

AN EXPLORATION OF A RURAL ARKANSAS K-12 EDUCATIONAL  
LEADER'S AND COMMUNITY'S SOCIAL MEDIA USE

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AN EXPLORATION OF A RURAL ARKANSAS K-12 EDUCATIONAL  
LEADER'S AND COMMUNITY'S SOCIAL MEDIA USE

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative case study was designed to examine a rural Arkansas K-12 educational leader's and community's communication using social media. Hoffman and Novak's (1996) model of marketing communications in a hypermedia computer-mediated environment served as the conceptual framework for analyzing the leader's social media use from the perspectives of students, parents, and faculty/staff members. The rural K-12 school was located in the northwest region of Arkansas. The study's participants included an educational leader nationally recognized for her use of technology and her students, parents, and faculty/staff members. Through information-gathering questionnaires, interviews, focus group sessions, observations, and document gathering, data were collected and triangulated. Three themes emerged through data analysis. The themes included: recognition of and appreciation for Mrs. Johnson's authentic proficient professional social media use on sites such as Twitter; the power of connectedness both in her relationships with students and with others around the nation through social media; and the positive impact of Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use on the school and its stakeholders, including the faculty/staff, students, and its reputation. These themes furnish an understanding of the phenomenon of a rural K-12

educational leader's professional social media use as perceived by faculty/staff, students, and parents.

This study's findings indicated that a rural K-12 educational leader's students, parents, and faculty/staff positively perceive the leader's professional social media use as a sign of leadership in technology use, a model of responsible social media use, a fount of resources and ideas to be shared, and as a source of school pride and culture.

Professional social media use may also function as an instantaneously-accessible personal learning network for educational leaders, supplying them with peer-connections, concepts, and information free from geographical limitations. While students, parents, and faculty/staff members may be novice users of technology or social media, they believe that the educational leader's professional social media use benefits the students and the school.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction to the Study**

Once the bastion of the young, social media use has risen rapidly among all human age groups (Henry, 2011). Technological advances in both hardware and software have made it possible for people to be connected to the internet, and thereby interacting through social media, nearly everywhere on the planet (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Portio Research, 2013). Technology becomes increasingly more portable and more sophisticated with each day that passes; it is possible to perform activities via personal technology that would have been unthinkable in the past (Cook & Pachler, 2012). For example, smartphone owners may now use their smartphones to take photos of their bank deposits that include checks and send the images to their bank, allowing the bank to process the deposit without ever having touched the actual deposit slip or checks. In terms of actual numbers, Facebook, a social media website, reported having over 1 billion active users in 2012 (Facebook, 2014). If Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populous one on the planet (Facebook, 2014).

As people have become increasingly connected via social media, expectations for communication have changed. In the past, communication either took place face-to-face or relied on wired telephones and printed or written media (Bullard, 2011; Gilbert, Karahalios, & Sandvig, 2010). Technological advances then made sending faxes and emails possible. In today's world, communication is virtually instantaneous all over the world. Frequent communication has become normal and expected – and the lines between business and personal communication are blurring or going away entirely. This phenomenon has implications for professionals of all kinds, but especially for educators,

and particularly for school leaders. In an age where students can use their phones to capture what takes place in school hallways or the substitute teacher who fell asleep while monitoring her class, school leaders must make sure their ability to use social media is on par with stakeholder expectations.

The focus of this research was an educational leader's use of technology to communicate professionally in her duties across the district and the community's social media use. Educational leaders communicate daily with students, faculty, staff, parents, peers, supervisors, community members, and media. The increasing phenomenon of social media use begs the question, "How are educational leaders using social media to communicate professionally?"

### **Statement of the Problem**

While social media use has exploded all over the planet and a great deal of research has been conducted regarding social media use in personal life, research of social media use in professional life has lagged behind (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Perhaps that is because social media use in professional life trailed behind its use in personal life (Henry, 2011). Social media websites such as Facebook have long provided users with options for chronicling and sharing their personal lives with others, but options for work-related professional life chronicling and sharing have lagged behind (Malesky & Peters, 2012). Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook are increasingly used for professional purposes, and sites such as LinkedIn are dedicated specifically to work-related social media use (Malesky & Peters, 2012; Perez, 2012). Individual school buildings and entire school districts are creating Facebook profiles and Twitter accounts and using them to communicate socially (Kirby, 2013). Educational leaders are

migrating to the same sites, particularly Twitter, to communicate about their work in education. A group of educational leaders in the State of Iowa conducts a weekly Twitter chat session titled #IowaEdChat (Twitter, 2013). The sessions are centered on professional development topics. Missouri educational leaders have a similar session at #moedchat, while educational leaders across the nation chat at #usedchat (Twitter, 2013).

Social media research has mimicked social media use. Much research has been conducted regarding personal social media use (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Joinson, 2008; Moore, 2012; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin, 2010; Yang, 2012). Research has also been conducted regarding social media use in education, with a focus on students, teachers, and classrooms (Eren, 2012; Graham, Faix, & Hartman, 2009; Koles & Nagy, 2012; Lampe, Wohn, Vitak, Ellison, & Wash, 2011; Looney & Ryerson; Mayer & Harrison, 2012). However, there is a gap in the research on educational leaders, such as school administrators, particularly on how they are using social media to communicate professionally. Additionally, there is little research regarding K-12 administrators' use of social media in their duties within their school district. While this research will focus on educational leaders in a rural school district in the United States, the research may be applicable to leaders and districts around the globe. This research may be of benefit to anyone who wants to increase his use of social media in his professional career. Anyone who has internet access and can learn to use social media has the potential to benefit from this research because social media use is not limited by geography. Internet access may also be free in many areas around the globe in places such as libraries, coffee shops, hotels, and restaurants. Further, the internet and social media sites may be accessed from any type of device that has the

capability to access the internet, such as a relatively inexpensive cell phone or smartphone. Because of the low cost and wide availability of connectivity to social media sites, this research may be of interest and benefit to many educational leaders and also to individuals in other professions around the globe.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to gather information and identify themes about an educational leader's professional use of social media in a rural school district and the community's use of social media, to share those themes, and to increase and enlarge the body of educational leadership research. The purpose of this case study was to explore educational leaders' use of social media to communicate professionally in their duties across the district as well as the community's use of social media. This study particularly focused on the ways in which educational leaders in a rural Arkansas K-12 school district use social media professionally.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How is an educational leader in a rural Arkansas K-12 school district using social media professionally in her duties across the district?
2. What are the perceptions of school faculty and staff regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?
3. What are the perceptions of students regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?
4. What are the perceptions of parents regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?



5. How are students, faculty and staff, and parents utilizing social media?

### **Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study**

With the literature on social media use in daily life, in education, and in business and the workplace in mind, this study will use Hoffman and Novak's (1996) model of marketing communications in a hypermedia computer-mediated environment as the conceptual framework. In this 'many-to-many' communication model, both the senders' and receivers' primary relationship is with the 'mediated environment', which in this case is the social media or social networking site.

In the hypermedia computer-mediated environment, users can send messages to and through the medium (social networking site) and can receive messages to and through the medium. Messages can be sent to one user or many users, just as messages can be received from one user or many users. Further, information regarding such things as products and services does not come only from the producers of products and services, but also from the consumers of products and services. This represents a significant shift from prior marketing communication models in that consumers, and not just producers, now have control over messages (Trusov et al., 2010). Consumers may not only create their own messages, but they may share them instantaneously with groups of other consumers, all without the producer's knowledge, help, or approval. In the hypermedia computer-mediated environment, power has moved from the producers to the consumers (Henry, 2011). While it is perhaps a disappointment to the producers, the power does not appear to be moving back to them any time in the near future.

An important component of the hypermedia computer-mediated environment model is the 'flow', a term that Hoffman and Novak (1997) used to describe:

[T]he state occurring during network navigation which is: 1) characterized by a seamless sequence of responses facilitated by machine interactivity, 2) intrinsically enjoyable, 3) accompanied by a loss of self-consciousness, and 4) self-reinforcing. To experience flow while engaged in an activity, consumers must perceive a balance between their skills and the challenges of the activity, and both their skills and challenges must be above a critical threshold. (p. 2)

Entering the flow state requires focused attention, interactivity, and a conscious presence in the mediated, rather than the physical environment. Within the flow state, two chief types of flow exist: goal-directed and experiential. According to Hoffman and Novak (1996), “[G]oal-directed flow activities in a [computer-mediated environment] CME are instrumental and utilitarian in nature, extrinsically motivated, characterized by situational involvement, and result in directed search and learning” (p. 19). Goal-directed activities might include a practicing school principal searching for specific information about principals’ social media use on Twitter in order to improve his own social media skills. Experiential flow activities, conversely, “are ritualistic and hedonic, intrinsically motivated, characterized by enduring involvement, and result in nondirected search and learning” (Hoffman & Novak, 1996, p. 19). Experiential flow activities might include an individual’s daily habit of checking his Facebook or Twitter account while eating breakfast. Experiential flow activities, specifically enduring involvement, preceded opinion leadership; situational involvement, a goal-directed activity, did not (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Richins & Root-Schaffer, 1988). Therefore, an individual who is, or would like to be, an opinion leader may habitually engage with the computer-mediated

environment as a way to share knowledge and experiences with others (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Lyons & Henderson, 2005).

In the case of this research, educational leaders (consumers) are not dependent on consultants or third-party providers (producers) to communicate with others professionally. Instead of sending their messages through media outlets such as newspaper and television, leaders and districts may now go straight to users such as students, families, and the local community, as well as potential users around the globe (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Joinson, 2008; Lewis, 2009). Further, educational leaders now have the capacity to connect in what is virtually “real time” with a near-limitless number of other educational leaders (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Henry, 2011; Lewis, 2009). In the past, educational leaders’ ability to connect with each other was limited by geography or the medium, such as the telephone or written word. Direct communication to a large community of other educational leaders who also possessed the ability to communicate in return was impossible. Today, it is reality (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Educational leaders are connecting with each other across the nation and around the globe. Groups vary in composition, even under the “education” umbrella. For example, groups may consist of educators from individual states or even across the nation, as is the case with #IowaEdChat for the State of Iowa and #usedchat for the entire nation. Interestingly, groups designated by state, such as #IowaEdChat, may have members from other states such as Missouri as professional networks and circles often cross state lines. Groups may also consist of educators from a variety of positions with the educational arena; groups often include K-12 administrators, K-12 teachers, educational consultants, university professors, educational advocates, governmental agency education professionals, and

educational organization professionals. In addition to making connections with other users and searching for specific information through the computer-mediated environment, educational leaders may also be motivated to become opinion leaders and share knowledge and experiences by habitually engaging with social network sites.

This study used Hoffman and Novak's (1996) model of marketing communications in a hypermedia computer-mediated environment as the lens through which to view the data. Focus was placed on the 'many-to-many' communication model's premise that both the senders' and receivers' primary relationship is with the 'mediated environment' (social media or social networking site).

### **Design and Methods**

This study is a qualitative case study of an educational leader in a rural K-12 school district in the State of Arkansas. This school district has a social media presence through Facebook and its district web page. District educational leaders have a social media presence through Twitter and personal web pages that include blogs.

The educational leader who is the focus of this research was purposefully chosen based on social media use and service as a principal in a rural Arkansas school district. This leader received the 2014 National Digital K-12 Educational Leader Award. This award is based on application of the National Education Technology Standards for Administrators to the *Achieving Greatness* Framework for School Improvement. The standards include: 1) visionary leadership, 2) digital age learning culture, 3) excellence in professional practice, 4) systematic improvement, and 5) digital citizenship (International Society for Technology in Education, 2009). This educational leader was the only rural

principal among the three who received the 2014 National Digital K-12 Educational Leader Award.

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). The choice of research design and method was made based on the purpose of the study as well as the aims and research questions. “Qualitative methods are used in research that is designed to provide an in-depth description of a program, practice, or setting” (Mertens, 2015, p. 236). In order to fulfill the purpose of the study and thoroughly explore and answer the research questions, it was determined that qualitative design and methods were most appropriate. They will allow the researcher to “explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory” about educational leaders’ professional social media use (Creswell, 2009, p. 99).

Within the qualitative design, an in-depth exploratory case study strategy was selected as the model of inquiry with the intent to deeply probe the topic and provide guidance for further research. The case study method of research allows for in-depth exploration during a specified time or activity using varied procedures of data collection (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 1995). The selection of the exploratory case study was based on the concept’s ‘immaturity’, defined by the scarcity of literature examining educational leaders’ social media use as well as the lack of theory on the topic (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). The result of this scarcity is that knowledge of this topic is limited and existing data are insufficient to direct highly focused research. Further exploration is therefore essential in order to guide future research (Creswell, 2009).

From a qualitative viewpoint, the lack of existing research on educational leaders' social media use requires exploration of the topic for the purpose of description (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Consequently, the research necessitates a method that permits the necessary exploration. The requirement of exploration, specifically, makes the case study a fitting strategy for this research (Mertens, 2010).

### **Data Collection**

Exploring this educational leader's use of social media lends itself to an exploratory qualitative case study because of the wide range of individuals' beliefs about social media and comfort levels with social media use, as well as the various points of view of stakeholders (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009). As a qualitative case study, this research gathered multiple sources of data through typical qualitative data collection methods including personal interviews, focus groups, and document review (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010).

An information-gathering questionnaire was utilized to procure data regarding respondents' social media use. Various school district stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents were interviewed and participated in focus groups in an effort to determine their perceptions of educational leaders' use of social media. One characteristic of qualitative research is that data are collected in natural settings, where participants experience the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, this study's interviews and focus groups took place in school district buildings chosen by participants. Qualitative research is also characterized by thick, or detailed, description, which ensures that the reader is able to accurately compare and contrast the research settings with those in his own sphere (Creswell, 2009; Mertens,

2010). Due to the importance of providing detailed description for readers of this research, careful attention was paid to gathering complex information that would enable readers to understand participants and the research setting. In addition, the research plan included document analysis of state and district documents that would provide insight into the district's use of social media and social media use by its educational leaders. The research plan received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this human subjects study in order to proceed with the data collection process and a notice of informed consent was provided to and signed by each participant.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process, according to Creswell (2009), involves “making sense out of text and image data” (p. 183). Creswell (2009) provides a detailed description of the steps in this process:

The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data (some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back the layers of an onion), representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. (p. 183)

Data in this research were analyzed using an inductive process and triangulation to associate responses with the research questions and themes found in the literature review so that the data would align with the conceptual framework (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Mertens, 2010). Each interview and focus group session was transcribed and then analyzed for themes by reading and highlighting. Themes that emerged from

this process were listed and then combined by condensing them into ‘overarching themes’ (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Lastly, the ‘overarching themes’ that emerged from the interviews and focus group sessions were associated with themes found in the literature, all aligning with the conceptual framework.

Document analysis of proposed state legislation, laws of the State of Arkansas, district policies and documents, social media documents, and state and local news media report documents was used to substantiate analysis of participant perceptions (Hatch, 2002). Like the analysis of the individual and focus group interview transcripts, document analysis consisted of finding emerging themes that related to the research and interview questions. Finally, the themes that emerged from the interview and focus group analysis and those that emerged from the document analysis were compared with themes from the literature regarding social media as well as the conceptual framework.

Validity and reliability, guaranteeing both the accuracy of the findings and the consistency of the researcher’s approach, were ensured through multiple strategies. These included proof-reading of transcripts, intercoder agreement, data triangulation, member checking, and detailed description (Creswell, 2009).

### **Assumptions**

The researcher’s worldview is that of a social constructivist (Mertens, 2010). As a social constructivist, the researcher has special interest in individuals’ viewpoints, the interaction between individuals that helps them make meaning and understand the world, and the process of these interactions (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, individuals’ use of social media to interact with others and create meaning is of great interest to the researcher. As an experienced educational leader and social media user, the researcher’s



personal biases are generally that educational leaders' increasing use of technology is a benefit to the leader, his students and families, his teachers, his district, and the entire educational profession. Additionally, the researcher believes that involving students and families, as well as teachers, in educational leaders' daily, work-related technological activities is positive and beneficial. Because the researcher understands her bias, she carefully constructed interview and survey questions to avoid inserting her point of view into the research. As well, she maintained awareness of her bias while conducting interviews to avoid providing participants with non-verbal cues that would make them aware of her point of view, thereby pushing toward responding in a certain way (Creswell, 2009).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For the purpose of enhancing the reader's understanding of this inquiry the following terms were defined.

**Cell phone.** A portable, usually cordless, telephone for use in a cellular system.

**Chat session.** Online, real-time text-based communication between two or more users over a network such as Twitter.

**Blogging.** A website containing the author's personal experiences and observations.

**Email.** A means or system for transmitting messages electronically (as between computers on a network).

**Facebook.** Social media site for connecting with friends (Facebook, 2013).

**Fax.** A facsimile communication.

**Google+.** Google's social media network that operates in conjunction with Google web search, email, and video services (Google+, 2015).

**Hypermedia computer-mediated environment.** "A distributed computer network used to access and provide hypermedia content (i.e., multimedia content connected across the network with hypertext links)" (Hoffman & Novak, 1996, p. 1).

**Instagram.** Social media photo-sharing and editing service (Instagram, 2015).

**Kik.** Social media site for chatting with friends (Kik, 2015).

**LinkedIn.** Social media site for connecting professionals (LinkedIn, 2013).

**Microblogging.** Blogging done with severe space or size constraints typically by posting frequent brief messages about personal activities.

**Opinion leader.** Influential members of a community, group, or society to whom others turn to for advice, opinions, and views.

**Pinterest.** Social media site and online bulletin board for ideas and interests (Pinterest, 2015).

**Smartphone.** A cell phone that includes additional software functions (as e-mail or an Internet browser).

**Social media.** Forms of electronic communication (such as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).

**Social network(ing) site.** Internet-based services that allow users to create a profile inside a constrained system, specify a list of other users with whom they connect, and observe and review both their own list of connections and those of others inside the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

**Tumblr.** Micro-blogging platform and social networking website (Tumblr, 2015).

**Tweet.** Twitter message containing text, photos, and videos that is posted to Twitter and shared with followers; the message is limited to 140 characters. Hashtags may be used to assign a topic to a tweet. Tweet example: Educational leaders use social media to learn. #educationalleadership. ‘Tweet’ may also refer to the act of sending a tweet (Twitter message). (Twitter, 2014).

**Twitter.** Social media site and micro-blogging service (Twitter, 2013).

**Vine.** Social media site and short, looping video sharing service (Vine, 2015).

**Voxer.** Social media site for sharing live voice, text, and photos (Voxer, 2015).

**Wanelo.** Social media site for online retail shopping (Wanelo, 2015).

### **Significance of the Study**

The researcher’s practice as an educational leader will be informed through this research as the depth and width of her understanding of educational leaders’ use of social media is increased and as her use of social media in her professional career is increased and improved. The improved effectiveness of her use of social media at work will also benefit her employing school district.

K-12 educational leaders including superintendents, building administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers will benefit significantly as it helps them to understand the reasons why a social media presence is important, not only for their district, but also for themselves. Educational leaders will gain guidance on how to create a social media presence for their district and for themselves, including best practices for success, as well as practices to avoid.

The findings of this research can also educate and inform the practices of those who guide and support K-12 education, such as students, families, community-members, state-level regional professional development practitioners, professors of educational leadership in institutions of higher education, state and local school board members, and state and local politicians. These stakeholders have a vested interest in the social media use of educational leaders, especially as it increases professional growth and communication.

While social media use is increasing, not all people are currently using it. As time passes, non-users may decide to begin using social media in their personal or professional lives or both. As beginners, they may need guidance and this study's findings can help provide that information.

Finally, the archival nature of social media will cause this study to be a relevant resource of benefit to practitioners around the world for some time to come. At the present time, social media users anywhere on the planet can efficiently look for and find information in social media archives. For example, Twitter users can use the term #IowaEdChat to search Twitter's archives and find all tweets with that hashtag. In a matter of seconds, those tweets are displayed for viewing (Twitter, 2013). Both the amount of information available through social media sites and the speed at which it can be accessed will likely increase in the future, causing this research to be significant for years to come.

### **Summary**

Due to advances in technology, social media use is rapidly increasing among all age groups of people around the world. Because of this increase in social media use,

communication expectations and capacities are changing. Research thus far has focused primarily on social media use in personal life; while research on social media has included educational use, the focus has largely been on students, teachers, and classrooms. Educational leaders have not widely been a focus of research regarding social media use. Therefore, there is a need for research regarding educational leaders' use of social media to communicate professionally, particularly in duties within their school district.

To both fill a gap in the research and to inform the practice of educational leaders and stakeholders, educational leaders' use of technology to communicate professionally is the focus of this inquiry. While this exploratory qualitative case study will focus on educational leaders in a rural school district in the United States, the findings will be applicable to leaders and districts around the globe. This research can be of benefit to anyone who wants to increase his use of social media in his professional career.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Review of Related Literature**

Humans have always been social creatures and communicated with each other (Hewett, 2012). Prior to today's technological advancements, communication took place orally, in writing, by telegraph, and by telephone (Bullard, 2011; Gilbert et al., 2010). Technology has now advanced to the point that communication increasingly takes place entirely through electronic mediums such as a smartphone or computer (Cook & Pachler, 2012; Koles & Nagy, 2012). What was unbelievable or found only in science fiction novels and movies two generations ago are part of daily life today.

Younger people were quicker than other age groups to use technology in social communication, but older people have adopted the practice in increasingly larger numbers. Today, social media use is rising rapidly among all age groups (Henry, 2011); 66% of all online adults in the United States use social media (Cook & Pachler, 2012). People age 35 and older comprise 51% of the total users of social media networks (Henry, 2011). In addition, that same population is Facebook's fastest growing demographic group (Malesky, Jr., & Peters, 2012). Of people online age 65 and older, 45% are using Facebook, the world's most successful and largest social network site (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Yang, 2012). With 1.15 billion users, if Facebook were a country, it would be the most populous one on the planet (DeMers, 2013).

Technology advances daily. Improvements in electronic hardware and software allow people to connect to the internet and social media all over the earth. At the same time, technology exponentially becomes both more useful and portable, allowing more and more human activity to take place via hand-held devices. In fact, worldwide

smartphone shipments are expected to top one billion in 2016; in that same year, the number of smartphone users around the world is expected to exceed three billion (Portio Research, 2013). Illustrating the trend of increasing hand-held device usage, 58% of all adults in the United States own a smartphone, and 68% of U.S. adults use a mobile device, such as a smartphone, to connect to the internet (Fox & Rainie, 2014).

Smartphone ownership has increased by more than 50% since 2011 among U.S. adults age 65 and older (Smith, 2014). Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald, and Vockley (2011) found that 55% of undergraduate students own an internet-capable handheld device, such as a smartphone, and more than 10% plan to purchase one in the next 12 months. Of those students who owned an internet-capable handheld device, over 60% reported using it to connect to social network sites (Smith, Salaway & Caruso, 2009). In 2012, Dahlstrom reported that 67% of U.S. undergraduate students who owned a smartphone reported using it for academic purposes and 37% thought it was important to their academic success. Mobile phone service is essential for using smartphones and connecting to the internet. It is predicted that the U.S. will add 71 million mobile phone subscribers in total from 2011 to 2016, making it the seventh-fastest growing country worldwide in terms of mobile phone subscriptions (Portio Research, 2013).

As technology becomes more portable and internet connectivity becomes increasingly widespread, geography ceases to be a limiting factor in human communication and activity (Gilbert et al., 2010). For example, depositing a check in the bank used to mean that a person had to physically go to the bank and make the deposit in person. Today smartphone owners may make bank deposits simply by using their smartphone to take a photo of the check to be deposited and sending that image to their

bank. Technology is increasingly removing geography as a barrier to human activity (Livingston, 2009).

As people have become more savvy social media users who are increasingly connected via social media, expectations for communication have changed. In years past, communication depended on wired telephones and printed or written media such as letters (Gilbert et al., 2010). Technological advances then made it possible to send faxes and, eventually, email messages. Today, communication occurs nearly instantaneously all over the planet. Frequent communication has become normal and expected. As a result, the ways that people communicate for personal and business purposes are changing, too (Rogers, Chapman, & Giotsis, 2012).

It is a moment of technological opportunity. Experiments in social communication abound. The advent of the Internet and the proliferation of mobile media are unleashing innovation in the creation and distribution of information. Those who possess and can use sophisticated devices interact ever more seamlessly with a global information network both at home and in public. (Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, 2009, p. 4)

This trend has implications for professionals of all kinds, but especially for educators and particularly for school leaders (Li, 2010). At a time in which students can use their phones to record and then share with the world virtually anything that happens in the school building or on the school grounds, including the substitute teacher who fell asleep while monitoring her class, school leaders must ensure their own social media savvy, consumption, and creation are on par with stakeholder expectations. Further,



school leaders should have the ability to strategically and purposefully use and manage social media in such a way that it benefits their students, schools and themselves. As Williamson and Johnston (2012) wrote, “This is a revolution in the way people communicate. It can also revolutionize the way we lead and the way our schools work. Not only is it inevitable, it may be the best thing that has happened for schools in a long time” (p. 4).

### **Definition and Description**

The term ‘social media’ is frequently used to describe people’s use of technology to communicate with others on the internet via social network sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter. Social media use is distinguished from other technological communication activities, such as sending email or using a technological device to engage in video face-to-face conversation, by the use of social network(ing) sites. Koles and Nagy (2012) defined social networking sites as, “interactive websites designed to build and enhance online communities and connect members with common interests” (p. 5). Boyd and Ellison (2008) constructed a more detailed, descriptive definition of social network sites as:

[W]eb-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

(p. 211)

Users of social network sites such as Facebook or Twitter create a descriptive profile about themselves, choose individually other users with whom they wish to share a connection, and are able to view the profiles, connections, and activity of the people with whom they have connection (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Trusov et al., 2010). While all social network sites have at least these three attributes in common, additional features or options may vary from site to site. Some sites, such as Facebook, allow users to upload photos and video. Others, such as Twitter, allow sharing of photos, but limit the amount of text that users can share; Twitter users are not able to share video directly through the site, but may share a link to video.

Facebook is one example of an extremely popular and populous social network site (Koles & Nagy, 2012; Steinfield et al, 2008). Facebook users create a profile about themselves that includes, at the very least, their name and birthdate. They are then able to add additional personal descriptive information including geographical location, educational background, work experience and location, familial connections with other Facebook users, photos, and personal preferences for businesses, products, music, and more (Selwyn, 2009; Trusov et al., 2010). Users may update and edit their profile on an on-going basis.

After creating their own profile, Facebook users then invite others to make a connection with them, a process known as ‘friending’ (Joinson, 2008). If the other person accepts the invitation, then the two are ‘friends’ on Facebook and have access to each other’s profile, timeline, and status messages (Selwyn, 2009). Users may also belong to ‘groups’. Members of the group do not necessarily have to be Facebook friends with each other to belong to the group.

Facebook users share information with each other in a variety of ways (Trusov et al., 2010). One way is to post ‘status’ updates, essentially a message which posts to their own timeline. This message is shared with their ‘friends’ in a ‘news feed’. Users may also send messages to one or multiple friends, called ‘private messaging’. This message does not appear on either the sender or the recipient’s timeline. Both status updates and private messages may contain text, photos, and video. Users may also make comments on other users’ posts with written message or simply by ‘like’ing them.

Twitter users begin by creating a personal profile in a manner similar to Facebook users. There are three distinct differences between Facebook and Twitter. One difference is that Twitter messages, called tweets, are limited to 140 characters; tweets are also referred to as micro-blogs (DeMers, 2013). The second difference is that Twitter does not utilize the ‘friend’ concept that Facebook uses. This means that users do not have to invite others to follow them nor do they have the option to approve those who choose to follow them. Finally, Twitter users may use hashtags, which are essentially searchable labels preceded by the pound sign, in tweets. This feature allows all Twitter users to quickly and easily search for related information, whether or not they follow the person who tweeted it. For example, Twitter users who participate in the Iowa Education Chat via Twitter use the hashtag #IowaEdChat as part of messages they tweet during the online chat. Because they do so, a Twitter user may use the hashtag #IowaEdChat to search for all Iowa Education Chat tweets. This hashtag allows Twitter users to efficiently find and condense large volumes of related information (Twitter, 2013).

While social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter have millions of users around the world today, this has not always been the case (Henry, 2011; Trusov

et al., 2010). The first social network site, SixDegrees.com, was launched in 1997 and lasted only 3 years, closing in 2000 (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). In the next decade, multiple services opened and several of those subsequently closed as internet users familiarized themselves with social network sites and as the sites worked to become more attuned to user preferences. LinkedIn and MySpace launched in 2003, Facebook in 2004 (to Harvard University users only), and Twitter in 2006. Facebook opened to high-school users in 2005 and to all users in 2006. Today, most college students, and increasingly higher percentages of people in other age groups, use social network sites daily (Zula, Yarrish, & Pawelzik, 2011).

### **Use in Daily Life**

Millions of people use social network sites to both create and consume social media on a frequent basis for a variety of purposes (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Trusov et al., 2010). These purposes flow across the personal, educational, and business aspects of people's lives. For some, the purpose is purely to connect socially with friends and family and causes they support (Moore, 2012).

In their personal lives, people are using Facebook to maintain or enhance existing connections with family and friends, to create new connections with family and friends, and to document their lives and share. Joinson (2008) found that the most common reason for using Facebook is to "keep in touch" (p. 1034). Educationally, people are using social media to connect with other learners and learn collaboratively, as well as independently, by directing their own learning (Graham et al., 2009).

With increasing frequency, students use social network sites as part of the educational process. Social media allows for flexibility in learning, freeing learners from

the time and space constraints of typical brick-and-mortar-housed education and learning. In the sphere of business, users are leveraging social media for business advancement and for employee growth (Trusov et al., 2010). Businesses and business professionals use social network sites in the workplace both to promote and improve their businesses and as an employee educational tool (Baxter, Marcella, & Varfis, 2011; Henry, 2011).

As social network sites become an increasingly pervasive part of daily life, the lines that delineate particular types of use begin to disappear. For example, students use Facebook as a social tool to connect with friends and family, but they also use it as part of their classroom education in many universities (Lampe et al., 2011). Further, business professionals such as school principals may have a Twitter account in their own name that they use as a professional development tool. Thus, the application of social network sites to activities of daily life crosses traditional boundaries that once clearly defined what was 'personal' and what was 'work' or 'education' (Koles & Nagy, 2012).

People of all ages are using social media and those living in rural areas, geographical areas with populations of less than 2,500, are no exception (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The rural population of the U.S. is approximately 20% of the total population, a percentage that is greater than that of senior citizens, people with disabilities, and nearly double that of students enrolled in post-secondary education (Digest of Education Statistics, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A majority of U.S. states have a rural population comprising more than 20% of the state's total population; however, in the State of Arkansas, the location of this study, over 40% of the total population is rural. Nine other states, Maine, Vermont, West Virginia, Mississippi, Montana, South Dakota, Kentucky, Alabama, and North Dakota, also have a rural

population above 40% of the total population. Further, this study will focus on a school district in Frisco County, Arkansas, which has a 100% rural population, as do 16 other Arkansas counties. Only one Arkansas county, Pulaski, has a population that is less than 20% rural.

The research regarding rural people's social media use in the U. S. is sparse. An exhaustive search turned up only a handful of sources and studies (Gilbert et al., 2010). This scarcity is exactly what necessitates further research on the topic of social media use by those living in rural areas. In particular, this lends credibility to the need for this particular research study of rural school leaders' social media use.

Fewer rural residents than urban and suburban people report using computers in the workplace, home, school, or elsewhere (Fox & Rainie, 2014). Rural individuals are also one-third less likely to own a smartphone than are suburban and urban people. They are also less likely to use the internet than are those living in suburbs or urban areas.

Rural citizens spend about 13 hours per week online. Nearly half of that time is spent on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. While 15% of rural inhabitants reported spending over 11 hours per week on social media, rural adults are less likely than urban and suburban adults to use social networking sites (Duggan & Brenner, 2013; Hammond, 2009). Of rural adults who are online, 71% report using Facebook and 11% report using Twitter (Duggan & Smith, 2013). However, the percentage of rural users lags behind that of urban and suburban users on Twitter and LinkedIn, most noticeably with LinkedIn. More than three times as many urban and suburban adults online use LinkedIn than do rural adults online.

## **Use in Education**

Koles and Nagy (2012) studied high school and college students and found that over half reported daily internet use of more 3 hours. According to Trusov et al. (2010), 90% of high school students and young adults in the United States participate in a social network community. Smith et al. (2009) and Dahlstrom et al. (2011) found a similar use percentage among undergraduate students. Of those using social media, 90% are using Facebook, 37% are using Twitter, and 25% are using LinkedIn (Dahlstrom et al., 2011). Dahlstrom et al. (2011) found that 58% of students reported using Facebook frequently (multiple times daily) and log in or check their account up to thirteen times per day; frequent Twitter users read up to 112 tweets per day. Twenty-one percent of U.S. undergraduate students reported using LinkedIn more in 2012 than in 2011; 18% of the same students reported using Twitter more during the same time period (Dahlstrom, 2012).

Social media is increasingly used by all age groups, not just high school and college students; people age 35 and older comprise Facebook's fastest growing demographic group and are also 51% of the total users of social media networks (Henry, 2011; Malesky, Jr., & Peters, 2012). More specifically, Smith et al. (2009) found that from 2006 to 2009, the number of U.S. undergraduate students age 30-39 who had used social media increased 236%; only 22.1% reported using social media in 2006 and 74.3% reported doing so in 2009. An even more dramatic increase (326%) took place among students age 40 and over. In 2006, 11.2% of such students reported using social media, and in 2009 that number had increased to 47.7%. In spite of the numbers of students using social network sites, only a little more than one quarter of U.S. undergraduate

students report using them in a course (Smith et al., 2009). However, that number appears to be rising (Lampe et al., 2011).

Whether or not they are integrated into the classroom, students are incorporating social network sites into their education. Selwyn (2009) reports that students are using social network sites for a variety of purposes, including sharing academic and practical information as well as personal thoughts and feelings about their educational experience. Further, Selwyn (2009) reports that Facebook can be considered an important venue for student socialization into university life. Twenty-five percent of U.S. undergraduate students believe Facebook is a 'valuable' or 'extremely valuable' contributor to their success (Dahlstrom et al., 2011)

As the population of social-media savvy young adults grow up, become teachers, and enter the classroom, and as the population of existing teachers becomes more social media savvy, social network sites are increasingly infiltrating the traditional educational classroom (Lampe et al., 2011). In fact, Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) reported that in 2006 approximately 297,000 Facebook users identified themselves as faculty or staff. As educators become more proficient at using social network sites, they are finding more ways to integrate them into education. Professional educators such as university professors, K-12 teachers, and librarians are finding ways to integrate students' social lives with their educational experiences, whether that be through connecting with students on social network sites, developing educational content that is delivered via social network site platforms, updating curriculum and student preparation, using social network sites to organize collaborative classroom activities, or setting up a closed group on a social network site for the purpose of educational foreign language study (Eren,



2012; Graham et al., 2009; Lampe et al., 2011; Looney & Ryerson, 2011; Mayer & Harrison, 2012).

Research examining integration of Facebook into the educational classroom has found that it can be a useful tool and that such integration received positive student feedback (Eren, 2012). Lampe et al. (2011) suggest that educators use Facebook to interact with their students, the majority of whom are already using Facebook on a daily basis. Instructors who are available on Facebook can serve as an important source of assistance and guidance for their students. Dahlstrom et al. (2011) found that 15 % of U.S. undergraduate students reported wishing their instructors used Facebook more often.

Facebook also has merit as a delivery mechanism for instructional content. Mayer and Harrison (2012) used social media to deliver food safety information and found that 66% of students reported enjoying and learning more from a content-specific, instructor-designed Facebook page than from a traditional lecture about the topic. Further, the Facebook page was found to have the greatest impact on improvement of students' food safety practices. In addition, more than half of participating students reported that they were likely or very likely to use Facebook to learn more about the topic in the future.

Mazer et al., (2007) examined student-instructor relationships and found that higher levels of teacher self-disclosure in Facebook profiles were associated with higher levels of student motivation and more positive classroom climate. Additionally, instructor self-disclosure had a positive effect on student motivation and student perception of the instructor (O'Sullivan, Hunt & Lippert, 2004). There appears to still be some concern about the appropriateness of instructor-students connections online via

social network sites (Mazer et al., 2007). Malesky and Peters (2012) found that nearly one-third of faculty participants and nearly 40% of students believe it is inappropriate for faculty members to have social network site accounts. Mazer et al. (2007) reported that students suggested faculty members keep professionalism and appropriate self-disclosure in mind in regard to creating and using social network site accounts.

Whether teachers and professors purposely use social network sites in the classroom or not, students are certainly using them as part of their educational experience (Lampe et al., 2011). Salaway et al. (2009) found that more than half of U.S. undergraduate students have used social network sites for educational purposes, including school-related communication with classmates. Facebook is one social network site that students are bringing into the classroom. According to Lampe et al. (2011), students are repurposing Facebook's social interaction tools for academic purposes, such as "sharing information about their classroom activities and collaborating with peers on assignments" (p. 330).

Social media use infiltrated daily life first in the personal realm and then in the educational realm. Social media research has followed this same path. There is a substantial body of research regarding both personal social media use and educational use of social media, focused mostly on students, teachers, and classrooms (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Eren, 2012; Graham et al., 2009; Koles & Nagy, 2012; Lampe et al., 2011; Looney & Ryerson; Mayer & Harrison, 2012). However, there is a gap in the research on educational leaders such as school administrators, particularly on how they are using social media to communicate professionally. There could be several potential reasons that explain why school leaders' social media use has not widely been the subject of

research. Perhaps school leaders are not widely using social media, perhaps school leaders are using social media personally but not professionally, or perhaps it is simply that school leaders' personal and professional social media use is not attracting researchers' attention.

In contrast to the students, teachers, librarians, and classrooms within their school buildings, but perhaps similarly to school leaders, school districts have not widely adopted social media (Baxter et al., 2011; Henry, 2011). Although individual school buildings and entire school districts are creating Facebook profiles and Twitter accounts and using them to communicate socially, a simple Facebook search turns up only a handful of Facebook profiles in geographic areas where the number of school districts is many times that (Facebook, 2013). This is especially true in rural districts, where school district web pages that are updated daily may still be an anomaly.

Ensuring adequate access to technology is an essential component of education (Williamson & Johnston, 2012). Providing this access may be more difficult for rural schools and communities because poverty is often higher in rural areas and many families, as well as the school district, may not be able to afford up-to-date technology (Bell, Reddy, & Rainie, 2004). Further, rural areas frequently lack affordable, high-speed internet service; this is also a barrier to technology access (Horrigan, 2009). According to Koles and Nagy (2012) and Jackson, Ervin, Gardner, and Schmitt (2001), poorer children who grow up with minimal computer and technology experience may be at a disadvantage when compared with wealthier peers who grew up using computers and technology more frequently

## **Use in Business and Professional Life**

For more than a decade, social network sites such as Facebook have given users options for sharing their personal lives with others, but options for work-related professional life sharing have lagged behind (Malesky & Peters, 2012). However, social network sites are increasingly used for professional purposes and social network sites such as LinkedIn are dedicated specifically to work-related social networking (Malesky & Peters, 2012; Perez, 2012). Businesses and business professionals are using social networks to connect with other businesses and customers, to promote their businesses to customers and potential customers, and to educate employees. Facebook and Twitter are popular social networks used by people at work (Baxter et al., 2011; Henry, 2011).

Businesses, including for-profit entities and non-profit or governmental entities such as school districts, are using social network sites to make connections and share information. (Graham et al., 2009; Mayer & Harrison, 2012). In the case of for-profit entities, such businesses are reaching out to potential customers, their communities, and other businesses (Yang, 2012). Businesses are also using social network sites to run promotions, distribute information, and monitor competitors (Henry, 2011). In Barnes and Mattson's (2009) study of *Inc. 500* companies, 34% of executives reported using social network sites to communicate with other businesses, including vendors, suppliers, and partners. Further, 25% of respondents believed that Twitter was an appropriate channel for business-to-business communication. Social network sites, specifically Facebook, provide excellent value to businesses as a promotional tool (Dutta, 2010; Yang, 2012). According to Henry (2011), online networks are where "meaningful

connections are made, transactions and deals completed, and individual and professional branding and success attained” (p. 6).

Barnes and Mattson (2009) researched business use of social media each year from 2007 to 2009, studying the *Inc. 500*, a select group of the United States’ fastest-growing companies. The findings are similar to those of Smith et al. (2009) regarding U.S. undergraduate students’ increasing familiarity with social network sites. Barnes and Mattson (2009) found that 75% of respondents rated themselves as “very familiar” with social network sites, up from 57% in 2008 and 42% in 2007. Further, 91% of respondents reported using at least one of the social media tools studied, with success rates of 82% or better. In 2009, 43% of respondents stated that social media was “very important” to their business and marketing strategy, up from 26% in 2007. Finally, 68% of respondents reported monitoring their company name and brand on social media in 2009, up from 50% in 2007.

Both non-profit organizations and governmental agencies, entities that operate much like traditional businesses but exist to serve a need rather than to make a profit, are leveraging the low cost and enormous reach of social network sites in a variety of ways. For example, the American Red Cross utilizes social network sites to:

[B]uild and maintain connections with beneficiaries, gather feedback from and address concerns raised by the public, and solicit financial donations. . . [Also to] mobilize its base of more than 13 million volunteers, often locally or from nearby regions, to respond to natural disasters and other emergencies. Social media serve as inexpensive and effective channels to alert potential volunteers—especially young adults—

about a crisis and advise them how they can help. They're also useful for coordinating routine activities such as blood drives and training events.

(Witman, 2013, p. 82)

An online search demonstrates governmental agency and non-profit organization use of social network sites (Facebook, 2013; Twitter, 2013). National, state, county, and city organizations exist on Facebook or Twitter or both, including the White House, the State of Missouri, the Benton County (Missouri) Health Department, and the Warsaw (Missouri) Parks and Recreation Department. Non-profits of all types and sizes are also on Facebook, Twitter, or both, including Convoy of Hope, an international humanitarian-relief organization; Community Foundation of the Ozarks, a regional charitable organization; and The Benton County (Missouri) Laundry Project, a local charity. Churches, schools, and universities also have a social network site presence on Facebook, Twitter, or both.

Social network sites are changing the way businesses and organizations promote themselves. In the past, such promotion was frequently characterized by clear messages shared via printed or video media, whether that was billboards, magazines, or television. Today, however, promotion occurs more and more often via social network sites. The style of the promotion message has also changed. Rather than resembling the overt messages of traditional advertising in the past, today's promotional message is increasingly more subtle. Rather than explicitly promoting a business or product, social network site promotion essentially involves influencing customers and potential customers to connect with the business and its products. Further, businesses strive to motivate customers and potential customers who have connected with them via social

network sites to then influence others to do the same. Yang (2012) suggests that businesses “spare no effort in attracting consumers to join Facebook fan groups and broadcast the various advertising message or marketing activities on Facebook to their close friends, thereby bringing word of mouth effects into play and further affecting consumer brand attitudes” (p. 57). Further, Yang (2012) recommends that businesses work with high-credibility communicators on social network sites to more effectively distribute marketing messages.

For-profit businesses are not the only ones using social media as a promotional tool. Baxter et al., (2011) researched social network site use by Scottish politicians during the 2010 United Kingdom general election campaign. They found that nearly 40% of candidates and parties used social media during the election, typically as a one-way delivery system to share information with declared supporters rather than providing an opportunity for conversation and interaction. Baxter et al. (2011) referred to this as “preaching to the converted” (page 476), which indicates that the candidate’s social media communication is reaching those who already support the candidate, rather than those who are still deciding whom they will support. Of those candidates and parties who used social network sites, most used Twitter and Facebook. Facebook users most often utilized the wall, information, and photo features; most of those using Twitter shared personal photographs and biographical information (Baxter et al, 2011).

School districts have also turned to social media as a promotional tool. According to Kirby (2013), 73% of respondents to the National School Public Relations Association’s member survey indicated that their district had a Facebook page. Schools are also building a presence with Twitter, using it to spread the word about everything

from important dates such as graduation to cafeteria menus and sports scores (Gordon, 2012; Solochek, 2013)

Businesses are using social media as an important recruitment and evaluation tool (Vicknair, Elkersh, Yancey, & Budden, 2010). Barnes and Mattson (2009) found that nearly half of respondents reported using social network sites to both recruit and evaluate potential employees. Grasz (2009) found that one-third of employers utilizing social network sites in the pre-hiring process did not hire a candidate because of information found on social network sites. Fifty-three percent of respondents reported that candidates posted information or photographs that were inappropriate, 44% reported that candidates posted information about themselves drinking or using drugs, and 35% reported that the candidate posted disparaging remarks about previous employers, clients, or co-workers. In addition to declining to hire candidates, businesses have also rescinded job offers and terminated employment based on content posted on social network sites such as Facebook (Peluchette & Karl, 2008).

In a manner similar to businesses, school districts are also using social network sites as a tool to evaluate candidates during the hiring process. According to Griffin and Lake (2012), Georgia school principals reported that finding statements or photographs that were violent, contained objectionable language, were disparaging toward those with disabilities, or contained sexual content on an applicant's social network site would likely influence a hiring decision.

Interestingly, Vicknair et al. (2010), reported that only about half of college students were aware that potential employers could view their social network site profiles, even those set to private, using specific search strategies and terms. Further,



Zula et al. (2011) found no significant difference between the amount of time that students 18-20 years of age spent on social networking sites versus students age 21-24+. However, there was a significant difference in the importance that each group of students placed on career exploration and research; students 18-20 rated it as less important than did students ages 21-24+.

One increasingly important reason for using social network sites is to learn, whether that be from employees, friends, peers, clients, or community members of the broader online community (Dawson, 2013; Dutta, 2010). This applies to personal, self-directed learning as well as learning that occurs in the educational classroom. Social network sites also have potential for learning in the workplace. According to Sparta (2012), “Social learning can dramatically accelerate the way we absorb, share and apply knowledge in the workplace, providing we apply it sensibly, responsibly and specifically” (p. 17). Social network sites have the potential to be useful in both formal and informal work-related learning.

One way that social media sites are having an impact on work-related learning is through personal learning networks (PLNs). According to Perez (2012), a PLN “involve[s] sharing work-related ideas with a network of colleagues via various digital communications (and even face-to-face) for the betterment of one’s professional practice” (p. 20). Reasons for utilizing PLNs include accessing the thinking of colleagues, accessing timely information, asking questions and getting responses, collaborating with colleagues, and communicating about events (Perez, 2012). PLNs can also help isolated professionals have access to colleagues, whether or not they are in close geographic proximity (Williamson & Johnston, 2012). Twitter’s hashtags, which

identify tweets as belonging to a particular group, help make it an essential social network site for PLNs (Dawson, 2013).

Professionals of all kinds are utilizing Twitter, Facebook, and other social network sites for work-related communication and learning (Dawson, 2013; Koval 2009; Perez, 2012). Educational leaders, as part of this trend, are migrating to social network sites, particularly Twitter, to communicate about their work in education (Williamson & Johnston, 2012). Twitter has several applications to workplace learning (Twitter, 2013). One way for individuals to learn using Twitter is to follow others, thereby receiving tweets on topics of interest to them. Another way professionals can learn is to tweet individually and follow each other. Twitter users may also learn by using hashtags as a way to search for relevant tweets from among all tweets on Twitter. Finally, professionals may use Twitter to learn by participating in group Twitter chats (Dawson, 2013). For example, a group of educational leaders in the State of Iowa conducts a weekly Twitter chat session titled #IowaEdChat. The sessions are centered on professional development topics. Missouri educational leaders have a similar session at #moedchat and educational leaders across the nation chat at #usedchat (Twitter, 2013).

Rural areas, by definition, are isolated. Compared to urban and suburban areas, rural areas have fewer businesses, fewer roads, fewer schools, fewer government services, and fewer people. Rural areas, in this increasingly digital age, may also be a ‘digital desert’ – a place lacking affordable, reliable high-speed internet service (Horrigan, 2009). Because they lack such service, rural communities may also lack access to information. According to the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy’s 2009 report “Informing Communities: Sustaining

Democracy in the Digital Age”, one essential requirement for healthy democratic communities is that they are ‘informed’. One important objective toward achieving that end is that “people have affordable high-speed Internet service wherever and whenever they want and need it” (p. 19). Unfortunately, residents of rural communities may not always have access to the information they need to be considered ‘informed’ (Horrigan, 2009).

School leaders in rural areas, in particular, may experience the lack of information; however, affordable, reliable internet service can greatly mitigate that lack. A lack of accessible peers contributes to rural school leaders’ lack of information. While even the smallest of rural schools typically have multiple teachers who can provide each other with peer support, collaboration, and professional education, there is frequently only one principal.

While technological advances such as the telephone, email, and cell phone have reduced rural principals’ isolation, nothing has increased the accessibility of peers the way social network sites have (Gilbert et al., 2010). Social network sites have expanded principals’ learning networks to include leaders in other counties, states, and countries. School leaders the world over can communicate with, learn from, and support each other, even though one is in northwest Arkansas and the other is in Scotland.

The purpose of this research is to add to the body of research regarding rural people’s social media use in the U. S. A search of related literature turned up only a handful of sources and studies (Gilbert et al., 2010). This scarcity is exactly what necessitates further research on the topic of social media use by those living in rural

areas. In particular, this lends credibility to the need for this particular research study of rural school leaders' social media use.

### **Summary**

Internet use is a daily activity for the majority of Americans; most are also using social network sites (Cook & Pachler, 2012; Henry, 2011). Social network sites are used in both personal and professional spheres of life. In personal life, social network sites are primarily used to keep in touch with friends and family, but they are also used to make new connections with people, document and share life events and occurrences, and to access and share information (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Joinson, 2008; Moore, 2012; Trusov et al., 2010). Social network sites are increasingly used in educational process as well, from public K-12 schools to universities (Dahlstrom et al., 2011; Graham et al., 2009; Selwyn, 2009). While students have been the driving force behind this phenomenon, educators are now taking part by adopting and integrating social network sites as part of their professional practice (Eren, 2012; Graham et al., 2009; Lampe et al., 2011; Looney & Ryerson, 2011; Mayer & Harrison, 2012; Mazer et al., 2007).

Social network sites are an important part of the activities of businesses, governmental agencies, and non-profit organizations (Trusov et al., 2010). Not only are these sites a way to attract new customers, communicate with existing customers, and receive feedback, they also serve as a tool for employee education and improvement (Baxter et al., 2011; Henry, 2011). One way in which employees are using social network sites to learn is through a Personal Learning Network (PLN). Professionals, regardless of their geographical location, can learn from and collaborate with others

around the globe via social network sites and their own PLN (Dawson, 2013; Perez, 2012).

School leaders are no exception to this trend; PLNs are reducing the isolation they experience in their chosen profession, particularly those who work in rural areas with few, if any, peers in close geographical proximity (Williamson & Johnston, 2012). The researcher sought to determine the impact of rural school leaders' utilization of social network sites as part of their professional practice on their schools, students, and themselves.

In Chapter Three, the research design and methodology are presented. Contained in Chapter Four are the findings of this qualitative multi-case study. The results, conclusions, implications and recommendations for future research are found in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Research Design and Methodology**

Human beings have always been social creatures. When technology was not as advanced as it is today, people communicated orally, in writing, by telegraph, and by telephone (Bullard, 2011). As technology advanced, the bounds of physical space and geography were increasingly removed to the point that communication can now take place entirely through electronic mediums such as a smartphone or computer. What was unthinkable or found only in superhero comics, cartoons, and movies fifty years ago is reality today.

While younger people have led the stampede toward social media use, older people are beginning to join them in large numbers. Henry (2011) reports that people age 35 and older comprise 51% of the total users of social media networks; that same population is Facebook's fastest growing demographic group (Malesky & Peters, 2012). The total population of social media users around the world is growing accordingly. In considering the actual number of people using social media, Facebook, a social media website, serves as an example. Facebook reported having over 1 billion active users in 2012 (Facebook, 2014).

People are able to both create and consume social media; this creation and consumption flows across the personal, educational, and business aspects of people's lives. In their personal lives, people are using Facebook to maintain or enhance existing connections with family and friends, to create new connections with family and friends, and to document their lives and share. Educationally, people are using social media to connect with other learners and learn collaboratively, as well as independently, directing

their own learning (Graham et al., 2009). Social media allows for flexibility in learning, freeing learners from the time and space constraints of typical brick-and-mortar-housed education and learning.

In their work lives, people are using social networks to connect with other businesses and customers, and to promote their businesses to customers and potential customers. Facebook and Twitter are popular social networks used by people at work (Baxter et al., 2011; Henry, 2011).

In spite of the fact that social media is permeating both educational life and business organizations, educational organizations such as school districts have not widely adopted social media (Henry, 2011). A Facebook search turns up only a few Facebook profiles in areas where the number of school districts is far greater. This is especially true in rural districts, where school district web pages, particularly those that are regularly kept current, may still be non-existent.

Rural areas in the U.S. have not widely been the focus of research regarding social media use. Only a few studies have been conducted regarding U.S. rural residents' use of social media; further, the researcher searched but found no record of studies or research regarding rural educators' use of social media in their professional duties.

The focus of this paper is on educational leaders' use of social media to communicate professionally as well as the community's social media use. Educational leaders communicate daily with students, faculty, staff, parents, peers, supervisors, community members, and media. The increasing phenomenon of social media use begs the question, "How are educational leaders using social media to communicate professionally?" An exploratory qualitative case study approach was chosen to provide a

descriptive account of an educational leader's professional use of social media (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). This chapter contains the purpose, research questions, rationale, participants, procedures, data collection and analysis, limitations, and assumptions of the study.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to gather information and identify themes about an educational leader's professional use of social media in a rural school district and the community's use of social media, to share those themes, and to increase and enlarge the body of educational leadership research. The purpose of this case study was to explore an educational leader's use of social media to communicate professionally in her duties across the district as well as the community's social media use. This study particularly focused on the ways in which an educational leader in a rural Arkansas K-12 school district uses social media professionally and how her community utilized social media.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How is an educational leader in a rural Arkansas K-12 school district using social media professionally in her duties across the district?
2. What are the perceptions of school faculty and staff regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?
3. What are the perceptions of students regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?
4. What are the perceptions of parents regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?



5. How are students, faculty and staff, and parents utilizing social media?

### **Design of the Study**

An exploratory qualitative case study was selected as the research strategy. This strategy will be used to address and thoroughly examine the phenomenon of rural educators' use of social media (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). This section will present the rationale behind the selection of this research design and methodology.

The research study was an in-depth exploration of an educational leader's use of social media (Mertens, 2010). This exploration is appropriate because the literature analyzing educational leaders' use of social media is scarce. As a result, little is known about this topic and insufficient data exists to guide highly focused research. Therefore, it should be explored in order to guide further, future research (Creswell, 2009).

According to Creswell (2009), one characteristic of a qualitative research problem is that "the concept is 'immature' due to a conspicuous lack of theory and previous research" (p. 98-99). This is indeed the case regarding the research problem of educational leaders' use of social media, as little research exists that specifically focuses on educational leaders' use of social media. Qualitative research is also characterized by "a need . . . to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory" (Creswell, 2009, p. 99). This is also the case regarding educational leaders' use of social media. For these reasons, immaturity of concept and the need for phenomena description, a qualitative approach suits the purposes of this research (Creswell, 2009).

From a qualitative perspective, the lack of existing research on educational leaders' use of social media necessitates exploration of the topic with the goal of description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Therefore, the research

requires a method that allows for the necessary exploration. According to Creswell (2009) and Stake (1995), the case study method of research allows for in-depth exploration during a specified time or activity using varied procedures of data collection.

[A] strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (Creswell, 2009, p. 13)

Exploring educational leaders' social media use lends itself to a qualitative case study because of the wide range of individuals' beliefs about social media and comfort levels with social media use, as well as the various points of view of stakeholders (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009). Because of the need for exploration, in particular, the case study is an appropriate method for this research (Mertens, 2010).

### **Participants and Sampling Procedures**

Creswell (2009) directs researchers to “purposefully select participants . . . that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 178). In order to answer the research questions, the study required the participation of educational leaders who use social media. Participants, therefore, could not be selected randomly. Rather, through purposive sampling, an educational leader who had demonstrated her expertise using social media and who also worked in the desired geographical location (rural) was selected as a participant (Merriam, 2009). In simple terms, an educational leader was chosen for this study specifically because she used social media and worked in a rural area.

To best understand how educational leaders are using social media in their professional duties and how students, faculty and staff, and parents are using social media, perspectives were sought through an information-gathering questionnaire as well as individual interviews and focus groups involving the educational leader herself, students, parents, and faculty and staff. Members of each of these groups have the opportunity to interact with and observe educational leaders and can provide perspective on how educational leaders are using social media in their duties across the school district. Specifically, these stakeholders are in close proximity to the educational leader and can listen to, converse with, discuss with, work alongside, and watch the educational leader's behavior and actions, both in person and online. Together, the data provided by multiple stakeholders from varying perspectives ensures that the research questions have been fully explored. Further, the perceptions and perspectives of students, parents, and teachers and school staff are important sources of data that provide for the multiple data sources necessary for triangulation and the detailed, specific description necessary for reporting findings; both triangulation and detailed, specific description add to the credibility of the research (Creswell, 2009).

The educational leader was interviewed individually. An information-gathering questionnaire was sent to all building students age 13 or older, parents, and faculty and staff. Various school district stakeholders including students, parents, and teachers and school staff, participated in focus groups designed to determine their perceptions of the educational leader's professional use of social media. Focus-group participants were selected purposefully from the larger group of students, parents, or teachers and school staff with the goal of ensuring cross-sectional representation.

Teachers and school staff were chosen based on the grade-level and subject they taught to have perspectives from both the elementary and high school levels. Social media use by participants was also used as a selection criterion to promote gathering data as widely as possible from across the spectrum of social media users.

One way by which students were selected to participate in focus groups was by grade-level. Facebook requires users to be age thirteen or older; to ensure that all students participating in this study were at least age thirteen, the participant pool was limited to high school students. Within the pool of high school students, students were purposefully selected to ensure participation from multiple grade-levels (seventh grade, eighth grade, ninth grade, tenth grade, eleventh grade, and twelfth grade). As with selection of teachers and school staff, social media use and proficiency of such use by student participants was also used as a selection criterion to promote gathering data as widely as possible from across the spectrum of social media users.

Parents were purposefully selected to participate in focus-groups from a larger pool of all school district parents, based on ensuring cross-sectional representation. The larger pool of all parents was divided into two groups: Kindergarten – 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Parents were chosen from each of these groups to have perspectives from across the spectrum of district grade levels. As with students and teachers and school staff, social media use and proficiency of such use by parent participants was used as a selection criterion to promote gathering data as widely as possible from across the spectrum of social media users.

## **Data Collection**

Gathering data for this exploratory qualitative case study included typical qualitative data collection methods such as questionnaires, interviewing participants in person regarding their professional social media use, conducting focus groups to determine district stakeholders' perceptions of the educational leader's professional use of social media, and collecting documents regarding participants' professional use of social media. Various school district stakeholders, including district administrators, students, parents, and teachers and staff were interviewed and participated in focus groups in an effort to determine their perceptions of educational leaders' use of social media. District leaders were also interviewed about social media use in their professional career. In addition, the research plan included document analysis of state and district documents that would provide insight into the district's use of social media and social media use by its educational leaders. The research plan received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this human subjects study in order to proceed with the data collection process and a notice of informed consent was provided to and signed by each participant.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Questionnaires were utilized to gather demographic information and general information about internet connectivity and social media use; questionnaires were distributed to all building stakeholders, including students age 13 and older, parents, and faculty and staff. Interviews and focus groups were selected as a primary method of information gathering in order to gather participants' views and opinions in person and allow the observer access to non-verbal communication that would not reveal itself via

telephone or other methods of gathering data removed from the participants (Creswell, 2009). A characteristic of qualitative research is that data are collected in natural settings, where participants experience the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, interviews and focus groups took place in school district buildings chosen by participants. Qualitative research is also characterized by thick, or detailed, description, which ensures that the reader is able to accurately compare and contrast the research settings with those in his own sphere (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Due to the importance of providing detailed description, careful attention was given to gathering complex information that would enable readers to understand participants and the research setting.

Individual interviews with the educational leader were conducted at a mutually agreeable date and time for the interviewer and participant, as well as at a comfortable setting for the participant, whether that was a work office or another location. The interview questions addressed the research questions. Interviews were structured and consisted entirely of open-ended questions that were designed to identify the interviewee's views on her professional use of social media. The interview questions were framed using a constructivist approach and open-ended to allow her the liberty to share her thoughts and to provide for more dialogue with the interviewer (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Interview data were kept confidential, accessed only by the researcher and doctoral advisor. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Three focus groups, one composed of faculty/staff, one composed of students, and one composed of parents, were conducted. Focus groups were conducted to gather participants' verbal and non-verbal responses regarding the educational leader's of social

media as well as participants' own use of social media. Focus groups were conducted at a mutually agreeable date and time for the interviewer and participants, as well as at a comfortable setting for the participants. Each focus group session lasted 45-60 minutes.

In addition to collecting data through interviews, data were also gathered from state and district documents to provide information and insight into the reasons the educational leader uses social media, the ways that the educational leader uses social media, the content of the educational leader's social media outlets, and the impact of social media use on the educational leader. The following documents are included in the research plan to be collected:

- Proposed State legislation (legislation proposed but not passed by either the Arkansas House of Representative or the Arkansas Senate) regarding school districts' and educational leaders' use of social media.
- School district policies regarding district use of social media and employees' use of social media.
- School district and employees social media sites, including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

### **Human Subjects Protection and Other Ethical Considerations**

The research plan received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this human subjects study in order to proceed with the data collection process. A notice of informed consent was provided to and signed by each participant.

### **Data Analysis**

Completed questionnaires were collected and processed; responses were categorized and tabulated for use in triangulation with other data sources including

interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The data analysis process for the interviews and focus groups was meticulous and involved using an inductive process and triangulation to associate responses with the research questions and themes found in the literature review so that the data would align with the conceptual framework (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Each interview and focus group session was transcribed and checked for errors. When transcriptions were error-free and finished, all data were read through and analyzed for overall meaning and general impressions. Transcripts were analyzed by reading and highlighting. Analysis became more intense and deep through coding based on emergent material. Detailed descriptions and themes surfaced (Creswell, 2009). The themes that emerged from this process were listed and then combined by condensing them into ‘overarching themes’ (Hatch, 2002). Lastly, the ‘overarching themes’ that emerged from the interviews were associated with themes found in the literature, all aligning with the conceptual framework.

Document analysis of proposed state legislation, district policies and documents, school district and employee social media sites, and school district and employees social media management sites, were used to substantiate analysis of participant perceptions (Hatch, 2002). Like the analysis of the individual and focus group interview transcripts, document analysis consisted of finding emerging themes that related to the research, interview, and focus group questions. Finally, the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected from interviews, focus groups, and documents were compared with themes from the literature regarding social media and the conceptual framework.



## **Role of Researcher**

The researcher's worldview is that of a social constructivist. As a social constructivist, the researcher has special interest in individuals' viewpoints, the interactions between individuals that help them make meaning and understand the world, and the process of these interactions (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, individuals' use of social media to interact with others and create meaning is of great interest to the researcher (Mayer & Harrison, 2012). As an experienced educational leader and social media user, the researcher's personal biases generally run along the line of thought that educational leaders' increasing use of technology is a benefit to the leader, his students and families, his teachers, his district, and the entire educational profession.

Additionally, the researcher believes that involving students and families, as well as teachers, in educational leaders' 'real world' technological activities is positive and beneficial. Because the researcher understands her bias, she carefully constructed interview and focus group questions to avoid inserting her point of view into the research. As well, she maintained awareness of her bias while conducting interviews and focus groups to avoid providing participants with non-verbal cues that would make them aware of her point of view, thereby pushing toward responding in a certain way (Creswell, 2009). Finally, the researcher maintained awareness of her own bias as she analyzed the data, carefully using qualitative reliability procedures (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007)

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure both qualitative reliability and qualitative validity of the research, reliability procedures and validity strategies were incorporated into the document and data analysis. Relevant documents, including proposed state legislation, school district

policies, and participant social media sites, were selected for analysis. Document analysis was used to support examination of participant perceptions (Hatch, 2002). In addition, documents were also scrutinized with the goal of finding common themes associated with the research questions and interview questions. Reliability procedures included checking transcripts to correct errors made in transcription and preventing ‘code drift’, a “shift in the meaning of codes during the process of coding” (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Validity strategies included practices such as triangulating data sources, using member checking, using thick, rich description, presentation of information that runs contrary to the themes, and clarification of the researcher’s bias (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Triangulating data from interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and document analysis involved “examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Participants were provided the opportunity to review interview and focus group session transcripts for accuracy as part of the process of member checking (Creswell, 2009; Mears, 2009). Thick, rich description provided readers with mental images of the setting and immersed them in the details of the findings (Mertens, 2010). Information that ran contrary to the findings was presented and discussed. Finally, at the start of the study, the researcher communicated the assumptions and bias that may have impacted the study. The researcher has used social media professionally as a practicing educational leader; this and other experiences both as an educational leader and social media user may have impacted this study’s design, methodology, analysis, and interpretation.

## **Limitations and Assumptions**

### **Limitations**

This exploratory case study was limited to qualitative design and to the case study method of research. This study was also constrained by geography and school-district size to be a study of one rural school district. Further, this study was restricted to study only educational leaders' professional social media use and the community's social media use. In addition, this study was limited to using information-gathering questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and relevant documents for data collection. Data analysis for interviews and focus groups was constrained to using an inductive process and triangulation to associate responses with the research questions and themes found in the literature review so that the data aligned with the conceptual framework (Hatch, 2002). Data analysis for document data was restricted to finding emerging themes that related to the research and interview questions. Overall data analysis was limited to comparing the themes that emerged from both the interview and focus group analysis and the document analysis with themes from the literature regarding social media, as well as the conceptual framework

### **Assumptions**

This research is based on the assumption that an exploratory qualitative case study is the best method for conducting the study to answer the research questions. Further, this research is based on the assumption that users and consumers of social media are willing participants in such activities. Additionally, this research assumes that involving students and families, as well as teachers, in educational leaders' 'real world'

technological activities is positive and beneficial. Procedures for ensuring reliability and trustworthiness were detailed.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore how a rural educational leader was using social media to communicate professionally; the research questions were 1) How is an educational leader in a rural Arkansas K-12 school district using social media professionally in her duties across the district?, 2) What are the perceptions of school faculty and staff regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?, 3) What are the perceptions of students regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?, 4) What are the perceptions of parents regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?, and 5) How are students, faculty and staff, and parents utilizing social media? Based on this purpose, an exploratory qualitative case study approach was selected to answer the research questions by providing a descriptive account of educational leaders' and a school district's professional use of social media.

An educational leader was purposefully selected for this study based on social media use. Data were collected from questionnaires, personal interviews, focus groups, and document analysis of pertinent, relevant district and state government documents. Focus groups, composed of district stakeholders, were conducted. The data analysis process involved using an inductive process and triangulation so that the data would align with the conceptual framework.

This exploratory case study was limited to qualitative design and to the case study method of research. In addition, this study is also limited by geography and school-

district size to be a study of one rural school district. Further, this study is limited to one educational leader's use of social media.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to gather information and identify themes about an educational leader's professional communication using social media in a rural school district and the community's social media use, to share those themes, and to increase and enlarge the body of educational leadership research. Exploration is appropriate when scarce knowledge about this topic is limited and there are insufficient data to guide highly focused research (Creswell, 2009). Utilizing Hoffman and Novak's (1996) model of marketing communications in a hypermedia computer-mediated environment as the conceptual framework, this research analysis was constructed to understand how an educational leader in a rural Arkansas K-12 school district uses social media professionally in her duties across the district, how the community is using social media, and to uncover the perceptions of school Faculty/staff, students, and parents regarding the leader's social media use. In this 'many-to-many' communication model, the primary relationship of both the senders' and the receivers' is with the 'mediated environment', which in this case is the social media or social networking site (Hoffman & Novak). The availability of internet in rural areas provides rural educational leaders and their faculty/staff, students, and parents with access to social media sites. Social media site access allows educational leaders to bypass traditional media outlets such as newspaper and television and instead directly communicate, both as senders and receivers, with students, families, and the local community, as well as potential social media site users around the globe (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Joinson, 2008; Lewis, 2009). Further, educational leaders' ability to connect with and learn from other

educational leaders was once constrained by geography or by the medium, such as the telephone or written word. Social media site access now allows educational leaders to connect as senders and as receivers in what is effectively “real time” with a near-limitless group of other educational leaders worldwide (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Henry, 2011; Lewis, 2009). With limited research on educational leaders’ professional social media use, the research study imparts the perceptions of the educational leader, faculty/staff, students, parents, and regarding the educational leader’s professional social media use.

The social constructivist lens was utilized for data analysis and interpretation; therefore, the researcher sought to deeply understand participants’ views and perceptions to explore the phenomenon of educational leaders’ social media use. Information-gathering questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups were used to gather data about participants’ perceptions of the educational leader’s social media use. Data were analyzed by triangulating interview and focus group session data with that from information-gathering questionnaires, observations, and document analysis to discover emerging themes (Creswell, 2009). Themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected from interviews, focus groups, and documents were compared with themes from the literature regarding social media and the conceptual framework.

The setting and participants are presented in Chapter Four. Also contained in Chapter Four were the interview results, questionnaire results, focus group results, and summary. Participants included the educational leader and focus group members. Place names have been changed to pseudonyms and some details have been changed to maintain participants’ privacy.

## Setting

Fristoe Public Schools are located in Fristoe, Arkansas, a town in extreme southern Fristoe County, Arkansas. Fristoe County, located in northwest Arkansas, is comprised of approximately 834 square miles and had a 2010 population of 15,717 persons (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With a population of less than 20,000 persons, Fristoe County is classified as a rural county and has 18.8 persons per square mile; in comparison, the State of Arkansas averages 56 persons per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The New York Mountains are the primary geographical feature in Fristoe County, most particularly in the southern and eastern parts of the county; much of the terrain is mountainous and remote. Fristoe County is bordered on the west by Jefferson County (population 203,065) and Thomas County (population 221,339), on the north by Lindsey County (27,446), on the east by Diamond County (population 8,330), and on the south by Pierce County (population 18,125) and Smith County (population 25,540) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

From 2000 to 2010, Arkansas's economy grew at a rate slower than did the national average; rural Arkansas counties actually lost 31,362 jobs during that decade. During the same time period, rural wage earners earned less per job than did urban wage earners and the gap between them widened. In addition, in 2010 only one in ten Arkansas jobs in urban areas was in manufacturing, forestry, or farming while the figure was one in four for rural areas (University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service, 2013). To illustrate, nearly 20% of 2013 Fristoe County wage earners were working in the 'farm and farm service' sector and just over 17% were employed in manufacturing. "With the historically dominant industries of manufacturing and



agriculture in rural areas in decline, the structure and economic base of rural Arkansas are changing” (University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service, 2013, p. 4).

Stover is the seat of Friscoe County and is the home of the county’s two major industrial employers, Homegrown Turkey Company and Fontaine Electronics (Association of Arkansas Counties, n.d.). Friscoe County residents age 16 and older traveled an average of 29.6 minutes to work from 2009 to 2013, nearly 40 percent longer than the State of Arkansas average of 21.3 minutes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Friscoe County has lower rates of educational attainment and higher poverty rates than average for the State of Arkansas. Of persons age 25 and older from 2009-2013, 76.6 percent had graduated from high school, but only 10.3 percent had earned a bachelor’s or higher degree; these figures are lower than the state average. From 2009-2013 in the State of Arkansas, 83.7 percent of persons age 25 and older had graduated from high school and 20.1 percent had earned a bachelor’s or higher degree. From 2009 to 2013, Friscoe County had a higher percentage of people living below the poverty line than did the State of Arkansas. In Friscoe County, 22.6 percent of people live below the poverty line, while the average for the State of Arkansas is 19.2 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In 2010, 838 Friscoe County 7 to 18-year-olds received supplemental nutrition assistant program (SNAP) benefits (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2013).

Friscoe is located on the northern border of the Arkansas National Forest and in the heart of the New York Mountains on the headwaters of the Turkey River. The town was once a hub of the timber and railroad industries, but the railroads left when the

timber industry declined. As of 2010, Fristoe had a population of 113, 52 occupied housing units, 18 unoccupied housing units, and an average household size of 2.17 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The town has a community library. An article titled “Fristoe”, describing the geographical location, townspeople, social organizations, economy, physical infrastructure, school, and surrounding area, was published in the local newspaper *The Fristoe Chronicle* on September 3, 1910.

[Fristoe], the principal town of the county, is a thriving little city of some 500 inhabitants, nestling between the [Pecos] and [New York] mountains in the beautiful [Turkey] River Valley, about twelve miles below its head. The town was plotted and laid out on the old [Fristoe] farm in 1887, by [Mr. Frank Fristoe], and for several years was the terminus of the [Turkey River] railroad, and for many years the hardwood headquarters of Northwest Arkansas, and is the main commercial center for not only a large part of this county but a part of the adjoining counties. Our citizens take much pride in their Arkansas homes, and glory in the fact that they are a well ordered community. They believe in education and refinement; in building up business on a substantial structure; in attracting attention of worthy, enlightened people to their circle and in those things which elevate, ennoble and benefit mankind and society.

We have a fine school system, with a large attendance of bright and hopeful youths, and the teachers are capable and well fitted for their duties, teaching all the higher branches; a fine public school building, and an average term of nine months each year.

There are five church organizations in [Fristoe], but only three church edifices, and two fine secret society halls, Odd Fellows and Masons, and about all their auxiliary branches.

All branches of business are well represented, but timber and lumber has been the leading commercial industry since the advent of the railroad. The newspaper field has been occupied for the past 16 years by “[The Fristoe Chronicle]”, a strictly independent local paper. We also have one fine banking house, three hotels, a large wagon wood factory, two sawmills, two corn mills, three barber shops, one restaurant, meat market, two drug stores, four large general stores, four grocery stores, telephone exchange, express office, etc.

[Fristoe] has always enjoyed a paying trade, never building ahead of the country, and drawing trade for a long distance in every direction.

[Fristoe] is nicely located in the beautiful [Turkey] River valley, the river gracefully flowing around two sides of the town – East and South – the little city crowding the [Pecos] Mountains on the North and facing the [New York] on the South, with the valley extending to the West, making a picture that appeals to the lovers of Nature. How few people living in the North and East have any conception of the proportions of the grand scenery in the hills around [Fristoe]. The eye scans the picture with delight, the beautiful waving green of the mountain forest, dotted here and there with cozy homes, sylvan shady groves and lowing kine [cattle], forming a pastoral picture long to be remembered, creating a feeling of

reverence in the Great Architect who planned this noble panorama and organized the laws which govern it. The beauty of this picture, so peaceful and calm, rests the mind of him who feasts upon it, and the sky ever recognizing its fairness, and now, in the distance, when the hazy halo of the evening blends with the brighter colors nearer, it seems to stoop and kiss this fair daughter of the [Highlands] – [Fristoe]. (pp. 36-37)

The Fristoe School District was created between 1869 and 1870; this was approximately 18 years before the present-day town of Fristoe was founded as a railroad town by the Kansas City and New Orleans Railroad in 1887. In 1871, the school district was given land on which to build a schoolhouse with the requirement that the building be used for both educational and religious purposes (Hatfield, 1991). After the founding of the Town of Fristoe, the school district's enrollment grew as did the town. In 1889, the district became a special town school district by order of the county judge. A new stone building including a gymnasium was constructed about 1940 and is still in use. The district survived consolidation in 1948 and became one of three school districts in Fristoe County. From 1948 until 2003, the Fristoe School District stood alone, overseen by its own superintendent and board of education. However, smaller districts across the State of Arkansas were consolidated with larger ones as a cost-saving measure; during the 2003-2004 school year, the Fristoe School District was absorbed by the Stover School District, the fifth-largest school district in the State of Arkansas encompassing an area of 747 square miles (Stover School District, 2015). Currently, Stover School District's School Board and Superintendent oversee the Fristoe Schools; Fristoe Schools' patrons elect one school board member to serve on the Stover School District School Board.

While the Fristoe schools are organizationally part of the Stover School District, they are 23 miles from Stover on Arkansas Highway 27 and operate with some degree of autonomy. As an example, Fristoe Schools may close for a snow day when the Stover School District is open for class. Due to the roads often being curvy and steep, the 23-mile-trip from Stover to Fristoe takes approximately 30 minutes by car.

The Fristoe Schools serve students from preschool through high school, with approximately 10 students enrolled in preschool, 115 enrolled in grades kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup>, and 115 enrolled in grades 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. Jeanette Johnson is the school principal and the 2014-2015 school year was her fourth year at Fristoe. The Fristoe mascot is the Falcon and the school colors are green and white.

The Fristoe Schools are classified as high-poverty schools by the Arkansas Department of Education because 79% of students meet federal guidelines for eligibility to receive reduced-price or free school meals. Because of this classification, the schools are eligible for government programs that are designed to provide help and support to students and families living in poverty. The Fristoe preschool program is an Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) for Success high-quality preschool program and serves children of families whose gross income is 200% or less of the federal poverty level. Students are able to participate in Fantastic Falcons, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center project funded by a grant from the Arkansas Department of Education. This grant targets high-poverty schools, defined as those having at least 40% of students eligible to receive free/reduced price meals, and enables them to offer enrichment activities, homework assistance, family literacy services, snacks, and transportation as both an after-school

program and a summer program (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013; Stover School District, 2015).

While the Fristoe Schools are classified as high-poverty, they are also high-achieving. In 2013, the Arkansas School Recognition Program honored Fristoe Elementary as a Top Ten Percent School. This award is given annually to schools in the top 10% of all Arkansas public schools in combined student performance and student academic growth. Fristoe Elementary School received a monetary award of \$10,387.29 for achieving this ranking (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013). Ninety-three percent of 2012 and 2013 Fristoe High School graduates either enlisted in the military or were accepted to postsecondary institutions (Stover School District, 2015). In 2014, Fristoe High School was recognized as a Top Ten Percent School by the Arkansas School Recognition Program. This award was based on the school's ranking in the top 10% of all Arkansas public schools in combined student performance, student academic growth, and graduation rate. The Fristoe High School received a monetary award of \$12,223.45 for achieving this ranking (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013).

Fristoe School students and faculty/staff have access to a variety of technological tools including interactive whiteboard, computers, tablet computers, handheld computers, and electronic readers. They are a "small town school using technology and relationships to provide a global education" (Stover School District, 2015). Mrs. Johnson instituted a policy allowing students to bring their own technological devices, such as smartphones, electronic readers, tablets, and computers, to school and connect them to the school's internet connection. The school also makes computers and internet connectivity available to parents, who may not otherwise have access to computers or the internet, during

certain scheduled hours. Approximately 10% of Fristoe students have home internet service (Stover School District, 2012).

The school campus is comprised of a four-block square bounded on the north by Arkansas Highway 27/35, also known as Seventh Street; bounded on the east by Fristoe Avenue; bounded on the south by First Street; and bounded on the west by Hickory Street. A tall pole sign on Seventh Street identifies the school campus and proclaims, “Home of the Falcons” in the school colors. It has an area for displaying announcements and updates, such as upcoming basketball game opponents and dates. There are approximately twelve buildings in the campus’s four-block area, including the high school, elementary school, library, cafeteria, bus barn, gymnasium, and the classroom and gymnasium building built in 1940 that is still in use today. The school grounds and facilities are well-kept and tidy, with signage that labels buildings and directs visitors. Multiple trees are on the campus. Several buildings are painted attractively in green and white, the school’s mascot colors. Others display brick facades. The high school office is located on the right just inside the main building entrance facing south on Sixth Street. The principal’s office is located inside the high school office. The school’s library is located in a separate building just east of the high school building. It is divided into one large open room and several smaller rooms, including the librarian’s office and a ‘lounge’ room with a sink and cabinets. The large open room has tall bookshelves around the perimeter and is divided into two adjacent areas, one containing bookshelves approximately four feet high and the other containing circular and rectangular tables with chairs; some of the tables have computers set up as stations on them.

## Participants

### Educational Leader

For the purposes of this research study, one individual, Mrs. Jeanette Johnson (pseudonym), was selected to represent rural Arkansas K-12 educators and their social media use. She has been in education for 20 years and is currently in her ninth year as an administrator. She has been using social media, including Twitter, professionally since 2011 and had 7,597 followers on Twitter as of March 17, 2015. In comparison, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson had 7,988 followers on the same date. The fact that the governor of the entire State of Arkansas has only 391 more followers than does the principal of a rural Arkansas K-12 school with a student population around 200 speaks to the impact of her professional social media use. Mrs. Johnson is the founder and co-moderator of #SmallSchoolEdChat, a weekly Twitter chat geared toward educators. Mrs. Johnson is known as @JeannetteJohnson on Twitter. In addition to Twitter, which she uses predominantly, Mrs. Johnson also uses LinkedIn and Voxer.

Mrs. Johnson is in her fourth year as K-12 principal at Fristoe Schools. She was born and raised in rural Arkansas and graduated from Stover High School in Stover, Arkansas. This is the same district of which Fristoe Schools are a part. Mrs. Johnson earned her bachelor's degree from Arkansas Tech University, received her master's degree in education administration from the University of Arkansas, and graduated with her education specialist degree from Arkansas University. She taught family and consumer sciences and coached basketball before becoming an administrator. Mrs. Johnson was the assistant principal at Stover High School (Arkansas) from 2005 to 2008. From 2008 to 2010, she was the assistant principal at Rockwood High School (Arkansas)



and during the 2010-2011 school year, she was the Rockwood High School Principal. She became the Fristoe Schools Principal in 2011.

Mrs. Johnson has received awards and honors. Mrs. Johnson was recognized for efforts in advancing the *Achieving Greatness* Framework for school improvement at Fristoe Schools when she was one of three U.S. school administrators selected to receive the 2014 National Digital K-12 Educational Leader Award. She was also honored as one of five finalists for the Excellence! Award 2013; the Excellence! Award is given by the Academy of Educational Excellence to celebrate great contributions in education (Twitter, 2015). In 2014, she was nominated for the Arkansas Secondary Principal of the Year Award.

Mrs. Johnson is a nationally-known educational presenter on small schools, technology, motivation, and instruction. She presented at the National Association of Secondary School Principals' (NASSP) 2015 Ignite Conference in San Diego, California. She also presented at the 2013 NASSP Ignite Conference. At the 2014 National Rural Education Association Convention, Mrs. Johnson was an honored speaker; she also presented at that organization's 2013 conference in Branson, Missouri. She presented at the 2013 Ohio Best Practices Conference hosted by the International Center for Leadership Education. She has also presented via webinar for Leadership 3.0, a professional learning community for school principals hosted by edWeb, an online professional learning network for educators. Mrs. Johnson co-led a 'conversation' at EduCon 2013, an education and technology conference hosted by the Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that participants could attend either in person or virtually. Also in 2013, she presented at the Edscape Conference, a convention focused

on innovation as a means to increasing student engagement and achievement. She co-presented at the 2013 International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Conference; the ISTE focuses on using technology to improve learning and teaching. Mrs. Johnson was a co-presenter at the Model Schools Conference in Orlando, Florida, in 2012. In addition, she is writing her first book.

In 2014, Mrs. Johnson traveled to Washington, D.C. as part of an educator panel and spoke to commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) about the importance of federal funding for high speed internet access in rural schools. After the educators' presentations concluded, the majority of commissioners voted to adopt the Second E-rate Modernization Order which increased the ability of schools and libraries, especially those in rural areas, to afford high-speed internet (Federal Communications Commission, 2014).

Under Mrs. Johnson's leadership, Fristoe Schools have received honors, awards, and grants. Fristoe Elementary was recognized as a Model School by the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) in 2012. Both Fristoe Elementary and Fristoe High School have been recognized by the Arkansas School Recognition Program as Top Ten Percent Schools, meaning that the schools have performed in the top 10% of all Arkansas public schools as measured by combined student performance, student academic growth, and graduation rate (high schools). When Mrs. Johnson became principal in 2011, the Fristoe Schools were in the second year of 'school improvement' as designated by the State of Arkansas. Two years later, in 2013, Fristoe Elementary was named a Top Ten Percent School and received a monetary award of \$10,387.29 for the achievement (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013). In 2014, Fristoe High School

was honored as a Top Ten Percent School and received a monetary award of \$12,223.45 (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013). Additionally, ninety-three percent of 2012 and 2013 Fristoe School graduates either enlisted in the military or were accepted to postsecondary institutions (Stover School District, 2015). Fristoe Schools have received grants to support technology and the ‘Fantastic Falcons’ after-school and summer tutoring and enrichment program, including a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grant from the Arkansas Department of Education totaling nearly \$700,000.00.

### **Questionnaire Results**

Information-gathering questionnaires were distributed to all Fristoe Schools’ faculty/staff, parents, and students age 13 and older; approximately 230 parent questionnaires, 40 faculty/staff questionnaires, and 115 student questionnaires were distributed. A total of 91 valid questionnaires were completed and returned, for a total return rate of 23.64%. The parent questionnaires were returned at the rate of 19.57%, with 45 questionnaires returned. The faculty/staff questionnaires were returned at the rate of 60%, with 24 questionnaires returned. The student questionnaires were returned at the rate of 20%, with 23 questionnaires returned; one questionnaire was invalid because it had been completed by a 12-year-old student, resulting in 22 valid student surveys.

All questionnaires had eight common options or questions. The student questionnaires had four additional questions, as did both the faculty/staff questionnaire and the parent questionnaire. Results of the questionnaires will be presented in both charts and narrative.

The first question on the questionnaire was, “What is your age range?” followed by a selection of age ranges in years. Ten participants selected 13-15 years, 12 chose 16-17 years, four selected 18-25 years, 15 chose 26-35 years, 32 selected 36-45 years, five chose 46-55 years, 13 chose 55+ years.

Table 1  
*Responses to question, “What is your age range?”*

	Students	Parents	Faculty/Staff	Total	% of Total
13-15	10	0	0	10	10.99
16-17	12	0	0	12	13.19
18-25	0	1	3	4	4.40
26-35	0	11	4	15	16.48
36-45	0	28	4	32	35.16
46-55	0	1	4	5	5.49
55+	0	4	9	13	14.29
Total	22	45	24	91	100
% of Total	24.18	49.45	26.37	100	

The second common question on the questionnaires was, “Do you have internet at home?” Seventeen respondents chose ‘no’. Seventy-four respondents selected ‘yes’.

Table 2  
*Responses to question, “Do you have internet access at home?”*

	Students	Parents	Faculty/Staff	Total	% of Grand Total
Yes	17	35	22	74	81.32
No	5	10	2	17	18.68
Grand Total	22	45	24	91	100
% of Total	24.18	49.45	26.37	100	

The third common question on the questionnaires was, “Do you have mobile internet access through a smartphone, tablet, or other device?” Thirteen respondents chose ‘no’. Seventy-six respondents selected ‘yes’. Two respondents did not answer the question.

Table 3

*Responses to question, “Do you have mobile internet access through a smartphone, tablet, or other device?”*

	Students	Parents	Faculty/Staff	Total	% of Total
Yes	17	36	23	76	83.52
No	5	7	1	13	14.28
No Answer	0	2	0	2	2.20
Total	22	45	24	91	100
% of Total	24.18	49.45	26.37	100	

The fourth common question on the questionnaires was, “Do you use social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)?” Twelve respondents chose ‘no’. Seventy-nine respondents selected ‘yes’.

Table 4

*Responses to question, “Do you use social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)?”*

	Students	Parents	Faculty/Staff	Total	% of Total
Yes	20	38	21	79	86.81
No	2	7	3	12	13.19
Total	22	45	24	91	100
% of Total	24.18	49.45	26.37	100	

The fifth common question on the questionnaires, a follow-up to the fourth common question was, “If you do use social media, please circle all types of social media that you use and add any not listed: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tumblr, Google+, Vine, Pinterest, Kik, (the student version of the questionnaire also included Wanelo).” Of the 79 respondents who said ‘yes’ to the fourth common question, 75 reported using at least Facebook; of those, 14 reported that Facebook was the only social media they used. Forty-four reported using at least Google+. Forty-two selected at least Pinterest; of those, one selected Pinterest only. Instagram use was reported by 31 respondents. Twitter was selected by 30. Seventeen respondents selected Snapchat.

Eleven reported using Vine. Eleven also reported using LinkedIn. Eight selected Tumblr. Six also reported using Kik.

Table 5

*Responses to question, "If you do use social media, please circle all types of social media that you use and add any not listed: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tumblr, Google+, Vine, Pinterest, and Kik.." Respondents may have selected one or more social media sites.*

Social media site	Students (out of 20)	Parents (out of 38)	Faculty/Staff (out of 21)	Total (out of 79)	% of Total (out of 100)
Facebook	18	37	20	75	94.94
Google+	13	16	14	43	54.43
Pinterest	13	14	15	42	53.16
Instagram	14	11	6	31	39.24
Twitter	6	10	14	30	37.97
Snapchat	15	2	0	17	18.68
Vine	11	0	0	11	12.09
LinkedIn	0	3	8	11	12.09
Tumblr	6	0	2	8	8.79
Kik	6	0	0	6	7.59

Social media site use varied among groups of participants. Although all groups reported using Facebook more than other social media sites, students reported using it slightly less than did parents and faculty/staff. Students were most likely to report using Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Google+, and Pinterest. Students also reported using Snapchat, Vine, and Wanelo at a rate more than four times that of the average of all participants' use of those sites. Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, and Tumblr were used by students more than the average participant. Students used Twitter less than did the average participant and did not report using LinkedIn at all.

Table 6

*Student responses to question, “If you do use social media, please circle all types of social media that you use and add any not listed: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tumblr, Google+, Vine, Pinterest, and Kik.” Respondents may have selected one or more social media sites.*

Social media site	Students (out of 20)	% of Total –Students Who Reported Social Media Use	% of Total –Respondents Who Reported Social Media Use
Facebook	18	90.00	94.94
Google+	13	65.00	54.43
Pinterest	13	65.00	53.16
Instagram	14	70.00	39.24
Twitter	6	30.00	37.97
Snapchat	15	75.00	18.68
Vine	11	55.00	12.09
LinkedIn	0	0.00	12.09
Tumblr	6	30.00	8.79
Kik	6	30.00	7.59

With the exception of Facebook, parent use of social media sites lagged behind the participant average for all sites. Parents were 2.43% more likely to report using Facebook than was the average participant. Parents reported using Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, and Twitter more often than did the average participant. However, Twitter was reportedly used by parents 1.65% less than the average participant. Twitter was also used more than Instagram by parents; the participant average is higher for Instagram than Twitter. Parents did not report using Vine, Tumblr, or Kik.

Table 7

Parent responses to question, “If you do use social media, please circle all types of social media that you use and add any not listed: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tumblr, Google+, Vine, Pinterest, and Kik.” Respondents may have selected one or more social media sites.

Social media site	Parents (out of 38)	% of Total –Parents Who Reported Social Media Use	% of Total –Respondents Who Reported Social Media Use
Facebook	37	97.37	94.94
Google+	16	42.11	54.43
Pinterest	14	36.84	53.16
Instagram	11	28.95	39.24
Twitter	10	36.32	37.97
Snapchat	2	5.26	18.68
Vine	0	0.00	12.09
LinkedIn	3	7.89	12.09
Tumblr	0	0.00	8.79
Kik	0	0.00	7.59

Like parents, faculty/staff reported using Facebook more than did the average participant; faculty/staff were 0.30% more likely to report using Facebook than was the average participant. After Facebook, faculty/staff most often reported using Pinterest, Twitter, and Google+. Instagram and Google+ were reported as used at a rate lower than the average participant; Tumblr and LinkedIn were used more by faculty/staff than by the average participant. Faculty/staff did not report using Snapchat, Vine, or Kik.



Table 8

*Faculty/staff responses to question, “If you do use social media, please circle all types of social media that you use and add any not listed: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tumblr, Google+, Vine, Pinterest, and Kik.” Respondents may have selected one or more social media sites.*

	Faculty/Staff (out of 21)	% of Total – Faculty/staff Who Reported Social Media Use	% of Total – Respondents Who Reported Social Media Use
Facebook	20	95.24	94.94
Google+	14	42.11	54.43
Pinterest	15	66.67	53.16
Instagram	6	28.57	39.24
Twitter	14	66.67	37.97
Snapchat	0	0.00	18.68
Vine	0	0.00	12.09
LinkedIn	8	38.10	12.09
Tumblr	2	9.52	8.79
Kik	0	0.00	7.59

The sixth common question on the questionnaires was, “How many hours per day do you spend using social media? (0, 1-2, 3-4, 5+).” Of the 79 respondents who reported using social media, six did not make a selection. Four reported using it zero hours per day. Forty-three reported using it one to two hours per day. Use of three to four hours per day was stated by 18 participants. Eight participants said they used social media five or more hours per day.

Table 9

*Responses to question, “How many hours per day do you spend using social media? (0, 1-2, 3-4, 5+)”*

Hrs per day	Students	Parents	Faculty/Staff	Total	% of Total
No response	0	3	3	6	7.59
0	0	3	1	4	5.06
1-2	9	25	9	43	54.43
3-4	6	6	6	18	22.79
5+	5	1	2	8	10.13
Total	20	38	21	79	100
% of Total	25.32	48.10	26.58	100	

The seventh common question on the questionnaires was, “How many hours per week do you spend using social media? (0, 1-5, 6-10, 10-14, 15-19, 20+)”. Six of the 79 respondents who reported using social media did not make a selection. No participant reported using it zero hours per week. Twenty-six reported using it one to five hours per week. Use of six to ten hours per day was stated by 20 participants. Eight participants said they used social media 10 to 14 hours per week. Social media was used 15 to 19 hours per week by six participants and 13 reported using it 20 or more hours each week.

Table 10

*Responses to question, “How many hours per week do you spend using social media? (0, 1-5, 6-10, 10-14, 15-19, 20+)”*

Hrs per week	Students	Parents	Faculty/Staff	Total	% of Total
No response	0	3	3	6	7.59
0	0	0	0	0	0.00
1-5	3	16	7	26	32.91
6-10	6	11	3	20	25.32
10-14	1	4	3	8	10.13
15-19	3	1	2	6	7.59
20+	7	3	3	13	16.46
Total	20	38	21	79	100
% of Total	25.32	48.10	26.58	100	

The eighth common question on the questionnaires was, “Why do you use social media? Parent and faculty/staff questionnaires included slightly different options than the student questionnaires. Of the 79 respondents who reported using social media, 71 reported using social media to stay in touch with friends and family; this calculates to nearly 90% of respondents. Just over 75% of respondents reported using social media to share and get news, information, and photos. “Connecting with those who like what I like” was a reason over thirty-percent of respondents used social media.

Table 11

*Responses to question, “Why do you use social media, (please circle all reasons that apply and add any not listed)? (parent and faculty/staff questionnaires included a) stay in touch with friends/family, b) share and get news/information/photos, c) connect with others who like what I like, d) for professional learning, and e) to complete my job duties) (student questionnaire included a) stay in touch with friends/family, b) hang out with friends/family, c) share and get news/information/photos, d) connect with others who like what I like, and e) complete school assignments/homework).” Respondents may have selected one or more reasons.*

Reason for using social media	Students (out of 20)	Parents (out of 38)	Faculty/Staff (out of 21)	Total (out of 79)	% of Total (out of 100)
Stay in touch with friends/family	19	34	18	71	89.87
Share and get news/information/photos	14	30	16	60	75.95
Connect with others who like what I like	6	15	10	31	39.24
Other	3	0	0	3	3.80
No response	0	3	3	6	7.59

There were some differences in questions asked among the questionnaires. The student questionnaire had a question asking if the student’s teachers used social media in the classroom to help him learn and another question asking if the student used social media in the classroom to help himself learn. The social media site Wanelo was included along with Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Tumblr, Google+, Vine, Pinterest, and Kik on the student questionnaire; only two out of the 20 student respondents reported using Wanelo. The student questionnaire also included ‘hang out with friends/family’ and ‘complete school assignments/homework’ as responses to the question asking why they used social media. Fourteen out of 20, or 70%, of students indicated that they used social media to ‘hang out with friends/family’; 10 of those same students, or 50%, used social media to ‘complete school assignments/homework’. Student and parent

questionnaires included a question about the type of internet access that existed if internet access was present in the home. Parent questionnaires had a question asking how many years the parent had lived in the Fristoe area. Faculty/staff questionnaires had a question asking what the faculty/staff member’s job was within the district and a follow-up question asking those who responded ‘classroom teacher’ or ‘paraprofessional’ to that question to also indicate the building in which they taught, either the elementary school or the high school. The faculty/staff questionnaire also asked how many years the faculty/staff member had worked in education. Parent questionnaires and faculty/staff questionnaires both had a question about the highest education level attained by the respondent and included ‘for professional learning’ and ‘to complete my job duties’ as responses to the question asking why they used social media.

Students were equally divided on whether or not their teachers used social media in the classroom to help them learn. However, students were nearly 20% more likely than not to use social media in the classroom to help themselves learn. Thirteen out of 22 students reported using social media in the classroom to aid in their learning.

Table 12  
*Responses to question, “Do your teachers use social media in the classroom to help you learn?”*

	Students	% of Total
Yes	11	50.00
No	11	50.00
Total	22	100.00

Table 13

*Responses to question, “Do you use social media in the classroom to help you learn?”*

	Students	% of Total
Yes	13	59.10
No	9	40.90
Total	22	100.00

All questionnaires had a question that asked, “Do you have internet access at home?” and student and parent questionnaires had a follow-up question, “If you have internet access at home, please choose the type.” Options listed were: dial-up, satellite, direct-subscriber line (DSL), mobile hotspot, broadband, and other. Of the 22 student responses, 17 students answered that they did have internet access at home and five reported that they did not. Thirty-five parents reported having internet access at home while ten responded that they did not have it. Satellite and DSL were the two most common internet connections at students’ and parents’ homes, while broadband was the third most prevalent.

Table 14

*Responses to student and parent questionnaire question, “If you have internet access at home, please choose the type.”*

Mode of Internet Connectivity	Students	Parents	Total	% of Grand Total
Dial-up	1	2	3	5.77
Satellite	5	12	17	32.69
Direct subscriber line (DSL)	5	12	17	32.69
Mobile hotspot	1	3	4	7.69
Broadband	1	4	5	9.62
Other	3	1	4	7.69
No Response	1	1	2	3.85
Total	17	35	52	100.00
% of Total	32.69	67.31	100.00	

The parent questionnaire was the only one containing the question, “How many years have you lived in the Fristoe area?” Respondents were most likely to report living in the Fristoe area from one to five years, followed by 30 or more years, and then 11 to 20 years. Three parent respondents did not live in the Fristoe area and are therefore contained in the ‘Not Applicable (NA)’ category.

Table 15  
*Responses to parent questionnaire question, “How many years have you lived in the Fristoe area?”*

Years lived in Fristoe area	Parents	% of Total
1-5	13	28.89
6-10	3	6.67
11-20	11	24.44
21-30	3	6.67
30+	12	26.66
Not applicable (NA)	3	6.67
Total	45	100.00

The faculty/staff questionnaire was the only one including the question, “What is your job within the district?” Response options were: classroom teacher, paraprofessional, ‘other’ certified teacher, and support staff. Seventeen of the 24 respondents, over 70%, were classroom teachers.

Table 16

*Responses to faculty/staff questionnaire question, “What is your job within the district?”*

Job	Faculty/staff	% of Total
Classroom teacher	17	70.83
Paraprofessional	0	0.00
Other certified teacher	2	8.33
Support Staff	3	12.50
Other	1	4.17
No response	1	4.17
Total	24	100.00

The faculty/staff questionnaire was the only one including the question, “If you are a classroom teacher or paraprofessional, in which building do you teach?” as a follow-up question to the previous question, “What is your job within the district?” Nearly 60% of respondents reported working in the high school. Just over 35% of respondents reported working in the elementary school.

Table 17

*Responses to faculty/staff questionnaire question, “If you are a classroom teacher or paraprofessional, in which building do you teach?”*

Building	Faculty/staff	% of Total
Elementary school	6	35.29
High school	10	58.83
Other	1	5.88
Total	17	100.00

The faculty/staff questionnaire was the only one including the question, “How many years have you worked in education?” Although one respondent had worked more than 30 years, the majority of respondents had worked in education for 11 to 20 years, followed by 21 to 30 years, and then by one to five years.



Table 18

*Responses to faculty/staff questionnaire question, “How many years have you worked in education?”*

Years worked in education	Faculty/staff	% of Total
1-5	5	20.83
6-10	2	8.33
11-20	8	33.33
21-30	7	29.17
More than 30	1	4.17
Other	1	4.17
Total	24	100.00

Both the parent questionnaire and the faculty/staff questionnaire included the question, “What is your highest education level attained?” The majority of parents had earned a high school diploma, but no more. Over 70% of respondents had an associate’s degree, a high school diploma, or a GED. Less than 20% of parents reported earning a bachelor’s or higher degree.

Table 19

*Parents’ responses to question, “What is your highest education level attained?”*

Education level	Parents	% of Total
GED	4	8.89
High school diploma	25	55.56
Associates degree	4	8.89
Bachelor’s degree	6	13.33
Master’s degree	2	4.44
Other	3	6.67
No response	1	2.22
Total	45	100.00

Faculty/staff responses to the question, “What is your highest education level attained?” differed from parent responses. All faculty/staff members had earned at least a

high school diploma. The majority, nearly 80%, of faculty/staff members had earned a bachelor's or master's degree.

Table 20

*Faculty/staff responses to question, "What is your highest education level attained?"*

Education level	Faculty/staff	% of Total
GED	0	0.00
High school diploma	3	12.50
Associates degree	1	4.17
Bachelor's degree	9	37.50
Master's degree	10	41.66
Other	1	4.17
Total	24	100.00

Both the parent questionnaire and the faculty/staff questionnaire included the responses 'for professional learning' and 'to complete my job duties' as answers to the question, "Why do you use social media?" While both parents and faculty/staff members reported using social media for professional learning, faculty/staff members were nearly twice as likely as parents to report doing so. Faculty/staff members were more than twice as likely as parents to report using social media to complete job duties.

Table 21

*Responses to question, “Why do you use social media, (please circle all reasons that apply and add any not listed)? (only parent questionnaire and faculty/staff questionnaire included d) for professional learning, and e) to complete my job duties) Respondents may have selected one or more reasons.*

Reason for using social media	Parents (out of 38)	Faculty/Staff (out of 21)	Total (out of 59)	% of Total (out of 100)
Stay in touch with friends/family	34	18	52	88.14
Share and get news/information/photos	30	16	46	77.97
Connect with others who like what I like	15	10	25	42.37
For professional learning	10	11	21	35.59
To complete my job duties	7	8	15	25.42
Other	0	0	3	5.08
No response	3	3	6	10.17

### Focus Group Results

All student, parent, and faculty/staff questionnaires included an invitation to participate in the focus group sessions. The respondent indicated willingness to do so by providing contact information. A total of 15 students, 13 faculty/staff members, and 23 parents provided contact information on the returned questionnaires. Additional eligible students, parents, and faculty/staff members who expressed interest in participating were allowed to participate even if they had not provided contact information on the questionnaire. Focus-group sessions were scheduled and those who attended were the focus group participants listed in Tables 22, 23, and 24.

A total 24 individuals participated in three separate focus-groups with questions centered on and around social media and the participants’ perceptions of the educational

leader’s professional social media use. These individuals were the educational leader’s students age 13 and older, faculty/staff, or parents of students. Focus group participants were given fictitious names as shown in Tables 22, 23, and 24. All focus groups were asked the same questions in the same order.

***Students***

Eight students, three females and five males, participated in the student focus group. Three of the students were juniors, two were sophomores, one was a freshman, one was in eighth grade, and one was in seventh grade.

Table 22  
*Student focus group participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Grade level
Andy	M	11
Beth	F	7
Bradley	M	11
Derek	M	10
Isaac	M	8
Mary	F	9
Seth	M	10
Stephanie	F	11

***Faculty/staff***

Nine faculty/staff, six females and three males, participated in the faculty/staff focus group. As is often the case in small school systems, some of the faculty/staff teach and work in both the high school and the elementary school. Five of the faculty/staff were classroom teachers and four held positions outside the classroom. Three of the classroom teachers worked primarily in the high school, one worked in both the high school and elementary school, and one worked primarily in the elementary school. Two of the four positions outside the classroom were held by certified faculty/staff members

who worked with students in both the elementary and high school buildings. The other two positions outside the classroom were held by non-certified support staff persons whose work did not directly involve educating students.

Table 23  
*Faculty/staff focus group participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Job	Building
Angela	F	Classroom teacher	High school
Beverly	F	Non-classroom teacher	Both
Claudine	F	Classroom teacher	High school
Don	M	Classroom teacher	Both
Leon	M	Non-certified staff	Both
Nelson	M	Non-classroom teacher	Both
Shelly	F	Classroom teacher	High school
Thela	F	Classroom teacher	Elementary
Veronica	F	Non-certified staff	Both

***Parents***

Seven parents, all female, participated in the parent focus group. One parent had a child in the high school and four parents had a child or children in the elementary school. Two parents had children in both the high school and the elementary school.

Table 24  
*Parent focus group participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Building child(ren) attend(s)
Ashley	F	Elementary
Jane	F	High school
Laura	F	Both
Nancy	F	Elementary
Peggy	F	Both
Rachelle	F	Elementary
Willow	F	Elementary

### *Focus Group Question 1*

*Please tell us who you are and what your position is within the school district or your relationship to the district.*

Participants' answers to this question are displayed in Tables 22, 23, and 24.

Participants' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Participants' gender and job, grade level, or building their children attend are real and not fictitious.

### *Focus Group Question 2*

*The second focus group question was, "What has been your personal experience with social media, including your educational or business/professional life?"*

Nineteen focus group members used social media. Two participants said that they did not use social media. Three participants made no response.

### ***Students***

One of the five students who reported using social media used Facebook. Two others used Twitter. Stephanie said, "I'm a big Twitter user." Another student used Kik. Finally, the last student reported Instagram use. One did not use social media; two others made no response. Students did not distinguish between their personal and educational use of social media.

Seven out of eight students said that they had what they considered to be 'good', reliable internet service at home, but that this was not typical of the majority of Fristoe Schools' students. However, because the school had internet service and allowed, even encouraged, students to use it, focus group members did say that they believed the majority of students were on the internet somehow. As one member said, "So if [students] don't have internet at [their] house, they just wait to they get to school to get on

the internet.” Mary talked about students’ use of social media services, such as Snapchat, that do not require internet service for use. She said, “I see people use it [Snapchat] more because they don’t have [internet] service at their houses.”

### ***Parents***

All seven parents used social media and five of those used Facebook; two used Facebook exclusively and four used both Facebook and Twitter. Two who did not use Facebook did use Twitter. Laura laughed, “I don’t have a Facebook page. I get on my daughter’s,” and Peggy commented, “That’s probably better!” Laura also said, “My mother has a Facebook [page], but I don’t.” Rachelle said, “My mom and my grandma, who is 79, have Facebook accounts. [Grandma] doesn’t know how to use it, but she knew she needed it.” Ashley stated, “I got tired of [him asking ‘who is this?’ and ‘who is that?’ about her account], so I actually made my husband a Facebook account. I had to make him an email address before I could make him a Facebook [account].” Willow, who did not have a Facebook page, said:

I don’t do Facebook. My sister, my buddies, everybody that I know does it. I just don’t do it. I’ve just never gotten involved with it just simply because I look at it as not for me. I just don’t [have the time]. I barely keep my head above water; I’m going to tell you that right now. I’ve got my nieces and nephews that have children [on Facebook]. They cannot believe [that I’m not on Facebook]. They thought I would be the first one to get on [Facebook]. I’m interested in it, very interested. That’s why I’m sad about the time thing. I would be on it all the time. [Also], I don’t

want [to hurt people's feelings or have people thinking] I'm ignoring them because I'm not "friending" them.

Jane used Instagram in addition to Facebook and Twitter but said she did not post anything on Instagram. She used social media to keep up with her four children, high-school age and older, who are "all over all social media". Peggy and Rachelle, like Jane, used Facebook to keep in touch with family and friends. Rachelle said:

Mine is a lot like [Peggy's]. Facebook [is for] friends and family. I use it to stay in contact with a lot of cousins that live out of state that I don't see [and] just friends and family. . . . When [Facebook] first came out, my husband [said], "That is just a gossip ring and nothing but trouble". He could be the picture of rural man in [Fristoe] County, he really could. [He was] totally against [Facebook]. Well, now he has a Facebook [account]; I think it's one of those things that, and I remember telling him this, "It's what you make it". We have people in our community [who] use it to vent about things when they shouldn't, but you can also [use it for good]. I've talked to cousins and people that I've lost touch with [such as] old classmates. I also have a Twitter account [but] I'm not real consistent. I'll use it a lot [for a while] and then I kind of get away from it.

Jane, Peggy, and Rachelle used Twitter professionally. Peggy used it sporadically, "I could go months between [uses]". Peggy and Jane both said that they sometimes used Facebook professionally as well by posting work-related information on their Facebook accounts. Rachelle liked to use Facebook's instant messaging feature; she and Nancy both talked about how they used Facebook at night before going to bed



instead of reading, which they had done in the past. Ashley posted pictures on Facebook occasionally and also used it to play games, but she did not “post anything that happened” such as “So-and-so checked in at the “[Smith] house”. She added, “Who cares? They’re home. Woo!” Rachelle chimed in, “I like the hide feature because I had an acquaintance on Facebook that I went to high school with and she was literally filling up the [Facebook news] feed talking about when she was doing household chores.” She explained further, “I have some family members [who] just fill it up. [One is a pastor]. It is all-day-long scriptures. That’s all I see in my [news]feed. I’m thinking, ‘When can I get to somebody else’, you know?” Speaking about her Twitter use, Rachelle said:

I’ve done chats before. Like I said, I’m not real consistent with it, but I do tweet occasionally and really re-post [more] than tweet. The people that I follow, that maybe I’d met at a conference, I’m more apt see what they’re doing, especially if they also [have a similar profession], but again, I’m not real consistent at it.

### ***Faculty/staff***

All eight faculty/staff focus group members who used social media also used Facebook; four of them reported using Facebook exclusively. Five participants who used Facebook also used Twitter; of those, two used LinkedIn as well. Don, a Facebook and frequent Twitter user, had an Instagram account but has forgotten his password and does not use the account. He used Facebook to keep up with his old high school friends. Shelly used it to, “keep up with students that I’ve had. They’re thousands of miles away and this is the only way I can keep up with what they’re doing.” Beverly said:

My Facebook [account] is very small. I do believe in blocking people of poor morals [and] I have blocked a few. [M]ine is so small that I think I'm probably one of the smallest Facebook people around; I have about 5 or 6 I even associate with and then all the others are just there. I think, in the 'friends' area I have up to 200, but I don't ever use them. I just know when I leave school [retire] I'll probably even close Facebook down, except for the very few that I want to keep up with. I think Facebook is dangerous, it's hard, [and] I think that you have to be really careful with it. Facebook has been used to get teachers fired because [a picture] is on Facebook showing them drinking. I think you have to be really careful who takes your picture and puts it out there. I think kids should be very careful of Snapchat. They put [a] picture out there and who get it? Where does it go? It was on the news that the [Snapchat] website was hacked. Whatever they put out there, good, bad, and ugly, stays there. Whatever you put on Facebook, it's there forever.

Angela, Claudine, and Beverly used social media professionally as well as personally. Angela's Facebook friends posted to her personal Facebook wall with links to information that they thought she would be able to use in her classroom. She then copied the links and emailed them to herself so she could access them in her classroom. Claudine used Facebook, as well as Twitter, to carry out job duties relating to public relations. Beverly used Twitter to access news and information related to specific educational content-areas of her job. Thela did not use either Facebook or Twitter much, but she wants to start using Twitter more because of the amount of quality content

available on it. One faculty/staff member did not use social media. Thela commented about her experiences with Facebook:

I don't use it much, Facebook or social media like that. I don't use it in the classroom at all. I haven't been on Facebook in a while, but I know we've had some problems with parents posting about something that happened at school before even talking to school people. That has happened to us this year already in our building. It's kind of tricky because you're the parent and you want to be outraged at first, but then you have to realize that you need to contact the school first before posting that everywhere so everyone can see it.

### *Focus Group Question 3*

*The third focus group question was, "What has been your experience with your principal's social media use?"*

### ***Students***

Only two of the eight students in the focus group used Twitter and neither followed Mrs. Johnson. None of the students had knowledge of her professional social media use, other than Stephanie, who knew that she was on Twitter. Bradley said, "School's over when school's over" in response to this question. Isaac reminded the group that he did not use social media, "I don't want to do it and my parents don't want me to do it."

### ***Parents***

Three of seven parents in the focus group followed Mrs. Johnson on Twitter. Two of them had participated in chats with her and followed some of her followers.

Nancy was not on Twitter, but knew that Mrs. Johnson had a “huge following”. Jane knew that Mrs. Johnson used Twitter as a professional network and that she shared ideas on how to “better yourself as a teacher, coordinator [or] administrator”.

### ***Faculty/staff***

All faculty/staff members were aware that Mrs. Johnson was on Twitter professionally. Five of the eight faculty/staff members who used social media also had Twitter accounts and three of those knew that Mrs. Johnson co-moderated #SmallSchoolEdChat. Don said he had, “looked at it every now and then, [but] never joined the group [because] it’s [held] when I’m getting ready to go to bed.” Don knew that she participated in other education chats as well. He added, “I’m on Twitter, but I don’t chat. I just like going through what’s going on.” Thela commented that Mrs. Johnson shared resources from Twitter with the faculty/staff. She added, “She’s done a great job.”

### ***Focus Group Question 4***

*The fourth focus group question was, “How has your principal’s social media use influenced you personally?”*

### ***Students***

None of the eight focus group students reported that Mrs. Johnson’s professional social media used had influenced them personally. One said, “I don’t have a Twitter [account], so I guess it hasn’t influenced me at all.” Only five of the students used social media and just two of them had Twitter accounts. One of the students with Twitter accounts followed Mrs. Johnson and one did not.

## *Parents*

Three of the eight focus group parents follow Mrs. Johnson on Twitter. Willow said that Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use had influenced her personally to not be afraid of technology but instead learn how to use it. The school, under Mrs. Johnson's leadership, provides instruction sheets for parents to use when learning how to use new technology; parents may also contact the school and get help learning how to use technology. Willow commented, "If you want to do it [use technology] and choose to do it, then you *can* do it for your child [the school will help you]." Jane said that she had gotten ideas from Mrs. Johnson on using new technology, such as programs or websites that she had never known existed.

Just four out of the seven parent focus group members said they had 'good', reliable internet service at home. One had Dish network. Another had DSL. Rachelle talked about her access to good internet service:

I live very rural, but it just so happens that I am in the radius where there is a telephone apparatus that the DSL [uses]. So I probably live more rural than anybody here but happen to have really good internet, just because of the proximity of that. I went through college on dial-up [internet service], trying to call Hog Call [University of Arkansas enrollment] to register for class and things; I was very appreciative [of DSL].

Ashley had Dish network for internet service, but did not characterize it as 'good' because, "it only works about half the time". Nancy used her cell phone as a mobile hotspot at home for internet service. Willow said, "Ours is pretty good unless the wind's blowing really hard. It will go out for a while, but then it comes back." Two of the seven

parents had poor cell phone service and reception at home, meaning that they could not make phone calls but could send and receive text messages. Two other parents had no cell phone reception at their homes. About her cell phone service and internet connectivity, Nancy said:

Well, gosh, we sound so ‘country’ here, but I go to the deck [outside my house] if I need to make a phone call. For internet, I can go upstairs and have pretty good cell phone reception [as a mobile hotspot]. I go to the window sill [so I have a strong enough cell phone signal to send] text messages.

Peggy commented on the changes she has seen in how people are accessing the internet. She said, “One thing I think is interesting is how many families are leaving the desktops and the laptops and they don’t have that. That’s not their internet access anymore. It’s primarily from a tablet or cell phone.” Nancy stated, “I use the laptop but my daughter uses her phone all the time.” Jane added:

I have wi-fi at my house. I have a desktop that I use but when I’m going to bed and looking at Facebook, I’m on my tablet. My children have laptops that they use over the house. They’re either at the kitchen counter or on the couch or in their room; [they use them] wherever they’re at. [Then] [teenage daughter’s] classmate knocked her phone off the table right before she went to the regional ballgames. Well, now there’s a line in the screen and she can’t hit one of her buttons to unlock her phone. She was about in tears when she walked out the door to go.

Parents also talked about how much and how frequently their children and others were using internet-connected devices, such as cell phones and tablets. They also commented on how attached children seemed to be to the devices. Laura said, “When the wi-fi goes out, for my daughter it’s just the end of the world. [She says](in a whiny voice) ‘What’s wrong with the wi-fi?’” Ashley stated, “[Daughter 1] has a tablet and [Daughter 2] has an Ipad; whenever they’re bad, that’s the very first thing to go. [Then] they’re bored. Seriously? Whenever I was a kid we had two [TV] channels and a home phone. Go out and play!” Rachelle added:

We kind of have the same thing with Ashley. My son’s just five but he has a little tablet and he likes his little games and stuff. We monitor what games are on there; they’re little ‘drive the tractor’ or truck. There are also academic games and I try really hard to make him practice his letters and numbers. We’ve not been really successful with that, but we try. I do make him spend time doing that sometimes before he can play the games.

### ***Faculty/staff***

Faculty/staff members said that Mrs. Johnson’s professional social media use had influenced them personally when she made them aware of the educational uses of social media, modeled and encouraged professional social media use, increased social media accessibility by asking the district to unblock Twitter at school (which was done), and connected them to resources and information, such as professional online communities, that she had learned about through social media. Beverly shared that Mrs. Johnson had introduced her to professional online communities, such as EdWeb, and that she joined them and used them to keep current on information, trends, and issues in her specific

educational content-area. Don said that he had improved the professionalism of his Twitter account, particularly the 'about me' section, as a result of Mrs. Johnson's influence. Shelly said, "She's raised the bar for all of us," and Thela agreed. Shelly continued:

You know, maybe, some of us still like to do it 'old school'. And some people say well, 'I don't really see much use of Twitter', but . . . she still raised the bar. She's brought it to our attention. This is out there . . . you can use it, not use it, glean what you want from it. I've actually . . . personalized even [my] Facebook to where it's more professional than [personal] . . . social media, if you know what I mean. I do give her kudos for raising the bar.

Thela shared that Mrs. Johnson's professional use of Twitter had influenced her decision to open a Twitter account. Her prior knowledge of Twitter was that it was "all about . . . who's doing this and who's doing that. It was just like another Facebook." However, after observing Mrs. Johnson's use of Twitter as a learning tool, she opened a Twitter account because, "I can see the advantages of using it for educational purposes." Leon said, "In my line of work I really don't have time for it, for any of it [social media]. I might check Facebook every now and again, but that's it." Veronica added, "I had a Twitter [account] and I deactivated it because I didn't like it much." Nelson said that Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use:

makes me feel like I'm falling behind the times, getting way behind. I can't keep up with all the technology. I still do a lot of things the old fashioned way because that's the way I was raised up. [I]t . . . depresses



me, in a way, because it's just hard to keep up with and when you have a job to do, you've got to do that job; you don't have time to sit there and learn something.”

#### *Focus Group Question 5*

*The fifth focus group question was, “How has your principal’s social media use influenced others?”*

#### ***Students***

Seth said, “In the school, nobody really cares.” Beth, however, disagreed, “Some of us do!” Isaac commented that he had not known that Mrs. Johnson used social media and that his circle of friends did not know either. Derek agreed with this statement. He did add that he thought her social media use had influenced teachers to use social media more. Beth said she thought that Mrs. Johnson’s social media use could help parents, but that her own parents do not use Twitter even though “most parents do”. Students did not share any other examples of the influence of Mrs. Johnson’s social media use.

#### ***Parents***

Parents commented on the influence of Mrs. Johnson’s social media use on students, parents, and families. She modeled and encouraged professional social media use among students and increased social media and general technological use and accessibility by writing grants and purchasing technology for the school. The impact of greater accessibility at school has been that parents increasingly purchased technological devices for their children to use at home as

well as bring to school since they were encouraged to do so by Mrs. Johnson.

Peggy said:

I have a child in the high school and I think her [Mrs. Johnson's] passion about social media and technology in general pushes them to use those tools in a way that is responsible . . . [S]he's unique in that a lot of principals don't encourage the use of those things within the classroom, within the school, at all.

Jane shared that Mrs. Johnson used social media to connect with and encourage her high-school age child by sending her a Twitter message. Jane believed that Mrs. Johnson's professional use of and comfort level with social media helped her connect with students. She said, "[T]hey're comfortable, more comfortable to go to her, to talk to her, to ask her questions, [such as] 'how do I do this?', 'how do I do that?'" because they know she's there and she will talk to them about it." Willow talked about Mrs. Johnson's influence in technology use for students spreading to their entire families, ". . . [A]ll these kids getting tablets and things for Christmas and all and the parents saying, I'm just learning through my child. I just have chills right now thinking about how a spark can really get a fire going." Jane also shared that Mrs. Johnson had helped increase her own awareness of responsible social media, as well as that of her children, by educating them about their digital footprint or what they leave behind on the internet. She said, "As a parent, I didn't think about a digital footprint; I never thought about it [internet use] that way." Willow shared her thoughts about her children and technology:

I want my girls to be savvy. I know that that is, it's not the future. It's now. So I want them to have all that. I think a lot of parents think that

way too. It probably scares them to death, to think that they would have to do what their kids are doing, but I think that they're proud of them.

### ***Faculty/staff***

Faculty/staff focus group members talked about how Mrs. Johnson's social media use had influenced others on a national scale. They mentioned that she had won an Excellence! Award, made contacts throughout the entire United States, travelled nationwide for speaking engagements, and testified before the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. Angela said, "She's had national exposure." One challenge they saw for influencing people in the Fristoe area with her social media use was that many homes and people in the area lack internet service. Seven out of nine faculty/staff members had what they considered to be 'good' internet service at home, but three of the seven did not live in the local Fristoe area. Angela, said "You can only get DSL so far away from the phone company . . . and then it becomes dial up, which is awful." Participants said that students' main source of internet was not at home, but at the school. Shelly said, "They [students] do not have access [at home], so that brings the kids with their devices to school, using the school's system for their social media." Other than lack of access, cost of service was one reason homes in the area may not have had internet service. Veronica said, "They [parents] can't afford it." One faculty/staff member said, "I've got kids that don't want to be in [specific subject] classes. But the reason why I think so is they've never had computer at their house, never had internet at their house, never had anything, so they're scared of it." Only five out of nine faculty/staff members had an internet-capable cell phone. Don said, ". . . [W]e barely even have cell phone service." Veronica had no cell phone service at her home and said

that, “a lot of the kids are the same way - their phones don't work at home”. Other participants talked about stretches of highway and certain geographical areas around Fristoe that have no cell phone service either. The main highway north out of town has no cell phone service for about three miles until the top of Lincoln Mountain and the main highway that runs east out of town toward Lewistown has no cell phone service for approximately 22 miles. Don said, “A lot of us don't even have cell phone service between here and home.” Veronica shared the story of her mother’s experiences with internet service:

My mom lived four-and-a-half miles down a dirt road and she had dial-up [internet service] because she was not eligible for the DSL. The DSL was \$9.99 per month. . . but she had to pay \$24.99 per month because it was dial-up. It cost more money for her to have dial-up than the DSL did. Whenever I moved out there, I said ‘That’s [ridiculous]! You can’t use it. It takes forever.’ Then I got Dish Network and Dish Internet and she got the same. Now we both have the satellite internet and it’s \$60 per month [for 2 gigabytes], but you can use it. It’s very fast.

#### *Focus Group Question 6*

*The sixth focus group question was, “What do you think about your principal’s social media use?”*

#### ***Students***

The students who responded to this question were favorable about Mrs. Johnson’s professional social media use. Stephanie said, “I think it's great that she uses it because we're a rural school, and #SmallSchoolEdChat chats with administrators and teachers

around the country.” Beth stated her agreement with Stephanie. Another student, Derek, said that he thought maybe Mrs. Johnson could publicize her use a little bit more since “the majority of us didn’t even know she [used Twitter or] had [a Twitter account]”.

### ***Parents***

All parents responded favorably to Mrs. Johnson’s professional social media use. They appreciated that she had embraced social media and referenced her model of responsible social media use for the students. Laura commented, “She handles it very positively and very appropriately, in a professional way. Ashley said:

[S]he's made it ‘let's teach the kids how to use it responsibly’ and ‘let's show them the digital footprint thing’. You know, ‘your first boss, after you graduate from college, can look back on your Facebook and look at your pictures so let's be responsible about this’. And I want them [my children] to catch that. I want them to know [that] whenever you put something out there, my husband preaches that, it is there forever. You can delete it off your profile, but that doesn’t mean that [someone] didn't already download it or whatever. When it's there, it's there.

Parents also noted that Mrs. Johnson’s social media use had positively impacted the school. Although the school was small and rural, it had received nationwide exposure because of Mrs. Johnson’s social media use. Willow said, “I think it’s wonderful what she’s done with this school. It’s wonderful” and added, “We’ve all become famous now!” Nancy said:

[T]hrough her use of social media that keeps her in contact with these professionals all over the country, we have become a very nationally

known little bitty school. I really think that ‘above and beyond’ has been introduced to this school because of all her use of social media and her passion for rural schools and technology. So I think that that's a really big thing.”

### ***Faculty/staff***

Faculty/staff members were favorable about Mrs. Johnson’s professional social media use. They knew it was important to her and believed that she wanted to use it to help people. Beverly said, “That is like the most important part of her life, that media and what she can do with it, and how she can help others.” One spoke about Mrs. Johnson’s commitment to excellence in all that she does, including using social media professionally. Veronica said, “She's the kind of person, though, . . . , whatever she does, she's going to succeed in. She puts everything she has into it. . . . [T]hat's just how she is. Whatever she does she puts herself in all the way.”

### ***Focus Group Question 7***

*The seventh focus group question was, “If you had a chance to give your principal advice about social media use, what advice would you give?”*

### ***Students***

Students did have some suggestions for Mrs. Johnson in regard to her social media use. Derek suggested that she get the word out more about her Twitter account so that people could follow her. Mary said that maybe she could make posters about it and hang them up around school or get a big board outside and put information about her Twitter account on it. Stephanie suggested that she appeal more to students by finding information about topics interesting to teenagers, such as what students at other schools

are doing and how they are using technology, and tweeting it because “we don’t care about what adults do – we’re teenagers.” Derek and Andy said that they would be interested in scholarship information. Two students, Beth and Bradley, said she should just “keep doing what she’s doing”.

### *Parents*

Although parents acknowledged that Mrs. Johnson was far ahead of them as far as proficiency using social media, they did have suggestions. One was to share information about learning websites that parents could use to help their children. Another suggested that she consider setting up some kind of ‘parent’ chat, like the #SmallSchoolEdChat, in which to share information with parents. Parents expressed gratitude for Mrs. Johnson’s social media use but also for her connections with students and leadership in improving the school. Jane said, “Even though she's got[ten] national attention, she still has time for all these kids in her school and uses social media on both ends of it.” Ashley said:

I am from here. I went to school here. And it was a great school when I was a kid, don't get me wrong, but it was nothing like it is now. And last year the elementary was in the top ten percent. This year the high school is in the top ten percent. So that tells me as a parent that our school is great. All of her social media and all of the sites that she is sending the teachers and the stuff that they're teaching the kids obviously is doing good. She's doing great things and our teachers are doing great things. . . .

I love that my kids go to school here.

Willow declined to offer Mrs. Johnson advice. She had none. Instead, she talked about her appreciation for Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use, her national recognition, and her leadership at the Fristoe Schools.

I don't have any advice for her, no. I really don't. I'm just so proud for these kids. I'm so proud . . . that she came in here like a whirlwind and she's still whirling. And she's whirled all over the country because other people want it. Other people want what she's done here and what our kids have and they want to know how they can get it. And that's her passion.

Kids. It's all about the kids.

### ***Faculty/staff***

Like the parents, faculty/staff members in the focus group thought Mrs. Johnson was far ahead of them in social media use. As far as giving advice, Beverly said, "I don't know that there's anything I could give her, she's so far ahead of me." Although the school had provided training and professional development on technology and social media, several group members expressed an interest in receiving additional in-depth training for technology and social media, including ways to use it in the classroom, perhaps on an ongoing basis over the course of a school year or several months. They were particularly interested in learning more deeply about the technology and how to apply it in the classroom. Nelson said, "You've only got 24 hours a day and you work eight hours. Then you've got family [and other things] to deal with; it can just be overwhelming." Angela added, "[There is] no time to learn new programs." Thela said:

I would [like to] figure out how to use [social media] better. She's introduced it a lot and I know some of the stuff on it, but I would like to



go more in-depth with it, [such as] a workshop or something about Twitter, like how we could put that into [our] classroom and how we could use it there. That would be my only advice because a lot of us don't know a lot about it. We had a couple [of] days [of training] showing us what to do and what to use, but that's not enough for me to understand how to use it. I need to know where to go [and] what to see.

#### *Focus Group Question 8*

*The eighth focus group question was, "Is there anything else that you would like to add?"*

No one added anything.

### **Interview Results**

Interviews were utilized to fully explore Mrs. Johnson's professional use of social media. Mrs. Johnson's office on the Fristoe Schools campus was the setting. An interview protocol, consisting of six questions, was utilized.

#### *Interview Question 1*

*The first interview question was, "What has been your professional experience with social media?"*

Mrs. Johnson began using social media in 2011 around the time she presented at the EduCon conference in Philadelphia. As she prepared for the conference and her role as a conversation leader there, she discovered that other educators were using Twitter and she decided to use it too.

I said, 'I'm not even going to get on the plane and go to Philadelphia if I don't have 100 followers and get connected with educators'; that was the

goal. So, before I went in January, I worked really hard and tried to connect with other educators so I would have 100 people that were following me; . . . [it]seems ridiculous at this time that 100 people was a big deal then, but to me it was. That was the start, and so it was really just getting motivated to be connected at least just a little bit at the time when I went there, so I would have something in common with all those people I saw as . . . the pinnacle of connected educators at the time.

Since that time she has been using it as a professional learning tool and to connect with educators around the country. She said, “[I]t’s become something that I use every single day and it’s something that I use very intentionally now as a learning tool. Twitter is her primary and favorite social media tool, although she does use others such as Voxer, and her use of Twitter has grown since she first began.

#### *Interview Question 2*

*The second interview question was, “What was your rationale for using social media professionally?”*

Mrs. Johnson’s rationale for her professional social media use was that it gives her the ability to connect with educators who share their knowledge with her and with whom she can also share knowledge. She could get ideas for strategies to try at her school and she could share strategies that are working at her school.

I think the biggest reason was because there were so many amazing educators that I found that were out on Twitter that were so freely open to share their knowledge and to give information. And, it was such a great free resource. I mean, to have a catalogue of educators at your fingertips

that are willing to share information with you about how they're doing amazing things at their school, that's just a priceless resource to me.

She also found that the more connections she made with educators on Twitter, the more she wanted to make. "It was just like a thirst. It's like whenever you get something and you like it . . . touching base and being able to get connect with five people and then five more that are even doing more amazing things." She found a supportive community of educators on Twitter.

[O]nce you get connected then you can share stuff that you're doing at your school with other people and then they learn from it and they're using it at their school. It's just . . . an amazing family . . . on Twitter, of connected educators that all share for the greater good of all students.

### *Interview Question 3*

*The third interview question was, "How do you see your social media use affecting you professionally?"*

Mrs. Johnson believed that her social media use had made her a better principal, more well-rounded, more open to sharing ideas, and more able to see things from others' perspectives. She said, "It's really pushed my thinking." Social media had been a source of ideas to take to her faculty/staff and ask if they wanted to try them. It had also strengthened her leadership, her confidence, and made her better for students. As well, "[I]t's just restored me, you know, my belief that education is . . . the best profession there is and [that] I'm definitely where I want to be and doing what I want to do."

### *Interview Question 4*

*The fourth interview question was, “How do you see your social media use affecting others?”*

Mrs. Johnson’s social media use affected others because she was more resourceful and able to connect people, including her teachers and students, than she had previously been. She noted the effect of the school’s accomplishments on the faculty/staff and students’ school pride, especially as the school received national attention

I think it [her social media use] also gives us some exposure we never had before and I think that’s really good for a small school in the middle of nowhere, Arkansas, because there’s nothing that I think is more valuable to the culture of a school than pride in school, and I think that’s something that is very important here. Nobody can devalue your school whenever you have pride in it. I think that’s something that we’ve really begun to gain that that they maybe didn’t have four years ago. In the last three and a half years that’s something we’ve really been building back up and the more that we’ve been able to have exposure for all the positive things that our students and staff and community have been doing [the better it is]. Even if they had been doing that here in a silo, that would have been great for the staff, community and students, but now we’re sharing it with the world. That makes it so much more powerful and it makes it really powerful for our students who are living in that connected world and they see that it’s connected and everyone knows all the great things that we’re doing. That makes it so much more powerful for everybody.

She also noted the school's rural location and the rural locations of students' homes in the rugged terrain of the New York Mountains. The rural location and rugged terrain impact internet connectivity. Many students' homes lack internet connectivity and that increases the importance of connectivity at the school.

Our kids really are living like miles and miles and miles on dirt roads.

They really don't have internet. They really don't have any connection unless they get here to us. We provide that connection to outside world and that's something that's really powerful I think.

*Interview Question 5*

*The fifth interview question was, "What outcomes are necessary for you to deem your social media use successful?"*

Mrs. Johnson's answer was, "We have to see school and student improvements and, and that's always going to be my goal because I tie so much of everything I do on social media to my profession." She elaborated about the improvements that had taken place at the Fristoe Schools over the past several years.

To me as an educator and to me in my school and trying to improve what we're doing here at Fristoe, I believe that coming from school improvement and not doing well and not having the resources we need to provide a great education for students to now being a top 10% school in Arkansas, that's improvement to me. I believe that you can measure that in a million different ways, but I believe part of that journey in the last three years came along because of some of the things that I've learned on social media. It came along because of the connections I've made,

because of people that helped me along the way, because of resources that we were able to obtain, because I've put my teachers in connection with great people, [and because of] students that I was able to connect with each other. That [was] a piece of the puzzle to us making that great success. Was it all of it? Absolutely not. Was technology all of it? No, absolutely not. But, some of the great relationships that I've made through social media were a huge help to me in navigating that pride improvement. So, I believe that [social media] was a real piece of that.

Mrs. Johnson talked about potential future outcomes of her social media use. She hoped to advocate for rural education. Her goal is a quality education for all students. She also hoped that all rural students would have access to high-quality internet.

I'm always going to be a proponent of the rural cause and I believe in providing a positive education that's very top notch for all students. I hope that I can push that social element and that I can be somebody that stands for that cause. I want broadband for everyone. I want every student regardless of their socioeconomic status or where they live to be able to access to that high speed internet and that same quality education that students in the most populated areas are able to access every single day. I want that for all of our rural students. I hope to have some type of social impact, even if it's just by telling my story and what we were able to do here. I think that that's important. I really hope that I can continue to share with other emerging educators and become better, because I think that's what's important. I enjoy feeling like I'm becoming a better

educator for our kids. I enjoy learning. I think life-long learning is really important and I think that Twitter is an amazing place to become a lifelong learner and to make connections so you can continue to be a lifelong learner. I'm hopeful that that can be a place that I can continue to do that. That's important to me.

*Interview Question 6*

*The sixth interview question was, "Is there anything else that you would like to add about your professional social media use??"*

Mrs. Johnson talked about her passion for technology and why it is so important to her and others, such as her students. Though she enjoys using devices such as her iPhone, it is not the device itself that she most appreciates. Rather, it is the ability to connect with others which the device provides that is so important to her.

[K]ids today, they're not addicted to their phones and they're not addicted to their iPads or whatever. They're addicted to communication and the connection. It's not that I love my iPhone . . . we're just addicted to the connection. I think that really is true. . . If I'm not connecting with somebody [in person], I want to be on my phone because I want to be connecting with somebody. It's about the connection. I always want to feel like I'm connected with someone.

She also shared about how she decides what types of messages, information, or content to share by tweet on Twitter. It is her typical pattern to tweet one or two times each day. She shares what she likes and what intrigues her

I really try to be authentic and share things that I'm interested in . . . I'm going to share things that I know either I would use or things I would send out to a staff member or something that is just interesting, blows my mind or is thought provoking. I'll share blogs that I might not agree with, but I think are so thought provoking [that] everyone should read it.

For educational leaders who are new to Twitter, Mrs. Johnson offered some advice. First, "I would say absolutely jump in and do it; . . . there is absolutely nothing to lose." "I think you need to be fairly intentional with your branding", so use your actual picture on your profile and be serious with your Twitter name, using your own name if you can get it. She cautioned users about using a name that is tied to their school, such as Fristoe Principal, because they may not always be employed in that capacity. Next, follow people and things you like and are interested in, such as Sports Center. Then, "find [and follow] some professionals that you respect, that you read their stuff and you think, 'someday I really want to be like them.'"

She also offered that new Twitter users should feel comfortable just getting started and then watching and learning, rather than putting pressure on themselves to tweet right away. "You can do amazing things and educators [in social media] are really giving. [T]hey want educators to be out there and they want people to connect. I think it's just a matter of putting yourself out there." Mrs. Johnson suggested that beginning Twitter users should check their 'message stream', or updated list of tweets from Twitter users that they follow five times per day, especially after school and at night because educational chats take place then. EdTechChat, SatChat, IowaEdChat, and PTChat are chats she suggested new users follow; she suggested Eric Sheninger (@E\_Sheninger on



Twitter) as an educational leader to follow. Twitter offers users suggestions for people they might want to follow in a section titled “Who to Follow” on the user’s main Twitter page and she recommended that new users follow those people that Twitter suggested. As far as tweeting, her recommendation was to intentionally think before tweeting and ensure that tweets are professional and appropriate; “make sure your youngest [child or student] can read it and make sure a school board member could read it.” Proactively maintaining your Twitter message stream is important too; pay attention to what those you follow are tweeting because that shows up in your message stream. Make sure that your message stream conforms to your image. She also elaborated further about the need for educational leaders to stay current on technology:

I was fortunate enough to present [on technology] in San Diego just recently [at the NASSP Ignite! Conference] and I was so excited because the room was standing room only. I was thrilled that so many leaders are starting to get the idea that this is something that we all need to be doing. It’s not okay to say “I’m just not that techie”. [T]hat’s not okay anymore.

Mrs. Johnson offered advice specifically for rural educators. Like her, they may have high poverty in their schools. They may also face lack of internet connectivity as she does in Fristoe. However, she encouraged them to be the best they can be for their students.

[I]t can be so isolating as a principal, much less to be the only administrator in the middle of nowhere. [M]y tip for people in rural places or places that don’t have all the bells and whistles per se is: don’t accept less, don’t accept less for your kids. One of my mantras and one of the

things that I tell my kids every day on the intercom is “no excuses, no limits” and I think that we as educators really have to set the bar for ourselves there as well in that. You are the Principal of that school and your students should be able to say that about you as well, “no excuses, no limits”. [B]ecause you’re a rural principal in the middle of rural Arkansas, does that mean you don’t have to be techie and you don’t have to be top notch in everything you do? No. I should be on top of my game with everything. . . People should be flying me here and there to go speak to different people because I’m that good. That’s how I should be because that’s what my students deserve, no matter where I am. You have to be a role model for your kids with regardless of where you are. And, I think probably more in a rural area than anywhere else, because they need to see you achieving. They need to believe that it can happen somewhere like this. I think that once you do that, then you’re setting the tone for what the school can do and perform and I think that’s a real key. If you allow yourself to be that rural principal, that “well, I’m just not that techie and we’re going to be status quo here”, then expect to get status quo and if status quo has been failing for nine years in a row then expect it to be 10. I think that the most important thing is really “no excuses, no limits”. You have to expect excellence from yourself first.

The power of professional learning through Twitter and social media has had a powerful impact on Mrs. Johnson. Like all learning, it takes time and commitment.

However, unlike more traditional forms of professional learning, such as a book study or attending conferences, learning from Twitter can be done quickly.

[I]t's "a point in time" instantaneous. If I want to know something like "what are you guys thinking about [this state] testing that's going on [because] we just had a glitch in ours?", I [can] tweet that out right now [and] I could get hundreds of replies instantly, and that's what's so exciting. It's just that instantaneous feedback, which is what we all hunger for. I think that's what's so awesome to me - and being able to use that to better your school. What better feeling as an educator who's there because of a passion for what's best for kids? [T]hat's what's exciting.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore a rural Arkansas K-12 educational leader's professional communication using social media in a rural school district, including the perceptions of students, parents, and faculty/staff members about the leader's social media use. The educational leader was interviewed. An information-gathering questionnaire was sent to all school parents, faculty/staff, and students age 13 and older. A total of 91 questionnaires were completed and returned. Although some of the questionnaire questions differed, the majority were the same for all three versions of the survey: parent, student age 13 and older, and faculty/staff member. The questionnaire asked respondents about their own experience with social media and their social media use, including time spent using social media daily and weekly, as well as reasons for using social media. Three focus groups were held, one each for parents, students age 13 and older, and faculty/staff members. Twenty-four participants took part in the focus

groups. All focus groups were asked the same questions with an emphasis on participants' experience with their educational leader's professional social media use and its impact on themselves and others. Chapter Five includes emerging themes, discussion of results, implications for future practice, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

This research study was designed to understand how an educational leader in a rural Arkansas K-12 school district uses social media professionally in her duties across the district, to understand the community's social media use, and to determine school faculty/staff members', students', and parents' perceptions regarding the leader's social media use. Internet connectivity in rural areas offers rural educational leaders and their faculty/staff, students, and parents access to social media sites. Access to social media sites allows educational leaders to directly and instantaneously converse with social media users around the globe as well as students, families, and local community members (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Joinson, 2008; Lewis, 2009). Limited research exists on educational leaders' professional social media use. This research study adds to the body of research and imparts the perceptions of the educational leader's faculty/staff members, students, and parents regarding the educational leader's professional social media use.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This research study utilized Hoffman and Novak's (1996) model of marketing communications in a hypermedia computer-mediated environment as the conceptual framework. This was a 'many-to-many' communication model in which both the senders' and the receivers' primary relationship is with the 'mediated environment', which is the social media or social networking site. The term 'flow' is used to describe a user's state while in the mediated environment. This state is:

- 1) characterized by a seamless sequence of responses facilitated by machine interactivity, 2) intrinsically enjoyable, 3) accompanied by a loss

of self-consciousness, and 4) self-reinforcing. To experience flow while engaged in an activity, consumers must perceive a balance between their skills and the challenges of the activity, and both their skills and challenges must be above a critical threshold. (Hoffman & Novak, 1997, p. 2)

Users must manifest focused attention, interactivity, and a conscious presence in the mediated environment instead of the physical environment to be able to enter the flow state. Two main types of flow, goal-directed and experiential, existed. Goal-directed flow activities were “instrumental and utilitarian in nature, extrinsically motivated, characterized by situational involvement, and result in directed search and learning” (Hoffman & Novak, 1996, p. 19). Users who engaged in experiential flow activity, however, when using the computer-mediated environment fit the following criteria: engagement was voluntary, use was regular or habitual and ongoing over time, and the goal was personal enjoyment rather than learning (Hoffman & Novak). Enduring involvement, one of the criteria for experiential flow, preceded opinion leadership (Hoffman & Novak; Richins & Root-Schaffer, 1988). As a result, an individual who is, or desires to be, an opinion leader may engage habitually with the computer-mediated environment as a means to communicate knowledge and experiences to others (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Lyons & Henderson, 2005).

Internet availability in rural areas supplies rural educational leaders and their faculty/staff, students, and parents with admittance to social media sites. Educational leaders may use social media sites to circumvent time-honored media outlets such as newspaper and television and directly communicate nearly instantaneously as both

senders and receivers to their students, parents, and others in the local community as well as social media users around the nation and world (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Joinson, 2008; Lewis, 2009).

### **Discussion**

Technological advances have contributed to the rapid, world-wide increase in the use of social media by people of all ages. As social media use has increased, changes have taken place both in methods of communication and expectations for communication in all facets of life, including personal, work, and education. While social media use has been the focus of research, the research has focused primarily on personal social media use. Research on the educational use of social media does exist and it has centered on classrooms, students, and teachers. Scant research exists on educational leaders' professional social media use, particularly those serving in rural areas. Further, research on students, parents, and faculty/staff members' perceptions of rural educational leaders' professional social media use was not found to exist. This exploratory qualitative case study focused on the phenomenon of a rural Arkansas K-12 educational leader's professional social media use as perceived by their students, parents, and faculty/staff members as well as the community's social media use.

Seventy-four out of 91, or 81%, of respondents to the student, parent, and faculty/staff questionnaires had internet access at home. Seventy-seven percent of students, 78% percent of parents, and 92% percent of faculty/staff members had internet access at home. These figures are higher than those reported by the Stover School District, which reported that only 10% of Fristoe Schools' students had internet in their homes in 2012. Seven out of eight, or 88%, of the students who participated in the

student focus group had reliable internet service at home, but they said that this was not typical of the majority of Fristoe Schools' students. Four out of seven, or 57%, of the parents who participated in the parent focus group had reliable internet service at home. Seven out of nine, or 78%, of faculty/staff members who participated in the faculty/staff member focus group had reliable internet service at home, but three of those seven did not live in the Fristoe Schools service area. Adjusting accordingly, only four out of nine, or 44%, of faculty/staff members who lived in the Fristoe Schools service area had reliable internet service at home. Parent and student questionnaires included a question that asked respondents who had internet to indicate the type of internet that they had. Satellite and DSL were the most common types of internet service; 33% of homes had satellite and 33% had DSL. Ten percent of homes had broadband internet service.

According to Cook and Pachler (2012), 66% of all online adults in the United States used social media. Adults who responded to the information-gathering parent and faculty/staff member questionnaires used social media at a higher rate than Cook and Pachler reported. Of the adult respondents in this study who were online, 89% used social media. Breaking the data down further, 90% of parents who were online used social media; 86% of faculty/staff members who were online used social media. Nineteen out of 24, or 80%, of all focus group members used social media. Questionnaire respondents who were online and age 56 or older used Facebook at a higher rate than did those in the research literature. Duggan and Smith (2013) reported that 45% of people age 65 and older who are online used Facebook. Of respondents to this study age 56 and older, 67% who were online used Facebook. Seven out of nine, or 78%, of faculty/staff members age 56 and older who were online used Facebook; one out of 3, or 33% parents



who were 56 and older and online used Facebook. Trusov et al. (2010) reported that 90% of high school students and young adults in the U.S. partake in a social network community, such as Facebook or Twitter. In this research, 82% of students took part in a social network community.

Respondents to the questionnaires used mobile devices to connect to the internet at higher rates than reported in research literature. Usage of hand-held devices such as smartphones has increased worldwide and the number of global smartphone users is predicted to exceed three billion in 2016 (Portio Research, 2013). Fox and Rainie (2014) found that 58% of all U.S. adults owned a smartphone and 68% of U.S. adults used a mobile device, such as a smartphone, to access the internet. Of adult respondents to the parent questionnaire and faculty/staff questionnaire in this research, 59 out of 69, or 86%, connected to the internet through a mobile device. Dahlstrom et al. (2011) stated that 55% of undergraduate students owned an internet-capable handheld device, such as a smartphone. Of the students who responded to the student questionnaire, 19 out of 24, or 79%, had mobile internet access through a smartphone or similar device.

Questionnaire respondents used social media at a rate higher than rural residents in research literature. Eighty-seven percent of questionnaire respondents used social media; 91% of students, 84% of parents, and 88% of faculty/staff members used social media. Duggan and Smith (2013) stated that 71% of rural adults who were online used Facebook and 11% used Twitter. Ninety-five percent of questionnaire respondents in this research used Facebook and 38% used Twitter. Facebook was the social media most used by all respondents, followed by Google+ (54%), Pinterest (53%), Instagram (39%), Twitter, Snapchat (19%), Vine (12%), LinkedIn (12%), Tumblr (9%), and Kik (8%).

Parents were more likely to use Facebook than was the average participant. Parents were less likely to use Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, and LinkedIn than was the average participant. No parents used Vine, Tumblr, or Kik. All seven parents in the parent focus group used social media. Five used Facebook, two exclusively, and four used both Facebook and Twitter. The two parents who did not use Facebook did use Twitter. One parent used Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Three of the parents used Twitter professionally; one of those also occasionally used her personal Facebook account professionally. One faculty/staff focus group member, Angela, did likewise by copying links that friends posted to her Facebook wall and then emailing them to herself so she could use them in her classroom. Lampe et al. (2011) and Koles & Nagy (2012) noted that application of social media use to daily activities has resulted in blurring of traditional boundaries that once clearly separated 'personal' from 'work' and 'education'. Faculty/staff members were more likely to use Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Tumblr than was the average participant. Faculty/staff members were less likely than the average participant to use Google+ and Instagram. No faculty members reported using Snapchat, Vine, or Kik. Mrs. Johnson used Twitter primarily, but also used Voxer and LinkedIn occasionally. Just 90% of student respondents used Facebook, a figure that was 5% lower than the average for all respondents. Students' use of Twitter was also below the average of all respondents at 30%. No students used LinkedIn; 12% of all respondents used LinkedIn. Student respondents' social media use was higher than was the average of all respondents for Google + (65% vs. 54%), Pinterest (65% vs.53%), Instagram (70% vs. 39%), Snapchat (75% vs. 19%), Vine (55% vs. 12%), Tumblr (30% vs 9%), and Kik (30% vs 8%). Students were nearly five times more likely to use Vine

than was the average respondents. Nearly four times more students than average respondents used Snapchat and Kik. More than three times as many students than average respondents used Tumblr. Students were nearly twice as likely to use Instagram as was the average respondent. The student questionnaire was the only one that asked if respondents used Wanelo. Two students out of twenty, or 10%, used Wanelo. Only one out of five, or 20%, of student focus group members who used social media used Facebook. One used Kik, another used Instagram, and two others used Twitter.

Fifty-four percent of questionnaire respondents spent one to two hours per day using social media, 23% spent three to four hours per day, 10% spent five hours or more per day. Thirty-three percent of questionnaire respondents spent one to five hours per week using social media, 25% spent six to ten hours per week, 10% spent 10 to 14 hours per week, 8% spent 15 to 19 hours per week, and 16% spent 20 hours or more per week on social media. While Mrs. Johnson did not comment on the number of hours per day that she spends using social media, she did say, “If I’m not connecting with somebody [in person], I want to be on my phone because I want to be connecting with somebody. It’s about the connection. I always want to feel like I’m connected with someone.” She tweets two to three times each day and recommended that educational leaders who use Twitter check their message stream at least five times each day, particularly after school and at night, to stay current and in order to follow chats, which typically occur in the evening. While Duggan and Brenner (2013) and Hammond (2009) found that 15% of rural adults spent over 11 hours on social media per week, 34% of respondents in this research spent 10 hours or more per week on social media. Dahlstrom et al. (2011) reported that 58% of students used Facebook frequently (multiple times daily). Thirty-

three percent of student questionnaire respondents in this research used social media three hours or more per day and 10% spent 5 or more hours using social media each day; 35% of students who used social media spent 20 or more hours per week using it.

Reasons for social media use vary. Joinson (2008) and Moore (2012) found that the most common reason for using Facebook was to “keep in touch” (p. 1034), a finding that was mimicked in this research. Ninety-percent of all questionnaire respondents used social media to ‘stay in touch with friends/family’; 76% used social media to share and get news information, and photos; and nearly 40% used it to ‘connect with others who like what I like’. Three of the seven parent focus group members used Facebook to “keep in touch” and a fourth used it to share photos. The one student focus group member who used Facebook did not elaborate about his Facebook use. Eight out of nine faculty/staff members used Facebook personally, but did not elaborate on reasons for its use. Graham et al. (2009) stated that people used social media in education to connect with other learners and learn collaboratively as well as independently. Selwyn (2009) reported that students used social media to communicate information, both academic and practical, and personal thoughts and feelings related to their educational circumstances. Further, Smith et al. (2009) observed that greater than 50% of U.S. undergraduate students have used social media for educational objectives, including school-related communication with classmates. Fifty-percent of student questionnaire respondents in this research who used social media used it to ‘complete school assignments/homework’; 70% of students used social media to ‘hang out with friends/family’. According to students, fifty-percent of students’ teachers used social media in the classroom to help students learn; nearly 60% of students used social media in the classroom to help

themselves learn. Student focus group members did not differentiate between or expand upon their own personal and educational use of social media. Baxter et al., 2011, Henry (2011), and Trusov et al. (2010) found that social media is increasingly used for employee growth and as an educational tool. Dawson (2013) and Dutta (2010) cited 'learning' as an increasingly important reason for social media use. Mrs. Johnson used social media "very intentionally" as a professional learning tool and to connect with, share with, and receive knowledge from a nation-wide network of educators. This use is consistent with Perez's (2012) reasons for using personal learning networks (PLNs): accessing colleague's thinking and timely information, posing questions and receiving responses, joining forces with colleagues, and conversing about events. Twenty-six percent of parent questionnaire respondents and fifty-two percent of faculty/staff questionnaire respondents who used social media used it for professional learning; 18% of parents and 38% of faculty/staff members used it to complete job duties. Three parent focus group members used Twitter for professional purposes. Three faculty/staff group members used Twitter for professional learning and one used it, along with Facebook, to complete job duties. Two faculty/staff focus group members used LinkedIn; one of those said she used it to stay in touch with colleagues around the country.

Parent and faculty/staff member questionnaires included the question, "What is your highest education level attained?" Nearly 85% of respondents had graduated from high school. Nearly twenty percent had earned a bachelor's or higher degree. Both figures are higher than the Fristoe County averages from 2009-2013; 77% percent of persons age 25 and older had graduated high school and 10 percent had earned a bachelor's or higher degree. The respondents' high school graduation rate is higher than

that of the State of Arkansas from 2009-2013 by less than one percent. The percentage of those 25 and older in the State of Arkansas from 2009-2013 who had earned a bachelor's degree or higher is less than one percent greater than the respondents' rate of bachelor's degrees or higher earned. All faculty/staff members had graduated high school; 83% had earned a bachelor's or higher degree.

With respect to the conceptual framework of this study, Facebook use tended to fit the characteristics of experiential flow activity criteria (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Users engaged with Facebook because they wanted to, not because they had to; they used Facebook on a regular basis; the purpose of use was to stay in touch with other users, many of whom were Facebook friends because of connections made offline in 'real life', not necessarily to search for specific information or learn; and they used Facebook because they enjoyed it.

For participants, professional social media use typically met goal-directed flow activity criteria. (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Those who engaged professionally with social media did so inconsistently; used it to search for specific knowledge or content; and were motivated to use it because they believed they should, rather than because they enjoyed it. One commented, "I can see the advantages of using it for educational purposes."

### **Themes**

Through synthesis of collected qualitative data from interviews, focus group sessions, observations, and document gathering, themes emerged. The themes included recognition of and appreciation for Mrs. Johnson's authentic proficient professional social media use on sites such as Twitter, the power of connectedness both in her

relationships with students and with others around the nation through social media, and the positive impact of Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use on the school and its stakeholders, including the faculty/staff, students, and its reputation. These themes furnish an understanding of the phenomenon of a rural K-12 educational leader's professional social media use as perceived by faculty/staff, students, and parents.

### **Theme One: Recognition of and Appreciation for Mrs. Johnson's Social Media Use**

In this study, it became evident that the majority of students, parents, and faculty/staff members were using social media; however, few were using it professionally. All but four focus group participants reported using social media. Those who did use social media frequently mentioned using social media sites such as Facebook personally to stay in touch with family, friends, and others as well as playing games. In fact, Facebook was the social media site used most frequently by participants; with 58% of participants reporting using Facebook. This is consistent with Duggan and Smith's (2013) finding that Facebook is used by 71% of rural adults who are online. The participants who did not use social media cited a lack of time or interest, having no internet connectivity, and concerns about privacy as the reasons.

Participants are using personal social media accounts on a professional basis on occasion. One reported using her personal Facebook page professionally, posting and sharing notices of school activities on her Facebook page. Another shared that friends post items to her personal Facebook page that she can and does use in the classroom. This application of social media crossed conventional boundaries that used to clearly define 'personal' activities and 'work' or 'education' activities (Koles s& Nagy, 2012).

Few participants were unaware of Mrs. Johnson's proficient professional social media use. In spite of the fact that they did not necessarily follow her on professional social media or even have a Twitter account, participants were aware of her presence there. They knew that she had a large number of followers (7,597 as of March 17, 2015) and tweeted frequently. Participants also knew that she focused on professional content and that she frequently shares resources she finds on Twitter with her faculty/staff. Jane said that Mrs. Johnson shared ideas on how to "better yourself as a teacher, coordinator [or] administrator". Some also knew that she founded and co-moderated #ArkEdChat on Twitter. Participants knew that Mrs. Johnson had received awards and traveled to educational and technological conferences to make presentations about social media. They also knew that she had signed a book contract to write a social media guide for educational leaders. Her proficient social media use was simply part of who she was, an educational leader committed to her students and to doing her very best for them. Beverly said, "That is like the most important part of her life, that media and what she can do with it, and how she can help others." Veronica said, "She's the kind of person, though, . . . , whatever she does, she's going to succeed in. She puts everything she has into it. . . . [T]hat's just how she is. Whatever she does she puts herself in all the way." Mrs. Johnson also talked about her determination to do her best for her students, "I think that the most important thing is really 'no excuses, no limits'. You have to expect excellence from yourself first."

Mrs. Johnson's social media use, evaluated through the perceptions of students, faculty/staff, and parents, fit the characteristics of experiential flow activity criteria (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). She engaged with Twitter simply because she wanted to, she



used it on a regular basis, and she enjoyed it. Further, her experiential flow activities were the precedent to her opinion leadership, which she demonstrates by habitually engaging with a social network site to share knowledge and experiences. Her legion of followers numbered 7,597 as of March 17, 2015; this adds credibility to her status as an opinion leader in education, leadership, and technology on Twitter. By comparison, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson has 7,988 followers on Twitter; the governor of the entire State of Arkansas has only 391 more followers than does the principal of a rural Arkansas K-12 school with a student population around 200.

### **Theme Two: Power of Connectedness**

Mrs. Johnson emphasized relationships and connectedness with people, whether that was in person or on social media. Although Twitter provided her with access to knowledge and information, the real power was in the connectedness to an educational community that is world-wide. She stated,

[O]nce you get connected then you can share stuff that you're doing at your school with other people and then they learn from it and they're using it at their school. It's just . . . an amazing family . . . on Twitter, of connected educators that all share for the greater good of all students.

The impact of this has not been lost on the students, parents, and faculty/staff members in her school. Henry (2011) reported that online networks are where “meaningful connections are made, transactions and deals completed, and individual and professional branding and success attained” (p. 6). Mrs. Johnson practiced what has become a progressively more important reason for social media use and that is to learn from employees, friends, peers, clients, or community members of the broader online

community (Dawson, 2013; Dutta, 2010). Nancy, a parent, said, “[T]hrough her use of social media that keeps her in contact with these professionals all over the country, we have become a very nationally known little bitty school. Jane, another parent, said “Even though she's got[ten] national attention, she still has time for all these kids in her school and uses social media on both ends of it.” Jane also noted that Mrs. Johnson used social media to connect positively with students in her school. “[T]hey're [students are] comfortable, more comfortable to go to her, to talk to her, to ask her questions, [such as] ‘how do I do this?’, ‘how do I do that?’”, because they know she's there [on social media] and she will talk to them about it.”

Mrs. Johnson’s connectedness to social media enabled her to share resources with her students, faculty/staff, and parents at her school. Her relationships with the students, faculty/staff, and parents at her school helped her to know what resources and information they needed to have. As Shelly said:

You know, maybe, some of us still like to do it “old school”. And some people say “well, I don't really see much use of Twitter”, but . . . she still raised the bar. She's brought it to our attention. This is out there . . . you can use it, not use it, glean what you want from it. I've actually . . . personalized even [my] Facebook to where it's more professional than [personal] . . . social media, if you know what I mean. I do give her kudos for raising the bar.

### **Theme Three: Positive Impact on Stakeholders**

In this research study, the perception that Mrs. Johnson’s professional social media use, including her opinion leadership in education, technology, and leadership, had

positively impacted the school faculty/staff, students, parents, and reputation was clearly evidenced. Mrs. Johnson's experience with social media impacted the school in general ways, such as overall school improvement, and in specific ways, such as working to get the school district to unblock Twitter on the school's internet network. Nancy said "I really think that 'above and beyond' has been introduced to this school because of all her use of social media and her passion for that rural schools and technology. So I think that that's a really big thing." A parent, Ashley, discussed the change that had taken place since the time when she herself attended the Fristoe Schools:

I am from here. I went to school here. And it was a great school when I was a kid, don't get me wrong, but it was nothing like it is now. And last year the elementary was in the top ten percent. This year the high school is in the top ten percent. So that tells me as a parent that our school is great. All of her social media and all of the sites that she is sending the teachers and the stuff that they're teaching the kids obviously is doing good. She's doing great things and our teachers are doing great things. . . .  
I love that my kids go to school here.

The impact of Mrs. Johnson's social media use on her students, as evidenced by participant perceptions, has been to provide them with opportunities to access technology, to model responsible social media use, and to encouraging them to use and explore technology. Stephanie said, "I think it's great that she uses it [social media, Twitter] because we're a rural school, and #ArkEdChat chats with administrators and teachers around the country." One way in which she provided students opportunities to access technology was by developing a 'bring your own device' program in the school.

Under the program, students may bring technological devices such as smartphones from home and connect to the internet at school. For students who do not have internet access at home, this opportunity is a lifeline. Another way that Mrs. Johnson provided students opportunities to access technology was by writing and receiving grants to purchase technological devices, such as Nooks.

Participants noted several ways in which Mrs. Johnson had modeled responsible social media use for her students. One such way was to educate students about their 'digital footprint'. A parent stated:

[S]he's made it "let's teach the kids how to use it responsibly" and "let's show them the digital footprint thing". You know, "your first boss, after you graduate from college, can look back on your Facebook and look at your pictures so let's be responsible about this". And I want them [my children] to catch that. I want them to know [that] whenever you put something out there, my husband preaches that, it is there forever. You can delete it off your profile, but that doesn't mean that [someone] didn't already download it or whatever. When it's there, it's there.

Mrs. Johnson's commitment to her students and to providing them with technology helped to make her an opinion leader on social media and an awarded educator. She has travelled around the nation educating her peers about social media use. It has also brought recognition to the Fristoe Schools. Willow stated,

I'm just so proud for these kids. I'm so proud . . . that she came in here like a whirlwind and she's still whirling. And she's whirled all over the country because other people want it. Other people want what she's done here and

what our kids have and they want to know how they can get it. And that's her passion. Kids. It's all about the kids.

### **Research Questions Answered**

*Research Question 1: How is an educational leader in a rural Arkansas K-12 school district using social media professionally in her duties across the district?*

This question was answered during focus group sessions and Mrs. Johnson's interview. Mrs. Johnson used Twitter, LinkedIn, and Voxer in her duties across the district. She utilized Twitter far more frequently and intensely than either LinkedIn or Voxer. Twitter was used to make connections with other educators around the nation and world, to share information, and to find information that she could use at her school and share with her faculty/staff. She also used it to get feedback from other educators by posing questions and getting answers.

*Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of school faculty/staff regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?*

This question was answered during the faculty/staff focus group session. All faculty/staff members were aware that Mrs. Johnson was on Twitter professionally. She modeled social media use for them and shared resources from it with them. As Shelly said, "She's raised the bar for all of us." Faculty/staff members perceived that Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use was important to her and that she wanted to use it to help them, her students, and her school. They perceived social media use as contributing to the awards and opportunities that she had received and also to the school's improvement and recognition.

*Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of students regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?*

This question was answered during the student focus group session. Students perceived that Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use had impacted teachers positively, but none reported that it had influenced them personally. The majority of students were unaware that Mrs. Johnson used social media professionally. Only two students had Twitter accounts and only one followed Mrs. Johnson's Twitter account. Two students spoke favorably about Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use being good for the school and the others did not comment on it. Students also had suggestions for Mrs. Johnson, including publicizing her social media use to a greater degree as well as finding and tweeting information that would specifically be interesting to her students. Two students offered no suggestions but instead said she should "keep doing what she's doing".

*Research Question 4: What are the perceptions of parents regarding the educational leader's use of social media in her duties across the district?*

This question was answered during the parent focus group session. Parents were aware that Mrs. Johnson was professionally using social media and three followed her on Twitter. Her social media use, use of technology, and leadership in ensuring help for parents in using technology caused parents to feel less afraid of using technology. Parents appreciated her model of responsible social media use for students, her pursuit of technology for the schools, and her encouragement of students to use technology. They also appreciated her connection with students, both in person and online. Parents suggested that she consider tweeting content directed specifically toward them such as

learning websites that they could use to help their children or that she set up a chat for parents on Twitter. They perceived that Mrs. Johnson's professional social media use had positively impacted the small school by providing it with national recognition that it would never have otherwise received. They expressed gratitude for her leadership in significantly improving the school and noted that her professional social media use played a part in that.

*Research Question 5: How are students, faculty and staff, and parents utilizing social media?*

This question was answered by questionnaire respondents and during focus group sessions. The majority of students, faculty/staff, and parents used social media, including Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter, and most used it for at least one to two hours each day or at least one to five hours each week. On average, students used social media more each day and week than did adults. Social media was used stay in touch with friends and family; to share and get news, information, and photos; for professional learning; and to complete job duties. Most students used social media to hang out with friends and family. Students also used it to complete school assignments and homework and to help themselves learn in the classroom. In addition, students reported that their teachers used social media in the classroom to help them learn.

### **Implications for Practice**

The primary knowledge to be gained from this research is that a rural educational leader's professional social media use can have a positive impact on the leader's school as perceived by students, parents, and faculty/staff. Regardless of whether or not students, parents, and faculty/staff are technologically savvy or proficient users of social

media, they have an appreciation for and take pride in their educational leader's technological and social media skills. Further, students, parents, and faculty/staff do not need to be social media experts themselves to perceive and believe that their educational leader is proficient as using social media. In this research, stakeholders perceived that their educational leader's professional social media use was linked to nation-wide recognition of their small, rural school. This national recognition of their school was an additional source of pride for stakeholders.

As perceived by stakeholders, benefits of an educational leader's professional social media use include modeling responsible social media use for all stakeholders including students, faculty/staff, and parents; modeling proficient use of technology for all stakeholders; displaying the power of connectedness and relationships, whether they be online or in person; demonstrating the pursuit of life-long learning; exhibiting the power of using social media as a personal learning network for rural people; facilitating school improvement; finding and sharing resources that help teachers and students; contributing to recognition that boosts school pride and improves the culture, and providing leadership in the acquisition and use of technology. As well, rural educational leaders' professional use of social media can serve as an important personal learning tool. Using social media professionally as a personal learning network strengthens leaders because of the connections made with other educators as well as the ideas and knowledge that are shared with them and by them. Even in rural areas, and perhaps *especially* in rural areas, where internet connectivity is limited and students, parents, and faculty/staff members may not be experienced social media users or even experienced users of



technology, they are favorable to an educational leader's professional social media use and believe that it is good for the students and the school.

As evidenced by this research, rural educational leaders' professional social media use can benefit their school and themselves in multiple ways as perceived by students, parents, and faculty/staff. These benefits include modeling life-long learning, demonstrating responsible social media and technology use, showcasing the power of relationships; exhibiting the educational application of social media and professional learning networks; aiding school improvement; and contributing to school pride. Because of these benefits and the favorable perceptions held by students, parents, and faculty/staff regarding educational leaders' professional social media use, educational leaders, especially those in rural areas, should seriously consider whether or not professional social media use would be advantageous for their schools and for themselves. This research has shown that an educational leader's students, parents, and faculty/staff members do not necessarily have to 'follow' them on social media in order to perceive the educational leader's professional social media use positively. Further, students', parents', and faculty/staff members' level of technological and social media expertise does not have to be high or even above-average in order for them to have favorable perceptions of their educational leader's professional social media use. In fact, even students, parents, and faculty/staff members who did not use social media had favorable perceptions of their educational leader's professional social media use. Educational leaders should keep this information in mind when making decisions about professional social media use. This is particularly important for rural educational leaders,

who may have no students, parents, or faculty/staff using certain specific types of social media, to keep in mind.

Educational leaders can start using social media such as Twitter with little effort or expense; it only requires an email address to set up an account. Carefully considering the image that they want to project in advance of setting up their account can help them to use Twitter appropriately. For example, educators should choose a Twitter name, photograph, and profile that projects professionalism. Further, thoughtful contemplation of the topics or content that educational leaders choose to both seek out and share will increase the authenticity of their professional social media use. Educational leaders can immerse themselves as shallowly or deeply as they want in Twitter by choosing who and how many other users to follow, when and how often they check their message stream, whether or not they participate in chats, whether or not they tweet, and whether they go beyond their message stream and search for content within Twitter or not. As Mrs. Johnson suggested, users can get a feel for Twitter and what it has to offer by selecting other educational leaders to follow and by following or participating in educational chats. Educational leaders should be mindful that the content of other users they choose to follow will be displayed in their own message stream; careful message stream oversight is recommended. In the event that an educational leader decides to cease following another user, it is a simple matter to ‘unfollow’ them. Once they have ‘unfollowed’ the other user, that user’s tweets will no longer appear in the educational leader’s message stream. If educational leaders have concerns about potential negative impacts of ‘unfollowing’ others, they should keep in mind that other ‘unfollowed’ user does not receive notification that the educational leader has ‘unfollowed’ them.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

The results of this research study suggest several potential possibilities for further research. Because limited research exists on rural people and availability of internet in rural areas, further research should focus on rural internet connectivity. Understanding out how many rural people have internet access, how affordable it is, what kinds of internet access they have, and how well it compares to internet availability in urban and suburban areas area options for further research. Focusing similar research on rural schools, including how many have internet access, how affordable it is, what kinds of internet access they have, and how well it compares to internet availability in urban and suburban schools would also be valuable.

Research could also be conducted on the types of devices that rural people are using to connect to the internet. As smartphone use rises in general, research could explore whether or not people in rural areas are adopting them in similar proportions to users in urban and suburban areas. For rural areas where cell phone service is non-existent or spotty, further research could gather information about the types of phones that residents of rural areas use and their reasons for choosing one device over another

Another avenue for future research would be the impact of gender on social media use. Women and men may use different types of social media or use the same kind of social media in different ways, as well as having different purposes for using social media. Further, gender may affect usage habits and patterns such as frequency and timing of usage.

Age may also be a factor in both internet and social media usage. Research could explore the impact of age on the amount and frequency of internet use. The impact of

age on the amount and frequency of social media use as well as on the specific types of social media used could be investigated.

Research could also be conducted on rural students' internet usage patterns. Some students may connect primarily at home and others may connect primarily at school. Knowing where and how students are accessing the internet can help schools and educational leaders make decisions about technology options and internet accessibility in schools.

As a larger percentage of the public begins to use social media, social media may become more prevalent in the classroom as a learning tool. Further research could explore the kinds of social media teachers are using in the classroom to help students learn as well as the kinds of social media students are using in the classroom to help themselves learn. Research could also explore how and where students who do not have internet at home or mobile internet access use social media.

This research has shown that geographically-isolated rural educational leaders can use social media as a professional learning tool. Additional research could explore further the ways in which all educational leaders are using social media for professional learning. Another avenue for research would be the investigation of the potential impact of geographical location, whether it be rural, urban, or suburban, on educational leaders' use of social media as a professional learning tool.

Because this research demonstrated the use of social media as a professional learning tool by educational leaders, exploration of the use of social media as a professional learning tool by all educators is a topic for future research. This could include educators such as classroom teachers; certified non-classroom teachers such as

counselors, librarians, and literacy specialists; and non-certified staff such as paraprofessionals. Further research could include the examination of geographical location, including rural, urban, or suburban, on educators' use of social media as a professional learning tool.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research study was to explore a rural Arkansas K-12 educational leader's professional social media use in her duties across the district from the perceptions of students, parents, and faculty/staff. Through an exploratory case study, the educational leader was analyzed using Hoffman and Novak's (1996) model of marketing communications in a hypermedia computer-mediated environment as the conceptual framework.

The findings of this study indicate that rural K-12 educational leaders' professional social media use is positively perceived by students, parents, and faculty/staff as a model of responsible social media use, an indication of leadership in technology use, a source of resources and ideas to be shared, and as a contributor to school pride and culture. Professional social media use may also serve as an instantly-accessible personal learning network for educational leaders, providing them with peer-connections, ideas, and knowledge unconstrained by geographical limitations. Although students, parents, and faculty/staff members may be inexperienced users of technology or social media, they believe that the educational leader's professional social media use is good for the students and the school.

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Appendix A  
Child Assent Form to Participate in a Research Study

**INVESTIGATOR'S NAME:** AMIE L. BRESHEARS

**PROJECT #**

**STUDY TITLE: An Exploration of Rural Educational Leaders' Social Media Use**

This is a study about principals using social media as part of their job.

**Why YOU are invited**

You are invited to be in this study because students' thoughts about principals' social media use are an important part of this research.

**What will happen?**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- participate in a focus-group session (lasting no more than 1 hour) along with other students,
- share briefly about your own social media experiences in your educational life and work life, and
- share your thoughts about your educational leader's professional social media use, including ways in which you believe it has influenced you and others.

**Can anything good happen to me?**

Your participation will benefit educational leaders who want to improve their professional social media practices.

**Can anything bad happen to me?**

The risks to this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

**What if I don't want to do this?**

If you say you do not want to be in the study, you just have to tell us. No one will be mad at you. You can also say yes and later if you change your mind, you can quit the study. The choice is up to you [and your parent(s)].

**Who will know my answers and see my information?**

Your participation in the study will be kept confidential. We will do our best to make sure that your answers to these questions and your information is kept a secret. Your parents or guardian will get the information if they request it.

**Who can I talk to about the study?**

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to me or you can talk to someone else, at any time during the study. Here is the telephone number to reach Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, a professor in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department: 660-543-4720.

**Do you want to be in the study?**

*YES*

*NO*

---

**Signature of Child**

**Date**

A copy of this form will be given to you.



Appendix B  
Parental Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

**INVESTIGATOR'S NAME:**           **AMIE L. BRESHEARS**  
**PROJECT #**

**STUDY TITLE: AN EXPLORATION OF RURAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERS' SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

**INTRODUCTION**

We ask for permission that your child be allowed to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to increase understanding of how rural educational leaders are using social media professionally. You have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent for your child to participate in this research study. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what your child will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to include your child in the study. Your child's participation is voluntary. They do not have to be in the study if they do not want to. You may refuse for your child to be in the study and nothing will happen. If your child does not want to continue to be in the study, they may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before allowing your child to participate in this study.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

Your child has been invited to be in this study because student perceptions about educational leaders' social media use are an important component of this exploratory research study.

**PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY**

If you agree to have your child be a part of the study, they will be asked to do the following things:

- participate in a focus-group session (lasting no more than 1 hour) along with other students,
- share briefly about his own social media experiences in his educational life and work life, and
- share his thoughts about his educational leader's professional social media use, including ways in which he believes it has influenced him and others.

**HOW LONG WILL MY CHILD BE IN THE STUDY?**

This study will take approximately 2 months to complete. Your child can stop participating at any time without penalty.

**HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THIS STUDY?**

Other students, school staff, parents, and the educational leader will be involved in this study.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH?**

Your child's participation will benefit educational leaders who want to improve their professional social media practices.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE RESEARCH?**

The risks to this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

**PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to allow your child to participate or withdraw your child from the study at any time. Your child may also refuse to participate or withdraw themselves at any time. Your child will not be penalized in any way if you decide not to allow your child to participate or to withdraw your child from this study.

**WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?**

We will do our best to make sure that your child's answers to these questions are kept private. Information produced by this study will be stored in the investigator's file and identified by a code number only. The code key connecting your child's name to specific information about you will be kept in a separate, secure location. Information contained in your child's records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify your child without your written consent.

Your child will be audio recorded, during this study. You will be given the opportunity to listen to the audiotapes before you give your permission for their use if you so request.

**WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT THE STUDY?**

If you have any questions about the study or if you would like additional information, please call Amie Breshears at (660) 619-7994 or email at [abreshears@centurylink.net](mailto:abreshears@centurylink.net). You may also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, at (660) 543-4720 or by email at [hutchinson@ucmo.edu](mailto:hutchinson@ucmo.edu).

You may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) if you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll your child or to continue to participate in this study. The IRB can be reached directly by telephone at (573)882-9585 and e-mail at [umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu)

**CONSENT**

I have read this parental consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my permission for my child to participate in this study. I understand that, in order to for my child to participate, they will need to be able to give their consent also. I understand that participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my child at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You will be informed of any significant new findings discovered during the course of this study that might influence your child's health, welfare, or willingness to continue participation in this study.

Parent/Guardian signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.*

## Appendix C Informed Consent

**Identification of Researchers:** This research is being conducted by Amie Breshears, a doctoral student with the University of Missouri Columbia in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study is to explore how educational leaders in a rural K-12 school district use social media professionally in their duties across the district.

**Request for Participation:** We are inviting you to participate in this research. This study will help to increase understanding of how rural educational leaders are using social media professionally. It is up to you whether you would like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply skip them.

**Exclusions:** You must be a parent of a student at the participating school.

**Description of Research Method:** The research involves participation in a focus group. The focus group will consist of other parents and should last no longer than one hour. Questions will focus on educational leaders' social media use. The interviews will be audio-taped, transcribed, and secured in a password-protected computer throughout the research study. Notes created from the observation session will also be secured throughout the research study. The information gained from this research will be shared with Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, doctoral advisor, and will be published as part of completion requirements for the researcher's Ed.D degree. Dr. Hutchinson may be reached at (660) 543-4720 or by email at [hutchinson@ucmo.edu](mailto:hutchinson@ucmo.edu).

**Privacy:** All of the information we collect will be confidential. We will not record your name or any information that could be used to identify you.

**Explanation of Risks:** The risks to this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

**Explanation of Benefits:** This research study will provide information that may be used to improve and enhance educational leaders' professional social media practices.

**Questions About Your Rights:** If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at 660-543-4621. If you would like to participate, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep.

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Participant Signature, Date

Appendix D

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Amie Breshears. I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri Columbia in Education, Leadership and Policy Analysis. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am required to conduct research. My research is studying how rural K-12 educational leaders are using social media professionally in their duties across the school district.

I will use your responses on this questionnaire to help me understand how exactly this is taking place. This information will be compiled with data received from interviews, focus group sessions, and documentation and will assist me in getting the complete picture of rural principals' social media use. This questionnaire should take you about 5-10 minutes to complete.

**Please circle or write your response.**

1. What is your age range?

13-15 years                      16-17 years                      18+ years

2. Do you have internet access at home?

Yes                                      No

3. If you have internet access at home, please choose the type.

Dial-up      Satellite              DSL              Mobile hotspot              Broadband              Other

4. Do you have mobile internet access through a smartphone, tablet, or other device?

Yes                                      No

5. Do you use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)?

Yes                                      No

6. If you do use social media, please circle all types of social media that you use. Please add any not listed:

Facebook Twitter              Snapchat              Instagram              Tumblr  
Google+ Vine              Wanelo              Pinterest              Kik  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many hours per day do you spend using social media?

0                      1-2                      3-4                      5+

8. How many hours per week do you spend using social media?

0                      1-5                      6-10                      10-14                      15-19                      20+

9. Do your teachers use social media in the classroom to help you learn?

Yes                                      No

10. Do you use social media in the classroom to help you learn?

Yes

No

11. Why do you use social media? Please circle all reasons that apply. Please add any reasons not listed:

Stay in touch with friends/family

Hang out with friends/family

Share and get news/ information/photos

Connect with others who like what I like

Complete school assignments/homework

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is a very important part of this research.*

We need help with further research. If you are able and willing to meet with a small group for no more than one hour and take part in a conversation about the impact of educational leaders' social media use, please fill out the following contact information. This research is impossible without your help. Thank you for participating!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Other phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Amie Breshears. I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri Columbia in Education, Leadership and Policy Analysis. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am required to conduct research. My research is studying how rural K-12 educational leaders are using social media professionally in their duties across the school district.

I will use your responses on this questionnaire to help me understand how exactly this is taking place. This information will be compiled with data received from interviews, focus group sessions, and documentation and will assist me in getting the complete picture of rural principals' social media use. This questionnaire should take you about 5-10 minutes to complete.

**Please circle or write your response.**

1. What is your age range?

18-25 yrs    26-35 yrs    36-45 yrs    46-55 yrs    55+ yrs

2. What is your highest education level attained?

GED                                      High School diploma                      Associates Degree  
Bachelor's Degree                      Master's Degree

3. Which building do your children attend? Please circle all that apply.

St. Paul Pre-K              St. Paul Elementary              St. Paul High School

4. How many years have you lived in the St. Paul area?

1-5 yrs              6-10 yrs              11-20 yrs              21-30 yrs              30+ yrs

5. Do you have internet access at home?

Yes                      No

6. If you have internet access at home, please choose the type.

Dial-up              Satellite              DSL              Mobile hotspot              Broadband              Other

7. Do you have mobile internet access through a smartphone, tablet, or other device?

Yes                      No

8. Do you use social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)?

Yes                      No

9. If you do use social media, please circle all types of social media that you use. Please add any not listed:

Facebook    Twitter              LinkedIn              Instagram              Tumblr

Google+    Vine                      Pinterest              Kik

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. How many hours per day do you spend using social media?

0                      1-2                      3-4                      5+

11. How many hours per week do you spend using social media?

0                      1-5                      6-10                      10-14                      15-19                      20+

12. Why do you use social media? Please circle all reasons that apply. Please add any not listed:

Stay in touch with friends/family

Share and get news/ information/photos

Connect with others who like what I like

For professional learning

To complete my job duties

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is a very important part of this research. Please send the survey back to school with your child. Thank you again!*

We need help with further research. If you are able and willing to meet with a small group for no more than one hour and take part in a conversation about the impact of educational leaders' social media use, please fill out the following contact information. This research is impossible without your help. Thank you for participating!



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Other phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix F

FACULTY/STAFF QUESTSIONNAIRE

My name is Amie Breshears. I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri Columbia in Education, Leadership and Policy Analysis. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am required to conduct research. My research is studying how rural K-12 educational leaders are using social media professionally in their duties across the school district.

I will use your responses on this questionnaire to help me understand how exactly this is taking place. This information will be compiled with data received from interviews, focus group sessions, and documentation and will assist me in getting the complete picture of rural principals' social media use. This questionnaire should take you about 5-10 minutes to complete.

**Please circle or write your response.**

1. What is your age range?

18-25 yrs    26-35 yrs                      36-45 yrs                      46-55 yrs                      55+ yrs

2. What is your highest education level attained?

GED                                      High School diploma                      Associates Degree

Bachelor's Degree                      Master's Degree

3. What is your job within the district?

Classroom Teacher                      Paraprofessional

'Other' Certified Teacher                      Support Staff

4. If you are a classroom teacher or paraprofessional, in which building do you teach?

Elementary                                      High School

5. How many years have you worked in education?

1-5 yrs    6-10 yrs                      11-20 yrs                      21-30 yrs                      30+ yrs

6. Do you have internet access at home?

Yes                      No

7. Do you have mobile internet access through a smartphone, tablet, or other device?

Yes                      No

8. Do you use social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)?

Yes                      No

9. If you do use social media, please circle all types of social media that you use. Please add any not listed:

Facebook    Twitter            LinkedIn            Instagram            Tumblr  
Google+    Vine                    Pinterest            Kik

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. How many hours per day do you spend using social media?

0            1-2            3-4            5+

11. How many hours per week do you spend using social media?

0            1-5            6-10            10-14            15-19            20+

12. Why do you use social media? Please circle all reasons that apply. Please add any not listed:

- Stay in touch with friends/family
- Share and get news/ information/photos
- Connect with others who like what I like
- For professional learning
- To complete my job duties

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is a very important part of this research.*

We need help with further research. If you are able and willing to meet with a small group for no more than one hour and take part in a conversation about the impact of educational leaders' social media use, please fill out the following contact information. This research is impossible without your help. Thank you for participating!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Other phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G Interview Protocol

### **OPENING:**

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Amie Breshears, a doctoral student at the University of Missouri Columbia in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. I am completing this research study as part of the requirements for earning my Ed.D degree. This research is a qualitative study of how rural K-12 educational leaders are using social media professionally in their duties across the school district.

I will use your feedback to help me understand how exactly this is taking place. This information will be compiled with data received from other interviews, focus group sessions, and documentation and will assist me in getting the complete picture of rural principals' social media use.

I will be taking notes throughout our conversation to ensure that I accurately document your statements. May I have your permission to do so?

Participation in this program evaluation is voluntary. At any time you may withdraw from the interview with no consequences. I will be audio recording the interview for transcription purposes. I will be transcribing our conversation and you may review the transcription of the interview if you desire. All you will need to do is request the copy of the interview or designate that you want to approve the transcription prior to our using your data.

I am working under the direction of Dr. Sandy Hutchinson at the University of Central Missouri. You may contact her if there are any concerns related to the process or result to this interview. Her number is 660-543-4720. Are you prepared to proceed with this interview and do you voluntarily agree to the conditions explained to you? If so, please sign the form that you have. I will keep a copy and the other copy is for your records. The interview will last no longer than 60 minutes. Are you ready to proceed?

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

1. What has been your professional experience with social media?
2. What was your rationale for using social media professionally?
3. How do you see your social media use affecting you professionally?
4. How do you see your social media use affecting others?
5. What outcomes are necessary for you to deem your social media use successful?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your professional social media use?

**THANK YOU:**

Thank you for allowing me to interview you today. I appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule to offer me your insights into educational leaders' professional social media use. This information will help to develop a high quality research study.

## Appendix H Focus Group Protocol

### **OPENING:**

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Amie Breshears, a doctoral student at the University of Missouri Columbia in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. I am completing this research study as part of the requirements for earning my Ed.D degree. This research is a qualitative study of how rural K-12 educational leaders are using social media professionally in their duties across the school district.

I will use your feedback to help me understand how exactly this is taking place. This information will be compiled with data received from interviews, other focus group sessions, and documentation and will assist me in getting the complete picture of rural principals' social media use.

I will be taking notes throughout our conversation to ensure that I accurately document your statements. May I have your permission to do so?

Participation in this program evaluation is voluntary. At any time you may withdraw from the interview with no consequences. I will be audio recording the interview for transcription purposes. I will be transcribing our conversation and you may review the transcription of the interview if you desire. All you will need to do is request the copy of the interview or designate that you want to approve the transcription prior to our using your data.

I am working under the direction of Dr. Sandy Hutchinson at the University of Central Missouri. You may contact her if there are any concerns related to the process or result to this interview. Her number is 660-543-4720. Are you prepared to proceed with the focus group and do you voluntarily agree to the conditions explained to you? If so, please sign the form that you have. I will keep a copy and the other copy is for your records. This focus group will last no longer than 60 minutes. Are you ready to proceed?

### **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS:**

7. Please tell us who you are and what your position is within the school district or your relationship to the district.
8. What has been your personal experience with social media, including your educational or business/professional life?
9. What has been your experience with your principal's social media use?
10. How has your principal's social media use influenced you personally?
11. How has your principal's social media use influenced others?

12. What do you think about your principal's social media use?

13. If you had a chance to give your principal advice about social media use, what advice would you give?

14. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**THANK YOU:**

Thank you for allowing me to interview you today. I appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule to offer me your insights into educational leaders' professional social media use. This information will help to develop a high quality research study.





**Campus Institutional Review Board**  
University of Missouri-Columbia

485 McReynolds Hall  
Columbia, MO 65211-1150  
PHONE: (573) 882-9585  
FAX: (573) 884-0663

November 11, 2014

Principal Investigator: Breshears, Amie L.  
Department: ELPA

Your Application to project entitled *An Exploration of a Rural Arkansas K-12 Educational Leader's Professional Social Media Use* was reviewed and approved by the MU Campus Institutional Review Board according to terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	1214034
Initial Application Approval Date	November 11, 2014
IRB Expiration Date	November 11, 2015
Level of Review	Expedited
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Expedited Categories	45 CFR 46.110.(f)(6) 45 CFR 46.110.(f)(7)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Child Category	45 CFR 46.404 Child Assent for Capable Children
Type of Consent	Parental Consent (One Parent) Waiver of Documentation Written Consent

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems, serious adverse events, and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Continuing Review Report must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date.
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize the IRB stamped consent documents and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eIRB.

If you have any questions, please contact the Campus IRB at 573-882-9585 or [umcresearchcibr@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcibr@missouri.edu).

Thank you,

Charles Borduin, PhD  
Campus IRB Chair

## VITA

Amie L. Breshears was born on July 10, 1973, in Manhattan, Kansas, the daughter of Everett Lynn and Sandra Mae Russell Bell. She grew up in rural Missouri, graduating from Warsaw High School in 1991. She received a B.A. in Biology with a Business Minor and an Environmental Studies Special Program (1996) and a Master's in Business Administration (1998) from Drury University in Springfield, Missouri. She received her Education Specialist Degree in Superintendency from the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Missouri, in 2007, followed by a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2015. Amie has been a banker, a business teacher, an elementary principal, a district transportation director, a high school assistant principal, and a high school principal.

Dr. Breshears and her husband, David, reside on a family farm near Warsaw, Missouri, with their three sons, Curtis, Benton, and Henry.