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#DoINeedSocialMedia:

Social Media in Local

Political Elections

Brittany K. Karzen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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School of Communications

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## ABSTRACT

#DoINeedSocialMedia:  
Social Media in Local  
Political Elections

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Master of Arts

More research is needed to be able to fully understand the role that social media plays in elections, specifically in local elections. Candidates need to understand how it works and how they can effectively use this new communication medium. By exploring Diffusion of Innovation Theory, Social Information Processing Theory, and the Two-Way Symmetrical Model of communications this study sought to answer one overarching question: how should a candidate employ social media in a local election? This qualitative, single case study explores the 2014 recall and general election in Yorba Linda, California. Councilman Tom Lindsey and candidate Matt Palmer are the primary subjects of study. Observations were made through analysis of documentation, interviews, and participant and direct observation. The researcher was employed as the campaign manager for both Lindsey's and Palmer's campaigns. The findings support the use of social media in local campaigns on a case by case basis. Determining use depends on the demographics of the voters and the abilities of the candidate. The data suggests that social media needs to be part of comprehensive strategy that includes traditional communication tools. Observations from the case study illustrate the need for candidates to engage in two-way communication that is monitored and regulated. This study begins to establish social media as a tool that candidates can use to inexpensively reach voters in a way that showcases the candidate's personality and allows them to connect on a personal level with constituents. Social media will play a role in politics at all levels.

Keywords: Yorba Linda, Tom Lindsey, general election, recall election, social media, diffusion of innovation theory, social information processing theory, two-way symmetrical model of communications

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## Introduction

Public relations (PR) professionals are finding themselves in a new era of PR, one that straddles the line of traditional PR practices and those of PR 2.0 emerging from the advent of the Internet and more specifically from social media. Social media presents unique challenges for the world of public relations; it can be the silver bullet as well as the Achilles heel for both public and private entities trying to engage a desired audience. Since the field is still in its infancy, many questions are being asked about how to properly employ social media and how to determine the effect it is having on the publics it is attempting to reach. This is particularly significant for political campaigns.

Social media has added a new component to the communications process in political campaigns. The phenomenon of social media in national campaigns has been the subject of research both in academia and by trade professionals. These studies have begun to draw conclusions about the role of social media, how to effectively use it, and the implications it will have for future elections. The research in the area has generally focused on national or other large-scale campaigns, overlooking, for the most part, local campaigns (i.e., city and county races).

Additionally, the only recall election to generate consistent national headlines since social media burst into the political communication world is the 2012 recall of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. The United States Conference of Mayors (USMC) says there were 23 mayoral recalls in 2009; that number jumped to 57 in 2010 (The United State Conference of Mayors [USMC], 2011) and did not decrease until 2013, when the number of recalls dropped below 30 (Ballotpedia, 2014). The dramatic increase in local recall efforts is accredited to the sluggish economy and the emergence of the Tea Party (USMC, 2011). With recalls becoming more

commonplace at the local level, there is an even greater need for research that can help candidates and their campaign teams effectively use social media to beat them. Only 26% of mayoral recalls are successful (Altman, 2011) but candidates still have to work to beat them, since “the rise of bloggers who can misrepresent the truth” has been especially problematic in recall efforts (McClimon, 2011, p. 2).

Understanding how to effectively create a communications plan that incorporates social media into a local election is critical for two reasons: first, as a medium it is basically free; and second, it is an effective means to reach constituents, since its general use is so pervasive. Piscataway, Alaska Mayor Brian Wahler says, “Because of considerable advance in technology and social media outlets, mayors are communicating with their constituents in a variety of ways, which included Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, and many others” (DeHaney-Howard & Burns, 2012, p. 1). Campaigns are expensive to run and are funded by the candidate himself and/or whatever money he can raise in accordance to campaign finance law. Since social media is essentially free, and even paid advertising on social media is relatively inexpensive, it is an important tool that can help carry the candidate’s message to voters’ homes, tablets, and phones (Vericat, 2010). Since social media is part of the greater digital revolution it is not a magical solution. Not every voter gets on Facebook, so traditional communication is still needed. The key is for campaign professionals and candidates to know how to effectively integrate the two (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2008; O’Connor, 2012).

In implementing a social media strategy the demographics of the voting base must be examined. Effective campaigns, like President Barack Obama’s 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns, targeted specific voters in specific areas, with specific messages. Reportedly, in 2012 the president’s campaign tailored its messaging to 26 voter segments (Christopoulos, 2013).

Local campaigns do not have these kinds of resources but need to be able to identify their publics and employ tools that will most effectively meet each one. This is the application of Strategic Communication Theory.

Social media in a campaign is not limited to Facebook and Twitter. The first time social media was truly engaged in political campaigns was the 2008 Democratic primary with the use of the blog. Hillary Clinton used her blog to speak directly to the people. Howard Dean also used a blog in his 2004 bid for the White House (Perlmutter, 2008). It is also important to consider what a candidate is comfortable with. Diffusion of Innovation is one of the primary theories that this study will apply (Foot & Schneider, 2006; Williams & Gulati, 2013). Using this theory this study seeks to answer these questions: Do I need social media? What platforms should I use? Am I comfortable with those platforms? Should I employ someone to do this for me?

Traditionally campaigns have employed one-way communication on the large scale, pushing out messages through direct mail, commercials, signs, etc. Even in doing this elected officials often claim to be the voice of their constituents and say they are listening to the voters (Catone, 2012; O'Connor, 2012; Perlmutter, 2008). This one-way communication strategy is inconsistent with the design and intent of social media. This study also seeks to understand how two-way communication works with social media and use the findings to determine if this is effective (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

This study assumes that the candidates and community groups being looked at have a basic understanding of social media in terms of purpose and practice. The purpose includes the presupposition that the intended use of social media is to engage in two-way communication. The definition of two-way communication used in this study is adapted from Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical communication; the organization (candidate) and public (voter) are

at the same place in the hierarchy; information is free to move in both directions; and the ultimate goal is to win over voters by building relationships. Platforms are social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, while tactics refer to the tools offered by the platform (i.e., posting text or an image, sharing another person's content, or "liking" or "retweeting" content).

By conducting a single holistic case study of a city councilman and mayor from the same city facing a recall and campaigns for the general election in November 2014 (reelection for the councilman and a run for higher office for the mayor), this research begins to provide some insight about the role social media should be playing in local elections.

### **Review of Literature**

Social media and the technologies that support it provide users more than just a new way to receive information; they also provide users the ability to share "opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with others," (Marken, 2007, p. 10) creating the potential for the two-way symmetrical model of public relations proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984). According to Grunig, two-way symmetrical communication is ideal, because it provides for the building of long-term relationships that are mutually beneficial (Duhe & Wright, 2013). Since 2008, mobile technologies, like smartphones, have become a popular means for participating in social media, as they provide another opportunity to facilitate communication (Veil, Buehner, & Palancher, 2011, p. 110). The use of such technology has a distinct impact on the traditional way public relations are conducted and political campaigns are run. This literature review will look at the evolution of social media in political campaigns; the impact social media has on democracy, voters, and the media; legal issues; recall elections; and finally examples of social media in political elections.

## Social Media and Elections

Social media is changing the landscape of political PR generally, not just in terms of campaigns. Citing the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and Trent Lott's racially insensitive remarks at Strom Thurmond's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, Williams and Delli (2004) noted that traditional mainstream media only provided coverage after the stories made their way through the Internet and tabloids. In his book *Blogwars*, Perlmutter (2008) gave the detailed account of how the Lewinsky scandal was brought to light. After mainstream media (*Newsweek*) killed the story a blogger on the *Drudge Report* began posting about it. The truth of the matter was that *Newsweek* was practicing responsible journalism by sitting on the story and deciding what to do (Perlmutter, 2008). "Before the era of 'breaking news' on the Internet, politicians and the press had news cycles, a period before the paper was printed or the evening broadcast was shown" (Perlmutter, 2008, p. 59). Trent Lott's situation was similar. Even though major news outlets did not cover the racially insensitive remarks until days after, Lott ultimately resigned due to the outrage being expressed by Internet bloggers (Perlmutter, 2008).

Today things go viral and ruin political careers. Anthony Weiner resigned from Congress after participating in a "sexting" scandal using social media; he made a political comeback in 2013 running for mayor of New York City but a similar "sexting" scandal effectively ended his career (Nelson, 2012). Prior to the 2012 elections Nelson (2012) observed that social media is still in its early days with the major social networks, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube not having reached their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversaries and newer platforms like Pinterest and Foursquare still in their infancies. "As digital natives make their way in the world, social media will continue to overhaul American democracy in new and unexpected ways" (Nelson, 2012, para. 22).

**2006: Political campaigns meet Facebook.** The late 1990s brought about the first campaign web sites (Woolley, Limmeros, & Oliver, 2010). Media and the public could be engaged through these sites, which were communication channels controlled by the campaign (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). By 2004 voters wanted campaign websites to be interactive rather than static; to help with interactivity and provide a more personal experience, candidates in the 2004 Democratic primary engaged the use of blogs (Perlmutter, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2002). Blogs are essentially an earlier version of Facebook groups in terms of interactivity and personalization (Woolley et al., 2010). When the 2006 midterm elections rolled around, 96 percent of U.S. Senate candidates and 86 percent of U.S. House candidates had campaign websites (Gulati & Williams, 2007), making them part of the standard communication tools employed by campaign staff. Also in 2006, campaigns met Facebook for the first time.

Until 2007 Facebook was exclusive to college students (Woolley et al., 2010), but in 2006 “Facebook carved out a special space – ‘U.S. Politics’ – on its network for all U.S. congressional and gubernatorial candidates” (Williams & Gulati, 2013, p. 56). Facebook did this again in 2008 with some modifications, according to Williams and Gulati. Smith and Rainie (2008) reported that only 8 percent of Americans said they got information about the 2008 election from engaging social media (not just Facebook). Even with this low number of 8 percent there is still much talk about the role of social media in the future of political campaigns.

**2010: A new era of social media use.** Political and social activists are embracing social media as a means of spreading their message. Two of these are relevant in terms of how publics were effectively engaged; they are the Arab Spring, which took place in multiple Middle Eastern countries, and the Occupy Wall Street movement in the U.S.

The Arab Spring refers to a series of uprisings by citizens in Arab nations to overthrow regimes from Tunisia, to Egypt and Libya, beginning in December 2010. Soengas and de Compstela (2013) discussed the movement, saying that the spread of the Internet broke down barriers that had traditionally kept Arab society cut off from the rest of the world, where media was usually government controlled. With the Internet came the ability to organize and share opinions with foreign communities as well as a tool to “denounce the government on a world stage, and... to receive all kinds of international support... Social networking through the Internet has not only facilitated more open access to information, but also freedom of expression and the right to express opinions and to associate freely, albeit in a virtual sense” (Soengas & de Compstela, 2013, p. 148).

The whole movement seems to have been sparked by Mohamed Bouazizi, who killed himself in economic and political protest. Author of *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam* Philip N. Howard said social media spreading across North Africa and the Middle East was a driving force behind this political change (O’Connor, 2012). A study supported Howard’s assertions that “conversations about revolution often preceded major events on the ground and social media carried inspiring stories of protest across international borders” (O’Connor, 2012, p. 241).

The Occupy Wall Street movement began September 17, 2011, stemming from citizen outrage over social and economic inequality. The protests were influenced by the Arab Spring. They began to spread to other major U.S. cities, including Boston and San Francisco, eventually reaching a global scale (DeLuca, Lawson & Sun, 2012; Tweksbury, 2013; White, 2011). Initially no one was covering the Occupy movement in 2011, but when social media was embraced, organizers and protestors took to telling the story themselves. The near real-time

aspect of social media gave their friends and followers the ability to keep people informed, sharing everything from their opinions to photos of being arrested (O'Connor, 2012).

Self-organizing is a characteristic of today's 20-and 30-year-olds. "They believe life can be more participatory, more decentralized, less dependent on the traditional models of organization, either in the state or the big company. Those were the dominant ways of doing things in the industrial economy, and they aren't anymore," said Yochai Benkler, a director of the Berkman Center for the Internet and Society at Harvard University (Kulish, 2011, para. 13).

**Promoting democracy.** Whether the Internet is a tool that supports the status quo, an elitist view of the world, or provides a new forum for political pressure, it remains clear that the Internet is having an impact on political campaigns today.

Bimber (2003) and Trippi (2004) both take an optimistic view of the Internet, saying previously marginalized or disadvantaged groups are able to use the Internet as a springboard to gather both on- and offline support for political activities. Bimber also notes that the Internet can be just another way for elites to continue to dominate public debate, a notion supported by Hindman (2008). Kaul (2012) says the public is placated by volumes of information that new media offers. Loader and Mercea (2012) say citizen engagement is not dependent on iPhones and access to social networking but that social media gives citizens the opportunity to stop being a passive consumer of "political party propaganda, government spin or mass media news" and start sharing their individual perspectives (p. 3).

Williams and Gulati (2013) looked at the 2008 presidential primaries and noted that social media had the potential to renew grassroots political movements and promote participatory democracy. There is competition between the old and the new communication mediums. Citing Rosen (2006), Metzgar and Maruggi (2009) observed that "blogs compete with printing presses,

podcasting competes with radio stations, and homemade videos posted online compete with television” (p. 144).

Social media strategist Nichole Kelly (2011) wrote that the potential two-way conversation that can happen between constituents and politicians is a major benefit of social media; that it provides an opportunity to help politicians better represent the opinions of the people they represent. This supports Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) model of PR. According to the model, there are two types of two-way communication: asymmetrical and symmetrical. The theory suggests organizations should strive for two-way symmetrical, which means open dialogue. Kelly (2011) also observed that local leaders do not hear from the majority of residents but rather from a small group of active and concerned constituents, begging the question of whether or not social media will allow elected officials to better represent the opinions of their constituents.

Talking about the traditional ways government engages with citizens (phone, email, hearings, etc.), Mergel and Greeves (2013) say the process is linear rather than topic-focused. This linear, or asymmetrical, form of communicating is not something citizens respond to well; they don’t like the bureaucratic approach (Mergel & Greeves, 2013). Social media gives the candidate a chance to engage constituents in a way that is very two-way symmetrical.

In their study on user-generated content of Facebook groups in the 2008 election, Woolley et al. (2010) suggested that Facebook has “unique democratic potential” (p. 633) but that there is potential for dialogue that can persuade and incite action. Randi Zuckerberg, a Facebook employee, also sees the democratic attributes in social media, because people are responsible for the creation, dissemination, and consumption of free content (Vericat, 2010).

**Near real-time.** Using a social media tracking tool, Metzgar and Maruggi (2009) looked at the 2008 general presidential campaigns to see how social media is applied to political campaigns with specific emphasis on public relations. One study participant noted that people engaging in the near real-time aspects of the Web changed the way stories unfolded in the 2008 campaign (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009). A study conducted by Williams and Gulati (2013) on the 2008 primaries also drew attention to the “real-time” issue. They noted that with Facebook specifically, there was a real-time count of how many fans a candidate had, which was something that could be used to determine the strength of a candidate, at least according to Facebook, in each state.

When it comes to local politicians, the speed of these real-time issues can be particularly challenging. Before social media a handful of news stories were significant, but now information and rumors can spread through digital mediums like blogs and Facebook “around the clock.” Then Hartford, Connecticut, mayor Scott Slifka believed the accelerated pace of social media is something local governments are not prepared to handle (Davy, 2009).

Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) find the Internet to accelerate the public discourse on political news by looking at the time lag from when information appeared in print and television to its reappearance online. But with all this considered, Metzgar and Maruggi (2009) discover that social media was as important as traditional media in the 2008 campaign, making it only part of the equation that led to Barack Obama winning the presidency (Woolley et al., 2010).

The near real-time nature of social media also poses some legal concerns. Even though a platform like Twitter can be useful for a city to disseminate information quickly — for instance that school is closed due to snow — problems arise when officials or city employees use the platform for personal use. Using the platform to share facts, information, documents, and answer

questions is appropriate, but if anyone engages these channels for personal use, like sharing personal opinions, there are likely unintended consequences of great significance (Fillmore, 2012).

Government agencies that use social media can use the near real-time feature of social media to quickly disseminate information, conduct polls, facilitate idea sharing, and spread information in emergency situations. Having citizens be part of this process increases the number of individuals giving government exposure to a larger audience (Mergel & Greeves, 2013).

**Impact of the evolution of journalism.** O'Connor (2012) wrote a book that, among other things, looks at how social media, and other online tools, are killing traditional, limited-access, one-way media. He argues that people have lost faith in traditional media because new networks emerged, creating their own economy that capitalized on Google search technology. Chaffee and Metzger (2001) observes that “agenda setting theory will change from what issues the media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about” (p. 375). In relation to this idea O'Connor (2012) notes that much credibility has been given to friends and followers in social networks. This is particularly true for “young voters see themselves as more than consumers of news but conduits, emailing friends links and video and receiving them in return” (Zhang et al., 2010, p. 80).

With the evolution of the media industry and the loss of traditional print newspapers, social media is becoming more important to local politicians for election and for local governments in general. In 2009 Mesa, Arizona, Mayor Scott Smith told PBS that social media is necessary due to the change in traditional news sources, because it is often the only means to get a message out (Davy, 2009).

In this same PBS blog post, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Mayor Walter Maddox talked about how Facebook, Twitter, and other online social networking sites allow the city to communicate more specific and comprehensive information to their constituents about policy decisions (Davy, 2009) compared to the surface-level storytelling provided by print or televised news sources.

### **Civic Engagement**

Many researchers have sought to measure civic engagement. Civic engagement can be dissected into two areas: civic and political participation (Zhang & Chia, 2006, p. 281). Activities that fall under the scope of civic participation focus on volunteerism and community projects that use non-governmental and non-electoral means, whereas political participation aims to influence the adoption of public policy and election of officials (Zhang, et al., 2009). It is relevant to the current discussion, because previous research has shown that social networks can be a predictor of civic and political engagement (Gil de Zuniga & Valenzuela, 2010; Zhang & Chia, 2006). De Zuniga and Valenzuela (2010), Putnam (2000), and Son and Lin (2008) all have found that people who participate in civic engagement generally have larger social networks. Zhang and Chi (2006) conclude that media consumption, trust, and more socializing with others are the keys to increasing both civic and political engagement. They further observed, “Casual conversation and informal socializing are no trivial matter” (Zhang & Chia, 2006, p. 293) since social connectedness has a demonstrated impact on engagement. “With the development of the Internet, researchers have found that online networks and services, such as blogs and social network sites, can also provide new ways of promoting both civic and political participation” (Gil de Zuniga & Valenzuela, 2010, p. 402).

There are two types of Internet political activity: passive information seeking and active interaction/participation in online communities (Katz, Rice, & Aspden, 2001; Kushin &

Yamamoto, 2010; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Wang, 2007). Wang defines it further as a two-factor model of information-seeking and opinion expression. This first is the exchange of information and the opportunity for candidates to create content to put out there for consumption (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). The second brings in this idea of civic engagement. By participating actively in online communities, users are creating and sending the content to other users (Bruns, 2006; Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

Hand and Ching (2011) examine how social media can encourage citizen engagement by looking at cities in the Phoenix, Arizona, area. They find that social media does not necessarily cause instant change in the engagement of citizens with their government, and vice-a-versa. Even though it may not foster citizen engagement it still needs to be considered and evaluated, because it has the potential to do this. Hand and Ching notice there is still a power issue when engaging social media, but its use can help with the imbalance and provide residents an opportunity to engage in the political process (Campbell, 2005). Of particular note for candidates wanting to use social media is Hand and Ching's finding of "the imbalance between speaking-from and speaking-to power" (p. 380), which can impact the way that citizens, or theoretically constituents, engage in using social media for political purposes.

Interpersonal communication motivates civic engagement practically in relation to political activity at the local level because the face-to-face interactions are where people learn about the problems their community is confronting (Zhang, et al., 2010). Face-to-face communication not only illustrates a problem but promotes participation by explaining how to get involved (Verba, Schlozman, Brady & Nie, 1995). Research also shows that interpersonal communication is effective because it can capitalize on the sense of ownership and commitment to a community (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Verba, Schlozman, Brady & Nie, 1995). McLeod

et al. (1999) and Scheufele et al. (2006) found a connection between participation in community forum and various political activities by individuals who engaged in diverse social networks. Carey (1989) and Walsh (2003) both found that those who participated in social networks with similar political beliefs had their views reinforced but also displayed politically empowered behaviors. Those engaged with diverse social networks (Mutz & Mondak, 2006; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002) as well as face-to-face interactions (Johnson et al., 2008) have been found to foster an increase in political knowledge and tolerance for different viewpoints. Engagement in social networks fosters political participation and educates citizens; to get more civic and political participation the citizenry needs to be encouraged to participate in more interpersonal political discussion (Zhang et al., 2010). Additionally, the public relations field generally is rediscovering the role of personal communication (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997) as a result in the shift in philosophy from viewing public relations as a way to manage public opinion to the new emphasis on developing relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).

### **Strategic Communication Theory and the Two-way Symmetrical Model**

Strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill a mission (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic, & Sriramish, 2007). It is goal oriented and requires consistency and coordination of messaging and tactics between the departments of a company. Execution of strategic communication is deliberate and purposeful (Sandhu, 2009) and is a way for a practitioner to “bridge” the gap between the organization and stakeholders (Grunig, 2006). Using environmental scanning to identify the organization’s goals, determining the relevant publics, and identifying possible obstacles or opportunities are all critical elements (Pfau & Wan, 2006). Research is needed to determine these things and then to choose tactics and messaging that will most effectively reach the relevant publics. Public

relations practitioners need to be more than just technicians in the execution of their duties. They need to be researchers in order to develop the most effective messaging and communication strategies (Dozier, 1990; Pfau & Wan, 2006).

The ultimate goal of a PR professional is to not only effectively communicate for the organization or candidate but to also cultivate quality, long-term relationships with publics (Kim, 2012). In the Excellence Theory Grunig and Repper (1992) suggest that public relations be optimized through the use of strategic management and suggests that tactics that involve two-way symmetrical communication are the ideal way to do this. Strategic management is often referred to as strategic communication, which embodies the same concepts of using two-way communication to manage relationships and influence publics (Mahoney, 2011; Zerfass, 2009).

Botan (1997) discusses the ethical implications of strategic communication, because public relations campaigns are intended to inform or persuade publics. These publics are groups of various sizes including organizations and societies at large by fostering the creation or maintenance of relationships that have a shared interest in an organization (Botan, 1997). Grunig and Reeper (2003) said organizations' most relevant publics can be the ones that pose the greatest threat. Often these publics are affected negatively by the organization, and when they recognize these effects they are likely to be active in seeking a resolution to a problem according to the authors. The balance in the relationships with these publics, who can be responsible for an organization's success or failure, is the point of public relations (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994). Relationships are the result that public relations seek (Center & Jackson, 1995), and these relationships are affected by the communication used in managing these relations (Dozier, 1995). Communication allows organizations to realize the goals they have set for their relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Mass media can be engaged as an effective way to communicate

with publics that include a significant part of the population, but it is more effective to reach publics using local media and interpersonal communication. Social media is a new way to build these kinds of relationships and influence communities at a local level.

Strategic communication can be carried out as one-way or monological communication or as two-way-dialogic communication. Johannesen (1996) says one-way communication is conducted with the view of the public as an object that the communicator imposes his message on. The resulting relationship with the public is power driven (Habermas, 1984) and is another tool the organization can use for its own gain (Johannesen, 1996). Botan (1997) says this is the primary model employed in public relations today. The dialogic or two-way communication predisposes organizations to more ethical behavior (Pearson, 1989). Engaging the two-way communication creates an environment where organizations and publics are equals and their communication authentic (Johannesen, 1996). The role of strategic communication and public relations is increasing in organizations with the information age, which is spurred on by the Internet (Botan, 1997). The development of relationships between organizations and publics are affected by the **near real-time** and worldwide nature of the Internet, the volume of information anticipated by publics, better education, and the rise of activists and consumer groups (Botan, 1997). Kent, Taylor and White (2003) acknowledge that dialogic communication is the most ethical communication between publics and organizations and assert that the Internet provides equality for the two. They do note that two-way communication is interactive, which is a limitation, but the Internet has the potential to change that.

**Strategic and two-way communication in practice.** In order to run a successful campaign, candidates and their communications people need to create strategic communication plans, coordinate the messaging across everyone involved, and all to help maximize reach

through both traditional and new media. Piscataway Mayor Brian Wahler says candidates are aware of the benefits and challenges social media presents but advises that social media be integrated into the existing communication strategy to ensure success (DeHaney-Howard & Burns, 2012). Other mayors have advised the hiring of a strong press and media person who can stay ahead of the message, development of a strong set of protocols, and using social media to strategically deliver the candidate's message all year, not just during election cycle (DeHaney-Howard & Burns, 2012). Strategic Communication Theory should govern the development of all political communication plans, and its principle of coordination is critical to the coordination of the messaging across new and traditional platforms and to whatever extent possible between the campaign and the individual supporting the candidate.

Grant, Moon, and Busby Grant (2010) did an analysis of Twitter use by Australian politicians. They found that politicians and government officials responsible for the transition to Web 2.0 both felt that social media is a tool that allows a message to be broadcast to a wide audience, but more importantly it allows politicians to listen to their constituents' feedback on proposed policies. This observation of politicians indicates that Twitter was being engaged more to broadcast messages than to listen. Macnamara (2008), also looking at Australian politicians, notices that comments on blogs are often turned off, they do allow for direct email, and their websites exist to put out information only.

### **The Ins and Outs of Engaging Social Media**

Understating the why helps explain the how. Why a candidate should engage social media in a campaign is supported by theory and examples; the how is more subjective and is better understood looking at social media in action. Diffusion of Innovation and Strategic Communication theories and the two-way symmetrical model of PR will guide this study in

understanding the why and the how. Jordan Bitterman, SVP and social marketing practice director at Digitas, notes that social media is the modern-day television in terms of deciding the outcome of presidential elections. He notes that it could be more powerful of a tool because of its ability to foster communication and relationship-building (Digitas, 2011).

**Choosing social media and Diffusion of Innovation Theory.** “The future leaders of politics in America live in MySpace, see in YouTube, and write in blog” (Perlmutter, 2008, p. XV). Candidates can choose from blogs and web pages to a host of social media platforms including Facebook. Selecting platforms that will effectively engage voters is critical for politicians.

Williams and Gulati’s (2013) 2012 analysis of the 2006 and 2008 congressional elections looked at who was adopting new technology relying on the theory of Diffusion of Innovation. This theory explains how new innovations are adopted beginning with a small group and ultimately resulting in adoption by all or most members of a social system (Rogers, 1983; Ryan & Gross, 1943; Valente, 1996). Diffusion is a five-step process beginning with knowledge, persuasion, decision-making, and confirmation (Chang, 2010; Williams & Gulati, 2013).

When it comes to Diffusion of Innovation in politics the main factors are constituencies and the political environment (Foot & Schneider, 2006; Williams & Gulati, 2013). When considering constituencies the theory takes into account access to and use of the Internet (Chadwick, 2006; Klotz, 2004; Mossberger, Tolbert, & Stansbury, 2003), education levels and race (Marriott, 2006), age and urban versus rural areas (Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, & Hindman, 2007). By taking these factors into account the theory can be applied by individual politicians to aid in the decision of whether or not to use social media. These factors need to be considered, because they are going to indicate, based on diffusion of innovation, if constituents are using

social media and if they have the tools to use it (Tornatzky & Klein, 1982; Williams & Gulati, 2010).

Having candidates that are not part of the social media revolution raises issues related to their ability and willingness to use various social media platforms. Williams and Gulati (2010) looked at Twitter use by members of the U.S. Congress and found that age was the only demographic factor to have a significant and negative impact on adoption. Diffusion of Innovation Theory analyzes the acceptance of new technology by individuals and by groups. Some candidates, like Mayor Cory Booker of New Jersey, have been engaged on social media since its introduction and already have experience using it personally and professionally (Nelson, 2012), while other candidates are resistant to not just engaging on social media but using it a means to have a conversation (Macnamara, 2008). To understand how social media is being utilized in local elections, where there is typically not a lot of staff, comfort and exposure of candidates need to be taken into consideration.

To employ new innovations, organizations have to consider the functionality of that innovation in helping them better serve their customer (Tornatzky & Klein, 1982; Ward & Gibson, 2009). While interviewing staffers from various campaigns in 2008, Williams and Gulati (2012) found that some campaigns did not utilize social networking, because they were volunteer based and did not have the resources or viewed them as a national election tool.

During the 2008 election 15% of Americans took to the Internet weekly to persuade others to support a candidate. That same study showed 10% of Americans made an online donation (Smith & Rainie, 2008). A 2012 study showed that 88% of adults using social media are registered voters (Digitas, 2012). Mashable's Catone (2012) says social media is still a young medium and its impacts have not yet been full discovered but that it should not be treated as an

afterthought or add-on. Social media will continue to play a role in politics in years to come; what is uncertain is how it will be used and how effective it will be.

***Selecting a platform.*** “Get on Twitter and Facebook or Get Out of the Race,” was the headline of a 2012 Digitas survey about social media and the 2012 election. Micha Stiffy, an industry insider, says local politicians tend to engage the “trifecta” of social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, with some showing interest in Pinterest because it reaches women (Nelson, 2012). The trifecta on the surface makes sense based on numbers.

According to a 2013 Pew Research survey, 72% of adults use social media. Of those, 67% use Facebook, and 18% engage on Twitter. LinkedIn came in second for usage at 20% but is not as useful for campaign purposes. During the 2012 campaign 22% of Facebook and Twitter users announced how they voted on the platform (Rainie, 2012), and 55% of registered voters watched political videos online (Smith & Duggan, 2012). Larger campaigns with more resources may engage additional platforms, and there are examples of politicians at all levels of government using a variety of platforms (Nelson, 2012). Understanding the demographics of constituents allows for platform selections that fit their need, use, and capabilities (Williams & Gulati, 2010).

***Blogs.*** Perlmutter (2008) paraphrases Rochard Benedetto, who says the role of a local political blogger is to “go places we cannot” (p. 117). Local bloggers can make connections, attend city council meetings, and visit archives, suggesting that blogs could have far greater impact on local campaigns than on national ones (Perlmutter, 2008).

A common assumption is that bloggers are only interested in high-profile issues, but this is not the case. *Callahan’s Cleveland Diary* is a blog focused, in large part, on local city planning issues. Local blogs are important, because most people do not “pay attention to what government

is doing until it immediately impacts our lives, unless good journalists call attention to the issues that should concern us, whether down the street or halfway around the world” (Perlmutter, 2008, p. 134).

*Twitter.* Twitter is a microblogging web service. Users “tweet” 140-character messages to “groups of self-designated followers” (O’Connor, 2012, p. 121). Founded in 2006, the platform has experienced exponential growth from five million in 2009 to over 200 million in 2011, half of which are active (daily login) users. Twitter often is the first to break major news stories, one of the first being the rescue of 155 passengers from the US Airways flight floating in the Hudson River in 2009. Someone on a nearby ferry took a picture on his iPhone and posted it to TwitPic.com (O’Connor, 2012).

**The pros and cons of user-generated content.** During the 2008 campaign YouTube launched its Citizen News channel. In part it was an online town hall where “citizens could discuss and debate, submit questions, watch it televised live, and then take quizzes” (O’Connor, 2012, p. 191). Social media provides many opportunities to engage and have a conversation, but there are some inherent concerns.

These are concerns because social media is essentially unmediated communication. One of those things is called flaming, which, according to O’Sullivan and Flanagin (2003), “includes the intentional creation, transmission, and interpretation of a message that is perceived from multiple perspectives as violating norms” (p. 85). Woolley et al. (2010) considered flaming in their study of Facebook groups in the 2008 election and said the freedom granted in forums like Facebook can potentially aid the antisocial behavior associated with flaming.

O’Connor (2012) discussed a “dustup” between presidential candidate Mitt Romney and a reporter during the 2008 election. Veteran political reporters would have understood the

incident and moved on, but because it was captured on film and uploaded to YouTube “an incident that would have been relegated to a campaign footnote took on a life of its own” (O’Connor, 2012, p. 112).

**Social Information Processing Theory.** A major concern both in academia and industry research relates to who is actually posting, the candidate or the staff. There are two negative implications for this. First, it sets a politician up for an “awkward” moment, because staffers will accidentally tweet or post some personal things from their bosses’ account (Nelson, 2012). A bigger concern, though, relates to authenticity. Kelly (2011), a social media expert, said it is “slightly disheartening” when staffers are managing the social media accounts, leaving it unclear if the candidate is even participating. Social Information Processing Theory applies here. The theory suggests that “people could decipher useful relational information through computer-mediated means that were similar to or better than traditional face-to-face interactions” (Woolley et al., 2010, p. 637). This begs the question, if staff is posting on behalf of the candidate, who is the voter getting to know?

More specifically, Social Information Processing Theory (SIP) says that to make judgments about others in computer-mediated communications people will take all the information afforded to them from the communication channel (Velasquez, 2012; Walther, 1992; Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2011). Evaluating the number of friends or followers a person has is one of the system-generated queues (Tong et al., 2008) that aid in passing judgments and assessing the credibility of a source (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2011). SIP assumes it will take multiple interactions online to form judgments about a person, but research is indicating reliable judgments can be passed in shorter time periods and with less interaction (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2011). Technology-based communication

presents different benefits and deterrents that are not shared with face-to-face communication (Hollan & Stornetta, 1992). Even though computer-based communication is primarily text based it still has both verbal and nonverbal cues that aid in communicating (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2011). Since research into the effects of social media on political campaigns is in its infancy there is a need to understand how relationships are developed between candidates and constituents, particularly in cases where someone is managing the candidate's online presence.

**A social, not PR, tool.** Another concern is the tendency to misuse social media, employing it more as a public relations or marketing tool instead of the two-way symmetrical model it is supposed to be (Kelly, 2011). Talking about new research, University of Washington Professor Philip Howard (Nelson, 2012) talks about the different approaches to using social media, noting that Republicans have a more managed approach to social media use than the Democrats because they use it to coordinate and put out messages that have been developed for them, while Democrats use it as more of a conversation but have trouble staying on topic.

The Pew Research Center found that candidates are not very social when it comes to using social media as another means of broadcasting their message, begging the question, is social media really a game-changer if candidates are using it like traditional one-way communication mediums like television and newspapers (Catone, 2012)?

### **Social Media and Campaign Law**

The Internet is a forum that requires minimal financial investment, grants access to a broad audience geographically, fosters an environment of anonymity, eliminates the traditional editorial channels that other forms of mass communication are subject to, and facilitates near real-time distribution of content (Carter, 2005). These characteristics set the Internet apart from traditional communication tools, because anyone can access any audience at any time. Content

does not have to be fact-checked, sources do not have to be verified, and this can all be done from anywhere there is an Internet connection (Carter, 2005). This poses challenges to the law and regulations that govern how political campaigns are conducted in America.

The Federal Elections Commission (FEC) has regulated how traditional communication tools like print, television, and radio can be used in a campaign. The regulations include disclosure statements and timing. The Internet presents different regulatory challenges, because it is relatively inexpensive and easy to access (*Reno v ACLU*, 1997). Television and radio are subject to limitations based on time and cost that the Internet is not. It was not until 2006 that the FEC began to regulate online advertisements when it included the Internet in the definition of “public communication” (Federal Register, 2006). As a medium, the Internet is a communication tool that is still evolving and is inherently different from other communication mediums and therefore requires a “restrained regulatory approach” (Federal Register, 2006).

Even 10 years after the birth of social media, many legal questions remain about the use of social media by individuals, employers, universities, the government, and candidates for political office. Many states are struggling with how to regulate the social media sites they use to communicate with constituents and are beginning to adopt social media policies (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2013).

It is unclear what the FEC’s role is in regulating social media for political campaigns. Its focus is on campaign finance issues (Robinson, 2009). In 2006 the FEC made Internet advertising by campaigns, political parties, and coordinated activities subject to campaign spending regulations (Robinson, 2009). The justification for the action was that “Everyday activity by individuals, even when political in nature, will not be affected by the changes made in this rulemaking” (71 Fed. Reg., 2006). The initial regulation was challenged in court *Shays v. FEC*

(2005) and the revised regulation is applied when \$1,000 or more is spent “with the ‘major purpose’ of influencing a federal election; ads (paid and, in some circumstances, free) are placed for candidates; or funds are solicited for candidates” (Robinson, 2009, para. 11).

The problems spill over to individual states. A Florida mayoral candidate in 2009 purchased a Google ad that limited the number of characters that would be used. The candidate omitted the disclaimer “Paid for by” required on all campaign advertisements. The candidate was eventually found to not having willfully violated the law, but in 2010 the Florida State Legislature passed a law exempting ads like this from the law (FL H.B. 869, 2010). As of 2011 five states were looking at the regulation of Internet campaigning (NCSL, 2013). California was one of those states. In August 2011 California’s Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) issued a final report that contained eight recommendations, which included “applying the same disclosure requirements that apply to broadcast or printed material to paid advertising on the Internet; exempting uncompensated political activity; and applying the media exemption to on-line media sources as well” (NCSL, 2013).

On September 19, 2013, the FPPC approved a new rule requiring campaign committees to disclose expenditures on individuals hired to post favorable or unfavorable content online (FPPC, 2013). Bloggers and others who are directly or indirectly receiving \$1,000 or more to post “favorable or unfavorable” content through blogs, social media, or online videos are subject to the new reporting requirement (Grimes, 2013; Rosenhall, 2013). FPPC lawyers say the purpose is to help voters “discern between genuine opinions and campaign material” (Rosenhall, 2013, para. 5). Democrat and Republican insiders are both unhappy with the new regulation (Howard, 2013), saying it will not stop the blogging but rather creates a “regulatory road block for basic communication like tweeting” (Rosenhall, 2013, para. 11).

This study asks the questions about how to use social media and what is effective. Without an awareness of the possible legal hurdles, implementing a social media strategy could be a major challenge and potentially result in fines or worse for violations of rules or laws.

### **Recall**

According to *CNN*, had the 2012 recall effort of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker been successful, it would have been the third time in U.S. history that a governor was recalled (Cohen, 2012). In 2011 there were 151 recalls in 17 states, making it the “year of the recall.” Of these 151 recalls, 99 were for mayors, city council members, and school board members, showing that this is a growing problem for local politics. Seventy-six were ultimately voted out, and nine resigned from office (Spivak, 2011).

The United States Conference of Mayors (USCM) saw a trend; since the economic downturn and rise of the Tea Party in the late 2000s recall elections were becoming more common at the local level (USMC, 2011). CEO of USCM Tom Cochran spearheaded the production of a short documentary examining recalls, the role the Internet and social media is playing, and encourages mayors to look at the recall statutes in their jurisdictions, because upset voters are targeting local elected officials who have not done anything illegal (USMC, 2011). These recalls are rooted in the voters’ anger and frustration and not a reflection of true wrongdoing (USMC, 2011).

Social media and blogging have created an atmosphere for recall that has never existed before now (Altman, 2011). Cochran and *Time Magazine* both assert that small groups of people using electronic communication to self-organize are successfully leading recall efforts (Altman, 2011). Adversarial groups, like those leading recalls, force an organization into directing

resources in response to their efforts, which often represent a minority in the community (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003).

The modern campaign techniques were not accounted for in the existing provisions of law related to recall, referendums, and initiatives. The Internet has made it easier to gather signatures (Hoffman, 2011). Since social media is being optimized by recall proponents, Omaha Mayor Jim Suttle, who survived a recall that began an hour after he was declared the winner, says mayors need to hire a strong media person to “maximize all the social media tools” (USMC, 2011, para. 7).

Social media also played a role in the Walker recall. Walker and his opponent, Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, had a large social media presence. Walker favored Facebook, and Barrett favored Twitter. Marketing consultant Oliva Roat (2012) did an analysis on the two candidates’ use of social media. Her title asks, “Did Scott Walker Tweet His Way to Triumph?” Ultimately her findings show that Barrett was more active on election day but that Walker had a greater reach. Barrett did receive better endorsements on Twitter, including from President Obama. Roat concluded that both candidates waged successful but different social media campaigns, and she says pure analytics show that Walker reached more people.

Another observation made by USMC was also relevant in the gubernatorial recall of Governor Scott Walker in Wisconsin: the growing influence of wealthy individuals. Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Alavez was recalled by 88% of the vote in 2011. A wealthy businessman backed the recall, spending \$1 million of his own money, because he was upset with a tax increase and government pay raises (Hoffman, 2011). In Wisconsin the dollar amounts were on a much grander scale, due in part to the *Citizens United* case. The court ruled that limits on corporate and union independent expenditures were unconstitutional; however, contrary to commonly held

belief, the decision did not change limits on campaign donations by corporation to candidates. Union funds flowed into Wisconsin, as did large dollar super PACs that received contributions from individuals across the county. The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign says a total of \$30.5 million was spent by anonymous donors through independent expenditures during this election; over \$60 million was spent total (Abowd, 2012). This is relevant, because all campaigns need funding. With that funding being easier to get through the use of PACs and the involvement of wealthy individuals, the threat social media poses is enhanced.

### **Examples of Social Media**

*"Let me ask you for your advice there, young man: Should I?" –Dan Coffey, Anchorage, Alaska's mayoral candidate and former assemblyman (Herz, 2013, para. 7).*

**Examples of agencies using (or not using) social media.** Local governments are increasingly incorporating social media (Nelson, 2012). Mergel and Greeves (2013) advise that social media use in the public sector is not a fad. They continue, noting that government agencies across the globe are learning how to use and incorporate social media as they continue to serve their publics and communicate with constituents.

Incorporating social media may seem counterintuitive to the traditional ways government communicates with citizens. Some agencies, like the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), have begun to track tweets from citizens after an earthquake to create a map with data points that can help direct emergency services (Mergel & Greeves, 2013). In 2010, Virginia State Police (VSP) issued an Amber Alert; they also posted the alert, additional information and pictures of the child and abductor to their Facebook page (24,000 fans). The VSP credits social media with the safe recovery of the child, saying that it gave them reach beyond what is normally available to them as law enforcement (Mergel & Greeves, 2013).

To illustrate how effective using social media can be, Mergel and Greeves (2013) discussed an incident in 2010 when an Amtrak train was stuck on the tracks for hours due to a power outage. The agency embraced all the traditional communication tools and was effectively communicating with everyone but the passengers, the ones that really needed the information. They did use their Twitter but only after the power was restored (Mergel & Greeves, 2013).

While government agencies are beginning to embrace social media, one thing they need to consider is adopting a social media policy. A social media policy provides direction for staff and explains to citizens how the organization will be using social media.

**Examples of politicians engaging social media.** President Obama's use of social media in both the 2008 and 2012 elections has been credited as the reason he won (Woolley et al., 2013). Given the resources available to a large national campaign, it may be harder to support the use of social media at the local level (Williams & Gulati, 2012). One industry expert says they lack the resources necessary to track 100,000 local elected officials and their use of social media (Nelson, 2012).

When Dan Coffey, Anchorage, Alaska's mayoral candidate and former assemblyman, was asked by a reporter if he tweeted, Coffey asked if he should be using social media. While seemingly skeptical of Twitter, Coffey has been receiving lessons on posting to Facebook (Herz, 2013). He is not alone in the apprehension or aversion to incorporating social media. Alaskan Assemblyman Bill Starr says he may be a "dinosaur" when it comes to social media (Herz, 2013, para. 15). The assemblyman does not have a Facebook page and says he prefers face-to-face relationships to electronic one. He raises one point likely to be used by politicians hesitant to embrace Web 2.0 technologies, that he would be open to using it but does not see how it could have an immediate benefit to him (Herz, 2013).

Alex Torpey, mayor of South Orange, says people under the age of 25 or 30 often began using social media personally before they did it professionally, which may explain why it is harder to get older candidates (Diffusion of Innovation) to employ the technology (Nelson, 2012). Supporting this idea, Coffey believes he has a hard time existing in the age of technology because he “missed the genetic shift” (Herz, 2013, para. 21).

There are some strong examples of local officials effectively employing social media. Scott Smith was elected mayor of Mesa, Arizona, in May 2008 with the help of social media, as was KC Becker to the Boulder, Colorado, city council (Davy, 2009). Justin Johnson effectively embraced social media when he ran for Phoenix, Arizona, city council. He not only used it to promote himself, he also used Facebook, Yelp, and Twitter to promote local businesses by promoting campaign events at local restaurants (Baer, 2013).

Newark, New Jersey Mayor Cory Booker had 1.2 million Twitter followers as of October 2012 (Nelson, 2012) to whom he tweets to about everything from policy initiatives to old proverbs (Davy, 2009). Proof Branding speculates that Booker’s success is his “hyper-local (and hyper-interactive) sensibility” (Nelson, 2012, para. 12). Anchorage, Alaska Mayor Dan Sullivan has also embraced social media, even gaining recognition by a local blogger after posting a rebuttal to her blog. Amanda Coyne states that today constituents expect more than letters, newspaper columns, and press releases, which are not interactive. “I think it serves the public to let your views be expressed in the venue in which people are expressing views” (Herz, 2013, para. 30).

This falls right in line with social media being used as a two-way form of communication.

Sullivan was also recognized by Anchorage Police Union Treasure Gerard Asselin for answering

questions posted on Facebook, which indicated to him that the mayor wanted to have conversation (Herz, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that many people believe that social media is going to have a continued effect on American and international politics, not only on how campaigns are won and lost but also as means of social movement. Mergel and Greeves (2013), Metzgar and Maruggi (2009), O'Connor (2012), and Perlmutter (2008) evaluated how the specific candidates, causes and government organizations, are using social media in an attempt to understand its use, effectiveness and the broader social impact. This case study will look at how two candidates in two different types of elections chose to engage social media and used the election results to draw conclusions about the effectiveness.

Understanding social media is a long-term investment for local candidates for two reasons: first, local politicians often run for reelection and/or move on to higher offices (Davy, 2009; Herz, 2013; Nelson, 2012), and second, municipalities and government agencies are more actively employing social media in their general communications plans (Mergel & Greeves, 2013). Because social media will have an impact not only on their campaigning (Catone, 2012; Digitas, 2011) but also on their governing (Fillmore, 2012; Hand & Ching, 2011), this case study seeks to understand how to use the various platforms and how to make candidates comfortable and capable of using them (Herz, 2013; Williams & Gulati, 2012). Additionally, understanding constituencies' engagement in social media (Chadwick, 2006; Foot & Schneider, 2006; Marriott, 2006) is important when choosing platforms, particularly when a candidate is trying to beat a recall effort (Altman, 2011; Cohen, 2012; USMC, 2011). This case study also asks what platforms are being used for which type of campaigns.

Lastly, based on analysis of existing regulation by Robinson (2009) and the NCSL (2013), this study asks how the regulation of social media use in political campaigns is affecting the development and implementation of a campaign's social media strategy. The study will pay specific attention to the new FPPC ruling issued in September 2013 (Rosenhall, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

The role that social media plays in political campaigns and all levels of government communication is growing (Mergel & Greeves, 2013). Studies by O'Connor (2012) and Metzga and Maruggi (2009) demonstrated that social media can be effective in reaching voters but that the fact that it's a two-way communication tool presents both benefits and challenges (Kelly, 2011; O'Sullivan & Flanagan, 2003; Woolley et al., 2010). Most studies have only analyzed national elections in the U.S. and abroad (Macnamara, 2008; Williams & Gulati, 2013). Local candidates do not have the resources that the larger national campaigns do. Therefore, the results of these studies are helpful for local politicians but highlight the need to look specifically at local elections. Social media is particularly helpful for local candidates, because it is low cost, but many candidates do not use or understand the platforms (DeHaney-Howard & Burns, 2012; Herz, 2013; Nelson, 2012). The review of literature suggests that a guide to social media for these candidates would help them to engage it properly.

Recalls are usually limited to local politicians, and with 2011 being the "year of the recall" the role that social media played in those efforts was explored for the first time. Social media provides a means to engage in grassroots organization; while it was not the reason the 152 recalls moved forward it likely helped efforts (Cohen, 2012; USMC, 2011). Local elected officials were not prepared for the impact that social media would play and did not maximize its use for their personal benefit. The United States Conference of Mayors realized this and produced materials

to help local candidates in these situations. Additionally, regulations from state and federal governments regarding the use of social media in political campaigns were slow to start but are expected to continually emerge as the technology matures (Robinson, 2009). How these regulations will affect candidates' use of social media is unclear.

More research is needed to be able to fully understand the role that social media plays in elections and how candidates can use it. By considering this existing research this study sought to answer one overarching research question, which is how a candidate should effectively employ social media in a local election. This question was broken down into four manageable questions:

1. How is the candidate using social media currently?
2. How effective is its use?
3. What platforms work for which type of campaign (campaign vs. general election) and candidates individually?
4. How is the regulation of social media in political campaigns affecting the development and implementation of social media strategy?

By applying Grunig's model of two-way communication and Strategic Communication and Diffusion of Innovation theories, this study provides new insight that can help local candidates maximize the tools at their disposal.

### **Method**

Based on the previous review of literature, questions about the use of social media in local elections were developed. To answer these questions a qualitative case study was conducted. A qualitative approach was chosen based on Daymon and Holloway's (2011) characterization of qualitative research as working “‘at the edge of chaos’, which is at the point

of balance where the research has some structure but the researcher may not be totally in control if they are open to spontaneously following up on new and interesting ideas or experiences which may not have been anticipated when the research began” (p. 7). Since the objective of this study is to understand the use of social media in local political campaigns, and there is very limited prior research to rely upon, the researcher wanted to ensure that avenues were available to pursue the inquirers of this study in any direction and not be constrained to a certain line of inquiry.

Like qualitative research generally, Yin (2014) says that “a case study allows investigators to focus on a ‘case’ and retain a holistic and real-world perspective” (p. 4). He also says case studies are ideal for answering how and why questions. Because the researcher sought the ability to take a holistic approach to answering the how and why questions generated from the literature review the case study method was selected as most appropriate.

Specifically, this study will look at the use of social media in a recall effort and a general election. There will be three groups observed for how they engage social media: first, the mayor and councilmember being recalled; second, the PAC supporting them; and third, the opposing PAC and/or community group. Both candidates have conservative leanings, as do the supporting and opposing community groups. (See Appendix A for additional details about the recall.)

The analysis will look at each campaign (recall and general) as its own case then draw comparisons where possible to provide greater credibility. The rationale for using a single case is that a recall and general election are both common causes and therefore warrant research. Studying the recall and the general election campaign of the same candidate provides a point of reference and allows conclusions to be drawn about which tactics are effective for which type of campaign. Yin says a common case is something that happens every day; in the field of politics,

general elections are held every year, and recent trends show over 50 mayoral recall elections alone across the United States a year (USMC, 2011).

The candidates to be studied were currently serving on the city council for the city of Yorba Linda, California. Tom Lindsey, immediate past mayor, was being recalled and was up for reelection to the city council in November 2014, and Craig Young, serving as mayor at the time, was also being recalled. He was two years into a four-year term and was running for California State Assembly in November 2014. The United Citizens, who evolved into Residents for a Better Yorba Linda (RBYL), were anti-recall and pro Lindsey and Young. On January 12, 2014, they agreed to manage the PAC that spearheaded the opposition to the recall. The group was made up of eight members; all had been residents of the city for over 20 years and were active in city council for at least 10 years. One member was a former councilwoman. Yorba Linda Residents for Responsible Representation (YLRRR) was the PAC that initiated the recall. Its demographics were similar to RBYL their leader was a former mayor and councilwoman. Two active members of YLRRR were serving on the city council at the time of the recall. There was a long history of distrust between these two factions.

### **The Candidates and Constituents**

Yorba Linda was a relatively affluent city (average income is \$111,000) of 64,000 residents located in Orange County, California. The city was predominately residential; three quarters of the population is white, with a median age of 41 and a homeownership rate of 84.5% (United States Department of Commerce, 2013).

Tom Lindsey first ran for city council in 2010. He was a retired business owner who rented and sold medical supplies across California. He was a 25-year resident of the city where he and his wife raised their four children, who all attended and graduated from the city's public

schools. In 2010, he ran with sitting council member John Anderson for one of two open seats on the council. At the time the Tea Party movement was sweeping the nation, and they jumped on board, embracing the tag line “true conservative.” Lindsey won his seat with a four-point margin over the next candidate (Land of Gracious Living, 2010). Lindsey served a one-year term as mayor in 2013.

In September 2013 Lindsey began gathering a team to help his reelection. As it is a city council race there is no primary, so the voters would not take to the polls until November 4, 2014. He gathered a team early to maximize fundraising and start voter outreach early because he was running against his former running mate, Councilman John Anderson.

Craig Young had lived in Yorba Linda for twenty years. He was a businessman and attorney with 33 years of private-sector experience. He and his wife raised their two children in the community. He ran for his first term in 2012 and came in second place. Young kicked off his State Assembly race in October 2013.

On December 17, 2014, Lindsey and Young were both served recall papers on the grounds that they both broke campaign pledges related to low-density development and that they were fiscally irresponsible and unethical (Langhorne, 2014). Both councilmembers issued the same response to the allegations. The response said the recall was reckless and the result of their unwillingness to bend to special interests (Langhorne, 2014).

### **Sources of Evidence**

Four of the six sources of evidence were used to gather data in this case study: documentation, interviews, and participant and direct observation. Participant observation was the primary source of evidence, since the researcher was employed as the campaign manager for Tom Lindsey’s campaign and as the social media manager for the recall. By using these four

sources the researcher was able to achieve what Yin (2014) calls triangulation. Triangulation of data from different sources supports construct validity, which refers to “operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Yin, 2014, p. 46). Having construct validity helps support the conclusions that the researcher drew since case studies are often criticized for their subjectivity.

Documentation was the first source of evidence to be used. One caution when using documents was that documents are not always objective nor are they always accurate; for instance, meeting minutes can be adjusted after the fact. Using other sources of evidence helped to verify the information in the documents and provide objectivity (Yin, 2014).

For this study, documentation was collected throughout the entire investigation. The types of documents to be collected and analyzed for this study included news articles (clippings and from online sources), blog posts, YouTube videos, postings from social media accounts that supported and opposed the candidates, text of speeches, flyers, recordings and minutes of city council meetings, correspondence between the researcher (in her campaign role) and candidates and community activists. Since social media was the focus of this study, all social media pages dedicated to campaign efforts, individual pages of activist, and individual postings identified through searches using hashtags and keywords that mentioned the campaign or candidates were closely monitored and documented. Analytics were collected regularly for the Facebook pages managed by the campaign. All documents were labeled, dated, filed, and saved on a password-protected computer. Monthly, or as needed the documents were uploaded to NVivo and analyzed for the themes listed in the framework of analysis found later in this section.

The second source of evidence for data collection used were interviews. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), “Interviews are particularly well suited to *understanding the social actor’s experience, knowledge, and worldviews*” (p. 173). This study sought to understand why

the decisions regarding social media use in the campaign were made, what factored into those decisions, and if it was working. The researcher used the interview format (unstructured, intensive, or in-depth interviews) to determine the most practical and effective social media platforms for the individual and situation (Yin, 2014). Due to the length of this study there were multiple interviews with key individuals like the candidates. Interview subjects included the candidates and members of both community groups. Interviews were also conducted with voters, residents, other city officials, and campaign professionals. Miller and Glassner (2011) suggested that when a researcher's goal is to understand something new they need to understand how a participant is experiencing that particular phenomena and how they interpret that experience. Interviews are a way to gain insight into an individual's experience.

In this study interviews were conducted for three purposes: first, to provide background on the situation and give an understanding of the actors and their motives; second to discuss social media strategy; and third, to get an assessment of effectiveness. The researcher interviewed both candidates and the leader of RBYL after the election to avoid any FEC or FPPC violations. Due to the researcher's role in the campaign she was unable to interview the opposition, YLRRR, in the early stages. However, at the end of the general election the researcher attempted to interview YLRRR representatives to ask about their social media strategy and an assessment of its effectiveness. The candidates were interviewed formally or informally on an ongoing basis, particularly when social media strategy is being implemented or changed.

There are some drawbacks to using interviewing. Daymon and Holloway (2011) summarized the challenges, saying, "Problems in interviewing concern a possible gap between what informants say they do and what they actually do, the time-consuming nature of interviews

and the interviewer effect” (p. 238). But there are many strengths with this method, and of primary importance to this study was that interviews are highly adaptable and can be conducted under a variety of circumstances (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Direct observation was the third source of evidence. This mainly applied to the data collected related to YLRRR and other opposition groups’ and candidates’ social media, since it was impractical for the researcher to be a participant in campaigns for both sides. Data from direct observation was collected while doing other types of field work. It was done either formally or casually, and was useful in providing additional information about the case being studied (Yin, 2014). To enhance the reliability of direct observation a researcher can use a formal or informal partner (Yin, 2014). This researcher used a second observer when appropriate.

Direct observation was conducted in person as signatures are collected outside of grocery stores and at council meetings. The researcher recorded observations while fresh in her mind and used pictures and video taken by others to support observations; at times she would consult a third party to compare observations.

The last source of evidence used was participant observation. As Yin (2014) said, participant observation provides an “inside” perspective (p. 117). As an insider the researcher was able to experience the issues firsthand with creating and implementing a social media strategy as the campaign manager. With complete access to the candidates and the responsibility of creating and managing the social media accounts and web sites, the researcher was able to employ her experience and research in the development and execution of social media strategy and could immediately analyze the effectiveness of various tactics and strategies. This could only be done as a participant. The researcher kept a log of observations made as close to events as possible and referenced that log in the final analysis of the data.

The focus of this study was social media, but her experiences at council meetings, talking to constituents, etc., helped her develop content, meet and recruit people to “like” the social media pages, and ask others what they thought of the social media strategies used. These experiences give additional content and insight about the use of social media for the final analysis. Additionally, anytime a strategy is implemented the researcher documented any academic theories or models that influenced the strategy considered.

### **Data Analysis**

There was no set procedure to analyze data collected in case studies (Yin, 2014). As such, the information was collected and reviewed in a timely manner according to Yin’s recommendation in order to ensure that no data was misplaced. Documents and interview transcripts were added to NVivo and coded for themes related to the case study questions. This was qualitative data. The initial framework of analysis that guided the findings was:

1. How social media is being used
  - a. Platforms
  - b. Post type (links, images, original content, etc.)
  - c. Types of followers
2. How effective social media use is
  - a. Reach
  - b. Engagement/responses
  - c. Strategy/tactic changes
  - d. Lessons learned
3. General issues
  - a. Recall vs. general

- b. Lindsey vs. Young
- c. Campaign finance
- d. Legal (FPPC and FEC regulations)

These themes were preliminary selected because they held answers to the questions this study sought to answer and, it was assumed, that documents and interviews would all discuss these themes since they illustrate the state of communication for the campaign and highlight direction and course changes. These themes evolved as data was collected and analyzed.

Some quantitative data was gathered, specifically with regard to analytics from Facebook and other social media sites. The type of posts, number of likes, comments, and overall number of followers were some of the analytics used.

### **Bias and Delimitations**

There were some concerns about subjectivity that arose from use of a case study and participant observation. One of those concerns was that the researcher would become a supporter of the group. In this case the researcher was paid to manage the campaign, which included implementing a successful social media strategy that would lead to the defeat of the recall and the reelection of the candidate and this role made her a supporter. Any person in a similar role, who actively participated in the campaign process, arguably, would become a supporter of the candidate they were working for. The researcher strived to maintain her ability to be an external observer by being appropriately critical of her candidate and campaign. Additionally, analyzing the opposition gave perspective to the researcher's observations. Triangulation of data supported objectivity since other data sources were used to support the participant observation. The researcher likely was biased in the discussion of her successes and failures with implementing

the social media strategy, but that discussion answered questions and provided findings that are valuable and applicable in future campaigns.

One expected delimitation of this study was the researcher's ability to gather information on the opposition and provide a full analysis of their social media strategy. Another delimitation was the law that prevents candidates' campaigns from having direct involvement with PACs. This hindered some of the researcher's information gathering with the anti-recall PAC, RBYL, during the recall and general election. When the campaigns concluded she conducted interviews and gained access to information on their strategy.

### **Other Considerations**

This case study took place in California; through experience the researcher learned the rules and regulations for running campaigns in the state. As a result careful attention was paid to identifying those rules and their impact. That knowledge was applied to the development and implementation of social media strategy and was accounted for in the results and analysis. Also, since the FPPC ruling on bloggers was new for 2014 she had an opportunity to see the implementation of a *first in the nation* social media policy.

### **Results**

In August 2013, four months before the recall was a reality, Yorba Linda City Councilman Tom Lindsey, candidate for reelection, realized how important social media would be to his bid for reelection. During his election in 2010 he had engaged Facebook and Twitter minimally; these pages were still in existence, but neither had been updated in three years. Acknowledging his limited capabilities when using social media, he engaged the researcher to set up and maintain his social media accounts.

Using documents, interviews, and participant observation, this study sought to gain a clearer picture of how candidates realize they need to use social media and how they should use it. Facebook posts and comments were collected from seven recall and general election candidates, and four community-managed Facebook pages, tweets from three candidates, two Instagram accounts, five web pages, emails sent from four candidate newsletters, two community newsletters, along with personal emails between the researcher and Lindsey were entered into NVivo. The initial framework laid out in the methods section was altered, adding a fourth primary category called issues which includes yard signs, lifetime benefits, high density, developers, contributions, and more.

Interviews were conducted with 25 individuals, 22 of whom were directly involved in the recall and general elections covered in this case study. The other three interviewees were subject matter experts who were involved in campaign management for races ranging from local to presidential. Efforts were made to contact and interview all candidates in both races and the leadership of Yorba Linda Residents for Responsible Representation (YLRRR), Lindsey's opposition. Requests were made in person and via email to the three opposition candidates and six additional individuals involved in YLRRR. Four requests were denied, two consented to an interview but stopped responding when scheduling requests were made, and three never responded to multiple email requests. The four who refused interviews cited their dislike and distrust of Lindsey as the reason they were unwilling to participate (E. Bennett and P. Solano, personal communication, December 2, 2014). Even after the elections there is still an obvious divide between YLRRR and the rest of city, as well as hurt feelings (J. Decker, personal communication, December 12, 2014).

The researcher was the campaign manager and the participant observer. Through the following sections, campaign manager refers to the researcher in her role as the campaign manager, and participant observer is used to describe the researcher when the conclusions being made reflect an analysis and synthesis of information from across the campaign. The names of all those interviewed that were not candidates have been changed to ensure privacy. Names of individuals that posted to candidate Facebook pages were not changed.

### **Recall background and timeline of events through November**

The recall was initiated by a group of community members known as Yorba Linda Residents for Responsible Representation (YLRRR). The primary grounds cited for the recall of Lindsey were that he had broken his campaign pledge of low-density development and that this was fiscally irresponsible and unethical. Young faced similar charges. The issues over density became the focus of the recall and general elections.

Social media is the focus of this study, but as the campaign progressed it became clear that social media's role could not be viewed from a vacuum. Traditional communication tools played a role in what social media content was generated and how social media was engaged. YLRRR collected signatures by telling community members that signing the recall would stop high-density development (see Appendix B). They focused on one project in particular known as the ETCO or Lakebed project. This project has never been submitted to the city for any approvals or permits. The proposed plan by the builder is for 159 units on nearly five acres. Images of the builders design appeared on YLRRR printed material and social media not just through the recall but also through the general (see Appendix C).

YLRRR hired signature gatherers to stand in front of grocery stores and go door-to-door, paying them up to \$5.00 a signature. A total of 9,422 signatures were collected based on these

claims. Once people realized it was for a recall many were upset and felt misled, saying they signed under false pretenses, and many took to social media to share this (Ann, 2014; Edward, 2014; Maynard, 2014). The buzzword “high density” encouraged people to sign the petition without realizing it was a recall and not something that could stop high density. During this time the majority of the campaigning from those against the recall and the two councilmembers was happening on social media largely because they wanted to conserve funds in case the recall qualified.

The opponents of the recall were engaging on social media to share information about why residents should not sign the recall, and they raised funds to purchase signs. Signs are a traditional means of communication in a political campaign, and one in three interviewed feel that in this community they are still important (F. Emerson, personal communication, December 11, 2014; J. Hansen, personal communication, December 3, 2014; M. Holbrook, personal communication, December 15, 2014). Due to a miscommunication with the printer the signs were not delivered until April 23, 2014, just 21 days before the signature-gathering deadline. Once those signs were placed on major thoroughfares and in yards people were confused about what the recall was really about. During the campaign Bill Delaney, a member of Residents for a Better Yorba Linda (RBYL), said his committee, Residents for a Better Yorba Linda (RBYL), probably would have been able to prevent the recall from occurring had its signs gotten out sooner. Recall supporters criticized the signs, saying they were a lie and misleading (Rikel, 2014c).

Below is a basic timeline to understand how events unfolded in the recall and general elections.

- December 3, 2013 – Moratorium on developments voted down, 3-2.

- December 17, 2013 – Recall papers served to Tom Lindsey and Craig Young.
- May 14, 2014 – Deadline for recall proponents to turn in 8,100 signatures (20% of registered voters) to qualify the recall for the ballot. The recall qualified for the ballot when 9,488 signatures were turned in. California state law requires the recall to be held between 88 and 125 days after it has been certified; in this case that was 15–52 days before the general election.
- June 17, 2014 – City Council schedules the recall for October 7, the latest date possible.
- July 24, 2014 – Filing deadline for replacement candidates. J Minton Brown and Matt Palmer file as the anti-recall candidates and Nancy Rikel and Jeff Decker file as pro recall candidates.
- August 13, 2014 – Six people file for the two seats up in the regular November election: Tom Lindsey, Matt Palmer, Jeff Decker, Judy Murray, Peggy Huang, and Paul Ambrose.
- October 7, 2014 – The recall is defeated by 18 points, meaning Lindsey and Young retain their seats. Decker defeats Palmer by 400 votes and Brown defeats Rikel by 97 votes.
- October 9, 2014 – All six candidates participate in a televised debate sponsored by the Yorba Linda Chamber of Commerce.
- October 10, 2014 – Palmer steps aside as a candidate and throws support behind Lindsey and Huang.
- November 4, 2014 – Lindsey and Huang win the two seats on the City Council. (See Appendix D and Appendix E for complete recall and general election results).

### **Social Media: The Nuts and Bolts**

Any candidate considering the use of social media in a campaign has many platforms to choose from. The appropriate platforms are dependent on the campaign it is being

used for (P. Haas, personal communication, December 2, 2014; K. Rasmussen, personal communication, December 22, 2014; J. Rivera, personal communication, December 3, 2014).

**Platforms.** Mark Gentry (personal communication, December 19, 2014) and Alex McBride (personal communication, December 29, 2014), both campaign professionals, recommend using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Pinterest, particularly if the candidate is trying to capture the female demographic. Shane Cunningham, another campaign professional (personal communication, December 23, 2014) and McBride both said Pinterest will be a far more important platform when it allows for paid political advertisements

Beginning in September 2013 the Lindsey campaign engaged on Facebook and Twitter. This decision was based largely on the fact that these were the most popular social media platforms, but the campaign manager explained to the candidate how social media could be used, the pros and cons of the various platforms, and their potential reach. In June 2014 an Instagram account was created and linked to the candidate's personal Facebook page. This gave the researcher direct access to Lindsey's 503 friends, over half of which were Yorba Linda residents or from neighboring communities that supported him financially or with their time. Images shared on Instagram were the same as those shared on the official Facebook page.

Twitter was not very effective for the Lindsey campaign. Initially, effort was put into following others to help build up Lindsey's followers, but when these efforts didn't yield results it became clear to the campaign manager that the audience the campaign sought to engage did not use this platform. Demographics reinforced this conclusion. With 40,394 registered voters, 54.3% were over the age of 50. Pew found that nationally only 9% of the population between 50 and 64, and 5% of those over 65 engaged on Twitter which justified limiting its use (Duggan, et al., 2015).

The campaign did not want to lose its 81 Twitter followers, so all the Facebook posts were automatically tweeted through June, when recommendations were made to discontinue this because it showed a lack of interest and effort (J. Woods, personal communication, July 30, 2014). The auto post was stopped, and moving forward the campaign manager only tweeted important posts from Facebook. No independent content was created for any other platform.

Considering the competition can also help determine what platforms are most effective to engage during a campaign. The use of Facebook by all candidates engaging in social media indicates that it was the best choice. Young, the other subject of the recall, only engaged on Facebook. RBYL had Facebook and Twitter accounts but, like Lindsey, discontinued the use of Twitter after June 17, 2014. All recall candidates, and five of the six general election candidates, had Facebook accounts. The one candidate without a Facebook account was the lowest vote getter.

Lindsey, who believed social media was important, finally understood its impact with the use of paid boosts. One boost in particular, on September 16, 2014, illustrated to Lindsey how influential social media could be. This post was his blog with an image of golden parachutes, viewed by 7,000 people (6,291 paid/ 537 organic) at a cost of \$5. The post was also shared by RBYL and Young, giving it more exposure. These numbers convinced Lindsey of the value of social media by giving actual quantitative data.

**Likes.** Likes and followers are the foundation for building a social media account. In 2013 Facebook introduced a new algorithm that changed how users see content in their feed. The intent was to make sure interesting and relevant information was getting to the user. This change altered the philosophy for pages trying to get likes, which resulted in a greater need for paid advertisements.

Spending \$232.61 provided a steady increase in likes to Lindsey's page. Gaining likes became a priority for the campaign in July, and more than \$100, nearly half the entire budget, was spent in that month alone. The campaign manager observed an increase in likes on YLRRR's page that began in July after Lindsey's likes began to steadily increase, leading her to assume that they, too, engaged in paid advertising. By the date of the recall, Lindsey had 620 likes, and at the general election he had 658.

Likes also allow users to see their friends who like the page. The most effective tool in campaigns is word of mouth (R. Portillo, personal communication, December 9, 2014). In this election door-to-door efforts are credited with being the most successful and most impactful (J. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2014; P. Haas, personal communication, December 2, 2014; C. Young, personal communication, December 3, 2014). McBride (personal communication, December 29, 2014), Portillo, and Rasmussen (personal communication, December 22, 2014), say walking, attending community events, and interacting with constituents are the best tactics because this provides interpersonal communication with voters in their daily lives.

**Photos.** Of the 175 posts to Lindsey's Facebook page, 14 were status updates without an image, and nine were links with images that were either a mail icon or the title of the news source being linked (see Appendix F). The 152 images posted fall into three primary categories: informational, events and personal, and generic. Pictures that included his image were tagged as his page and also as his personal profile. The three highest-performing images for Lindsey were a picture of him and his family (89 likes), a screenshot of the results from the general election (85 likes), and the endorsement by Congressman Ed Royce (82 likes). Two of these pictures included his image. Lindsey included seven family related photos; only one was boosted and

reached 2,383 users. The organic reach of the photos fell between 239 and 1,260, with an average click rate of 42 and a like, comment, and share rate of 44.

Instagram is a social networking site that is focused on pictures. Instagram images fell into the same categories as Facebook. There were only 77 followers on Lindsey's Instagram, but every one of his 20 posts were engaged with, averaging 10 likes. Comments on Instagram were always positive. Palmer's Instagram only had 23 followers, and all seven posts received likes and comments. Images of either candidate or their family performed better than infographics on Instagram.

One challenge with images on Facebook is that to boost them only 20% of the image can contain text. This was not an issue on Instagram or Twitter. On 19 occasions Lindsey or Palmer had posts that were denied a boost for this reason. Because campaigns want to highlight the name of the candidate and date of the election, text is often necessary. There are tools online that allow anyone to test their image before posting. The alterations that had to be made to make sure the photo met the 20% rule took additional time and sometimes resulted in an image that did not convey the message as clearly. Using a strong image that will draw a user in and make them read the comment, being selective with text or using small text, and adding white space to the edges are ways the campaign manager avoided problems with the 20% rule.

By having MailChimp post blogs directly to the Facebook page the 20% rule was avoided, but this made analyzing engagements and clicks more challenging; additionally, the link on Facebook took users to a MailChimp archive rather than the candidate's website. Another drawback to this was that the images were not added to Lindsey's photos for future viewing. A solution would be to add the images as separate posts, which was not done for either Palmer or Lindsey, because they wanted engagements focused on a single post, rather than multiples of the

same posts, to best assess their reach. MailChimp is a free tool for distributing mass emails for streamlined tracking and ease of use. It should only be used to send emails avoiding the auto post option.

*Tagging.* Tagging individuals in a photo is another way that helps to maximize exposure, particularly if those individuals have a number of friends in the community. In September 2014, Palmer's oldest son and his wife had a baby. A picture was posted to his campaign page, tagging his son, and it received 111 likes; only 26 of those likes came from people who liked Palmer's page, which shows that tagging others gave broader exposure to the content, since his son's friends also saw the content in their feed. Other local candidates should consider the local online connections of anyone they consider to manage their social media. A spouse or child is likely a good choice. Without these added connections candidates miss out on accessing large and relevant audiences.

*Sanitize social media.* As a candidate is getting started in his campaign it is important to sanitize his online presence. Eliminating links created through likes on Facebook, for example, to pages, people, or causes that could be controversial is part of the sanitization process. Photos a candidate has posted or is tagged in need to be reviewed. Katherine Rasmussen, who was considering entering the campaign as a candidate early on, said that she removed any photos of her making funny faces so her opponents would not be able use those in Photoshop to portray her in a negative light (personal communication, July 22, 2014). Because the recall was shaping up to be a vicious campaign, Rasmussen suggested that Palmer and his children review the photos they were in. Because his youngest son was under 21 she advised deleting any pictures of him holding a Solo cup to avoid implications of underage drinking. She also suggested that family

members of candidates be careful in what they choose to post on their social media during a campaign.

*Video.* Lindsey's campaign manager used Windows Live Movie Maker software to produce the videos for his page. This was the first time she had used the software or done any video editing. She says the software was easy to use, and while it did not produce the best-quality clips it met the needs of the campaign. Movie Maker allows for voiceovers, which she would have used had she had the time to get a script written and approved and found someone to be the voice. There were six videos posted for Lindsey and two for Palmer. Lindsey's videos were seen by an average of 409 people and received an average of 29 likes. All video clips were between 0:22 and 2:22.

YLRRR had an active YouTube channel. It posted clips from council meetings with text overlays. During the recall and general election 11 videos were posted with an average view rate of 504. On March 11, 2014, a clip entitled "My Dog Ate My Homework" was posted to its YouTube channel. It is a clip of Lindsey, surprised to find out a deal between the developer and city to include low income housing had not been written into the proposal. The video's intent was to show Lindsey as a rubber stamp for developers by implying that he does not read the proposals he votes on. This clip was included in 53 editions of Rikel's *Yorba Linda e-News* and was posted to the YLRRR Facebook page once, where it received 17 likes and no comments. The video received 818 views on YouTube. "My Dog Ate My Homework Part 2" was published on October 16, 2014. It appeared in four editions of the newsletter and was in one post to the YLRRR Facebook page where it received 22 likes and five comments, two from the page administrator, two from a declared critic of Lindsey, and one from an assumed fake profile page.

It had 537 views on YouTube. The number of views represents individual views, not individual viewers.

**Hashtags.** In April the campaign manager began using the hashtag #tom4yl with all social media postings to distinguish Lindsey as a brand. When Palmer became a candidate she used #matt4yl. As the campaign progressed she identified other hashtags to use on both Lindsey's and Palmer's social media posts, like #YorbaLinda. As part of the brand, and to reinforce the message, during the recall she used #NoRecallYL and #VoteNoOct7, which was a hashtag used by Paul Haas, the social media manager for RBYL. There is no way to quantify what additional exposure this might have brought Lindsey and Palmer, but it was an easy way to boost visibility if someone searched for Yorba Linda on Facebook.

The hashtag appears to have boosted Lindsey's search engine optimization (SEO). When #tom4yl was entered into a Google search the first 10 results linked directly to content created by Lindsey, and eight of them linked to his social media accounts. None of these links redirect to the homepage of his website. A Google image search yielded 19 results, 15 of which were graphics created by the Lindsey campaign.

**Getting a core group to engage with content.** Candidates need likes and shares, but they also need a team they can rely on to help direct conversations on posts. Before the recall was certified the campaign manager initiated Team Tom, an invite-only group on Facebook. The idea was to leverage interpersonal communication to affect political involvement (McLeod, et al., 1999) and factual knowledge of the situation (Zhang, et al., 2009). The group included friends of the campaign manager that she knew were supportive of Lindsey. She contacted each person through a private message on Facebook, letting them know an invite to this group would be coming and explaining the goal of the organization; however she was never able to get the group

active. She tried sending a notice to them anytime new content was posted to Lindsey's page, asking them to like, comment, or share that content. With no responses and none of the invited individuals engaging with the content she changed tactics, reaching out in person to known supporters, regardless of their social media usage. She created a packet of information and engaged in phone and in-person conversations with recruits to explain the needs and goals of Team Tom.

The Team Tom Kit included: 1) an introduction that explained what the campaign was seeking help with; 2) a one-page detailed summary of high-density development in the city; 3) seven FAQs; 4) Lindsey's accomplishments; and 5) an explanation of how the campaign was seeking to use social media and how supporters could help. The kit also provided step-by-step instructions on how to like, comment, and share on Facebook and how to retweet on Twitter.

These kits were printed and distributed at a kickoff fundraiser and were sent to people that signed up for Team Tom on the official website. Only 16 people signed up for Team Tom online. In terms of social media, these kits made supporters aware of the campaign's goal to use it. By recruiting a social media team through actual conversations the campaign manager was using traditional communication tools to affect new media. She found that by talking to people she was better able to engage them online and with social media. This illustrated that word of mouth is still the most valuable tool to communicate in this campaign. Not all of the individuals engaged in this way became part of the core team, but it did get people to regularly participate with the campaign on Facebook.

**Scheduling social media content.** Posting regularly is a necessity. Facebook has a tool that allows page administrators to schedule posts and make changes to these posts before publishing them. The Lindsey and Palmer campaigns both used this tool. Another tool that can help

scheduling content on social media is Hootsuite, a tool for managing multiple social media accounts on multiple platforms. The campaign manager opened a Hootsuite account and realized a few problems immediately. Even though Hootsuite allows users to post to multiple platforms instantaneously it does not circumvent the 140 character restriction on Twitter, so separate posts had to be written for Twitter and Facebook, which did not offer a time savings. Additionally, Hootsuite allows monitoring of multiple Instagram accounts but does not permit posting directly from Hootsuite to Instagram. Being able to look at both Instagram accounts on the computer and not on a smartphone was useful to monitor engagements. The campaign manager wished she could have posted from Hootsuite as well, instead of logging into Lindsey's and Palmer's accounts individually on an iPhone, trying to make sure she knew whose account she was in. Instagram was the platform that proved most challenging to track whose account she was in and where Hootsuite would have benefitted her most.

Another challenge the campaign manager had with Hootsuite was that it did not allow for tagging in Facebook posts generated in that platform. Tagging friends, candidates, organizations, and community pages is important to campaigns, because it can help build credibility and allows access to their friends and followers. Posts for Lindsey and Palmer would tag people and organizations mentioned in posts including elected officials, the newspaper, or places.

***Social media calendar.*** Instead of using Hootsuite, a social media calendar was used for the Lindsey and Palmer campaigns to help organize and prioritize content, plan ahead, and maintain a consistent posting schedule. This calendar included all public appearances, city events, community events, and any personal events that the candidates were willing to share with followers. The calendar helped the candidates and campaign manager to coordinate content and

gain preliminary approval for postings. It also allowed the candidate to help draft content for posts and blogs when he had time.

The campaign manager believes a Google calendar is ideal because it is shared, online, and always up to date. Because Palmer was not a Gmail user and Lindsey did not like the online calendar, she used Excel and shared the document via Dropbox. This process was not as streamlined as Google calendar but it was effective. Using Excel she was able to create a calendar for all three pages she ran, include links to images, and draft posts in advance. For her, this layered calendar was especially helpful to make sure that Lindsey's and Palmer's content did not overlap or look redundant. The biggest obstacle the campaign manager faced was coming up with content for three pages that were relevant, interesting, and timely. Ideally, she says, the calendar would take some of the pressure off the campaign manager, because the candidate and others helping with content could come up with ideas or write some of the posts for the ideas suggested.

**Budgeting.** One overwhelming advantage of social media compared to traditional communication tools is the cost, ranging from \$0 to as much as you want to spend. Young said he liked the control he had over advertising through Facebook. He would post something then watch how it performed; if it did well he would spend up to \$100 to boost it to the audience he selected using Facebook targeting (personal communication, December 3, 2014). Taking a different tactic, RBYL would choose certain posts to boost then, like Young, would spend up to \$100 (P. Haas, personal communication, December 2, 2014). Its social media manager felt this was effective. Lindsey's and Palmer's campaign manager would boost anything she felt would get traction for \$5 and increase the dollar amount as needed on posts performing exceptionally well. No more than \$15 was spent to boost a post on either candidate's Facebook page.

Lindsey felt social media was essential to his campaign, and it was the central piece of his communication strategy. He spent \$3,510.14 on the campaign manager's time for social media and \$704.96 on advertising and boosting for a total of \$4,215 over 14 months. Paid social media, including the time, made up less than 20% of the campaign budget; Lindsey equated this with the cost of one mailer. It took 20 to 30 minutes for the campaign manager to draft, edit, and fact check a basic post. Posts requiring images to go with the content could take up to an hour to develop. Blog posts took anywhere from one to four hours for written content and the images for those posts averaged two hours to create. If the campaign had access to stock photography or someone who was better at editing photos and creating graphics, this would not have been as time consuming.

Lindsey spent \$232.61 on likes and \$165.36 on boosts. There was no line item for social media expenditures for Lindsey, so the campaign manager used her best judgment for boosts and likes, and Lindsey never complained. He felt the boosts were effective and worthwhile for the cost.

**Targeting.** Lindsey's team only used the targeting available on Facebook, which can identify age, gender, and location and also filter in a list of users' likes. Included in this list were local landmarks like theme parks, sports teams, companies, political affiliations, radio stations, and local stores. These parameters were included when content was boosted or when paid ads were placed on the platform. Money buys better research, but this tool from Facebook was a good start.

**Website and posting links.** The previous election indicated to Lindsey that a campaign website was worthwhile, which was why he included those costs in his budget and asked the campaign manager to work it into the overall communication plan. Building a quality website is

important for candidates. Lindsey's and Palmer's web pages were designed by local web designer Miguel Acosta using WordPress. After building the site he turned over the day-to-day management to the campaign manager. She became proficient with the WordPress platform, calling on Acosta when she ran into problems.

Acosta felt that out of the four sites he built for Yorba Linda candidates this election cycle, Lindsey's was the best run, had the most timely information, and was the most visually appealing. He says being comfortable with the technology is critical for someone to be able to manage a web page, and he thinks candidates should strive to do this or have someone who can do this for them (M. Acosta, personal communication, December 9, 2014). He says WordPress has revolutionized website development and management, because it is an easy-to-use platform. It has plugins and other options that are predesigned tools to link social media accounts, newsletter sign ups, and allow for quality design features like sliders. Managing one's own content provides for faster posts, more personal content, and a stronger vested interest. The campaign manager says WordPress is an intuitive platform that most people, comfortable online and with social media, should be able to use.

The website was constructed with easy-to-use navigation links to social media and a sign up for the newsletter/blog through MailChimp. The campaign manager would provide links back to the web page in Facebook posts to maximize a user's experience.

*Google Analytics.* Google Analytics is a tool that allows a website to monitor its traffic. It shows that 29.88% of the time users landed on the home page. The top five most visited pages were: 1) home page; 2) "Roads or Recall" blog (June 6); 3) blog page; 4) "Recall: The Details" blog (August 6); and 5) the Meet Tom page. Pages linked from Facebook to the website received an average of 15 views per day.

Referring to these analytics throughout the campaign, the campaign manager was able to see spikes in traffic after various blogs, and she used this to gain insights into the popularity of various topics. For example, the second-most-viewed page on the site was the blog *Roads or Recall: What did \$300,000 Buy?* it received 192 views the day it was posted and 102 the second day. Comparatively, the last blog posted, *November 4: Vote, Vote, Vote*, was the 29<sup>th</sup> most visited page and received 43 views.

**Donations: PayPal.** Something Lindsey was criticized for his lack of PayPal usage. Lindsey decided that he wanted to have control over every dollar that came in and out of his campaign, so he would only accept cash and checks. PayPal makes it easy for people to make donations, and it capitalizes on the sense of political pride a user may have while looking at the candidate online. Lindsey likely missed out on some fundraising dollars without it. Due to the older demographic, Lindsey's campaign manager and his fundraiser felt that PayPal was not necessary, because 85% of donors were over 55.

In the political climate in this city candidates run the risk of having online donations slip through and show up on their official campaign finance reports. Even if the money was refunded it has still been reported and could be used by the opposition to show a connection to a developer or some other person or group that helps to portray the candidate in a negative light.

### **Social Media: A Tool in the Tool Belt**

Knowing the avenues available to a candidate is critical. All of these tactics are important, because campaigns work under the belief that voters must receive five points of contact with the campaign before candidate names or messages resonate with them (A. McBride, personal communication, December 29, 2014). Social media is effective and relevant in political campaigns; however, it is just one of a variety of tactics that can be used to reach constituents and

needs to be integrated with traditional communication tools (T. Lindsey, personal communication, December 9, 2014; M. Palmer, personal communication, December 7, 2014; C. Young, personal communication, December 3, 2014). Traditional tactics like direct mail, precinct walking, calls, and signs are still important tools and should be included in the overall communication and campaign strategy (J. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2014; J. Hansen, personal communication, December 3, 2014; M. Holbrook, personal communication, December 15, 2014; C. Young, personal communication, December 3, 2014). In-person conversations were still the number-one tactic to sway voters (B. Delaney, personal communication, December 10, 2014; P. Haas, personal communication, December 2, 2014; R. Portillo, personal communication, December 9, 2014; J. Rivera, personal communication, December 3, 2014).

### **Social Media: Part of a Comprehensive Strategy**

Young stressed the importance of having a strong “ground game.” A similar concept was supported by Roland Portillo, a political professional involved in this campaign (personal communication, December 9, 2014). Controlling the ground game will ultimately enable a candidate to control the outcome of an election. The ground game uses all of the tactics and tools available to a candidate. Local activist and former political staffer Marie Holbrook (personal communication, December 15, 2014) agrees with Portillo, who said that in twenty years social media will replace direct mail but nothing will replace the personal contact of a candidate going door-to-door and attending meet-and-greets. Young says it may not have been the most effective use of his time, but he believes making those personal connections is still critical to winning an election (C. Young, personal communication, December 3, 2014).

One of the cornerstones of RBYL's campaign against the recall was a paid walker program. Having four to six walkers out five days per week for six weeks allowed them to knock on every high-propensity<sup>1</sup> voter's door — 9,000 doors in total — on two occasions. Voters not home received literature left on their door. The total cost of the program was approximately \$40,000, and Delaney (personal communication, December 10, 2014) and Haas (personal communication, December 2, 2014) both felt it was worth every penny and played a major role in educating the community and combating what they characterized as untruths that their opposition was spreading. Young also had a paid walker program run through his campaign management team that worked toward similar goals.

**Recall ballots.** Delaney (personal communication, December 9, 2014) said a major challenge the committee faced was getting people to realize they needed to vote against the recall and for a candidate. Palmer (personal communication, December 7, 2014) also mentioned this. The recall ballot included two questions for each of the councilmembers up for recall. The first question asked if the council member should be recalled, and the second asked, in the event that the council person was recalled, who should be their replacement (see Appendix G). Delaney and his wife agreed that social media was instrumental in being able to talk about this extensively and felt that Young's post was one of the best ways to show the two votes needed (personal communication, December 10, 2014). RBYL put out two mailers during the recall and included this on two trifold walk pieces, printing a total of 20,000, but social media was the most readily available resource to get this information out.

Despite their efforts, many voters thought they only needed to answer the first question, which is demonstrated by the results. Over 2,800 voters voted against the recall only and not for

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<sup>1</sup> High propensity voters targeted by the no on recall campaign were voters that had voted in at least three of the these four campaigns, Primary 2014, General 2012, Primary 2012, Midterm 2010.

a replacement candidate (Orange County Registrar of Voters, 2014). Due to voter confusion about the ballot in the recall, it is not possible to assess the effect of social media, but the pattern supports the assumptions that social media is an important tool in a candidate's campaign tool belt.

**Replacement candidates.** Social media was particularly relevant for replacement candidates. Three of the four replacement candidates came into the race as unknowns with little financial support or organization. All four of the candidates had Facebook pages, and two had Twitter accounts. Social media became the cornerstone of Palmer's campaign; Brown embraced the concept of Facebook but struggled with execution; and Decker and Rikel relied heavily on traditional campaign tactics.

Rikel and Palmer were the only two replacement candidates to use Twitter in addition to Facebook. Both Rikel's Facebook and Twitter pages, titled *Nancy Rikel, Public Servant*, were created prior to the recall, and the only posts to both were generated automatically from Constant Contact, the program she used to distribute her newsletter, *Yorba Linda e-News*. From the time recall papers were served to Young and Lindsey on December 17, 2013, through the date of the general election on November 4, 2014, no original posts or tweets appeared on either of her social media accounts. Her Facebook page had 85 likes, and Twitter had 19 followers. Her newsletter was sent 63 times from May 14, 2014, when the recall qualified, to October 7, 2014, the date of the recall election, to an unknown number of residents.

Decker launched his website and candidate Facebook page, called *Jeff Decker for City Council*, on July 23, 2014. His early posts were intended to introduce himself as a candidate and included family photos, pictures of a trip to China with his wife, humanitarian work, and interaction with his students. Also included in these early posts were invites to meet-and-greets

and fundraisers. His wife helped him maintain both his Facebook page and his website and would respond on his behalf (Yorba, 2014).

Brown had a webpage and a Facebook page. Both consisted of basic content, including his candidate statement and platform. He only posted to his Facebook page seven times and never posted after the month of August. Brown did not have anyone to help him maintain his Facebook. He knocked on approximately 1,000 doors in the six weeks before the recall. Despite his minimal use of social media he gained 91 likes and felt social media was an important tool. He plans to engage with it more through RBYL off-season efforts

Palmer was the most active replacement candidate during the recall on social media, and his content was similar to Decker's early content. Family photos, the launching of the *I Love Yorba Linda – The Palmers* page, and general community news made up nearly 40% of Palmer's Facebook postings during the recall. Also included were regular posts from MailChimp linking to his blogs. These blogs explained his positions on important issues and offered insight into him as a candidate and person. Decker occasionally posted his positions, but both men had distinctly different tones. Additionally, Palmer outnumbered Decker in likes 323 to 152 and 33 to 29 in posts from July 23, 2014, to the recall. Five of Decker's posts were repeats, which the campaign manager believed showed a lack of comfort and experience with the technology.

While Palmer had the upper hand with social media, Decker dominated traditional communication tools. Decker and Rikel appeared on two mail pieces, a door hanger, three flyers placed on doors or passed out in the community, and had three robocalls placed on their behalf. None of the direct mail pieces sent by Young, RBYL, or others opposing the recall mentioned replacement candidates. Neither Palmer nor Brown sent out any direct mail. They printed 500 door hangers that were strategically hung in certain areas of the community. Brown printed 2,500

flyers that were passed out with the literature from RBYL, and Palmer printed 1,000 similar flyers passed out the same way.

**Social media management.** A direct comparison about how social media was integrated into the overall campaign plan can be made between Lindsey and Young, since they were both subjects of the recall. Young engaged expensive and experienced campaign staff, but their services did not include day-to-day social media management. His Facebook page had over 800 likes at the start of the recall, and his content was updated, but with no real consistency since taking office in 2012. He frequently included posts with community-related interests as well as recall and campaign material. Facebook is the only social media platform Young used.

While he already had the infrastructure in place as well, as the skills and some level of comfort to post content on his Facebook, he was not engaging those resources consistently early in the recall effort. Seeking to capitalize on Young's audience, to help him post regularly, and to be mindful of overlap in content between him and Lindsey, Rasmussen volunteered to help Young. Before she could get organized and build up content Young began posting on his own. Beginning on Friday, June 27, 2014, he posted five times in three days. The content he posted was what she considered quality content that she would have saved to post during prime hours the following week. Posts included images of major construction on the town center, the Richard Nixon Library, Stefano's, and on Saturday and Sunday there were two separate postings about the real estate market in Yorba Linda. The real estate posts were timely, because his opposition was getting up in council meetings, claiming that high-density developments were causing the real estate market in the city to plummet.

Further comparisons can be made on the basis of mail and walking. Young was able to take time away from work and was therefore able to walk multiple days a week going door-to-door

asking people to vote no on the recall. Lindsey did not have the same ability to take time away from work and, therefore, only walked on Saturdays. Young put out two mailers during the recall, and, as an active member of the Lincoln Club and Orange County Republican Party (OCGOP), he leveraged relationships for endorsements and contributions. Lindsey, needing to keep enough money on hand for the general election, chose not to send out any mail during the recall. He did work with contacts he had to get endorsements and was actively raising money. They both attended meet-and-greets.

**Parallel campaigns.** In July Palmer and Decker became the replacement candidates for Lindsey, and they were also going to be candidates in the general election. Palmer and Lindsey planned on running together as running mates in November. Lindsey helped educate Palmer on critical issues affecting the city. Palmer hired Lindsey's campaign manager. Lindsey explained this complex situation shortly after Palmer became a candidate as an impossible task for the campaign manager who had to "defeat the historic recall, establish an unknown candidate to take the place of a current council member that you are trying to get reelected 28 days after a possible recall" (personal communication, July 29, 2014).

***Parallel campaigns: Role of Palmer and Lindsey.*** Neither Palmer nor Lindsey were regular users of any social media platforms. Palmer did not even have a personal Facebook page. Palmer's wife, Ann, wanted to be active in the campaign. While she regularly checked her Facebook page and posted occasionally, she was not comfortable with the platform and needed to be taught how to use it. When the *I Love Yorba Linda – The Palmers* Facebook page was conceived, the campaign manager believed that Ann had the skills needed to manage the page and develop content. However, Ann was not as comfortable with the medium, making that a challenge. The campaign manager believes that creating a "how to" guide for simple Facebook

tasks like posting and tagging would have helped. Because Ann was not able to take the reins on the page, the campaign manager felt like the page never met its full potential because she did not have the time necessary to establish and maintain it.

Through the recall both candidates supported their distinct roles through their social media use. During the recall Lindsey's messaging needed to focus on illustrating why the recall did not accomplish its stated purpose and to persuade voters to vote no. He also promoted the replacement candidates as a "backup plan," in case the recall was successful. To accomplish both goals, he shared information that corrected and refuted statements put out by his opposition.

As a replacement candidate Palmer's main role, like Lindsey's, was to persuade voters to vote no. During the recall his social media was as much about defeating the recall as it was about getting his name out there and building his reputation. Reputation-building was important, because his name would also be on the November ballot. The campaign manager worked with Palmer to make sure his social media reflected him, because the brand they built during the recall would carry into the election and possibly on to future elections. A positive message that was family centered and the creation of the Facebook page, *I Love Yorba Linda – The Palmers*, were cornerstones of his branding.

No content was shared that explicitly showed a connection between Lindsey and Palmer during the recall, but a joint social media campaign was planned to go into effect after the recall, including a shared mail piece. They would continue to have their own social media content but would actively like and share each other's content. This never came to fruition, because Palmer resigned from the general election on October 10, 2014. His name still appeared on the ballot.

Palmer announced his resignation from the campaign through an email to his supporters and auto-posted it to Twitter and Facebook through MailChimp. The resignation was picked up by

others on Facebook, including RBYL, Young, and *Yorba Linda News You Can Use*. In total 5,316 people saw the post. It received 51 likes, 16 comments, and was shared 12 times. The post explained that he was leaving the campaign because there were three candidates, himself included, who espoused the beliefs and qualities to be a leader in the community. He did not want split votes to allow those they had defeated in the recall to win the two seats on council. Palmer dropping out created some additional challenges for RBYL, because it needed to tell voters, many of whom already had their absentee ballots, not to vote for him.

**Lindsey endorsing.** On 18 occasions Lindsey mentioned Palmer or the recall, specifically endorsing him 11 times. On August 6, 2014, in a blog post that was also posted to Facebook, Lindsey endorsed Palmer as his replacement. This post was seen by 2,382 people and was shared 12 times. When the *Orange County Register* endorsed Palmer and Brown on August 25, 2014, Lindsey shared the article and added his endorsement; he also tagged both Palmer and Brown in the post. Throughout the recall his posts would say to vote no on the recall and vote for Palmer and Brown and would tag them when appropriate. Young endorsed the replacement candidates through social media, as did RBYL.

**Endorsements.** The importance of endorsements was discussed by 17 of the interviewees who participated in Yorba Linda; three considered it to be one of the three most important tactics to win a campaign in Yorba Linda. A local legal professional, past council candidate, and recall supporter discussed endorsements specifically in terms of party affiliations, saying, “Once the party affiliation decides where it wants to go, then the issue is determined and it is determined for the voter who otherwise has no guidance on this matter. People rely upon endorsements to make their decisions instead of taking the time to research the issues and come to a conclusion” (personal communication, December 10, 2014). He believes that the Republican Party weighing

in had a major impact on the outcome of the recall. Delaney (personal communication, December 10, 2014), Haas (personal communication, December 2, 2014), Portillo (personal communication, December 9, 2014), Young (personal communication, December 3, 2014) and others agreed that such a decisive defeat would not have been possible without the party endorsement. That endorsement came with three mailers from the party and another from the Orange County Taxpayers Association. Lindsey observed that endorsements are worthless if a candidate is not getting it into the literature and out to the voters. Social media was a tool that could get that information out in real-time, anytime an endorsement came along. He had nine posts that were specifically about endorsements, four during the recall and five during the general.

As Lindsey started to advertise his endorsements more after the recall, Decker tried to do the same. Lindsey's announcement of Congressman Ed Royce's endorsement came on October 15 and received 82 likes, while one day later Decker posted Fred Baltzer's endorsement, which received 11 likes. Decker reposted it five days later and got 64 likes. Baltzer is a former member of the Regan administration. Rasmussen (personal communication, December 22, 2014) said volunteers found Yorba Linda constituents willing to vote for the assembly candidate they were walking for when they found out the candidate was endorsed by the congressman.

Sometimes it's not about getting the endorsement but making sure someone else doesn't get it. Using his blog, Lindsey was able to ensure that Orange County Sheriff's Department (OCSD) did not enter the fray of the recall. Delaney (personal communication, December 10, 2014), Haas (personal communication, December 2, 2014), and Young (personal communication, December 3, 2014) all reported concern early in the recall about OCSD, because they gave \$70,000 in the 2012 election to three candidates who were supporting the recall. In July 2014 the police chief

retired, and Lindsey posted a blog thanking Chief Bob Wren for his service to the community and expressing his commitment to ensuring that OCSD had all the resources necessary to protect the city. The OCSD had been contracted as the new police services provider for the city a year before this. OCSD and members of the community believed Lindsey opposed the contract because he had voted to reconsider the previous provider's contract during the negotiations, which was another issue that had divided the city and initiated a recall that never qualified. This blog reportedly put the OCSD at ease, and it did not get involved in the recall.

**Community-run social media.** The two dominant newsletters in Yorba Linda are both run by former city council women. *Yorba Linda News You Can Use*, a monthly publication from Jan Horton, was the anti-recall publication in this case. Horton also had two Facebook pages, one by the same name and the other called *Yorba Linda Politics*. The pro-recall publication was *Yorba Linda e-News* was published regularly by Nancy Rikel, who was also a replacement candidate in the recall and led the efforts to qualify the recall. These would both be considered community bloggers (Perlmutter, 2008), but instead of just informing residents of what is happening with local government they both actively advocated for a course of action.

The *Yorba Linda News You Can Use* Facebook page has 9,539 followers; the majority of the content is submitted by community members seeking recommendations for local doctors, photographers, and construction workers; advertising a lost or found pet; or promoting local events. The page averages 11 posts a day, and more than 75% of those posts are commented on. *Yorba Linda Politics* has 501 likes, and posts are most frequently from the administrator; posts are more infrequent and, outside of election season, are primarily about city council or commission happenings. Rikel is affiliated with YLRRR, and her newsletter is auto posted by Constant Contact to the YLRRR Facebook page. This page has 769 likes.

On *Yorba Linda News You Can Use* Horton shared five posts from Lindsey's page and one from Palmer's page. There were nine posts that related to the election. Of these nine posts, four were supportive of Lindsey, three critical of YLRRR, and two were get-out-the-vote messages. On *Yorba Linda Politics* she shared 10 of Lindsey's posts on 11 occasions and one from Palmer. In addition she posted personal commentary on the page 69 times. Her commentary was supportive of Lindsey 14 times, critical of YLRRR 42 times, and issued a reminder to vote 13 times. On 68 of these posts the community engaged by liking, commenting, or sharing. Up to 19 users liked the content produced by the page or Horton herself, and the highest number of comments received on a single post was 47. That number does not take into account comments by the same user on the same post. Average rates are 8.27 for likes, 8.05 for comments, and 0.32 for shares. While it is not clear if these engagements actually changed any votes, it did serve to broaden the conversation across the community, making the issues in the community clearer. One noteworthy post on September 10, 2014, was a resident expressing disgust over the number of signs posted throughout the city. There were 83 comments from 72 individuals. While this is a small sample of the city, it was clear that people were tired of the campaign tactic.

***Community newsletters.*** Horton's newsletter is published once a month. The email containing the newsletter includes a table of contents. Politics took up the smallest portion of her newsletter and were clearly labeled. As signatures were gathered she called her section on politics "A Word about the Recall" and clearly indicated that it was her opinion.

Rikel's *Yorba Linda e-News* did not have a regular publishing schedule and was published 118 times between December 17, 2013, and November 4, 2014. The newsletter focused on a community event, public safety, or on the political happenings in the community. Content

included below the first story was repeated through multiple newsletters, including her section “Facts are Stubborn Things” and the inclusion of links to YLRRR-produced videos on YouTube.

### **Civic Engagement**

The civic engagement found in this study that specifically related to social media was all political participation, and the most blatant examples of this were community members sharing their thoughts and positions on the recall and the candidates through social media.

Anti-recall activist Jon Hansen (personal communication, December 3, 2014) discussed his personal email list, which he considers to be social media; he said people would engage him personally about the online content. Hansen says he only got involved in this campaign because he is friends with Lindsey, but through this process he was able to get educated and share information with his friends and neighbors, many whom would not have paid much attention to the city council race. By putting his political knowledge into action he was able to demonstrate what civic engagement truly is.

Horton’s two Facebook pages highlighted her civic engagement and showed how her political participation affected or motivated others to express opinions. When she posted a letter from former Mayor Hank Wedaa on the *Yorba Linda News You Can Use* page and asked for comments to be posted to the *Yorba Linda Politics* page, 20 comments went back and forth between her and others that said political content should not be posted on *Yorba Linda News You Can Use*. Some commenters argued that political content should not be allowed if the other side was not allowed to post comments on that page. Horton argued that this is important community information and, as such, was posted because it was consistent with the mission of the page. Recognizing that it could turn into a heated discussion, she asked that comments be put on the politics page.

**Social Media: Messages**

Message consistency through all communication mediums used is necessary for campaigns and includes a consistent and authentic voice in all written materials. Lindsey's campaign message was threefold: 1) maintaining local control; 2) ensuring fiscal sustainability; 3) protecting quality of life. During the recall he used these three messages to support claims that the recall would not stop high-density developments and would put the city at risk of violating state law.

**Social media and the candidate's voice.** To capture Lindsey's vernacular, cadence, and sentence structure the campaign manager reviewed tapes of city council meetings and recorded him speaking at various events. She included actual sentences and phrases from emails or speeches in written content. Lindsey noted that the written content sounded like him and expressed his ideas, making it easy to use in his speeches and dialogues with voters (T. Lindsey, personal communication, December 9, 2014).

When asked if Lindsey's social media and blog posts sounded like him Young (personal communication, December 3, 2014) noted that they sounded consistent but not like Lindsey. Acosta (personal communication, December 9, 2014) and Holbrook (personal communication, December 15, 2014) also said the blogs sounded consistent, were engaging and well written but that they knew it was the campaign manager writing so they could not say whether or not it sounded like Lindsey. Hansen (personal communication, December 3, 2014) said he felt the blogs sounded just like Lindsey. Lindsey's wife also indicated that the posts sounded very similar to him (N. Lindsey, personal communication, December 9, 2014).

The campaign manager was also Palmer's voice on social media. Palmer said he felt everything the campaign manager wrote represented his views, and he always saw phrases from

their conversations appear in print. Like Lindsey, he reported getting feedback at the gym and church from friends, who said they liked what he had written (M. Palmer, personal communication, December 7, 2014). There are distinct differences in how social media pages were managed by the candidates in this case. Each page was done differently and was a reflection of the candidate. The way comments were responded to, how negative posts were deleted, and posting community information unrelated to the campaign, among other things, were ways each candidate expressed him or herself. Young's content was direct and message driven, included community information and shared photos of family for a personal touch. He actively monitored his page and would delete comments and ban users as he saw fit. Lindsey posted community information and shared content that included his family as well. His campaign-related posts included factual information and was to the point, using relatively little hyperbole. Rasmussen (personal communication, December 22, 2014) said she appreciated the "humorous and somewhat whimsical" way Lindsey provided information in his blogs. Decker's social media posts and responses were consistent with the way he presented himself in candidate forums and over the podium at council meetings. Palmer and his wife discussed Decker's post that appeared after the first candidate's forum when his wife told him he needed to be more like Palmer (personal communication, December 7, 2014). In this post Decker said that he really was a nice guy and included a picture of himself smiling (Jeff Decker for City Council, 2014a). The researcher had multiple interactions with Decker in person, on the phone, and over email, and she says comments from those personal communications and his social media matched. Brown (personal communication, December 9, 2014), Delaney (personal communication, December 10, 2014), and Hansen (personal communication, December 3, 2014) all had personal dealings with him as well and made similar conclusions.

**Comments.** Lindsey and the campaign manager knew negative comments were possible, and likely, when they decided to use social media. In April the campaign manager looked into cities that were implementing social media policies. She assumed that, like a city, a public official would face similar criticisms for any perceived censoring on Facebook. She decided that a social media policy would be good to have but was not necessary for Lindsey, because his Facebook page was privately managed (no public funds were used to create or maintain the page), making all content on the page subject to the owner's discretion. In September 2014 she began to regret this decision. McBride (personal communication, December 29, 2014) says posting a policy is important, because the policy can be referred to in a note sent to the commenter explaining why their content was taken down.

Prior to August the campaign would engage on direct questions, but after Lindsey logged into the Facebook page and responded to one of his most ardent critics, the campaign manager said no more responses. Mike Jansen, a believed fake Facebook profile, asked about contributions from developers (Jansen, 2014a). Lindsey responded himself, saying his campaign took no donations from developers (Lindsey, 2014); Jansen came back asking about a video from YLRRR that shows Lindsey and Young thanking developers (Jansen, 2014b).

After this a "no response" strategy was adopted; instead of engaging with a critic or clarifying a misstatement Lindsey's campaign manager would wait, and supporters responded on their behalf (T. Lindsey, personal communication, August 25, 2014). All of the comments the campaign manager felt needed a response were responded to by supporters, making it unnecessary for the candidate to engage. The campaign manager felt it was prudent to keep the page, and therefore the candidate, above the fray. By doing so true two-way communication on the page ceased since the candidate was not responding any questions or statements.

**Banning users.** The campaign elected to ban users sparingly. Eddy Jackson, an outspoken critic of Lindsey's, posted comments beginning on December 20, 2013. These comments consistently distracted from the conversation and were intended to discredit Lindsey. On June 16, 2014, Lindsey posted that he had over 400 followers. Jackson responded, "How many of them are developers?" (Jackson, 2014b). In April Lindsey announced the support of the state senator via Facebook. Jackson commented, "In 2012, Huff raised \$1,169,601 in campaign contributions. His largest donors came from the insurance, health professionals, and REAL ESTATE sectors, with the ... CALIFORNIA BUILDING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION" (2014a). This was done with the intent of tying Lindsey to developers, which his financial statements proved was not the case.

On June 17, 2014, Jackson announced his candidacy<sup>2</sup> for the recall election during public comment at a televised city council meeting, at which time the campaign manager banned him from the page. This prompted the campaign manager to discuss a policy about banning candidates with Lindsey. They agreed that there was no reason to allow an opponent to reach the audience that they had built through organic and paid advertisements. The policy was never shared but was understood internally.

Judy Murray filed papers to be a candidate in the November general election on August 13, 2014, but she was not banned from his Facebook page until after the recall, a concession due to their existing relationship. Prior to her banning she posted comments criticizing Lindsey's positions on issues, saying he lied, and condemning his choice of content.

A citizen claiming to have no association with any community groups was banned after abusing his ability to post comments. On the "Recall Santa" blog post (Tom Lindsey 4 Yorba Linda City Council, 2014b) he commented five separate times but was not banned until his

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<sup>2</sup> Jackson never filed papers to run in either election.

second comment on Lindsey's post sharing the article from the *Orange County Register* endorsing him and Huang (Tom Lindsey 4 Yorba Linda City Council, 2014b). Marsile's repetitive comments detracted from the conversation. Lindsey's approach to banning set him apart from Young. At the September 16, 2014, council meeting a resident spent five minutes during public comment repeating her disdain for Young and how his use of his Facebook page. Young has a public Facebook page called *Mayor Craig Young*; when this woman posted a negative comment on it, he removed it and then banned her. She asserted that he could not delete her comments and ban her because he had "mayor" in his page name. While Lindsey's campaign had been leaving unflattering comments, this incident reinforced the value of letting comments stay. The campaign manager believed she was preventing another avenue that could be exploited to discredit Lindsey. Since Young was not facing reelection in November, his social media management style may have been the best for him, but because Lindsey had to defeat a recall and get reelected 28 days later he needed to use different social media management strategies.

***Fake profiles.*** Fake Facebook profiles complicated the approach to deleting comments and banning users Lindsey was using. A fake profile page can be determined by looking at the profile and cover photos, friends, likes, and date joined (M. Holbrook, personal communication, June 3, 2014; J. Rivera, personal communication, July 12, 2014). Betty Norris and Mike Jensen cannot be officially confirmed as fake pages, but according to the campaign manager, background checks were done on both individuals, and the investigator reported that neither individual exists. Comparing the syntax, vocabulary, and content of posts, the campaign manager believes she knows who was behind them. Delaney (personal communication, December 10, 2014), Haas (personal communication, December 2, 2014), and Holbrook (personal communication,

December 15, 2014) agreed with her assessment. Jansen was ultimately banned after posting an YLRRR video to Lindsey's page and calling him a "doofus" (Jansen, 2014c).

Cunningham (personal communication, December 23, 2014) has run into issues with fake Facebook profiles on past campaigns. McBride (personal communication, December 29, 2014) says that only real Facebook accounts should be recognized, and only their comments should remain. Fake profiles make it hard to attribute the content to either faction. On June 3, 2014, Betty Norris posted a video by YLRRR that shows Lindsey and Young thanking developers for contributions during a council meeting. The campaign manager hid the post from Lindsey's page, waiting to discuss a response with Lindsey. As soon as she did, Norris reposted, saying, "I asked if this was true, and you deleted my response" (Norris, June 3, 2014). A few hours later the campaign responded publicly, but this more negative comment was visible on the page for a couple of hours.

**Negative campaign messages on social media.** Commenters called Lindsey's golden parachutes blog post (see Appendix H) a negative campaign tactic. This blog post discussed the revelation that Rikel would be eligible for lifetime pension and medical benefits if the recall was successful, and she was seated as a member of the city council. The post suggests that she initiated the recall in order to claim these benefits that would be suspended with the passage of Measure JJ<sup>3</sup> in November. Lindsey took his argument a step further, saying that voting no on the recall would stop the city from having to pay her benefits after she cost the city \$300,000 by initiating the recall. This post reached the highest number of people of any post in the campaign — 7,000. This issue became the primary message for those working to stop the recall for the

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<sup>3</sup> Measure JJ was a ballot measure on the November 4, 2014 election for the city of Yorba Linda. The measure would suspend lifetime benefits to all current and future council members not already qualified. The measure passed 85.5%.

duration of the campaign (B. Delaney, personal communication, December 10, 2014), and the image was used by Young on a print flyer.

Response to this blog on Facebook, via email, and in person included claims that Measure JJ was not conceived until the recall had qualified (Murray, September 20, 2014a); the benefits issue had nothing to do with the recall (Rosales, September 16, 2014); and that he was resorting to petty personal attacks (Murray, 2014b). Three days later Lindsey's first video was posted, which included a clip of the city attorney dismissing the claims that Lindsey would not be eligible for lifetime benefits because he would not start his fifth year until December and the measure would be effective immediately following the November election (Tom Lindsey 4 Yorba Linda City Council, 2014a). The issue did not die with the recall and continued to be a key point from Rikel and YLRRR in the general election (Rikel, 2014a). Among the variety of slogans that appeared on the hand-painted signs put up by YLRRR was one that said, "Stop Lifetime Benefits; No Lindsey."

To portray Decker as a liberal Democrat, RBYL exposed a contribution he and his wife made to Michael Dukakis's 1988 presidential campaign. This backfired, with 19 of the 26 comments criticizing RBYL for bringing up such old information (Greer, October 24, 2014; McCune, October 24, 2014; Postma, October 24, 2014). Haas, who was responsible for the message, said the intention was to show that Decker had flip-flopped on his political affiliations, which he believes are established by the mid-thirties, Decker's age at the time of the contribution. Had he anticipated this kind of response he would have never used this kind of content (personal communication, December 2, 2014).

***User-generated content.*** Hansen printed six banners at his expense and placed those on private property throughout the city. The banners read, "Shame on Decker, \$300,000 Wasted"

and “Decker = Rikel’s Puppet.” One sign was vandalized, and Hansen took to *Yorba Linda Politics* to draw attention to the issue. His post received 49 comments; most were critical of the tactics both sides were using. Hansen posted a sign next to the vandalized banner which read “Vandalized by Jeff Decker supporters. No respect for freedom of speech” (Hansen, October 24, 2014). Decker subsequently banned Hansen from his Facebook page and posted a copy of the private message where he said he had no idea who vandalized his sign (Jeff Decker for City Council, 2014b).

Another example of user-generated content was a YouTube video produced by a local resident (Oppose the Yorba Linda Recall, 2014). The video looked at the set of facts surrounding the recall and tied them together in a way that explained why residents should vote no. The video was shared by RBYL and others and was viewed through Facebook by over 4,000 people.

### **Social Media and the Law**

Social media is a relatively new means of communication, so the laws regulating its use are just beginning to emerge. The review of literature discussed a new California regulation that requires disclosure of paid bloggers (FPPC, 2013). None of the candidates or committees involved in this case study met the \$1,000 threshold for reporting, so no conclusions can be drawn about the regulation and its impact on free speech. This case highlights the issues that candidates and others were having effectively managing social media without thwarting free speech. This relates to the issues with removing comments and banning users, which were discussed previously.

**Free speech challenges on social media.** The previous discussion of two-way communication lays out the issues of social media management. These include deleting comments and banning users. Delaney (personal communication, December 10, 2014), Hansen

(personal communication, December 3, 2014), and Young (personal communication, December 3, 2014) think candidates have complete discretion over how they manage social media, while Cunningham (personal communication, December 23, 2014), Haas (personal communication, December 2, 2014), and Rivera (personal communication, December 3, 2014) advocate for ground rules on social media management. Horton (personal communication, December 4, 2014) and McBride (personal communication, December 29, 2014) specifically say that rules should be posted on social media pages. These rules need to be decided by the individual candidate and constitute a social media policy. Examples of possible rules are no profanity or personal attacks (J. Horton, personal communication, December 4, 2014), comments should stay on topic for the thread (A. McBride, personal communication, December 29, 2014), no warning will be given before deleting (S. Cunningham, personal communication, December 23, 2014), and enforcement of rules is at the candidate's discretion (C. Young, personal communication, December 3, 2014).

**PACs, committees, and candidates.** The Federal Elections Commission (FEC) has rules relating to campaign finance, prohibiting candidates and committees from coordinating communication efforts to prevent corrupting financial contributions (11 CFR 109.21). The campaign manager, Lindsey, and RBYL were all aware of these rules from the beginning and took measures to ensure compliance. In this case the arguments to combat the recall were straightforward, so the inability to coordinate did not impact any of their effectiveness. Haas (personal communication, December 2, 2014) observed that while the candidates were out sharing information and campaigning early in the recall the committee was still conducting polling on messaging. That polling showed that Young and Lindsey were using the most

effective messages, like the \$300,000 cost of the recall. The polling provided additional guidance to RBYL for fine-tuning those messages (P. Haas, personal communication, December 2, 2014).

Having a campaign manager gave Lindsey peace of mind that his campaign was being run in accordance with state and federal rules and regulations. Lindsey prefers to have a campaign team made up of volunteers from the community. With the recall, many of those volunteers were active with RBYL, and he was concerned that the crossover in volunteers would give the appearance that he was violating the law. Even the appearance of this would have been exploited by his opposition (T. Lindsey, personal communication, December 9, 2014).

**Ethics violations.** From January through July 2014, YLRRR members and associates filed five ethics violations with the city. The two violations against Young related to campaign contributions, and the violation against Lindsey related to his website. In July a complaint was filed claiming that Lindsey had violated the ethics ordinance when he directed those viewing the city council meeting to his website, where they could review data about the real estate market in Yorba Linda. The complaint said this was campaigning from the podium, since Lindsey's website is a campaign site paid for by contributions to his campaign committee. Ultimately, Lindsey was cleared of any wrongdoing.

Lindsey knew he could not campaign from the podium and had directed people to his website, because they were asking for this information. He referred people to his site, because it was the only place he knew he could post the information (T. Lindsey, personal communication, July 15, 2014). This was another tactic his opposition was using to discredit him and a clear illustration of the way that the truth and the law could be bent to carry out someone's agenda (B. Delaney, personal communication, July 30, 2014; J. Horton, personal communication, July 28, 2014; A. Moss, personal communication, July 21, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

The social media platforms used by Lindsey and Palmer were Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Facebook had the most content and was the platform engaged by the other candidates as well as the community. The results show that images are the most effective type of posts; users like to see pictures of family and other personal content; and sharing information with strong visual aids to catch users' attention. Hyperbole has a role in campaigns but, when used with visuals, needs to be backed up with facts, like in the case of the golden parachutes.

Managing social media effectively can be time consuming, and while it can be done for free, paid advertising and boosts increase exposure and assist in generating additional likes. Without a following, social media is ineffective. The number of likes and posts engaged with indicate how active the candidate was. Users want to engage with a candidate that provides valuable content and who is accessible.

The ability for users to publicly post comments to a candidate page presents some problems, but an active following and a response policy help combat the negative repercussions. In this case user comments resorted to name-calling or posting information that was irrelevant to the discussion; repeated abuses like this resulted in the banning of users. This raised some legal concerns but the pages are private and Lindsey, like the other candidates, has the right to protect his brand.

## **Observations and Future Research**

This case study was undertaken to determine whether or not social media is necessary to win local political elections. The results support the conclusion that using social media is dependent on the candidate and the race. Social media needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis and should include an analysis of the constituency, an assessment of the candidates

capabilities, an evaluation for integration into the comprehensive communication plan, an inspection of competitors social media, and projections of cost and time necessary to use it.

Due to the recall, the campaign in this study was more expensive, lasted months longer than a traditional campaign season, and drew a significant amount of outside attention. Instead of having the standard six to eight weeks of campaigning this case had seven months of active campaigning. Residents were aware, concerned, and involved in this campaign because of the use of emotional appeals in relation to high-density development. This provided an ideal situation to conduct this study, since there was a significant amount of activity that occurred on social media. Due to the 28 days between the recall and general election Rasmussen, Haas, Lindsey, and the campaign manager agreed that Lindsey won the general election at the time of the recall and that social media was an inexpensive tool that allowed him to maintain his status.

### **Choosing Social Media Platforms**

The review of literature considers the role of social media in elections at a high level. It focused on concepts of flaming, user-generated content, and near real-time nature's effect on journalism. It also noted that there are many platforms to choose from.

**Platforms.** Today Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the most -used platforms by campaigns. LinkedIn can also be important but was not used by any candidates in this case. Pinterest is most effective with female audiences and will likely make the list of top platforms in 2016, for statewide and national campaigns, when political advertising is permitted (A. McBride, personal communication, December 29, 2014). NextDoor is a closed platform that individuals register for to connect with their neighbors. Police and fire departments have access to it to send out safety information, and individual users can also post content. LinkedIn and NextDoor need further study if users are to understand their impact on local campaigns.

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, coupled with an email campaign, were the platform used by both Lindsey and Palmer. The candidates in this case that used social media all engaged on Facebook, and some used Twitter but with no consistency. Ultimately Twitter was abandoned by Lindsey, Palmer, and RBYL. Instagram as a platform is useful, because it is image driven. Images are the most effective posts. Using this platform helped the campaign manager remember to take pictures at events and to use an image in all postings. Instagram also allowed the campaign manager to use Lindsey's personal Facebook page for campaign purposes. Lindsey and Palmer were the only two to use Instagram. Because Facebook and Instagram are linked, using it is repetitive, but it ensures that followers on both platforms see the same message twice. Because of this it is advisable to use Instagram strategically to share important messages.

***Demographics.*** Demographics should play a large role in deciding to use social media and which platforms to engage. Age, race, and socioeconomic makeup of the constituency would be three of the major factors. These factors will indicate who has access to computers, engages with social media, and what platforms they are using. The size of the community where the candidate is running also needs to be taken into account. Discussions with campaign professionals for this study indicate that social media is necessary in communities with populations over 100,000 (A. McBride, personal communication, December 29, 2014).

Demographics were not part of the initial criteria in choosing social media platforms to use for Lindsey. Facebook and Twitter were selected because they were the most popular platforms. As the campaign progressed demographics were considered when the decision to stop using Twitter was made. A Pew study showed that Twitter was not broadly used among the major age demographic targeted in this election (Duggan, et al., 2015). Lindsey essentially had no engagement with followers on Twitter, which prompted the campaign manager to reconsider

its use. The demographics were shared with Lindsey, which resulted in his support for using Twitter for important messages only.

**Resources.** Each candidate and each campaign are different, have access to different levels of financing and time, either of staff or volunteers, and because of this a candidate should choose to use the platforms that will reach voters and that they have the time and ability to maintain. Taking into account how a candidate uses social media personally in daily life will help determine if social media should be used. In Lindsey's and Palmer's cases, neither used social media personally, but both wanted it to be the primary communication medium of the campaign communication plan, so they employed someone to do it for them.

Most local candidates have limited financial resources, so each dollar has to be carefully considered. Lindsey chose to redirect funds from traditional communication mediums to fund the campaign manager, who had social media included in her duties. Ultimately social media was helpful in this case, but a different result, had it not been used, was unlikely. Had Lindsey not paid the campaign manager, his wife and daughter would have used social media to an extent. While this may not have been as effective, it would have ensured his online presence at no cost.

**Budgeting.** Budgeting for social media is necessary. There should be a line item for dollars allocated to Facebook ads. To determine this figure, potential local candidates need to consider the size of the audience they want to reach, if they want to do ads, boosts, and likes, and how much they want to spend on the person creating them (M. Gentry, personal communication, December 19, 2014; A. McBride, personal communication, December 29, 2014). Both Lindsey and the campaign manager note that their strategy centered around the cost-effectiveness of social media; they both agree that without the outside organizations putting out mail that

included his name his reelection bid would have likely failed and the recall would not have been defeated by as large of a margin.

**Message.** Local candidates also need to consider the message their campaign is trying to share and the tools within each platform that help get that message out. Social media was a central part of Lindsey, Young, and RBYL's campaign in the recall. They used it and their websites to post information and links that provided voters with additional information. Their primary message was that a recall does not change anything in relation to the state housing mandate. This was something that was hard and time consuming to explain, so the social media helped them do this in a way that is coherent, informative, and that included visuals that caught users' eyes.

In contrast, YLRRR did not have a cohesive message, which made its use of social media ineffective. Determining the platform of a candidate before choosing a communication strategy will allow for more effective messaging and will determine which communication mediums are best to get that information out. This will help the candidate determine how many resources will be needed for social media as well as at what point to engage them.

**Posting.** Regular updates, including pictures and videos, are necessary to engage the audience. Finding content to post was the biggest challenge, according to the campaign manager. Keeping an eye out for community events was one way she found content. Posting images and updates at events is another way to generate regular content. This also serves a greater purpose, because it shows how active the candidate is by documenting activities and providing a means of accountability to constituents. Lindsey now takes pictures at every event he attends to post to Facebook as a way to keep his page active until the next election. Fact-checking, proofreading,

and discussing potentially controversial post are all steps that should be taken so the candidate does not create an issue for him- or herself.

Integrating social media into a candidate's daily routine will help the candidate to manage social media pages and see and respond to comments in a timely manner. Having a smartphone makes managing social media easy, because it can be done anywhere. Applications available on smartphones provide notification functions that alert a candidate to any activity on their page.

***Personal social media.*** While assessing the need for social media, local candidates and their families should review their own existing social media pages and remove unflattering pictures, videos, and likes, as well any comments that are questionable. Guidelines for future posts should also be discussed to ensure that nothing embarrassing or inappropriate is posted during the campaign. This may seem paranoid and overly sensitive, but content individuals share via social media has negatively affected politicians and their staff (Hu, 2013). In December 2014 a communications director for Rep. Stephen Fincher (TN) resigned after criticizing the demeanor of the First Daughters during the annual White House turkey pardoning (Parkinson & Dwyer, 2014).

**How a candidate uses social media.** The first research question considered in this study asked for an evaluation of how a candidate currently uses social media. That question should have asked how social media should be used by a candidate. This is because a candidate does not have to be the person actually using the social media in a campaign. Considering the voters and their use of social media is more important, because a candidate needs to be using communication tools their constituents will consume. The previous discussion illustrates that there are a number of factors that need to be considered when making the decision to use social media, and a candidate's capabilities are just one of those considerations.

The third research question is similar to the revised first question. It asked which platforms are better for which type of campaign and candidate. Social media was used the same in both the recall and general elections. Social Information Processing Theory, discussed later, better answers the second part of the question relating to candidates.

#### **Strategically choose social media platforms.**

Consider the demographics of the constituency.

Identify the resources/ personnel available to manage social media and their capabilities.

Include a line item for social media related expenses in the budget.

Determine what the campaign messages will be so the platform that will convey them most effectively can be engaged.

If using multiple platforms ensure they convey a cohesive message.

Regularly provide status updates including pictures and video.

Incorporate monitoring of social media into the candidate's daily routine.

Candidates and their families should review and edit their personal social media pages.

*Figure 1.* Recommendations for future candidates about choosing social media platforms for their local election.

#### **The Nuts and Bolts**

The review of literature failed to capture the nuances of social media including likes, hashtags, and managing personal accounts. These things pertain to the day-to-day management of social media accounts, and understanding them is necessary to implement effective social media. These also help to answer the second research question: how effective is social media? Understanding the day-to-day management of social media, and knowing what tools are available, will help local candidates ensure that they are maximizing the benefits they can get.

**Recruiting.** Social media can be harnessed to bring in donations, recruit volunteers, and galvanize supporters. In this case RBYL posted its mail pieces to show donors what work it was doing with their contributions. Delaney (personal communication, December 10, 2014) and Haas (personal communication, December 2, 2014) believe that this brought in additional funds to RBYL, which paid for the walk effort, a critical effort for defeating the recall. Blog posts, like the golden parachutes, were effective in solidifying support. It is unclear if Facebook puts a

candidate in communication with new voters at a rate that makes a difference in the election results, but what is certain is that it is a good way to stay in touch with supporters. A candidate's base should not be taken for granted. Lindsey had friends and neighbors tell him they had no idea what was going on with the recall until they checked out his Facebook page. Some would ask how they could help or say they were telling their neighbors to vote no on the recall. Many of the volunteer walkers showed up on Saturday mornings in response to an email or Facebook posting. Facebook and the email campaign for Lindsey resulted in many requests for yard signs.

The goal of every campaign is to win. Winning is a team effort; recruiting that team and keeping them informed is made easier with the use of social media. It was interesting that Team Tom was initially unsuccessful but that once the campaign manager started recruiting volunteers through conversations the likes on Lindsey's page increased. Team Tom never reached the goals set by the campaign manager, but a Rikel newsletter (Rikel, 2014b) criticized Team Tom, which Lindsey and campaign manager took to mean that Rikel was threatened by the effort. So while it did not bring in the numbers that were sought it did cause problems for the opposition.

**Targeting.** Overall, targeting is the best way to ensure the message is reaching the right voters, especially with social media. This historically has been done with traditional communications. Targeting with social media continues to evolve, making it a more effective tool. Local candidates need to identify voters who support and oppose them so they can target communications to those who are undecided and necessary for them to win (A. McBride, personal communication, December 29, 2014).

**Likes.** Before Facebook changed its algorithm in 2013, likes served a more significant role in getting content into the feed. Now only 6% of people who like a page actually see that page's content in their feed, making the organic reach ineffective (Smith, 2014). Even though likes do

not serve the role they used to, they were still important in this campaign and should be part of all local campaign strategies. The campaign manager found that recruiting through Facebook alone was not nearly as effective as using word of mouth. To build the Facebook audience she would tell anyone interested in helping Lindsey to stay up to date with the campaign by liking his Facebook page.

Getting users to like a page does more than just keep them in touch with the campaign; those likes are the first indication to new users regarding how popular a page is. The number of likes on a Facebook page is prominently displayed at the top of a page and is accompanied by the profile pictures of the user's friends that like the page. The number alone infers popularity, and by seeing their friends that like a page, a user is more likely to scroll through and like the page. Likes do not put a page's content into the feed the same way they used to, but they do help reach out to other Facebook users.

***Hashtags.*** Hashtags are a social media phenomenon. Acosta (personal communication, December 9, 2014) says the hashtag generally is not being used for its intended purpose but is still something anyone seeking to build an online and social media presence should engage in. According to Christensen (2013) and Parmelee (2014), hashtags represent topics of discussion and can be used to further exposure of a person or issue. This study shows that the use of the hashtag lends credibility and gives the appearance that the user is social-media savvy. Palmer and Lindsey were the only candidates to use them regularly, and Acosta and Rasmussen agree that seeing them in the post made both candidates appear realistic and more technologically savvy. Creating a specific hashtag for every campaign and candidate is an inexpensive way to gain exposure and to capitalize on social media use and should be considered by other local candidates.

**Content.** With the advent of the 24-hour news cycle and the near real-time realities of social media, local candidates and others helping with social media can feel pressure to share information. The goal of Lindsey's campaign was to post regularly, even daily as both election days approached. The challenge with this was finding worthwhile content. The challenge was compounded as replacement candidates were added to the mix, because this stretched the limited amount of fresh content.

Businesses, brands, and candidates alike all have the same problem with providing content that people want to consume. Local candidates must be careful, because they risk losing users if they post frivolous content; but the same can happen if they don't post enough. Posting every three to four days on average for a local race similar to this one is a good guide. Posting timely information, like updates from city council meeting, may not be the most exciting content but demonstrates the candidate's involvement in the community.

***Posts and platforms.*** Using different social media platforms requires identification of additional worthwhile content or taking more time to repackage the same content to post to different platforms at different times. Lindsey's and Palmer's campaigns both used the exact same content across all social media platforms at the same time. The campaign manager discovered that this did not do anything to increase engagement or reinforce the message to voters. Different platforms allow for the message to be packaged differently and reach different voters, which means messages need to be tailored to each platform and, therefore, audience. The 140-character limit on Twitter impedes sharing complicated information, so the most important and compelling part of that message should be used with a link that can provide more information.

Local candidates need to recognize that limited resources will prevent them from including different content on every platform. What is important is consistent and quality engagement on the platforms used. Creating one quality post should be the priority, and if more than one platform is used by the candidate additional posts can be generated if the resources are available.

**Timing.** The best time to post on Facebook is Wednesdays at 3:00 p.m., and the worst time is weekends before 8:00 a.m. or after 8:00 p.m. (Gillett, 2014). Haas, who ran RBYL's social media, and Lindsey's campaign manager both posted in accordance with this. Paid boosts would also help get content into the feed that was posted outside these times. When content was created ahead of time it was scheduled to post at high traffic times. Blog posts for Lindsey were sent via email and posted to social media on Wednesdays or Thursdays as a general rule. The goal for posting is to get the candidate's content in front of as many people as possible, but because campaigns are unpredictable, content may need to be posted during hours with lower traffic. Some content was posted as soon as it was created regardless of the timing, like the video clip of the city manager addressing lifetime benefits, because getting on the record sooner was more important. Facebook allows posts to be boosted later during times of higher visibility.

The content posted by Young in June was timely but not time sensitive. It addressed some critical issues related to the campaign, namely the real estate values in the city. By posting at low traffic times he lost some of the impact and viewership that could have been leveraged. He did pay to boost some of these posts, which offset the negative of posting at low traffic times.

**Photos.** The review of literature did not discuss types of posts that can be used on social media specifically. The results of the case study support the findings of MIT (Fizz, 2013) and Mashable (Buck, 2012), which have found that using images increases the exposure of a post on social networks. Lindsey only had 23 posts that did not include an image.

There are different types of images, and in this case they fell into three categories: informational, events and personal, and generic. Generic images are those that show sites in the city, stock photos of individuals, and clip art. These provide a visual but, compared to the other two categories, do not do much to educate voters or show them who the candidate is. Photos of a candidate at an event or with family are important for personalizing the candidate particularly in local campaigns. Traditional communication mediums have always used these types of images, and social media allows for a greater number of them. Facebook specially allows the creation of albums, a series of images from an event. Creating albums of events gives the candidate the opportunity to tag others from the community in their photos, which makes them feel like part of the campaign and boost exposure, because friends of those tagged will see the images in their feed. People like to feel part of a campaign and to have a personal connection with a candidate. Tagging provides that.

The informational category includes images with text overlays of campaign messages. In this case the images were stock photography, clip art, or pictures of the candidate or his opponent. The most memorable informational image for Lindsey was the golden parachutes. Other images included money going down a drain with words asking about the \$300,000. RBYL replicated this image in its print material. These images catch the eye of voters and stay with them. Designing these images is relatively easy; Young designed all the ones used on his social media himself. Developing the concept and finding the appropriate visual can be a challenge, and sharing it with others before publication is advisable.

***Video.*** The method section stated that a YouTube channel would be created for Lindsey. This did not occur, because the first use of video by the campaign was on September 17, 2014. At that time it was determined by Lindsey and the campaign manager that hosting the video on

Facebook was the most practical approach, because they did not want to lose viewers by redirecting them to YouTube. They also felt that directing viewers from the web page to Facebook would increase the chances of the user engaging with other Facebook content and liking the page.

Haas and Rasmussen observed that voice overs are more professional than substantial amounts of text scrolling across the screen, which is how YLRRR videos are produced. Windows Movie Maker, the software used by Lindsey's campaign manager, had this capability, but it was not feasible to write and approve a script on the timetable she faced. This is one thing she would have changed. Even with the text overlays YLRRR videos did receive a sizable number of hits. This shows that voters were responsive to this format. Lindsey may have missed some voters by not using more videos. If videos can be kept to 15 to 30 seconds they can provide a benefit but longer vides will only by consumed by those who are interested in the campaign, and those individuals typically have selected a side already. Local candidates need to remember to use formats that will reach and sway undecided voters.

**Tagging.** All social media platforms provide some way of tagging others in posts. On Twitter it is a mention, and on Facebook and Instagram it is tagging. This links a user from a post to a person or group, which is important, because the post will appear in the feed of others mentioned or tagged. Tagging is an easy way to get content in front of people that a local candidate does not usually have access to. It can also provide credibility if the person being tagged is an elected official or an opinion leader. Unfortunately, there was no way to determine if tagging played any role in gaining likes on Facebook or votes in the election. There is also no way to gauge the effectiveness behind local candidates tagging other candidates. Lindsey tagged both Palmer and Brown in posts to boost their visibility and inform his followers about them.

**Endorsements.** Endorsements were not considered in the review of literature. The findings in this case support Tarde's (1903) conclusion that political decisions were not made by average citizens but rather were a reflection of the citizen's group membership (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, p. 710). The local candidates in this case all believe that endorsements were critical for success in this campaign. Organizations like the OCGOP played a major role in the recall by sending out mail and taking a formal position against it. One pro-recall voter says that this effectively determined the outcome of the campaign.

Future local candidates need to create a list of influential endorsements in their community and then contact those on the list asking for an endorsement. The community in this case responded strongly to endorsements from elected officials and political parties. This dismayed Lindsey, who felt that individuals more directly involved in the community should have more influence over voters.

Endorsements play a role in voter psychology. Today most voters use slate mail to decide their votes. Slate mail comes from organizations that give a list of candidates that support their point of view. If voters believe the same basic principles of that organization they will likely vote for that slate of candidates. This is not likely to change, because voters do not have the time or inclination to do the extensive research about a local candidate on their own. This means that endorsements will continue to be a major factor in voter decisions, and therefore the outcome of elections and social media will not change this.

***Social media versus endorsements.*** Lindsey ran a campaign based on social media; without the outside interest and endorsements this strategy would have failed. Budget was the driving force behind this strategy and will likely be the driving force for many local campaigns. Endorsements, specifically party endorsements were critical to the success of the local candidate

in this case. Pursuing endorsements from individuals and groups relevant in a candidate's community, could be the difference between winning and losing. Endorsements bring tangible support, like mail sent on Lindsey's behalf.

Palmer, who had a strong Facebook presence and web page, demonstrated why social media is still not the silver bullet and how influential endorsements can be. Palmer had the advantage of campaigning for 11 weeks before the recall, an online presence, contributions, a walk effort, a running mate, and some momentum, but he realized this was not enough to put him over the top to be successful in the general election. Without the endorsement of OCGOP, the congressman, state senator, and other groups, he knew his name would not be on the slate mailers sent out by the party and other organizations. He stepped aside, via a social media announcement, endorsing Lindsey and Huang, who were both endorsed by those groups and individuals.

**Website.** Websites and blogs were the first online tools used in political campaigns in 2004 and evolved into social media in 2008 (O'Connor). Today major candidates have to have a website, but this is not the case for local candidates. Lindsey and Palmer both had active websites. RBYL's site was text heavy, making it less appealing to voters. It also had a number of options in the heading that were cumbersome. Decker's site was well designed and included updated information. Murray had a website that was essentially worthless because of the lack of content. This case illustrates that simply having a website is not enough; it needs to be updated regularly, be easy to use, and be visually appealing.

Having a website was helpful in this campaign, because not everyone in the community used social media, but most used the Internet (T. Lindsey & A. Moss, personal communication, September 16, 2013). It was another resource that could be used to highlight the positions and accomplishments of Lindsey. It served as a repository for historic blog posts and included more

detailed information social media users could link to the site with more detail. Because of this the campaign manager felt that the website gave validity to the campaign.

***Interactive websites.*** The review of literature indicated a need to make websites interactive (Perlmutter, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2002) and more of a two-way communication tool (Macnamara, 2008). The web pages for Lindsey and Palmer were designed to include direct links to the Facebook and Twitter pages, a link for direct email to the candidate, and allowed visitors to sign up for the newsletter on the site, providing more two-way communication. A direct link to the *I Love Yorba Linda – The Palmers* Facebook page on Palmer’s site was also included. Palmer’s site featured a plugin with a live feed from Facebook. This plugin showcased his last three posts, which ensured that his homepage always had fresh content. There are no analytics to compare Lindsey’s site to understand the effectiveness of the interactive webpage; however, with WordPress the tools to make a page interactive are readily available and easy to use.

**Community-run social media.** Social media in Yorba Linda also afforded the candidates coverage in local online forums. Local bloggers serve the community, because they draw attention to issues that affect people but are not covered by the news as discussed in the review of literature (Perlmutter, 2008). Rikel and Horton both had social media pages and newsletters that served as the community blog. The anti-recall side believes that without Horton’s support it would not have defeated the recall. While there is no doubt that Rikel’s page was influential, the overall role of social media in the outcome of this election was minor.

Neither Lindsey nor Young ever had any say in the content Horton posted, nor did they select which of their posts she shared. Horton was able to bring an educated and experienced voice to the debate. Rikel’s newsletter represented the other side of the debate, and the community benefited from having both sides of the argument represented in the public domain.

However, Rikel's newsletter had a clear bias, but unlike Horton, that bias was not made clear. Additionally, Horton would engage online through her Facebook pages with supporters and detractors; Rikel, unless doing it under a fake name, did not make herself available for questions or to defend her claims. Any local candidate considering running should find out if similar community-based outlets exist in his or her area.

**Evaluating effectiveness.** As mentioned, the second research question addressed the effectiveness of social media. The types of posts, their reach, and the impact of websites and community social media all help to determine what is effective. Images were found to be the most effective posts. Proper timing also helped to make social media posts more effective. Effectiveness should be evaluated for each post. Understanding the candidate's audience will help each campaign better tailor their messaging, making it more effective. Essentially social media is as effective as a candidate wants it to be, because its effectiveness is based on regular use and quality content.

<b>Using social media.</b>	
	Use social media to share campaign messages, recruit volunteers, solicit donations, and galvanize supporters.
	Identify target audiences for paid advertisements.
	Likes are the online yard sign; getting likes helps spread information on- and off-line.
	Hashtags are an easy way to brand the candidate and boost SEO.
	Only post worthwhile content.
	Different messages for different platforms are ideal but creating one quality post is more important if resources are limited.
	Identify the days and times that maximize exposure of posts.
	Use images as frequently as possible.
	Tagging other people in posts and images increases visibility and can provide credibility.
	A website is not necessary but if used should be interactive; plugins with live feeds from social media pages is one way to do this.
	Identify community-based blogs and newsletters and leverage those pages and publications if possible.
<i>Figure 2.</i> Recommendations for future candidates about using social media in their local election.	

## **Diffusion of Innovation**

Diffusion of Innovation manifested itself throughout the campaign. One interesting manifestation was Lindsey's and Palmer's belief that social media is an important tool that they should engage; at the same time, they expressed no real interest in learning how to use it themselves. Lindsey maintained a personal Facebook account on an infrequent basis and has never logged into his Twitter account, created in 2010. He did not understand basic terms like "sharing," "liking," "following," or "the feed." Despite this, he grew to rely on social media throughout his campaign.

Lindsey began to see the benefits of social media when his pages were actively maintained and his blogs were sent by email blast through MailChimp. He became convinced of the need and effectiveness of these platforms when paid boots were used beginning in April 2014 (T. Lindsey, personal communication, September 17, 2014). He believed that these "turbo boosts" were influential in his campaign and helped him understand how important social media is for a local candidate (T. Lindsey, personal communication, December 9, 2014).

**Candidates and social media.** Candidates engaged social media differently, which can be attributed to technical skill and personality. Diffusion of Innovation can explain this in part because it considers the individual's integration of new innovations (Williams & Gulati, 2013). Young regularly engaged Facebook since his first campaign in 2012 and was comfortable with the Facebook platform. He was also able to write his own content and design his own images. Comparatively, Lindsey rarely used social media platforms on his own but would work with the campaign manager on content. He actively monitored the page and occasionally responded to posts on his own. He may not have been the one pressing the "post" button, but he was very active in all the social media decisions.

In Brown's case it is noteworthy that he believed in the technology, had some comfort and experience with using it, and wanted to engage it; but he did not have a campaign manager or other volunteer to help him, so his efforts were instead funneled into walking door-to-door. The minimal use of social media platforms by candidates can be taken to either support the conclusion that they were using what was best for the audience or give credence to the Williams and Gulati (2010) finding that age is the most influential factor when it comes to adopting new innovations, specifically social media, in campaigns.

*Examples of diffusion: Not just candidates.* Foot and Schneider (2006) and Williams and Gulati (2013) assert that constituents are the main factor in diffusion of innovation, because any new innovation employed by a candidate has to be accessible by the voters he or she is targeting. The following examples support the assertions that diffusion of innovation of the constituency has to be considered when determining use and platforms. This study assumed that social media users generally understood the basic purpose and practices of social media, which turned out to be an over-estimation.

The campaign manager assumes that the individuals who accused Lindsey of using their names under false pretenses liked Lindsey's page in his 2010 campaign. They saw this as an opportunity to make Lindsey appear desperate for support by lying and misrepresenting himself by listing them as likes. Instead, they highlighted their limited social media expertise. The campaign manager believes that attempt failed and instead highlighted their ignorance and Lindsey's professionalism. It is entirely possible that they did not understand how Facebook worked.

RBYL supporters wanted to use Decker's page likes against him; both the campaign manager and Haas were concerned with this tactic. Similar to the incident with Lindsey,

individuals were again trying to use a candidate's social media to discredit them. Haas explained, "We don't know why Mr. Decker liked that page; maybe a former student runs the organization, and he is just being supportive" (personal communication, October 10, 2014). The campaign manager explained to Young that she likes a number of pages in her personal account to stay abreast of their activities and not because she supports them. Young disagreed with her concerns, saying people have to be careful what they like on social media (C. Young, personal communication, October 9, 2014). While Young was effective using his own social media, this instance showed a lack of understanding of social media's intended use. The campaign manager and Haas agree that more social-media-savvy voters will see through these kinds of tactics (personal communication, December 2, 2014). In this case, candidates and supporters alike used social media, but neither seemed to fully understand the innovation. It is clearly being adopted, but it will take time for full diffusion to occur.

### **Communication Mediums**

The review of literature noted that social media is a great new tool, but campaigns need to continue to engage traditional communication tools. Social media alone cannot win an election; in this election it likely resulted in additional votes, though it is unclear if those votes were enough to make it efficient. Candidates need to remember that it takes five points of contact to get a voter to remember a candidate; social media is an inexpensive and relatively easy point of contact. In this case social media was the primary point of contact for both Lindsey and Palmer, while other candidates relied more on traditional communication mediums like mail and going door-to-door.

Out of all of the recall candidates Rikel had name recognition, personal access to presumably a few thousand email inboxes with her newsletter, and she appeared on triple the amount of print

material as Brown, who was an unknown. Even though her social media posts were automatically generated, they were consistent, making her use of social media arguably better than Brown's. Decker defeated Palmer, which can be attributed to triple the amount of exposure in print mediums and robocalls. Looking at it this way makes social media appear irrelevant, because Palmer was markedly more active with social media and lost. The one factor that this analysis does not take into account is the sentiments of residents. Looking at comments from various Facebook pages, it can be concluded that Rikel is a divisive figure and the tactics she and YLRRR engaged during the signature-gathering, namely signature gathers at the grocery stores, were met with significant disdain that manifested itself at the ballot box.

Looking at the outcome of the recall, the conclusion can be made that social media had no effect on the results, since Palmer, who engaged mostly on social media, and Rikel, with her email newsletter, both lost. However, social media was used extensively by the anti-recall effort. Palmer is the best case to assess the effectiveness of social media in this case. He was an unknown, never appeared on a mailer, and only used social media, door-to-door, and meet-and-greets to advertise himself. While he did not defeat Decker in the recall, he did receive over 4,600 votes after campaigning for just over two months, and he still came in fifth out of six candidates in the general election after suspending his campaign. The one city council candidate who came in behind him only used signs and had no social media presence, walk effort, or direct mail campaign.

**Social media should be part of a comprehensive strategy.** Social media is a new tool that is being added to the traditional tools on the campaign tool belt, and it needs to be integrated into the communications plan. Portillo observed that anti-recall candidates and organizations were good at integrating content across multiple platforms and ensuring that the message they were

putting out was consistent, something he said their opposition lacked (personal communication, December 9, 2014). From his perspective, YLRRR and its candidates would throw a lot of different content out, hoping some of it would be effective in convincing voters, which is not only a poor tactic but also confuses voters and dilutes the point.

Young, Lindsey, and RBYL all used social media pages to reinforce the message put out in their traditional mediums. They also used social media to go more in depth on the issues by providing additional background and facts on the platforms or by linking to their websites. It allowed them to use video and link to outside sources to back up their claims. The near real-time nature of the medium, discussed in the review of literature, allowed them to “break” news and post content that could be immediately consumed instead of waiting for a few days to turn around mail or other print materials. These three campaigns were vigilant about ensuring that the content posted to their social media pages was consistent with what was being disseminated via mail and door to door. RBYL and Young would both post images of the mail pieces that they sent or received. Anything Lindsey talked about online he worked into his talking points when he went door to door. Young would take content posted on social media and print flyers that he would use in conjunction with other materials when he went door to door or just around the community generally (personal communication, December 3, 2014).

Door to door and mail tactics were considered two of the most effective tactics by those interviewed for this study. Social media, in this case study, was used to share and elaborate on the information appearing in print communications. Messages important enough to make it to print were considered most persuasive, and echoing them through social media increased their exposure. Understanding the traditional communication mediums is necessary to effectively engage social media.

*Lindsey and Young: Compare and contrast.* There were some differences between how Lindsey and Young used communication tools during both elections, but specifically during the recall. Lindsey attributes the difference in the tactics to the fact that the recall was different for each of them (personal communication, December 9, 2014). Had Young been recalled he would have been off the council for at least two years; Lindsey was up for reelection 28 days later. He says this was like a second chance that Young did not have. Lindsey loved this city, and he wanted to ensure its sustainability, which is why he fought in the recall. Some criticized his lack of traditional communications, but he says borrowing money or employing consultants that would try to get him to run a more negative campaign were not worth it to keep his seat. He directed his campaign manager to ensure that they were running a “gentleman’s campaign” in the recall and general elections. He acknowledges that without the other organizations in this recall he probably would not have survived as a politician, but he would have maintained his integrity. Having supporters willing to do the “dirty work” and defend him in public and on social media also helped immensely.

### **Two-way Communication**

Two-way symmetrical communication is intended to provide publics the ability to talk to an organization, ask questions, and give reviews (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). It makes organizations acknowledge and respond to publics, making it preferable to one-way communication.

Traditional campaign communication mediums are one-way sources like mail, newspapers, door hangers, and television ads. Websites are also mainly one-way communication. These mediums are used for advertising and get the candidate’s message out with the goal of swaying voters.

Social media facilitates two-way communication. Two-way communication is a means for organizations to engage their publics with the purpose of creating a higher-level dialog. To

engage two-way communication candidates have to understand how to use the technology to show an online audience who they are.

**Candidates using two-way communication.** In this campaign all but one candidate, Rikel, attempted to employ social media as two-way communication. Her social media pages only contained auto posts of her newsletter from Constant Contact. The same auto posts were on YLRRR's Facebook page and received some comments there; however, Rikel never responded to comments. Horton, who was not a candidate in either of these races, provides a similar service for the community and was active in responding to comments. Rikel clearly was using social media for PR or advertising purposes only, with no interest in adding to the community dialog.

**Comments.** Campaigns should strive to have two-way communication. The dialog, when it is appropriate and respectful, is likely to lead to better policy decisions, stronger community relations, and may inspire civic engagement. Appropriate and respectful dialog on a candidate's page is not likely based on this study. However, this campaign has led Lindsey to believe that the time between elections may allow for true two-way communication (personal communication, December 9, 2014).

Comments, even those that are critical but respectful, need to remain posted to ensure the two-way communication. Statements that misrepresent facts or derail the relevant conversation are not constructive and should be removed. It is important to monitor comments posted to the candidate's Facebook page for two reasons: first, to respond to legitimate questions, and second, to delete offensive and demeaning comments. Gentry (personal communication, December 19, 2014) suggest that free speech ends when comments become offensive and demeaning. Cunningham (personal communication, December 23, 2014), Gentry (personal communication, December 19, 2014), and McBride (personal communication, December 29, 2014) agree that a

one-response strategy to comments posted on a candidate's page is best, because it shows engagement without getting into a back-and-forth between a user and the candidate, which does nothing to advance the conversation. When using social media platforms for a political purpose true two-way communication is not possible or advisable.

This does not mean every comment with a negative connotation is removed. Candidates do not want to sterilize their page; they need to look authentic, and comments that question a candidate's positions help to do this. Candidates should remember that they are a brand and should ensure that content posted to their page does not damage their brand with offensive and demeaning comments that do not contribute to the overall conversation. Campaigns should only allow comments that are germane to the conversation to remain on their page; setting forth rules of engagement is important for candidates so they can remove content that does not fit the broader purpose of their social media. This study found that campaign professionals believe the majority of comments to a candidate page are unproductive, and because there are limits on staff and resources, campaign officials need to set ground rules for itself that include not changing their own content once it has been posted to prevent contradictory messages and acknowledging that social media cannot be a free for all.

**Combating comments.** Regardless of platform, social media is most successful in a local race when the candidate has a following. In addition to the one-response policy for candidates, having a group of supporters that are willing to post responses to negative comments will help combat them. The supporters serve two purposes: first, they increase the exposure of content, and second, they can respond to questions and accusations posted to a candidate's page, saying things the candidate should not. In this case, followers were necessary to combat some of the negative commentary and to help redirect a conversation

**Negative campaign messages on social media.** Negative campaign messages work. They have worked for years in elections at all levels. Candidates, committees, the community newsletters, and individuals all engaged in some level of negative campaigning, both on- and offline, during the recall and general elections in this case.

Differences in social media use during the recall and general elections were anticipated; however, the volume of negative campaigning during the recall was the only difference. The two elections essentially ran together, because they were separated by just 28 days. The quality of negative campaign by Lindsey's opposition in the recall served to create a dialog and raise issues. Lindsey's opposition used social media as well as traditional media to share their positions. Overall, the quality of this debate was worthy of public consumption. During the general election, they stooped to name-calling and sign-stealing.

Lindsey was criticized for some of his blog posts that were deemed negative, but these posts all had facts to back up every claim. He was subjected to negative campaigning in the majority of Rikel's newsletters. These are both cases of politics as usual. The actions of YLRRR during the general election took negative campaigning to a new low. The best response in this case was to continue running a campaign with integrity. Ultimately candidates need to have a thick skin and determine early on what kind of negative campaign they are willing to engage in.

***User-generated content.*** Individuals were also involved in negative campaigning. This content included comments and posts to a candidate's or committee's page and content created and shared by individuals. This description fits the definition of user-generated content (O'Sullivan & Flanagan, 2003). This content can be good, bad, or neutral and has the potential to take on a life of its own, causing problems for a candidate in any race (O'Connor, 2012; O'Sullivan & Flanagan, 2003).

Fake Facebook profiles, namely that of Mike Jansen, were responsible for most of the negative user-generated content found on Lindsey’s page. These types of comments, and the ambiguity of this user’s reality, demonstrated that a social media policy would have been helpful to combat this content. His content distracted from the key points and devolved into name-calling. Supporters often directly engaged Jansen to combat his content or his promotion of YLRRR content. Anti-recall material, including a video, was created and shared by users. This video specifically was promoted by RBYL and others. So user-generated content has both pros and cons, and candidates should be prepared to address or remove the negatives and promote the positives.

<b>Social media as a communication medium.</b>	
	Engage traditional communication mediums; social media alone will not win an election.
	Use social media as two-way communication by:
	Monitoring activity on social media pages and removing comments that are offensive, demeaning, detract from the conversation, or misrepresent facts.
	Using a one-response policy when responding to legitimate questions from real profiles.
	Allowing respectful but critical comments to remain on the page to ensure authenticity.
	Engaging supporters in efforts to respond to and refute critical comments.
	Provide facts on social media or campaign websites that support negative campaign messages.
	Create a list of influential endorsements from the community and then go after those endorsements.
<i>Figure 3.</i> Recommendations for future candidates about using social media as a communication medium.	

### **Civic Engagement**

The hope is that using social media will lead users to some action — in this case, voting. Social media can also inspire civic engagement. According to Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela (2010) and Zhang and Chia (2006), civic engagement is the ultimate goal of political involvement. The entire recall effort was essentially derived from civic engagement and relied on civic engagement to be successful. The recall initiators appealed to community members to sign a recall; they drew attention to the high-density issue and were able to qualify the recall. Research has shown that people who participate in civic engagement generally have larger social

networks (de Zuniga & Valenzuela, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Son & Lin, 2008). When the recall became real, community members who participated in civic engagement and opposed the recall got active. Their Facebook efforts touched more people than those of their opposition did. They were also able to muster a larger volunteer force and, through efforts like Team Tom, leveraged their personal social networks. The findings also support the role of interpersonal communication in civic engagement, as mentioned earlier (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Verba, Schlozman, Brady & Nie, 1995).

While it is clear that civic engagement played a role in this recall, it is difficult to judge what that role was and how much of an impact it truly had. Looking to the *Yorba Linda News You Can Use*, *Yorba Linda Politics*, and YLRRR Facebook pages, some assumptions can be made. First, *Yorba Linda News You Can Use* received some criticism from users when political information was posted; those posts received attention that showed people not associated with YLRRR or RBYL were aware of what was going on in the community and had opinions.

**The future of RBYL.** Moving forward, RBYL is committed to embracing this idea of civic engagement, expressing little interest in being a political organization. Its goals are to get people engaged in the community through service activities, provide easy to access calendars with community events, give periodic updates about what is happening at the city council, and organize meet-and-greets in the off-political season. While it will remain a political organization, its desire is not to pick winning and losing candidates but to support individuals who have the city's best interest at heart.

Social media will be the cornerstone of its efforts because of the low budget it requires. "We want to bring people together to do good things for the city," says Delaney (personal communication, December 10, 2014). "The city needs to heal and this group can help. While I

am not a regular user of social media I know that it is an important tool that will help us accomplish our goal.” Brown also plans to get more involved with social media through this (personal communication, December 9, 2014).

### **Social Information Processing Theory**

This study shows that managing a candidate’s social media, from content to implementation, can paint a fairly clear picture of the candidate. Historically, people have been getting to know politicians through mail, volunteers, television commercials, and the news. The only difference between social media and traditional communication mediums is that it allows for two-way communication. This alone does not justify holding it to a different standard.

**Interpersonal communication.** Social media is similar to the kind of interpersonal contact that is engaged in by candidates when they go door to door and attend community meetings, because it personalizes the candidate in a local race and shows a constituent which of their friends and neighbors like a candidate. Online interpersonal discussions affect political involvement (Calhoun, 1988; McLeod et al., 1999) and increase factual political knowledge (Eveland & Scheufele, 1998; Scheufele, 1999, 2000), meaning interpersonal communication plays a significant role in the success and failure of campaigns and is worthy of future study. People trust the opinions of those they know, which is why yard signs in residential yards are more effective than are the same yard signs on major streets. On Facebook, users can see which of their friends likes a candidate. This is the digital equivalent of a yard sign.

Getting likes and followers was evaluated in the review of literature as it relates to Social Information Processing Theory (SIP), because the number of followers a person has is one way to make judgments about that person (Tong, et al., 2008). For instance, likes show popularity and

can be used to compare with other candidates. Because they help people make judgments in computer-mediated interactions (Tong et al., 2008) they are evidence of SIP.

**Candidate's voice.** Social Information Processing Theory says people can build relationships online using computer-mediated nonverbal cues. Researchers have voiced concerns about hiring individuals to run a candidate's social media, saying there can be a disconnect between who the candidate really is and his or her online presence (Woolley et al., 2010). Gentry (personal communication, December 19, 2014) and McBride (personal communication, December 29, 2014) both agree that fears of losing authenticity and opportunities for relationship-building with candidates because someone else serves as their voice online are not reasonable. Candidates do not write their own mail, so why should social media be any different?

A family member or trusted volunteer can be enlisted to help manage and maintain a candidate's social media. In this case paid help was used to manage social media in two of the campaigns; a third candidate's social media was managed in conjunction with a spouse. Young managed his social media himself and was able to produce quality content regularly, which indicates that it is possible for a local candidate to manage social media on his or her own. Candidates with staff in larger races should not be spending more than 20 minutes on social media (S. Cunningham, personal communication, December 23, 2014).

The campaign manager feels that the responses she received from Lindsey, his wife, and other supporters indicated that the written materials used on- and offline sounded like Lindsey and clearly expressed his views. This disproves concerns about losing the candidates' identity by employing someone to manage social media on their behalf. Lindsey said people would come up to him at church to say how much they enjoyed a blog post and to get more information about the recall (T. Lindsey, personal communication, December 9, 2014).

If a candidate chooses to have someone manage his online presence it is advisable to use someone who is around the candidate and knows him or her personally. Engaging expensive firms usually buys more experience and resources, but it lacks personal touch. When Brown entered the recall as a city council candidate a firm had drafted a well-written candidate statement that lacked personal touch, so Brown went with a draft from two local consultants that included statements he had made.

**Personality in social media.** This study showed that the online “voice” of the candidate is not the only way voters begin to know candidates. Beyond the actual words, how candidates, or those acting on their behalf, used social media told constituents a lot about the city council candidates. The candidate’s personalities manifested themselves through social media use. Using social media is defined by the content posted, how it is posted, if the candidate engaged with comments, how comments are managed (deleted), and whether or not users were banned. This essentially allows the effectiveness of each candidate’s social media to be assessed.

Rikel, Decker, and Murray all engaged social media rather ineffectively, and the personalities that showed through in their social media use were likely not as positive as they would have liked. Their posts were inconsistent; in Rikel’s case, posts were automatically generated. Decker consistently accused Young and Lindsey of unethical behavior, talked about the high-density problem, and provided only one solution: recalling them and electing him. Palmer’s social media, on the other hand, was warm, had a sense of humor, and was created to drive home his core message: “I love Yorba Linda.” Murray spent more time commenting on other pages than posting to her own. The assumption can be made that Rikel didn’t care to engage on social media, since she only used auto posts and was not responding to comments. Because Facebook is more interactive, she may not have given this impression had she just used

Twitter, which is less interactive. Doing that would have prevented her from communicating with the larger Facebook audience.

**SIP 2.0: Networked Relationship Cultivation Theory.** This study considered Social Information Processing Theory to help explain that the interactions between users and politicians were real and provided honest insight into the candidates' positions, specifically when the candidate was not writing the actual posts. Campaign professionals dismissed this as a concern, and the study showed that, at least in the case of Lindsey and Palmer, people who knew them personally did not discern that the campaign manager was the voice online.

SIP can be used loosely to explain this manifestation of candidate personalities showing through social media use; however, the phenomena would be best explained by a contemporary theory that relates specifically to social media. SIP is used to explain the communication between individuals through computer-mediated means (Velasquez, 2012; Walther, 1992; Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2011) and show how the non-verbal cues are generated and conveyed (Tong et al., 2008). The theory falls short of explaining the specific interactions that social media facilitates between individuals and organizations, companies, and politicians. Individuals and groups that fall into these categories are interested in communicating with individuals but are not seeking to build the same kind of relationships that SIP was created to address.

SIP is best used to discuss personal-relationship-building and, more specifically, relationships that will likely be longer term and have the potential to translate to offline relationships (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2011). Groups, politicians, celebrities, companies, opinion leaders, and journalists have a strategic need to develop relationships with their individual audience members, and social media makes this possible. These interactions are

not the same as person-to-person interaction. Any person or group that falls into these categories has a persona and an agenda they want to convey. They want something other than a traditional relationship out of the interaction, for example, a fan, a voter, or a customer. In these cases, a theory needs to be less concerned with ensuring that computer-mediated interaction is a true reflection of the individual but instead explains how the social-mediated interactions between the branded entity and individuals drives them to the desired action.

This theory is Networked Relationship Cultivation Theory. This theory is rooted in SIP, because it seeks to explain the computer-mediated interactions; but instead of looking specifically at person-to-person interaction it allows for the relationships between the public and public figures or organizations to be considered.

**Preferred platforms for candidates.** This new theory, Networked Relationship Cultivation Theory, is rooted in SIP, specifically considers the manifestation of candidate personality, and addresses the part of the third research question which asks which social media platforms are better for which candidates. The platform the candidate uses should be that which will be most effective, but candidates should also consider how their use of each platform is perceived by the public.

### **Legal Issues of Social Media**

Regulations of social media were the subject of the fourth research question. Campaigns, along with companies and government agencies, have to determine how to handle this new public forum and the negative comments that come with it. The primary legal concerns found in this case related to the First Amendment due to accusations of suppressing free speech by deleting comments and banning users. This was not explored in the review of literature, but First

Amendment issues surrounding social media are making national headlines and are being taken up in the courts.

The reason Facebook and other social networking platforms are engaged by candidates is to help get messages out. To effectively disseminate a message via social media requires the use of two-way communication. The way this done is where the legal issues relating to the First Amendment arise. There were no legal issues with the way the pages in this study were managed, mainly because they were all personal pages that did not use government resources. There were, however, other challenges faced, mainly by Lindsey and Young, that had legal implications, including accusation of ethics violations and the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) rules related to PACs.

**History of First Amendment issues and social media.** Legal challenges are emerging in relation to the removal of negative comments by government agencies. On September 3, 2014, Dimitrios Karras used the pseudonym Jim Block to post under a thread about braking for school busses on the San Diego Sheriff's Department Facebook page: "Sheriff Gore: Do you plead the 5<sup>th</sup> about involvement in the murder of an unarmed woman who was holding her baby? REMEMBER RUBY RIDGE." The day before, he posted a similar comment under his real name.

Karras says his First Amendment rights were violated when the department removed the two posts and banned him from posting in the future. He filed a lawsuit in federal court on October 27, 2014, in which his attorney argued that sites like Facebook are the modern public forum and that, therefore, government agencies should have "limited latitude in censoring" (Davis, 2014). Counsel for the county said Karras' comments violated posted participation guidelines and were off topic. As a result of the lawsuit the department deactivated its Facebook page "to avoid the

time, expense and hassle necessary to enforce the Department's policies regarding comments" (Associated Press, 2014).

The first case of this type in the nation was a 2012 lawsuit between the Hawaii Defense Foundation and the Honolulu Police Department. The foundation argued that the department arbitrarily deleted comments that were unfavorable (Associated Press, 2012). As a result of the lawsuit, HPD now allows unrestricted posting (KITV, 2012).

Government agencies are not the only ones experiencing challenges in using social media as a two-way means of communication. In June 2013 Indiana Gov. Mike Pence was criticized when his staff deleted hundreds of comments responding to his comments supporting a state constitutional ban on gay marriage (Murray & Sikich, 2013). Pence initially said his staff targeted uncivil posts but later came out apologizing, recognizing that some comments were deleted because they disagreed with him. In addition to the apology, the governor said his office would review its practices and post a formal standard of conduct to clarify the rules for engagement (Murray, 2013).

**Free speech challenges on social media.** Candidates should implement policies that are posted to all their social media pages and platforms indicating how they will manage their pages and the content posted to them, including how they will handle deleting comments and banning users. These policies should list the types of comments that will be deleted, whether or not warnings will be given, and the criteria for banning a user. Including a disclaimer stating that the page is managed by the candidate, with no public resources, is advisable for candidates seeking reelection. This study also finds that comments should be responded to once, private messages should be written as if they were public, comments that are not relevant to a thread should be

deleted, repeat abusers should be banned, and any profiles found to be fake should be banned if they are not conducting themselves civilly.

In April 2014 the campaign manager did some research and considered implementing a social media policy for Lindsey, and they revisited the issue in September. This was prompted by the increase in negative comments and the emergence of more candidates. What held the campaign manager back were concerns that the policy would be used to further claims from YLRRR's Facebook and Rikel's newsletter that Young and Lindsey were thwarting free speech by hindering signature-gathering at the grocery stores. The renewed discussion about a social media policy in September was sparked by the Karras lawsuit against San Diego Sheriff's Department. Concerns that being criticized for abusing free speech, like Gov. Pence, would do irreparable harm to the campaign won out. Additionally, the ambiguity in the law and the fact that Lindsey's page was private, with no public dollars or resources used to maintain it, mitigated any real legal concerns.

**Federal, state, and local regulations.** Often candidates running for local office are political novices with little experience and limited resources. Many run campaigns using friends and family, which does not necessarily include a campaign professional. Candidates need to be familiar with local, state, and federal regulations to make sure that they run their campaigns legally — rules that will affect every candidate, including the filing of financial statements.

***First Amendment issues.*** The Federal Elections Commission (FEC) has begun to regulate the use of social media in campaigns (Robinson, 2009). The review of literature only considered the rules that specifically related to social media, overlooking the broader communication rules that include the interactions between PACs and committees. These interactions are regulated by both state and federal organizations. Obeying these regulations is necessary; this case showed

that candidates must also watch out for any appearance of violation. Candidates and committees need to be autonomous so there can be no perceived wrongdoing.

YLRRR exploited perceived wrongdoing in this case. Rikel published many newsletter editions that included RBYL and Young's financial statements, highlighting donors that were either developers or associated with developers. Some of these developers had projects in the city. This was put forth as proof that Young, and therefore Lindsey, was getting kickbacks for approving projects that were bad for the community and could legally be rejected. Lindsey, who was selective about the donations he accepted, was implicated because the PAC was supporting him alongside Young.

It is illegal to coordinate messaging, and Lindsey never violated that law. This means Lindsey could not talk to RBYL, for instance, and ask about or suggest content for the next flyer. It also means that he had no control over what a PAC sent out in his name. Mail pieces from various PACs and organizations were sent out during both the recall and general election; most included an endorsement of Lindsey and Young or Huang. The content of some of these used hyperbole, common in political campaigns, but in a way that was objectionable to Lindsey. He was asked to comment on some of these pieces and apologize for others. The banners posted by Hansen throughout the community are one example of this. In this case, and a few others involving RBYL, Lindsey and the campaign manager both asked that the rhetoric against Decker be toned down, which was the extent of action they could take. People generally fail to realize the legal line that is drawn between candidates and organizations that support them and that candidates have no impact on their actions.

***The Brown Act.*** Liking and sharing content as a local candidate has to be carefully considered. First, if the candidate is also currently serving as a local elected official, legal issues

need to be considered. While this was not a violation of California's Brown Act<sup>4</sup>, Young was concerned when Lindsey shared a post about a change in service from the gas company, because he feared it could possibly be construed as a violation. Moving forward no content posted by Young was liked or shared by Lindsey. This was another law that the campaign manager should have had a stronger grasp of. Knowing all the laws that affect how a sitting elected official communicates is necessary when working on reelection campaign.

***Ethics violations.*** In this case no one anticipated that legal challenges could be exploited the way the ethics violations filed against Young and Lindsey were. Yorba Linda passed an ethics ordinance in 2010. The intent of the ordinance was to prevent corruption and ensure transparency (Pierce, 2014), but these violations showed that the ordinance was flawed.

Had the campaign manager been more familiar with the ethics ordinance she would have advised Lindsey not to mention his website over the podium, which would have prevented the filing of ethics violation against him. Young's violations related to campaign contributions. This situation illustrated the importance for candidates and their teams to know the local, state, and federal rules that regulate campaigns and behavior of elected officials.

These violations were never responded to in any mail piece or formal advertisement but were discussed in some blogs, emails, and frequently mentioned by the candidates and volunteers going door to door. The anti-recall candidates and RBYL would explain that these violations were costing \$10,000 each to investigate and that none had been found to have any merit. Coupling this dollar amount with the \$300,000 for the recall and explaining that it was the constituents' tax dollars being used swayed many voters. The goal of YLRRR was to paint the councilmen as corrupt and unethical. In the case of Lindsey they had been searching for

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<sup>4</sup> The Brown Act guarantees public access to meetings held by local government agencies and prohibits secret meetings of those same governing bodies.

something to use, and all they could find was the mention of his website. This violation specifically swayed a number of voters, because they could not believe that \$10,000 was being spent because he mentioned his website.

The use of ethics violations illustrates that something that can be used against a city council candidate can just as easily be turned around. With social media, getting the information out quickly and taking control of the narrative is much easier. Because YLRRR was not effective in using social media the anti-recall message about the ethics violations was seen more, and repetition drives a point home. The intent was to show how two councilmen had violated the law, but with the help of social media they changed that narrative to say that YLRRR was costing more tax dollars for unfounded accusations.

#### **Prepare for legal issues.**

Post a social media policy that outlines how the page will be managed.

Become familiar with local, state, and federal regulations that govern campaigns including finance and interaction with political action committees.

*Figure 4.* Recommendations for future candidates about preparing for potential legal issues associated with their campaign.

#### **Limitations**

The original protocol indicated that participant observations would be used to collect data from both Tom Lindsey and Craig Young's activities, leading up to the qualification of the recall and the actual recall election if it qualified. It did qualify on May 14, 2014. Young and Lindsey worked toward the same goal of defeating the recall, but participant observation by the researcher in Young's day-to-day social media management was neither possible nor advisable. Due to the pace and complexity of the issues, both men needed to run campaigns that were independent. Additionally, while there would be no actual legal issue, to avoid the appearance of violating any campaign finance rules or California's Brown Act (which regulates

communications between current elected officials), the researcher decided not to take an active role in Young's campaign or to be privy to his day-to-day activities during the election.

The researcher was able to engage in some direct observation of Young as well as interview him during and after both the recall and general election. Another departure from the original protocol was direct observation of Matt Palmer's campaign. Palmer employed the researcher as his campaign manager when he entered the race in July 2014 as a replacement candidate in the recall. The researcher engaged in participant observation of his campaign from July 22, 2014, until Palmer dropped out of the race for the general election on October 10, 2014, with Palmer's consent.

This case study looked at a city of 60,000, making the results more applicable to candidates in smaller communities. The recall provided additional information, but the complexities in addition to the added costs and time do make generalizing the findings to other local candidates more challenging. The findings do illustrate general best practices and highlight a number of things that were initially overlooked by the campaign manager in this case.

### **Future Research**

The new theory, Networked Relationship Cultivation Theory, offered here needs to be tested against other cases to prove its validity. Candidates will be most effective on social media when they know how their constituents perceive them online and understand how those relationships are formed and fostered. This also will provide avenues for additional research into two-way communication. Research on two-way communication needs to look at how social media pages are managed and evaluate the implementation of a social media policy. This research will be impacted by pending court decisions.

Analysis of the impact of endorsements, specifically in local elections, is an area that had an unexpected impact in this study and needs further research. This does not relate directly to social media but is one of the ways that endorsements can be advertised. Understanding hashtags and their effect on SEO is worth further observation and study, as would be the benefits of online fundraising like PayPal.

This case study never looked at the personal toll on families. With social media emerging, family members view the terrible things being said about candidates. Lindsey's wife was never actively involved with the campaign, but as the allegations got more outrageous she became more active, taking to her own social media to combat some of the negatives. Lindsey's daughter, who is married with three children in the community, did the same. A son who lives out of the area would like and comment on Lindsey's posts. Understanding the toll that negative campaigns take on families in a pre- and post-social media world would be an interesting area of study and could help candidates insulate their families from negative campaigning, if possible.

Looking at a local candidate for reelection; use of social media in terms of voter perception would be a worthy area of study. For anyone planning to run for reelection the campaign, in some ways, never stops on Facebook. This study looked specifically at how to use social media for an election, but it would be just as helpful to understand what types of posts in the off-season provide the biggest benefit when reelection rolls around. Overall, this is an area that needs significantly more research. Understanding the general principles and best practices that apply to multiple platforms would be helpful. Regardless, in 20 years there will likely be no more mailboxes, so the next generation of politicians should start the research now.

### **Final Thoughts**

Candidates in local elections may not need social media to be successful, but this study shows that they should strongly consider it. As candidates decide to enter a campaign and begins

to devise a strategy they must consider their time, budget, staff, volunteers, and other resources. Demographics of their constituency need to be analyzed. This study shows that in communities of similar size social media can be an important factor, another tool to get the message out. Comfort and capabilities with social media and online technology also need to be taken into account. Diffusion of Innovation Theory is particularly relevant, because it allows for understanding all those who will be using social media in an election and the challenges and benefits that it will bring.

In this case social media likely resulted in additional votes; how many there were and if they were enough to be worth it are unclear. What is clear is that the Lindsey campaign would have benefited from a stronger traditional media campaign. Overall the campaign integrated all the communication tools together well, but the voters did not engage with social media at a high enough rate to support its being the primary communication tool. Future candidates will be in the same shoes until the younger generation is the primary voting demographic or the older generation diffuses use of the technology at a greater rate.

As social media targeting becomes more advanced there is likely a way to use it to help maximize the benefits social media can provide. If the right undecided voters can be targeted, the value of social media may outweigh mail, because most campaign mail is treated as “junk mail” and is simply disposed of. With social media, there is a lower cost to get the same message in voters’ feeds that they regularly look at.

The challenge that will be faced by candidates at all levels is finding quality content to post and keeping a regular posting schedule. If candidates manage their own social media this is even more difficult. Taking pictures, posting while attending events, and sharing community

related news will make up the bulk of posts. Pictures are invaluable and need to be used with every post possible.

Creating and posting a social media policy will not stop naysayers but gives candidates something to point to explain their actions. Having true two-way symmetrical communication is ideal; the fervor that goes into politics will likely never allow that to happen. Because of this it is important to manage the comments on a page and ban users who abuse the privilege to post. Free speech needs to be respected by candidates, but candidates also need to remember that, so long as no public funds or resources are used to maintain their social media, their pages are their property and they have every right to manage them as they see fit.

Recall elections overall are rare occurrences; in those cases social media will likely play a much larger role than in a general election. The campaigning in a recall will be more negative, so candidates need to be prepared and use their social media to ensure they are showing their true personality; how they conduct themselves on social media will be a reflection on them and help voters make a decision. Social Information Processing Theory and Networked Relationship Cultivation Theory, the new theory proposed here, help to explain how computer-mediated relationships are formed and maintained and ultimately how they will affect winning over voters.

In conclusion, social media is necessary for all candidates; it is cheap, has a broad reach, and can help voters get to know the candidate. Any local candidate using social media alone will not win an election; social media has to be part of a broader communication plan. Social media in local elections needs additional study but will be part of American politics at all levels for decades to come.

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### **Appendix A**

The recall effort was initiated on December 17, 2014, when papers were served to Lindsey and Young during a regularly scheduled city council meeting. The councilmen had 10 days to respond to the allegations. Once the response was received it took 10 days to certify the recall petition. After certification in January the petitioners had 120 days to collect 8,100 signatures (20% of registered voters) required to put the recall on the ballot. If they failed to collect the signatures the recall effort would have been over. This study included the social media efforts over the 120 days and all subsequent activity.

### **Appendix B**

The Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) is a program from the State of California that requires cities to zone for certain numbers of units dedicated to the affordable housing. For the 2008-2014 cycle, Yorba Linda was required to have 2,039 of these units. Facing noncompliance and the rollover of the units into the next housing cycle, Yorba Linda citizens passed Measures H & I in 2012, rezoning certain sites in the community to allow for construction of multi-family units in order to meet the RHNA numbers. For the 2014-2021 housing cycle, Yorba Linda's requirement fell to 669 units. Seeking to down zone some Measure I properties, a moratorium was sought and supported by two members of the council. The moratorium would have frozen development on all but two sites for 45 days, exposing the city to lawsuits by developers, the State of California, and housing advocacy groups. Three members of the Council voted against the moratorium, Lindsey, Young, and Portillo. At the next council meeting, two weeks later, recall papers were served to Lindsey and Young but not to Portillo.

Because of this the recall was characterized as a political ploy largely because Lindsey was up for reelection in November while Young and Portillo had two years left on their terms.

### Appendix C

YLRRR's high-density advertising image used in various forms during the recall.

**This is NOT Gracious Living!**



Proposed 159-unit, 4-story Etco Apartments at Lakeview Ave. and Mariposa Dr.

**Say NO to High-Density**  
**Vote YES to Recall**  
**Craig Young & Tom Lindsey**

- Young & Lindsey voted against a moratorium on high-density development that would have helped further a ballot measure to eliminate or reduce high-density housing sites that include 4-story buildings that are up to 50 feet tall.

## Appendix D

Election results for the recall election held October 7, 2014.

### Shall Thomas H. Lindsey be recalled (removed) from the office of City Council Member?

Completed Precincts: 22 of 22

	Vote Count	Percentage
Yes	5,216	41.0%
No	7,518	59.0%

[Top](#)

### Candidates to succeed Thomas H. Lindsey if he is recalled.

Completed Precincts: 22 of 22

	Vote Count	Percentage
JEFFREY N. DECKER	5,101	52.2%
MATT PALMER	4,680	47.8%

[Top](#)

### Shall Craig Young be recalled (removed) from the office of City Council Member?

Completed Precincts: 22 of 22

	Vote Count	Percentage
Yes	5,234	41.2%
No	7,457	58.8%

[Top](#)

### Candidates to succeed Craig Young if he is recalled.

Completed Precincts: 22 of 22

	Vote Count	Percentage
J. MINTON BROWN JR.	4,987	50.5%
NANCY RIKEL	4,890	49.5%

[Top](#)

**Appendix E**

Election results for the recall election held October 7, 2014.

**CITY OF YORBA LINDA Member, City Council**

Number To Vote For: 2

Completed Precincts: 49 of 49

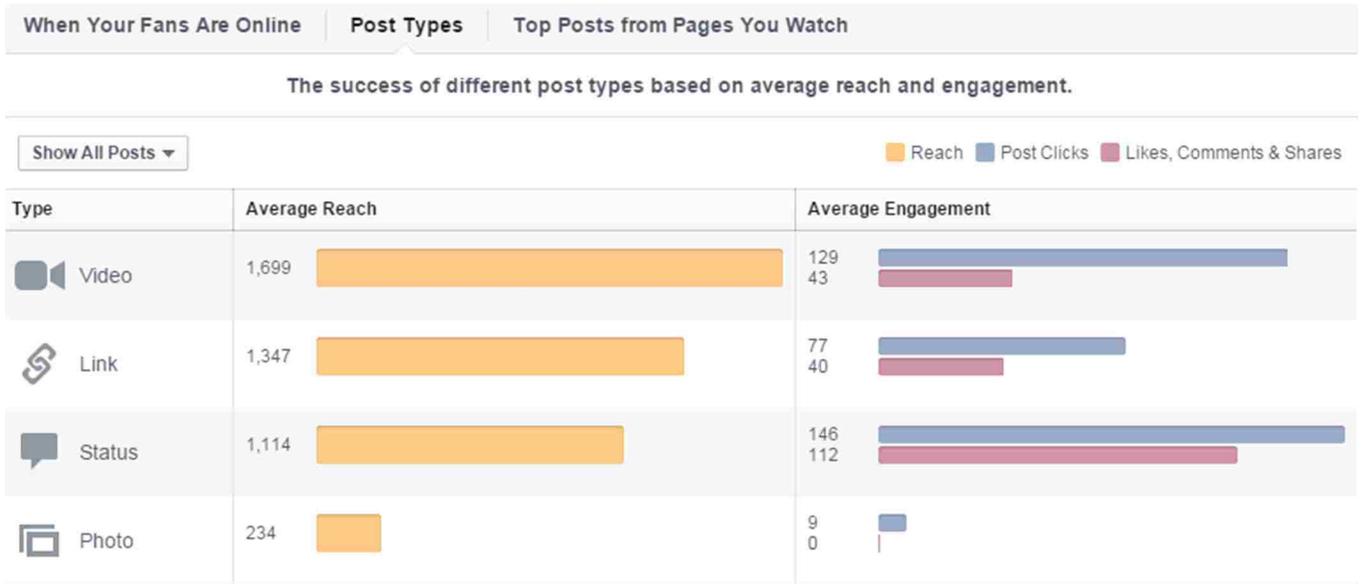
	<b>Vote Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
PEGGY HUANG	5,858	23.9%
* TOM LINDSEY	5,715	23.3%
JEFFREY N. DECKER	4,663	19.0%
JUDY MURRAY	4,042	16.5%
MATT PALMER	2,323	9.5%
PAUL AMBRUS	1,905	7.8%

\* Indicates Incumbent Candidate, if any

Top

## Appendix F

Posts to Lindsey’s Facebook page by post type.



### Appendix G

The official sample ballot for the recall election on October 7, 2014.

<b>Sample Ballot</b>		<b>City of Yorba Linda Special Recall Election</b> <b>Orange County</b> <b>October 07, 2014</b>
		CITY OF YORBA LINDA SPECIAL RECALL ELECTION
		Shall Thomas H. Lindsey be recalled (removed) from the office of City Council Member? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
		Candidates to succeed Thomas H. Lindsey if he is recalled, for the duration of the term ending December 2, 2014. Vote for One <input type="checkbox"/> MATT PALMER Businessman <input type="checkbox"/> JEFFREY N. DECKER Professor/Business Executive <input type="checkbox"/>
		Shall Craig Young be recalled (removed) from the office of City Council Member? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
		Candidates to succeed Craig Young if he is recalled, for the duration of the term ending December 6, 2016. Vote for One <input type="checkbox"/> NANCY RIKEL Business Executive <input type="checkbox"/> J. MINTON BROWN JR. Businessman <input type="checkbox"/>
		

### Appendix H

Lindsey's golden parachute blog post that addressed the lifetime benefits issue.



**Tom Lindsey 4 Yorba Linda City Council**  
Posted by MailChimp [?] · September 16, 2014 · 🌐

#### Recall: Rikel's Last Chance at Taxpayer Funded Lifetime Benefits



#### Recall: Rikel's Last Chance at Taxpayer Funded Lifetime Benefits

Currently Council Members that serve five years qualify for lifetime pension and medical benefits. This is a practice that I disagree with which is why I voted to...

[US3.CAMPAIGN-ARCHIVE1.COM](http://US3.CAMPAIGN-ARCHIVE1.COM)

6,828 people reached



✔ See Results

Like · Comment · Share · 👍 30 💬 6 ➦ 20

