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## **A Social Media Campaign to Vote Could Increase Voter Participation in Salinas, CA**

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# CAPSTONE PROJECT

Topic:

A Social Media Campaign to Vote Could Increase Voter  
Participation in Salinas, CA

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## **Abstract**

The City of Salinas, CA has 10,897 adults in the age group of 18-29 years old registered to vote, and 7% of this group voted during the 2014 Primary Statewide Election. The low interest and apathy to vote from young adults could affect them and other community members dramatically in how their political interests are represented. This research evaluated how a social media campaign could increase voter participation among young adults in Salinas. Relevant literature shows that the proper use of social media directed to young adults could work to mobilize community members to vote. However, a social media campaign might only generate online participation, such as sharing or liking a political post, and these activities not necessarily will turn into offline participation such as voting. The resource methodology included a sample survey of the targeted population, interviews with experts of social media sites and a focus group of community leaders. The study data results validated how a social media campaign directed to young adults could bring their interest and involvement in government issues and therefore increase voter registration and participation in Salinas. It is recommended that different agencies work together with Monterey County Elections, as the leading agency, preparing the content, design and distribution of the social media campaign to expose and engage teenagers and young adults to political decisions through their vote in every election. Also the Salinas Union High School District should develop a peer to peer program on “education to vote”, exposing young adults to civic engagement at an earlier age. Further research should include an evaluation of the implemented recommendations and research on election educational material young adults are more interested in to make the social media site more effective.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Voting is a right for all US Citizens at least 18 years old, except for those that are in prison or on parole for a felony conviction, or that have been declared mentally incompetent by a court. This right was earned for US Citizens after many people fought and gave their lives to obtain equality and freedom for their right to have a voice within government. Today, society has an opportunity to enjoy democracy through their vote. However, in Monterey County the turnout in elections points to a lack of enthusiasm for voting.

According to the US Census in 2010, the County of Monterey has a population of 415,057, and only 55% of the population is eligible citizens of voting age. On May 19, 2014, Monterey County Elections Department had 164,032 registered voters in the County, 28,004 are young adults of 18 to 29 years old, and only 9% of the young adults voted in the 2014 June Primary Statewide Election. During the last 10 years the voting participation in the County of Monterey shows a tendency of lower voting participation during election races that are not at the federal or state level. The City of Salinas has 10,897 registered young adult voters, 18-29 years old, and only 7% cast a vote in June 2014 Statewide Primary Election. *Monterey County Elections (2014).[Voter Participation by City, June Election 2014]*  
*Unpublished raw data.*

Currently Monterey County Elections uses Facebook and Twitter as a location to post some election activities; however there is not a specific social media campaign or online program to motivate young adults to register and vote at every election. It is important to research if an effective use of social media campaign will motivate young voters to vote and therefore, the voter turnout will increase in the city of Salinas. The findings from this study could help develop education and communication strategies for candidates and media to educate voters well as it will allow Monterey County Elections Department, and any other agency interested in politically mobilizing young adults, to provide programs and policies

appropriate to increase voter turn out in this age group.

According to The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

- **Voting is habit-forming:** when young people learn the voting process and vote they are more likely to do so when they are older. If individuals have been motivated to get to the polls once, they are more likely to return. So, getting young people to vote early could be key to raising a new generation of voters.
- **Young people are a major subset of the electorate and their voices matter:**
  - 46 million young people ages 18-29 years old are eligible to vote, while 39 million seniors are eligible to vote
  - Young people (18-29) make up 21% of the voting eligible population in the U.S.

(Hart, Donnelly, Youniss & Atkins, 2007) stated that “over the last 50 years in the United States, there has been a decline in many important facts of civic participation. Particularly troubling has been the steady decrease in the percentage of adults voting in local and national elections...As the fraction of adults casting ballots becomes even smaller, political theorists worry that popular commitment to the democratic process and the government it produces will wane.” (p. 197). Civic engagement should start from an early age explaining the different concepts on how government is directed and make decisions in this country. According to (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss & Atkins, 2007) “Civic engagement has many facets,...*voting* is often considered to be the most important of civic duties, and voting, as well as other roles in the electoral process, are frequently viewed as core components of political participation) (p. 197). Similarly (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss & Atkins, 2007) mentions that the

foundation for Adult Civic Engagement involves three qualities: (1) civic knowledge, (2) community service and (3) extracurricular activities. Civic knowledge relates to government information, its functions, current political issues, and needs of the community; “such information can be obtained through interactions at home and with friends, participation in community service, reading newspapers and magazines, listening to news on the radio or television, and courses taught in school” (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss & Atkins, 2007, p 198).

However, in addition to the different methods mentioned previously to obtain political information suggested there is a new tool: social media sites. The use of social media sites has become an important aspect to reach out to community members by different organizations trying to make people take action or give their opinion. According to a study from Pew Internet & American Life Project, 6 in 10 American adults use social network sites and “43% of SNS users have decided to learn more about a political or social issue because of something they read on social media” (Smith, 2014).

- A recent study made by PewReserch Center, found that “the use of social media is becoming a feature of political and civic engagement for many Americans. Some 60% of American adults use either social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter, and a new survey by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project finds that 66% of those social media users—or 39% of all American adults—have done at least one of eight civic or political activities with social media” (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady & Verba, 2012). At the same time the use of a social media as stated by Carlisle & Patton (2013) “the Internet can help convert or mobilize the politically disengaged to become politically engaged. The Internet offers convenience and accessibility for a larger swath of citizens”.

Some of the young adult population in Salinas represent the first generation of their families to

be eligible to register and vote. The east area of the city of Salinas has a large population that their preferred language is Spanish. It is important to have a study done on the young adults in the City of Salinas to find out if they will be motivated to vote if there is a social media campaign. Hence, this study is founded on the following research question **“Will A Social Media Campaign Directed To Young Adults In The Age Group Of 18-29 Years Old In The City Of Salinas Increase Their Voter Participation?”**



## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review:**

The objective of any marketing campaign is to influence the behavior of, or to create an action by the person who sees the campaign. In the case of a social media campaign to increase voter participation, the objective would be to make the audience take action by registering to vote and vote during elections. However, it is important to understand why young adults are not participating in elections. Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell (2007) mention “Denver (2003:40) argues that as individuals grow older and their stake in society increases they are increasingly likely to perceive the importance of elections. Evans (2004) suggests that young voters are less ‘implanted’ in the electoral aspect of the political system because they have not voted before and may not have developed the habit of voting...and that they are less integrated into society. Others have argued young voters are less informed about politics (Wattenberg 2002) and are less likely to feel a sense of civic duty” (p. 798).

Although the use of a social media campaign could reach out to a large group with information, one of its challenges would be to create a change in voting behavior of young adults who might have never been exposed to elections or feel less integrated into society. Previous authors have done studies related to social media and voting, and based on different literature reviewed, there appears to be two different schools of thought on the use of social media as a tool to increase voter participation. The first concept refers to how the use of social media increases online participation but not offline participation, and the second concept affirms that social media increases voter participation.

### Use Of Social Media Increases Online Participation But Not Offline Participation

The meaning of offline participation refers to voting, attending an event, signing a petition, and making monetary contributions. The online participation refers to the member to participate in an online dialogue, post their ideas, support other ideas by sharing the information with other

members, liking a post, following a political actor or campaign.

A study made by Towner (2013) was built on “Foot and Schneider’s (2006) work, which distinguishes between four functions of online campaigning: (1) informing voters; (2) involving supporters; (3) connecting online users with political actors’ and (4) mobilization” (p. 530). Despite the effort an online campaign takes to be effective and make a change in the target audience, not all the time it is effective. Towner (2013) states as part of his research results:

“one online source, Facebook, increased online participation but not offline engagement. This implies that attention to campaign information on Facebook does not translate into offline behavior. Perhaps Facebook, unlike Google+ and Twitter, distracts young people from offline engagement rather than encouraging it...Regarding likelihood of vote/turnout, television is still king. Only young adults’ attention to campaign information on television is significantly and positively associated with the likelihood of voting” (538).

Furthermore, Towner (2013) concludes on his research that “attention to some online sources can foster offline and online political participation, but not voter turnout”; he states that “some forms of social media have the potential to increase offline and online participation among young people”. Similarly, Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie (2012) states that “Governments worldwide are increasingly attempting to use the internet to engage citizens,” however, “a further feature of social media pertinent to political participation is that a substantial proportion of their content and use is related to entertainment rather than seeking information or engaging in politics” (Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012, p. 626).

Despite that a social media campaign could bring online participation, there are different areas that should be taken into consideration before engaging in the use of a social network site to promote political activity. According to Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie (2012) one of the implications of why a government agency would not want to take on a social

media campaign is the need for maintaining the information and engaging in social media. Social media requires frequent updates, and establishing a response time and monitoring the content that is posted by external members. For that Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie (2012) conclude on their research that “social media can provide channels for EMBs (Electoral Management Bodies) to engage citizens in discussion and education about democratic processes such as enrolling to vote and vote formally in elections to some extent. However, social media do not offer a quick-fix solution to declining political participation and for reinvigorating the public sphere among disengaged citizens and youth” (p. 635).

On the other hand another view on the use of a social media campaign to increase voter participation is:

#### Social Media Can Increase Voter Participation

Despite the efforts from different political campaigns to remind voters how and when to vote, there is still a low interest in the young population to vote. According to Luna-Reyes, Bridges & Grossklags (2012) “A study run by the McArthur Foundation supported that youth who are engaged with the Internet exhibit tendencies of political involvement and show an increase in exposure to political ideas divergent from their own. Therefore, a social campaign directed to young adults could generate a behavioral change and increase voter participation.”

Similarly, Chan, M., & Guo, J. (2013) found that “the use of social network sites, such as Facebook, can to some extent counter the lack of real-world civic resources available to young adults by providing an accessible source of information as well as a space for like-minded people to meet, discuss, or even coordinate on participatory actions”.

It will be interesting to find out how a social media campaign developed by a neutral position organization, such as the Monterey County Elections Department, could impact the voter participation of young adults. Baxter & Marcella (2013) found through their research that

there is “a shift towards Facebook as the more popular campaign tool”, and Carlisle & Patton (2013) mentioned that “as citizens, campaign strategies and candidates become more familiar with how to use Facebook as a tool for political engagement; it is likely that Facebook will become more embedded into the political landscape”.

A study made by Bond, R. M., et al. (2012) showed that “online political mobilization works. It includes political self-expression, but it also includes information gathering and real, validated voter turnout”. At the same time Bond, et al. found through their study that an online social mobilization is more effective than an informational mobilization alone; that is because there is a familiar face to other users on a respective opinion, information, idea or action that can drastically improve the effectiveness of a mobilization message. (Bond, R. M., et al. 2012)

### **Chapter 3 - Methodologies:**

The Research question guiding this research paper is:

**Will a social media campaign directed to Young adults in the age group of 18-29 years old in the city of Salinas, increase their voter participation?**

Independent Variable: A social media campaign directed to young adults in the age group of 18-29 years old in the City of Salinas

Dependent Variable: Increase voter registration and participation of young adults 18-29 years old in the city of Salinas

Operational Definitions:

**Developing:** For the purpose of this study, developing a social media campaign refers to the activities Monterey County Elections Department will perform including planning, creating from scratch and implementing different types of publications such as advertisements, messages, and images to bring attention to the target population for this study. For the purpose of this study Monterey County Elections is the agency who will be implementing the social media campaign.

**Monterey County Elections Department:** Monterey County Elections Department's mission is to protect and promote public trust and confidence by excelling at providing professional, courteous, and efficient service. To ensure the highest degree of integrity of the election process through the administration of all federal, state, local and special election laws in a uniform and consistent manner.

**Young Adults:** The population that this research project will survey will be those who are 18-29 years old in the city of Salinas at the time of the survey.

**Social Media Campaign:** This will be an information campaign, implemented by Monterey County Elections Department. The information communicated through social media

will refer to important deadlines like, registering to vote, updating voter registration, date of election and it will include helpful links to Monterey County Elections' website where the voter could access the location of their polling place. The frequency of the informational messages will vary depending on the results from this research; however, there will be at least three messages in a period of two months. Effective communication strategies will be part of the data collection for this research, as key interviewee's have experience in doing social media campaigns.

**Increase:** The measurement of an increase in registration and participation will be represented by a response to a survey on the likelihood of young voters in the age group of 18-29 years old in Salinas to vote if they receive election information via a social media site. The survey response from the age group of 18-29 years old in Salinas should represent at least a 15% "yes, I am more likely to vote if I receive election material via a social media site". This increment will be compared to the responses from experts of social media who will suggest the parameters of a successful social media campaign.

Methods for Collecting Data: The strategy used to collect data is by a convenience sample by giving out survey questionnaires in specific locations such as: Hartnell Community College, this location represents young adults from different locations of the city of Salinas, and in the community of East Salinas to understand the Hispanic young adults and their needs. There will also be select interviews of four different key community members that have expertise with Social Media and have a good understanding of the community of Salinas. In addition, a focus group of community leaders from East Salinas will participate in a discussion on the use of a social media campaign to increase voter participation among young adults in Salinas.

The social media key interviewees are:

Councilwoman for Salinas City Council District 5, Kimbley Craig. She ran her winning political campaign with help of social media; she is an involved citizen and used to be part of the Jaycees organization. These previous involvements with the community give her a good understanding of the youth in Salinas. Her experience and expertise will shed light on how a social media campaign can create a change in voting activity with young adults.

President and owner of Farmhouse Communications-PR, Kristina Chavez-Wyatt. She has expertise in community relations, community engagement and public relations. Her involvement with political topics gives her insight into the type of message needed in a social media campaign directed to young adults. In addition, she has knowledge on how to bring communities together and get engaged to work towards a community goal.

Registrar of Voters, Monterey County Elections Department, Claudio Valenzuela. He has experience understanding the voter turn-out during different elections by regions in Monterey County. It is important to find out what currently is established by the Elections Department in order to reach out to young adults in Salinas. Mr. Valenzuela's opinion on the use of a social media campaign to increase voter participation in this age group will represent the likelihood of implementation of a social media campaign toward young adults.

President of Associated Student Body of Hartnell College, Raul Damien Tapia. His information will represent the needs of young adults in the community of Salinas and what type of information will be most effective to them to create a change on voting participation. Also, he has experience and understanding on what type of message is the most adequate to reach out to young adults and to them engaged in civic activities; such as voting.

Background of researcher: The researcher conducting this study is Greta Arevalo, she has been employed by Monterey County as the Bilingual Outreach Program Manager in the Monterey County Elections Department since August 2012. Greta is conducting this research in a role of a graduate student for Golden Gate University, and not as part of her job in the

Monterey County Elections. She obtained her Business Administration Bachelor Degree from Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. She previously worked for the City of Salinas Government and the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce, giving her an opportunity to understand the interest of businesses in the community as well as learn the issues found within the City of Salinas.



## Chapter 4. Research Findings

### ANALYSIS

The data obtained for this study is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative information captured from a variety of sources including literature, personal interviews, and statistical data from a survey of different community members. 50 completed surveys were collected from community members in Hartnell Community College, 60 completed surveys were collected from community members in East Salinas. This data analysis explores the possibilities of a behavior change toward voting; therefore the results will determine the effectiveness of the use of a social media campaign to increase voter registration and voting participation in young adults in Salinas.

The analysis of the data from the surveys is presented at first as a comparison between the two different locations where the surveys were given to community members; Hartnell and East Salinas. The interviews with key informants were based on questions that could help better understand if a social media campaign could increase voter participation and their answer will be compared to the survey taken by community members. The focus group represents community members that have already an interest in solving a community problem and their opinion on the effectiveness of a social media campaign to increase voter participation.

#### Survey Analysis.

The convenient locations were chosen based on the following: The Hartnell location is a Community College in Salinas, therefore the surveys collected from this location can represent community members from the age group 18-29 years old that attend this college from different locations in Salinas. The location of East Salinas was chosen because according to Monterey County Elections from previous election results, East Salinas is

marked as an area with the lowest participation from all the ages in general.

On July 7, 2014, 50 surveys were distributed to community members in the library and cafeteria of the Hartnell Community College. The majority of the people taking the survey were students; however, there were a few that were part of the Community College staff. Out of the 50 completed surveys, 33 respondents were in the age group of 18-29 years old. Between July 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014, 60 surveys were distributed and collected from community members in different locations in East Salinas. These community members represent business owners, employees and clients from different businesses in this geographical location in the City of Salinas. Out of the 60 completed surveys, 29 were in the age group of 18-29 years old.

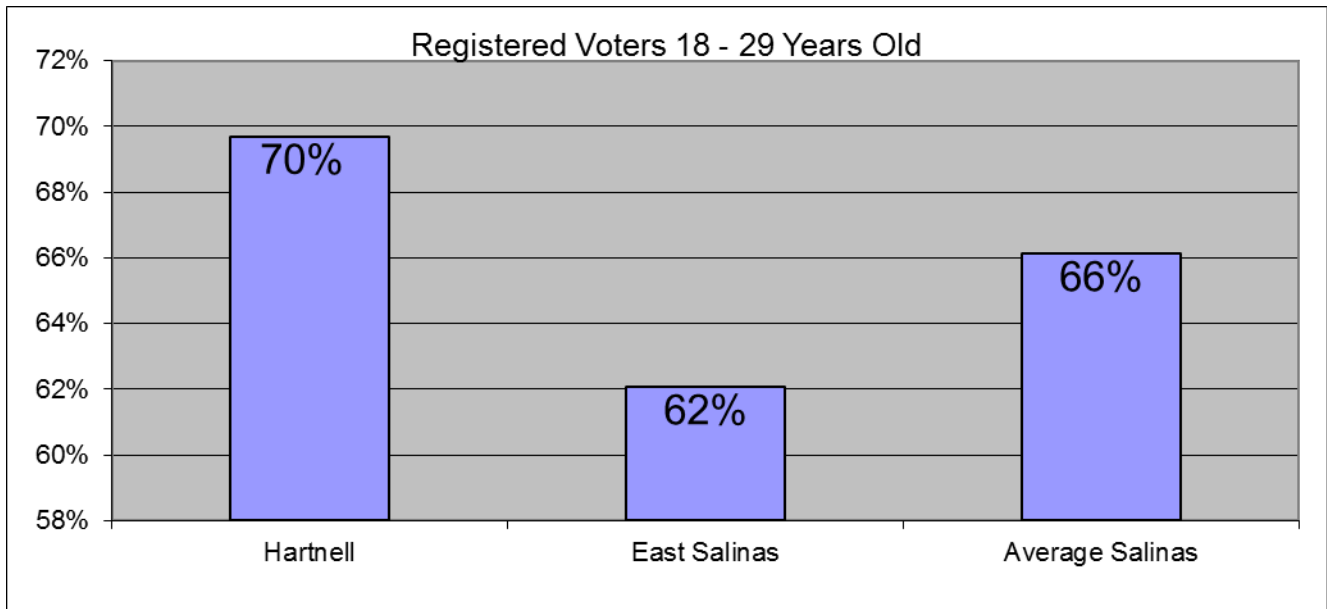
The following analysis of data is based using the data from only those that match the age group. This analysis will explain how many are registered to vote, voting participation, use of social media sites and likelihood of voting because of messages through a social media site.

### Registered Voters

The requirements in Monterey County to be eligible to register to vote are: (1) Be a US Citizen, (2) Be at least 18 years old by the next election, (3) Be resident of California, and (4) Not be in prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony. The research found out that from the 62 community members who took the survey that were in the age group 18-29 years old, 66% are registered to vote. The 34% that is not register to vote represents a population that are qualified to register to vote by age but might not be register to vote because they could: (a) not be interested in registering to vote, or (b) they do not meet one of the requirements of eligibility by not being a US Citizen or by being on probation or parole for a felony conviction. On average, from the survey participants in the target age group 66% were registered voters.

Comparing the two survey locations 70% of Hartnell respondents were registered to vote, while 62% of East Salinas were registered to vote. See Graph 1 for a comparison on young adults registered to vote based on the location where the survey was taken.

Graph 1. Registered Voters 18 – 29 years old. Information based on results from survey research. Hartnell n=33, East Salinas n=29, Average Salinas n=62

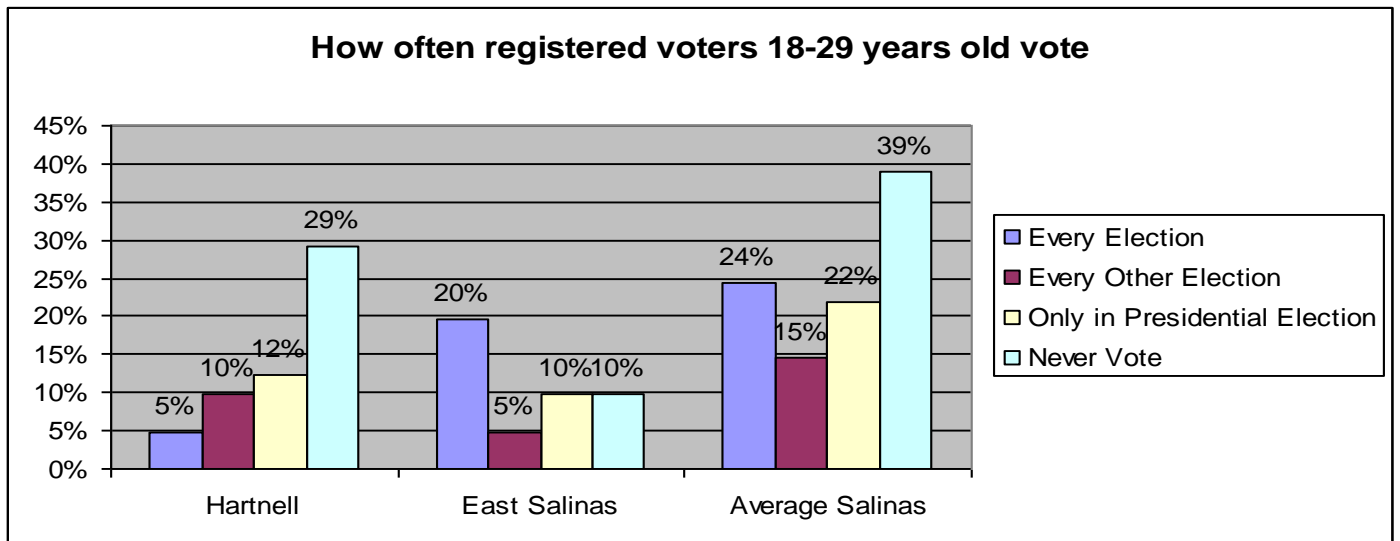


This graph shows how people attending Hartnell Community College are aware of the importance of registering to vote; and therefore already have registered to vote. The percentage difference from Hartnell to East Salinas might be because they have professors who could remind students to register to vote. In contrast the community that is represented from East Salinas might not necessarily have that trusting person reminding them to register to vote. Registering to vote is the first step in participating in the election process. Analyzing previous election results, we can see that some people are registered to vote however they are not voting, such as the 7% of young adults in Salinas that decided to vote during the June election in 2014; in order to make a difference a person needs to vote.

## Voter Participation

Analyzing the data and how only 66% of the age group who took the survey was registered to vote, the next question to answer was: how often are these groups of registered voters actually voting? The options to the answers were: (1) every election, (2) every other election, (3) only in presidential elections, (4) never vote. The results from the survey, demonstrated that on average 39% of a total of 41 of the Salinas young adults in the age 18-29 years old, never vote even though they are registered to vote; 22% vote only in presidential elections; 15% vote every other election and 24% vote every election. This information shows how the young adults in Salinas have a low interest in voting. The results by location of the survey, shows that on East Salinas 20% of their registered voters vote every election and in Hartnell Community College only 5% of registered voters vote every election. The 15% difference by location gives the idea of two different possibilities. It could represent that (a) East Salinas community is more engaged in voting or (b) East Salinas community is aware only of presidential elections and they interpret voting every election as voting only for president. For a detailed table showing the percentages by survey location see Graph 2.

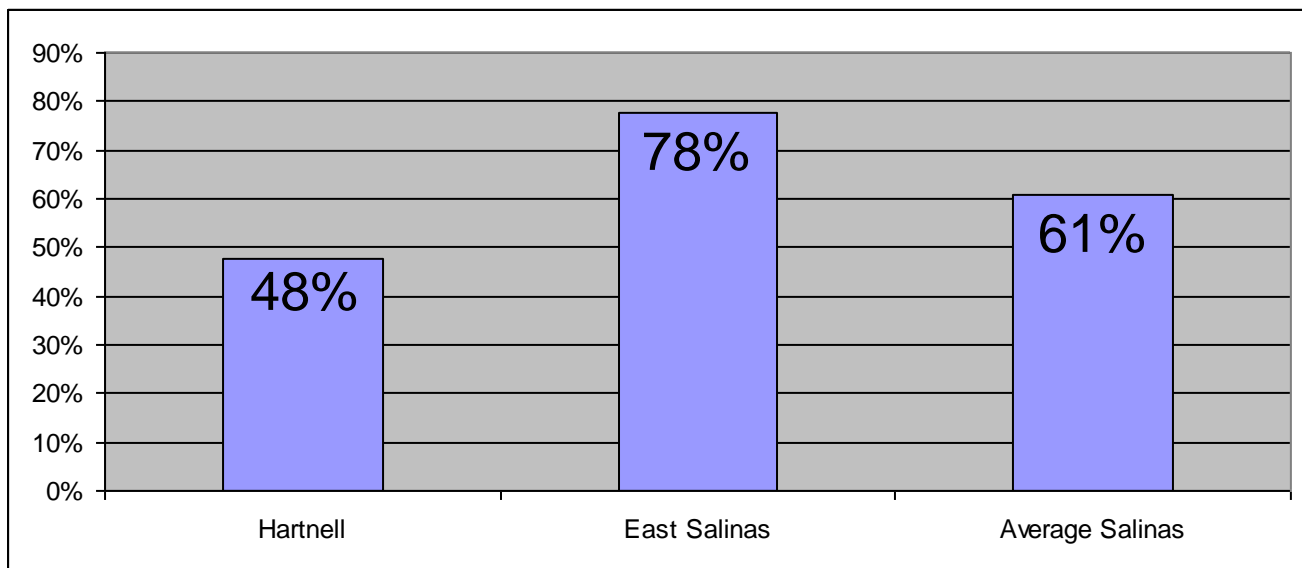
Graph 2. How often registered voters 18-29 years old vote. Hartnell n= 23, East Salinas n=18, Average Salinas n=25



Interpreting this data as one result to find out if people registered to vote, in this age group, is actually engaged in voting, the data was modified as follows. If a person taking the survey answered to the question “how often do you vote?” with a response other than “never”, then the response is considered as that the person is involved in voting. This gave the following results: 48% of the registered voters from Hartnell College Community have participated in at least one election; while 78% of the registered voters from East Salinas have participated in at least one election. Amongst the survey participants, if all the current registered voters were to participate at every election that would mean at least a 61% turnout from the age group of 18-29 years old in Salinas. See Graph 3 below for an image of these data.

Graph 3. Voting Participation of the 18-29 years old in Salinas

Hartnell n= 23, East Salinas n=18, Average Salinas n=41



On average 61% of young adults in the survey have voted at one point; however they do not necessarily vote often. The Hartnell survey had a question related to find out why young adults do not vote. From the different responses, from the age group 18-29 years old including the ones that were not registered to vote, the most common answers were (1) voting is complicated, (2) there is no time, (3) my vote does not count, and (4) I don't qualify to vote. The East Salinas survey contained a question to find out what would it take for them to vote. From all the young adults, registered and not registered to vote, the most common answers were: (1) More education, (2) More involvement, (3) Motivation to vote, (4) Gain trust in candidates, and (5) Become a US citizen.

### Use of Social Media

In order to find out if a social media campaign will increase voter registration and participation the survey had more in detail questions; for the full sample of the survey see the appendix section. To analyze if a social media could make a change in behavior the answers from the age group 18-29 years old was divided into two categories: (1) those registered to

vote and (2) those not registered to vote.

Registered to Vote. The results demonstrate that from 41 registered voters in the age group of 18-29 years old, 68% belong to a social media site, 78% understand the importance of voting, 56% would benefit from elections reminders through a social media site, 32% uses social media sites to learn about elections, 10% would register to vote if a friend makes a comment on a social media site, and 41% agreed that a message saying "Go Out and Vote" through a social media site could increase their chances of voting.

Not Registered to Vote. On the other hand out of 21 not register to vote young adults, 18-29 years old, 71% belong to a social media site, 67% understand the importance of voting, 67% would benefit from elections reminders through a social media site, 14% uses social media sites to learn about elections, 33% would register to vote if a friend makes a comment on a social media site, and 48% agreed that a message saying "Go Out and Vote" through a social media site could increase their chances of voting. See table 1 below for the compared numbers.

	Registered to Vote n=41	Not Registered to Vote n=21
Do you belong to a Social Media Site?	68%	71%
Do you understand the Importance of Voting?	78%	67%
Would you Benefit from Elections Reminders through a social media site?	56%	67%
Do you Use Social Media Sites to learn about	32%	14%

elections		
Would register to vote if a friend makes a comment on a social media site	10%	33%
Receiving a message saying "Go Out and Vote" through a social media site could increase my chances of voting	41%	48%

These results represent an opportunity for a social media campaign to develop an increase in participation of young adults in the election process. In conjunction with knowing that there was an opportunity to have a social media campaign, it is important to find out why these group of young adults are not voting and what would make them vote. Most of the percentages appear to be close to each other, except for the percentage of people who agree that they will register to vote if a friend tells them to do so via a social media site. The reason for the 10% result from the registered to vote group could be that they are already registered to vote and no need a reminder from a friend, in comparison the 33% of the not registered to vote group represent an opportunity for a social media campaign to reach out to them. The other section that shows a low percentage and difference among the two groups is to the question if they agree that they use social media sites to learn about elections: 32% of the registered voters group agree that they use it and only 14% from those that are not registered to vote agree that they use a social media site to learn about elections. One of the comments from a student taking the survey was that social media posts are more for opinions on political or social issues rather than facts. Based on that student response and that currently there is not a specific social media campaign directed to young adults in Monterey County, these numbers show that there is a need for factual information on the voting process.



The survey showed that out of the 62 people that participated in the survey and that were in the age group 18-29 years old in Salinas, 61% logs into a social media site more than once a day, 16% logs into a social media site about once a day, 6% logs in 2-3 times a week, 3% logs in 2-3 times a month and 13% less than a few times a month. However, the times they log into social media site is possibly for other activities rather than for civic education, support of candidates, political campaign or learn about an issue.

The table below shows a comparison of the percentage of young adults who responded “yes” to the questions in the table. The comparison is by registered voters vs not registered voters in the age group 18-29 years old.

	Registered Voters	No Registered Voters
Do you Currently belong to a social media site that is involved in political or social issues, or that is working to advance a cause?	11%	29%
Do you currently follow any elected officials, candidates for office or other political figures on a social networking site?	15%	0%
Do you ever use social network sites to post links to political stories or articles for others to read?	27%	10%
Do you ever use social network sites to post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues?	37%	19%
Do you ever use social network sites to encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you?	32%	19%
Do you ever use social network sites to encourage other	20%	0%

people to vote?		
Do you ever use social network sites to repost content related to political or social issues that were originally posted by someone else?	34%	10%
Do you ever use social network sites to “Like” or promote material relate to political or social issues that others have posted?	44%	24%

These results show that young adults in Salinas have a low interest for participating political or social issues through a social networking site. However on average 32% of all the young adults agreed that they have used social network sites to “like” or promote material related to political or social issues that others have posted.

### Focus Group Analysis

The group was formed by fifteen community leaders of East Salinas. A motive for their reunion was to solve a community problem in East Salinas with the Police Department. This group of community leaders is civically involved and takes action on behalf of their needs. It is important to mention that the focus group discussion was directed in Spanish. Out of 15 members, 90% agree that a social media campaign could increase voter participation among young adults in Salinas; the 10% that disagree that the use of a social media campaign could work is because they see the need of language accessibility for those that are Spanish speakers in East Salinas and according to the group, most of the political campaigns are done in English. During the discussion, the group mentioned that most young adults in their community, East Salinas, do not vote because they do not have enough information to make

a decision. They believe that a social media campaign could bring awareness to the community in current proposals, problems and ways to take action to make a difference. This focus group recommended that the content in the social media campaign should be:

- *Information that is accessible and relevant.* The information should be easier to get and understand, that involves the need to have the information in Spanish; as well as keeping the important information flowing to expand the awareness of an issue among young adults.
- *Use motivational messages.* The focus group believes that motivational messages that are personal can bring a change in the level of engagement of young adults to participate during an election. An example of a suggested message, provided by the focus group, was “Te gustaria que te cuenten?” (Would you like to be counted?)
- *Identify leaders among the young adults and find out how to make them lead in voting.* The focus group suggestion was to lead the rest of the group, community members believe young adults will follow certain leaders and would do what is recommended by these individuals; therefore getting these leaders involved could increase the trust and interest in voting by young adults in Salinas.
- *Identify their political interests and provide them with proper information.*

One of the problems they see as to why young adults do not vote was the lack of information on particular items that could help them make a better decision. If the social media campaign could bring awareness, that could increase their interest for making a difference through their vote.

Most of the arguments from the focus group were in favor to have a social media campaign directed to young adults; however the 10% that disagree on the use of a social

media campaign mentioned that internet connection in East Salinas seems to be slower than in the rest of the community, and that most of the information in the media is in English. The slow access to internet or lack of interest in following a social media campaign because of the language used could become a challenge to reach out community members in this area of the City.

### Social Media Experts Interviews

The interviews to social media experts were planned in order to understand how a social media campaign could increase voter registration and participation in young adults in Salinas.

Councilwoman for Salinas City Council District 5, Kimbley Craig participated on a personal phone interview on July 22, 2014. Miss. Craig has been the city councilwoman for District 5 since 2010. Her expertise in marketing helped her develop a social marketing strategy to win her political campaign by using only social media to promote her activities and have control over her information to the community. According to Miss. Craig's opinion, (personal communication, July 2014), young adults do not vote in Salinas because "current events are not on the radar of young people. People might not have an interest because politics is complicated, controversial and at that age they have so many other things going on in their lives that it does not equate to decisions that are made in government".

Simultaneously Miss. Craig mentioned during the interview that one of the possible solutions to make young adults to get involved in politics is by simplifying the process and using technology for voting, and having something that could relate to the young adults. In Miss Craig's opinion, an effective social media campaign is one that the content will relate to the target audience, the language and images used is appropriate for that target demographic and in some occasions making it funny can help. Miss Craig's tips on how to use Facebook

based on her experience when running her campaign was that Facebook allowed her to control the message and reach out to people she didn't know before. She would use Facebook to communicate with friends asking them to share some posts with their friends to increase her visibility; Miss. Craig's believes that "Facebook is wonderful for personal endorsements". One of her social media strategies to reach out to people was to be "creative". She mentioned how she was creative during her political campaign by asking her followers to change their profile picture to her campaign picture two days prior to the election as a way to remind them to vote for her on election day; and to reach out to other people that could take action based on what their friends were posting (Kimbly Craig, personal communication, July 2014).

President and owner of Farmhouse Communications-PR, Kristina Chavez-Wyatt. Her expertise in community relations, community engagement and public relations place her as an important informant for this research paper. According to Mrs. Chavez-Wyatt (personal communication, July 2014) young adults in the age group 18-29 years old do not vote because "they are turned off by dirty partisan politics at the national level", in her opinion the negativity that surrounds local politics makes the young adults want to stay away from the content. Also, they do not understand the political decisions; to them the information is not relevant. During the discussion about the best method to use with young adults to inspire them to vote, Mrs. Chavez-Wyatt suggested having a message that "comes out from their respective peer leaders within the groups they congregate, whether it is social media or radio". Due the fact that Monterey County has 55% Hispanic population, Mrs. Chavez-Wyatt discussed that for Latino communities, they need to know why voting in local elections is relevant to them personally. An example to relate information according to Mrs. Chavez-Wyatt

(personal communication, July 2014) is: “you will need to support a school board because this will increase property values, better grades at school, education level increases, etc”.

According to Kristina Chavez-Wyatt, young adults need to have information about their candidates, an explanation on what it means to vote “yes” or “no” on a proposition, obtain information on how to participate at all government levels, and most importantly “voting” should have a social motivation and be seen as a “cool” activity. Mrs. Chavez-Wyatt believes that a social media campaign could increase voter participation by 15% in young adults. Some of her suggestions to run a social media campaign was:

1. Have informational 30sec videos that are rotated every 2 weeks, the video should be English and Spanish.
2. Invite leaders from the community to be part of quarterly strategy meetings to help with Facebook and leading their own precinct or region promoting voting participation through social media.
3. Have an attractive message and tag line related to the target audience.

In Mrs. Chavez-Wyatt opinion “voter participation is a common goal” and universal support is needed to have a representative democracy. She mentioned that a social media campaign won’t work on its own; therefore a strategic plan is needed by using social media and traditional media. (Kristina Chavez-Wyatt, personal information, July 2014).

President of Associated Student Body of Hartnell College, Raul Damien Tapia. Mr.

Tapia has been the President of the Associated Student Body of Hartnell College for the last three months, prior to that he was the Senator at Large and Senator at Alisal Campus for Hartnell College. According to Mr. Tapia (personal communication, July 2014), the top reason why young adults are not voting in Salinas is because of the lack of knowledge in what voting is and the contests they’ll be voting on. He said that for some students, they are the first

generation going to college and even the first voters in their family. Part of the apathy to vote is because the young adults believe government decisions do not pertain to them, “they feel detached from this government, and they are not saying anything to take action and make a difference” (personal communication, July 2014). Mr. Tapia mentioned that this age group has never received a class on how to vote or understand the information that they are voting on. Based on workshops he has given to community members to help them understand measure languages, he found out that community members quickly learn political terms and adapt their language when talking about a political item and get interested in making a difference. Mr. Tapia thinks this happens because these community members were exposed to the material and it was explained to them in a way it was easier to be understood.

According to Mr. Tapia, a social media campaign could increase voter participation, because social media is one of the sites youth spend most of their time; however a social media campaign will need to involve young adults so they feel part of the election process. This could be achieved by having them design and provide content for the campaign. A social media campaign needs to be shared by leaders in the young adult community to increase the chances for the campaign to be accepted (personal communication, July 2014).

Registrar of Voters, Monterey County Elections Department, Claudio Valenzuela. Mr. Valenzuela has experience as a multimedia producer/director and marketing, and in addition to that, he has been within Monterey County Elections for more than 10 years. He believes that one of the reasons why young adults do not vote is because of convenience, if there is a way to eliminate possible excuses of not voting, then that could help increase voter participation; for example, by providing a link with immediate access to the source of information. Mr. Valenzuela mentioned during the personal interview that “there is a need to generate a change of perception; most of the people get information through social media

sites” and not so many are getting information presented on television. According to Mr. Valenzuela, a key part of success of a social media campaign is sharing with other friends the message of the campaign, that is because “if a friend tells you to vote, you will take action because you respond better to a friend than a total stranger or government telling you to do something” (personal communication, July 2014). Mr. Valenzuela believes that a social media campaign could increase voter participation; however the message should be in the language of the young adults and be shared from peer to peer to create a trend that demonstrates that “voting is a good thing”.

In general, all the social media experts agree 100% that a social media campaign directed to young adults could increase their voter registration and participation if the social media campaign:

1. Involves young adults to bring awareness of the different contests in elections, the community issues, its different needs and possible solutions proposed by a candidate, measure or proposition.
2. Content of the social media campaign relates to young adults to make it easier for the young adults to feel part of the community and provide solutions to problems. This way young adults will start taking action by them having a closer perspective of an issue of their interest and in result make a better decision through their vote.
3. Peer leader involvement to motivate others to vote. The majority of the social media experts expressed that the best way for young adults to get motivated and take action could be through a leader from their peer group to be an example for others to vote, or to generate a political movement on a specific topic.

According to the comments from the social media experts, if the campaign contains these



three elements, the chances of creating an impact in the target audience increase. At this moment Monterey County Elections does not have a specific campaign related to voting for young adults. So there is a greater opportunity to bring young adults on board into a project where they can feel they are making a difference by designing and establishing a language that will be easy for other young adults to relate to.

## **Chapter 5. Conclusions**

Based on the results from the surveys collected from Hartnell College and East Salinas, the information discussed by the Focus group, and the Social Media Experts interviews, these are the conclusions to the research question “*will a social media campaign increase voter registration and participation in young adults, 18-29 years old, in Salinas?*”.

The conclusions are described in three parts:

- 1) A social media campaign could increase voter participation from those that are registered to vote by having election information related to them. Young adults have not been exposed to information on how to vote, and do not understand elections language and how to make an informed decision. Part of the reason why they do not vote is because they do not have a developed interest in government or feel part of it. The information is complicated and they make excuses to the reasons why they don't vote. Therefore an informational social media campaign with messages that relates to the voter could increase voter participation. The registered voters will be motivated to vote more often or to start voting. Based on the survey results, 68% of the current registered voters have access to social media and 56% suggest that they will benefit from using a social media campaign to learn about elections material. In addition to that 41% agreed that a message saying “go out and vote” could increase their chances of voting.

- 2) A social media campaign could increase voter registration from those that are not registered to vote. The survey results showed that from the group that are not registered to vote, n=21, 71% of the respondents on the age group have access to a social media site and 67% understand the importance of voting. This group that is not registered to vote but are eligible would benefit from a social media campaign by giving them motivational messages, encouraging messages and most importantly their peers will be expressing to them the reasons why they should take action to register to vote and vote during elections. The same group had 48% who agreed that receiving a message saying “go out and vote” could increase their chances vote and 33% agreed that they would register to vote if another friend makes the suggestion through their social media site.
- 3) The content of the social media campaign should be bilingual in order to be accessible to all young adults. The content of the social media according to the experts should involve young adults in the development of the campaign, provide content that relates to the target age group and peer leaders should motivate the rest of the group to take action. In order to make it accessible and with content that relates to them, the social media campaign should also be in Spanish to increase accessibility for those that don't understand English. Bilingual advertisements increase the opportunity for the campaign to be seen and shared by members of the age group.

However, registering people to vote sometimes is not as hard as it could seem; the hardest part would be to engage the registered voters and invite them to vote on all eligible elections. For that here are some recommendations on how to implement the social media campaign to make it successful.

## **6. Recommendations and Further Research**

The research results provide evidence that a social media could increase voter participation by following a strategic plan. Therefore the following are some recommendations to be implemented by different agencies but working toward the common goal of increasing voter participation in young adults 18-29 years old in Salinas by using a social media campaign. The main objective is to develop a social media campaign that will be implemented by a neutral organization, in this case Monterey County Elections Department, in conjunction with participation of other agencies that have constant contact with young adults in the age group 18-29 years old, and future young adults that are attending a high school in the City of Salinas.

1. It is recommended for Monterey County Elections Department to act as the leader in the implementation of a social media campaign to increase voter participation from young adults in Salinas. The information that this social media campaign will share will be related to information topics of interest for young adults. Some of these educational materials should involve: how often there are elections, how to identify their office representatives, and how each office representative serves the community. Also it would be important to bring up educational topics such as how to register to vote, how to mark a ballot, what is a proposition, how a proposition gets started, and what it means to vote yes or no in a proposition or measure. By providing this educational information to young adults, it could remove some of the barriers that exist when it comes to voting. Monterey County Elections will provide the educational information, provide guidance on the content if needed and represent the agency launching the social media

campaign directed to young adults.

2. It is recommended for the Associated Students of Hartnell College (ASHC) to engage young adults in the development of the content and image of the social media campaign. The members of the ASCH have regular opportunities to communicate with a large group of young adults; therefore they are aware of the interests that this age group has and they have a good understanding of what visual campaign material and language would relate the best to them. By having a group of the ASCH work together with the Elections Department to provide the image and language used in the campaign, it can improve the effectiveness of engaging young community members with government activities. They could feel involved in taking action for the benefit of the community, where they could express their voice and interest for a better community.
3. The third recommendation is to involve the Salinas Union High School District as a key part of this social media campaign. Young adults mentioned that one of the reasons they do not vote is because voting is complicated. Understanding voting material is a matter of practice in reading different election material, knowing how to analyze issues and discover what decision could better improve their community. For that reason, having the involvement of an education agency such as the Salinas Union High School District could bring the opportunity for future voters to start getting engaged in election information. The High School District should allow a peer to peer “education to vote program”. As mentioned by the key experts, people respond better to a friend than to a

stranger. A program that educates the students on election topics where the actual issue and discussion is prepared, presented and lead by the same high school students could lead to increase awareness of the political issues that are relevant in their community and how the decisions will impact their lives. This educational program should be lead by seniors in high school receiving training or elections information by the Elections Department and sharing it with classrooms of seniors and juniors. The goal of the program is to help the students understand how to make decisions when voting, the process of voting, and how to be a more involved citizen.

These three agencies working together in the development of a social media campaign and improving the services provided by the Elections Department could create an impact in the percentage of participating young voters in Salinas by constantly sharing the universal goal, of increasing voter participation for better representation in the local and state government.

#### Further research

The suggested plan of having a social media campaign with involvement of the Elections Department, Associated Students of Hartnell College and the Salinas Union High School District should be implemented and the plan should be evaluated after a year and make modifications. The process of evaluating the plan will play a very important part to modify the social media campaign and increase exposure. The social media campaign will take place in Salinas; however there should be an evaluation of how many people shared the posting related to the campaign, how many registered to vote because of the campaign and how many voted because of the campaign. Furthermore, the education to vote program, implemented in high schools, should be measured to know the percentage of students who

received a peer to peer presentation and how many registered to vote and voted on an election. The evaluation of the plan and the social media campaign will be able to analyze questions such as: was the message in the campaign easy to relate to young adults?; was the message motivational to inspire young adults to take action?; was the social media campaign informative and accessible for young adults in Salinas with a different language, culture and education background? The responses to these questions could be an indicator of the effectiveness of the social media campaign.

In addition, it is important to research what specific educational material or information young adults are more interested in obtaining in order to vote. What social media site is the most effective to share information to young adults in order to make them vote? How to identify the peer leaders from their age groups? The election material covers many different areas that the information could also be applied to other age groups and not only to young adults. In order to put in place an extended search on what educational material young adults need, it is recommended that high schools and colleges are surveyed in order to know how much this age group is already familiar with the election process and what areas they feel the need to gain more knowledge. The information should be used to develop a social media campaign directed to a target audience and measure the increase of voter registration and participation after implementing the social media campaign.

In summary, the answer to the research question “will a social media increase voter participation of young adults in Salinas?” indicates that there is an opportunity for a social media campaign to reach out to young adults through a social media site in Salinas. The change in behavioral activities toward voting will take time to develop credibility amongst young adults and hopefully they will find out that voting is important at every election to voice community needs.

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## Appendix A

Date:	7-Jun	14-Jun	21-Jun	28-Jun	5-Jul	12-Jul	19-Jul	26-Jul	2-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug
Tasks \ Week:	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Read Literature											
Draft Literature Review											
Finalize Research Proposal											
Devise Research Proposal											
Identify Expertise People for Interview											
Schedule Interview											
Identify Method of Survey											
Develop Survey											
Develop Questionnaire for Interview											
Implement Survey											
Implement Interview											
Analyze Data											
Prepare findings and recommendations											
Finish writing research paper											
Prepare and Power Point Presentation											
Presentation and Research Project Due											

Start date	
Deadline	

## Appendix B

Table showing the percentage of people agreeing to the statement asked in the survey. This table represents answers only from those that were in the age group of 18-29 years old in the different locations of data collection.

	Hartnell			District 1			District 2	
	Registered	Not Registered		Registered	Not Registered		Registered	Not Registered
Are Registered to Vote	70%	30%		69%	31%		54%	46%
Belong to a Social Media Site	35%	10%		55%	60%		71%	33%
Understands Importance of Voting	57%	50%		45%	60%		71%	83%
Would Benefit from Elections Reminders through a social media site	39%	60%		90%	40%		71%	50%
Uses SMS to learn about elections	17%	30%		18%	20%		43%	17%
Would register to vote if a friend makes a post on a social media site	13%	30%		18%	0%		14%	40%
A Go Out and Vote message in SMS will increase my chances of voting	26%	30%		27%	20%		43%	100%

## Appendix C

### Survey given to collect information

#### Introduction

My name is Greta Arevalo, Outreach Program Manager for the Elections Department and I am currently a student of Master in Public Administration at Golden Gate University. I am working on my thesis on Social Media and Young Voters and I will appreciate if you can answer this survey, it will take you 5 min. Your responses will remain confidential and will not be used for any further study.

The objective of this survey is to find out if a social media campaign will increase voter participation and registration of young voters, 18-29 years old, in the city of Salinas.

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Greta Arevalo

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Please check the box pertaining to your answer, only one option per question.

1. What is your age?

☐ under 18 years old   ☐ 18 – 24 years old   ☐ 25 – 29 years old   ☐ 30 or older

2. What is your gender?

☐ Female   ☐ Male

3. Are you a registered voter?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Unsure/I Don't know

4. How often do you vote?

☐ Every Election  
☐ Every Other Election  
☐ Only in Presidential Election  
☐ Never vote  
☐ I am not register to vote

5. Do you belong to a social network site?

☐ No   ☐ Yes (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

6. What method do you use to stay informed on politics and elections information?

☐ Facebook   ☐ Instagram   ☐ Twitter   ☐ LinkedIn   ☐ Google Plus+  
☐ MySpace   ☐ Pinterest   ☐ Internet   ☐ Newspaper   ☐ Tv News  
☐ One on One Conversations   ☐ Other\_\_\_\_\_   ☐ None

**CONTINUE ON THE BACK**

6. How often do you log into social media networks (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)?

- ☐ More than once a day
- ☐ About once a day
- ☐ A few times a week (2-3 times a week)
- ☐ A few times a month (2- 3 times a month)
- ☐ Less than a few times a month

7. Thinking about how you use a social network sites, please respond the following statements:

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
Do you currently belong to a group on a social networking site that is involved in political or social issues, or that is working to advance a cause?				
Do you currently follow any elected officials, candidates for office or other political figures on a social networking site?				
Do you ever use social network sites to post links to political stories or articles for others to read?				
Do you ever use social network sites to post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues?				
Do you ever use social network sites to encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you?				
Do you ever use social network sites to encourage other people to vote?				
Do you ever use social network sites to repost content related to political or social issues that was originally posted by someone else?				
Do you ever use social network sites to "Like" or promote material related to political or social issues that others have posted?				

9. Evaluate the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I understand the importance of voting at every election					
I would benefit from a social media message reminding me of important election dates and deadlines					
I learn about election results from social media posts on my social network accounts					
I would be more interested to register to vote if I see a message from my social network friends					
Receiving a "Go Out and Vote" message via a social media network site will increase my chances of voting					

10. What would it take for you to vote at every election?

**Thank you for your time!**

## Appendix D

Interview questions for Social Media Expert: City Councilwomen District 5, President of FarmHouse Communications, Registrar of Voters.

1. Please describe your professional and/or personal experience relating to social media.
2. In your opinion. Why do you think people 18-29 years old do not vote?
3. In your judgment, what is the best method to use with young adults in the age of 18-29 years to inspire them to vote at every election?
4. What type of social media strategy for implementation, would you consider will be the most efficient for this age group to encourage them to vote?
5. Do think a well establish social media campaign could increase voter registration and participation among young adults age of 18-29 years old in Salinas?
6. What would you recommend to make this age group to vote?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to add that hasn't been covered by the questions I've already asked?

## Appendix E

### Interview Questions for Student Body President of Hartnell.

1. In your opinion why do you think young adults (18-29 years old) do not vote?
2. Some responses to the reason why they do not vote was that politics is complicated, they don't see voting as important or they distrust government. In your opinion, what do you think it would take for this age group to vote and get involved?
3. Do you believe, a social media campaign would make a difference on this age group to increase voter participation? Why?
4. In your opinion, what social media site is the most used by this age group?
5. In your judgment, what would be the best strategy to communicate elections information with this age group?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add that wasn't covered in the interview?