USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND OHIO SENTATE MEMBERS AS IT RELATES TO AGRICULTURAL POLICIES

Thesis

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Abstract

Social media sites have become widely used and are a relatively new form of communication, with uses that are new to many. Use of social media by the public is increasing and reports show that the public has been engaging with each other on political topics; but it is hard to determine if they have been engaging with politicians, and if politicians are engaging with them. Studies have looked at the views and uses of social media by staff members of politicians and their use in campaigns, but few studies have looked at how the elected officials are using social media, particularly in terms of engaging with constituents, and policy decision making. The majority of attention to political use of social media is also focused on the national levels not state or local politics. Studies also have not focused on specific industries and social media use in politics, particularly the agriculture industry.

For Ohio agriculture, a study was needed to examine how Ohio politicians are using social media, and if they are using social media when making policy decisions related to agriculture. This information can help the public to better understand how to engage their elected officials using social media.
The purpose of this study was to examine how Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members are using social media, and how they are using it as it relates to agriculture and agricultural policy decision making. Grounded in ideas from media richness theory, social presence theory, groundswell, and other studies of political use of social media, this study aims to meet the following research objectives: Describe the use of social media, compare the agriculture background to their use of social media, describe social media connections to agricultural organizations in Ohio, describe social media effects on agriculture policy decision making of Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members.

This study collected data from eight qualitative interviews, six with Ohio Representatives and two with Ohio Senators selected through random sampling of the entire population of Ohio Representatives and Senators. Interviews were conducted both in-person and by phone, depending on the preference and availability of the participant. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using open coding, themes were found, and reported.

This study found that most Representatives and Senators are using social media, but that they are still developing that use, and still deciding the value of conversations held through social media. It would seem that social media is not impacting policy voting on agricultural issues much at this time, but with some relationship building and continued engagement by individuals, social media could become the next email in terms of elected officials’ communication with constituents.
Dedicated to everyone in my life who has believed in me.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Communication technologies have developed greatly throughout history. In early times, communication started with the development of languages, which led to communication through writing, with things such as letters, and later on books. When inventions such as the printing press came about, communication moved to mass communication through media such as newspapers and magazines. After this came radio, then television, and then the Internet. Each of these advancements dramatically changed how people communicate with each other.

There have also been changes and advancements, throughout history, in agricultural policy, in the state and federal governments of the United States. With changes in policies come the opinions of those invested in the portions of the industry that are impacted by the policy. Those interested in making their opinions known to the policy makers use a variety of tools to communicate their opinions to government officials, and to the public; and those tools change and advance as communication media changes. It seems that the recent advancement in Internet technology and the evolution of
Social media has created a new tool to facilitate communication between policy makers and those interested in the policies that impact the agricultural industry.

**History of Communication and Information in Politics**

The history of political communication can be explained by information revolutions that have occurred throughout American history. Bimber (2011) describes the first information revolution, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, as the technological development of the U.S. Postal Service and the American newspaper industry. The development of these entities allowed for national flow of political information that was the first possibility for mass flow of information. This helped develop a simple and centralized political system, with parties, which served as the dominant policy-making and collective action influence (Bimber, 2011).

The second information revolution that Bimber describes was a socio-economic development with the industrial revolution and the growing country. Policy issues increased, causing the national agenda to multiply along with the number of private and public members engaged in information exchange. With the increasing complexity of information, a new form of organizing information was needed. This need was met by the development of the organized interest groups, which can be considered information specialists. This caused a more decentralized complex system with the interest groups serving as policy and collective action influences (Bimber, 2011).
The next information revolution in the 1950s-1970s involved the technological development of broadcasting, with the possibility to command national-scale mass audience attention. In the early years of broadcasting, party organizations in politics were weakened by the mass audience, but new possibilities surfaced. Later in the revolution, the development of cable television, and increase in the number of channels, fragmented and divided communication and information; this set the stage for the technologies of the next revolution. This revolution moved communication and information back to a centralized and resource-dependent system of market-driven organization that influenced policy along with the interest groups (Bimber, 2011).

The current information regime, as Bimber describes it, involves technology increasing the complexity and specialization of information, while also decreasing the cost. New technologies, such as the Internet, are making political information and communication abundant and available to anyone that wishes to acquire it. Bimber speculates that the new, cheaper, technologies expand the possibilities for engagement, and fuel a rise in levels of citizen political involvement (Bimber, 2011).

Development of the Internet

The development of the Internet, as it is known today, starts with a pre-history that began in the 1950s-1970s. Networking systems began to be developed in the 1950s as a result of state intervention. Government funded research programs began developing as a response to Russia’s launch of Sputnik, and a way to integrate research programs that
were scattered across the country was needed. As a result, ARPANET, considered the precursor to the Internet, was developed to connect U.S. universities and their research projects (Chadwick, 2006).

In the 1970s, ARPANET was a network of defense contractors and a limited number of elite universities, but late in the decade the development of small personal computers led to the development of technologies, such as dial-up modems, by do-it-yourself and hacker cultures. The 1980’s saw an increase in government investment in Internet governance. This led to expansion of networks to join academic intuitions across the country, and eventually to Europe, but commercial use was banned at that time. The policy that banned commercial use was vague enough to be worked around and was difficult to enforce. This led to the Internet connecting academic, government, and corporation organizations, and eventually to the backbone of the Internet being fully privatized in the 1990s (Chadwick, 2006).

The end of the pre-history of the Internet is the development of the World Wide Web in the 1990s. This development allowed several technological developments to converge. Then, the development of HTML and HTTP allowed the Internet to evolve into a more graphical medium. This is when use of the Internet exploded with commercial, educational, and government users (Chadwick, 2006).

When ARPANET was originally developed, it was meant to be a command, control, and communication medium for the Pentagon to link Congress, the White House, and the military in the event of nuclear war. ARPANET led to the development of the
Internet, which is nonhierarchical and is a very large web of networks worldwide that no longer have limited access. Users can now communicate and transmit data to one another, including full-color pictures, video, and text through the Internet. The Internet is as close to television as ever, with the development of video streaming, and is a fraction of the cost. The Internet has also caused a major increase in the amount of information users can access, which has led to regular Internet users being more interested in politics that ever before (Browning, 2002).

With an increased interest in politics by Internet users, the most recent developments referred to as social media, have potential to have a great impact on U.S. politics.

Social Media

Social media has been defined as being, “centered around the concept of a read–write Web, where the online audience moves beyond passive viewing of Web content to actually contributing to the content” (Sweester & Lariscy, 2008, p. 179). In 2008, Boyd and Ellison defined social networking 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. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site,” (pp.1).
Stassen gives another definition of social media, “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content,” (2010, pp. 5).

The most common portions of social media definitions are user-generated content and interactivity. These definitions differ slightly in terminology, some using the term social media and the others social networking sites, but for this study the term social media will be used and a definition that incorporates all of these definitions will be used.

Several social media sites started as early as 1997, but many of these did not last. At the time, many people were not using the Internet regularly, and those that were early adopters of these social media became bored with the low level of activity on the sites. Most of these early sites included a user profile, a friends list, and a way to communicate with the friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Friendster was the first relatively successful site. It was created to compete with Match.com, a dating site, with the idea that a friend of a friend would make a better date. Friendster began to decline in popularity, but another major social media, MySpace, emerged in 2003 (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). MySpace became very popular because of bands that promoted themselves through the site, because it added features based on user demand, and it was popular with teens who told their friends about it. There was rapid growth in MySpace use, but they were plagued with problems because of sexual predators using the site (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).
While MySpace became popular in the U.S., many other countries had other social media sites that were popular with their citizens. Blogging sites also became popular worldwide. Then, in 2004, Facebook was developed as a social media site just for Harvard students. Facebook then began supporting other universities, but users had to have a “.edu” email address. In 2005, Facebook opened up to high school students, and then expanded to allow anyone with an email address to join (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Facebook’s popularity has soared and it continues to be one of the top social media sites with 92% of social media users using Facebook in 2010 (Hampton, et al., 2011). Other sites such as YouTube and Twitter also have become popular along with Facebook, and many use these sites for more than online communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Social media sites bridge offline communities with online communities. People that are connected through social media typically have a shared interest, some connections are through strong ties and some are weak ties, but even weak ties often share at least one similar offline interest (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Social media has allowed users to maintain relationships that they may not have been able to do without them, and has allowed users to begin talking to each other and engaging in conversations about issues and topics that are important to them. According to the PEW Research Center, “68% of all Americans said the Internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to communicate with members,” (Rainie, Purcell, & Smith, 2011, p. 2) and “48% of those who are active in groups say that those groups
have a page on a social networking site like Facebook.” (p. 2). The same PEW survey showed that those who use the Internet have higher levels of participation in their groups and in person than non-users (Rainie, et. al., 2011, p. 2-5). This shows that people are using the Internet to communicate, and are most likely to use social media sites to do so.

The social media movement has changed the way businesses, organizations, and individuals communicate with each other. This has created the opportunity for anyone to create and share content, as well as view other people’s content, and have conversations about it in real-time (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). With this opportunity for anyone to create and share content, view content, and have conversations, the use of social media has been increasing at a rapid rate. In a PEW research poll, 59% of adult Americans used at least one social networking site in 2010, as compared to the 39% that used social networking sites in 2008. PEW also found that internet users, and particularly Facebook users, are more politically engaged (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011).

Political Use of Social Media

Social media users use these technologies to participate in many different things, including politics. According to a PEW research survey, “Among social networking site users, 40% of Republican voters and 38% of Democratic voters used these sites to get involved politically,” (Smith, 2011, p. 2).
There are many studies that show how the public is using social media with politics, but there are very few that show how politicians are using social media. Some Capitol Hill staffers have said that the Internet has decreased the quality of constituent messages. There seems to be some negative buzz about using social media to engage constituents because it is difficult to determine who are true constituents (Lovely, 2011). Despite this, politicians do use social media.

For example, President Barak Obama had success with this in his 2008 Presidential campaign by tapping into social networks to recruit volunteers for his campaign, raise money, and get out the vote (Carr, 2008). President Obama did not abandon social media once he was elected. Knowing that those who elected him would want to stay connected, and that this would be a key to success while in office, he maintained a social media presence. The President can now cultivate grassroots communities directly, in a place that people already discover, create, and share information. The President also promised to involve citizens in decision-making by allowing legislation to be online and available for comments from the public for 5 days before his signs it. He also created his own version of fireside chats, but instead of the radio he uses YouTube and other online videos that allow for comments. Both of these uses of social media by the President help to meet the goal to make the political process more transparent (Qualman, 2011).

With all of the political use of social media, there is potential for citizens and organizations to impact policy more than in the past. One industry that has many
government policy concerns is the agriculture industry. There is potential for those involved in the agriculture industry to use social media to communicate their concerns with agricultural policies.

Agriculture Industry in Ohio

In the 2010 Annual Report, Ohio Department of Agriculture Director James Zehringer said, “Governor Kasich has made it clear that he believes that the agriculture industry will lead the way out of this economic downturn. Agriculture is already Ohio’s largest industry, but there is still greater potential for further growth.” (pp. 7). According to the United State Department of Agriculture Economic Research service more than 14 million acres of land in Ohio are used for agriculture production, and the top commodities for Ohio are soybeans, corn, and dairy (“state fact sheets,” 2012). For Ohio’s largest industry to have further growth, development of government policies is a topic of interest that agriculture organizations must engage.

One of Ohio’s largest agriculture organizations is the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation. The mission of Ohio Farm Bureau, according to their website, is “to forge a partnership between farmers and consumers that meets consumer needs and ensures agricultural prosperity in a global marketplace,” (Ohio Farm Bureau, “History,” n.d.). Ohio Farm Bureau has a staff of experts, lobbyists, and educators that work to promote quality legislation that benefits the agricultural industry. Staff members also work to educate organization members on how legislation will affect them. To ensure agricultural
prosperity the Ohio Farm Bureau staff works with its members to develop a list of federal and state priority issues that are of concern. These priority issues are what Ohio Farm Bureau uses to guide their campaigns to effect government policies (Ohio Farm Bureau, “Legislation,” n.d.). Ohio Farm Bureau state priority issues in 2011 included estate tax, business climate and taxes, state budget, transportation, animal care, and energy and environment (Ohio Farm Bureau, “Legislation,” n.d.).

Another group that represents the interests of their farmer members is the Ohio Soybean Association. According to their website, “As a grassroots organization, the Ohio Soybean Association's mission is to provide leadership for Ohio's soybean producers in promoting effective policies and legislation to ensure a growing and profitable soybean industry,” (Ohio Soy Association, “Welcome,” n.d.). Ohio Soybean Association focuses on educating and promoting the soybean industry while representing Ohio soybean farmers' interests in the state government and at the national level on the American Soybean Association board. The Ohio Soybean Association has interest in several topics in the state government including estate tax, zoning laws, and agricultural law revisions (Ohio Soy Association, “State legislative update,” n.d.).

A group similar to the Ohio Soy Association, in the fact that it represents the interests of farmers of a specific commodity, is the Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association. According to their website, “Ohio Corn & Wheat Growers Association has positioned itself as both an educational and political powerhouse for the regulation and advancement of domestic and international issues that affect the success of Ohio’s corn
and wheat markets,” (Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association, “About OCWGA,” n.d.). This association of farmers has several top issues that they lobby for in the government on behalf of their members including the farm bill, ethanol, trade, transportation, and energy policies (Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association, “Priority issues,” n.d.).

Several other associations exist to represent farmers of specific commodities, and all make attempts, through many different media to reach, out to politicians who make decisions on agricultural policy. Social media is the newest technological development in communication, and the agriculture industry can use it to communicate with others.

Agriculture and Social Media

An increasing number of farmers and people involved in the agriculture industry are using social media. Farmers are tweeting from their tractors and including pictures of what they are doing in order to engage in conversations with consumers who may be worried about how their food is being produced (Hest, 2010).

One specific group that has organized to tell the story of agriculture through social media is the Ag Chat Foundation. The foundation teaches farmers how to effectively tell their stories using social media. With its beginning in a weekly chat on Twitter using the hashtag “#AGCHAT,” the foundation uses social media to give farmers a larger voice (Ag Chat Foundation, n.d.).
With a very small percentage of the population still involved in production agriculture, politicians included, there is a need for farmers and agriculturalists to communicate how they are producing food with those that have no knowledge of food production. The need for more information to make decisions about agriculture was identified by the National Research Agenda for Agricultural Education and Communication with this statement: “Most issues relating to agriculture are complex and include a varying degree of risk. Provided with reliable information and given solid tools with which to process it, people will make informed decisions that are good for themselves, society, and the world,” (Osborn et al, 2007, p. 10). One source of reliable information for a non-farmer is interaction with a farmer (D. Toland, personal communication, November 2011), and according to Grant (2010) social media are “delivering the non-farmer to the farm.” In other words social media can be used to allow non-farmers to interact with farmers, which can be a part of the information people use to make informed decisions about food and agriculture.

Significance and Problem Statement

Social media sites have been in existence for several years now, but in relation to other forms of media, its uses are very new to all involved. The public is continually using social media at higher rates and they are also using social media to get involved in politics at higher rates. The public has been engaging with each other when it comes to politics, but it is hard to determine if they have been engaging with politicians, due to a
lack of research in the area. It is also hard to determine how politicians are using social media outside of their election campaigns because most research and reporting on politicians using social media revolves around how they have used it in their campaigns and has mostly focused on national politicians, not state or local politicians (Abroms & Lefebvre, 2009; Johnson & Perlmutter, 2010; Rigby, 2008; Qualman, 2011; Brundidge, 2008).

As mentioned previously, agriculture is the largest industry in Ohio, and therefore has many people interested in engaging the politicians who vote on the policies that affect their industry. A study is needed to learn how politicians are using social media, and to see if they are using it when making policy decisions. For Ohio agriculture, a study is needed to determine how Ohio politicians are using social media, and if they are using social media when making policy decisions related to agriculture. This information can help the public to better understand how to engage their elected officials using social media.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine how Ohio House of Representative and Senate members use social media as it relates to agriculture policy decision making. The following research objectives were used in this study:

1. Describe the use of social media by Ohio House of Representative and Senate members.
2. Compare the agriculture background of Ohio House of Representative and Senate members to their use of social media.

3. Describe Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ social media connections to agricultural organizations in Ohio.

4. Describe social media effects on Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ agriculture policy decision making.

Definition of terms

Social media

Social media, as referred to throughout this study, are defined as web-based services that allow users to create a profile, public or private, create a list of connections to other users, and contribute content to the web rather than passive viewing of the web. Some examples of social media are Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Blogs, and YouTube, all of which allow users to create a profile that shares information about them, show their social connections to other users, and create and share content.

Summary

Media used to communicate with one another has been developing and changing for many years. Each time a new medium surfaces communication practices change. Communication in politics has also changed with the media changes through several information revolutions, with recent information revolutions changing with the development of the Internet. One of the latest developments on the Internet is social
media, defined in this study as web-based services that allow users to create a profile, public or private, create a list of connections to other users, and contribute content to the web rather than passive viewing of the web. The development of social media has also shown use of social media in politics. One industry that has interest in political use of social media is the agriculture industry, which is the largest industry in Ohio. This study will help to gather information about how elected officials in Ohio, whose largest industry is agriculture, are using social media.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study was developed based on the knowledge that agriculture is the largest industry in Ohio, and there is a need for more information about how politicians are using social media. The purpose of this study is to examine how Ohio House of Representative and Senate members are using social media as it relates to agriculture policy decision-making. The following are the research objectives for the study:

1. Describe the use of social media by Ohio House of Representative and Senate members.

2. Compare background demographics of Ohio House of Representative and Senate members to their use of social media.

3. Describe Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ social media connections to agricultural organizations in Ohio.

4. Describe social media effects on Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ agriculture policy decision making.
This chapter reviews media richness theory, social presence theory, groundswell, and past studies of social media used in political realms as the theoretical foundation for this study.

**Media Richness Theory**

Assuming that humans are striving for efficiency and effectiveness, media richness theory suggests that if effective communication is to occur, the communication medium must allow senders and receivers to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. Using a medium that fails to have a high level of richness, defined as the potential for information carrying capacity, may cause message receivers to experience ambiguity from the message. Ambiguity may be a result of multiple conflicting interpretations of the message (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

The original media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) predicts that the choice of a medium for a message depends on the richness of the medium and the possibility of different meanings, or equivocality, of the message. Message developers that are efficient and effective will select media with information richness matching the level of equivocality of the message. Senders will use a richer medium for equivocal messages, and less rich media for clearly defined messages.

There are four criteria that determine the richness of media: (a) capability for immediate feedback, (b) capacity for multiple cues, (c) provision for the use of natural
language, and (d) potential to convey a personal focus (Trevino, Daft, & Lengel, 1990). The more a medium displays these criteria, the richer it is.

Features of a medium that allow the recipient to interact with the sender rapidly and determine consistency in the message are thought to create a better capacity for dealing with more complex and difficult messages. When media allow recipients to use visual, auditory, tactile, or other sensory modalities, they are thought to have more richness. Also, media that allow the sender to use more natural delivery, such as face-to-face conversation, are richer than media that use more formal or technical delivery. Media with high richness allow a sender to tailor a message to specific receiver or receivers with a personal focus rather than with generalization (Timmerman & Kruepke, 2006).

Face-to-face communication is considered to be the richest medium because it has the capacity for immediate feedback, carries multiple cues, and uses natural language. Daft and Lengel (1986) described commonly used media in order from the richest to the leanest: Face-to-face, telephone, electronic messaging, personal written messages, formal written text, and formal numeric text.

A study by Shapiro, Buttner, and Barry in 1994 showed strength of media richness theory. In their study, 150 MBA students were asked to recall a job interview experience that resulted in rejection. Among other questions, the students were asked if they received an explanation of the reason they were rejected, and if they felt that the explanation was adequate. The results of the study showed that the whether the
explanation was given orally or in writing impacted the perceived adequacy of the explanations. They found that oral explanation allowed for nonverbal cues to be used, and that those are often used to assess the degree of concern and sincerity on the part of the communicator. They also found that the degree to which the content was tailored to the recipient, and the specificity, were major predictors in whether or not the message recipient found the message to be an adequate explanation of rejection (Shapiro et. al., 1994). This study confirmed the ideas that communication through media with high richness is valued more than communication through media on the other end of the media richness continuum.

In 1999, Jacobson argued that online media have limitations for the presentation of self. The limitations of new media stemmed from the media’s less-than-optimal capacity to transmit rich information. Jacobson suggested that even with many features, new media were limited in transmitting the same amounts and types of information as face-to-face communication (Jacobson, 1999).

However, Scheer (2011) found different result in their study of teenagers in Hong Kong and their use of instant messaging. Part of the study focused on the richness of the technology and how that related to the teenagers’ use of it. Six discussion topics were examined: boy- or girlfriend, family issues, schoolwork, mutual friends, future aspiration, and hobbies. To measure media richness, five measures were created for the students to rank the level that they agreed with the item. The items included topics of expressing
feelings, freely saying what they intend to say, explaining complex ideas, using multiple cues, and a feel of face-to-face communication.

The study (Scheer, 2011) found that the discussion frequencies of all of the topics positively correlated with media richness, and showed that richness and had a direct impact on self-presentation and friendship development of the teenagers. Scheer (2011) concluded that it was likely a high media richness that gave the teens incentive to engage in communication and share other information that leads to a friendship, and that the teens were likely to make friends using instant messaging with the medium, suggesting that some new media are richer than some suggested.

Media richness theory studies find that media that allow for feedback, multiple cues, natural language, and personal focus are richer, and those with less of those qualities move down the continuum of media richness. Some have found that new media, or online media, have low media richness (Jacobson, 1999), while others have found that online media can have high levels of richness (Sheer, 2011).

Social Presence Theory

Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) conducted a series of experiments that led to the formation of their Social Presence Theory. This pioneering approach to mediated communication has laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of many later theories about medium effects.
Social presence theory suggests that a medium's social effects are, for the most part, caused by the degree of social presence it gives its users. The term social presence refers to the awareness of the presence of the partner a communicator is interacting with. Features in interpersonal communication are important in social presences theory: nonverbal signals, proximity, orientation, and physical appearance (Short et al., 1976).

According to Short et al. (1976) social presence is closely related to perception of a person. Increased presence leads to a richer perception of a person. Social presence can be viewed as the amount of interpersonal contact a medium allows.

Short et al. conducted studies in which different media were ordered according to their social presence by using ratings such as unsociable-sociable, insensitive-sensitive, cold-warm, and impersonal-personal. These studies ranked formal written messages as having the least social presence and face-to-face communication as having the most social presence (Short et. al., 1976).

In 2003, Richardson and Swan studied social presence in online courses. They found a relationship between students’ perceived social presence and students’ perceived learning. The study also provided support that social presence is sometimes cultured, and suggests more than media effects. The study also found that students with high satisfaction with the instructor also had high social presence scores.

Another study of online courses and social presence by Stacey (2002), took a different approach. In this study, qualitative methods were used by archiving and analyzing the online interactions of the students in the online course. Student perceptions
and reflections were also collected. When asked what activities in the online course they felt were the most beneficial activities, 59% indicated interaction, feedback, and other students’ perspectives and/or acknowledgement. These findings indicate that social presence permeates not only the activities generally thought of as social activities but also those activities usually thought of as individual activities. This study suggested that consideration of the social nature in which students interact in an online course is as important as the way the material is presented, and that high social presence helps the student succeed (Stacey, 2002).

Yung (2011) demonstrated that social presence is a predictor of satisfaction in social virtual worlds (i.e. Second Life). Yung found that people use social virtual worlds for socialization, and that they allow socialization that was facilitated by social cues (i.e., high-level social presence). Yung found that social presence fills users’ desire for socialization, and affects their satisfaction with social virtual worlds.

Studies in social presence theory study the degree to which one perceives communication with another person through a medium to be social. Face-to-face communication is obviously the most socially present medium and handwritten letters the least. The studies mentioned above would suggest that at least some online media have higher social presence value.

Social presence theory and media richness theory have some shared ideas, including that media that allow a user to communicate in a way that has fast feedback, multiple cues, and allows the user to feel comfortable have high social presence and
media richness. New and different social media is being developed at rapid rates, and some have higher social presence rates and media richness than others, depending on the desired use of the social media. Groundswell, a trend developing through the use of social media, may aid in the understanding of this usage.

**Groundswell**

In this time of exponential change in technology, people are communicating with each other in a new way, and a trend known as the groundswell is growing. Li and Bernoff define the groundswell as “a social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from traditional institutions like corporations.” (2011, p. 9). Groundswell is a new and completely different way for people to relate to organizations and each other.

According to Li & Bernoff, the groundswell is happening because of three forces coming together: people, technology, and economics. People depend on each other and draw on each other’s strengths and they have always rebelled against institutions through social movements, but the balance between institutions with many resources and their constituents is changing because of social technologies. The ever-evolving technologies of today have changed many things about how people communicate with each other and interact with each other. Reason for this, in part, is due to the wide spread use of the internet (Li & Bernoff, 2011).
In 2010, 79 percent of Americans were online, and many of them have fast, broadband connection (Li & Bernoff, 2011). The large number of people using online technologies also allows for an increase in the ability of technology to adapt because of the increase opportunity for prototyping and failure, and ability to learn from failure. The evolution of online technologies has led to interactive software that can connect people with each other directly. The rapid growth and ever increasing traffic on the internet has led to increases in online advertising, and other ways for any person or company to make money online.

In an offline world people do not change behaviors easily or quickly, but in an online world people can change behavior quickly because of the extreme increase in information available, and the ability to access that information quickly and efficiently. Groundswell changes the balance of power because of the ease for anyone to put a site online that connects people with each other. People can create a site to do anything from sell things to share experiences, and the organization that filled that role before will no longer be relevant (Li & Bernoff, 2011).

Li and Bernoff said that if you understand groundswell you can work with it so that your business or institution does not become irrelevant. To do this they said that you must understand that technologies change at a very rapid rate but that the technologies are not the point, the forces at work are. Mastering groundswell means concentrating on relationships and not technology. The technologies that are used in the groundswell are blogs, user-generated content, podcasts, social networks, virtual worlds, wikis, open
source, forums, ratings, reviews, tags, rss, and widgets. When evaluating a new technology and how to use it to one’s advantage, the way in which a technology allows for new relationships is key (2011).

In order to make more sense of the groundswell, Li and Bernoff (2011) use what they call the Social Technographics Profile as a tool to understand the participants of the groundswell. The Social Technographics profile includes seven different groups of participants: Creators, conversationalists, critics, collectors, joiners, spectators, and inactives (Figure 1).
Creators are online participants that publish some type of content at least once a month. In 2010, 23 percent of American online participants fell into the creator group. Conversationalists are participants who often participate in back-and-forth dialogues online weekly. This group makes up 31 percent of people online. Critics are those who
react to online content by posting comments. One in three online Americans are in the critic group. Collectors are those who save URLs and tag online content on social bookmarking sites, or use RSS feeds. Collectors play a big role in organizing the vast amount of information produced by the creators and critics. About 19 percent of online Americans are collectors. Joiners are those who participate in social networking sites (i.e. Facebook). Fifty nine percent of online Americans are joiners. Spectators are those online who consume what everyone else produces, and 68 percent of online Americans are spectators. Inactives are those who do not participate in social technologies at all, which also means they are untouched by the groundswell. About 19 percent of online Americans are inactive (2011).

Li and Bernoff suggest using the Social Technographics Profiles to understand how a target audience is adopting technology and create a strategy that will be appropriate and effective with that group. As an example, they discuss profiles of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. They suggest that as a strategist for any of these three groups you exploit differences the group has with averages in social technology participation. They data showed that Democrats’ base was about 10 percent more likely to participate in the groundswell, and that stragestists for Democrats would be well served to exploit the 27 percent of the base that are joiners. Republicans ran about 20 percent below the averages of participation, but Li and Bernoff say that this information does not mean a Republican strategist should ignore the groundswell. Their data showed that half of Republicans are spectators, and that while they were not
contributing to discourse, they were watching it. They recommend that all candidates invest in monitoring online tools and messages (2011).

Li and Bernoff also discuss why people participate in the groundswell at all, and they collected reasons for participation. Some of the reasons they found included keeping up friendships, making new friends, succumbing to social pressure from existing friends, paying it forward, altruistic impulse, prurient impulse, creative impulse, validation impulse, and affinity impulse (2011).

Technologies that drive the groundswell are exploding, are cheap and easy to create, use and improve. They tap into Internet advertising economy, and connect people who want to be connected. Li and Bernoff suggest that the rapid increase in the groundswell will soon be involved in every activity of everyday life, not just computers (Li & Bernoff, 2011).

The groundswell trend explains that people are using new technologies to get things from each other and achieve goals, and social presence theory and media richness theory suggest that media that allow the most natural interactions are valued. Ideas from these three theories can be used to explore how politicians are using social media. Some current uses of social media and technology by politicians are explored next.

Politicians’ Use of the Internet and Social Media

The Internet has provided politicians a new way to campaign and communicate with constituents. A study by Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2007), showed that
politicians have moved past using websites as a way to simply display information and started to use them for interaction, but have had reservations about doing so. The study showed reservations about increasing interactivity through their websites is based on feasibility and considerations of strategic costs versus benefits (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2007). A different study by Esterling, Lazer, & Neblo (2011) showed that design of politicians’ websites was subpar and was not as effective at serving the constituents of the politicians. Politicians in Congress have been accused of being slow to adopt new technologies, such as email (Congressional Management Foundation, 2010), but they are beginning to adopt social media technologies.

The Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) released several reports based on a survey of congressional staffers, taken between October and December 2010, on their attitudes, ideas, etc… about social media and online advocacy. The first report, released in January 2011, described the perceptions of constituent communication by congressional staffers.

The first report released by the CMF reported that congressional staffers believed that emails and the internet have increased constituent participation in public policy and has increased lawmakers’ accountability to their constituents, but they felt that the new electronic communication has reduced the quality of communication. CMF reported that 87 percent of the staffers felt that email and the Internet have made it easier to become involved in public policy, and 97 percent felt that these communication tools have
increased the number of constituent communications with their offices. At the same time 65 percent felt that electronic communications have reduced the quality of constituent communications and 41 percent felt that these technologies have increased constituent understanding of what goes on in Congress (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

Another conclusion of the CMF report was that citizens have more power than they realize. The report found that the staffers felt the most influential strategy to sway an undecided member of Congress was personal communication. This personal communication could be face-to-face, phone call, or personalized mail or email. Ninety seven percent of Washington staffers said that constituent visits to Washington offices have influence on an undecided Congressman and 94 percent said the same of visits to district and state offices. Staffers said that constituents who made an effort to communicate with a member of Congress personally were more influential than lobbyists or the news (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

The CMF study found that it is not the delivery method of constituent communication, but the content that matters. The staffers reported on difference between email and regular mail communications, and felt that both are equally as influential to undecided members of Congress. Messages that were personalized and not form messages were influential. Staffers suggested that discussing local impact of a bill, and providing the reasons one supports or opposes a bill are good ways to personalize a
communication with the member of Congress a constituent is trying to influence (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

The report by CMG found that Washington staffers were conflicted on the effectiveness of grassroots advocacy campaigns. Thirty five percent of staffers said that advocacy campaigns are good for democracy, but 53 percent felt that most advocacy campaigns are identical in message and the messages are sent without the constituents’ knowledge or approval (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

CMF found that social media is being used to listen and communicate with constituents. Sixty four percent of staffers reported that Facebook was an important way to understand the views of constituents, and 42 percent felt the same of Twitter. Seventy four percent felt that Facebook was important in communicating the views of the member of Congress, and 51 percent thought the same of Twitter. Seventy two percent of staffers also reported that YouTube is important in communicating the views of the Congressman (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

A second report by the Congressional Management Foundation reported findings from surveys about congressional staffers’ attitudes and beliefs about how their offices’ use social media. Senior managers such as Chiefs of Staff and Deputy Chiefs of Staff and Legislative Directors, along with staff who identified themselves as social media managers were surveyed in this study. The report had several key findings (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).
The first key finding was that congressional offices are using social media to help research public opinion, and the second is that they are using social media to communicate the views and activities of Senators and Representatives. Sixty percent of those surveyed felt that Facebook is an important tool for understanding constituents’ views, and 42 percent said the same of Twitter. YouTube was viewed by 34 percent as important in understanding views and opinions. When sharing the views of Congress members, 74 percent of senior managers and social media managers felt that Facebook is an important tool. Fifty one percent felt the same about Twitter, and 72 percent thought the same of YouTube (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

The third major finding of this study showed that staffers feel that benefits of social media outweigh the risks. The survey showed that it is generally felt that social media allows congressional offices to reach people they were not able to reach before and that social media use was worth their time. Seventy two percent of staffers thought that social media allows them to reach people they were not able to reach before use of social media, and 59 percent feel like it was worth their time to use social media. Only 10 percent felt it was not worth their time. When it comes to benefits versus risks, 55 percents felt that the benefits outweighed the risks, and 14 percent felt that risks outweighed the benefits (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

The CMF study found that the staffers from offices that embrace technology are more likely to see social media as a benefit and believe that the Internet has improved dialogues between Congress and their constituents. It also found that there is a significant
gap between the offices that embraced and understood technology and those that did not (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

A sixth key finding of this study is that social media managers have a more positive view of constituent communications than senior managers and staffers that mostly answer mail. Sixty eight percent of social media managers felt that email and the Internet have made members of Congress more responsive to constituents, while only 46 percent of senior managers and staffers felt the same. Forty eight percent of social media managers felt that advocacy campaigns directed at Congress are good for democracy while only 33 percent of staffers felt the same. The final finding of the study showed that staffers who were surveyed felt that their offices did not spend enough time in online communications, and that Democrats were more likely to feel this way than Republicans (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011).

The Congressional Management Foundation also conducted a study of how Americans are using the Internet and contacting members of Congress. The study asked adult Americans about general contacting of members of Congress, and how the internet plays a role. The first key finding was that 44 percent of Americans contacted a member of Congress in the past five years, which is much higher than the rate found in a 2004 study. They also found that Americans that contact members of Congress were more likely to be politically active in other ways than people who did not contact members of Congress (Goldschmidt & Ochreiter, 2008).
CMF found that 92 percent of Internet users who had contacted a member of Congress had also visited that member’s website, and 42 percent of those who contacted a member of Congress did so online. They also found that 88 percent Internet users who contacted members of Congress did so because they were passionate about an issue (Goldschmidt & Ochreiter, 2008).

This CMF study also reported several implications for Congress as a result of the study. The first is that there is an opportunity to communicate more with motivated constituents, and that Congress has not fully tapped the opportunity. The study also found that Congress needs to improve its use of online communications and rethink their constituent communications. The study also implies that congressional offices should reconsider how they handle grassroots advocacy campaigns because of the importance Americans place on the campaigns led by organizations they trust. Lastly, the CMF suggested that Congress needs more resources to effectively manage the workload of the internet age (Goldschmidt & Ochreiter, 2008).

The CMF studies provide a lot of information about Congressional use of social media, but the information is provided by the staff and not the politicians. Information about social media use by politicians has been focused to the staff of national level politicians, but local and state politicians have much smaller staffs (G. Wolford, personal communication, September, 2011; B. Vanderkoii, personal communication, January 2011). A study about use of social media by state and local politicians may provide different results than the studies of federal level politicians.
Summary

This chapter described and provided examples of media richness theory, social presence theory, and groundswell. It also explored studies on the use of social media by politicians.

Media richness theory suggests that a message sender chooses a medium to send a message based on their desired outcome and the information carrying capacity, or richness, of the medium. Criteria that determine richness of media include capability for immediate feedback, capacity for multiple cues, provision for the use of natural language, and potential to convey a personal focus. These criteria are similar to the ideas in social presence theory that determine a medium’s level of social presence, or amount of interpersonal contact a medium allows. Studies in these theories have shown that media that allow natural interactions are valued, and that social media can have high richness and social presence. These theories support the groundswell trend, that people are using social media to get things from each other and achieve goals. Ideas from these three theories, and information already collected through studies of politicians’ use of online media, can be used to further explore how politicians are using social media.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In the previous two chapters, the development of social media and its potential for engaging politicians in regards to agricultural policy was discussed. Then a theoretical foundation for the study was presented using media richness theory, social presence theory, groundswell, and political use of social media. This chapter will describe the design of this study.

Problem Statement

The public is continually using social media at higher rates and they are also using social media to get involved in politics at higher rates. While politicians have been using social media, it is hard to determine how politicians, particularly state or local politicians, are using social media outside of their election campaigns.

Many people in Ohio are interested in agricultural policy, because it is the largest industry, and therefore people are interested in engaging the politicians who vote on the policies that affect the industry. Social media is a relatively new communication tool that could be used to engage these elected officials who vote on agricultural policies.
A study is needed to learn how politicians are using social media, and to see if they are using it when making policy decisions. For Ohio agriculture, a study is needed to determine how Ohio politicians are using social media, and if they are using social media when making policy decisions related to agriculture. This information can help the public to better understand how to engage their elected officials using social media.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine how Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members are using social media and how it relates to agriculture policy decision-making. The following are the objectives of the study:

1. Describe the use of social media by Ohio House of Representative and Senate members.
2. Compare the agriculture background of Ohio House of Representative and Senate members to their use of social media.
3. Describe Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ social media connections to agricultural organizations in Ohio.
4. Describe social media effects on Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ agriculture policy decision making.
Research Design

The design of this study was a basic qualitative study. These types of studies are the most simple and provide descriptions that aid in understanding the bigger picture of a topic, using collected data (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). This type of study was chosen because having a better understanding of the bigger picture of politicians’ social media use will help to find more specific questions that should be asked. The design for this qualitative study utilized interviews of Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members on their use of social media and how it relates to agriculture policy decision-making.

Interviews are a research tool that allow the interviewer to read questions to the research subjects and collect data about their opinions, beliefs, and feelings in their own words (Ary, et. al., 2010). An interview was chosen over a survey in order to collect richer data about social media use and agricultural connections, as opposed to raw numbers (Ary, et. al., 2010). Interviews also have the advantage of a higher response rate, a concern especially considering the population for this study. Ohio Representatives and Senators have very busy schedules, and have a smaller staff than elected officials in Congress (G. Wolford, personal communication, September 2011; B. Vanderkoii, personal communication, January 2012). Response rates are higher because of the personal contact created with the interviews (Ary, et. al., 2010), or higher social presence of the interviewer for the participant. Interviews allowed some rapport to be built through contact with a letter and phone call prior to the interviews. If a mailed questionnaire was
used it would likely get lost in the large amount of mail politicians receive on a daily basis.

There is not a general rule of how many participants should be included in a qualitative study, but practical decisions like time and availability of the participants does play a role. Sampling of a population in these types of studies typically is stopped when saturation of data is reached. Saturation is the point at which no new information is being obtained from participants (Ary, et. al., 2010). In this study, eight participants were sampled to start, and at the conclusion of the eight interviews it was determined that saturation of data had been reached, because no new information had been obtained in the last two interviews, and no more participants were sampled.

Population and sample

The target population for this study is elected officials in the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate. This population includes men and women ranging from ages 25-75. The target population included legislators, from throughout the state of Ohio that vote on policy in Ohio, including agricultural policies.

There are 132 people in the target population, 25% Senators and 75% Representatives. Lists of the current Representatives and Senators were obtained from their websites. The lists were alphabetized and a number was assigned to each name. A random number generator was then used to randomly sample the population. In order to maintain the proportion of Senators and Representatives in the target population, two
Senators and six Representatives were randomly selected. Random selection of participants was used in order to prevent interviewing only members of the population that are known for social media use, or for their knowledge of agricultural issues. Opinions and data from all schools of thought on social media use were desired, and random selection was the process that worked best to achieve this.

Procedures

Participants were contacted with a faxed letter (Appendix B) and a follow up phone call to schedule the interview. This method of contacting the participants was recommended by an Ohio State University government relations staff person who had experience contacting the target population (G. Wolford, personal communication, September 2011). The letter included information on the study, and assurance that all answers and information regarding the participants would be kept confidential.

Participants were allowed to choose an in-person interview or a phone interview, depending on their preference and schedule. Three phone interviews were conducted, and all three phone interview participants chose to use this method due to their schedule and traveling to their districts outside of Columbus. The other five interviews were conducted in-person at the participants’ offices in Columbus, Ohio. In total, 11 people were contacted for participation in the study. Three declined to participate, all due to schedule conflicts. Interviews were scheduled for up to an hour to allow adequate time, but most of the interviews lasted only 30 minutes.
Approval was obtained from the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A, approval protocol number: 2011E0511). The study is not experimental and the target population includes only adults, therefore an exempt research form was filed with the Institutional Review Board. Research began after receiving IRB approval (see appendix A). Verbal consent procedures were given before participation. No incentives were given to participants of this study.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire administered in a personal interview or phone interview (See Appendix C). The questions were developed based on the objectives of the study. Open-ended questions were used because there were a great number of possible answers and no way to predict the possible answers (Ary et. al., 2010, p. 391). Twelve open-ended questions, some with sub-questions, were developed.

Questions were ordered to flow in a conversational manner, starting with general and basic questions that moved into more complex questions that built upon each other. Ary et. al. listed guidelines for writing good questions, and these were used in development (2010, p. 395).

The first six questions of the interview were basic questions about general use of social media. Questions in this section consisted of items such as whether or not the participant used social media, if they used it professionally or personally, and how often they use social media. There were also questions about whom they choose to friend or
follow and accept friend request from and other basic uses of social media, such as using social media to monitor what others are saying and using social media in campaigns. Questions seven and eight were about interactions with constituents and others using social media. These questions will help to meet objective one, to describe how Ohio House and Senate members are using social media.

Questions nine through 12 were about agriculturally related groups, organizations, and people using social media and if anything from these groups influences the participants’ decision on agriculturally related policy. These questions meet the objectives to describe Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ social media connections to agricultural organizations in Ohio, and social media effects on their agriculture policy decision-making.

Final follow up questions asked participants if they have any kind of agricultural background. This question was used to meet the objective to compare participants’ agriculture background and use of social media.

**Data Collection**

Data collection for this study took place December through February 2012. The researcher scheduled and conducted all eight interviews, which lasted an average of 30 minutes. Verbal consent was obtained by the interviewer at the beginning of each interview.
The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, and notes were taken by the researcher on any answers that should be looked at closer during analysis. Audio recordings allowed for the answers to be recorded exactly, and prevented interviewer bias in recording the answers. During the recording of the participants’ names and other identifying information were not used in order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

Interviews took place at the Ohio Senate Building, the Riffe Center, or by phone. The Ohio Senate Building and the Riffe Center are where the target population offices are, and interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants. The phone interviews were done in a private room where the interviewer would not be distracted and the participants’ answers would be kept private.

Data on which committees the participants serve on in the House and Senate were also collected from the participants profiles on the House and Senate websites.

**Data Analysis**

All data was stored in a locked file cabinet inside the researcher’s office. Upon conclusion of all interviews the data was transcribed. The data was then analyzed using open coding, which is used to develop major themes and categories within the data (Ary, et. al., 2010, p. 464-465).

Data were reviewed question by question and any words or phrases of importance were labeled, or coded. After initial coding, the codes were reviewed again and reduced, combining any codes that had similar meaning. Data was then organized into categories.
based on the objective that the questions answered were developed from. The codes in each category were then analyzed and compared for similarities and differences, which led to themes in the data to be revealed. The themes were then used to make statements about each of the research objectives. Quotations that were representative of major and minor themes in each category, as well as unique responses, were reported to help explain the themes.

Validity and Reliability

Validity of the questions was determined by several experts. The experts included researchers and governmental relations staff from The Ohio State University. The experts had knowledge of social media and agricultural policy in Ohio. The experts reviewed the questions numerous times before use in the study, with the final draft of questions having gone through three rounds of checks and editing.

Internal validity in qualitative research is often referred to as credibility. Credibility is about the truthfulness of the findings, and this study utilized reflexivity, or self reflection to recognize biases and actively acknowledging them, on the part of the researcher (Ary, et. al., 2010).

In this study all interviews were conducted by the researcher. A background in agriculture and interest in the use of social media in agriculture and politics could have created bias, but the potential bias was recognized and measures were taken to prevent it. Measures included the researcher paying careful attention not to discuss opinions of the
topic at any point before, during, or after the interview. Only objectives of the study were discussed when interacting with participants. Also, each interview used the same set of questions, and the researcher did not react to the participants’ answers, which could create bias problems. The interviews were also recorded so that exact answers would be recorded, preventing any bias in reporting answers.

Reliability, often referred to as dependability or trustworthiness in qualitative research (Ary, et. al., 2010), was addressed through documentation throughout the study. Documents were kept on who was selected for interviews, and when and how they were interviewed, along with all data and information used in development of the study. The data collected was also transcribed, kept, and checked for consistency by the researcher and by another researcher at Ohio State University. Also, the researcher’s notes were compared to the transcripts of the interviews, and another Ohio State University researcher reviewed the open coding process.

Summary

This chapter described the methods used to conduct this study, which sought to describe the use of social media by Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members. This study was a qualitative study that utilized eight participant interviews to collect data. A sample of six Representatives and two Senators was used in the study, and after the recordings of the interviews were transcribed the data was analyzed using qualitative open coding.
Chapter 4: Results

Social media sites are a relatively new form of communication, and its uses are new to many. The public is using social media more each year, and studies suggest they are using social media to get involved in politics. Reports show that the public has been engaging with each other when it comes to politics, but it is hard to determine if they have been engaging with politicians, and if politicians are engaging with them. It is also hard to determine how politicians are using social media outside of their election campaigns, because much of the research and reporting on political use of social media has revolved around campaign usage by politicians and the public. Much of the research of political use of social media has also been targeted at federal level politics. Many studies have looked at the views and uses of social media by staff members of the politicians, but few studies have looked at how the actual elected officials are using social media, particularly in terms of engaging with constituents, and in terms of policy decision making. For Ohio agriculture, a study is needed to determine how Ohio politicians are using social media, and if they are using social media when making policy decisions.
related to agriculture. This information can help the public to better understand how to engage their elected officials using social media.

The purpose of this study is to examine how Ohio House of Representative and Senate members are using social media, and how they are using it as it relates to agriculture and agricultural policy decision-making. The study aims to meet the following research objectives:

1. Describe the use of social media by Ohio House of Representative and Senate members.
2. Compare the agriculture background of Ohio House of Representative and Senate members to their use of social media.
3. Describe Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ social media connections to agricultural organizations in Ohio.
4. Describe social media effects on Ohio House of Representative and Senate members’ agriculture policy decision making.

This qualitative study collected data from eight interviews, six with Ohio Representatives and two with Ohio Senators selected through random sampling of the entire population of Ohio Representatives and Senators. Six of the participants interviewed were Republicans, two were Democrats, three were women, and five were men.
Interviews were conducted both in-person and by phone, depending on the preference and availability of the participants. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using open coding, and this chapter reports the themes that were found for each research objective.

Objective 1: Describe the Use of Social Media by Ohio House of Representative and Senate Members.

During the interview participants were asked questions to help describe their use of social media. Below are the results to the questions pertaining to: a) social media used; b) personal and professional use of social media; c) using social media because of benefit or because others are; d) friend requests and follows; e) how often social media is used; f) campaign use of social media; g) management of social media efforts; h) monitoring what is said on social media; i) constituent communication; j) conversations held through social media with others; and k) general thoughts about social media.

Social Media Used

Participants were asked if they used social media, and if so which ones. Top themes that emerged from this question were Facebook; Twitter; and LinkedIn.

Facebook was the top theme, with seven of the eight participants answering that they used it. Participant two stated, “Really the only one I know that I use is Facebook. I tried Tweeting but I’m not sure, and that I’m told that my status goes into a Tweet and it
will send it out to people if they have it on their phone but really it is Facebook.”

Participant four said, “We use Facebook, both personally and the statehouse which of course is only the statehouse business.” Similarly, participant six who said, “Yes, we have Facebook. We are in the process of setting up a separate Facebook page for the legislative office.”

Another major theme was Twitter. Participant three said, “I utilize Twitter as well,” and participant four also said, “We use Twitter.”

The last major theme for this question was LinkedIn. Participant six said, “I use LinkedIn.” Another example is participant seven, who said, “I used Linked In but that is kind of the more professional version of Facebook.”

Several other social media sites were mentioned in the interviews. Myspace, Ustream, campaign websites, and email were all given as answers by participants, but were not major themes. One participant stated that they did not use social media at all. Their answer to the question do you use social media was “No.”

*Personal and Professional Use of Social Media*

When participants were asked if they use social media for personal or professional use, or both, the major theme was *both*.

Of the eight participants, six answered that they use social media both personally and professionally. “Both. I think, especially on Facebook, they want to follow posts, like from last week I posted one of the awards I received as Chairman of the State Parks
and Recreation Legislative of the year so I let that out and still also talk about my family. I think the people want to see that too,” said participant eight. Participant six said, “Probably more on the personal end but we are starting to use it more professionally as well.”

Participant three answered, “I would say it is mostly professional. I utilize Facebook to really inform the public about the different things happening in state government. We will post press releases online, post videos online, and also different things that are happening in Columbus in general so I would say to a degree it is mostly professional use.” This was the only participant that answered that they only use social media professionally.

A follow up question asking if professional use of social media had affected their personal use, the most common theme was yes. Participant seven said, “Before I was state representative I just had a personal Facebook account. Lots of personal stuff on Facebook and now that I am a state rep and I have a state rep page which is more of a one dimensional page, I do watch what is on my personal like if somebody put something up that I don’t feel comfortable with I will delete that post.” Another of this theme participant two’s example, which said, “Just mindful, I guess, of you know what you are putting on Facebook. You can’t get too personalized because if you are using it for political stuff you have to be careful there.” A similar answer from participant eight said, “I probably don’t post as much as I used to that is personal because you don’t know what eyes are on there and everything else like when I’m not home. I don’t want people to
know that I’m not home because I’m down here so I don’t post as much as I do personally like before.”

*Friend Requests and Follows*

When asked how they determine who to accept friend requests from participants had varying answers, but the major theme was *common friends*. “Usually I just friend pretty much everybody. I don’t have, one thing I guess I am careful, I see how many mutual friends or how many friends they have or something like,” said participant two. In a similar answer, participant five said, “If I see somebody who has hundreds of friends and we have friends in common, sometimes I think somewhere along the line I must have met this person even though I can’t recall exactly.” Participant seven said, “I will look at their friends and if it looks like there is a network of friends it is like ok, they are friends with other state representatives or republicans,” and participant eight said, “Actually on there I want to see if they have some common friends with me or common likes as I kind of look into that but usually common friends is kind of nice to know.”

In a similar question, participants were asked how they chose who they friend or follow, and two major themes emerged: *suggestions* and *personal friends*. The *suggestions* theme refers to when a social media site provides a list of suggested friends based on people they are already friends with. “I might Facebook if something comes up saying this is someone you might know. Sometimes they will send it just to expand our network, especially if they are connected to me through friends of friends or political
circles otherwise,” said participant six. “You know if you are on Facebook there is something on the side, a frame on the right-hand side that will pop up and say here is this and it will have the face of the person and you have three friends in common and I’m like oh, I know that person and sometimes I will send them a friend request,” said participant seven, and similarly participant eight said, “Just basically something might click up on the right-hand side of my Facebook page that says or somebody that I’m interested in and has the same common beliefs I will click on and try to friend.” Participant two said, “As you know, Facebook makes recommendations…”

Choosing to friend or follow personal friends was another major theme in answers. “For the most part it is those that I know. I guess would be the biggest criteria,” said participant four. Another example is the answer from participant five, “People that I know. I mean people that I’ve personally met, not just people that I know.”

*How Often Social Media is Used*

Participants were asked how often they use social media, and the common theme was *everyday or every other day*. Participant three said, “I would say almost on a daily basis actually,” and “We use it every day,” said participant four. Participant five said, “I’d probably say four or five times a day to be honest with you. I know that sounds like a lot. Before it was only two or three times a week but I’d say now we are up to four or five times a day.” Another example is participant six’s answer, “I check my Facebook page probably every other day. In the office we just started the legislative Facebook. We
are just starting it now so we will have someone man that and tend to it every day,” and participant eight said, “I am on there every day.” Four of the eight participants used the word “we” in their answers to this question, indicating that staff help with use of their social media.

**Campaign Use of Social Media**

When asked if they have used social media in campaigns, the major theme in participant answers was yes. Answers include, “Yes we have. As a matter of fact if you go to our website we have a Facebook, Twitter, and Flicker, as well we are starting to build even a YouTube channel so that we can try to push things out there,” said participant five. An answer with a specific example from participant two said, “It has gotten the word out quickly and lets friends know, for instance, I was thinking of using this soon, is okay the March primary is coming up, who would like a yard sign? Who would like to be a volunteer at the next town hall? Who, and you can get instant, you know, people text you right away, hey “participant” you know next week I can do it or I can’t or yes, give me a yard sign. I’ve had people actually without even saying can I have a yard sign.” Another example is when participant eight said, “I have used a limited social media in my campaigns the last time I ran two years ago. Very limited, it was just allowing people to know where I was at and what I was doing.”

When asked how social media enhanced their campaign, the major theme in participant answers was plans to increase use. An example is participant six’s answer,
“We will use it more this time around. Last time it was limited to small number of tweeting and then websites. Next time we will probably definitely use it more. I think it is good. It is mass communication that is free. Campaigning cost is always an issue so any time that you can get hits that are free, if you have a big volunteer list or big list of people to communicate with you can get a little extra people out to a parade or go door knock or something like that or whatever then it is worth it.” Participant eight said, “This time I will really ramp it up and basically about anything and everything I do will be posted through social media.”

Management of Social Media Efforts

When asked who manages their social media efforts, the major theme was self, with help. Examples of answers in this theme include participant three’s answer, “It is mostly myself actually. I typically make the posts online and respond to inquiries,” and participant eight said, “So far myself but I expect someone else to be helping me out in that process.” Participant four said, “It is a combination of both myself on the campaign side and my legislative aide on the professional side here at the statehouse,” and participant two said, “Myself and my aide are the only two administrators.”

Participants were also asked if they monitor staff’s use of social media, and if they have any specific policies for social media use. The major theme that emerged was informally. Examples of answers in this theme are when participant eight said, “Basically staff members will get my approval or call me, text me, allowing me to understand what
that person is going to either put in there or tweet,” and participant five said, “He comes to me before he puts it in and we talk about what the parameters are.” Participant two said, “I would before she is allowed to put anything on, we discuss it and we go over what goes on there so we have a good dialogue.” In terms of policies, participant two said, “Defined, promulgated ones no, but I mean it is understood I guess,” and participant five said, “We do have policies but they are not written down. They are common sense policies.”

**Monitoring What is Said on Social Media**

The major theme that occurred in answers when asked if they monitor what is said about them on social media was *no*. Examples of answers included when participant one said, “Nope,” and participant said, “No, not really to be honest with you.” Similarly participant seven said, “I do not. I just don’t monitor it.”

**Constituent Communication**

With questions about how they communicate with constituents the common themes in participant answers were *email, phone calls, and face-to-face*. Some examples of answers in the *email* theme include when participant two said, “Emails, I get a lot of emails from constituents,” and participant three said, “I think in essence a lot of people are utilizing email as a way to reach out to us so I think that has really exploded from the traditional format of mailing in a letter or even making a phone call. It seems that we
receive a vast number of emails on a daily basis and that is the typical format that people will use to reach out to us.” Participant four said, “I would say probably the email. I think we have more of our constituents emailing to us, especially if there is a house bill that is controversial. We will get an enormous amount of emails that will question why we are doing it or please explain it, I don’t understand. Email is probably the biggest tool that we will see used especially if there are different concerns out there about different house bills we are working on,” and participant eight said, “Emails a lot.”

In the phone calls theme, participant answers included, “Direct phone call,” from participant one, and participant three said, “I will typically respond to them with a phone call so I can speak to them personally about some of the issues or concerns that they may have. Or if they direct a question online I will typically also encourage them to give me a phone number so that I can reach back out to them and speak with them.”

The third theme, face-to-face, examples included, “I have my office is my home. That’s where my constituents meet me so therefore we keep it personalized to the point that they can come to see me they can come in and know that I’m listening to them and to them alone and they can have some confidence and it has worked,” from participant one. Participant three said, “Typically the conversations with a constituent will be in person.” Participant seven said, “No, my conversations are pretty much face to face or via phone,” which is an example with two themes. Other examples of answers with more than one of the themes include participant five’s answer, “Usually respond in a like-like fashion so if somebody calls up here to the office and they want a call back we call them. Somebody
emails, they get an email back. If somebody writes a letter, they get a handwritten letter back a lot of times,” and participant said, “I mean there is nothing better in reaching people than to have that personal conversation whether it is by voice over the phone or whether it is in front of them at their doorstep or whether it is an event that they attend.”

When asked if they every use social media to have conversations with constituents, the major theme was directed off of social media, meaning that if contact is initiated via social media, the Representative or Senator continue the conversation through another medium. Answer examples in this theme include participant three’s answer, “If they direct a question online I will typically also encourage them to give me a phone number so that I can reach back out to them and speak with them,” and participant five’s answer, “If it requires research I will forward it down to the office and then they can respond to the person directly or if it is just a views and values kind of question or a question on a bill that we are working on I will respond directly. I think you have to be careful because everything you put down is public. I do think that there is a tendency to not be as forthcoming on the social media network than if we were sitting down face-to-face in my office. It is hard with any conversation electronic versus vocal to say exactly what you want to say in a way that you know that person understands what you are talking about.”
Conversations Held Through Social Media with Others

Participants were asked if they ever use social media to communicate with others, and no major theme emerged, three participants said that they did, and four said that they did not. Participant three said, “No actually. Typically I do not,” and participant eight said, “Oh yes, no doubt about it. I quite often. I’ve pretty well friended a lot of both sides, Republican and Democrat.”

General Thoughts About Social Media

Participants were asked what their general thoughts about social media were, and no major themes emerged. The answers did provide several points of interest. Participant two said, “I was surprised how much since being elected how much it really has become more of a mainstream of how to keep in touch with your constituents. Facebook, for instance, and I never thought I would, I didn’t even know what Facebook was four or five years, I guess, but you know it has actually taken over my web site. I don’t even use my web site anymore. I use Facebook and it is because with people it is instant communication.” Participant one said, “Oh, I totally find it to be disruptive and can malign people so easily and I don’t like it at all and will not use it, will not be on it at all.” These two examples show the two ends of the spectrum of answers for this question.
Objective 2: Compare Agriculture Background of Ohio House of Representative and Senate Members to Their Use of Social Media.

Participants were asked about their agricultural background during the interview in order to compare farm and non-farm backgrounds and social media use. Participants’ answers had a theme of very little agriculture background. Examples of descriptions participants gave of their agricultural background include, participant two said, “Very, very small. My uncle had a farm and I kind of grew up in a rural area and I did work a little bit on this farm and baled hay and that kind of stuff,” and participant three said, “I come from a district that agriculture is the biggest industry in “participant” County. I do not specifically, but I’m well versed in the agricultural issues.” Participant six said, “Not in terms of training or education but when I was younger I owned or was part owner of some farmland up in northwestern Ohio that I inherited and then we sold it eventually. I owned that for some time,” and participant four said, “No.”

Four of the participants of the study serve on an agriculture committee, and participant three reported becoming well versed in agricultural issues due to serving on the committee when they said, “I’m becoming a very versed legislature on those issues and I also serve on the agriculture and natural resources committee as well and it is another great avenue for gathering information and learning more about the industry as a whole.”

One participant, eight, did report an agriculture background and said, “I grew up and on a farm. I still own a family farm but don’t live on it but still own a farm. I was in
4-H, FFA, vocational agriculture. I had a lot of deep roots in my younger years growing up and so I had a lot of background. I still constantly working with the soil and water groups, Farm Bureau through the years and as a former county commissioner so from a rural agricultural county, “participant” County, so a lot of work with constantly involved with agriculture sides every day it seems like.”

When answers about social media use from participants that indicated very little agriculture background were compared to answers from the participant that indicated a background in agriculture the themes found were regular social media use and value in social media by those with and without a background in agriculture. Participant eight, who indicated a background in agriculture, said, “I am on there every day,” and, “Oh I think it is beneficial. I think especially nowadays a lot of people skip over the papers, newspapers and radio and they want to get it instant so it is information I like to see too and I’m guilty as everyone else. I want that instant information from others.” Examples of answers in the regular use of social media and value in social media theme from of one of the participants who indicated very little agriculture background come from participant three who said, “I would say almost on a daily basis,” and “I think social media is a great avenue to be able to inform the public about things that are happening at a state level, federal level, and even worldwide so it is a great avenue to really get the word out about the many issues, thoughts, concerns people have here in the state government.
Objective 3: Describe Ohio House of Representative and Senate Members’ Social Media Connections to Agricultural Organizations in Ohio.

Participants were asked questions in the interview to help describe connections to agricultural organizations in Ohio through social media. Below are the results to the questions pertaining to: a) where is agricultural information obtained; b) familiarity with agricultural organizations, companies, people, etc… that use social media; c) conversations with agricultural groups through social media; and d) agricultural information through social media.

Where is Agricultural Information Obtained

When asked where they obtain information about an agricultural issue, when it comes up, participants had varied answers. One theme that occurred several times was constituents. Examples of this include, “Agricultural issues, I will consult with the just depends on what agricultural issue but first usually the Farm Bureau, constituents back home since I have a heavy agricultural district. There are a lot of people in the industry,” from participant eight, and participant five said, “Our constituents. The base that we have of folks who are farmers and people it may affect.” Participant two said, “Again, it would go back to either doing part of it is doing your own research, part of it is talking, but what I like to do and I think it is very important, is talk to the people in your home district.”

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Another theme that was mentioned in a few answers was Farm Bureau. Participant eight, in the above paragraph mentioned Farm Bureau, and participant five said, “The base that we have of folks who are farmers and people it may affect and the Farm Bureau as well.”

Familiarity with Agricultural Organizations, Companies, People, etc... That Use Social Media

Participants were asked if they were familiar with agricultural organizations, companies, people, etc… that use social media. Themes that emerged were probably and farm bureau. In the probably theme, there were several answers similar to participant six when they said, “Agricultural, I’m sure we do and I couldn’t tell you any.” The farm bureau theme was observed in three answers. Participant three said, “Agriculturally, yes I’m aware of a few entities that do, for example, the Ohio Farm Federation they utilize the online media,” and participant six said, “I’m sure on Farm Bureau and some of the others but I couldn’t tell you specifically.” Other organizations that were mentioned included the Department of Agriculture, Cattleman’s Association, and Agribusiness groups in answers from participant eight who said “Yes, like the Cattlemen’s Association, Agribusiness groups,” and participant three who said, “The Department of Agriculture, for example, they have a Facebook page.”

When asked how they found out about these organizations on social media answers varied greatly from search to word-of-mouth to inadvertently. Examples include,
“Commercials and print media,” and, “Inadvertently. I think probably the Farm Bureau is having a dinner or an event or something,” and, “Well, it could be from an email that they will send to us,” said participant three.

Answers to the questions of whether or not they followed any agriculturally related groups three participants indicating that yes they do follow, and four saying no they do not. Examples of yes and no answers include, “We have plenty of agricultural contacts to this office but probably not a lot of use in the social media context,” participant six said, and, “Yes I do,” participant eight said.

Conversations with Agricultural Groups Through Social Media

When participants were asked if they had conversations about agriculture through social media with any agricultural organization, companies, or people, the major theme was no. Answers were common to the following example from participant seven, “No, not really.”

Agricultural Information Through Social Media

The common theme in participant answers when asked if they use social media to receive or seek out agricultural information was no. Examples of answers in this theme are, “No. I mean not at this time anyway,” from participant six, and participant two said, “Not really, not social media. I will go online and Google, and I’m assuming that is not a form of social media, that is more of a research type thing, or I’ll talk to the lobbyist or
I’ll talk to farmers or people in my district. It depends on what the concerns is, and meet with them and talk to them directly but not a social media. I would not use Facebook or anything for things such as that.”

There were two participants that said that they have used social media to get agricultural information. Participant three said, “I think we do. I mean we certainly utilize it for some of the information,” and participant eight said, “Text or go into a Facebook and we start going back and forth and actually we had an individual from an association through Facebook reach out to us and talk to us about a bill and said can you slow the bill down because we have some concerns so social media was right there and in the forefront of let’s start talking and actually allowed us to start to process.”

Objective 4: Describe Social Media Effects on Ohio House of Representative and Senate Members’ Agriculture Policy Decision Making.

Participants were asked in the interview if any information or campaigns using social media had ever affected their voting decisions, and if so what about the campaign was effective. The major themes in participant answers to the question were no and not social media exclusively. Examples of the answers in the not social media exclusively theme include, “I don’t know on social media since I haven’t been on like, but I mean communication with the office whether it is social media or otherwise always does have an impact on educating us on the issues when we decide to vote,” from participant six and participant five said, “You know, I would say I think I like the Farm Bureau or some
of the other agricultural organizations that we visit or work with or do research on. Every once in a while I will bring up their websites and I know this sounds probably human for lack of a better term, but if it looks good, feels good, it is current and up to date, I take these folks a little more seriously because you are obviously trying to outreach to your folks and that tells me that you are on it and the issues are important.” Another example is when participant three said, “I really can’t answer that in full. I mean, of course, there have been some agricultural issues even on the ballot so when you see commercials or you see email blasts or go to certain websites, of course there would be influences there but I really can’t put my finger on what issue exactly there was that made that difference.”

Examples of answers in the no theme include, “I would say not social media as is more of a lot of emails discussing people’s stands, gathering that information, and some of it may have been but not on social media. I’m going to say yes, email just gathering information or where constituents stood and that helped me educate myself or the committee,” from participant eight, and participant two said, “Again, because it is not there, that’s not what would affect it. Again, it’s going back to your constituents and to what the legislation is, and what’s debated and talked about in the committee meetings and that is what we will make the determining factor.”
Summary

Through analysis of the interviews with Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members for this study, numerous themes emerged. Themes were coded by question, and then organized to each research objective. The themes were reported by objective, and question clusters within each objective.

Themes found in describing use of social media by Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members included: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn use; both personal and professional use of social media; friend requests and follows are addressed through common friends, suggestions, personal friends; social media is used every day or every other day; there is campaign use of social media: yes; management of social media efforts is done by self with help; no monitoring of what is said on social media is done; and constituent communication is done via email, phone calls, face-to-face, and directed off social media.

The major theme found in agriculture backgrounds was that the majority of participants had very little agriculture background. When answers about social media use from participants that indicated very little agriculture background were compared to answers from the participant that indicated a background in agriculture the themes found in both were regular social media use and value in social media.

Themes found regarding social media connections to agricultural organization in Ohio included: agricultural information was obtained from constituent and farm bureau; familiarity with agricultural organizations, companies, people, etc… that use social media
include *probably* and *farm bureau*; *no* conversations with agricultural groups are held through social media; and *no* agricultural information is obtained through social media.

Describing social media effects on Ohio House of Representatives’ and Senators’ agriculture policy decision making was the fourth, and final, objective of this study. Participants were asked if any information or campaigns using social media had ever affected their voting decisions, and if so what about the campaign was effective. The major themes found in regards to information or campaigns using social media affecting voting decision were *no* and *not social media exclusively*. 
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Social media sites have become widely used and are a relatively new form of communication, with uses that are new to many. Use of social media by the public is increasing and reports show that the public has been engaging with each other on political topics; but it is hard to determine if they have been engaging with politicians, and if politicians are engaging with them. It is also hard to determine how politicians are using social media outside of their election campaigns, because much of the research and reporting on political use of social media has revolved around campaign usage by politicians and the public.

Studies have looked at the views and uses of social media by staff members of politicians, but few studies have looked at how the actual elected officials are using social media, particularly in terms of engaging with constituents, and policy decision-making. The majority of attention to political use of social media is also focused on the national levels, not state or local politics. Studies also have not focused on specific industries and social media use in politics, particularly the agriculture industry.
For Ohio agriculture, a study is needed to examine how Ohio politicians are using social media, and if they are using social media when making policy decisions related to agriculture. This information can help the public to better understand how to engage their elected officials using social media. The purpose of this study was to examine how Ohio House of Representative and Senate members are using social media, and how they are using it as it relates to agriculture and agricultural policy decision-making. Grounded in ideas from media richness theory, social presence theory, groundswell, and other studies of political use of social media, this study aimed to meet the following research objectives:

1. Describe the use of social media by Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members.
2. Compare agriculture background of Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members to their use of social media.
3. Describe Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members’ social media connections to agricultural organizations in Ohio.
4. Describe social media effects on Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members’ agriculture policy decision making.

This study collected data from eight qualitative interviews, six with Ohio Representatives and two with Ohio Senators selected through random sampling of the
entire population of Ohio Representatives and Senators. Interviews were conducted both in-person and by phone, depending on the preference and availability of the participant. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using open coding, themes were found, and reported. This chapter will discuss the findings of this study, the implications for future research, and implications for agriculture.

Objective 1: Describe the Use of Social Media by Ohio House of Representatives and Senate Members

Participants of this study were asked several questions to aid in describing their use of social media, and several conclusions can be made from analyzing their answers. Most of the participants use Facebook, and several use Twitter and LinkedIn. This is similar to the statistics of social media used in the general population, with Facebook being the most popular (Hampton, et al., 2011). One participant indicated using Ustream to hold online town hall meetings. This shows some movement to use less popular social media to engage constituents.

While most of the participants do use social media one said that they do not at all, in fact they find it to be a very negative medium to use and they have no plans to use it in the future. This shows that while many politicians are adopting social media technologies, there are still hold outs. This means that social media cannot yet be used to engage all politicians, and communication through other means such as email, phone
calls, and face-to-face meetings are still needed. The answers from this participant allude to a view that social media have low media richness and social presence for some.

Many of the participants also use social media both personally and professionally. They have personal profiles, and pages or accounts for professional use as an elected official. Some participants mentioned having conversations or being sent questions about state house business through their personal use, which shows that while social media are being used for personal uses by these politicians, they still do business as an elected official through their personal pages. It can also be inferred that many of them are using it as a way to stay connected to their constituents, as informing the public was a reason given for using social media professionally.

The themes found in answers about friends on social media sites show similarities to social presence theory which says that increased presence leads to a richer perception of a person and that it can be viewed as the amount of interpersonal contact a medium allows (Short et al., 1976). When it comes to friend requests, most of the participants accept requests from people they have not met personally but they use the number of common friends as a way to determine if they are indeed going to accept a friend request. While this only applies to personal Facebook profiles it has implications to how people engage with politicians online. If a politician is only using a personal profile, a friend request acceptance is needed to engage with them. If the information gleaned from this study is common in other Ohio Representatives and Senators some face-to-face contact and networking with them and their friends may be needed before engagement can begin.
on social media. Even if a page that does not require friend acceptance is being used, instead of a personal profile, the information provided in this study suggests that having previous contact with the politician before interaction on social media would increase likelihood of engagement. If the politician has met the person before social media contact they will have a higher sense of awareness of that person, or social presence, and likely feel more comfortable engaging with them.

How they decide whom to follow or send friend request to was also a question asked of the participants. A theme in their answers was suggestions and personal friends. This falls in line with the friend request acceptance answers. Facebook suggests friends to users based on their current list of friends. This requires having common friends with the politicians, and networking to acquire the common friends or meeting the politicians in a manner that would allow them to recall the name or face of the requester. Again, this suggests that if the politician has a higher sense of social presence of someone suggested to them they are more likely to feel comfortable sending them a friend requesting, following them, and engaging with them.

The Representatives and Senators that were interviewed were asked how often they use social media, and the common theme in answers was everyday or every other day. This suggests that they find value in their use of social media to be spending time on the sites. Some answers did indicate that some of the time is spent by staff.

When asked about who manages their social media efforts the major theme was that they do most of the social media work themselves, with some help from staff
occasionally. State elected officials have fewer staff as compared to federal politicians; therefore they must do more of the social media use themselves. Participants’ answers also had a theme of having informal policies on use of social media. A common form of monitoring staff’s use of social media was for the staff member to discuss what was being posted with the Representative or Senator before it is posted. With this in mind, those attempting to connect to their state elected official through social media have a better chance of communicating with the official and not their staff, and if they are connecting to the staff the messages are still passed along to the official.

The major theme in answers about using social media in their campaigns was that they do use it. Answers mentioned using it to recruit help or ask who would like a yard sign, but also mentioned that use in their last campaign was somewhat limited and that they planned to increase use in their next election. This suggests that in the next round of elections there will be more opportunities to engage with the Representatives and Senators online. A desire to increase the use of social media in their campaigns indicates that value is found in their use of social media, which suggests that they find social media to have adequate media richness for their desired uses.

Participants overwhelmingly said that they do not monitor what is being said online. They are not “listening” to conversations about them or other political topics outside of their own pages. This implies that those posting Facebook status updates and tweets about their opinions of policies and issues in the state house are not seen by the politicians unless it is on the politicians’ own pages and profiles.
When asked about how they currently communicate with constituents, Representatives and Senators did not mention social media. Instead email, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings were the common themes of how they communicate with their constituents. This falls in line with conclusions of media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) that media with high richness allows the sender to tailor the message to the receiver with a personal focus, and that face-to-face and telephone communication are the richest media to have contact with someone. While there are varying views of the richness of social media (Jacobson, 1999; Sheer, 2011), answers given in this study suggest politicians do not value the richness of social media over email, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings.

When asked if they ever use social media to have conversations with constituents the study found the common theme to be that social media conversations are directed off of the social media and to an email or phone call. Some answers inferred a lack of trust and lack of ability to be forthcoming on social media. This suggests that questions can be asked and conversations started through social media, but that they will not be completed through social media. This allows for good engagement with an individual, but does not allow answers to questions or other conversations with the official to be viewed by the public. When others can view a conversation with the politician on social media it could answer questions that they have without the added need of contacting the politician, and it could encourage them to ask other questions and increase engagement.
Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members do not use social media to have conversations with others such as other elected officials or interest groups, according to the themes found in this study. A few of the participants indicated that they did in fact have conversations with other elected officials, but many of the answers indicated personal conversations such as birthday wishes, and not conversations about political topics or conversations with interest groups. This indicates that companies or organizations wishing to have conversations with elected officials through social media cannot do so through that company’s social media account, but may have success having individuals from the company or organization holding the conversations. This also indicates that elected officials are not willing to hold conversations about their political views with potential opponents or proponents, only friends and constituents.

Participants were asked what their general thought about social media were. No major theme was found throughout their answers. The major implication of this is that no one elected official has a similar view of how to use it or what its benefits are. This means that anyone wishing to engage their elected official through social media should pay attention to how that individual is using their social media sites. This suggest that having a Social Technographics profile of elected officials use of social media could help them discern how best to use social media to engage their elected official. Also, it may help to have conversations through other media such as email, phone, or face-to-face before attempting to engage them through social media.
Findings for this study suggest that media richness and social presence play a role in Representatives’ and Senators’ use of social media. If was found that if the politician has a higher sense of social presence of someone attempting to engage or contact them through social media they are more likely to feel comfortable in doing so through that medium. Differing findings in regards to media richness of social media were found. On one hand a desire to increase the use of social media in their campaigns indicates that value is found in their use of social media. This suggests that they find social media to have adequate media richness for their desired uses. But, answers given about how the participants communicate with constituents suggests that they do not value the richness of social media over email, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings.

This study also found that participants of this study fall into the Joiners group of the Social Technographics Profile (Figure 1), but they do participate in activities in the Creators group (i.e. creating websites and YouTube videos) and the Conversationalists group (i.e. posting status updates). Participants’ activities as Creators and Conversationalists are somewhat limited, but they do participate in those activities some.

Objective 2: Compare Agriculture Background of Ohio House of Representatives and Senate Members to Their Use of Social Media.

The participants of this study were asked if had a background in agriculture, and the common theme found was that they had very little background in agriculture. One participant had a strong background in agriculture, and did see value in social media and
used social media regularly. The rest of the participants indicated that they had very little background in agriculture, but some of them reported being well versed in agricultural issues. Some of their knowledge of agriculture that was reported was due to service on an agriculture committee. Of the eight interviewed, four served on an agriculture committee and all used social media.

Although only four of the participants serve on an agriculture committee, all participants vote on agricultural policy once it leaves the committee and is up for a vote in the full House or Senate. Answers in this portion of the study do not indicate any difference in agriculture background in social media use.

Objective 3: Describe Ohio House of Representatives and Senate Members’ Social Media Connections to Agricultural Organizations in Ohio.

Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members were asked about their familiarity with agricultural organizations, companies, people, etc… that use social media. The emerging theme found was that they probably know of some, but they couldn’t think of any at the time of the interview. Answers as to whether or not they follow any agriculture groups on social media, the answers were split between yes and no. Farm Bureau was mentioned by a couple of participants, but familiarity expressed was not strong. Participants may be familiar with Farm Bureau on social media because of Ohio Farm Bureau’s lobbying efforts at the statehouse, with two employee spending a significant amount of time there (B. Vanderkoii, personal communication, January 2011).
When asked how they found out about agriculture groups on social media, there was not a consistent theme found. Some answers included inadvertently, word-of-mouth, and commercials and print media. Participants had a major theme of not having conversations about agriculture through social media with agricultural groups, and they also showed a theme of not seeking out agricultural information through social media. When asked where they obtain information about agricultural issues the major themes that emerged were constituents, and farm bureau was also mentioned several times.

These answers suggest that while some of the elected officials know of a few agricultural groups using social media, the majority of them are not seeking out these groups through social media. This indicates similar findings from the social media use description questions; that groups, organizations, and companies will not likely have a lot of success engaging elected officials. These groups would likely have better success engaging the Representatives and Senators through individuals with their group engaging them. This suggests that the participants perceive a low social presence with groups through social media. Because there is less of a “human” element when a contact from an organization’s page occurs, lower social presence is perceived, and therefore less engagement occurs with those pages. Having an initial personal contact with the politicians before contacting them through social media was also suggested again through questioning in this objective.
Objective 4: Describe Social Media Effects on Ohio House of Representatives Senate Members’ Agriculture Policy Decision Making.

The Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members that participated in this study were asked if any information or campaigns using social media had ever affected their voting decision, and if so what about the campaign was effective. The theme that emerged in participants’ answers was not social media exclusively. Participants reported that their voting decisions most often are affected by going back to constituents.

The themes that emerged in the participant answers in this area suggest that right now social media campaigns cannot be used exclusively in an attempt to change agricultural policy. As emerged before, constituent communication is important to the participants and that communication needs to be personalized. Answers did not indicate that social media would not ever affect their voting decisions, but it would not likely be the first way someone wanting to affect policy should contact their elected official.

Again, this shows that the richness and social presence of email, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings is valued over the richness and social presence of social media.

Limitations

The sample of this study was limited in number due to time and resource restraints. While the data collected in this study is rich, it cannot be generalized outside of the sample that participated in the study. Although the number of participants was limited, it was evident by the end of the study that saturation was achieved. The
interviews allowed for intense and rich data to be collected to aid in understanding how Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members are using social media.

**Implications for researchers**

This study has surfaced several things that researchers should pursue in the future. Research in media richness theory and social presence theory would be beneficial in understanding how elected officials are using social media. Some research in groundswell and developing a Social Technographics Profile of elected officials was also indicated in this study. Other research surfaced in this study is more specific communication with constituents through social media.

Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and social presence theory (Short et al., 1976) both order, or rank, media based on their uses and effects. Studies that rank the richness and social presence of social media would be helpful in other research of social media uses in politics. Studies that rank each social media based on richness or on social presence are an area that could use further research, as many social media have differing levels of interaction between users.

Groundswell (Li & Bernoff, 2011) suggests using a Social Technographics Profile when determining how to using social technologies to engage with a target audience. Social Technographics Profiles are available for politicians to use when targeting their audiences. A study to create a profile of elected officials would be suggested from this
study because there are different uses of social media throughout the population studied, and their answers indicate that communication with them through social media needs tailored.

Other research areas that would be suggested from this study include more studies of how politicians are communicating with their constituents through social media. Themes in this study suggest that social media is used a little by some politicians when communicating with constituents, but further research would shed more light on the conversations held and their effects. A survey of how constituents are contacting their elected officials would also be useful in further research of this topic.

Further research of other agricultural groups such as agriculture commodity groups and Extension’s use of social media, and connections with politicians would be suggested from this study. Farm Bureau is mentioned often in this study, and a study of other groups’ use of social media, and why they are not thought of or mentioned as often by politicians would be useful in research of this topic. In the same area, more research on what affects voting decisions would be suggested.

A study of any party guidance given to the politicians on their use of social media is another suggestion for future research. This study did not ask about party coordination or guidance, but in future research this may give further insight to politicians’ use of social media.
Implications for practitioners

Several implications for those interested in impacting policy in Ohio were surfaced in this study. These implications include relationship building before social media interaction, social media does not solely affect voting decisions, and interaction with individuals is valued over interaction with groups.

One of the biggest implications is that relationship building before and during interactions using social media are important. The participants’ answers suggest that they likely do no start up, participate in, or pay attention to conversations with others on social media without having some sort of personal interaction with the conversation starter before the social media interaction. Several participants indicated that they do not accept friend requests from people that they do not know, or at least do not have personal connections to, or that they do not recognize. While not all interaction through social media happens through personal profiles that require friend acceptance, this would suggest that having a relationship with the elected official before social media interaction would enhance the social media interaction.

Another implication to impacting policy decision-making that surfaced in this study is that social media cannot solely be used to impact policy. Answers in the study suggest that social media can be one source of information that the Representatives and Senators use when gathering information to make a voting decision, but social media does not make the only impact. The bigger impact indicated was communication with constituents on a more personal basis using email, phone calls, and face-to-face
interactions. The elected officials can, and sometimes do, communicate with constituents through social media; but right now they do not view that interaction as important as the others. This does not mean that social media will always be viewed this way. Politicians have been accused of being slow to adopt technologies such as email in the past (Congressional Management Foundation, 2011), but now they consider email one of the top ways they communicate with constituents. Continued relationship building along with continued use of social media may lead to an increase in the use of social media to communicate with constituents in the future, which would then increase the impact of social media use on policy voting decisions.

Another implication of this study is that groups, organizations, and companies have very little to no impact on policy decisions using social media. The Representatives’ and Senators’ answers in this study suggest that little attention is paid to these groups on social media, and that more attention is paid to individuals. Knowing exactly whom they are communicating with was important to the participants. Being able to put a face to whom they are communicating with is important to them. Participants were familiar with Farm Bureau on social media possibly because of Ohio Farm Bureau’s lobbying efforts at the statehouse, with two employee spending a significant amount of time there. This suggests that if a group, organization, or company wishes to communicate their thoughts on a policy through social media they should do so through an individual, and not a group page, or they should have individuals that communicate with the politicians regularly face-to-face.
Conclusion

This study sought to examine how Ohio House of Representatives and Senate members are using social media, and how they are using it as it relates to agriculture and agricultural policy decision-making. It was found that most Representatives and Senators are using social media, but that they are still developing that use, and still deciding the value of conversations held through social media. It would seem that social media is not impacting policy voting on agricultural issues much at this time, but with some relationship building and continued engagement by individuals, social media could become the next email in terms of elected official communication with constituents.
List of References


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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Document

September 2, 2011

Protocol Number: 2011E0511
Protocol Title: OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE AND SENATE MEMBERS’ USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE CONNECTIONS TO AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS, EMILY RHOADES, CALLIE WELLS, HUMAN AND COMMUNITY RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
Type of Review: Request for Exempt Determination

Dear Dr. Rhoades,
The Office of Responsible Research Practices has determined the above referenced protocol exempt from IRB review.

Date of Exempt Determination: 08/31/2011
Qualifying Exemption Category: 3

Please note the following:
- Only OSU employees and students who have completed CITI training and are named on the signature page of the application are approved as OSU Investigators in conducting this study.
- No changes may be made in exempt research (e.g., personnel, recruitment procedures, advertisements, instruments, etc.). If changes are made, a new application must be submitted.
- Per university requirements, all research-related records (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended.
- It is the responsibility of the Investigator to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under The Ohio State University’s ORRP Federally Assurance #00006378. All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the ORRP staff contact listed below with any questions or concerns.

Cheri Petrey, MA, Certified IRB Professional
Senior Protocol Analyst—Exempt Research
Office of Responsible Research Practices
Ohio State University
1980 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210
Phone: 614.688.0339
Fax: 614.688.0366
Email: petrey.6@osu.edu

Exempt Determination
Version 1.2

Full Accreditation

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Appendix B: Fax letter to participants

August 17, 2011

Honorable (Full Name)
(State) Senate
(Street Address)
(City), (State) (Zip Code)

Dear Mr./Ms. (Surname):

Hello, we are conducting a study in an effort to understand how you, as elected lawmakers and leaders in Ohio, are using social media. Being that you represent constituents in your home districts, and social media has been touted by many as a great communication tool, we are requesting your participation in a short interview at your office. This should only take 45 minutes of your time.

We realize your time is very valuable and that you have many other things going on, but we hope that you will take a few minutes to talk with us so we can learn how to better use social media for agricultural causes in the future. Your answers will be included in research as part of my master’s thesis at The Ohio State University, but be assured your responses will be kept anonymous and confidential in any reports and in the data.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Furthermore, you would be free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation without prejudice. All answers are confidential to the extent provided by law. There are no known risks associated with this study.

We will be following up this letter with a phone call to discuss your willingness to participate and to schedule a time to meet. If you would like to contact us you can do so by emailing rhoades.100@osu.edu, or calling 614-292-4937.

If you have any questions about this research please contact my adviser, the principal researcher, Dr. Emily Rhoades at rhoades.100@osu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1800-678-6251.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Callie Wells
Graduate Student in Agricultural Communication
The Ohio State University
Appendix C: Interview Questions

Hello. Thank you very much for agreeing to meet and discuss your use of social media as part of my research. This research is going to help us provide insight into successful use of social media for engaging elected officials, such as you. This should only take about an hour and all of your information will be kept confidential and anonymous to the extent provided by law. We will be audio recording this interview but your name or any other identifying information will not be associated with any recordings or other records, and the recording will be destroyed after the completion of this research project. There are no risks or benefits to participating in this study, and you are welcome to stop at any time with no repercussions. By agreeing to answer the following questions you agree that you have been informed of your rights as a research participant and are participating of your own free will.

Thank you, let’s begin

1. What are your general thoughts about social media?

2. Do you use social media? If so, which ones?

   a. Do you use social media more for personal or professional use or both?
i. Has professional use of social media affected your personal use, and if so how?

ii. Do you use social media because you think it is beneficial or because you feel that if others are you should too?

iii. How do you determine who you accept friend requests from?

iv. How do you decide who to “friend” or “follow”?

3. How often do you use social media?

4. Have you used social media in your campaigns or considered using social media for your campaigns? If so, how has social media enhanced your campaigns?

5. Who manages your social media efforts?

   a. If a staff member is the primary manager how do you monitor what the staff member is saying on social media?

   b. Do you have specific policies about you and your staff’s use of social media and if so what are the policies?
6. Do you monitor what others are saying about you on social media? If so, how do you monitor what is being said?

7. What media do you believe works the best to receive information from constituents?

8. How do you have conversations with constituents? Do you ever use social media for those conversations?
   
a. Do you use social media to have conversations with others, such as other elected officials or interest groups?

9. Are you familiar with agricultural organizations, companies, people, etc… that use social media? If so, who are they?
   
a. How did you find out about them?
   
b. Do you follow any of them?
   
c. Do you have conversations about agriculture through social media with any of them?
10. Do you use social media to receive or seek out agricultural information, and if so how?

11. When an agricultural issue comes up, who/what do you consult for information?

   a. Have you ever used social media to obtain information on these agricultural issues?

   b. What social media and which people or groups have you consulted with to obtain information?

   c. What other media do they use to communicate and receive information?

12. Has any information or campaigns using social media ever affected your voting decisions on agricultural issues? If so, what about the information or campaign was effective?

Agricultural Background:
Appendix D: Interview Transcriptions

Thesis Research – Social Media

Interview 1:
I: Ok, so our first question is just what are your general thoughts about social media?
P: Now explain what you call social media.
I: Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, You Tube
P: Oh, I totally find it to be disruptive and can malalign people so easily and I don’t like it at all and will not use it, will not be on it at all.
I: Ok, second question, you have already answered this for me once but just so we have it on recording, do you use social media?
P: No.
I: Ok, there are some sub questions there but since you don’t use it I will skip those.
P: The only thing that I have is a political web site, I have a state web site which is more for our house members and for anyone who wants to look into my office, but that’s it. In fact, I don’t even give out my personal email address at all and will not allow anyone to use my husband’s email address except on very, very, very, very few occasions. I’m not a candidate for your interview.
I: Well, actually you know it is great to have this information to have the side of the Representative’s that do not use social media so actually you are a great candidate and I want to thank you again for agreeing to the interview.
P: I wish I could. I have seen, I’ve lost several candidates, I’ve lost several friends to the Internet and I remember one friend of mine she has political office and she used to be on the phone with me and she would be doing running off at the mouth and I was saying you have your computer on? Yes, and I told her it was a bad thing but that is what she wanted. Ok, now, go ahead.
I: The third question and like I said, a lot of these questions are not going to apply to you but I’m just going to ask them and you can answer that you don’t have an answer for that or that you do not use it and so the third question is how often do you use social media?
P: Don’t.
I: Ok, have you ever used social media in campaigns or considered it?
P: Only my web site.
I: Who manages your social media?
P: I have a company that I pay for that I have done in my office, usual information, you know, different meetings, what have you but no.
I: Who manages your social media efforts?
P: There is a company and gosh I forgot the man’s name, but I know he has done my literature last year. Ummm, I can’t think of his name but he does and I pay him by the
hour to enter things to my web site. For goodness, does that tell you how much I’m interested in social media?
I: Yes, next question, do you or anyone else monitor what others are saying about you or your policies on social media?
P: Nope.
I: Ok, what media do you believe works the best to receive information from your constituents?
P: Direct phone call, I have my office is my home. That’s where my constituents meet me so therefore we keep it personalized to the point that they can come to see me they can come in and know that I’m listening to them and to them alone and they can have some confidence and it has worked. Now I’m probably the only legislator that has their home as their office, but I do that.
I: Ok
P: It has worked very well for me.
I: Ok, great. Next question, how do you have conversations with constituents?
P: Over the phone or in person.
I: Ok. Next question, are you familiar with agricultural organizations, companies, or people that use social media?
P: I probably am but I never ask them.
I: All right.
P: If they send something to me through social media, they have to send it to my office in Columbus.
I: Ok, next question, do you use social media to receive or seek out agricultural information?
P: Usually just send out a letter or talk to the person who is or whom I’m going to interact with.
I: Ok, next question, when agricultural issues come up, who or what do you consult for information?
P: I consult a former legislative colleague who are farmers and are involved in the agricultural side of legislation.
I: Ok, let’s see, what other media do you use to communicate or receive information about agriculture?
P: I do get a magazine called Country Living and a farmer’s magazine and my husband and I find it interesting. I do because I’ve learned a lot about agriculture and components of agricultural that normally some people don’t pay attention to, especially urban legislators.
I: Ok, and last question or second to last question, has any information or campaigns using social media ever affected your voting decisions on agricultural issues?
P: Nope.
I: Ok, and the last question is do you have any type of an agricultural background?
P: My ties believe it or not, my family was from the West Indies and we still own a great deal of land on the East Coast of Florida and they sold land not knowing the use of the land after they sold it. All we can think about sometimes at family get together how we own something on the island and how we did and as our family came up from the islands they were the migrant workers of that time frame in the 20’s and 30’s but we were African American so we were the sharecroppers in a sense.

I: Ok, all right. That is all of my questions. Again thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview.

P: I think I’m probably different than anyone else you probably called.

I: Ok, and that’s great, that’s perfect so thank you so much.

P: If you want to find out what happened to the Bohemians and the West Indians that came over and they bought the land….

Interview 2:

I: The first question is just, what are your general thoughts about social media?

P: I was surprised how much since being elected how much it really has become more of a mainstream of how to keep in touch with your constituents. Facebook, for instance, and I never thought I would, I didn’t even know what Facebook was four or five years, I guess, but you know it has actually taken over my web site. I don’t even use my web site anymore. I use Facebook and it is because with people it is instant communication. You have the ability to almost, I think, Tweet you can write your status what is going on in the house today, you know that happened, what did we vote on, what was in committee. You can put that right on and instantaneously it goes out to all the people who are interested who are your friends, as you know. It is interesting to see how the feedback does come back and how people are interested in certain laws that you didn’t think they would be so it has been very eye opening because I never really thought of it for politics and never was going to use it for politics. I just happened to have a friend who said hey, you should go on Facebook three years ago and I found a lot of high school friends that way and then all of a sudden I’m running for office and it exploded and I use it quite a bit to keep like I said, in touch with the constituents.

I: Ok, great. Next question, do you, well this is just to start off, do you use social media and if so which ones?

P: Really the only one I know that I use is Facebook. I tried Tweeting but I’m not sure and that I’m told that my status goes into a Tweet and it will send it out to people if they have it on their phone but really it is Facebook.

I: Ok, and second, well I guess going from that, do you use social media for more personal or professional, or do you use it for both?

P: Both, I would say both.

I: Ok, and has professional use of social media affected your personal use? And, if so, how?

P: Just mindful, I guess, of you know what you are putting on Facebook. You can’t get too personalized because if you are using it for political stuff you have to be careful
there. That’s mainly about it. I really do not use it that much like I’m not on it every single minute of every single day. I know people are but I’m on it maybe once every other day or you know, something has happened in the State House and I want to get it out there I use it.

I: Do you use social media because you think it is beneficial or because you feel that if others are you should too?

P: Probably because it is more beneficial, it is just more instantaneous. It is right then and there and it is free. It is the best price when you are a politician.

I: How do you determine who you accept friend requests from?

P: That’s tough. Usually I just friend pretty much everybody. I don’t have, one thing I guess I am careful, I see how many mutual friends or how many friends they have or something like that because there are a couple of questionable things that have come across where I’m a little bit nervous so I didn’t friend them but overall I would say pretty much friend everybody.

I: Great. How do you decide who you friend or follow?

P: Again, you know, the friend request and how it comes up or if I happen to know the person. As you know, Facebook makes recommendations or Facebook will just automatically add, hey this is someone who wants to be your friend. Excuse me, I usually don’t go looking for friends. It usually comes up on the popup and I just say ok accept, accept, accept.

I: You’ve kinda already answered this but how often do you use social media?

P: Like every other day.

I: Have you used social media in your campaigns or considered using social media for your campaigns?

P: Yes.

I: How has this enhanced your campaigns?

P: It has gotten the word out quickly and lets friends know, for instance, I was thinking of using this soon, is okay the March primary is coming up, who would like a yard sign? Who would like to be a volunteer at the next town hall? Who, and you can get instant, you know, people text you right away, hey Shawn you know next week I can do it or I can’t or yes, give me a yard sign. I’ve had people actually without even saying can I have a yard sign, requesting yard signs, Issue 2 or Senate Bill 5. I had people on there, a lot of people debating the issue and then asking for yard signs or things like that.

I: Ok, great. Who manages your social media efforts?

P: Myself and my aide are the only two administrators.

I: Ok, and then if a staff member is the primary manager, how do you monitor what the staff member is saying on social media?

P: I would before she is allowed to put anything on, we discuss it and we go over what goes on there so we have a good dialogue and she has been a really great aide so I pretty much trust her decision.

I: Do you have specific policies about you and your staff’s use of social media?
P: Defined, promulgated ones no, but I mean it is understood I guess. I mean we are the only two using it. Before she can put really anything on she does go over it with me.

I: Do you monitor what others are saying about you on social media, and if so, how do you monitor what is being said?

P: No really, I mean I have had people underneath posts that I have written say that but not too often that that is a bad idea or that’s not a good bill or I love that bill or you know, Nitrol’s Bill I’ve gotten a lot of people on that. I had House Bill 143 a concussion bill and one person said all the problems that we are having, why are you worrying about concussions. Then 500 people said it’s good for kids, you don’t understand my child got a concussion. I didn’t realize how important House Bill 143 is and we applaud that. So, in a way I do use it to kinda gauge and check out ok, you know this is what is going on in the House, how many people are really for or against it and they are your friends usually so you are not going to get too much negativity so I don’t think it accurately reflects maybe what everyone is thinking but for the most part it does kinda give you a little bit of an idea.

I: What media do you believe works to best receive information from your constituents?

P: Emails, I get a lot of emails from constituents, just calling in, I do get some requests on Facebook but a lot of my constituents are a little bit an upper age bracket and do not have computers or don’t necessarily know how to work them or are not really Facebook. This is more of a younger phenomenon and most of what I get is emails or phone calls.

I: How do you have conversations with constituents and do you ever use social media for those conversations?

P: Conversations, as far as just talking to them or town hall meetings or just outdoor campaigning door to door at other events, other fundraisers, just being out in the community and there have been times when I’ve said to people are you on Facebook, Facebook me because by the time I say this is my email, …, they will forget it. If they remember, hey just look me up on Facebook or look me up or I’ll look you up, Facebook just makes it a little bit easier that way.

I: Do you use social media to have conversations with other such as other elected officials or interests groups?

P: Once in a while I guess I do. I’ll say hey Representative ___ Happy Birthday, or where are we at on House Bill 143, have you heard anything? But not too often, most of the time it is used by phone or through the aides. I do use it.

I: And now we are going to move towards some questions about agricultural organizations. Are you familiar with ag organizations, companies, people, etc. that you social media? And if so, who are they?

P: I’m sorry, can you say that again?

I: Are you familiar with ag organizations, agricultural organizations, companies, or people that use social media? And if so, who are they?
P: At the top of my head I don’t know of any that do. I mean companies. I’m sure they are all on my Facebook but without looking at them I don’t know them off the top of my head.
I: How do you find out about them?
P: If they were there, I guess they would make friend requests but usually companies or people that I’m dealing with I’m going to deal with their lobbyist. I’m going to talk to them directly, meet with them. That’s more of in person or through the regular means and not through really a social media.
I: Do you follow any of them?
P: Yes.
I: So you said you may but you would have to look again.
P: I really don’t think that I do but that is not to say that I don’t and really they only way I know is if they post things on Facebook because again, I’m not really on there like that (snap). I’ll post stuff, I’m not checking out how what Susie, Steve, or Fred are doing or what constituents are doing too much other than I check my homepage to see what other things people are writing on there because I let people post on mine which a lot of reps don’t do that but I feel it is a good voice that they can use.
I: Do you ever use social media to seek out, receive or seek out agricultural information?
P: Not really, not social media. I will go online and Google, and I’m assuming that is not a form of social media, that is more of a research type thing, or I’ll talk to the lobbyist or I’ll talk to farmers or people in my district. It depends on what the concern is, and meet with them and talk to them directly but not a social media. I would not use Facebook or anything for things such as that.
I: Ok, and you just sort of answered this a little bit. When agriculture issues come up, who and what do you consult for information?
P: Again, it would go back to either doing part of it is doing your own research, part of it is talking but what I like to do and I think it is very important, is talk to the people in your home district. What, you know, ok there is a farm bill on whatever it is, on livestock, I don’t have livestock myself. I’ve worked on farms but I don’t know exactly what this issue may be so I may call up Farmer Jim or Steve or someone and say, hey, you guys have 100 head of cattle, there is some new bill that is coming through, do you understand or explain it to me, what do you think about it? Why do you have the position that you have? I think it is important to get it from them as well as from, you’re going to get lobbyists on both side come in and I would like to get someone who is in the trenches and who is really living it, who is doing it to give me an idea of what is going on.
I: What other media do agricultural groups or companies or people use to communicate information to you?
P: As far as media, I’ll get emails, I’ll get letters, things like that but not really social media. Not Facebook or anything like that. I’m not saying it is not there and that they
don’t send it to me. They could be friends of mine but off the top of my head that I not how I get my information.

I: Has any information or campaigns using social media ever affected your voting decisions on agricultural issues and if so, what about the information or campaigns was effected?
P: Again, because it is not there, that’s not what would affect it. Again, it’s going back to your constituents and to what the legislation is, and what’s debated and talked about in the committee meetings and that is what we will make the determining factor.

I: Lastly, we just want to know if you have any kind of agricultural background.
P: Very, very small. My uncle had a farm and I kinda grew up in a rural area and I did work a little bit on this farm and baled hay and that kind of stuff, plowed fields and so it is very minute. I wouldn’t say big exposure to it but spent some time.

I: That is it. I thank you very, very much.

Interview 3:
I: What are your general thoughts about social media?
P: I think social media is a great avenue to be able to inform the public about things that are happening at a state level, federal level, and even worldwide so it is a great avenue to really get the word out about the many issues, thoughts, concerns people have here in the state government.

I: Do you use social media and if so, which ones?
P: I do utilize Facebook actually. I utilize Twitter as well and we also utilize an online video type format YouStream actually as an avenue to host online town halls so it is really a web based video platform that we utilize.

I: Do you use social media for more personal or professional use or both?
P: I would say it is mostly professional. I utilize Facebook to really inform the public about the different things happening in state government. We will post press releases online, post videos online, and also different things that are happening in Columbus in general so I would say to a degree it is mostly professional use.

I: Has professional use of social media affected any of your personal use and if so how?
P: Repeat the question.

I: Has professional use of social medial affected your personal use and if so how?

Have you had to start doing anything different personally?
P: I think in general I’ve just used it as an avenue to inform the public about different things that are going on. I don’t think it has changed it. No, I think people still use it as an avenue to communicate with me just as they would if it was for personal use.

I: Do you use social media because you think it is beneficial or because you feel that if others are you should too?
P: I use it mostly because it is beneficial. People really appreciate the fact that you are keeping them informed about what is going on. As things are shifting to a degree
from newspaper and radio, people are going online and online is a great avenue to really have an individual know what is happening almost instantly too. It is incredible verses waiting the next day before you grab the daily newspaper, you have the opportunity to see what is happening really now.

I: How do you determine who you accept friend requests from?
P: I accept friend requests from my constituents.

I: How you decided who you choose to friend or follow?
P: I actually, I don’t think I’ve made a friend request online in a while to be honest with you. All of the requests are incoming that I’ll approve online.

I: How often do you use social media?
P: I would say almost on a daily basis actually.

I: Have you used social media in your campaigns or considered using social media for your campaigns and if so, how has social media enhanced your campaign?
P: I think that is a question I probably would not be able to answer here but it is something we do utilize.

I: Who manages your social media efforts?
P: It is mostly myself actually. I typically make the posts online and respond to inquiries.

I: Do you have any specific policies about you or your staff’s use of social media? If so, what are the policies?
P: Yes, I mean I mostly make the posts online and inform the people about what is going on but typically if there are legislative inquiries, things of that sort, I direct them to my email address or direct them to my office to really discuss any of their legislative questions or concerns with the state agency, for example, so typically I will have them reach out to us. I am using a traditional format online, email, phone, things of that sort.

I: Do you monitor what others are saying about you on social media and if so, how do you monitor what is being said?
P: I think as I spend a little bit of time online you can typically come across and post about myself, for example, so there is not a specific technique but every once in a while I come across something.

I: What media do you believe works best to receive information from your constituents?
P: I think in essence a lot of people are utilizing email as a way to reach out to us so I think that has really exploded from the traditional format of mailing in a letter or even making a phone call. It seems that we receive a vast number of emails on a daily basis and that is the typical format that people will use to reach out to us.

I: How do you have conversations with constituents and do you ever use social media for those conversations?
P: Typically the conversations with a constituent will be in person. For example, I make a lot of in person visits if somebody has a concern utilizing the phone if they reach out to our office or send a request through email. I will typically respond to them with a
phone call so I can speak to them personally about some of the issues or concerns that they may have. Or if they direct a question online I will typically also encourage them to give me a phone number so that I can reach back out to them and speak with them.

I: Do you use social media to have conversations with others such as other elected officials or interest groups?

P: No actually. Typically I do not.

I: Are you familiar with agriculture organizations, companies, or people that use social media and if so, who are they?

P: Agriculturally, yes I’m aware of a few entities that do, for example, the Ohio Farm Federation they utilize the online media. The Department of Agriculture, for example, they have a Facebook page I believe and also have a web site that keeps people well informed about what is going on on a daily basis.

I: How did you find out about those?

P: Well, it could be from an email that they will send to us. For example, a letter they will send and it will say on there that they have a Facebook page or a twitter page and encourage you to visit the page to really get up to the minute updates on what they are doing.

I: Do you following any of them through your pages?

P: I would say I do.

I: Do you have conversations about agriculture through social media?

P: I would say in the past we have maybe had some conversations about agriculture. We have worked on several different pieces of legislation in this general assembly, for example that has affected agriculture in general and typically will get some questions or thoughts on a specific bill online and always happy to respond to them about the legislation and maybe clarify something or answer any questions that they have.

I: Do you use social media to receive or seek out agricultural information and if so, how?

P: I think we do. I mean we certainly utilize it for some of the information. They could potentially inform us better of an event that is coming up, for example, in the district and I’ll use that as a manner of knowing what is going on.

I: When an agricultural issue comes up, who or what do you consult for information?

P: I’ll typically do research on my own reaching out to different individuals that may be versed in that specific issue involving agriculture or we will reach out to some organizations to get their thoughts as well so I think it is really a mixture of everybody to really get all the research together and make an informed decision about a specific issue.

I: Have you ever used social media to obtain information on agricultural issues?

P: I would say yes.

I: What social media and which people or groups have you consulted with to obtain information?
P: I think we have utilized several different formats to obtain information. For example, Facebook, Twitter, email. I utilize several of those programs/applications to gather information. I do not know if there is a specific one but we use a wide gamut of things to really gather information.

I: What other media do these agricultural groups use to communicate or receive information?

P: I think it is email, Facebook, Twitter; they utilize those types of applications. I am not aware of any others but I’m sure there will be something up and coming in the near future that people will utilize and get the word out.

I: Has any information or campaign used in social media ever affected your voting decision on agricultural issues? If so, what about the information or campaign was effective?

P: I think it is a source for information just as anything else. Just like reading a newspaper, for example, depending on where that information comes from but it can be a source for information when you are making a decision. It is, I think, a segment but it is not the only avenue for really finding research or getting answers so it is a small niche of really the whole gamut of how I determine or make a decision on an issue.

I: Lastly, we just want to know if you have any agricultural background.

P: Well, I come from a district that agriculture is the biggest industry in Ashtabula County. I do not specifically, but I’m well versed in the agricultural issues, what happens in the district and I reach out to all the individuals to really become a better informed legislature so that I can be effective in my job and ensuring that I represent them to the fullest capacity on these issues because it is the biggest industry in the State of Ohio as a whole as well. We want to ensure that we keep it that way and support them in their endeavors so I think in essence I’m becoming a very versed legislature on those issues and I also serve on the agriculture and natural resources committee as well and it is another great avenue for gathering information and learning more about the industry as a whole.

Interview 4:

I: What are your general thoughts about social media?

P: Social media is something that we all have to participate. There is no denying that the younger voters are plugged into social media and we need to be a part of that world.

I: Do you use social media and if so which ones?

P: We use Facebook, both personally and the statehouse which of course is only the statehouse business. We use Twitter and, of course, I have my own website for our campaign. The statehouse, of course, has its own website. We have email, which I use regularly, and I have a team or a campaign team that is part of a monthly update that I send out email updates.

I: Do you personally use social media more for your own personal use or professional use or both?
P: Both.
I: Has professional use of social media affected your personal use and if so how?
P: Well, you know there is the same person so of course there would be an interaction of what it is you do personally and what you do professionally, but we do try to keep it and we do actually keep it separate because it is under two different umbrellas, but it is still the same person.
I: Do you use social media because you think it is beneficial or because you feel that others are using it so you should too?
P: Both. I mean we wouldn’t be using it if others weren’t using it. It is a communication tool that goes both ways. We have found that it is not only efficient but it is a good way of reaching people and it is very economical so there are many reasons why you need to be part of the social media. It used to be back in my early days when I was on city council we would reach out with newsletters and you have postage and printing and it is much more efficient to be able to use the social media to get the same message out to those who are listening.
I: How do you determine who you accept friend requests from?
P: We really don’t block who it is that wants to be a friend. If we find through conversations that we don’t like the tone or the language or is not productive, we will then unaccept them but anyone can join who wants to learn more about what we are doing or what I’m doing or what the campaign is about if it is a personal campaign.
I: How do you decide how you choose to friend or follow?
P: Well, for the most part it is those that I know. I guess would be the biggest criteria.
I: How often do you use social media?
P: We use it every day.
I: Have you used social media in your campaigns or considered using social media for your campaigns and if so, has this enhanced your campaign?
P: Well, I think social media expands to campaign websites, emails, answering questions about what it is we are doing, organization of perhaps members who want to be part of our campaign so on a personal level on that part of the spectrum, gosh it is invaluable. It replaces the phone call, phone messages in many respects. On the statehouse side we reach out to those that have questions and answers of different topics that we are working on, house bills, it is a great communication tool. We use it all the time. We use it for every purpose we could possibly think of in trying to connect to the constituents.
I: Who manages your social media efforts?
P: It is a combination of both myself on the campaign side and my legislative aide on the professional side here at the statehouse.
I: Do you have specific policies that you and your staff use for social media and if so, what are the policies?
P: Well absolutely, especially on the statehouse side. It can only be used for information, answering questions all related to statehouse business, house bills, anything that we are doing that we would like to raise the awareness of any issues, but absolutely the policy is and we adhere to it that it can only be used for informational purposes.

I: Do you monitor what others are saying about your on social media and if so, how do you monitor what is being said?

P: I try not to pay attention if it is not positive, so what are you going to do. If you have a thin skin you should get out of this business. I mean, we read the newspapers and it is not always good or was that really what I said in that interview. I think there was somebody else saying those words, but interpretation sometimes are not always the same but you can’t control that and you either have to have thick skin and try to correct if you think something has been mis-said or you just live with it and do the best you can. One thing we have learned is you can’t please everyone; you just do the best you can for those that you are serving.

I: What media do you believe works best to receive information from constituents?

P: I would say probably the email. I think we have more of our constituents emailing to us, especially if there is a house bill that is controversial. We will get an enormous amount of emails that will question why we are doing it or please explain it, I don’t understand. Email is probably the biggest tool that we will see used especially if there are different concerns out there about different house bills we are working on.

I: How do you have conversations with constituents and do you ever use social media for those conversations?

P: We are talking specifically about social media but that doesn’t mean that there are not phone conversations, that there aren’t face to face events that we don’t on the campaign side that we are not going door to door. I mean there is nothing better in reaching people than to have that personal conversation whether it is by voice over the phone or whether it is in front of them at their doorstep or whether it is an event that they attend. Second to that though would be the ability to reach them in ways that you may not have been able to before and that is where I find the value of social media.

I: Do you use social media to have conversations with other such as other elected officials or interest groups?

P: Sure. I mean for the most part they reach out to you and you answer them back. It is just conversation both ways. If we have questions about a house bill, maybe perhaps in the building trade or real estate question we will get out of the website and look up different people that we need to know. If there is an email access we will use that. If there is a phone number that we access through their website we will use that. It is just a tool that we use every day. I think the test is if you took it away how would we exist?

I: Are you familiar with agricultural organizations, companies, or people that use social media and if so, who are they?

P: I represent five cities that are for the most part suburban districts so agriculture is not a big part of who I represent.
I: Do you follow any agricultural organizations or companies on your social media sites?
P: I would have to say it is not at the top because it is not the district that I represent.
I: Do you use social media to receive or seek out agricultural information?
P: If needed, I will. I'm not sure the need is as great as other things that we use but it is certainly, if it is a need I would do it, sure.
I: When an agricultural issue comes up, who or what do you consult for information?
P: Well, again it is not at the top of what I hear are issues in the district that I represent so I would do the same as I do for any issues and go and resource any way I can whether it is books, telephone, websites, email, but agriculture is not a big part of those I represent.
I: Have you ever used social media to obtain information on these agricultural issues?
P: I probably have but I can't really recall at this point.
I: What social media and which people or groups have you consulted with to obtain information?
P: Oh gosh, we would be here an hour or more. It all depends on what we are working on. I have a house bill that is related to vacant properties so we are reaching out to those entities that would be helpful in understanding the blighted areas and what we can do and also talking to those that would help fill those blighted areas and what incentives we can give in order for companies to think about going into vacant buildings, but then you have the extreme of perhaps you are working on. I have another bill, a rape crisis center bill that we are working with the court system and trying to increase the penalties of those that were the offenders to help the victims in the treatment that they need. So it is a gamut, I mean whatever it is that comes before us we will research anywhere to find out what it is we need to know.
I: What other media did these people or groups use to communicate and receive information?
P: They use whatever there is. We have libraries and books and telephones and you know, I think anything that seems reasonable to use that is a credible source, they will use.
I: Second to last question, has any information or campaigns using social media ever affected your voting decisions on agricultural issues and if so, what about the information or campaign was effective?
P: I really can't answer that in full. I mean, of course, there have been some agricultural issues even on the ballot so when you see commercials or you see email blasts or go to certain websites, of course there would be influences there but I really can't put my finger on what issue exactly there was that made that difference. It is like I said earlier; it is really not big from my district. There are other issues that are in front of
them like school funding and property taxes and even loss of jobs that certainly would be higher on the list than agriculture.

I: Last thing, we just want to know if you have any kind of agricultural background.
P: No.

Interview 5:
I: What are your general thoughts about social media?
P: Positive. I think in general it appeals to a younger crowd in terms of incorporating it into your lifestyle, but I think older folks use it. My mom who is 80, for example, has a Facebook page and we Tweet in and of course it rolls over through an app in MySpace and Facebook so she knows where I’m at and she keeps track of things amazingly for an 80 year old woman with a Facebook page. It is out there but in terms of incorporating it into their lives and making it part of your I guess information diet, that to me is probably appealing to 40 and younger if not definitely 30 and younger kind of crowd.

I: Do you use social media and if so, which ones?
P: Yes I do. I use Facebook, Twitter, MySpace for what little that is still around, and then like linked in but that is not really. I would say mainly it is Facebook and Twitter at this point.

I: Do you use social media more for personal or professional use or both?
P: If you mean professional in terms of being an elected official, we do both.

I: Has professional use of social media affected your personal use and if so how?
P: You know there is information out there like any other piece of information it is what you do with it so how you use it, I think, is just a subjective thing. I don’t know if it had really influenced my use of it. I guess I’ve always been cautious. I think that is probably again the generational thing between folks coming out. Who do you trust? I read it and I look at it but to me I take it with about as much faith sometimes as one of those reality based shows. I don’t know, maybe younger kids look at it with the same moral parallel as CNN or Fox News, but I don’t. When I read these things there is always skepticism of really. Is that really happening? There are other things people type in that are more mundane that have a lot of merit. We use it. We type in certain places that I’m going to or doing and I think most people look at that as fact. I think I look at it for information. I really don’t care if somebody is doing their laundry at 2:00 or feeding their cat, but when people get into personal issues I think that becomes a turnoff and that becomes less real because who cares. It becomes a he said, she said thing so we just try to use it as a way to relate to people. When I get feedback from other people or read tweets of the few people that I follow, most of them we try to make sure that they are real and not over inundating us. Actually gaining value out of what is being sent to you, not just getting stuff. If that makes sense.

I: Do you use social media because you think it is beneficial or because you feel if others are you should too?
I think it is beneficial. We’ve been doing it for a long time. We’ve just been trying to find a home for it. That’s been the problem. You know when you and a few people are the only ones out there you really can’t integrate and now it has really caught fire so we use it as a way to disseminate information and build a base, make contact with folks, integrate with their life. I think it makes it convenient because it is on demand, for lack of a better term. I mean you could get them sent right to your phone. You can go check when you log onto your computer and not have them forwarded to your phone. There are all different ways to do it but you are getting information out there and again that is why we try to keep it simple and short and not inundate people like email stuff.

I:  How do you determine who you accept friend requests from?
P:  You know it generally is going to be 99% of the time somebody I know. I’ve worked with the person, I know the person. I rented to the person. Very, very, very rarely I will accept a friend through somebody else I know and trust so if I see somebody who has hundreds of friends and we have friends in common, sometimes I think somewhere along the like I must have met this person even though I can’t recall exactly who they are but I don’t just accept anybody, anywhere. I think that is very dangerous. Believe it or not, I’ve met or personally know everybody who I’m a friend with.

I:  How do you decide who you choose to friend or follow?
P:  People that I know. I mean people that I’ve personally met, not just people that I know. I don’t follow celebrities and I don’t know these people from Adam to be honest with you, not do I care, but it is folks that I know.

I:  How often do you use social media?
P:  I’d probably say four or five times a day to be honest with you. I know that sounds like a lot. Before it was only two or three times a week but I’d say now we are up to four or five times a day. I’ve even got a member of my staff who is my IT/Social Media director and then the caucus recently hired on somebody who is specialized in electronic relationships I guess for lack of a better word. Everything from web page to Twitter but I really believe that we build a base and this young guy is only 22. He is half my age and he gets it but those are the kind of people that we need to reach out to. When I see my kids who are 8 and 13 and the way that electronics and media and things, even though we try to filter it as parents, still integrates into their lives and the way that they use it. It is a lot different than the way I use it. I think we are getting there. I still have my iPhone S that I just bought after having a Droid that I got frustrated with but these people are intuitive to this kind of stuff. I had to stop by the bookstore and buy a book for my iPhone S to figure out how to use some of the functions that are in it. So for my kids it is intuitive. I would still say for me it is somewhat of a learned art. We still know how to use the product but as campaign it is probably into this Facebook, Twitter thing one way or another four to five times a day.

I:  Have you used social media in your campaigns or considered using social media for your campaigns and if so, how has this influenced your campaign?
P: Yes we have. As a matter of fact if you go to our website Burkforohio.com we have a Facebook, Twitter and Flicker as well we are starting to build and even a YouTube channel so that we can try to push things out there. We’ve got these set up. We need to do video to back it up. We have a couple of videos that are out there but I think we are building. Social media isn’t something like a mailing list where you can just mail 5,000 people in a county overnight. It is a relationship, that social part. This is where it comes out I think folks think in the 11th hour of a campaign you can just plug into it and kick on this machine. It is a little more difficult than that. This is something that you build just like relationships and you have to have willing participants not like folks that you just get a letter and it is unavoidable because the postman delivers it. I mean, here we can defriend and untweet and do everything else to people and basically unplug them on the spot so we want to build our relationship with folks so that we gain that critical mass and that just takes time so we are starting early and that is how we do that.

I: Who manages your social media efforts?

P: Our IT/Social Media Director for the campaign.

I: If the staff member is the primary manager, how do you monitor what the staff member is saying in social media?

P: Well, he comes to me before he puts it in and we talk about what the parameters are for what we put in to this so most of our things are fairly mundane and we really don’t have a lot of dynamic stuff. Once in a while we pass bills and things like that and I will tweet that myself. I can do that right from my phone as a text message. So he integrates with the office, of course, because we do press releases. I’d say it is fairly well controlled. We are not again sending out whacky stuff like Dave having clam chowder in Mt. Gilead today. I mean that is not what we are sending out.

I: Do you have specific policies about you and your staff’s use of social media and what are the policies?

P: We do have policies but they are not written down. They are common sense policies. As I mentioned before we have someone with the caucus here that is going to help with those kind of policies. We have been doing this for years and I think for some folks when they start they don’t know exactly what to say, what do you send out there, what interests people because you start from zero but it can be very damaging too if folks don’t learn how to use it. I think the caucus and some folks have been scared of it because they think if you tweet out the wrong thing or put something down that is not appealing that it could be a negative but again, going back to what I said earlier, it’s not gospel and that cuts both ways. So I don’t necessarily think a bad tweet will hurt you. I think a stupid tweet could hurt you but, do you know what I mean? I don’t think a spelling error is going to bring you down and I don’t think the fact that you are so inclined to tweet that you are having clam chowder in Mt. Gilead that is going to bring you down. What it is going to do is tell people that this is worthless and I’m just going to unfriend or detweet that person. If detweet is a word.
I: Do you monitor what others are saying about you on social media and if so, how do you monitor what is being said?
P: No, not really to be honest with you. Again, we get into this Montel Williams kind of environment and you know every once in a while I’ll have folks that will Google me, look in blogs, and do that kind of stuff but we get, of course, updates when we are tagged in photos and these kinds of things but that is all positive. I’ve not been attacked in social media or anything like that, but again you know, I don’t know how much merit that has. I mean it is a cowardly way to go about doing something because it is cheap, it doesn’t have a whole lot of effectiveness to it. I think there are folks like me and younger folks are even more so where maybe you do think how real is this? Again, it is a reality show it kinda what it is and you know you wonder, come on, really? I don’t think it has the merit of the paper or the press yet and it probably never will.

I: What media do you believe works best to receive information from constituents?
P: Number one, hand written letters. I mean that tells me that you are serious, you took time, it is in your own words and those always end up on my desk.

I: How do you have conversations with constituents and do you ever use social media for those conversations?
P: I do, believe it or not. We usually respond in a like like fashion so if somebody calls up here to the office and they want a call back we call them. Somebody emails, they get an email back. If somebody writes a letter, they get a handwritten letter back a lot of times. So when I get things on social media or people find Dave Burke and ask a state question we will do one of two things. If it requires research I will forward it down to the office and then they can respond to the person directly or if it is just a views and values kind of question or a question on a bill that we are working on I will respond directly. I think you have to be careful because everything you put down is public. I do think that there is a tendency to not be as forthcoming on the social media network than if we were sitting down face to face in my office. It is hard with any conversation electronic versus vocal to say exactly what you want to say in a way that you know that person understands what you are talking about. Say if you have a bill that is bogged down or an issue that is bogged down and you try to explain we are working through this, this is what we are doing, the hang-ups and these are the folks that we are trying to get through. When you put that down in electronic format I think people want to tear that apart and they cut and paste and they put quotes around what you said and so I really tell you what I think it does, it tells you to be very careful what you say and I think that also requires some shielding because the person that you don’t want to get it may get it rather than if you and I are just sitting down here having a conversation about something. You are going to get the full facts and I know you understand when you leave so I think there is some shielding that goes on in those responses but we do respond.

I: Do you use social media to have conversations with others such as other elected officials or interest groups?
P: Not really. You know again when you see some re-tweets from time to time but I don’t use it as a form of conversing.
I: Are you familiar with agricultural organizations, companies, people, etc. that use social media and if so, who are they?
P: I know some of them do. I really don’t pay much attention to it. We see a lot of these QR code things and their little Facebook and Twitter symbols but I never follow through with them.
I: How did you find out about them?
P: Commercials and print media.
I: Do you follow any of them?
P: No.
I: Do you have conversations about agriculture through social media with any other of these agricultural groups?
P: No.
I: Do you ever use social media to receive or seek out agricultural information and if so, how?
P: No.
I: When an agricultural issue comes up, who or what do you consult for information?
P: Our constituents. The base that we have of folks who are farmers and people it may affect and the Farm Bureau as well. I turn to them. They are a valuable resource. We use multiple resources and we fact find and hopefully we hear the same thing over and over again but again that is either done face to face or though the phone.
I: Have you ever used social media to obtain information on these agricultural issues?
P: No.
I: What social media and which people or groups have you ever consulted with to obtain information?
P: Again, the Farm Bureau, my colleagues here in the general assembly because we have like Bob Peterson, for example, who is a former Farm Bureau member but now a legislator, Cliff Hite, Jim Zehringer. We’ve got some good folks around and again going back to the Farm Bureau again and the folks that we know that own farms, large and small, who we can call on the phone and fact find and develop our own well rounded opinion and so we just don’t turn to one thing. I don’t know how comfortable I’d be with the social media part of that. I mean I hate to say this, but it is faster to pick up the phone and make a phone call than type something in and have is spell checked. I’m always afraid my spelling isn’t exactly perfect and then too if there are secondary thoughts. Those are fairly acute issues where you just want to get ahold of somebody versus like having a thread, so to say that is an ongoing working digitalization of where you are going to get to an end point. These are real acute issues that we just call somebody up and just say hey, how does this work for you.
I: What other media do they use to communicate and receive information? They being agricultural groups. How do they communicate and receive information from you?
P: In a couple of ways. Obviously letters, communications, updates. Most of it is done personally. They will stop by the office and update us on legislation either in the house or the senate. Issues they have with bills or things we like to work on and then also with Farm Bureau members. I get their magazine at home and so I kinda look through that and get a feel for how all that flows so multiple sources but most of that actually I would say is done face to face. Nine times out of ten they will come by the office or call and if it is something really urgent that they can’t get by that quickly they will fax out a letter or email that will get printed off.

I: Second to last question, has any information or campaigns using social media ever effected your voting decisions on agricultural issues, and if so, what information about the campaign was effected?
P: You know, I would say I think I like the Farm Bureau or some of the other agricultural organizations that we visit or work with or do research on. Every once in a while I will bring up their websites and I know this sounds probably human for lack of a better term, but if it looks good, feels good, it is current and up to date, I take these folks a little more seriously because you are obviously trying to outreach to your folks and that tells me that you are on it and the issues are important. You know what I mean, you’ve got a media outlet that you are using and are capable of using it so that tells me that you must kinda be on it a little bit and that is, occasionally too you go in and do research on that site on their standings on issues before you talk with them so you get a better understanding of their point of view, but that is probably the extent of it. I don’t obviously plug in and blog and follow. It is through the website that would probably be the extent of media.

I: Lastly, do you have any kind of agricultural background?
P: Do I, other than growing up in Marion County? No

Interview 6:
I: What are your general thoughts about social media?
P: I think more and more we start off with social media being something kind of unique or out of the ordinary now is more and more common every day. Usage you see it more and more and advertising business, politics, and government so it is more and more something that is becoming more mainstream.

I: Do you use social media and if so, which ones?
P: Yes, we use, are you talking about personally, legislative office?
I: Anything that you use?
P: Yes, we have Facebook. We are in the process of setting up a separate Facebook page for the legislative office. We have Twitter and we have a campaign website. We also are connected to, will probably set up a Facebook page there as well. Personally I used Linked In. I have a law practice website too where we are setting up Facebook for that so we use it quite a bit and are actually expanding the usage of it.
I: Do you use social media more for personal or for professional or both?
P: Probably more on the personal end but we are starting to use it more professionally as well.
I: Has professional use of social media affected your personal use and if so, how?
P: Yes, I think having to use it more professionally since you know how to do it; it is more likely to use it personally. I use Facebook quite a bit personally but I also use that for law practice and campaigns and things like that too so I think you are definitely more likely to use it if you use it professionally you will also use it personally.
I: Do you use social media because you think it is beneficial or because you feel that if others are you should too?
P: A little bit of both. I think it is beneficial, it’s fun. There is when something like this is involved like websites. When websites were new then eventually professionally or on the campaign or government offices eventually people there was the added incentive that it is expected so we should do it.
I: How do you determine who you accept friend requests from?
P: That is a good question. My Facebook page which is a personal page, more people send friend requests because you are an elected official than normally would. It makes it difficult because you don’t want to turn you back on people so it is hard to decline so I definitely accept more friend requests since I’m a legislator than if I wasn’t but then we have to watch too because sometimes you will get some that you know may not be appropriate so you kinda scratch your head and wonder so you have to decline them just to make sure you are not putting something up there that people are going to see and be embarrassing.
I: How do you decide who to friend or follow? As in who do you seek out to friend or follow?
P: I started off friends and family, people that I know well and family and work colleagues and then from there I might Facebook if something comes up saying this is someone you might know. Sometimes they will send it just to expand our network, especially if they are connected to me through friends of friends or political circles otherwise.
I: How often do you use social media?
P: I check my Facebook page probably every other day. In the office we just started the legislative Facebook. We are just starting it now so we will have someone man that and tend to it every day. Twitter is something new. We will probably do that as needed, depending on whether we are doing something here that is worthy so we are not overusing it.
I: Have you used social media in your campaigns or considered using it in your campaigns and if so, how did it enhance your campaign?
P: We used it some. We will use it more this time around. Last time it was limited to small number of tweeting and then websites. Next time we will probably definitely use it more. I think it is good. It is mass communication that is free. Campaigning cost
is always an issue so any time that you can get hits that are free, if you have a big volunteer list or big list of people to communicate with you can get a little extra people out to a parade or go door knock or something like that or whatever then it is worth it.

I: Who manages your social media efforts?
P: My own personal I do and then now we are allowed to do Facebook and/or Tweeting from the legislative office if it is just for those purposes so I have a page that is setting that up now and is going to manage it for us. Staff member.

I: If a staff member is the primary manager, how do you monitor what the staff is saying on social media?
P: We don’t know yet because it is new. I mean doing it from the office anyway. We did do some through the campaign and we usually to put something out I will probably have it where I would approve it first.

I: Do you have specific policies about you and your staff’s use of social media and if so, what are the policies?
P: We do. We are working on it. We have internal policies we have to follow from the senate and legislative ethical guidelines that we are implementing for this office’s purpose. If it is for the campaign then it is a little different because you are not using government resources and you still have to follow any other general rules and guidelines so on that we are a little more loose about what we can do but on state time it is tighter so we have a myriad of guidelines that we will implement.

I: Do you monitor what others are saying about you on social media and if so, how do you monitor what is being said?
P: You mean like blogs?
I: Anything.
P: Some. Not a lot. I mean it is fun occasionally to check the blogs and see what people you know there is always plenty of stuff. I voted against a bill yesterday and got nailed in the comment section of the Columbus Dispatch today from someone who is mad about the way I voted. So we track it some but I try not to be obsessed with it. Some people get upset or very obsessed about a comment or two on a blog and you have to also not go too crazy and spend too much time or stress following everything that is out there because there is always going to be things out there on you that are bad.

I: What media do you believe works the best to receive information from your constituents?
P: We get a lot of emails and we get a lot of our information via email, some calls, and we also send out surveys and get responses. People fill them out and send them back are probably the main ones.

I: How do you have conversations with constituents and do you ever use social media for those conversations?
P: We do. I mean so far mainly email but in terms of social media when we have the Facebook page set up we will probably do more when we have the wall set up.
I: Do you use social media to have conversations with others such as other elected officials or interest groups?
P: Well, I mean like if we set up the Facebook it will be for whoever, general public. We don’t target necessarily a specific group. When we do the legislative, for example, or the tweeting that will be anybody who wants to sign up to be a part of it so it will be pretty broad.
I: Are you familiar with any agricultural organizations, companies, or people that use social media and if so, who are they?
P: Agricultural, I’m sure we do and I couldn’t tell you any. I sure on Farm Bureau and some of the others but I couldn’t tell you specifically.
I: How did you find out about them and do you follow any of them?
P: We have plenty of agricultural contacts to this office but probably not a lot of use in the social media context.
I: Do you ever have conversations about agriculture through social media with any of these groups?
P: I don’t think I ever have. Not to say that I haven’t, but not that I can think of offhand.
I: Do you use social media to receive or seek out agricultural information?
P: No. I mean not at this time anyway. If anyone wanted to, if anyone wanted to provide us information on that or we had something like that they want us to follow we surely would.
I: When an agricultural issue comes up, who or what do you consult for information?
P: On a legislative context probably Farm Bureau and the Department of Agriculture. I mean contact them, calling them, things like that.
I: Have you ever used social media to obtain information on these agricultural issues?
P: No. I should clarify too when you say social media you are meaning like Facebook, email, websites too or just?
I: Mostly Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, stuff like that. Email isn’t.
P: We do occasionally get on YouTube if we have an issue on agriculture. There is a lot you can find on You Tube about any topic imaginable.
I: When the agricultural issues come up, what media or people or groups have you consulted to obtain information?
P: Pretty much the same.
I: What other media do people involved in agriculture use to communicate and receive information?
P: I’m sorry, say that again now.
I: The people in agriculture groups, organizations, or anyone involved in agriculture, what other media outside of social media do they use to communicate information?
P:  I get letters all the time. They still make calls or come in personally but a lot of written communication. I’m sure that they, most of the organizations too have done this different, flyers. We get this all the time, bulletins, whatever their quarterly newsletter. We get a lot of those too. Farm Bureau and otherwise.

I:  Second to last question, has any information or campaigns using social media ever effected your voting decisions on agricultural issues?

P:  I don’t know on social media since I haven’t been on like, but I mean communication with the office whether it is social media or otherwise always does have an impact on educating us on the issues when we decide to vote.

I:  Ok, and the last thing we just wanted to know if you had any agricultural background.

P:  Not in terms of training or education but when I was younger I owned or was part owner of some farmland up in northwestern Ohio that I inherited and then we sold it eventually. I owned that for some time. That was pretty much it.

Interview 7:

I:  What are your general thoughts about social media?

P:  I think it is great. I’ve been on Facebook for I don’t know, five or six years and I think it is a great way to keep track. I have Facebook friends I don’t see them face to face very often but they are my Facebook friends and I know what is going on in their lives and I’ve been able to reconnect with people I haven’t seen in decades and so that is a blessing. I’m not on Facebook as much because of my role in the state house just physically the hours in the day. So I’m not the one who updates it every day. I don’t update it very often because of my role in the state house just physically the hours in the day. So I’m not the one who updates it every day. I don’t update it every day but I think it is a great, great thing.

I:  Do you use social media and if so, which ones?

P:  Oh, which ones, ok I have officially used Facebook and I use Facebook. I have a Twitter account but I don’t use it. I mainly opened it in my name so that somebody else couldn’t open it in my name and misuse it. You know, same way with a domain name. I have bought the domain for my name but a long long time ago before I ever used because I just didn’t somebody to do that and then put something that would misrepresent me but I think it is mainly Facebook. What else did you have in mind? Oh, I used Linked In but that is kinda the more professional version of Facebook.

I:  Do you use social media for more personal or more professional use or both?

P:  Both.

I:  Has professional use of social media affected your personal use and if so, how?

P:  Affected my personal use, yes. Before I was state representative I just had personal Facebook account. Lots of personal stuff on Facebook and now that I am a state rep and I have a state rep page which is more of a one dimensional page, I do watch what is on my personal like if somebody put something up that I don’t feel comfortable with I will delete that post.

I:  Do you use social media because you think it is beneficial or because you feel that if others are you should too?
P: Well, whenever I was a campus minister and that was the way that I communicated with the students. Students are not always going to be on email but they are going to be on Facebook and the other way in which I used Facebook as a campus minister was there are some people and you probably notice who will put up their status multiple times a day. If they are having a bad day, they will say so. If they are having a good day and as a campus minister if there was a particular student that I knew was prone to depression and he/she would put up a depressing message I would be on the phone calling them.

I: How do you determine who you accept friend requests from?

P: Oh gosh, well I used to only accept friend requests from people that I knew and I felt comfortable having as my friends. Now as a state rep because everybody knows me and I don’t know them I am accepting friend requests from people that I do not know. I will look at their friends and if it looks like there is a network of friends it is like ok, they are friends with other state representatives or republicans or whatever then I’m like ok, all right and sometimes I will pause and pray about it and I’m like ok, I hope this is a real person. You know, but the repercussion in that role of not accepting can be greater.

I: How do you decide who to friend or follow as in who do you seek out to friend?

P: For me to seek out, I don’t really seek out friends. However, you know if you are on Facebook there is something on the side, a frame on the right-hand side that will pop up and say here is this and it will have the face of the person and you have 39 friends in common and I’m like oh, I know that person and sometimes I will send them a friend request but it is almost as if I thought I was friends with that person. I am personal friends with that person and so I didn’t know they were on Facebook or active or whatever. I have to see the face. I really have to see the face.

I: How often do you use social media?

P: Well, I used to use it every day and I still pretty much. There are some very very busy days at the state house when I don’t have time to eat much less check my Facebook or email for that matter. Late in the evening just before bed I will be checking email on my Blackberry and then oh, and if I have a Facebook message that comes through then that shows up in my Blackberry as an email but I’m not always clicking on the Facebook app every day especially when I’m in session. Normally it would be and yesterday on a Sunday I was on Facebook a lot. Not posting, I was reading.

I: Have you used social media in your campaigns or considered using social media for your campaigns and if so, has it enhanced your campaign?

P: Well, I was appointed to my office so I haven’t actually gone through a campaign yet. I do have a primary but nobody is running against me. I think the way in which I might use something in a campaign sort of mode that my representative Margaret Conditt’s Facebook page is more the political one and then the personal one is still Margie Conditt that all my personal friends and a bunch of republican friends too because that’s really the one where I will post. I don’t make my, I haven’t made my representative Conditt page political yet as a campaign site. I don’t ask for donations on
that site. It just doesn’t feel right yet. And then with my personal and those are my personal friends, I bet a bunch of them don’t even know I’m a state rep because they live out of state and because I might have a link to the representative Margaret Conditt one but if they didn’t notice that then I’m all over my Facebook that I’m a state rep.

I: Who manages your social media efforts?
P: Me. If I were in a primary race, if I had a competitor then I would hire or get help doing that but I don’t have anybody running against me in the primary so.

I: So the next question is, if a staff member, so you don’t have a staff member doing that right now right?
P: I do not, I mean a have a legislative aide but they don’t do our campaign stuff for us and she could post things just in state business nature on my Facebook but she is busy too. So my state rep Facebook page is just really just me presenting accommodations to Eagle Scouts and things of that nature.

I: Do you have any specific policies about you and your staff’s use of social media?
P: Policies, I’m sorry would you repeat the question.

I: Do you have any specific policies about how you and your staff use social media?
P: Well, because my staff doesn’t use my social media, I don’t even think she has my password. My basic policy is I’m not going to put up anything offensive.

I: Do you monitor what others are saying about you on social media and if so, how do you monitor what is being said?
P: I do not. I just don’t monitor it. I guess if there was something ugly out there, somebody or one of my friends would share it with me and nobody shared anything ugly and so I guess there is nothing to be worried about right now.

I: What media do you think works the best for you to receive information from constituents?
P: What media works the best for what?

I: For your constituents to give you information or to communicate with you.
P: Sometimes I will get a Facebook message from a constituent but it is more on my personal account. I, my email, people have my phone number. Sometimes when they just call the district office then it goes to my LA and only if it is something she can handle then she handles it but my personal friends know my cell phone number and they call me. So what media, people call me, email me, text me, and occasionally not often they will send me a Facebook message but is really more email.

I: How do you have conversations with constituents and do you ever use social media for those?
P: No, my conversations are pretty much face to face or via phone. I haven’t done any, used Facebook or social media posting a question or requesting feedback on an issue. Not yet.

I: Do you use social media to have conversations with others such as other elected officials or interest groups?
P: Not conversations but clearly I’m Facebook friends with all sorts of people so ____ will use Facebook a bunch. There is another state rep who is not in a primary race anyway he uses Facebook really well and his friend Andrew Brenner and I’m just amazed. I’m just like wow, one day I’m going to grow up and be like Andrew Brenner but I’m not there yet.

I: Are you familiar with agricultural organizations, companies or people that use social media and if so, who are they?

P: Well I think maybe just the Farm Bureau. I am assuming. That is primarily it, Farm Bureau. I live in Butler County so I don’t think I am on any of their, you know, if they use social media for legislative things then I’m not getting those. That could also be because I am not on the ag committee. I am sure if I am on the ag committee I would be hearing a lot more from the Farm Bureau on whatever method of communication they have.

I: How did you find out about them on social media?

P: Inadvertently. I think probably the Farm Bureau is having a dinner or an event or something and they will create an event on Facebook and I will get the invitation and I accept is and then I will get a reminder that you have the dinner, luncheon or whatever with the Farm Bureau. So I think events are actually a really handy thing. It just magically goes on my Google calendar which then keeps me organized and I love that.

I: Do you follow any of the agricultural groups?

P: Follow them, no. I don’t have time to follow anybody. It is more except on a Sunday when I’m just kind reviewing posts but most of that is personal stuff. As far as following like you would follow somebody on Twitter or something like that, no I don’t follow, technically I suppose I have a Twitter account and I’m technically “following” people but I don’t. I don’t have time.

I: Do you have conversations about agriculture through social media with any of these groups?

P: No, not really. It is funny that last summer when I was just appointed June 8th and one of the things that state reps do is go to the county fair and they go to the junior livestock auction. At least in Butler County the expectation is that the local representatives and elected officials will buy something at the auction. Last year I, being kinda a suburban woman, wanted to rescue something off the meat truck so I rescued a goat, actually I ended up rescuing two goats but one I had planned on rescuing and the other the little girl was just crying. She was in line to auction off her........ (voice file cut off at this point)

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P: south of Oxford so she is always at the barn and things like that. That is not really true agriculture because it is horses, right?

I: Well, that still is. It is still agricultural related.

P: Ok, then my agricultural link is through my granddaughter who is a horse girl and my father who is actually now working with the stable in South Oxford, The Honey Tree.
Stable. They are setting up a non-profit to do assisted therapy for people; it is a riding therapy so it is like horse therapy. So my daughter is an accountant and she is doing the accounting and setting up the basics for this non-profit that is being started to use horse therapy to help people.

Interview 8
I: What are your general thoughts about social media?
P: I think at my age it is something that has to be out there. The outreach we can do with social media is important nowadays, especially as a legislator and chairman of a very powerful committee. I believe I need that and just in the early stages of getting that information out there.
I: Do you use social media and if so, which ones?
P: I have Facebook and Twitter. Yes.
I: Do you use social media for more personal or professional use or both?
P: Both. I think, especially on Facebook, they want to follow posts, like from last week I posted one of the awards I received as Chairman of the State Parks and Recreation Legislative of the year so I let that out and still also talk about my family. I think the people want to see that too.
I: Has professional use of social media affected your personal use at all and if so, how?
P: I probably don’t post as much as I used to that is personal because you don’t know what eyes are on there and everything else like when I’m not home. I don’t want people to know that I’m not home because I’m down here so I don’t post as much as I do personally like before.
I: Do you use social media because you think that it is beneficial or because you feel that if others are you should too?
P: Oh I think it is beneficial. I think especially nowadays a lot of people skip over the papers, newspapers and radio and they want to get it instant so it is information I like to see too and I’m guilty as everyone else. I want that instant information from others.
I: How do you determine who you accept friend requests from?
P: Actually on there I want to see if they have some common friends with me or common likes as I kinda look into that but usually common friends is kinda nice to know.
I: How do you decide who to friend or follow that you are choosing to?
P: Just basically something might click up on the right-hand side of my Facebook page that says or somebody that I’m interested in and has the same common beliefs I will click on and try to friend. My daughter won’t let me friend. I’ve tried.
I: How often do you use social media?
P: I am on there every day. Some days I don’t use it, some days just to gather information from what other people are doing but every day I check it quite often or post something every once in a while. It just depends of the committee or if it is an event that I’m going to then I will post but not very often will I post every day.
I: Have you used social media in your campaigns or considered using social media for your campaigns and if so, how has this enhanced?

P: I have used a limited social media in my campaigns the last time I ran two years ago. Very limited, it was just allowing people to know where I was at and what I was doing. This time I will really ramp it up and basically about anything and everything I do will be posted through social media.

I: Who manages your social media efforts?

P: So far myself but I expect someone else to be helping me out in that process.

I: If a staff member is a primary manager, how do you monitor what the staff member is saying or how will you monitor?

P: It is basically staff member will get my approval or call me, text me, allowing me to understand what that person is going to either put in there or tweet. I want to all of a sudden have a backlash of something I didn’t approve of.

I: Do you have specific policies about you and your staff’s use of social media and if so, what are some of the policies?

P: I don’t. Basically I feel that in social media the staff is a wise move sending information, gathering information. I think it is important. I don’t have a policy. I just think that the staff is well versed on how to handle social media. I have a young staff.

I: Do you monitor what others are saying about you on social media and if so, how do you monitor what is being said?

P: I don’t monitor but I know my staff does so they do that but I really don’t. It is something I don’t want to spend time worrying about what they are saying out there.

I: What media do you believe works the best to receive information from your constituents? So when they are giving information to you what media is the best?

P: I think right now on social media I get Facebook a lot from constituents. They will personally message. I get quite a few of those. I say that would be the one that so far. I am just in the beginning stages of a young tweeter and Michael over here has been helping me. I would say tweeting is an early stage. I cracked the egg and it is developed now.

I: Also, when I saw media, any kind meaning letters, phone calls, emails…

P: Emails a lot. I get a lot of text messages now. I put my personal cell phone out there so people can text me any time and I will get something and I will either have Mike here followup or I followup real quick with a text and email. That helps us turn around information real quick. It is good to get a 24-hour turnaround on anything constituents ask for.

I: How do you have conversations with constituents and do you ever use social media for those conversations?

P: Oh yes. I do. I use Facebook quite a bit on the personal messages and actually I check my messages quite often on my phone I’m charging right now. I do that quite a bit and somebody either wants me to attend an event or is asking policy issue. Quite often I get that information.
I: Do you use social media to have conversations with others such as other elected officials or interest groups?
P: Oh yes, no doubt about it. I quite often. I’ve pretty well friended a lot of both sides, republican and democrat. Being a chairman so when they ask me from one of the committees, hey when are we hearing a bill or what is the status on a bill and I do that quite a bit.
I: Are you familiar with agricultural organizations, companies, people, etc. that use social media and if so, who are they?
P: Yes, like the Cattlemen’s Association, Agribusiness groups. I am constantly with Farm Bureau back and forth. Those organizations back and forth. They actually talk to me about a bill or something that we need to visit, a site visit. Yes, no doubt about those organizations are out there.
I: As far as them on social media, how did you find out about them?
P: It was basically either a search or I just looked at and then some of it is through word of mouth or somebody said hey, this group is out there or basically dealing with a lot of them as my position and I kind of expected that they would be on social media so found like, liked them and that was it.
I: Do you follow any of them?
P: Yes, I do.
I: Do you have conversations about agriculture through social media with any of these groups?
P: Oh yes, I deal with policy issues. Farm Bureau a lot because of they are constantly advocating for the agricultural sites so I do a lot of that with Farm Bureau to just either Cattleman’s, Pork Producers, yes we are dealing with policy issues.
I: Do you use social media to receive or seek out agricultural information and if so, how?
P: Yes, the same thing with just either I will first text someone from the associations or individual and then just start from there. Text or go into a Facebook and we start going back and forth and actually we had an individual from an association through Facebook reach out to us and talk to us about a bill and said can you slow the bill down because we have some concerns so social media was right there and in the forefront of let’s start talking and actually allowed us to start to process.
I: When an agricultural issue comes up, who or what do you consult for information?
P: Agricultural issues, I will consult with the just depends on what agricultural issue but first usually the Farm Bureau, constituents back home since I have a heavy agricultural district. There are a lot of people in the industry. It just depends on what issue in agriculture you are dealing with. If it is crops or agribusiness, it just depends on who it is but we want to make sure there are so many different people out there that we get individuals, organizations we can reach out right away and say hey, what is the issue
and what are we dealing with and sometimes it is an education process but usually it is more of just getting an understanding of what direction we are heading.

I: Have you ever used social media to obtain information on specific agricultural issues?

P: Just on reaching out to the organizations and that usually allows. That organization understands that I want to see them and the next thing is we end up in a meeting.

I: What other media do agricultural groups, people, organizations, etc. use to communicate and receive information? How do they besides social media?

P: We do email, a lot of email, texting actually too. Farm Bureau just started last year texting. That just basically gives me some conversation back and forth but a lot of it is email, some letters but a lot of it now is email.

I: Has any information or campaign using social media ever effected your voting decisions on agricultural issues and if so, what about this campaign information was effective?

P: I would say not social media as is more of a lot of emails discussing people’s stands, gathering that information, and some of it may have been but not on social media. I’m going to say yes, email just gathering information or where constituents stood and that helped me educate myself or the committee.

I: What kind of agricultural background do you have?

P: I grew up and on a farm. I still own a family farm but don’t live on it but still own a farm. I was in 4-H, FFA, vocational agriculture. I had a lot of deep roots in my younger years growing up and so I had a lot of background. I still constantly working with the soil and water groups, Farm Bureau through the years and as a former county commissioner so from a rural agricultural county, Holmes County, so a lot of work with constantly involved with agriculture sides every day it seems like. When I go back home to the district I go through the rolling hills of Holmes County and agriculture is in my backyard.