

Building Community Online:
Social Media Use in Sacramento Area
Neighborhood and Homeowner Associations

By

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Abstract

Social media allows individuals or groups to create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content online. The goal of this thesis is to assess in which way the use of social media can serve (1) the needs of organization-membership relations and (2) coordination among neighborhood organizations proximate to each other, and (3) connectivities to local or relevant government agencies. Neighborhood and homeowner associations and the local government departments responsible for interacting and managing these groups in five Sacramento County cities are the subjects of this research. A two-tiered interview method finds that both local government agencies and neighborhood/homeowners associations use social media to notify constituents, membership and other association about community news, events and public meetings. By using social media for primarily for notification, user interaction and collaboration is limited

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Because as much as I love newspapers, magazines, and broadcast media, I'm not happy to be a passive receptacle, a recipient of a packaged product. I want to be a participant in the news, a party to social discourse, a part of the conversation.
(Lasica, 2001 as cited by Crampton, 2003).

Communication is a two-way street. Well, it really ain't happening here ...
(M. Elias, personal communication, April 21st, 2011)

The term 'social media' is a hot topic in the popular press, in academia, and in our everyday lives. Activists in the recent Green and Jasmine Revolutions across the Middle East used Twitter and Facebook to organize protests. Corporations are actively developing viral social media campaigns to promote products, artists, and events. Individuals blog, tweet, and status-update to share their musings, rants, and observations with millions across the world. Social media is influencing how we spend time on the Internet: Nielsen Wire estimates that the "world now spends over 110 billion minutes on social networking sites and blog sites each year...[which equates] to 22 percent of all time online or one in every four and a half minutes" (2010).

But what exactly is 'social media' and why is it so appealing? While there are a number of definitions floating around (Lake, 2009), for the purpose of this paper, social media is defined as media that allows individuals or groups to "create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and/[or] share content" (HowTo.gov, 2011). Common examples of social media are social networking, blogging and microblogging sites, wikis, and video and picture sharing sites (See Table 1).

Table 1. Common Social Media Types and Examples (HowTo.gov, 2011;Wikipedia, 2011a)¹.

Social Media Type	Description	Common Examples
Blogs	Permits users to post in a journal/diary format. Users can choose to ‘open’ a page to public comment	WordPress, Blogspot, LiveJournal, Xanga
Social Networking	Allow users to create personal profiles to connect and network with other users along common interests and affiliations	Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, LinkedIn, Ning
Microblogs	Permits users to post brief messages, similar to that of a text message/SMS. Some services also enable users to post links and photos.	Twitter, Foursquare, FML, Jaiku
Wiki	Encourages users to develop, edit and comment on interlinked webpages	Wikimedia, PBworks
Video Sharing	Enable users to store, publically share and upload visual media. Other users often can comment and rate videos	YouTube, Dailymotion, Vimeo
Podcasting	Allows users to listen to and upload/download MP3 audiofiles.	SoundCloud, ShareTheMusic, Last.fm
Discussion Forums/ Message Boards	Forums allow users to discuss topics of common interest. User postings are generally organized into related threads and topics. Moderators may manage/screen forum topics and postings.	Google Group, Yahoo Groups, 4Chan
Photo Sharing	Enable users to store, share and upload visual media. Other users often may comment and rate videos	Flickr, deviantArt, Photobucket, Picasa

¹ Note that this is not an exhaustive list of social media types, but list of commonly used social media. For a more exhaustive list, see Wikipedia 2011a.

While diverse in their content and audience, social media pages are united by the Web 2.0 philosophy of web development. The term, first coined by DiNucci in 1999 and further developed by the O'Reilly Group in 2005 and 2006, is defined as:

"...[T]he business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this: Build applications that harness network effects to get better the more people use them" (O'Reilly, 2006).

Web 2.0 principles involve developing user-friendly web interfaces, encouraging dynamic and decentralized management of user content, and operating online without no additional software (O'Reilly, 2005). By following these guiding principles, it is believed that users and web developers will benefit from the collective intelligence of users.

PERSONAL INTEREST IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The topic of social media interests me as I am a board member on two local non-profits in the Sacramento area- the Alchemist Community Development Corporation (Alchemist CDC) and the Ben Ali Neighborhood Association. For the Alchemist CDC, I am responsible for promoting upcoming events and fundraisers on the non-profit's Facebook page. The CDC uses Facebook as it is free, is popular (many of our board members and community partners have profiles), and is considered to be a great outreach and communication tool. Our non-profit values the page as we have a relatively small budget with only one- paid staff member. The capacity to instantly inform hundreds of people of our activities is both time and cost effective. Although my interaction with the profile isn't perfect, our non-profits is establishing relationships with individuals and

other organizations. This experience with social media inspired me to learn more about how others use these media.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The goal of this thesis is to assess in which way the use of social media can serve (1) the needs of organization-membership relations and (2) coordination among neighborhood organizations proximate to each other, and (3) connectivities to local or relevant government agencies. The subjects of this research are neighborhood and homeowner associations, their membership and the local government departments responsible for interacting and managing these associations. I specifically want to study these groups as I am a member of a neighborhood association and may benefit from this research. I know from experience the challenges facing these voluntary associations: limited human and financial resources makes interacting with members, other associations and local government staff a challenge.

Furthermore, there is a lack of literature available on voluntary organizations and their social media activity; in fact, no *academic* literature can be found on this issue². Research is focused on understanding how corporations, government agencies, large non-profits or individuals use these media (Crampton, 2003; Institute of Local Government, 2010; Russo and Peacock, 2009; Nielson 2006; Daily 2010).

This thesis research hopes to initiate an academic discussion on social media use by these associations: Why do neighborhood/homeowner associations choose to use social media sites? Why do some associations choose *not* to use social media? Do

² When searching for possible reference literature on UC Davis's Harvest and Next-Generation Melvyl Catalogues, I queried the terms: 'social media', 'associations', 'participation', 'neighborhood associations', 'homeowners associations', 'Web 2.0' and 'communication', both individually and in combination.

associations and its membership find social media use to be meaningful and effective? Does a local government's use or disuse of social media influence an association use or disuse? Answers to these and other questions may provide insights on the opportunities and limitations of these media for these groups.

EXPECTED FINDINGS

Given that social media is a fairly recent phenomenon, I believe that only a small number of neighborhood and homeowners associations will use social media platforms. The associations that *currently use* social media are expected to have one or more of the following characteristics: 1) a critical mass of active members that participate in association activities, both on and offline; 2) a younger and/or professional membership; and 3) a belief that social media is necessary to interact with members and interested persons. I also hypothesize that these organizations will use their social media pages/accounts infrequently and will continue to rely on traditional methods and media (e.g. flyers, mailers and newsletters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing, phone and email trees, and websites). Moreover, I hypothesize that these neighborhood or homeowner associations will only use social media to communicate with residents and will not use these media to network with other associations or local government departments.

For neighborhood and homeowner associations that *do not use* social media, they will do so for a number of reasons: 1) a belief that social media is a temporary phenomenon or a 'fad'; 2) a belief that social media is not compatible with the association's goals or mission; 3) a belief that the technology is inaccessible or not user-friendly, and/or 4) a belief that their membership does not use these media. It is expected

that these organizations will continue to use traditional media to interact and engage with members, other associations and local government agencies.

Interviews with representatives from local neighborhood and homeowners associations and local government agencies in the Sacramento Area will hopefully answer these research questions. These persons have an expansive knowledge of neighborhood and homeowner activity in the area. This qualitative research is also supported by secondary research related to voluntary associations, communication, engagement; and social media.

The organization of this paper is as follows:

- Chapter 2 includes a literature review of previous voluntary association research.
- Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and practical features of social media and its use inspires greater participation.
- Chapter 4 summarizes the research methodology used to carry out this thesis research
- Chapter 5 highlights my interview findings with local government staff persons
- Chapter 6 describes the social media activity/inactivity in neighborhood and homeowners associations within the five Sacramento County cities.
- Chapter 7 discusses the implications of these findings and possible directions for future research

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Before investigating social media use by neighborhood and homeowners associations in the Sacramento area, it is important to review the concept of association. Describing the theoretical and empirical research on voluntary associations is a natural beginning for this thesis as neighborhood and homeowners groups are examples of associating at the local level.

THE IMPORTANCE OF (LOCAL) ASSOCIATION

Associating is the process of joining with others because of a shared interest or of a desire to accomplish a goal or task (Frumkin, 2002). Associations are the manifestations of the process and are a means of social coordination and for accomplishing social ends independent from the powers of state (*Ibid*). Historically, associations have been portrayed both positively and negatively. Thomas Hobbes saw private groups organized around community interests as potentially dangerous as these groups could question and undermine the authority of the state (*Ibid*). James Madison also believed that a rise in ‘factions’ would lead to a “zeal for different opinions”, making civic cooperation impossible (*Ibid*).

A.D. Lindsay, on the other hand, cited that associations are beneficial in that they do protect an individual from growing bureaucracy: “Within trade unions...working men’s clubs and institutes, the ordinary member of the rank and file has the chance to make his contribution, to have his work and particular gift recognized, to earn the personal respect of his fellows” (Lindsay, 1943, as cited by Frumkin, 2005). Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835) believed that the large presence of

voluntary associations was intimately linked to American democracy. Other voluntary association research suggests that participating in associations is beneficial as a means of developing and building social capital (Putnam, 2000). Here, social capital is “the networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (*Ibid*). Authors further posit that by being a part of a voluntary association, individuals can create social relationships and can access social resources which improve their social and economic prospects.

ASSOCIATING LOCALLY- NEIGHBORHOOD AND HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS

There are many groups which one can associate- religious organizations, sports or recreational clubs, art, music or educational groups, labor unions, political parties, environmental organizations etc.; however, it is through homeowners and neighborhood associations where individuals can (ideally) be involved in the governance of the geographic areas in which they live and/or work (Lance, 2004; Matejczyk, 2001 as cited by Haddad, 2006).

Neighborhood associations are civic organizations created for the purpose of “maintaining or improving the quality of life” in a designated area within a city or county. In these associations, residents, employees, landlords and others can come together to learn about local issues and to support decision-making processes that may protect their interests (Guest, 1985; Crenson, 1983; Goering, 1979 as cited by Logan and Rabrnovic, 1990). These organizations can vary in their governance structure (although primarily voluntary), can have 501 © 3 non-profit status and may collect dues or membership fees (Logan and Rabrnovic 1990). Neighborhood associations are often founded on a single

issue; such as a controversial development or a public safety concern; however, as time progresses, these associations may broaden their issue base (Arnold, 1975).

A homeowners association (HOA) is a governing body which organizes homeowners of a particular subdivision, condominium or planned unit development. HOAs establish covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) by which all homeowners must comply. Often these CC&Rs set up regulations to maintain property values and aesthetically pleasing environs (Smith ,2006 as cited by Erman and Coskun-Yildar, 2007). HOAs have 501 ©3 non-profit status and are required to have board of directors and official by-laws. HOAs also have the authority to impose fees and fines to fund services that maintain home and property values (US Legal, Inc, 2011).

ASSOCIATIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

These associations may have an intriguing relationship with their respective local governments. Associations may legitimize the activities of government agencies by communicating local government services and resources to their membership and by mobilizing support for government-supported community events (Thomas, 1986; Ley and Mercer, 1980). On the other hand, these associations may have an antagonistic relationship with its local government by organizing against local government interventions (Oakley and Verity, 2003). These can take form of protests, writing or phoning government officials, and/or attending and speaking at public meetings. Whatever an association's relationship is with its local government, this relationship is fluid and is very dependent on local contexts.

PARTICIPATION IN NEIGHBORHOOD AND HOMEOWNER ASSOCIATIONS

Participation in voluntary associations rests on a continuum. The most common and the least demanding form of participation is nominal membership- paying a membership fee for an organization, without contribution to organizational activities (Bekkers, 2002). This form of membership often is guided by self-interests: in exchange for becoming a member, resources or services are provided. Attending meetings is a moderate form of participation as it requires more time than simply being a member. The most demanding form of participation is voluntary work. This form of participation bestows the largest amount of obligations on the individual in the hopes of producing large benefits for the organization (*Ibid*).

Participation rates in associations have been explained through different theoretical frameworks. The rational choice perspective weighs the opportunity costs of participation in terms of an individual's available time, money and skills. If a person does not believe that he or she has a sufficient amount of these resources or could use these resources elsewhere, then this person will not be a part of an association.

Historical and environmental conditions are also linked to organized participation. Previous experience with the association, on both a personal level- "My issues were actually listened to by the association"-and on a community scale- "Our association's efforts did something about the situation"- may influence whether or not one will continue to engage in association activity (Stoll, 2000). Periods of high political activism have also influenced public involvement in associations; Jargowsky (1997 as cited by Stoll, 2000) found that minorities had a greater presence in associations during the 1960's

and 1970's because many neighborhood associations were active in civil rights movements.

Taking on a social ecology perspective (Shaw and McKay, 1942 as cited by Stoll, 2000), association participation rates are also believed to be influenced by a community's environment. Urban research suggests that associations in high poverty areas tend to have low participation rates as these neighborhoods lack the social resources such as capital, education or jobs, and the institutions that serve neighborhoods. Without these foundations, residents have little agency to start up and maintain voluntary associations (Bursik, 1988 as cited by Stoll, 2000) Conversely, studies find that suburban neighborhoods have greater association participation as suburban neighborhoods have a high percentage of homeownership and tend to have fewer public services available to them: in order to maintain their levels of service and to protect their personal and community lifestyle, these residents are 'forced' to vocalize their concerns to local officials (Dye, 1970, Cox ,1973 and cited by Stoll, 2000):

Developments in network theory, however negate the importance of this research, by stating that 'the neighborhood' is losing importance. With improvements in telecommunications and transportation, relationships are no longer spatially bound. Community is no longer limited to the immediate geographies of the home or the place of employment as high speed communications allow individuals to interact, collaborate, support, and bond with a much larger group of people at greater distances (Wellman, 2002). The importance of neighborhoods, according to Wellman (1999), has diminished, as it is now only one space, out of many of which a person can choose to network. To further prove this point, Wellman suggests that in our modern society, neighborhoods

only function as “variably safe and salubrious milieus from which people sally forth” (2002).

This discussion summarizes a large body of research dedicated to the function and forms of associating and touches upon the internal and external forces that influence an individual’s level of participation at the neighborhood level. The next chapter will summarize the theoretical and practical features of social media.

Chapter 3: Features of Social Media

In this paper, social media is defined as media that allows individuals or groups to “create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content” (HowTo.gov, 2011). Social media use has grown over the past ten years and is steadily influencing individual and organizational online activity and behavior (Crampton, 2003; Institute of Local Government, 2010; Russo and Peacock, 2009; Nielson 2006; Daily 2010). This brief chapter describes the common features of social media.

All social media and Web 2.0 websites are said to exhibit one or more of the following characteristics (Wikipedia, 2011a):

- *Spatial Reach*- These sites can be used on a numbers of different geographic scales- these sites can be used by a small group of individuals to organize a meeting or can be used by multi-national corporations to interact with customers.
- *Ease of Access*. Social media sites have low to no costs because they do not require additional software to run its service. Here, the only limitation is Internet availability.
- *Simple Usability*. These sites are developed to be user friendly, thus, it is not expected that users acquire new skills to join theses sites.
- *Immediate Transmission*. With social media, information can be shared instantaneously.
- *Semi-Permanence*. With social media, user can edit or erase comments or postings.

Hints of these theoretical principles manifest themselves in a number of physical features. The following principle features, alone or in combination, are believed as facilitating user collaboration (all features cite Cronin, 2009):

- *Simple and Minimalistic Interface.* Social media sites typically use little color and minimal graphics in their layouts- white or monochromatic colors are common color schemes (See Figure 1.). Keeping layouts ‘simple’ reduces the user visual ‘noise’ or distractions. Instead, user focus is directed towards the text.



Figure 1. Wikipedia’s home page is an example of a minimalist interface, with its limited color scheme and use of one prominent graphic (Wikipedia, 2011b).

- *Search and Filter Functionality.* Sorting through information allows users to look for what they are looking for in a timely manner. A recent trend in social media applications is live search results and filtering- as text is typed into the search bar, predictive text appears in the search bar and potentially relevant search terms are displays in drop-down menu (See Figure 2)

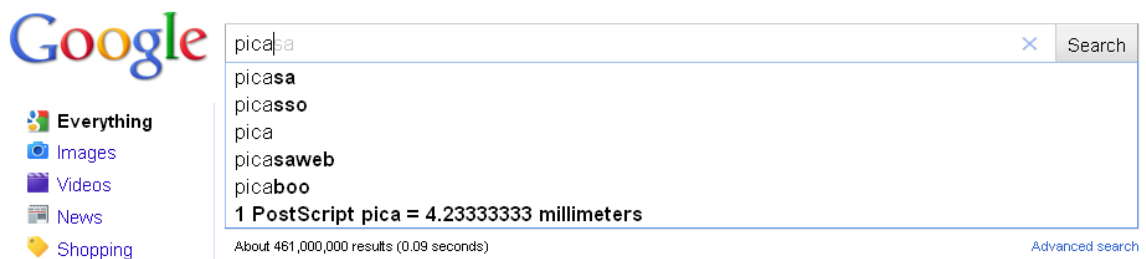


Figure 2. Google Instant is a recent example of live searching (Personal photo, 2011).

- *Call-to-Action Buttons.* These “clickable boxes” are typically bold and placed prominently onto the site. These buttons are developed to inspire a person to complete an action- to follow or ‘like’ a person, place, or product and to share and bookmark media (i.e. photos, videos, links etc.). A count box, which tracks the number of times the button was clicked on, may complement the button. The kinesthetic act of tapping on a mouse or touchpad also makes the experience memorable.



Figure 3. Common Call-to-Action Buttons (Starting from the left hand corner: Blogspot, delicious, Digg, Facebook, RSS Feed, Reddit, Stumble Upon, Technorati, and Twitter) (Pep Top, 2011).

- *User-centric Interfaces.* Social networking websites employ this principle to the fullest. Information about a user’s social contacts, interests, events, groups etc. can be shared with others via profiles, mood and status updates. Sharing this information openly can potentially generate conversations with others. (See Figure 4).
- *Real-time Information Sharing.* Chat rooms, Facebook and Twitter wall feeds (pages that display recent social network activity) and comment and rating boxes allow users to view and post opinions, feelings, and news instantly³. Most social media sites archive this activity (See Figure 4).

³ On many social media sites, users may have the option to schedule when a post may be shared publically.

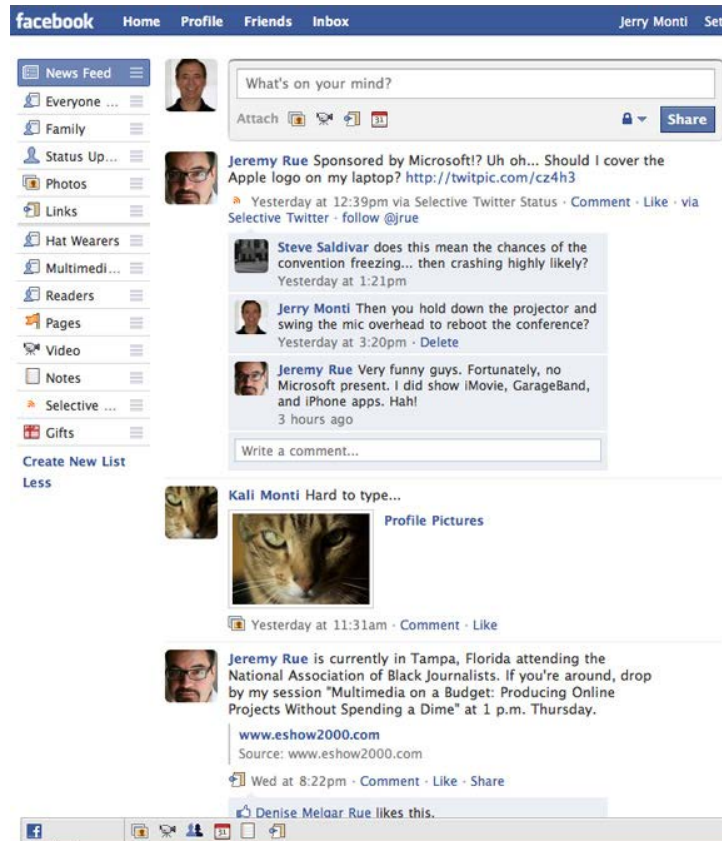


Figure 4. Facebook’s newsfeed is an example of a user-centric interface and real time information sharing. In the newsfeed above, a user’s status updates and comments are shared with mutual friends and logged by date and time. The response times in the first newsfeed item is a testament to the instantaneous nature of social media (Monti, 2011).

- *Simple Registration.* Joining social media pages generally requires the user to enter an email address and a unique password. Once registered, it is up to the user to share other personal information publically, and usually takes the form of a biography or profile) (See Figure 5).

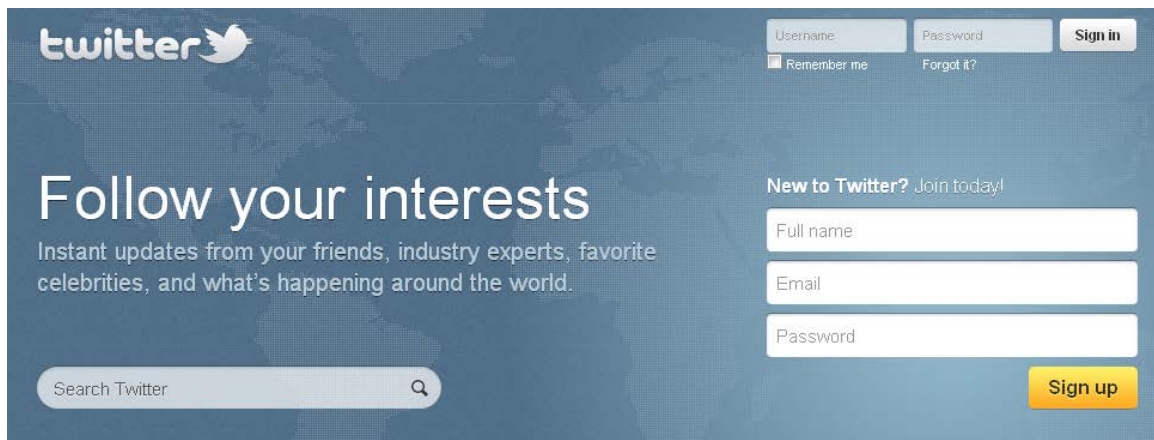


Figure 5. Twitter's login page demonstrates a simple registration interface. Existing users are required to enter their username and password. To register, a person only needs to input his/her name, email address and a password (Twitter, 2011). The homepage also has a search bar on the left hand side of the homepage, exhibiting the common search feature on social media sites (Twitter, 2011).

In sum, these fundamental and practical elements of social media make user collaboration possible: these features are what make social media 'social'.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

The objective of this thesis research again is to uncover how –and ultimately why and to what effect - Sacramento County neighborhood and homeowners associations use social media. To learn about associations and their social media practices, a semi-structured interview methods is used. While a survey method is more advantageous for gathering information from a large sample population, I believe that conducting interviews yields richer and more meaningful information about user experiences with social media. Furthermore, the concept of social media is still quite new to popular press, academia and the general public; thus there is a possibility that interviewees may not be familiar with the term ‘social media’ and/or which websites are categorized as being social media. Lastly, employing an interview method allows me to probe for answers and to detect tone and attitude shifts in responses.

STUDY AREA

For this research, I am interested in learning about social media use by Sacramento area neighborhood and homeowners associations and related local government departments. The Sacramento area in this thesis is defined as the five northern cities of Sacramento County- the city of Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Rancho Cordova, and Sacramento. Although this is an expansive area, the diversity of urban form, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicities, languages spoken, and homeownership rates across these five cities makes for unique and dynamic research area

and findings. Furthermore, there is a convenience factor contributing to this study area selection- all cities are within 15-20 minute drive from my house.⁴

Research Study Area

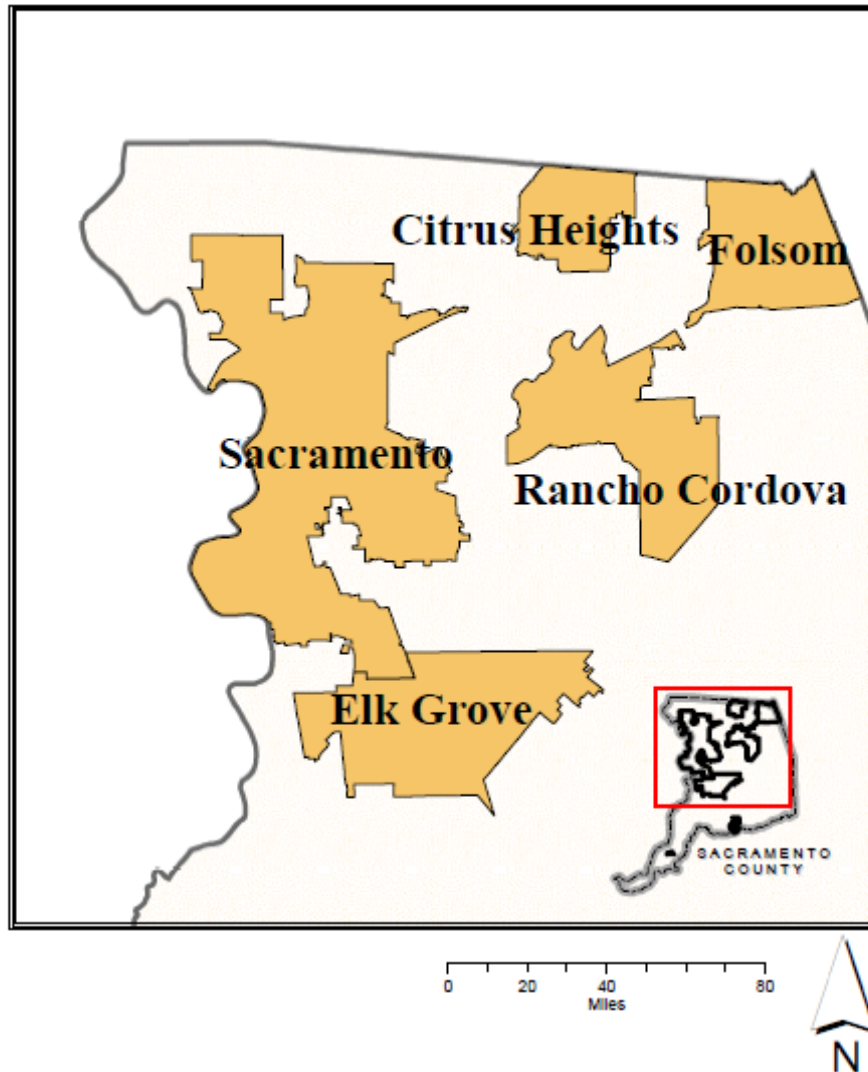


Figure 6. Map of the Study Area (SACOG 2011)

⁴ I did consider using a conventional definition of the Sacramento Area, such as the six county SACOG boundary (El Dorado County, Placer, Yolo, Sutter, Sacramento, and Yuba) or the US Census-delineated Sacramento-Arden-Arcade- Roseville Metropolitan area, however, these geographies are too large cover in a three month research period (See Interview Protocol).

Study Area

In each city profile, information about size, incorporation, population, income homeownership, age and race distribution and English proficiency are provided. These data give a broad of what neighborhoods may look like their respective city limits. All data is from the US Census American Community 5 Year estimates (2009) as complete Census 2010 is not available. Furthermore, US Census 2000 data could not be used as the cities of Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova were not incorporated at the time. Information from the 2005-2009 American Community 5 Year Estimates is used for the sake of consistency.

City of Citrus Heights: (See Appendix 1)

Situated in northeast Sacramento County, the City of Citrus Heights is classified as a middle-income suburban community. The City was incorporated on January 1st, 1997 and has a population of 84,547. The median household income for Citrus Heights is \$53,735. 58.6% of the City's housing units owner-occupied and have an estimated median value of \$309,600. Citrus Heights is predominately White, with a sizable Hispanic/Latino population. The majority of households speak only English.

City of Elk Grove: (See Appendix 2)

Located in the central west of Sacramento County, Elk Grove was the first California city to incorporate in the new millennium (January 1st 2000). This suburban city, accessible to Interstate 5 and 99, and can be characterized as supporting a number of planned unit developments and large retail and commercial plazas (City of Elk Grove, 2011a). The population is estimated to be 130,007, with a median household income of \$81,097. 78.85% of all housing units are owner-occupied, with an estimated median value of \$404,300. The City is racial diverse, with high concentrations of White, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian populations. 31.3% of households speak a language other than English and 9.8% of these households speak English 'less than very well'.

City of Folsom: (See Appendix 3)

This suburban city located in northeastern Sacramento county and is accessible off of Highway 50 (City of Folsom, 2011). The City is home to Folsom State Prison and a number of local and multinational high tech firms (*Ibid*). The total population of the City

is 66,399, with a median household income of \$92,427. 72.8% of all housing units of owner-occupied and have an estimated median value of \$484,200. Folsom is predominately White, but has a sizeable Hispanic/Latino population, at 11%. 83% of households speak English only; only 5.2% of the population is said to speak English 'less than very well'.

City of Rancho Cordova: (See Appendix 4)

The middle-class suburb is located in eastern Sacramento County, just off of Highway 50. The city incorporated on July 1st, 2003 after a 20 year fight for cityhood (City of Rancho Cordova, 2011a). Rancho Cordova is home to the now closed Mather Air Force Base (*Ibid*). The City's population is 60,008, with a median household income of \$49,860. There is an almost equal mix of owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing units, at 55.9% and 44.1% respectively. The estimated median value of owner-occupied homes is \$286,700. Rancho Cordova is racially diverse, with sizeable representations of 'minority' populations (e.g. Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian and persons of two or more races). 32.9% of households speak a language other than English, with 17.4% speaking English 'less than very well'.

City of Sacramento: (See Appendix 5)

Founded in 1849, the City of Sacramento is the oldest incorporated city in California (City of Sacramento, 2011a). Sacramento is the capital of the State of California and the county seat of Sacramento County. The city's economy is broadly based; however, the State of California the largest employer (*Ibid*). Sacramento's population is 456,394, with a median household income of \$50,381. Like Rancho Cordova, there is almost an equal

balance of owner-occupied to renter-occupied housing units, at 51.3% and 48.7% respectively. The estimated median value of owner-occupied homes is \$331,400. The city is racially diverse and 35.7% of the population speaks a language other than English; 17.1% are said to speak English 'less than well'.

THE INTERVIEWS

Interview Protocol

Interviewees for this research are representatives of neighborhood and homeowner associations and are city staff members in city planning departments involved in managing or registering neighborhood and homeowner associations. Because there are a large number of homeowner and neighborhood associations in my study area, speaking with planning or department staff is necessary as they could possibly identify active or functioning associations⁵. This filter is necessary as there are over 100 neighborhood groups in the study area. Thus, this interview methodology utilized a two-tiered approach: to first interview local government staff and then with association contacts.

Email solicitations were the primary mode of contact for both staff and association members: This email includes a brief description of my project and my contact information (See Appendices 6 and 7). If I did not receive a response within seven days, a follow-up email was sent. If still no response, then I followed up with a phone call (if such contact information is available). Interviewees were given the option of a phone, email or an in-person interviews; however phone or email correspondence was preferred (because of the associated travel time and cost) During phone interviews, I kept hand-written notes of the conversation. If a subject preferred an email interview, I sent my interview prompt, and in accordance to IRB Exemption status, I included a disclaimer for my research, indicating that the subject may refuse to answer any questions. After each interview, I transcribed interview notes on a word document and placed all

⁵ Voluntary organizations must officially register with their respective local planning department. This contact information is then made public record.

hand-written notes in a secure file folder. Additionally, all contact was logged in an Excel document.

After receiving information from department staff, I then contacted individual associations. Most local government directories for neighborhood and homeowners associations include contact information of one individual for each association. In the case where information from one or more contacts was provided, I sent solicitation emails at least two persons (e.g. President and Vice President). In the case where no contact information was available, I simply did not include the association in my research sample. The interview process began on March 18th and lasted until May 6th, 2011⁶.

Interview Questions

Again, as social media is a relatively new phenomenon, I created an open-ended structured interview guide (See Appendices 8 and 9). The questions developed both quantified and qualified user's choice to use or not use social media. Both local government and association guide were divided into two parts: (1) General information and (2) Social media use or disuse. In the general information questions, I was interested in learning the mission and governance structure of the department or association interviewed and the role the interviewee had in the organization. These questions were beneficial in contextualizing the interviewee's experiences with social media. The second portion of the interview prompt, includes questions regarding the current ways in which a department or association interacts with constituents/ residents. If social media sites are

⁶ I initially wanted to end all interviews on April 30th, 2011; however starting May 1st, a number of association contacts responded to my solicitation emails. I was hesitant to interview these individuals, but a number mentioned that they used social media sites. Because very few associations use social media (See Findings), I was intrigued to hear their social media experiences.

an element of this strategy, a number of questions pertaining to social media preferences, interactions taking place on the(se) site(s), and perceived effectiveness of social media use were asked. I concluded each interview by thanking the individual and by requesting permission to ask follow-up questions if needed.

When coding interview findings, I developed a coding scheme based on the common responses by associations or departments. If an association/department used social media, I organized their responses by the social media platform preferences, social media motivations, identified user groups, perceptions of social media effectiveness and social media challenges/obstacles. For associations and departments that do not use social media, I took note of the reasons why these media were not used and the group's current means of interacting with residents and constituents.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

Reviewing past webinars and PowerPoint presentations was also method used in this research. The consulting firm, Concept Optional, developed webinars to educate non-profit on the benefits of using social media (Context Optional, 2011). These organizations helped me understand the features and capabilities of different social media platforms (See Chapter 3). Reviewing these webinars also proved helpful when conducting interviews- interviewees often commented on their favorite and least favorite applications and features of social media. Having knowledge of platform capabilities helped me internally validate/invalidate an interviewee's claims. As these webinars occurred sometime in the past, I was only able to listen to these recordings.

I also will review the social media pages of associations to again verify the information shared in association interviews.

LIMITATIONS TO METHODOLOGY

There are several limitations to this methodology. In the interview process, I only received responses from those that were willing to speak with me. Additionally, the association and department members I interviewed were mostly individuals with power and authority (e.g. managers, presidents, association co-founders etc.) Their responses and perspectives may not be representative of the rest of the department or association: statements maybe exaggerated, “in-the- minority” or even false. I would have liked to have to speak with a number of individuals from each association or department; however my research period was short.

I also intended to speak with communication academics to learn more of the theoretical and practical implications of social media; however, my emails to UC Davis professors were unanswered.

Chapter 5: Local Governments and Social Media

“Twitter is narcissistic, but Facebook allows us to share our City’s successes”
(C. Haven, personal communication, March 18th, 2011).

The first step of this research is to understand if and how the departments that are in charge of managing neighborhood and homeowner association groups use these media. It is assumed that these departments have influence over the associations within their jurisdiction; thus, these departments have the potential to lead by example. Findings pay close attention to the missions and goals of these departments, the outreach and recruitment media used, and, of course, its use or disuse of social media platforms.

CITY OF CITRUS HEIGHTS

The City of Citrus Heights is unique in that it financially supports neighborhood associations. After incorporating in 1997, Bill Hughes, the mayor of the City pushed to create a system of neighborhood associations in Citrus Heights: he and the City believed that by creating neighborhood associations would help the City better server the community: “it helps us because people within the community know what is best for themselves” (R. Moore, personal communication, April 7th, 2011). This idea created the Residents' Empowerment Association of Citrus Heights (REACH), a coordinating body for the eleven neighborhood groups in Citrus Heights⁷. The mission of REACH is to

⁷ There are 11 neighborhood areas within the City of Citrus Heights. Each neighborhood area is designated an area number (e.g. “Area 1”) and has the option of creating a unique neighborhood association name for itself (e.g. Northwest Neighborhood Association (See Figure 7). There are only ten neighborhood association organizations within the City as Areas 7 and 8 have a combined neighborhood association (Area 7 and 8 Neighborhood Association, respectively).

“responsibly [represent] the interests of our community and its citizens and encourages participation in neighborhood associations to achieve continual improvement of our quality of life” (City of Citrus Heights, 2011). Each neighborhood group appoints one member to represent the association in the REACH board. At REACH board meetings, associations can share issues, accomplishments and grievances with the other neighborhood associations. The governance structure of the board follows a traditional board structure (i.e. President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer), with the rest of the REACH representatives making up the REACH board of directors (*Ibid*).

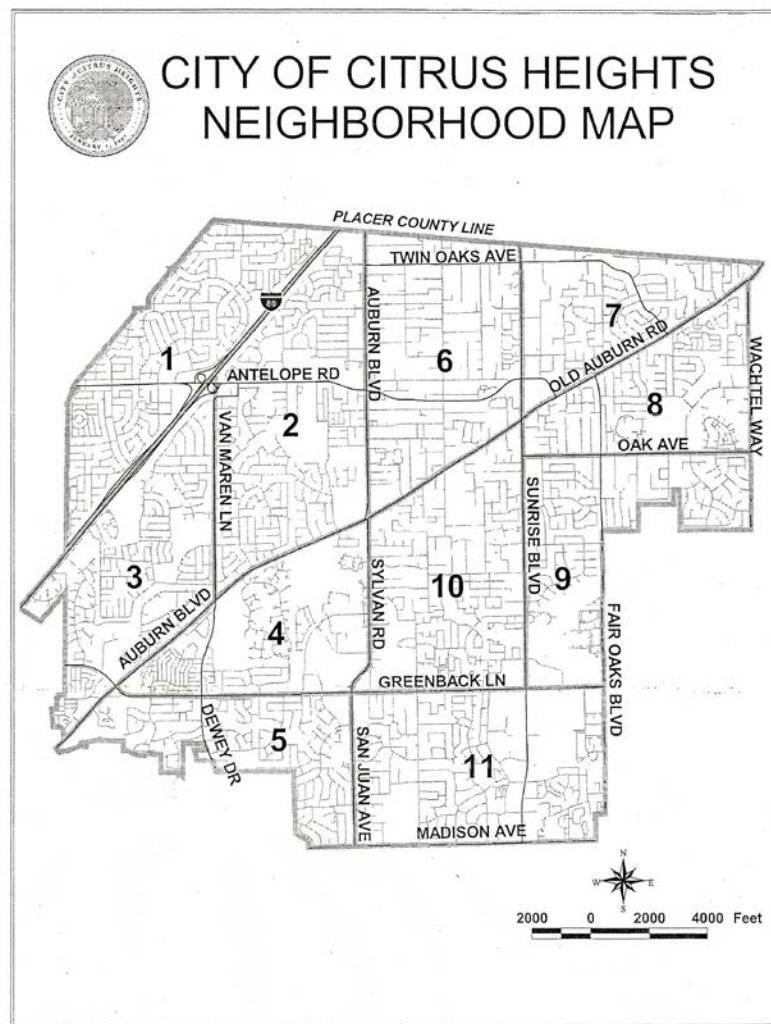


Figure 7. REACH Map (City of Citrus Heights, n.d)

Table 2. REACH Map Key (City of Citrus Heights, 2011)

Area Number	Association Name
1	Northwest Neighborhood (NNA)
2	Rusch Park Neighborhood Association
3	Citrus Heights Association Number Three (CHANT)
4	Arcade Creek Neighborhood
5	Park Oaks Neighborhood
6	Sunrise Ranch Neighborhood
7	Citrus Heights Area Seven and Eight (CHASE)
8	Citrus Heights Area Seven and Eight (CHASE)
9	Sunrise Oaks Neighborhood
10	Sylvan Old Auburn Road (SOAR)
11	Birdcage Heights Neighborhood

While the activities of the REACH board and neighborhood associations are not monitored by City of Citrus Heights, the City does provide financial and technological support. Each neighborhood receives funding for local improvement projects and for association operational costs (i.e. food for meetings, copying expenses at City Hall etc.). The amount of funding given to associations has declined over the years: previously association's received \$7,500 per year; now due to budget cuts, associations receive \$1,750 per year (R. Doyle, personal communication, April 15th, 2011). Additionally, the City creates a webpage for the REACH board and for individual associations. The City's REACH Coordinator, a member of the Community Development department, is responsible for updating each association's website (R. Moore, personal communication, April 7th, 2011).

Recruitment and Outreach Strategies

Citrus Heights utilizes a number of media to notify residents of City events, resources, public meetings and volunteer opportunities. Online, the city itself has a website, with

links to community resources and directories, an email listserv (“E-Notifier”) where residents or interested persons can select to receive updates on a range of topics (City employment opportunities, City news and events etc), and a biannual electronic newsletter (City of Citrus Heights, 2011). City resources and services information can also be found in paper formats in the City’s General Services office/kiosk (T. Wagner, personal communication, April 26th, 2011). Robin Moore, the REACH coordinator, mentioned that the City now is now on Facebook, but that the page is not used by her department (personal communication, April 7th, 2011).

CITY OF ELK GROVE

The City of Elk Grove does not offer specific services or programs for neighborhood or homeowner associations; however the Public Information Office is responsible for dispensing information about these associations and the city-wide services that may interest these groups (i.e. Code Enforcement, Animal Control)⁸. Christian Punsal, the City’s HOA/Neighborhood Group Coordinator and the City’s Public Information Officer, Christine Brainerd make up the Elk Grove’s Public Information Office. Punsal receives the majority of association inquiries: real estate agents contact him on behalf of homebuyers interested in learning if their prospective home is located in a homeowners association. There are currently 30 registered neighborhood and homeowner associations in Elk Grove (See Figure 8)

⁸Elk Grove’s Public Information Office has a wide-range of responsibilities, as seen in its mission statement: “The mission of the City’s Public Information is to proactively, accurately, and effectively convey information about the City’s economic development climate, public policy objectives, and other municipal service activities to the public; business community; prospective job creators; regional, state, and federal decision makers; and electronic and print media” (City of Elk Grove, 2011b).

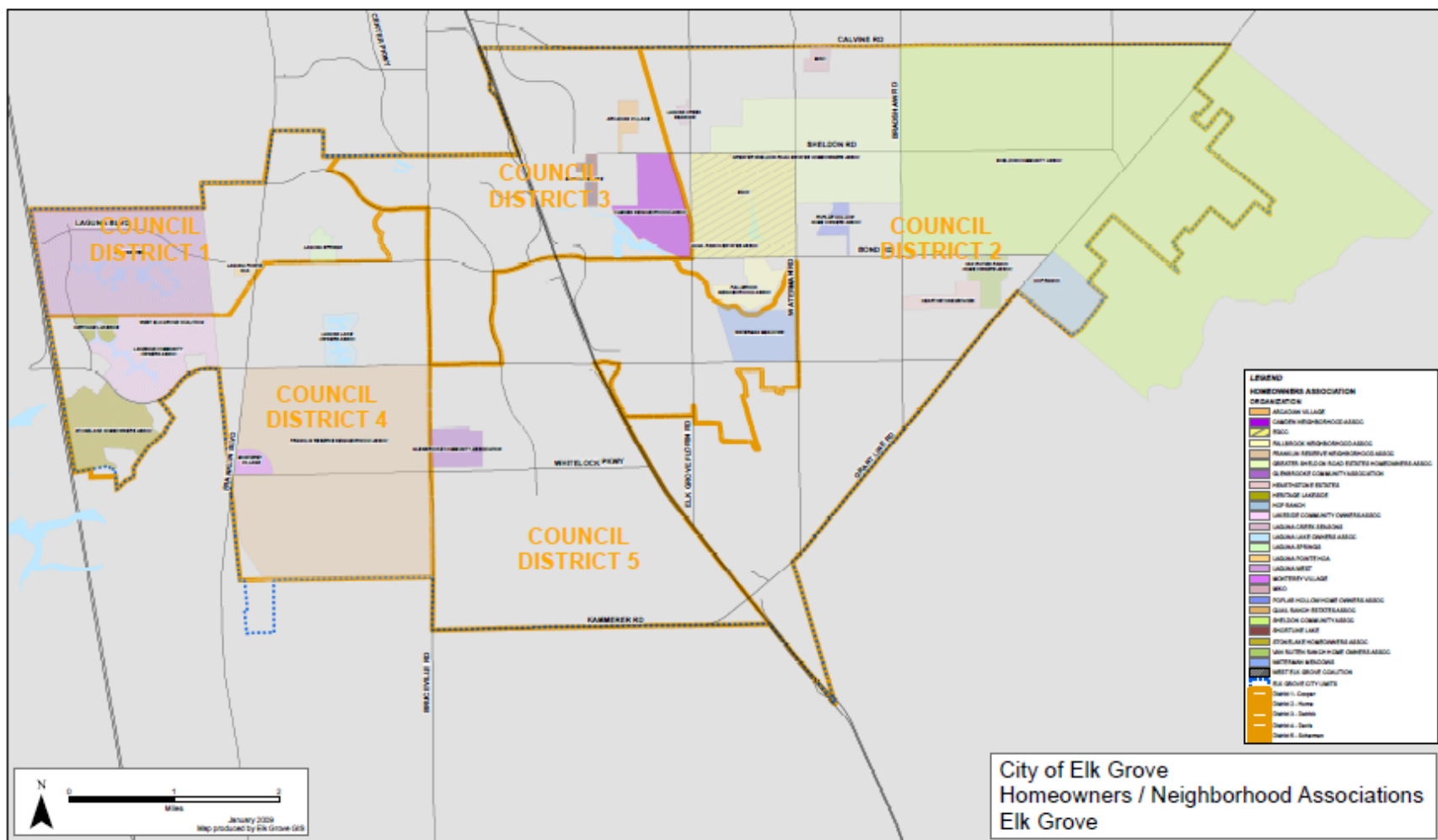


Figure 8. Map of Homeowners/Neighborhood Associations of Elk Grove (City of Elk Grove, n.d.)

Recruitment and Outreach Strategies

The Public Information Office utilizes a number of media to inform residents of Elk events and resources- newsletter (both in physical and electronic forms), website, PSAs, email listservs, advertisements in local papers (Sac Bee), and recently, social media pages⁹. Within the past year, Christian Punsal and Christine Brainerd launched the City's Facebook and Twitter page: Brainerd, as the Public Information Officer for Elk Grove, is responsible for updating these pages, while Punsal can suggest content (C. Punsal, personal communication, March 18th, 2011). As of April 30th, 2011, the city has 1,382 fans and 659 Twitter followers. These fans/followers are diverse and include local residents, businesses, non-profits and city departments (Personal observation of Twitter and Facebook pages).

Punsal and Brainerd mention that the City's social media pages serve educational and networking/outreach purposes. Brainerd tries to post at least 2-3 times each week, "although it really depends on what is going on in the City" (personal communication, April 13th, 2011). She typically posts information about road detours, new homes, events, meeting times, and events on the community calendar. Both also see the City's social media pages as tools to build community: "Posts don't always have to be 'business oriented' ...[J]ust having the status update of 'Hi, how are you doing today?'" is a great way to keep connected with the community...and people like to respond to these posts" (C. Punsal, personal interview, March 18th, 2011). Punsal added that "fanning" or

⁹ The City of Elk Grove's Public Information Department has won a number of international and local awards for its newsletter and its marketing and public relation campaigns. See City of Elk Grove, 2011d for the full list of awards and recognitions.

“following” Elk Grove’s Facebook or Twitter page, allows residents, businesses and HOAs to “ see that each other exists” and can lead to networking opportunities (*Ibid.*)

CITY OF FOLSOM

The City of Folsom appears to not have a department or a person that is responsible for assisting homeowner or neighborhood associations. When speaking with Omega Deppe, a planner in the City’s Community Development Department, she mentions that Folsom does not provide services or engage in outreach specific to these associations: “these groups already comply with strict [homeowner association regulations], so they have the ability to manage themselves” (O. Deppe, personal communication, April 27th, 2011). There is a Landscaping and Lighting District Advising Division that is responsible for maintaining the walls, medians, landscape corridors and street lighting in the 25 landscaping and lighting (L&L) districts throughout the city: many of these features are found in homeowner association boundaries (City of Folsom, 2011b). Furthermore, a number of homeowner association members make up the L&L District Advisory Committee (D. Bracht, personal communication, March 27th, 2011). This committee assists the L&L Manager, Lorraine Poggione, by recommending where L&L improvement funding should go (City of Folsom, 2011b).

There is a monthly L&L newsletter that is (e)mailed to homes in each L&L district and an L&L Engineering report is available online each fiscal year (*Ibid.*). When browsing on the City of Folsom’s website and popular social media sites (Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube), I did not find a City-sponsored social media page/account.

CITY OF RANCHO CORDOVA

The Rancho Cordova Alliance of Neighborhoods (RCAN) is a network of neighborhood-groups in the City of Rancho Cordova. Formally established in 2009, the mission of RCAN is to support the creation of neighborhood and homeowner associations and Neighborhood Watch groups within the City (M. Cummings, personal communication, March 31st, 2011). RCAN assists groups with website and newsletter development, funding, and provides leadership training; the body also helps groups secure meeting locations. Being a “neighborhood association president can be a difficult, lonely volunteer road...having the network of support like RCAN helps keep these associations sustainable” (C. Haven, personal communication, March 18th, 2011). Matt Cummings, one of the founding members of RCAN, echoes this sentiment by stating that increased association and Neighborhood Watch activity fosters neighborhood pride and can lead to improved quality of life for all residents in Rancho Cordova (M. Cummings, personal communication, March 31st, 2011). Currently, there are 14 HOAs, neighborhood associations and Neighborhood Watch Groups in RCAN (City of Rancho Cordova, 2011b).

Another resource for neighborhood groups within the City is the Economic Development and Neighborhood Services Department. The mission of the department is to attract and maintain business interest in Rancho Cordova, oversee redevelopment projects, and to connect neighborhood associations with City services (City of Rancho Cordova 2011b). Curt Haven, the department's Director, stated that he and his department are to network residents to available services, such as code enforcement, animal services and the City's Volunteer in Neighborhood (VIN) program. Simply put, the department itself does not provide services, but acts as a broker for other departments: "We are facilitators, not doers" (Long, 2010).

Recruitment and Outreach Strategies

Information about RCAN and its support services can be found on the City of Rancho Cordova's Neighborhood and Homeowners Association page under the Community tab. On the page, one can find URLs and email addresses for neighborhood groups. At the moment, all groups have email contact information available; however, only four groups have developed websites.

As the Economic and Neighborhood Services Department is a local government department, the community outreach tools utilized are developed. Like other cities, the department uses conventional print and electronic communication (seasonal community newsletters, email listservs, mailers, marketing campaigns). The Department does have a social media presence. Megan McMurty, an Economic Development Specialist, is responsible for updating the City of Rancho Cordova's Facebook page. The City of Rancho Cordova has also been an avid user of Facebook since 2009. (As of April 30th,

2011, the page has 752 fans (See Figure 10). These fans are diverse, ranging from local residents, businesses, non-profits and RCAN groups and neighboring cities.) McMurty enjoys updating the page as she feels it facilitates dialogues between the department and local residents; she mentioned that site activity increases after she posts links for community events, new businesses and development projects and controversial projects (M. McMurty, personal communication, March 22nd, 2011). When reviewing the City's Facebook page, I also noticed that posts pertaining to criminal events also elicit a large number of responses.

Another perceived benefit of Facebook is that it allows Rancho Cordova to share its successes with its residents. In my conversation with Curt Haven, he mentioned that for the past few years, the City has had an 'image' problem, brought about by increased gang and violent crime activity. When the city announced its All-American City status on Facebook, the City's profile received a number of "likes" and comments, roughly 20 respondents. Although somewhat small gesture, Haven stated that it felt great knowing that residents and Facebook friends were aware of positive news about Rancho Cordova (Personal communication, March 18th, 2011).

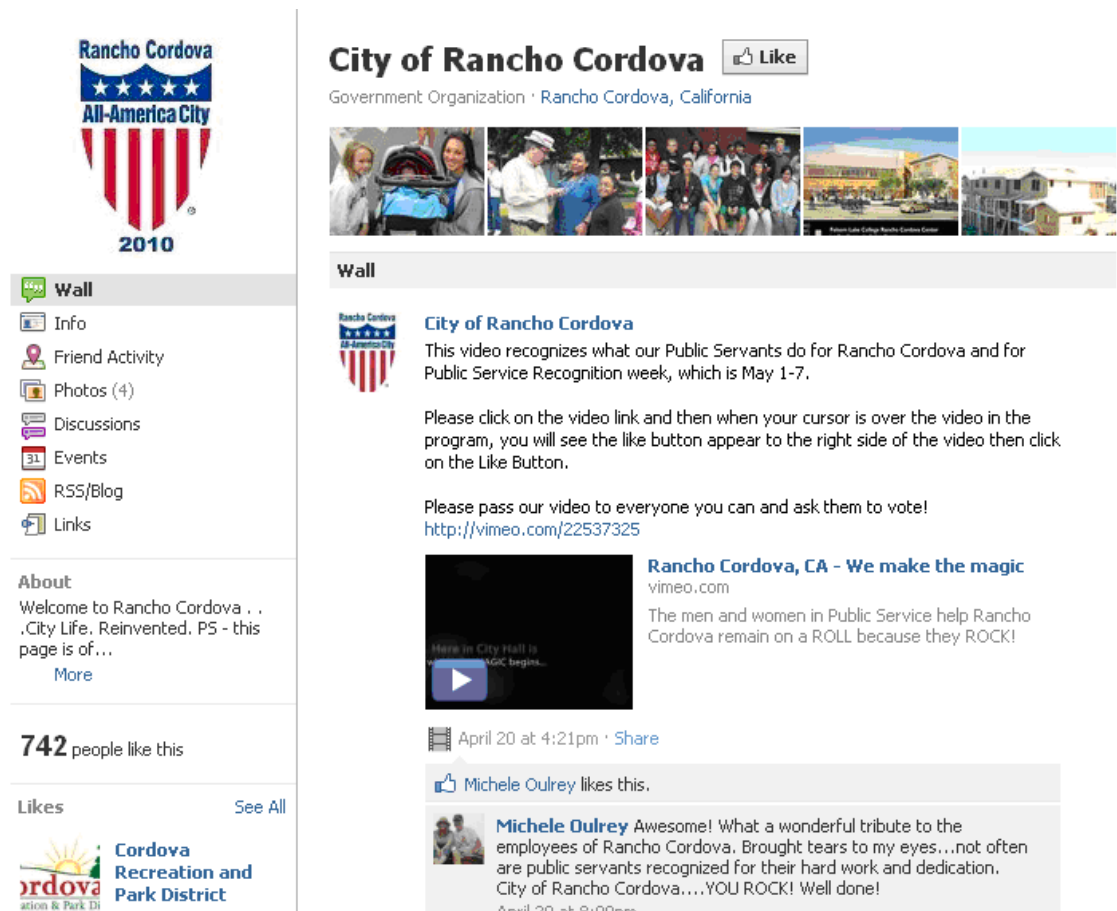


Figure 10. The homepage of the City of Rancho Cordova’s Facebook profile (City of Rancho Cordova, 2011c).

Both McMurty and Haven overall had a very positive perspective towards social media, and even suggested that neighborhood groups use Facebook for educational and networking purposes, for engaging younger populations (“these organizations cannot be sustained by older retired folks forever”), and for cost savings (“Facebook is free”) (*Ibid*). However, Haven added that despite all the great things social media can do, society should not communicate with others solely through technology: “although technology saves time, it reduces face-to-face personal interaction...and nothing beats face-to-face interaction” (*Ibid*).

CITY OF SACRAMENTO

Neighborhood, homeowners and business associations and Neighborhood Watch groups in the City of Sacramento must register with the City's Neighborhood Services Division¹⁰ The mission of the division is to "[bridge] and [engage] Sacramento's diverse residents with resources to revitalize, maintain and promote healthy communities" (City of Sacramento, 2010a). The division was created under the guiding principle that knowledge and collaboration between neighborhood-based groups, City officials, City departments and other community stakeholders is important in keeping communities safe, clean, and healthy (*Ibid*). Additionally, neighborhood-based associations are seen as positive spaces where residents can 1) network and connect with other residents, businesses and City staff, 2) stay informed about proposed development and improvement projects within a neighborhood, and 3) serve as space where individuals can voice their opinions and concerns about their neighborhood (City of Sacramento, 2010b).

Neighborhood based groups, homeowners, and business associations and Neighborhood Watch groups are organized into four geographic zones- Area 1, Area 2, Area 3 and Area 4- and are served by Neighborhood Resource Coordinators. Coordinators are responsible for notifying associations and groups of city services/resources and events and for conducting facilitation/mediation services in neighborhood disputes (D. Lim, personal contact, April 7th, 2011).

¹⁰ Until July 2010, the Neighborhood Services Division was the Neighborhood Services Department. Due to 2010 budget cuts, the department was consolidated into the Department of Parks and Recreation's Special Events Division (Jones, 2011). Consolidation lead to staff lay-offs. The division now has seven full-time staff members: a Division Manager, Manager, Program Analyst, three Neighborhood Resources Coordinators and a Secretary (*Ibid*).

Recruitment and Outreach Strategies

The primary duty of the Division is to provide information outreach that will help strengthen neighborhood organizations so that they themselves can make a difference in the community (City of Sacramento, 2010a). The Division utilizes a number of ways to disseminate this information. On the Division's website, there is an online neighborhood directory, which includes contact and boundary information the four neighborhood areas; this directory is complemented with the neighborhood calendar, where associations can post meeting times and agendas. The Neighborhood Services Division also produces *The Bridge*, a paper and online newsletter, informing readers of upcoming Department of Parks and Recreation events, changes to city services, and Special Event Ordinance Committee/Youth Commission meeting summaries (Jones, 2011; D. Lim, personal communication, April 7th, 2011). City residents also have the option to sign up for the Division's weekly email updates listserv. Lastly, the Division staff engages in direct contact with residents by attending neighborhood group meetings and community events.

According to Derrick Lim, the Division manager, joining social media sites is not a priority as it is "currently facing more budget and staff cuts" (Personal communication, April 7th, 2011). Furthermore, Lim mentioned that given the financial and staff constraints, the outreach strategies used by the Division are "pretty effective" (*Ibid*).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall, it can be said that two¹¹ out of the five cities in the study area use social media to potentially communicate with associations - the City of Elk Grove and the City of

¹¹ In my conversation with the City of Citrus Heights' REACH coordinator, Robin Moore, she mentioned that the City created its own Facebook page; however, the Community and Economic Development

Rancho Cordova. I stress the word ‘potentially’ here because the social media pages created by the City of Elk Grove’s Public Information Office and the City of Rancho Cordova’s Economic and Neighborhood Services departments are not limited to serving or informing neighborhood and homeowners associations; these agencies are committed to notifying *all residents* within their jurisdiction of city resources, services, and activity. The typology of these posts are generally links to public meeting information and to local business webpages, photos from public meetings or community events, or promotional plugs for city-wide campaigns. Both cities also feel that their presence on social media is beneficial because these media have the ability to engage users and to generate conversations with residents at zero monetary cost. For these very same reasons, these departments would strongly recommend that neighborhood groups in their area utilize social media pages like Facebook.

Another interesting similarity these agencies share is that they are all relatively young cities, with two incorporating post-2000- Elk Grove became a City on January 1st, 2000 and Rancho Cordova on July 1st, 2003. This begs the question- Does the age of a City (and its subsequent agencies) play a factor in its use of social media? Conducting more interviews with staffers in these departments could possibly elucidate if the age of the city/department/office facilitates a culture of experimentation with new communication and social media.

Department is not involved in the management of the page. Using this logic, I decided that it did not fall under the idea of using social media to communication with associations.

Chapter 6: Association Findings

In the second half of my research, I contacted over 100 representatives from active neighborhood and homeowner associations in the five cities to discuss their perceptions and use/disuse of social media. This interview period began March 30th and ended May 6th, 2011.

RESPONSE RATE

The aim of these interviews was to gauge of how social media are being used by active associations- the research method utilized in this thesis is not conducive to producing a representative sample for social media activity within the Sacramento area.

Each local government staff person I spoke with sent a list of associations within their jurisdictions; in total, I was given contact information for 156 neighborhood and homeowners associations. (Sacramento had the largest number of these associations with 84 associations; whilst both Rancho Cordova and Citrus Heights had the least with 10 associations). Of these associations, only 111 had valid contact information available; for many Sacramento, Folsom, and Elk Grove groups, email and telephone information were either missing or invalid. Following the interview protocol explained previously, I secured an overall response rate of, with a total of 40 interviewees 36% for the entire study area¹². The highest response rate came from the City of Sacramento, with 24 respondents, whereas I only heard back from four members of homeowners associations

¹² This reflects data collect up to May 1st, 2011. A number of association contacts have responded to my solicitations emails. I decided to continue interviewing association contact until May 6th, 2011/

in Elk Grove, and from only two of the homeowner associations from Folsom¹³. (See Appendices 10-14 for detailed interview breakdowns for each city).

From the contacts I interviewed, only 17 mentioned that their associations have previously used or are currently using social media (See Table 3). The most common social media type used is social networking sites. A number of associations, such as Rancho Cordova's Cordova Towne and Lincoln Village and Sacramento's Newton Booth use multiple social media sites. No associations mentioned using microblogs or podcasting platforms.

Table 3. Types of Social Media Used by Sacramento Area Neighborhood Groups¹⁴

Social Media Type	Use	Percent (%)
Blog	6/16	37.5%
Social Networking Sites	12/16	75.0%
Microblog	0/16	0.0%
Wiki	0/16	0.0%
Video Sharing	1/16	6.3%
Podcasting	0/16	0.0%
Discussion Forums	4/16	25.0%
Photo Sharing	2/16	12.5%

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

When speaking with these associations, a number of themes appeared:

¹³. Such low responses from these areas make me curious to why this is so. From examining the directories given to by city staff, both Elk Grove and Folsom have a large number of homeowners associations- 13 out of 30 associations in Elk Grove are homeowners associations and all 22 associations in Folsom are homeowners associations. Elk Grove may have more homeowners associations as 13 other associations on the directory given to me by Christian Punsal did not have HOA or Neighborhood Association identifiers. Determining why a high number did not respond to my solicitations would be helpful; however, it is beyond the scope of this research.

¹⁴ The neighborhood associations of Southside Park and Woodlake have accounts on the photo sharing site Flickr; however, the association contacts I spoke with did not mention these accounts. These accounts are mentioned on their respective association websites.

1) Which Social Media Platforms Do Associations Use?

Social networking sites are the most commonly used social media page by these associations (70.6%), the most common being Facebook. Association members were very frank in explaining their preference for the site: “many of our residents are already on it ...Why not create a page?” (F. Anderson, personal communication, April 7th, 2011). Some added that tapping into Facebook’s existing networks, allowed them to dedicate more time and money on other association business and little less on public outreach (K. Jenkins, April 1st, 2011). The technical capacities of Facebook are also attractants: “On Facebook, you can send messages and links out to members instantaneously...I don’t have to select every email address in our directory anymore” (*Ibid*). Others added that the Event pages application has been very helpful for promoting meeting and association-sponsored socials; with Event pages, associations can post event information and can notify fans/friends of this event via an e-invitation (T. Shettle, personal communication, April 13th, 2011).

Blogs are also attractive to groups. While the associations that I spoke with have had variable success with blog platforms, blogs are sought out by as they do not have character limitations, like Facebook and Twitter¹⁵. The journal interface allows for longer and personal discussions of activities and issues (D. Helmer, May 2nd, 2011). Also, there again is the benefit of not having to “sort through a number of email address” to spread information (K. Cox, personal communication, March 28th, 2011). Blogspot, Wordpress

¹⁵ Facebook status updates have a 420 character limit, whereas Twitter has a 140 character limit (<http://themelis-cuiper.com/facebook/facebook-status-update-has-420-character-limit.html>).

and BigTent.com are the blog platforms used by the six organizations that have or had used blogs¹⁶

Discussion forums are also positively mentioned by number of associations. Google Groups and Yahoo Groups are often mentioned. Kevin Jenkins, the President of Rancho Cordova's Lincoln Village Neighborhood Association, states that:

While we have a Facebook page, I think our Yahoo Groups is better for on-going conversations about issues or events... On Facebook you have to kind of search the Wall to find past posts, but on Yahoo Groups, you can easily find older discussion topics and threads (Personal communication, April 1st, 2011).

In his opinion, Facebook is more suitable for quick notifications (i.e. meeting reminders and 'Lost Pet' announcements). Others appreciate how the discussion forum platforms notify members of new discussion forum postings via email (G. Kingsley, personal communication, April 13th, 2011).

Other social media pages are also mentioned in Table 3, such as Photo Sharing and Wikis; however, the association contacts I spoke with did not mention these social media accounts¹⁷.

It is interesting to note that a number of associations made their social media private, meaning that only individuals recognized and accepted by (an) administrator(s) are allowed to post or comment on the media site. Furthermore, as alluded to in a number of quotes mentioned, a number of associations use a combination of social media types (i.e. Sacramento's Newton Booth, Southside Park, Sierra Curtis NA and Rancho Cordova's Lincoln Village NA, Capital Village HOA and Cordova Towne NA).

¹⁶ Katherine Cox of the Raven Oaks Neighborhood Watch Group and Bob Cashatt of the La Loma Neighborhood Watch Group did use blogs in the past; however, at the moment no one is managing their group's blog accounts.

¹⁷ Both the Southside Park and the Midtown neighborhood associations have Flickr photo sharing accounts. These accounts are managed by 'sav74sac' and 'khasan' respectively. The Southside Park account appears to be have been last update in 2009, while the Midotwn account was last updated in 2006.

2) What Motivated Social Media Use?

In all interviews, individuals mentioned that their presence on social media was prompted by the need to build community: Social media platforms are seen as a means of communicating and engaging with others, and as so well put by Dairl Helmer of Newton Booth, “engaging with community is the first step toward creating a better community” (Personal communication, May 2nd, 2011).

For some, this engagement is out of necessity- having a social media presence was necessary for reviving a “dead” association. The Birdcage Heights Neighborhood Association in Citrus Heights, is one such example. John Silveira, the President of the association, along with his wife Kristi, restarted the association in late 2010 after years of burn out and inactivity. Their group is utilizing a number of different communication media to spread the word about meetings and the association in general; along with a Facebook page, the group uses “Save-the-Date” mailers, flyers, an email blast and phone tree system, and the REACH website provided by the City. Silveira cites that although “nothing much has come out of it”, the Facebook page is something worth maintaining as it could be a way to get the public especially younger residents, to recognize the association (Personal communication, April 17th, 2011)

On a similar vein, Sacramento’s Newton Booth Neighborhood Association member Carrie Caramena created a Facebook profile out of fear of association disintegration. In this interview, Caramena mentions that the association member responsible for maintaining the group’s website moved to Oregon, and that she was concerned that “without [*sic*] having a website, there was no way for [the] association to attract people or get people involved” (Personal communication, April 27th, 2011). She

adds that she was further inspired to create a Facebook profile after seeing the Marshall New Era's Neighborhood association's page. This statement is powerful in that it suggests that modeling influences social media use.

3) *Why Are Social Media Pages Being Used?*

In my research, I was interest in learning the reasons for why neighborhood and homeowner associations are using social media pages. For the purposes of this research, I asked neighborhood/homeowner groups if they used social media for the following purposes:

- ***Establishing Social Media Presence:*** This involves the desire for the association to be on social media platforms for the intrinsic reason of being on such sites
- ***Networking:*** This could involve connecting with members, city officials and departments, or other neighborhood/homeowners associations
- ***Organizing:*** Here, organizing is defined as the using social media sites to rally support or volunteers for association-sponsored events
- ***Fundraising:*** This involves using social media platforms to raise money for an association or association-sponsored events
- ***Notifying/Educating Membership:*** This involves using posting information about association meetings, events, or news
- ***Engaging Under-represented Groups:*** In this circumstance, “under-represented groups” is defined as young adults (18-26), minority populations (Hispanic/Latinos, Black/African American, Asian, American-Indian, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or individuals categorized as being Two-or-more Races), non-native English Speakers and working class individuals. (In association related literature, neighborhood/homeowners associations members are typically White middle-class individuals) (Brady, et. al., 1995;).

Table 4 and Figure 11 graphically summarize the results of my interviews¹⁸

¹⁸ At the moment, I am still waiting for responses from the Tallac Village and Cordova Towne neighborhood associations and the Anatolia HOA, Natomas Park, and South Meadows HOAs.

Table 4. Summary of Reasons for Social Media Use by Sacramento Area Associations

Reasons for Social Media Use	Number of Responses
Establishing Social Media Presence	4
Networking	5
Organizing	2
Fundraising	0
Notifying/Educating Membership	9
Engaging Under-represented Groups	3

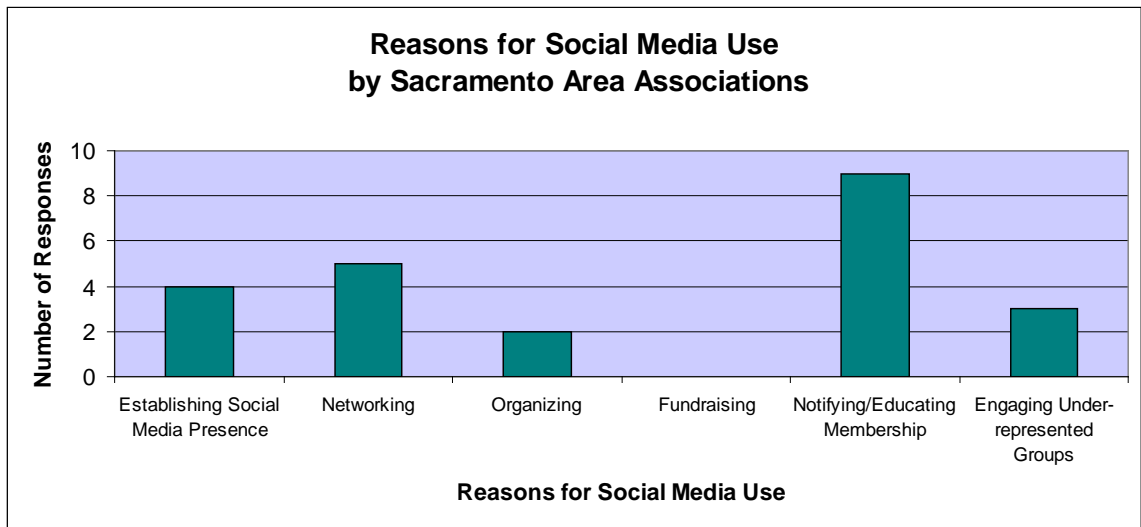


Figure 12. Reasons for Social Media Use by Sacramento Area Associations.

The most common reason for social media use by neighborhood and homeowners associations is for notifying/educating members, while none of these organizations use social media for fundraising purposes. Many cited their 501 ©3 status as a reason to not pursuing fundraising activities (T. Shettle, personal communication, April 13th, 2011). Moreover, after asking this question, association contacts mentioned that the intentions for using social media are without a doubt connected to a desire to increase association membership. Increased membership is believed as a means building a sense of community. Other explicitly mentioned that social media helped their group stay

connected to the activities of other groups (C. Caramena, personal communication, April 26th, 2011) and their city council members (B Bumpas, personal communication, April 14th, 2011; M. Avila-Rogers, personal communications). In the case of Fruitridge Manor, their district's city council member actually initiated the group's Facebook page. It is important to note that many of the association contacts stressed that their group's social media sites serves multiple purposes.

4) What is Shared on Social Media Pages?

Despite the fact that this was an open-ended question in my interview prompt, association responses were surprisingly similar. Members who manage the association's social media page typically post information on meeting dates and times, links to city councilmember sites (M. Avila-Rogers, personal communication, April 13th, 2011, F. Kennedy, personal communications, April 13th, 2011), links about local businesses (G. Kingsley, personal communications, April 14th, 2011) and photos from previous association meetings and events (C. Caramena, personal communication, April 27th, 2011). Administrators may also post local news related to public safety, local school district business and development projects in or around the association's boundaries (K Jenkins, personal communication, April 1st, 2011; M. Cummings personal communications, March 30th, 2011). Non-administrative users may post similar items and may comment on administrative or other users comments.

Most association contacts I spoke with did not schedule or program postings; most responded by saying that they just post whenever something interesting happens.

4) *Who are Using the Social Media Pages?*

On a very broad level, it can be said that of the 16 associations that use or has used social media, 12 are neighborhood associations, three are neighborhood watch groups, and one is a homeowners association (See Appendix 15)¹⁹.

However, answering this question within the association's context is a bit more challenging. Responses are truly diverse. This diversity lies both in the association boards that advocate the use of social media and in the members that participate on the association's social media page. Furthermore, when asking these sorts of descriptive demographic questions, many association contacts gave me very broad responses, to the effect of 'we have all sorts of types of people in our neighborhood- older, retirees, young professionals, middle and working class people' and that our 'neighborhood is going through a transition period' (B Bumpas, personal communication, April 14th, 2011; F. Anderson, Personal communication, April 13th, 2011).

Two interviewees do provide concrete example however. Bob Cashatt of Rancho Cordova's La Loma Neighborhood Watch Group, states that while the neighborhood watch group is older and that he himself is in his 70's, his interest in new technologies and the coercion of his daughter inspired him to create a blog for the group (Personal communication, March 30th, 2011).

Carrie Caramena of the Newton Booth neighborhood association mentioned that the board of her neighborhood association is older ("retirees"), but that the residents are of the association is relatively young ("twenty and thirty-something's that work for the

¹⁹ Establishing a relationship between association type and social media type is not something that can be determined in this study as the methodology used to secure interviews is not intended to generate a representative sample.

State”). This dichotomy has spawned the use of three types of social media platforms for the group- Yahoo Groups, a blog and a social media page and each group appears to have their own preference:

“The board members really take a liking to the Yahoo Groups, while I think the Facebook page could be more appealing to the younger residents of the neighborhood...I don’t know anyone but Dairl who reads the blog...I can’t really get into the Yahoo Group. It is foreign to me, but then again Facebook could seem foreign to the board” (Personal communication, April 26th, 2011).

Another insight unique insight is that those who ‘fan’, ‘friend’, or comment on the association’s social media account may or may not be the same individuals that attend association meetings or events. This is still seen as positive to associations as they are aware that not everyone can attend association meetings; to them it is comforting knowing that residents are connected to the association and its activities in some soft of fashion (F. Anderson, Personal communication, April 13th, 2011).

5) How Effective Are These Media?

During the interview process, it became apparent that the definition of effectiveness is unique to each association. To some associations, knowing that association information is disseminated and/or being discussed in the social media sphere is a success, whereas, an increase in attendees at meetings or community events is an accomplishment. To others, finding a reliable and vocal member is the greatest proof of that social media activity is worthwhile.

It was interesting in hearing that all but two or three associations believe that their social media accounts are effective for the reasons mentioned earlier. Kevin Jenkins of Rancho Cordova’s Lincoln Village even describes that the activity on the group’s private

Yahoo Group and Facebook pages has lead to a decline in the need to have face-to-face meetings- his group now only holds meetings when there are guest speakers e.g. city officials or police officers (Personal communication, April 1st, 2011). Towards the end of many interviews, members cite their association's social media practices as being instrumental to their success: Capital Village HOA's Matt Cummings suggests that by maintaining a positive and apolitical tone on social media sites has helped sustain activity on the association's social media accounts (Personal communication, March 30th, 2011). Faye Anderson from the Southeast Village Neighborhood Association mentions that her group is helping older residents 'connect' with Facebook activity by "friending" their adult children. This has helped expand the network of people that get involved in neighborhood events (Personal communication, April 7th, 2011).

At the same time, a few of these same respondents mention that when speaking with me, that "this was the longest time they've been on" the association's social media account (G. Kingsley, Personal communication, April 13th, 2011).

For the few groups that feel that their social media activity has not been effective. The La Loma and Raven Oaks Neighborhood Associations of Rancho Cordova, mention that all their hard work has been heard by 'deaf-ears' and ultimately has lead them to no longer use their social media page: "Blogging kept me busy for a while, and it felt good... too bad no one was reading it" (K. Cox, personal communication, March 30th, 2011).

6) What are the Challenges to Using Social Media?

Despite the overwhelmingly positive reception of social media by these associations, interviewees did mention that these sites are not perfect. The Southside Park and

Southeast Village neighborhood associations cite that the English-centric interface²⁰ of social media sites limits the possibilities for limited or non-English speakers to post or interact with other individuals:

Everything is in English...Our Hispanic members could possibly post in Spanish, and we have a person who could translate their posts, but how could they even navigate Facebook if everything is in English? (F. Anderson, Personal communication, April 13th, 2011)

Another challenge with social media is that it requires members “to remember another username and password”- a number of associations mention that this can deter people that are not already participating on these social media sites (G. Kingsley, personal communication, April 13th, 2011). Many believe that they must complement social media use with other outreach methods- email blasts, electronic or paper newsletters, phone trees, door-to-door canvassing- to engage/connect with residents and members.

Lastly, there is a resounding belief that an association cannot force someone to use a social media page. People may “fan” or “follow” an association’s page, but this may not lead the person to comment or interact on the page- if you do not hear from these individuals online, how do you know if they are paying attention to the association? Bob Cashatt and Katherine Cox from Rancho Cordova mention that this problem led to their disuse of their blog. Simply put, establishing a critical mass of active participants is difficult.

²⁰ Facebook is available in 77 languages; therefore it is technically possible for an association to set up a Facebook page in another language. This would however require that the group know of the languages that are read by the residents/members in the association’s jurisdiction and that the administrator share the information posted on other Facebook page to the rest of the association (Context Optional, 2011).

ASSOCIATIONS THAT DO NOT USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Out of the 40 association responses, only 16 associations utilize social media. Why are the other 24 associations not using these sites? These associations mention a several reasons for their disinterest in social media:

- *(Board) Members Do Not Use Social Media.* This explanation is the most common response. Dr. Jayna Karpinski-Costa, the President of the Citrus Height's Sylvan Old Auburn Road, mentions that she is unaware of anyone in her association that uses social media and that she herself does not use it. She adds that she has a very difficult time communicating with residents as many do not have email (Personal communication, April 9th, 2011). Other cite that the majority of there members are older, and that "older people are not into blogging" (J Resse, personal communication, April 18th, 2011). There is a perceived generation divide in social media use- younger people are believed to be the only users of these platforms.
- *Time Constraints/Preferences.* Association contacts also mention that they either did not have the time or did not *want* to spend time updating a social media page: Jesse Reese from the Meadowview Neighborhood Association states this feeling quite well "I don't want to spend my free time hunched over a computer" (Personal communication, April 18th, 2011). These groups believe that maintaining social media accounts as being too time consuming.
- *Social Media is Not For Us.* A number of associations reveal that their group is very informal and meet sporadically. Steve Detrick of Elk Grove's Shortline HOA states that his HOA is comprised a few close friends and that they can easily

email or call each other if they need to discuss an issue (Personal communication, April 5th, 2011). Dennis Bracht, the president of Folsom's American River Canyon South adds that social media is suited for more "cohesive associations" which convene regularly (Personal communication, March 27th, 2011).

- *Liability and Image Concerns.* Two homeowners associations in Sacramento did mention that their respective board of directors were not comfortable using social media because homeowners can publically potentially post malicious and false information about the HOA (L. Lindsay, personal communication, April 19th, 2011; M. Elias, personal communication, April 21st, 2011). The property manager of the Park River Oaks HOA worries that if the HOA is to create a social media page, it would be a "bitchfest": Vocal homeowners would abuse the site/account and "trash talk me and homeowners they do not like" (Personal communication, April 21st, 2011).
- *Current Outreach Methods and Discussion Spaces are Satisfactory.* Instead of social media, these associations use a combination of email blasts, phone trees, door-to-door communication, general meetings, newsletters, and websites to engage, communicate or discuss association business. To some of the interviewees, the use of these tools has already exceeded their expectations; this often takes the form of improved association meeting and event attendance and greater knowledge/recognition of the association activity. In particular, the associations in Citrus Heights, cite that the operational funding, City Hall copy machine privileges, and website support afforded to them by the City have helped

them accomplish much more than what they would have otherwise (D. McSherry, personal communication, April 21st, 2011).

- *Preference for Face-to-Face Communication.* Tonya Wagner appreciates the current strategies for another reason: to her, face-to-face interaction allows “you to really get to know someone better... people are more open, comfortable and relaxed” (Personal communication, April 27th, 2011) As the president of her neighborhood association, the Northwest Neighborhood Association in Citrus Heights, she regularly schedules both weekly association and social meetings to encourage more face-to-face interaction between association members.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Future Research

The purpose of this research was to learn if and in which ways social media are used by neighborhood and homeowners associations and if this use facilitates interactions between relevant local governments, like-minded associations, and association members. Throughout the research journey, I was able to test many of the hypotheses developed during my research proposal phase.

Many of interview findings supported my preconceptions about social media use by these associations. For associations that do use social media, there is an overwhelming belief that social media is necessary to interact with its memberships and interested persons; these media are seen as community building tools. Furthermore, these groups still invest time and effort into other means to interact with others (e.g. flyers, mailers and newsletters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing, phone and email trees).

The hypotheses for the associations that do not use are also confirmed. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a belief that that social media use would not be in-line with an association's goals and mission. Instead, these associations prefer to use a number of other communication and outreach mediums to connect with its membership- in these conversations, face-to-face meetings, newsletters, phone trees, email blasts and websites are most common. I must admit that I am personally surprised by the heavy used of email and websites by these groups, as these media, like social media, are examples of online interaction. Many organizations mentioned their association many associations actively collects emails from residents during community meetings or during community canvassing events (D. McSherry, personal communication,

April 21st, 2011; J. Reese, personal communication, April 19th, 2011). While these two mention that most of its membership has email, future research should explore why these electronic media are preferred by these associations.

Interview findings also disproved three of my hypotheses. 1) Although a number of non-using social media groups claim that older residents are hesitant to use social media, a number of associations that do use these media have older retirees using these media. Both the creators and users of social media were very diverse and are not limited to younger and/or professional social groups, although there may be a preference by these groups to use discussion groups and blogs and not social networking sites (B. Cashatt, personal communication, March 30th, 2011; C. Caramena, personal communication, April 27th, 2011). There is also a believe that social media is not a fad: representatives feel that social media “is here to stay” (J. Reese, personal communication, April 19th, 2011).

Unfortunately, at the conclusion of my study, I find it hard to assess two important hypotheses. At the time of this writing, 17 of the 40 associations interviewed claim to use these media (or 36%). I realize that when drafting my hypotheses, I did not quantitatively define low association use and high association use, making it difficult for me to determine if this 36% qualifies as low, moderate, or high social media use.

Verifying frequency and interconnectivities of social media use is also something I can not easily quantify. While I did ask contacts to estimate the number of times an administrator posts onto the associations media site and the demographics of its followers, responses are vague and/or information these individuals could answer. A number of interviewees state their social media pages are actively used by its membership, but viewing their respective social media pages, I did not see this activity e.g. followers or

individuals posting comments or commenting on administrative comments²¹. From this perspective, it appears that very little user interaction is taking place (See Figure 12). Yet to site administrators or to the association as a whole, the very fact that individuals are following or fanning the site may be indicative of user interaction and collaboration. Moreover, users may choose to privately message other users, thus making user interaction invisible to other users and to the public. Lastly, I do not have access to the association's social media analytics tools. Analytics tools, such a count boxes (See Chapter 3), measures user engagement on a website or an application; these tools are only visible to administrators (Context Optional, 2011). While I understand that a number of associations are new users to sites such as Facebook, (M. Avila-Rogers, personal communications, April 13th, 2011), further explanation is needed. Access to analytic tools may give a better sense of how interaction is organized on the groups social media account.

²¹ I acknowledge that by viewing an association's social media page, I am only observing the activity at the moment in time and the postings that are stored on the site's activity log. Activity on a group's social media page may have changes since my last observation.

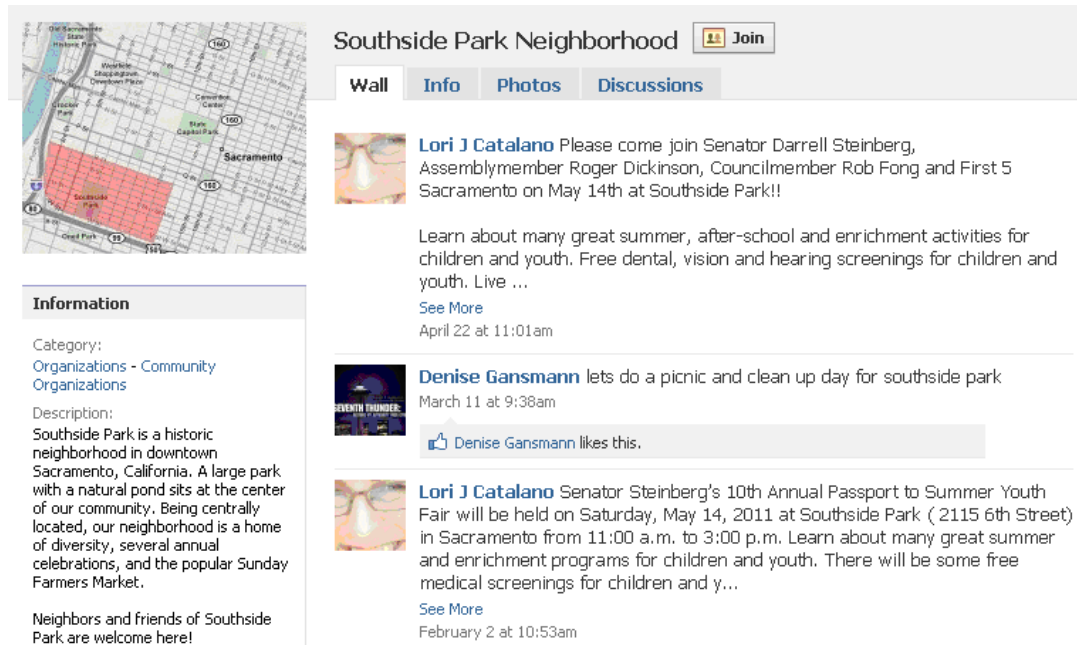


Figure 13. This is example of perceived low activity page. The feed above are the most recent posts for this association’s Facebook page, yet, there very few commentary on these posts other than from the administrator and from self-posters. Beverly Bumpas did mention that language may be a barrier to those not using the page (Personal communication, April 13th, 2011). This page was created in May 2009 (Southside Park Neighborhood Association, 2011)

With respect to the connections between other users, I find it surprising that local government agencies do not provide services to associations in their area and actually encourage and support that associations organize and regulate themselves. If anything, local government departments are responsible for notifying associations of city services and event, which a top-down approach to interacting with associations. This primarily interaction is facilitated through newsletters, websites and email listservs. In the cases of Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova, even their social media pages follow this protocol- city resource and event information posts far outweigh the number of ‘pleasantry’ postings (See Figure 13).

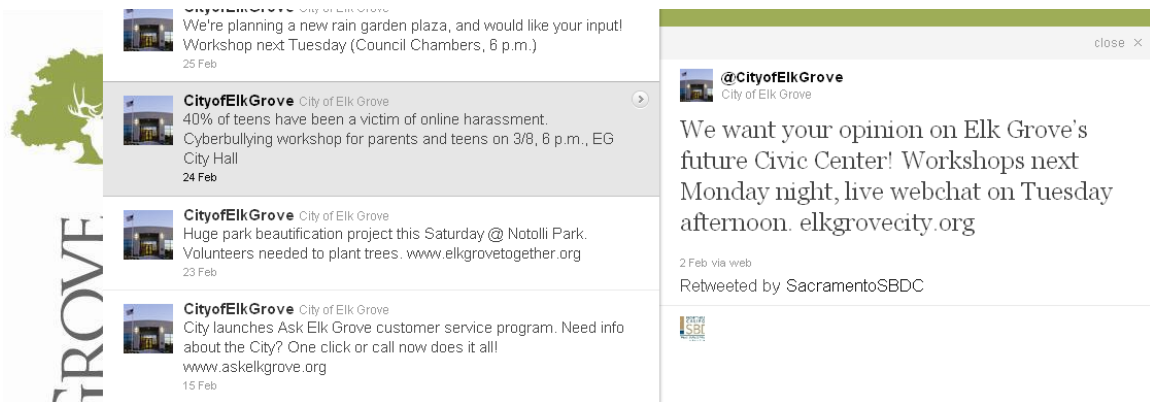


Figure 14. This screenshot of Elk Grove’s Twitter pages illustrates “notifying” nature of posts. These posts alert residents of businesses, community news and events. It should be noted that these tweets are regularly scheduled and are re-tweeted by other organizations (City of Elk Grove, 2011e).

Also, in terms of connecting with other associations, there are cases of modeling other association behaviors, as best told by my Newtown Booth Association interviews (D. Helmer, personal communication, May 2nd, 2011; C. Caramena, personal communication, April 27th, 2011); however, I think access to analytic information would be helpful is better understanding these types of connections.

So ultimately what exactly can be said about social media use by neighborhood and homeowner association in the Sacramento area? Social networking sites, blogs and discussion forums are used by a number of diverse associations to primarily notify and educate members, and to possibly connect with other associations, and city officials. Topics on these pages are generally association meetings and community and resources. These pages are developed in an effort to improve association recognition and to increase membership in the hopes of fostering community. The perceived effectiveness of social media are mixed- while some associations cite technical and user limitations as being

challenging, a number of associations believe participating in social media pages is worthwhile.

The biggest take away point from this research is that social media, media that is theoretically and physically constructed to facilitate collaboration, is mainly used as a bulletin board by neighborhood and homeowners associations and related local government department in the Sacramento Area. Because these sites are being used to disseminate information to its users, I believe that the benefits of user interaction and collaboration may not be truly realized.

As a researcher, I am currently finding it hard to ground this theory. If many associations find their social media pages effective, who am I to say that using social media as a notification medium is not an example of collaboration and user interaction? Should further research be pursued to determine the conditions that make greater posting and user commenting possible on association social media? Is association social media interaction and collaboration, like association participation, dependent on personal, historical, and environmental factors (Bekkers, 2002; Bursik, 1988; Dye, 1970, Cox, 1973; Jargowsky, 1997; Stoll, 2000)? Is association social media interaction and participation on a continuum? Nielson (2006) suggests that there is '90:9:1 rule' participation on new media, like social media: "90% of users are lurkers (i.e., read or observe, but don't contribute). 9% of users contribute from time to time, but other priorities dominate their time. 1% of users participate a lot and account for most contributions" (as cited by Russo and Peacock, 2009). Does this rule-of-thumb apply in this situation? This thesis research has opened the door for more research on the topic of

social media and collaboration on the neighborhood and homeowners association;
hopefully, someone will join me in this pursuit. Let the collaboration begin...

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Appendix 1: City of Citrus Heights Community Profile (US Census Bureau 2009a)

Area (sq. mi): 14.1

Founded: January 1st, 1997

Population: 84,547

Median Household Income (in 2009 inflation adjusted dollars): \$53,735

Estimate Median Value (Owner Occupied Homes): \$309,600

Housing Characteristics:

<i>Housing Unit</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>US Comparison(%)</i>
Total housing units	35,847	-----	-----
Occupied housing units	33,328	93.0	88.2
Owner-occupied housing units	19,542	58.6	66.9
Renter-occupied housing units	13,786	41.4	33.1

Age Distribution

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Under 5 Years	4,989	5.9	6.9
18+	64,279	76.3	75.4
65+	11,646	13.8	12.6

Racial Distribution

<i>Race</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
White	70,501	83.7	74.5
Black	3,291	3.9	12.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	371	0.4	0.8
Asian	2,811	3.3	4.4
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	352	0.4	0.1
Some other race	5,005	5.9	5.6
Persons reporting two or more races	1,938	2.3	2.2
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	11,621	13.8	15.1

Languages Spoken At Home (Population over 5)

<i>Language Spoken</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
English Only	66,033	83.3
Language other than English	13,247	16.7
Speak English less than 'very well'	6,373	8.0

Appendix 2: City of Elk Grove Community Profile (US Census Bureau 2009b)

Area (sq. mi.): 42.1

Founded: January 1st, 2000

Population: 130,007

Median Household Income (in 2009 inflation adjusted dollars): \$81,097

Estimate Median Value (Owner Occupied Homes): \$ 404,300

Housing Characteristics

<i>Housing Unit</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Total housing units	42,803	-----	-----
Occupied housing units	40,036	93.5	88.2%
Owner-occupied housing units	31,537	78.8	66.9%
Renter-occupied housing units	8,499	21.2	33.1%

Age Distribution

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Under 5 Years	10,368	8.0	6.9%
18+	88,450	68.0	75.4%
65+	9,618	7.4	12.6%

Racial Distribution

<i>Race</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
White	60,067	46.2	74.5%
Black	14,099	10.8	12.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native	773	0.6	0.8%
Asian	32,765	25.2	4.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	1,402	1.1	0.1%
Some other race	13,511	10.4	5.6%
Persons reporting two or more races	7,390	5.7	2.2%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	21,936	16.9	15.1%

Languages Spoken At Home (Population Over 5)

<i>Language Spoken</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
English Only	82,209	68.7%
Language other than English	37,430	31.3%
Speak English less than 'very well'	11,775	9.8%

Appendix 3: City of Folsom Community Profile (US Census Bureau 2009c)

Area (sq. mi.): 24.2

Founded: 1946

Population:

Median Household Income (in 2009 inflation adjusted dollars): \$ 92,427

Estimate Median Value (Owner Occupied Homes): \$ 482,200

Housing Characteristics

<i>Housing Unit</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Total housing units	23,180	-----	-----
Occupied housing units	21,895	94.5	88.2
Owner-occupied housing units	15,950	72.8	66.9
Renter-occupied housing units	5,945	27.2	33.1

Age Distribution

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Under 5 Years	4,696	7.1	6.9
18+	50,406	75.9	75.4
65+	5,436	8.2	12.6

Racial Distribution

<i>Race</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
White	48,296	72.7	74.5
Black	4,974	7.5	12.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	286	0.4	0.8
Asian	286	0.4	0.8
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	120	0.2	0.1
Some other race	3,788	5.7	5.6
Persons reporting two or more races	1,611	2.4	2.2
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	7,335	11.0	15.1

Languages Spoken At Home (Population Over 5)

<i>Language Spoken</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
English Only	50,172	81.3
Language other than English	11,531	18.7
Speak English less than 'very well'	3,195	5.2

Appendix 4: City of Rancho Cordova Community Profile (US Census Bureau 2009d)

Area (sq. mi):22.8

Founded: July 1st 2003

Population: 60,008

Median Household Income (in 2009 inflation adjusted dollars): \$ 49,860

Estimate Median Value (Owner Occupied Homes): \$ 286,700

Housing Characteristics

<i>Housing Unit</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Total housing units	24,581	-----	-----
Occupied housing units	22,451	91.3	88.2
Owner-occupied housing units	12,543	55.9	66.9
Renter-occupied housing units	9,908	44.1	33.1

Age Distribution

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Under 5 Years	4,366	7.3	6.9
18+	44,773	74.6	75.4
65+	6,015	10.0	12.6

Racial Distribution

<i>Race</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
White	38,019	63.4	74.5
Black	6,383	10.6	12.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	867	1.4	0.8
Asian	6,701	11.2	4.4
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	388	0.6	0.1
Some other race	4,638	7.7	5.6
Persons reporting two or more races	3,012	5.0	2.2
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	11,313	18.9	15.1

Languages Spoken At Home (Population Over 5)

<i>Language Spoken</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
English Only	37,326	67.1
Language other than English	18,316	32.9
Speak English less than 'very well'	9,703	17.4

Appendix 5: City of Sacramento Community Profile (US Census Bureau 2009e)

Area: 97 sq. mi. (2000)

Founded: 1849 (it is the oldest incorporated city in California)

Population: 456,394

Median Household Income (in 2009 inflation adjusted dollars): \$ 50,381

Estimate Median Value (Owner Occupied Homes): \$ 331,400

Housing Characteristics

<i>Housing Unit</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Total housing units	190,672	-----	-----
Occupied housing units	173,968	91.2	88.2
Owner-occupied housing units	89,163	51.3	66.9
Renter-occupied housing units	84,805	48.7	33.1

Age Distribution

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
Under 5 Years	35,336	7.7	6.9
18+	342,272	75.0	75.4
65+	48,590	10.6	12.6

Racial Distribution

<i>Race</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>US Comparison (%)</i>
White	228,670	50.1	74.5
Black	65,653	14.4	12.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	5,115	1.1	0.8
Asian	80,984	17.7	4.4
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	5,762	1.3	0.1
Some other race	46,890	10.3	5.6
Persons reporting two or more races	23,320	5.1	2.2
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	113,100	24.8	15.1

Languages Spoken At Home (Population Over 5)

<i>Language Spoken</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Estimate</i>
English Only	270,698	64.3
Language other than English	150,360	35.7
Speak English less than 'very well'	71,840	17.1

Appendix 6. Solicitation Email to Local Government Departments

Hello [Insert Name],

My name is Jamila Khan and I am second year Community Development graduate student at UC Davis. I am interested in learning how neighborhood associations utilize social media for association activities. This research is supervised by my research advisor Stephen M. Wheeler. I am contacting you as you are identified as a staff person knowledgeable on the neighborhood associations in [name in the City].

I would love to speak with you about your thoughts on communication tools and social media for neighborhood and homeowner associations. This conversation can be completed on the phone or via email (which ever method you prefer). There is minimal risk to participating in this interview, but you are not obligated to participate if you do not wish to do so.

Please feel free to contact me at (916) 335-1044 or jbkhan@ucdavis.edu, at your convenience, if you have any questions or concerns. You may also contact my research advisor, Stephen Wheeler, at smwheeler@ucdavis.edu or (530) 754-9332.

Best,

Jamila B. Khan
Community Development Graduate Student
University of California, Davis
(916) 335-1044
jbkhan@ucdavis.edu

Appendix 7. Solicitation Email to Neighborhood Associations

Hello [Insert Name],

My name is Jamila Khan and I am second year Community Development graduate student at UC Davis. I am interested in learning how neighborhood associations and homeowner associations use social media for association activities. This research is supervised by my research advisor Stephen M. Wheeler. I am currently speaking with associations in the Sacramento area to identify communication and social media barriers and best practices. I am contacting you as [City Staffer Name] from the City of [Name of City] has identified you as a contact for the [Name] neighborhood/homeowners association.

I would love to speak with you about your thoughts on communication tools and social media for neighborhood and homeowner associations. This conversation can be completed on the phone or via email (which ever method you prefer). There is minimal risk to participating in this interview, but you are not obligated to participate if you do not wish to do so.

Please feel free to contact me at (916) 335-1044 or jbkhan@ucdavis.edu, at your convenience, if you have any questions or concerns regarding this research. You may also contact my research advisor, Stephen Wheeler, at smwheeler@ucdavis.edu or (530) 754-9332.

Thank you,

Jamila B. Khan
Community Development Graduate Student
University of California, Davis
(916) 335-1044
jbkhan@ucdavis.edu

Appendix 8. Interview Prompt for Local Government Departments

Background Information

1. Purpose/Mission/Vision:
2. Goals:
3. Structure:
4. Service Area:
5. What is your role in facilitating community engagement?
 - a. Within neighborhoods?
 - b. Between neighborhoods/homeowner associations?
 - c. Within the city/ county?
 - d. Regionally?
6. What are the resources your department provides for neighborhood associations?
7. How does your department communicate with neighborhood associations?
 - a. Print (press releases, print ads etc.)
 - b. Radio
 - c. TV
 - d. Websites
 - e. Other?
8. Why do you choose to use this/these methods?
9. Social Media is defined as “software tools that allow groups to generate content and engage in peer-to-peer conversations and exchange of content”. Does your department use social media: YES or NO?
10. If YES, Does your department use any of the following? (Circle all):
 - a. Social Networking Sites (i.e. Facebook, Myspace)
 - b. (Micro)Blogging (i.e. Twitter)
 - c. Wikis (i.e. Wikipedia)
 - d. Photosharing (Flickr)
 - e. Online Video Sites (YouTube, Daily Motion)
 - f. Other
11. For what reasons does your department use social media? (Circle all that apply):
 - a. For media outreach or media presence?
 - b. For networking purposes?
 - c. Educational purposes?
 - d. To engage underrepresented groups?
 - e. Other?
12. Who is in charge of managing your social media accounts?
13. How would you describe your activity on social media
 - a. Frequency of posts?
 - b. Types of posts- status updates, questions, links, polls, likes, data, stories
14. If known, how would you describe those that participate and use your department’s social media sites?

If NO,

15. Why does your organization not use social media? (circle all that apply)
 - a. Using Social Media does not align with my department’s goals

- b. My department's current outreach methods suffice
- c. My department would like to use Social Media, but SM is difficult to use.
- d. My department had a Social Media page, but did not find it useful.
- e. Other_____

16. How do you feel about the following statement: "Social Media is a fad."

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Appendix 9. Interview Prompt for Neighborhood/Homeowners Associations

Neighborhood/Homeowner Association Basic Information

1. Purpose/Mission/Vision:
2. Goals:
3. Structure:
4. Service Area:
5. Membership into Organization/Demographics:

Social Media Definition and Use

1. Please define social media?
2. Does your organization use social media? Yes/No
3. If NO, skip to **Question # 21**
4. If YES, which types of social media do you use (Circle all):
 - a. Social Networking Sites (i.e. Facebook, Myspace)
 - b. Microblogs (i.e. Twitter)
 - c. Blogs (i.e. WordPress, BlogSpot)
 - d. Wikis (i.e. Wikipedia)
 - e. Photosharing (i.e. Flickr)
 - f. Online Video Sites (i.e. YouTube Daily Motion)
 - g. Discussion Boards?
 - h. Podcasts?
 - i. Other?
5. How would you describe your activity on social media
 - a. Frequency of posts?
 - b. Types of posts- status updates, questions, links, polls, likes, data, stories
6. Who is in charge of managing your social media accounts?
7. How does your organization deal with spammers, inflammatory posters (trolls)?
8. If known, how would you describe those who participate/ use your social media site/page?
 - a. Background? Personality traits? Status within the community?
 - b. Does your organization actively seek out these types of individuals?
 - c. Are there other individuals/groups that you still would like to engage with this medium?
9. . How do you feel about the following statements:
 - a) “My association’s social media page(s) create(s) an environment where people can openly share their ideas and concerns about [insert neighborhood name]”

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Please explain.

b) “My association’s social media page(s) is/are easily accessible to my community”

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Please explain.

c) “My association’s social media page(s) is/are easy to use and edit”

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Please explain.

10. Why do you use this/these social media? Please circle all that apply:

- a. For media outreach or media presence?
- b. For networking purposes?
- c. For organizing/advocacy purposes?
- d. Fundraising
- e. Educational purposes?
- f. To engage underrepresented groups?
- g. To keep up with other organizations?
- h. Other?

11. Do you feel that your social media page is effective in serving this/these purpose(s)? YES or NO

12. If NO, How could Social Media be improved to meet your needs?

13. If YES, Can you explain why it is effective?

- a. Saw increase # of responses/comments on social media site?
- b. Saw increased # of persons attending organization’s general meetings?
- c. Saw increased # of persons participating in community events?

14. Could you cite specific instances where your organization has used social media?

- a. Did you compliment your social media use with other media?
- b. Do you feel that this was effective? Ineffective?

15. How does your social media use differ with the scope or context of an organizational effort/project? (i.e. a neighborhood campaign? Regional effort?)

16. Do you have a strategy to get online supporters to get involved with association activities offline? Explain.

17. Does your organization collaborate with other neighborhood/homeowners associations?
18. If NO, why?
- a. Are there barriers to working with others?
 - b. Working with other neighborhoods does not align with your organization's mission/needs?
 - c. Other?
19. If YES,
- a. Where does this take place (online? In person?)
 - b. How would you describe this collaboration:
 - i. Effective? Ineffective?
 - ii. Have you adopted elements of their outreach/ community engagement/ social media tactics?
20. Would you recommend any of your social media use/strategies to others? To neighborhoods?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time!

If Answered NO to Question#2,

21. Why does your organization not use social media? (circle all that apply)
- a. Using Social Media does not align with my association's goals
 - b. My organization's current outreach methods suffice
 - c. My organization would like to use Social Media, but SM is difficult to use.
 - d. My organization has a Social Media page, but did not find it useful.
 - e. Other_____

If circled 20a,

22. Why do you/your organization believe that social media does not meet your organization's outreach goals?
23. How could social media sites better suit your organization's needs?

If circled 20b,

24. Does your organization have a web presence?
- a. A website?
 - b. An email list serve?
 - c. Other?
25. How often do you use or update these?
26. Does your organization use any of the following media (and why do you use these media?)
- a. Print (press releases, print ads etc.)

- b. Radio
 - c. TV
 - d. Websites
27. If known, how would you describe those who participate in your association's events/activities?
- a. Background? Personality traits? Status within the community?
 - b. Did you and your organization actively seek out these types of individuals?
 - c. Are there other individuals/groups that you still would like to engage with?

If circled 20c,

28. Please rank the difficulties faced when using social media (1-4):

My organization is not sure which social media site/ applications to use.
 My organization's board does not find social media sites/accounts easy to use.
 Most of members of my neighborhoods do not find social media sites easy to use.
 My organization does not have the time to update or manage a social media site/account.

Please explain selections.

29. Are there other difficulties faced preventing your organization from using social media?
30. If you could overcome these obstacles, would you social media for any of these reasons? Please circle all that apply:

- a. For media outreach or media presence?
- b. For networking purposes?
- c. For organizing/advocacy purposes?
- d. Fundraising
- e. Educational purposes?
- f. To engage underrepresented groups?
- g. To keep up with other organizations?
- h. Other?

If circled 20d,

31. Which social media type did you use?
- a. Social Networking Sites (i.e. Facebook, Myspace)
 - b. Microblogs (i.e. Twitter)
 - c. Blogs (Wordpress, Blogspot)
 - d. Wikis (i.e. Wikipedia)
 - e. Photosharing (Flickr)
 - f. Online Video Sites (YouTube, Daily Motion)

- g. Discussion Forums?
- h. Podcasts?
- i. Other

32. For what reason(s) did your association stop using social media (Circle all that apply)

- a. Did not have enough free time to update account/page
- b. Did not receive enough feedback by others to justify continued use of account/page
- c. Did not see online participation translate into offline action
- d. Other: _____

33. How could this/these social media site(s) change so that would use its/their services again?

34. How do you feel about the following statement: "Social Media is a fad."

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Thank you so much for your time!

Appendix 10. City of Citrus Heights Interview Response Data

POSSIBLE RESPONDENTS	(Contacts w/ Email Addresses/Total # of Associations)	10/10	100.0%
RESPONSE RATE	(# of Respondents/Total Possible Respondents)	5/10	50.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
In-Person Interviews	(# of In-Person Interviews/# of Respondents)	2/5	40.0%
Phone Interviews	(# of Phone Interviewees/# of Respondents)	2/5	40.0%
Email Interviews	(# of Email Interviewees/# of Respondents)	1/5	20.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
Social Media User	(# of SM Users/# of Respondents)	1/5	20.0%
<i>Social Media Type...</i>			
Blog	(# of Blog User/ # of SM User)		
Social Networks	(# of Social Network User/ # of SM User)	1/5	20.0%
Microblog	(# of Microblog User/ # of SM User)		
Wiki	(# of Wiki User/ # of SM User)		
Video Sharing	(# of Video Sharing User/ # of SM User)		
Podcasting	(# of Podcast User/ # of SM User)		
Discussion Forums	(# of Forum User/ # of SM User)		
Photo Sharing	(# of Photo Sharing User/ # of SM User)		

Notes: All associations contacts had valid email addresses. I chose to contact Presidents and REACH representatives, as Robin Moore suggested that these individuals would most likely respond. All associations in Citrus Heights are neighborhood associations.

Appendix 11. City of Elk Grove Interview Response Data

POSSIBLE RESPONDENTS	(Contacts w/ Email Addresses/Total # of Associations)	6/30	20.0%
RESPONSE RATE	(# of Respondents/Total Possible Respondents)	4/6	70.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
In-Person Interviews	(# of In-Person Interviews/# of Respondents)	0/4	0.0%
Phone Interviews	(# of Phone Interviewees/# of Respondents)	0/4	0.0%
Email Interviews	(# of Email Interviewees/# of Respondents)	4/4	100.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
Social Media User	(# of SM Users/# of Respondents)	0/4	0.0%
<i>Social Media Type...</i>			
Blog	(# of Blog User/ # of SM User)		
Social Networks	(# of Social Network User/ # of SM User)		
Microblog	(# of Microblog User/ # of SM User)		
Wiki	(# of Wiki User/ # of SM User)		
Video Sharing	(# of Video Sharing User/ # of SM User)		
Podcasting	(# of Podcast User/ # of SM User)		
Discussion Forums	(# of Forum User/ # of SM User)		
Photo Sharing	(# of Photo Sharing User/ # of SM User)		

Notes: Out of all of the HOA/Neighborhood Association, only six contacts had valid email addresses. Most associations did not have phone numbers or names of individuals for me to contact. Addresses may or not have been included in association contact information, mail correspondence was not pursued.

Appendix 12. City of Folsom Interview Response Data

POSSIBLE RESPONDENTS	(Contacts w/ Email Addresses/Total # of Associations)	11/22	50.0%
RESPONSE RATE	(# of Respondents/Total Possible Respondents)	2/11	18.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
In-Person Interviews	(# of In-Person Interviews/# of Respondents)	0/2	0.0%
Phone Interviews	(# of Phone Interviewees/# of Respondents)	0/2	0.0%
Email Interviews	(# of Email Interviewees/# of Respondents)	2/2	100.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
Social Media User	(# of SM Users/# of Respondents)	0/2	0.0%
<i>Social Media Type...</i>			
Blog	(# of Blog User/ # of SM User)		
Social Networks	(# of Social Network User/ # of SM User)		
Microblog	(# of Microblog User/ # of SM User)		
Wiki	(# of Wiki User/ # of SM User)		
Video Sharing	(# of Video Sharing User/ # of SM User)		
Podcasting	(# of Podcast User/ # of SM User)		
Discussion Forums	(# of Forum User/ # of SM User)		
Photo Sharing	(# of Photo Sharing User/ # of SM User)		

Notes: The HOA contact list only had eleven contacts with valid email addresses. Some HOAs contact information did not provide phone numbers or names of individuals.

Appendix 13. City of Rancho Cordova Interview Response Data

POSSIBLE RESPONDENTS	(Contacts w/ Email Addresses/Total # of Associations)	10/10	100.0%
RESPONSE RATE	(# of Respondents/Total Possible Respondents)	5/10	50.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
In-Person Interviews	(# of In-Person Interviews/# of Respondents)	0/5	0.0%
Phone Interviews	(# of Phone Interviewees/# of Respondents)	5/5	100.0%
Email Interviews	(# of Email Interviewees/# of Respondents)	0/5	0.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
Social Media User	(# of SM Users/# of Respondents)	5/5	100.0%
<i>Social Media Type...</i>			
Blog	(# of Blog User/ # of SM User)	4/5	80.0%
Social Networks	(# of Social Network User/ # of SM User)	2/5	40.0%
Microblog	(# of Microblog User/ # of SM User)		
Wiki	(# of Wiki User/ # of SM User)		
Video Sharing	(# of Video Sharing User/ # of SM User)		
Podcasting	(# of Podcast User/ # of SM User)		
Discussion Forums	(# of Forum User/ # of SM User)	2/5	40.0%
Photo Sharing	(# of Photo Sharing User/ # of SM User)		

Notes: As of May 1st, 2011, I only spoke with five neighborhood groups in Rancho Cordova. Contact information for all associations was available on the RCAN website.

Appendix 14. City of Sacramento Interview Response Data

POSSIBLE RESPONDENTS	(Contacts w/ Email Addresses/Total # of Associations)	74/84	88.1%
RESPONSE RATE	(# of Respondents/Total Possible Respondents)	24/74	31.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
In-Person Interviews	(# of In-Person Interviews/# of Respondents)	1/24	4.0%
Phone Interviews	(# of Phone Interviewees/# of Respondents)	11/24	46.0%
Email Interviews	(# of Email Interviewees/# of Respondents)	12/24	50.0%
<i>Of Respondents...</i>			
Social Media User	(# of SM Users/# of Respondents)	11/24	0.5%
<i>Social Media Type...</i>			
Blog	(# of Blog User/ # of SM User)	1/11	9.0%
Social Networks	(# of Social Network User/ # of SM User)	9/11	20.0%
Microblog	(# of Microblog User/ # of SM User)		
Wiki	(# of Wiki User/ # of SM User)	1/11	9.0%
Video Sharing	(# of Video Sharing User/ # of SM User)		
Podcasting	(# of Podcast User/ # of SM User)		
Discussion Forums	(# of Forum User/ # of SM User)	2/11	18.0%
Photo Sharing	(# of Photo Sharing User/ # of SM User)	2/11	18.0%

Notes: As of May 1st, 2011, I spoke with 24 association representatives. All contact information was found on the City of Sacramento Neighborhood Directory. The directory includes information on neighborhood, homeowner, and business associations and on redevelopment areas; however the later two associations were not considered in this research. Available contact information for these associations was variable.

Appendix 15. Associations That Use Social Media

Association Name	Association Type	Location	Social Media Pages Used
Tallac Village Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	Social Networking (Facebook)
Southeast Village Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	Social Networking (Facebook)
Southside Park Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	Social Networking (Facebook), Photo Sharing (Flickr)
Newton Booth Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	Discussion Forum (Yahoo Group), Social Networking (Facebook), Blog (Wordpress)
Fruitridge Manor Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	Social Networking (Facebook)
Woodlake Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	Photo Sharing (Flickr), Blog (BigTent)
Cabrillo Park Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	???
Midtown Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	Social Networking (Facebook); Social
Sierra Curtis Neighborhood Association	NA	Sacramento	Social Networking (Facebook)
Deer Field?	NW	Sacramento	???
La Loma Neighborhood Watch Group	NW	Rancho Cordova	Blog (Blogspot)
Raven Oaks Neighborhood Watch Group	NW	Rancho Cordova	Blog (WordPress)
Cordova Towne Neighborhood Association	NA	Rancho Cordova	Social Networking (Facebook)
Capital Village Homeowners Association	HOA	Rancho Cordova	Social Networking (Facebook)
Lincoln Village Neighborhood Association	NA	Rancho Cordova	Social Networking (Facebook)
Birdcage Heights Neighborhood Association	NA	Citrus Heights	Social Networking (Facebook)