The body of academic literature on social media is vast in scope and growing constantly. As researchers continue to give context to the phenomenon of social networking technologies, consumers, students and fellow academics perhaps get a clearer picture of where these technologies fall among prior research in the larger area of human communication.

However, there is a regulatory element to this that is largely unaddressed in the academic community. There seems to be a growing sense of urgency from academics and professionals alike to rein in the virtually unencumbered world of social media, as it becomes more deeply ingrained into the daily rituals of people worldwide. It is clear that the rate of adoption of habitual social media use is at a fever pitch, growing consistently at a disquieting rate. Due to the fact that the Internet provides this space for creative collaboration and communication, there has been limited ability for ground rules to be set for appropriate use of Internet technologies, particularly in the area of social media.

This is perhaps most pertinent in the field of public relations, where every employee with a Twitter account now has a worldwide stage for communication about their employer. As employees are often the most valuable brand ambassadors for their respective organizations, social media communications
become a major cause for concern when attempting to maintain a consistent brand identity.

The focus of this research is to see where Indiana’s local government agencies and major universities are in that process. The aim is to see if they are attempting to regulate their employees regarding social media, and if so, to what degree.
Section II
Literature Review

Prior to websites like Facebook and Twitter, scholars had already recognized the Internet’s capacity as a mass communication tool, which gives the novice user with the right hardware and little necessary knowledge the power to communicate worldwide, a privilege once reserved for the celebrity, politician, and pundit (Dominick 1999).

Since the inception of social media platforms, even since the coining of the term “social media platforms,” there has been much scholarly research devoted to the impact that these tools have on society. Social media have been recognized by One-Party East Asian states as such powerful tools for the obtaining of information, so much so that heavy restrictions have been placed by most of these governments on citizens’ use of the Internet (Hichigian, 2002).

Health professionals recognize the power of social networking websites in, “connecting you with your customers, giving you a space for dialogue with them, and sharing the experience of being a part of your professional development services” (McKenzie 2009; McNab 2009).

There has also been much research devoted to the widespread adoption of social media among politicians and participants in the democratic process
The academic community acknowledges the ineffaceable mark that has been made on privacy, or the perception thereof, because of social media technologies. Some scholars note that the pervasive nature of these technologies can lead to “unintended consequences,” such as threats to privacy and changes in the relationship between public and private sphere; noting also that the perceived “benefits of Facebook outweigh privacy concerns, even when concrete privacy invasion was experienced” (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes, 2009). Additionally, the popularity of these social networking sites indicates the “emergence of complicit risk communities where personal information becomes social capital, which is traded and exchanged” (Ibrahim, 2008).

Some scholars go as far as to define social media more as a system for relational actualization than a form of Internet communication. Boyd and Ellison (2008), define social media by three basic attributes:

1. The ability to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system
2. The ability to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection
3. The ability to view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.
Several studies have been conducted on the threat of the Internet to traditional forms of authority. In a study conducted of religious blogs, it was found that while hierarchical authority was challenged at some points, for the most part, individual users in fact affirmed authority in large part (Campbell, 2010). Also the internet may create new religious authorities, such as the moderator of an online group being identified and treated as a legitimate spiritual authority by members of an online religious community (Herring, 2005).

There has also been much research and discussion devoted to social media’s effect on the practice of public relations. Some scholars contend “Facebook provides unique public relations opportunities for corporations to fit in with its users’ social norms and meet them in a place of real relational comfort” (Vorvoreanu, 2009). While other say public relations practitioners as it regards the tactical practice of public relations have overstated the potential effect of social media (Taylor & Kent, 2010). There is a disconnect between how much public relations practitioners think social media is effecting public relations tactics and how much they are actually effected. “The claims of social media power far outweigh the evidence social media effectiveness as a communications tool” (Taylor & Kent, 2010).

Perhaps the area given most credence by the academic community as it regards the effect of social media is the profession of journalism. “Some well-known news media names now have Twitter followings that are almost as large as the circulation of their newspapers or the viewership of their TV shows” (Farhi, 2009). George Stephanopoulos had more than 564,000 people following his

What started as a field test in the effects of interpersonal communication conducted at the University of Iowa (Ludwin, 1947) was eventually applied to the media’s role in filtering information to the public in the form of “Gatekeeping Theory.” However, according to some scholars, Internet technology “has eviscerated the role of the elite media as gatekeepers” (Rieder, 2000).

In a surveyed population of journalists, 32% considered social media to be an important component to their work (Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, and Howes 2009). Social media has made such an indelible mark on the journalistic process, that the line for some news outlets between a journalists’ home life and their life in the news room has been completely obscured. Take for instance, the Los Angeles Times social media policy, which reads, “Assume that your professional life and your personal life merge online regardless of your care in separating them. Don't write or post anything that would embarrass the LAT or compromise your ability to do your job” (Podger, 2009).

This wouldn’t be the first time in which there were questions raised as to the how negative the potential effect of computer technology is on the workplace. This same issue was discussed by scholars at the height of the popularity of “Instant Messaging” technology. While some at the time were contending that IM was a workplace distraction and made workers more unproductive, a study
revealed “employees use IM in ways that help them to manage interruption, such as quickly obtaining task-relevant information and negotiating conversational availability” (Garrett & Danziger, 2008).

Social Media in Universities and Governments

Some scholars consider social media to be a strong tactical approach to public relations within a university or government setting. Chadwick (2001) contends “the Internet offers the prospect for governments to create new ‘electronic faces’, which act to support a symbolic architecture of power.” Some universities, like Davenport University in Michigan, are effectively using social media as a means of recruiting and retaining their student body (Kattner, 2010).

Scholars have isolated three functions of Internet technologies that are the primary manifestations of use among students and professors in the university setting:

1. To clarify course material and procedures
2. As a means of efficient communication
3. For personal or social reasons (Waldeck, Kearney & Plax, 2001)

In a study conducted of college students, their perceptions of college professors being on Facebook were generally negative regarding that professor’s credibility as a faculty member of the university (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007). However, some other scholars would contend that Internet technologies like email and social media are a means of healthy self-disclosure for professors. “Teacher self-disclosure can also be a way to increase flexibility when class
discussions occur and allows for teachers to adopt a less rigid teaching style” (Cayanus, 2004).
Section III
Methodology

The muddled, and often contradictory nature of the findings in the historical and secondary research for the literature review, are the breeding ground for clarification of the role of social media in the university and local government setting.

The aim of this research is to lay the groundwork for further investigation into the consistencies, or lack thereof, among social media policies in major universities and local governments. The sample group that was selected was the major universities and city governments in the state of Indiana. In order to make statistical comparisons between the presence and absence of certain attributes or topics pertaining to social media, the original method chosen for this study was a quantitative content analysis. However, even the most cursory of observations of the content of these policies will reveal the complete lack of consistency one to the next. This can be attributed to multiple factors.

Rate of Innovation

Some of the policies analyzed herein have not been updated since as long ago as 2004, which was the same year Facebook was conceived in its most primitive “Harvard only” format. However, even some of the more recently
updated policies cannot account for things like the permeation of social networks onto mobile devices and smart phones. Considering the rate of innovation and the relatively sudden pervasiveness of social media technologies, it is not a surprise that there would be inconsistencies among social media policies.

*Intended Audience*

Particularly in the university social media policies analyzed, there are major discrepancies in whom the university chooses to address with the social media policy. Some are guidelines for students who want to create social media accounts for student organizations; others are more strict procedural policies intended to be an addition to an employee handbook for university faculty and staff. All of these still refer to themselves as the official “social media policy” of their respective university.

With these and other inconsistencies in mind, it was quickly determined that a *qualitative* content analysis would be a more appropriate fit for the purpose of this particular study. A quantitative content analysis would have had zero statistical reliability. Qualitative content analysis still lends itself to making in depth observations of the content of these policies while avoiding bunk statistical measurements.
Local Government Agencies

The sample of local government agencies included seven of the top 10 most populated cities in Indiana according to the most recent available census data. None of the seven cities had a section of their policy book dedicated specifically to social media or social networking sites. The closest applicable sections in policy dealt with general technology and information systems usage. These sections covered all areas of Internet and computer use, which, whether it was mentioned by name or not, encompass the activity of engaging in social media and social networking.

Bloomington

Under the section “Other City Policies and Procedures” in a subsection called “Information and Technology Services Policy,” the City of Bloomington discusses issues of technology use. The section is three pages long and appears on pages 59-61 of the 71-page manual. The “General Use” section covers technology as it regards issues of sexual harassment, illicit or illegal use of information technology, as well as prohibiting the distribution of unsolicited emails “en masse” (all employee emails).
Within the subheading of “Personal Use” lies issues of storing or downloading large personal files, accessing or downloading of sexually inappropriate material, as well as the non-confidentiality of online transmissions made from city computers. Since all of those transmissions are considered a matter of public record, there is to be no expectation of privacy for city employees when they write emails, post or download things from their work computers.

A “Security” section outlines the importance of Bloomington’s proprietary information; that any sharing of information or materials that are property of the city is explicitly prohibited. “Intellectual Property” is what the city defines as anything created on a computer belonging to the city is also itself the city’s property, whether it was meant for use for the city or not.

In Bloomington’s employee handbook there is no mention whatsoever of “social media” or “social networking.” However, there were two points, one from the “General Use” section and one from the “Personal Use” section that pertain to activities on social media sites. Under “General Use” it is stated that, “Information that is posted externally shall reflect the standards and policies of the City of Bloomington.” Under “Personal Use” references were made to the tracking of personal time on information systems, “Time spent on personal IT use must not be included as time worked on daily time sheets, or wherever work time is tracked.” Also, it was made clear that these personal uses of information technology were “subject to the City’s personnel policies,” thereby potentially leaving room for the accommodation of emerging technologies.

The last revision of the Bloomington employee manual was April 4, 2005.
Evansville

Within the “Policy Guide” portion of the handbook appears a section entitled “Internet and Email Use Policy Statement.” The section is two paragraphs, containing a total of five sentences (by far the shortest of the policies analyzed), and appears on the top half of page 14 of the 60-page manual. Due to its brevity, the policy is included in its entirety here:

INTERNET AND EMAIL USE POLICY STATEMENT

The City of Evansville provides most employees with Internet service and/or email in order for such employees to perform their job duties in an efficient and effective professional manner. The service is to be used strictly for the conduct of the business of the City of Evansville in a manner consistent with individual employees' job responsibilities and must not be used for personal or non-official purposes. The City of Evansville strictly prohibits non-job related use of its software and business equipment. Telephone systems may only be used for non-business purposes in an emergency and only with the permission of the employee’s supervisor.

Employees who violate this policy are subject disciplinary action up to and including termination from employment depending on the seriousness of the offense in the judgment of the City.

As is observable here, the policy states, and restates, the restriction on “non-job related” or “non-official purposes” regarding technology use. Evansville also gives themselves the ability to subjectively administer punishments to those who might use technology in a manner that could be deemed unprofessional, inefficient, ineffective or outside the permission of the employee’s supervisor.

Again, as is observable, no explicit reference to social media of any kind is made herein. It can only be inferred, by both the employee and employer
(Evansville) the degree to which social media and social networking sites are appropriate for their work activities.

The most recent revision to Evansville’s handbook was April 2008.

**Carmel**

In a section entitled “On the Job” under the subsection “Computer Technology,” the City of Carmel deals with the use of computer technology by their employees. Carmel has one of the more extensive local government policies, covering eight pages from pages 30-38 of the 94-page handbook.

Carmel addressed most of the other areas that other cities addressed regarding privacy, intellectual property and general acceptable/unacceptable uses of technology.

However, Carmel is one of only two local government policy manuals to mention the term “social networking” within its technology policy. The following appears under the “Unacceptable Use” portion of the policy:

“Accessing social networking sites or peer-to-peer sites, except for business purposes, which must be approved by the directors of Human Resources and Information Systems.”

Carmel was the only local government policy book to mention blogs or blogging. It was first mentioned in the “Unacceptable Use” portion of the policy, along with gaming, which is also considered a venue for online social networking, “Blogging, participating in on-line forums or chat groups, playing games…and other non-business activities that waste computer resources.”
Further down in the policy, an entire subheading was devoted to the practice of blogging, particularly personal blogs that are not specifically linked to the City of Carmel. In the introduction to the section on blogs, the City of Carmel acknowledges that “blogging has become a common pastime and an important means of sharing experiences and information.” The policy establishes that blogging on City time or with City computers is strictly prohibited without explicit authorization from the Mayor’s Office. It then includes a four-point guideline for personal blogs of City employees, as follows:

- Blogs are individual interactions, not official communications, and employees must not represent or imply that they are expressing the opinion of the City.
- Bloggers are personally responsible for the contents of their blogs. All entries pertaining to the City should be accurate and truthful.
- Blogs should be respectful, and not include any material that is intended to embarrass, insult, demean or damage the reputation of the City, its services, its citizens and/or its employees.
- Bloggers should never disclose any confidential information concerning the City and its operations.

Also, Carmel makes mention of a concept called “De Minimis Personal Use.” The opening line to the section on De Minimis use is as follows:

“The City realizes that much of an employee’s personal communication and many daily tasks are now accomplished via e-mail or the Internet, and that the ability to dispose of routine personal tasks quickly and
easily may allow employees to concentrate more fully on their job responsibilities."

*De Minimis*, then, is a concept that accounts for the efficiency that emerging technologies bring to the work environment and thus affords a certain level of discretion in using these same technologies for personal matters in a manner that is so insignificant and fast, that it does not adversely effect the ability of an employee to complete his or her work.

The latest revision of the employee handbook was July 2010.

*Terre Haute*

Terre Haute was unique in that its policy manual technology section actually referenced an entirely different document called the “Electronic Communications System Policy” to be provided to newly hired employees as part of the hiring process. The policy is actually a piece of the contract and is to be signed by the prospective employee having fully read and understood the tenets of the technology policy. Although the presence of a technology protocol policy in any of these employee manuals inherently means that a new employee will have read the manual and agreed to its entirety as a part of being hired, this was the only technology policy to have a signature section devoted solely to its contents.

The “Electronic Communications System Policy” document is four pages long, with 11 sections outlining different aspects of the policy. It begins with a brief explanation of the expectation that all employees know and understand the Electronic Communications System (ECS) policy, including the bolded phrase in capital letters, “**IT WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED.**” This is reinforced by three
separate mentions of the potential consequences of acting outside of the constraints of the policy, up to and including termination.

Terre Haute’s ECS policy makes no specific mention of “social media” or “social networking.” It does not mention any social networking sites by name (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.). It does however, allude to a common understanding of the marginal amount of occasional personal use of technology, similar to the “De Minimis” clause in the Carmel “Computer Technology” policy. However, it does not bear the moniker of “De Minimis.” It reads as follows:

“Incidental and occasional personal use of the ECS is permitted, subject to the restrictions contained in this policy. Any personal use of the ECS is expected to be on the employee’s own time and is not to interfere with the person's job responsibilities. Personal use of the ECS must not detrimentally affect the job responsibilities of other employees, disrupt the system and/or harm the city’s reputation.”

The latest revision of the Terre Haute employee handbook was January 2011.

Fort Wayne


Fort Wayne is unique in expressing its concern for the “responsible use of taxpayer dollars” as a primary factor in the purpose of the technology policy. It is
also unique in mentioning “technology resource users are deemed to have given consent to this policy by their continued use of City technology resources.” So, in contrast to Terre Haute’s policy, which was in and of itself a contract, Fort Wayne is inferring that if a City employee is using City technology, then it is understood that the employee is consenting to the policy just by virtue of their technology use.

Fort Wayne is another policy with a “De Mimimus (occasional or incidental)” clause. There are eight tenets of the “De Minimus” clause that are outlined, which provide the limitations by which occasional or incidental use will be measured. These tenets include adversely affecting individual’s performance or impact on work time, restrictions on political activity, and the use of technology to gain advantages that other citizens could not from the City.

The “De Minimus” section is followed by a subsection entitled “Unacceptable uses of City technology resources.” This section sets the city of Fort Wayne apart because in this section they specifically mention the term “social networking.” Here is the exact context for their mentioning it:

“Posting personal messages on social networking websites, [bolding not added] chat rooms, newsgroups, and messaging services (e.g. MSN Messenger).

This is the extent of the specific mentioning of “social networking websites” in Fort Wayne’s technology policy. There are no mentions of any social networking websites by name, or any specific functions of social networking sites that are prohibited, other than “posting personal messages.”
The “Unacceptable uses” section is by far the longest of its kind among any of the analyzed government social media policies. There are 36 different specifically cited instances wherein City employees could violate the social media policy. These range from "misrepresenting or hiding" your identity while using City technology, to “moving computer equipment,” to “using software that does not have an obvious work related function.”

Also unique to Fort Wayne was a “Q&A” section, which is the final component of the technology policy. It includes 13 sample questions about the technology policy. Most of the sample inquiries are general in nature, but one sample question had a specific tone that related back to the superfluous use of the Internet during work hours for City employees. It is as follows:

Can I still check my personal Yahoo! e-mail account from work?

Yes. Occasional, non-intrusive use of the Internet is permitted under the policy. Specific business areas may, for business reasons, create, publish and enforce a more stringent policy. (All exemptions to the policy must be approved by the chief information officer or designee before implemented.)

The last revision of the Fort Wayne employee handbook was January 2010.

Fishers

The final section of the Town of Fishers’ 47-page personnel manual is the “Computer Usage Policy.” The section begins with a “Preamble” explaining the
purposes and background for having a computer usage policy for the Town. This is followed by a short section on “Permitted Uses; No Expectation of Privacy.”

While several of the technology policies analyzed here have addressed the issue of monitoring their employees’ computer usage, being able to review email, file uploads and downloads and Internet history, no other city or town besides Fishers addressed the issue of e-mail as a matter of public record. Fishers dedicates a small section of their computer usage policy to remind employees of “Indiana Open Door Laws (IC 5-14-1.5 and following),” which was unique to Fishers. The policy also advised employees to print and retain any important email interactions as they may be referenced in legal matters where they are pertinent.

Also unique to Fishers was their brief section entitled “E-mail Etiquette,” where they took time to coach employees on how to, or not to, write an e-mail. An italicized portion of this section reminds employees to consider the ramifications of e-mails sent in a hasty emotional response to someone else:

“Some people will send an angry e-mail message; one that they would never say in person. Take a minute before you compose any e-mail message. Be careful about the words you use and how you use them. Remember - messages can be printed or forwarded.

Don’t write things you will regret later.”

Phrases that encompass the use of social media are laced throughout the policy: “engaging in any publishing activity,” or “information from non-Town sources such as the Internet,” are a couple of examples.
Fishers was the only town that provided an exception clause to the accessing of personal, profane, obscene or pornographic sites. It is as follows:

Exception: In the course of an official investigation, it may be necessary for members of the police crimes unit to visit and view sites that are otherwise prohibited by this policy. Equipment used for this purpose will be restricted to those systems specifically documented by the Police Chief. Systems used for such investigations will be identified by serial number and/or Town asset tag number in writing to the Town Manager with copies to the Information Technology Director. All other systems not so identified and documented are subject to the provisions of this policy.

Fishers was also the only town to outline tiered consequences to violations of the policy. Other towns/cities did say that the consequence for violation was not necessarily immediate termination, but Fishers explicitly established three tiers of punitive action to be taken by the Town against policy violators:

1. Internet and e-mail access may be revoked;
2. Access times may be restricted
3. Disciplinary action and/or termination

There was no explicit mentioning of “social media” or “social networking,” nor were there any specific names of social networking tools mentioned (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.).
The latest revision to the Town of Fishers technology policy was March 2011.

**Universities**

As of the writing of this paper, five major universities in Indiana have “social media policies.” However, there is little to no continuity between them, mostly due to the intended audience of each policy. Some of these policies are intended for students, some for faculty/staff of the university. Regardless of intended audience, their content is analyzed here in order to create a holistic picture of what universities are saying about their use of social media.

*University of Southern Indiana*

The University of Southern Indiana (USI) social media policy begins with the line, “USI encourages the University community to be actively involved with social media.” What follows is both a policy and a guide, providing “how to’s,” as well as guidelines for what to do and not to do with university social media.

This policy/guide is web-based, and is not available in a PDF, or otherwise documented format. This policy addresses both faculty/staff of the university as well as students interested in making a social media channel to represent their respective group or organization, but only university or organizationally affiliated social media channels.

“The USI Social Media Policy applies only to social media accounts created to represent University of Southern Indiana groups, departments, programs, entities, etc., and does not apply to private individual accounts.”
The university does not intend, at least from this document, to have their hand in employee’s personal social media accounts. However, if a social media channel is to be opened that is going to represent USI, it requires two things:

1. Prior approval of the Marketing and Communications department of the university, and
2. At least two USI staff members to function as administrators overseeing the activity of all approved social media channels. This is to “ensure continuity” between channels.

The policy also outlines the procedure to follow for employees who leave their post as administrators of said social media accounts. They are responsible for replacing themselves upon stepping down from their responsibilities.

The policy provides coaching on how to effectively monitor discussions that occur on university social media channels. It provides the protocol for handling dissenting opinions or slanderous feedback that could have an adverse effect on the university’s reputation. It also advises to qualify when any opinions are being shared on over the social media channels to carefully state that they are “not necessarily that of the university.”

This social media policy mentions several major social networking sites by name: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. It also provides links to all of these pages. They provide links to all currently approved and active university social media channels. As of the content analysis there are 37 active, university approved Facebook fan pages, and five active, university approved Twitter
accounts. USI also offers direct contact information to personnel in charge of managing the approval of social media channels.

*The University of Notre Dame*

The University of Notre Dame (ND) social media policy begins with a preamble positioning ND as a university, which recognizes “the importance of open exchange and learning between the University of Notre Dame and its many constituents” and sees emerging technologies like social media “as an important arena for interaction and collaboration.”

The ND social media policy is web-based, and no PDF or otherwise document-based format of the policy is readily available. There are three clickable “tabs” under the heading of “social media policy:” Best practices, definition and our sites.

“Best practices” is a list of current trends and tips for having an effective social media presence. It is by no means a guideline, which social media will hold sites affiliated with the university accountable.

“Definition” is simply ND’s working description of what exactly social media is, which they say is “a variety of Web-based platforms, applications and technologies that enable people to socially interact with one another online.”

The “our sites” tab has links to some currently approved social media sites of the university. At the time of the content analysis, there are six sites listed: one blog, one YouTube channel, one Facebook fan page, two Twitter accounts and one Photoshelter account. ND indicated that there were other approved sites, but did not link to them directly from their online social media policy page.
In terms of the scope of the parties who are subject to the social media policy, ND says the following:

“The University of Notre Dame Social Media Policy only applies to social media accounts created to represent University of Notre Dame groups, departments, programs, etc. and does not apply to private individual accounts.”

The site indicates that ND approves all university affiliated social media channels through the Office of Public Affairs and Communications. This department also serves as a resource for any questions about the maintenance of university social media channels. It also lists protocols for obtaining university images, icons and logos, as all visual elements of social media have to be approved through the university.

*Ball State University*

Ball State University’s (BSU) introductory paragraph ends with a summation of its purpose, which is “to enhance and protect personal and professional reputations when participating in social media.”

With regard to this premise, BSU is the only university among the ones analyzed that placed restrictions on individual, personal accounts of faculty/staff of the university. Here is their rationale:

“Both in professional and institutional roles, employees need to follow the same behavioral standards online as they would in real life. The same laws, professional expectations, and guidelines for interacting with students, parents, alumni, donors, media, and other
university constituents apply online as in the real world. Employees are liable for anything they post to social media sites."

The following section entitled “Policies for All Social Media Sites, Including Personal Sites,” reminds employees of standard operating procedure regarding proprietary and confidential information, copyright and fair use, and following terms of service. However, among these policies that is the a prohibition of using the “Ball State logo or any other university images or iconography on personal social media sites.” This was another element unique to BSU. It was not made explicitly clear, however, whether this policy restricted incidental use of the logo or iconography by virtue of their appearance in the background of a picture or on a university shirt worn in a picture.

BSU also offers a working definition of social media as “media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques.” They mention several (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and MySpace) by name to give examples.

The “Best Practices” section covers several of the same bases as the other universities, but one thing that was unique to BSU was their emphasis on photography accessibility in social media sites. BSU gave a dots per inch “dpi” and resolution description to protect university social media channels from the violation of intellectual property by way of printing university images.

While the “Best Practices” section was described as being “helpful for anyone posting on social media in any capacity,” the final section in BSU’s social media policy entitled “Institutional Social Media” contains a specific set of
“practices” that only apply to university social media. These include things like protecting “the institutional voice” and acknowledging when sites are in fact representing the university in their site’s content.

The Ball State University social media policy was updated on November 17, 2009, and was available in PDF format, was not strictly web-based.

**Indiana State University**

The tone of Indiana State University’s (ISU) social media policy is very similar to that of University of Southern Indiana. It is a guideline for faculty/staff and students who are interested in developing a social media presence that represents the university in some capacity. It is not intended to be a regulation piece for individual personal accounts for students or faculty/staff of the university.

ISU aligns its development of online credibility to the four-step model used by Barack Obama’s campaign in the 2008 United States presidential election:

1. **Crawl:** Establish an online presence.
2. **Walk:** Enrich the content.
3. **Run:** Engage People.
4. **Fly:** Embrace the concept of community.

ISU’s purpose in all of their social media “using today’s technology to present the positive aspects of Indiana State University and open the lines of communication.”

The overall tone of ISU’s policy/guide is lighthearted and engaging, using subsection headings like “Oops! Did You Screw Up?” and “If It Gives You Pause,
Then Pause!” and “Oh Boy, Now You Did It!” Their guidelines read more like pieces of advice than restrictions on any behavior. Each section heading is hyperlinked at the top of the page, and below each section is a link that will send you back to the top of the page if the reader intends to stop reading the policy where they are and start again.

A unique element to ISU’s policy/guide was their specific coaching on how to “tweet” (a 140-character microblog entry on the social networking site known as Twitter). They gave in depth analysis of what makes a tweet a “valuable” addition to the Twitter conversation, and even discouraged using abbreviations like “lol” and “rotfl,” saying that these made tweets read like a “teenager’s text message.” They also gave instruction on effective linking in tweets, to give followers a place to go, a value added content boost to a university Twitter feed. They even reference “tinyurl” and “bit.ly,” two websites whose sole purpose is to shorten URLs to be placed in the body of a tweet.

There is no formal process outlined as a part of the policy/guide for establishing university affiliated social media channels. However, at the bottom or the policy there is an email contact established soliciting responses to the policy itself and how it could be improved, updated or otherwise changed. ISU’s policy/guide is entirely web-based and not available in PDF or otherwise document-based format.

Indiana University School of Medicine

While a social media policy was not found for Indiana University at large, there is an established social media policy specifically for the School of Medicine.
at Indiana University (IUSM). It is formally titled “Guidelines for Use of Online Social Networks for Medical Students and Physicians-in-Training.”

Many aspects of this social media policy make it unique because of the legal implications of communications originating from medical practitioners, even those in training. This is what the policy itself refers to as a “unique social contract” which makes the public nature of the Internet a particularly temperamental venue for medical mass communication. With this in mind, the policy here applies to “all IUSM students and affiliated residents and fellows who participate in social networking sites and online weblogs.”

Under the subheading of “Professionalism,” it is noted to IUSM students “statements made by you within online networks will be treated as if you verbally made the statement in a public place.” This is a unique way of contextualizing the basis on which IUSM will use online forms of communication as cause for disciplinary action on its students.

Also, IUSM is unique in that it offers students a quotable, copy/paste ready disclaimer to put on social media sites in order to protect both the student and the university:

“The posts on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the IU School of Medicine’s positions, strategies, or opinions.”

Under the subsection “Privacy,” IUSM makes reference to the practice of “tagging” photos (a practice almost exclusively associated with the interface of Facebook, though IUSM does not mention Facebook by name in this section).
“Others may post photos of you, and may “tag” you in each of the photos. It is your responsibility to make sure that these photos are appropriate and are not embarrassing or professionally compromising. It is wise to “untag” yourself from any photos as a general rule, and to refrain from tagging others unless you have explicit permission from them to do so.”

This reference to the practice of “tagging” photos is exclusive to IUSM among Indiana Universities. No other university gets as granular with its description of the protocols of Facebook photo sharing.

The final line of the social media policy for IUSM encourages students and physicians-in-training to “Refrain from accessing personal social networking sites while at work or in clinical work areas.” This social media policy was in a PDF format, and was not web-based.
Section V
Discussion

There are 12 different policies analyzed with great depth in this study. No two among them are even remotely similar regarding issues of social media. The local government technology policies had similarities in their approach to the legalities involving things like email as a matter of public record, issues of intellectual property, and privacy protection. However, when it came to any matter of social media, there was little-to-no evidence that the writers of the policy regarded that as anything more than an extension of email communication. These local government policies feel outdated, but most of them were revised and updated within the last two years, so it’s not as if the technologies weren’t around for them to make necessary policy statements that include them. Not one local government mentioned any social media platform by name. Attributes and functionality may have been alluded to in a few (not the majority), but even within those, no local governments said anything about Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn or MySpace directly.

These discrepancies beg the question: “Where is local government on the scale of preparedness regarding social media?” It seems that towns like Carmel and Fishers that have been most recently updated, seem to take more notice of
social networking technologies with Carmel’s section devoted to personal blogs and Carmel’s (among other towns) “De Minimis” policy. There is certainly some level of understanding of the rapid emergence of efficient means of technological communication there, but to what degree? Is there a level of regulation than can encompass the rapid rate of innovation and stay relevant from one year to the next? Perhaps this is why some of the most recent (as recent as less than two months ago) policies still don’t mention social networking tools by name: there is a fear that it will be outdated before it is even enforceable.

The inconsistencies continue at the university level. While universities seem to be more universally aware of social networking technologies, all of their points of emphasis seem to spread in different directions. Some are concerned with consistency in branding and imaging, others seem to just be getting their social media efforts off the ground. While in some cases, like Ball State University, social media has become a pervasive enough matter that there are stringent regulations in place to protect the university and its employees from falling victim to unpreparedness or inappropriate activities regarding social media.

So the fundamental question for both universities and local governments is: Is anyone getting it right? Who is more forward thinking, Ball State with its strict regulation of social media among employees, or Indiana State with its more advice-based coaching on how to establish a credible social media presence? Who is in better shape to defend itself against employee use of social media, Carmel with its page-long litany of regulations on personal employee blogs or
Evansville whose entire policy is five sentences that basically gives them the subjective right to judge the severity of anyone’s “non-business related” use of computer technology and take punitive action?

The holes present in the current academic literature regarding the development of social media policies for organizations, along with the distinct questions raised by the research conducted here, are the groundwork for an even more in depth study into the future of social media policy making.
Section VI
References


&media=4>.


[Schultz online resource](http://jcmc.indiana.edu.proxy.bsu.edu/vol5/issue1/schultz.html#Concept%20of%20Interactivity).


