GETTING SOCIAL WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS: HOW GOVERNORS AND
STATE LEGISLATORS ARE HARNESSING THE POWER OF
SOCIAL MEDIA AS A FORM OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Submitted by
Abigail Rose Quackenboss
Class of 2015

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Abstract

The advent of the Internet and development of social media tools has had a profound impact on politics, most notably stateside being the ability to get out the youth vote in the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections. Social media allows for a two-way flow of information, which in politics is ideal when seeking feedback from constituents. Ideally, a politician's social media strategy will: (1) cover a variety of policy areas; (2) respond to the social-media feedback from constituents; and (3) adapt to the changing trends in social media.

This paper, in a pseudo-case study analysis, examines the social media strategies of twelve politicians, governors and state legislators alike. The paper begins with an exploration of how social media has been used in politics, by both voters and politicians. In the analysis portion of the paper, messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability are used as metrics to gauge how effectively the twelve chosen politicians are utilizing social media as a form of political communication. Findings suggest politicians inconsistently use social media as a political communication tool along the metrics of messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability, allowing room for improvement when utilizing social media as means of communicating with voters, supporters, and constituents.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

In the ten years since social media's conception, the now indispensable tool has gone through many phases to become an essential part of many Americans' lives. While social media began as an extension of Internet's basic capacities to connect millions of users worldwide, it has now taken on various other roles, including becoming a resource for politicians at the local, state, and federal level. Currently, approximately 87% of American adults use the internet, including approximately 6 in 10 adults over the age of 65.[1] Furthermore, of those online, 73% of adults report using social media and networking, with as many as 63% of users reporting checking a social media platform at least once a day.[2]

Though we may expect politicians to use social media like other users, we must also consider how social media is/should be an attractive communication outlet for elected officials. This begs the question: how are local and state level politicians utilizing social media to reach out to their constituents? Although there have been developments in social media use by local politicians and governors, there are still many inconsistencies regarding messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability, which currently results in an overall ineffective use of social media as a political communication tool.

Previous research has examined how social media is utilized as a campaign tool, with less focus on how social media is used as a policy and constituent communication tool. Furthermore,

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[1] See Smith, Aaron. "Older Adults and Technology Use." *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*. Accessed October 14, 2014. http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/04/03/older-adults-and-technology-use/ and Smith, Aaron. "Pew Research Findings on Politics and Advocacy in the Social Media Era." July 29, 2014. http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/07/29/politics-and-advocacy-in-the-social-media-era/.

[2] "Social Media Update 2013 | Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project." Accessed January 24, 2014. http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Social-Media-Update.aspx.

most research has focused on congressional and presidential use.[3] Considering the advancements

in technology even since the 2008 presidential elections, it is important to re-examine how

politicians are currently using social media *outside* of the campaign bubble. Furthermore, this

paper explores how effectively politicians are spreading their political messages through social

media channels. Specifically, this paper will examine how governors and state legislators are

utilizing Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to convey their political messages to

constituents.

Defining Social Media

Merriam-Webster offers its definition of social media as, "forms of electronic

communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users

create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as

videos)."[4] This definition, although quite broad, encompasses the main objective of this paper: to

gain a better understanding of how politicians are utilizing social media as a way to better

convey their policies to constituents. Additionally, this paper will also explore how the

communication has changed as technology has changed. It is also important to explain the

various social networks, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, which are examined

throughout this research. The first, and currently most popular, is Facebook. With 945 million

monthly active users worldwide, Facebook has grown to a publicly traded entity within eight

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[3] See Gueorguieva, Vassia. "Voters, MySpace, and YouTube The Impact of Alternative
Communication Channels on the 2006 Election Cycle and Beyond." *Social Science
Computer Review* 26, no. 3 (August 1, 2008): 288–300. doi:10.1177/0894439307305636;
Edelman Digital. "Capitol Tweets: The Yeas and Nays of the Congressional
Twitterverse," March 21, 2012. http://www.edelmandigital.com/2012/03/21/capitol-
tweets-yeas-and-nays-of-the-congressional-twitterverse/; and Gulati, Girish J., and
Christine B. Williams. "Social Media and Campaign 2012: Developments and Trends for
Facebook Adoption." *Social Science Computer Review*, May 23, 2013,
0894439313489258. doi:10.1177/0894439313489258.
[4] "Social Media - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary." Accessed
January 27, 2014. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media.

years.[5] Twitter, the microblogging site, is the second site that this paper addresses. In addition, Instagram, the photo sharing site and application, and YouTube, the video sharing website, are also examined.

Social Media Messaging in Politics

While there are likely countless ways to measure how effectively governors and state legislators are using social media, for the purposes of this paper effectiveness will be measured across three metrics: messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability. The first focus of this research is what sort of content and patterns the messages that politicians convey using social media have. Specifically, what policy theme the post, tweet, picture, or video has, what the tone of the message is, and whether or not the message originally came from the politician (as opposed to a share or retweet).

Adaptability

The secondary focus of this research is whether or not governors and state legislators are adapting to the technological and social media advances that have been made in recent years. Though there may be different expectations for different levels of politics, it is important to assess how politics as a whole is adapting to the trends in constituent social media use. For example, in January 2014, Senator Rand Paul joined Snapchat, the disappearing photo-service that has become a popular social messaging application.[6] The current social media landscape is dominated by Facebook and Twitter, with other platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest contending for attention. As voters flock to a number of different social networking

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[5] Facebook. "Facebook Newsroom." *Facebook*. Accessed February 27, 2014.
http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?newsareaid=22.

[6] Est, Mike Allen | 1/15/14 9:23 Am. "Sen. Rand Paul Joins Snapchat." *POLITICO*. Accessed March 24, 2014. http://www.politico.com/story/2014/01/rand-paul-snapchat-102199.html.

platforms, it is important for social media teams and all politicians to adapt by also having a presence within social networks.

Responsiveness

The third and final facet to this research is how responsive politicians are to constituent feedback on social media. As an example, if a constituent comments on a politician's post on Facebook, can he or she expect a response from the politician, or at the very least, his/her social media team? A politician's social media presence should first and foremost be considered a service to his or her constituents. By extending this service to constituents, there is a level of duty associated with it to respond to serious inquiries and concerns from constituents. This responsiveness varies across offices and level of service, and will be important in determining how committed a politician is to using social media as a constituent service.

Plan for the Paper

In the following chapters, this paper will show what role social media has played in politics to date. The second chapter will consist of a literature review, with a particular emphasis on campaigns because that is where the academic interest has been in the past decade. Examples of congressional social media use will be presented, again following the path that academia has taken. The third chapter is devoted to an in-depth look at the usage of social media by a total of twelve politicians, governors and state legislators alike. Examples of social media use are presented. The fourth chapter analyzes, using data and examples, and discusses the overall effectiveness of political social media based on messaging, adaptability, and responsiveness. The paper concludes with an overview of the evidence that supports the thesis that governors and local legislators are, on the whole, inconsistently and ineffectively using social media as a form of political communication.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Before one can examine how social media is currently being used as a constituent

communication tool by governors and state legislators, it is imperative that a solid foundation is

built upon how social media has already been used in political communication. Most of the

previous literature has focused on campaign social media use. While a different focus than this

paper, the findings cannot be discounted simply for that reason. Furthermore, because social

media is a *communication* tool, it is also important to understand how constituents utilize social

media, both for personal and political use. The chapter is divided into two distinct sections. The

first examines social media use by constituents while the second explores how social media has

been and is used by campaigns. The chapter will conclude with a brief introduction to Chapter

Three.

Constituent and Voter Social Media Use

To better understand how quickly social media is being adapted, first consider this: in

1997, approximately six years after the Internet's advent, the U.S. Census asked its first question

pertaining to Internet usage. At that time, only 18.0% of households were online. Fast forward to

2011 and over 70% of homes have Internet connectivity.[7] Furthermore, accessing Internet-based

content is no longer limited to the home. Pew Research's Internet Project reports that of the 58%

of adult cell phone owners who have a smartphone, 60% have accessed the Internet.[8] Taking that

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[7] File, Thom. *Computer and Internet Use in the United States*. U.S. Census Bureau, May 2013.
    http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-569.pdf.

[8] Pew Research Internet Project. "Internet Use Over Time." *Pew Research Center's Internet &
    American Life Project*. Accessed October 17, 2014. http://www.pewinternet.org/data-
    trend/internet-use/internet-use-over-time/.

figure into consideration, it is impressive that approximately 40% of all cell phone users use a social networking site from their phone, with over half of those doing so at least once a day.[9]

Knowing how social media is used is great, but it is even more pertinent to understand how social media is aiding in political and civic engagement. Pew Research has many facts and figures about social media use, but they should be taken with a grain of salt. Many of Pew's figures regarding political content and engagement date back to 2012, and, in turn, are becoming outdated. For example, in 2012 a Pew survey found that 33% of social media users had reposted political content originally posted by others (not necessarily politicians), with Republicans more likely to do so (39%) than Democrats (34%).[10] Pew's 2012 research estimated that 20% of all social media users follow elected officials and candidates on social media outlets with varying levels or participation.[11]

In addition to simply understanding the levels of social media use by voters, it is important to understand their motivations for doing so. John H. Parmalee and Shannon L. Bichard, in their 2012 book *Politics and the Twitter Revolution: How Tweets Influence the Relationship between Political Leaders and the Public*, found five key themes/factors for following politicians on Twitter: social utility, entertainment, self-expression, information/guidance, and convenience. Social utility emerged as the primary motivation for

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[9] Pew Research Internet Project. "Social Networking Fact Sheet." *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*. Accessed October 17, 2014. http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/social-networking-fact-sheet/.

[10] Rainie, Lee, Aaron Smith, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry Brady, and Sidney Verba. "Social Media and Political Engagement." *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*. Accessed October 17, 2014. http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/10/19/social-media-and-political-engagement/.

[11] Ibid.

following political leaders.[12] But what does "social utility" really mean? According to Parmalee and Bichard, and based on previous research, social utility assumes that people collect information because they want it to aid them in social contexts and interactions. Over 14% of survey respondents (14.46%) indicated that social motivations were the primary reason for following political leaders on social media.[13]

In second place, Parmalee and Bichard found that entertainment was the second most motivating factor for following political leaders, with approximately 14.36% of the variance accounted for by entertainment factors.[14] Information-seeking motivations were the fourth most powerful factors for following political leaders on social media, accounting for approximately 13.43% of the variance. While this figure seems a bit disconcerting, it is important to remember that Parmalee and Bichard examined *motivations*, not true information gathered. An individual who wants to be able to discuss politics in interpersonal relationships will still have learned more about politics than if they did not follow a political leaders at all. Furthermore, Parmalee and Bichard also found that individuals who followed only *elected* officials were less likely to have social utility, entertainment, and self-expression motivations.[15]

Furthermore, motivations have been shown to be a significant predictor of how many political leaders an individual follows on Twitter.[16] More specifically, individuals who noted

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[12] Parmalee, John H., and Shannon L. Bichard. *Politics and the Twitter Revolution: How Tweets Influence the Relationship between Political Leaders and the Public*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012.

[13] Ibid, 37.

[14] Ibid, 48.

[15] Ibid, 50.

[16] Ibid, 54.

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social-utility and self-expression as their primary motivations for following elected officials were more likely to follow a greater number of elected officials.[17]

There is, of course, more to social media than just the factors that motivate users. Social media, by definition, is meant to be an information-sharing tool for ideas and commentary. There are a number of ways an individual can share information, specifically something they did not write, on social media. On Facebook, this function is met by sharing a post, while on Twitter it is met by retweeting. Though not specific to politics, in a 2010 study from Pew, Smith and Raine found that 53% of Twitter users have used the retweet function.[18] However, most tweets ($> 70\%$) generate a no active reaction, such as a reply or retweet.[19]

Parmalee and Bichard found that the content of political leaders' tweets is rather influential on actions a follower's subsequent actions. Most influential was the call to seek out more information, suggesting that not only are users following politicians for the sake of following, but they are also actively reading and taking in the information in most tweets.[20] How interested in politics an individual self-reported they were was also significantly related to whether or not they were likely to retweet, reply to, or find more information about a tweet.[21] Furthermore, conservative Republicans were more likely to retweet and reply to tweets, while being a liberal Democrat was significantly correlated to taking suggestion action mentioned in a tweet.[22] More importantly, when an individual felt strong ties to the political leader they were

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[17] Ibid, 54.

[18] Smith, Aaron, and Lee Rainie. "8% of Online Americans Use Twitter." *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*. Accessed October 20, 2014. http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/12/09/8-of-online-americans-use-twitter/.

[19] Sysomos Inc. "Replies and Retweets on Twitter," September 2010. http://www.sysomos.com/insidetwitter/engagement/.

[20] Parmalee, John H., and Shannon L. Bichard, 80.

[21] Ibid, 82.

[22] Ibid, 83.

following, the political leaders tweets were more influential than if the individual felt weak ties to the political leader.

Each of Parmalee and Bichard's findings supports the idea that Twitter is more than just background noise in the world of politics. Significant and tangible survey results suggest that social media, and Twitter specifically, has substantive value to voters. Furthermore, there is evidence to support the idea that individuals are motivated to use social media as an information gathering tool. As a result, politicians should consider, if they are not already, treating social media as a valuable tool for conveying their platforms, policies, and activities to voters.

With this information in mind, it is now important to examine how social media has already been used by campaigns and political officials.

Internet and Social Media Use in Politics

Similarly to understand voter usage of the early Internet, it is key to understand how far political usage has come. It can easily be argued that Congress's implementation of the Internet rather early on can be considered critical to how politics has adapted to technological changes.

Early Campaign and Congressional Internet Use

E. Scott Adler, Chariti E. Gent, and Cary B. Overmeyer, in 1998, concluded that congressional webpages were utilized as another outlet to convey home-style , homestyle having originally been proposed by Richard Fenno in 1997.[23] Even before the turn of the century, there were trends in political use of the Internet: young Congress people were most likely to have webpages and Republicans were more likely than Democrats to have a webpage.[24]

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[23] Adler, E. Scott, Chariti E. Gent, and Cary B. Overmeyer. "The Home Style Homepage: Legislator Use of the World Wide Web for Constituency Contact." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (November 1, 1998): 585–595. doi:10.2307/440242.
[24] Ibid, 590.

The Internet's use in politics has been viewed as a way to allow candidates and politicians to "present personal information that is difficult to convey in other media," and as a result, "the Internet might lend a more human, positive tone to campaigns."[25] Regarding campaign use of websites, humanistic traits were conveyed in a number of ways, most notably through a biographic page/section on the site.[26] Congressional web use was already quite broad by July 1998, at which point all 100 serving Senators had personal webpages.[27] Although the sites were all online by mid-1998, the content, quality, and accessibility was quite varied.

Regarding the 2006 election, Vassia Gueorguieva argues that outlets such as YouTube and MySpace, similar to Twitter and Facebook in more recent elections, provided candidates with an alternative to broadcasting their messages through traditional media channels.[28] However, more recently, a study focusing on the 2010 elections in the Netherlands suggested there was little "social" about "social media" meaning that as candidates became more popular, they were less likely to engage in the social portion of networking (ex: following back or engaging with followers).[29]

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[25] Klotz, Robert. "Positive Spin: Senate Campaigning on the Web." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 30, no. 3 (September 1, 1997): 482.

[26] Ibid, 483.

[27] OMB Watch. "Speaking Up in the Internet Age: Use and Value of Constituent E-Mail and Congressional Web Sites," December 1998. http://www.foreffectivegov.org/files/npt/resource/reports/emailsurvey.pdf.

[28] Gueorguieva, Vassia. "Voters, MySpace, and YouTube The Impact of Alternative Communication Channels on the 2006 Election Cycle and Beyond." *Social Science Computer Review* 26, no. 3 (August 1, 2008): 288–300.

[29] Vergeer, Maurice, and Liesbeth Hermans. "Campaigning on Twitter: Microblogging and Online Social Networking as Campaign Tools in the 2010 General Elections in the Netherlands." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 18, no. 4 (July 1, 2013): 413.

Getting Social: Congressional Twitter Studies

One of the first serious examinations of political Twitter use, published in 2010, examined nearly 5,000 tweets prior to September 2009. Though very early on in Twitter's adoption, even among the public, Jennifer Golbeck, Justin M. Grimes, and Anthony Rogers found that the majority of tweets (53%) from members of Congress were simply informative, which meant they could be a link to an article, fact, opinion, position on an issue, or a resource regarding the congressional office.[30] While it may be expected that informative tweets account for most of a politician's social media activity, considering how early on the Golbeck et al. study was conducted, the results were only a starting point. Three years later when Edelman Digital conducted a content analysis of congressional tweets, their findings were more substantive and in-depth.

The Edelman study used five different categories to measure how successfully a Congressperson was using Twitter: engagement, mentions, amplification, follower growth, and TweetLevel influence.[31] In the broadest sense, the study found that Republicans were the most successful at using Twitter. Republicans being the best at using Twitter seems a bit counterintuitive; social media, and by extension change, is typically associated with a younger population and therefore Democrats.

Many of the Edelman findings are likely indicative of larger trends which are not limited to congressional Twitter use. For example, Congress members from the Northeast were amplified more, as their tweets were retweeted three times as many times more than the Midwest

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[30] Golbeck, Jennifer, Justin M. Grimes, and Anthony Rogers. "Twitter Use by the U.S. Congress." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 61, no. 8 (2010): 1612-1613, 1616. doi:10.1002/asi.21344.

[31] Edelman Digital. "Capitol Tweets: The Yeas and Nays of the Congressional Twitterverse," March 21, 2012. http://www.edelmandigital.com/2012/03/21/capitol-tweets-yeas-and-nays-of-the-congressional-twitterverse/.

and South.[32] However, when it came to partisan differences, highly-followed (more than 10,000 followers) Republicans had an average of 14 retweets per tweet compared to highly-followed Democrats, who averaged four retweets per tweet.[33]

Social media use as a constituent service in politics, especially in Congress, is often controlled by staffs. As such, not all of the credit and criticisms can be directed solely at the politician, but instead their staffers. Moreover, if staffers are in charge of the accounts, it is important to examine their views about social media use.

Getting Social: Staffer Views

A 2011 study by the Congressional Management Foundation explored the attitudes surrounding congressional social media use across different platforms. While a number of themes emerged from the study, larger takeaways include: social media was noted by staffers as a tool to "gauge public opinion"; congressional offices are more actively using social media to communicate a Congressperson's activities; and social media managers felt that email and the Internet have made Congress members more responsive and accountable for their views and actions.[34]

The implications of staff views on social media use in a congressional office can have an important impact upon the direction that congressional social media use takes. Many times it is the media or public relations staffers who maintain an office's social media presence. Fifty-nine percent of staffers surveyed stated that social media is worth the time and effort that offices are

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] The Congressional Management Foundation. *#Social Congress: Perceptions and Use of Social Media on Capitol Hill*, 2011. http://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cmf-social-congress.pdf.

devoting to keeping social media accounts up to date.[35] Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of staffers

surveyed stated that Facebook was an important tool in "understanding constituents' views and

opinions" compared to 42% of staffers who believed Twitter was "somewhat or very important"

when trying to understand constituents and constituent concerns.[36] As a result of the staffs'

efforts, social media can be used to understand constituents' views and opinions.

Although only 42% of staffers viewed Twitter as critical to understanding constituents

and their concerns, the reality is that Twitter use is growing, especially among young, typically

measured as 18-34 year old, constituents.[37] Political activity on social networking sites has been

deemed important by users as a whole. Thirty-six percent of respondents surveyed by Pew

Research in 2012 said that social networking sites were "very important" or "somewhat

important" to them when keeping up with political news.[38] Moving forward, trends such as those

examined by the Edelman Digital and Congressional Management Foundation studies may allow

politicians gain a better understanding of their and their constituents' social media use.

Moreover, findings such as those from Pew Research will help offices tailor their messages and

reach out to constituents.

Where the Previous Literature Falls Short

Although the previous literature has done a decent job of examining social media's use in

politics, there have also been a number of insufficiencies. For example, most of the pervious

literature has focused on congressional or presidential campaign- and office-based use. In the

process of reviewing the literature for this research, there were no studies pertaining to state and

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[35] Ibid, 4.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Smith, Aaron, and Lee Rainie. "Politics on Social Networking Sites." *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*, September 4, 2012. http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/09/04/politics-on-social-networking-sites/.

[38] Ibid.

local level politician's social media use. Furthermore, typically the only social media outlets that researchers consider when examining political social media use are Facebook and Twitter. While these are the most widely utilized outlets, politicians have been known to resort to other outlets for conveying their policy agendas, happenings, and communicating with constituents. Finally, most of the research has been a basic analysis, with content as the typical metric. There does not appear to be research that has developed models to test the likelihood of themes, retweets, and other factors.

Conclusion

Throughout Chapter Two, previous research has been examined as a basis for further exploring how governors and local legislators utilize social media as a form of communicating with constituents. The literature review has focused on social media use by voters as a form of political engagement, in hopes to better understand motivations for engaging with politicians on Twitter. The second part of the chapter focused on social media as a campaign and constituent communication tool at the congressional level, with a particular emphasis on the advancements that have already been made in the field.

Chapter Three will cover the theory and hypothesis portion of this research before moving on to Chapters Four and Five which discusses methodology and the data analysis, respectively.

Chapter Three: Theory and Hypotheses

As a result of the focus on congressional and campaign use of social media, this research shifts to focus on gubernatorial and state legislative uses of social media as a form of constituent communication. More specifically, how effectively are these politicians utilizing social media?

Theory

There are likely a number of factors that influence how actively a politician employs social media, such as the legislator's constituency make-up, age, and even position in office. However, given that social media is a free way to communicate with constituents, there should be expectations when it comes to social media. While the previous research, as mentioned in the Literature Review, can stand as a preliminary metric for how effectively social media is being utilized, it is also important to analyze some of the data associated with social media use as well. For example, if a politician is sending out a large volume of tweets or Facebook posts but not receiving any amplification (retweets or shares) or acknowledgement (favorites and likes), it can be argued that there is little value to the politician's efforts. As a result, politicians may believe their social media efforts are effective and that could be *why* they do it, but if constituents, supporters, and voters are not interacting with the politicians, that may not be the case.

Because it is important to understand what messages followers and constituents are receptive to, an important part of this research is to track different qualities of tweets, posts, videos, and photos. Additionally, with ample data, it is the goal of this research to also run linear models that will account for a fair amount of variation in tweet outcomes.[39]

Overall, this research aims to not only gain a better understanding of how effectively social media is being used, but to also understand what (if any) trends are present in policy and

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[39] See Parmalee, John H., and Shannon L. Bichard. *Politics and the Twitter Revolution: How Tweets Influence the Relationship between Political Leaders and the Public*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012.

information sharing. Furthermore, as a result of data and (a brief) content analysis, this research will also make basic recommendations to politicians so they may improve their social media presence.

Hypotheses

To apply the theory more specifically, this research examines the use of social media by four governors and six Wisconsin state legislators to expand on previous research. However, one may expect that governors will be more effective at utilizing social media than state legislators for a number of reasons. Governors are full time politicians and have resources at their disposal to build an ample social media base, whereas state legislators likely have other occupations or do not have the time, money, or personnel to devote to full-time social media operations.

The second hypothesis pertains to engagement from constituents/followers. Because the constituencies vary greatly even among the governors selected for analysis, one would expect a relationship between constituency size and number of active engagements (retweets/shares). However, because passive engagements (favorites/likes) typically do not require much effort on behalf of the follower/constituent, the third hypothesis predicts a difference between passive engagement rates between governors and state legislators.

Governors typically must juggle more policy areas with greater breadth than state legislators who can become more focused on one or two policy areas. As a result, $H_{4.1}$ and $H_{4.2}$ predict that there will be a difference in tweet, post, video, and picture content among governors and state legislators.

Finally, when it comes to engaging with and responding to feedback from constituents on social media, there is likely little to no feedback from either governors or state legislators. Replies and comments, when treated equally, are some of the least executed forms of

engagement from followers because they (followers) feel they will never get a response.[40] Until there is an active effort from politicians to actively engage with constituents on social media, it should instead be considered a one-way flow of information, with little to no feedback from politicians.

H₁: Governors will have a greater volume of tweets, posts, videos, and pictures than state legislators.

H₂: Governors will have higher rate of active and passive engagement from followers than state legislators.

H₃.₁: The content of gubernatorial tweets, posts, videos, and pictures will be evenly distributed among all policy topic categories.

H₃.₂: The content of state legislators' tweets, posts, videos, and pictures will be evenly limited to one or two main policy topic categories.

H₄: Both governors and state legislators alike will neglect to respond to constituent feedback, in the form of replies and comments, on social media.

Conclusion

This chapter briefly described the theory and hypotheses behind the research. While the bare bones are outlined, other interesting findings will be noted in the analysis portion of the paper. The next chapter will give an overview of the methodology behind the research.

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[40] Parmalee, John H., and Shannon L. Bichard. *Politics and the Twitter Revolution: How Tweets Influence the Relationship between Political Leaders and the Public*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012: 92.

Chapter Four: Methodology

For the purposes of this research, the social media happenings of twelve politicians were tracked for a four week period from September 23, 2014, to October 22, 2014. On the outset, there were certain expectations for the accounts and activities, many of which were not met and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Five. This research, as a result of the unmet expectations, focuses on Twitter and Facebook activities for the following politicians:

Governors and Former Governors
- Scott Walker   (R-WI)
- Rick Perry   (R-TX)[+]
- John Kitzhaber   (D-OR)[+]
- Peter Shumlin   (D-VT)

Wisconsin State Legislators
- Tom Tiffany*   (R, State Senator)
- Kathleen Vinehout   (D, State Senator)
- Andy Jorgensen   (D, State Assemblyman)
- Paul Tittl   (R, State Assemblyman)
- Julie Lassa   (D, State Senator)
- Nikiya Q. Harris Dodd (D, State Senator)
- Jessie Rodriguez   (R, State Assemblywoman)
- Samantha Kerkman   (R, State Assemblywoman)

[+] Denotes former Governor.
* Tom Tiffany, a Wisconsin State Senator representing the 12th Senate District, does not have a Twitter account and was not included in Twitter's analysis.

More specifics about each politician can be found in Appendix B.

The original analysis was meant to be equal parts of governors and state legislators, but after one week of analysis, there was not enough data. As is, the data collected for the eight state legislators should be considered preliminary as many of the state legislators were not nearly as active on social media as originally expected. Wisconsin state legislators were picked mostly because I was born and raised in Wisconsin and wanted to gain a better understanding of how the people who represent me and my fellow statesmen are communicating with their constituents.

While none of the politicians were randomly selected, each case is meant to satisfy a different need. For example, all of the governors are meant to be a representation of different regions of the country. Two Republicans and two Democrats were selected so as to avoid bias. Rick Perry was not seeking re-election and John Kitzhaber and Peter Shumlin's accounts were the official gubernatorial office account, which means neither is allowed to discuss the campaign from the account. To provide contrast, Scott Walker's account is his personal account, which allows for him to discuss his upcoming election and unofficial business. The nuances of choosing each account will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Each day, the tweets, Facebook posts, and in the case of gubernatorial accounts, YouTube videos and Instagram posts were analyzed for the *previous* day. By coding approximately 24 hours after the posts and tweets, ample time was allowed for constituents who would engage actively or passively to do so. Each analysis included a number of different metrics and categories, including active and passive engagement from constituents and followers, if the post was original content or not, if links were or were not included in the post, and what policy area the post/tweet was about. Below are the policy areas used to code social media content.[41]

> Campaign and campaign visit
> Abortion/choice (would include right to life/choice)
> Budget issues
> Voter id
> Constitution (bill of rights)
> Crime
> Defense
> Economics/jobs/labor issues (includes women's fair pay)
> Education
> Energy
> Environment
> Health care (including women's health unless specifically abortion/choice)
> Senior issues (Senior housing, care, retirement, Medicare)
> Taxes

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[41]A complete list of variables and coding can be found in Appendix A.

Veterans
Non-political content (Pop culture references, sports, music, etc.)
Misc. Policy
Civil and gay rights

After four weeks of analysis, governors tweeted a combined total of 400 times and state legislators 407 times. Governors posted to Facebook a total of 162 times, compared to state legislators who had 102 posts in the same period of time. The posts and tweets and the engagement they did or did not spark, in addition to Governor Scott Walker's Instagram use and Governors Perry and Kitzhaber's YouTube use, provided the data points necessary to analyze messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability of political social media use.

One final definition necessary to understanding the analysis in Chapter Five is how passive and active engagement is defined. "Active" has a level of risk associated with it in the sense that the constituent/follower/supporter is taking a chance when engaging with the elected official because it can be much more easily seen by the constituent's friends, followers, and others. Depending on the social media outlet, active engagement comes in the form of comments, shares, retweets, and replies. On the other hand, a passive engagement has less risk associated with it because it is not as visible to others. Passive engagement is an action such as a like or favorite, again depending on the social media outlet.

In Chapter Five, the data is further analyzed in order to reveal why local politicians and governors are inconsistently using social media as a form of communication with constituents and supporters.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis

While the previous chapters have reviewed some of the research surrounding social media use among the United States' population and politicians, this chapter examines the social media use by a select group of twelve politicians through data and brief content analyses. The chapter provides an overview of trends among the two groups of politicians (governors and Wisconsin state legislators). The chapter concludes with recommendations for more effective use of social media as a political communication tool.

Gubernatorial Social Media Use

As mentioned in Chapter Three, four governors from different regions were selected for this research. Texas's Republican governor, Rick Perry, was not running for re-election. Democrats Peter Shumlin (Vermont) and John Kitzhaber (Orgeon) and Republican Scott Walker (Wisconsin) were. However, what makes Scott Walker stand out from his Democratic counterparts for this research is that his personal Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts were analyzed, rather than the official Governor's office account. As a result, some campaign-related material made its way into his social media use. This messaging is not disregarded because although it is not the focus of this research, the overall messaging is still an important aspect of why politicians utilize Twitter.

Gubernatorial Twitter Use

As a starting point for analysis, Figure 5.1 shows the trends in Twitter use from September 23, 2014, through October 21, 2014. Note the peaks from Scott Walker's account on the evenings of Friday, October 10, and Friday, October 17. On those evenings, Governor Walker allowed his campaign staff to use his Twitter account while he and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Mary Burke engaged in debates.

**Figure 5.1:** Twitter use by governors from 9/23-10/21/14.
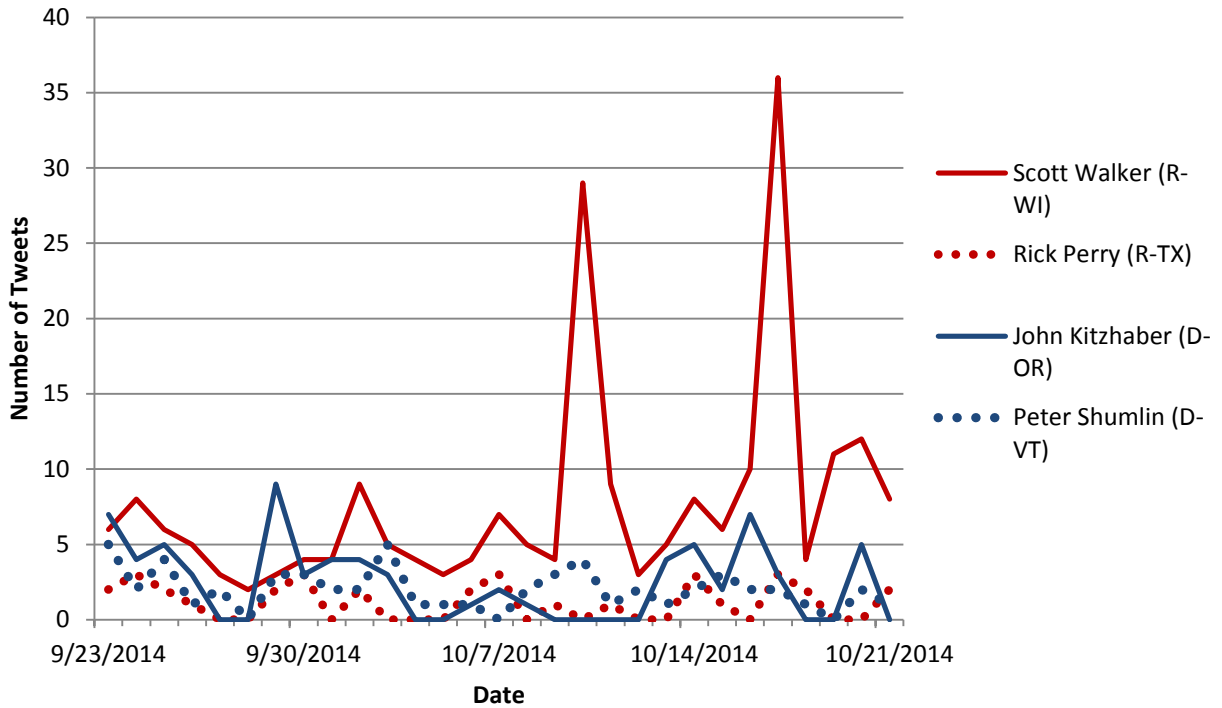
Save for Governor Walker's debate tweets, the four governors were rather similar in their day-to-day Twitter use. When Scott Walker's Twitter use is examined in terms of just his tweets per day dedicated solely to policy, there is a clear difference in his Twitter use. He tweets at a lower rate, with a maximum number of tweets in a day of 10. Please see Figure 5.2 for the daily distribution.

Figure 5.2: Gubernatorial Twitter use by day when Scott Walker's campaign-use of his personal account is not included.
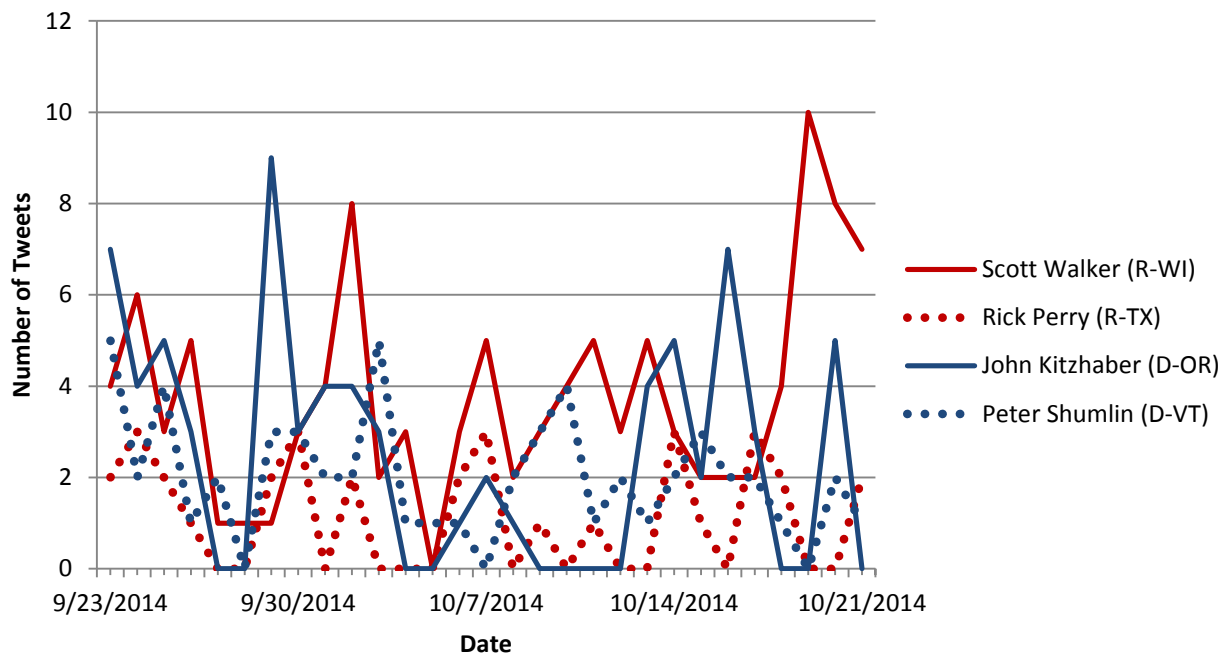

More specifically, when Scott Walker's Twitter habits are examined, there is a clear difference in tweets devoted to campaign activities and policy. Keep in mind that tweet content was at the discretion of the coder, and some tweets could have been coded under two categories. However, for the purposes of this research, only the primary content was coded, not the underlying meanings. For a graphic representation of Scott Walker's tweets by week, please see Figure 5.3 below. Notice that Scott Walker's total tweets increased over the four week period, while when campaign-related tweets are removed from analysis, the account's use is rather steady. This can certainly be accounted for by the imminent gubernatorial election which would take place three weeks after the analysis ended.

Figure 5.3: Scott Walker's total tweets, non-debate tweets, and non-campaign related tweets from 9/23-10/21/14.
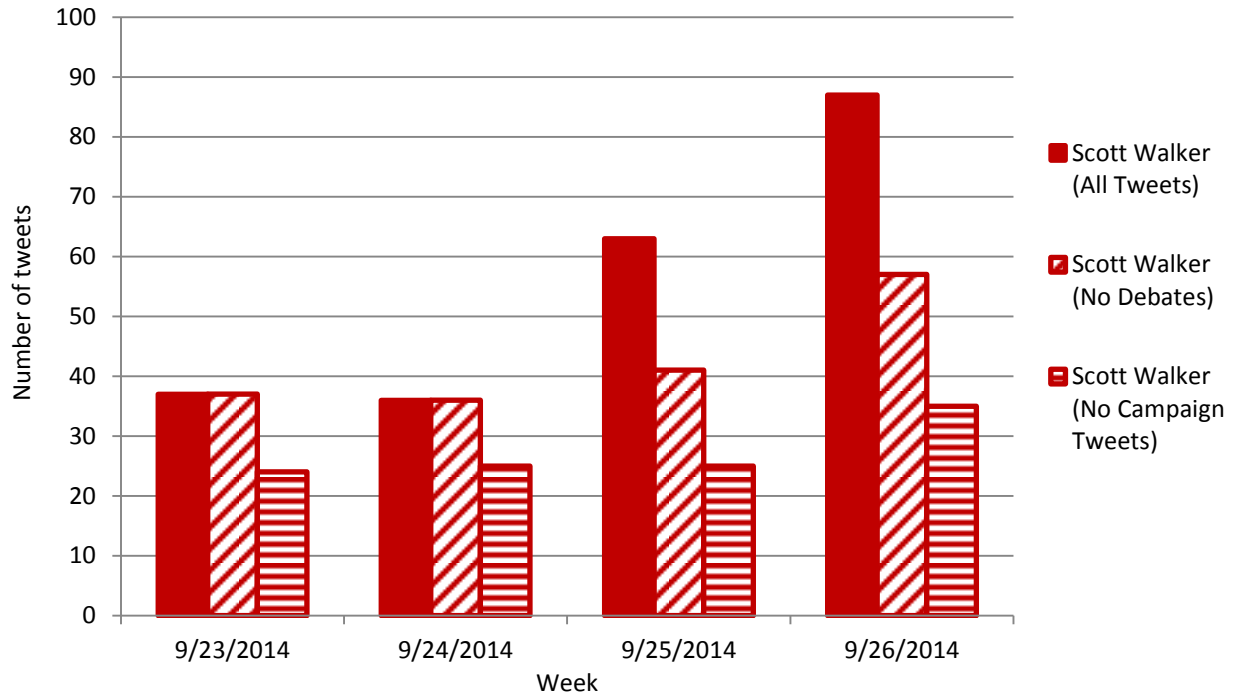
Regarding messaging, when tweets pertaining to campaigns, jobs/labor, and non-political content are removed from the analysis, there are still noteworthy trends. Figure 5.4 below shows the number of times each governor tweeted about a particular policy area. Of particular mention is Governor Rick Perry's (R-TX) high number of tweets about health care. During the four week analysis period, there was an individual in Texas who was diagnosed with and died from Ebola. On a similar note, John Kitzhaber's (D-OR) tweets regarding education addressed the launching of a new literacy initiative in Oregon, while Scott Walker's (R-WI) peaks are related to campaign issues and advancements Wisconsin has made in the four years since his inauguration.

Figure 5.4: Categorical distribution of gubernatorial tweets between 9/23-10/21/14.
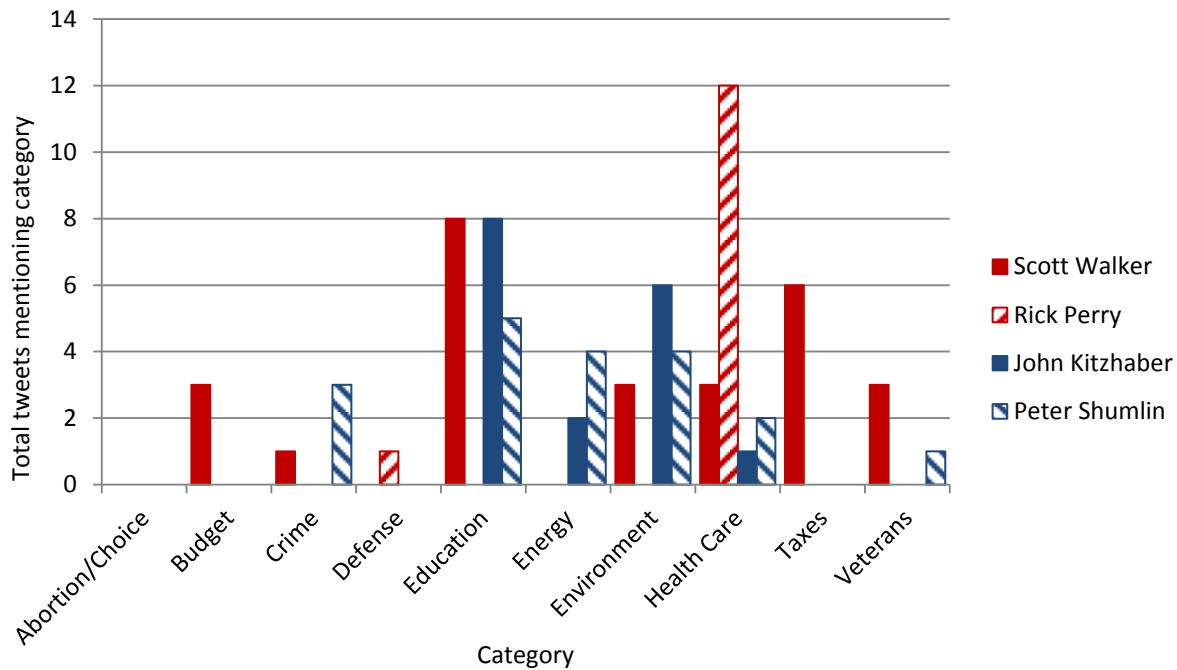

Engagement from Followers

Gubernatorial use of Twitter leaves a lot to be desired. Figure 5.5 shows the average active (retweets) and passive (favorites) engagements per tweet from followers for each gubernatorial account from 9/23-10/21/14. It is clear that former Governor Perry's tweets attract the attention of more followers, at almost double the engagement rate, than those of his peers. However, it is also important to remember that former Governor Perry had almost three times as many followers as Scott Walker, 14 times as many followers as former Governor Kitzhaber, and over 20 times more followers than Governor Shumlin. Perry was in the national spotlight during his 2012 Presidential bid, which is likely a reason for so many followers. As such, it is important to remember that his messages will reach a broader audience than strictly constituents.

Furthermore, two additional metrics could have been used to measure engagement with followers: replies and mentions. However, given the limited time and resources for this research, it was unrealistic to obtain such figures.

Figure 5.5: Gubernatorial Twitter followers' average active and passive engagement per tweet from 9/23-10/21/14.
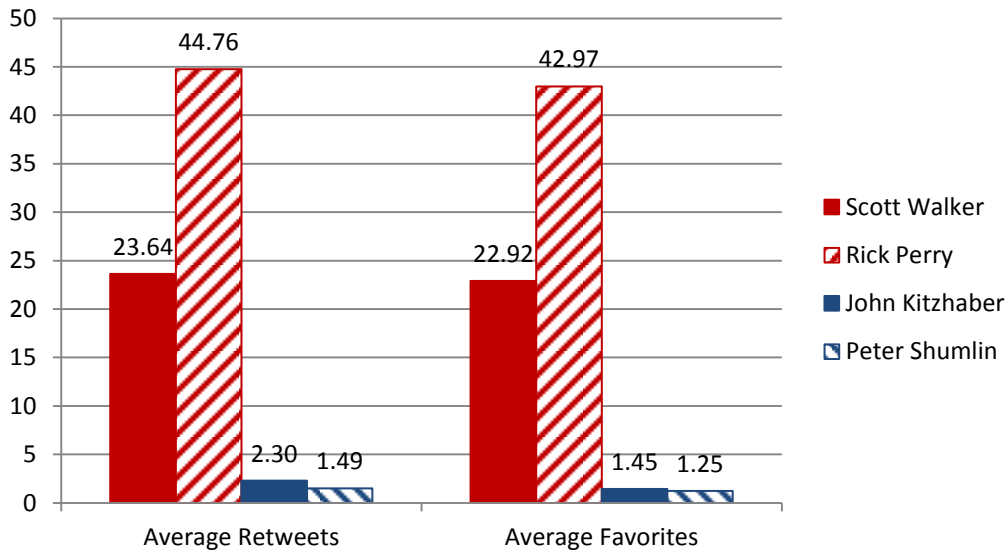

Gubernatorial Facebook Use

Facebook, by its nature, provided the four governors with an outlet to provide longer-form information to followers and constituents. However, the governors did not abuse the outlet by overloading followers and constituents with too much information. Figure 5.6 shows the number of posts per week for each governor, including Governor Walker's posts that did not pertain to campaign activities. Each of the governors was rather consistent in their posting, suggesting a refined social media strategy.

Figure 5.6: Weekly number of Facebook posts by governors from 9/23-10/21/14.
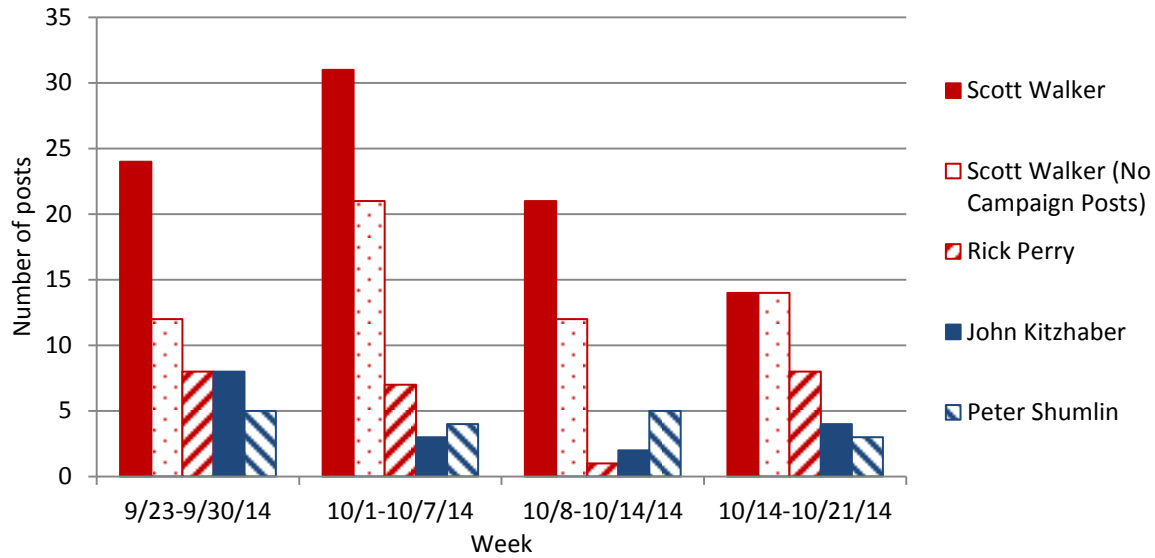
When the post content is analyzed, again removing all categories in which no governor had a category mentioned, in addition to campaign and non-policy tweets, there are a few trends. Scott Walker mentions economics, jobs, and labor almost six times more than his counterparts. During the 2014 Wisconsin gubernatorial campaign, jobs and the state economy were considered a high salience issues. Similar to Twitter, Rick Perry had many posts pertaining to health care. However, Scott Walker and John Kitzhaber, who tweeted eight times about education, had effectively zero Facebook posts about education. This suggests inconsistent messaging strategies across platforms.

Figure 5.7: Categorical distribution of gubernatorial Facebook posts from 9/23-10/21/14.
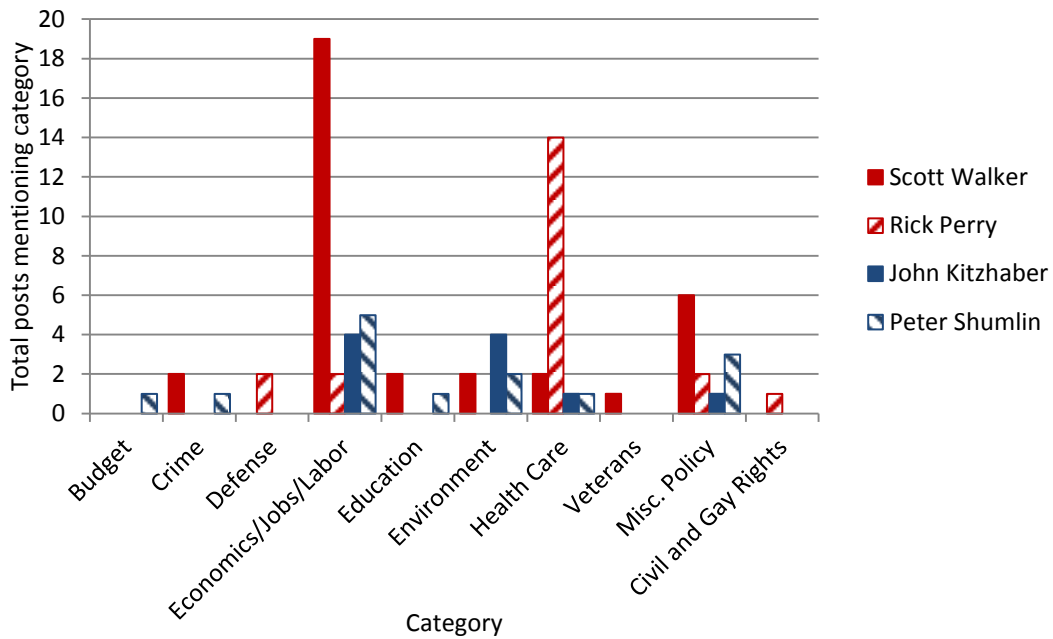
Engagement from Followers

Actively engaging with constituents, supporters, and followers is again a struggle for Governors, this time on Facebook. The average rates of engagement per post can be found below in Table 5.1 below. Once again, Governors Walker and Perry outshine Kitzhaber and Shumlin. In addition, there are far more instances of passive engagement (Likes) for each governor than there are active engagements (Shares and Comments). One can again speculate that former Governor Perry's name recognition helps his number significantly.

Table 5.1: Gubernatorial Facebook followers' average active and passive engagement per post from 9/23-10/21/14.

	Scott Walker	Rick Perry	John Kitzhaber	Peter Shumlin
Average Likes	1,537.91	12,306.32	152.83	54.16
Average Shares	155.63	938.86	14.22	8.11
Average Comments	141.98	871.82	18.83	6.21

Alternative Gubernatorial Social Media Accounts

The original plan for this paper included analyzing alternative social media outlets, such as YouTube, and Instagram, which have been used by congressional offices as a supplement to Facebook and Twitter strategies. However, after an original search, governors are not utilizing alternative social media outlets nearly as frequently or consistently as Congressmen.

Of the four governors, Scott Walker is the only one with an active Instagram account. In the one-month period from September 23-October 21, 2014, he posted 25 pictures to Instagram. Sixteen of the pictures were not policy related, and instead dealt with family, sports, or other activities. While this may not be the most effective use of social media as an elected official, it certainly brings a humanistic trait to the account, making Scott Walker more relatable to his followers, supporters, and constituents.[42]

In regards to YouTube, only Rick Perry and John Kitzhaber had updated videos during the one-month analysis period. Rick Perry posted 10 videos, all but one of which were related to the Ebola outbreak in Texas. John Kitzhaber's posted two videos, one related to Oregon's newly-launched reading initiative and one pertaining to "Wood Week," an environment forestry products celebration.

The implications of how certain outlets can be used more effectively will be explored further in the "Recommendations" section near the conclusion of this chapter.

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[42] See Adler et al. and page nine for further elaboration on humanistic tones in politics.

State Legislator Social Media Use

As noted in Chapter Three, eight state legislators' social media accounts were selected for analysis. It was not only difficult to find state legislators who use social media, but to also find legislators who also use social media on a regular basis. As a consequence, the findings reported here should be considered preliminary and a starting point for future research, as they are by no means conclusive.

State Legislator Twitter Use

Similar to gubernatorial Twitter use, the best place to begin the analysis of state legislators' Twitter use is with a day-to-day representation of the volume of tweets, which can be found below in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8: Twitter use by seven Wisconsin state legislators from 9/23-10/21/14.
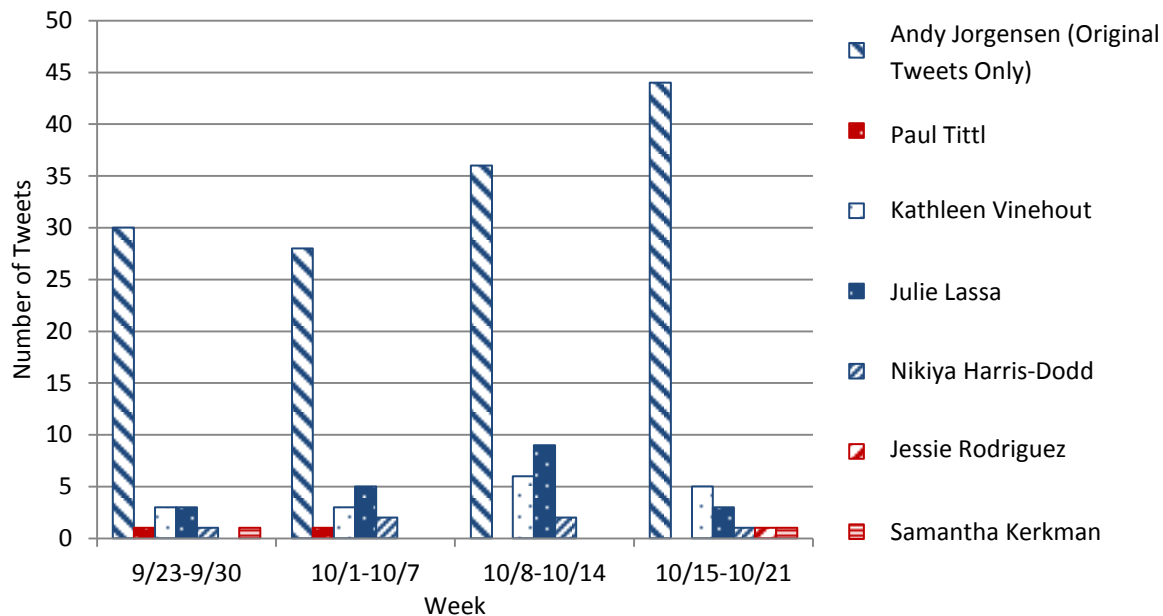
Similar to the gubernatorial Twitter use, there are two very distinct groups of Twitter users in the state legislature. Representative Andy Jorgensen, who represents Wisconsin's 43rd Assembly District, could serve as a case study in of himself. Jorgensen tweets almost three times

more per day than his counterparts. However, it is important to also consider how many of Jorgensen's tweets are original and not retweets. For a graphic representation, please see Figure 5.9 below. However, as will be elaborated on in the *Engagement from Followers* sub-section, while Jorgensen places a great emphasis on his social media presence, he is not engaging with followers and constituents on Twitter.

Figure 5.9: State Assemblyman Andy Jorgensen's total tweets contrasted with non-retweeted tweets.
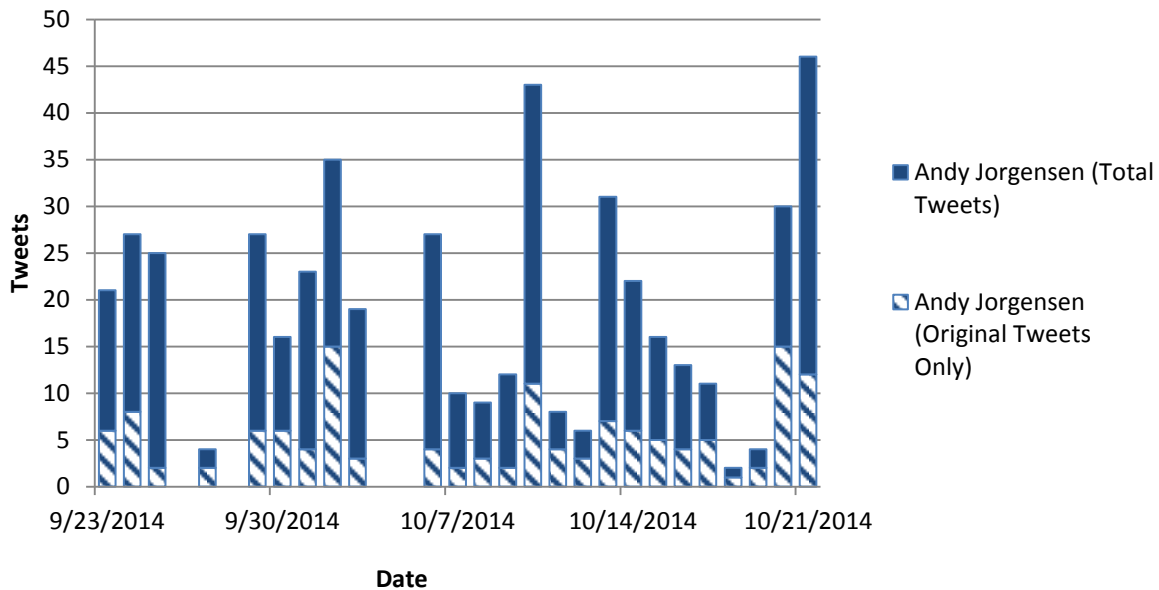
In regards to messaging, Wisconsin's state legislators had a different focus than governors. No one category serves as a dominant policy among all legislators, especially when Representative Jorgensen's tweets are removed from analysis, as can be seen below in Figure 5.10. (See Figure 5.11 for Jorgensen's categorical distribution of tweets.)

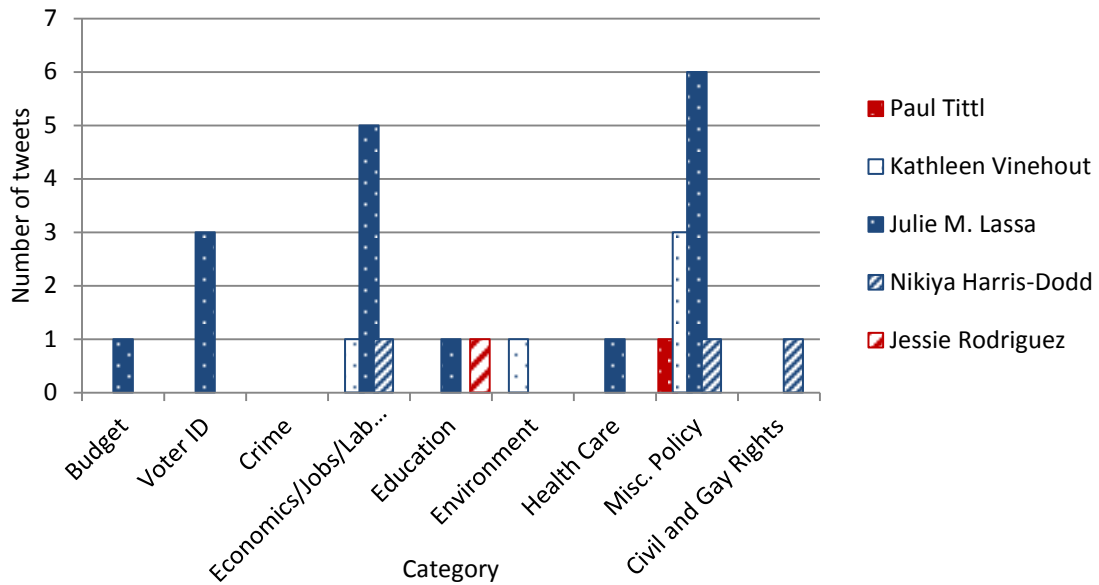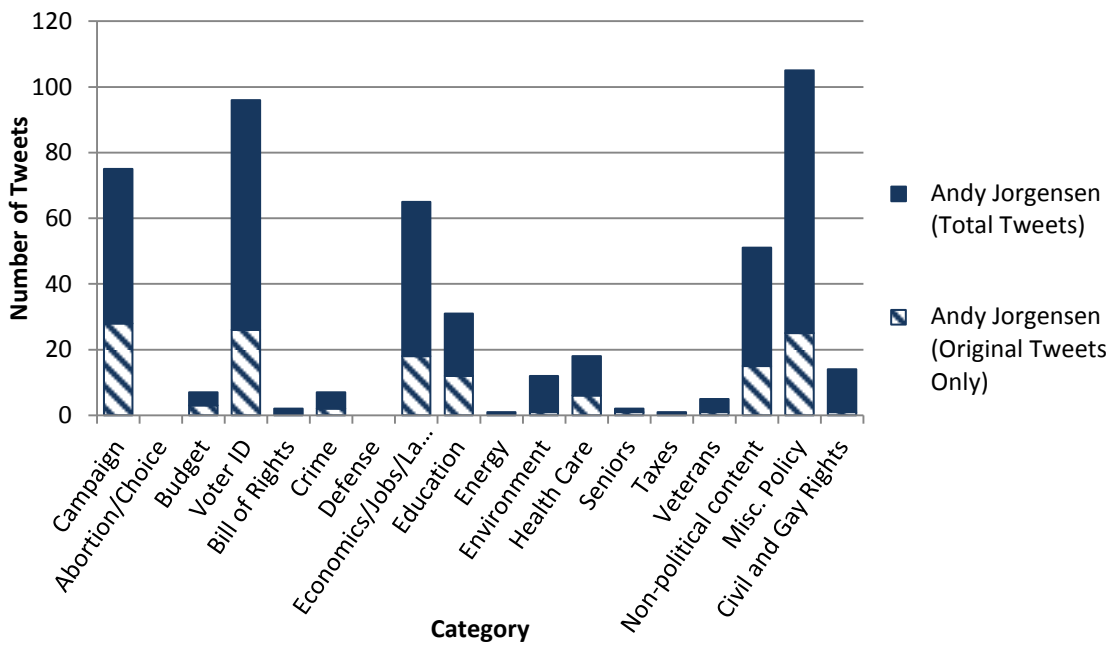**Figure 5.10:** Categorical distribution of State Legislators' tweets from 9/23-10/21/14.

Figure 5.11: Categorical distribution of State Assemblyman Andy Jorgensen's tweets from 9/23-10/21/14.

Engagement from Followers

Despite having an impressive sheer number of tweets, Andy Jorgensen cannot back up

his Twitter presence with an impressive average engagement rate. In fact, Julie Lassa, who had

only 17 tweets total, had over five times the average engagement per tweet. Her tweets brought

in over 130 retweets and 40 favorites. The comparison between each legislator and average

active and passive engagements can be seen below in Figure 5.12.

Figure 5.12: State legislators' Twitter followers' average active and passive engagements per tweet from 9/23-10/21/14.
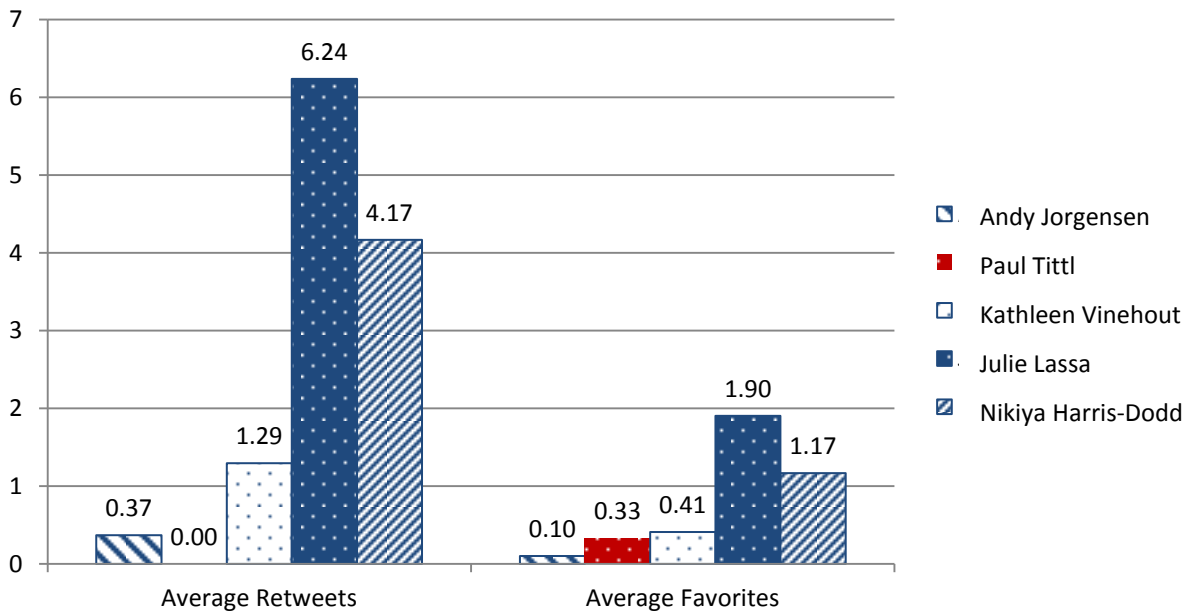
State Legislative Facebook Use

Turning the focus to State Legislators' Facebook use, there are again many

inconsistencies. First, Samantha Kerkman, Paul Tittl, and Jessie Rodriguez are excluded from the

analysis because they did not post at all during the one-month period. Similar to Twitter use,

Andy Jorgensen is the most prominent Facebook user, posting over three times more per week

than his counterparts. Please see Figure 5.13 below for a clearer comparison.

Figure 5.13: Number of State Legislators' Facebook posts, by week, from 9/23-10/21/14.
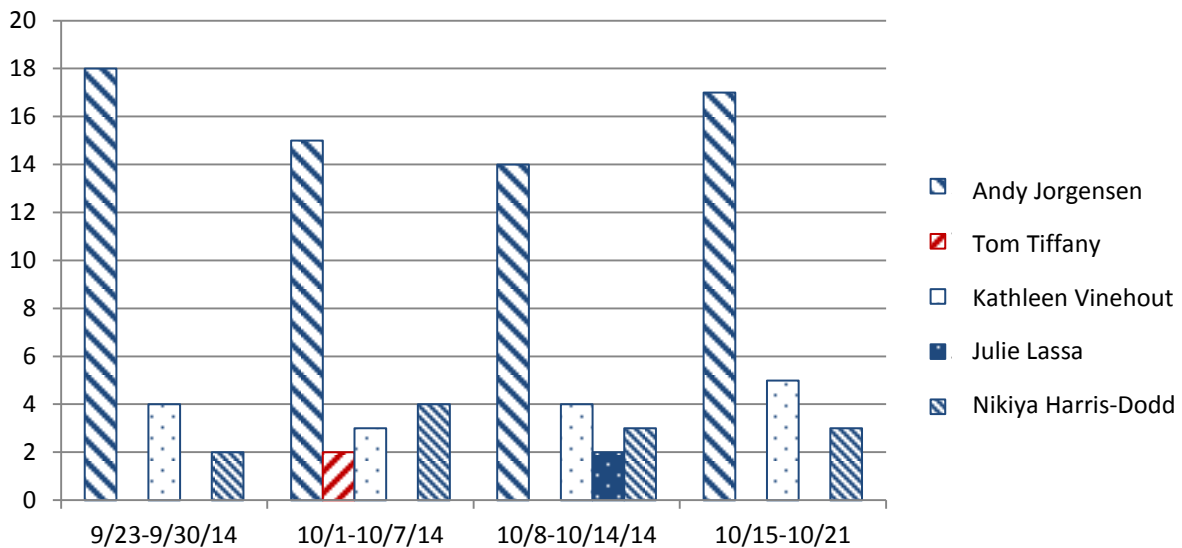
There are weeks when various legislators did not post, or posted very minimally, as is the case with Tom Tiffany and Julie Lassa. Furthermore, only one of Tom Tiffany's *two* posts was related to politics, but it did not fit into a clear category. Similarly, Julie Lassa's two posts were not politics related either.

Since Andy Jorgensen's data, although likely not an accurate representation of how all state legislators use social media is the greatest in volume, his will be the basis for analyzing what types of messages are conveyed using Facebook. Figure 5.14 below shows the categorical distribution of Andy Jorgensen's Facebook posts during the one-month analysis. Voter ID, while it was not a clear talking point for Scott Walker, it was for Andy Jorgensen. Many of the Voter ID-related posts were informing followers how to be properly equipped on Election Day, prior to the Supreme Court placing a hold on Wisconsin's implementation of the law. In addition, the high count of miscellaneous policy posts were along grey lines for different categories.

Figure 5.14: Categorical distribution of Andy Jorgensen's Facebook posts from 9/23-10/21/14, not including categories which had no content.
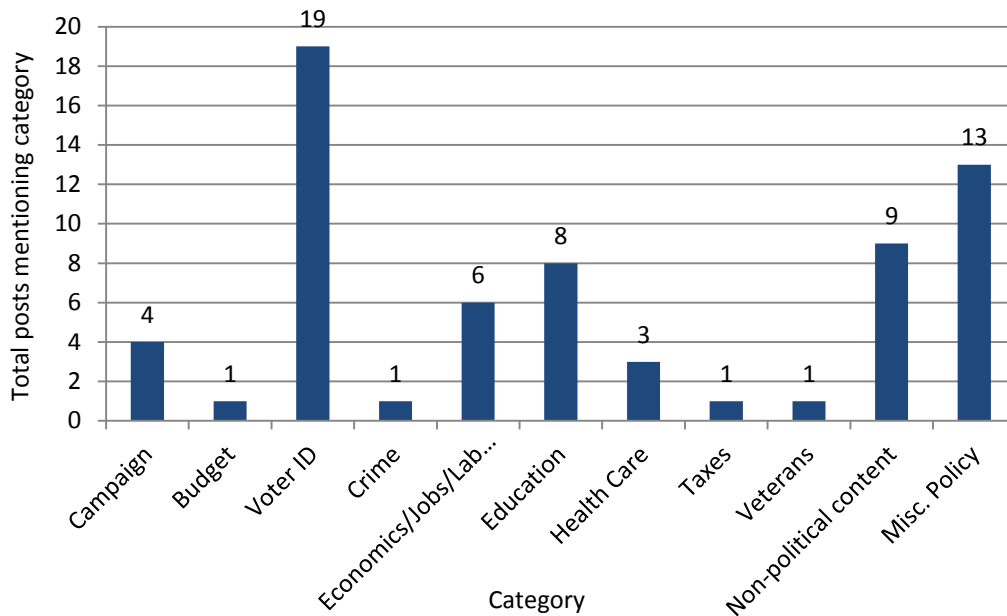
Engagement from Followers

While there are a number of concerns surrounding state legislators' Facebook use, one of the most concerning is how Andy Jorgensen and Samantha Kerkman make their posts available to the public. Typically public figures have pages that denote their public status and allow users to "like" their page in order to receive regular status and information updates. However, Jorgensen and Kerkman have created a normal user profile. Jorgensen's profile, State Representative Andy Jorgensen, has over 3,000 friends, which is more friend- and like-based than other state legislators have garnered. However, whether or not it can be used as an accurate baseline for follower engagement is not certain.

Furthermore, State Representative Samantha Kerkaman's page gives no indication of whether or not it is personal or public. As a result, this research was unable to conclude how many supporters Kerkman may be communicating with through her profile. By requiring that individuals friend them on Facebook before allowing them to engage in political discourse,

Jorgensen and Kerkman have limited how they are communicating with both constituents and followers. Even more concerning then, is that constituents and followers are limited in how they can engage with these state representatives. Social media is effectively, in this instance, a one-way flow of information, defeating the original purpose of utilizing social media as a communication tool.

Finally, as with previous analysis, Figure 5.15 below shows the average number of likes, shares, and comments per state legislators' Facebook post during the analysis period. It is refreshing to see such high rates of active engagement (comments) for each state legislator. This means that followers, supporters, and/or constituents are giving their state legislators feedback. It would, however, be equally refreshing, to know if legislators were responding the feedback on social media.

Figure 5.15: State legislators' Facebook followers' average active and passive engagements per post from 9/23-10/21/14.
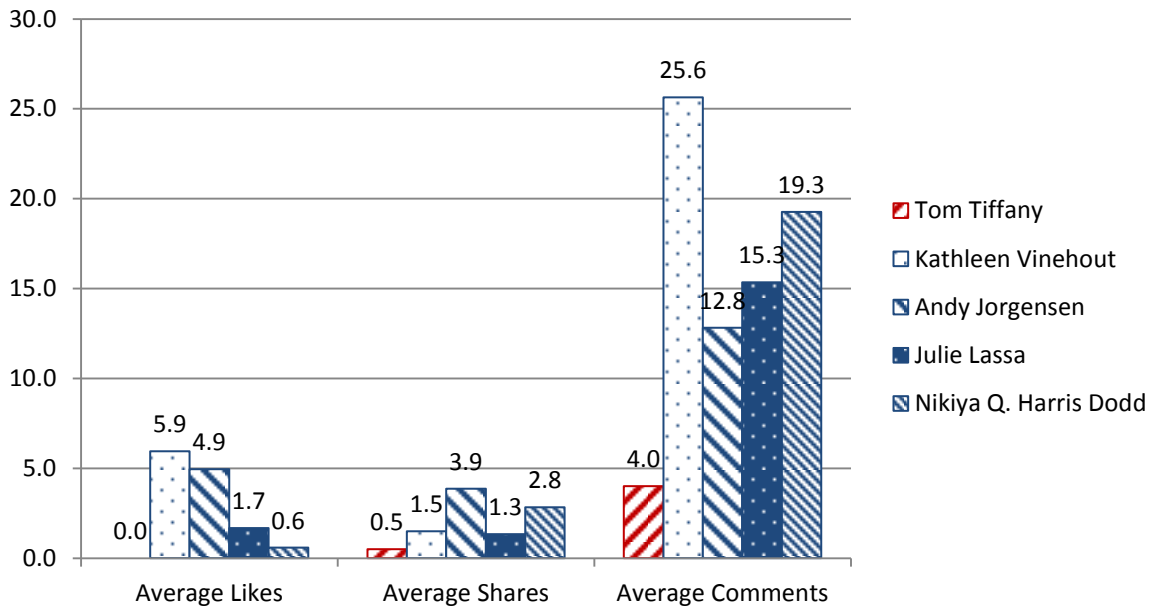
Conclusion

In this chapter, the social media strategies of four governors and nine state legislators were analyzed. Graphic representations provided the basis for highlighting the content, messaging, and engagement strategies for the politicians. While strategies will vary at their most basic level, the trends observed through a one month analysis have showcased a deeper theme among political social media use. In Chapter Six the hypotheses will be revisited in a discussion of the overall effectiveness of the political social media strategies, especially in regards to the three conditions of the thesis: messaging, adaptability, and engagement.

Chapter Six: Evaluating Gubernatorial and State Legislative Social Media Strategies

In Chapter Five, the social media strategies of twelve politicians were examined. In this chapter, the very same strategies are analyzed for messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability. Too often, social media is used as a one-way flow of information and users are not interactive.[43] As a result, politicians are evaluated on their ability to use social media as formal and informal forms of communication.

Messaging

Recall from Chapter Three the various hypotheses proposed at the onset of this research. The results surrounding H_1 (the messaging hypothesis) are mixed. Governors tweeted more than state legislators. Even the governor who tweeted the least tweeted more than the state legislator who tweeted the most when Andy Jorgensen's account is not included in analysis. Similarly, in terms of sheer volume of Facebook posts, governors and state legislators had very similar habits. However, save for Andy Jorgensen, no one state legislator posted to Facebook as much as or more than one governor. The results surrounding videos and pictures are inconclusive because there were no state legislator-owned YouTube and Instagram accounts.

The hypotheses regarding content, $H_{3.1}$ and $H_{3.2}$, were only partially satisfied. Hypothesis $H_{3.1}$, as shown in Figures 5.4 and 5.6, is not completely satisfied. Tweet and post content was not evenly distributed among policy categories. Furthermore, Rick Perry's YouTube videos were very specific to health care, not unlike his Facebook post trends during the same month. $H_{3.2}$, as shown in Figures 4.9 and 4.12, was partially satisfied as well. The hypothesis cannot be fully

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[43] Donehue, Wesley, Julie Germany, Laura Packard, and Michael Pratt. "Right Platform For The Right Politician." presented at the Campaign Tech East, The Washington Marriott, April 10, 2014.

satisfied because so many state legislators were excluded for analysis among categorical distribution for Facebook posts, nor were there videos and pictures to analyze.

Responsiveness

For the purposes of this research, averages were used to determine rates of engagement with each political social media account. Although not ideal, this metric gives a starting point for measuring engagement, and serves as a good start for future research.

Recall that H_2 predicted that Governors would have higher rates of active and passive engagement from followers than state legislators. As a result of the different number of followers, a solid conclusion cannot be drawn. However, there are a few noteworthy points about the data. First, Republican governors Scott Walker and Rick Perry had higher active and passive engagement rates on both Facebook and Twitter than Democratic counterparts John Kitzhaber and Peter Shumlin. This is likely a result of the Republican governors' mentions in media outside of their home states. As an example, Rick Perry is a former Presidential candidate and Scott Walker reformed unions in Wisconsin.

When state legislative social media use is examined, the tables turn. State Democratic followers were more engaged with politicians, actively and passively, on Twitter and Facebook. State Republicans had a lack-luster Facebook presence, which is likely one of the causes. Furthermore, State Assemblyman Andy Jorgensen should keep in mind that sometimes less is more. Though he had an overwhelming Twitter presence, followers were not nearly as engaged with his Twitter account as some of his other colleagues.

Finally, H_4, which predicted both political groupings (governors and state legislators) would neglect to respond to constituent feedback, in the form of replies and comments, on social media is satisfied, at least on Twitter. Politicians, both state legislators and governors, neglect to actively respond to replies and mentions. While this may be a strategy to avoid gaffes and

confrontation, the idea of social media is to remain social. A one-way flow of conversation, which is further addressed briefly in Chapter Six, is not conducive to the purpose of social media. The only instance of interaction between constituents and politicians was, once again, State Representative Andy Jorgensen. Representative Jorgensen replied to a few comments on his Facebook posts to clarify points and thank supporters, followers, and constituents.

Adaptability

Among the twelve cases examined, adaptability was seriously lacking. Governors with alternative social media accounts did not maintain their online presence on a regular basis, a sin in the realm of social media. Remaining relevant is one of the cardinal rules of social media. Going forward, it would likely be beneficial for the politicians evaluated and others to not only develop a sound social media strategy, but also continue to evolve online. Facebook may hold the corner on social media right now, but in the future, that may not necessarily be the case.

Discussion

While there was noticeable variation among both governors and state legislators, there are a few commonalities. Politicians clearly are not harnessing the power of social media as a political communication tool. Even members who seem to be posting a lot of content, such as Representative Jorgensen, have areas in which they could improve their strategy. It appears that the responsiveness and adaptability components of the strategies are the most lacking. Politicians are relying on two social media platforms, accounting for poor adaptability. Responsiveness is lacking because the flow of information is so one-sided that the twelve selected politicians' social media strategies are not very social at all.

Specifically, most messages politicians and their staffs are sending out via social media are a one-way flow of information. If political leaders used social media more effectively and consistently, the critical "social" aspect of social media would be satisfied. Of the twelve

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politicians examined, Representative Jorgensen was the only one who responded to social media posts using Facebook or any other outlet for that matter.

Finally, coordinating messages across Facebook and Twitter seemed to be consistent for most politicians studied. Governors, overall, had a more effective strategy including multiple platforms, than did the state legislators.

Overall, politicians' social media strategies can and should be improved. However, given how varied the social media strategies are, there are no definitive and blanket suggestions for every politician. In the broadest terms, using messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability as metrics for measuring effectiveness of social media strategies covers a lot of ground, and will continue to allow for comparison between past, present, and future accounts.

Recommendations for Future Social Media Strategies

Many of the recommendations for furthering politicians' social media strategies may seem like common practice for those who frequently use social media. However, especially at the lower levels of government, it can be easy to get caught up in the hype of social media without a clearly developed strategy. With that in mind, it is important to consider what is important to having an effective social media strategy in politics.

Most importantly, keeping a professional, or at least appropriate, tone on social media is imperative. Social media, while not meant to be completely formal, should still reflect the values and duties of the office an individual is elected to. While not all political gaffes can be avoided, simple things such as proofreading, using the correct hashtags on Twitter, and not using official accounts for personal use can prevent unfortunate circumstances and gaffes.

It is also important to remember that social media is supposed to be a two-way flow of information. As was seen in this analysis, politicians are neglecting the important "social" aspect of social media. If politicians are seriously committed to utilizing social media as a form of

communication with constituents, they must also be committed to responding to serious inquiries and requests by constituents on social media. That is not to say, of course, that politicians must respond to every single social media mention by constituents. To do so would be exhaust time and resources while also encouraging crackpots and their unwarranted attacks.

While the politicians throughout this analysis have shared a number of ideas and policy positions with their constituents, on the whole the politicians are neglecting to engage with constituents. It cannot be said for certain what the root of the problem is, but if one is to speculate, there are likely a number of causes. First, especially at the more local levels of government, it is difficult to devote an entire staff person to developing and cultivating a social media strategy. Criticizing is easy, but to effectively execute a social media strategy that engages with constituents, supporters, and followers on a regular basis is much more difficult than it appears.

Another reason for failing to engage actively with constituents is that social media is still taking hold in politics. While there have been great social media advancements and rates of adaptation among voters in recent years, please see Chapter Two, it is unrealistic to expect social media to completely replace traditional media (such as print or broadcast) for constituent communication in the near future. There are still many technologically-averse voters, especially among the aging population, who will resist the extinction of traditional constituent communication. The same can be said for economically disadvantaged groups who may not have access or the resources to obtain only digital and social media-based constituent communication. However, as younger individuals are elected to office, one would expect that more and more effective constituent communication will be social media-based.

As briefly referenced above in *Alternative Gubernatorial Social Media Accounts,* politicians should not be afraid to consider alternative social media accounts. Simply because Facebook and Twitter are the most popular outlets does not mean that they will reach all groups equally. The current youth vote, mostly 18-34, is more likely to be influenced by visual appeals. As such, alternative outlets, such as Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, could provide a form of communication with constituents who would otherwise be uninterested in policy, positions, or politics in general. Just because the aforementioned outlets are not popular among politicians right now does not mean that they will a) not be popular in the future or b) fail to connect completely with certain groups. An effective strategy is key to targeting and understanding which groups will be most receptive to new/different outlets.

One final recommendation, though certainly not the last as social media continues to develop, for politicians utilizing social media, is to keep in mind that being proactive on social media is just as, if not more, important as reacting to feedback. As Parmalee and Bichard found in their 2012 research that one of the most prominent reasons social media users do not respond to politicians is because the user believes they will never get a response.[44]

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of a one-month analysis of twelve politicians' social media use. The final chapter of this paper will summarize the findings of this research while also looking to the future of social media in politics. A number of points for future research will be discussed while also commenting on areas in which this research could have been improved.

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[44] Parmalee, John H., and Shannon L. Bichard. *Politics and the Twitter Revolution: How Tweets Influence the Relationship between Political Leaders and the Public*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012: 92.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Throughout this paper, the underlying idea that social media has provided governors and state legislators with a tool for communicating with followers, supporters, voters, and constituents. More specifically, a series of hypotheses examined the messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability of twelve politicians' social media strategies in order to gain a better understating of how social media is being used at a more local level. Trends from a one month period were analyzed in order to showcase good and bad strategies. In addition, suggestions for future social media strategies, to better connect with voters, supporters, and constituents, were provided.

Chapter Two explored previous research surrounding social media use by voters and politicians. In Chapters Three and Four the theory, hypotheses, and methodology were spelled out, build on the solid foundation of research provided in the previous chapter's literature review. Chapter Five, as the data analysis portion of the paper, provided insight into the use of social media as a political communication tool by a total of twelve politicians, governors and Wisconsin state legislators alike. The results of the analysis, presented in Chapter Six, explained why there are inconsistencies and inadequacies in the twelve social media strategies examined.

It is evident through analysis that social media strategies currently vary quite a bit. However, as online communication becomes a more viable method of communicating with constituents, and as constituents move toward a more pronounced online presence, politicians will likely become more aware of the power of social media. When that becomes the case, one

should expect for social media strategies to become more assimilated while still maintaining the unique home style of each office.[45]

Although trends in gubernatorial and state legislative social media use were established, there are still a number of questions left unanswered, two of which may be "So what? Why should politicians or constituents care about social media use in politics?" This may seem a bit editorialized, but the fact of the matter is that the way in which politicians communicate with constituents, voters, and supporters will be changing in the very near future. As more technologically tuned-in teens become voters, they will be looking to what they already know (social media) to get their news. If politicians hope to attract the attention of these individuals, they will have to do so in an engaging, and partially revolutionary on their part, way. By engaging with younger people in new ways, and still maintaining old forms of constituent communication, politicians will be able to better reach out to their audiences

By no means is this research the final conclusion surrounding social media use in politics. This research could have been improved in a number of ways. First, a better sample of politicians would have provided a more adequate analysis of social media use. The sample is very small, and as a result it is hard to generalize the results to the broader population. A longer-range analysis would also improve the generalizations that can be drawn from this research. Furthermore, a more statistical analysis, including multiple logistic regressions, would likely help to determine significant factors in engagement and messaging.

In terms of future research, others should begin to examine the responsiveness of political social media accounts. For example, how do politicians, or their aides, determine which inquiries

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[45] See Adler, E. Scott, Chariti E. Gent, and Cary B. Overmeyer. "The Home Style Homepage: Legislator Use of the World Wide Web for Constituency Contact." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (November 1, 1998): 585–595. doi:10.2307/440242.

to respond to? It would also be informative to examine how the *policies* behind political social media use are developed. In addition, comparing congressional social media use to that of more local politicians would showcase the difference in political messaging.

The first place to begin research will likely begin at the campaign level. Campaigns have become a testing ground for many forms of technology and strategy. As new social media platforms become popular and widely-used, one should expect the platforms will debut in campaigns before they make their way in the day-to-day operations of political office, which allows for adequate testing. Testing will ensure the demand for new platforms is present before investing significant time into keeping the platform up to date with a politician's happenings.

While the future of social media in politics still remains uncertain, the evidence suggests that there is a lot of room for improvement. The evident inconsistencies in messaging, responsiveness, and adaptability significantly hinder a politician's ability to harness the full potential of utilizing social media as a political communication tool.

Appendix A: Coding and Variables

Coding

Coded Value	Policy category
0	Not applicable
1	Campaign and campaign visit
2	Abortion/choice (would include right to life/choice)
3	Budget issues
4	Voter ID
5	Constitution (bill of rights)
6	Crime
7	Defense
8	Economics/jobs/labor issues (includes women's fair pay)
9	Education
10	Energy
11	Environment
12	Health care (including women's health unless specifically abortion/choice)
13	Senior issues
14	Taxes
15	Veterans
16	Non-political content
17	Misc. Policy
18	Civil and gay rights

Variables

Twitter

Account	username
Date	mm/dd/yyyy
Time	hh:mm (24 hr)
Retweets	number
Retweeted	0- original, 1 retweeted
Favorites	number retweets
tweetContent	see category codes above
includeLink	0 – no, 1 - yes
tone	-1 negative, 0 neutral, 1 positive
characters	number of characters

Facebook

Account	username
Date	mm/dd/yyyy
Time	hh:mm (24 hr)
Shares	number of shares
Comments	number of comments
Likes	number of likes
postContent	see category codes above
pic	0 – no, 1 - yes
includeLink	0 – no, 1 - yes
tone	-1 negative, 0 neutral, 1 positive
words	number of words

Other Platforms (Instagram and Youtube)

Account	username
Platform	instagram, youtube
Date	mm/dd/yyyy
Time	hh:mm (24 hr)
Shares	number of shares
Likes	number of likes
Comments	number of comments
picContent	see category codes above, 0 for n/a
videoContent	see category codes above, 0 for n/a
duration	video length in seconds
includeLink	0 – no, 1 - yes
tone	-1 negative, 0 neutral, 1 positive

Appendix B: Accounts Analyzed

Coding: T=Twitter Y=YouTube F= Facebook I= Instagram

politician	accountName	office	party	state	district	constSize	accounts
Scott Walker	@ScottWalker	governor	R	WI	n/a	5,743,000	T,F,Y,I
Rick Perry	@GovernorPerry	governor	R	TX	n/a	26,450,000	T,F,Y,I
John Kitzhaber	@GovKitz	governor	D	OR	n/a	3,930,000	T,F,Y
Peter Shumlin	@GovPeterShumlin	governor	D	VT	n/a	626,630	T,F,Y
Tom Tiffany		state senator	R	WI	12		F
Kathleen Vinehout	@VinehoutK	state senator	D	WI	31		T,F
Andy Jorgensen	@RepJorgensen	state rep	D	WI	43		T,F
Paul Tittl	@Tittlassembly	state rep	R	WI	25		T,F
Julie Lassa	@JulieMLassa	state senator	D	WI	24		T,F
Nikiya Q. Harris Dodd	@NikiyaQHarris	state senator	D	WI	6		T,F
Jessie Rodriguez	@RepJessie	state rep	R	WI	21		T,F
Samantha Kerkman	@samanthakerkman	state rep	R	WI	61		T,F

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