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Exemplary California School District Superintendents Leading the Social Media Charge

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

April 2018

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April 2018

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I am going to leave you all with my favorite Walt Disney quote: *All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.* You have the courage . . . go make it happen!

ABSTRACT

Exemplary California School District Superintendents Leading the Social Media Charge

by Jamie M. Hughes

Purpose: The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to identify the social media tools used and the role of social media when communicating with parents as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents. In addition, the purpose of this study was to describe the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents.

Methodology: A mixed-methods study was applied to identify the social media tools used, the role of social media, and the benefits and challenges of using social media to communicate with parents as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents. An online survey was used to identify the social media tools and role. Face-to-face interviews were used to describe the benefits and challenges of using social media.

Findings: This study revealed that exemplary California school district superintendents strategically use a variety of social media tools when communicating with parents for awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy based on their perception of the importance of the social media tool. In addition, superintendents perceived the role of social media to be used in all four levels of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. The superintendents identified many benefits and some concerns regarding managing parent criticism and inaccurate information being shared on social media.

Conclusions: Superintendents are using social media intentionally and strategically when communicating with parents. The four levels in the Dixon ongoing social engagement

model (awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy) were represented in the social media tools used by exemplary superintendents and the role of social media used to communicate with parents. Superintendents recognized the urgency for the district to be present on social media and utilize it to communicate with parents.

Recommendations: It is recommended to replicate this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study using exemplary unified school district superintendents with public information officers when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social media engagement model.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Information and communications technologies (ICT) have dramatically changed the means by which and the way people communicate with each other. ICT includes any technologies that accumulate, save, and facilitate the communication of information, such as computer-based technology, any digital technology, and smartphones (Day, Scott, Paquet, & Hambley, 2012; Werle, 2016). Currently, 77% of Americans own smartphones, showing a large increase in ownership with households earning less than \$30,000 per year to 64%, up 12 percentage points from last year (Pew Research Center, 2017). In addition, the advent of social media has dramatically increased what, how, and when people communicate, thus transforming how they think about 21st century communication. (Goyal, Purohit, & Bhagat, 2013; Werle, 2016). Furthermore, stakeholders can innovate utilizing ICT to engage, communicate, interact, and inform their audiences instantly through social media (Day et al., 2012; Goyal et al., 2013; Werle, 2016).

Social media allows people to communicate and exchange perspectives and experiences forming a collaborative culture (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). More than 2.34 billion people are social network users worldwide with 68.3% of them accessing social media in the world (Statista, 2016). In the United States, there are more than 195.7 million social media users (61% of the population) utilizing social media (Statista, 2016). Social media provides users with a high level of engagement disseminating information in an instantaneous manner. Currently, the average U.S. social media user will spend more than 216 minutes per week on social media via smartphone, 53 minutes per week via personal computer, and 50 minutes per week via a tablet device (Statista, 2016).

Social networking sites (SNS) offer ubiquitous access to information, communication, engagement, and social interaction (Tienhaara, 2016).

ICT and social media changes have influenced all originations, including education and its communities. The responsibility for effective communication in this changing social media world falls upon the educational leaders as a key component of organizational success (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Effective communication now includes the fluent use of social media. Leaders are grappling with the social media movement to communicate with their stakeholders (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). One of the driving forces for social media is the dramatic speed at which communications occur. As with any communication (crisis or not), “It’s not without its risks, but bad news spreads rapidly these days, and people demand information faster than ever before” (Lacey, 2012, p. 74). Leaders can choose to communicate through social networking sites or not, but if they do not, they accept the unknown consequences, good or bad.

Equally important, educational leaders need to be able to sustain and build trusting relationships with students’ families and community members that they serve (Kowalski, 2013; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Porterfield and Carnes (2012) stated that educational leaders must recognize that two-way communication using social media is a new expectation. This expectation not only includes the leader providing information but also the need to listen and build trust with their stakeholders (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Research is needed to determine how educational leaders embrace social media to strengthen relationships and communication with stakeholders.

Background

In this digital age, understanding the way people prefer to engage and communicate determines the success of the organization (Schmidt & Cohen, 2014). Ferriter (2011) stated that the tools used to communicate transformed the level of society's engagement. Ultimately, it is important to know how the stakeholders prefer to receive information and communicate through those channels, meeting them where they are (Ferriter, 2011; Team ISTE, 2015). Social media has become a way of collaborating and engaging. It strengthens communities by providing opportunities to increase connectedness and intensify relationships (Gonzales, Vodicka, & White, 2011). The education system can utilize social media by engaging families, creating collaborative school cultures, and increasing community investment (Dixon, 2012).

Social Media Communication, K-12 Leaders

School leaders can communicate messages in a faster and more flexible way with today's technologies using social media (Lang, 2016; Schmidt & Cohen, 2014; Trump, 2012). Social media permits educators to be more engaged in the process of creating new types of public relations (Kostojohn, Johnson, & Paulen, 2011). Equally important, social media can be used to foster collaborative environments (Gonzales & Young, 2015). Gordon (2012) determined that social media creates transparency and increases stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, Gonzales et al. (2011) stated that social media allowed school leaders to be the communication source rather than relying on the more traditional outlets to communicate the news.

Social media provides the opportunity for an online dialogue in an interactive way by creating and exchanging user-generated content (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Powers &

Green, 2016). Through a two-way communication process, essential conversations can transpire between school and community (Tapper, 2015). Dixon (2012) stated that education leaders can share content on social media in an original way, allowing the community to enhance and extend the conversations to deepen the collaboration and strengthen relationships. This level of communication empowers stakeholders to support and advocate for the advancement of the system (Dixon, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2011).

Families and communities have become important resources in school districts, and forming relationships with them is valuable (Wynne, 2016). Tapper (2015) expressed that the relationship needs to be authentic and transparent to advance the system. In addition, educational leaders' expanding communication networks to build strong, collaborative relationships transforms the school systems (Sheninger, 2014). Social media has the capability to unite stakeholders by enabling them to advocate and to become partners in the school system (Wynne, 2016). Dixon (2012) indicated that social media is a platform for stakeholders to hear the district's story, draw them to the district, and learn of the opportunities to engage in the partnership. Indeed, public presentation is crucial in education's relationships with stakeholders (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Ultimately, social media enhances communication and connection through social networking sites.

Social Networking Sites

The definition of a social network site is a networked communication platform allowing participants to have unique profiles, to articulate connections viewed by others, and to utilize, create, and interact with user-created content presented by their connections on the site (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Furthermore, boyd and Ellison (2008)

stated that social networking sites are integrated into everyday life, allowing strangers to unite by shared interests, views, practices, and beliefs. Individuals build a profile on a social networking site to enhance their connection to the site and to others. These profiles could include a photo, personal and/or professional interests, and the individual's location (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). In addition, boyd and Ellison (2008) indicated that people identify others in the system with terms like *friends*, *contacts*, *fans*, and *followers*. As people form these bonds, they begin to strengthen the community (Gonzales et al., 2011).

Geiger (2016) identified that 79% of online users are on Facebook (76% access Facebook daily). This is more than double the users on Instagram (32%), Pinterest (31%), LinkedIn (29%), and Twitter (24%; Geiger, 2016). People receive news primarily from Facebook and Twitter (Lang, 2016). Underwood and Drachenburg (2014) indicated that caring can be shown through tweeting on Twitter and commenting on Facebook. Utilizing social networking sites provides great opportunities for organizational leaders to deepen the level of engagement (Ellison & boyd, 2013).

The enhanced level of communication and sharing of information on social networking sites has been the prominent inspiration for participation (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Social networking sites provide the visible communication opportunities and connections that would not be provided in an offline connection (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Haythornthwaite, 2005). Halligan and Shah (2010) indicated that a social networking site provides people with the opportunity to search and connect with people of similar opinions and interests on one site. Many social networking sites have created a collaborative culture by allowing users to create, share, and comment on

content, extending the networking in a potentially instantaneous manner (Dixon, 2012). Additionally, Ellison and boyd (2013) stated that these opportunities allow users to form interactive, expanding communities.

On a social networking site, information can be shared through interactive messages portrayed in real time (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Ferriter, Ramsden, & Sheninger, 2011). Video, pictures, and external site links are a few interactive opportunities provided on a social networking site (Ferriter et al., 2011). Underwood and Drachenburg (2014) expressed that social networking sites provide a platform of sharing journeys and telling stories to humanize the connection. Utilizing social networking sites allows educational leaders to build ownership and a sense of community with stakeholders in an inclusive environment (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). This study examined the role of the superintendent as the educational leader of a school district using social media to communicate with their parents.

Role of the School District Superintendent

Over the past 150 years, the school district superintendent's role has been described as five fluid roles: teacher-scholar, business manager, democratic leader, applied social scientist, and effective communicator (Kowalski, 2013). Kowalski (2013) defined the effective communicator as recruiting public support and participation, along with building relationships. In addition, Glass (2005) emphasized that the superintendent must communicate clearly, build relationships, and demonstrate political cleverness. Superintendents need strong verbal and written communication skills, listening skills, media relations, and sound public speaking (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). Ultimately, the superintendent will build trust, provide guidance, and demonstrate

responsiveness to situations by taking a proactive approach to communication (ECRA Group, 2010; McCullough, 2009).

The superintendent's role as communicator is defined by the emerging social conditions (Kowalski, 2013). In this digital age of emerging technologies, superintendents are forced to communicate more skillfully when they are seeking ways to engage stakeholders (Bjork et al., 2014). Bjork et al. (2014) expressed that the superintendent must utilize technology to be a master in communication. Also, the superintendent must provide timely and relevant information to build clarity and support of stakeholders (D. Cox, 2012; Waters & Marzano, 2007). Bjork et al. (2014) added information, and communications technology will allow superintendents to enhance their role as an effective communicator. Indeed, utilizing information and communications technology will provide two-way communication, increasing internal and external relations (Bjork et al., 2014; Sharp & Walter, 2004).

As superintendents expand their communication opportunities, they will be sharing their vision and utilizing the ability to *brand* the district (Sheninger, 2014). Branding builds a sense of trust and value. Through branding, superintendents open the opportunity to attract resources into the district, including additional funding sources (Ferriter et al., 2011). The most successful branding opens the organization for examination and criticism centered on stakeholder feedback to constantly improve (Ferriter et al., 2011).

The superintendent's role as an effective communicator is instrumental in the success of cultivating relationships with the community and families (Kowalski, 2013). Building and sustaining relationships are believed to be significant assets, as the parents

and families are considered valuable resources for success (Gneiser, 2010). Effective communication impacts how others perceive the superintendent and the district and is vital when building and sustaining relationships (Callan & Levinson, 2015).

In times of crisis, people will look for the person they trust to get the story and the facts (Scott, 2011). It would be an advantage to the superintendent to have an established relationship with parents before a crisis occurs (D. Cox, 2012). According to Wilson (2012), a superintendent “can quickly and easily take control of its messaging and communicate directly with its audience . . . to minimize the spread of mis-information” (pp. 67-68). As an effective communicator in education, it is imperative that superintendents communicate efficiently with parents (Glass, 2005).

Effective Parent Communication

Educational leaders who communicate in brief and succinct messages, use their own voice, are visible, and listen is the definition of effective parent communication (S. Anderson, 2014). Prior to information and communications technology and the social media opportunities, communication practices in districts included face-to-face opportunities, phone conversations, and written communication. The International Society for Technology in Education (Team ISTE, 2015) standards suggests that superintendents employ digital tools to model use and communicate effectively with parents. Dixon (2012) indicated that the primary source of the parent communication be directed to the school district. Dixon stated, “Families that have a connection with your school will advocate for your school and will aid in your grassroots marketing efforts” (p. 3). Further, the community should not be the first communicator to parents; districts need to be proactive with communication (Dixon, 2012). More importantly,

understanding how parents want to receive and share information is the key to effective parent communication (D. Cox, 2012; Trump, 2012).

Gatekeeping Theory

The communication theories pertaining to social media are in their infancy. The researcher believed that the gatekeeping theory is the best foundational theory that aligns with the purpose of this study. Psychologist Kurt Lewin introduced the gatekeeping theory in 1947 during World War II to describe how behaviors with food in a household could be changed by the family cook/mother (Shoemaker, Johnson, & Ricco, 2017). He believed that the family cook or mother of the family would be the one to harvest and collect the food, cook the food, and serve it to the family. In this process, the family cook (mother) controlled what was served at the meals and therefore is the gatekeeper of the meals. Lewin believed that this theory could be applied to other movement of items, including the movement of information.

According to Adler, Rodman, and Pré (2017), “Gatekeepers determine what messages will be delivered, how the messages will be constructed, and when they will be delivered” (p. 4). Information will come from all avenues, external and internal, and will swirl toward the gate. Once at the gate, the gatekeeper will analyze the information. After analysis, the gatekeeper will approve the information or reject the information. The approved information is shared on various platforms (website, e-mail, tweet, post, blog, etc.). The gatekeeper is purposeful with the delivery of information and determines the engagement level of the audience (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) suggested that the gatekeepers must analyze information and the delivery approach carefully, as it can diffuse a crisis situation or create one. The level of audience

engagement (awareness, feedback, collaboration, or advocacy) can strengthen the relationship between the gatekeeper (district superintendent) and audience (parents; Dixon, 2012).

Dixon Ongoing Social Engagement Model

Dixon (2012) identified “a need for a foundational framework to help guide school leaders to effectively use developing social media tools” (p. 6). Dixon stated that this model will help school leaders evaluate and use social media tools to heighten community and/or parent engagement. As the director of High Tech High in San Diego, Dixon developed a foundational framework for successful use of social media that the researcher applied to this study.

The Dixon ongoing social engagement model consists of four stages as seen in Table 1: awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy. Awareness is the first level of social engagement in this model. It takes place when the district informs the community, and the community reads, hears, and sees the information (Dixon, 2012). This level is the traditional level of communication that school districts have with parents and community: paper notes physically handed out to students, posters, banners, kiosks, and perhaps a mass call through a phone service (Dixon, 2012). The second level of social engagement is feedback. Feedback occurs when the district asks the community and the community answers by telling, voting, or responding in the desired form of communication (Dixon, 2012). The more traditional ways of feedback were collected through paper surveys, targeted phone calls, or face-to-face meetings at district, school, or community events (Dixon, 2012). Collaboration is the third level of Dixon’s ongoing social engagement model. It occurs when the district and community work together

Table 1

Dixon Ongoing Social Engagement Model

Stage	Description	Traditional forms of communication
Awareness	District informs the community, and the community reads, hears, and sees the information.	Paper notes physically handed out to students, posters, banners, kiosks, mass all call.
Feedback	District asks the community, and the community answers by telling, voting, or responding.	Paper surveys, targeted phone calls, face-to-face meetings.
Collaboration	District and community work together through conversations, planning, and initiation.	District committee meetings, Parent Teacher Association meetings, other school and district planning meetings.
Advocacy	Community empowers and steers the district through leadership projects, promoting events, and creating new followers.	District representatives for county committees, Parent Teacher Association presidents, distributors of district content to the community to recruit.

Note. Adapted from *Social Media for School Leaders*, by B. Dixon (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

through conversations, planning, and initiation (Dixon, 2012). More traditional ways of collaboration would occur at district committee meetings, Parent Teacher Association meetings, and other district and school planning meetings (Dixon, 2012). The fourth and most difficult level to achieve in this model is advocacy. This takes place when the community empowers and steers the district through the leadership of projects, promoting events, and creating new followers (Dixon, 2012). The more traditional advocates are district representatives for county committees, Parent Teacher Association presidents, and distributors of district content to the community to recruit (Dixon, 2012). With the

use of social media, there are ways to increase social engagement of district communities in evident ways (Dixon, 2012).

As the superintendent continues to use social media to engage the parents, “The power and ownership shift” (Dixon, 2012, p. 6). This shift occurs from the district distributing all the content to the superintendent and parents collaborating on the design of the content (Dixon, 2012). The Dixon ongoing social engagement model is shown in Figure 1. For this study, the researcher received permission to use this model to help superintendents evaluate and use social media tools for parent communication (B. Dixon, personal communication, July 7, 2017).

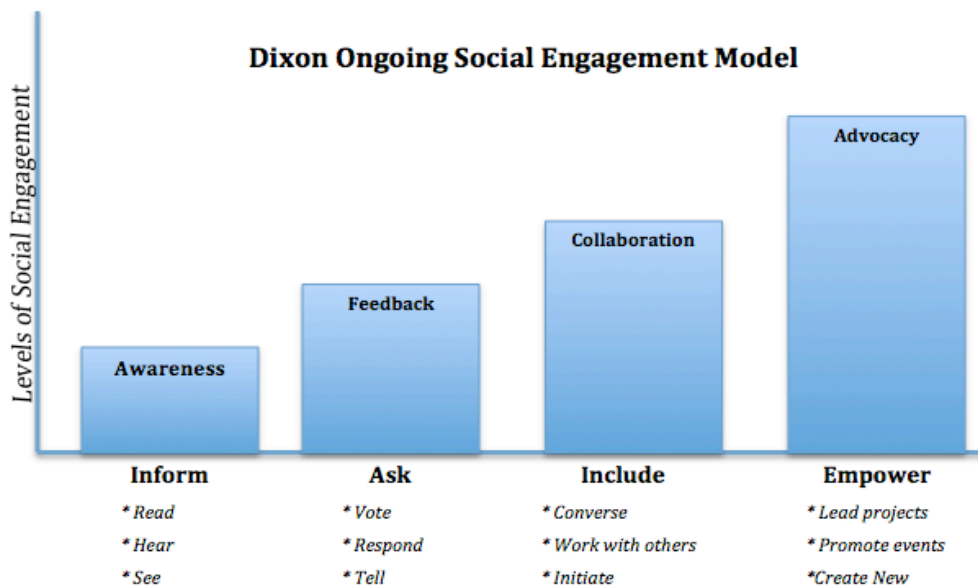


Figure 1. Dixon ongoing social engagement model. From *Social Media for School Leaders*, by B. Dixon, p. 6 (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

Statement of the Research Problem

It is a known fact that social media is a vital part of this culture and how people connect with others (Lovecchio, 2013). Carr (2013) shared that, in 2025, most of the world’s population will instantly retrieve unfiltered communication in their hands from

mobile devices. Schmidt and Cohen (2014) indicated that every view will be delivered in real-time in the extensive virtual environment, heightening emotions within the social media communities. This can cause havoc in *nanoseconds* in a crisis and any dissemination of *fake* news (Dougherty, 2014). It is crucial for superintendents to keep parents informed in a direct and simple way and to build trust and confidence in the school system through open communication (Kellough & Hill, 2014; Larkin, 2015; Powers & Green, 2017; Tapper, 2015).

There is a perception of a divide transpiring between public school districts and parents (Griffin, 2014; Sheninger, 2014). Sheninger (2014) expressed, “The longer the disconnect continues, the more meaningless and irrelevant our schools become to our students” (p. 5). Parents sharing a common belief of desiring the highest quality education for their children can be identified in communities formed within social media (Underwood & Drachenburg, 2014).

Superintendents of elementary school districts face many challenges as leaders for the current and future generation of learners while connecting with parents. Kowalski (2013) identified that superintendents are not required to take a communications or public relations course in their academic preparation. Gone are the days of one-way communication, here to stay are the days of two-way communication (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Without the realization that effective communication contains consideration and cultivation, superintendents could find themselves in a heated media situation (Kowalski, 2011). It is extremely important for superintendents to capitalize on the opportunity to communicate in the way the community receives their information and be out in front of the situation (Kowalski, 2011). Therefore, superintendents “must

develop new communication skills that utilize new technologies” (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012, p. 2).

In summary, elementary school districts are requiring tech savvy and brave leaders who will overcome the anxiety and concern that comes with using social media to communicate with parents (Sheninger, 2014). Tapper (2015) emphasized that the leader’s role is crucial to connect the community with the district. There is research on how principals and teachers use social media to communicate with parents (Dixon, 2012; Greenhow, Sonnevend, & Agur, 2016; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012; Powers & Green, 2016; Sheninger, 2014). However, very little is known about how superintendents use social media to communicate with parents. This study will add important research and insight to better understand how effective superintendents use social media to communicate with their parents.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to identify the social media tools used by exemplary California school district superintendents. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to identify the role of social media perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Lastly, the purpose of this study was to describe the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model.

Research Questions

1. What are the social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
2. What do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive is the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
3. What benefits do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
4. What challenges do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Significance of the Problem

The research about how superintendents use social media needs to be better understood given the dramatic changes in the use of social media in elementary school districts. This study examined how and why California superintendents use social media to communicate with parents. Superintendents that are reluctant to communicate with parents via social media “are quickly being left behind by almost everyone” (Ferriter et al., p. 1) and are allowing others to form their own opinions and assumptions regardless of the accuracy of the source (Schmidt & Cohen, 2014). Superintendents are released from their contract due to lack of communication and the inability to be an effective gatekeeper (Bagin, 2007; Barzilai-Nahon, 2008; Kowalski, 2013; Lumetta, Thomas, &

Vendelin, 2014). This study could assist superintendents in strengthening their two-way communication strategies utilizing various social media tools. In addition, superintendents will be able to recognize the role of social media when communicating and engaging with parents by informing, providing feedback opportunities, collaborating, and advocating through Dixon's ongoing social engagement model framework (Dixon, 2012). Also, superintendents will understand the benefits and challenges of using social media to communicate with parents as perceived by the California superintendents in this study.

Studies such as this may aid in how superintendents use social media as a branding tool to promote the educational programs and opportunities occurring in their districts in hopes of increasing enrollment and aiding districts to pass fiscal initiatives, such as parcel taxes and bond measures. In addition, professional organizations and schools of education may be interested in the results of the study to provide professional learning opportunities, including classes in social media to assist superintendents and district leadership in the public relations and social media realm. Due to the emerging research of social media use by educational leaders, this study is opportune and significant. Finally, this study is critical as school districts are modifying to meet the communication expectations of the newest generation of parents and students that they serve.

Definitions

To have a clear understanding of the terms in the theoretical framework used in this study and the operational terms in the purpose of the study, the researcher provided

definitions to these terms. The following terms are defined aligning to the key variables in this study.

Theoretical Definitions

Advocacy. Empower by leading projects, promoting events, creating new fans (Dixon, 2012).

Awareness. Inform by reading, hearing, or seeing (Dixon, 2012).

Blog. Online journal for sharing stories.

Collaboration. Include through conversation, working with others, initiation (Dixon, 2012).

District website. Social media used by school districts to communicate with internet users.

E-mail. Mail received electronically for communication.

eNewsletter. Newsletter e-mailed to recipients.

Facebook. A popular social networking site created in 2004.

Feedback. Ask by a vote, response, or tell (Dixon, 2012).

Gatekeeping theory. The actual journey of information received by an audience.

Gatekeeper. Individual deciding what information will be given to the audience and what platforms will be used to distribute the information.

Online survey. Survey distributed and accessed online.

Twitter. A popular social networking site created in 2006.

Operational Definitions

Advocacy. Empower by leading projects, promoting events, creating new fans (Dixon, 2012).

An active account on a social networking site. An account that includes a profile picture, networked connections, and posts.

Awareness. Inform by reading, hearing, or seeing (Dixon, 2012).

Branding. What distinguished one district from another district; uniqueness.

Collaboration. Include through conversation, working with others, initiation (Dixon, 2012).

Communication. The sending and receiving of messages, sharing of information, and interacting with others using technology or face-to-face (Krcmar, Ewoldsen, & Koerner, 2016).

Crisis communication. The communication at a time of difficulty, trouble, or danger.

Fake news. False information distributed in the form of authentic news.

Feedback. Ask by a vote, response, or tell (Dixon, 2012).

Information and communications technologies (ICT). Technologies that can share, store, create, and facilitate communication (Day et al., 2012; Werle, 2016).

Parents. In this study, the term “parents” includes biological parents, stepparents, legal guardians, caretakers, and/or families of elementary students.

Public relations. Developing and preserving relationships with an open channel of communication (Kowalski, 2011).

Social media. The technologies that allow free expression opportunities in virtual communities and networks.

Social networking sites (SNS). The internet sites that users can network with other people who share the same interests, beliefs, and/or activities.

Superintendent. The leader of a school district.

Web 2.0. The platform connecting all technology devices.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to superintendents in California who are currently working in elementary public school districts with no more than one charter school in the district. Also, the elementary public school districts in this study had an enrollment between 500 and 5,000 students. Additionally, this study was delimited to school districts that employ superintendents, excluding the role of superintendents/principals. Finally, this study was delimited to superintendents who have an active account on Twitter, Facebook, and/or blog and an active district website.

Organization of the Study

The rest of this study is formed in the following four chapters. Chapter II is comprehensive review of the literature about social media in K-12 education, social networking sites, the role of the superintendent, effective parent communication, generation cohorts and their use of technology, and the theoretical framework of the gatekeeping theory and of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Chapter III describes the designs of the research and methods applied in this study. This chapter also explains the population, target population, and sample of the study, as well as the instruments utilized for data collection and analysis. Chapter IV presents the data findings and thorough explanations of the results in this study. Chapter V closes this study with the summary, including the important findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is a review of the literature, providing additional research to support the findings of the research questions for this study. The chapter begins with communication and communication channels. It transitions to social media and social networking. The next area of this chapter is the gatekeeping theory leading into the role of the district superintendent as a gatekeeper, communicator, and a public relations leader within the school district. The chapter then concentrates on parent and community engagement and shifts to generational differences. Finally, this chapter describes the Dixon ongoing social engagement model as the lens used through the communication theory framework.

Communication

Social media is changing the way people communicate, and it is transforming the modes of connecting, building relationships, and collaborating online (Howell, 2012). Howell (2012) continued to add that this approach of communication occurs at a rapid pace and gains momentum that could be positive or negative for an organization. Organizations need to act fast and be ahead of the message to ensure the correct message is communicated to the correct audience (Howell, 2012). In fact, Porterfield and Carnes (2012) recommended that the communicator use as many social media tools to communicate to reach all the intended audiences. These intended audiences will become aware, provide feedback, collaborate with the communicator, and advocate for the communicator (Dixon, 2012). The actions of the audiences happen within minutes

(Howell, 2012). What is most important are the channels from which the audience receives and presents the communication.

Communication Channels

There are two main channels of communication: formal and informal. Formal communication is described as an organized channel of communication through a chain of command or an organizational chart internally in an organization (Nwogbaga, Nwankwo, & Onwa, 2015). Informal communication is the communication between informal relationships, such as friendships, family members, or community (Nwogbaga et al., 2015). Specifically, the most common term of informal communication is the “grapevine” (Nwogbaga et al., 2015, p. 33). Nwogbaga et al. (2015) defined the “grapevine” as “gossip or rumor.” They stated, “While grapevine communication can spread information quickly and easily, the information it carries can be changed through the deletion or exaggeration crucial details thus causing the information inaccurate—even if it’s based on the truth” (Nwogbaga et al., 2015, p. 33). The birth of the Internet and the rise of social media support the dissemination of the communicated information in an informal manner unlike anything before (Coombs, 2017). Coombs (2017) also shared the importance of the mobile phone and the smartphone as the internet mediums for vastly spreading information. Ultimately, the forming of a rapid and uncontrollable grapevine throughout the community is the result of the newest waves of the channels of communication (Nwogbaga et al., 2015). This study focused on the informal channel of communication through social media platform.

Internet

The Internet has existed as a government weapon in the Cold War (History Staff, 2011). The Internet has advanced over time. In 1991, as the Internet was in another advancement, a Switzerland programmer, Tim Berners-Lee, introduced the World Wide Web (WWW): “an Internet that was not simply a way to send files from one place to another but was itself a ‘web’ of information that anyone on the Internet could retrieve” (History Staff, 2010). Berners-Lee created Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) for creating websites, Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) as the set of rules for data transfer through the web, and Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) as the web addresses for finding web pages. This led to Berners-Lee creating the first website about the first web project and how to use it. He envisioned the web to be free to everyone and refused to patent his web technology (Nix, 2016).

Mobile Phone

After the PC launched and prior to the World Wide Web, the invention of the mobile phone surfaced. In 1983, Motorola shared the first mobile phone to the public (Ladzinski, 2017). The DynaTAC 8000X was sold for \$3,995, took 10 hours to recharge after use, weighed 1.75 pounds, was 13 inches in height, and stored 30 contact numbers (Ha, 2010). As time went on, the mobile phone became more mobile by becoming cordless and smaller in size—even collapsing into a flip model (Washington Post Staff, 2014). As the phone became more affordable and more compact, it shifted toward a mini device that could do more than make phone calls.

Smartphone

The first Smartphone appeared in 1992 by IBM called the Simon Personal Computer. IBM sold 50,000 units at a price of \$899, including a service contract (Tweedie, 2015). The Simon had a 4.5 inch by 1.4 inch touchscreen. It could send and receive pages, e-mails, and faxes. It included a stylus that allowed the user to take notes, access a calendar to schedule appointments, and access third-party applications if the owner purchased a special PC card (Tweedie, 2015).

On January 9, 2007, at the MacWorld Conference in San Francisco, California, Apple chief executive Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone to the world (Washington Post Staff, 2014). According to *The Washington Post*, “Combining the features of a cellphone, pocket computer, and multimedia player, the iPhone changed the nature of how users related to their pocket devices” (Washington Post Staff, 2014). The advances of communication devices that allowed users to be connected at a quicker rate sparked a huge social media and social networking explosion.

Social Media and Social Networking

The terms social media and social networking are interwoven but do encompass key differences that are often overlooked (Aiken, 2015). Social media and social networking share the essential role of communication (Blumenreich & Jaffe-Walter, 2015). According to Fuchs (2017), “Communication is a reciprocal process between at least two humans, in which symbols are exchanged and all interaction partners give meaning to these symbols” (p. 6). Social media sites and social networking sites can be described as containing connectedness, participation, community, and conversation characteristics (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). Auer (2011) stated that social media

sites and social networking sites incorporate the ability for individuals to be the bases of information due to disclosing experiences, insights, perspectives, and opinions. Table 2 shows the history of social media because “it is important to understand the history of a phenomenon” (Sajithra & Patil, 2013, p. 69). These communication platforms empowered users for socialization and collaboration (Magro, 2012). However, there were distinct differences with social media sites and social networking sites (Aiken, 2015).

Table 2

Historical Timeline of Social Media

Social media	Year
E-mail	1971
Personal websites, discussion groups, chat	1991
Personal blog first introduced by Justin Hall	1994
Social networking site—classmates.com	1995
Blogs became popular, podcasts, wikis	1998-2003
Web 2.0 (Facebook–2004, Twitter–2006)	2004 and beyond

Note. From “Social Media—History and Components,” by K. Sajithra & R. Patil, 2013, *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 7(1), pp. 69-74.

Bryer and Zavattaro (2011) defined social media as “technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders” (p. 327). Social media sites include the sites aligned with the traditional media like newspapers, television, or radio delivering the information to anyone that connect to those sites (Bullas, 2012; Dougherty, 2014; Nations, 2017; Waddington, 2012). The definition of social media is a very broad definition for a very broad term (Fuchs, 2017; Nations, 2017).

Components of Social Media

According to Sajithra and Patil (2013), social media has expanded to 10 components. Figure 2 shows these components. Many of these social media components encompass the ability to inform, communicate, collaborate, and form social communities (Fuchs, 2017).

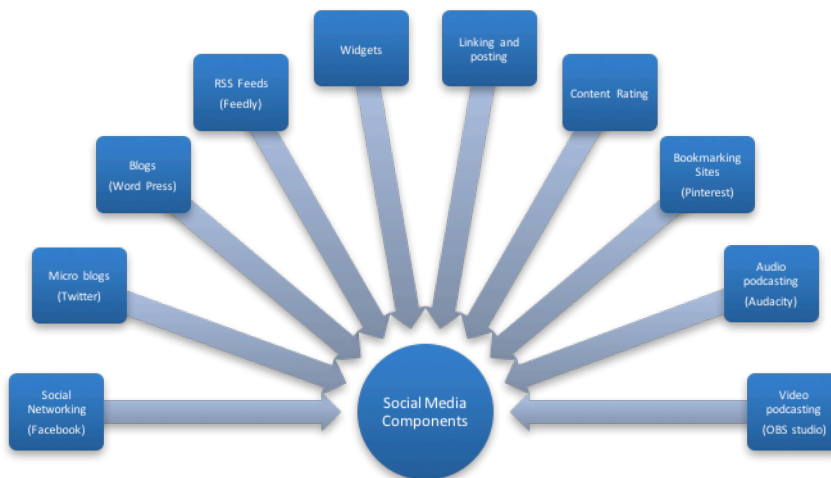


Figure 2. Social media components. From “Social Media – History and Components,” by K. Sajithra & R. Patil, 2013. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 7(1), pp. 73-74.

Social media is a tool allowing users to disperse the information and rapidly spread the news (Aiken, 2015; Blumenreich & Jaaffe-Walter, 2015; Schaffer, 2013; Waddington, 2012). Social media users are consumers of content fostering collaborative knowledge building (Bradley & Thouësny, 2011; Cheng et al., 2013; Duffy, 2012; Powers & Green, 2016; Waddington, 2012). People using social media sites rely on websites, e-mails, and alerts to be informed of issues (King, 2015; Martin, 2014). In addition, social media users rely on search engines for communication, innovation, researching, engagement, and collaboration (Aiken, 2015; Martin, 2014; Schmidt & Cohen, 2014; Tapper, 2015; Waddington, 2012). Social media platforms include over

500 various sites, including politics, education, finance, fashion, and more (Aiken, 2015; Wright & Hinson, 2012). Social media sites include blogs, multimedia (photo, video, and audio) sharing, and text media sharing (Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011; Dixon, 2012; Greenhow et al., 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Smith, 2014). These sites are used to interact and enrich the lives of stakeholders (Dixon, 2012; Greenhow et al., 2016; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Social media platforms are popping up weekly, providing endless opportunities for social media promotion (Dixon, 2012; Ziontz, 2015). Mobile social media provides instant information and communication through short formats, and it is stored for easy retrieval (Gillin, 2009; Smith, 2014). The rapid growth of social media sites has minimal cost for organizations to enhance awareness and achieve goals (D. Cox, 2014; Klososky, 2012; Waddington, 2012).

Social networking is one component of the social media landscape (Sajithra & Patil, 2013). It primarily focuses on creating, facilitating, and reflecting on the social relationships created from like interests and activities (Aiken, 2015; Ellison & boyd, 2013). Social networking emerged from the interconnectedness between individuals, groups, and organizations (Buzzetto-More, 2012; Smith, 2014). Members of social networks primarily communicate with members inside their social circle of similar behaviors, education, interests, and experiences (Aiken, 2015; boyd & Ellison, 2008; D. Cox, 2014; Dixon, 2012; Dougherty, 2014; Ellison & boyd, 2013). Boyd and Ellison (2008) stated that social networking has a distinct membership or group enhanced through sites, such as Facebook, for establishing social relationships, sharing information, and community building (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Smith, 2014).

Social networking sites encompass a targeted emphasis on engaging members of a social group (Aiken, 2015; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Dixon, 2012; Greenhow et al., 2016; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). The sites allow users to create profiles, accumulate a list of other connected users, and generate two-way communication (Aiken, 2015; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Dixon, 2012; Greenhow et al., 2016; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Each person's stream shares the content shared by those they have chosen to follow or friend (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Social networking sites are accessed through mobile applications, making it easy to instantly support two-way communication (Aiken, 2015; D. Cox, 2014; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Greenhow et al., 2016; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012).

Phenomenon of Web 2.0

The term *Web 2.0* originated in 2005 by Tim O'Reilly (Fuchs, 2017; O'Reilly, 2005). O'Reilly (2005) was the founder of O'Reilly Media, a publishing house focused on computer technology. According to O'Reilly, the definition of Web 2.0 is the following:

Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an “architecture of participation”, and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences. (para. 1)

Web 2.0 is the second stage of the World Wide Web and is characterized by user-generated content and the growth of social media (Dixon, 2012; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Greenhow et al., 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Additionally, O'Reilly stated that Web 2.0 was “designed to restore confidence in an industry that had lost its way after the dotcom bust” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 35). Ellison and boyd (2013) stated that Web 2.0 brought online communities into the social norm phenomenon, adding that “all social networking sites support multiple modes of communication: one-to-many and one-to-one, synchronous and asynchronous, textual and media-based” (p. 158).

However, there are authors that share unfavorable perspectives of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 tools are designed to promote social media; however, there are unintended consequences, obscuring the ethical, political, and social boundaries (Zimmer, 2008). Scholz (2008) shared that Web 2.0 is not new; it existed in one form or another prior to O'Reilly's origination. Zimmer (2008) stated, “By embracing Web 2.0, Scholz concludes, We are acquiescing to a market ideology of crowdsourcing, the exploitation of immaterial free labor, and ‘harvesting of the fruits of networked social production’” (para. 4). Allen (2008) believed that the key components of Web 2.0 are the users, philosophy, economic, and the platform itself that O'Reilly communicates: “Web 2.0 is about the ideas, behaviors, technologies, and ideals all at the same time” (para. 4). Petersen (2008) communicated that the Web 2.0 sites and services share personal information captured by search engines and threatens online privacy.

Content of social networking sites surfaces through streams and is embedded with links (Barkley, 2012; D. Cox, 2012; Dixon, 2012; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Ferriter et al.,

2011; Tienhaara, 2016). Each Web 2.0 site has a unique audience and formats that appeal to the audience an organization desires to attract (Ziontz, 2015). Web 2.0 includes websites, blogs, and popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Websites

The first website was created in August of 1991 (Dixon, 2012; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Once private Internet service providers started operations in the United States in 1994, websites exploded allowing users to have free content and sharing their opinions (Sajithra & Patil, 2013). This allowed social media and the phenomena of user-generated content to expand allowing Internet users to create personal websites (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison et al., 2013). Social networking features, such as the Facebook and Twitter icons, are common to find on websites, enhancing them to become social networking sites themselves (Barkley, 2012; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Dixon, 2012; Gordon, 2012). Websites invite engagement and collect information through surveys, comment area, and allowing users to venture into social media such as Facebook and Twitter (Dixon, 2012; Gordon, 2012). Websites enhance the social engagement level through awareness of the organization, feedback from users, collaboration with multiple users, and advocacy through social networks (Dixon, 2012).

Blogs

In 1994, Justin Hall began the initial personal blog by evolving his diary to an online diary (Sajithra & Patil, 2013). A blog is an online journal site for telling stories in the first person (Dixon, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2011). Blogging became popular after the U.S. presidential election when agencies critiqued the role of new bloggers could be amateur journalists (Ellison et al., 2013; Lee, 2004). Blog popularity went from 3 million

users in 2006 to 152 million users in 2013 (Dougherty, 2014). Blogs are used to communicate expertise and informal learning, enabling the exchange of information and sharing of experiences allowing visitors to interact via comments, Facebook, and Twitter (Dixon, 2012; Ferdig & Trammell, 2004; Waddington, 2012). They are maintained by the individual with text, photo, or video entries published chronologically by date (Waddington, 2012; Ziontz, 2015).

Facebook

In early 2004, Facebook was designed to support the Harvard college network with the allowed users having a Harvard e-mail address (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Cassidy, 2006; Ellison & boyd, 2013). Other colleges were being added to Facebook through college email addresses only (boyd & Ellison, 2008). In 2005, Facebook allowed high school students (with administrative approval), then corporate professional networks, and eventually it expanded to everyone (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Kennedy & Macko, 2009). Pew shared 79% of all internet users are active Facebook users, making it the most popular social networking site (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016).

Facebook allows users to build communities through amplifying messages to engage followers (Waddington, 2012). The Facebook user can view messages on their news feed and are provided various ways to react (Carr, 2015). The user can share a message with their friends, add a comment, or like the message (Carr, 2015; Dixon, 2012). The like button is a pervasive way to disperse content virally from a site to networks of users across the web (Carr, 2015; Dixon, 2012; Ellison & boyd, 2013). The connecting tools in Facebook include pages, groups, and events, allowing the user to stay connected to causes, groups, and people (Dixon, 2012). Dixon (2012) stated, "Facebook

is easy to use, accessible, ubiquitous, and manageable” (p. 25). The users favor looking at videos, pictures, and comments through a discovery mode and engaging with people they already know (D. Cox, 2012; Dixon, 2012; Ellison et al., 2011; Waddington, 2012). However, the reasons for connecting are varied as the term *friends* can be deceptive (boyd, 2006; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison & boyd, 2013). Facebook allows users to control the delivery of information to a wide variety of people and organizations (Carr, 2015; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012; Sheninger, 2012).

Twitter

Twitter made its debut in 2006 and is the social network site “with the most hype” (Barkley, 2012, p. 21). Twitter allows the user to customize profiles, post publicly or privately, and select followers (Barkley, 2012; Carr, 2015; Dixon, 2012; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). As of June 2016, Twitter had 313 million active users; 82% of active users were mobile, and it had 1 billion unique visits to sites with embedded tweets (Twitter, 2016). Twitter is considered a microblog consisting of short thoughts and ideas in a personal way (Barkley, 2012). Posts are considered “tweets” in 280 characters or less (Larson, 2017). It is ideal for instant information in a “micro” fashion through tweets (Barkley, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2011). Dixon (2012) stated Twitter is a two-way communication tool enabling open public dialogs in multiple forms. The user can reply to a tweet, retweet (share), and favor (like) the tweet (Carr, 2015; Waddington, 2012). Twitter is a convenient way to distribute repository news, innovations, meetings, events, and growth with a brief snapshot (Sheninger, 2012; Ziontz, 2015).

Twitter can be transformational by changing behavior through the generation of influencing and increasing leads (Waddington, 2012). Tweets can include links to

websites, blogs, videos, and photos (Gonzales et al., 2011). Dixon (2012) stated that tweets are conversational by asking questions and giving data on impactful information for the ability of building a community. Tweets can influence a vast audience within a few seconds, adding a feeling of intimacy (Gonzales et al., 2011; Ziontz, 2015). Twitter encourages users to utilize the “hashtag” feature to engage others by making it easier to see the posts and engage other users outside of their following (Waddington, 2012; Zalaznick, 2014). Hashtags generate loyalty and a closer bond by revealing all the posts referencing the hashtag and allowing people to maneuver through topics (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Waddington, 2012). Twitter is succinct and precise, providing a way to communicate with a target audience (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012).

Communication in K-12 Education

The entire community is empowered through the generation of open communication to address and shape features of the educational process (Tapper, 2015). Salacuse (2006) shared that communication fosters strong relationships, and leadership could not occur without communication and relationships. The indirect role of communication and sharing information has become a powerful influence for participation (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Communication is ongoing and must be effective for the public to have positive views of the school district (Callan & Levinson, 2015). When communicating, it is highly important to speak and interact the same way the stakeholders do (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010). A case study done by D. Cox in 2012 shared effective communication must be impactful, interactive, transparent, and expected. District leaders who utilize a clear media communication plan earn the trust of the community (Kellough & Hill, 2014; Larkin, 2015; Powers & Green,

2016). The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2006) shared the elements of a strategic communication plan. The elements are determining the goal, identifying the audience, developing the message, selecting communication channels, choosing activities and materials, establishing partnerships, implementing the plan, and evaluating to make course corrections as needed (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2006). School districts need to be proactive to engage followers and reactive when responding to communications (Bjork et al., 2014; Schaffer, 2013). Having a communication plan will support effective communication in a crisis (Tapper, 2015). Crisis communication may be required for a potential break in the stability of school operations or possible harm to the reputation and integrity of the school district (Tapper, 2015). Tapper (2015) stated that appropriate measures should be prepared in advance of a crisis through a communication plan.

As face-to-face communication continues to be important, technology provides the vehicle for reaching more people, more often (Gordon, 2012). Technology can play a role to building deeper relationships (Lotkina, 2016). School districts are expected to communicate and build relationships using technology as a function of doing business and an essential resource (Consortium for School Networking, 2010; Gordon, 2012; Kowalski, 2011; Mullen, Kealy, & Sullivan, 2004; Whitehead, Jensen, & Boschee, 2003). Districts must be aware of the digital divide due to lack of access and online literacy and work to fill the gap to enhance stakeholder communication (Briones & Janoske, 2013; Haggared, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011; Hargittai, 2002; Kowalski, 2013). Using text alerts and recorded phone messages can deliver the information for the stakeholders not connected to the internet (Consortium for School

Networking, 2010). According to Porterfield and Carnes (2012), “Virtual communities are like actual communities in that they flourish under strong leadership” (p. 64).

Web 2.0 brought online communities through the easy use of posts (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Lang, 2016). Communicating and building relationships with stakeholders is the most frequent basis for using social media (Dembo, 2015; Ferriter et al., 2011; Kellough & Hill, 2014; Powers & Green, 2016; Sheninger, 2014). Powers and Green (2016) indicated that social media specialists state social networking will continue to remain. Social media can reinforce communication, listening, engagement, and meaningful conversations with stakeholders (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). In addition, social media may lead to a positive influence on behavior and to greater engagement (Shin, Carithers, Lee, Graham, & Hendricks, 2013; Valentini, 2015; Wright & Hinson, 2012). As social media becomes an important part of the culture, districts cannot afford to play catch up to innovative districts leading the social media charge (Lovecchio, 2013). Building the stakeholder’s awareness of communicating with Web 2.0 tools is vital for successful communication (Ferriter, 2011).

Twitter is used to help districts serve their community and engage greater loyalty (Waddington, 2012). Big news events can be shared instantly (D. Cox, 2014). Districts can connect with fellow districts, educators, authors, and classrooms around the world to enhance innovation and branding (D. Cox, 2014; Dixon, 2012; Greenhow et al., 2012; Zalaznick, 2014). According to Zalaznick (2014), Twitter has developed into the new education symposium. Using twitter feeds enhances proactive communication by sharing news, showcasing programs, and inviting community dialogue (Gordon, 2012). Gordon

(2012) stated that one tweet a day ranging from district news to linking to other media resources allows the community to see the proactive communication endeavor.

Facebook can be a way for districts to engage the community with upcoming events, important announcements, or to stay connected with the district (Dixon, 2012; Ziontz, 2015). Also, districts can use Facebook for branding by highlighting district work, student and staff successes, and initiatives inviting public comment (Gordon, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2011). After a district creates a Facebook page, events inviting the community with the ability to collect RSVPs will assist in the management of the hosted event (Dixon, 2012). Facebook ads can be used to recruit students, teachers, and community engagement (Dixon, 2012). A district Facebook page may be an important tool for managing a crisis by quickly taking control of its messaging and communicating directly with its audience (Waddington, 2012). Districts should use Facebook to steer the users to their website where additional valuable information is stored (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012).

Currently, school districts utilize a district website to communicate with stakeholders (Dixon, 2012). A district's website is a proactive way to communicate by sharing news and programs as well as initiating dialogue (Dixon, 2012; Gordon, 2012). To facilitate interaction with the community, the website must go beyond only providing information (Gordon, 2012; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Tapper (2015) stated that the district website needs to represent the community value accurately.

A blog created by the school district's superintendent is a critical way for the community to become acquainted to their educational leader (Dougherty, 2014; Gonzales et al., 2011; Lovecchio, 2013; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012; Ziontz, 2015). Porterfield and

Carnes (2012) stated that the difficulty of sustaining an engaged audience, and a blog can benefit with the connections, humanizing the leader, and providing the community with “thoughtful leadership” (p. 75). Dougherty (2014) reminded bloggers to continue to build relationships to discover topics for which superintendents can help stakeholders build understanding, request resources, and discover how to stay connected with the district. It is important to know that a blog is an ongoing communication and that it can be compared to a marathon of communication (Dixon, 2012; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012).

Eblasts are an efficient way to share information through e-mail to the masses of stakeholders (Gonzales et al., 2011). Newsletters and action alerts can be sent as eblasts as a form of one-way communication (Dixon, 2012). Gonzales et al. (2011) shared that an eblast could be a way to share snippets of significant events and news. They can also share with the community how to connect the school district, but must be written as it is personalized so that the reader feels the individual invitation (Dixon, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2011).

According to research and related documents from the U.S. Department of Education, the effective capacity development of social media platforms beyond Twitter and Facebook for school districts remains a challenge (Herold, 2014). Consistent monitoring of the platforms is essential when the community can instantly comment (Underwood & Drachenburg, 2014). Social media guidelines help districts protect their brand, empower others to share, and are vital to the success of the district (Waddington, 2012). School district leaders need to align their communication goals and the social media tools to support the growth of communication for the population of the community (Hampton, 2016; Tsouvalas, 2012).

Gatekeeping Theory

Psychologist Kurt Lewin's gatekeeping theory is a communication theory describing the movement of information along with forces that assist or restrict it (Shoemaker et al., 2017). The theory is the actual journey of information received by the audience (Carlson & Kashani, 2017). The gatekeeper is the individual deciding what information will be given to the audience and what platform the information will be displayed on. For this study, the school district superintendent can be seen as the gatekeeper, the platform on the audience receives the information is the social networking sites and social media, and the audience is the parents with children enrolled in the elementary school district. When aligning the gatekeeping theory to this research study, the researcher solely focused on the platforms on which the parents received the information. Lewin's gatekeeping theory is shown in Figure 3.

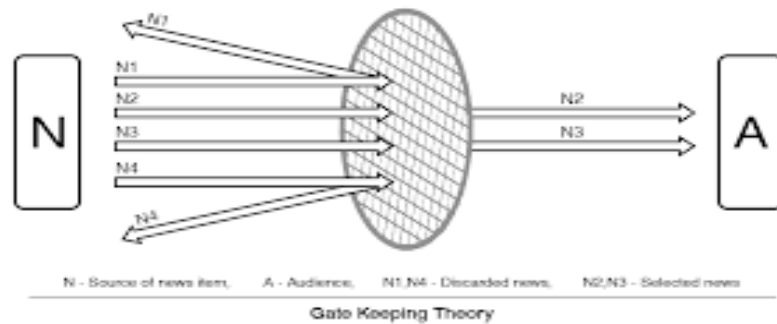


Figure 3. Gatekeeping theory. From Communication theory: All about theories for communication, n.d. (<http://communicationtheory.org/gatekeeping-theory>). In the public domain.

This diagram reveals the movement of information. The *N* is the source of the information. The *N#*'s represent the separate information originating from the source. Events such as a conversation, blog post, or tweet can frame the information (Shoemaker et al., 2017). The information begins to swirl around and reshape, forcing it toward the

gate. The circle containing the screen is the gate. When the information forces toward the gate, the gatekeeper begins to filter the information. The gatekeeper decides when, where, and how the information will be conveyed to the audience. N_2 and N_3 in the figure represent the information shared with the audience. Finally, the A signifies the audience as the recipient of the information.

The gatekeeper's role is a highly important role in an organization. Gatekeepers operate within a single organization, internal and external forces, controlling information and seeking feedback (Adler et al., 2017; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The spinning of information being forced to the gate can have positive or negative values and the strength of the force can vary (Shoemaker et al., 2017). According to Carlson and Kashani (2017), "If one took too long to release information then speculation can lead to rumors and if one responds too fast with inaccurate information than future information may be disregarded (Fitch, 2012)" (p. 12). Infinite events of information occur each day, and leaders must decide which information is to be delivered to the audience and on the platform most appropriate to matching the message (Carlson & Kashani, 2017; Serban, 2015). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) believed that the gatekeepers control a person's social reality as an actual view of their world. Shoemaker et al. (2017) indicated, "Today's gatekeeping model includes the evolution of messages and then movement along people. Those who receive also send, and senders receive in an ever-increasing web of transmission, making the audience a powerful player in the gatekeeping process" (p. 352).

District Superintendent as the Gatekeeper

With the rise of technology and the various social platforms, a district superintendent must take the role of gatekeeper. A gatekeeper is a leader who controls the information that is shared with the audience (Adler et al., 2017). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) defined the gatekeeper as the individual responsible for the gatekeeping selection of information and the interpretation of the information. As the leader of the school district, the superintendent must be aware of the information channeling through the community (Kowalski, 2011).

There are many forces affecting gatekeeping, making the role of a gatekeeper difficult. Barzilai-Nahon (2008) shared that gatekeepers' decisions are subjective, ultimately affecting the credibility of the gatekeeper. The audience needs to trust the gatekeeper and the information shared from the gatekeeper (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Porterfield and Carnes (2012) expressed the importance of trust in the relationship between the district superintendent and the community. Time constraint is an enormous undertaking as a gatekeeper. Shoemaker et al. (2017) described that the time to gather information, process the information, decide which information is critical, and determine how the communication needs to reach the audience is a huge undertaking for a leader. Ultimately, there is time-sensitive information that can be crucial to a superintendent's relationship with the community (Kowalski, 2013; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Therefore, it is important for a district superintendent to manage the gateway of information and communicate the desired information to the audience to secure the relationship with parents and the community (Kowalski, 2013).

District Superintendent as a Communicator

The view of the superintendent as a communicator emerged with America's transition from a manufacturing society (Kowalski, 2011). Historically, the superintendent's ability to be the communicator is a skill (Kowalski, 2005). New superintendents come to the position with a directive to improve communication, enhance relationships, and reconnect the schools to the community (Ascough, 2010; Lumetta et al., 2014). Comprehensive communication training has not been part of superintendent preparation (Kowalski, 2013). The community, including the school district board members, have become increasingly less tolerant of superintendents who have poor and selective communicative skills (Kowalski, 2013). Lack of communication and keeping the public informed are the main reasons why superintendents are released from employment (Bagin, 2007; Kowalski, 2013; Lumetta et al., 2014).

Bjork et al. (2014) revealed the superintendent's roles and responsibilities are defined by evolving political, economic, and social conditions that determine performance expectations for schools and students aligned with transformational efforts and national requirements (Bjork et al., 2014; Bjork & Keedy, 2001). Two conditions shape the superintendent's role of communication: (a) the need for superintendents to lead the process of restructuring schools and (b) the need for superintendents to facilitate organizational restructuring by accessing and using information timely to identify and solve problems of practice (Bjork et al., 2014; Kowalski, 2013).

Kowalski (2005) stated that the effective communicator role a district's superintendent has is outlined by new expectations. Two-way, symmetrical interactions are the superintendent's normative behavior of communication (Bjork et al., 2014;

Houston, 2001; Kowalski, 2005; Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2007). Bjork et al. (2014) added the expectations have become evident since the early 1980s. Superintendents are expected to engage in fair, consistent, open, and honest two-way communication with the community, employees, and school board members (Bjork et al., 2014; Kowalski, 2011, 2013; Tapper, 2015). Superintendents must build a positive district image through a culture of open communication and positive relationships, gain community support, facilitate the creation of a shared vision with clarity, and keep stakeholders informed about the education students need to be successful for tomorrow (Ascough, 2010; ECRA, 2010; Ferriter, 2011; Lumetta et al., 2014; Kowalski, 2013; Waters & Marzano, 2007). For a superintendent to be a highly effective communicator, he or she must have a positive disposition, apply the skills of communication consistently (including a willingness to listen and respond), and build relationships (Bjork et al., 2014; Ferriter, 2011; Kowalski, 2011, 2013). Superintendents must be outstanding facilitators of communication recognizing how to market their ideas and gauge the public (Houston, 2001).

Superintendents have been expected to maintain a high community profile continuously (Kowalski, 2013). They need to be visible in activities in the community, including civic endeavors and serving on committees (Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2010). Being visible allows the superintendent to build relationships by informing the public of goals, strategies, and intended outcomes (Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2010; Tapper, 2015). Superintendents are also responsible for building more inclusive cultures as the community becomes more diverse (Kowalski, 2013).

Superintendents dedicated to involving all stakeholders are directed by a combination of philosophical, political, and professional principles (Bjork & Keedy, 2001; Kowalski, 2011, 2013). There is a philosophical principle that superintendents believe the community has a right be informed about the public schools (Kowalski, 2011, 2013). Politically, superintendents acknowledge that if stakeholders are alienated from what the school district is achieving, they will be less likely to support the district financially (Duke, 2004; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005; Kowalski, 2011, 2013). Superintendents must seek the political perspective of stakeholder support by understanding the community expectations and needs, establishing a positive working relationship, securing support for reform initiatives, and engaging in two-way communication (Bjork et al., 2014; Kowalski, 2011, 2013; Tapper, 2015). Superintendents are change agents who need to thoroughly examine the stakeholder's understanding and know when to implement reform for the district (Bjork et al., 2014; Kowalski, 2013). Kowalski (2013) stated that superintendents have a professional duty to represent the district and to inform the community of school programs and effectiveness. A mix of the professional, political, and philosophical principles are needed for a superintendent to be an effective communicator in the community he or she leads (Fullan, 2001; Kowalski, 2011, 2013).

Crisis Communication

In a situation of crisis, it is the leader's responsibility to communicate the story, including a resolution to the issue (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). According to Porterfield and Carnes (2012), "One of the main differences between success and disaster is the willingness and ability to communicate early and often with stakeholders" (p. 115).

Trump (2015) shared that social media is the platform for receiving information at a rapid rate within the school community. Dunn and DeLapp (2013) emphasized that “in today’s global light-speed communication environment, saying nothing is not a viable option” (p. 1).

Social media can support sharing the message especially in a crisis due to time being a significant factor (Hood, 2014). According to Dunn and DeLapp (2013), social media can eliminate the press as a filter and allows the leader to control the message in a timely manner. Porterfield and Carnes (2012) stated, “Social media gives the leader a chance to frame the message around a crisis before outsiders attempt to take control” (p. 120). Dunn and DeLapp (2013) added by stating that others will create the message they perceive, which can lead to negative and damaging consequences to the district and its leader if the leader does not manage the message.

Leaders face information spreading rapidly throughout the school community and beyond by students, parents, and/or media (Trump, 2015). Trump (2015) stated that the information that used to take days to disseminate now takes minutes. His research revealed that threats such as bomb threats, hoaxes, acts of violence, and shootings cause police response (high taxpayer costs), lost instruction time, and anxiety in the community, and the threats are shared by students, parents, and the community (Trump, 2015). After analyzing 43 states during the first 6 months of school for the 2013-14 school year, Trump (2015) shared that 35% of the threats were sent through social media, including texts and e-mails. Leaders using social media to diffuse these threats could be immediate, factual information; the community needs to know the schools are safe (NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee, 2015).

Developing and sharing a crisis communication plan that is accessible to the community will assist in overcoming a social media crisis and managing the communication (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012; Trump, 2015). Social media can support the creativity, flexibility, and improvisation of a crisis communication effectively (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee, 2015) identified that the community must be educated with the crisis communication plan prior to a crisis. Dunn and DeLapp (2013) expressed that superintendents “remaining central to the discussion will be the importance of professional communication practices in all school districts, so that the ‘hero’ of any media story is as it should be: dedicated, professional educators who perform heroically under unpredictable crisis-based circumstances” (p. 1).

District Superintendent as a Public Relations Professional

Public relations are the sharing the story of the organization while building a strategic communication process benefitting the public and the organization (Dougherty, 2014; Schaffer, 2013; Waddington, 2012; Wynne, 2016). Public relations professionals guarantee that they have the knowledge, skills, and systems in place to listen and engage with the stakeholders (Waddington, 2012). District superintendents must be the person who is responsible for relations with the public and school personnel (Sharp & Walter, 2004; Wynne, 2016). All superintendents practice public relations (Carroll, 2013). The superintendent’s role of public relations “is to maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the school district and the publics it serves” (Carr, n.d., p. 25).

Superintendents are expected to brand and market the district and schools with all the stakeholders (parents, community, board members) to help with issues such as

declining enrollment and district transfers (Padgett, 2007; Tapper, 2015). Branding can also help target and provide resources to the parents of toddlers and preschoolers, members of the real estate community, and local business partnerships (Gordon, 2012). The community should see the celebration of achievements and see the good things happening in the school district (Gordon, 2012; Tapper, 2015).

According to Valentini and Kruckebug (2012), “Social media must be at the heart of public relations activities because social media can enhance organization relationships by increasing and improving community relations” (p. 11). Public relations and social media can result in a quantifiable behavioral change (Waddington, 2012). Social media as a public relations tool can be used to protect, build, and enhance reputations (Wynne, 2016). Callan and Levinson (2015) stated that social media is essential for a superintendent’s success and survival. If superintendents are not telling the story, someone will, and it may not be the story they want told (Gordon, 2012). As district technology and public relation leaders, superintendents are responsible for the endeavor of embracing social media to communicate with parents, students, and community (Griffin, 2014; Powers & Green, 2016; Sharp & Walter, 2004; Tapper, 2015).

Parent and Community Engagement

Parent and community engagement provides school districts with an immense range of resources to provide students with a good quality education (Ezarik, 2002; Hampton, 2016; Vogel, 2006). Parents expect their children to be in a safe environment while receiving a quality education (Carr, 2009; Hampton, 2016; Vogel, 2006). Effective parent engagement is assisting the child’s learning and growth at both school and at home (Lotkina, 2016). For student learning to excel, concentrated attention was given to

parents because they are the most influential constituent (Kowalski, 2011). Lotkina (2016) stated that parents want to have meaningful opportunities to contribute to their child's success and they want to be informed.

Superintendents must participate in a proactive role to build and maintain relationships with parents and the community (Kowalski, 2011). Kowalski (2011) stated that superintendents need to define, assess current levels, and establish an ideal parental involvement plan. Superintendents should facilitate and encourage the implementation of the plan (Hampton, 2016; Kowalski, 2011). Encouraging positive relationships with parents makes it easier to have the difficult conversations when unpleasant situations arise because the trust has been built prior to the situation (Hampton, 2016; Kowalski, 2011; Lotkina, 2016; North, 2005). Tapper (2015) shared that superintendents need to educate the public and parents about the value of the educational opportunity the district is providing to the children.

According to the Consortium for School Networking (2010), superintendents voiced strong satisfaction with the technological power to assist with parent involvement and community engagement. The social media tools offer district and parent communication that can keep parents informed (Lotkina, 2016). Social media assists with finding various ways to help busy parents and community members stay engaged and informed about the public schools (Carr, 2009; Hampton, 2016). It is important to include the school district's board to develop a social media communication strategy to engage parents and the community (Ezarik, 2002; Hampton, 2016). Hampton (2016) and Tsouvalas (2012) agreed that social media can prosper parent and community engagement by promoting the positive opportunities by posting photos and seeking

feedback. Lotkina (2016) cautioned that social media does not enhance parent relationships but is effective for replacing paper piles. It fulfills the required instant access to information (Abe & Jordan, 2013). Parents want to be reassured that a person cares about their child's education as much as they do (Lotkina, 2016).

Generational Differences

Generational differences have been examined more in depth for the past 20 years; however, special attention is being paid to the Millennial Generation (Generation Y) as the Digital Natives (Oh & Reeves, 2014). Millennials have been immersed with technology since birth and expect the prior generations to accommodate their way of communication with technology (Rosen, 2010). Oh and Reeves (2014) shared that the millennials are the majority of the parents of children in the education system.

Distinctive characteristics of a generation cohort can be impacted by major events, historical experiences, social and economic circumstances (Barbour, 2009; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Moore, 2007; Strauss & Howe, 1991). According to Main (2016), "These events may include the perceived status of children, the nature of societal work required as children age into adults, heroes, disasters, and the nature of technology advancements" (p. 34). Many researchers do not agree about the exact length of time a generation encompasses; however, they do agree upon an approximate 20-year span from when a person is born until they begin having children (Main, 2016). Table 3 shares the generation cohorts and characteristics according to "Talking 'bout my generation . . . and learning" (2016). People of different age ranges are immersed in varying degrees of technology (Haeger & Lingham, 2014). Understanding the unique communication

characteristics, attitude toward technology, and the generation signature product is used to investigate the relationships and connections between groups of people (Main, 2016).

The traditionalists were born prior to 1945, making them at least 73 years old. This generation was influenced by the Great Depression, Second World War, rock ‘n roll, and clearly defined gender roles, especially for women (“Talking ‘bout my generation . . . and learning,” 2016). This cohort consists of members in the community who can influence the direction of local schools even if their grandchildren do not attend the local schools (Autry & Berge, 2011). The automobile was the prominent product with this cohort and communication consisted of formal letters and face-to-face meetings (“Talking ‘bout my generation,” 2016). Traditionalists are characterized as follows:

Table 3

Generational Characteristics

Characteristics	Traditionalists (pre-1945)	Baby boomers (1945-1960)	Gen X (1961-1980)	Gen Y (1981-1995)
Attitude toward technology	Largely disengaged	Early information technology (IT) adaptors	Digital immigrants	Digital narratives
Signature product	Automobile	Television	Personal computer	Tablet/smart phone
Communication media	Formal letter	Telephone	E-mail and texts	Text or social media
Communication preference	Face to face	Face to face, but telephone if req.	Text or e-mail	Online/mobile

Note. From “Talking ‘bout my generation . . . and learning” [Blog post], March 9, 2016 (<https://im4learning.wordpress.com/2016/03/09/talking-bout-my-generation-and-learning/>)

disciplined; believe in conformity, rules, and authority; have a defined sense of right and wrong; and are loyal and respectful to authority (Strauss, 2005). As parents, this generation was influenced by parenting manuals. Benjamin Spock's book, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, was the guide for parenting with the philosophy of "let kids be kids" and inspired parents to allow the natural progression of childhood to adulthood develop (Troksa, 2016).

The baby boomer generation was born approximately between the years of 1945 and 1960 and are currently 57-72 years old ("Talking 'bout my generation," 2016). The baby boomers are currently the retiring generation and leaders in communities (Main, 2016). This generation was influenced by the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and Watergate, which formed idealism and optimism (Strauss, 2005). According to "Talking 'bout my generation" (2016), the television was the technological movement, and communication was accomplished through telephone and face to face. Autry and Berge (2011) shared that the baby boomer parents demonstrated a dedicated work ethic and were supportive of the education system.

People considered to be in the Generation X cohort were born approximately between the years of 1961-1980 and are currently 37-56 years old ("Talking 'bout my generation," 2016). This generation is noted as the *latch key* children due to a movement of both parents being in the workforce and that they were exposed to high percentages of divorce (Main, 2016). According to Strauss and Howe (1991), this generation is considered cynical and disbelieving; however, they are independent and self-sufficient. They were influenced by the Cold War, MTV, and the introduction to the first personal computer and cellular phone (Strauss, 2005). Prensky (2001) stated that Generation Xers

are considered digital immigrants, and it is essential that they quickly acclimate to the new world of technology. Due to the latch key movement, Generation X children witnessed their parents separated from the educational system, preferring communication by phone or e-mail (Autry & Berge, 2011; Strauss, 2005).

Generation Y, also known as millennials, is the second largest generation behind the baby boomer cohort. They are born approximately 1981 to the 21st century and range between the ages of 22 and 36. This cohort consists of the majority of the parents with children in the education system (Autry & Berge, 2011). This cohort is known as *helicopter parents* and ensures equality among children with the *everyone gets a trophy* approach (Autry & Berge, 2011). This generation was influenced by the Internet and constant connectivity, U.S. school shootings, social media, reality TV, and 9/11 terrorist attacks (Strauss, 2005; Tapscott, 2008). Mobile devices are the strong technology product for the millennials, and they prefer to communicate via online and mobile phone through text messages or social media (“Talking ‘bout my generation,” 2016). According to Keengwe and Georgina (2013), the millennials are the first cyber literate generation (digital natives) that are a determined group with pressure to perform. Strauss (2005) shared that this cohort tends to get along well with their parents and community members, which is desirable when communicating with the education system regarding their children.

This research identified that there was a difference of technology use for communication within generation cohorts. Haeger and Lingham (2014) stated, “There is anecdotal evidence that technology is changing how people work and life spheres and how younger generations are savvier with technologies” (p. 316).

Dixon Ongoing Social Engagement Model

The platforms used by the school district superintendent (gatekeeper) were exhibited through the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Dr. Brian Dixon created the model as a result of a foundational framework desired by school leaders to effectively use social networking sites and social media tools to engage with parents and the community. This model is in its infancy in the research realm, as its conception was from more than 10 years of practical digital content creation, use of social media, and personal blogging by Dr. Dixon (Dixon, 2012; B. Dixon, personal communication, October 19, 2017).

The Dixon ongoing social engagement model identifies four levels of social engagement between school leaders and the community: awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy (Dixon, 2012). Dixon shared that the goal of this model is “the power of ownership shift from the school distributing content to the school community collaborating on the creation of content” (p. 6). For the purpose of this study, the model was taken through the engagement lens of the district superintendent and the parents.

Awareness

The awareness level in this model identifies how the social media tool informs the audience. Technology has created the age of awareness (Francis, 2016). Francis (2016) stated that information is readily at our fingertips and can heighten awareness in an instant. Awareness allows the audience to be connected to the information that is shared (Dixon, 2012). In the Dixon ongoing social engagement model, awareness is the first

level of engagement and is an important part of communicating with parents (Dixon, 2012).

Feedback

In the Dixon ongoing social engagement model, the feedback level recognizes that the audience has the opportunity to respond to what is asked on social media.

Feedback is a level that involves both the receiving and the giving of information and is critical to advance the organization (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Constructive feedback is the healthiest type of feedback for an organization (Naumann, 2015). It provides growth, unlocks innovation, and can require change (Naumann, 2015). Throughout California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), it is clearly stated that feedback is an important component of family engagement and relationship building (California Department of Education [CDE], 2017). Although feedback could be achieved in various platforms, building the trust of parents and the community (CDE, 2017) is this second level of Dixon's (2012) model.

Collaboration

The collaboration level in this model describes how the social media tool is utilized to provide opportunities for the parents to converse with the district superintendent. Collaboration occurs when the members formulate a cooperative team through learning and growing (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Collaborative dialogues formulate a joint efficacy (Strahan, 2003). When parents and school districts truly collaborate, there is a level of engagement that focuses on school district improvement and student achievement (Skanson, 2016). This level of social engagement can be achieved through various social media tools (Dixon, 2012).

Advocacy

The advocacy level in this model empowers the parents to promote the school district through the social media tool. In this level, the parents and community experience the “process of articulating a position and mobilizing support for it” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 309). Having advocates in the community will halt the negative, fictitious messages and provide correct information (NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee, 2015). Trump (2015) communicated that strong relationships are formulated at this level of engagement and advocates can assist in the positive branding of the school district. It will benefit the district if the advocates are active social media users as this is the platform to which information explodes in a rapid manner (Hood, 2014). Within the various social media tools, there are ways that the parents can promote the school district and empower the community (Dixon, 2012).

Storytelling. Storytelling is an opportunity to create emotion and drive action from target audiences and take an investment (time and/or resources) to create and share (Trybus, 2017a). According to Trybus (2017a), there are six milestones of storytelling: (a) visual storytelling, (b) verbal storytelling, (c) printed storytelling, (d) multichannel storytelling, (e) branded storytelling, and (f) democratized storytelling.

Democratized storytelling is the current storytelling that is intensifying as it is the technology allowing all people to be storytellers. Social media and social networking devices are allowing stories to be shared with others. According to Denning (2011), “Social media make it wonderfully—and frighteningly—easy for anyone to communicate instantly with anyone else in the world about anything” (p. 112). Denning (2011) stated that the community “can band together and use stories to rapidly form alliances that can

work powerfully for any organization” (p. 112). Therefore, it is extremely important for leaders to share the organization’s story so that others can promote and advocate for the organization (Denning, 2011). Trybus (2017a) shared in the future, social impact includes the citizen storytelling opportunities. These opportunities will be important for organizations producing authentic stories and focusing on activating influence creating a social impact of advocacy (Trybus, 2017b).

Building capacity. To create advocates for an organization, the organization must build capacity (L. S. Anderson & Anderson, 2010). According to L. S. Anderson and Anderson (2010), to build capacity, “You may have to address people’s mental states, physical states, emotional condition, or sense of meaning and purpose” (p. 85). This can be accomplished through communication sessions, dialogue, or events (L. S. Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Capacity building is an approach to development to build a community of supporters (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Additionally, social media can cultivate the social impact needed to build capacity producing advocates (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). The advocates will utilize social media to create strong networks, sharing community resources and telling the organization’s story (Dixon, 2012).

This study focused on Facebook, Twitter, district website, e-mail, eNewsletter, blog, and online survey as the social media tools district superintendents might use to engage parents in the areas of awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy.

Facebook

Dixon (2012) described Facebook as one of the most popular platforms that is easy to use, accessible, and manageable. Creating Facebook pages, groups, and events is a way that Facebook can engage parents with school districts. Facebook is a valuable

tool to increase communication, brand a school district, and create a platform for positive public relations by making personal connections and building relationships (Hartstein, 2011). In Figure 4, Facebook provides the ability to engage parents in all four levels of the social engagement model.

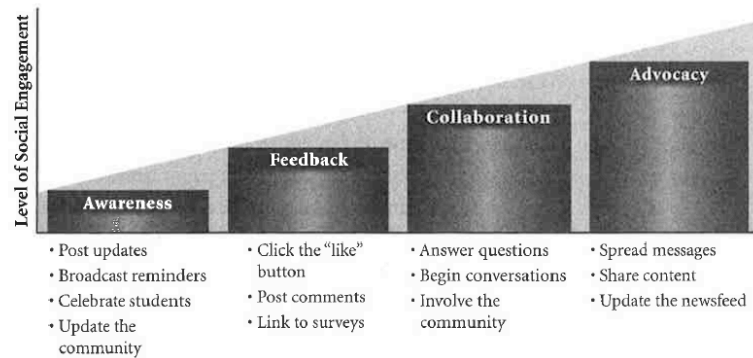


Figure 4. Facebook. From *Social Media for School Leaders: A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Most out of Facebook, Twitter, and Other Essential Web Tools*, by B. Dixon, 2012, p. 27 (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

Twitter

Twitter is a well-known social networking site for information sharing in real time by uniting blogging, short message service (SMS), communities with messenger (Park & Lee, 2015). Twitter presents unique features that correlate with the four levels of social engagement. These features include following and followers, direct messages, following trending topics through hashtags (#), and a quick catch up to the latest news (Dixon, 2012). The short 280 maximum character message can update parents, allow for feedback, invite collaboration by building networks and starting conversations, and advocate for the district by promoting links, using a hashtag, and retweeting (Dixon, 2012). Figure 5 displays how to use Twitter for the four areas of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model.

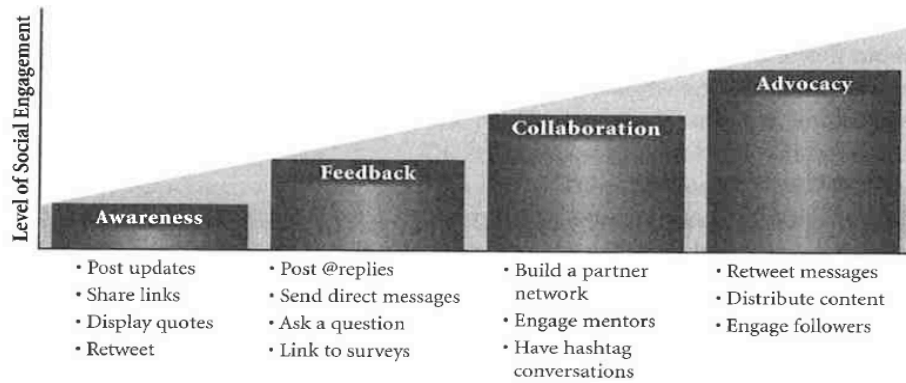


Figure 5. Twitter. From *Social Media for School Leaders: A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Most out of Facebook, Twitter, and Other Essential Web Tools*, by B. Dixon, 2012, p. 46. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

District Website

The district website “is the primary place your families visit for information” (Dixon, 2012, p. 52). An online search of the school district’s name will suggest the school district website (Dixon, 2012). Websites have the ability to collect information and invite engagement as the district’s main online location (Dixon, 2012). Developing an effective district website can engage parents in each of the four levels of social engagement as shown in Figure 6.

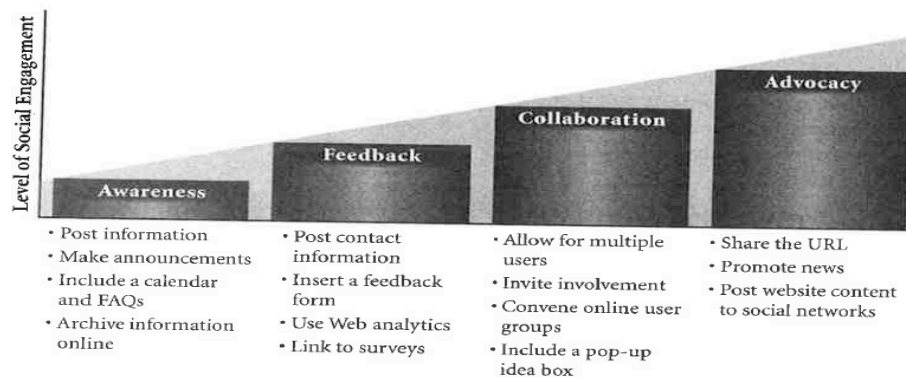


Figure 6. District website. From *Social Media for School Leaders: A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Most out of Facebook, Twitter, and Other Essential Web Tools*, by B. Dixon, 2012, p. 60 (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

E-mail

Dixon (2012) stated, “An overlooked social media tool many school leaders could make better use of is e-mail” (p. 107). Dixon (2012) shared that the excessive number of e-mails is a struggle for school leaders to manage and leaders are not able to maximize the opportunity e-mail provides to connect with parents. An e-mail signature containing contact information, important resources, vision and mission of the district, and the district logo provides parents with valuable information and confirms professionalism (Dixon, 2012). E-mail provides opportunities for ongoing social engagement as shown in Figure 7.

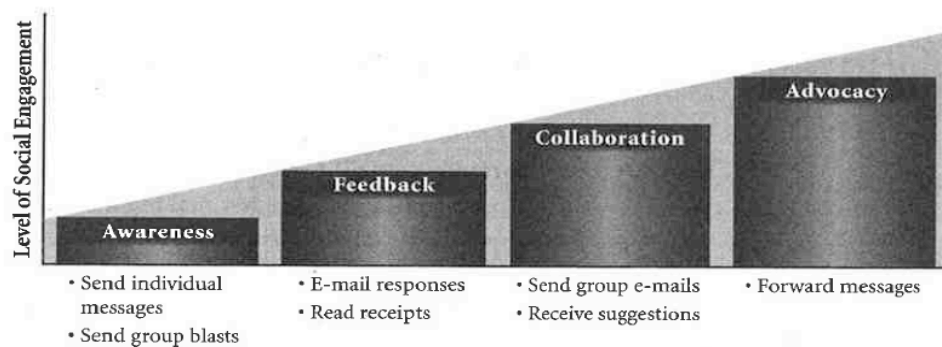


Figure 7. E-mail. From *Social Media for School Leaders: A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Most out of Facebook, Twitter, and Other Essential Web Tools*, by B. Dixon, 2012, p. 119. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

eNewsletter

eNewsletters are e-mail newsletters, allowing a quick way to communicate with parents, that are cost and time effective (Dixon, 2012). eNewsletters can be formatted with templates with customized content that can include links (Dixon, 2012). Dixon (2012) stated that superintendents can track the statistics of successful and unsuccessful transmissions, views, and forwards. eNewsletters can be collaboratively designed, allowing multiple users to customize information in the template. They also provide

benefits to being digital including the ability to archive it, customize it, and maximize the data collection of the interaction it could create (Dixon, 2012). eNewsletters provide opportunities for social engagement as displayed in Figure 8.

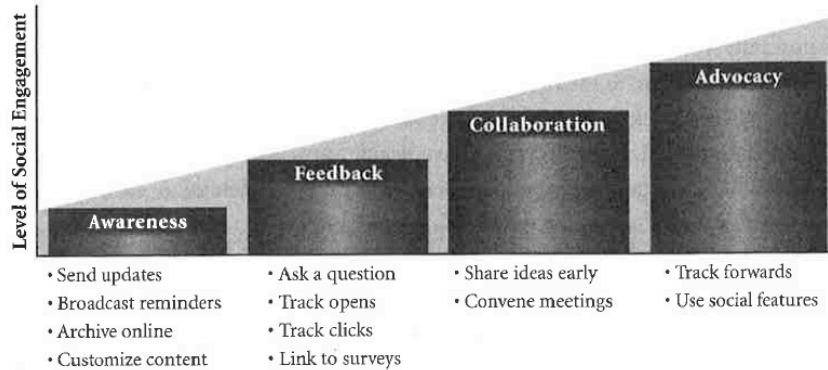


Figure 8. Enewsletter. From *Social Media for School Leaders: A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Most out of Facebook, Twitter, and Other Essential Web Tools*, by B. Dixon, 2012, p. 14 (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

Blog

Parents want to hear from the district superintendent (Dixon, 2012). A blog is an online journal platform that allows the superintendent to cast the district’s vision, share the district’s story, influence the educational community, and improve professional practice through the reflection of prior blogs (Dixon, 2012). Blogs can be in video, multimedia, audio, and text form and are free to create and publish. According to Dixon (2012), blogs have enhanced functions to track statistics on the views, record the most entries that are shared on other social media platforms, customize the look for a personalized design, and can be updated from any device. Blogs can be viewed, shared, liked, and receive comments. Blogs can support ongoing social engagement as shown in Figure 9.

Online Survey

Online surveys allow leaders to gather valid feedback in a quick manner (Dixon, 2012). It can provide the superintendent with the parents' perspective of what is going well and what can be improved (Dixon, 2012). Online surveys incorporate many elements to enhance the feedback by using the following tools: a template, effective question types, instant results, and statistics for data analysis (Dixon, 2012). Online surveys are present in the four areas of ongoing social engagement as seen in Figure 10.

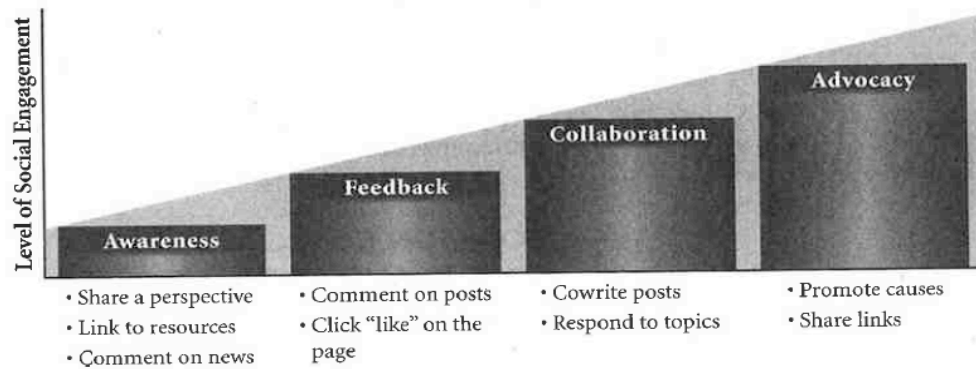


Figure 9. Blog. From *Social Media for School Leaders: A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Most out of Facebook, Twitter, and Other Essential Web Tools*, by B. Dixon, 2012, p. 161 (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

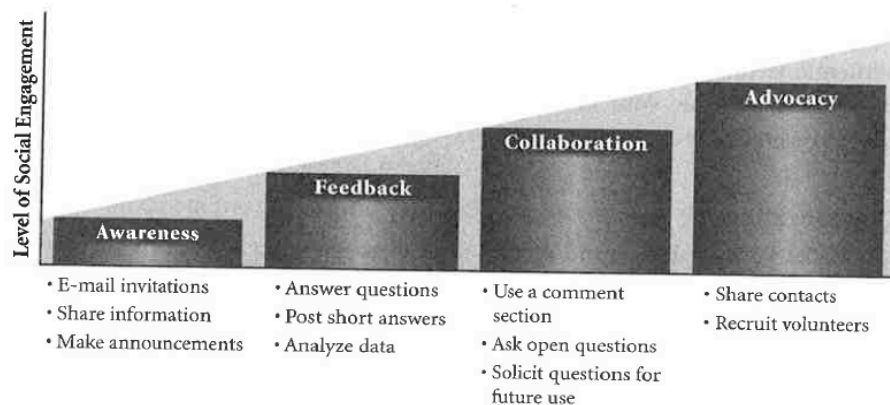


Figure 10. Online surveys. From *Social Media for School Leaders: A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Most out of Facebook, Twitter, and Other Essential Web Tools*, by B. Dixon, 2012, p. 101 (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

Literature Synthesis

The literature connected to this topic was synthesized to establish themes, contrary views, and any gaps in the literature. Synthesizing the literature occurs when the mutual areas of focus are grouped according to similarities and differences through the combination of sources (Pan, 2016). The body of literature shared the depiction of the known and unknown of the topic, weaving it together (Patten, 2012). The researcher created a matrix to support the synthesis of literature for this study (see Appendix A; see also Appendix B).

Summary

The influence of social media and social networking sites through an informal communication channel has an impact on the flow of information within a community. District superintendents have a duty to be a gatekeeper of the information and a communicator to parents as the educational leader. Research showed the expectations and importance of parent communication. Additionally, research showed the engagement of social media and social networking through devices and the impact it has on an organization. However, even though there is research on how superintendents use social media and social networking to deepen their professional learning and collaborate with peers, there has yet to be a study that examines the role of social media used by superintendents to communicate with parents.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter contains the methodology used for this study of examining California superintendents' use of social media and the role it had when communicating with parents. This chapter begins with the purpose statement and research questions to provide the rationale for the research of superintendents' using social media when communicating with parents. It then provides an overview of the research design, population, sample, instruments, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis. The final section of this chapter discusses the limitations of the study and then proceeds into the conclusion of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to identify the social media tools used by exemplary California school district superintendents. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to identify the role of social media perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Lastly, the purpose of this study was to describe the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model.

Research Questions

1. What are the social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

2. What do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive is the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
3. What benefits do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
4. What challenges do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Research Design

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design. Patton (2015) stated that the mixed-methods study utilizes multiple methods including the blends of quantitative data and qualitative data. Quantitative data provide the answers to closed-ended questions and can yield statistics from the answers, whereas qualitative data are the meaningful stories of the statistics (Patton, 2015). In addition, the combination of both methods provides the stories to interpret the meaning of the numbers (Patton, 2015). In this research study, the quantitative method was the initial method, followed by the qualitative method resulting in an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) described, “The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results” (p. 224). After an extensive review of the literature, the researcher selected this research design as the best way to gain demographic information from the target population first and then,

based on the information, to go more in depth with interviews seeking answers to the research questions. Figure 11 illustrates the organization of this mixed-methods study.

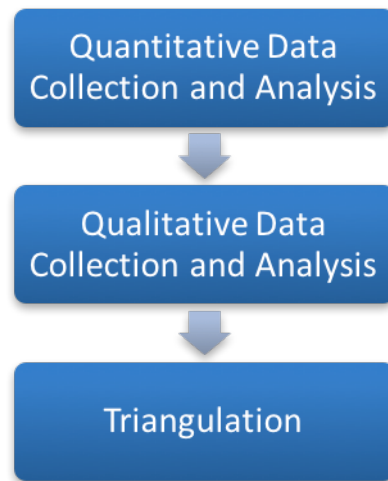


Figure 11. Explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. From *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, by J. Creswell, 2014, p. 220 (Los Angeles, CA: Sage).

Quantitative Research Design

Quantitative research is a measurement that uses a technique to identify numerical trends conforming to the sample population (Patton, 2015). The numerical trends are summarized and conclusions are drawn in the results of the study (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) indicated that a quantitative instrument, such as a survey, could be comprised of controlled questions. In this study, the quantitative data were the best way to gather the inquired background information of the superintendent, including years as a superintendent, years in the district as a superintendent, and age range aligned to the generation literature. It also investigated the social media tools used by superintendents and the perception of the role of social media for parent communication aligning to the research questions. The researcher chose a survey to ask controlled questions aligning to the research design of this study. In addition, it provided a quick way to gather

important, basic-level information without explanation to address the first two research questions.

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative researchers learn the perspectives of the participants in regular conditions (Patton, 2015). There are three areas of data collection in a qualitative study: observations, interviews, and artifact collection. This research study focused on in-depth, individual interviews with superintendents utilizing open-ended questions. In addition, it allowed the researcher to gather detailed responses regarding the benefits, challenges, recommendations, and beliefs about the use of social media with parents. Interviews are an in-depth way of understanding feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives of the individuals on the specific research area (Patton, 2015). In the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the qualitative data helped explain the initial quantitative results (Creswell, 2014). The researcher selected the qualitative purpose in this study to allow superintendents to share their perceptions, which may include experiences and stories of using social media when communicating with parents to provide the depth beyond the survey results. The combination of these qualitative information sources enabled the researcher to triangulate the responses to the surveys and the interviews.

Population

A study's population is explained as a group of people having a similar characteristic that differentiates them from others (Creswell, 2014). The population can be any amount of people from any certain area. Additionally, a researcher can encounter various limitations, such as time and money, when using many people in the study. For

this study, the researcher chose to focus on school district superintendents as the population.

According to California Department of Education (CDE, 2016), there were 1,025 school districts in California in 2015-2016. Each school district must have a superintendent or a superintendent/principal. Therefore, the population in this research study is 1,025 superintendents as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

2015-2016 Number of California School Districts and Categories

District category	Number of districts
Unified	343
Elementary	526
High	77
Other	79
Total	1,025

Note. From “Fingertip Facts on Education in California—CalEdFacts,” by the California Department of Education, 2016 (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/ceffingertipfacts.asp>).

Since there are over 1,000 California school district superintendents, a study of this population size would be extreme; thus, it was necessary to continue to reduce the size of the population (Patton, 2015). The researcher selected elementary school districts as the focus of this study as it is the category with the majority of the districts. Therefore, the population for this study was 526 superintendents.

Target Population

The population of 526 superintendents continued to be excessive and needed to be reduced. According to Creswell (2008), “The target population or ‘sampling frame’ is

the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). This research study identified the target population using the following criteria:

1. California elementary school district superintendents with enrollments between 500 and 5,000, and
2. with no more than one charter school.
3. The district does not employ a public information officer, and
4. the school district website indicates the district’s use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and/or blogs.

Table 5 shows the number of school districts with enrollments between 500 and 5,000 according to Ed-Data.

Table 5

California School Districts With Enrollments of 5,000 or Less for the 2015-16 School Year

District category	Number of districts
Unified	175
Elementary	448
High	42
Total	665

Note. From “Comparison,” by Ed-Data Education Data Partnership (<http://www.ed-data.org/Comparisons>).

Once the criteria were established to identify the target population, the researcher validated these criteria with a statewide expert on school district communications to ensure the identification of an *exemplary* superintendent. The researcher downloaded the list of 448 elementary school districts, examined each district’s website, and used the exclusion criteria to eliminate any districts that had a superintendent/principal as well as any districts that showed evidence of a public information officer. Also, districts that had

more than one charter school were removed from the list to allow this researcher to focus on traditional public elementary school districts. The researcher then examined each district's website for evidence of social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, and/or blogs) aligned to the stages of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model (awareness, feedback, collaboration, advocacy). There were 162 superintendents who met the criteria of the target population. The purpose of this study was to identify the social media tools along with the superintendent's perspectives using the tools for parent communication. Therefore, there was another criterion added to the target population to create a sample size that would generalize the research for the population.

Sample

The sample of a research study is a "group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The sample of participants ideally signifies the entire population (Creswell, 2014). For the quantitative portion of this study, purposive sampling was used due to the identification of individuals who met the participation criteria and provided the best information to address the purpose of this study. Following the quantitative segment of this design, the researcher selected reputational case sampling for the qualitative approach to identify the superintendents that are exemplary in using social media when communicating with parents. Patton (2015) stated that reputational case sampling requires experts to select the exemplary sample participants. The disadvantage of these findings is that they will not be representative of the entire population due to selection bias to seek superintendents who were experts in using social media with parents. Figure 12 demonstrates the population, target population, and sample for this study.

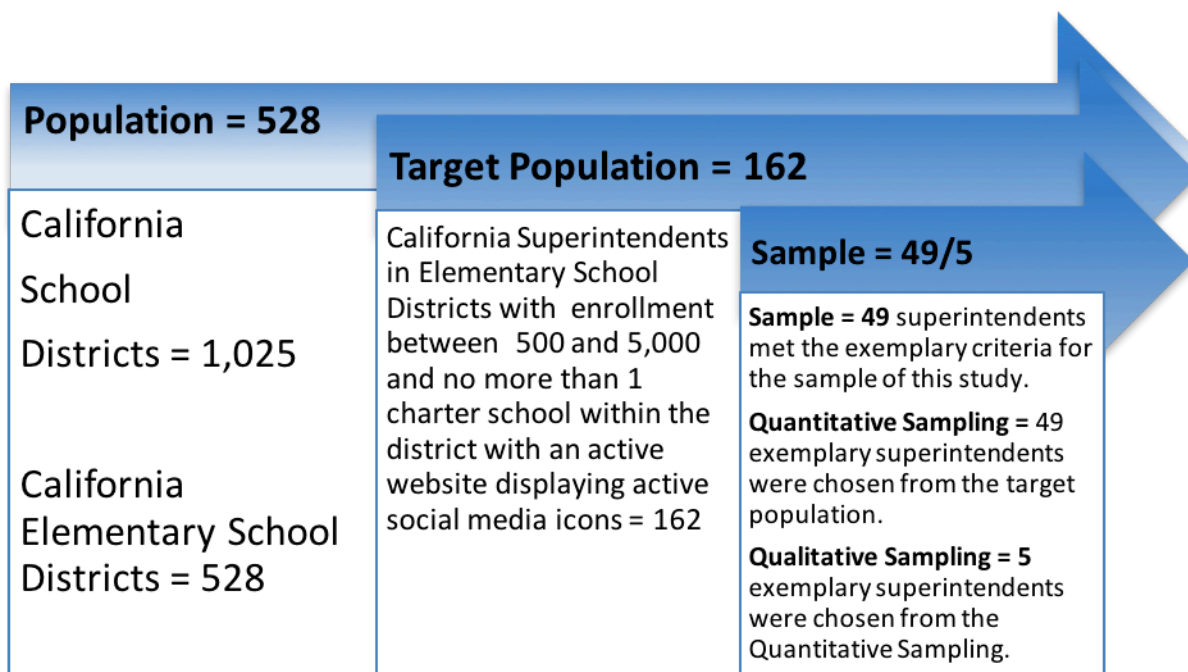


Figure 12. Population, target population, and sample.

Quantitative Sampling

For the quantitative portion of this study, a purposeful sampling was used because the participants selected exemplified certain criteria which yielded the most beneficial data for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010), “On the basis of the researcher’s knowledge of the population, a judgment is made about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research” (p. 138).

The target population of 162 elementary school district superintendents required an additional criterion to create a sample population of exemplary superintendents. This research study identified the target population with the following criterion:

- an active account on a social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and/or blogs;
- and

- recognized by a professional technology organization as an exemplar user of social media in their role as a district superintendent.

An active account was defined as having a profile that included the following:

- a profile picture,
- connections to other people, and
- posts that have occurred within the last 2 months.

The professional technology organizations used to identify the quantitative sample population could include the following: Computer Using Educators (CUE), Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), and Technology Information Center for Administrator Leadership (TICAL). The researcher contacted the organization's leaders and inquired elementary school district superintendents that are active social media users. These criteria narrowed the sample size to an exemplary population of 49 superintendents needed for this research. The researcher validated this additional criterion with a statewide expert on school district communications ensuring that the total criteria identified exemplary superintendents to form the sample needed for this study.

According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), the rule of thumb for a target population of less than 100 subjects can be noted as a minor subgroup allowing for 49 subjects to be known as a sufficient sample size. Therefore, for this study, 49 superintendents were identified for participation for the quantitative portion of this study.

Qualitative Sampling

After analyzing the quantitative data, qualitative sampling was chosen. Once superintendents have participated in the quantitative sampling, the qualitative sampling first consisted of a reputational case sampling. The researcher examined the data

compiled from the quantitative sampling and shared the results with three communication experts. The three communication experts that participated as the expert panel used in this study are Thomas DeLapp, APR, Terilyn Flinders, and Michelle McDonald.

Thomas DeLapp, APR, has served as communications counsel for over 400 school districts in California. He has conducted over 1,500 communication workshops nationwide and trained over 250,000 educators on effective communications, media relations, and community engagement. He has over 40 years of experience in the public and private sector. He has received numerous awards. In 2016, DeLapp received the highest award from the Association of California Administrators, the Ferd Kiesel Memorial Distinguished Service Award, for his exceptional contributions to public education in California.

Terilyn Flinders is the director of communications and legislative affairs for the law firm of Fagen, Friedman, and Fulfrost (F3). She has over 30 years of experience with corporate and crisis communications. She supports the law firm's clients when they have gained the attention of the community, media, and social media. She provides workshops on communication and media management for California superintendents. She participated and partnered with the Association of California Administrators to design and develop a workshop titled Designed to Disrupt, a governance workshop that focuses on the best practices of social media.

Michelle McDonald is the director of communications for the Alameda County Office of Education. She leads a team to ensure the story of Alameda County Office of Education is told and raises awareness about its initiatives, programs, achievements through various forms of media including social media. Prior to this position, she was

the public information officer for Dublin Unified School District in Dublin, California. She is also an accomplished sports journalist and author of women in sports. She was inducted into the Sports and Athletics Category of the Alameda County Women's Hall of Fame. She is a member of the California School Public Relations Association, National School Public Relations Association, and the California Association of Public Information Officers.

The expert panel identified and recommended five exemplary superintendents that they believed to be the key superintendents (informants) to be interviewed to develop a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges in using social media when communicating with parents. According to Patton (2015), "Key informant interviews are used to identify trends and future directions . . . and provide valuable expertise on and insights into the root of problems" (p. 284).

For this study, the researcher selected five superintendents as a strong qualitative sample of the total qualitative sample to provide a deep understanding of the perspectives of the total sample size. Patton (2015) stated that "there are no rules" for a qualitative sample size (p. 311). Qualitative sampling is a size of representatives that can represent the population (Patton, 2015). For a qualitative sampling, "Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources" (Patton, 2015, p. 311). From the 49 quantitative participants, the recommendations from communication experts, and the desire to conduct in-depth interviews with these selected exemplary superintendents to answer the research questions and align with the purpose of this study, the researcher selected five as an adequate number to meet the qualitative

sample size. The five exemplary superintendents were contacted to secure participation. The process for contacting the sample exemplary superintendents is outlined below:

1. The researcher contacted the school district superintendents by phone at their offices to explain the purpose, benefits, and risks of participating in the study. The terms of anonymity for participants were explained by the researcher, and any questions from the superintendents were answered by the researcher. An informational letter was e-mailed to the school district superintendent (Appendix C).
2. Upon agreement to participate, the researcher scheduled a 60-minute meeting with each of the five exemplary school district superintendents. The time allotment for the interview accommodated their busy schedules.
3. At the completion of scheduling the interview, the researcher e-mailed the following documents to the participant: (a) invitation to participate letter (Appendix D), (b) Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix E), (c) informed consent form to be signed and collected at the time of the interview (Appendix F), (d) interview protocol and script to review prior to the interview (Appendix G), and (e) audio release form to be signed and collected at the time of the interview (Appendix H).

Instrumentation

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study used one quantitative and one qualitative instrument to collect the data. According to Creswell (2014), "The key idea is that the qualitative data collection builds directly on the quantitative results" (p. 224). In this study, first, a survey of demographic information was given to 49 superintendents and then a follow-up in-depth interview with five exemplary superintendents was identified by an expert panel. An online survey was used to accumulate the quantitative

data. Following the survey, the researcher conducted interviews to gather the qualitative data. The strengths of both instruments combined “provides for a more comprehensive picture of what is being studied” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 396).

Quantitative Instrumentation

Creswell (2014) stated that “a survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions” (p. 155). The researcher selected a survey to gather information in an efficient manner. After an intensive review of the literature and an extensive study of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model, the researcher developed a survey titled Social Media (Appendix I). Due to the infancy of this model, the researcher needed to verify the alignment of this survey to ensure validity (Appendix B). The survey questions were designed by the researcher based on the need to collect data to address the research questions. Specifically, the first and second research questions were addressed by the quantitative survey instrument.

There were three parts to this survey (see Appendix I). The first part of the survey collected background information. The second part of the survey asked how the exemplary superintendent used the listed social media tools referencing the four stages of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model and the importance of the tool. The final part of the survey included a 5-point Likert scale to answer 16 statements to describe the exemplary superintendent’s perception of the role of social media when communicating with parents. The statements in Parts 2 and 3 of the survey were gathered from the extensive literature review. Because a quantitative instrument is limited to the depth of the responses, the researcher added a follow-up qualitative instrument to address the other research questions that could not be addressed by a survey.

Qualitative Instrument

Patton (2015) shared that in qualitative research the instrument of the study is the researcher. To collect qualitative data, there are three techniques—artifacts, observations, and interviews (Patton, 2015). The researcher chose the interview method for this study to address the other research questions. In addition, the researcher utilized open-ended questions to strengthen the perceptions of the exemplary superintendents by eliciting comprehensive explanations as this was the best method to collect the perceptions and reasoning of the exemplary superintendents. The researcher conducted the interviews with the five exemplary superintendents who completed the survey and were recommended by the expert panel. According to Creswell (2014), in an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the qualitative follow-up with the same individuals is “a key strength to this design” (p. 224).

The interviews began with a brief explanation of the study by the researcher, reviewing the Participant’s Bill of Rights, and obtaining written consent prior to conducting the interviews. The interview protocol and open-ended questions were provided to the participants prior to the interview. Even though the interview method is an intensive approach to gathering and coding the information, the researcher selected this method to stimulate responses detailed from the exemplary superintendents regarding the benefits and challenges of using social media when communicating with parents. Patton (2015) noted, “Open ended interviews add depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience” (p. 24). The responses of sharing the benefits and challenges provided the personal experience of exemplary superintendents to bring depth to the study.

Researcher as an Instrument

According to Patton (2015), the researcher is an instrument of the qualitative research, and the researcher's professional background in education has been solely in an elementary school district with enrollments between 500 and 5,000. Based on the researcher's experience, a potential bias to this study could occur. The researcher needs to be attentive to his or her own behaviors as they can influence the participant's responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Therefore, it was important for the researcher to follow the methodology and field testing to extinguish any biases that could occur in the actual interviews.

Validity and Reliability

Roberts (2010) defined validity as "the degree to which your instrument truly measures what it purports to measure" (p. 151). Both the quantitative and qualitative instruments were developed based on the literature review displayed in Chapter II, verified by a field test, and improved by following up with the participants for verification to ensure content validity. It was critical to cross-reference the questionnaire items with the research questions of the study to ensure alignment (J. Cox & Brayton Cox, 2008). This method also ensured for content validity. Appendix B displays the alignment for content validity in a matrix.

Roberts (2010) noted, "Reliability is the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another" (p. 151). A study will attain reliability if it is consistent with the data collection, data analysis, and results (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). For the quantitative instrument, the survey questions were developed through an extensive review of the literature. To ensure that this

instrument is reliable, an instrument field test was conducted for the survey. For reliability with the qualitative instrument, the researcher utilized a script and questions for the interview. This allowed for consistency with the interview data collection. Additionally, the participants were asked to review the transcripts to ensure the accuracy. A final way to ensure reliability for the qualitative instrument was to utilize a peer to assess the coding to ensure accurateness of the themes identified by the researcher. Literature indicated that a study is considered reliable through the consistent processes in data collection, analysis, and results (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010).

Field Testing

Field testing was performed for both the quantitative and qualitative instruments. For the survey, an instrument field test was conducted by asking one participant to take the pilot survey. After the participants completed the survey, they were asked to provide feedback regarding the process and questions based on the survey feedback reflection questions (Appendix J) that were added to the end of their survey. Revisions were made to the instrument using this guided feedback from participants.

Prior to conducting the interviews with the qualitative instrument, the researcher conducted a field test of this instrument. The researcher performed a mock interview with a volunteer school district superintendent. This pilot test of the interview protocol and script was conducted with an observer present. After this pilot-test interview, the participant provided feedback regarding the process and questions based on the interview feedback reflection questions (Appendix K). Revisions were made to the instrument guided from the feedback. The observer also provided the researcher with feedback regarding the delivery of the interview and any behavior that could signify biased

behavior. To further guarantee the overall reliability of this study, triangulation was utilized through the double recording of the interviews, the surveys given to the superintendents, and the review of the interview transcripts.

Data Collection

Prior to the beginning of data collection, the researcher completed the needed training to qualify to conduct research on human participants (see Appendix L). After a successful completion of certification, the researcher sought and obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Brandman University to conduct this study (see Appendix M). Informed consent, which described the use of the data and guaranteed confidentiality, was provided and obtained from all participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Prior permission was obtained to record the interviews. All data throughout this research study were stored using password-protected technology devices or in a locked cabinet. The researcher was the only person with access to the collected data.

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative data portion of this study was collected by administering a survey to the superintendents included in the sample size, answering Research Questions 1 and 2. The researcher sent the 49 superintendents an e-mail inviting them to participate in this study. The survey was distributed electronically through the computer-generated web-based program SurveyMonkey. All survey questions were protected using a secure account with password protection. The purpose of the study was clearly incorporated at the beginning of the survey. Before beginning the survey, the participants were asked to read the informed consent form (Appendix F). It was mandatory for participants to

acknowledge and read the consent at the beginning of the survey, which consent must be agreed upon for the survey to open. The participants were given two weeks to complete it, and it took no more than 10 minutes to complete. The participants were sent two reminder e-mails before the close of the survey.

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative data comprised one-to-one interviews in person with five exemplary superintendents who were selected in the qualitative sampling process. The interviews were conducted to deepen the understanding of the strengths and challenges using social media to communicate with parents as perceived by the superintendents, answering Research Questions 3 and 4. An interview was scheduled for an agreed-upon date and time with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. To ensure validity and reliability, an interview protocol and script, which included open-ended questions were used (see Appendix G). In addition, each interview was recorded with two different devices to assist with accuracy. When the transcription of the interviews was completed, a copy was sent to the participant for review and feedback to ensure accuracy. Any follow-up feedback from the participants was included in the final data.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection was complete, the researcher entered the data analysis phase of the study. This mixed-methods study followed the design of an explanatory sequential design. The quantitative data from the survey administered to exemplary superintendents were collected first. Then the qualitative data were collected from individual interviews through reputational case sampling of those who had completed the

survey. The quantitative data were analyzed first, and then the qualitative data were collected, transcribed, and analyzed. A final analysis was completed to triangulate the results of the quantitative and qualitative data to interpret and explain the findings of this study.

Quantitative Data Analysis

For this study's quantitative part, the survey was given to superintendents who met the sample criteria. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "Descriptive statistics are used to transform a set of numbers or observations into indices that describe or characterize the data" (p. 149). The quantitative results from the survey completed by superintendents allowed the researcher to perform an analysis. In a quantitative research study, presenting data and interpreting the results in a descriptive way is important (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Central tendency is a value for a probability distribution that provides a numerical index of a data set and its distribution. There are three measures of central tendency: mean, median, and mode. The mean is the most common of the three and is used to establish the average of all the scores. The median explains the center score of the data set when all the numbers are placed in numerical order. The mode is the score that occurs most frequently (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the researcher used the mean to analyze the collected data in Part 2 of the survey aligned to answer Research Question 1 and Part 3 of the survey aligned to answer Research Question 2 to provide a clear interpretation of the data in a percentage format.

Qualitative Data Analysis

After the quantitative data were analyzed, the researcher reexamined the interview questions. Following the analysis of the quantitative data, the researcher determined whether there were any revisions with the interview questions to ensure relevance, and they were completed at this time. The researcher then proceeded with qualitative data collection. After the collection, the analysis took place. During a qualitative data analysis, the researcher examines large amounts of data and converts them into themes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). After the researcher interviewed five exemplary superintendents, transcriptions were created from the recordings and reviewed by the participants. This large amount of data needed to be converted into codes or themes to execute a deep analysis (Roberts, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “A code is a name or phrase that is used to provide meaning” (p. 371). The researcher used NVIVO, a technology-based software, to input the transcribed interviews, and coded them to look for major themes for efficiency. Once the researcher reviewed the major themes, a master list was developed and linked back to Research Questions 3 and 4, which asked what the benefits and challenges are that exemplary superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents. The data from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis were compared and triangulated along with the extensive literature review to accumulate findings and form conclusions.

Triangulation of Data

The data gathered with the quantitative instrument and the qualitative instrument were analyzed for patterns and themes. The patterns and themes were compared to the extensive literature review in Chapter II of this study. A deep analysis of these areas

gave this study the greatest confidence in the findings. Creswell (2014) stated that the examination of the data sources and the evidence from the literature defends the themes adding to the legitimacy of the study.

Limitations

Limitations are aspects of the study that can have an undesirable effect limiting the researcher's capability to generalize (Roberts, 2010). The first limitation for this study's explanatory sequential design was the organization of time allotted to get the data needed to complete the study. The interviews needed to be conducted shortly after the collection and analysis of surveys. It was important to create a quantitative collection and analysis timeline and communicate with the communication experts, so they can make their recommendations and the researcher can begin the interview process.

Another limitation was the time commitment needed from superintendents to collect the data and organize the collection timeline in a way that would consider the heightened times in the educational school year. The researcher needed to schedule the distribution of the surveys and interviews in such a way that was sensitive to the superintendent's calendar.

The final limitation of this study was the researcher having the expertise in both quantitative and qualitative researcher methods when using a mixed-methods approach (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The extensive expertise of two of the three committee members confirmed that the correct mixed-methods technique was being followed by the researcher.

Summary

In Chapter III, the purpose and questions were researched using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. As described in this chapter, the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was aligned to the purpose of the study and answered the research questions using a survey, followed by interviews with exemplary superintendents as recommended by an expert panel. The chapter described the population, target population, and sample size as well as the selection process of the participants. In addition, this chapter included the descriptions of both the quantitative instrument (survey) and qualitative instrument (interview). In the data collection and data analysis sections, the purpose and research questions were investigated and addressed. Finally, this chapter detailed the limitations of the study. Chapter IV states the research findings and detailed descriptions of both the quantitative and qualitative results of this study. Finally, Chapter V examines the data, significant findings and provides conclusions.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

It is a known fact that social media is a vital part of this culture and how people connect with others (Lovecchio, 2013). Carr (2013) shared that, in 2025, most of the world's population will instantly retrieve unfiltered communication in their hands from mobile devices. Schmidt and Cohen (2014) indicated that every view will be delivered in real time in the extensive virtual environment, heightening emotions within the social media communities. This can cause havoc in *nanoseconds* in a crisis and any dissemination of *fake* news (Dougherty, 2014). It is crucial for superintendents to keep parents informed in a direct and simple way and to build trust and confidence in the school system through open communication (Kellough & Hill, 2014; Larkin, 2015; Powers & Green, 2016; Tapper, 2015). Additionally, it is extremely important for superintendents to capitalize on the opportunity to communicate in the way the community receives its information and be out in front of the situation (Kowalski, 2011). Therefore, superintendents “must develop new communication skills that utilize new technologies” (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012, p. 2).

Overview

In Chapter IV, quantitative data from this mixed-methods study were presented about what social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Also, presented with the quantitative data were exemplary California school district superintendents' perceptions of the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. In addition, qualitative data were presented on the perceptions of exemplary California school district

superintendents to identify the benefits and challenges when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. This chapter begins with the study's purpose statement and research questions. Next, is a summation of the methodology, data collection procedures, population, and sample. Then, this chapter focuses on the data analysis and presentation provided in narrative, table, and figure forms by addressing each research question. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the data.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to identify the social media tools used by exemplary California school district superintendents. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to identify the role of social media perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Lastly, the purpose of this study was to describe the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model.

Research Questions

1. What are the social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
2. What do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive is the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

3. What benefits do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
4. What challenges do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design. The quantitative method was the initial method used to identify the social media tools and the use of social media to communicate with parents as perceived by California school district superintendents. Following the quantitative method, the qualitative method shared the benefits and challenges of using social media to communicate with parents as perceived by California school district superintendents. Creswell (2014) described, “The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results” (p. 224).

Quantitative Procedures

After an intensive review of the literature and an examination of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model, the researcher developed a survey titled Social Media (Appendix I). Due to the infancy of this model, the researcher needed to verify the alignment of this survey to ensure validity (Appendix B). The survey questions were designed by the researcher based on the need to collect data to address the research questions. Specifically, the first and second research questions were addressed by the quantitative survey instrument. In order to field test the survey, one participant was

asked to provide feedback regarding the process and questions based on the survey feedback reflection questions added at the end of their survey. Revisions were made to the instrument using this guided feedback.

The researcher sent the 49 superintendents an e-mail inviting them to participate in this study including the SurveyMonkey online survey link (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>) and a unique three-digit code. The survey information was protected using a secure account with password protection. Before the beginning of the survey, the participants were asked to read the informed consent form, acknowledge it, and agree with it for the survey to open. The online survey took no more than 10 minutes to complete and superintendents were given 2 weeks to complete it. Superintendents were sent three e-mails reminding them to complete the survey. The online survey program generated results to allow the researcher to analyze it.

Qualitative Procedures

The researcher selected the interview method to stimulate responses detailed from the exemplary superintendents regarding the benefits and challenges of using social media when communicating with parents. An interview protocol and script were developed by the researcher based on the literature review aligned to the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. The researcher performed a mock interview with a volunteer school district superintendent with an observer present. Following this pilot-test interview, feedback was provided to the researcher in the areas of delivery of the interview and observed behaviors that could be perceived as biased.

Prior to conducting the interviews, five exemplary California school district superintendents were identified by three experts in the communication field to be known

in this study as the expert panel. After the quantitative results were received and analyzed by the 37 superintendents who participated, the researcher e-mailed the list of respondents to the expert panel. The respondent list included the name of the superintendent, the school district name, the county of the school district, and the district enrollment. The expert panel members analyzed the list of 37 superintendents and submitted five superintendent names to the researcher that they recommend interviewing for this study. The researcher charted the recommendations from the panel. Analyzing this chart, the researcher noted that if two out of three experts recommended a superintendent, the superintendent would be contacted for an interview. There were three superintendents who met this criterion. The nine superintendents having one expert recommendation were filtered from the list. This list needed further analysis. As recommended by the researcher's committee, the list was forwarded to a superintendent of an unified school district recognized as an avid social media user to recommend the needed two superintendents to be interviewed for this study. The superintendent identified the two superintendents to complete the total of five exemplary California school district superintendents interviewed for this study.

Once informed consent was secured, the researcher conducted the interviews using an interview protocol and script containing open-ended questions. Each interview was recorded by the researcher using two different devices to assist with accuracy. The recordings were transcribed and sent by electronic mail to the superintendents for their review and feedback to ensure accuracy. Once the superintendents confirmed that the interviews were accurate, the researcher began coding the data looking for themes.

Triangulation of Data Procedures

The data gathered with the quantitative instrument and the qualitative instrument were analyzed for patterns and themes. As recommended by Roberts (2010), the patterns and themes were compared to the extensive literature review in Chapter II of this study to ascertain agreements or disagreements with the limited previous findings on this topic. A deep analysis of these areas gave this researcher the greatest confidence in the study's findings. Creswell (2014) stated that the examination of the data sources and the evidence from the literature defends the themes adding to the legitimacy of the study.

Population

A study's population is explained as a group of people having a similar characteristic that differentiates them from others (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the population was school district superintendents. According to California Department of Education (CDE, 2016), there were 1,025 school districts in California in 2015-2016. Each school district must have a superintendent or a superintendent/principal. Therefore, the population in this research study was 1,025 superintendents. Since there were over 1,000 California school district superintendents, a study of this population size would be extreme; thus, it was necessary to continue to reduce the size of the population (Patton, 2015). The researcher selected elementary school districts as the focus of this study as that is a category with the majority of the districts. Therefore, the population for this study was 526 superintendents.

The population of 526 superintendents was still excessive and needed to be reduced. According to Creswell (2008), "The target population or 'sampling frame' is

the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). This research study identified the target population using the following criteria:

1. California elementary school district superintendents with enrollments between 500 and 5,000, and
2. with no more than one charter school.
3. The district does not employ a public information officer, and
4. the school district website indicates the district’s use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and/or blogs.

There were 162 superintendents who met these criteria. There was another criterion added to the population to create a sample size that would generalize the research for the population.

Sample

The sample of a research study is a “group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The sample of participants ideally represents the entire population (Creswell, 2014). For the quantitative portion of this study, purposive sampling was used due to the identification of individuals who met the participation criteria and provided the best information to address the purpose of this study.

The target population of 162 elementary school district superintendents required an additional criterion to create a sample population of exemplar superintendents. The additional criterion included the following:

- an active account on a social networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, and/or blogs;
and

- recognized by a professional technology organization as an exemplar user of social media in their role as an elementary school district superintendent.

This criterion narrowed the sample size to 49 California exemplary school district superintendents.

Following the quantitative segment of this design, the researcher selected reputational case sampling for the qualitative approach to identify the superintendents who were exemplary in using social media when communicating with parents. Patton (2015) stated that reputational case sampling requires experts to select the exemplary sample participants. For this study, the researcher selected five superintendents as a strong qualitative sample of the total qualitative sample to provide a deep understanding of the perspectives of the total sample size. Patton stated that “there are no rules” for a qualitative sample size (p. 311). Qualitative sampling is a size of representatives that can represent the population (Patton, 2015).

Demographic Data

For the quantitative portion of the study, a total of 37 exemplary superintendents participated in the online survey. The 37 respondents were identified as 14 females and 23 males. The respondents represented a variety of ages as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6

Age Category of Exemplary Superintendents

Age	25-35	36-52	53 or older
Respondents	0	15	22
Percentage	0%	41%	59%

The exemplary superintendents also indicated the number of years they had been in the position of a school district superintendent as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

Number of Years as a District Superintendent

Years	0-3	4-6	7-10	11 or over
Respondents	10	12	11	4
Percentage	27%	32%	30%	11%

Additionally, the exemplary superintendents indicated the number of years they had been the superintendent in their current district as shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Number of Years as a District Superintendent With the Current District

Years	0-3	4-6	7-10	11 or over
Respondents	17	11	7	2
Percentage	46%	30%	19%	5%

Furthermore, in Table 9, the respondents indicated whether they resided in the community that they served as superintendent.

Table 9

Superintendents Reside in the Community They Serve

Reside in the community	Yes	No
Respondents	12	25
Percentage	32%	68%

For the qualitative portion of the study, five exemplary superintendents were referred to the researcher by the expert panel to be interviewed. The five exemplary California school district superintendents consisted of three males and two females. The researcher was able to interview school district superintendents throughout the California regions. Three school districts were located in Southern California, the fourth district in the Central Valley, and the fifth district was located in the Bay Area. The five exemplary superintendents represented in Table 10 are displayed in random order.

Table 10

California Exemplary Superintendents Interviewed

Interviewees	District location	Gender	Age range	# of years as a superintendent	# of years in current district as superintendent	Reside in community
Superintendent 1	Central Valley	F	53+	4-6	4-6	Yes
Superintendent 2	Southern California	M	53+	7-10	7-10	No
Superintendent 3	Southern California	M	53+	4-6	0-3	Yes
Superintendent 4	Bay Area	M	36-52	0-3	0-3	No
Superintendent 5	Southern California	F	53+	10+	10+	No

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The collection of the quantitative data consisted of 49 online surveys deployed to the 49 exemplary superintendents. After three e-mail reminders, 37 exemplary superintendents responded to the online survey. This was a response rate of 75.5%. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the return rate of an online survey should be at least 70% to accurately represent the population. As for the qualitative data, face-to-face interviews were conducted with five exemplary superintendents.

Research Question 1

What are the social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

The data in Research Question 1 were collected from the exemplary superintendents to identify the social media tools used when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Forty-nine surveys were sent and 37 exemplary superintendents responded. For each tool, the respondents were able to identify one or more of the following choices for each social media tool:

- (1) Awareness (I inform others and others listen)
- (2) Feedback (I inform others and am looking for a response)
- (3) Collaboration (I converse and collaborate with others to create the direction of the district)
- (4) Advocacy (I empower others to share the vision and direction of the district)
- (5) Do not have an account or do not use this tool,
- (6) Personal account only (I do not use it as a superintendent)

These results are shown using number and percentage of respondents (see Table 11).

Awareness. In the Dixon ongoing social engagement model, awareness is defined as informing others and others listen. The two most popular tools used by exemplary superintendents to communicate with parents were Twitter (52.8%) and the district website (51.3%). Not far behind those tools were Facebook (43.2%) and eNewsletter (40.5%). Furthermore, 32.4% of exemplary superintendents used e-mail to communicate

with parents for awareness. Only 11.1% of the exemplary superintendents stated that a blog was used to build awareness with parents.

Table 11

Social Media Tools Used by 37 Exemplary Superintendents

Social media tool	Awareness (1)	Feedback (2)	Collaboration (3)	Advocacy (4)	Don't use (5)	Personal use only (6)
Twitter	52.8% 19	16.7% 6	11.1% 4	30.6% 11	2.8% 1	0.0% 0
District website	51.3% 19	29.7% 11	13.5% 5	40.5% 15	0.0% 0	0.0% 0
Facebook	43.2% 16	18.9% 7	13.5% 5	24.3% 9	16.2% 6	10.8% 4
eNewsletter	40.5% 15	5.4% 2	5.4% 2	21.6% 8	24.3% 9	0.0% 0
E-mail	32.4% 12	27.0% 10	32.4% 12	37.8% 14	0.0% 0	0.0% 0
Online Survey	27.0% 10	43.2% 16	32.4% 12	37.8% 14	0.0% 0	0.0% 0
Blog	11.1% 4	2.8% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	58.3% 21	11.1% 4

Feedback. Feedback, in the Dixon ongoing social engagement model, is defined as wanting to inform others and seeking a response. The online survey was the most popular social media tool with 43.2% of the response in this area. Next was the district website (29.7%) as a feedback tool. Facebook (18.9%) and Twitter (16.7%) followed as a feedback platform. Finally, the two social media tools that received the lowest scores were blog (11.1%) and eNewsletter (5.4%) as perceived by the exemplary superintendents.

Collaboration. Collaboration is defined as the superintendent conversing and collaborating with others to create the direction of the district. There were two tools that were popular as perceived by the exemplary superintendents for collaboration. The online survey (32.4%) and e-mail (32.4%) were the social media tools used for collaboration. Both Facebook and the district website were perceived by 13.5% of the exemplary superintendents to be used for collaboration. Then Twitter (11.1%) and the eNewsletter (5.4%) were used for collaboration with parents. Finally, a blog (0%) was not perceived for collaboration with parents.

Advocacy. Advocacy is defined as empowering others to share the vision and direction of the district in the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. The district website (40.5%) was perceived by exemplary superintendents as the social media tool as an advocacy tool with parents. Following were e-mail (37.8%) and online survey (37.8%) as tools to promote advocacy. Then Twitter (30.6%), Facebook (24.3%), and eNewsletter (21.6%) were perceived by exemplary superintendents as advocacy tools when communicating with parents. Ultimately, a blog (0%) was not perceived to be used for advocacy in the districts of the exemplary superintendents.

Although it was not a research question in this study, it was necessary for the researcher to see how exemplary superintendents perceived the importance of the social media tools used to communicate with parents. Table 12 displays the social media tool and level of importance perceived by the exemplary superintendents. The levels of importance were *very important*, *important*, *moderately important*, *slightly important*, and *not important*. According to the exemplary superintendents, 62.1% stated that Facebook was very important or important. Similarly, 63.9% stated Twitter was very

important or important. In fact, 91.9% of exemplary superintendents indicated that the district website was very important or important for communication with parents. In the same way, 89.2% stated that e-mail was very important or important when communicating with parents and 86.5% expressed that the online survey was very important or important. Even the eNewsletter received 62.2% of exemplary superintendents identifying it as very important or important. However, 53.3% of exemplary superintendents indicated that a blog was not important when communicating with parents.

Table 12

Level of Importance of Social Media Tools Perceived by 37 Exemplary Superintendents

Social media tool	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not important
District website	67.6%	21.6%	10.8%	0.0%	0.0%
E-mail	59.5%	29.7%	10.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Online survey	56.7%	29.7%	8.2%	5.4%	0.0%
Facebook	27.0%	35.1%	24.4%	5.4%	8.1%
eNewsletter	24.3%	37.8%	16.2%	21.7%	0.0%
Twitter	22.2%	41.7%	25.0%	8.3%	2.8%
Blog	2.8%	8.3%	13.9%	21.7%	53.3%

Research Question 2

What do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive is the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

The data for Research Question 2 were collected by survey from the 37 exemplary superintendents to share their perceptions of the role of social media when

communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. In this model are four levels: awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy. To gather these data, a 5-point Likert Scale in the areas of 1 (*strongly agree*), 2 (*agree*), 3 (*disagree*), 4 (*strongly disagree*), and 5 (*not certain*) was used. Only one option could be chosen per statement. There were 16 statements in this survey; four from each level of the model. The mean was determined to provide a clear interpretation of the data in a percentage format. In Table 13, the statements, percentage of responses on the Likert Scale, mean of each statement, and the statement alignment of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model are displayed.

Furthermore, the researcher calculated the overall mean of each area of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Table 14 displays the results of the overall role of social media when communicating with parents as perceived by exemplary superintendents. Social media was perceived to be used for awareness (4.40) and advocacy (4.00). However, feedback (3.80) and collaboration (3.77) were close behind in overall mean.

Research Question 3

What benefits do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with five exemplary California school district superintendents determined by the expert panel to gain their perceptions on the benefits of using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. The superintendents were reminded of the four components of

Table 13

Role of Social Media as Perceived by 37 Exemplary Superintendents

Use	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	Area of model
Disseminate event information, news, or crisis communication	89.2%	10.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.89	Awareness
Educate parents about issues that are meaningful to the school district	73.0%	27.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.73	Advocacy
Celebrate students (accomplishments, engagement, learning opportunities)	70.3%	27.0%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	4.68	Awareness
Share news that directly helps the parent community	64.9%	35.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.65	Collaboration
Provide customer service to parents	48.65%	48.65%	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%	4.41	Collaboration
Monitor external trends that could affect the school district	43.2%	43.2%	10.8%	0.0%	2.7%	4.24	Awareness
Answer questions	34.3%	45.7%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.14	Feedback
Empower parents to tell the district's story	29.7%	54.1%	8.1%	2.7%	5.4%	4.00	Advocacy
Collect opinions from parents	18.9%	54.1%	24.3%	2.7%	0.0%	3.89	Feedback
Involve the parents in conversations on behalf of the school district	18.9%	54.1%	21.6%	0.0%	5.4%	3.81	Advocacy
Identify issues, problems, or complaints	13.5%	59.5%	21.6%	2.7%	2.7%	3.78	Awareness
Elicit feedback from parents	8.1%	64.9%	18.9%	0.0%	8.1%	3.65	Feedback
Encourage parents to have a presence on a social media platform	13.5%	51.4%	21.6%	0.0%	13.5%	3.51	Feedback
Recognize parents who contribute on the district's social network issues	16.2%	43.2%	24.3%	2.7%	13.5%	3.46	Advocacy
Initiate dialogue with parents on a social media platform	8.1%	32.4%	35.1%	10.8%	13.5%	3.11	Collaboration
Respond to criticism from parents	2.7%	27.0%	35.1%	27.0%	8.1%	2.89	Collaboration

Note. 1 (*strongly agree*), 2 (*agree*), 3 (*disagree*), 4 (*strongly disagree*), and 5 (*not certain*).

Table 14

Role of Social Media When Communicating With Parents as Perceived by Exemplary Superintendents

Area of model	Mean
Awareness	4.40
Feedback	3.80
Collaboration	3.77
Advocacy	4.00

the Dixon ongoing social engagement model (awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy) with a visual of the definitions explained by the researcher and placed in front of them for the entire interview.

The interviews with the exemplary California school district superintendents contained questions regarding each level of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model in order to elicit the benefits of using social media to communicate with parents. The data collected provided rich, deep answers to this research question. Furthermore, upon analyzing the data, 10 major themes and the levels of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model emerged as noted in Table 15.

Awareness. Exemplary superintendents identified the benefits of using social media to communicate with parents in the level of awareness. The total percentage of responses equaled 37%. There were four major themes aligned to the awareness level of the model: evidence of vision (14%), student achievement evidence (11%), control content/message (8%), and situation management–crisis (4%).

Evidence of vision presented itself as a theme with all five exemplary superintendents. Superintendent 3 indicated, “One of the first things I did was create a new website that reflected the values of the district and met my vision of what I wanted

Table 15

Themes for the Benefits of Using Social Media to Communicate With Parents

	Major themes	Frequency of responses	Percentage of responses	Level of model
1	Relationship building	50	17%	Collaboration
2	Parent empowerment	45	16%	Advocacy
3	Evidence of vision	40	14%	Awareness
4	Shared responsibility	35	12%	Collaboration
5	Student achievement evidence	31	11%	Awareness
6	Branding/marketing	25	9%	Advocacy
7	Control content/message	24	8%	Awareness
8	Customer service	14	5%	Feedback
9	Situation management (crisis)	11	4%	Awareness
10	Creating volunteers	11	4%	Advocacy
	Total	286	100%	

our district to be perceived as.” All of the superintendents reported that social media provides the platform as evidence for the district’s and the superintendent’s vision. One superintendent shared that throughout the district’s experience with social media it needs to begin with the vision and end with the vision. “It is a vital way to communicate the vision,” shared Superintendent 2. Superintendent 4 confirmed, “Social media is used to share the vision.”

Next, *student achievement evidence* was communicated in the data as it related to awareness with the five exemplary superintendents. Superintendent 1 indicated that social media was a platform in which “a picture is worth a thousand words” and parents enjoy seeing what their children are doing. Superintendent 4 added that social media gives parents “a snapshot into the classroom” and uses social media as a “window to what goes on in our classrooms.” Superintendent 3 uses social media to “tell our story in

terms of student achievement” and “we want our parents understanding and knowing what their kids are involved with on a regular basis.” Superintendent 2 shared, “There’s always a positive acknowledgement of school or student activity in the messages . . . it’s really highly student focused.”

Then the theme of *control content/message* was exhibited in the level of awareness from the five exemplary superintendents. Superintendent 1 specified that using social media to communicate with parents “is strategic and very intentional.” The superintendent shared that social media “is a good way to get the information out so they [parents] have the right information” preventing parents from “making it up.” Superintendent 3 stated, “Making it [the message] simplistic enough so they [parents] know what we are talking about . . . eliminating the unique language of education . . . jargon.” Superintendent 4 shared, “Parents are existing in a world of information saturation, so getting the important information in front of them is important.” All superintendents stated that as the leader it was important to control the message to eliminate confusion and misconceptions.

Finally, *situation management (crisis)* emerged in the awareness level with four of the five exemplary superintendents. All superintendents shared that the district needs to be present on social media during a crisis or situation in an in a timely manner. Superintendent 5 stated, “I think that social media in terms of emergency times could extremely, extremely helpful. It would be a great tool to keep everyone informed with the correct message.” Superintendent 2 indicated that the district uses social media “to continue to be proactive even in situations where we don’t think there’s information to be shared.” Superintendent 1 gave a specific example of a situation, “We will use social

media to send out safety notices [i.e., foggy days] as a quick way to communicate with parents.” Superintendent 2 shared an experience of using social media to communicate with parents when “criticism’s come up, and we feel we can cover it with a crisp statement with the community, I’ve done that.”

Feedback. There was one theme that emerged in the feedback level of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model that was identified as a benefit when communicating with parents from the five exemplary superintendents. *Customer service* received a 5% response rate. Superintendent 5 shared, “We focus on using our website to inform our parents about information and actions we want them to take [kindergarten registration].” Additionally, Superintendent 3 stated, “I think part of it is telling them [parents] not only what they need to know, but telling them when to do certain things.” Superintendent 1 expressed that social media provides “easy reminders” and “a good way to gather information quickly and keep everyone informed.”

Collaboration. With regard to collaboration, exemplary California superintendents identified the benefits of using social media with parents. The total response rate of the themes aligned to the collaboration level of the model totaled 29%. These two themes include relationship building (17%) and shared responsibility (12%).

All five exemplary superintendents stated that *relationship building* was important when communicating with parents on social media. There are various ways that the superintendents are using social media to build relationships. Superintendent 3 shared, “Social media should be a way of building relationships with people because we are a people-based industry.” In addition, Superintendent 2 stated, “We really highlight the good work of our parents, so others will hopefully be attracted.” All of the

superintendents stated that they welcome parents on campus so that they can see what is going on at the school and in the classrooms. Superintendent 4 indicated that his/her school uses social media as “a way for parents to know what is going on in the classrooms because student work is not coming home due to digital platforms.” Superintendent 1 expressed, “Parents really like to see their children involved; they like to see their child showcased” leading to building and strengthening relationships.

The other major theme in the level of collaboration is *shared responsibility*. All five of the superintendents shared that they have started the social media venture in a controlled way and have since allowed a shared responsibility to bring awareness to parents. Superintendent 2 stated, “We are looking at moving content creation out to staff and students” as an “evolution of getting more people to create content.” Additionally, Superintendent 3 expressed, “We give parents talking points that they can put into their own words so they can communicate to others.” All five of the superintendents specifically shared that teachers and principals are providing content on social media. Superintendent 5 shared, “Principals are really getting their [school] stories out there . . . they are so active.” Superintendent 4 stated, “We do a great deal of calling their [teacher] tweets, and then retweeting them on the district sites as representative examples of what’s going on our school district.”

Advocacy. Three major themes emerged in the level of advocacy. The total percentage of responses equaled 29%. They included parent empowerment (16%), branding/marketing (9%), and creating volunteers (4%).

Parent empowerment was a major theme in advocacy. All five of the exemplary superintendents shared the importance of finding parents who can share the vision of the

school district. Superintendent 1 shared, “If parents have the right information, they can be advocates for the district.” Superintendent 2 stated, “We have around 1,300 followers on Facebook . . . now when we post something, we find parents grouping around it . . . by viewing it or giving it a thumbs up.” In addition, Superintendent 3 noted, “There is someone deeply, deeply engaged who ends up being the point of contact for people; if you get in contact and work with that person, [he/she is] able to disseminate and bring back information.”

Another major theme in advocacy was *branding/marketing*. Four of the five exemplary superintendents expressed the concern of declining enrollment and the concern of parents shopping for the best school district or school for their child. They believed social media could brand or market the district to attract more families, which would increase the enrollment and funding for the district. “Making sure that we get the positive information out there that’s accurate” will help the parents when they are “shopping for a school district for their son or daughter,” stated Superintendent 3. Superintendent 1 expressed, social media “brings our district to life with pictures, and announcements, and news.” Additionally, Superintendent 4 indicated that social media continues “to build the reputation of the district.”

The final major theme as a benefit of using social media for advocacy was *creating volunteers*. The five exemplary superintendents wanted parents to volunteer and be active participants in the districts. They all shared that they have various district committee opportunities. They utilized social media to expand parent engagement. Superintendent 3 shared, “Our families will participate by giving their time and what little they have.” Additionally, Superintendent 2 stated, “Parents like seeing pictures of

themselves in committee meetings. We post the pictures and with our following are hopeful more parents will participate.” Most superintendents indicated that sharing what other parents are doing on social media at the schools and with the district is increasing parents becoming advocates for the district.

Exemplary California school district superintendents have identified major themes expressing the benefits of using social media to communicate with parents. Figure 13 indicates the percentage of responses from exemplary superintendents as related to the four levels of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model (awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy).

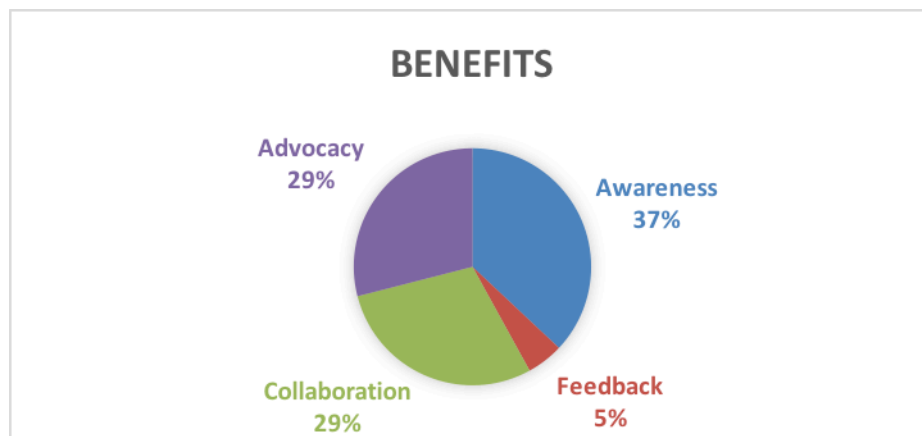


Figure 13. Benefits of using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model.

Research Question 4

What challenges do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with five exemplary California school district superintendents selected by the expert panel to determine the challenges of using

social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. The data collected provided rich, deep answers to this research question that wove throughout all four levels of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Furthermore, upon analyzing the data, six major themes emerged as noted in Table 16.

Table 16

Major Themes for the Challenges of Using Social Media to Communicate With Parents

	Major themes	Frequency of responses	Percentage of responses
1	Too many platforms	21	22%
2	Time	19	20%
3	Monitoring comments	9	9%
4	Various technology abilities	9	9%
5	Lack of accountability for opinions	8	8%
6	Special populations	8	8%
	Total	74	100%

The most frequent major theme that was a challenge for the five exemplary superintendents was the number of various *social media platforms* that were being used by parents. Superintendent 4 stated, “There is not just one watering hole and we can’t be filling every watering hole, so you have to go to the big ones making it very complicated.” In addition, Superintendent 3 shared,

There are things I think that are missing that we just don’t know enough about and need to figure out how do we start using some of these other tools to get in touch with parents and figure out how to engage with.

Because there are too many platforms to constantly post on, Superintendent 2 expressed,

We are finding packages that frankly, make posting much more efficient by creating a post and having it post everywhere, with the flexibility to be able to pick and choose, not only across platforms, but across locations, sites, and audiences.

Time was a major theme from the five exemplary superintendents as a challenge to use social media when communicating with parents. All of the superintendents shared that they have various personnel to help them be on the district's social media platforms; however, they monitor their own Twitter for the district. Superintendent 5 shared that the board of trustees is pushing for more social media activity from the district and stated, "Finding the time to be on it so it's really effective" is a challenge. Superintendent 3 expressed, "Initially, it was a big investment of time . . . now it is something I do every day." Additionally, Superintendent 4 stated, "It takes time to be thoughtful and decide on the message you want to send." In fact, Superintendent 2 shared, "Social media can be time occupying but can also be time sensitive." Time to be present on social media was a major theme, which was a challenge when communicating with parents.

Monitoring comments was another major theme, which was a challenge perceived by four of the five exemplary superintendents. The superintendents shared that this was a challenge and that it needed continuous attention to make sure the messages sent out with social media were productive and controlled when utilizing it as a feedback platform. Superintendent 5 stated, "You need to have someone almost like listening and watching everything that is coming in." Additionally, Superintendent 3 indicated, "You need someone monitoring because people don't necessarily read the intended message and

they interpret the message themselves differently, and then they respond to what they interpret.” In fact, Superintendent 2 expressed,

Once it’s [comment] is out there, for better or worse, it adds to your image and reputation. If it’s worse, particularly if it’s not necessarily true, it’s just a perceptive issue, or opinion, no matter how malicious or naïve, you still got to find a way to neutralize it.

Another challenge from the five exemplary superintendents was the various *technology abilities*. Superintendent 1 shared that parents are “getting out in front of me because their generation is so comfortable with it [social media]. My generation’s not so comfortable with it so I had to get out of my comfort zone and find the spot that was manageable.” In a district that demands heavy social media presence, Superintendent 4 stated, “Getting the important materials out in front of our parents and getting them to pay attention to the important one because they’re just a wash in emails or texts, it’s just the volume.”

The next challenge that presented itself as a theme with four of the five exemplary superintendents was the *lack of accountability* for opinions. The superintendents expressed that when the district posts a message using social media, the parents are quick to comment if they do not agree with the information. However, when parents provide negative comments on social media, there is no accountability for what is stated on the various platforms. Superintendent 3 shared,

I don’t allow for folks to comment on social media, only using online surveys or e-mail. I think the challenge that some school districts are facing deal with the

anonymity of the social media. You can post anything and not be held accountable.

Additionally, Superintendent 1 stated that with the district's Facebook account, "We don't allow responses. We get out information and we're strategic on when we want information back." This was done to avoid any public opinions. In fact, Superintendent 2 expressed,

We've had to run down some issues that have shown up on Facebook, through our website, and just trying to understand what goes on, and then we've had some things, frankly, that are very challenging to get off social media.

It was shared that when parents are not correct with their interpretation of a situation, they are not forthcoming with apologies to clear up their comments. This is a challenge for the exemplary superintendents.

The last theme that existed as a challenge perceived by three of the five exemplary superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents was *special populations*. Special populations include language barrier, immigration, and special education families. Superintendents 3 and 5 shared that language is a challenge with social media. Superintendent 3 stated, "Language barrier is one [challenge]. Some of them [social media platforms] have Google Translate. It's not always accurate, but it's pretty good for the most part. They [parents] get the gist of what we're trying to do." Additionally, Superintendent 5 confirmed that there are multiple languages in the district, "The great thing about social media doesn't necessarily have to be in all languages, but we try to, for any really important district news, to send it in all languages." Immigration is a component of this challenge. Parents who are "immigrants who are not maybe really

comfortable with digital or technology even . . . they don't feel comfortable putting their information on something electronic because they don't trust where it will go," stated Superintendent 5. Superintendent 3 indicated that there was a high population of families with special education children in the district. "Our families being a little less well-informed and a little less-knowledgeable" is a challenge, stated Superintendent 3. To try to help support this challenge, "We try, through our special education webpage to put out information that parents need to know," explained Superintendent 3. The three minor themes of language, immigration, and special education families combined equal the major theme of special populations.

Summary

This chapter presented the purpose of the study, the research questions, the research methods, and the data collection procedures. It also included the population, sample, and demographic information of the exemplary superintendents. Chapter IV then provided a presentation of the data collected in the mixed-methods study.

The quantitative data were gathered from an online survey completed by 37 exemplary California school district superintendents. The researcher was seeking what social media tools used when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model (awareness, feedback, collaboration, advocacy). The researcher obtained the data on the level of importance perceived by exemplary superintendents of each social media tool. There were five levels of importance indicated: very important, important, moderately important, slightly important, and not important.

In addition, the researcher sought the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. To gather these data, a 5-point Likert Scale was a component of the survey answered by the exemplary superintendents. There were 16 total statements, four in each level of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model, that provided a percentage and a mean score to analyze.

After the analysis of the quantitative data, the qualitative data were gathered. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with five exemplary California school district superintendents as recommended by an expert panel to discover the benefits and challenges of using social media when communicating with parents perceived by the superintendents. The researcher discovered 10 major themes identified (in order from most frequent to least frequent) that exemplary superintendents perceived as benefits when using social media to communicate with parents: relationship building, parent empowerment, evidence of vision, shared responsibility, student achievement evidence, branding/marketing, control content/message, customer service, situation management (crisis), and creating volunteers. The researcher also discovered six major themes identified (in order from most frequent to least frequent) as challenges when using social media to communicate with parents: too many platforms, time, monitoring comments, various technology abilities, lack of accountability for opinions, and special populations.

In Chapter V, a final summation of the explanatory sequential mixed-methods study is provided. It includes the major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions based on the research, data collection, and analysis. In addition, it presents the implications for action and recommendations for further research as well as the researcher's concluding remarks and reflections.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter I began with an introduction of the background and rationale for this study. Chapter II presented a comprehensive review of the literature about social media in K-12 education, social networking sites, the role of the superintendent, effective parent communication, generation cohorts and their use of technology, and the theoretical framework of the gatekeeping theory and of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Chapter III described the design of the research and methods applied in this study. Chapter IV presented the data findings and thorough explanations of the results in this study. This final chapter closes this study with the summary, including the important findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to identify the social media tools used by exemplary California school district superintendents. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to identify the role of social media perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Lastly, the purpose of this study was to describe the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model.

Research Questions

1. What are the social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
2. What do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive is the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
3. What benefits do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?
4. What challenges do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Methodology

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design was used in this study. The quantitative method was the initial method used to identify the social media tools and the use of social media to communicate with parents as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents. This portion was conducted through a survey entitled “Social Media” (Appendix I). The survey was deployed electronically to 49 exemplary superintendents. Of the 49 exemplary superintendents, 37 individuals completed the survey. Following the quantitative method, the qualitative method was used to identify the benefits and challenges of using social media when communicating with parents as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents. A

total of five exemplary superintendents of the 37 participants that completed the survey were chosen by an expert panel for face-to-face interviews. The interviews were conducted using a series of questions (Appendix G). Creswell (2014) described, “The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results” (p. 224).

Population

A study’s population is explained as a group of people having a similar characteristic that differentiates them from others (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the population was school district superintendents. According to the California Department of Education (CDE, 2016), there were 1,025 school districts in California in 2015-2016. However, due to this population size being extreme, it was necessary to continue to reduce the size of the population (Patton, 2015). The researcher selected elementary school districts as the focus of this study, therefore narrowing the population to 526 California elementary school district superintendents.

Target Population

The population of 526 California elementary school district superintendents continued to be excessive and needed to be reduced. According to Creswell (2008), “The target population or ‘sampling frame’ is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). This research study identified the target population using the following criteria:

1. California elementary school district superintendents with enrollments between 500 and 5,000, and
2. with no more than one charter school.

3. The district does not employ a public information officer, and
4. the school district website indicates the district's use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and/or blogs.

There were 162 superintendents who met these criteria. There was another criterion added to the population to create a sample size that would generalize the research for the population.

Sample

The sample of a research study is a “group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The sample of participants ideally signifies the entire population (Creswell, 2014). For the quantitative portion of this study, purposive sampling was used due to the identification of individuals who met the participation criteria and provided the best information to address the purpose of this study.

The target population of 162 elementary school district superintendents required additional criterion to create a sample population of exemplar superintendents. The additional criterion included the following:

- an active account on a social networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, and/or blogs;
and
- recognized by a professional technology organization as an exemplar user of social media in their role as an elementary school district superintendent.

This criterion narrowed the sample size to 49 California exemplary school district superintendents.

Following the quantitative segment of this design, the researcher selected reputational case sampling for the qualitative approach to identify the superintendents who are exemplary in using social media when communicating with parents. Patton (2015) stated that reputational case sampling requires experts to select the five exemplary sample participants for face-to-face interviews. For the qualitative sampling, “Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources” (Patton, 2015, p. 311). Figure 14 demonstrates the population, target population, and sample for this study.

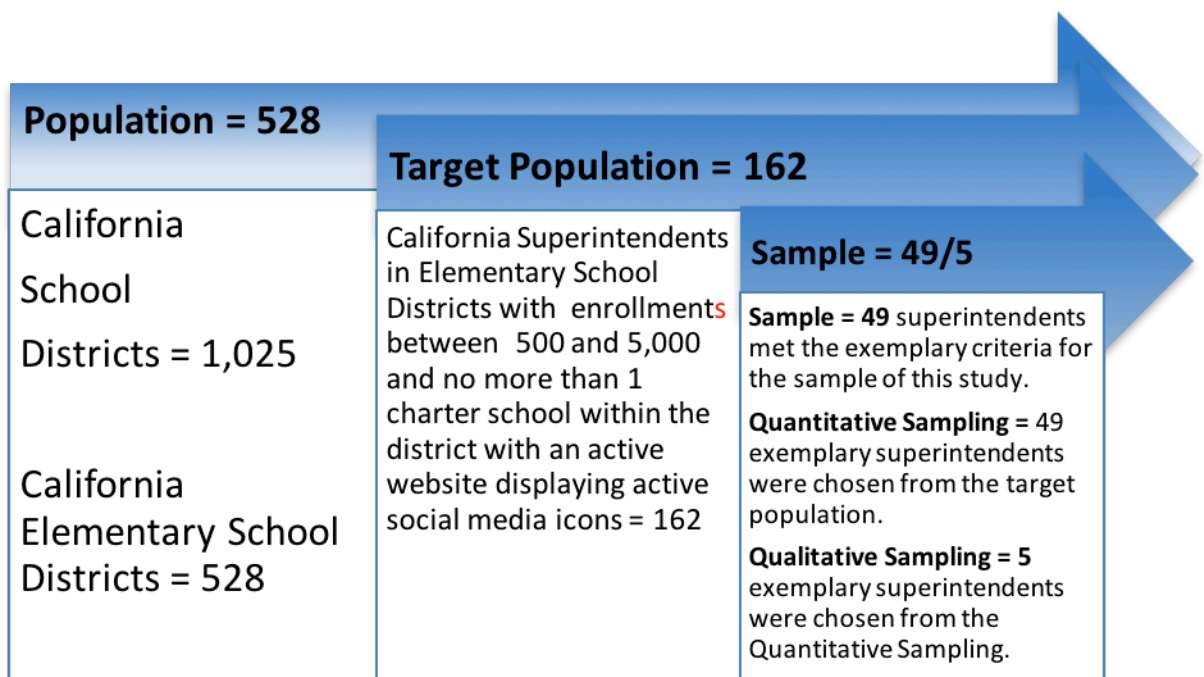


Figure 14. Population, target population, and sample.

Major Findings

Research Question 1

What are the social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Finding 1. Exemplary superintendents use multiple social media tools for bringing awareness when communicating with parents (inform the parents and the parents listen). Nearly half of the exemplary superintendents used Twitter, district website, Facebook, and eNewsletter as the dominant awareness social media tools. Awareness was the dominant level used by exemplary superintendents, yet in the Dixon ongoing social engagement model, it is the beginning level of engagement using social media tools. Utilizing social media allows superintendents to build ownership and a sense of community with parents in an inclusive environment (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012).

Finding 2. Exemplary superintendents used specific social media tools for feedback purposes when communicating with parents. The online survey was the most popular tool for this purpose significantly ahead of district website and e-mail. Less than 20% utilized Facebook or Twitter as a form of feedback in spite of these platforms being designed to receive and give information. Feedback is a level that involves both the receiving and the giving of information and is critical to advance the organization (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Throughout California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), it is clearly stated that feedback is an important component of family engagement and relationship building (CDE, 2017). Although feedback could be achieved in various

platforms, building the trust of parents and the community (CDE, 2017) is this second level of Dixon's (2012) model.

Finding 3. Exemplary superintendents are not using social media tools to collaborate with parents. Collaboration received the least amount of responses from the 37 exemplary superintendents when analyzing how social media tools are utilized. The two highest tools of e-mail and online survey were slightly above 30%. Collaboration is the third level of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. The model defines collaboration as the superintendent using social media to converse and collaborate with others to create the direction of the district (Dixon, 2012). When parents and school districts truly collaborate, there is a level of engagement that focuses on school district improvement and student achievement (Skanson, 2016). It is evident, based on the perceptions of the 37 exemplary superintendents, that they are not utilizing the strongest and most popular social media tools to collaborate with parents and strengthen parent engagement.

Finding 4. Exemplary superintendents perceive they are using social media tools to create parent advocates. Advocacy received the second highest response from the superintendents as to the level of the model at which superintendents are using the social media tools to communicate with parents. Almost half of the exemplary superintendents perceived that the district website was used as a tool to empower parents with e-mail and online survey not far behind. Having advocates in the community will halt the negative, fictitious messages and provide correct information (NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee, 2015). It will benefit the district if the advocates are active social media users as this is the platform to which information explodes in a rapid manner

(Hood, 2014). Again, based on the perceptions of exemplary superintendents, they are not utilizing the social media tools (Facebook and Twitter) that provide the advanced level on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model to create the advocacy with parents.

Finding 5. The most important tools perceived by exemplary superintendents to use when communicating with parents are district website, e-mail, and online surveys. Over 80% believed the district website, e-mail, and online survey were of the most important tools in the district. However, over 60% of them perceived that Facebook and Twitter were important, yet when analyzing what tools were used, these two tools were not consistently being utilized at the highest level of the model (advocacy). According to Dixon (2012), advocacy is the most difficult level of engagement and can be attained if the social media tools are used operated in the manner designed.

Research Question 2

What do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive is the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Finding 1. Exemplary superintendents believed that a highly informed parent community through social media was critical. Of the 37 exemplary superintendents, 65-90% strongly agreed that the role of social media was to disseminate event information, news, or crisis information, educate parents about issues, celebrate student success, and share news that directly helps the parent community.

Finding 2. Exemplary superintendents do not believe social media is used for public dialogue. Between 46-62% of the exemplary superintendents highly disagreed with using social media to initiate dialogue and respond to parents. These two areas are

located in the level of collaboration in the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. When parents and school districts truly collaborate, there is a level of engagement that focuses on school district improvement and student achievement (Skanson, 2016). Dixon (2012) stated that social media provides the opportunity for this level of collaboration; however, the 37 exemplary superintendents disagreed.

Finding 3. Exemplary California school district superintendents perceived the overall role of social media to include all four levels of the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. There was just a 3% difference in range from the highest to lowest. Based on the average mean score for each level, awareness resulted in 27%, feedback was 24%, collaboration was 24%, and advocacy was 25%. Awareness was the highest, which confirms that exemplary superintendents use social media to inform parents.

Research Question 3

What benefits do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Finding 1. Building relationships, creating parent advocacy, showing evidence of the district's vision, and recognizing a shared responsibility were the consistent themes. Superintendents realized the advantage of using social media to build relationships and create parent advocacy. Each district was unique and the perceptions of the superintendents included focusing on the population of families the district serves.

Finding 2. Exemplary superintendents perceived the benefits of using social media to communicate with parents to be used for awareness, followed by collaboration and advocacy, and, finally, feedback. When analyzing the themes by percentage of

responses in correlation with the model, awareness was 37%, feedback was 5%, collaboration was 29%, and advocacy was 29%.

Research Question 4

What challenges do exemplary California school district superintendents perceive when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model?

Finding 1. There are too many social media platforms that parents are engaged with to cover all of the communication systems. Exemplary superintendents shared that it was time consuming to post on each individual social media platform, and they were seeking programs or applications on which a post could be created and that could post on various platforms and to various audiences.

Finding 2. The time necessary to respond with thoughtful messages in a time sensitive manner is difficult. Although these exemplary superintendents felt that they were able to manage being present on social media and communicating with parents, they still faced challenges.

Finding 3. Exemplary superintendents believed it is challenging to track and respond to a diversity of opinions and communicate when there is a lack of accountability for parent's opinions. These challenges perceived by the five exemplary superintendents reinforced the gatekeeping theory. Shoemaker et al. (2017) indicated, "Today's gatekeeping model includes the evolution of messages and then movement along people. Those who receive also send, and senders receive in an ever-increasing web of transmission, making the audience a powerful player in the gatekeeping process" (p. 352).

Unexpected Findings

After the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed, three unexpected findings emerged from the study. They included the use of Facebook as perceived by the 37 exemplary superintendents, the tools not used for advocacy when communicating with parents, and the perception of exemplary superintendents utilizing a blog as a social media tool to communicate with parents.

1. An unexpected finding was the low level of usage of Facebook by the most exemplary superintendents. Ten out of the 37 exemplary superintendents do not use or only personally use Facebook. Pew shared that 79% of all internet users are active Facebook users, making it the most popular social networking site (Greenwood et al., 2016). To see that 27% of exemplary California school district superintendents were not utilizing that tool to communicate with parents was completely unexpected.
2. A second unexpected finding was the social media tools that were not used for advocacy as perceived by the exemplary superintendents when communicating with parents. Advocacy was to empower others to share the vision and direction of the district. Facebook and Twitter are the social networking sites that provide a platform to empower parents to share the district's messages. Facebook allows users to build communities through amplifying messages to engage followers (Waddington, 2012). The Facebook user can share a message with their friends or like the message (Carr, 2015; Dixon, 2012). The like button is a pervasive way to disperse content virally from a site to networks of users across the web (Carr, 2015; Dixon, 2012; Ellison & boyd, 2013). Twitter provides the same advocacy platform. The Twitter user can reply to a tweet, retweet (share), and favor (like) the tweet (Carr, 2015; Waddington,

2012). The 37 exemplary superintendents in this study perceived Facebook as the fourth important social media tool out of the seven tools and Twitter as the sixth important out of the seven tools. It was obvious Facebook and Twitter were not being utilized as the social networking tools to create advocacy with parents.

3. The next unexpected finding was how exemplary superintendents perceived a blog as a tool when communicating with parents. Of the exemplary superintendents, 68% do not use or only personally use a blog; and 53.3% of exemplary superintendents stated that the blog is not an important tool to communicate with parents. Superintendent 2 expressed, “A blog is pretty unstructured . . . you say one thing, the wrong thing, and next thing you know it becomes a political issue.” Superintendent 3 shared, “People don’t necessarily read the intended message and they interpret the message themselves differently, and then respond to what they’ve interpreted . . . so perception becomes reality and it’s not necessarily what we wanted to convey.” However, the research states that blogs are used to communicate expertise and informal learning enabling the exchange of information and sharing of experiences (Dixon, 2012; Ferdig & Trammell, 2004; Waddington, 2012). Blogs are a way for a leader to share his or her vision and insight regarding education with parents, and exemplary superintendents are not utilizing that social media tool to communicate with parents.
4. Overall, exemplary superintendents interpreted collaboration with social media as a form of one-way communication. Superintendents did not want to engage in two-way communication on social media due to the concerns of the comments being visible and public. In addition, they recognized that parents were using social media at high rates and knew that the district needs to be visible on social media. They wanted to use all

social media tools as a form of pushing out information to the parents without wanting or having them comment. Superintendent 2 expressed, “This is a tricky part . . . if you’re going to be transparent about communications, you’ve got to accept what comes back. It is very time occupying, time sensitive, and challenging to get off social media.”

Conclusions

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study intended to accomplish four objectives. First, through the collection of quantitative data, it endeavored to determine the social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Second, it attempted to identify the role of social media when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents. Third, through the collection of qualitative data, it identified the benefits of using social media when communicating with parents as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. Finally, it sought to identify the challenges as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. There are five conclusions that can be made from this study:

1. Based on the findings in this study, it was concluded that superintendents who use social media for awareness will strengthen relationship building and trust with parents. The data supported exemplary superintendents using multiple social media to inform parents. This conclusion was supported in the literature; for example, Dixon (2012)

stated that awareness allows the audience to be connected to the information that is shared. Therefore, bringing awareness to the parents will allow the parents to be connected to the school district leading to relationship building and trust. It is crucial for superintendents to keep parents informed in a direct and simple way and to build trust and confidence in the school system through open communication (Kellough & Hill, 2014; Larkin, 2015; Powers & Green, 2016; Tapper, 2015).

2. Based on the findings in the study, superintendents who use social media to intentionally and strategically share information will control the messaging and create advocates for the district. Within the survey data and the interviews, exemplary superintendents have strong reasoning about why they do or do not use the tool when communicating with parents.
3. Based on the findings in this study and the literature review, it can be concluded that exemplary superintendents are taking the position of a gatekeeper when using social media to communicate with parents. Furthermore, the gatekeeping theory in this study was validated. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) defined the gatekeeper as the individual responsible for the gatekeeping selection of information and the interpretation of the information. As the leader of the school district, the superintendent must be aware of the information channeling (Kowalski, 2011). Exemplary superintendents are securing the role of the gatekeeper when using social media to communicate with parents.
4. Based on the findings in this study, it can be concluded that exemplary superintendents are not maximizing the use of social networking sites with parents to build collaboration and advocacy. Social networking sites (SNS) offer ubiquitous

access to information, communication, engagement, and social interaction (Tienhaara, 2016). Utilizing social networking sites allows educational leaders to build ownership and a sense of community with stakeholders in an inclusive environment (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012). Exemplary superintendents shared that relationship building and parent empowerment are the two greatest benefits of using social media to communicate with parents, yet they do not use the networking sites to enrich the opportunity.

5. Based on the findings of this study, superintendents who do not use social media are allowing parents to create all of the communication for the district. This will create time-consuming and ongoing communication issues and will damage the reputation of the school district. Schmidt and Cohen (2014) indicated social media communication is in real-time and heightens emotions. This causes havoc in nanoseconds in a crisis and any dissemination of fake news (Dougherty, 2014). It is crucial for superintendents to be the creator of district messages (Powers & Green, 2017; Tapper, 2015). Elementary school districts are requiring tech-savvy and brave leaders who will overcome the anxiety and concern that comes with using social media to communicate with parents (Sheninger, 2014). It is crucial that superintendents be present and communicate using social media.

Implications for Action

This study has identified the social media tools and the use of the tools as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model. This study also identified the benefits and challenges of using social media to communicate with parents

based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model as perceived by California school district superintendents. Therefore, in order for a California school district superintendent to be exemplary when using social media to communicate with parents, superintendents should take certain actions:

1. Professional organizations must design a social media academy to educate superintendents about social media. Superintendents must understand the purpose of social media, analysis of social media tools, and analytics of social media tools, and create an effective social media plan. It is extremely important that this become a priority for professional organizations.
2. It is crucial for superintendents to analyze the district's organization and create additional job duties for personnel. An administrative assistant could take on the role of social media master. This person would create the messaging on the various platforms, monitor the platforms, and ensure effective social media communication. It is critical for this person to receive specialized training in this area as well as guidance from a communication expert.
3. Superintendents must attend professional learning opportunities specifically targeted toward social networking sites: what they are, how to use them effectively and efficiently, and how to build the district's social network. Having this knowledge will deepen relationships and communication with parents through collaboration and advocacy.
4. It is critical that superintendents participate in specialized professional development with the focus on using social media in crisis communication. When a crisis occurs,

superintendents must have the knowledge to recognize how social media effectively and efficiently supports the crisis communication.

5. It is crucial that superintendents identify key district communicators (board members, cabinet members, principals, key parents) and provide talking points to help communicate the messages on the social media platforms. This must be included in the district's communication plan as it will strengthen and create district advocates.
6. Superintendents must consult with a communication expert to create a communication plan that includes social media. It is crucial for superintendents to overcome all barriers (anxiety, concerns, negative stories, etc.) and to be present on social media. The social media communities are strong. Superintendents need to be tech-savvy and brave district leaders to strengthen the connection between the district and the community.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study filled a gap in the literature by identifying the social media tools used and the use of social media by exemplary superintendents to communicate with parents for awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy. In addition, the study was able to identify the benefits and challenges of using social media to communicate with parents as perceived by the superintendents. Based on the study, there are seven recommendations for further research, which would contribute to the body of research.

1. It is recommended that this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study be replicated using exemplary unified school district superintendents with public information officers when communicating with parents based on the Dixon ongoing social media engagement model.

2. It is further recommended that researchers conduct a case study of exemplary superintendents on using social media to communicate with parents. This study would provide a deeper understanding of the use and role of social media as perceived by superintendents.
3. It is recommended that researchers conduct a mixed-methods case study, which would use the same protocol and premise as this research, but would include exemplary principal's perception of the social media tools when communicating with parents.
4. It is further recommended that this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study be replicated, focusing on the parent's perceptions of the social media tools used, the role of social media, and the benefits and challenges of using social media to communicate with the school district based on the Dixon ongoing social engagement model.
5. It is recommended that researchers conduct a quantitative study to seek the correlation between the social media tools used by superintendents and the role of social media as perceived by superintendents when communicating with parents. The findings will provide information on what social media tool would best be used for a specific role or purpose of communication.
6. It is further recommended that researchers conduct a qualitative study with exemplary superintendents using the gatekeeping theory identifying the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for new superintendents.
7. It is recommended that this study be replicated using exemplary school board members' perspectives on the social media tools used, the role of social media, and the benefits and challenges of using social media to communicate with the community.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This study contributed to identifying the social media tools exemplary California school district superintendents use to communicate with parents in the levels of awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy. Additionally, this study identified the role of social media perceived by exemplary superintendents when communicating with parents on the levels of awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy. Lastly, this study described the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents. Moreover, the tools and use of social media can be utilized by other superintendents to deepen the level of communication with parents and the families they serve.

Superintendents of smaller elementary school districts are required to wear many hats and juggle a lot of responsibilities as the district's leader. One of the major roles of a superintendent is communication. Communication enhances relationships and builds trust in the community and especially with parents. Parents drop their children, their ultimate treasures, off to school in the morning. They are expecting their child to be physically and emotionally safe throughout the day, deepening their knowledge and strengthening peer interactions. At the end of the day, the parents pick up their child and want to know what they are learning, what they did, what was fun. Because parents are trusting the education system to get their child college, career, and life ready, it is crucial that the district's leader communicate the direction of education in the community and engage the parents, utilizing the mode of communication the parents are most familiar with.

As the advancements in technology are ubiquitous, social media continues to be on the rise as a form of media to provide communication and collaboration. It is becoming prevalent now for districts to go beyond the district website and the online survey to engage parents with technology. Therefore, it is significant for a superintendent to recognize the purpose of the communication and use the correct social media tool when communicating with parents. In turn, this will maximize communication, deepen relationships, and improve overall student achievement.

When I began this journey, I was fascinated with the millennials becoming parents and how they use social media to communicate. They were raised with cellular phones, MySpace, and texting (pushing the key multiple times to find the letter they needed). Because it is my desire to be a school district superintendent, I aspired to understand how a district leader communicates with parents using social media. The President of the United States is constantly on social media, where are district leaders? This study will continue to have a profound impact on my leadership as it has deepened my knowledge about communication, social media, and stakeholder engagement.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Literature Synthesis Matrix

Theme	Sources
Communication Channels	Coombs (2017); Ha (2010); History Staff (2010, 2011); Ladzinski (2017); Nix (2016); Nwogbaga, Nwankwo, & Onwa (2015); Tweedie (2015); Washington Post Staff (2014).
Social Media and Social Networking	Aiken (2015); Auer (2011); Blumenreich & Jaffe-Walter (2015); boyd & Ellison (2008); Bradley & Thouésny (2011); Bryer & Zavattaro (2011); Bullas (2012); Buzzetto-More (2012); Cheng et al. (2013); D. Cox (2014); Dixon (2012); Dougherty (2014); Duffy (2012); Ellison & boyd (2013); Fuchs (2017); Gillin (2009); Greenhow, Sonnevend, & Agur (2016); Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); King (2015); Klososky (2012); Magro (2012); Martin (2014); Nations (2017); Porterfield & Carnes (2012); Powers & Green (2016); Rainie & Wellman (2012); Sajithra & Patil (2013); Schaffer (2013); Schmidt & Cohen (2014); Smith (2014); Tapper (2015); Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar (2011); Waddington (2012); Wright & Hinson (2012); Ziontz (2015).
Phenomenon of Web 2.0	Allen (2008); Barkley (2012); boyd (2006); boyd & Ellison (2008); Carr (2015); Cassidy (2006); D. Cox (2012); Dixon (2012); Dougherty (2014); Ellison & boyd (2013); Ellison et al. (2013); Ferdig & Trammell (2004); Ferriter, et al. (2011); Fuchs (2017); Gonzales et al. (2011); Gordon (2012); Greenhow, Sonnevend, Ellison & boyd (2013); Greenwood, Perrin & Duggan (2016); Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Kennedy & Macko (2009); Larson (2017); Lee (2004); O'Reilly (2005); Petersen (2008); Pew (2016); Porterfield & Carnes (2012); Sajithra & Patil (2013); Scholz (2008); Sheninger (2014); Tienhaara (2016); Waddington (2012); Zalaznick (2014); Zimmer (2008); Ziontz (2015).
Communication in K-12 Education	Bjork et al. (2014); Briones & Janoske (2013); Callan & Levinson (2015); Consortium for School Networking (2010); D. Cox (2012); D. Cox (2014); Dembo (2015); Dixon (2012); Dougherty (2014); Ellison & boyd (2013); Ferriter (2011); Ferriter et al. (2011); Fullan & Quinn (2016); Gonzales et al. (2011); Gordon (2012); Greenhow et al. (2012); Haggared et al. (2011); Hampton (2016); Hargittai (2002); Herold (2014); Kellough & Hill (2014); Kowalski (2011); Kowalski (2013); Kowalski et al. (2010); Lang (2016); Larkin (2015); Lotkina (2016); Lovecchio (2013); Mullen et al. (2004); Porterfield & Carnes (2012); Powers & Green (2016); Salacuse (2006);

	Schaffer (2013); Sheninger (2014); Shin et al. (2013); Tapper (2015); Underwood & Drachenburg (2014); Valentini (2015); Tsouvalas (2012); Waddington (2012); Whitehead et al. (2003); W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2006); Wright & Hinson (2012); Zalaznick (2014); Ziontz (2015).
Gatekeeping Theory	Adler, Rodman, & Pré (2017); Carlson & Kashani (2017); Fitch (2012); Serban (2015); Shoemaker, Johnson, & Roccio (2017); Shoemaker & Vos (2009).
District Superintendent as a Gatekeeper	Adler, Rodman, & Pré (2017); Barzilai-Nahon (2008); Kowalski (2011); Kowalski (2013); Porterfield & Carnes (2012); Shoemaker & Vos (2009); Shoemaker, Johnson, & Riccio (2017).
District Superintendent as a Communicator	Ascough (2010); Bagin (2007); Bjork et al. (2014); Bjork & Keedy (2001); Duke (2004); ECRA (2010); Ferriter (2011); Fullan (2001); Houston (2001); Hoyle et al. (2005); Kowalski (2011, 2005, 2013); Kowalski, Peterson, & Fusarelli (2007); Lumetta et al. (2014); Tapper (2015); Waters & Marzano (2007).
Crisis Communication	Dunn & DeLapp (2013); Hood (2014); NASP School Safety & Crisis Response (2015); Porterfield & Carnes (2012); Trump (2015).
District Superintendent as a Public Relations Professional	Callan & Levinson (2015); Carr (n.d.); Carroll (2013); Dougherty (2014); Gordon (2012); Griffin (2014); Padgett (2007); Powers & Green (2016); Schaffer (2013); Sharp & Walter (2004); Tapper (2015); Valentini & Kruckeburg (2012); Waddington (2012); Wynne (2016).
Parent and Community Engagement	Abe & Jordan (2013); Carr (2009); Consortium for School Networking (2010); Ezarik (2002); Hampton (2016); Kowalski (2011); Lotkina (2016); North (2005); Tapper (2015); Tsouvalas (2012); Vogel (2006).
Generational Differences	Autry & Berge (2011); Barbour (2009); Haeger & Lingham (2014); Kenngwe & Georgina (2013); Lancaster & Stillman (2002); Oh & Reeves (2014); Main (2016); Moore (2007); Prensky (2001); Rosen (2010); Strauss (2005); Strauss & Howe (1991); Talking 'bout my generation (2016); Tapscott (2008); Troksa (2016).
Dixon Ongoing Social Engagement Model	L. S. Anderson & Anderson (2010); CDE (2017); Denning (2011); Dixon (2012); Francis (2016); Hargreaves & Dawe (1990); Hartstein (2011); Hattie & Timperley (2007); Hood (2014); Jenkins (2006); NASP School Safety & Crisis Response (2015); Naumann (2015); Park & Lee (2015); Porterfield & Carnes (2012); Skanson (2016); Strahan (2003); Trybus (2017a, 2017b); Trump (2015).

APPENDIX B

Content Validity Alignment Matrix

Quantitative Survey Questions	Research Question Number	Dixon Ongoing Social Engagement Model Element
Use Facebook when communicating with parents	1	Awareness, Feedback, Collaboration, Advocacy
Use Twitter when communicating with parents	1	Awareness, Feedback, Collaboration, Advocacy
Use District Website when communicating with parents	1	Awareness, Feedback, Collaboration, Advocacy
Use E-mail when communicating with parents	1	Awareness, Feedback, Collaboration, Advocacy
Use eNewsletter when communicating with parents	1	Awareness, Feedback, Collaboration, Advocacy
Use Blog when communicating with parents	1	Awareness, Feedback, Collaboration, Advocacy
Use Online Survey when communicating with parents	1	Awareness, Feedback, Collaboration, Advocacy
Identify issues, problems, or complaints	2	Awareness
Provide customer service to parents	2	Collaboration
Answer questions	2	Feedback
Respond to criticism from parents	2	Collaboration
Educate parents about issues that are meaningful to the school district	2	Advocacy
Disseminate event information, news, or crisis communication	2	Awareness
Collect opinions from parents	2	Feedback
Share news that directly helps the online parent community	2	Collaboration

Monitor external trends that could affect the school district	2	Awareness
Involve the parents in conversations on behalf of the school district	2	Advocacy
Recognize parents who contribute on the district's social network issues	2	Advocacy
Elicit feedback from the parents	2	Feedback
Celebrate students (accomplishments, engagement, learning opportunities)	2	Awareness
Encourage parents to have a presence on a social media platform.	2	Feedback
Initiate dialogue with parents on a social media platform.	2	Collaboration
Empower parents to tell the district's story.	2	Advocacy
Qualitative Survey Questions	Research Question Number	Dixon Ongoing Social Engagement Model Element
How have you been able to add social media as a form of communication with the numerous duties as a superintendent? Have you had to shift any responsibilities to others to be present on the social media platform(s)?	2	n/a
How do you use social media to tell the district's story?	2	Advocacy
How do you use social media to build capacity with parents?	2	Collaboration, Advocacy
How has social media benefited when communicating with parents to build awareness?	3	Awareness

How has social media benefited when communicating with parents to incorporate feedback?	3	Feedback
How has social media benefited when collaborating with parents?	3	Collaboration
How has social media benefited when creating parent advocates?	3	Advocacy
How have you overcome the challenges when using social media to communicate with parents to build awareness?	4	Awareness
How have you overcome the challenges when using social media to incorporate feedback?	4	Feedback
How have you overcome the challenges of using social media to collaborate with parents?	4	Collaboration
How have you overcome the challenges of using social media when creating parent advocates?	4	Advocacy

APPENDIX C
Informational Letter



INFORMATIONAL LETTER

Date

Dear School District Superintendent,

I am a doctoral candidate in Brandman University's Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership program in the School of Education. I am conducting a mixed methods study that will identify the social media tools used by exemplary California school district superintendents and their perception of the role of social media when communicating with parents. In addition, this study will describe the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary California superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents.

I am asking for your assistance in the study by participating in an interview which will take approximately 60 minutes and will be set up at a time and location convenient for you. If you agree to participate in the interview, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All information will remain in locked files accessible only to the researcher. No employer will have access to the interview information. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. Further, you may be assured that the researcher is not in any way affiliated with XYZ school district.

The research investigator, Jamie Hughes, is available at jhughes1@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at (209) 663-8093, to answer any questions or concerns you may have. Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jamie M. Hughes
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
341 Sparrow Drive
Galt, CA 95632

APPENDIX D

Invitation to Participate



INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

DATE:

Dear ...

My name is Jamie Hughes and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Education at Brandman University. Please accept this letter as an invitation for you to participate in a research study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this mixed method study is to identify the social media tools used by exemplary California school district superintendents and their perception of the role of social media when communicating with parents. Additionally, this study will describe the benefits and challenges as perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents. Results from this study will be summarized in a doctoral dissertation.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to a 60 minute, one-on-one interview. I will ask a series of questions designed to allow you to share your perception as an exemplary school district superintendent. The questions will assess the role of social media when communicating with parents. Also, the questions will assess the benefits and challenges of using social media when communicating with parents.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no major risks to your participation in this research study. The interview will be at a time and place which is convenient to you. Some interview questions will ask you to describe social media experiences that may cause mild emotional discomfort.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation. A potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to describe the role of social media when communicating with parents. The information for this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of best practices for using social media when communicating with parents.

ANONYMITY: If you agree to participate in the interview, you can be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be recorded on any notes or records from the interview. You will be assigned a participant number. All information will remain in a locked file, accessible only to myself. The recorded interview will not reference your name, school

district name, or county name. Any names used by the participant during the recorded session will be redacted from the transcript. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time.

You are encouraged to ask questions that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. Feel free to contact the investigator, Jamie Hughes, by email jhughes1@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at (209) 663-8093 at any time. If you have further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Sincerely,

Jamie Hughes
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
341 Sparrow Drive
Galt, CA 95632

APPENDIX E

Research Participants Bill of Rights



BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

APPENDIX F

Informed Consent



INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMATION ABOUT: Exemplary California School District Superintendents Leading the Social Media Charge.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Jamie Hughes, Doctoral Candidate

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jamie Hughes, a doctoral student from the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at Brandman University. The purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify the social media tools used by exemplary California school district superintendents and their perception of the role of social media when communicating with parents. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to describe the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents when using social media to communicate with parents.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will include an interview with the identified student investigator. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience. The interview questions will pertain to your perceptions and your responses will be confidential. Each participant will have an identifying code and names will not be used in data analysis. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

I understand that:

- a) The researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes safeguarded in a locked file cabinet or password protected digital file to which the researcher will have sole access.
- b) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.
- c) If I have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Jamie Hughes, jhughes1@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at (209) 663-8093; or Dr. Tim McCarty (Chair) at tmccarty@brandman.edu.
- d) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol: Script and Questions

Interview Script

Congratulations on being identified as an exemplary California school district superintendent leading the social media charge! I am conducting this research to explain the role of social media in communication with parents as perceived by superintendents. I am also seeking your perception of the benefits and challenges when using social media to communicate with parents.

I am conducting five interviews with leaders like yourself. The information you provide, along with the information provided by others, hopefully will provide a clear picture of the benefits and challenges perceived by exemplary California school district superintendents and will add to the body of research currently available.

Incidentally, even though it appears a bit awkward, I will be reading most of what I say. The reason is to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating exemplary superintendents will be conducted in the most similar manner possible.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

I would like to remind you any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your perceptions.

You received the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights in an email and responded with your approval to participate in the interview. Before we start, do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Ok, let's get started, and thank you so much for your time.

Interview Questions

I am going to remind you of the definitions of the elements of the Dixon Ongoing Social Engagement Model. On this card are the definitions of awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy for your reference.

Content Questions

1. Technology is such a part of our personal lives and professional work. How have you been able to add social media as a form of communication with the numerous duties as a superintendent? Have you had to shift any responsibilities to others to be present on the social platform?
2. How do you use social media to tell the district's story?
3. How do you use social media to build capacity with parents?
4. How has social media benefited when communicating with parents to build awareness? How have you overcome any challenges?

5. How has social media benefited when communicating with parents to incorporate feedback? How have you overcome any challenges?
6. How has social media benefited when collaborating with parents? How have you overcome any challenges?
7. How has social media benefited when creating parent advocates? How have you overcome any challenges?

“Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, I will send you a copy of my findings.”

General Probes that can be added to any question to produce more conversation:

1. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “What did you mean by...?”
4. “Why do you think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about...”
6. “Can you give me an example of ...?”
7. “How did you feel about that?”

APPENDIX H

Audio Release Form



AUDIO RELEASE FORM

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: California School District Superintendents Leading the Social Media Charge

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618
RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Jamie Hughes

I authorize Jamie Hughes, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University, and all persons or entities associated with this study, permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the identifier-redacted information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal or presented at meetings and/or presentations. I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any rights and royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organizations utilizing this material.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party Date:

Signature of Principal Investigator – Jamie Hughes Date:

APPENDIX I

Quantitative Survey

Social Media

Introduction

School district superintendents have an obligation to communicate to parents and the community. Social media can be used to foster communication in an interactive way in four levels: awareness, feedback, collaboration, and advocacy.

Completing this survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Please choose to become a part of this important undertaking.

Informed Consent

It is important to read the following consent information carefully and click the agree box to continue. The survey will not open until you agree.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will include this electronic survey with the identified student investigator. You can withdraw at any time.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey questions will pertain to your perceptions and your responses will be confidential.

Each participant will use a three digit code for identification purposes.

The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

I understand that:

- a) The researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file cabinet or password protected digital file to which the researcher will have sole access.
- b) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.
- c) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.
- d) If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

If I have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please email the researcher.

* **ELECTRONIC CONSENT:** Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.

- AGREE:** I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent. I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in this study.
- DISAGREE:** I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey.

Part 1

Please provide the following background information.

Please enter the code provided to you by the researcher.

Please provide your age range.

- 25 - 35 years old
- 36 - 52 years old
- 53+ years old

Number of years as a superintendent:

- 0 - 3 years
- 4 - 6 years
- 7 - 10 years
- 10+ years

Number of years as a superintendent at your current district

- 0 - 3 years
- 4 - 6 years
- 7 - 10 years
- 10+ years

Do you live in the community that you serve as superintendent?

- Yes
- No

Social Media

Part 2

For each social media tool, please indicate *how you (as a district superintendent) use the tools when communicating with parents* by selecting one of the following choices:

- 1. I do not have an account or do not use this tool
- 2. Personal Account Only (I do not use it as a superintendent)
- 3. Awareness: I inform others and others listen
- 4. Feedback: I inform others and am looking for a response
- 5. Collaboration: I converse and collaborate with others to create the direction of the district
- 6. Advocacy: I empower others to share the vision and direction of the district

How do you (as a district superintendent) use the tools when communicating with parents? Please refer to the definitions above. Please select all that apply.

How important are the social media tools in communicating with parents?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
Facebook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
District Website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E-mail	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
eNewsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blog	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Online Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Social Media

Part 3

Below is a set of statements relating to the role of social media when communicating with parents. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each statement by selecting from the following responses:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not certain

Indicate your degree of agreement for the statements focusing on the role of social media when communicating with parents.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not certain
Identify issues, problems, or complaints.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide customer service to parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Answer questions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respond to criticism from parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educate parents about issues that are meaningful to the school district.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disseminate event information, news, or crisis communication.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collect opinions from parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share news that directly helps the parent community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Monitor external trends that could affect the school district.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not certain
Involve the parents in conversations on behalf of the school district.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognize parents who contribute on the district's social network issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elicit feedback from parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Celebrate students (accomplishments, engagement, learning opportunities).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encourage parents to have a presence on a social media platform.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Initiate dialogue with parents on a social media platform.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empower parents to tell the district's story.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

APPENDIX J

Survey Feedback Reflection Questions

1. How long did the survey take to complete? Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. Were the directions for the parts of the survey clear to you? Would you recommend any revisions to the directions?
3. Did you feel comfortable answering the questions asked in the survey? If not, which questions do you recommend that the researcher adjust?
4. If you were to change any part of the survey, what would that part be and how would you change it?
5. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX K

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

1. How long did the interview take? _____ Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX L

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Clearance

