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Social Media as a Primary Means for Parent Involvement in Missouri Rural Schools:  
Secondary School Principals' and Superintendents' Perceptions

by

Justin Paul Copley

May 2019

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

Social Media as a Primary Means for Parent Involvement in Missouri Rural Schools:

Secondary School Principals' and Superintendents' Perceptions

by

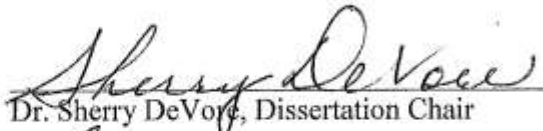
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**Declaration of Originality**

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study base solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college of university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Justin Paul Copley

Signature: Justin Paul Copley Date: 5-1-2019

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## **Abstract**

With a lack of research regarding the viability of social media use as a tool for learning in K-12 education, administrators are struggling to determine if this technology belongs in school settings (Piotrowski, 2015). Educators who have not reviewed current perceptions regarding technology may not use appropriate technology practices with students (Dietze & Kashin, 2013). Furthermore, since social media and technology use is an expected practice in classrooms, the responsibility of attending to this growing trend is assumed by school administration (Piotrowski, 2015). The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of school administrators in regard to social media as a primary means for parent involvement. The sample group selected for this study included 16 individuals from rural Missouri schools consisting of eight public school superintendents and assistant superintendents and eight secondary principals and assistant principals. Participants were asked interview questions to determine their perceptions of social media as a primary means of parental involvement. The interview questions were also posed to identify what social media platforms were currently being used as a means to increase or maintain an appropriate level of parent involvement. Results from this study indicated most administrators perceived social media to be an integral part of public education, communication, and parent-involvement. However, most administrators reported a lack of professional development opportunities for administrators and teachers specific to the use and implementation of social media as a means for parent involvement.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Educators around America's schools are accountable for meeting the academic needs of a diverse population of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In a 2010 publication by the U.S. Department of Education entitled *Diverse Learners*, former President Barack Obama stated:

Every child in America deserves a world-class education. Today, more than ever, a world-class education is a prerequisite for success. America was once the best educated nation in the world. A generation ago, we led all nations in college completion, but today, 10 countries have passed us. It is not that their students are smarter than ours. It is that these countries are being smarter about how to educate their students. And the countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow. (p. 3)

For many years, the importance and the need for parental involvement in education have been well recognized (Ravitch, 2016). Administrators, teachers, and parents are in universal agreement; different types of learning environments are a necessity to meet the diverse needs of 21st-century students, particularly in environments that include a wide range of digital tools (Grove, 2016).

Researchers over the last 30 years have cited the importance of parental involvement in the academic success of children (Epstein, 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Since learning experiences occur through life in many forms, learners need a wide range of experiences to develop their skills, dispositions, and abilities to succeed (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2017). A strong foundation of success for

learners is embedded in the learning that takes place out of school (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2017).

As students proceed through the different levels of their education, individual academic achievement is vital to the knowledge base, skills, and strategies required once out of high school. Why, then, are some students not achieving to their potential? One possibility might be that student achievement is affected by communication and parental involvement in school activities (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Social media has become the way for individuals to communicate and interact. According to Grove (2016), there has been a rapid decline in the amount of parents who believe more formal forms of communication, such as face-to-face meetings with teachers, are the most effective way to share student information. Grove (2016) also reported that parents are increasingly accepting digital methods as a form of communication.

The background of this study is presented in Chapter One, in addition to the rationale and application of the theoretical framework. The statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions are offered. To provide support for the worthiness of the research, the significance of the study is detailed. Completing the chapter is the definition of key terms.

### **Background of the Study**

Researchers have established parent involvement has a substantial impact on student success and academic achievement in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Muller, 2018). The impact has been of such significance that legislation, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), has mandated parental engagement and tied campus

funding to the mandates of the act, causing the topic of parent involvement and achievement to be a high stakes issue for many schools and districts (Marchetti, Wilson, & Dunham, 2016). Additionally, McNeal (2014) determined parent involvement reduces negative student behaviors in school-age children. In a study by Grove (2016) for Blackboard, parents and principals were increasingly interested in using digital tools and resources to facilitate more effective school-to-home communications.

The United States federal government has recognized the importance of parent involvement by identifying it as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In the 2004 publication of NCLB, *Parental Involvement: Title I, Part A Non-Regulatory Guidance*, the federal government defined parental involvement as parent participation in regular and meaningful two-way communication about student academic learning and in other school activities, including the following:

- Parents assisting their child's learning;
- Encouraging parents to be actively involved in the child's education at school;
- Parents as full partners in their child's education and appropriately being included in decision making and serving on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- Carrying out other activities including those described in section 118 of the ESEA Section 9101 (32). (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 32)

Jeynes (2017) urged researchers to continue research related to parent involvement specific to education in the 21st century. Not only is there a need for greater research, but there is a need for monitoring and evaluating parent involvement initiatives (Schueler, McIntyre, & Gehlbach, 2017).

The degree of impact and effectiveness of an initiative could vary significantly depending on the quantity of resources and the quality devoted to the initiative (Arvizu, 2017). Jeynes (2017) stated, “New questions on family engagement are being asked that even 10 years ago few would have ever imagined. It is important to embrace these developments rather than resist them” (p. 13). This current study includes an examination of those developments to qualify the information gathered through elicitation of administrator perceptions.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Regoniel (2016) described the conceptual framework as the researcher’s understanding of how variables, factors, and concepts all connect to one another and map out the entirety of a study. The framework for this study was interpretivism, and the interpretivist approach was utilized throughout the interviews and observations of secondary school principals and superintendents. The identification of commonalities and differences among the perceptions of principals and superintendents were the “intent of an interpretivist” (Butin, 2009, p. 184), since the interpretivist researcher “documents the perspective being investigated” (Butin, 2009, p. 60).

According to Lindlof (2017), the interpretivist generates credible knowledge through prolonged immersion in actual social settings and through extensive interaction

with the members of those groups. Butin (2009) further explained an interpretivist “does not attempt to adjudicate between competing truth claims in order to determine the one best answer; rather interpretivism suggests that all one can do is accurately and thoroughly document the perspective being investigated” (p. 60). An advantage of using the interpretivist framework is the researcher is able to focus on one single phenomenon and is able to gain a higher level of understanding of the complexity of the matter at hand, rather than trying to understand the entire population. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Another advantage of this framework is the researcher is able to use personal interviews, which provide authentic information related to the topic of research (Pham, 2018). Although there are advantages, there are limitations that exist due to the interpretivist framework that focuses solely on the phenomenon within the complexity of the context (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). This disadvantage also lends to the inability to scientifically verify and validate the usefulness of research (Pham, 2018).

### **Statement of the Problem**

A lack of parent involvement continues to persist even after research suggests the involvement of parents in their children’s activities compares directly to academic success (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016). Additionally, there is a lack of research among educational leaders regarding practices and perceptions of social media and its ability to involve parents in education and communication (Holmes, 2016). Although most administrators believe effective communication is of utmost importance, there continues to be a concern by stakeholders that leaders need to improve communication (Hall, 2006).



To address parent involvement, Grove (2016) found schools and districts are increasingly adopting digital tools to both engage parents in students' lives and to facilitate timely, efficient, and effective communications with parents. Hollenczer and Schneider (2006) offered, "In successful organizations, members need to be well informed, have the capacity to understand one another, trust that what they are learning is truthful, and know that their ideas are sought and respected" (para. 4). Minero (2017) found, "There is a growing reliance on tech-based communication which shows that digital outreach can help parents stay informed, become more involved, and be better positioned to help with kids' schoolwork—all factors driving better student engagement and performance" (p. 2). Additionally, minimal peer-reviewed literature exists regarding the specific support provided for administrators and teachers to ensure effective use of social media as a tool for learning (Piotrowski, 2015). If educators have not analyzed their current perceptions regarding technology, they may not use appropriate practices with students and parents (Dietze & Kashin, 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify and categorize perceptions of secondary school principals and superintendents on the use of social media as a primary means for encouraging parent involvement, rather than relying exclusively on traditional methods. Furthermore, the purpose of conducting this study is to identify specific social media outlets used by secondary school principals and district office administrators, as well as the types of information or activities communicated through these methods. The research questions were created following an extensive review of current literature surrounding

the topics of social media and parent involvement. With 4.021 billion Internet users and 3.196 billion social media users, it is important to consider this as a useful platform (Chaffey, 2018, para. 3).

**Research questions.** The following research questions guided this study:

1. Which social media outlets are currently used, and what delivery methods are used by secondary school principals and superintendents?
2. What perceptions exist among secondary school principals regarding social media for communicating with parents as opposed to other traditional methods?
3. What perceptions exist among superintendents regarding social media for communicating with parents as opposed to other traditional methods?
4. What types of information and activities are communicated by secondary school principals through social media outlets?

### **Significance of Study**

According to Creswell (2009), the significance of the study “creates a clear rationale for the importance of the study. . . to convey the importance of the problem for different groups that may profit from reading and using the study” (p. 107). There are few studies with data or information that exist on the frequency of social media use by school principals and superintendents to enhance parent involvement in the United States. Additionally, there are minimal studies on the effect of social media use and its impact on parent involvement. With that said, the study will expand the body of research that does exist in regard to parent involvement.

Students in the United States are falling behind students in other countries academically (Duncan & Murnane, 2016). The academic gap among the students in the United States and other countries is steadily increasing, according to a study by Desilver (2017). Furthermore, Desilver (2017) stated the results of the study would not likely surprise people as only 29% of Americans rated K-12 education as above average (para. 7).

Why are these students not as academically successful as students in other countries? One explanation is the lack of parent involvement (Kim & Bryan, 2017). Children whose parents fail to become involved in their education often do not benefit academically and socially as significantly as those children whose parents are involved (Kim & Bryan, 2017).

The results of this study may provide administrators, teachers, and parents with data to make informed decisions and with an approach to handling online communications (“Using Social,” 2018). Educators will be able to use the data collected to identify attitudes and practices regarding initial implementation or improvement in developing and providing opportunities for digital parental involvement within their districts. Parents may use the findings of this study to guide their involvement efforts in their child’s education. With educators and parents working together to improve parental involvement, it is anticipated the result will be evident in the degree of student academic achievement.

## Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

**Administrator.** The term *administrator* refers to a school leader who “is responsible for the goal setting, encouraging teacher participation in decision making, ensuring a healthy and orderly school climate, and ensuring the desired student outcomes are met” (Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2016, p. 5).

**Brand.** Brand is the image that businesses create to emotionally connect with customers to create, build, and maintain lifelong relationships (Wheeler, 2017). Brand communicates the intrinsic quality of the product or service and reassures the stakeholders they have made the right choice (Wheeler, 2017)

**Interactive technology.** Interactive technology refers to devices and digital materials including desktop computers, digital cameras, SMART Boards, tablets, smartphones, software programs, applications (apps), e-books, the Internet, and other tools utilized in an instructional activity to increase engagement, creativity, and social interaction (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012).

**Parent involvement.** Patel and Agbenyega (2016) recognized parent involvement as “the participation of parents in every facet of children’s education and development from birth to adulthood” (p. 8).

**Rural.** According to the National Center for Health Statistics and the Missouri 2016-2017 Biennial Report for rural classification (2017), urban counties are defined as those with a population density of greater than 150 persons per square mile (p. 6). Using

this statistic, 14 Missouri counties are urban, and the remaining 101 counties in Missouri are rural (Biennial Report, 2017, p. 6).

**Social media outlets.** Social media outlets are defined as tools that allow the user to engage with different forms of sociality on the Internet (Fuchs, 2017). Social media sites may include Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Messenger, WeChat, Instagram, QQ, Tumblr, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Baidu, Wikipedia, Snapchat, Weibo, and Vine (Lua, 2019)

**Stakeholders.** Stakeholders include a large group of individuals who have a vested interest or investment in the school in one fashion or another (Hollenczer & Schneider, 2006). In this study, stakeholders included students, school staff, parents, guardians, and community members.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

The following limitations were identified in this study:

**Instrument.** The interview questions used in this study were created by the researcher.

**Sample demographics.** Purposeful sampling was utilized for this study. A limitation of purposeful sampling “includes nonrandom selection of participants, that is to say the researcher is subjective and bias in choosing the subjects of the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The sample encompassed only selected educators within school districts in rural Missouri. The selected schools may not be representative of all districts in Missouri or other regions of the state. Also, the schools included in the interviews had a range of grade configurations within buildings.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.
2. The participants answered questions based upon their experiences.

**Social media use and knowledge.** A limitation of the study included the minimal use of social media in the rural schools and the measurement of effectiveness by school administrators in regard to the practices used in their school by building-level administrators and teachers. In a study by Greenhow (2017), she noted the least common type of study conducted about social media was the research that involved the effectiveness of the technology used and how it improved student learning.

### **Summary**

In recent years, social media has influenced school culture in many positive and negative facets (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). The impact of social media to the culture within a school comes from the amount of time social media is used by all stakeholders (Holmes, 2016). Holmes (2016) described how speed of communication and the ability to reach many people are also impactful. Social media has the power to redesign school-home communications and parental involvement in student learning (Goodall, 2016).

Administrators in public education must be knowledgeable about the benefits and drawbacks of using social networking tools, the planning component involved for effective social networking use, and the impact professional development has on developing teachers (Huffman, 2013). In addition, administrators must also be

knowledgeable about the level of usage of social media by district staff members (Day, 2017).

Chapter One was presented as an introduction to the study. Background information on the topic was offered. The background of the study and statement of the problem were presented to provide evidence supporting the connection between parent involvement and social media and to determine the need for further research regarding the use of social media and its specific impact on parent involvement. The conceptual framework was explained, and the statement of the problem was detailed. Completing the chapter were the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, as well as limitations, assumptions, and definitions of key terms.

In Chapter Two, a review of literature is presented to include information on important topics related to the study. Chapter Two includes a closer examination of the conceptual framework. The main topics of discussion include types of parent involvement, engaging families and community in schools, social media uses in schools, parent perceptions of parent involvement, and public relations, possible obstacles of social media and parent involvement, teacher perceptions of parent involvement, student perceptions of parent involvement, marketing and basic information pertaining to parent involvement, and social media.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Chapter Two contains a review of recent literature to further explore the topic of parent involvement and social media. Specific to parent involvement, topics included in this study are types of parent involvement, ways to increase parent involvement, parent involvement and academic achievement, obstacles of parent involvement, and perceptions of stakeholders. Specific to social media, topics included in this review are types of social media, social media compared to social networking, corporate and business utilization, educational utilization, benefits of social media, obstacles to social media, perceptions of stakeholders, social media policy, and tips for school administrators.

### **Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement in education is a subject that is of growing interest with legislation defining parent rights in education (Topping & Wolfendale, 2017). Parent involvement includes the development of a clear understanding of the needs of the school as parents, the community, and educators (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parent involvement provides not only an opportunity for a teacher and parent to discuss academic and behavior performance, but it also provides an opportunity to share strategies that are successful in the home or in the school (Ahmad, Hassan, Ahmad, Lay Nee, & Othman, 2016).

Parent involvement is not linear and unilateral, but rather moves in both directions between school and home (Crosnoe, 2012). According to Hong, Yoo, You, and Wu (2010), parental interest in being involved not only comes through parental expectations but from behaviors such as parental values, communication, and reinforcement of



positive outcomes in academics. Parent involvement in school has proven to forecast all students' success, including students with disabilities, during in-school experiences, as well as post-secondary outcomes (Hirano & Rowe, 2016).

### **Types of Parent Involvement**

**Traditional parent involvement.** According to Fan and Chen (2001), a clear and consistent definition of traditional parent involvement is not evident when it comes to operational terms. Nonetheless, parental involvement traditionally includes activities, behaviors, or expectations of the parent that inspire the child to achieve academic success (Epstein, 2018). Parental involvement in school activities can occur in several forms (Muller, 2018). Involvement may include participation in parent-teacher conferences, attending or assisting with academic events, serving on school committees, volunteering in the classroom or on class field trips, participating actively in the school's Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), regular monitoring, or assisting the student with homework (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Additional parent involvement activities include parents assisting students in the selection of courses and discussing day-to-day school activities with the student (Carranza, You, Chuon, & Hudley, 2009).

Fan and Chen (2001) identified four groups into which these involvement activities can be grouped. These include basic parental obligations, school-home communications, parental involvement at school, and parental involvement in the learning activities of the child at home (Fan & Chen, 2001). Fan and Chen (2001) asserted all these activities operationally define parental involvement regarding education, but the inconsistent nature of the definition is responsible for the variable

findings on the topic. Evidence obtained through research proves the dimensions of findings relative to parent involvement are unequal, as some of the dimensions have more noticeable benefits than others (Hong et al., 2010).

Harris and Goodall (2007) described parental involvement by delineating the various types of involvements into two groups. The first group includes the parental involvements that contribute to the running of the school but have little influence on student academic achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007). The second group includes the parental involvements that directly influence student academic achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

Epstein (2018) categorized parent involvement into different categories. These six categories of involvement describe how parents, teachers, and communities can increase their ability to stay informed and involved in the education of their children (Epstein, 2018). Epstein (2018) describes the six types of school-related opportunities for parental involvement: parenting: assisting parents in child-rearing skills; communicating: school-parent communication; volunteering: involving parents in school volunteer opportunities; student learning at home: involving parents in home-based learning; decision making: involving parents in school decision-making, and collaborating with the community: involving parents in school-community collaborations (Epstein, 2018).

**Cyber involvement.** Another type of parent involvement is cyber involvement (Borup, 2016). There has been a significant increase in students taking some or all of their courses online, which places a greater responsibility on parents to be involved in their child's education (Borup, 2016). According to Constantino (2016), employing

methods of involvement that extend student and teacher relationship-building beyond a brick and mortar building can substantially and critically contribute to the long-term success and education of children. While not a replacement for human engagement, technology and the growing interest in cyber involvement can play an important role in extending the efforts of school personnel and parents to connect with each other (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012). Constantino (2016) listed several examples of tools for involvement, including Facebook, Google Docs, Google Hangouts, Twitter, and Instagram. These tools are discussed further in this chapter.

### **Increasing Parent Involvement**

School administrators and teachers who offer personalized areas of support to parents, such as classes that focus on literacy, are more likely to engage the parents in their children's learning (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Teachers need to recognize that regardless of income, ethnicity, or educational level, all parents are concerned about their child's academic performance and wish for them to perform well (Mapp, 2003). The school, therefore, needs to design programs which can support families and help them guide their children in the learning process (Strategies for Community Engagement, 2014). Additionally, relationships between school districts and parents should be developed through trust among the parents, educators, and other community members (Herman & Reinke, 2017). According to Herman and Reinke (2017), stakeholder involvement is increased when communication is frequent and effective between the school district and stakeholders.

## **Parent Involvement and Academic Achievement**

Findings from numerous studies have substantiated the positive correlation between parental involvement in school activities and student academic achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hong et al., 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). There are several dimensions of parent involvement and how parent involvement is perceived as a benefit to student academic achievement (Carranza, You, Chuon, & Hudley, 2009). Therefore, it is worth noting, when evaluating the benefits of parent involvement, a multi-dimensional approach is necessary (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hong et al., 2010).

Fan (2001) pointed to communication and volunteering to assist with school activities as involvements that contribute inconsistently, unnoticeably, or even negatively in relation to academic achievement. On the other hand, parental aspiration for their child to succeed academically is rated very effective in consistently contributing noticeable effects on academic attainment (Hong et al., 2010). Hong et al. (2010), as well as other researchers, reviewed different types of parent involvement strategies and the impact of these strategies on academic achievement.

For instance, McNeal (2014) found communication between the child and the parent enhances a higher performance in science subjects, while the parent's involvement in PTO had an almost unnoticeable effect on the same. In the publication, *Every Parent Matters*, the main idea was that parental involvement contributes significantly to the educational results of students, and parents have an enormous part in raising educational standards for their children (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Parents who

are more involved and engaged in the education of their children, it is increasingly likely for their children to succeed (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). As already evidenced, schools that include and engage families and the community in the educational process have a higher level of student academic performance than districts that do not (Epstein, 2018).

In a study by Henderson and Mapp (2002), engaging parents and the community in school activities was described as a strategy receiving a large amount of attention, especially in lower-performing schools in various states. The long-term goal of efforts to engage parents and the community in school activities is to improve academic performance, yet other benefits to the school district also result through the development of important relationships at an early age (Ma, Shen, Krenn, Hu, S., & Yuan, 2016).

Most parents desire to see their children excel academically, although the levels of commitment to ensure this occurs vary from one parent to another (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Furthermore, parent support for basic psychological needs has proved to be the most substantial measurement of academic motivation (Ricard & Pelletier, 2016). Additionally, there are lower rates of school incompleteness and better self confidence among students when teachers have better classroom management and when parents participate more (Moon & Hofferth, 2016). School administration and teachers should take the responsibility to build political and social connections to the family to ensure no child is left behind in the academic process (Strategies for Community Engagement, 2014).

## **Obstacles of Parent Involvement**

The academic success of students is a challenge, and administrators, educators, and parents must work together to conduct productive partnership activities to identify and remove obstacles that hinder parental involvement and collaboration (Epstein et al., 2018). Concern over academic achievement of students has in some cases been a battle between educators and parents in which each party blames the other for poor performance (Carlbaum, 2016). Parent involvement in education is important for improving poor performance and enhancing student outcomes, and educators must search for ways to include families; however, the approach and practices that are used lack coordination and consideration of status (Garbacz, 2016).

Parental involvement is profoundly linked to socioeconomic status, as well as a parents' experience in education (Agirdag, Hemmerechts, & Kavadias, 2016). Socioeconomic status can greatly influence a child's academic achievement level and educational opportunities in school (Reardon, 2016). Harris and Goodall (2008) used a case study methodology to identify and examine the importance of parental involvement to academic achievement and to determine obstacles that hinder this involvement. The results of the study revealed as much as lower socioeconomic status hinders parental involvement, it is the schools that have placed a major barrier between themselves and these parents (Harris & Goodall, 2008).

The barrier stems from the teachers' perceptions of parental involvement (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Many times, teachers consider parents who participate in school activities on a regular basis as being influential on academic achievement due to their

higher social status (Harris & Goodall, 2008). However, Harris and Goodall (2008) stressed it is parental involvement through one-on-one engagement with child and teacher that has a positive outcome on academic achievement of the student.

### **Social Media**

Social media is a universal phenomenon (Elhai, Levine, Dvorak, & Hall, 2016; Pittman, & Reich, 2016; Quinn, 2016). Social media has become an important and applicable means of assisting and supporting activities and communications among peers, consumers, and organizations by thinking outside the box of time and space constraints (Kizgin, Jamal, Dey, & Rana, 2018). According to Spencer (2018), social media network sites have grown considerably as people “no longer need a personal handshake or face-to-face meeting” (para. 3). Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social media network sites as:

...web-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. (p. 211)

Facebook has become the most popular social networking site in the world (Beyens, Frison, & Eggermont, 2016; Jafarkarimi, Sim, A. T. H., Saadatdoost, R., & Hee, 2016; Steers, 2016). Holmes (2016) described how social media has changed communication, “Social media has changed the communication model from hierarchical to a more horizontal model where many can contribute and share quickly and widely” (Holmes, 2016, p. 12). Klososky (2012) described this medium as a way for people and entrepreneurs the means to communicate and collaborate with each other.

According to Smith (2016), the social media efforts of every school should begin with Facebook, which provides the best means to link the visitors (parents) and broadcast new trends and activities. Before implementation of any social media platform, it is important to consider the demographics of social media users (Bergstrom, 2017):

- Eighty-three percent (83%) of Millennials are on Facebook.
  - Eight-four percent (84%) of 30-49 year-olds use Facebook.
  - Over half of Instagram users are between the ages of 18-29.
  - Eighty-one percent (81%) of Millennials check Twitter at least once per day
- (para. 3)

Smith (2016) described social media as platforms for changing business globally. Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others are important for businesses to stay competitive (Smith, 2016). Kwayu, Lal, and Abubakre (2018), in their article, *Enhancing Organizational Competitiveness Via Social Media —A Strategy as Practice Perspective*, argued, “the affordances, popularity and pervasive use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have made these platforms attractive to organizations for enhancing their competitiveness and creating value” (p. 1).

### **Types of Social Media**

Social media can be classified under six categories, which include collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Collaborative projects include wikis and Wikipedia, which are a collection of collaboratively authored web pages that help facilitate group projects (Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016). Blogs, such as Tumblr, are a



format of publishing brief articles to a website (Bruns, 2017). You Tube is an example of content communities, which allow users to share online multi-media materials (Manetti & Bellucci, 2016). Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace are online social platforms used to communicate and interact with others (Baker & Algorta, 2016). Virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds are computer-based simulated environments in which multi-users can participate and experience a virtual world (Chow, 2016). Schachter (2011) stated:

Whether communicating with parents and the public, enhancing classroom instruction and staff development, or rallying school spirit, administrators and teachers are beginning to leverage the inter-active and multimedia features of social networks that have the added advantage of being widely and easily accessible—and free. (p. 27)

The term social media has multiple meanings and the definition of different types of social media has been contested and is not always clear as to what tools, platforms, social phenomena's count as social media (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2017).

### **Social Media Compared to Social Networking**

Social media is described as the use of web-based and mobile technologies to reach out and communicate with other humans, create relationships, build trust, and be available when people in these relationships are ready to communicate, purchase a product or service, or offer a product or service (Safko, 2010). Social networking is defined as a popular online communication structure among adolescents and adults who are joined by a common interest (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008).

It would be appropriate to claim social networking is a subcomponent of social media (Cohn, 2018). Some users believe that social media and social networking can be used interchangeably, which is a misconception (Cohn, 2018).

Social media is a comprehensive term and includes a group of Internet-based applications of media such as videos, blogs, and interactive systems (Grover & Stewart, 2010). Social media is a medium where people can transfer human knowledge that begins in social relations in society (Fuchs, 2017). Social media allows users to share content and information that other users can share and see with other online mediums (Cohn, 2018).

The main objective of social networking is to connect and communicate with adolescents and emerging adults (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). The foundational component of social networking is essentially the human interaction side (Cohn, 2018). Social networks are groups of people that are connected by a system and “one or more types of interdependencies: these include shared values, visions, and ideas; social contacts; kinship; conflict; financial exchanges; trade; joint membership in organizations; and group participation in events, among numerous other aspects of human relationships” (Serrat, 2017, para. 3).

Users fill in their profiles on social media platforms and other adolescents or adults will interact with them based on the personal details they disclose (Cohn, 2018). Social networking can be for the workplace or for personal reasons (Bennett et al., 2010). Furthermore, social networking can facilitate workplace productivity by increasing the effectiveness of communication and collaboration of employees (Bennett et al., 2010).

According to Coyle and Vaughan (2008), social networks and the need to communicate are both universal human conditions.

When comparing both social media and social networking, there are commonalities (Cohn, 2018). One commonality of both social media and social networking is that both present opportunities for new forms of communication and commerce between marketers and consumers (Miller & Lammas, 2010). The basic difference between the two is that social media assists individuals to make the connection and social networking improves that connection (Cohn, 2018). In the article, *Signed Networks in Social Media*, Leskovec, Huttenlocher, and Kleinberg (2010) described the relationship between social media and social networks:

Relations between users on social media sites often reflect a mixture of positive (friendly) and negative (antagonistic) interactions. In contrast to the bulk of research on social networks that has focused almost exclusively on positive interpretations of links between people, we study how the interplay between positive and negative relationships affects the structure of on-line social networks.  
(p. 1)

Although similar, social networking and social media are not the same (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Kuss and Griffiths (2017) described the research of social networking and social media as having methodological problems with the research to date.

### **Corporate and Business Utilization of Social Media**

Corporate use of social media for advertising, public relations, and communication has increased dramatically over the last 10 years (Tienhaara, 2016).

According to Hampton (2016), “Social media is being used more and more by businesses, the healthcare industry, and by government agencies to communicate information and get feedback from their target audiences” (p. 80). Professional and corporate benefits of social media include sharing of information, promotional marketing, and support services (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017; Dwivedi, Rana, & Alryalat, 2017; Kapoor, Dwivedi, & Piercy, 2016; Plume, Dwivedi, & Slade, 2016). Fuchs (2017) described social media as a collection of software that provides people and groups of people the opportunity to gather, communicate, and collaborate with each other.

Furthermore, social media tools enable professionals to promote events (Alryalat, Rana, Sahu, Dwivedi, & Tajvidi, 2017). Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) defined the trend:

Traditionally, consumers used the Internet to simply expand content: they read it, they watched it, and they used it to buy products and services. Increasingly, however, consumers are utilizing platforms—such as content sharing sites, blogs, social networking, and wikis—to create, modify, share, and discuss Internet content. This represents the social media phenomenon, which can now significantly impact a firm’s reputation, sales, and even survival (pp. 1-2).

Corporate use of social media for advertising, public relations, and communication has increased dramatically over the last 10 years (Tienhaara, 2016). According to Fulmer (2012), public relations professionals’ accomplishments depend on their ability to use social media as a means to reach their target market.

When considering social media as a tool for communication, three characteristics have reshaped corporations' identities:

1. Social media allows a company to maintain relationships with its stakeholders.
2. Social media are uncontrollable, meaning the information flow is multidirectional and hardly predictable, as social media users can easily create, share, and even alter information.
3. Social media makes all content easily searchable and accessible to anyone.

(Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017, para. 11)

Information from social media is a major influence on consumer decision making (Stephen, 2016). Business leaders in today's society recognize that social media is global in nature and is the voice of the company (Schaffer, 2013). In the book, *Social Media Marketing*, the authors stated:

Today the Internet is the backbone of our society. Widespread access to connected devices like personal computers, digital video and audio recorders, webcams, smartphones, and wearables like "smart watches" ensures that consumers who live in virtually any part of the world can create and share content. (Tuten & Solomon, 2017, p. 4)

Social networks represent unlimited opportunities for large and smaller business and their brand to grow the business (Smith, 2016). Social media platforms, the internet, and other technology sources provide businesses with the ability to connect with people in today's society (Klososky, 2012). Additionally, governmental agencies are using social media to reach people who have historically been disconnected and

disenfranchised from the world (Krzmarzick, 2013). According to Krzmarzick (2013), social media sites are used in the following ways:

1. Train employees to develop geographically dispersed stakeholders,
2. Inform the public about agency activities,
3. Organize groups to take action,
4. Elicit feedback on policy decisions,
5. Create efficiency in contracting and procurement, and
6. Disseminate multiple sources of content for ease of access. (p. 23)

There are other traditional methods of promoting involvement implemented through social media marketing.

Due to the limited amount of research on social media marketing and its applicability to education, the media techniques utilized in business are highlighted in this section. Methods which are considered more traditional include utilizing social media outlets such as Facebook. For example, a printed newsletter can be linked and shared through Facebook. These numerous traditional product promotion techniques can be successfully implemented in today's businesses (Geraghty, 2016). The following are facts about social media marketing:

- As of August 2017, two-thirds (67%) of Americans reported they get at least some of their news on social media—with two-in-ten doing so often (Gottfried & Shearer, 2107, para. 1)
- Seventy-seven (77%) of the United States population has at least one social media profile (Percentage of U.S. Population, 2019, para. 1)

- Fifty-two percent (52%) of social media marketers say that showing a return on investment is one of their top challenges (Content Marketing, 2017, p. 8)
- Ninety-one percent (91%) of social media users are accessing social channels via mobile devices (Forer, 2017, p. 8)
- One hundred million hours of video content is watched on Facebook daily (Extend the Reach, 2016, para. 1)
- Two hundred million people use Instagram stories per month (Richeter, 2017, para. 2)
- Originally launched in 2011, Snapchat has become one of the most popular social messaging and phot sharing apps worldwide, and there are 186 million active Snapchat users daily (Number of Daily, 2019, para. 1)

As social media marketing techniques continue to grow, Tuten and Solomon (2017) stated, “We need to add a fifth P: Participation” to the four Ps: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place. (para. 1) As social media changes the means by which buyers exist; social media platforms also change the way that marketers approach their business (Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

### **Education Utilization of Social Media**

The major benefit of using social media in the educational environment is the effortless ability to connect, convenience, and time it takes to access and delineate information (Huffman, 2013). Traditional education, without the use of social media, often appears to lack interaction and engagement (Kelm, 2011). Additionally, using social media allows for teachers, students, and parents to establish a new set of skills

(Huffman, 2013). Contrary to the aforementioned benefits, in a study by Lau (2017), social media that was used by students for nonacademic purposes negatively impacted academic performance.

Due to the rise of social media in education, the International Society for Technology Education has developed standards for school administrators to use as a guide for implementation (Tienhaara, 2016). Research shows that social media use has increased significantly for parents, but school leaders have been slow to use social media to engage parents in a strategic manner (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). With that said, there are minimal studies that measure the impact of social media on school public relations (Tienhaara, 2016).

If administrators want to view their school districts as businesses, they must take advantage of all the opportunities to use social media for attracting customers—parents (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). Using social media helps customers, the parents, feel more freely, or nonofficial, to communicate with the company—school. (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). In education, teachers have to look at learning through different lenses, making it exciting and applicable for students, and one method is to use social media technology for learning (Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016). Mitchell, Foulger, and Wetzal (2009) suggested schools use social media to:

1. Create a classroom website to provide classroom information and post assignments
2. Send individual positive emails to parents about a student's accomplishments or activities



3. Post photos on the classroom website focusing on the learning process
4. Provide at-home educational activities on the classroom website
5. Create a form on the classroom website to gather feedback and questions from parents
6. Establish and moderate discussion forums for parents and families
7. Send group emails to remind parents of upcoming events (pp. 46-49)

Administrators and those who are in charge of school programs can use social media to partner with families to support their children's development (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). School leaders must carefully consider the information that is provided and decide which best fits their needs and district goals (MODESE, 2016).

### **Benefits of Social Media**

Recently, social networking sites have become a major communication vehicle in all societies (Jafarkarimi et al., 2016). Cox (2012) communicated six themes that emerged from his study, *School Communications 2.0: A Social Media Strategy for K-12 Principals and Superintendents*:

1. More immediate and more frequent interactions between school superintendents and their stakeholders;
2. Greater transparency regarding decision-making and budgeting processes;
3. Impact on a school superintendent's personal and professional growth;
4. Stronger connections to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world;
5. Use is an expectation: it is no longer optional;

6. Accessing information from the superintendent in a multi-modal way. (p. 220)

The study by Cox (2012) was based on the views of superintendents who used multiple forms of social media to communicate with stakeholders. Social media provides many benefits including sharing information and instant engagement (Dany, 2017).

**Sharing information.** Individuals are connected to the internet for the majority of the day through mobile phones, computers, tablets, and other devices (Vorderer, Kromer, & Schneider, 2016). Furthermore, individuals express anxiety and emotional distress when they do not have internet access (Vorderer et al., 2016). The information that is shared between individuals ranges from personal photos to assignment information, political views, and much more (Eid & Al-Jabri, 2016).

With the internet and use of social media, individuals have the capacity to access, maintain, and share information and attitudes without much consideration (Townsend & Wallace, 2016). There are usage differences between different generations, which may indicate that some generations have not accepted social media as a valuable tool for communication (Fietkiewicz, Lins, Baran, & Stock, 2016).

**Instant engagement.** Many individuals share personal information and are connecting through social media, which also causes people to be engaged in someone else's personal story in real-time (Anderson, 2016). Due to the influence of online and instant engagement, students, parents and teachers are able to establish an online presence due to their ability to interact with others to build virtual communities

(Garner, 2016). Students have become the expert at engaging and interacting with others online (Dany, 2017).

### **Obstacles of Social Media**

In a 2014 study, Dron and Anderson concluded that educators are left to their own devices to determine how to use social media as a learning tool, because there is a lack of training and support related to pedagogical uses of social media. An additional barrier of using social media for parent involvement most frequently mentioned is the need for professional learning (Donelan, 2016). There is recent research that supports there is little peer-reviewed literature that exists regarding the support provided to administrators and other staff to ensure effective use of social media for involvement (Piotrowski, 2015). Now, K-12 educators are beginning to use social media as a tool for learning but with little guidance from research-based literature (Piotrowski, 2015). There are many aspects that need to be considered. Smith (2016) stated, “There are huge audiences who can reach towards your brand, and the brand owners (school) have to make sure that they are easily reachable and presentable” (para. 5).

In a 2016 study, Hampton concluded, “...the data indicated the study was approaching a statistically significant difference across age groups of perceptions of school administrators” (p. 82). Furthermore, Hampton (2016) determined:

With the popularity of social media in today’s society, the implementation of social media in education presents school administrators with concerns like privacy issues, cyber bullying, and the replication and manipulation of content posted on social media. The lack of knowledge and understanding of social

media by the older school administrators leads to their concerns on using social media outlets to communicate with their stakeholders. Whereas, the younger generation of school administrators utilizes and is comfortable with social media.

(p. 28)

As expressed by Hampton (2016), administrators who do not promote the use of social media are likely constrained by a lack of understanding of how social media can be implemented. These same administrators may have concerns about the ethics of implementing social media.

In the article, *Social Media Use and Teacher Ethics*, the authors described a challenge faced by administrators and teachers:

. . . schools are justified in taking action against teachers when evidence emerges from social networking sites that teachers are (a) doing something that is illegal, (b) doing something that reflects badly on their strictly professional judgments and attitudes, or (c) pursuing or contacting students in a way that makes the students uncomfortable. . . If teachers are not engaged in harmful activities, open teacher involvement with social networking may provide productive educational possibilities. (Warnick, Bitters, Falk, & Kim, 2016, para. 1)

Although there are mixed feelings about the advantages of social media compared to the challenges, some research has shown the challenges outweigh the advantages (Manca & Ranieri, 2016).

In the 2018 publication, *Social Media: The Good, the bad, and the Ugly*, the authors stated:

With seemingly endless benefits it is easy to overlook the disadvantages of social media, which are an increasingly important consideration as social media platforms continue to proliferate. Social media has facilitated a loss of ownership and control of content as private, public and institutional domains progressively overlap. There is a need for careful balancing of professionalism and freedom of speech to ensure that posts do not cause offence or harm reputations. (Gallacher, Barash, Howard, & Kelly, 2018, p. 419)

Considering threats can be facilitated through social media, governments are starting to introduce Internet social media surveillance (Kwon & Rao, 2017).

There is substantial research supporting the “bright side” of social media; however, it is increasingly observable there is a side of social media that presents many dangers (Baccarella, Wagner, Kietzmann, & McCarthy, 2018). Examples of these dangers include cyberbullying, addictive use, trolling, online witch hunts, fake news, and privacy abuse (Baccarella et al., 2018). Other dangers that have presented ethical dilemmas include teacher use of social networking sites, such as Facebook, has presented some ethical dilemmas for policy makers (Warnick et al., 2016).

### **Stakeholder Perceptions of Parent Involvement and Social Media**

Some educators believe parents have the responsibility to mold their children toward academic achievement, while on the other hand, some parents believe this is the teachers’ responsibility (Hess, 2017). Hong et al. (2010) asserted the measurement of parental involvement includes different dimensions such as parental aspirations, interests, attitudes, expectations, and beliefs in regard to education, as well as active parental

involvement in specific school-related activities. Fan and Chen (2001) guided a moderator analysis which revealed parents who perceive involvement through aspiration or stating their expectations to their children generated higher academic performance compared to those who believe the best way to improve academic performance is to get involved through control and supervision.

Bakker, Denessen, and Brus-Laeven (2007) found parents' perceptions of parental involvement differ significantly from those of teachers. Parents include several specific factors that define their level of involvement as it relates to the child's academic achievement. Parent perceptions of parental involvement most often include any and all activities they participate in, with, and for the student (Bakker, Denessen, & Brus-Laeven, 2007). Another area in which parents perceive their involvement to be supportive, informative, and educative, is career planning for their child (Mobley, Sharp, Hammond, Withington, & Stipanovic, 2017). Other activities parents consider as part of parental involvement include supervising an assignment at home, helping the child review for a test, initiating contact with the teacher upon realizing there is a mistake that needs to be corrected, or watching an educational television program and discussing it with the child (Bakker et al., 2007).

Teacher perception of parental involvement involves the students' performance in classroom activities as well as parental participation in school events such as conferences and PTO meetings (Bakker et al., 2007). A student who completes homework on time and scores well on classroom assignments will be perceived to receive attention from the parent as far as education is concerned (Kikas & Gintautas, 2017). Moreover, parents

who actively participate in parent/teacher conferences are rated by teachers as being highly involved in their child's education (Kikas & Gintautas, 2017).

Carranza et al. (2009) revealed some of the perceptions of students toward parental involvement. The study involved Mexican students for whom there was already an academic concern (Carranza et al., 2009). According to Carranza et al. (2009), academic performance and educational aspirations of students were impacted by the perceptions of the students regarding parental involvement and expectations. Carranza et al. (2009) measured perceived parental educational involvement through a specific scale formulated for the study.

Students in the study considered their parents to be involved with their education if the parents assisted with homework, restricted the student's leisure time until assignments were completed, had expectations the student do well on assignments and required state testing, and expected the student would graduate from high school (Carranza et al., 2009). This is an indication the student's perception of parental involvement can lead to the attainment of academic success; an aspect Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, (2017) termed as motivational for the student's performance. However, the researchers did not weigh whether it is the student's own analysis of the benefits that drives him or her to perform or whether it is because of the consistency of parental involvement (Gonzalez et al., 2017).

This shows that if parents believe and portray education is important and that children need to excel in education, then it is likely the children will internalize this information and strive to perform better (Hong et al., 2010). Children tend to perceive

their parents as models from whom they learn their own attitudes, behaviors, and efforts. If children perceive the parent not to be very concerned about the student's academic life, then such a student tends to have a lower attachment to academic performance (Hong et al., 2010).

Children are likely and willing to showcase their academic potential if they repeatedly perceive their parents value education and expect them to perform well at school (Hong et al., 2010). Hong et al. (2010) suggested children perceive reinforcements as a positive motivational factor. Reinforcements can range from words of praise and encouragement to tangible items valued by the child (Gonzalez et al., 2017). With the multitude of perceptions, it is crucial from the school perspective to understand parents' perception of parent involvement and the impact that grade level, culture, relationships, resources, and values has on the school-home relationship (Carpenter, Young, Bowers, & Sanders, 2016).

### **Social Media Policy**

With the increased engagement in technology and social media, schools implementing 1-1, and "bring your own technology" initiatives, there is heightened concern for administrators to initiate surveillance as to how social media is used within their districts (Martin, Wang, Petty, Wang, & Wilkins, 2018). In an effort to regulate social media, despite the desire to incorporate social and digital media into schools, the majority of districts create policies to block such tools and technologies (Ahn, Bivona, & DiScala, 2011). For example, the MODESE (2013) released a social media policy that prohibits users from posting material that contains vulgar or offensive language, posting



material that is unlawful, posting material that is off-topic, impersonating another person, promoting, advertising or soliciting services or products, allowing other persons to use your identification for posting or viewing comments, and posting any other item deemed inappropriate by Department officials.

The Missouri School Boards' Association (MSBA, 2019) has sample policy that states teachers and staff must maintain appropriate boundaries with students. A sample social media policy on the Missouri Association of School Administrators' (2015) website describes two areas of responsibility to include: personal and professional. When considering a policy for a school district, include the following:

1. Identify the need for the policy to govern the use of social media technologies.
2. Examine existing policies to identify any policies that already cover social media use.
3. Determine if the social media policies need to be embedded into existing policies or be separate stand-alone policies.
4. Ensure the new social media policies are aligned with the existing policies.
5. Identify key stakeholders that are responsible for social media policy and approval. ("Keys for Developing," 2013, p. 42)

According to Esdal and McDonald (2011), there are key elements that need to be included when developing good policy: autonomy and accountability.

### **Tips for School Administrators**

In an online article titled, *Using Social Media: Tips for School Leaders* (2012), the authors provided tips based on questions posed to a panel of administrators:

1. School administrators should establish their own Personalized Learning Networks (PLNs) based on their specific interest and professional development needs. PLNs are free and available at all times anywhere there is internet connection.
2. The first step to using social media effectively is to determine your goals, set aside some time to learn, observe how other tech-savvy school leaders are using social media, and inform your community as to how these tools will be used.
3. Any school that chooses to use social media tools should be very cautious about what they share and post. Furthermore, there should only be one person, preferably the principal, to be in charge of distribution of information.
4. Social media is a quickly evolving tool that should be used for staff professional development.
5. Administrators can be used to deploy professional development content to staff. The flexible format of social media allows for administrators, teachers, and students to learn at a time that is convenient to their own calendars. Using social media increases engagement by assuring that every voice is heard.
6. To increase engagement, encourage teachers to use social media tools such as Edmodo to post discussions and assignments for students.
7. There is a strong presence on Facebook and Twitter to inform parents and other stakeholders about school announcements. With the strong presence, districts are feeling overburdened by the time pressure to keep both of these

social networks up to date. Now, they use a no-cost service called Ping.fm to simultaneously update a campus Twitter and Facebook accounts. (para. 4-9)

To further examine the use of social media, Rodesiler (2017) conducted a study of 30 public school districts. Of the 30 public school districts, only 19 reported to have published policy specific to the use of social media (Rodesiler, 2017, para. 1)

### **Summary**

A major task for school districts is to develop partnerships with families of children they serve—partnerships which will require commitment, specialized knowledge, and skills (Grant & Ray, 2018). Each of the topics discussed in Chapter Two are important to educators in school districts when considering the connection between social media and parent involvement.

In Chapter Two, a background of the study regarding various aspects of parental involvement and social media was included. Also, a review of literature was presented to include information on relevant topics pertaining to the study. The main topics included in this study were types of parent involvement, ways to increase parent involvement, parent involvement and academic achievement, obstacles of parent involvement, and perceptions of stakeholders. Specific to social media, topics included in this study were types of social media, corporate and business utilization, educational utilization, benefits of social media, obstacles to social media, and perceptions of stakeholders.

In Chapter Three, the methodology of the qualitative study is detailed. Included in this chapter are a review of the purpose of the study and the research questions. Chapter Three also includes description of the instrument, methods of data collection, and

analysis of the data. The sample included 16 individuals, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, secondary school principals, and assistant principals selected from rural schools in Missouri. The information gathered from the interview questions was collected and analyzed to examine perceptions of school superintendents, assistant superintendents, secondary school principals, and assistant principals related to social media as a primary means of parental involvement.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Although few, there are systematic programs on using social media to engage families, which have been provided with guides to address the need for implementation of social media (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). The perceptions of administrators within school districts provide valuable information regarding the success of programs in school settings along with the factors necessary for successful implementation (Horner, Sugai, & Lewis, 2015). In this chapter, an overview of the problem and purpose is provided, and the research questions are restated. The design of the research study and data procedures is documented, followed by how the data were analyzed. The population and sample of the study are provided along with instrumentation, which consisted of interviews conducted with administrators in rural Missouri. More in-depth information about data collection and data analysis is then discussed. The chapter closes with ethical considerations to ensure the identity of the districts, schools, and administrators of the study are protected.

#### **Problem and Purpose Overview**

The focus of this study was on the specific social media outlets currently used by administrators in secondary schools and the activities and information communicated through social media. Another focus of this study was to garner the perceptions of secondary principals and superintendents as to the use of social media as another means for communicating with parents instead of through traditional methods. Lastly, the perceptions and concerns of superintendents about using social media as a substitute for communicating with parents via traditional methods were collected.

Discussed in this chapter is the process designed to examine the perceptions of school administrators about their use of social media as a primary means for parental involvement. The problem and purpose are re-introduced. Also detailed are the research design, population and sample of participants, research instrument, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

**Research questions.** The following research questions guided the study:

1. Which social media outlets are currently used, and what delivery methods are used by secondary school principals and superintendents?
2. What perceptions exist among secondary school principals regarding social media for communicating with parents as opposed to other traditional methods?
3. What perceptions exist among superintendents regarding social media for communicating with parents as opposed to other traditional methods?
4. What types of information and activities are communicated by secondary school principals through social media outlets?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research method was utilized within this study to allow for analysis of the perceptions of Missouri public superintendents and principals. The instrument utilized to collect data for this study was a set of interview questions designed to elicit open, truthful responses from participants. These interview questions were designed specifically to gain insight and perceptions of the administrators' school or district level implementation and effectiveness.

Before conducting interviews, the researcher gained informed consent of the participants, according to Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Potential interview participants were identified and contact information was obtained through the Missouri School Directory located on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE, 2018) website. A total of 16 individuals, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, secondary principals, and assistant principals were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in a time and place suitable for the participants. The researcher designed one set of interview questions, both for superintendents and for secondary principals. Responses were used to identify themes and categories that emerged regarding perceptions of using social media as a primary means for parental involvement.

### **Population and Sample**

The population included a field of 514 superintendents, 279 assistant superintendents, 614 secondary principals, and 623 secondary assistant principals in Missouri (MODESE, 2017). A purposive sampling method was used to gather participants in rural Missouri. The sample selected for this study totaled 16 individuals, consisting of eight public school superintendents and assistant superintendents, and eight secondary principals and assistant principals. In many instances, the feasibility to use the entire population is limited, in which case a sample of the population is utilized; therefore, a purposive sampling method was applied (Etikan et al., 2016). In qualitative research, the determination of sample size is “contextual and partially dependent upon the scientific paradigm under which investigation is taking place” (Boddy, 2016, p. 426).

The sample size and selection criteria were purposive since the researcher “decided what needed to be known and set out to find people who can and were willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience” (Etikan et al., 2016, p.

1) The participants in the study included superintendents and secondary school principals from the rural regions of Missouri. The participants from secondary buildings included assistant principals and principals. The participants from district offices included assistant superintendents and superintendents.

To be a participant of this study, interviewees had to meet the following criteria: serving in a school district in rural Missouri as superintendent, assistant superintendent, principal, or assistant principal with a minimum of one year of experience. Participants selected for the study were also chosen based upon their willingness to participate. A total of 16 combined superintendents and principals were interviewed.

### **Instrumentation**

The research instrument used for this study included nine semi-structured interview questions created by the researcher to elicit candid information regarding superintendents’ and principals’ perceptions of social media as the primary means of parental involvement (see Appendix A). This instrument allowed the researcher to explore themes by using pre-determined questions following conversations and collecting data relevant to the study (Wildavsky, 2018). Interview questions were also developed utilizing information gained from research in Chapter Two regarding perceptions of students, parents, and teachers, as well as common barriers related social media and parent involvement. It was imperative that interview questions were directly aligned to



the research questions and the solicited information came directly from the interviews.

Interview questions selected for the study were field-tested by individuals in rural-Missouri, not directly participating in the study, to ensure the questions were plausible and developed to contribute to the objectivity and trustworthiness of the study (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). Questions were revised based on suggestions provided from the field-test participants.

The questions were constructed based upon the interpretivist framework. The position of interpretivism in relation to ontology and epistemology is that interpretivists believe reality is multiple and relative (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). The information gained in this framework is socially formed rather than objectively established (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001). Interpretivists circumvent set structural frameworks, such as in positivist research, and prefer a more personal and flexible research structure in order to capture meaning in human interaction and to make sense of what is perceived as reality (Carson et al., 2001).

### **Data Collection**

First, approval was received by the Lindenwood University IRB (see Appendix B) prior to contact of any potential participants. Next, participants in the study were contacted via electronic communication or telephone regarding the study (see Appendix C). Contact information was gathered from the public MODESE website. After receiving confirmation of an interest in participating in the study, each participant was provided an informed consent form (see Appendix D) along with a copy of the interview questions through electronic communication. Next, the researcher scheduled a time for

each phone interview to occur. A reminder of the date, time, and location of the interview was sent to each of the participants prior to the interview

With permission from the participants, the interview data were audio-recorded to ensure responses were documented accurately. The researcher then transcribed the recorded interviews into a Microsoft Word document. All electronic documents were stored and secured on a password-protected computer. To ensure accuracy of the data, the researcher randomly checked the transcripts against the recorded interviews.

Then, each participant received a copy of his or her individual transcript to review for clarity. This step, termed *member-checking*, is used to check for accuracy and resonance throughout the transcription (Birt et al, 2016). To maintain necessary ethical precautions, participants were not identified by name, but rather were assigned codes. Upon completion of the study, data will be retained for three years. Following the three-year period, all data will be destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people make sense of their experience and the world in which they live (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) related, “Data analysis is a complex procedure that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 202). Overall, the purpose of data analysis is to form responses to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

At the completion of the interviews, the data were analyzed. The results, which are presented in Chapter Four, were compared and contrasted with literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Each of the interviews was summarized using the basic interpretive qualitative technique in which the researcher is interested in how people apply their personal experiences to the topic that is being studied (Mayan, 2016).

The data analysis was conducted in accordance with the constant comparative method of data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The constant comparative method involves three types of data encoding (open, axial, and selective) to gain insight into the participants' answers. The researcher collects data, categorizes information, reduces the data into smaller themes, and divides the data into segments to look for categories and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Maxwell (2013):

Reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observations notes, writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these to your data, analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships, and creating matrices and other displays are all important forms of data analyses. (p. 105)

Creswell and Creswell (2017) explained in open coding, each meaningful unit of the interview is coded, and at this stage, initial categories of information about different perceptions are formed.

The next phase is axial coding. Axial coding is a central phenomenon identified through the exploration of the interrelationship of categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To assist in this effort, codes are organized into more abstract categories, as for example, causal conditions and consequences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) believed the development of identifying the categories “is largely an intuitive process. . . [which is] systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (p. 211). The framework and research questions are posed to guide the study; therefore, the “name of these categories will be congruent with the orientation of the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 211).

### **Ethical Considerations**

After approval of the Lindenwood University IRB, consideration was made to assure participant confidentiality. The data and interview responses were stored electronically using a password-protected personal computer under the supervision of the researcher. All documents will be destroyed three years after conclusion of the study.

Each participant received an informed consent form, which contained language addressing the opportunity to opt out of the study and possible risks of the study. To protect identities, any personal information shared by the participants will remain confidential. Unique codes were assigned to each participant and school district to decrease the possibility of identifying participants.

Once the interviews were completed, the transcripts collected through interviews were secured in a locked cabinet and locked office. Transcripts were then presented to participants for member checking to be utilized. Member checking allows participants to review, edit, or delete any information the participants deemed necessary from the transcriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After approval by all participants, the

transcript information was finalized and stored electronically on a personal computer, which was password-protected.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the methodology of this research study was outlined. The problem and purpose, research design, and population and sample were shared. Discussion included the research instrument and data collection procedures. Finally, data analysis processes and ethical considerations were shared.

In Chapter Four, the results of the data collected are revealed. The responses from the interviews are shared. Tables are provided to aid the reader in understanding the individual characteristics and perceptions of the participants.

## **Chapter Four: Analysis of Data**

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Missouri rural secondary principals and superintendents in regard to social media as a primary means for parent involvement. Baskwill (2012) stated, “Social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, are helping teachers keep parents and other community members informed” (para. 2). Qualitative data were collected through personal and phone interviews with building administrators rural Missouri. The instrumentation for this study was based on an interpretivist framework. The instrumentation included semi-structured interview questions created by the researcher to elicit the perceptions of secondary principals and district superintendents.

### **Interviews**

**Administrators of rural Missouri.** Sixteen administrators from rural Missouri were interviewed for this study. To maintain necessary ethical precaution and to ensure anonymity, each administrator was assigned a code. For example, the first principal interviewed was referred to as P1, and the first superintendent interviewed was referred to as S1 throughout the interview process. As shown in Table 1, the administrators were referred to by either assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, or superintendent.

Table 1

*Administrators by Position*

Assistant Principal	Principal	Assistant Superintendent	Superintendent
AP1	P1	AS1	S1
AP2	P2	AS2	S2
AP3	P3	AS3	S3
AP4	P4	AS4	S4

Prior to the interviews, individuals who agreed to participate in the study were given a letter of participation, a consent form, and a copy of the interview questions. Participants were informed there would only be one interview. They were also informed each interview would take approximately 30 minutes and would be conducted either by phone or in person. The interviews were conducted by the researcher. Permission was gained from participants for the interviews to be audio-taped and then transcribed to ensure research accuracy.

***Interview question one.*** Tell me about yourself (number of years in education as a teacher and as a superintendent/assistant superintendent/principal/assistant principal; areas of certification; highest degree held.)

Principal 1 indicated he had been in education for 16 years, “Eight-teaching, and eight as a high school principal. I am certified to teach anything P.E. and math, in grades 1 through 8. Superintendent 1 had been a superintendent for two years and stated, “I have also been a teacher for three years and a principal for four years. I also have a teaching certificate for fifth through twelfth grade social studies.” He also included, “My

principal certificate is from kindergarten through twelfth grade.” Superintendent 2 was in his seventh year as superintendent, and he reported:

I have spent eight years as a Business Education Teacher and coach and three years as a kindergarten through twelfth grade principal. I also have certificates in Business Education, grades seven through twelve, social science grades seven through twelve, and my principal certificate in grades seven through twelve.

Assistant Superintendent 1 spent five years as a teacher, three as a technology director, three as an assistant high school principal, five years as a high school principal, and 13 in an assistant superintendent role.

Superintendent 3 reported, “I have served as a superintendent in a K-8 school for two years. Additionally, I have been a building principal for six years.” Principal 2 indicated he was in his 35th year in education with “13 of those years as a principal.”

Assistant Principal 1 explained she was a classroom teacher for five years and had been a principal for 2 years. Principal 3 stated, “This is my 21st year in education and my 11th as a high school principal.” Superintendent 4 reported, “I have been a superintendent for six years and was a principal for 16 years prior my superintendency.”

Assistant Superintendent 3 reported to have 15 years of experience in education as a school counselor, special education teacher, special education process coordinator, assistant high school principal, elementary principal, and assistant superintendent.

Assistant Superintendent 4 indicated he had 19 years of experience education ranging from three years of teaching, 14 years as a principal, and two years in an assistant superintendent role.



The mean number of years of experience in education, which included teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent, was 18.25 years. The mean number of years of experience in education as an administrator, which included assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent, was 9.69 years. As shown in Table 2, the administrators ranged in administrative experience from two to 21 years.

Table 2

*Total Administrative Years of Experience by Area*

Participant	Teacher Experience	Principal Experience	Superintendent Experience	Total
P1	8	8	0	16
P2	15	20	0	35
P3	10	11	0	21
P4	16	6	0	22
AP1	5	2	0	7
AP2	9	4	0	13
AP3	14	2	0	16
AP4	13	4	0	17
S1	3	4	2	9
S2	8	3	7	18
S3	5	6	2	13
S4	7	16	6	29
AS1	5	8	13	26
AS2	9	5	2	16
AS3	7	7	1	15
AS4	3	14	2	19

In regard to the highest level of education, as shown in Table 3, S1 and S2 had a Doctorate Degree. While, P1, AS1, S3, P2, AP1, and S4 reported their highest level of education was a Specialist Degree. Then, P3, AP2, and P4 stated their highest level of education was a Master's Degree. Specifically, P4 reported, "I am in my last class to complete my Specialist Degree." Assistant Superintendent 3 replied, "I have received BS in Psychology, a Masters in Counseling Psychology, a Masters in Educational Administration, a Masters in Special Education, and an Education Specialist." Assistant Superintendent 4 earned a Specialist in Education and was currently working on his Doctorate in Education.

Table 3

*Highest Level of Education by Administrator*

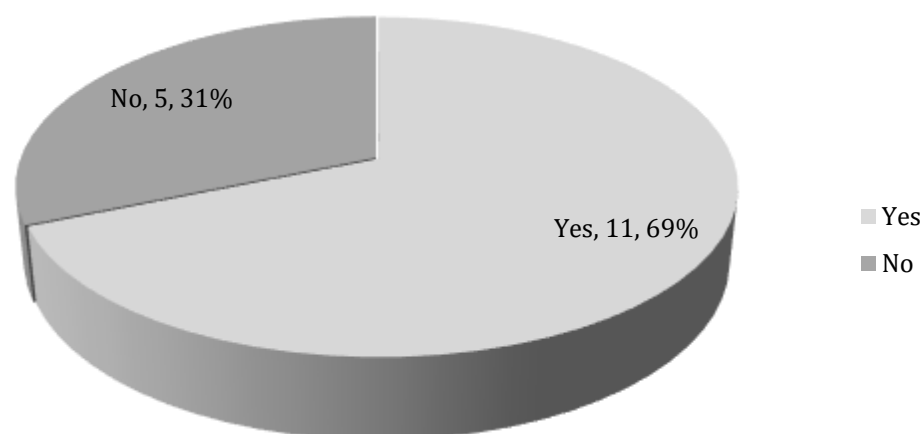
Participant	Bachelor Degree	Master's Degree	Specialist Degree	Doctoral Degree
P1			X	
P2			X	
P3		X		
P4		X		
AP1			X	
AP2		X		
AP3		X		
AP4		X		
S1				X
S2				X
S3			X	
S4			X	
AS1			X	
AS2			X	
AS3			X	
AS4			X	
Total	0	5	9	2

*Interview question two.* Does your school or district currently have a parent involvement initiative?

As shown in Figure 1, five of 16 participants reported having a parent involvement initiative. Also shown in Figure 1, 11 of 16 administrators reported their district does not have a specific parent involvement initiative. Not having a parent involvement plan does not mean their district does not value parent involvement but rather they are not currently working on specific plan to address parent involvement. Principal 1 and S2 simply stated, “No,” their districts do not have a specific parent involvement initiative; however, they “utilize several means of communicating and involving parents throughout the district.” Superintendent 1 replied, “Yes, we use the school website, Remind App, SIS text system, various types of social media, and a monthly eNewsletter.” Principal 1 went on to explain, “Although the district does not have a specific plan, our local PTO in the elementary does have a specific plan.”

Principal 4 indicated, “We have a limited parental involvement initiative. There is district goal toward building parent communication, but nothing beyond that.” Principal 4 concluded, “There is no formal plan.” Assistant Superintendent 3 responded her district has a building-wide plan that specifically included parent involvement, but not specific to social media. For example, in AS3’s district, each school has a component of their building school improvement plan (BSIP), which includes having one or more parent involvement activities. Assistant Superintendent 3 also stated, “We have volunteer opportunities and parents can attend activities and field trips if all requirements have been met.” Assistant Superintendent 4 reported his district does not necessarily

have an initiative; however, social media is his district’s primary means of communicating current and future events for the district. The number of schools with parent involvement initiatives is summarized in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Parent involvement initiatives in schools.

***Interview question three.*** If so, is social media included in this initiative? (Examples of social media may include, but not limited to, email, text messages, communication applications, Facebook, Instagram, school reach systems, etc.)

Principal 1 explained, “The elementary principal uses the Remind App. I control the high school Facebook page for updates on activities and highlight student achievements.” Superintendent 1 added his district primarily uses social media. Superintendent 1 also added his philosophy on text messages:

We do not use text messages, and we discourage teachers and other administrators from using text messages as any form of communication or parent

involvement. It is really difficult to track and ensure the communication is appropriate and in line with district policy.

Superintendent 2 reported, “While we do not include any type of social media in a specific plan, we do utilize Facebook, email, phone, and text messaging on the school reach system. We also use Twitter, but minimally.” Superintendent 3 indicated his district uses Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, email, group text, Google Classroom, Smore newsletters, Voxer, and School Messenger.”

Assistant Principal 1 replied, “We use email, text messages, Facebook, Instagram, and School Messenger.” Principal 4 elaborated with, “The district uses Facebook and Twitter for communication about typical school things such as school closings and athletic events. In the past this has not been an avenue for communication and engagement but rather like an advertisement board.” Assistant Superintendent 2 indicated her school used Facebook, and a lot of the clubs and organizations in the school use the Remind App. She also said, “We use Google Calendar for events in the district and link it to the school website.” Assistant Principal 4 said his school primarily uses Facebook, and that most extracurricular groups will have their own social media page.

Assistant Superintendent 3 indicated teachers are encouraged to communicate through various social media outlets. Assistant Superintendent 3 specifically mentioned, “Text, email, Twitter, Facebook, School Reach, and the school website.” Assistant Superintendent 4 responded that although they do not officially have a parent involvement initiative, they do value parent involvement and use social media as the

primary means to reach communicate with them. Specific outlets mentioned by AS4 included Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Blackboard.

*Interview question four.* Tell me your thoughts on using social media as a primary means for parent involvement (specifically grades 9-12).

Principal 1 described his thoughts, “Parents seem to like the Facebook notifications and announcements, especially if it includes family and friends. For all district announcements we use a feature through Lumen that will reach all of our parents.” Principal 1 also indicated, “This works great when the contact information that we have in our school system is updated.” Principal 1 also described his thoughts on using social media as the primary means:

I believe we are in time when social media probably needs to become the primary means for parent involvement, but what I see is that teachers and administrators are not that comfortable with the technology and so, not allowing it to become a primary means.

Assistant Superintendent 3 also believed social media was an “ideal way” to communicate and showcase student achievements and daily happening in real time. Assistant Superintendent 4 stated, “Social media is the primary means of communication for our district.” Superintendent 1 was adamant that administrators should be cautious:

Any time you utilize a third party to handle communication, you can have issues. Facebook is the most used social media outlet by our parents and guardians; however, the way algorithms are set up, we often hear back from parents and guardians the announcement, activity, post, message is not showing up for them.

Shown in Table 4, are direct quotes and concepts from those administrators who had disagreements about using social media as a primary mean of parent involvement.

Table 4

*Quotes/Concepts Describing Disagreements about Using Social Media for Involvement*

Examples of Open Ended Responses	Concepts
<p>I do not like the idea of it being the primary means of parental involvement, but it is extremely useful as a secondary means of parental involvement. I am from a rural community, and we still believe in hometown values such as looking people in the eyes and shaking hands. That is where the real connection and involvement is.</p>	<p>Secondary Means Values Connection</p>
<p>I do not think that it will reach all parents, much less connect with all parents. There is a difference between communication and involvement. I do not think the mere fact of putting information out to the public is parent involvement. Just putting information out is communicating. It takes reciprocation and action back from the other party to be considered involvement.</p>	<p>Involvement Two-way Reciprocation</p>
<p>Times have changed, and I realize lots of people use social media, but I have an old-school mentality. I like face-to-face conversations and phone calls.</p>	<p>Generational Values</p>
<p>I do not support the idea of using social media as a means for parental involvement due to the lack of ability to monitor and control access.</p>	<p>Inability to Monitor</p>
<p>I have not thought about using it as a means for parental involvement. I guess that I have limited understanding about how it could be effectively used as a tool for parental involvement. It seems that social media creates a false impression of reality. Most of the time when I think of social media, I think of negative drama.</p>	<p>Lack of Understanding Fear of Misuse</p>



Assistant Superintendent 2 reported and elaborated on the use of social media as a primary means for parent involvement:

I am indifferent. Using social media as your primary means of parent contact or involvement is an open gate for negative and positive comments alike; however, in my experience, once a negative comment is posted, the flood gates can open wide, with both supporters of the school and those who like to bash. Sometimes, using a phone call is a simpler approach that doesn't allow or require any feedback. I think the best is to use a variety of all forms of communication. When feedback is needed, Google docs or surveys are great as well as Facebook, when it's a message being sent out and feedback is not needed. Sometimes I feel it's best to use a simple phone call.

Superintendent 2 stated, "While many people have a social media account, there are still several who do not. There are times when we utilize Facebook to get a quick message out to parents and the community." Superintendent 2 described times like this as when there is no time to get a note home. He went on to add:

We live in a difficult time. For example, when cancelling school due to weather, we have to use all mediums such as a Facebook post, a school reach call, messages to the local newspaper, and radio station. We also use other news media such as schoolclosingnetwork and KY3.

Specifically, Superintendent 2 believed, "Social media has not removed the necessity of the other forms of communication and parent involvement."

Assistant Superintendent 1 believed that social media is how current parents communicate. Assistant Superintendent 1 went on to explain, “Schools that do not consider using social media are missing a key component of ways to reach parents, even if it’s only one-way communication.” Assistant Superintendent 1 also suggested, “Educators would ultimately rather have face-to-face conversations with parents but social media is a way to have an initial connection with parents and for parents to feel like they are connected and informed about school events, activities, and general information.”

Assistant Superintendent 4 had a strong opinion that traditional methods, such as newsletter, are proven to be ineffective, as student do not take them home. He stated, “I doubt parents even read them if the students get them home.” Assistant Superintendent 4 included almost all parents have a device at home that is “never from their fingertips” and allows social media access at any time.

Superintendent 3 elaborated and reiterated his point about social media as a primary means for parent involvement:

I think social media has its positives and negatives. It is a quick and cost-effective way to get information out to parents if the parent is an active user of the social media medium. However, I think that some information can be misinterpreted by written communication versus face-to-face conversation and interactions. Also, I live in a rural area where there are several families that do not have access to the internet or what they have is not consistent. For example, we have a lot of parents that have only a limited amount of minutes on their

phone, which makes this method of engagement not reliable. I am also a parent in the district and have been guilty of ignoring school communication, because I get the same message by phone, text, and email. This multi-means of communication can be a little too much.

As interviewees were sharing thoughts related to social media as a primary means for parental involvement, they also shared ways in which they would like to use social media in their school or district. Shown in Table 5 are direct quotes from respondents and the corresponding concept.

Table 5

*Quotes/Concepts Describing How Administrators Would Like to Use Social Media*

Examples of Open Ended Responses	Concept
I have been meaning to start a Remind App to help put out last minute information. It seems the administrators and school that use this App really like it.	Collaborate Timely Communication Emergency Information
One specific social media tool that we have not used that I would like to consider is Instagram. A lot of parents and students use Instagram. Instagram also has feature where you can also post announcements and information to additional social media mediums such as Facebook and Twitter. This type of feature allows you to reach many people in a hurry.	Collaborate Multi-Function Timely Communication
Our school is considering using a program called Smore. Smore is an online newsletter that has many features that would be beneficial as we try to increase the way that we reach parents and stakeholders. This program allows for the reader to respond and interact. For example, if the reader is reading an article or looking at a picture they can click they “like” the article or picture. Additionally, there is an analytics feature that allows the school to see several things. For example, you can see how many “likes” you have. There is an opportunity for the reader to respond and provide feedback. And what I like most about it is that you can see how long people are viewing certain components.	Collaborate Multi-Function Interactive
I think that social media is an ideal way to communicate with parents. I believe that social media reaches more parents and provides immediate communication and allows the school to showcase and highlight student achievements and daily happenings in real time.	Timely Communication

***Interview question five.*** Does your school or district utilize a specific social media platform (Examples of social media platforms may include, but not limited to, email, text messages, communication applications, Facebook, Instagram, school reach systems, etc.)? If so, please explain.

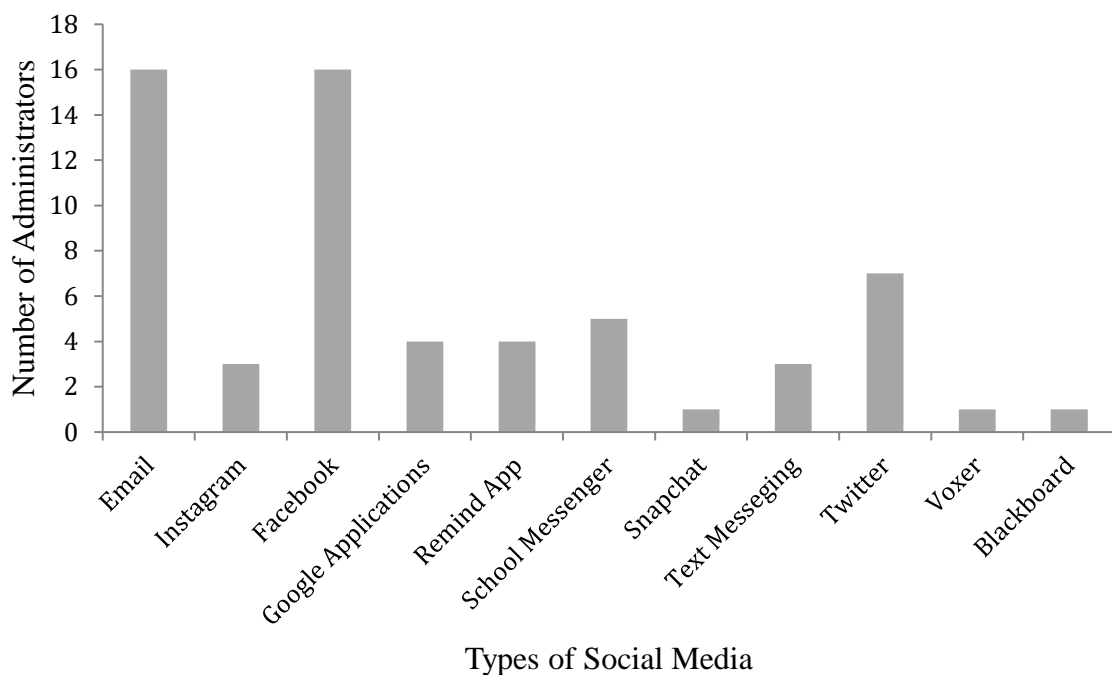
Principal 1 indicated at the district level, “we use Lumen for all-calls. At the high school, they use Facebook, and at the middle school and elementary they use the Remind App.” Superintendent 1 and S2 both added, “Our district primarily uses Facebook,” as a social media platform. Additionally, S1 stated, “We also use Twitter.” Assistant Superintendent 1 stated, “Our district uses a combination of Facebook, School Messenger, email, and some text messaging.”

Principal 3 reported his school uses a multitude of social media platforms. Furthermore, he stated, “Our superintendent spearheads most of the platforms, but each building has an administrator that helps with the daily and weekly posts.” Assistant Superintendent 2 replied, “As a school or district, we do not have a specific platform that everyone uses.” Assistant Superintendent 2 went on to list the following platforms that are used: Facebook, Remind App, Google Calendar, school website, School Reach, Twitter, and teacher web pages. Principal 4 elaborated:

The district uses school reach systems for calendar items, especially at the elementary level and for school closings. The district also uses Twitter and Facebook at the discretion of the administrators. There are some school groups, such as Future Farmers of America, that have their own Facebook page. Email is also used, but the system we use is difficult to maneuver through for teachers. As a district we also use Lumen. In using email, the teacher first must look up the email address in Lumen and then move to the Google email system to actually send the email. It's very time consuming, especially when you are needing to email an entire group. Text messages have also been used by teachers to

communicate with students and parents. This practice is not a practice that I am comfortable with.

Shown in Figure 2 are the types of social media administrators reported using as part of their parent involvement initiative.



*Figure 2.* Social media types used in parent involvement initiatives.

Throughout the interviews and during this question, it was evident that some administrators used social media more for personal reasons as opposed to using it in the academic environment. In a study by Roth (2016), he stated:

Superintendents who have Twitter accounts predominantly tweet for professional reasons, and the content of those tweets demonstrate a strong inclination toward

leveraging influence through social media. School superintendents who use Twitter are predominantly male; and 50% are located in the Midwest of the United States. Superintendents indicated planned and purposeful reasons for their use of Twitter along with a direct connection to their enactment of leadership. (pp. 92-93)

Shown in Table 6 are respondent comments that suggest their use of social media is primarily used for personal reasons as opposed to academic or professional reasons. There were many social media platforms available to school administrators at the time of this interview but only three platforms emerged during the interviews—Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Table 6

*Administrators' Social Media Use*

Examples of Open Ended Responses	Platform
I use Facebook some in school, but I mostly use it at home. There are very few times that I use Facebook during the school day. I do use it to look up potential teachers to get some background of their character throughout the job interview process.	Facebook
I do not have any social media accounts, but I do look at my wife's Facebook and Instagram. I have not ventured to start using it personally or at school. I mainly look at the pictures of people.	Facebook Instagram
I use Twitter for school reasons, but not for parent involvement. I use Twitter for professional development. There is a huge educational community online.	Twitter
Much of our communication from school to home includes Blackboard. Messages can be sent to the entire district, school, grade-level, class, or specific individuals. We also use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.	Blackboard Facebook Instagram Twitter

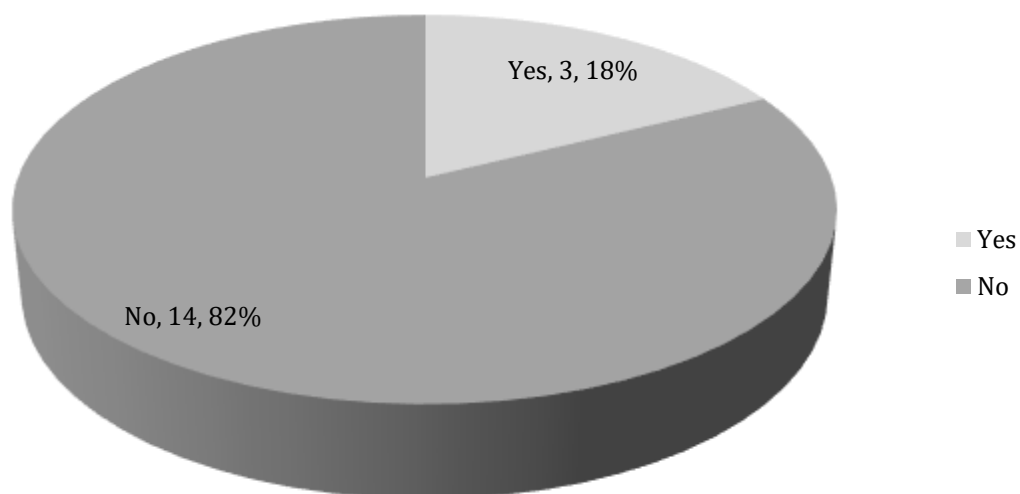
***Interview question six.*** Does your school or district provide professional development for teachers and administrators in the area of social media and parent involvement? If so, describe the focus and/or titles of the professional development sessions.

Principal 1, S1, and S2 replied, "No," they do not provide professional development for teachers or administrators in the area of social media and parent involvement. Principal 1 added, "We do encourage it (using social media), and just have our building administrators talk about the pros and cons and the things not to do."



Assistant Superintendent 1 added, “Our school district goes over general board policies relating to teachers and administrators using personal social media accounts.” In this district, it is up to individual building principals in regard to how to involve parents.

Assistant Superintendent 1 reported most of her buildings, “post frequent information on the district’s Facebook page, but it is the building administrator who is posting on the district’s site, not the teachers.” Teachers and administrators do not receive specific professional development sessions based only on social media or parent involvement. The number districts receiving professional development on the use of social media as a means for parental involvement is summarized in Figure 3.



*Figure 3.* Professional development provided for districts.

Superintendent 3 reported his district does not provide specific training for social media. Superintendent 3 elaborated and said, “During some professional development days, there may be a breakout session for online tools, but I am not sure how effective it is.” Principal 2, AP1, P3, and S4 reported no official training or professional development.

Assistant Superintendent 3 admitted this was an area of weakness for her district due to the lack of training and follow-up training specific to technology and social media. She followed up by saying, “This is an area that I would like to see improve in my district.” Principal 4 elaborated:

At the district level, there has been no professional development other than the required "watch yourself" speech from the superintendent. At the building level, I have done professional development in regard to my expectations. This training included professional manners of using email and being cautious on social media. I plan to incorporate more professional development for first-year teachers about the usage of social media and how to professionally write an email to a parent and/or colleague.

Assistant Superintendent 4 indicated his district has a district communications director who meets with all teachers prior to each school year. The director discusses district policies related to social media but also provides training on how to best reach parents using a variety of social media platforms.

***Interview question seven.*** What types of technology do teachers use within your school or district (Examples of technology may include, but not limited to, iPads, Chromebooks, laptops, cell phones, tablets, etc.)?

Principal 1 indicated classrooms within his building “have the televisions that were put in the rooms years ago, and they do not really use them.” At the high school level, “we have Chromebooks in science, health, and in the English I classes.” For the other classrooms, “students are allowed to bring their own laptop or tablet.” He attributed one factor in limited technology, especially at the elementary level, to the fact, “There are a lot of veteran teachers and that may be a part of the issue.”

Superintendent 1 and S2 believed, “Chromebooks are probably the most utilized item by the staff.” Superintendent 2 also included, “desktops, iPads, SmartBoards, and projectors,” as examples of technology utilized in the school. Assistant Superintendent 1 indicated teachers in her district use, “iPads, Chromebooks, desktops, laptops, and cell phones.”

Superintendent 3 reported, “Teachers use a variety of tools. Some of the tools they use are desktops, cell phones, Surface Pros, and the coaches use iPads.” Principal 2, P3, P4, AP1, AP2, AP3, AP4, S4, AS2, and AS3 reported their teachers use Chromebooks. Assistant Superintendent 3 stated, “Other than the use of Chromebooks, our technology is very limited.” Assistant Superintendent 4 reported the use of the same devices as previously listed, but also said, “All the devices that we utilize by staff are also provide to students.”

***Interview question eight.*** Which do you feel is the most important?

Principal 1, S1, and S2, indicated the technology that is most important would be, “the Chromebook.” Principal 1 added, “The Chromebook is very easy to use and maintain in a school setting.” Superintendent 2 also added, “The iPad is also an important piece of technology, but sometimes staff do not like them, because they do not have a keyboard.” Assistant Superintendent 1 also believed Chromebooks are the most important, and this is “because students are actively using this device on a daily basis.”

Superintendent 3 reported, “Chromebooks are the most important tool that we have as a district.” Principal 2, P3, P4, AP1, AP2, AP3, AP4, S4, and AS2, reported Chromebooks are the most important technology tool for students. The only administrator who believed the iPad was the most important piece of technology was AS3. Assistant Superintendent 4 had a belief all devices are important; however, it depends on what task one is trying to accomplish. If he had to pick one, he stated, “I believe a smart phone is the most important because of accessibility and flexibility in communication.”

***Interview question nine.*** What types of support do you offer teachers when it comes to technology implementation and social media use?

Principal 1 indicated the support they offer to teachers is “to make it (social media communication) one-way (informational) and only about education and classroom material. Principal 1 gave the example of a professional development session that has taken place, “Chromebook training was offered to teachers on the basics of use and different tools that staff can use.” Superintendent 1 reported there was “no specific

training offered on social media. While moving towards a 1:1 initiative we utilized a significant time of professional development towards preparing teachers and administrators with resources and strategies.” Superintendent 2 stated, “We are probably lacking in that area. I think often times we mistakenly assume everyone knows how to use it (social media and technology).”

Assistant Superintendent 1 reported, “We have one-and-a-half technology support staff, one full-time curriculum director/instructional technology coach, and a secretary.” These members are all available to all students and staff members to support, train, and troubleshoot technology implementation. Instructional technology supports includes training all teachers to use desired technology devices, tools, and programs. Assistant Superintendent 1 further stated, “Social media use is also supported for administration.” For example, training is provided to assist in the use of the district Facebook site.

Assistant Principal 4 also stated having the support of the superintendent and board of education is important. He went on to explain, “We have a very supportive board of education that supports our training and technology needs.” Assistant Principal 4 also went on to say, “Due to the amount of other initiatives, sometimes technology training goes along the waste side. If a teacher comes to me with a need for support with technology, I will find a way to get the support.”

Assistant Superintendent 2 described minimal support in regard to technology support and social media use. Assistant Superintendent 2 replied, “We do have some discussions about MSBA policy regarding teacher/student communication and the use of cell phones and social media so that are staff are educated and aware of the policy.”

Principal 4 reported two areas of support, the first a technology specialist and the second was the staff. Principal 4 went on to describe her support mechanisms:

Our district has a position called "Ed technology specialist." Her job has been to teach teachers how to incorporate the use of Chromebooks and online tools in the classroom. This has been a tremendous help, as the district has purchased around 500 Chromebooks this year. We are not quite one-to-one. I think something that we need to do is actually teach teachers how to use the technology in the classroom. I am seeing freshman students and classes trying to totally rely on the Chromebook for instruction and assessment, but these students are not mature enough to use this platform solely. It's like asking a small child to learn how to ride a bike on a 10-speed. They aren't ready for it yet.

Assistant Principal 1 noted her biggest support is they have a technology coach who is available two hours a day, "The coach is a huge asset to our small district."

Principal 3 jokingly stated, "Don't put anything stupid out on social media...we don't offer anything." Superintendent 4 stated, "We don't offer any support. All social media is controlled by the principals." Assistant Superintendent 3 stated she has never had a teacher ever ask for support or training in regard to social media usage or parent involvement. Assistant Superintendent 3 went on to include the biggest problem in her district is the staff are not given the same technology as the students.

For example, all of the students in AS3's district is provided with a Chromebook, but teachers have not been issued any kind of technology other than the desktop computer in the classroom. She stated, "This is the reason that our students use the technology we

provide at a very basic level.” Furthermore, AS3 believed there are significant instructional differences between teachers who are issued the technology and those who are not. The teachers who have been issued the technology are able to take it home and spend time learning, exploring, and practicing.

Assistant Superintendent 4 listed several supports from his school district. He stated his school district has a communications director who is available to all teachers. Additionally, the school district has a “Tech-Brarian” in each building to assist with not only the library-media center, but also with technology integration and training.

### **Summary**

The utilization of technology and social media is increasing in schools (Arora, 2016). To determine the status of technology in the participating school districts, interviews were conducted with administrators. The perceptions and opinions of these administrators from rural Missouri were obtained to examine the role of social media as a primary means for parental involvement. A majority of the viewpoints of the participants was favorable to the use of social media as a means for involvement, but the participants related there was not a consistent approach among schools and districts.

In Chapter Five, the findings and conclusions are presented. Implications for practices are detailed. Then, recommendations for future research and a comprehensive summary of the study are offered.

## Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The Internet and social media has changed the way that people interact, create and maintain relationships, and interact and work together (White, 2016). With that said, there is an opportunity for educators to use social media for the purpose of involving parents in the educational process (Krutka & Carpenter, 2016). This study was conducted to analyze the perceptions of administrators in regard to the use of social media as a primary means of parent involvement.

This was a qualitative study based on the interpretivism philosophy, which was conducted with 16 rural Missouri assistant principals, principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents. The framework analysis method was used to identify similar responses of administrators concerning similarities of social media use for parent involvement. This study will serve as a resource for administrators by providing professional development topics teachers and administrators could use to implement best practices.

There were four main research questions as follows:

1. Which social media outlets are currently used by secondary school administrators?
2. What perceptions exist among principals regarding social media for communicating with parents as opposed to other traditional methods?
3. What perceptions exist among superintendents regarding social media for communicating with parents as opposed to other traditional methods?



4. What type of information and activities are communicated by secondary school administrators through social media outlets?

In this chapter, the research questions which guided the study are answered, and the findings are presented with supporting data. In addition, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research are provided regarding using social media as a primary means for parental involvement.

### **Findings**

The data indicated the perceptions of rural Missouri administrators fell into six major themes: Understanding of Social Media, Understanding of Parent Involvement, Effectiveness of Social Media, Experience of Social Media Relative to Parent Involvement, and Comparison with Traditional Methods.

Framework analysis is one of the most popular systematic approaches in qualitative analysis (Gale, Gemma, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). In this analysis, the researcher analyzes the common and consensus responses of respondents and tries to develop his or her understanding on the basis of those mutual responses (Islam & Mahmood, 2018). Following is Table 7 in which the framework analysis has been applied and divided by principal and superintendent responses. Highlighted is the framework theme, the consensus response.

Table 7

*Framework Analysis of Responses by Principal and Superintendent*

Framework Theme	Principal Consensus Response	Superintendent Consensus Response
Understanding of Social Media	Most of the respondents interviewed had limited views and scope in regard to the impact that social media can have and its capacity. Most respondents agreed that using social media for parent involvement is effective but did not portray a detailed and clear understanding of social media. Through their responses, there was consensus in regard to the “unknown” of social media.	Most of the respondents interviewed had limited views and scope in regard to the impact that social media can have and its capacity. Most respondents agreed that using social media for parent involvement is effective but did not portray a detailed and clear understanding of social media. Through their responses, there was consensus in regard to the “unknown” of social media. This consensus among superintendents was higher than that of principals. This also elicited the question of age. The superintendent age range appeared to be higher than that of the principal group.
Understanding of Parent Involvement	The majority of respondents interviewed had a traditional view of parent involvement, which included phone calls, newsletters, letters, and emails.	The majority of respondents interviewed had a traditional view of parent involvement, which included phone calls, newsletters, letters, and emails.
Effectiveness of Social Media	Almost all of the respondents confirmed that social media, as they understand it, is a good way to get parents involved. Although they believed that social media could be used as a means to involve, the majority of respondents lacked the professional development to speak about implementation and best practices of using social media as a means to involve parents.	As with the principal responses, almost all of the respondents confirmed that social media, as they understand it, is a good way to get parents involved. Although they believed that social media could be used as a means to involve, the majority of respondents lacked the professional development to speak about implementation and best practices of using social media as a means to involve parents. Additionally, the consensus was the respondents have not made it a professional development priority for their administrative or teaching staff.

Table 8

*Framework Analysis of Responses by Principal and Superintendent*

Experience of Social Media Relative to Parent Involvement	Almost all respondents confirmed that social media use has caused them to look at things differently, which they have not previously done. But, the consensus was they have not been intentional about creating a strategic plan of action that uses social media as applied to parent involvement. Several of the respondents were able to articulate some of the uses in “pockets” within the school. For example, a principal was able to discuss the use of Voxer, a social media platform, to help the communication between a special education student, parent, counselor, case worker, and principal.	The majority of respondents echoed the responses from the principals. They recognized they need to be more intentional and effective with both the use of technology and parent involvement. In rural schools in Missouri, there is unlikely a Communications Director. Typically that responsibility is going to fall on the principal and superintendent. This may be part of the reason as to why there is lack of intentionality and strategic planning for parent involvement and social media (technology).
Development of Social Media	The majority of respondents said that although they recognize social media is an important part of education today, they lack the professional development for administrators and teachers on effective practices.	The majority of respondents said that although they recognize social media is an important part of education today, there is still a lack of professional development for administrators and teachers on effective practices of implementing a plan of parent involvement as related to social media.
Comparison with Traditional Methods	Again, most respondents realized the impact social media could have on parent involvement; however, they lacked the understanding and planning of specific social media outlets within their district. Additionally, some respondents just admit they are “old school” and prefer phone calls and letters.	All superintendents were in favor of using social media as a means to involve parents and believed that in today’s society social media is far more effective than traditional methods. Again, as with the principals, they also agreed that without a clear understanding of the different platforms and uses for each, it will be difficult to capitalize on this tool.

Data were then analyzed, and the findings were summarized and applied to the corresponding research questions. Also, supporting literature from Chapter Two was incorporated to provide further comparisons with the results of this qualitative study.

**Research question one.** Which social media outlets are currently used by secondary school administrators?

**Email.** In an article by Turner (2019), *2019: Top 57 Social Media Platforms Every Executive Should Know*, she stated, “Email can often get overlooked in the world of social media, but if you define social media as tools that help you have a dialogue with your customers and prospects, then email falls in to the social media category” (para. 23). All participants reported using email as a social media outlet. Throughout the interview process, there was a discrepancy of understanding in regard to the participants classifying email as a social media outlet. For example, AP2 reported, “I think more parents will see messages through social media platforms as opposed to email.” Contrary to this description, AS2 described both Facebook and email as social media platform. Furthermore, AS2 stated, “We use Facebook and email as a secondary platform.”

**Facebook.** During the interviews each participating administrator was asked the question, “Does your school or district utilize a specific social media platform?” Fifteen of 16 participants reported the social platform they use most often is Facebook. In a research summary by Chaffey (2016), he reported, “Facebook’s dominance is truly extraordinary. Not only does it take the top spot, its other platforms also take second and third respectively. Facebook Messenger has an impressive 47 penetration, and Instagram

(also owned by Facebook) comes in second for engagement” (para. 27).

Superintendent 1 agreed, as he stated, “Facebook is the most used social media outlet by our parents and guardians.” Assistant Superintendent 2 agreed that Facebook is a great tool to use, but she also believed that using Facebook can allow for a “flood gate” of negative comments. Principal 1 supported the use of Facebook as a platform by stating, “Parents seem to like that we use Facebook because it allows family and friends to stay connected to our kids.”

*Instagram.* Instagram is described as a “fun” photography app that is “sweeping the globe” (Turner, 2019, para. 39). Only three administrators reported their school district utilized Instagram as a social media platform. Principal 4 reported using Instagram in her school district and elaborated by saying, “I think social media is a highly effective way to communicate with parents as this is the media in which we live. Using tools like Instagram, which is picture based, allow us to ‘brand’ our school.” Wheeler (2017) stated:

Effective brand strategy provides a central, unifying idea around which all behavior, actions, and communications are aligned. It works across products and services, and is effective over time. The best strategies are so differentiated and powerful that they deflect the competition. (p. 12)

In a study by Pittman and Reich (2016), they reported that especially young adults prefer social media platforms such as Instagram because “image-based platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat) have the potential to ameliorate loneliness due to the enhance intimacy they offer” (para. 6).

***Remind App.*** According to Google Play (2018), the location for which the Remind App can be downloaded is described as follows:

Remind is a communication platform that helps every student succeed. Whether you're in the classroom, at home, or anywhere in between, Remind makes it easy to stay connected to your school community. (para. 1)

Four participants reported using Remind App as a social media platform. Assistant Principal 2 stated, “A lot of our coaches and sponsors use the Remind App. It is not something that we track or ask them to use. It is something that they just do on their own.”

Assistant Superintendent 2 also reported that many of her school’s clubs and athletic sponsors use the Remind App to communication with students and parents. In a review by Rogowski (2018) and *Common Sense Education*, the cons of the Remind App are stated: “Without mindful use, it could be more enabling than empowering; families in varying parts of the digital divide may not have equal access” (para. 2).

***SchoolMessenger.*** Five participants reported their school or district uses School Messenger as a social media platform. SchoolMessenger (2019) is defined as the following:

SchoolMessenger combines school notification, mobile apps, and web content management all under one, easy-to-use platform. Designed to work together from the start, our school communication systems save time and provide more immediate, thorough engagement with your community. (para. 1)

Although most respondents reported using SchoolMessenger, S3 elaborated the most by saying:

We use SchoolMessenger to notify parents of anything that is going on. For example, if school is canceled, I will receive an email, phone call, and text message telling me what is going on. We have sent school emergency information, attendance reports, and other alerts through SchoolMessenger. We also send weekly newsletters out through SchoolMessenger. It is kind of like a one-stop-shop for communication.

Principal 4 reported that her district uses SchoolMessenger mainly for calendar items and school closings. Assistant Superintendent stated, “We only use SchoolMessenger for entire district communication.”

*Text.* During the interviews, three of the respondents reported texting as a form of social media. Although it is questionable if texting is a form of social media (You, 2018), this researcher still wanted to include this component as it was a reported method used for social media. Principal 4 reported, “Text messages have also been used by teachers to communicate with students and parents.” She also stated, “This makes me very nervous!”

During the interviews, each participating administrator was asked, “What types of support do you offer teachers when it comes to technology implementation and social media use?” Assistant Principal 3 reported all teachers, including new teachers, go through training. Furthermore, AP3 stated, “We discuss the use of texting and the use of social media and the expectation of professionalism, but I guess we don’t provide support

on how to use it appropriately.”

**Twitter.** Of the administrators interviewed, seven participants reported using Twitter as a social media outlet. Gil (2018) described Twitter as follows:

Twitter is an online news and social networking site where people communicate in short messages called tweets. Tweeting is posting short messages for anyone who follows you on Twitter, with the hope that your messages are useful and interesting to someone in your audience. Another description of Twitter and tweeting might be microblogging. Some people use Twitter to discover interesting people and companies online, opting to follow their tweets. (para. 1)

Superintendent 3 reported using Twitter for professional reasons. Superintendent 3 also said, “I use Twitter for professional development as there is a huge educational community online.” Schools are using Twitter as a quick and easy alternative for professional development (Caron, 2017).

**Research question two.** What perceptions exist among principals regarding social media for communicating with parents as opposed to other traditional methods?

Principal 1 described his thoughts: “Parents seem to like the Facebook notifications and announcements, especially if it includes family and friends. For all district announcements we use a feature through Lumen that will reach all of our parents.” Principal 1 also indicated, “This works great when the contact information that we have in our school system is updated.”

Principal 1 also described his thoughts on using social media as the primary means: “I believe we are in time when social media probably needs to become the



primary means for parent involvement, but what I see is that teachers and administrators are not that comfortable with the technology and so, not allowing it to become a primary means.” Principal 2 believed using social media as a means for parent involvement was appropriate, but went on to say, “Social media needs to be used a secondary tool for keeping stakeholders up-to-date with what is happening at school.”

Principal 4 elaborated, “The district uses Facebook and Twitter for communication about typical school things such as school closings and athletic events. In the past this has not been an avenue for communication and engagement but rather like an advertisement board.” Principal 3 admitted to being “old school” and believed there is more value to receiving information face-to-face, over the phone, or in a letter. Principal 3 was also apprehensive about social media due to the liability that might exist with putting something “stupid” on the internet.

**Research question three.** What perceptions exist among superintendents regarding social media for communicating with parents as opposed to other traditional methods?

Superintendent 1 was adamant administrators should be cautious:

Any time you utilize a third party to handle communication, you can have issues.

Facebook is the most used social media outlet by our parents and guardians;

however, the way algorithms are set up, we often hear back from parents and

guardians the announcement, activity, post, message is not showing up for them.

Assistant Superintendent 2 elaborated on the use of social media as a primary means for parent involvement:

I am indifferent. Using social media as your primary means of parent contact or involvement is an open gate for negative and positive comments alike; however, in my experience, once a negative comment is posted, the flood gates can open wide with both supporters of the school and those who like to bash. Sometimes, using a phone call is a simpler approach that doesn't allow or require any feedback. I think the best is to use a variety of all forms of communication when feedback is needed Google docs or surveys are great, as well as Facebook when it's a message being sent out and feedback is not needed. Sometimes, I feel it's best to use a simple phone call.

Superintendent 2 reported, “While many people have a social media account, there are still several who do not. There are times when we utilize Facebook to get a quick message out to parents and the community.” Superintendent 2 described instances when there is no time to get a note home. He went on to add:

We live in a difficult time. For example, when cancelling school due to weather, we have to use all mediums such as a Facebook post, a school reach call, messages to the local newspaper, and radio station. We also use other news media such as schoolclosingnetwork and KY3.

Specifically, S2 believed, “social media has not removed the necessity of the other forms of communication and parent involvement.”

Assistant Superintendent 1 believed social media is how current parents communicate. Assistant Superintendent 1 went on to explain, “Schools that do not consider using social media are missing a key component of ways to reach parents, even

if it's only one-way communication.” Assistant Superintendent 1 also suggested:

Educators would ultimately rather have face-to-face conversations with parents but social media is a way to have an initial connection with parents and for parents to feel like they are connected and informed about school events, activities, and general information.

Superintendent 3 elaborated and reiterated his point about social media as a primary means for parent involvement:

I think social media has its positives and negatives. It is a quick and cost-effective way to get information out to parents if the parent is an active user of the social media medium. However, I think that some information can be misinterpreted by written communication versus face-to-face conversation and interactions. Also, I live in a rural area where there are several families that do not have access to the internet or what they have is not consistent. For example, we have a lot of parents that have only a limited amount of minutes on their phone, which makes this method of engagement not reliable. I am also a parent in the district and have been guilty of ignoring school communication because I get the same message by phone, text, and email. This multi-means of communication can be a little too much.

**Research question four.** What type of information and activities are communicated by secondary school administrators through social media outlets?

From the research gathered in this study, rural Missouri administrators are using social media outlets to engage teachers within the district and stakeholders outside of the

district. Assistant Principal 2 reported Facebook is consistently used as a communication mechanism throughout the district to share and highlight events and student activities. Assistant Principal 2 provided an example: “Recently, we have highlighted the students who had perfect attendance for the first quarter.” Additionally, S3 communicated her district recognized “Students of the Month.” All of the superintendents reported using Facebook and School Messenger for school cancellations. Superintendent 2 reported, “The district can reach more individuals and at a faster rate by posting our school cancellations on Facebook.”

Likewise, AS1 believed Facebook has allowed the district to share stories and events with a larger audience than through traditional methods. Principal 4 stated, “Through Facebook, the district is able to highlight events at school for the entire community.” Assistant Principal 3 reported she uses Facebook and Twitter to communicate any information teachers believe is important to share with parents. Assistant Superintendent 3 reported using social media to showcase student achievements, communicate news and information, and daily happenings in real time.

## **Conclusions**

Conclusions were developed based upon the responses from the participants, which were analyzed and then applied to answer the research questions. This section includes conclusions concerning common perceptions among rural Missouri principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and assistant superintendents in regard to social media being used as a primary means for parent involvement. The following themes are the result of analysis of participants’ transcribed interviews.

**While social media is believed to be a tool for involvement, it must be intentional and systematic to be effective.** Administrators in this study agreed social media has a place in public education to assist with parent involvement. While participants were upfront about the challenges and lack of initiative, the benefits of social media as tool for parent involvement superseded the challenges. While there were varying examples shared by the participants, there was consistency in the benefits. Participants spoke of the timeliness of communication that schools are able to capitalize on in the event administrators have to relay information quickly. This observation relates to research on how social media can provide leadership with an avenue to quickly respond to a situation to prevent crisis and share how a matter is being resolved (Huda et al., 2019).

Although administrators did discuss social media as a tool for involvement, there was also consistency in the interviews that led me to believe that administrators and schools involved in this study lack intentionality and systematic planning for the tool of social media to be capitalized on most effectively. When administrators were able to identify a specific plan put in place by the school district, their perception of social media favored the positive perception trend versus a negative perception trend. Administrators were able to gain more benefits when the district had a school-wide or district-wide plan.

**School districts should provide professional development related to the use of social media as a tool for parent involvement.** Professional development should help administrators see the value of social media as it pertains to parent involvement and how and when it can be used safely and effectively. Administrators should be able to

conclude from professional development that parent engagement has a high level of impact on student achievement and that social media technology can support that engagement. Additionally, professional development should assist administrators understand that today's technologies are complex and require a deep level of understanding as compared to technology from the past.

**Administrators do not examine their definition of social media and define what that looks like in their building as to not minimize to only social networking sites.** There are many different types of social media platforms and tools available to school administrators. Social networking is a type of social media which includes Facebook, Instagram, and Snap Chat (Fuchs, 2017). Too often, social media is thought solely as social networking for which most people, including those in the study, refer to Facebook as the leader.

Part of the reason that administrators confuse the two is because they have something in common. In an article by Cohn (2018), he stated:

One thing that social media and social networking have in common is they both depend on viral marketing to become truly successful. If the content goes viral, more and more people will be paying attention and the more online traffic you have, the better your chances are of increasing your business. A simple way to look at the basic difference between social media and social networking is that social media assists users to make the initial connection and social networking develops the connection between people. People get together because they have common interests, passions, and causes and they continue to strengthen their

relationships as they get to know each other through interaction over time. (para. 5)

It is imperative to understand that social media and social networking sites are not the same, but both are important and can be used by administrators for the success of the school district. It is also important for administrators to understand that social media is more than just Facebook.

**There is a need for school districts to have a more defined parent involvement plan.** Almost all administrators expressed they either did not have a parent involvement plan or they communicated the only plan they have is at the elementary level. Those administrators who reported plans, also communicated the primary purpose of the plans were to appease Title I parent involvement requirements. As part of the draft Missouri School Improvement Plan-6 (MODESE, 2019), references are made to collaborative partnerships in two areas:

1. The school is intentional in providing opportunities for parents/guardians to learn about the intellectual and development needs of their children, at all ages, and to participate constructively in their children's education. (p. 5)
2. The school community collaborates to demonstrate shared vision, mission, values, and goals for promoting high expectations, enhancing and sustaining a positive school environment. (p. 5)

Analysis of the administrator interviews revealed that administrators who claimed to have a plan, did not recall many details about the building or district plan.

## **Implications for Practice**

The data collected from the interviews indicated a majority of school administrators, both principals and superintendents, support social media as a primary means for parental involvement. Blackwell et al. (2013) indicated lack of professional development is a concern of educators. The research conducted in this study revealed similar results, as all 16 participants indicated limited professional development related to research-based practices in social media as it pertains to parent involvement. As explained by two administrators in the study, social media can be a powerful, too, but also can be a dangerous tool, and adequate professional development is necessary for effective implementation. Professional development is of the utmost importance when dealing with the application of social media and technology.

During the interviews, administrators indicated that social media as it relates to parent involvement should be intentional and used in such a way that enhances the school-home relationship. This belief is congruent with the recommendations from the NAEYC (2012): “Technology and interactive media are tools that can promote effective learning and development when they are used intentionally...and within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice... to support learning goals established for individual children” (p. 5). The topics revealed in the study can serve as professional development sessions for educators to develop a deeper understanding of strategies on how to implement social media as a means for parent involvement.

Due to the shortage of in-district training and out-of-district training specific to social media and parent involvement, it would be beneficial for administrators and



teachers in rural Missouri to create and participate in professional development opportunities through a collaborative partnership with local professional agencies. The participants who were interviewed reported to have a variety of experiences with social media as related to parent involvement but generally lacked the development to serve as presenters. The collaboration could include working with the MODESE and local Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC) to offer more guidance and clear expectations to increase parent involvement through social media.

Most importantly, the findings from this study could have a significant impact on the future of professional development for administrators and teachers. It is the role of the administrators and educators to adequately and appropriately involve parents in the education of their children. Social media and technology are only going to continue to grow and become a more integral part of society and the educational environment. To best prepare teachers and administration, it is necessary have proper training and development.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This qualitative study was conducted to gather the perceptions of rural Missouri principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and assistant superintendents for using social media as a primary means for parent involvement. The findings from this study suggest the following recommendations for future research.

1. Conduct the study in different geographical locations to gain the perspectives of a larger population of administrators. For example, a nationwide study could be conducted.

2. The data for this study were qualitative, consisting of interviews of administrators. For future studies, the use of both qualitative and quantitative data could provide more information on the perceptions of administrators. Quantitative data, such as age and professional development hours could reveal different themes of conclusion.
3. Conduct a study on the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding the use of social media as a method for parents to be involved. Additionally, teachers could be interviewed or surveyed to find out what social media outlets they use to effectively engage and involve parents.
4. Within this study, there was limited demographic information collected from participants. An important area to study could be how years of experience, gender, race, and the socioeconomic status of the students impact perceptions of administrators about social media.
5. Other findings from this study suggest that future research examines how school districts define social media as it relates to parent involvement. A clear definition of social media and scope for how it is expected to be used in a district is necessary. When social media is minimized as only being about one social networking site such as Facebook, this may impact the perception of administrators.
6. Examine how administrators' perceptions of social media impact educational use by teachers and students. If their perception of social media use is

negative, the question becomes: Does that affect the potential impact for the use of social media as a tool for academic achievement in their school?

7. Examine the impact of districts requiring administrators to use social media for professional purposes and if that would change the perceptions of social media being used as an effective tool to increase parent involvement.
8. Compare the perceptions and pedagogy of administrators who are producing effective and successful schools and districts and using social media as a means for parental involvement to the perceptions and pedagogy of those administrators who are not comfortable with social media.
9. Findings from this study suggest that future research examine how school districts define “primary” means as relates to the use of social media for parent involvement.
10. Replicate this study with a larger interview base.

## **Summary**

District superintendents and building principals have to progressively and technologically develop the way they communicate with stakeholders. Improving communication allows for administrators to improve the brand of the school district and increase buy-in of all stakeholders. According to Bartz, Rice, and Karnes (2018), school administrators and other educational leaders need to build a collaborative culture in which they provide meaningful input and output by using any communication tool available to reach all stakeholders.

Parent involvement is much different today than years ago, but what has not changed is the importance of parent involvement in the academic success of children. According to Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), “schools need to build partnerships with parents and develop mutual responsibility of children’s’ success in the educational system” (p. 137). Faizi, Afia, and Chiheb (2014) noted, “Another vital benefit of social media is that they foster collaboration. Collaboration means working together jointly, intellectually, and socially to achieve common goals” (p. 52). Technology and interactive media are tools that can promote effective learning and development and have the ability to connect the formal and informal learning through the participation of digital technologies (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of secondary administrators and superintendents of rural Missouri in regard to using social media as a primary means for parental involvement. In this study, a majority of administrators showed interest toward using social media; however, the actual use and knowledge of use was limited. There was a population of principals and superintendents who believed that social media does not have a place in public education in regard to parental involvement. This research provides an example of the potential of social media technologies to reduce the gap between home and school to encourage parent involvement. Research shows that student outcomes, which include attendance, behavior, academic achievement, and health, increases as parents become more engaged in student learning within the school setting (Povey et al., 2016).

Chapter One included background for the study, as well as a conceptual framework. Also included was the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. In Chapter One the significance of the study was detailed. In addition, the research questions which guided this study were presented. Lastly, the definitions of key terms, limitations, and assumptions were described.

In Chapter Two, a literature review was included. The literature reviewed for this study was divided into categories. Specific to parent involvement, topics included in this study were types of parent involvement, ways to increase parent involvement, parent involvement and academic achievement, obstacles of parent involvement, and perceptions of stakeholders.

Specific to social media, topics included in this review were types of social media, social media compared to social networking, corporate and business utilization, educational utilization, benefits of social media, obstacles to social media, perceptions of stakeholders, social media policy, and tips for school administrators. Each section included findings from experts and theorists in the field of education and business field. The literature review was considered when analyzing practices currently implemented by rural Missouri public school principals and superintendents.

In Chapter Three, the methodology used in this qualitative study was described. The purpose of the study was identified, and the research questions were restated. More detailed explanations of the sample, instrumentation, and the data collection procedures were documented. The researcher utilized the method of purposive sampling, resulting in 16 administrators participating from rural Missouri. The participants agreed to

interviews, and semi-structured interview questions were asked to gather their perceptions concerning the use of social media as a primary means for parent involvement. Data collected from the interviews were then analyzed to determine commonalities between their perceptions and literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Lastly, the ethical considerations were addressed.

Chapter Four included the perceptions and opinions of rural Missouri public school principals and superintendents. Interviews conducted with principals and superintendents were analyzed using open and axial coding procedures. In this study, the perceptions of the administrators indicated support for use of social media as a means for parent involvement.

In Chapter Five, the research questions which guided the study were answered, and the findings were presented with supporting data. In addition, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research were provided regarding using social media as a primary means for parental involvement.

In summary, the perceptions of administrators seemed to favor the use of social media as a means of parental involvement. Although the administrator perceptions favored social media, the definitions and beliefs of social media and parent involvement were different. The social media outlet that was predominantly used by administrators was Facebook. In addition, there was little consistency as to what type of information or activities that was being communicated.

## Appendix A

### Administrator Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself (Number of years in education as a teacher and as a superintendent/assistant superintendent/principal/assistant principal; areas of certification; highest degree held.)
2. Does your school or district currently have a parent involvement initiative?
3. If so, is social media included in this initiative? (Examples of social media may include, but not limited to, email, text messages, communication applications, Facebook, Instagram, school reach systems, etc.)
4. Tell me your thoughts on using social media as a primary means for parent involvement (specifically grades 9-12).
5. Does your school or district utilize a specific social media platform (Examples of social media platforms may include, but not limited to, email, text messages, communication applications, Facebook, Instagram, school reach systems, etc.)? If so, please explain.
6. Does your school or district provide professional development for teachers and administrators in the area of social media and parent involvement? If so, describe the focus and/or titles of the professional development sessions.
7. What types of technology do teachers use within your school or district (Examples of technology may include, but not limited to, iPads, Chromebooks, laptops, cell phones, tablets, etc.)?
8. Which do you feel is the most important?

9. What types of support do you offer teachers when it comes to technology implementation and social media?



## Appendix B

### IRB Approval Letter

Feb 5, 2019 12:57 PM CST

RE:

IRB-19-141: Initial - Social Media as a Primary Means for Parent Involvement in Missouri Rural Schools: Secondary School Principals' and Superintendents' Perceptions

Dear Justin Copley,

The study, Social Media as a Primary Means for Parent Involvement in Missouri Rural Schools: Secondary School Principals' and Superintendents' Perceptions, has been approved as Exempt.

Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

The submission was approved on February 5, 2019.

Here are the findings:

- This study has been determined to be minimal risk because the research is not obtaining data considered sensitive information or performing interventions posing harm greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

Sincerely,

Lindenwood University (lindenwood) Institutional Review Board

## Appendix C

### Letter of Participation

<Interview>

Dear <Title First Name and Last Name>

My name is Justin Copley. I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University, and I am conducting a research study on the perceptions of Missouri rural secondary principals and superintendents in regard to social media as a primary means for parent involvement.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. I have attached the Research Information Sheet and a copy of the interview questions to be used. If you choose to participate, please respond affirmatively to this email message and I will be in contact with you soon to schedule a telephone interview.

Please contact me at [jpc727@lindewood.edu](mailto:jpc727@lindewood.edu) with any questions you might have.

Thank you,

Justin Copley  
Lindenwood University  
Doctoral Student

**Appendix D****LINDENWOOD****Research Information Sheet**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. We are doing this study to learn about perceptions of secondary school principals and superintendents on the use of social media as a primary means for parent involvement as opposed to traditional methods. During this study you will participate in an interview of open-ended questions regarding social media as a primary means for parent involvement as opposed to traditional methods. It will take about 30 minutes to complete this study. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time. There are no risks from participating in this project. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

We will not collect any data which may identify you. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

**Who can I contact with questions?**

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Mr. Justin Copley, [jpc727@lindenwood.edu](mailto:jpc727@lindenwood.edu)

Dr. Sherry DeVore, [sdevore@lindenwood.edu](mailto:sdevore@lindenwood.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or [mleary@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mleary@lindenwood.edu).

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### **Vita**

Justin Paul Copley attended College of the Ozarks for his undergraduate degree. He obtained a Bachelor of Science in Business and Secondary Education in 2006. Justin was hired to the Plato School District as a high school business educator in June 2006. In addition, Justin began his cross-country coaching career in 2006 and continued to coach until 2015. In 2011, Justin accepted a new position as Superintendent of Schools in the Success School District. He worked in that district for two years and then returned to the Plato School District as an elementary principal. In 2015, he transferred internally within the Plato District and became the middle and high school principal. In July of 2018, Justin accepted a high school principal position within the Houston R-I School District, a position which he currently holds.

Prior to Justin's employment in the Plato School District, he joined the Army National Guard as a Non-Commissioned Officer. He remained part of the National Guard from March 2004 to March 2012, serving in many capacities and locations: Germany, Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, and local state emergencies.

While working in the Plato School District, he has also earned his Master's Degree in Education and is currently working on a doctoral degree in Educational Administration from Lindenwood University. Justin is a proud patron and small business owner in the Plato community. In 2006, he opened Just-In-Time Fitness where he offers several services to the community.