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## Social Geographies of Educational Leadership: Exploring Social Structure and Influence in Social Media

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### Abstract:

Educational leaders across the globe are facing a growing set of challenges that include concerns around academic performance, but go well beyond to include the pandemic, equity, climate, and poverty. This is a defining time for leaders to attend to the needs of students in the face of ongoing and developing challenges. Better understanding how educational leaders engage with one another in developing community and accessing timely and context connected information is an important line of investigation during these challenging times. One of most widely used and simplest strategies is engaging communities through communication and collaboration in online spaces which involves accessing just in time information (e.g., news, ideas, approaches) and the exchange of information, knowledge, and strategies. Social media platforms provide multiple opportunities for these exchanges and yet we know very little about how educational leaders are engaging with these platforms.

The rise of social media has led to a panoply of online communication spaces or sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, wherein individuals can engage into the informal learning with others. Furthermore, a growing number of studies have shown that educational professionals use social media, such as Twitter, to access and share information that helps them and others to face their everyday challenges. Being embedded in their immediate (work) environments, media constitute social opportunity spaces enabling individuals to engage discussions with a wide variety of others and stimulate a process of critical reflection. Consequently, educational leaders can benefit from participating in social media to help them (and their colleagues) in their efforts to engage in high quality practice. However, traditional views of leader activity have constrained work in the space.

Leadership is one of the most examined concepts in the education literature, and while the study of online social networks is also gaining interest, the intersection between leadership and online social networks has received limited attention. The key notion underlying most traditional leadership research is that the behaviors or attributes of a leader, typically a person in a formal position, matter for a variety of outcomes. While offering valuable insights, this dominant view of leadership behavior and attributes underestimates the impact of (informal) social networks particularly those in online spaces.

Scholars are increasingly recognizing the importance of social processes involved in leading. Leadership in its broadest sense has often been conceptualized as a process of influence toward an outcome. Social relationships through networks may provide leaders with the necessary infrastructure to access resources in achieving outcomes. A social network perspective brings to the fore the dependencies of actors within a social system. This perspective shifts the focus away from individual attributes toward an examination of the ties between individuals, thereby placing leadership directly in the role of a social undertaking. Leadership from a network perspective emphasizes the interdependence of action that are reflected by a network of ties, which may ultimately moderate, influence, or determine the activity and movement of resources such as practices and knowledge. We explore these ideas drawing on our longitudinal which stretches from June 2017-December 2020 in which we tracked several key educational leadership hashtags in order to visualize the network, identify influencers, and better understand the online educational leadership community.