary communication tools to find and share information.

Wright and Hinson (2008, 2009, & 2010) have studied the impact of social media on the field of public relations by conducting annual surveys since 2005. Results of their studies have shown that major news stories are told first via social media tools such as microblogs (e.g., Twitter). Through additional research studies conducted between 2006 and 2009, they noted the substantial changes taking place in the field of public relations as a result of blogging and other social media use. The public has been empowered to communicate in new ways through message boards, images, wikis, podcasts, and much more.
Curtis et al. (2010) have found that social media tools have become increasingly beneficial in the nonprofit arena. In a survey conducted of public relations practitioners, the authors found that 404 of 409 respondents used some form of social media. They also noted that social media use increased if the people who used them viewed the social media tools as credible.

Scott (2010, p. 11-12) defined the old rules of marketing and public relations as: relying solely on the media for ink and airtime; communicating with journalists via press releases; using jargon; including quotes from customers, analysts, and experts in press releases; using “clip books” to measure effectiveness; and maintaining public relations and marketing as separate disciplines. In this researcher’s experiences working in rural and urban public school districts, he has observed that school officials have abided by these rules and have not aggressively shared their stories with stakeholders.

Scott (2010, p. 23-24) described 13 major components in his new rules of marketing and public relations. Of the 13, several stand out as more applicable to the ways that school employees communicate with their stakeholders. The first two stated: “marketing is for more than just advertising” and “public relations is for more than just a mainstream media audience”. School district officials have communicated with more than just parents and students. Approximately 70 percent of community members no longer have children in the schools, yet they have expressed a desire and a need to know about the good things taking place in the schools (Carr, 2011a). They vote in school board elections, bond referenda, and the like. School public relations and marketing efforts have needed to be multi-faceted to meet the needs of these stakeholders as well as the needs of parents, students, alumni, and
prospective families considering moving to the area. Scott referred to this process as developing “buyer personas” (p. 29) that targeted the specific needs of each group.

A second grouping of the “new rules” stated: “you are what you publish”; “people want authenticity, not spin”; and “people want participation, not propaganda”. Content-rich interactive websites have offered an opportunity to address these components and to provide stakeholders with an avenue to engage the school in authentic, two-way communication. It also has emphasized the importance of keeping information updated frequently. A website that does not change often or one that does not allow for interaction will not attract and retain visitors, thus diminishing its value as a communication tool with stakeholders.

The final grouping of components stated: “instead of causing one-way interruption, marketing is about delivering content at the precise moment your audience needs it”; “blogs, online video, e-books, news releases, and other forms of online content let organizations communicate directly with buyers in a form they appreciate”; and “the lines between marketing and public relations have blurred.” Social media has become the vehicle through which to provide this around-the-clock content. Stakeholders have become able to access content-rich websites, blogs, or social networking sites at times that are convenient and in the manner in which they prefer to receive information.

Scott (2010) created a metaphor of a city to represent social media. In that metaphor, corporate websites represented storefronts of a city. Craigslist exemplified a bulletin board at the entrance of the corner store. eBay was a garage sale. The New York Times online symbolized newspapers of this fictitious city. Amazon signified the bookstore. Chat rooms corresponded to the pubs. Social networking sites epitomized bars, clubs, and cocktail
parties taking place in the city (p. 38). Scott did not mention a school in his metaphor. Sites like Wikipedia or YouTube could potentially embody role.

Continuing with his metaphor, Scott (2010) supplied a set of guidelines that people follow when they attend social engagements. The guidelines provided advice for effective use of social media by officials at corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies when communicating with prospective customers and clients. To begin with, someone attending an event where there were many people she did not know would not start shouting, “BUY MY PRODUCT!” She also would be unlikely to try and meet every single person. Instead, she likely would try to engage in a few significant conversations. In addition, it is likely that this attendee would listen more than she spoke. She probably would act in a helpful manner, providing information to people without expecting something in return (Scott, 2010, p. 39).

These guidelines provided by Scott are the same for effectively communicating with stakeholders through social media. Employees in schools, corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies have needed to shift from their traditional one-way communications practices to the two-way format that social media tools now easily facilitate. Successful implementation of these guidelines could immensely benefit these organizations in their quest to effectively communicate with their stakeholders and the public at large.

**Movement Toward Social Media Use**

There are multiple social media tools which employees in schools, corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies could utilize. Blogs written by teachers, principals, and superintendents have sprung up as part of school and district websites and in nonschool settings. Content-rich websites have been replacing the first-generation ones that appeared
with the advent of the Internet. Employees in school districts, corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies have created pages on Facebook and related social networking sites, have started Twitter feeds, and have begun the use of Flikr and Picasa to share pictures of the teaching and learning activities taking place in their respective institutions. Wikis have been replacing the volumes of three-ring binders that used to sit on shelves collecting dust.

The next section features five social media tools: blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), podcasts, and online videos. Each of the social media tools is described in a general setting first. Subsequently, the tool is illustrated in an educational context.

**Blogs**

*Blogs* is a shortened version of *web log*, a term coined by Jorn Barger in 1997 (Harbison & Fisher, 2010). Technorati, an Internet search engine for blogs, tracked 13,000 blogs when it began operation in November of 2002 (Weil, 2006). As of November 12, 2011, the Nielsen Company (2011) had identified 176,584,202 blogs. Of that number, 112,422 blogs had been created in the previous 24 hours. The exponential growth in the popularity of blogs has made them a valuable resource for employees in corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies.

According to Weil (2006), blogs differed from traditional web sites because they are interactive, they are written in a conversational tone, they can be created with instant publishing software, they are frequently updated, and they are a form of viral marketing. Blogs could be either internal or external. They could be interactive, allowing readers to post responses to the blog posts or they could be read-only (p. 7).
In a study conducted by Barnes (2010), eight percent of Fortune 500 companies were blogging in 2007. That number had increased to 22 percent by 2009. Inc. 500 companies fared better. In 2007, 19 percent were blogging. Two years later it had increased to 45 percent. Wright & Hinson (2008) found that there was little in the literature that discussed the impact of blogs on the communication process. However, their findings two years later (Wright & Hinson, 2010) revealed that blogs and other social media have had an impact on communication theories such as two-step flow theory, the conceptual model, agenda setting theory, spiral of silence theory, and excellence theory (p. 3).

Internal blogs have allowed a Chief Executive Officer to communicate with his or her employees. They also have served as an avenue for employees to communicate with one another. Executives at IBM began allowing internal blogs in 2003; within two years, 20,000 employees were blogging (Weil, 2006). Jonathan Schwartz, former President and CEO of Sun Microsystems, regularly blogged as did many of the senior executives in his organization. In an opinion piece he wrote for the Harvard Business Review Schwartz predicted that in 10 years executives having a blog will be as common as “using email is today” (Schwartz, 2005).

The growth of personal and corporate blogs has been written about in numerous journals and books (Barnes, 2010; Carr, 2006b; Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Handley & Chapman, 2011; Li, 2010; Schwartz, 2005; Scott, 2010 & 2011; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009; Stock, 2009; Teich, 2008; Weil, 2006). Baker and Green (2008) wrote plainly about the impact that blogs are having in the business world, stating, “Go ahead and bellyache about blogs. But you cannot afford to close your eyes to them, because they’re simply the most explosive outbreak in the information world since the Internet itself.”
Several advantages have been identified for corporate officials who have implemented internal blogs as a communication tool within their organizations. The volume of email could be drastically reduced as information for projects could be placed on a blog for all members to see (Weil, 2006). In addition, since the blog keeps a cumulative history of all of the posts, employees could search the blog to find information quickly and easily. Newly hired employees readily could access previous knowledge and trainings that had been posted to the blogs prior to their start with the organization.

Executives at some companies have allowed employees to post personal blogs as part of the internal corporate blog pages. The benefit, according to Weil (2006), has been that an employee who reads professional journals or attends conferences and seminars might post information from those sources that could benefit others in the organization. Conversely, if the information is not of interest to fellow employees they could choose not to read it and there is no harm.

External blogs have allowed the general public to learn more about an organization. They also have provided a way for customers to give the organization feedback. Weil (2006) suggested that the best corporate blogs come from employees rather than the CEO because employees are more likely to write in a style that customers can understand.

Numerous writers have suggested a set of tips or guidelines for creating the most effective blogs. Primary among them has been to select a specific topic about which to blog. The topic should be something about which the blogger has a passion in order to sustain the interest of the readers and to sustain the blogger’s motivation to write (Handley & Chapman, 2011; Schwartz, 2005; Scott, 2010; Teich, 2008; and Weil, 2006).
A second common tip has been to publish consistently. Regular postings would likely maintain readers’ attention and keep them following the blog. Inconsistent postings or long periods between posts could cause readers to abandon the blog and to follow others instead. Responsive posts that addressed customer concerns and allowed for two-way communication have added to the community-building level of a blog. Adherence to a specific focus for the blog enhances its effectiveness as well.

Another common guideline would be to write in a friendly, casual way. The writing style should reflect the voice of the blogger; her way of speaking (Handley & Chapman, 2011; Scott, 2010; and Weil, 2006). Warren Buffett, chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, suggested that a blogger write with a specific person in mind (Weil, 2006, p. 107). He pretended that he was writing to his two sisters, Doris and Bertie. Teich (2008) proposed adding an “edgy tone” to the blog voice to attract and retain readers. Schwartz (2005) advised adding humor. Others suggested inviting readers into a conversation (Handley & Chapman, 2011; Scott, 2010; and Weil, 2006). This series of suggestions could give the blogger the opportunity to inform, educate, or entertain readers on the topic about which the blog exists (Scott, 2010).

Linking is the final common effective blogging strategy promoted by multiple authors. The act of linking to other blogs, websites, social networking sites, etc. could increase the visibility of the blog, increase the popularity of the blog on Technorati, and could generate more readers (Handley & Chapman, 2011, p. 142; Scott, 2010, p. 66; and Weil, 2006, p. 100).
Blog Use by School Employees

Teachers, principals, and superintendents are now blogging as a way to reach a broader audience with school-related news. Dr. Mark Stock, former superintendent of the Wawasee (IN) Community School Corporation, wrote that communication in “old school style” involved chili suppers, Friday night ball games, and face-to-face events (Stock, 2009, p. 13). The use of blogs has permitted citizens with little or no connection to the local schools to get to know the school leader and to stay informed of what is happening just like those who partake in the face-to-face events.

Dr. Reggie Engebritson, Executive Director for the Northland (MN) Special Education Cooperative, found that the number of principals who blog is unknown. In her dissertation on principals and blogs she surveyed 50 known principals who actively blog. She found that the majority of the principals chose to begin blogging to communicate with parents, the school community, and other principals about issues ranging from instruction to school celebrations (Engebritson, 2011).

The advantage to having a school official (teacher, principal, and/or superintendent) write a blog is that the school controls the message. As Stock (2009) pointed out, there is no chance of being misquoted and the school does not have to wait for a reporter to cover a story. The school blogger controls it. Mark Twain once said, “A lie can travel around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes” (Bagin, 2010a). Having a school blog allows the school official to respond to stories in the print media right away rather than writing a rebuttal that may appear a few days later in the Letters to the Editor section (Stock, 2009). Half of the respondents in Engebritson’s study reported that they blogged because it was “timely, efficient, easy, paperless, quick, immediate, and readily accessible” (2011, p. 52).
Ferriter, Ramsden, and Sheninger (2011) described blogs as the safest option for school administrators because the conversations could be moderated easily and the blogging administrator could choose to approve all comments before they were posted. The authors noted several advantages to the use of a blog, including the ease of publishing, increased transparency, and two-way communication. They further suggested the use of blogs as part of a professional development program (p. 72).

Another advantage of a school blog would be that stakeholders could read through archived materials to see the whole picture of a particular issue. It could build a sense of community as readers get to know the blogger and it could lead to additional contacts by news media outlets for interviews (Stock, 2009). It also could provide insights into how a superintendent thinks and the things that she values (Carr, 2006b).

In the early days of blogs’ existence Dr. Clayton Wilcox, former superintendent of the Pinellas County (FL) Schools, started blogging and gained notoriety from the local press in Tampa. He stopped blogging after just two years due to clashes with critics and critical teachers. In his final post he wrote “…the lies, distortions, and mean spiritedness of some – were not worth my time or worthy of this district” (Carr, 2006b). Although blogging has come a long way in the succeeding years, school district administrators still would be wise to understand that challenges such as distortions and mean spiritedness by respondents could arise when using social media tools.

A second area of concern regarding administrative blogging would be that it takes time. In order for school officials to have an effective blog, someone must commit to writing, monitoring, and responding to the posts. During his time as a blogging superintendent, Stock spent 10 minutes to one hour a day on blogging (2009, p. 61). Peter
Gorman, former Superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) Schools, also blogged and acknowledged that “all this transparency and responsiveness are tough to maintain” (Carr, 2006b).

Teachers, principals, and superintendents who would like to blog will likely need permission from their immediate supervisor and from the local board of education prior to starting a blog. The board of education for whom Stock worked as a superintendent in Indiana asked that he include a disclaimer notice on his blog stating that it was his own personal blog and did not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the school district or individual board members. Li (2010) recommended implementing clearly defined limitations for employees as well as social media guidelines so that employees could have trust and confidence to be open (p. 110-111).

The blogging school official must keep in mind the elements of an effective blog. Chief among these are to post frequently, to write in a conversational style, and to link to other blogs (Stock, 2009). Failure to maintain a regular schedule of postings, publishing uninteresting material, and not linking to other blogs will likely ensure that no one follows the blog.

**Microblogs**

Twitter has become the most well-known of the microblogging sites (Harbison & Fisher, 2010). Its popularity has grown exponentially. From its launch in 2006 until March of 2010, more than 10 billion tweets had been sent. Four months later, the total exceeded 20 billion (Baird, 2011).
Microblogs have differed from their conventional counterparts due to their size. Twitter, for example, permits a maximum of 140 characters for each post, which is “the average length of one well-written sentence” (Ferriter, Ramsden & Sheninger, 2011, p. 12). A traditional blog entry, in comparison, has no limitation on its length.

*Tweets*, the term for posts made on Twitter, have tended to be more casual than email and initially centered on daily life activities (Scott, 2010). That has been changing as individuals and corporate employees have found ways to engage in conversations and share information 140 characters at a time.

When using Twitter, the # sign followed by a name or event allows that person or event to be easily located in a search function. The @ sign precedes the person’s Twitter ID when referencing someone to whom you are talking (Scott, 2011). Handley & Chapman (2011) provided several tips for effective tweets, including making every character count. Keeping tweets to 85-100 characters would allow someone else to forward the tweet with a comment or two (p. 108), which is referred to as “retweeting.”

Analytical tools for Twitter, such as Tweetscan and Twitterment, could allow an official at an organization to monitor comments and conversations related to the organization or its products (Cocheo, 2009). Best Buy is one of many companies that has empowered its employees to help monitor the tweets about the company. The employee group, called Twelpforce, has checked for negative tweets and has responded to customer complaints quickly by directing the appropriate staff to assist with the issue (Bernoff & Schadler, 2010). Due to its success, other companies have followed suit.

Company executives also have promoted microblogs internally. The IBM corporation implemented an internal microblog that permitted up to 250 characters rather
than the 140 allowed by Twitter. In a study of its use, positive effects due to the “family chatter” that developed were noted (Klopper, 2010). In addition to providing a way for employees to get answers to questions, the system also afforded some employees to become “influencers” within their respective areas of the company.

**Microblog Use by School Employees**

Many building principals and school superintendents have embraced Twitter as an effective communication tool with their stakeholders. Messages have provided a quick way to keep stakeholders informed about events taking place at the school, weather-related delays or closings, and good news happening in the classroom. Stu Silberman, former Superintendent of the Fayette County (KY) Schools, said, “Tools like Twitter are now very natural modes of communication utilized by millions of people” (Hughes, 2010).

Tweets sent out from a school or district Twitter account have been more real-time than a blog would be (Handley & Chapman, 2011). This instant availability has provided followers an opportunity to retweet the message and spread it to more stakeholders in a rapid fashion. The act of tweeting has engaged more members of the community because of the ease in sharing the message, which is the goal of the communication in the first place (Handley & Chapman, 2011). Silberman recommended including links back to the school’s web page when sending tweets so that stakeholders could find more in-depth information, adding the Twitter address to the school letterhead and email signatures, and tweeting on a daily basis (Hughes, 2010).

Rotolo (2010) suggested that executives at organizations invite stakeholders to contribute their ideas. As a social media tool, its use should be two-way rather than one-way.
School administrators could use Twitter to get feedback on issues affecting the school, such as changes to the curriculum, improving traffic flow as parents drop off or pick up their students, etc. School district officials also could solicit feedback from stakeholders who cannot traditionally make it to school-sponsored parent engagement activities due to their work schedules, a lack of transportation, or other barriers.

Twitter also could be a valuable communication tool for school administrators to use with the members of the local media. The school official (building principal, superintendent, director of community relations, etc.) who deals with the media could “follow” the tweets of local television and newspaper journalists and vice-versa to begin developing a personal relationship with them. In times of crisis, the journalist likely would turn to someone she knew first to get the story (Scott, 2011). It would be to the advantage of the school district official to already have established the relationship with the journalist before the crisis occurred.

Monitoring the conversations on Twitter could be facilitated by the use of TweetDeck, HootSuite, or Seesmic. These services allow the user to organize tweets into customized categories, place tweets into columns, translate tweets into different languages, shorten web addresses, and integrate with social networking sites to make sharing the content that much easier. Additionally, tweets can be scheduled for release at a later date. HootSuite also allows for tracking of analytic data (Ferriter, Ramsden & Sheninger, 2011).
Social Networking Sites

With over 800 million members worldwide, Facebook has become the largest of the social networking sites (Facebook, 2011). MySpace, LinkedIn, Google+, Bebo, Ning, and Orkut are just a few of the other popular social networking sites currently in existence.

According to Brogan (2010) networks are about sharing resources. Both Brogan (2010) and Solis & Breakenridge (2009) stated that the person who takes part in social networking will only get out of it what he puts into it. Services such as Ning could make the social network experience more personalized and valuable to the individual (Harbison & Fisher, 2010).

From a communication standpoint the real strength of social networking sites has come from the relationships that get cultivated. Scott (2010) posited that “strong social networking ties lead to stronger personal relationships because it is easier to facilitate face-to-face meetings that never would have occurred otherwise.” Solis & Breakenridge (2009) concurred. They encouraged the cultivation of relationships and participation in the social networking site discussions to build support for the business or brand.

Returning to the cocktail party analogy that Scott (2010) previously used to describe social media, he argued that it is not possible to attend every party, so people should focus on just a few to attend. He recommended creating profiles on a few social networking sites and devoting time to those rather than trying to create a profile for every site imaginable.

Officials at corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies should share only the most interesting information through social networking sites (Rotolo, 2010). If followers of the site find the posts boring too often, it could cause the follower to “hide” the information sent by the organization or to even “unfollow” it completely.
Effective conversations should be two-way instead of one-way (Murtland, 2010). Organizational leaders should listen to the conversations taking place by means of social media rather than just broadcasting one-way messages. Like Scott (2010), Brogan (2010) used the pub metaphor and wrote that one should “buy someone else a drink”, listen as well as communicate with others, and hear their stories, too. It strengthens the relationship and adds richness to it (p. 154). Going further, Scott (2011) advocated for real-time communication with customers as the most effective way to meet their needs. This could take place in a Twitter chat or live webinar opportunity.

Social Networking Site Use by School Employees

Carr (2010b) suggested several things that school officials could do to avoid committing social media gaffes on Facebook. First was to create an official site for the school or district, but to set it up as a fan page. By making it a fan page, it would eliminate access to the individual’s personal page. She advised to keep the tone conversational, but to represent the school’s position respectfully. Next, counseled against ever connecting with students online. Instead, she recommended the use of group sites to connect with students and parents, keeping in mind that parents are partners in the educational process and not “friends.” Finally, she reminded school officials to keep their personal business private and to be aware that they always represent their school or district.

Rich Bagin, Executive Director of the National School Public Relations Association, asked that school officials consider what they want their new Facebook “friends” to do after they attract them. Carefully planning out a targeted strategy for the Facebook page would allow school officials to more effectively involve stakeholders in a specific project, to
develop more positive stakeholder views about the school, or to better inform stakeholders about key issues (Bagin, 2011). An unfocused Facebook page likely could result in little impact on any of the key areas the school officials had targeted.

The Solon (IA) Community School District created a district Facebook account and embraced other social media tools as part of the district’s overall communications approach with stakeholders. However, neither students nor staff could access Facebook on school grounds (Crow, 2011). School district officials planned to ease up on the restrictions during the spring semester of the 2011-12 school year as they continued to encourage staff to embrace social media tools.

Administrators at New Milford (NJ) High School reached out to students, parents, and stakeholders by way of multiple social networking sites, such as Facebook, VoiceThread, Ning, and Second Life in addition to social media tools like Twitter. More than 1,000 “fans” have kept up on the academic and extra-curricular achievements of students on the school’s Facebook page. Students at the high school, in fact, were the ones who suggested to the principal that the school start a Facebook page (Davis, 2010). The principal, who once opposed social networking and other social media sites, now strongly supports their use at school. In fact, he frequently tweets about school topics and has acquired more than 15,000 followers.

Ning, another popular social networking site, is where teachers Julie Lindsay and Vicki Davis created The Flat Classroom web page ("Flat classroom project," 2011). The site has attracted more than 3,000 students from around the world to collaborate together on educational projects (Magid, 2010). The Flat Classroom project would be another example of the countless possibilities that social networking sites could provide.
Podcasts and Online Videos

The term *podcast* originated from two words: *pod* (personal on demand) which Apple made famous through its iPod, and *cast*, from the word *broadcast* (O’Bannon, et.al., 2011; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010). Handley & Chapman (2011) categorized a podcast as “an audio program in a compressed digital format, delivered over the Internet to a subscriber and designed for playback on computers or portable digital audio players such as the iPod.” They described podcasting as being similar to running your own radio station. With podcasting the creator of the program has the ability to focus the content toward a very specific target audience (Handley & Chapman, 2011).

Subscribers to podcasts could listen to programs at any time and in any location. This format might be an ideal way to reach stakeholders who commute to work and would prefer to spend that time learning more about a particular topic and/or organization. Podcasts also could make the time spent waiting in line at the supermarket, for example, more productive.

Many podcasts are 30 minutes or less (Handley & Chapman, 2011). Scott (2010) cited a noted podcaster, Christopher S. Penn of the Student Loan Network, who kept his podcasts between 18-24 minutes because the average American’s attention span is 18 minutes and the average commute is 24 minutes (p. 216).

YouTube has become the most popular video sharing site on the Internet (Scott, 2010). Every minute of the day, 24 hours’ worth of video is uploaded to YouTube (Handley & Chapman, 2011). It is easy for employees at corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies to record and upload videos to sites such as YouTube. The only thing needed would be a Flip camera and an account. It also has become easy to embed the video into the organization’s interactive website, blog, or news release (Scott, 2010).
Very few videos have gone “viral”, meaning the content “catches fire, earning tons of views, retweets, and likes, and is shared globally in the remotest villages and biggest cities” (Handley & Chapman, 2011). Instead, most videos that have been shared via the Internet are geared toward a specific audience just like podcasts.

According to Handley & Chapman (2011), the most effective videos have had three common features. First, they have presented a real rather than a fictitious story. Second, they have included real people, perhaps from the very corporation or nonprofit shooting the video. Third, they have highlighted outside resources such as customers or stakeholders. They also have brought forward a problem or challenge that the corporation or nonprofit has overcome.

Handley & Chapman (2011) suggested five different types of videos that could make for effective content sharing. Diary-style videos, where an individual or a group of people talk to the camera about using a product, are one type. A second would be an interview with someone on staff or a customer. Third might be a short video highlighting one of the products made by the company. Behind-the-scenes videos are a fourth option. Finally, event videos, such as a conference or other industry event, could be an effective type to share through social media.

**Podcasts and Online Video Use by School Employees**

There are multiple ways in which podcast use could assist in the learning process. Hew (2009) stated that “the main advantage of podcasting is the simplicity, convenience, and time savings that it offers to learners” (p. 334). The literature on the implementation of podcasts into K-12 classes and higher education courses has grown (Hew, 2009; O’Bannon,
et.al., 2011; Safko & Brake, 2009; Walls, et.al., 2010). Three broad categories of podcast use have tended to be for lectures, supplementary learning, and student-created projects (Heilesen, 2010).

The same has held true for the use of online video, such as YouTube. Downes (2008) documented the potential benefits of YouTube in a classroom setting for academic purposes. He noted that videos such as “The Last Lecture” by Randy Pausch had been viewed more than 2 million times. Since YouTube could potentially expose students to inappropriate content, he recommended TeacherTube as a safer alternative. Mullen and Wedwick (2008) recommended additional sites, such as SchoolTube, United Streaming, and OneWorldTV.

Jones and Cuthrell (2011) wrote that for classes such as social studies, YouTube offered access to a wide range of historical videos. Teachers might choose to incorporate footage from the Civil Rights movement, but may opt not to show the Watts riots. Jones and Cuthrell also pointed out that classic educational videos that may be difficult to find in videotape or DVD format, such as the School House Rock series, could be found through YouTube. For the generation of kids that did not get to grow up with “Conjunction Junction” or “I’m Just a Bill,” they would have the ability to enhance their language arts and social studies content knowledge. Mullen and Wedwick (2008) noted similar School House Rock benefits.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the different forms that effective communication by school officials typically has taken in the past. It also described several social media tools and the
ways that they are or could be used in both a school and a nonschool setting. The advent of social media tools and the exponential growth in their popularity and use requires that further investigation take place regarding effective communication between school officials and their stakeholders.

Scant peer-reviewed literature exists about the ways in which school principals and superintendents have utilized multiple social media tools to enhance their comprehensive communications efforts with their stakeholders. Even fewer articles exist which describe how school principals and superintendents have shifted from the “old rules” to the “new rules” of marketing and public relations as they have engaged with their stakeholders. This qualitative multiple-case study built upon the broader base of existing literature from the areas of business and higher education in two ways.

First, by describing, analyzing, and interpreting the experiences of school principals and superintendents who are using multiple social media tools with their stakeholders, this study has added the voices of practitioners who are ahead of the curve in their use of social media as part of their comprehensive communications with stakeholders. The addition of the practitioner voice to the literature on effective school communication validated the importance of using multiple social media tools and provided authentic examples of how these tools could complement traditional forms of effective communication. These lived experiences unveiled new opportunities for other school principals and superintendents to follow.

Second, by exploring the professional impact on the school principals and superintendents as a result of using multiple social media tools, this study has added to the literature about SCRM. The shift from the “old rules” to the “new rules” of marketing and
public relations and from one-way to two-way dialogue affects school administrators as well as employees at corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies. The perspectives that the practitioners shared are an important piece that needed examination.

The methods and procedures used for this qualitative multiple-case research study are described in Chapter 3. The results of the study and the implications for future research will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe, analyze, and interpret the experiences of school principals and superintendents who utilize social media tools to communicate with their stakeholders. Using a constructivist approach, the focus of the study was on how the use of blogs, microblogs (e.g., Twitter), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), podcasts, and online videos have complemented the more traditional forms of communication used by school administrators when engaging with their stakeholders and why school administrators have used them as part of their comprehensive communications approach.

Methodology

The goal of qualitative research, according to Jones, Torres, & Arminio (2006) “is to illuminate and better understand in depth the rich lives of human beings and the world in which we live” (p.2). Cresswell (2009) described qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Social media use by individuals, corporate executives, school administrators and the like has continued to grow at a rapid pace. An exploration of the experiences of school principals and superintendents could elucidate the issue for school administrators who have not begun to use social media tools professionally.

Yin (2011) posited five features of qualitative research rather than one definition. One of the features he identified was, “Representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study” (p. 7). A second feature was, “Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior” (p. 8). The definitions of
qualitative research offered by Jones, Torres, & Arminio, Cresswell, and Yin aligned with the goals of this researcher. As such, in-depth interviews were conducted by telephone and in person with school principals and superintendents from across the United States and Canada. The intended outcome was to more fully understand their experiences and insights so that their views and perspectives could be shared in the literature about school administrator use of social media tools.

A quantitative approach, on the other hand, would not have illuminated the experiences of the participants in the same way; rather, it would have proposed a research theory and investigated the relationship of specific variables (Cresswell, 2009). It might have involved sending an electronic or print survey with closed-ended questions to a large number of school principals and superintendents to inquire about their use of social media as a communications tool with stakeholders. Analysis of the data sets would have shown which social media tools were used most frequently by each group of school administrators, but would not have revealed the stories of why specific tools had been helpful in communicating with stakeholders or how it came to be that the school official began using social media tools to complement the existing forms of traditional school/home communication already in place.

The author of the study was interested in unfolding those stories and sharing the themes they generated. From the time he was in fifth grade through his junior year in college, he played the alto saxophone in the band. Whether it was concert, marching, or jazz band season, the best musical experiences occurred in partnership with others. Similarly, Oldfather and West (1994) described the process of qualitative research as being collaborative and interdependent. Jazz takes place in a variety of settings, just as fieldwork
takes place in a variety of settings. Oldfather and West further stated that “those who experience jazz firsthand…are those most deeply affected” just as “those who participate directly in qualitative research…are those for whom the understandings are most vivid and meaningful” (p. 23). In order to get to that vivid and meaningful understanding of the topic, the researcher chose to approach it through a qualitative lens.

Tierney (2002) invoked the word *vividness* as he wrote about his disappointment with the majority of the qualitative research articles and books that he reads. Few “capture the vividness of a scene or the qualities of an individual” (p. 390). In response, Piirto (2002) elaborated on the theme of vivid descriptions and contended that the reader of a qualitative study has the right “to read good writing; to read a good story; to trust the narrator not to be solipsistic, narcissistic, or, in the case of a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, inexperienced in the genre in which the story is told” (p. 414). This researcher concurred with both Tierney and Piirto. Qualitative research was selected in order to better illuminate the lived experiences of the participants of the study and to bring vividness to their narratives that would entice a reader to sit for a while and become engaged in their stories.

**Research Questions**

Two overarching questions guided the research study:

1. What are the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), podcasts, and online videos to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members?
2. Why are school principals and superintendents choosing to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members through multiple social media tools?

The data gathered from the research questions could provide guidance on the development of a comprehensive communications strategy for school principals and superintendents to use with their stakeholders.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The case study approach is a qualitative strategy “in which a researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” using a variety of data collection methods (Cresswell, 2009, p. 13). Yin (2009) asserted that case studies are used to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but doing so while looking at the context of the condition. This research study sought to take an in-depth look at the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use social media to communicate with stakeholders in the context of their daily work as a school administrator. This examination of a real-life phenomenon, using a variety of data collection methods, could provide guidance or incentive for school administrators who have not yet embraced Web 2.0 tools as part of their comprehensive communications with their employees, students, parents, and community members.

According to Yin (2009) there are five components of a case study research design:

1. A study’s questions;
2. Its propositions, if any;
3. Its unit(s) of analysis;
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions; and

5. The criteria for interpreting the findings. (p. 27)

In a qualitative case study, the questions typically address “how” and “why” rather than “what” and “who.” Propositions direct attention to something in the study that should be examined. For example, one of the questions used in the interviews for this study asked, “How has the way that you communicate with stakeholders changed over the past five years?” The results could shed light on a theoretical issue.

The unit of analysis for this study could reflect each individual’s experience, the experiences of the two groups (principals and superintendents), or the collective experience of the 24 participants. The logic linking the data to the propositions could refer to pattern matching, logic models, or other ways of linking the data to the original propositions. Finally, the criteria for interpreting the findings could look at statistically significant differences or rival explanations (Yin, 2009).

As noted in Chapter 1, Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) provided the framework upon which to describe the communication experiences of the school principals and superintendents who participated in the study. The use of social media tools to communicate with stakeholders in the manner that the stakeholder prefers, at the time the stakeholder prefers, and at the frequency that the stakeholder prefers all aligned with the shift from the “old” to the “new” rules of marketing and public relations about which Scott (2010) wrote. The use of Web 2.0 tools to engage stakeholders in collaborative conversations in a trusted and transparent environment was congruent with SCRM.


**Epistemology**

Constructivism served as the epistemological approach for this study. According to Jones, Torres, & Arminio (2006), constructivism “seeks to understand individual social action through interpretation or translation” (p. 18). Crotty (1998) stated that “…it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (p. 9). The school principals and superintendents who participated in this research study currently have been using social media tools as part of a comprehensive communications practice. Each has interpreted (constructed meaning) of what it means to communicate with stakeholders via social media (same phenomenon).

An objectivist approach would not have been appropriate for this study because the objective approach states that reality exists apart from consciousness (Crotty, 1998). The individual does not make meaning out of the experience; the meaning exists independent of the individual. Following an objectivist approach, the participants would not have been able to make meaning out of their experiences using social media with stakeholders.

Similarly, a subjectivist approach also would not have been appropriate for this study. In a subjectivist outlook it would not be possible for a person to interpret an experience for another. As such, the researcher would not have been able to create meaning out of the data that he collected because his power as the researcher would have distorted the findings (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Thus, having ruled out the objectivist and the subjectivist approaches, the constructivist approach was selected instead.
Research Design and Sampling

The focus of this research was a qualitative multiple-case study. The phenomenon being studied in-depth was the use of multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs (e.g., Twitter), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), podcasts, and online videos by school principals and superintendents as part of their comprehensive communications with employees, students, parents, and community members.

This case study involved school principals and superintendents from across the United States and Canada. It examined the comprehensive communication practices of school principals and superintendents from four regions of the United States and Canada in order to get data from the schools where social media use by administrators is frequent. Urban, suburban, and rural school district settings were intentionally selected in order to expand the applicability of the findings. Conversations were held with school principals and superintendents from a cross-section of schools in four different regions of the United States and Canada in order to gain an understanding of how the social media tools were being incorporated into the comprehensive communications practices of varied school settings instead of just one region or area.

The participants for the study were selected through a process called purposeful sampling. It also has been referred to as purposeful selection and criterion-based selection (Maxwell, 2005). Purposeful sampling “is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). According to Yin (2011) “the goal or purpose for selecting the specific study units is to have those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data, given your topic of study” (p. 88). The use of this technique assured that there were an equal
number of school principals and superintendents taking part in the study. The selection also ensured that the participants used at least two social media tools as part of their comprehensive communications practices with stakeholders. If random sampling had been employed, it would not have been possible to control for these two important qualities.

Initially, the search for school principals and superintendents focused on administrators from across the United States and Canada who blogged and tweeted as a method of communicating with stakeholders. Preliminary Google searches using terms such as “school principals who blog” and “superintendents who blog and tweet” yielded websites like Connected Principals (http://www.connectedprincipals.com), the American Association of School Administrators (http://www.aasaconnect.com/Member-Blogs), and the University Council for Educational Administration’s Center for the Advanced Study of Technology Leadership in Education (http://schooltechleadership.org/research/projects/superintendent-blogs) as well as specific Blogger web pages for school administrators who had blogs.

Next, an investigation began to see how frequently the potential interview subjects had blogged and how many followers each had on Twitter. Additionally, the search included a review to see if the potential interview participant’s school had a social networking site, podcasts, or online videos. From there a list of 20 potential interview subjects was created, each purposefully chosen from different regions of the country stretching from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Coast. The 20 initial potential interview subjects represented 13 states. The list included nine principals, nine superintendents, and two central office staff in the hope that at least six principals, six superintendents, and one of the two central office staff would take part. After submitting the initial list to one of his co-major professors, the researcher was encouraged to expand the number of participants to a target range of 20-24
school principals and 20-24 school superintendents. The central office staff category was
omitted in favor of having the two larger groups.

Additional time was spent locating an expanded pool of potential participants. In the
end, 24 school principals were identified from 21 U.S. states and one Canadian province, and
24 superintendents were identified from 17 U.S. states and one Canadian province. The list
was broken down into four regions with six participants per region. Due to the wide array of
regional terms in use across the country (e.g. New England, Mid-Atlantic, Deep South,
Midwest, Heartland, Pacific Northwest, etc.), the geographic regions used by the United
States Census Bureau were selected.

The United States Census Bureau divides the country into four regions: Northeast,
Midwest, South, and West (Appendix A). The Northeast, Midwest, and West are split into
two divisions; the South has three for a total of nine divisions. Three school principals and
three superintendents were located in each region for the purposes of this study. The balance
achieved from interviewing school administrators from all parts of the United States and
Canada was accomplished by using the four regional groupings without having to use the
nine subdivisions.

The 24 purposefully-selected participants were rank ordered 1-6 in each of the four
regions. The first three would be contacted initially and asked to take part in the study.
Prospective participants four, five, and six would serve as alternates in the event that a
participant from the first group of three declined. Their order (1-6) was based upon factors
such as: the frequency of their blogging/tweeting/social networking posts; their number of
followers; and the desire to get a mix of urban, suburban, and rural perspectives. In the
Midwest region preference was given to participants who lived within a 6-hour drive of the researcher’s home so that some of the interviews could be done in person.

Emails were sent the morning of January 2, 2012, to the purposefully-selected principals (n=12) and superintendents (n=12) explaining the project and asking for their participation in the study. Of the 24 who were asked to take part, 21 responded affirmatively. Nine eager participants responded affirmatively on January 2. The quickest responses came from two superintendents who replied four and seven minutes after being invited to take part. One principal was so eager to take part that he asked to conduct the interview that same evening or the following evening. Six participants accepted the invitation on January 3. The remaining nine were secured over the next 15 days.

Table 1. Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Years of Experience as a School Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>NE-P-1</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>NE-P-2</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>NE-P-3</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>SO-P-1</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>SO-P-2</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
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<td>South</td>
<td>SO-P-3</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Rural</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>WE-P-2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>WE-P-3</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.33 MEAN

* Canadian school district. No designation available.

One superintendent in the Midwest declined the invitation and was replaced by an alternate. A second superintendent in the Midwest never responded to any of the three emails he was sent. An alternate was selected. One superintendent in the South also was
contacted three times by email and never replied. That superintendent was replaced by an alternate as well. Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of the participants by region, school type, and years of experience.

**Table 2. Superintendents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Years of Experience as a School Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>NE-S-1</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>NE-S-2</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>NE-S-3</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
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<td>South</td>
<td>SO-S-1</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>South</td>
<td>SO-S-2</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Rural</td>
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<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>WE-S-3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|  |  |  | 18.75 MEAN |

* Canadian school district. No designation available.

**Data Collection Methods**

The data collection methods used in this research study included telephone and in-person interviews with school principals and superintendents. The study also included an analysis of the administrators’ social media tool usage. Interviews were conducted with currently practicing school principals and superintendents who used at least two of the following as part of their comprehensive communications with stakeholders: blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), podcasts, and online videos.
The interviews were qualitative rather than structured. Yin (2011) listed three features of qualitative interviews to which this researcher adhered. First, the relationship between the participants and researcher was not strictly scripted. There were 11 standard questions as part of the interview, but the phrasing of the questions, the phrasing of the probing questions, and even the order in which the questions were asked differed according to the flow of each of the conversations. Second, the interviews followed a conversational manner rather than a scripted one. Topics such as pending snowstorms, doctoral programs, and the NFL playoffs filtered into the discussions, allowing each interview to be individualized to the participant and to provide a more social relationship. Third, the interviews contained open-ended questions that allowed participants to provide deep, rich descriptions instead of single-word answers.

Yin (2009) also characterized qualitative interviews as ones that “cater to the interviewee’s schedule and availability” and not the researcher’s (p. 85). Of the 24 interviews conducted for this study, 6 took place after school hours or in the evenings, 2 took place on a holiday (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day), 2 took place on a Sunday, and 14 took place during school hours; all at the participants’ request. The format afforded the participants the opportunity to go in-depth about the specific tools that each used when communicating with employees, students, parents, and community members, to talk about their overall experiences using social media, and to talk about why they have chosen to use social media with stakeholders.

Twenty-two of the interviews took place over the telephone and lasted from 12 to 42 minutes. NoNotesVoice.com, a third-party service, was used to record each of the calls and provided a transcript of the conversations, typically within two business days. The
transcriptions were not 100 percent accurate, so the researcher listened to each interview and made the necessary corrections to the transcripts to reflect what was actually said.

Two of the interviews took place in-person and lasted from 27 to 29 minutes. Logistically it would not have been feasible to conduct all of the interviews in person since the majority of the participants lived quite a distance from the researcher, including as far away as 2000 miles. The in-person interviews also were uploaded to NoNotesVoice.com for transcription. After the transcripts were received, the same process of listening to the interviews a second time and correcting the errors was followed.

**Data Analysis**

Yin (2011) recommended five steps to follow in the analysis of qualitative research: compiling, disassembling, reassembling and arraying, interpreting, and concluding. First, the researcher compiled the data. This step involved gathering the interview transcriptions, the field notes taken during the interviews, and the data on social media tool usage. The researcher followed the advice of Maxwell (2005) and began to organize and analyze some of the data immediately after conducting the first interview. Through the use of the Review Tab tools in Microsoft Word, the interview questions were located in the transcriptions with New Comment bubbles and interesting quotes were highlighted for use in the write-up. Next, the researcher began to disassemble the data to get a sense of the emergent themes. This entailed searching for common responses to questions and key words that respondents used. The fragments were coded so that the data could be grouped in different ways in preparation for reassembling. After reassembling the data, it was interpreted based upon the themes that surfaced. The themes were described in greater detail to provide the basis for the
stories that would unfold in Chapter 4. Finally, the researcher drew his conclusions and
selected the ways in which he would represent the findings, including detailed descriptions as
well as charts, graphs, and tables. In the conclusion, the description, analysis, and
interpretation of the school administrators’ experiences were provided and a social media
strategy was developed for school principals and superintendents who have not yet embraced
this method of communicating with stakeholders.

Validity Strategies

Cresswell (2009) recommended the use of multiple validity strategies in order to
provide a basis for accuracy during qualitative research. The eight strategies included:
triangulation, member checks, thick descriptions, clarifying researcher bias, presentation of
discrepant information, prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing, and use of an external
auditor (p. 191-92). Triangulation, member checks, thick descriptions, and peer debriefing
were selected as validity strategies in this research study.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves seeking three different sources in order to confirm the data
(Yin, 2011). The findings of this study were corroborated by locating 11 of the 12 school
principal participants and 10 of the 12 school superintendents through websites that
showcased school administrators who frequently used social media tools; by engaging in in-
depth interviews; and by examining the total number of blog posts, tweets, social networking
site “likes”, podcasts, and uploaded videos (to sites such as YouTube or within the context of
a blog post or tweet). These sources served as data points to provide validity that the school
administrators interviewed had made consistent use of multiple social media tools with which
to communicate with stakeholders. Tables 4, 5, 7, and 8 display the participants, the social media tools utilized, and the total number of uses as of December 31, 2011.

In addition to the interviews with each participant and the collection of the total social media tool use data, the researcher also randomly selected the month of October 2011 and reviewed the respective blogs, tweets, school social networking site posts, and online videos of each participant from that month to document the volume of communication produced by the school official. It served as one additional source of triangulation.

**Member Checking**

The process of “member checking” (Cresswell, 2009) or “respondent validation” (Maxwell, 2005) was followed to provide validity that the emergent themes represented an accurate description of the conversations with the participants. Each participant received an electronic copy of their interview transcript two to five days after the telephone conversation or in-person interview. Only one of the 24 participants, Northeast Superintendent 3, responded with corrections to the transcript. Two principals and five superintendents responded with a short email that the transcript was fine.

Once the themes from the conversations had been written up, the participants received an email with the emergent themes from their category (principal or superintendent) to ensure that it had been interpreted correctly (Appendices K and L). Cresswell (2009) recommended this process rather than just providing the participant with the transcript. The interviewees also were provided with the opportunity to respond to the findings and to suggest changes. Three principals and one superintendent responded with: “I like it”, “I
agree with the four themes and look forward to seeing your final report/analysis when it is complete”, “You’re on the right track,” and “I think you’re right on.”

**Thick Description**

The findings from the study were written up using a process called “thick description.” This style of writing, coined by Geertz in 1973 who credited Gilbert Ryle (1949), provided a more realistic and richer experience for the reader and could add to the validity (Yin, 2011). A thick description puts the focus on the participants and situates them in their local context (p. 231). Prasad (2005) cautioned that the process of writing thick descriptions “demands that the researcher unravel different clusters of meaning and interest while simultaneously tracing their interconnections with each other” (p. 81). The narrative in Chapter 4 provides the stories and descriptions that show the different meanings revealed from the principals and the superintendents. It also weaves their stories together to show the interconnectedness.

**Peer Debriefing**

Finally, the validity strategy of peer debriefing was followed. Cresswell (2009) referred to this process as “locating a person (a peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (p. 192). Yin (2011) referred to this as a “peer review” process. He suggested securing an academic peer or colleague who has “a keen analytic sense or a critical eye for your work” (p. 275). Three employees of the Great Plains ISD were selected as peer debriefers. Two of the peer debriefers, the Director of Secondary Curriculum and an Assistant Superintendent, each hold Ed.D. degrees. The third, a teacher at North, co-
presented her literacy research at the American Educational Research Association fall conference in New Orleans with a professor from the local university. Feedback from the three peer debriefers ensured that the final product provided clarity and that it met the goal of encouraging a reader to sit for a while and become engaged in the stories of the participants.

Ethics

The Institutional Review Board of the Office for Responsible Research at Iowa State University approved the application for this study on December 6, 2011. The IRB paperwork that was filed stated that the identities of the participants would not be made known. In order to protect the identities of the participants, each was assigned a code that included the individual’s region (NE = Northeast, SO = South, MW = Midwest, and WE = West), job title (P = principal or S = superintendent), and a number indicating if the participant was the first, second, or third in their region to agree to take part. Data reflecting the participants’ social media use was placed into broad ranges (e.g. 101-500 blog posts, 5,001-10,000 followers, etc.) to provide anonymity while also revealing the depth and breadth of the social media use of the respective school principals and superintendents.

Each of the 24 participants was emailed an electronic copy of the Informed Consent Document (Appendix B) prior to the scheduled interview. Each participant was asked to sign it and return it as a PDF attachment to ensure that they willingly agreed to take part in this study. Of the 24 participants, 20 fulfilled the request. The other four subjects (three principals and one superintendent) verbally consented to the interview and stated that they had signed the paperwork. Although they each indicated that they would return the electronic copy, they did not. Since they had verbally agreed to take part in the study and to
return the Informed Consent Document, the researcher went ahead and conducted those interviews. Their consent was recorded and appeared as part of the NoNotesVoice.com transcription.

**Researcher Positionality**

Prior to conducting this study the researcher did not know any of the participants personally. Approximately three months prior to contacting the participants to ask them to take part in this study, he created a Twitter account for the middle school that he serves as principal. Over the course of those three months he began following 16 of the participants. Six of them reciprocated and began following his tweets as well. For the three previous school years the researcher had fashioned the weekly newsletter to his staff in the format of a blog. At the start of the 2011-12 school year the switch to the blog format was made official and the content was placed on the school’s web page with a password control so that it was only available to staff members.

Researchers need to be aware of their position in the study; their relationship to the participants (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Careful attention must be paid to the conscious and unconscious decisions made about representing the data results. The researcher must address and reflect upon how his role affects the outcome. The author of this study recognized that as a school administrator who tweeted for an external audience and blogged for his staff members, his perceptions of the use of social media tools as part of a comprehensive communications strategy with stakeholders had bias. He believed that school administrators should embrace social media tools as part of their communications strategy with stakeholders.
In addition, this researcher also recognized that due to the nature of following some of the participants on Twitter and being followed by them on the same, there may have been additional bias involved. Perhaps the participants would only share the positive side of social media use since the researcher had already begun its use himself as a school principal. The bias should be minimal since the participants and researcher do not know one another personally. Alternatively, perhaps the participants would assume that the researcher has extensive Twitter skills and they might not go as in-depth had he not been tweeting.

A final bias that may have existed is that the researcher included the name of his major professor in his email to prospective participants. Four principals and one superintendent stated in their acceptance of the request to participate or in the interview that they admired the work of Dr. McLeod, trusted him, and/or agreed to take part because of knowing him. It is possible that his role as a national expert in the field may have caused some participants to share what the researcher wanted to hear rather than an honest assessment of their experiences using social media as a school administrator.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

This study was limited to the perceptions of school principals and superintendents regarding their experiences using social media tools to communicate with stakeholders. It did not examine how employees, students, parents, or community members perceived the received information from the school administrators, nor did it provide an analysis of who read the blogs, followed the tweets, “liked” a school’s social networking site, listened to the podcasts, or viewed the uploaded videos. Additionally, this study did not examine stakeholders’ preferences for receiving school communication via social media tools versus
the traditional forms of communication that school employees use. Each of those topics could be the focus of a different independent research study and likely will be recommended in Chapter 5 as topics for further investigation. This study focused on the unique experiences of school principals and superintendents in order to begin filling the void in the literature on this topic.

This qualitative case study was delimited to school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools in their communications with stakeholders. The selected participants actively blogged, tweeted, made use of the school’s social networking site, created podcasts, and either created videos to be uploaded or uploaded existing videos as part of their blog. Many of the school administrators were prolific users of multiple social media tools and have become national leaders in the field. They have spoken at conferences, published articles, and co-authored books so that others may learn from their expertise.

Finally, the study was not delimited to a specific school or school district (e.g. urban, suburban, or rural). It took a broad look at social media use by school principals and superintendents from across the United States and Canada in order to provide more generalizable findings.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the methodology, theoretical perspective, epistemology, and research design for this qualitative case study. It discussed the participants and the process for their selection, the steps taken for data analysis, validity strategies, the researcher’s positionality, and the limitations and delimitations of the study.
The findings of the research will be shared in Chapter 4. The implications for future research will be discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to describe, analyze, and interpret the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools with stakeholders as part of their comprehensive communications practices. Additionally, the study examined why school principals and superintendents have chosen to communicate with their stakeholders through social media. Through the use of a multiple-case study, the researcher identified the themes common to both groups as well as the ones specific to each.

This chapter presents the demographics of the 12 school principals and 12 superintendents who took part in the qualitative interviews. It then presents the data and emergent themes from the school principals followed by the data and emergent themes from the school superintendents. The chapter concludes by examining the themes common to both groups, which provide the basis for the discussion and recommendations in Chapter 5.

Participants

Initially, nine school principals, nine superintendents, and two central office administrators were identified as potential participants for this research study. The candidates represented a mix of urban, suburban, and rural administrators from four regions of the United States and Canada. The potential pool of participants was expanded later to include 24 school principals and 24 superintendents. The central office administrator category was removed. Of the 24 identified participants in each category, it was hoped that three participants from each region could be secured from both groups, resulting in 12 school
principals and 12 superintendents taking part. The participant selection process was described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

**Pilot Study**

Yin (2009) recommended the use of pilot studies as a way “to develop relevant lines of questions” prior to conducting the actual study and to assist with the process of refining data collection plans and procedures (p. 92). In this research study, the intent was to locate a practicing administrator who used social media as part of his professional activities in order to pilot the interview questions. Due to the desire of one of the initial respondents to conduct the interview on either the evening of January 2 or 3 and the lack of access to a local school principal or superintendent who fit the criteria for the study, a pilot interview was not conducted prior to the actual research interviews. However, it was known that some of the interview questions might be modified, as needed, during the actual interviews. This flexibility supported the semistructured, qualitative interview techniques that had been selected for the interview process.

**Revisions to the Interview Protocol**

The initial interview protocol (Appendix C) document had a lengthy introductory script of 328 words. The intent was that it would be read verbatim with each participant as part of the interview. When the first participant answered the telephone the evening of January 3, nerves kicked in and the researcher ad-libbed an abbreviated 134-word version of the introduction. Over the course of the three weeks of interviews the opening section of the protocol script was trimmed to 210 words and then to 118 words (Appendix D). Even so, the researcher orally improvised when talking with the participants in order to start off the
interview in a more conversational manner. All 24 participants received the document ahead of time, so the researcher felt comfortable covering the major points and concluding the introduction by asking, “Do you have any questions before we begin?”

**Data Collection**

The emergent themes were identified through careful analysis of the data. Handwritten notes were taken during each of the 24 interviews as a backup in case the third-party service failed to record the call. The interview transcript provided by NoNotesVoice.com typically was available two to three days after each interview. Upon receipt, the researcher listened to each interview and edited the transcript as needed to ensure it reflected what was actually said. Pauses, stammering, and filler words, such as “um” and “OK” were generally not included. The edited transcripts were sent back to each participant within two to five days for their verification. Just one of the participants, Northeast Superintendent 3, provided some grammatical corrections and additions.

Following the process recommended by Yin (2011), the data gathered from the 24 qualitative interviews was carefully compiled, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted. From there, conclusions were drawn. Each interview transcript was read through a third time to identify important passages and potential quotes that might be used in the summary. The 12 superintendent interviews were analyzed and interpreted first followed by the 12 principal interviews. Each transcript was printed and placed in a respective binder so that it could be read through easily and further notations could be made.

Next, a table with the interview questions was created with key words from the superintendents as well as short notes that captured the essence of an answer (Appendix J).
The common responses were color-coded to make it easier to identify them. A first, second, and third iteration of coding was generated as the data was disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted; a process recommended by Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) to make the research process more public. The same process was followed with the data from the interviews with the school principals (Appendix I). The respective blogs, Twitter pages, social networking pages, and YouTube pages from the 24 participants also were examined.

After writing up the findings from the data gathered from the school principals, the disassembling and reassembling process was completed once more with the data from the superintendents to ensure that each of the relevant themes had been properly identified. Each of the interview transcripts was reprinted with the first round of emergent themes categorized by specific color codes. Each transcript was read through again more closely and extensive margin notes were taken. The revised code words were transferred into a new set of columns, which were then color-coded into the final themes.

Based upon these processes, four emergent themes were identified from the 12 school principals and six emergent themes were identified from the 12 school superintendents. Four of the themes were common to both case study groups. The data supporting the themes from the school principals and the school superintendents will be presented separately in the next section. The chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis of the four common themes.

**Study Findings: Principals**

Four themes emerged from the 12 qualitative interviews with the school principals and from the Internet data regarding their social media use. The four emergent themes included:
1. Social media tools allow for greater **interactions** between school principals and their stakeholders.

2. Social media tools provide stronger **connections** to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world.

3. Social media use can have a significant **impact** on a school principal’s personal and professional growth.

4. Social media use is an **expectation**; it’s no longer optional.

The first three themes more closely aligned with the first research question: *What are the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), podcasts, and online videos to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members?* The fourth theme more closely aligned with the second research question: *Why are school principals and superintendents choosing to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members through multiple social media tools?*

**Interactions**

Four of the interview questions provided response data that contributed to the formation of the first theme: *interactions*. After asking about length of service in their current administrative role and as a school administrator overall, participants first were asked to discuss how their communication with stakeholders has changed over the past five years. This gave the respondents the opportunity to begin the interview with some reflection about how much their communication with stakeholders has changed in a relatively short period of time.
Interview Question 3: How has the way that you communicate with stakeholders (community members, employees, parents, and students) changed over the past five years?

Ten of the 12 participants referred to the movement away from paper forms of communication in favor of electronic options such as social media tools. Selected quotes from the participants are included below and are followed by their assigned code. NE-P-1, for example, refers to Northeast Principal 1.

Over the past five years, we’ve gone a lot less from traditional paper modes to more electronic modes to communicate. I feel like we have a lot more vehicles to get out our messages and different communications we have to get out from a school standpoint. We have a lot more options, so we can take an advantage of those. (NE-P-1)

A principal from the South shared how communication between school administrators and stakeholders has evolved to include Twitter:

We had a parents’ coffee where I spoke for an hour and a half to the junior high parents who wanted to attend, and ask questions, and provide a little program about our “Learning for Life” vision statement. And I had one of my colleagues tweet the questions and conversations so that other faculty who couldn’t attend and other parents who couldn’t attend could follow along virtually. (SO-P-2)

Another principal from the South shared that he has gone strictly electronic in his communications. “I've seen my own practice move from paper or physical forms to more electronic or actually entirely electronic. I don’t do anything on paper anymore. I've also seen that my communication has actually become more frequent and focused too.” (SO-P-3)
From the West region, a principal described the change from email to multiple social media tool use:

I would say that it has changed significantly. Five years ago, we only would have been in the embryonic stages of having even a common email system in our school district, and now we have a comprehensive communication protocol that, of course, includes email, computerized phone-outs, and then, using social media such as Google Buzz, Twitter, Facebook and a variety of other applications that we pop out there. So, I would say it’s changed dramatically with the changing of what our clientele wants. (WE-P-2)

Another principal from the West shared similar findings about the inclusion of social media:

Now, obviously, our school is shifting to a lot of social media to be honest. One of the biggest, Facebook, is probably one of the most readily accessible forms of communication with our parents. That's seen a huge increase in the number of parents that are on Facebook. It tends to get the quickest responses if I post the information to that. And then what we do is, concurrently, we use our school website and a Twitter account as well to push information out. It's really cut down on the number of pieces of paper we're sending home. The feedback that we get from parents on that is that they would prefer to have things electronically at the junior high. (WE-P-3)

These initial quotes reveal the shift that has taken place in the way that school officials have been interacting with their stakeholders. They have chosen to embrace digital forms of communication in order to increase the interactions with stakeholders. Many of
those stakeholders have indicated, as stated by West Principal 3, that they prefer to receive communication in a digital format.

**Interactions: Two-way dialogue**

Seven of the 12 participants referred to the movement from one-way communication to two-way dialogue with stakeholders. “I think the more people you have in the conversation that the more powerful, the more meaningful it is,” said a principal from the Northeast. He then shared a compelling quote about the importance of bringing people into the conversation:

I don’t know who said this quote about “the smartest person in the room is the room,” so I just feel like the more people we can bring into the room to help us with the discussion, that may give us access to a new perspective a bit. (NE-P-1)

Social media tools, such as blogs and Twitter, could facilitate “bringing more people into the room” and extending the dialogues between school officials and any of the stakeholder groups. Those discussions could provide deeper, richer exchanges that might foster stronger solutions to the questions at hand. Those new perspectives could yield better benefits for all involved.

A second principal from the Northeast detailed the impressive changes that have occurred in just the past three years as he began communicating with his stakeholders via social media tools:

It’s changed dramatically. Prior to March 2009, it was all traditional one-way forms of communication such as newsletters, updates to a website, email for example. I mean, that could be construed as two-way, but all traditional forms. Then from 2009,
moving forward I started to adopt more relevant forms of communication in twenty-first century such as leveraging the real-time web and social media resources such as Twitter and Facebook and blogging to not only distribute information to my stakeholders, but make the conversation more two-way where I could get feedback on things that I was posting or sharing with them. (NE-P-3)

In 2010, an administrator from the South accepted a middle school principal position in another school district. As he made the transition to his new role, he decided to use social media tools in order to engage in two-way conversations with his new stakeholders:

Two years ago I decided to create a Ning account and I chose the Ning account because you could have, you know, it’s a social media tool, but it allowed us to have kind of ongoing conversation back and forth, not just emails, and everyone could see it. They could see that that communication would provide a terrific way to begin, you know, setting the expectations, building relationships and even surveying parents, teachers, and the community as a whole to understand their expectations. (SO-P-1)

A principal from the West summed up the changes over the past five years in one word: “Huge!” He then set the stage for how the communication changes have transitioned. “I mean, when I got here, it was like your typical newsletter, very one-way communication. There was email, but not everybody was using email even within the school, so … it was, put stuff, information, in the mail boxes.” Additionally, he shared some poignant remarks about the dialogue that is now possible through social media tools:

Your conversations that you had, happened in meetings or the staff room and because we supervise when the staff are in the staff room, we don’t ever get to have those conversations. So, through social media you're not only communicating with parents
and community members by sending out information here, you're also getting feedback. (WE-P-1)

Extending access to conversations was one important change that he had noted. Next, he elaborated on the changes to traditional forms of communication, such as the school newsletter. Information is now available instantly and in multiple manners.

So, like, we've taken our newsletter, our traditional newsletter and now do it as a blog, and so you're putting information out there in a more timely fashion. You're not waiting til the end of the month when it happens. You're posting it on the blog and parents can read it and respond. When we post it on the blog it goes to our Facebook page, which goes to our Twitter account and basically, you're kind of meeting parents and community members where they are, so if they are on Facebook they are going to see it. (WE-P-1)

These three school principals discovered that they could get feedback quickly and efficiently from their stakeholders by sharing the school information through a variety of social media outlets. By using blogs, microblogs, and social networking sites to “meet parents and community members where they are” the school principals were able to engage them in discussions about issues, survey them about their opinions, and understand their expectations. The tools also gave the school principals access to conversations to which they might never have had access in the past.

After setting the stage by having the school principals reflect on the shift in how they had been communicating with their employees, students, parents, and community members, the principals were asked to identify the social media tools currently being used with
stakeholders. Following up, the principals were asked about the length of time each participant had been using the tools and the frequency of use.

Interview Question 4: Which social media tools are you currently using in your role as a school administrator? How long have you used them? How frequently?

Each of the 12 participants blogged and used Twitter in his communication with stakeholders (Table 3). Nine of the 12 communicated with stakeholders through a social networking site such as Facebook, Ning, or Google+. Seven of the 12 created and uploaded online videos to sites such as YouTube. Only one school principal mentioned using podcasts with stakeholders.

Table 3. Principals’ Social Media Presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Microblogs (e.g. Twitter)</th>
<th>Social Networking Site</th>
<th>Podcasts</th>
<th>Online Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses varied regarding the length of time each participant had used the social media tools and the frequency with which they were used in communication with stakeholders. Tables 4 and 5 provide data for the number of years each participant has been...
blogging and using Twitter. They also include the total blog posts, tweets, Twitter followers, online videos, and Facebook “likes” as of December 31, 2011, and January 26, 2012.

Table 4. Principals’ Social Media Tool Use (part 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Total Blog Posts as of 12/31/11</th>
<th>Years Blogging</th>
<th>Tweets as of 12/31/11</th>
<th>Twitter Followers as of 12/31/11</th>
<th>Years Using Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-1</td>
<td>501-1,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-2</td>
<td>1,001+</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-3</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-1</td>
<td>1-100</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>501-1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-2</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>501-1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-3</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-1</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-2</td>
<td>1-100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>501-1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-3</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-1</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-2</td>
<td>1-100</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-3</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Principals' Social Media Tool Use (part 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Facebook “likes” as of 1/26/12</th>
<th>Online Video as of 1/26/12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-1</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>101+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-2</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-3</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>1-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-3</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-3</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>1-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-3</td>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Question 7: Which topics do you typically communicate to stakeholders through social media and how often do they respond?

Nine of the 12 school principals indicated that they communicated items about school, including routine announcements, celebrations, athletic events, classroom visits, and the like. A principal from the South shared the types of items he typically conveyed via social media tools:

Typically… I communicate announcements, which can be about upcoming events. I might tweet out some celebrations; some things that the school’s accomplished. Or if I’ve got clearance from the parents or the kid, I'll tweet out maybe something that one of our students has received an award for example. Usually, what happens is when I do those kinds of celebrations and announcements, a lot of times I'll get emails probably pretty quickly from a parent saying that, “My child did this.” So, the responses usually come pretty regularly from parents as far as if they get word that we're celebrating one student they certainly want us to celebrate their child's accomplishments, too. (SO-P-3)

A principal from the West discussed the types of things he initially shared with parents and stakeholders. “I originally was trying to promote things that … went, like, past your typical academic events or academic practices, so, here are your cool projects, you know? It had to be something really cool that I put on there.” After getting input from parents, he now shares the commonplace activities:

Now it’s like, I just put on, if I go into the classroom I put on what they are doing because the feedback from parents is, you know, “We love to hear what's happening in your school whether it’s this amazing, great thing, or if it’s just day-to-day stuff.
We just love to know what's going on with school.” So, I just put if there is a couple, they are doing buddy reading or something, and I'll post it so, yeah it's everything. Anything that I see. Basically, if I have something with me, and it's something that I feel parents would like to know about, I put it on there. (WE-P-1)

School principals who have not yet begun using social media tools as part of a comprehensive communications strategy with employees, students, parents, and community members might have thought that those stakeholders only would want to read about the really innovative activities taking place in the school. As the previous quote stated, parents enjoy reading about the ordinary as well as the extraordinary activities. Posting the information to the school’s social networking site and adding photographs also could increase the number of employees, students, or community members who see and share the information.

Seven of the 12 school principals actively have blogged and tweeted about educational reform, pedagogy, and/or education in general. Several remarked that they are trying to get their constituents to think beyond the parameters of the local school or community in order to focus on bigger issues in education. A principal from the Northeast stated:

Now I've expanded into, obviously, editorial comments on different educational issues, topics, just to try to bring community awareness to what's going on nationally in regards to some Ed reform movements and just try to get our school’s perspective, our community, to be aware of the perspective that's outside of our small community. (NE-P-1)

A principal from the South has blogged and tweeted to stay current about educational issues and trends:
I blog and tweet quite a bit about PLCs (professional learning communities) and assessment, and really trying to understand more balanced assessment, and formative, summative learning progressions, and so I try to stay active and involved in that community of thinkers. Those are probably the big topics in addition to things that are going on in the school specifically, sharing out practices, events, that sort of thing, just my own developing thinking about educational shift that's happening right now. (SO-P-2)

When asked the topics about which he wrote, a principal from the West said, “Mostly about education and education reform.” He continued his comments with, “My areas of interest are assessment and sort of educational philosophy and a lot of stuff about twenty-first century learning and student behavior, educator behavior. Those are kind of the things that I tend to stick with. (WE-P-2)

It is likely that most stakeholders would have cursory knowledge of the educational reform topics advocated by politicians, directors of state departments of education, and federal bureaucrats. When school principals blog and tweet about such topics and share how the reforms might impact the local school system, it could result in a better informed populace. The three principals previously quoted have blogged and tweeted to do just that.

Interview Question 8: On average, how much time per day or week do you spend communicating with stakeholders through social media?

Respondents indicated a broad spectrum of answers ranging from 10 minutes a day sending tweets to “far too much.” Two of the principals indicated that the time spent on social media communication replaced the time that would have been spent on traditional
forms of communication. A principal from the Northeast who has been using social media tools extensively gave an honest answer:

Far too much! I don’t know that there is an answer there. It’s hard. A lot. I don’t know if -- I don’t know if I can because it's just so part of every day and sort of, it’s not like I sit and I'll be like, “Now it’s my social media time.” It's just my HootSuite is up and I glance at it and what have you. (NE-P-2)

A colleague of his from the Northeast, who also is a prolific blogger and tweeter, made these remarks:

It’s like anything. It’s like, effective administrators have mastered the art of communication and should openly create a positive brand presence through a public relations platform that really accentuates the positives that are going on. That’s a part of my job. I'm just using a different tool to accomplish that task. Where the time comes in, it’s, sometimes, when I'm going to read certain articles that I find on Twitter in-depth, that's done outside of school. In school, I'm doing what every other administrator is doing; I just might be using different tools. (NE-P-3)

“That's a hard question to answer,” remarked a principal from the South region who also had a hard time determining the amount of time he spent communicating through social media tools “because it’s three seconds here, five seconds there, two seconds somewhere else because to me, it doesn’t take long. It's become somewhat of a positive habit.” He illustrated his thinking by relating a recent experience he has had with sharing information via social media:

Now, if I'm -- for instance, I'm reading a book on innovation right now and instead of reading a hard copy, I would read it on my iPad and the Kindle app. So, as I'm
reading I’ll highlight to keep notes about what strikes me, like you would use a highlighter or margin notes and a hardcopy book. One of the options is to tweet, and so it’s not really taking me any additional time that is in a negative sense of additional time, but I don’t know that I could give you an accurate read on how often. I probably spend anywhere from an hour to five hours a week writing blog posts. (SO-P-2)

These three school principals admittedly use social media frequently as part of their work as school administrators. However, the time that they have spent communicating via social media tools has largely taken the place of conventional methods of sharing information with others. When South Principal 2 was asked the follow-up question, “Has it (social media) replaced the time that you used to spend writing a monthly newsletter or doing some of the more traditional forms of communication?” he stated, “It has replaced those things by and large, maybe not entirely, but upwards of, I’m guessing 80-90 percent replacement value.”

In the Midwest, a principal brought to light the extent of his social media communications as he tried to build a following for his blog and Twitter presence:

I would very safely say that between all the blog writing, the various tweet sessions or tweet chat sessions, any Facebook stuff even just during the day as well during the work day, during the school day, I would assume, Monday through Friday alone, I have to be at least at 20 hours and on a Saturday or Sunday it would be safe to say an additional, probably additional 14 hours or so. So, I'm up to -- I think it's very safe to say about 35 hours if we round up. (MW-P-1)
As he elaborated on his desire to build a social media following, he concluded his thoughts with, “…It's a little bit more involved than just that, but 35 hours is probably, embarrassing maybe, a pretty accurate guess.”

Traditional forms of communication between school officials and stakeholder groups have been effective at conveying information. School principals who have converted to digital forms of communication or a blend of traditional and digital forms have found that they could convey information in a variety of methods (blogs, Twitter, social networking sites, etc.) that suited the preferred style of the recipient. The principals in this study also have found that they could engage those stakeholders in two-way dialogue, which was not possible through standard forms (e.g. school newsletter). These participants now have access to conversations to which they previously did not. The increase in the interactions between the principals and their stakeholders validated the inclusion of social media tools as part of a comprehensive communications approach.

Connections

Three of the interview questions provided response data that contributed to the formation of the second theme: connections. Several variations of this term were considered. During the disassembling and reassembling phases of the analysis two other terms were employed as part of the process: connectedness and relationships. After exploring the semantic differences between the three words, the term connections was selected as the umbrella under which the subthemes of connectedness and relationships would reside.

The first reference to the theme of connections surfaced in responses to Interview Question 5. The bulk of the references came from responses to Interview Questions 6 and 9,
which are both two-part questions. Three school principals spoke about connections as one of the factors that caused them to begin using social media tools with stakeholders. The first response that follows comes from a principal in the Northeast who spoke passionately about the subject and conveyed his belief that social media is a powerful tool to connect students to a world of opportunities and knowledge. In true multi-tasking principal form, he juggled a long-distance interview for this research study while assisting students who had ordered pizza and could not locate plates or discern how much to tip the delivery man when he arrived. Twenty seconds prior to being asked the question about the factors that caused him to start using social media tools with stakeholders, the interview was interrupted with this side conversation:

[Other conversation: It’s here. How much do I owe? You're killing me kid. Don’t forget to tip him, though. Give me 10 back and a slice.]

To researcher: Sorry.

*Printed Interview Question 5: What factors caused you to start using social media as a school administrator?*

*Interview Question 5 as asked: The next question, I don’t know, it's -- What factors caused you to start using social media as a school administrator? But it sounds like it’s always been part of your career?*

I think that's right. So, for me that's right.

[Other conversation: Thank you sir. What's that? I think there are plates underneath in the cabinet, in the cabinet in the conference room. If not, ask Miss Diane.]

Yeah, I mean for me technology serves a purpose, right? It’s got to. The idea that it can allow kids to create and research and connect and network and produce more
powerfully is really important to me. I think that if we just rely on the idea that all of the knowledge anybody needs is contained within the room and the entire audience that we need is contained within the room, we miss a powerful opportunity for kids, and to me that's wrong. By doing, having access to the most interesting, the most cutting-edge data they can to having access to just one.

[Other conversation: You da man. Thank you.]

That's powerful, and to me, to miss that opportunity is to deny kids access to the world that they live in today. I think the other thing is that kids can be authentic voices. Kids can, things that kid can write, can make a difference in the world. Why wouldn’t we do that? Why wouldn’t we allow for that? (NE-P-2)

This principal not only embraces social media as a way for him to connect with respective stakeholder groups, he has also fostered an environment in which students can connect with the world around them and the knowledge therein. His reference to knowledge and “the room” is reminiscent of the quote from the previous section about getting more voices into the room to broaden everyone’s perspective. Social media tools could foster that connection and in this participant’s school, they have done just that.

A principal from the Midwest talked about how social media tools had allowed him to connect with local stakeholders as well as others in the education field and beyond:

It truthfully, as well, motivates me because I can connect with so many different educators, not just administrators, and not even just teachers, but researchers and college professors on the topics of Ed Admin and other educational-related topics, and it has so entirely motivated me like never before simply because of all the direct contact I have with other people. (MW-P-1)
A second principal from the Midwest discussed how his desire to make connections with students caused him to embrace Twitter:

I was an assistant principal at the time and I was trying to come up with creative ways to communicate with the students. We had between six and seven hundred kids in our school and even on your best day you can't talk to everybody. So I kind of threw Twitter out there as a way, you know, kids could follow me…”

This school principal purposefully chose Twitter rather than a social networking site such as Facebook. He explained:

… I didn’t really want to mess with Facebook at the time with the kids because I don’t want to see what they are posting and I didn’t want to get into that whole issue. But Twitter kind of, you know, it allowed two-way communication because I can get a message from them on Twitter and they can connect with me that way, but without that whole having to deal with “Oh my gosh, I don’t like what you posted here.”

Having to wrestle with that whole thing, so I kind of got into it, kind of got into Twitter just as a way to communicate with kids. (MW-P-2)

Microblogs such as Twitter provide school officials with a method of connecting with stakeholder groups that could feel less intimidating than using a social networking site. The focus of Twitter is on sharing brief messages, interesting quotes, links to stories, or perhaps a picture or video clip. The constant stream of content and conversations could appeal to a school official who wishes to engage in dialogue rather than seeing countless pictures and personal information that typically appears in an individual’s social networking site.

The second of the three interview questions that contributed to the theme of connections had two parts. It asked participants to consider whom they had in mind when
they first started to write blog posts, send tweets, and create other social media content. Then, participants were asked to consider if the intended audience had changed at all since using social media.

*Interview Question 6: Who was your initial “audience” and how has that changed during the time you have been using social media as a school administrator?*

A principal from the South region complimented the researcher on this question and then offered an analogy about how his audience has grown in the time that he has used social media tools with stakeholders:

That's a great question! I think probably my initial audience was more the faculty members here at my own school and probably parents who were beginning to understand social media and wanting to take advantage of such a resource the principal would offer. I think my audience, you know, if one pays attention to that cluster map, it’s become a much more international following of fellow educators and fellow educational thinkers and other educational organizations and institutions like professional organizations, Learning Forward, NAIS, ASCD, and other centers for teaching and learning. So, it’s had ripples on the pond, I think, that like most relationships it starts with a tighter community and then, as those ripples in the pond start to amplify outward, it pulls in more people. (SO-P-2)

Another principal from the South explained how his audience expanded beyond the confines of his small, rural community:

My initial audience was mainly my teachers and I, but it didn’t take long to see the benefits in expanding to all stakeholders, you know, and beyond, and you know we learned quickly that we could break down our school walls and go beyond our small,
little community. Not only am I now globally connected, but over half of my teachers and much of our student body are learning from people all over the world.

(SO-P-1)

The third principal from the South shared his thoughts on how his Twitter audience has changed:

It has changed and it's probably changed depending on what the social media tool is, too. For example, Twitter, when I first started, I think it was probably more or less whoever would listen. You know, starting out you don’t have any followers. I think as I posted more on Twitter, I got more and more educators to follow and probably less of the other folks, and ended up, I think I sort of developed a Twitter personality, and people are looking for those kinds of posts. (SO-P-3)

Initially, participants in this research study indicated that they wrote for a specific audience. As their blogging or tweeting continued, the audience shifted and additional stakeholder groups began reading their work. The participants’ influence stretched beyond the four stakeholder groups identified for this study (employees, students, parents, and community members) and included people from other parts of the country or world. This sphere of influence has connected the participants to even more conversations and ideas that could positively impact the school principal’s local school and district.

The third of the three interview questions that contributed to the theme of connections also had two parts. It asked participants to consider the direct and indirect benefits of social media communication as a school administrator. The answers to this question invoked the variations of connections, connectedness, and relationships. Samples of the responses are
grouped together after the interview question, beginning with responses that mentioned connections to prominent figures in educational reform.

*Interview Question 9: What have been the direct and indirect benefits of your social media communications as a school administrator?*

A principal from the Northeast region talked about the connections he had made with notable figures in the field of education, such as Diane Ravitch, Research Professor of Education at New York University. “Not only do we tweet, but we've direct messaged back and forth … How cool is that?” He continued by discussing others with whom he has interacted:

And then I've had conversations with Robert Marzano, members of the U.S. Department of Education, so many other authors and speakers that, kind of like you said, Dan, these are just people that in my, where I live, where I work, never in a million years would I have ever come across these people except maybe at a professional conference, and I never even went to a major annual conference until I got connected. I would never – and now these people I can call my colleagues. I can send them messages and they will respond back in seconds. It’s amazing! I can go to a conference now. You can name any one: ASCD, NASSP, ISTE, NSBA, it doesn’t matter, and I automatically know a minimum of five people. Doesn’t matter where I go, because now the education community becomes much more connected. (NE-P-3)

A principal from the South referenced two additional prominent figures in education: Todd Whitaker, Professor of Education at Indiana State University, and Rick DuFour, educational consultant and author.
Many times I've written that the 10 people who influence me the most on a daily basis I have never met. It's not my mentor and things like that I've never met, and I talk with them every day through Twitter. I read their blog posts. I read their books, and not a day goes by do I not talk with usually Todd Whitaker or Rick DuFour as a professional learning community and things like that. And I learn from the experts themselves and it's really changed, like I said, the way I learn. So, it’s been great.

(SO-P-1)

Another principal from the South echoed the sentiments of the previous two principals regarding the power of social media tools providing connections between “big name figures” in education, including the President of the American Federation of Teachers, and out-of-the-way schools and their administrators:

The networking, I've connected with folks that I would have never connected with otherwise. I mean, they’re national or international figures that I have actually had contact with all the way here in (location) in the middle of the foothills of the mountains. I wouldn’t have connected with people like Diane Ravitch. Occasionally, we've messaged a couple of times. Randi Weingarten. AFT. We don’t have unions in our state, but she and I have messaged a couple of times together.

Writer and author Todd Whitaker, who has written a lot of great administration books. He and I have messaged several times. So, the networking is definitely the biggest advantage or the biggest benefit that I found. I have connected with folks that I wouldn’t have, would never have had the ability to connect without social media.

(SO-P-3)
A principal from the Midwest was surprised to learn that prominent figures in the field were reading and responding to his blog posts and subsequently engaged him on Twitter:

I came home one evening. As a matter of fact, I remember distinctly it was a Friday night and there were two comments from a blog post that I had created which were responded (to) by NYU's Diane Ravitch, … and so I responded back thinking, “Well, this is interesting,” and she and I actually had a back and forth conversation, so I guess it became a direct benefit. And from there she followed me on Twitter and we now kind of, on a regular basis, have some communication. Well, just having those two interactions between she and I, and me being on her Twitter list, the indirect (benefit) was that Randi Weingarten, the AFT union leader, picked up on one of my posts once and then she also commented and I was able to find that I'm also now on her Twitter list. And the last one that completely caught me off guard was Robert Marzano. And he gave me a direct tweet once and then made a comment on a post that I had created. (MW-P-1)

Prior to the advent of social media tools, access to prominent figures in education was limited. Only those individuals who worked in or near their universities/institutions or attended workshops/conferences where the noted figures spoke had the ability to interact with them. Through social media tools such as blogs and Twitter, two-way dialogue with individuals such as Diane Ravitch, Todd Whitaker, and Robert Marzano has been opened up. School principals in any location could engage with them in a chat session on Twitter, respond to their blog posts, and even find a comment from a noted figure on the school principal’s blog or Twitter account. This access to leading figures in education has flattened
the process of educational reform and given school officials everywhere the opportunity to create world-class schools.

**Connections: Connectedness**

Connectedness to students, staff, the community, and the profession also came through on several responses. The principals talked about how the use of social media tools had strengthened that feeling of *connectedness*, which had not happened as noticeably through traditional forms of communication. The first quote contains an analogy about how using social media tools as an administrator could keep the principal connected to education and the world that students are entering:

I think I can be a better educator by practicing, you know. I think the best football coaches play football. The best running coaches actually are runners. The best instrumental music teachers actually play an instrument, so to help students navigate the world that they are inheriting, I want to be practicing those things that we believe the world will be more connected with Web 2.0 tools. So I need to stay on that edge of learning myself. (SO-P-2)

A principal from the Midwest shared his thoughts on the connectedness he has developed with students:

I think that that's been a benefit for me and for the students as a way that we could connect, and I think that sometimes the students, because you're not a teacher, they think you don't communicate. They see you as very different when you could kind of come out to the open and say, “I'm on Twitter, too!” and “I participate in social media just like everybody else.” I just think it makes you a little bit more relevant. I
think it makes you somebody that they can relate to a little bit better hopefully. (MW-P-2)

**Connections: Relationships**

A principal from the West provided a response that segues into the third aspect of connections: *relationships*. First, his comments on being connected to educators from around the world:

More indirectly, I think you start to develop relationships with people that you've actually never met. I'm in contact with people in Finland a lot right now just because I'm really interested in their education system and it’s funny how we tend to look for each other a lot (on social media). (WE-P-2)

Five principals stated that the quality and/or the quantity of their relationships had grown either as a direct or indirect benefit of their social media use. Northeast Principal 2 had several insightful comments to share that really exemplified this theme. First, his thoughts on the impact that social media has had on informal communication:

The informal communication has increased and that is something that I don’t think, I think it’s under sold sometimes, right? Everybody knows you send out the announcements, you post the official stuff, you make people’s homework available, yada blah, yada blah. Fine. That’s easy. Or, it's not easy. That makes sense. (NE-P-2)

Next, he shared how his love for a professional football team had allowed him to strengthen his relationships with parents and students:
Something that I have noticed is that the number of parents who, you know, like it very silly but I love tweeting out or posting out...when I'm watching an Eagles game. You would think, “That's no big deal. Who cares?” Except then, when parents and students are commenting on those threads and interacting with their child's principal in a way that breaks down that barrier, it makes it that much easier for them to come into the office, or come into the school when it does matter.” (NE-P-2)

Continuing to eat his pizza, he shared some powerful insights about the broader effect this type of communication could have:

So that notion that we can use social media to humanize each other, and to break down some of the traditional barriers that may exist between school and home, and that idea that every parent brings the ghost of every parent meeting they ever had when they were a student in to them, into their child’s educational experience. That can break down, that can, when we can use social media to humanize one another, and that is an outgrowth of really authentic use of it, that's powerful! And that's really interesting to me. (NE-P-2)

Finally, he commented about relationships, sharing his thoughts on how a few tweets of encouragement had made a strong impact on students:

Or it’s just the silly things. You know, you're watching on Twitter. You've got your Twitter stream of your kids up and you see that they are all sort of moaning and groaning over how hard the pre-calc or the statistics benchmark is and you're able to tweet back to them at 9:30 at night, “Hang in there. You're gonna get this done.”

And then they come in the next morning and they say, “You know, that mattered to
me.” That's profound, and it’s silly, and it takes two seconds, and it's not a big deal, and yet it is, and so there’s all of that. (NE-P-2)

A principal from the Midwest sheepishly noted how social media had impacted his relationships. “I guess I have developed some relationships with people I have never met that I would have never known, and that adds a richness to both my personal life and to my career.” (MW-P-3)

“You actually start to make relationships with people that are not just professional, but actually more personal relationships where you get to know people on a different level, so that's really cool,” said West Principal 2. He added one more thought:

You learn how to share. You learn how to be vulnerable with other people in terms of what's going well at your school and sometimes what's not going so well. And you learn some collaborative skills and you have some courage to try things because there is a support network out there. (WE-P-2)

The series of quotes shared by Northeast Principal 2 and West Principal 2 really exemplified the myriad ways in which engaging with stakeholders through social media tools could benefit a school principal. In larger school systems, students, parents, and community members may not really get to know the principal of the school on a personal level. The act of sharing innocuous things such as thoughts on an NFL game or supportive comments to a student who is struggling with a homework assignment could, over time, remove some of the barriers between stakeholders and the principal. That humanization process and vulnerability could lead to increased parental involvement and other benefits. As the participants stated, the impact could be profound, the time investment is minimal, and a richness could manifest in the school administrator’s life.
Impact

Interview Questions 7 and 9 provided response data that contributed to the formation of the third theme: *impact*. Social media use could have a significant impact on one’s personal and professional growth. Data from the principals revealed that there were four areas of impact: their own professional development / their own Personal (or Professional) Learning Network (PLN), their transparency, their confidence and image in the eyes of stakeholders, and professional perks (e.g. invitations to attend or speak at conferences, to write for major publications, to take part in podcasts, etc.)

**Impact: Professional Development and PLN**

Eleven of the 12 school principals commented on the impact social media has had on their own professional development. Eight of those 11 referenced the impact of a PLN. A principal from the Northeast shared how his PLN of over 10,000 people had benefited him:

I've built a tremendous resource for myself and my school now because pretty much any question on any educational topic I have whether it’s an old topic or a brand-new topic, on how to use some one of the latest tools or how people are integrating in their school, like, I'm going to get a response, like, it’s the best resource that I have at my disposal as far as learning goes that can, I have over 10,000 educators all over the globe that I can rely on if I need help or I have a question on something, so it’s a pretty phenomenal resource. (NE-P-1)

The individualized nature of the PLN can be very motivating. “I feel my learning has grown exponentially because, through the establishment of my own Personal Learning Network, I'm allowed to finally solely focus on areas of educational leadership, pedagogy,
and technology integration that interests me.” As this principal from the Northeast continued his thoughts, he described the addictive nature of a PLN:

There are no restrictions. Its 24/7 from anywhere, at any time, and I think that is probably one of the most exciting features of this whole phenomena because, again, I have different needs, I have a different learning style, and it’s just -- I don’t want to say, like, it’s a drug, but it’s kind of addicting, because from a sense that everything I’m learning I may want to bring back, like, the next day and apply in some meaningful fashion. You can't say that about many of the professional development programs that are out there and since it’s driven by, like, intrinsic motivation to do what's best for my kids here, the reward is my knowledge and the ability to share that with my staff, with my students, so I think that's the biggest thing for me is it’s why I've decided to put a lot of effort into this because I can talk and share with everyone all the rewards that have come about. (NE-P-3)

A rural school in the South can now have access to the latest professional development opportunities by way of social media tools. South Principal 1 shared how he and his teachers have built a PLN through Twitter that includes noted figures in the education field. In this quote he had just finished discussing several of the chat sessions in which he and some of his teachers take part during the evening hours:

We have all created the same strong and focused PLN, Professional Learning Network. What I mean by focused is, you know, if you look at who I follow, I follow about 400 that they are all educators. They are great educators…and what's great is the next day in between transition times the teachers are talking about Tom Whitby and David Ferriter, some of these people, as if they teach next door because we all
know, because we were on the same chat last night, or, you know, we’ve all read their blogs. We all have Google Reader and we all share Google Reader and we read a lot of the same things. We’re truly building a collegial learning community and it’s just been great. Twitter has really changed the way. (SO-P-1)

A second principal from the South shared how valuable it is to be able to get quick responses from his PLN colleagues. “I literally can post an issue or an idea or follow, and on Twitter, and immediately 15 or 20 people respond and say, ‘Have you tried this?’ or they’ll send me a link to something.” Summing up his thoughts he said, “That kind of connection, again, wasn’t possible before social media came along.” (SO-P-3)

A principal from the West had similar sentiments about getting feedback from a PLN. “I think professional development has been the real key, like learning from different educators in different jurisdictions in different countries with different situations. That’s kind of a -- that's been a real benefit.” He continued by commenting about the broad range of feedback he receives from his PLN. “You can really locate resources for your school quickly on virtually any topic in education. You can bounce your ideas off of other people which is really neat and you actually get feedback from them.” (WE-P-2)

The ability to individualize the professional development experience was important to a Midwest principal:

The different tweets, chat sessions that I'm going to participate in, the various videos that I'm going to upload to YouTube and purposely share with my PLN members. It's completely motivating and I gain more -- I truly do gain more of, I guess you could say autonomy, and this greater sense of purpose through just working with those folks than I actually do through my own school district because it's all driven by me, and if
I don’t like it, I leave. If I really like it, I continue. So that was probably by far the most direct and largest benefit. (MW-P-1)

In the closing remarks portion of our interview, West Principal 3 shared that his brother is a high school teacher in a rural school district in the Midwest. As the lone teacher in his content area, his brother has no one at his school with whom to collaborate. As such, the interview participant had encouraged his brother to get active in social media and create a PLN. The interview participant shared:

I just see that there is such power in using social media to develop a professional learning network, and for me it has really changed because even though I'm in a big district in a relatively big school, and so I have lots of people I can go to and interact with, to step out of your district, out of the state, and even out of the country and hear some of the ideas really challenges the way you think about things. And to me that's been the most powerful thing is just, there was times I'll read a blog post, and I'll say, “Good grief! Why have I been doing this the other way? Why have I not thought of that?” So to me that is the clincher for why someone should be on social media in education. (WE-P-3)

School principals who only have experienced whole-group professional development might find the individualized focus of a PLN very appealing. The strength of the PLN as a tool for personal and professional growth is found in the ability to suit it to the needs of the individual. The impact generated from interacting and connecting with others in the field of education with similar interests or with noted figures could lead to new ways of thinking and a motivation to continue learning and growing.
**Impact: Transparency**

Four school principals stated that social media has impacted them by creating greater levels of transparency. The principals were able to express their thinking to stakeholders more clearly through social media tools, which was seen as desirable. South Principal 2 provided a good segue between the PLN aspect of *impact* and the concept of *transparency*:

> Just having that support-based Professional Learning Network is a huge direct benefit. Being able to communicate quickly and easily and efficiently and to be transparent about my own learning and to share my questions and comments about what I'm thinking because then other people can think with me. “We are smarter than me” type of idea. (SO-P-2)

Northeast Principal 1 shared his perspective on *transparency* in the context of prospective families that were considering moving into his school’s attendance zone. “You get a pretty good handle on who we are without ever visiting the school and so a lot of people like the transparency that's available when it comes to (Northeast) High School.” (NE-P-1)

Another principal from the Northeast pointed out the level of transparency that central office staff had noted about his building. “Well, direct benefits, I've heard it from board members, central office, the fact that we have created a completely transparent atmosphere here, you know, for high school.” (NE-P-3)

A principal from the South communicated his thoughts on *transparency* as part of his response to the question about the direct and indirect benefits of using social media with stakeholders. “In this day and age, I can't hide anything, which is good. I don’t want to hide anything. People can see exactly how I'm leading the organization; what we're doing. It makes it really transparent.” (SO-P-3)
Higher levels of transparency could lead to higher levels of trust between school officials and stakeholders. As the previous principal stated, stakeholders could see how he leads his organization. It would be possible to create a transparent environment through traditional forms of communication, such as newsletters and articles in newspapers. However, by using social media tools in conjunction with traditional formats, it could be easier to create such an atmosphere. Any of the five social media categories highlighted in this study could serve as a vehicle through which to convey background information and supplementary materials that support the decisions and changes being implemented in a school. The use of multiple social media tools could complement the traditional ways of sharing information to achieve high levels of transparency.

**Impact: Confidence**

Four principals also stated that either their own image or their school’s image had been enhanced as a result of social media use. The first quote comes from a Midwest principal who felt that his credibility to parents had increased:

I had a parent call and say, “I read your blog and I don’t understand some of it, but I know you know what you're talking about” and I think that that’s helped our staff a little bit because it’s helped my credibility. So when I say something to our parent group, there is a record out there in public of me knowing what I'm talking about and I think that's been a direct and indirect benefit for our school. (MW-P-2)

A principal from the West shared how his interactions with his PLN had given him a boost of confidence. “It’s helped my career out in a huge way because I'm confident when I speak about something.” That boost of confidence that he felt then allowed him to engage in
discussions that could be divisive. “I know that I’ve already had this conversation with other people, so it’s -- you kind of have an idea what people are going to say, you know, when you want to bring up something a bit more controversial.” (WE-P-1)

Two principals from the Northeast discussed how the images of their schools had been impacted positively due to the social media use by the principals. Northeast Principal 2 said, “…the benefit to the community that we are seen as a model. We didn’t set out, we didn’t do this so that way people could say, ‘Hey, good job (Northeast School 2) for being those people.’” (NE-P-2)

Northeast Principal 3 had just gone through a long list of direct and indirect benefits he had witnessed since starting his social media use with stakeholders when he made these remarks: “So, when I look back, almost three years now, none of this was happening. We were an ordinary school.” He continued by discussing the transformation he had seen take place in his school. “Now we're seeing a transformation in the teaching and learning process and a lot of it is, it could be directly linked to when we started with our social media presence.” (NE-P-3)

**Impact: Professional Perks**

The final area of impact mentioned by school principals was the professional perks that they have received as a result of using social media. This included being asked to attend and/or speak at regional and national conferences, being asked to write columns or blogs for major publications, and receiving free technology devices from businesses and corporations. Northeast Principal 1 identified several of the indirect benefits that have come his way since he started blogging and tweeting:
Indirect things are crazy, like, all of a sudden you will get, like, in the last year I got invited to some conferences, like, that are pretty expensive to pay for, just because I blog and I tweet. They are like, “Oh, we’d like you to come to our conference and just tweet from the conference and write a few blog posts and we’ll pay for you to come.” And I'm like, “OK.” You know, like, it was like that. And I'm getting invited to speak at events just because I use social media. It’s like, I don’t really think, I just think I'm doing what I should be doing so, but I'm happy to talk about it, so, like, getting to be a keynote speaker. There was a regional conference in (location) that I got invited to. They are like, you know, “Oh, we would like a nationally-known person to come and lead a session.” And like, “Who are you talking about?” Like, just because, you know, just because you build a little influence in social media, people look at you differently. (NE-P-1)

A second principal, from the South region, also received an invitation to a conference due to his blogging:

I do make a lot of contacts with people for the blog. I know another example is I made contact with an organization, an Edtech (educational technology) organization in New York, a couple of summers ago and that was through my blog. It ended up that they invited me to come up there that summer and present at their conference, so the blog is probably pretty important in that. (SO-P-3)

A principal from the Northeast shared how the students in his school had received additional technology to use in their classes and how teachers had benefited professionally as a result of his use of social media tools:
Being connected, different other stakeholders are hearing our story and these are stakeholders that traditionally are selling or promoting their services to schools. And because they hear what we're doing and they understand that we can indirectly promote their products through what we do here, we've been showered with a lot of educational technology items for free. It’s cost my district nothing. So, we've been given document cameras. I’ve had a teacher flown out to Israel… (NE-P-3)

A major radio station in Chicago referenced the ways in which a rural school in the South used social media tools among students and staff. The principal did not hear it live, but several community members did and they told him about the program. He was able to go to that station’s website and listen to the podcast of the story. The principal eagerly related the episode during the interview for this study. “It had a good two minutes. It talked about us and what we do, how we use social media and even SchoolTube and some things like that. So, it was pretty cool.” (SO-P-1)

School principals in this research study noted at least four different ways in which social media tools had impacted them in a positive manner. Professional development was the most mentioned benefit. Participants valued the personalized professional growth opportunities available through social media. They also valued the boost in confidence they received as a result of having an active social media presence. The participants felt that they had created more transparent school environments, which was appreciated by their respective stakeholders. Finally, some of the individuals in this study had enjoyed professional perks as a result of using social media, which benefited them and their schools.
Expectation

Interview Question 11 and the concluding remarks portion of each of the 12 interviews provided response data that contributed to the formation of the final theme: expectation. Ten of the 12 school principals made statements that directly reflected the use of social media tools by their peers. The remaining two school principals spoke about the expectation of using social media without expressly stating it.

Three school principals answered the final interview question by stating, “Jump in!” Two responded with the mantra “Lurk and Learn.” Three cautioned, “Don’t be afraid.” Two gave insightful quotes about the non-negotiable aspect of using social media as a communications tool.

Interview Question 11: What advice would you give to a school administrator who is thinking about using social media tools with stakeholders as part of a communications strategy?

The first quote about jumping in, from Midwest Principal 2, was one of the shortest responses to this question. “I would say jump in! Jump in with both feet!” (MW-P-2)

A principal from the West touched on two of the common themes: “Lurk and Learn” and “Jump in!” He began his advice by saying, “I would start carefully, you know, like, I mean, you got to lurk a little bit and learn. It’s a different culture, right?” After suggesting that, he continued his advice.

It’s -- my first response when I read that, was just, “Jump in!” And you do. You do need to just say, “I'm gonna do it.” And you got to try. You got to seriously try it for-- someone said six weeks. So, try Twitter for six weeks and just connect with people. (WE-P-1)
He continued the interview by providing advice on avoiding controversial topics and the importance of lurking and learning before he returned once more to the theme of jumping in. Continuing on, he said, “(S)o I would say, ‘Jump in, but jump in sort of slowly, if you can jump in slow. It’s kind of hard to do. Wade in and stick with it. That’s the biggest thing.’”

(WE-P-1)

“Just jump in! Do it! Get involved!” remarked a second principal from the West. He continued his advice by saying:

And I think, “Don’t ban what you don’t know.” And I think you don’t need the training. You just need a little bit of time to get started because all of these applications: Twitter and Facebook and Google+, like, they are made for non-techie people. They are made for people to just-- there is a big red button that says, “Sign up here and do all this sort of stuff.” And I think as an educator you have to demonstrate a willingness to learn and to try new things. Certainly, we would want our staff to do that. Certainly, we want our kids to do that, so I think if we don’t jump in and get involved, then we can’t really be leaders that way. (WE-P-2)

Many school principals have elected to continue with traditional forms of communicating with respective stakeholder groups. The participants previously quoted have found that communicating through social media tools has many benefits. As a result, they encouraged non-users to get started even if it meant just trying a social media for six weeks. They provided reassurance that it would not be hard to learn and that the act of learning itself is important to model for employees, students, parents, and community members.

“Lurk and Learn” was mentioned by two school principals. The term signifies entering the social media world as an observer first in order to see how the specific tool is
used. After learning the ins and outs of the tool(s), the participant could then start engaging others in a more productive way. Going back to the comments made by West Principal 1, he stated, “I would start by sort of lurking a little bit, learning the culture of social media, how people use it. But stick with it. That’s the biggest thing.” (WE-P-1)

Northeast Principal 3 started by sharing three tips. “Pick one or two tools. Develop a strategy for how you're going to use the tool and then ‘lurk and learn.”’’ He went on to define his advice by saying, “meaning just watch what other administrators are doing. Look at how they are interacting. Look at the information they are sending out. That’s how I learned.” (NE-P-3)

When asked to give advice to a school administrator who is thinking about using social media tools with stakeholders, a principal from the South had strong words to say:

I would say, “Use it. You know. Do not, just don't be afraid.” I believe that social media as a communications tool will become the new non-negotiable. It will be non-negotiable to use social media as a communication tool that our kids are already using it, and if we choose not to tap into this, what I believe is a proven platform, then we are ineffective as an administrator. (SO-P-1)

A principal from the Midwest concurred. “The best advice I would have is do not be afraid of it. You absolutely, positively, actually have to embrace it.” (MW-P-1)

A principal from the West encouraged modeling of social media tools as well as not fearing them. “To me modeling is the biggest thing, and just not being afraid of it, and trying to get in, and try it out.” (WE-P-3)

If a school principal has not yet begun to use social media professionally, it might be a little intimidating. These quotes provide encouragement that there is nothing to fear.
Similar to the previous quotes on jumping in, the message delivered by these principals was to try out a social media tool and start using it.

The final aspect of expectation mentioned by school principals was that the use of social media tools was non-negotiable. The first of the quotes, by South Principal 1, stated it straightforwardly. “It's going to be non-negotiable. That's how everybody is going to communicate because it's so effective and it's cheap. It doesn’t cost anything.” Two other principals stated the same opinion more eloquently and in stronger language. First, however, are the continuing remarks made by South Principal 1. “And so, as administrators, I think we are ineffective if we are not using these free, proven effective strategies to communicate. (SO-P-1)

Northeast Principal 1 concluded his interview by sharing these thoughts on the use of social media tools by school administrators:

I think to really do the job we need to as school leaders, we need to make sure we see what’s going on in other schools, and other states, and other countries, because our job is to obviously prepare kids for a global economy that I still don’t think a lot of people understand. So, to me it’s a no brainer. I just think it’s, honestly, other people have said it’s educational malpractice not to take advantage of these resources and not only to use them yourself, but to show others how to use them. (NE-P-1)

South Principal 2 elaborated on the importance of blogging and tweeting as an educator, administrator, or school leader:

I kind of consider the Blogosphere and the Twittersphere among educators to be the best faculty lounge in the universe and to not participate in that sort of positive virtual faculty lounge, to me, seems irresponsible as a principal and school leader; to not tap
into that wisdom and experience and innovative thinking that's happening there. (SO-P-2)

The 12 school principals who took part in this research study have each been using at least two forms of social media. They have been blogging for as little as half a year to as long as eight and a half years. Seven of the 12 have written 101-500 blog posts over that time. They have been active on Twitter for one to five years. Eight of the 12 have sent over 5,000 tweets. Nine of the 12 have more than 1,001 followers. They have experienced the positive benefits from using social media tools professionally. Each of them believed that it is no longer optional for school administrators in the twenty-first century to use social media tools and they highly encouraged school principals who have not yet done so to jump in and start using them.

**Study Findings: Superintendents**

Six themes emerged from the 12 qualitative interviews with the superintendents and from the Internet data regarding their social media use. The six emergent themes included:

1. Social media tools allow for more immediate and more frequent **interactions** between school superintendents and their stakeholders.
2. Social media tools provide for greater **transparency** regarding decision-making and budgeting processes.
3. Social media use can have a significant **impact** on a school superintendent’s personal and professional growth.
4. Social media tools provide stronger **connections** to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world.
5. Social media use is an **expectation**; it’s no longer optional.

6. Social media tools allow stakeholders to access information from the superintendent in a **multi-modal** way.

Themes 1, 3, 4, and 6 more closely aligned with the first research question: *What are the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), podcasts, and online videos to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members?* Themes 2 and 5 aligned more with the second research question: *Why are school principals and superintendents choosing to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members through multiple social media tools?* In the sections that follow, the interview questions will be referenced to allow the reader to easily navigate between the responses from the superintendents and the previous responses from the school principals.

**Interactions**

Interview Questions 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 provided response data from the superintendents that contributed to the formation of the first theme: *interactions*. Each interview began in the same fashion as the school principal interviews, with the researcher asking about the length of service in the participant’s current administrative role and as a school administrator overall. Then, the superintendents were asked to discuss how their communication with stakeholders had changed over the past five years.

All 12 participants expressly stated or implied in their response to this question that they had incorporated social media tools as a complement to their traditional forms of communication or that they had gone completely digital. Selected quotes from the
superintendents are included below. The code format reflects that of the school principals’ section. NE-S-1 refers to Northeast Superintendent 1, who provided the first comments about the changes he has seen the past five years.

I went from mostly using print resources: school newsletter, board meeting, stuff like that, and for the past three years anyway, have transformed and I'm using all those measures plus I'm also using a weekly blog, daily Twitter, and also using Facebook on a daily basis as well. (NE-S-1)

A superintendental from a rural district in the South shared, “The board notes and minutes of district teams and things like that have all been distributed electronically. I use our website to post a lot of information, so it's really -- it's changed dramatically.” He finished with an interesting sound bite, “Instead of producing lots of paper, we produce a lot of bits.” (SO-S-3)

A superintendental from a rural district in the Midwest had a bigger reaction to the question:

Oh gosh, it's changed dramatically! This would be my ninth year total as a principal or superintendent and … I can remember nine years ago, I mean the only way you communicated was either a phone call, generally to the home phone, not even to a cell phone, but just to their home phone, or a letter home. You used to send a letter home with the kids or, you know, the secretaries would mail one, but back then, gosh, that doesn’t seem that long ago to me, but there was no Twitter, there was no school website even. There was no, like, we have a parent notification system where you can make one phone call and it calls all the parents in the district. We didn’t have
that. So even, like, snow days, as I look back, it was kind of a complicated issue to even notify people or anything. (MW-S-1)

Out in the West, a suburban school superintendent has gone almost completely digital in his communication with stakeholders. He remarked, “Five years ago, I was in a bit of a -- still in a bit of a transition where there is still some paper, but that, that's definitely going away.” He continued by remarking on the frequency of his communications: “I’m also communicating probably more on a more regular basis with more timely updates than I did five years ago.” (WE-S-3)

Similar to the findings from the school principals, the superintendents in this study have embraced the movement to digital communications or have implemented a comprehensive communication strategy that includes both traditional and digital formats. The use of social media tools has allowed the superintendents to convey their messages quickly and efficiently to their stakeholders. For some it has even led to an increase in the frequency of their communication.

The broad theme of interactions included multiple subthemes such as the movement from print to digital communication shared in the opening quotations of this section. Eight of the 12 participants commented on their interactions with stakeholders by means of social media tools. Six superintendents mentioned an increase in informal communication with stakeholders as a result of sharing information through social media. Six participants cited specific blog “hits” as a gauge of the impact of their social media communication with stakeholders. Five respondents discussed the immediacy of sharing weather-related delays and cancellations. References to attracting the media as followers and the effect of a
superintendent’s social media use on prospective families moving into the area rounded out this category.

**Interactions: Two-way dialogue**

Superintendents with large, established blog followings or Twitter networks were more likely to get responses to their postings. A superintendent from a suburban school district in the Northeast exclaimed:

> If you follow my Twitter, for example, you know today the Governor did the State of the State yesterday and today I'm going to give a blog post about it and I'll guarantee you that by the end of the day today there will be feedback about it, about what I say about the Governor, what I thought about the Governor’s State of the State, stuff like that. So, I mean, it’s issue specific. If I just say, “Here is Jimmy buying chicken nuggets” I'm not going to get the reaction on that. But, if I pick out and talk about something, you know, State of the State or budget…you do get some reaction to that right away. (NE-S-1)

A second superintendent from the Northeast was more succinct about the frequency of responses he has gotten through social media from community members, teachers, and the media. Simply stated, he replied, “All day long, so it's frequent.” (NE-S-2)

Midwest Superintendent 1 had a similar reply to the question. He shared, “On my personal blog, I get responses or comments or emails or tweets or whatever every hour. I mean, it never stops.” (MW-S-1)

The two-way communication between school administrator and stakeholder is one of the clear advantages of using social media. These respondents have cultivated large
followings for their blogs and tweets, which has yielded high levels of participation from the followers. When large numbers of stakeholders are reading and responding to an administrator’s content, it could lead to higher levels of transparency and trust.

Not all superintendents who took part in this study have achieved high levels of replies to their content. A superintendent from a rural district in the South noted that he gets responses from all over the country to his personal blog:

I know that on my personal blog I get lots of comments from people who are teachers in other states and I found that very interesting and when I look at the traffic sources on that blog site, I mean it's all over the country and international. (SO-S-3)

He continued by sharing the difference in the responses he has gotten to his tweets and then he elaborated some more on his blog responses:

Not as many responses to the tweets. That tends to be more one-sided. To the blogs, that’s kind of a function of how often I post. If, when I initially post, I see that the readership, based on followers, or word-of-mouth, or whatever, jumps up dramatically and it will taper off until I do a new post. (SO-S-3)

Northeast Superintendent 3 has not had the same success in getting her stakeholders to respond back through social media tools. She shared: “Some people will go online and comment, but I haven't found that a lot of people do that yet, so I don’t know if that's good or bad.”

Midwest Superintendent 2 also has had little success getting stakeholders to engage in dialogue with him through social media. He started by commenting about board members. “I think what it is, it’s kind of like with board members. There are certain things board
members are comfortable talking about. And sometimes there’s things that they are not comfortable talking about.” Elaborating on the point, he shared some specific examples:

But the color of something, the size of school bus, the lunch count, those are tangible things that we know about and we’re very comfortable. Talking about what strand of curriculum for vocational education at the high school may or may not be something, or curriculum choices, or you name it, those are things that maybe they might trust or want the administration to take more of a leadership role in. And I think the community is the same way. (MW-S-2)

A suburban superintendent from the Midwest talked about the responses he had been getting and the location of the respondents:

It's kind of interesting to see where people are reading. I got a couple of guys in England of all places that are reading my blog. I have no idea why. Every once in a while, I guess, you know, I would like people (stakeholders) to go out there and comment on what I write about, and that doesn’t seem to happen very much. (MW-S-3)

Quotes from two superintendents from the West region conclude this section. Rather than being disappointed in the limited number of responses they had been getting, both participants reframed the issue in their own thinking and saw it in a different perspective. First, the remarks from West Superintendent 1:

That was an interesting question! I didn’t feel too good about the comments I get, but then I think about how many times I comment and all the hundreds that I read, too. So, I get a comment or two every week and I have a few people that are fairly
consistent in providing a comment when there is something of interest to them, but not a lot. (WE-S-1)

Reframing the perspective allowed the superintendent to see that the lack of responses to his blog posts did not negate their impact. He recognized that he rarely took the time to respond to the blogs that he followed, yet those blogs often served to influence the topics about which he blogged for his own stakeholders. Similarly, another superintendent from the West shared that same reframed message with the principals in his school district:

It’s interesting with responses. So, I was just with our principals yesterday (talking) about their blogs and there is a bit of disappointment that they are not getting a lot of comments on them. They are getting huge numbers! They are getting what I think are huge numbers. They are getting 500 hits a day on their blogs as the school principal, which are, you know, some of them are averaging more clicks than they have students in their school on an average day which is really phenomenal! But, they are not getting the kind of comments and I said, “That's what I have seen.” It’s sort of an inverse relationship between geography and comments is that the more, the people that comment most on my blogs or comment back to me on Twitter are ones who actually aren’t in our jurisdiction. (WE-S-3)

His insights provided a nice segue into another common subtheme of interactions: the rise of informal communication between the superintendent and stakeholders. Although employees, students, parents, and community members may not be tweeting back, replying to blog posts, or writing comments to information posted on social networking sites like Facebook, the person-to-person dialogue generated from the school superintendent’s social media use has increased.
Interactions: Informal Communication

Continuing the discussion of social media responses by stakeholders, West Superintendent 3 said:

There is a sense of discomfort, still, between a teacher commenting on my blog and some, you know, and I get that. If they want to challenge me or push back, they are not comfortable wanting to do that in a public venue and maybe it’s not the right forum, but they will shoot me an email or send me a direct message or a text message, or they will see me and go, “I read your blank and what about this?” And that’s what our principals are experiencing, too, is that we can't just use sort of, how many people are commenting as a metric for the influence that we're having through these tools, that there is a -- even that the reading and the thinking and those side conversations we’re creating, which are really hard to quantify, are so huge…”

The last statement in the previous quote might sum up the thoughts of some school administrators who have not yet adopted social media tools as a way of communicating with stakeholders, especially if the administrator sees social media as a large investment of time. However, as West Superintendent 3 pointed out, the impact that this type of communication could have upon the thinking and conversations taking place in the school district would be very difficult to quantify. That impact likely would benefit the school district. For West Superintendent 3 it has done just that.

A superintendent from the South had a unique story to share about the increase in informal responses. After acknowledging that some of his community members had engaged him in conversations about his blog, he gave an example of a community member he didn’t expect to be reading his blog: his pastor. “I was in Sunday school yesterday and our pastor
said, ‘Well, based on some of your writings,’ yada, yada, yada, and I thought, ‘Well, OK. I
guess he is reading it, too!’” (SO-S-3)

Midwest Superintendent 1, who has maintained both a personal blog and a school
blog, commented on the varying types of informal responses to his blogs and tweets that he
has received from stakeholders:

As far as the school one, most of my responses are done in person. Like, someone
will, it’s kind of a one-way street as it stands right now. People will read it, then they
see me at the football game and they want to talk about it. I don’t get a lot of -- I get a
few email questions and responses, which is always nice. That's much easier than
someone as you know walking up and kind of catching the off guard when you're out
for pizza or something, but most of it is still done from the community back to me in
person. Even the mayor here, who is very interested in the school district and very
helpful in what we do here, he will email me to tell me that he wants to see me at the
next basketball game so he's got a chance to comment or tell me right there, but it
seems like they still, most people still feel most comfortable doing it in person almost.
(MW-S-1)

At a suburban school district in the Midwest, the local coffee house has become
another setting where stakeholders have engaged the superintendent in conversations about
topics they have followed through social media communications. During an in-person
interview with this researcher, Midwest Superintendent 2 shared:

I’ll be up at the coffee house and someone will come up and say, “So, you're the
superintendent, aren’t you? Well, you know, I saw on your blog that you had posted
this. Why do you think that way?” Or, “I read that, and here is something I took
from it.” And so those are the conversations I get into and that, again, that's a surprising piece for me. (MW-S-2)

Even if stakeholders feel more comfortable discussing ideas with a superintendent in person, a benefit of social media could be the act of planting the seed for that conversation. As Midwest Superintendents 1 and 2 noted, their blog posts have fueled the talks that take place at extracurricular activities or out in the community. For these two school leaders, it has resulted in an increase in informal exchanges.

One of the stakeholder groups that few superintendents mentioned was students. A superintendent from the Midwest was surprised to discover that the high school students in his district were reading his blog. He shared:

The (members of the) student newspaper, they will, they want to come over and talk to me about some article that they’ve, that they are working on and they will say, “We read your blog and you said this and that. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?” That’s pretty interesting and to know that they are reading what I'm putting out there and it’s putting, and it’s making some conversations happen. (MW-S-3)

Typically, people think only of community members or parents as stakeholders. As this superintendent noted, students also have an interest in the blog posts written by their superintendent. It would be important to keep this group in mind and to tailor some of the content to them.

In the West, the superintendent of an urban school district agreed that informal communication has risen due to his social media use. As he and the researcher talked about informal communication, he stated:
Well, it actually increases that communication. What I've learned is that people that are reading that will often tell you that they’re reading it, so they will stop and say, “Hey, I saw that – what you put up on the blog. I agree with you” or whatever that type of thing. So, as far as – it hasn’t decreased any contact on the traditional contact list, I think it's increased it. (WE-S-2)

**Interactions: Blog hits**

One of the metrics mentioned by participants as they quantified their social media impact was the number of blog hits they recorded. South Superintendent 1 had the most sophisticated approach to tracking the influence of his blog on stakeholders and beyond. He used Google Analytics to calculate his social media impact, which he routinely shared with his school board so that they could understand his reasons for blogging and the impact it was having. He remarked:

> I use Google Analytics. I don’t know if you're aware of that, but Google Analytics is kind of, it’s the tool that you embed in the HTML on the blog and you can actually see who came to your blog, what state, what country, they are all over the place. It tells you how long they stayed on the page, how many pages they read, what kind of browser they used, what kind of machine they have at home. It tells you what city they are in. It tells you their Internet Service Provider. So it gives lots of data, and of course I use that to share back with the board that not only our people in our county are looking at it, but people in the state and across the United States. (SO-S-1)
A superintendent from the Northeast not only has generated a large number of hits on each of his blog posts, but also has had his posts copied by other sources nationally. He shared his pride and his concerns:

So many people read it. The blog is getting about 5,000 reads every time I post one. So, and it’s also getting some, it gets national attention every now and then, so I’ve got to be really, really careful because now, what's happening with the blog is some of the media sources are actually physically copying and pasting it into their newspapers or onto their online newsletters and stuff like that verbatim. (NE-S-1)

One of the unintended consequences of writing an engaging blog is having it reprinted by others in its entirety. Northeast Superintendent 1 has managed to successfully get his message out to a large following; larger than he initially intended. Even though his posts have been distributed by others without his permission, he still has achieved the goal of getting his message conveyed. At 5,000 reads for each post, he is reaching a large audience.

In the Midwest, a rural superintendent has garnered quite a following for his blog. He stated that, “…on a slow month, I get 15,000 unique hits, so it's anywhere from 15,000 to may be 22-23,000.” (MW-S-1)

Midwest Superintendent 2 started blogging at the urging of his school district’s Director of Technology. “I almost felt like no one wants to listen to what I have to say,” he shared as he talked about his new foray. “I was too humble to think that that was a worthy thing.” As he and this researcher continued their conversation in the superintendent’s spacious office, he went on to describe how shocked he was at his numbers the first year. “Now, I'm not this big blogger that I -- I mean I got, I had over 10,000 hits, which for me for the first year, I was kind of surprised at even that level of interest.” (MW-S-2)
West Superintendent 2 shared the latest statistics from his current blog site compared to his previous blog site in another school district. “I wouldn’t guess we've cleared a thousand hits a day. On my old blog site, I was getting two to seven thousand hits a day on the site.” (WE-S-2)

**Interactions: Weather**

Five of the participants from this study cited the ability to quickly notify parents and stakeholders about weather-related delays and cancellations as one of the benefits of using social media tools. Four of the five spoke in general terms, extolling the benefit of a quick tweet to parents so that they did not have to wait for the entire list of schools to scroll across the television set until their school name appeared on the screen in the list of schools that were delayed or closed for the day. One participant, Northeast Superintendent 1, began using Twitter as a tool for alerting stakeholders about snow days:

I actually started Twitter and I told kids that I would call, I would post a snow day on Twitter before I called the radio stations or TV stations, or anything else, and my Twitter followers blew up and it was mostly students following me.

**Interactions: Media**

Just prior to sharing the blog numbers he was generating, West Superintendent 2 had talked about one of the revelations he had noted in his years of using social media as a communications tool:

One of the surprises to the social media was, one of the bigger users of it, and the same thing has happened here in this district, one of the quickest users of it become the journalists. The journalists in traditional media markets start with subscribing to
your Twitter feeds and to the blog and then that's how they monitor what stuff you're putting up. And they actually surf the blogs for the news stories that they want to run. So, it’s kind of a way to help influence at least what kind of stories that they write.

(WE-S-2)

A superintendent from the Northeast acknowledged, “They all do, yeah, every single one of ‘em.” Knowing that his blog posts and tweets were followed by the local media, he continued by articulating the approach that he took in crafting his social media messages:

So I gotta be really careful on what I post sometimes, just to make sure – my whole point is to control the message and we do, and sometimes you just have to be careful about your timing of when you're going to post something because you know that within 30 seconds some of the media could be picking it up. (NE-S-1)

Two other superintendents shared the positive side of having the media following the superintendent’s social media postings. South Superintendent 2, who serves a rural school district, talked about the connection between local media outlets and his school system. He said, “We have two local newspapers, two radio stations, and no TV directly in this area, so they will look at it and of course, if you’re in a small community, the local media will cover the school a lot.” Continuing on, he related the advantages of having a good working relationship with the members of the local press. “So, I'm on the radio show once a month … so they will kind of keep up with what's going on in the blog, and they will occasionally refer folks on their news reports to that information.”

Midwest Superintendent 3, who serves a small suburban school district, approached his local newspaper editor and asked him to print the superintendent’s blog each week. “I went to the newspaper and asked them to subscribe and I also asked them if they would print
that in the newspaper the following week.” The superintendent’s rationale for getting his weekly blog post included in the newspaper was simple: “They like to have stuff from the school. They are always asking for stuff from the school. So, they have a ready-made conduit that comes right to them every week for publication and works out really nice.” Having his weekly blog printed in the local newspaper also ensured that he was getting his message out to a larger percentage of the community members and to stakeholders who may not have been accessing his electronic blog.

West Superintendent 2 stated, “It’s really, really challenging now to stay ahead of the traditional media markets and how things work.” Speaking about the changes over the past five years, he said, “…the police and the schools have a great deal of difficulty staying ahead of the rest of the community, and the rumors and misinformation are spread very fast.” In his district they have used social media and one-call systems to let parents and other stakeholders know that students are safe.

**Interactions: Prospective families**

Two superintendents talked about the marketing aspects of their social media communications, specifically referencing how it had helped to attract new families into their school districts. The first example comes from a suburban superintendent in the Northeast:

We had a family from out-of-state who we attracted to our website. On our website, we’ve got links to our Twitter, blog, and Facebook and they got, actually got hold of me via Twitter to say that they were interested in the district and I was able to patch them through to get a reply, to get a hold of the building principal, and whatever building it was, and have a tour set up for them. (NE-S-1)
West Superintendent 3 spoke enthusiastically about some of the responses he had gotten from families who chose to relocate into his school district. “Absolutely! So, I have - - we've had students, we've had families who’ve told me they registered in our schools because of stuff they read on my blog and places I pushed them to.” As he continued with his remarks, he touched first on the theme of expectations. “We have all our principals blog in our district and so I push their materials out.” He then referenced a second theme: connections, both of which will be detailed later in this chapter. “I've had parents who’ve commented either because of what I have written or they feel that connection before we meet; they feel connected to me.” (WE-S-3)

Transparency

Five of the interview questions provided response data from the superintendents that contributed to the formation of the second theme: transparency. One superintendent invoked this theme when responding to Interview Question 3. The bulk of the references came during Interview Questions 4, 7, and 9 as participants discussed the social media tools that they used, the topics they communicated, and the benefits they observed from using social media tools. Two superintendents referred to transparency as part of their advice in Interview Question 11.

Nine of the 12 superintendents explicitly stated or alluded to the importance of being transparent with their stakeholders. Superintendents noted that the use of social media tools afforded them the opportunity to share in-depth responses and information with the public that oftentimes would not be printed in traditional media formats due to space limitations or that would be edited down as a short sound bite for radio or TV. Superintendents also
mentioned that through the use of social media tools they could transparently share the rationale behind decisions that were made.

A superintendent from the Northeast revealed why he has made use of social media tools with his stakeholders:

Well, I was always looking for ways to continue to be more transparent and Twitter and Facebook and the blog really give me an opportunity for some of those parents who want the most up-to-date information to remain transparent to them. And also, just to make sure that we’ve got everything that a community member could want available for them, so that’s why this stuff is available, so we have chosen to use it.  

(NE-S-1)

Another Northeastern superintendent said, “I think there is certainly more transparency in terms of building organizational trust among board members and community members. I mean they have access, they can see the actual governance and operations of the districts happening right before their eyes.” He went on to discuss a few other direct and indirect benefits of his social media use before concluding with this thought, “I think the bottom line is that it provides better transparency and communication.”  

(NE-S-2)

A superintendent in the South had similar remarks when answering this question. He said:

I think school superintendents often fight the perception that they are somehow closeted and keeping secrets and holding cards close to their chest. I think the perception has grown that I’m much more open…so I think the transparency role of the superintendency has, at least for me, dramatically improved, so that would probably be the biggest thing.  

(SO-S-3)
These three superintendents have found intentionally used social media tools in order to make their work more transparent to stakeholders. They want stakeholders to have access to as much information as possible as a way of building organizational trust.

In the Midwest a superintendent repeated a comment he had heard from his constituents. “I hear time and time again from the stakeholders in the community that they appreciate the fact that there is so much transparency. I hear the word transparency over, and over, and over again.” The discussion returned to the weekly blog that the superintendent gets published in the local paper.

When I have my blog, I can go into a little more detail about “This is what the discussion was,” and “This is what the decision was made,” and “This is why that decision was made.” So, people appreciate that transparency because we don’t have a lot of people come here to our board meetings unless there is a hot button issue, and most of the time you don’t have those. (MW-S-3)

As the in-person interview wrapped up, the superintendent provided some concluding thoughts on the topic. “I hear transparency all the time, ‘Boy, do we appreciate the transparency. We really know what's going on. We know more now what's going on than we ever did and that doesn’t have anything to do with who was here before.’” (MW-S-3)

Comments from a superintendent in the West tied together the need for transparency overall and the importance of transparency in financial matters. He observed:

In all levels of government right now there is this hypersensitivity around wanting to be more transparent and nothing better than social media to live transparently. And lots of people ask, “What the heck does the superintendent do?” or “What the heck does the principal do?” and “Why do we need them?” and “They get paid too much
money!” and the more that we can do and tell our stories about what it is we're actually doing, I think really helps change that narrative a little bit. (WE-S-3)

Several participants mentioned financial transparency in their comments. Through the use of blogs, specifically, superintendents were able to provide more detailed information related to budgets and expenditures. A superintendent from the South stated, “I give lots of information about finances and how we're spending money in our audit reports, so I would say it's a good tool to make sure that what we do is out there for the public to see.” (SO-S-1)

In the Midwest, a superintendent also transparently shared financial and related information directly with stakeholders through social media tools. As he talked about the upcoming bargaining season, he hesitatingly said, “I can get it out to the whole community and bypass, I hate to say this because my wife is a member, but I can almost bypass the teachers and the teachers’ union. Does that make sense?” The superintendent continued with his thoughts on financial transparency. “We’re getting ready to negotiate and it’s kind of a difficult financial time for us, but whatever I put out there on the school blog, the mayor reads, the city council, the bankers, the lawyers, and certainly the parents.” The superintendent identified multiple groups that he could reach through social media tools and the power of being transparent with those stakeholder groups. He brought his thoughts to a close by addressing the convenience factor of this transparent social media sharing. “I don’t have to rely on word-of-mouth. I don’t have to go to Rotary on Tuesdays at noon and tell 20 old guys what's going on at school. I can tell the whole community all at once.” (MW-S-1)

Respondents in this research study recognized the benefits of transparently sharing financial matters and thoughts behind the decision-making process with their stakeholders.
Citizens thanked their school leaders for creating transparent environments. The transparency also helped change the narratives taking place in the respective communities.

**Impact**

Interview Questions 4, 5, 6, 9, and 11 provided response data that contributed to the formation of the third theme: *impact*. Eight of the 12 superintendents shared examples of the impact on their personal and professional growth as a result of using social media tools. Their responses indicated that the biggest area of impact was either their own professional development or their own Personal (or Professional) Learning Network (PLN). Seven of the eight school superintendents referenced the ways in which the use of social media tools had impacted their own professional development. Four of those eight referred to the impact of a PLN.

**Impact: Professional Development**

A superintendent from the Midwest had one of the more insightful comments about the power of social media to influence his own learning and affect the work that he does in his rural school district.

Twenty years ago it would just be me sitting here at the desk doing my work affecting the kids I have in the district, but I think I've been able to, like, get outside the district and certainly -- probably more importantly, bring things in from the outside and learn things that I never would have gotten an opportunity without a silly blog or a website.

(MW-S-1)

Prior to making this statement, he had been discussing how social media tools had made his world smaller. “We have a thousand kids where I'm at now, so it's just -- it's Anytown, USA,
basically, you know?” So now, by embracing social media tools and using them in his role as a superintendent he has been able to enhance his own learning and exponentially affect the learning that he brings to his own staff and students.

A superintendent in the Northeast talked about his own personal and professional growth when he was asked about the factors that caused him to start using social media tools as a school administrator (Interview Question 5). “I think for my own personal and professional growth. I mean, that's how I originally got into it. That’s pretty much how I work and how I communicate.” When he finished his remarks about Interview Question 5, he was asked about his initial audience (Interview Question 6). “Twitter, in particular, became sort of my primary source of professional development and that audience was really other technology-oriented educators around the world, around the country, around the state…” (NE-S-2)

“I think the very direct benefit is in my own learning,” said another superintendent from the Northeast. “I really do feel like I'm learning from people across the country that I never would have even known about before, so to me that's a huge leap and an opportunity to learn.” (NE-S-3)

A superintendent from the South viewed his daily blog writing as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. When asked if his social media use has impacted him, he said, “I think so, and the reason I say that is I try to stay up on all the research. I try to share books I've read.” He went on to comment about the current book he was reading before finishing with, “But the issue is I try to write about things and I think it forces me to keep up.” (SO-S-1)
Responding to the comments that people leave and reading the blogs written by colleagues in the education field caused a rural school superintendent in the South to continue to grow. “I think both the kind of responses I get to my positions or thoughts on given issues have triggered additional thinking on my part, plus I follow blogs and tweets and others, and I find that very informative.” (SO-S-3)

A Midwest superintendent responded to Interview Question 11 by providing some advice for fellow administrators who have not yet seen the power for personal and professional growth. “(T)his is the piece that people miss, is they don’t see the opportunity for personal growth, and (to) help your district, help you be more successful in the challenges that you have.” (MW-S-2)

LinkedIn, a popular social networking site, was cited by two school superintendents in this study. Midwest Superintendent 3 referenced LinkedIn when responding to a follow-up question about Twitter and the role that it played in his administrative professional development.

Absolutely! Probably more through LinkedIn than Twitter to be honest. And it's probably because I’m a newer Twitter user. I’ve been using LinkedIn for quite a while so there are some pretty good conversations that happen on some of those forums on LinkedIn. I get good stuff from a lot of the superintendents, I mean not all of the superintendents in the (athletic) conference are tweeting, but a good number of them are, and they will put stuff out. (MW-S-3)

Blogs, Twitter, and social networking sites such as LinkedIn each served as sources of professional development for the 12 superintendents who took part in this research study. The respondents remarked that their own learning has been directly affected and they felt
more current on research. The two-way dialogues that have taken place have expanded their learning and given rise to new thinking.

**Impact: Personal Learning Networks**

Personal Learning Networks, also referred to as Professional Learning Networks by two Northeast superintendents, were mentioned by four superintendents overall as having had an impact. Much of the impact of a PLN came from the fact that it was personalized to the needs of the individual. One of the four responses powerfully aligned with the theme of *expectations* and appears in that section rather than in this section.

Fellow superintendents have asked veteran Northeast Superintendent 3 why she uses Twitter. She tells them, “… for two reasons. You can disseminate information out there that you think others will be interested in, but as importantly or more importantly, you can learn from others in very rapid fashion.” Continuing on, she remarked, “you just define who you want to follow and it’s a very quick way to learn, so I consider it my little PLN: Professional Learning Network.” Even after serving more than 25 years as a school administrator, she was still interested in learning from others. “So I think it’s a fabulous way to learn and I’m gradually trying to convince my colleagues in (Northeast state) to use it.” (NE-S-3)

Quick access to the professional practices of others enticed Midwest Superintendent 2 to ask for input regarding walkthrough templates for iPads.

I follow a lot of people nationally and what a great resource for information. You know, I put out we were looking at our walkthrough template for our iPads this year and I just put out on Twitter, you know, ‘Hey, I'm looking for a great walkthrough
template. What's out there?’ And boom, boom, boom, just started getting some really quality stuff. (MW-S-2)

A few minutes later in the interview the PLN theme emerged again as he talked about how social media tools had been impacting his suburban district. “The opportunity to go out there and have a cadre of people you don’t really know, but you know them through this medium called Twitter, to share insight and their perspective on things has really been valuable for us.” (MW-S-2)

In the West, a superintendent shared how he believed that his PLN had landed him his current position. As part of the interview process, he was given a prepared question and one hour to consider his response before meeting with the school board. He chose to tweet out the question to his PLN to get their insights. When he came into the board room he told them, “I actually don’t think you want to know what I think. I think you want the best thinking and (you) want me to explain to you how that will make sense and work in our context.” After making his bold statement, he said, “(Y)ou don’t just want me to pull research or pull thinking … you want me to contextualize that, so that I can pull together … the best ideas that are out there and weave the narrative for our community.” As his job interview continued, he talked about his vision for the school district, his vision that every student and principal would have their own blogs, and his vision for what twenty-first century learning would look like under his leadership.

As the interview for this research study transitioned into the benefits of using social media as a school administrator (Interview Question 9), the superintendent shared some insightful comments about his PLN that also tied into the fourth theme: connections:
I have this pretty amazing network and that so when I have a question or I need help with something, that I have this, that either in a public sense through a blog or through Twitter, I can get feedback, or in a private sense through an email or a phone call I built this amazing network of people around the world that I'm connected to and so that's just huge! And so I think, and then that case I make, where I go, and if I -- the next time I apply for a job, they are not just getting me, they are getting this huge network of people I bring. And that I don't just come by myself. I come with all these people that I'm connected to, and they get that all that wisdom with me. And so compare that to who can be someone, a fabulous educator, who doesn't have a network, you know, that's great, fabulous educator, fabulous leader, but there is a piece missing if they can't bring perhaps hundreds or thousands of people with them who are part of that network. (WE-S-3)

As was found with the 12 principals, the superintendents in this study valued both the professional development options and the ability to establish a Personal Learning Network suited to the specific needs of the individual. They appreciated the quick responses to professional development questions such as the iPad walkthrough templates. The new learning from the superintendents in this study was the impact that a PLN could have on getting a job. West Superintendent 3 was assisted by his PLN with an interview question and was hired by that Board of Education. His response analogy about two teachers in a similar situation exemplifies the potential future impact of PLNs for multiple stakeholder groups.
Connections

Interview Questions 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11 provided response data that contributed to the formation of the fourth theme: *connections*. Seven of the 12 participants spoke about connections in a broad context. Selected quotes from those respondents will be shared first. Two of the seven participants also specifically mentioned having a stronger connection between teachers and the superintendent. Their comments conclude this section of the chapter.

One of the benefits mentioned by Northeast Superintendent 1 was the ability to control the message. The byproduct of that, in his eyes, equated to fewer phone calls. “I get fewer phone calls from parents because they feel like they are connected.” Continuing on, he explained, “They are connected; they have the information that they need which allows me to get in the classrooms and do what I think my job is more than I ever could in the past.”

When this superintendent was asked if he thought that the students in his school district felt connected, he said:

Yeah, 100 percent because when I see, in fact, sometimes I'll even say stuff on Twitter like, “Tomorrow is Blue Shirt Day” to the kids. So, it’s like our little secret. And so we all wear a blue shirt and I'll know who is following me on Twitter, so we do do fun stuff like that. You know, Ugly Sweater Day, that kind of thing, and the kids feel really connected to that. (NE-S-1)

If a superintendent has an interest in strengthening the culture and climate of his school district, activities like “Blue Shirt Day” could contribute to that goal. The use of Twitter, in this instance, facilitated that goal and could lead to stronger bonds between the
stakeholder group (students) and the school leader. The same could be done with employees as well.

A second superintendent in the Northeast also felt that there was a stronger connection now between the community and the school. “Absolutely! It has brought people into a common ecosystem and that ecosystem is now defined much more broadly than it was previously which was probably just internal.” (NE-S-2)

In the South, a superintendent described how potential new hires were able to develop a connection to the district leadership team via social media even before interviewing in the district. “We're constantly recruiting teachers and…what we found, a lot of times when people come to interview, they will have checked out the blog. They will get a feel for what the leadership of the district thinks.” (SO-S-1)

In hard to staff areas of the country, this could be a very important benefit to a school superintendent. Potential new hires could read blog posts and other social media content to get a better feel for the school district and its leadership team. If a positive feeling has been generated by the social media postings, it could lead to candidates deciding to apply at districts they might not have considered previously.

Actively blogging and tweeting has given a rural school district superintendent from the South a connection to what is happening on a larger scale.“(Y)ou can get real myopic and think that the world exists just within the boundaries of your system and I think this has helped me and the systems stay more connected with things state and federal, if not internationally.” (SO-S-3)
A Midwest superintendent spoke about the connections he has made since moving to his current position two years ago as well as the national connections made possible through Twitter and his PLN:

I talked earlier about making connections with the community. I've made connections through social media with people. I mean on Twitter, I've sent direct messages to people that I didn't think I could ever have a conversation with. And it’s just, also, when they respond back and you can kind of go back and forth and talk with someone who lives out in New York or wherever, that you read their stuff and you're going, “Are we really having this conversation?” (MW-S-2)

In a large, suburban school district in the West a superintendent has been energized by the connections he has been making in his community as a result of using social media to communicate with stakeholders. “I like it. It’s energizing to me. I just enjoy doing it and the feedback.” He continued by sharing about the feedback he has received. “I know the messages that are embedded in some of the posts are getting out to some people, and believe that they talk about it and know that they talk about it because I get the feedback.” (WE-S-1)

Similar to the comments made by Midwest Superintendent 1 at the close of the section on transparency, West Superintendent 3 shared his perceptions on the power of taking his message directly to stakeholders. Rather than phrasing it in the context of transparency, his comments really aligned with the concept of connections. He remarked:

So, if we want to influence the dialogue, we can't lament the fact of the people who seem to be influencing it. We’ve got to go in there. We can all have our own channel now, and what I'm -- and I find that you can get huge traction in this space that and then also you can connect directly, and what happens in a role like mine is that my
message often gets filtered through the teachers’ union or through a parent group or through the media or through the board, and by the time the message comes out of the other end, it’s not really my message any more. And social media allows me to connect directly to a really wide range of people in different roles. And that’s the power for my colleagues, too, is that that they can -- they can connect directly to communities. (WE-S-3)

Two superintendents from the South identified a stronger connection between themselves and their teachers as a result of using social media tools. South Superintendent 1 said it plainly, “I think my teachers feel more connected to me.” He intentionally has visited at least 100 classrooms each school year and has written a daily blog of his classroom visits. He described the connection he feels and the evidence that supported his statement:

It's very important for me to stay connected to teachers, to students, to principals, and so by being in the classroom and then documenting what I saw, one teacher told me one time, she said, “I’ve never had a superintendent in my classroom.” I have had teachers who wanted me to print things that I have written and send it to them as documentation. “Hey I did a good job with this particular activity” as they were working toward National Board Certification. So, I think it’s a good way for me to stay connected with those folks even though I don’t take direct comments because I don’t have time to moderate and I don’t want someone to put something inappropriate. I think it keeps me connected because I get nice emails. I do a survey every year in which teachers provide feedback regarding my performance as a superintendent and I always get really positive comments and I think it's a good tool. (SO-S-1)
A fellow Southern superintendent also noted a stronger connection between his teachers and himself. He shared:

And the other thing that I find kind of interesting is that as I interact with teachers, because within the system, because they've been reading what I have been writing, you know, they’ll walk up and they feel much more personally connected. I have noticed a change in their demeanor. There is always that phenomenon when an administrator walks in the teachers’ lounge: everybody shuts up. But what I see now is when I walk in the teachers’ lounge, somebody will say, “Oh, I really liked this post” or “I'm glad that you tweeted that” or something. I mean, it’s more of an icebreaker, so I see that as real positive. (SO-S-3)

The ability to connect directly to a specific stakeholder group, to strengthen those bonds, and to increase the informal conversations that take place all could be accomplished by using social media tools. Some participants in this study felt more energized about the increased connections between administrator and stakeholder. The ability to forge stronger ties with staff members and potential hires also resonated among participants.

**Expectation**

The fifth theme that emerged from the superintendents’ group was *expectation*. Interview Questions 3, 5, 10, 11 and the concluding remarks portion of each of the 12 interviews provided the response data. Seven of the 12 school superintendents commented about the use of social media tools as required, expected, needed in the near future, or no longer optional. The other five superintendents responded as if it was not an option, but did not expressly vocalize that.
The most profound of the responses came during the twelfth of the 24 interviews. The morning of January 12, 2012, the interview with Northeast Superintendent 2 took place. When the participant was asked Interview Question 11, “What advice would you give to a school administrator who is thinking about using social media tools with stakeholders as part of a communications strategy?” his response was, “I think it’s a broader question. It isn’t, ‘Here is the tool that you might want to consider strategically to communicate.’ I think it's, that almost keeps you out of your responsibility to be a part of the chain.” Momentary panic set in as the researcher began to wonder if the scope of the research study had not fully considered the broader context of social media use by school principals and superintendents.

Northeast Superintendent 2 continued with his beliefs:

I think, personally, leaders have to be centered in their professional lives using these technologies which means they have to have that Professional Learning Network and then the communication with stakeholders is just a natural offshoot of that, one aspect of it, but it isn't like you would use the tools just to communicate with stakeholders, you have to use it to advance your own professional knowledge to operate your organization. It’s just part and parcel of the expectation today of how you would operate as a district leader. (NE-S-2)

The comments made by Northeast Superintendent 2 exemplified the two overarching research questions in this study. The experience of using social media tools cannot be limited to just communication with stakeholders. It goes much broader than that. The benefits and usefulness extend to several other areas. His response also provided a solid answer to the question of why school administrators choose to use social media tools. The
personal and professional growth opportunities are too extensive not to use social media tools.

Hinting at the expected use of social media, Northeast Superintendent 3 said, “I think it’s a good, it’s an efficient way to communicate with the public, and I think the public appreciates that, and they look for it.” At the conclusion of the interview she did not mince words as she stated:

I would say number one: It's required today. I think you cannot pretend as a school administrator that social media is not an important, valid, sophisticated way to communicate, so I think you have to jump into those waters. I don’t think it's optional and I would say, “Just jump in.” (NE-S-3)

She then drew some analogies as justification for her position. The first applied to all school administrators. “It's like writing your first newsletter. The first time you did that you probably said, ‘I don’t know where to start!’ So, just start.” Then, perhaps for this researcher’s benefit, she compared jumping into social media use for the first time to the experience of writing a dissertation:

It’s just like a dissertation: just start, right? Like sometimes you start at the end, right? You move back, sometimes you jump in the middle, that's how we all wrote them, right? You didn’t know “here is the place to start.” There are no rules about that, so just jump in, and do it. (NE-S-3)

The superintendent, who answered each interview question in a professional manner and invoked the theme of professionalism throughout the interview, finished her advice by admonishing fellow administrators to be mindful of their role. “Remember that you’re
always in your professional role and so the messages you send should always be sent with that in mind, but I would say you cannot avoid it.” (NE-S-3)

Reflecting on his more than 30 years in the education profession, South Superintendent I stated bluntly, “I just think it's going to be a way of life; we're all connected, whether we want to or not, we're going to have to communicate that way.”

South Superintendent 3 shared some direct advice initially. “I would say if they are not doing it, they really need to start. I can't imagine being an administrator in the twenty-first century and not doing it.” He then provided an analogy as he talked about the expectation of school administrators using social media tools. “It's like, once the printing press was developed and widely used, why would you use parchment? It's the vehicle of the time and that's how most of our constituencies are communicating, so we’ve got to be in on that.” (SO-S-3)

Midwest Superintendent 1 also chose to respond to Interview Question 11 by sharing an analogy. He stated:

People ask me that like it’s a choice and I'm not sure it’s a choice anymore. You're going to have to do it if you're going to be successful as a school administrator. I mean, me choosing not to use the school website is like someone 25 years ago choosing not to send out letters. I mean you just -- you can't exist, you can't survive, you can't -- you certainly can't improve your district or your schools or your -- help your students out if you don’t. And generally, I mean, the administrators I meet or talk to -- most seem very open and seem very understanding that they have to do more of this. The problem is they don’t know how to get started and it seems like such a big mountain to climb. (MW-S-1)
Another superintendent from the Midwest chose to include a little humor in his response. “Well, don’t be afraid of it! You hear about people like (former United States Representative from New York) Anthony Weiner doing stupid stuff. Obviously, don’t do stupid stuff!” From there he gave some practical advice; the same advice he has given to the teachers in his school district that are beginning to use social media tools. “(Y)ou learn by doing. You learn by -- you just gotta get in there and figure it out and that's what I have been telling the teachers here.” He shared some examples of how his first- and second-year teachers as well as his veteran teachers have embraced these tools:

You just gotta jump in and do it. You’ve gotta figure it out and, yeah, you're going to -- you might push the wrong button and delete everything or you might post it before you're ready, but that's the only way you learn how to use this stuff. There is no other way and I still pick up tricks all the time. (MW-S-3)

Finishing his response to the question, he suggested, “(Y)ou gotta take some initiative and you got to just try it. That's my advice.”

A superintendent from the West commented about the lack of school administrators who have recognized the necessity of using social media tools in their communication with stakeholders. As he ended the interview, he stated, “It will be interesting to see what you find out because I know as a profession, not just superintendents, but certainly across our profession we're not taking advantage of the opportunities there to communicate.” (WE-S-1)

Another superintendent from the West framed the work of school administrators in the context of narrating a story. “The important work that we’re trying to do and the important work of leading the systems, leading schools, and leading systems, I think that’s stories that nobody else is going to tell, so we need to start.” His comments then centered on
the expectation that school administrators should set the example for students, inferring that they need to become proficient in social media use.

We need to tell those stories. If we think all the kids need to learn like this, well leaders need to lead, and so that's what, that's the idea my -- we can't just talk about it, we got to be about it is sort of my -- that's one of my, the final slide I use in some of my presentations I do. It's okay to say, “Well, the system has to change and teachers have to change and kids got to -- we got to go where the kids are.” Well, okay, but let's go there then and then show a lot more credibility when you ask your system to move, if you're moving as well. (WE-S-3)

**Multi-Modal**

Four of the interview questions provided response data from the superintendents that contributed to the formation of the final theme: *multi-modal*. All 12 school superintendents used at least two forms of social media in their administrative communication with stakeholders (Table 6). Each of the 12 authored a blog. Two superintendents had both a personal blog and a school blog that they maintained. Nine of the superintendents maintained an active presence on Twitter. One superintendent opened a Twitter account when Twitter was launched, but he has not made use of it. Six of the superintendents used a social networking site such as Facebook, Google+, or LinkedIn as a communication tool. Six superintendents either uploaded online videos to sites like YouTube or embedded videos into their blog posts. Two superintendents created and shared podcasts; one as stand-alone communication with stakeholders and one as an embedded tool within his blog posts.
Responses from the superintendents varied regarding the length of time that each of them has used social media tools and the frequency with which they have communicated with stakeholders by means of social media. Tables 7 and 8 provide the data regarding the number of years each superintendent has been blogging and using Twitter. They also include the total number of blog posts, tweets, Twitter followers, online videos posted, and Facebook “likes” as of December 31, 2011, and January 26, 2012.

Five of the superintendents commented specifically on the ways in which multimodal communication had benefited their work. This theme arose in Interview Questions 3 and 4 with two of the participants and in Interview Questions 6 and 10 with two additional participants.

### Table 6. Superintendents’ Social Media Presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Microblogs (e.g. Twitter)</th>
<th>Social Networking Sites</th>
<th>Podcasts</th>
<th>Online Video</th>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-S-2</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-S-3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-2</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-3</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-S-1</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-S-3</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Table 7. Superintendents’ Social Media Tool Use (part 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Total Blog Posts as of 12/31/11</th>
<th>Years Blogging</th>
<th>Tweets as of 12/31/11</th>
<th>Twitter Followers as of 12/31/11</th>
<th>Years Using Twitter</th>
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<td>501-1,000</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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Table 8. Superintendents’ Social Media Tool Use (part 2)

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<td>SO-S-1</td>
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<td>SO-S-2</td>
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<td>WE-S-1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Northeast Superintendent 3 had the most explicit and insightful comments about taking a multi-modal approach. First, remarks made by other superintendents will be shared.
When asked about using blogs, Twitter, and Facebook as communication tools for stakeholders, Northeast Superintendent 1 said, “And the thing about social media I think is that it’s an opt-in, so if you don’t want the information, fine. Just don’t sign up for it, or don’t go to it.”

A fellow superintendent from the Northeast spoke about using Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and a blog for communicating with stakeholders before he elaborated about the multi-modal manner in which his organization has shared information with another stakeholder group: staff. “Yeah, we have a whole learning management system that has some of Web 2.0ish tools embedded. So, that’s pervasive throughout the entire organization. That would include wikis, chatting, RSS aggregation, yeah, so on.” (NE-S-2)

In the Midwest, a superintendent shared his thoughts on the progressive stance his suburban district has taken on social media use compared to the stance another Midwestern state has taken. “We’re a district that really promotes social media. We’re not -- I don’t want to say this in a negative way--Missouri, and what we’re just saying (is) we want you to do best practice.” He continued his thoughts on using multiple social media tools and the need for a comprehensive social media policy before ending his line of thinking with “Part of that is to encourage the usage of the different social media tools that are out there, but doing it in a manner that really protects the district and protects the staff.” (MW-S-2)

West Superintendent 3, who leads an urban school district, shared these thoughts when discussing how communication has become more multi-modal over the past five years. “Everything has gotten to be a lot more electronic and a lot more varied in terms of your communication strategies. Just sending a press release out now we have to use all these other things as well.” The *other things* he went on to mention included his blog, Twitter, periodic
video communications to staff and parents, a one-call phone communication system for
sending out messages, and Facebook, to a lesser extent.

As mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this section, Northeast Superintendent 3
had the most insightful comments about the multi-modal approach. Early in the interview
she shared some examples of blog topics. After relating a story about a recent budget issue,
she said:

I think with today’s generation and their use of various modes of multimedia, you're
better off if you send them the message in three or four different ways and then
people will acquire the message in the way that's comfortable for them. (NE-S-3)

Reminiscent of the quote in the opening paragraph of Chapter 2 in which Nora Carr
stated that social media tools will complement traditional forms of communication rather
than replace them, Northeast Superintendent 3 remarked:

I still use old-fashioned email and will email things to the whole district, my whole
parent community, as appropriate, sometimes during a crisis, sometimes just
informational, talking about the budget, talking about a new program, but often times
things that I'll email, I might also post on the blog because it doesn’t hurt to do it in
two different ways, and also post it on the website in another way, so there are really
three ways I probably am covering the bases. It’s no more work to do that. You're
doing it anyhow, so why not send it out in various venues and people, as I said, will
use the venues that they are comfortable with. (NE-S-3)
Cross-Case Comparison

This qualitative multiple-case research study involved two categories of school administrator groups: principals and superintendents. The research findings from each of the groups have been presented in the previous two sections. In this section, the researcher presents a cross-case analysis of the emergent themes from the school principals and superintendents. The strength of the cross-case analysis, according to Yin (2009), is that “…even with two cases, you have the possibility of direct replication. Analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, will be more powerful than those coming from a single case (or single experiment) alone” (p. 61).

The findings from the group of 24 school administrators would have provided valuable insight into this topic of study. Analyzing the data from the two groups as separate cases sheds even greater light on the experiences of the school principals and superintendents and the reasons why they choose to communicate with stakeholders through social media tools.

Of the themes that emerged from the school principals and the superintendents, four were common to both groups in at least 18 of the 24 participants. These four common themes included: interactions, connections, impact, and expectation. Although the participants were evenly split among four different regions of the United States and Canada, no regional differences were noted in the findings.

Interactions

Twenty-two of the 24 participants in the study expressly stated or implied that they have shifted away from traditional paper forms of communication with their stakeholders.
This reflected the opinions of 10 school principals and 12 superintendents. The school administrators now either utilize a combination of digital and paper modes or they have gone completely digital. Those administrators who still use the blended approach indicated that it was for the benefit of the elderly stakeholders in their communities, but that the practice likely would be discontinued. Northeast Superintendent 3 stated, “…you still, we need to inform them, so you still do the old fashioned mail-the-paper, but I think that day is probably going to end soon.”

The digital interactions between administrators and stakeholders have yielded an increase in two-way digital conversations, which are not possible through the traditional print forms of communication sent from the school. Fifteen of the 24 participants shared examples of the interactions they have had with stakeholders through their blogs, Twitter accounts, and social networking sites. West Principal 1 gave multiple examples of how conversations with his staff, parents, and community members have evolved. Summing up his thoughts, he said, “…it’s just totally changed the way conversations happen. They’re not an event so much as ongoing. And that’s with everybody.” West Superintendent 3 also mentioned several examples of the impact that his social media use and his building principals’ social media use has had on conversations with their stakeholders. “They’ll email me. They’ll call me. They’ll have a conversation… now, all of a sudden, we’re influencing the conversations through social media by just pushing ideas out there.”

Informal interactions between school administrators and stakeholders have increased according to 11 of the 24 participants. Six superintendents and five principals referenced the increase. West Superintendent 1 said, “Yeah, in the community and when I'm in buildings, people say ‘That was an interesting site. I didn’t comment, but boy, I wonder.’ So, yeah, I
get that.” Midwest Superintendent 2 has had similar experiences. He shared this story of an interaction at the local coffee house. “It’s that whole piece: surprised at the number of people that have come up to me based on what they have seen on the blog and that, it’s a great conversation starter.” West Principal 2 remarked, “I've had parents come up and say, ‘Hey, I read your blog the other night,’ and just, it’s kind of shocking, actually, because you write stuff and you're not sure if people are actually reading it…”

The superintendents were more likely to talk about the benefit of *immediacy* when sharing examples of how interactions with stakeholders have improved as a result of social media use. Situations such as weather-related delays, school cancellations, and safety-related concerns fell more within the purview of the superintendent rather than a building principal. As such, seven of the 12 superintendents and four of the 12 principals acknowledged that social media tools had assisted them in getting instant communication out to stakeholders. West Superintendent 2 summed it up this way:

> If an editorial goes out and it isn’t accurate, you can put up your own reaction to it immediately. If somebody has got rumors and misinformation on my blog … we immediately put … that information out. So the most direct benefit is that it’s instantaneous information that gets put out. (WE-S-2)

The shift from print to digital communications between school administrators and their stakeholders has resulted in an increase in the two-way conversations in which they are able to engage. The conversations could either be real-time or more frequent. Social media use by school principals and superintendents has also allowed them to convey their messages to employees, students, parents, and community members more immediately than traditional forms of communication had allowed.
Connections

The theme of *connections* emerged from 18 of the participants; 11 of the 12 school principals and seven of the 12 school superintendents. Among the school principals the theme had three strong variations: connections, connectedness, and relationships. Responses from the superintendents tended to invoke the theme in a broader context, but did touch upon each of the subthemes as well.

Using social media tools to create a link between school administrators and stakeholders, between school administrators and noted education figures, or between school administrators and the profession itself all surfaced during the interviews as benefits of social media use. Midwest Superintendent 2 referenced these links when he said, “you can make connections using social media with your own community, but can also do it professionally with the people locally, statewide, or worldwide.” South Principal 3 had a similar comment about the links that he had created. “Yeah, I think it's stronger with the community and school, but I also feel a stronger connection with education as a profession.”

The link that participants felt also was expressed in a manner more aligned with being part of something bigger than oneself, or a sense of connectedness. Regardless of whether the administrator served in an urban, rural, or suburban school setting, the reaction to the newfound connectedness to the educational reform movement and the high profile figures (e.g. Diane Ravitch, Robert Marzano, Randi Weingarten) was the same.

The connectedness that administrators felt was expressed by one urban school principal and one suburban school superintendent in a profound fashion. They each believed that social media tools had humanized them to their stakeholders in a way that had not happened before. An excerpt from comments made by Northeast Principal 2, which
appeared in the school principals’ section, included: “…when we can use social media to humanize one another, and that is an outgrowth of really authentic use of it, that's powerful! And that's really interesting to me.”

West Superintendent 3 shared these insightful observations about how his social media connections have humanized him to his stakeholders:

It’s an interesting phenomena that I think my social media connections have made me much more human than in a role that, I don’t sometimes, face-to-face, get a ton of time to connect with the huge numbers that you have in a school district when you think of all the students, teachers, and parents that you have, but it’s humanized me. They feel, that people feel connected when we meet because, and they feel, they -- an entry point is, ‘I was reading your blog about blank’ or you know they -- what I've been told is it’s helping, I'm influencing the water cooler conversations. (WE-S-3)

Continuing on with his thoughts, the superintendent dismissed the counter-argument that social media communication is less personal:

The pushback always is, “Well, you know, what does he do? He’s just out there blogging and tweeting and he’s hiding behind the computer,” you know? Those who don’t understand what we're doing, it’s actually the exact opposite; that this social media presence is actually humanizing a role and so, as we then, these connections move from digital to face-to-face and back to digital. It's far more human and far more personal than if we didn’t have it. And then, all of a sudden, my -- what was -- people knew me as a role have a much greater sense of who I am. (WE-S-3)

Relationships were the third type of connection mentioned by the participants in this study. Five principals and four superintendents provided examples of how social media use
helped improve their relationships with stakeholders. Northeast Principal 2 described the benefits of social media communication with stakeholders as “much richer relationships.” Northeast Superintendent 1 elaborated about how he used Twitter to cultivate relationships with students in his suburban school district by tweeting out “fun things” such as “blue shirt day” or “ugly sweater day” to his followers. South Superintendents 1 and 3 both expressed that there was a stronger relationship, or connection, that had developed between the staff members and the superintendent.

Whether the connection was viewed as a link, a sense of being part of something larger, or a relationship, a school administrator’s use of social media tools to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members resulted in the overall strengthening of the connections between administrator/stakeholder as well as administrator/educational profession.

Impact

The third theme that emerged from the two cases was impact. Eighteen of the 24 participants commented about the impact that social media tools had on their own personal and professional development. This included 11 of the 12 school principals and seven of the 12 superintendents. Specifically, eight school principals and four superintendents referenced a Personal (or Professional) Learning Network (PLN) and how important it had become as a professional resource.

The majority of the references to a PLN came in the context of microblog use. School principals and superintendents had discovered that through Twitter they could establish relationships with educational professionals from around the world who shared
common interests. By sharing questions and answers back and forth about curricular issues, educational technology, staff development options, and a plethora of other topics, the administrators were able to assemble a network of individuals with whom they could “stretch their thinking” as South Principal 2 stated. The members of the respective PLNs might or might not include nationally-known figures in the education field.

South Principal 1 appreciated the fact that a PLN could provide his rural school district staff with access to a wide range of noted authorities in the field of education. He and approximately half of his staff engaged in nightly chat sessions with other educators from their PLN, which included high-profile figures. Instead of feeling like they were continually behind regarding best practice, the interactions with the 400-member PLN allowed South Principal 1 and his staff to stay abreast of the latest educational trends. He stated:

Now that we have Twitter and things like that, we can read and know what some of these outstanding schools are doing all over the world. We’re able to not just sit back and wait three years when it happens here. We can do it now and be one of the leading schools. (SO-P-1)

Other administrators elaborated on a similar benefit of a PLN: quick responses. Just as South Principal 1 enjoyed the up-to-date access to information and trends, South Principal 3 and Midwest Superintendent 2 pointed out that they valued getting responses to their queries in rapid fashion. Finally, the personalized professional development available through engaging in discussions with members of a PLN, reading blog posts written by fellow educators, and the reflective value of authoring one’s own blog all were mentioned as benefits of social media use.
Nine of the 12 superintendents indicated that social media tools had allowed them to perform their jobs in a more transparent fashion. As such, transparency was one of the six emergent themes among superintendents. Only four of the 12 school principals shared similar findings. Since 13 of the 24 participants overall did talk about the ability to be more transparent, it was included as a sub-part of the section on impact.

Superintendents set the vision for the school district, advocate for needed instructional changes, orchestrate most of the budgetary allocations, and promote the school district to the local community and beyond. As such, transparency is an important quality to maintain in order to reinforce organizational trust. It was, therefore, no surprise that three-fourths of the superintendents in this research study mentioned transparency.

Northeast Superintendent 2 summed it up succinctly when he said, “I think the bottom line is that it (social media) provides better transparency and communication.” Assisting stakeholders with understanding a broad range of topics is part of the method of being transparent that Northeast Superintendent 3 follows. She shared that she tries to help stakeholders “understand how the district works in terms of curriculum development, in terms of budget, in terms of hiring practices, whatever that issue may be on people’s minds, so it really varies.”

Midwest Superintendent 3 enjoyed blogging because it gave him an opportunity to share his thinking with stakeholders regarding controversial issues. Sitting in his office discussing the topic with the researcher, he shared a recent story about a proposed calendar change for the coming school year. Through his blog he intended to share “what the pros and cons are of this ending before Christmas, so that will be another way for them to interact with me, and see what’s --why that -- or how that decision is being made.”
As stated earlier, four school principals also noted the importance of being transparent with their stakeholders. Northeast Principal 3, who was quoted in the impact section of the principals’ findings, summed it up concisely when he said, “I’ve heard it from board members, central office, the fact that we have created a completely transparent atmosphere here, you know, for high school.”

The use of social media tools by school principals and superintendents has had a positive impact upon the administrators’ personal and professional development, allowed them to build Personal (or Professional) Learning Networks tailored to their individual needs, and brought about more transparent interactions with their stakeholders. Twice as many school principals as superintendents have assembled PLNs to enhance their personal and professional growth. Likewise, twice as many superintendents as principals noted the transparency benefit afforded by social media tools. Overall, the school administrators acknowledged that using social media has had a positive impact upon them professionally.

Expectations

The fourth of the dominant themes that emerged from the two case study groups was that of expectations. Seventeen of the participants characterized the use of social media tools by school administrators as required, expected, no longer optional, or needed in the future. This included 10 of the 12 school principals and seven of the 12 superintendents. The remaining seven participants spoke about the subject as though it was required, but did not expressly state it.

Several catch phrases were used as advice to a school administrator who is thinking about using social media tools with stakeholders as part of a communications strategy.
“Jump in!” was mentioned by three principals and two superintendents. Three principals and one superintendent said, “Don’t be afraid!” Two school principals advised, “Lurk and Learn.”

Other participants cut to the chase regarding the expectation to use social media. As Northeast Superintendent 3 said, “I would say number one: It's required today.” Her colleague, Northeast Superintendent 2, remarked, “It’s just part and parcel of the expectation today of how you would operate as a district leader.” South Superintendent 3 declared, “I can’t imagine being an administrator in the twenty-first century and not doing it.”

Principals, too, shared the same outlook. South Principal 1 stated, “I believe that social media as a communications tool will become the new non-negotiable.” Northeast Principal 1 said, “it’s educational malpractice not to take advantage of these resources and not only to use them yourself, but to show others how to use them.” Referring to the power of blogging and tweeting, South Principal 2 said that it would be “irresponsible as a principal and school leader to not tap into that wisdom and experience and innovative thinking that's happening there.”

**Discussion of SCRM**

Social Customer Relationship Management, also known as CRM 2.0, served as the theoretical framework for this research study. SCRM is an outgrowth of CRM, which has a focus on relationships, trust, and two-way communication. The advent of social media and prevalence of technology devices led to the development of SCRM. Through SCRM, employees at corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies could use social media tools as a vehicle to establish and maintain relationships with their customers and stakeholders.
The school principals and superintendents involved in this study each employed the use of multiple social media tools as part of their communications with stakeholders. Blogs and Twitter were the two dominant methods by which the school principals and superintendents were able to establish and maintain relationships with their stakeholders, develop trust, and engage the stakeholders in two-way communication. Additional social media tools used by the administrators included social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn), podcasts, and online video.

Greenberg (2010) stated that SCRM is “designed to engage the customer in a collaborative conversation in order to provide mutually beneficial value in a trusted & transparent business environment” (p. 413). The findings from this research study indicated that collaborative conversations are taking place between school principals and their stakeholders as well as superintendents and their stakeholders. These two-way conversations occurred in-person and through blogs, Twitter, and social networking sites. Twenty-two of the 24 school administrators noted this in the emergent theme of interactions.

A portion of Greenberg’s definition referred to a “trusted & transparent business environment.” Transparency was mentioned by nine of the 12 superintendents and emerged as one of six dominant themes. Four of the school principals also cited transparency as an important benefit of social media use. These 13 participants validated the premise that social media tools allowed them to interact with their employees, students, parents, and community members in a transparent manner.

The third theme that tied into the theoretical framework of this study was connections. The simple connection between two people, the stronger sense of connectedness and being a part of something bigger than oneself, and the enhanced
relationships that have developed all supported the precepts of Social Customer Relationship Management. Eleven of the school principals and seven of the superintendents identified these connections as they spoke about their social media use with stakeholders.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the research findings from the qualitative interviews and identified the emergent themes from the two case study groups: school principals and school superintendents. All 24 school principals and superintendents agreed that their fellow administrators should be utilizing social media tools. This affirmation was due to the personal and professional benefits that social media tools could provide to the user. This qualitative, multiple-case research study documented that there were at least four strong benefits to school administrators who used multiple social media tools with their stakeholders. These benefits included enhanced interactions with employees, students, parents, and community members; increased connections to stakeholders, fellow educators, and the education profession; a positive impact on the administrator’s own personal and professional development as well as increased transparency in interactions; and an expectation that social media tools would be used. Finally, the findings were discussed within the context of Social Customer Relationship Management.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings within the context of the two research questions and addresses some of the limitations of the study. Subsequently, it proposes a comprehensive communications strategy for school administrators and suggests implications for professional practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with a discussion of the emergent themes from the 24 qualitative interviews and their alignment with the two research questions previously presented. As part of the discussion on the research questions, the counter-arguments regarding social media adoption are put forth along with the viewpoints shared by the school administrators concerning those counter-arguments. The chapter then continues by presenting the limitations of the study. The third section of this chapter describes some implications for administrators’ practice and proposes a social media strategy for school leaders. The final section offers a series of recommendations for further research.

Discussion of the Research Questions

Noted school public relations specialist Nora Carr (2001, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2010a, 2010c, 2010d, 2011b, 2011c) has written extensively about social media use in an educational context. Aside from her writings, little research has been conducted on the use of social media tools by K-12 public school officials as part of a comprehensive communications strategy. Additionally, little research has been conducted that examines the impact upon a school principal or superintendent of using social media tools with stakeholders.

The lack of existing research about the use of social media tools by school administrators led to the development of the two guiding research questions in this study:

1. What are the experiences of school principals and superintendents who use multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites
(e.g. Facebook), podcasts, and online videos to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members?, and

2. Why are school principals and superintendents choosing to communicate with employees, students, parents, and community members through multiple social media tools?

The findings from this qualitative, multiple-case research study revealed five major themes that emerged from interviews with the 24 participating school principals and superintendents. Each theme is discussed in this section as it relates to the research questions. While some of the emergent themes aligned more closely with one of the two research questions, there were aspects about each of the emergent themes that spoke to both the experiences as well as to the why.

**Interactions**

Of the 12 school principals in the study, 10 shared examples of how they either were complementing the traditional forms of print communication with the use of social media/digital forms of communication or how they have completely embraced digital communication. Their experiences transitioning away from one-way communication has resulted in higher levels of two-way communication, stronger connections with stakeholders, and enhanced personal and professional growth opportunities. The relative ease in communicating with stakeholders this way also addressed the reason why the school principals continued to use social media.

Northeast Principal 1 made the switch to social media due to “the fact that you could get out your message so easily…” He elaborated further by saying, “I can simultaneously
blog, Facebook, tweet, and now that at G+, the Google+ page, send the same information to all four places…” Other participants in the study echoed those sentiments. Northeast Principal 3 said, “We try to cover every type of media in order to portray our students in a variety of different lights.”

All 12 of the school superintendents stated or implied that they either had chosen to incorporate digital communication as a complement to their traditional formats or that they had gone completely digital in the ways that they communicate with stakeholders. Similar to the principals, the responses from the superintendents addressed both the experience and the reasons for continued use of social media with stakeholders. West Superintendent 3 noted, “I'm using more channels definitely now than I did five years ago and almost exclusively digital now.” Northeast Superintendent 3 shared that there are senior citizens who may not be using social media, so in her district they have elected to use a blended communications approach. Addressing the direction her district may be headed regarding digital communication, she surmised, “I think we're at a time where you still have to do both… but I think that day is probably going to end soon.”

In school districts where administrators have switched completely to digital communication, there has been little to no pushback reported. Northeast Superintendent 1 serves a district of approximately 5,000 students and 40,000 residents. Just two elderly citizens requested to continue receiving print copies of the district newsletter. Referring to his district’s switch to digital communication, he said, “I think the trend is really changing there, and people are okay with it.”

One of the counter-arguments to using social media and digital communication rather than traditional print forms has been the issue of access. It has been feared that stakeholders
would be excluded from vital information due to the lack of access to blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, podcasts, and online videos. The majority of the participants in this study expressed that due to devices such as Smartphones, that perception is unfounded. According to West Principal 2, “I would say most of our kids at our high school of about 1400 students would have cell phones. I would say a significant percentage of those are Smartphones.” Northeast Principal 1 notified his stakeholders that they were discontinuing their print communications and that they would send out hard copies to anyone who requested them. So far, there have been no requests.

South Superintendent 2 estimated that five percent of his stakeholders do not have access in his rural school district. He added that, “A lot of folks who should be spending money on rent are spending it on Smartphones.” Midwest Superintendent 1 had an insightful perspective to share regarding access to technology and using it to communicate with the school. He said:

My assumption is it’s the same as, like, if you have Open House, you know, and you opened up the doors of your building. There’s those families that always come every single year, talk to every single teacher that their son or daughter has. And then you have families, you can give away a hundred dollar bill and you couldn’t get them to walk across the street to see their kid’s math teacher. And I feel like technology is kind of the same way. You won’t get 100 percent, but I think we probably will get a much higher percent than we would if it was just in-person or if it was at the Open House kind of thing. But, it’s something that we have to work towards…”

South Principals 1 and 3 have worked to overcome any access issues by holding sessions for parents. South Principal 1 said:
We bring them in and we help them create their account for them. We show them how to use it and we have them either tweet us or we have them use their account, so before they leave they have done it and they see how effective it's going to be and we will send a few things throughout the night so that they can see…the benefits.

The act of bringing stakeholders into the school building and teaching them how to use the tools has been vital for increasing the two-way communication between the home and the school. That increase in two-way communication is another aspect of the interactions theme that emerged from the interviews. South Principal 1 shared, “We do have kids or parents that will tweet us…throughout the day.” In his rural school, approximately 85 percent of the parents are using Twitter. He learned that parents favored this style of communication over calling the school because it was more efficient for them versus being on hold or being transferred.

Multiple authors have written about the movement in the business world to more fully engage with customers and more effectively meet their needs (Handley & Chapman, 2011; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittendon, 2011; Scott, 2010 & 2011; Scott & Halligan, 2010; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Evidence from this research study validated that the same transformation has been taking place between some school administrators and their stakeholders. The school principals and superintendents in this study have been engaging the employees, students, parents, and community members in their school buildings and school districts to more fully and effectively meet the needs of the stakeholders.
Connections

Eleven of the school principals expressed stronger connections to stakeholders, a sense of connectedness to the profession and to noted figures in the field of education, and richer relationships with stakeholders as a result of social media use. West Principal 3 observed an increase in parent participation in school as a result of his social media use. He stated, “…about 50 percent of our kids have free lunch, and so parent involvement has always been a little bit sparse, but I've seen an increase, especially this year.” South Principal 3 said “I also feel a stronger connection with education as a profession.” Northeast Principal 2 stated that a direct benefit of his social media use has been the “deepening of the relationships that exist between all stakeholders here.”

Seven of the 12 superintendents shared similar comments regarding the increase in their connections. South Superintendent 3 described his blog posts and tweets as “more of an icebreaker” between him and his staff, which resulted in a stronger sense of connection between them. Other superintendents noted an increase in the informal communication that was taking place. After reading one of his blogs posts, stakeholders in Midwest Superintendent 1’s school district were likely to see him at a school activity and want to talk with him about it. When asked about the levels of informal communication he was seeing, West Superintendent 2 said, “Well, it actually increases that communication.”

In the past, access to noted figures in the field of education was limited. School principals and superintendents might have had the chance to see someone like Diane Ravitch or Todd Whitaker deliver a keynote address at a state, regional, or national conference. Opportunities to interact with the noted figure would have been limited to a brief encounter or an exchange of an email or two. The abundance of social media interactions now has
made it possible for school principals and superintendents from rural, suburban, and urban districts to engage in conversations with noted figures through educational chats on Twitter or through blog posts. Participants in this research study took part in group discussions as well as one-on-one dialogues. South Principal 3 affirmed, “That kind of connection, again, wasn’t possible before social media came along.”

The authentic two-way communication broadened the perspectives of some of the participants and enhanced the professional practice of others. South Principal 1 remarked how important it was to him to “have people like Bill Ferriter or Will Richardson or Jonathan Martin or Lynn Hilt or David Jakes comment back and stretch my thinking.” The two-way communication also served to level the playing field so that educators and administrators could strengthen their practice regardless of the school setting in which they served. This effect also tied in to the emergent theme of impact.

**Impact**

Identical to the numbers from the previous theme, 11 school principals shared examples of the impact that social media tools have had on them. The largest effect came in the area of Personal Learning Networks. Fame was also a component of the theme. Participants from this study have been asked to speak and/or serve as guest bloggers at regional conferences at no cost to them. They have been asked to guest blog for national publications and their schools have received free technology devices to test out with students.

Seven of the school superintendents also shared responses that aligned with this theme. They referenced the powerful impact that a PLN has had on their personal and
professional growth. Two superintendents provided examples of being asked to speak at conferences or to serve as a guest author/blogger for national publications.

As part of his comments on social media use, Northeast Superintendent 2 remarked that school administrators need to have a Professional Learning Network. In his opinion, it was not optional to be connected to a PLN to continue growing as a professional; it was an expectation. Similar to the previous comments about having one's thinking stretched, West Principal 3 valued his PLN for the differing viewpoints to which he was exposed. At times those viewpoints caused him to change his opinion and to wonder why he had not been doing things the other way in the first place.

Being exposed to differing viewpoints and having instant access to the best thinking available on a given topic was a benefit to school principals and superintendents regardless of the setting in which they served. It is likely that school administrators in small, rural districts with a small administrative staff would see the value in being connected to fellow administrators across the country through a PLN. Even in large, urban and suburban districts with multiple principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators, the value in getting perspectives outside of the ones shared across the district’s administrative team was seen by participants.

The highest motivator for creating a PLN was that it suited the exact needs of the individual. Northeast Principal 3 pointed to the ability to focus on specific areas, such as educational leadership and technology, in which he was interested. Midwest Principal 1 had comparable thoughts. He said:

…these ideas of Personal Learning Networks, adult learning theory, motivation theory, all of that stuff ties into what it is that I'm getting satisfaction of every time I
choose the different blogs that I'm going to read, a blog post I'm going to create and share with other people, the different tweets, chat sessions that I'm going to participate in, the various videos that I'm going to upload to YouTube and purposely share with my PLN members. It's completely motivating…if I don’t like it, I leave. If I really like it, I continue…

This differentiation that a PLN afforded to school principals and superintendents far exceeded the old way of receiving professional development. Rather than a “flavor-of-the-month” or “one-size-fits-all” approach that was delivered to an entire staff, professional development by way of blogs and Twitter brought value to the recipient and a higher likelihood of implementation. The professional development available through a PLN might also lead to the school principal or superintendent sharing the new learning from the PLN with his/her staff. Teachers might decide to form their own PLNs, join one collectively, or even take part in educational chat sessions with their administrator like they do in the school district in which South Principal 1 serves. Half of his teachers have actively taken part in the same PLN.

The use of social media tools, specifically blogs and Twitter, by school principals and superintendents has had a clear impact on their personal and professional development. It has provided them with the opportunity to build Personal Learning Networks customized to their individual needs. Social media use also has brought about more transparent interactions with their employees, students, parents, and community members. School principals in this study were twice as likely as superintendents to have their own PLN to enhance their personal and professional growth. Similarly, superintendents were twice as likely as school
principals to comment on the impact that social media has had in helping them be more transparent with stakeholders.

**Transparency**

A strong theme among school superintendents who took part in this research study was that of *transparency*. Nine of the 12 superintendents referenced it along with four school principals. Peter Gorman, former Superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) Schools and not one of the participants in this research study, conceded that it was tough to be transparent (Carr, 2006b). Although transparency can be a challenge for a school administrator, nonetheless it was seen as a valuable byproduct of social media communication by the leaders interviewed for this study.

Increased transparency was one of the benefits of using social media that Ferriter, Ramsden & Sheninger (2011) identified in their book *Communicating & Connecting with Social Media*. Transparency also was one of the three key strategies of effective communication mentioned by Carr (2011d). Bagin (2010b) observed that secrecy, rumors, and mistrust can develop if school administrators do not effectively communicate with their stakeholders.

Northeast Superintendent 2, who responded succinctly to most of the interview questions, reiterated the importance of transparency: “I think the bottom line is that it (social media) provides better transparency and communication.” Midwest Superintendent 3 stated repeatedly that his stakeholders have said to him several times how much they appreciate all of the transparency he has brought to the district. Drawing attention to which tools had assisted him the most in his communications with parents and community members,
Northeast Superintendent 1 shared, “Twitter and Facebook and the blog really give me an opportunity … to remain transparent to them.”

These school administrators also shared the reasons why they have continued to engage with stakeholders through social media tools. By using social media, the administrators could provide the rationale behind the decisions that were made and could go much more in-depth regarding the decision-making process. They did not have to worry about an editor who would cut their remarks down to fit into a specific space in the newspaper or pare down their interview comments to fit into a specific sound bite parameter for broadcast on radio or television. Blogs, in particular, were solid choices for providing that additional information and transparency to stakeholders since there is no limit on the size of blog posts.

**Expectation**

In this study, 10 of the 12 school principals and seven of the 12 superintendents stated that the use of social media tools had become or soon would become an expectation. The remaining seven participants did not explicitly state it, but responded to the interview questions in a way that indicated it was no longer an option for a school administrator to use social media. This addressed both the question of what the experience had been for the school administrators and why school principals and superintendents were choosing to communicate with their stakeholders in this fashion.

Several powerful comments were articulated during the interviews for this research study and were presented in Chapter 4 as part of the findings. Due to the importance of their statements, selected sentences from those larger quotes are presented as part of this
discussion section. South Principal 1, who serves in a rural school district said, “I believe that social media as a communications tool will become the new non-negotiable.” Northeast Principal 1, who serves in a large, urban high school said, “It’s educational malpractice not to take advantage of these resources and not only to use them yourself, but to show others how to use them.” South Principal 2, who serves in a suburban school setting, said that it would be “irresponsible as a principal and school leader to not tap into that wisdom and experience and innovative thinking that's happening there.”

Responses from the superintendents were even more to the point. Northeast Superintendent 3, who leads a large, suburban school district said, “It's required today.” A colleague from the same region, Northeast Superintendent 2, posited, “It’s just part and parcel of the expectation today of how you would operate as a district leader.” South Superintendent 3, who serves a rural school district declared, “I can't imagine being an administrator in the 21st century and not doing it.”

The research participants acknowledged that there were two primary concerns that fellow administrators had, which have led them to avoid using social media tools as a communications platform: time and negativity. Six of the principals and three of the superintendents addressed the concerns about time. Two superintendents addressed the issue of negativity.

The common response from participants about the amount of time that social media communication might require dealt with replacement of existing practices. Northeast Principal 3 said, “instead of spending time working on a newsletter or memos or a press release or anything like that, I’m instead allocating time to send out tweets to articles, writing a blog post which happens after school, things like that…” South Principal 2 shared that his
time spent using social media had nearly replaced the time he devoted to traditional forms of communication, perhaps by as much as 90 percent. West Principal 2 stated, “…some people might say it takes a lot of time, but it's only as much time as you're willing to devote to it…” West Superintendent 2 conceded that time could be a barrier, but since he now schedules his blog posts in advance, it is no longer such a problem for him.

The second perceived drawback to using social media has been that the public would go negative and would post nasty things on a school administrator’s blog site, school social networking site, etc. West Superintendent 2 acknowledged that “the only drawback really is the perception that people will attack you.” He rebuffed that concern with this: “Quite frankly, they attack us in the blog section of the newspaper blog. They don’t typically attack me on my blog. I’ve just not really seen much of that at all.” South Superintendent 3 said:

You're going to get comments that you may not like, but that happens anyway, and the truth of the matter is I don’t see that as a real negative, because I would rather get it electronically than (have) people walking around and talking about it at coffee shops. So, even the negatives are positive. At least I know what it is.

Five emergent themes were discussed in this section as they related to the two research questions. Three counter-arguments to the use of social media tools have been presented and addressed. The data from the 24 qualitative interviews conducted with school principals and superintendents from all school settings and across four major regions of the United States and Canada revealed that the school administrators have had positive experiences which have allowed them to grow personally and professionally. The school principals and superintendents have experienced the benefits and have determined that it is no longer optional to use social media tools in their communication with stakeholders.
Limitations

This study was limited to the perceptions of school principals and superintendents who currently use two or more forms of social media to communicate with their stakeholders. All 24 participants stated or implied in their interviews with the researcher that social media use by school administrators is now or will soon be expected. The study did not include the thoughts and perceptions of school principals and superintendents who are only experimenting with social media use, those who have not been able to engage their stakeholders in two-way conversations, or those who have not yet implemented social media as part of a comprehensive communications approach.

Additionally, this research study did not examine how employees, students, parents, or community members perceived the information that was sent via social media from their school administrators, nor did it provide an analysis of who read the blogs, followed the tweets, “liked” a school’s social networking site, listened to the podcasts, or viewed the uploaded videos. Finally, this study did not examine stakeholders’ preferences for receiving school communication via social media tools versus the traditional forms of communication such as printed monthly newsletters, bulletins, and the like.

Implications for Practice

From the perspectives of those administrators who participated in this study, school principals and superintendents who have not yet begun to utilize social media tools in their communication with employees, students, parents, and community members must begin doing so. The data from this study overwhelming revealed the innumerable benefits derived from social media use as a communications tool with stakeholders. Twelve school principals
and 12 superintendents drawn from the Northeast, the South, the Midwest, and the West described the varied ways in which they have used blogs, Twitter, social networking sites, podcasts, and online videos to enhance the two-way communication between the administrator and his/her stakeholders. All 24 concurred that it is no longer optional for school administrators to use these tools to enhance the two-way communication between the school and stakeholders as well as for their own personal and professional development.

Identifying a starting point for a comprehensive communications strategy need not be a source of concern for a school principal or superintendent. Although innumerable social media options do exist, it should not dissuade an administrator from taking action. Based upon the advice and responses from the participants in this study and the existing literature discussed in Chapter 2, the subsequent section proposes a comprehensive communications strategy for school principals and superintendents.

**Implications for School Administrators: a Comprehensive Communications Strategy**

The advice from the participants in this research study to administrators who have not been using social media tools in their professional role was to “jump in” and start using them. The participants acknowledged that there might be fears of not having enough time to learn how to use the tools, not having enough time to devote to two-way communication with stakeholders, or not getting stakeholders to engage with their school’s principal or superintendent through these new avenues.

School principals and superintendents who have not yet embraced social media tools need not cling to those fears. The component pieces to a comprehensive communications
strategy likely are already in place. It starts with reframing the mindset of stakeholder/school communication to see the value in creating two-way conversations with employees, students, parents, and community members. Once that mindset is established, the existing components comprising the communication between stakeholders and the school administrator can be evaluated for transformation into a twenty-first century communications strategy.

**Component 1: Blogs**

Blogs are an easy way to share content with stakeholders. As such, they are the first component of a comprehensive communications strategy. Northeast Superintendent 1 and West Superintendent 2 each recommended that the school administrator seek permission from his supervisor (superintendent or school board) prior to starting a blog. The supervisor or school board may want the blogging administrator to put a disclaimer on the blog stating that it represents the personal views of the blogger and not necessarily the views of the school district.

Websites such as Blogger and WordPress provide individuals with the opportunity to create and publish a blog at no cost. If the school principal or superintendent plans to have multiple members of the administrative team start blogging, there are more advanced options that could be obtained for a fee. Once that decision has been made, content for the blog can be determined.

Most school administrators share information with stakeholders through weekly or monthly newsletters and bulletins. The content from those publications could also be shared through a blog. It takes no additional time to prepare, since it is already being shared in a traditional format. The content could be copied and pasted into a blog post and shared
electronically. The advantage in sharing it through a blog is that stakeholders could easily access it at their convenience (Weil, 2006). This advantage emerged from the interviews in this research study as *interactions*. The participants in this study noted the benefits of being able to convey their messages in a digital fashion.

The content from the newsletters and bulletins written by the school administrators likely reflects their passions and beliefs about education. The literature from Chapter 2 supported this style of writing as important for blog posts (Handley & Chapman, 2011; Schwartz, 2005; Scott, 2010; Teich, 2008; and Weil, 2006). Participants from this research study also shared that they normally select topics about which they are passionate, such as educational reform, when blogging.

The ease of scheduling blog posts also makes them desirable as a component of a comprehensive communications strategy. Blog posts need not be written every day; they can be written at times that are convenient for the school administrator and then scheduled to be posted throughout a week or month. Participants from this study shared that they found it very helpful to be able to devote time on one specific day to do their writing and then schedule the blog posts to appear at regular intervals during the following week or month.

The scheduling feature facilitates the regular appearance of new blog posts. Keeping a regular routine is an important part of attracting and retaining a following (Handley & Chapman, 2011; Schwartz, 2005; Scott, 2010; Teich, 2008; and Weil, 2006). South Superintendent 1, South Superintendent 2, and West Superintendent 1 each shared similar sentiments. West Superintendent 1 stated, “…it will do far more damage if you just dabble in it, put your feet in it, and then say, ‘Aw, this isn't working.’”
Finally, even if two-way conversations are slow to develop between stakeholders and the school administrator, blogs still have been determined to benefit the administrator. In this study, the connections that developed between stakeholders/administrator were one of the emergent themes that surfaced as participants discussed blogging. Increased transparency was a second emergent theme that supported blogging.

**Component 2: Twitter**

Twitter is the second recommended component with which to begin formulating a comprehensive communications strategy. Twitter is relatively easy to use and navigate. There is no cost to sign up and creating an account is easy. A new registrant to Twitter and other social media tools is encouraged to select a username that is consistent and accurately describes the individual or school. This increases the Search Engine Optimization. For example, the author of this research study selected his school’s name and city for his school’s Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube accounts.

Once registered, the first task would be to identify people on Twitter to “follow.” Twitter will show a list of recommendations by clicking on “Who to Follow.” The customer can scroll through the list and click “follow” for whichever people or organizations she desires to follow. A search bar enables the customer to type in specific words or phrases to generate recommendations based upon the choice.

Initially, the school administrator who has just joined Twitter may wish to “Lurk and Learn,” which was the advice from this study’s participants. Observing the content that others post as well as the conversations that develop could benefit the new subscriber as she
learns to navigate this mode of communication. She also could begin tweeting about school events and activities, new blog posts, or brief snippets about classroom visits.

One way to alert stakeholders to the presence of the Twitter account would be to post the latest tweets on the school’s website as well as the Twitter icon. Another suggestion would be to place the Twitter ID on the school administrator’s email signature and letterhead (Hughes, 2010). South Principal 1 has gotten about 85 percent of his parents signed up on Twitter by taking every opportunity he can find to register them and show them how Twitter works. He has conducted informational sessions at Parent/Teacher conferences, Open Houses, and the like. He also has made sure to engage them on Twitter immediately to ensure that they take advantage of the new skills they have learned.

In addition to the two-way communication that Twitter provides, it would allow the school administrator to begin forming a so-called “Personal Learning Network” (PLN) that is individualized to the exact needs of the participant. The importance of a PLN was cited by eight school principals and four superintendents in this research study. The PLN provided connections to the profession and to noted figures in the educational field. Those connections brought about great relational value as well as access to the latest in best practices. Through Twitter, location and tight budgets were no longer barriers as principals and superintendents from rural, suburban, and urban districts could have access to leading experts in the field. The administrators did not have to travel to regional or national conferences to get the access; it was instantly available to them already.

Accessibility was another feature of Twitter that has made it a key component of a comprehensive communications strategy. Stakeholders and school administrators alike could access Twitter from a Smartphone, an iPad, or a laptop. This ease of accessibility could
facilitate greater interactions between and among stakeholders and school administrators as they engage one another in two-way communication about matters affecting the local school or district.

School administrators who have not yet begun to use social media tools in their communications with stakeholders might choose to begin with just the two previous suggestions: Blogs and Twitter. West Superintendent 2 advised that an administrator “start slow” initially. He further stated:

It's not a good time to open up a blog in the middle of the big, negative crisis. The best time to start a blog is when it's quiet, when there isn't a huge burning issue that's tearing up the district because that way you can gently ease into it and not turn into a negative firestorm right off the bat.

For those administrators who have not had much experience with social media tools, starting a blog and learning to navigate Twitter would be sufficient first steps. The administrator likely has the content that could be disseminated through blogs and Twitter. All that remains is to learn how to share it via social media; a manageable task to achieve.

Those administrators who feel comfortable venturing into the realm of blogs and Twitter may wish to consider adding one or more of the remaining three social media tools presented in this research study: social networking sites (e.g Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Ning, and Google+), podcasts, and online video.

Component 3: Social Networking Sites

Facebook now has more than 800 million members worldwide (Facebook, 2011). A school administrator who wanted to go where the stakeholders are would choose to create a
presence on a social networking site such as Facebook. Scott (2010) stated that “strong
social networking ties lead to stronger personal relationships because it is easier to facilitate
face-to-face meetings that never would have occurred otherwise.” Participants from this
research study shared similar findings that emerged under the themes of connections and
interactions. The development of richer relationships and increased informal communication
were attributed to the use of social media tools.

Carr (2010b) recommended several things that school administrators could do to
avoid making social media mistakes on social networking sites such as Facebook; primarily
to set up the official site for the school or district as a fan page. Northeast Superintendent 1
and West Superintendent 2 each encouraged school administrators to monitor what gets
posted to the site to ensure that it is appropriate. A school administrator who does not have
the time or personnel to devote to monitoring the content could also choose one of two
options. First, all comments could have to be approved prior to being posted. Second, the
comment section could be disabled. The obvious downside to that would be the elimination
of two-way conversations between stakeholders and administrators.

Oversight of the social networking site could be delegated to a teacher, an assistant
principal (AP), or a central office administrator. This could free up the school administrator
to focus on the content creation and sharing versus the added responsibility of monitoring the
conversations for appropriateness. Delegation could also assist the teacher, AP, or central
office administrator in further development of leadership skills.

A social networking site could also support the two previous components of a
comprehensive communications strategy. It would be simple to have all tweets posted
directly to the social networking site, which could increase their reach. The same could be
done for each new blog post. Pictures that are tweeted or that appear in blog posts could be posted as part of the social networking site’s photo albums. Since most people love to see pictures of themselves or of their friends and family, pictures from school events, celebrations, and everyday classroom activities could lead to higher traffic at the social networking site and a larger audience for the two-way conversations.

**Components 4 & 5: Podcasts and online video**

Podcasts and online videos were the least utilized tools among the 12 school principals and 12 superintendents from this research study. Their lack of use might be due to any number of factors, including: a general lack of knowledge about podcasts and online videos, the specific hardware needed to record them, or discomfort at the thought of having one’s voice or image recorded and shared. Nonetheless, Scott (2010) noted that with just a Flip camera it would be easy to embed a video into an organization’s website or blog.

Participants from this study who have used them have found podcasts and online video to be helpful. Seven principals and six superintendents have created and uploaded online video to a site such as YouTube or have embedded them into blog posts. One principal and two superintendents have done the same with podcasts. Midwest Principal 3 has created and shared online video messages for members of his local school board periodically. He stated:

They (board members) really liked the personal touch of seeing a video and listening to my voice and the inflexion, because a lot of times when you send out an email or a written memo they don’t catch necessarily all the nuances of what's going on, the emotions of what's going on, and the fire of what's going on if you don’t share it in a
way that they can see or hear you. So, it’s just been a unique way to connect with them as well.

A simple recommendation would be to find audio or video clips of interest that then could be embedded into a blog post or tweet to make it more interactive. Since 24 hours’ worth of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute of every day (Handley & Chapman, 2011), there would be ample material to embed and share with stakeholders. This would not have to occur each time a blog post or tweet was created. A goal might be to embed one podcast or video per month. A school administrator also might consider videotaping a welcome back message at the start of the school year for employees, students, parents, and community members and posting it to the school or district’s website, a practice that West Superintendent 2 has done each year. A simple Flip camera would be all that is needed to record the message.

These five components comprise a manageable comprehensive communications strategy that all school principals and superintendents could follow as a way of increasing their two-way communication with stakeholders. The time required to fulfill the components would minimally exceed the current investment of time into existing forms of traditional communication, such as printed newsletters, bulletins, and articles in the local newspaper. The investment of a little more time for these social media strategies could provide exponential gains for the school administrator in the areas of increased interactions, deeper connections, broadened impact, and enhanced transparency with stakeholders. Inevitably, according to the participants of this research study, the use of social media tools will no longer be optional.
Implications for Boards of Education

Boards of education are encouraged to grant permission to school principals and superintendents who desire to communicate with stakeholders through social media tools. It is understood that they might ask the school official to put a disclaimer on a blog, for example, stating that the content of the blog reflects the personal thoughts and opinions of the school administrator and does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the school board or district. Boards of education are also encouraged to support such use if stakeholders question the need for or the legitimacy of social media communication.

This research study revealed that school principals and superintendents have benefited in four distinct ways as a result of using social media tools. The interactions between the administrators and their stakeholders have increased, including higher levels of informal communication and the ability to instantly communicate important items such as weather-related delays, school cancellations, and safety concerns. The connections between administrators and stakeholders had strengthened, leading to deeper, richer relationships. School administrators reported an impact on their personal growth and professional development, partly due to the varied benefits derived from a Personal (or Professional) Learning Network. Finally, administrators valued the enhanced transparency afforded by social media communications. In addition to sharing more detailed information about decision, school administrators could share the rationale behind the decision and the thought process that led to the decision. Additionally, participants noted that communication via social media tools was no longer optional. It should be considered as a requirement for serving as a school administrator in the twenty-first century.
**Implications for Educational Leadership Preparation Programs**

Coordinators of educational leadership preparation programs should take note of the findings from this research study and begin implementing aspects of social media communication into their programs of study. Participants from this study referred to the use of social media as “nonnegotiable” and “required” for administrators. Prospective school leaders should gain experiences with each of the five identified components of a comprehensive communications strategy prior to taking on their first principalship or superintendency.

Working in concert with an administrative mentor, prospective principals and superintendents should learn how to create an effective and engaging blog post that not only shares important information, but also invites response from the reader. The prospective administrator should learn how to navigate Twitter and establish a Personal Learning Network for continued personal and professional growth. It would be highly likely that the candidate already knows how to post and share content on a social networking site like Facebook. The candidate should gain experience creating and monitoring an organizational page; perhaps for the school or district where the candidate serves. Finally, the prospective principal or superintendent should learn how to create and share information via podcasts and online video. Each of these five components could assist a new school principal or superintendent in more effectively communicating with internal and external stakeholders. The art and science of effectively doing just that could lead to higher levels of success and satisfaction for both the administrator and the stakeholders involved.
Implications for the Great Plains Independent School District

The importance of effective communication with parents, staff, and the media was shared in Chapter 2. Examples were provided of the positive impact that effective communication can have on stakeholders and the potential negative effects when there is a lack of communication (Bagin, 2010b; NAESP, 2000). Among the memorable quotes from the literature was this: “Remember to go in-house before you go out-house” (Carr, 2011d; NAESP, 2000).

The emergent themes from this research study were presented in Chapter 4. Of the findings from the data and the interviews, three of the emergent themes might have assisted central office administrators in the Great Plains ISD during the implementation of the major change initiatives referenced in Chapter 1: interactions, connections, and transparency.

The stakeholder reaction to the major changes made to the standardized dress code, the mathematics curriculum, and the instrumental music program might have been different had there been a comprehensive communications strategy in place prior to the changes. A blog written by the superintendent or one of the associate superintendents, for example, might have led to increased transparency with all stakeholders as all stakeholders would have been able to access the information about the changes as well as the rationale behind the decision. Armed with all of the information ahead of time, stakeholders might have better understood the need for the change and supported it. Even if some stakeholders still did not support the decisions, their opposition might have been lessened.

Blogs written by the two curriculum coordinators and by building principals might have lessened the opposition to the Connected Mathematics 2 Program by transparently providing the background information about why it was selected as well as testimonials from
teachers and students regarding its implementation in the local schools. Embedded videos and podcasts also might have helped allay parental concerns and foster stronger connections between parents and school officials. Social networking sites at each of the respective buildings as well as tweets from teachers, building administrators, and central office administrators might have been another avenue through which to strengthen the interactions and connections with stakeholders and minimize concerns.

The lessons learned from the major change initiatives could apply to any school principal or superintendent who is considering making substantial changes to existing programs. As citizens and school administrators alike prepare for far-reaching changes put forth by governors and Directors of State Departments of Education, it is recommended that effective two-way communication take place via social media tools to ensure that energy can be spent on implementation of the changes rather than correcting misinformation.

**Implications for Theory**

Social Customer Relationship Management served as the framework for this qualitative study. Greenberg (2010) defined Social CRM, or CRM 2.0, as follows:

CRM 2.0 is a philosophy & a business strategy, supported by a technology platform, business rules, processes and social characteristics, designed to engage the customer in a collaborative conversation in order to provide mutually beneficial value in a trusted & transparent business environment. It’s the company’s response to the customer’s ownership of the conversation (p. 413).

Findings from this study indicated that CRM 2.0 also applies to the field of education. As such, a more inclusive definition of Social CRM is proposed:
Social CRM is an organizational strategy designed to engage a customer or stakeholder through social media in a collaborative conversation that promotes transparency, trust, and a stronger connection to the organization.

Responses from the school principals and superintendents in this study clearly revealed that an expanded understanding of Social CRM has application to the interactions taking place between school administrators and the employees, students, parents, and community members in their respective schools and districts. The theoretical implications beyond the business sector need to be explored even further.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings from this qualitative multiple-case study suggested several areas for potential future research. The first section addresses additional qualitative studies that could be conducted. The second section suggests additional quantitative studies that could be conducted. The final section suggests areas of research based upon the perspective of the stakeholder groups.

**Qualitative Studies**

Three additional qualitative studies are recommended. First would be an analysis of the results of in-depth interviews with 12 school principals and 12 superintendents who rely strictly on traditional forms of communication with stakeholders compared to the results of this study. A comparison study between the data from these two groups and the ones from this research study could further validate the specific impact that social media communication has on the school administrators and their stakeholders.
Second, a qualitative study focused on the impact that a Personal Learning Network has on a school principal’s or superintendent’s own professional development is suggested. The phenomenon of a PLN could have significant impact upon professional development for school administrators as well as teachers. A qualitative study of the PLN impact could provide valuable incentive for school administrators to embrace blogs and Twitter as a means for continued personal and professional growth. The data could also assist coordinators of educational leadership preparation programs as they redesign and enhance their programs for the twenty-first century.

Third, a qualitative study of the perceived transparency of superintendents who use social media tools versus those who do not. Superintendents in this research study were twice as likely to report the benefit of transparency. Given the increasing scrutiny that superintendents face as enrollments and budgets shrink, a study focused on transparency could prove very beneficial.

Finally, a qualitative study of the ways that school administrators use social media tools to market and brand their schools or districts to prospective families is suggested. Ferriter, Ramsden & Sheninger (2011) included several tips about how to use Twitter to build a school’s brand. Three principals and two superintendents from this study discussed the potential to use social media to enhance their school or district’s brand. Little research exists that substantiates that impact.

**Quantitative Studies**

In addition to the qualitative studies previously mentioned, four additional areas for suggested research are proposed. First, a study of school administrators who use social
media tools in their personal life but do not use it in their professional life. It could be of interest to learn why the administrators have chosen to communicate with friends and family via social media, but do not embrace that communication with stakeholders.

Next, a quantitative analysis is proposed of the Twitter followers of the 12 school principals and 12 superintendents from this study. It could be very valuable to determine the percentage of followers who are stakeholders versus the percentage who are fellow administrators or non-stakeholders. An analysis of this nature could verify that Twitter is a valid means by which to communicate with stakeholders. Likewise, it could also be revealed that the majority of followers for these 24 participants are other school administrators, vendors, and similar non-stakeholders. If that were true it might negate Twitter as a true communication tool with stakeholders, but would not diminish its value related to Personal Learning Networks.

Third, a similar quantitative analysis of the percentage of stakeholders versus non-stakeholders who visit the school administrator’s blog site is proposed. Tools such as Google Analytics could make such a study feasible. The results could be of interest to the respective participants from this study as well as their boards of education. The results could also validate the usefulness of blogs as a communications tool with stakeholders.

Finally, a national study of school principals and superintendents is suggested regarding the frequency with which they communicate with stakeholders through blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, podcasts, and online videos. This proposed study would extend the scope of the present study. The results could validate the findings of the present study. They could also assist with identification of future prospective interview subjects for replication of this study.
Stakeholder Perspective

The viewpoint of the stakeholder also provides several areas for potential research. Three topics are suggested for exploration. The first is a comparative, qualitative study of the connections that stakeholders feel to the 12 school principals and 12 superintendents in this study who use social media versus 12 school principals and 12 superintendents who do not. The present research study provided the perspectives of school principals and superintendents. It would be valuable to understand the connection that school employees, students, parents, and community members feel to their principal and superintendent to validate or dispel that emergent theme.

Second, a similar qualitative study is proposed of the perceived transparency of school principals and superintendents from this study versus a similar group that does not use social media with stakeholders. Once more, it would be valuable to understand the perceptions of transparency that school employees, students, parents, and community members feel about their principal and superintendent to either validate or dispel that emergent theme.

Finally, a qualitative or quantitative study of stakeholder groups is proposed to identify their preferred method of receiving information from the principal and/or superintendent. The existing literature and data from this study supported the notion that communication with stakeholders via social media is a valuable activity. It would be important to get the perspectives of the differing stakeholder groups to verify that they indeed prefer digital versus traditional formats.
Conclusion

“I'm glad you're doing the study,” declared Northeast Superintendent 3 as she finished her interview. “I think it's an important study just to call attention to the topic. Sometimes we can be a bit of a Luddite in these jobs, so it's good to have people spark our thinking.” That certainly was one of the goals of this research study: to spark some thinking. Unlike the Luddites of two centuries ago, school administrators can ill afford to ban social media or turn their backs on this important communication tool.

In the business world, corporate and nonprofit employees have had to embrace social media tools to stay competitive and meet the demands of the marketplace. The education world moves much more slowly regarding change initiatives, perhaps due to the relative lack of competition. As information and technology continue to make rapid advances and as the ability to access and share information instantly with others becomes even more prevalent, school principals and superintendents will have to adapt their practices to include social media tools. It will no longer be an option.

The results of this study revealed numerous findings that could encourage a school principal or superintendent to begin using social media in their professional role. Blogs, Twitter, social networking sites, podcasts, and online videos were found to be effective communication tools with which to engage stakeholders in two-way conversations. They also enhanced the professional development of the user, which could lead to greater interactions with stakeholders. Social media use was found to provide greater transparency regarding the decision-making process. They also could lead to stronger connections to stakeholders and beyond. We have reached the point where they are no longer an option. It is expected in order to be an effective, twenty-first century school leader.
APPENDIX A. UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU REGIONS
APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study:  How the new rules of marketing and public relations are changing the way that school administrators communicate with stakeholders

Investigator:  Dan Cox, doctoral candidate at Iowa State University

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how social media tools are changing the way that schools communicate with stakeholders. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your active use of blogs, Twitter, and other social media tools to communicate with your school’s stakeholders and leaders in education in general.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will consist of this interview and a possible follow-up interview. The interview will last between 30-45 minutes. If necessary, the follow-up will not last longer than 30 minutes. The interviews will be transcribed by a third-party service and you will be given a copy of the transcript for your review. This will be delivered via email or through the postal system. After that, your participation will be over. When the dissertation research concludes, you will be provided with a written copy of the findings from the study.

RISKS

There are no known or foreseeable risks for participation in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be a direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will add to the body of knowledge about how social media tools can be used by school officials as part of an overall effective communications practice.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study other than the time you spend during the interview and reviewing the interview transcript. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.
PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or stop participating in the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or detrimentally affect your relationship with the researcher or Iowa State University.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed but you will be identified in the transcripts and on tape with a pseudonym.
2. The data will be stored on a password-protected computer in a locked room at all times.
3. The data only will be kept until the completion and publication of the study. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. In publications related to this study, your school district and all participants will be referred to by their pseudonyms.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, contact primary investigator Dan Cox at (319) 215-2479 or Dr. Scott McLeod at (707) 722-7853.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

***************************************************************************
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ____________________________________________

___________________________________________   ________________________
(Participant’s Signature)                      (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of his/her questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

___________________________________________   ________________________
(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)                      (Date)
APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (ORIGINAL)

Hello (_name__). Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I know you have a busy schedule and I really appreciate your willingness to take part in this project.

As stated in a previous email, I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University conducting a study on the ways that schools are using social media tools to communicate with stakeholders. Today I hope to get your insights about the ways that you are using blogs, Twitter, social networking sites, podcasts, and online video to reach the community members, employees, parents, and students in your school or school district. As a result of this research study I hope to put together a social media strategy for school administrators who are unsure of how or where to begin with these tools.

Any information you share will not be attributed to you or used to identify you or anyone else. You will remain anonymous in any ensuing presentations or publications that may stem from this study. As a result of your participation, there should be no risks for you personally. Your participation is strictly voluntary and may be discontinued at any time during the interview. You may also decline to answer any question during this interview.

For ease of note taking, getting all of your input, and not slowing down the interview, I would like to use a third-party source to record our conversation. The recording made today will be kept confidential and in a safe place. This audio recording will only be heard by me and the company that provides the transcript. It will be kept in a secure location and destroyed when the study is complete. If at any time you would prefer that we end our conversation, please let me know and we will do so immediately.

Do I have your permission to record our discussion?

Will you agree to participate by signing the Informed Consent document?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Introductory Questions
1. How long have you served in your current administrative role?
2. How long have you been a school administrator overall?
Interview Questions

3. How has the way that you communicate with stakeholders (community members, employees, parents, and students) changed over the past 5 years?

4. Which social media tools are you currently using in your role as a school administrator?
   a. How long have you used them?
   b. How frequently?

5. What factors caused you to start using social media as a school administrator?

6. Who was your initial “audience” and how has that changed during the time you have been using social media as a school administrator?

7. Which topics do you typically communicate to stakeholders through social media and how often do they respond?

8. On average, how much time per day or week do you spend communicating with stakeholders through social media?

9. What have been the direct and indirect benefits of your social media communications as a school administrator?

10. What have been the drawbacks?

11. What advice would you give to a school administrator who is thinking about using social media tools with stakeholders as part of a communications strategy?

Conclusion

1. Is there anything I did not ask that you wanted to share?

Thank you so much for taking part in this interview. I appreciate your time and insights. After I have reviewed the transcript of our conversation, may I contact you if I have additional follow-up questions? If you have any further questions, please contact me at any time. A written transcript of this interview will be made available to you. As a reminder, this information will remain confidential and will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Do you have any final comments or questions?

Thanks again.
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (REVISED)

Hello (name). Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I know you have a busy schedule and I really appreciate your willingness to take part in this project.

Today I hope to get your insights about the ways that you are using social media tools to reach stakeholders in your school or school district.

For ease of note taking and not slowing down the interview, I am using a third-party source to record our conversation. If at any time you would prefer that we end our conversation, please let me know and we will do so immediately.

**Do I have your permission to record our discussion?**

**Will you agree to participate by signing the Informed Consent document?**

**Do you have any questions before we begin?**

**Introductory Questions**

1. How long have you served in your current administrative role?
2. How long have you been a school administrator overall?

**Interview Questions**

3. How has the way that you communicate with stakeholders (community members, employees, parents, and students) changed over the past 5 years?

4. Which social media tools are you currently using in your role as a school administrator?
   b. How long have you used them?
   c. How frequently?

5. What factors caused you to start using social media as a school administrator?
   a. Admin conference? Stakeholder request?
6. Who was your initial “audience” and how has that changed during the time you have been using social media as a school administrator?
   a. Parents? Students? Staff? Media? Prospective families?
   b. More frequent? Less frequent?

7. Which topics do you typically communicate to stakeholders through social media and how often do they respond?

8. On average, how much time per day or week do you spend communicating with stakeholders through social media?

9. What have been the direct and indirect benefits of your social media communications as a school administrator?

10. What have been the drawbacks?
    a. Time? No access for all? Limited dialogue?

11. What advice would you give to a school administrator who is thinking about using social media tools with stakeholders as part of a communications strategy?

Conclusion
1. Is there anything I did not ask that you wanted to share?

Thank you so much for taking part in this interview. I appreciate your time and insights. After I have reviewed the transcript of our conversation, may I contact you if I have additional follow-up questions?

Thanks again.
APPENDIX E. INITIAL EMAIL TO PRINCIPALS

January 2, 2012

Dear _____:

My name is Dan Cox and I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University working on my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Scott McLeod (now at the University of Kentucky). I am studying the ways in which school principals and superintendents use social media to communicate with parents, students, staff, and community members. I noticed that you are a contributor to the Connected Principals blog. Since you actively use social media tools in your role as a school administrator, I am particularly interested in learning more about your experiences.

Would you be willing to take part in a telephone interview of approximately 30 minutes to share your thoughts and experiences? Your identity and school will be kept confidential and the findings may encourage other school administrators to start using social media in their communication with stakeholders.

I would like to conduct the interview by Sunday, January 22, 2012. If you are willing to contribute to this study, please contact me by January 6 to arrange a day and time that is convenient for you.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Dan Cox, Principal
APPENDIX F. INITIAL EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS

January 2, 2012

Dear _____:

My name is Dan Cox and I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University working on my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Scott McLeod (now at the University of Kentucky). I am studying the ways in which school principals and superintendents use social media to communicate with parents, students, staff, and community members. I located your name through either the CASTLE or AASA blog sites. Since you actively use social media tools in your role as a school administrator, I am particularly interested in learning more about your experiences.

Would you be willing to take part in a telephone interview of approximately 30 minutes to share your thoughts and experiences? Your identity and school will be kept confidential and the findings may encourage other school administrators to start using social media in their communication with stakeholders.

I would like to conduct the interview by Sunday, January 22, 2012. If you are willing to contribute to this study, please contact me by January 6 to arrange a day and time that is convenient for you.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Dan Cox, Principal
APPENDIX G. FOLLOW-UP EMAIL TO PRINCIPALS

January 7, 2012

Dear _____:

As a middle school principal I know how busy you are, especially as students and staff are returning after winter break. Earlier in the week I emailed you about a research study that I am completing as part of my dissertation at Iowa State University under the direction of Dr. Scott McLeod. I am studying the ways in which school principals and superintendents use social media to communicate with parents, students, staff, and community members. Since you actively use social media tools in your role as a school principal, I am particularly interested in learning more about your experiences.

I have had 5 great conversations this week with 3 of your Connected Principals colleagues and 2 social media savvy superintendents. Our talks have averaged right at 30 minutes. Would you be willing to take part in a telephone interview to share your thoughts and experiences? Your identity and school will be kept confidential and the findings may encourage other school administrators to start using social media in their communication with stakeholders.

I hope to finish all interviews by Sunday, January 22, 2012. If you are willing to contribute to this study, please contact me by January 9 to arrange a week day or weekend time that is convenient for you.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Dan Cox, Principal
APPENDIX H. FOLLOW-UP EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS

January 7, 2012

Dear _____:

As a middle school administrator I can only imagine how busy you are, especially as students and staff are returning after winter break. Earlier in the week I emailed you about a research study that I am completing as part of my dissertation at Iowa State University under the direction of Dr. Scott McLeod. I am studying the ways in which school principals and superintendents use social media to communicate with parents, students, staff, and community members. Since you actively use social media tools in your role as a school superintendent, I am particularly interested in learning more about your experiences.

I have had 5 great conversations this week with 2 social media savvy superintendents and 3 members of the Connected Principals group. Our talks have averaged right at 30 minutes. Would you be willing to take part in a telephone interview to share your thoughts and experiences? Your identity and school will be kept confidential and the findings may encourage other school administrators to start using social media in their communication with stakeholders.

I hope to finish all interviews by Sunday, January 22, 2012. If you are willing to contribute to this study, please contact me by January 9 to arrange a week day or weekend time that is convenient for you.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Dan Cox, Principal
**APPENDIX I. PRINCIPAL RESPONSES**

### SECOND ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactive</th>
<th>Colleagues, connections, &amp; curiosity</th>
<th>Local stakeholders</th>
<th>A global audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### FIRST ITERATION

| Everyone can take part. Comprehensive. | Impacted by article, conference, and desire to connect | Stakeholders | The world. |

### INTERVIEW QUESTION ANSWERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IQ3 5 YEARS (RQ2)</th>
<th>IQ5 FACTORS (RQ2)</th>
<th>IQ6A INITIAL AUD. (RQ2)</th>
<th>IQ6B NOW (RQ2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE-P2</td>
<td>All the tools have evolved. Powerful communication tool with families.</td>
<td>Student access to world. Authentic tool. Connections.</td>
<td>Immediately community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P3</td>
<td>Dramatic. From 1-way to 2-way. Real-time posting, sharing, conversations.</td>
<td>Initially opposed. Read an article in local paper on Twitter.</td>
<td>Immediate SKT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P1</td>
<td>2-way conversations. Everyone can be part. Collaboration.</td>
<td>Read an article.</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-1</td>
<td>Old-fashioned, with some SMT. Trying to get them to use SMT.</td>
<td>Futurist. Desire to teach digital citizenship to students. Connect w/educators.</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-2</td>
<td>Less email. More SMT. Trying to be more interactive.</td>
<td>Bond election. To connect with S.</td>
<td>Parents. Community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-3</td>
<td>No newsletter. No email. Passive communication.</td>
<td>It was there. Colleague showed him.</td>
<td>Staff and school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-1</td>
<td>Huge. From 1-way to 2-way. SMT use. Conversations are ongoing, not events. Everyone can be part.</td>
<td>To get info to P quickly</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-2</td>
<td>Dramatically. Using SMT at clientele request.</td>
<td>Conference in Chicago.</td>
<td>Educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-P-3</td>
<td>Shifting to SMT. Parents want electronic, not print.</td>
<td>For own PD</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>THIRD ITERATION</td>
<td>SECOND ITERATION</td>
<td>FIRST ITERATION</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Varied</td>
<td>Significance/Influence/Impact.</td>
<td>Connections &amp; Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines/Reform</td>
<td>Varied/Informal Relationships.</td>
<td>Own PD/PLN. Connectedness.</td>
<td>Personal and professional perks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ7A TOPICS</td>
<td>IQ7B RESPONSES</td>
<td>IQ9 DIRECT</td>
<td>IQ9 INDIRECT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RQ1)</td>
<td>(RQ1)</td>
<td>(RQ2)</td>
<td>(RQ2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-2</td>
<td>School. All topics.</td>
<td>Varies.</td>
<td>Richer relationships. Deeper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-3</td>
<td>SO-P-3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Announcements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Networking.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Celebrations.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Connectedness.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Awards.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transparency. PLN.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Retweets.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fame.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emails.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Better feel for where kids are.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Networking.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ravitch.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connectedness.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weingarten.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transparency. PLN.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Whitaker.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MW-P-1</th>
<th>MW-P-2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ed reform.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Announcements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low.</strong></td>
<td><strong>School. Educ.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Picking up.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Informal comm.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connectedness.</strong></td>
<td><strong>TW: daily</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Own PLN/PD.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Professional opps.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff realize no reason to fear SMT.</strong></td>
<td><strong>PLN.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Connections.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>PhD studies.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Connections to Ravitch, etc.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Future job offer?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>To profession: connections.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Own credibility to parents.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Access to Students.</strong></td>
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<th>MW-P-3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academics.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Successes.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informal comm.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blog: not as often. Email.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clearer vision.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Own PLN.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community connectedness.</strong></td>
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<th>WE-P-1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academics.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Athletics.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Events.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“likes”</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent engagement.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent satisfaction.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Own PD.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gives school a pos. presence.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connectedness.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>WE-P-2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Educ. Ed Reform.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Varies.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informal.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Own PD.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Connections.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learn to share.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PR reach.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connectedness.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent involvement</strong></td>
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<th>WE-P-3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School ldrshp.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>At-risk kids.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facebook: yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immediacy of comm. PLN.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent involvement</strong></td>
</tr>
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### THIRD ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time &amp; Access</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
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### SECOND ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived vs. real drawbacks</th>
<th>Jump in! Define your presence.</th>
<th>It’s not really an option.</th>
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### FIRST ITERATION

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### IQ10 DRAWBACKS (RQ1)  | IQ11 ADVICE (RQ2)  | CONCLUSION |
<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-1  None if you manage time wisely.</td>
<td>Pick one. Educational malpractice not to use SMT.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-P-3  Perception he spends too much time on SMT. Be careful of what you say.</td>
<td>Read “Communicating &amp; Connecting With Social Media”. “Lurk &amp; Learn”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-1  IT issues. Access?</td>
<td>Use it. Don’t be afraid.</td>
<td>It’s non-negotiable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-P-3  Access. Managing all the info. Recognizing the need to unplug.</td>
<td>Think carefully before posting. Use blended comm. approach.</td>
<td>Must tap into blogosphere. Irresponsible not to. Don’t post about beer on school account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-1  Access. Family competes for his time. Colleagues don’t understand SM need.</td>
<td>Don’t be afraid. Embrace it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-P-2  Colleague skepticism.</td>
<td>Jump in with both feet.</td>
<td>This study is important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MW-P-3  Access maybe. Ability to communicate w/STK via SMT is important. Must be a leader in communication. Important to shape social media presence.


WE-P-2  Need to be a critical consumer. No access issue. Jump in. Share well. Speak well. Define your SM presence or have it done for you.

WE-P-3  SMT opportunities. Jump in. Try it out. Model the use of it.

RQ1 – What are the experiences? Initial themes:

- A big shift from print to digital communications (DIGITAL)
- 2-way vs. 1-way. Conversations are ongoing, not events. (INTERACTIONS/DIALOGUE)
- Easy way to share school items, announcements, etc. (INTERACTIONS)
- Perceived vs. real drawbacks (TIME & ACCESS)

RQ2 – Why are administrators using social media tools (SMT)?

- Impactful experiences and personal growth (CONNECTIONS)
- Importance of own PD/PLN (IMPACT)
- Use of SMT has brought about more than ever thought possible (IMPACT)
- Colleagues, connections, & curiosity got them hooked (CONNECTIONS)
- Audience has shifted from local stakeholders to the world (CONNECTIONS)
- Personal & professional perks (CONNECTIONS/IMPACT)
- Jump in! Define your presence. It’s really not an option. (EXPECTATION)
Themes:

1. **Interactions** (shift to digital communications, real-time discussions, ongoing conversations)
2. **Connections** (connection to what’s going on with students, access to “big” names, own PLN, “humanizing” effect; deeper, richer relationships; own PLN; informal communication, connected to education profession)
4. **Expectation** (Jump in! Define your presence. It’s really not an option.)

Propositions & Themes:

1. Social media tools allow for greater **interactions** between school administrators and their stakeholders.
   a. Transition to social media tool use
   b. 2-way conversations
   c. More frequent
2. Social media tools provide stronger **connections** to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world.
   a. Connections to “big names”
   b. Connectedness to students, staff, community, and profession
   c. Relationship quality and quantity improves
3. Social media use can have a significant **impact** on one’s own personal and professional growth.
   a. Own PD/PLN
   b. Confidence and image
   c. Be more transparent
   d. Fame, invitations to conferences, invitations to write for major publications
4. Social media use is an **expectation**; it’s no longer optional.
   a. Jump in!
   b. Not an option any more
# APPENDIX J. SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSES

## THIRD ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digital Interactions</th>
<th>Multi-modal</th>
<th>Lead by example</th>
<th>Globally: like me vs. Local stakeholders</th>
<th>Far-reaching audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## SECOND ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement from print to digital</th>
<th>Multi-modal</th>
<th>Lead by example</th>
<th>Globally: like me vs. Local stakeholders</th>
<th>Far-reaching audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## FIRST ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IQ3 5 YEARS (RQ2)</th>
<th>IQ4 SM TOOLS (RQ1)</th>
<th>IQ5 FACTORS (RQ2)</th>
<th>IQ6A INITIAL (RQ2)</th>
<th>IQ6B NOW (RQ2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE-S-1 Traditional comm and SMT</td>
<td>Twitter (TW). Facebook (FB). Blogs (BL).</td>
<td>Transparent. Reach all. Control the message.</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>All STK. Local media. Prospective Families (PF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-S-2 Onslaught of SMT</td>
<td>TW. FB. BL. LinkedIn (LI). YouTube (YT).</td>
<td>Personal and professional growth</td>
<td>Other like-minded educators</td>
<td>All STK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-S-3 SMT. Better websites. Community member (CM) expectations.</td>
<td>TW. BL.</td>
<td>Colleague rec.</td>
<td>Own CM. Other like-minded educ.</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-1 Use of Blogger. Accountability.</td>
<td>BL. Online Video (OV) &amp; podcasts in blogs.</td>
<td>Model for T. Visibility.</td>
<td>School district. School board</td>
<td>All over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-2 Trad comm &amp; SMT</td>
<td>BL. FB.</td>
<td>Inform the message</td>
<td>Community members (CM)</td>
<td>Some neighboring admins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-3 More digital. Less paper.</td>
<td>TW. BL.</td>
<td>Better than trad media. Colleague rec.</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>All over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-S-1</td>
<td>Dramatically. Now SMT.</td>
<td>BL. TW. FB.</td>
<td>Saw need. State reports.</td>
<td>Other like-minded educators CM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-S-2</td>
<td>Less paper</td>
<td>BL. TW. YT.</td>
<td>Tech conf. Colleague rec.</td>
<td>CM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-S-3</td>
<td>Increased comm.</td>
<td>BL. TW.</td>
<td>Join the conversation. Message to CM.</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-S-1</td>
<td>Online presence</td>
<td>BL. FB. TW.</td>
<td>Model for STF. Replace trad com.</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-S-2</td>
<td>More electronic. Hard to stay ahead of traditional media.</td>
<td>BL. TW. OV.</td>
<td><em>How blogging has transformed our world</em> (Hewitt)</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-S-3</td>
<td>Almost exclusively digital. More communication.</td>
<td>BL. TW. FB. YT.</td>
<td>Pers use first. Model for STF.</td>
<td>Other like-minded educators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### THIRD ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediacy of interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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### SECOND ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Increase in informal comm.</th>
<th>Connected &amp; Transparent. PLN Opportunities.</th>
<th>Approachability and Presence.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local interest (budgets, weather delays/cancellations, celebrations) vs. Change Agenda</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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### FIRST ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IQ7A TOPICS (RQ1)</th>
<th>IQ7B RESPONSES (RQ1)</th>
<th>IQ8 TIME (RQ1)</th>
<th>IQ9 DIRECT (RQ2)</th>
<th>IQ9 INDIRECT (RQ2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE-S-3</td>
<td>Educ Pol. Budget. Change agenda.</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>1 hr/day</td>
<td>Ease of comm. PLN. Own PD. Efficiency of communication</td>
<td>Greater presence in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-3</td>
<td>Educ Pol. Athletics. Academics.</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>&gt;1 hr/day</td>
<td>Transparency. Teachers more connected to him.</td>
<td>Own PD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-S-1</td>
<td>Control the message</td>
<td>Non-stop.</td>
<td>Informal.</td>
<td>3-4 hrs/wk</td>
<td>Make world smaller. Fame. Connections. Share w/CM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-S-2</td>
<td>Educ Pol. CM questions.</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>20-30 min/day</td>
<td>Immediacy of comm. Ability to go in-depth</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
THIRD ITERATION

SECOND ITERATION

FIRST ITERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IQ10 DRAWBACKS (RQ1)</th>
<th>IQ11 ADVICE (RQ2)</th>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE-S-2 Managing info.</td>
<td>Admins need a PLN. Expectation to use SMT.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STK dependence on instant info.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE-S-3 None</td>
<td>It’s required. Jump in. Remember role.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-1 Occasional complaints. Access.</td>
<td>Stay current w/entries.</td>
<td>Future need to use SMT w/STK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO-S-3 Negative comments. Time.</td>
<td>Start! It’s required. Don’t post if mad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW-S-2 No SM policy in place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-S-1 None</td>
<td>Be committed.</td>
<td>Opportunities to communicate via SMT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-S-2 Perception that STK will attack</td>
<td>Get approval. Use disclaimer. Start slow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE-S-3 SM “presence”/”look at me”. Colleague skepticism.</td>
<td>Less of an option. Direct connection to STK. Transparency. Need to tell the school’s story.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ1 – What are the experiences: Initial conclusions

- Although stakeholders (STK) may not reply via social media tools (SMT), the level of informal communication increases. (CONNECTIONS)
- SMT topics: change agenda, Ed Reform, celebrations, classroom activities, snow day, budget (IMMEDIACY)
- Will STK attack? (Reality: they already do at coffee shop, laundromat, newspaper blog) (IMPACT)

RQ2 – Why are administrators using SMT: Initial conclusions

- There has been a shift from print to digital communication with stakeholders. (IMMEDIACY)
- The superintendent needs to lead by example. (IMPACT)
- Although the audience may have started locally, it is now far-reaching (CONNECTIONS)
- SMT allow for a sense of connectedness and humanization. (CONNECTIONS)
- SMT allow for greater transparency (TRANSPARENCY)
- SMT allow control of the message and immediacy (IMPACT & IMMEDIACY)
- Jump in! SMT use is no longer an option for educational leaders. (EXPECTATION)

Themes:

1. **Immediacy of interactions** (shift from trad comm to instant access to info, response to events, safety, weather-related)
2. **Connections** (informal communication, approachability, connections to staff & community, own PLN)
3. **Impact** (Ed reform conversations, control the message, own PD, local to world)
4. **Transparency** (thought process behind decisions, budget info, ability to go in-depth)
5. **Expectation** (Jump in! Expected for educational leaders)
6. **Multi-Modal** (use of at least two forms of social media to convey messages)

Propositions & Themes

1. Social media tools allow for more immediate and more frequent **interactions** with stakeholders
   a. Shift to digital
   b. Weather delays/cancellations
   c. Safety concerns
   d. Response to events
2. Social media tools provide stronger **connections** to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world.
   a. Connections to “big names”
   b. Connectedness to students, staff, community, and profession
c. Relationship quality and quantity improves

3. Social media use can have a significant **impact** on one’s own personal and professional growth.
   a. Own PD/PLN
   b. Confidence and image
   c. Be more transparent
   d. Fame, invitations to conferences, invitations to write for major publications

4. Social media tools allow for greater levels of **transparency** with stakeholders
   a. Thought process behind decisions
   b. Go in-depth on topics vs. 30-second sound bite
   c. Budget information

5. Social media use is an **expectation**; it’s no longer optional.
   a. Jump in!
   b. Not an option any more

6. Social media tools allow stakeholders to access information from the superintendent in a **multi-modal** way.
   a. Send out tweets, write blogs, post thoughts on school social networking site
February 25, 2012

Principals,

Thank you, again, for your participation in my doctoral study regarding the ways that school principals and superintendents use social media to communicate with their stakeholders. I have analyzed the data from the interviews and determined four emergent themes. In keeping with Cresswell's suggestion of member checking, I want to provide you with the opportunity to review the themes and provide feedback regarding their accuracy.

I welcome your responses and/or suggested changes.

Sincerely,

Dan

Four themes emerged from the twelve qualitative interviews with the school principals and from the Internet data regarding their social media use. The four emergent themes include:

1. Social media tools allow for greater interactions between school principals and their stakeholders.

2. Social media tools provide stronger connections to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world.

3. Social media use can have a significant impact on a school principal’s personal and professional growth.

4. Social media use is an expectation; it’s no longer optional.
APPENDIX L. MEMBER CHECK EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS

February 25, 2012

Superintendents,

Thank you, again, for your participation in my doctoral study regarding the ways that school principals and superintendents use social media to communicate with their stakeholders. I have analyzed the data from the interviews and determined six emergent themes. In keeping with Cresswell's suggestion of member checking, I want to provide you with the opportunity to review the themes and provide feedback regarding their accuracy.

I welcome your responses and/or suggested changes.

Sincerely,

Dan

Six themes emerged from the twelve qualitative interviews with the school superintendents and from the Internet data regarding their social media use. The six emergent themes include:

1. Social media tools allow for more immediate and more frequent interactions between school superintendents and their stakeholders.

2. Social media tools provide for greater transparency regarding decision-making and budgeting processes.

3. Social media use can have a significant impact on a school superintendent’s personal and professional growth.

4. Social media tools provide stronger connections to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world.

5. Social media use is an expectation; it’s no longer optional.
6. Social media tools allow stakeholders to access information from the superintendent in a **multi-modal** way.
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