An Analysis and Recommendations of the Use of Social Media within the Cooperative Extension System: Opportunities, Risks, and Barriers

Honors Thesis
Presented to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Social Sciences
of Cornell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Research Honors Program

by
Lucas Clayton Fuess
May 2011

Dr. Lee Humphreys

Abstract

In recent years, social media has become a huge and integral component of how people spend their time online; from wikis to blogs and from Facebook to Twitter, people are spending enormous amounts of time on websites used to share information and connect with people. New forms of relationship building and social capital occur through social networking sites. Within Cooperative Extension, it is imperative to keep up with evolving forms of communication to connect with an ever changing audience. Interviews were conducted throughout New York and Wisconsin with educators in both rural and urban counties, with varying amounts of social media experience, and varying ages and backgrounds. A cross state study was conducted to determine if results were consistent in unique areas. Questions asked determined how Cooperative Extension is utilizing social media to connect with people in different ways, if social media was an effective communication platform, and if it is worth it for Cooperative Extension to utilize this resource. Data was collected about the uses of social media and its perceived opportunities, risks, and barriers for use. Conclusions drawn indicate people are excited about a new, free, and easy opportunity to connect with others. Concerns include time spent using social media, a perceived lack of privacy and control of the websites, and a lack of training opportunities for extension educators. As technology continues to evolve, Cooperative Extension needs to evolve as well in order to most effectively communicate with constituents.

Biographical Sketch

Lucas Fuess is from Hamilton, New York. Lucas will graduate from Cornell University's

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in May 2011 with a Bachelor's Degree in Agricultural

Science Education, Animal Science, and International Studies. He has held internships with

Cornell Cooperative Extension in Madison County, New York in 2008 and at Cornell University

in 2010. Lucas is looking forward to a career in agricultural education, agricultural policy, or

international development work.

Acknowledgements

I would like to specially acknowledge several people who have made this project possible.

When admitted to Cornell, I was accepted into the Rawlings Cornell Presidential Research

Scholars Program. Without the financial support and guidance from this program, I wouldn't

have had such an easy time finding opportunities for research and finding funding during my

time at Cornell. I extend a thank you to Cornell Cooperative Extension for their support and

internship programs, and to all of the Extension educators and administrators who have so

willingly helped with this project. I would also like to acknowledge my academic advisor, Dr.

Travis Park, for his mentoring, advice, friendship, and leadership that has guided me throughout

my undergraduate years at Cornell University. Ultimately, this thesis would not have been

possible without the support of my research advisor, Dr. Lee Humphreys. Dr. Humphreys is a

leader in the field of Communications and her love for teaching, research, and outreach has been

incredibly inspirational throughout the past year. Her support, revisions, advice, and guidance

have helped tremendously throughout the course of this project. Additionally, I would like to

thank my Mom and my entire family for their never-ending support of all that I do. Finally, a

special thank you to all of my Facebook friends, who make social media the incredible

technology that it is!

Table of Contents

Introduction

In recent years, social media has become a huge and integral component of how people spend their time online. Between wikis, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and many others, people are spending enormous amounts of time on websites used to share information and connect with people (Acar, 2008). Not surprisingly, people are easily connecting with others and sharing information more than ever before. Many people get their news, gossip, and friendship updates via social network sites, sometimes even before breakfast from the convenience of their mobile phone or laptop. Social media can be defined as a website or internet service that allows users to interact with each other and create content instantaneously. Examples include Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, etc. These online media facilitate "conversation as opposed to traditional media, which delivers content but doesn't allow readers/viewers/listeners to participate in the creation or development of the content" (Ward, 2010, p. 1). Social media allow people to share content such as life updates, pictures, videos, quotes, or anything the user creates or finds interesting and wants to share (Boyd, 2008).

Facebook is currently the most popular social media website in the world with over 500 million users, 50% of whom log into the site everyday (Facebook.com). With the average user having around 130 friends, there is a large potential for people to share information with a variety of other people. In fact, the average user shares 90 pieces of content each month with his or her Facebook friend network. In 2010, 47% of adults who access the internet used social media sites (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Social media use also accounted for 23% of internet users' time online (Mui & Whoriskey, 2010). Therefore, not only are many Americans today frequently using social media but they spend more time on social networking sites than spending time on email (ibid).

Social media sites are used not only by individuals, but by groups, organizations, and even large companies (Culnan 2010). The large numbers of users and the frequency with which users communicate and use social media suggests that social media are a serious platform that organizations and businesses need to think about. Companies and organizations are realizing that engaging in social media can allow for "highly participative" interaction with customers and constituents which makes them feel more loyal and positive towards the company or organization performing the outreach (Culnan 2010). In particular, four different social media platforms are being utilized by companies the most because of their effectiveness at engaging consumers: Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, and client hosted forums (Culnan 2010). Social network sites are powerful tools than can improve a group's welfare and rate of information exchange (Skelly, 2005).

As organizations reach out to constituents in new and different ways, a wider variety of people can be reached because of the way social networking sites function. Social network sites allow users to make their social networks visible to others (boyd & Ellison, 2007.) This allows people to maintain connections that otherwise might have been lost and can make explicit the connections between people and organizations. As such, social media can help organizations connect with potential customers, clients, and business contacts, and share resources and information (Abbe, 2011). Particularly for non-profits, social media provide a new venue to marketing and outreach. Social media is a form of social marketing, on which many non-profits rely. Social marketing "uses traditional marketing strategies to create social change by maximizing audience response" (Skelly, 2005). When an organization can maximize the response of its audience, it undoubtedly expands the opportunities and influence it has on the population it serves. Indeed, bloggers like Beth Kanter (2009) have argued that social media

have transformed non-profit organizations in not only the way they function internally, but in how they connect with those they serve.

Therefore, for non-profits such as Cooperative Extension, social media offer a potentially intriguing opportunity to expand their outreach and impact. As the mission of Cooperative Extension is to "extend" the resources of their respective resources to a variety of interested parties ("Land Grant Mission," 2010), it seems that Cooperative Extensions can incorporate social media into their outreach programs and reach a larger number of people while providing a greater amount of higher quality information to anyone interested. On one hand, social media may be an extremely useful and helpful platform that can help Cooperative Extension raise awareness about programs, help educate the public, attract new constituents, and enhance communication. Social media could allow educators and constituents to connect with others in the county who potentially have similar interests. Both of these benefits could greatly help extension advocate itself and reach out to people who possibly might not know about the programs and resources it provides. Conversely, however, it may be a waste of time and money for everyone involved if constituents do not have access to social media or do not attend to it. Many Cooperative Extension Educators already have a variety of tasks to complete and adding an additional task like incorporating social media may seem daunting. There is no incentive to incorporate social media in Cooperative Extension if there isn't research or documentation of the opportunities it can possibly provide.

There is little empirical data on the extent to which current Cooperative Extension offices currently use and understand social media. It is important to study Cooperative Extension's use of social media to connect with constituents as well as the risks and barriers to social media adoption to begin to better understand the impact of social media within Extension work.

Therefore, this paper presents findings on the perceived opportunities, risks, and barriers of social media websites from the perspectives of current Extension employees of multiple ages, genders, roles within Extension, and usage levels of social media. This study aims to provide empirical research about social media perceptions and use by Extension educators across various counties within two states. Findings may help to assist and educate Cooperative Extension when they are making decisions regarding their outreach strategies and social media use. As social networking sites continue to grow and attract more users, it is important to research the possible and perceived opportunities, benefits, and risks of using this technology.

Literature Review

Changing Environment

The internet and wireless communication allow people to connect with others more and easier than ever before (Acar, 2008). Social networking sites allow people to connect with others who possess similar interests. Users can control what people see on their pages, and social media essentially allows people and businesses to easily create their own webpage (Acar, 2008). In the past few years, companies, governments, and non-profit organizations have been establishing a presence on social media websites to better engage their constituents and social media has become a key part of the outreach strategy for many organizations (Dadashzadeh, 2010). Social media and "Web 2.0" have transformed the internet from solely a place with information to a place where users interact with each other and create content to share (Dadashzadeh, 2010). Many companies use social media as a way to engage customers, provide information, contribute to conversations, and even adopt user ideas for products (Dadashzadeh, 2010).

With the current state of the economy, Hensel (2010) discusses how it is imperative that entrepreneurs, businesses, and any organization with something to market learn how to utilize social media to advertize and promote the products or offerings of the organization. The traditional marketing methods are no longer as effective because of the changing consumer behaviors and the increased usability of the internet (Hensel, 2010). Traditionally, newspapers and television were important venues for advertising and marketing for organizations. However, with the increase in internet usage and more active seeking of consumer information (Shaver, 2007), the internet and more recently social media have become important marketing and outreach venues. These traditional media are either costly if placing a paid advertisement or

unreliable if simply submitting a story because it is not guaranteed to be printed. Marketers or organizations that are trying to advertise must take into account the effects and impact that social media have the potential to bring (Barnes and Barnes, 2009). Extension shouldn't ignore the potential that social media has to reach out and connect with constituents via another medium. Social media new ways to network, collaborate, communicate, and connect to a numerous people with like needs and wants (Patton, 2009). Social media are becoming an integral component of the lives of many people across the world.

Social Media for Organizations

Many businesses have learned that people use social media because it is an enjoyable way to interact with friends and family (Hensel, 2010). When reaching out to or interacting with customers, social media are a unique and great way to do this because the customers or end users are engaged in an environment and activity they enjoy. Information, communications, and socializing are main gratifications when using social media (Chung & Austria, 2010), and as social media combines all three of these things, consumers are generally enjoy using social media and are gratified when doing so. In addition to identifying the gratification that people receive when using social media, Chung & Austria (2010) also found that the attitude towards the marketing messages themselves were higher when the gratification for the social media website was high. Theoretically, marketing is more effective and better received by consumers when the message is received through social media because of the gratification that accompanies it.

Interacting with others, sharing content, viewing photos, and finding out about events are all enjoyable activities that social media offers. The customer will probably be more likely to react or engage with the company or organization because the communication is on a platform

the customer enjoys using. Online tools like social media websites can allow users and

businesses to enhance their positions (Abbe, 2011). An important point to remember about

social media is that it is in addition to, not instead of, traditional outreach methods (Abbe, 2011).

Strategic use of internet technology can result in strong relationships with customers and

constituents (Foster, 2010). It is important to keep in mind the motivations that people have as

they use social networking sites to be better able to connect with and influence them. Most

youth and young adults use social media websites for two reasons: to maintain social networks

and keep in touch with others, and to share information (Foster, 2010). Cooperative Extension

could tap into these uses as they join networks of people who use extension services. It can be a

further medium of outreach to ensure extension is reaching the most people possible to inform

them of programs and advertise events.

Social Media Effectiveness, Advantages, and Popularity

Effectiveness of social media should only increase with steady and continued usage over

time (Hensel, 2010). An effective company or organization could use social media to increase

brand recognition, increase consumer loyalty, and spread awareness about a company or its

products. Effective posts will be targeted towards audiences that are known and understood

(Hensel 2010). Benefits and drawbacks of social media are totally dependent on the organization

and the posts, and poor quality posts (infrequent communication, low value updates) will take

away from the effectiveness of social media (Hensel, 2010).

Das (2009) listed some of the advantages of using social media as low cost, increased

credibility, and more connections with your audience. Some disadvantages were safety and

privacy concerns, large amounts of time required to build rapport with the audience, and lack of

anonymity (Hensel, 2010). However, some of these are not necessarily as harmful as they may

seem. A perceived lack of privacy is a hurdle in initially establishing a presence on social media, and a lack of anonymity is not necessarily a bad thing from a company's point of view when they are trying to establish connections and market their product.

Facebook is convenient mostly because it is so popular. As visibility increases, businesses can see an increase in sales as well (Abbe, 2011). Social media websites give back and provide benefits equal to the time spent working with them (Abbe, 2011). When extension employees put a dedicated and real effort into connecting with constituents via social media, the results can be incredible. In one study amongst 4-H members, one girl stated that, "blogs are so 2004" because they don't carry the instant gratification that accompanies social media sites (Ashton, 2010, p. 3). Instead of blogging, teenagers and 4-H youth like to "layer" their communications by using instant messaging, texting, and social networking sites (Ashton, 2010, p. 3). The popularity of Facebook and other social media tools contributes to this. A platform is generally popular because it is probably fun or functional. Using new media to connect with youth and young adults is incredibly important and shouldn't be undervalued (Ashton, 2010). "Extension educators need to use new media to effectively engage Extension learners" (Ashton, 2010, p. 4).

Electronic Word of Mouth

Twitter and other "micro-blogging" websites shouldn't be a "be all and end all for communications" yet they are a critical component of social media outreach that allows small- to medium-sized enterprises to listen to or influence their constituents' opinions (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010, p. 304). Social media presents many benefits, networking opportunities, relationship opportunities, and positive branding, yet these benefits can sometimes be equal to the negative repercussions from negative word of mouth (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). Word of

mouth, and especially the electronic word of mouth that social media websites allow users to do, is one of the most effective forms of marketing (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). For businesses that do not currently use Twitter, it presents an "enormous untapped potential" for word of mouth purposes and company communications (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010, p. 297). Use of Twitter is expanding at a rapid pace- its user numbers increased 949% between 2008 and 2009 (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). However, the main concerns holding many businesses from utilizing Twitter are its difficulty to understand the use and measure the results that come from it (Fisher, 2009).

While word of mouth is tough to measure and understand (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009; Dellarocas, 2003; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004), electronic word of mouth is potentially even more impactful because of the rapidity, scale, and uniqueness of the internet and social media (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). Electronic word of mouth is more effective because of advocacy, positive reviews of programs or products by average people, and the quickness and cost effectiveness of the social media platform (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Dellarocas, 2003; Trusov *et al.*, 2009; de Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; & Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner (2010) also discuss online word-of-mouth in depth. Kozinets *et al.* (2010) looked at how marketers using social media encounter coproduction of messages across many networks, and this offers four different communication strategies of evaluation, embracing, endorsement, and evaluating. Using electronic word-of-mouth can amplify and increase the messages being sent, but marketers must also learn how to embrace this electronic world because messages can be altered as well. Overall, electronic word-of-mouth marketing can offer tremendous advantages to organizations attempting to market their programs.

However, it should also be noted that electronic media and word of mouth can also spread negative views of programs or businesses at very quick rates because of the nature of the social media platform (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). Users of Twitter should be properly trained on how to best utilize it and take advantage of it (Fisher, 2009; Rusbridger, 2010; & Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). Furthermore, while the cost of Twitter is free, it is important to remember that it takes employees time to "develop relationships, as well as commitment, people, finance, and management buy-in" (p. 300) which could possibly be difficult for small enterprises to commit to (Nettleton, 2010; Jacobs, 2009; & Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). While Bulearca & Bulearca (2010) studied only Twitter and the micro-blogging component, the results can be applied to other social media platforms as most focus on short postings. Bulearca & Bulearca (2010) interviewed 4-5 small and medium-sized enterprises about how they utilize and perceive Twitter. Overall, Twitter allowed those enterprises to network better and have more effective marketing with only a commitment of time, consistency, and strategic implementation. Public tweets reach a wider business audience faster, and are one of Twitter's main benefits. Social media allows organizations to have effective electronic word-of-mouth.

Striking a Balance

Some people believe the benefits of social media for marketing purposes are overblown (Abbe, 2011). Yet for others, they value social media as necessary to their success (Abbe, 2011). Abbe (2011) compiled a variety of quotes about writers using social media to promote their work. Many said that social media allows users to be authentic and share the correct and right amount of information without going overboard. It requires finding a balance between what users need to hear or read yet not bombarding them with information (Abbe, 2011).

Finding a balance can be a delicate task. On one hand, organizations should strive to deliver a decent, regular amount of information to their followers (Ramsay, 2010). Yet on the other hand, too much information can potentially cause people to become disinterested in the posts. Ramsay (2010) mentions adopting a communication strategy for social media and having framework in place for the "who, where, what, and why" (p. 259) of posting. It is also necessary to maintain a balance between professional and personal social media accounts (Gunawardena 2009). This can be especially difficult in smaller organizations (like Extensions) where personal relationships are often forged between the employee and the person receiving the services.

Barriers to Social Media

Internet connectivity is often one of the largest barriers to social media use, especially in rural America. A mere 60% of rural households have broadband internet access and 28% of Americans do not use the internet at all (Severson, 2011). Only eight percent of adult internet users utilize Twitter (Smith, 2010). There is a technological disparity between urban, suburban, and rural areas, where two-thirds of rural residents use dial-up while only half of urban and suburban residents do, and suburban and urban residents are "much more likely" to use a cable modem than rural residents (Stern, Adams, & Elsasser, 2009).

In addition to connectivity, age may be a large barrier to constituents receiving information via social media. In 2009, just 38% of adults age 65 and over were using the internet (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). However, this number has been steadily increasing as older adults realize the potential that the internet has. As this trend increases, reaching older adults using social media may become more realistic, but until then, there is a very small percentage of older adults who will see a message on social media.

One potential unrealized risk is the risk of not delving into social media at all and missing a younger (sometimes) and tech-savvy population (Pry, 2010). Many social media users expect an interactive environment as opposed to a typical static webpage employed by many companies and organizations. Pry (2010) discusses how social media is not like traditional media in the sense that information posted on social media oftentimes comes from many sources and goes to many different people. With this transfer of information, control is lost. The opportunities one passes up by electing not to use social media are sometimes much larger than the risks presented. By supervising organization's social media sites, this is often enough to ensure content and reputation are being maintained. By responding where appropriate and removing offensive content, employees can ensure their social media is effective and under control (Pry, 2010).

Extension Outreach

Utilizing social media may seem like an additional time commitment on the part of extension educators, yet social media can be easily integrated into the everyday activities and outreach that educators already perform (Rhoades, Thomas, & Davis 2009). With extension educators extremely busy, it is important to remember that this integration is easy to achieve and doesn't add a large amount of time to the duties of extension employees.

Some extension educators believe that social media represent the next giant leap forward for extension outreach (Langcuster, 2010). Formerly, extension outreach used face to face contact, newspapers and other printed media, and other forms of broadcast to get word out about programs, opportunities, and advice to interested constituents of extension's work. Now, extension is competing with people and organizations around the world because of the ease of finding information online. To continue to educate the public about extension programs and be the local source of information, one Extension educator believes Extension needs to be highly

intuitive and accessible (Langcuster, 2010). To achieve this, extension can turn to social media to provide information and connect with its clients. Social media is helping extension perform its outreach services in a more cost-effective and efficient manner (Langcuster, 2010).

Levine (1995) encourages extension educators to continue to make use of the newest possible technologies to "fulfill a person's desire to learn" (p.1). While Levine's article was written 15 years ago about purchasing CD's online, his advice to other extension educators is still applicable today. Levine discusses how it is important to take advantage of new technology to "achieve an end that was not previously in reach" (p. 2) and how it is necessary to "creatively exploit the uses of the technology to better facilitate learning" (p. 2). Following Levine's advice, social media may be the newest technology for extension educators to enhance the education of their constituents.

Twitter is one form of social media especially popular amongst young adults, minorities, and urban residents. Despite the relatively low number of adults using Twitter, its popularity among this younger demographic may be particularly important for Extension Educators to connect with. There are possibly many people in this demographic who don't regularly use extension services and possibly don't even know about extension in general. By utilizing Twitter, Extension may be able to reach out to and connect with a new demographic of people.

Extensions could use social media to its fullest extent by sharing pictures, videos, interesting content, and communicating with others. Some Extension youth are already using it for these purposes. As Rhoades, Thomas, & Davis (2009) found, youth are also sharing information about their 4-H clubs and 4-H projects. There is great opportunity to harness the excitement that youth already have about sharing and promoting 4-H. When extension educators

create pages targeted towards youth or 4-H members, there is great potential to attract new members or at least spread the word about the 4-H club to youth and adults alike.

Kinsey (2010) writes that various forms of social media can "extend Extension's educational reach into the community" (p. 1). The author discusses various ways Extension can utilize social media. Extension educators will find social media "easy to use, readily available, free of charge, and an interesting addition to the toolbox of dissemination strategies" (p. 1). Extension educators should stay knowledgeable of the newest resources available to most effectively perform their job. However, time constraints prohibit educators from attending trainings or experimenting with various forms of social media. When exploring new social media outreach options, extension educators should keep in mind the usefulness of the outreach, the ease of use, availability of technical assistance, and the connectivity of the audience (Kinsey, 2010). However, perhaps most importantly, "extension educators can greatly expand their outreach by using free online networking tools" (Kinsey, 2010). Many people use social networks and extension can reach into a new audience by engaging people through social media. It is important to choose which outreach methods to utilize that reach a maximum audience in the minimum amount of time.

While Rhoades, Thomas & Davis (2009) provide some evidence for the use of social media within current Extension activities, there is little empirical research that explores how Extension educators across program areas are currently using social media. Therefore this study sought to examine how current extension educators were using social media, as well as what they perceived to be the key opportunities and barriers to incorporating social media into their outreach efforts.

Methodology

Qualitative research was conducted to view the perceptions and practices of social media in Extension offices. Often, qualitative research allows one to understand how social settings operate in complex and nuanced ways (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland 2006).

The research was conducted in two separate stages. Stage One consisted of interviews with Extension educators/directors from across New York State. Participants were recruited through the Central Cornell Cooperative Extension office. The Communications Team leader at the central office had recently performed a communications survey within all of their counties. Contact information of the survey respondents was provided to the research team as those were the people deemed responsible for the communication and outreach in their respective counties, and therefore most knowledgeable about how social media was being used in their county. In total, 31 names were provided by the Communications Team leader and all were initially contacted to participate in study. 25 of 31 the contacted educators replied to the initial email. In the end, 17 of the original 31 contacts were interviewed via telephone interviews about social media use and outreach efforts.

Participants represented a wide variety of education level, social media experience, New York counties, ages, genders, and other factors representing a wide cross section of educators within New York Cooperative Extension. There were 13 women and 4 men interviewed. Their ages ranged from mid-twenties to early sixties. All but two educators held a Bachelor's Degree and some had additional graduate education. The 17 participants came from 17 different counties in New York, ranging geographically across the state and including both very rural, as well as more urban and suburban counties. See Appendix 1 for a chart of participants and their demographics.

Stage Two of the research consisted of expanding the project into a cross-state study to determine similarities and differences between outreach methods in different states and to identify any key similarities or differences within opportunities, risks, or benefits noticed from using social media. Wisconsin was identified as the second state because of its similarities to New York in terms of a great deal of rural counties and large dairy industry. Also, there was already a contact established in Wisconsin which would make setting up interviews flow more smoothly. Stage Two began by contacting the central Extension office in Madison and identifying the characteristics desired of extension educators to be interviewed. Again, a wide cross section of educators was sought to ensure views and comments from many different people were being examined. The Communications Program Manager was contacted and agreed to provide the names of a variety of educators to contact for participation. Twenty-one educators were identified by the Central Office and contacted for participation. The interview guide used during Stage Two of the study was the same as Stage One. In total, 10 Wisconsin extension educators were interviewed, again over the telephone. Conducting interviews in Wisconsin allowed for comparison between similar extension systems yet with different people, leadership, and initiatives involved.

Participants from Wisconsin also represented a variety of education levels, social media experience, Wisconsin counties, ages, and genders. I interviewed 8 women and 2 men. Most of the educators had a Master's or Doctorate degree, with only 2 having only a Bachelor's. See Appendix 1 for further details.

All interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. They lasted anywhere from 30-60 minutes in length. There was an extensive and thorough list of questions to ask in order to gain a

deep understanding of how extension educators understand social media and how they are using

it within their careers. There were several main questions, though additional probing did occur:

- What kinds of social media does your office use? Why or why not?

- What do you think some of the best features of social media are?

- What do you think some of the drawbacks or risks of social media are?

- What are some of the barriers of Cooperative Extension using social media?

- What kind of audience would Cooperative Extension be able to connect with if it incorporated social media into its outreach efforts?

- What role do you see social media playing in the future?

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the

statements from the participants. Interviews were then coded using a comparative interpretive

approach (Lofland *et al.,* 2006) in order to identify major and specific themes from the

interviews. Important quotes were identified and quotes were organized into four main

categories: Risks/Barriers, Opportunities/Reasons to Use, Social/Industry/Administrative

Pressure to Use, and Social Media Within Broader Outreach. These categories were further

broken down into specific areas. The Risks/Barriers section was divided and organized into time,

money, privacy, control/liability, technological expertise/training, maintaining audience

engagement, connectivity of audience, relevancy of audience, rapid evolution of new media,

quality vs. speed, and decreased personal connections. The Opportunities/Reasons to Use

section was organized into Breadth of Audience, Interactivity, Increased Brand/Activity

Awareness, Immediacy, Finances, and Control of Information.

Results/Findings

The opportunities, risks, and barriers of social media were broken down into several sub-categories based on our initial research questions and the emergent themes from the data analysis. The key perceived opportunities and barriers are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Key Opportunities & Barriers of Social Media for Extension

Perceived Opportunities of Social Media for Extension	Perceived Barriers or Risks of Social Media for Extension
• Increased breadth of audience • Increased interactivity and connections with audience • Increased awareness of Extension activities and brand • Increased speed of communication • Low costs for communication & outreach • Increased control of information	• Decreased control over information & brand • Lack of training and technological expertise among educators • Lack of internet connectivity • Increased time commitment to learn and maintain • High costs for equipment • Decreased personal connections

Risks and Barriers

There were several sub-categories of risks and barriers that were revealed in the coding of data. The most relevant or meaningful quotations have been included within each section that they correspond to.

Control, Privacy, and Liability

Control, privacy, and liability issues were among the largest risks or barriers that educators mentioned when discussing either what is holding them back from using social media or what they are scared about on their already-established social media pages. Over three quarters of NY educators (13 out of 17) mentioned this, while nearly every person (9 out of 10) interviewed from Wisconsin did. It is one of the largest perceived risks/barriers associated with Cooperative Extension utilizing social media.

> [I am] a little reluctant because of some of the concerns in terms of how do you monitor it, how do you control it, how do you make sure that the people that are on that represent the organization either as volunteers or as staff, that we have enough controls in place, that there's not a lot of inner program information exchange or detrimental information exchange. (Christopher, NY)

Christopher is concerned about having control over the page to ensure people are representing Extension well. Most other participants in the study mentioned control issues as one of their largest concerns. Some were unaware of the settings available to control the information on the wall, while others had just heard stories and/or news reports about social media that made them cautious about using it. A majority of educators mentioned control issues stemming from people posting bad comments on the profiles that represent Cooperative Extension.

> It's a little hard to regulate what they post, I mean, you can go back and delete things afterwards, but if someone posts something mean or defamatory or foul language on your wall and you don't pick it up right away, all of a sudden that's up there and with the user innovation, we can't risk that. (Ashley, WI)

Ashley also expressed her concerns about what other people post on Extension's profile. Educators were hesitant of using social media if Extension would be held liable for anything bad

that was written on their page. Many were also scared about their profiles simply being unprofessional because "anybody can post anything" and perceived the Facebook content to be out of the control of the educator moderating the page. As Extension's profile on social media websites is the sole way they are represented, educators were concerned about the postings and repercussions of any negative interaction on their profiles.

Educators were also concerned about the privacy and confidentiality of the information that was posted on Extension's social media page. Privacy was a large issue for extension offices, as they are dealing with the public, and, in the case of 4-H, youth. Extension is also supported with public money so they need to be careful how they represent themselves. Extension educators were concerned about who would be able to see information that was posted or commented on profiles and how they would use it to harm extension's image. As some educators didn't understand what privacy controls were available, it was understandable that they would be concerned about who had access to the information posted.

Time

The perceived issue of the time it takes to work with social media was a concern expressed by many extension educators. Indeed, it was mentioned by 10 out of 17 educators in New York and mentioned by 3 out of 10 educators in Wisconsin. Many extension educators are hesitant to think about adding another responsibility in their career when they are already extremely busy. Others discussed how it was difficult to keep already established social media pages up to date or give them the attention they deserve to keep constituents engaged. One educator perceived that Facebook was a way to waste time and implied that it was an unimportant thing to do throughout the day.

A lot of my colleagues are too busy and they have important things to do and they can't

be wasting their time on Facebook. (Fonda, NY)

The above participant's views about Educators being too busy for social media were reflected in

interviews with many other Educators as well. As budgets shrink and extension educators take

on additional responsibilities, the thought of incorporating social media into educators' wide

variety of tasks was intimidating and perceived as something that would take up a great deal of

time. Also, once educators established a presence on a social media site, they were concerned

about the level of work that it would take to continually attract and engage the followers of the

site. Some educators expressed that it was more important to have a plan on how to engage and

continually connect with their followers that to not have a social media presence at all. Many

educators did not see a value from using social media as compared to the amount of time that

they perceived they would need to spend on it to ensure its success.

A few educators were concerned about the quick changes that the internet brings.

Knowing how quickly social media sites become popular and then fade away, they didn't want to

commit to a site only to have to change soon after. They were worried that time spent

developing a social media presence would be wasted as social media evolves. Other educators

weren't sure of the total value that social media would achieve in the long run. As educators are

busy, they were concerned about the quality of the end result of using social media as compared

to the time spent in creating an online presence.

Money

Money was not often considered a barrier to social media use. Nevertheless, 3 of the 27

participants mentioned the financial barriers of social media. It is important to realize the beliefs

that some extension educators have towards social media and the costs that some perceive it to have.

> What are the cost savings of using social media, because that's oftentimes how they make decisions of what's valuable is how much money is saved. I don't know if money is saved because you have to invest in the equipment and have the right kinds of things installed on your equipment. (Diane, WI)

Diane had a perception that social media would cost money, either through using the service itself, installing programs on existing computers, or upgrading equipment. A few educators had the perception that social media cost money, perhaps like creating a website, and they deemed this a barrier to successfully implementing social media in their county.

Technological Expertise/Training

Training in the use of social media was also a relatively frequent concern that educators expressed. This was important to the majority of the interviewed Educators, with 17 of 27 educators mentioning training. Many would be more confident or feel better about using social media if there was training offered that taught them how to use it and what makes a quality post. Some extension educators expressed interest in social media, yet they felt they did not have the knowledge or confidence to use it.

> I have yet to find a good training where we sat down and somebody said I'm going to show you how to use Facebook. I'm going to show you how to log on, how to upload, etc. I have never seen that kind of training. (Fonda, NY)

Without training, some educators simply lacked the confidence to begin using various social media platforms to promote their work as they didn't know how to begin, where to start, or what constituted a good post that people would read and remember. Many requested that

opportunities for training be offered. Even if they were already using social media, some educators mentioned that they could always improve their use of it, and in turn their ability to promote extension and their programs to the audience that uses social media.

Internet Connectivity

Concern about internet access and connectivity was another important barrier to social media use by Extension, more so in Wisconsin than in New York. In New York, 8 out of 17 educators mentioned connectivity, while 9 out of 10 Wisconsin educators mentioned this. Because both states have large rural areas, there are areas of the state without high speed internet access. High speed internet access is consistently less available in rural areas compared to rural areas; in urban areas, 93.5% of people have access to internet with a speed of 10 megabytes per second while only 55.7% of rural residents have this speed (Broadband Statistics Report, 2011). Educators from these more rural areas were concerned about putting time and effort into social media when constituents might not be able to access it easily. It is interesting to note that concerns about connectivity were almost double in Wisconsin as compared to New York. This may be due to the fact that in Wisconsin, many Extension employees are official county employees and thus subject to the country rules which often block access many social media sites at work. Thus *their own* connectivity to social media is severely limited. Even if the constituents could access the social media sites, the Extension employees do not have easy access to update them.

We have, some of our, we have pockets in the state where broadband is difficult to use. You can't access it. We have county offices where their IT rules don't allow them use YouTube and Facebook as an instructional methodology. (Bonnie, WI)

Bonnie, like many other educators, stressed that internet connectivity for some constituents as well as educators themselves were barriers to the implementation of social media. Because high-speed internet is not prevalent in some rural areas, there were concerns about exerting time and energy into creating a social media presence if constituent access wasn't reliable or fast.

Relevancy to Audience

About half of educators interviewed mentioned social media relevancy to their audience as being a potential problem, with 13 of 27 educators including this in their response. These educators tended to have not yet established a social media presence to see how many people actually would take interest. Educators do not believe that their audience is using social media and even if Extension had a presence it wouldn't be relevant to the constituents in their county. They were concerned about how many people would actually benefit from social media or how many people would find value in the pages. Most educators who discussed concerns about relevancy didn't think the end result would be worth the perceived staff time and effort that it would take to establish and maintain a social media presence.

> Because you can have a Facebook and, if nobody does Facebook, it doesn't make any
>
> sense. You can have the greatest page in the world and have all the information in the
>
> world. But if it's not where they're going, it's not what you're going to do. (Kourtney, WI)

This participant was concerned that nobody would be on Facebook, and the efforts of her work wouldn't be worthwhile because of a lack of readership.

Decreased Personal Connections

The important personal connections that educators have with constituents was also deemed at risk by some educators in this study who thought social media could actually harm the relationship they have with their constituents. Eight of 27 educators mentioned this concern.

Sometimes educators expressed hesitation to delve into social media because they felt it may come at the expense of their face to face relationships.

> [Social media] is less personal. It's not developing the relationships with people. When someone comes into the office, you meet them. You're eye‑to‑eye with them and there's rapport. (Diane, WI)

This participant thought that social media seemed less personal than seeing people in person at the office and was concerned that social media does not create the deep relationships like interacting face to face with someone does. They didn't like that social media made extension seem distant and less personal. Most educators who expressed this concern suggested that a focus on social media outreach may come at the expense of face-time and personal communication, rather than a supplement to such efforts.

Social/Industry/Administrative Pressure to Use

While not clearly a barrier or an opportunity, almost half of educators (12 of 27) felt pressure to use social media as part of their work. Many extension educators discussed how they thought they would be left behind if they did not engage constituents via social networks. Participants who mentioned this pressure recognized that large numbers of people are using social media to communicate, interact with others, and receive information, yet they were concerned about Extension itself using it for the same purposes. They knew that many people were using social media and in turn felt pressured to have a presence on the social media sites because that's where the audience is.

> If we don't get on the bandwagon we're going to be behind the 8-ball because if everybody else is communicating in those ways, and we don't, we've lost that whole entire audience. (Pierce, NY)

Participants recognized the potential that social media could possibly have, yet some were hesitant to begin using it to reach that audience. Some extension educators were reactive in using social media and only did so because they felt enough pressure to begin to connect with people in new ways.

Social Media within Broader Outreach

The majority of educators (15 of 27) suggested that social media is just one component of a broad outreach plan that Extension should have. These educators suggested that social media can be a good tool to reach people who don't utilize other media (i.e., newspapers) and it can be good reinforcement for people to see the Extension message or advertising in another area.

> There's always going to be some groups that won't care for social media or don't even have internet. Just like there are people who don't read the newspaper. You're always going to have to find a way to communicate with them. (Pierce, NY)

Many participants identified social media as an additional platform to communicate with and distribute information to constituents. Even those participants who were most enthusiastic about using social media for outreach acknowledged that social media does not reach everyone. As such it should not necessarily replace current forms of outreach, but be considered a supplement to other outreach efforts and potentially allowed them to communicate with a new audience.

Opportunities/Reasons to use

Breadth of Audience

Nearly all interviewed Extension educators mentioned the large breadth of audience that it is possible to reach by utilizing social media (24 of 27). From influential lawmakers to sheer numbers of different people within the sites, most recognized that social media can reach tremendous numbers of people within a very short timeframe.

It's just amazed me within a couple hours that we had 80 people that had been on the site.

I'm sure they're people who didn't know we existed. (Logan, NY)

Many educators were amazed at how quickly people noticed and subscribed to their social media profiles. Many had substantial numbers of followers within just a few hours or days of establishing a social media presence. Educators also recognized the wide breadth of people who have a presence on social media and the potential to connect with them.

The next people who are you going to be on your board, be your participants, and be your

volunteers... you've got to reach them and that's where they are. (Darla, NY)

This educator recognized the potential social media has to connect with the next generation of people who will be utilizing the resources offered by Extension. Most participants mentioned the large breadth and variety of people that they were able to interact with and connect with through social media. Even if the participants hadn't used social media yet, they recognized and acknowledged the different audience that uses social media and commented on the opportunities of interacting with new people who didn't yet know about or take advantage of Extension's programs.

Interactivity

In the minds of educators, interactivity was also one of the largest opportunities social media offers, with 19 of 27 participants bringing up this point. Word of mouth outreach is important for extension programs, and social media offer an easy way for many people to hear a message. As people reply to posts or repost updates, more people can see a message. Also, social media allows people to share content easily.

I think it's pretty successful because other people, for instance on Facebook they're able

to like an article or a report that we post and that then goes to all of their friends, their

friends see and then we're able to get more friends because of that. (Joann, WI)

This participant enjoyed the interactivity opportunities that Facebook offered. She enjoyed when

people liked or reposted something that Extension had posted because then it went to that

person's friends and was reaching a greater number of people than Extension was originally

impacting. Thus interactivity was not just defined as educators interacting with constituents

through social media, but constituents interacting with each other about Extension matters and

content. This interactivity and the ease of disseminating information was a key opportunity

mentioned by many participants.

Increased Awareness of Extension

Related to interactivity, another opportunity commonly expressed by educators was that

social media offer a powerful platform through which educators can show the public exactly who

they are and what they do. Twenty-two of 27 participants suggested that people can easily learn

about extension and become more aware of the programs and opportunities available.

I think the biggest opportunity is increased awareness of who Extension is and what we

can offer, and getting the word out about events. (Amanda, NY)

This participant commented on the opportunity of increasing Extension's audience and

awareness after using social media. Many participants commented on the larger numbers of

people who would be seeing Extension's information, events, and postings, and some

commented that it would be new people being exposed to what Extension does. Participants who

were already using social media noted that a larger number of people were aware of Extension's

programs and what it had to offer.

Immediacy

Immediacy is seen as another important factor unique to social media. Fifteen of 27 educators mentioned the importance of disseminating information quickly to a large number of people through social media, instead of waiting for a press release to be published or a newsletter to be mailed.

> The updating quickly, getting information out relatively fast to a large number of people. When something comes through, like a food safety issue, or now the dietary guidelines were just released, I could release it the day it came out. (Diane, WI)

This Extension educator gave an example of how important the immediacy factor of social media was to her. Instead of having a few days of turnaround time with some traditional forms of outreach, educators can get whatever information they want disseminated to their followers whenever they wanted to. As social media is constantly updating itself and changing, users could see new content posted by Extension as soon as it is submitted.

Finances

Some educators (12 of 27) suggested that social media are a good opportunity for Extension because they are a financially free platform to connect and communicate with people. Indeed some educators in this study have begun to utilize social media as a way to reduce printing and mailing costs. Others mention the value social media provides simply because it is a free communication tool.

> It's so expensive, with limited resources, to put out and print and send everything. First of all it takes a long time; second of all it costs a lot of money. Cooperative extensions have such limited resources at this point that you just can't afford to waste any of those resources. (Jaime, NY)

This participant compared the cost of using social media with the cost of printing and mailing information to constituents. Some educators mentioned that they were cutting back on mailing information to save money. They found that utilizing social media was free and provided similar benefits of reaching a great number of people. Other educators didn't cut back on mailings, but still added social media into their communication strategy simply because it was free and could reach many more people and a different audience.

Control of Information

As mentioned earlier, control of information was often identified as a risk that educators were concerned about, however, eight educators thought social media could actually enhance rather than limit control of information and be viewed as an opportunity. These eight educators suggested that social media allows Extension to be in control of when information is released, instead of waiting for a newspaper to publish something. These educators also felt that social media allowed them more control over the content of their messages than outreach via traditional media.

> With Facebook, we get to choose what's on there. With the newspaper, because we send
>
> it as releases, they get to decide. (Colleen, NY)

Colleen spoke about knowing exactly what is online and available for constituents and always being able to access and control the outreach material she is working with. Some extension educators saw the benefits of being able to control the information on the social media page as one of its most important features.

Discussion/Conclusion

Social media has the potential to affect Cooperative Extension in tremendous ways. As a free, interactive platform with millions of users and a diverse audience, Cooperative Extension can utilize social media as a way to connect with new users, advertise events and programs for free, establish stronger ties and connections with current users, and increase overall awareness of Extension and the opportunities and resources it provides.

A variety of aspects of social media emerged as interesting results of this research. The wide-ranging perceptions that educators had highlighted how little some people understand about utilizing this resource. Some of the barriers of utilizing social media that were perceived by Extension educators actually stemmed from misunderstanding the platform or not having knowledge or training about the service. For example, while some participants mentioned privacy and control of information as barriers, some educators actually viewed these as positives. On one hand, educators were concerned about postings on their wall and where their information would go, yet on the other hand some participants viewed this lack of control as a form of positive electronic word of mouth instead, where an educator could post something on the wall and it could be shared amongst a variety of people while simultaneously spreading Cooperative Extension's name.

A second example of this was highlighted in the various tensions regarding time versus benefits that educators had. Typically, educators who had not used social media or were not familiar with the features of social media were apprehensive of the time that it would take out of a busy educator's day. Some educators are not even considering implementing it. However, participants who had implemented social media praised the little amount of time it takes to update and reach large amounts of people. Some educators believe it is the best form of outreach

for the least amount of time. A wide variety of educators expressed a wide variety of opinions about social media, but overall results suggest that social media can be a positive, innovative, supplemental, and interactive form of outreach that can help Cooperative Extension publicize its programs and connect with a new audience.

Cooperative Extension educators are extremely busy. With budget cuts, many educators are taking on more and more responsibilities within their career. Some educators expressed concern that social media would be yet another additional task that they would be responsible for managing. Most stated they couldn't deal with an additional responsibility and perceived that managing social media accounts would take a large amount of time. However, many educators who had already implemented social media expressed how little time it takes to update and reply to people they are connected with. Some stated that they don't produce any new content solely for their social media sites; instead they use social media as a supplemental avenue for outreach. Posting already created materials only takes a few additional minutes to do. Some educators discussed how social media provides them with the most "bang for their buck" because social media reaches a wide variety of people compared to the amount of time it takes to post something. While it may take time initially to establish a social media presence, time shouldn't be a large concern for educators thinking about beginning to work with social media.

A second perceived risk of social media is a lack of control on social media platforms. Some Extension educators are mainly worried about harmful or damaging posts on their social media site. Some expressed that they were scared information would get into the wrong hands or that they would post something wrong and it would be on the social media site for the world to see. However, what some educators didn't realize was how privacy and content controls available on social media. With the click of a button, incorrect or damaging posts can be easily

removed from the social networking site. Some educators who had already established a social media presence had their privacy setting set so they need to approve each comment that was made. Others let any friend or follower post freely. Regardless of their social media practices, no educators in this study indicated they had ever had a problem with any harmful or negative posts on their social media website. While there is the perceived risk by some that something damaging could happen through social media, nothing had happened to our participants. Not only are there preventative control measures available through the site, but administrators of the sites can remove or edit all postings associated with a group.

Many educators expressed the true need for training in how to use social media. Some educators had no idea where to begin and desired a thorough training. Others wanted lessons on what makes a good post. Some simply needed the confidence or while others needed permission to access use social media within a professional setting. Overall, training is one of the best recommendations that can be made from this study: with a training offered by Cooperative Extension about what social media is and the best ways to use it, many educators would feel more comfortable and confident beginning social media campaigns in their own counties to reach the constituents who utilize social media. Sharing best practices among educators would also benefit those who are already utilizing social media as part of their outreach.

Internet connectivity of extension constituents and educators remains an important barrier. Many counties in both New York and Wisconsin are mainly rural, and high speed internet access can be spotty in these areas. Educators were unsure if a social media presence would to worthwhile or relevant to constituents if they weren't able to access them in the first place. However, some educators mentioned that some social media sites actually load quicker on dial-up internet accounts than some larger websites. Furthermore, a few educators suggested that as

mobile phones are becoming more widespread, more and more people are checking and updating social media accounts from the ease of their mobile phone. While high speed internet access may continue to present problems for rural areas, people can still have ways to access social media and take advantage of information posted by Extension educators. However, if there are serious infrastructural issues with a lack high speed internet and mobile phone service, social media might not be right for a county at this point in time.

Benefits

Many educators recognized the benefits from having a presence within social media. The audience on social media sites is perceived as different from the audience who reads newspapers or listens to the radio (some of the more traditional forms of Extension advertising), thus educators have found that they are able to reach new people and expose them to the programs and opportunities available through Cooperative Extension. Through electronic word of mouth or referrals by friends, it is incredibly easy for people to find Extension's social media pages through simple, everyday browsing of the social media site. Few outreach methods provide the opportunities for audience awareness that social media does: new people can find Extension, learn about their programs, and instantly become permanently connected to receive updates.

One of the largest benefits cited by educators is the interactive nature of social media. When an educator posts a comment, photos, or any other sort of information, everyone else following the page has an opportunity to publicly post questions, comments, or anything else they desire. These comments are visible to others following the page as well. It creates an atmosphere where everyone can learn from others and valuable, continuous, and interactive dialogue about Extension programs can take place.

Social media is instant. Through posts, conversations, and other features, everything is in real time. Followers of the page are able to immediately see the information and then respond with questions or comments or RSVP to events. Also, the educator has the freedom to post whatever and whenever they desire. With traditional media such as a newspaper, it sometimes takes one week for information to be printed and then it might be a few days before it is delivered to the reader or the reader has time to see the advertisement or article. Also, there is no guarantee that a newspaper will print information sent to them. With the immediate nature of social media, an educator can control what is posted, when it is posted, and have updates immediately sent to all of that county's followers.

Social media is a financially free form of advertising and outreach. The only investment necessary is that of employee time and effort, and possible training. Social media can be updated from any device that can connect to the internet. Some educators have found a significant enough following on social media that they've been able to reduce costs by eliminating some people from the mailing list. A few participants in the study referred to social media as the outreach method that provides the most benefits for the smallest amount of resources. Overall, social media cannot hurt because it doesn't cost anything to establish or use in the first place. Utilizing social media is not expensive and provides large amounts of benefits for minimal cost.

Research Limitations

There are a few limitations to this research study. First, only Extension educators in certain counties were interviewed. In the future, it may be beneficial to interview educators from every county within a state to be able to make more generalizable claims about that state's Extension's use of and views on social media. While participants included those who both used and did not use social media as part of their extension work, this study only interviewed

educators from counties with active Extensions within both states. Through there is little indication from the current study, it is possible that educators from counties not interviewed think about and use social media differently than those in our study.

Another limitation is that we only interviewed Extension educators who replied to the communication survey sent out by the Central Cooperative Extension office (in New York) or who were recommended by the Central Extension office (in Wisconsin). This means that we were interviewing educators who already were interested in or worked within communication in their counties. Different insights may have been gained had we interviewed educators who were not involved with the general communication and outreach efforts within their county.

Opportunities for Future Research

There are tremendous opportunities for future research looking at using social media within Extension, and more generally, within non-profits or organizations. In the future, it would be beneficial to interview and gain the perspective from constituents who use Extension's services. Gaining viewpoints from the people who benefit from the outreach and programming performed by Extension would allow us to better understand the value of Extension's social media use. By gaining perspectives only from employees with Extension we did not analyze the actual opportunities or barriers by constituents; we only analyzed the perceived opportunities, risks, and barriers from Extension's point of view.

A further opportunity for future research would be performing a more quantitative study to isolate and measures to the various risks and barriers identified in this study, which could be sent to all county Cooperative Extension offices to get more generalizeable data regarding usage and impact. Instead of performing interviews with an open set of questions, this survey could be developed to try to quantify the impact of social media for Extension educators and constituents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are a wide variety of perceived opportunities, risks, and barriers amongst Extension educators in regards to implementing and using social media within the Cooperative Extension system. While some educators in this study are not interested in utilizing social media to connect with constituents, a majority of educators in the study are interested in the technology or would be interested in the technology if they were trained to use it. Most participants believe that social media would be a unique and beneficial supplement to their other outreach strategies. Many participants also suggested that keeping up with technology is a crucial way to ensure Extension is not left behind as constituents find new and different ways to communicate. Social media was perceived as a way to provide Extension with an interactive, controlled, and immediate way of communicating and disseminating information. Additionally, social media was perceived as extending and supplementing traditional outreach strategies in order to spread Extension's message to as many people as possible, rather than replacing these traditional outreach efforts. With training, some educators believe they will be more knowledgeable and confident about using social media. This study suggests that social media has the potential to become an integral component of Cooperative Extension and could provide numerous opportunities to strengthen Extension's communication efforts.

Appendix 1

Interviewee Data

Name	State	Title	Social Media Use
Amanda	NY	Assistant to ED	Blog, Facebook
Barbara	NY	Educator	None
Beatrice	NY	IT	None
Buffy	NY	Farm Business Management Educator	None
Christopher	NY	4-H Youth Development	None
Colleen	NY	IT/HR/Finance	Facebook
Darla	NY	Public Affairs	Facebook
Fonda	NY	4-H Educator	Facebook
Jaime	NY	Agriculture Economic Development	Facebook, Twitter
Logan	NY	Executive Director	Facebook
Pierce	NY	Executive Director	Facebook (established, but don't use)
Porter	NY	Marketing Communication Manager	Facebook, Twitter
Sabrina	NY	Public Relations	Facebook
Sleena/Dorothy	NY	Food and Nutrition/4-H Programming	Wiki
Sonia	NY	4-H	Facebook
Tracy/Kate	NY	Executive Director/Admin Assist.	Blog, Facebook
Vera	NY	Production Assistant/IT	Facebook
Andrew	WI	Community Resource Development	Facebook, Twitter
Ashley	WI	Public Information Specialist	Blog, Facebook, Twitter
Bonnie	WI	Beef Program Director	Facebook
Diane	WI	4-H/Family Living/Commun. Dev.	None
Joann	WI	Community Development Educator	Blog, Facebook
Korrine	WI	Public Information Specialist	Facebook, Twitter
Kourtney	WI	4-H Youth Development Program	Facebook
Megan	WI	State Program Director for 4-H	Facebook
Rachel	WI	State Beef Cattle Extension Specialist	Blog, Facebook, Twitter
Shawn	WI	Ag/Nat Res Program Director	Facebook, Twitter

Name	Age	Gender	Education	County Type
Amanda	35	F	Bachelor's	Rural
Barbara	60	F	Master's	Rural
Beatrice	60	F	Bachelor's	Urban
Buffy	46	F	Master's	Rural
Christopher	55	M	Master's	Rural
Colleen	39	F	Associate's	In-between
Darla	56	F	Bachelor's	Rural
Fonda	61	F	Bachelor's	In-between
Jaime	29	F	Master's	In-between
Logan	45	M	Master's	Urban
Pierce	48	M	Master's	Rural
Porter	27	M	Bachelor's	Rural
Sabrina	41	F	Bachelor's	Rural
Sleena/Dorothy	28/24	F	Bachelor's	Rural
Sonia	56	F	Associate's	In-between
Tracy/Kate	56/51	F	Master's/Some College	Rural
Vera	25	F	Bachelor's	Rural
Andrew	50	M	Master's	Rural
Ashley	23	F	Bachelor's	Urban
Bonnie	58	F	Doctorate	NA?
Diane	53	F	Master's	In-between
Joann	46	F	NA	In-between
Korrine	47	F	Bachelor's	Urban
Kourtney	31	F	Master's	Rural
Megan	59	F	Master's	Urban
Rachel	35	F	Doctorate	Urban
Shawn	50	M	Doctorate	In-between

Appendix 2

<u>Interview Guide</u>

Stage 1: Preliminary Questions
1. How long have you been working with Cooperative Extension?
2. Could you tell me about your office? (number of employees, programs, etc.)
3. How does your Cooperative Extension office advertise or promote its programs? (probe: direct mailing, radio, newsletter, website, etc).
4. What do you find to be the most effective communication strategies Cooperative Extension uses?

Stage 2:
5. **What kinds of social media does your office use?** (probe: Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, MySpace, LinkdIn, etc) If yes, then:
   a. What do you use it for?
   b. How did you first decide to use _____? What brought about Cooperative Extension using _____?
   c. Why did you decide to use it? (if applicable)
   d. How does _____ fit with your other communication and outreach efforts?
   e. How do you know if your media & communication outreach are working?
   f. Have you ever tried a new media outreach that didn't work?
6. **What do you think some of the best features of social media are?**
7. What do you think social media allows you to do that traditional "old" media like broadcast didn't allow?
8. What would some of the opportunities of using social media be for Cooperative Extension?
9. What do you think are the barriers of Cooperative Extension using social media?
   a. How might social media be confusing for your clients?
   b. How many of your clients have internet access?
10. **What do you think are some of the drawbacks or risks of Cooperative Extension using social media?**
11. In your opinion, what is the best thing about social media?
12. In your opinion, what is the worst thing about social media?
13. How could Cooperative Extension use social media?
14. **What kind of audiences would Cooperative Extension be able to connect with by incorporating social media?**
15. What advice would you give to a new Cooperative Extension educator about social media?
16. How do you think Cooperative Extension could incorporate social media into its communication strategies?
   a. What do you think are the common mistakes that people make when using social media?
   b. What tricks or strategies would you have based on your experience using social media to promote Cooperative Extension programs?
17. Is social media use worth spending time on? (why or why not?)

18. How do you see social media affecting how Cooperative Extension performs on a regional level?
19. How do you think the public will view your use of social media?

(If applicable):

1. What do you think is holding Cooperative Extension back from using social media?
2. What role do you think training could have to help educators use social media?
3. **What role to do see social media playing in the future? Is it just a "fad" or do think it's important for extension to be thinking about?**
4. What is it about traditional communication strategies that make them work or effective for extension?
5. How is internet connectivity in your county/area?
6. How do finances play a role into the use of social media?

Stage 3:

7. We're just going to ask a couple of demographic questions. How old are you?
8. What gender are you?
9. What is the highest level of education you completed? High school? Some college? 4year college? Masters education? Doctorate?
10. How would you characterize the county in which you work? Urban, rural, or somewhere in between?
11. Is there anything I didn't ask that you think might be interesting or important?
12. Do you have any questions for me about social media or the research project?
13. Would it be ok to follow up with you about any further questions we might have?
14. Is there anyone else at Cooperative Extension that you might recommend we talk with?

Works Cited

Abbe, E. (2011). The buzz on social media. *Writer*, 124(3), 34-55. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Acar, A. (2008). Antecedents and Consequences of Online Social Networking Behavior: The Case of Facebook. *Journal of Website Promotion*, 3(1/2), 62-83. doi:10.1080/15533610802052654

Barnes, N., & Barnes, F. R. (2009). EQUIPPING YOUR ORGANIZATION FOR THE SOCIAL NETWORKING GAME. *Information Management (15352897)*, 43(6), 28-33. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

Broadband Statistics Report. (2011, February). Retrieved from National Broadband Map, FCC website: http://www.broadbandmap.gov/download/reports/ national-broadband-map-broadband-availability-in-rural-vs-urban-areas.pdf

Bulearca, M., & Bulearca, S. (2010). Twitter: a Viable Marketing Tool for SMEs?. *Global Business & Management Research*, 2(4), 296-309. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Chung, C., & Austria, K. (2010). Social Media Gratification and Attitude toward Social Media Marketing Messages: A Study of the Effect of Social Media Marketing Messages on Online Shopping Value.*Proceedings of the Northeast Business & Economics Association*, 581-586. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Culnan, M. J., McHugh, P. J., & Zubillaga, J. I. (2010). HOW LARGE U.S. COMPANIES CAN USE TWITTER AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA TO GAIN BUSINESS VALUE. *MIS Quarterly Executive*, 9(4), 243-259. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Dadashzadeh, M. (2010). Social Media In Government: From Government To eGovernance. *Journal of Business & Economics Research*, 8(11), 81-86. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Das, N. (2009, February 26). The Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Networking. Retrieved January 8, 2010, from http://www.mytripledub.com/blog/romance-relationships/advantages-and-disadvantages-social-networking

De Bruyn, A. and Lilien, G.L., 2008. A multi-stage model of word-of-mouth influence through viral marketing, International Journal of Research in Marketing, vol.25, pp.151-163;

Dellarocas, C., 2003. The digitization of word of mouth – promise and challenges of online feedback mechanisms, Management Science, 49(10), pp.1407-1424;

"Facebook.com" [Important Facebook Statistics]. (n.d.). Retrieved February 23, 2011, from

http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics

Fisher, T., 2009. ROI in social media: a look at the arguments, Journal of Database Marketing and Customer Strategy Management, 16(3), pp.189-195;

Foster, M. K., Francescucci, A., & West, B. C. (2010). Why Users Participate in Online Social Networks.*International Journal of e -- Business Management*, 4(1), 3-19. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Godes, D. and Mayzlin, D., 2004. Using online conversations to study word-of-mouth communications, Marketing Science, 23(4), pp.545-560

Gunawardena, C. N., Hermans, M., Sanchez, D., Richmond, C., Bohley, M., & Tuttle, R. (2009). A Theoretical Framework for Building Online Communities of Practice with Social Networking Tools.*Educational Media International*, 46(1), 3-16. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Hensel, K., & Deis, M. H. (2010). USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO INCREASE ADVERTISING AND IMPROVE MARKETING. *Entrepreneurial Executive*, 1587-97. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Jacobs, D.G., 2009. Surviving the social explosion, Landscapemanagement.net, Dec, pp.10-13;

Jansen, B.J., Zhang, M., Sobel, K. and Chowdury, A., 2009. Twitter power-tweets as electronic word-of-mouth, Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 60(11), p.2169-2188;

Kanter, B. (2009, May 22). *4 Ways Social Media is Changing the Non-Profit World*. Retrieved June 1, 2010, from http://mashable.com/2009/05/22/non-profit-social-media/

Kinsey, J. (2010, October). Five Social Media Tools for the Extension Toolbox. *Journal of Extension, 48*(5).

Kozinets, R., de Valck, K., Wojnicki, A., & Wilner, S. (2010). Networked Narratives: Understanding Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Online Communities. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(2), 71-89. doi:10.1509/jmkg.74.2.71

"Land Grant Mission." (2010). Retrieved September 7, 2010, from http://cce.cornell.edu/learn About/Pages/landgrant.aspx

Langcuster, J. (2010). Social media changing Extension work. *Southeast Farm Press*, 37(22), 17-23. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010, February 3). *Social Media & Mobile*

Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults. Retrieved from Pew Internet & American Life Project website: http://pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2010/ PIP_Social_Media_and_Young_Adults_Report_Final_with_toplines.pdf

Levine, S. J. (1995, August). Taking Advantage of New Technology for Education. *Journal of Extension, 33*(4).

Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analyzing Social Settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Mui, Y. Q. & Whoriskey, P. (2010, December 31). Facebook passes Google as most popular site on the Internet, two measures show. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved March 22, 2011, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/30/AR2010123004645.html

Nettleton, K., 2010. VW seeks agency for social media, Campaign Magazine, 22 January, p.2;

Patton, C. (2009). The Social Networking Express. *Professional Safety*, 54:11, 5(1). Page 5.

Pry, C. G. (2010, September). Social Media: The Less-Noticed Risks. *ABA Bank Marketing*, 23-27.

Ramsay, M. (2010). Social media etiquette: A guide and checklist to the benefits and perils of social marketing. *Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, 17(3/4), 257-261. doi:10.1057/dbm.2010.24

Rhoades, E., Thomas, J. R., & Davis, A. (2009, October). Social Networking Among Youth: How Is 4-H Represented? *Journal of Extension, 47*(5).

Rusbridger, A., 2010. Twitter eyes new ad platform, Campaign Magazine, 29 January, p.7;

Severson, K. (2011, February 17). Digital Age Is Slow to Arrive in Rural America. *The New York Times*.

Shaver, D. (2007). Impact of the Internet on Consumer Information Search Behavior in the United States. *Journal of Media Business Studies, 4*(2), 27-39.

Skelly, J. (2005, February). Social Marketing: Meeting the Outreach Challenges of Today. *Journal of Extension, 43*(1).

Smith, A. (2010, December). *Who Tweets?* Pew Research Center.

Stern, M. J., Adams, A. E., & Elsasser, S. (2009). Digital Inequality and Place: The Effects of Technological Diffusion on Internet Proficiency and Usage across Rural, Suburban, and Urban Counties.*Sociological Inquiry*, 79(4), 391-417. doi:10.1111/j.1475-682X.2009.00302.x

Trusov, M., Bucklin, R., & Pauwels, K. (2009). Effects of Word-of-Mouth Versus Traditional Marketing: Findings from an Internet Social Networking Site. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 90-102. doi:10.1509/jmkg.73.5.90

Ward, S. (n.d.). Social Media Marketing. Retrieved January 8, 2010, from Small Business Canada Website: http://sbinfocanada.about.com/od/socialmedia/g/socmedmarketing.htm