

SHARING
THE GOSPEL
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Authors:

Weston Giles Zoe Gibson James Richards Alex Engstrom Ryan Brennan Jenney Premont

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Abstract

Background

There are hundreds of millions of messages sent each and every day online. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) strives to reach individuals through social media in an attempt to touch their lives. The purpose of this study is to discover the most effective and least effective ways that LDS members share their beliefs through social media.

Method

A focus group through convenience sampling was conducted and comprised of eleven individuals. The participants were chosen because of their experience at sharing church messages through social media. The participants were asked several questions about their experiences and feelings about sharing church related messages through social media. The focus group was recorded and transcribed. The transcription was studied to gather insights to determine what the most effective methods to share religious messages are.

Results

Although many social media platforms can be used as a positive effect on people, the participants indicated that Instagram had the greatest success. The study also found that personal and trial related quotes were the best way to share religious messages. The biggest deterrent when sharing church related messages was fear of damaging a family relationship. The group also found that success is most commonly found when the post is very concise.

Conclusions

During the focus group the conversation naturally flowed towards sharing church messages on Facebook and Instagram. There are ways that you can share religious messages and receive positive responses that can result in church activity and spirituality.

Background

Social Media is Used to Persuade and Influence People

Social media has dominated the world over the past few years and changed how the world works. A study was done on the growth of social media from the year 2012 to the beginning of 2014. This study has shown that “72% of all Internet users are now active on social media.”¹ The top three social media networks of 2013 were Facebook, Google+ and Twitter. In 2012 Twitter was the fastest growing social network with 44%. The second fastest growing social network was Google+ at 33% with Facebook and Instagram following close behind.

Businesses have seen the influence of social media throughout the world and have been trying to use it to their advantage. In this same study 93% of marketers use social media for business. The majority of those marketers have used Facebook and were able to gain new customers. On the consumer side, it has been shown that “47% of Americans say Facebook is their #1 influencer of purchases.”

Social Media not only is a powerful tool in business but also in politics. There are studies stating how crucial it is to have a social media presence online today to gain support in campaigns.² Through social media, candidates running for a political office can position themselves and even create a personal brand that shows what their core values are.

¹ Jones, K. “The Growth of Social Media”

² Terrel, J. “The Social Media Survival Guide for Political Campaigns”

Social media is where many of the U.S. citizens get their information. Approximately 30% of Americans get their news directly from Facebook alone as opposed to 60% getting some of their news from social media in general.³ Social media is a powerful tool and shapes how people think. More social media networks are being created and those that already exist are trying to find more ways they can influence people’s lives. The world recognizes the great impact social media can have on its users.

Power of Positivity in Social Media

In a study done by professors Mina Choi and Catalina L. Toma, the power and influence of positive sharing both verbally and written was proved to be extremely significant.¹ Many of the initial findings of this study suggested that social sharing boosts sharers’ positive effect above and beyond the positive effect generated by the event itself. The social sharing of negative events over interpersonal media will be associated with higher negative affect. In general, when individuals talk about something, they start to develop more extreme feelings toward that issue.

In this study, they had 311 students from a university complete daily “diary entries.”

³ Anderson, M., & Caumont, A. “How Social Media is Reshaping the News”

⁴ Choi, Mina., “Social Sharing Through Interpersonal Media: Patterns and Effects on Emotional well-being”

In these entries the participants were asked to explain “the most important positive event or issue of the day” or to explain “the most important problem or stressful event or issue of the day.” After the actual event (negative or positive) they were asked follow-up questions like “How positive?” or “How negative?” on scales of 1 to 5 to measure intensity. The participants were asked what medium they shared this emotion with. The options included: phone calls, text messages, e-mails, IM, face-to-face interaction, Facebook posts, Twitter posts, blogs, and video chat. Some of the results that were found were that for positive and negative events, the way most of the participants shared it was through face-to-face communication and via social media. Positive events were more likely than negative events to be shared via texting, and Twitter posts. This is believed to be so high because these forms of social media were easily accessible and noninvasive.

Another finding in this case was that “more intensely positive events were more likely than less intense positive events to be shared via Twitter posts but not via Facebook posts or blogs.” The last finding in support of their initial study was that “negative affect increased with social sharing done through face-to-face, phone call, text, and Facebook posts.”

From these experiences, it was proven that when social media users share negative thoughts or stories, they began to have an even more negative feeling toward the event or person they share about. The same is true for positive messages. When users share positive stories and events, they feel even more positive about that message after they share it.

Religion on Facebook Pages are Growing

With major religions in the world growing at a steady pace, the more and more people are turning to social media to voice their religious feelings. Applications for smartphones are also turning in this direction like the popular Bible app called YouVersion. “This app has over 146 million downloads and growing. It gives user’s access to 924 various versions of the Bible and supports 628 different languages.”⁵

Author Nicole Williams, in an⁵ article by the LA Sentinel, focuses on how different religious groups have been using social media to discuss their different viewpoints and beliefs within the social media society. The article discusses how these religious groups use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other forms of social media to increase traffic on their sites. The article poses the question in regards to religious groups and their success online, “is this phenomenon effective?”

Through her research the answer has been determined to be yes and no. Some users agree that it is effective and helps others join their religious groups while others find it completely contradictory. An example of this included some people who post on social media about their religious endeavors with inconsistent messages by posting something religious one day, and something completely ontradicory next. This is deemed to be not okay in the social media world– a social faux pas.

The key finding of this article was that success is possible through social media, especially if you have

⁵ William, Nicole. “religion on the Go: Believers Embrace Social Media”

a large reach. *“...The more platforms a church is involved in, the larger reach it has.”*

In this day and age it is pivotal to adapt. If religions expect to stick around, it is crucial that they make their presence known on social media.

LDS Culture Place Emphasis on Social Media Sharing

The church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints has recently issued a challenge given to members to share meaningful messages of hope and enlightenment. This challenge has become more prominent as stated by church leader David A Bednar on August 19, 2014, during Campus Education Week at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

“What has been accomplished thus far in this dispensation communicating gospel messages through social media channels is a good beginning—but only a small trickle, I now extend to you the invitation to help transform the trickle into a flood. Beginning at this place on this day, I exhort you to sweep the earth with messages filled with righteousness and truth—messages that are authentic, edifying, and praiseworthy—and literally to sweep the earth as with a flood.”⁶

Prior to this speech, the church handbook “administrative policies” was updated with similar expectations. One excerpt from the handbook says:

“Members are encouraged to share messages from official Church websites and social accounts as well as their own words, images, and media. As members express their own thoughts and feelings, they should not give the impression that they represent or are sponsored by the Church.”⁷

Another leader of the LDS church, M. Russell Ballard, echoed the message of his religious colleague when he said;

“The Lord invites you to get involved and use the social media platforms you prefer to share the gospel and stand as modern sons and daughters of Helaman in the great battles of the last days. He wants you to become the modern stripling warriors who stand strong and united to defend the truth. He wants you to be courageous and stalwart in the face of the enemy’s advances. We know that in the end the Lord will win the day and Satan will be defeated.”⁸

The church of Jesus Christ has also branded the famous Christian hashtag #SharedGoodness. Members are encouraged to add this hashtag on their social media posts that can uplift others who may see the posts of click directly on the tag. The goal is to fill the media with messages of positivity so that others may see and “Come unto Christ.”

What Does This Mean?

The rapid growth of social media and the persuasive elements that it has is influencing our world greatly. The extreme power that sharing a positive message has on the one who shares it (as well as the receiver of the message) also makes a great difference. The growth of religion apps as well as social media platforms for religion, and the push to share by religious leaders has led to the question, “What is the the most effective way to share the messages of religion (specifically, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints) through social media?”

6 Bednar, David A. “To Sweep the Earth as with a Flood”

7 LDS Church “Official Handbook 2: Administering the Church”

8 Ballard, M. Russel. “Be Still and Know That I Am God”

Method

Focus Group

To start the research project, the first step was to solidify a meta-question. After a question was placed, the researchers created a further list of questions (see next page) to explore the topic of religious sharing. The purpose was to gain overall understanding of the meta-question and focus.

For the purpose of this research, a focus group was conducted. The focus group consisted of eleven individuals in which a convenience sample was used. Each researcher found one or more individuals. These participants were specifically chosen for their success at frequent religious sharing of LDS gospel messages via social media.

In advance a date, time and place were scheduled for the focus group to be held. The date of the group was Saturday November 15, 2014 at noon. The group met in the Manwaring center on the BYU- Idaho campus. Pizza was used as incentive/reward for members sharing their time and experiences with the group.

Written consent forms were created, printed and given to each participant to read and sign in order to give permission to the researchers to use quotes, names, and information talked about during the conversation for further evaluation (See appendix B). Members of the focus group were asked to say their name before they added anything to the discussion so that the transcription process would be clearer.

A moderator was also chosen for the group. The moderator filled in questions as needed. Upon completion of the consent forms, participants created a nametag for themselves as help for the moderator. The moderator did a short activity including asking the participants to write down several answers on a note card before the discussion. These questions were referred to later on in the conversation. This focus group consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions.

The focus group was recorded on two different cameras. The audio from the focus group was used in the process of transcription. Analysis and evaluations were then made to determine the findings.

Method Cont.

Focus Group Questions

1. From your experience, what have you found effective? What hasn't?
2. Is most of your content for members or nonmembers?
3. Do you feel like you're getting your message through to nonmembers effectively? Why?
4. Do you receive a positive or negative response from viewers?
5. What has been your biggest success? Biggest failure?
6. Concerning the content, what was the largest response? (Like, shares, comments, etc.)
7. What are your fears about sharing gospel messages through social media?
8. What is your biggest hindrance on sharing the gospel online?
9. How were you personally impacted by a gospel message on social media? What was the experience?
10. Is there anything you would like to comment on that you feel we haven't covered?

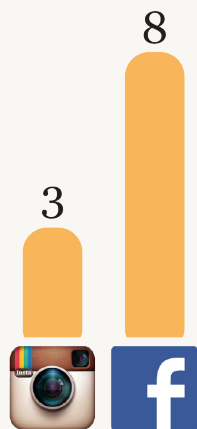
Finding 1

Facebook more commonly used, but Instagram was more successful

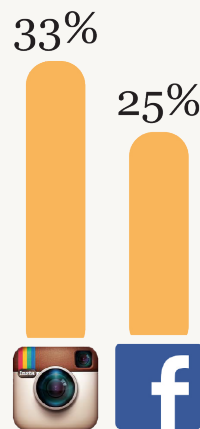
Success is defined as interest such as talking with the missionaries, inquiring about the church, going to church, or ultimately conversion to the church. Out of the eight participants who used Facebook, two of them had success. Out of the remaining three that used Instagram, one had success. One of the participants explained their reasoning of using Instagram over Facebook by stating:

“I chose Instagram because my Facebook is basically my close friends and family... On Instagram, I have a lot of random followers, so when I post pictures and bear my testimony, a lot more random people can see and make comments and know my beliefs rather than my family who already know.”

Social Media
of Choice



Success Rate
of Conversion



— Finding 3 —

Trials are the base for sharing church related messages through social media

Members in the focus group concluded that it is often useful to relay messages concerning trials/ personal struggles as a base for sharing. They noted that, for them, the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a message of hope and they wanted people to see it who were looking for that same hope in their own lives. One participant said,

“Well, I know for me personally, when other people have shared quotes from Mormon messages and I am having a really hard time with something, it helps me get over certain things. So, I want to be that for someone else who needs some extra help by sharing a favorite quote or a message. Doing this makes me feel better and hopefully helps someone else.”

This participant found that a message that had to do with overcoming trials had helped her, so she tried to do the same for her family and friends. Another participant of the group shared a story with a friend going through a significant trial:

“It was something about trials and afflictions and then blessings. They said it was something that they really needed to hear at this moment because they were going through a really hard time. And I responded that the blessings do come, you just have to be patient. So, it is something uplifting that they really needed at that moment.”

— Finding 4 —

Family is feared more than friends when sharing religious messages on social media

Several of the participants in the focus group expressed the fear they have when sharing gospel related messages on social media. The opinions of their family members seemed to supercede that of their own. One participant said,

“In my family there are anti-Mormon family members. It is...scary to post something because they automatically shut me down, but at the same time one of them is my father and he still respects [me]. I am just hoping it strikes him. I don’t know how to say it but it is scary posting because I look up to him in different ways...”

Participants fear their inactive, anti-mormon family members. They do not want to be looked down upon by the people they love the most. Fear is also an attribute to sharing on social media because of the backlash a person will receive from a post. Another participant stated,

“I would say there is still a little bit of a fear when it comes to sharing on social media just because there’s that aspect where there are people who are set in their religion as well and there could be some backlash so that it defeats it.”

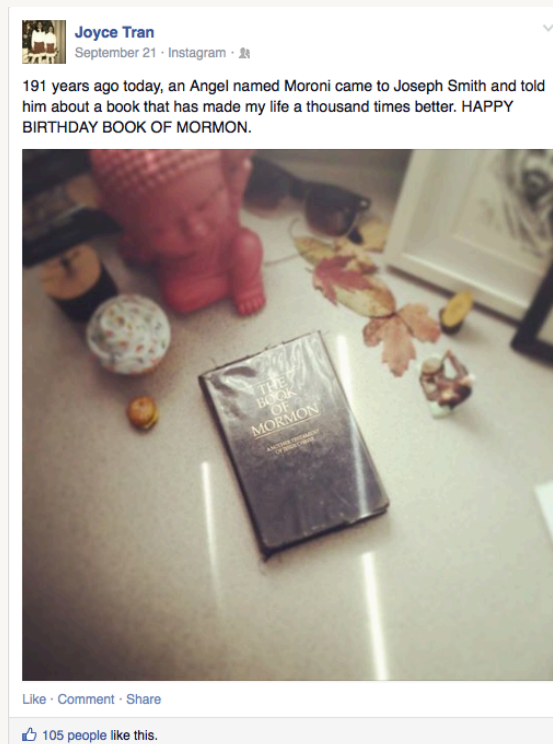
This finding is only relevant to those participants who recently converted to the gospel and whose family members are either not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or anti-Mormon. In our findings, sharing the gospel through social media generates this offense especially towards family members.

Finding 5

Conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is higher if post is concise

A question was proposed during the focus group: “From your experience what have you found to be the most effective?” One of the participants of the focus group said,

“I feel like Mormon messages are powerful if people are taking time to watch them, but when I see them I don’t always play them because they take too long, but I will take time to read a short quote. If it is more powerful than it is more effective... because more people will read it than watch.”



A good example of a concise post that reached a variety of individuals.

Finding 5 Cont.

When participants explained their feelings on what is most effective on sharing the gospel through social media they said that short posts rather than long posts are best. Short quotes from the general authorities showed to be the most popular among the participants in the focus group. Another participant said,

“There are a few things that I found to be really effective. The first one is very simple just always keep it short. Nobody likes reading something long--even someone who loves the gospel will not read a long post. Another thing is to post something with a short message with your profile picture with something that everyone is going to see or like a cover picture everyone sees those things more than just a simple status.”

Participants concluded that simplicity was the driving force behind success when sharing the gospel through social media.

Conclusion

There are things that can be done that make sharing church related messages more effective and helpful to others on social media. One of these things would be to post to Instagram. Instagram, although used less for religious sharing purposes, has more success than the more commonly preferred, Facebook. It also can have less of a family reach, which the study group concluded, does make a difference.

The focus group concluded that posts to Instagram can optimize how much success and good feedback one receives. One of these conclusions was to create short posts that engage activity. This can be a quote from a religious leader or a picture accompanied by a quote or with an inspirational message. Simple and short posts like these are well received because they do not require much time or energy from anyone who comes in contact with the post. As panorama and social media marketing expert Pam Dyer said, "Use relevant photo captions to grab attention, including questions. This will help drive comments."

If you do post on Facebook, you should also make sure that you keep your posts at about 40 characters. Posts with 40 characters receive 86% more engagement than posts with a higher character count. Some other advice from Dyer is to "Keep things positive, provide information, provide links, include images, mobile-friendly, engagement with others, and be available". This advice correlates strongly with the data that was received from the focus group. Putting posts on something such as a Facebook event, brings loyalty among followers. As found in the focus group,

another way to bring people to action would be an online event that commits people to doing and accomplishing a certain action. This also creates an online community that helps with support and encouragement within the event.

One of the most important conclusions from this study was that success is **almost impossible** if you do not follow up with people who were interested. When the person who posted will take time to follow up with people who were interested in the shared posts, positive experiences will more than likely result. Because the fear that can accompany religious talk, it is often helpful to be the one to inquire with those who showed any interest in the post. Those in the group that had stories of success were found to use this tactic.

Another finding shows that short and simple quotes that include messages of hope through life's trials can be very effective. This simple tactic is one of the most effective ways to share the gospel on social media. This is a less invasive method that people can relate to and will result in further sharing.

Fear is a large factor in posting and sharing gospel related messages. Individuals fear family, close friends, and acquaintances. Several individuals during the focus group mentioned the fact that sharing religious messages is "scary". A conclusion is that people don't like to be known as a source of contention or dispute. This fear is particularly prominent in a family situation.

Within the focus group there were multiple participants that had "anti-Mormon" members in their immediate and extended family. This emphasizes

Conclusion Cont.

the fact that hearing hurtful or upsetting perspectives really stops people from posting things they are passionate about. People would rather be rejected by their friends than their family members. These findings are applicable in any religious person's life who engages in social media.

The conversation naturally moved toward sharing on Facebook and Instagram. Although it was presumed that these forms of media would be brought up, other forms of social media such as Twitter or Pinterest were surprisingly not brought up.

The best way to share the gospel is through concise quotes based on hope and enduring trials posted to Instagram. Then, to follow up with those who were interested and accepting of what is conveyed. When a post is concise it catches a reader's eye and is more likely to be read.

Recommendations

When conducting a focus group, the mediator should have the participants write down whether they agree or disagree with a statement. After having them write down their responses, the mediator should have gone around and asked for the answers. This way there will be more numerical data and the mediator will be able to gauge the way that everyone is feeling. This would have a positive impact on the direction of the focus group.

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Appendix A

Transcript

Weston: First question if you could write down on your index card is: what is the most effective medium through which to share the gospel on social media? Medium is clarified as Facebook, Instagram, any source of medium that you feel is most effective. Write it down, turn it over, and when you're done just look at me.

Moderator: So, I want a response by a raise of hands, who put Facebook?

9 out of 11 raised their hands for the Facebook.

Moderator: Ok, who didn't put Facebook? Participant 6 what did you put?

Participant 6: I put Instagram.

Moderator: and Participant 4 what did you put?

Participant 4: I put Instagram.

Moderator: So, Facebook and Instagram are the top two. Can I ask why you didn't put Facebook? Please say your name.

Participant 4: I put Instagram because I feel it's an easy way to share a quote or inspirational message through a picture. I think that Facebook is effective if you're trying to go with a topic or an article or something more in depth, but for Instagram I think it is an easy way to share something quick and uplifting about the gospel.

Moderator: Great, so if I am understanding you correctly, you are saying that Instagram is an easier more effective way for pictures and quotes whereas, Facebook is more effective articles wise?

Participant 4: Yeah

Moderator: Ok, Participant 6.

Participant 6: I chose Instagram because my Facebook is basically my close friends and family which are already members. On Instagram I have a lot of random followers and so when I post pictures and bear my testimony a lot more random

people can see and make comments and know my beliefs rather than my family who already knows.

Moderator: Great. Next question, Why are you sharing the gospel through social media? Participant 3.

Participant 3: My name is. I share it because the prophet told us to.

Moderator: Great. Anyone else? Participant 10.

Participant 10: So, I share it because I think its fun. Like if its what I am focused on and thinking about I like to share uplifting quotes. I think its... I like to use Facebook to uplift people not to say that my life is so hectic... thats not helpful. So, I like to use it for good.

Moderator: Great. Participant 9?

Participant 9: I love the words of the apostle Paul : I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's one of the greatest tools to share God's gospel to fulfill God's prophecy and let us go forth in full accordance to all the world.

Moderator: And Participant 9 what are you sharing?

Participant 9: I share my favorite scriptures and quotes from different apostles and prophets and with that I like to put a # with the topic that is very very relevant to the quote.

Moderator: Great. And have you seen a lot of success?

Participant 9: Ya I actually see plenty of success. People message me on Facebook and tell me that that was a very cool quote and very uplifting.

Moderator: Ok hold on, we will go Participant 8 and then we will go Participant 7.

Participant 8: I like to share the gospel because I feel it's like what Heavenly Father wants me to do and there is great joy in it. I have always like the quote from the prophet Joseph Smith and it goes something like this--no man filled with the love of God is content with blessing his family alone, but it extends to the entire human race. Now, that's not exactly what the quote says, but in essence if you love the gospel and you take the love of God kind of like Lehi's dream, then you want others to feel that happiness. Obviously God loves each and every one of us, how can we restrict that just to ourselves? It is a way of showing thank you to our Heavenly Father and also feeling the love of our Heavenly Father.

Moderator: Thank you.

Participant 7: Well, I know for me personally, what other people have share quotes from Mormon messages and I just scroll through when I am having a really really hard time with something and when I read it it's like... like when they always post it really helps me get over certain things. So, I want to be someone else just in case if someone else needs some extra help like a favorite quote or a message. I don't know, doing this makes me feel better and hopefully hits someone else.

Moderator: Do you mind sharing what has hit you the most or the hardest or help you?

Participant 7: umm... One time I watched this Mormon message and it was just like the right time that I watched it I guess. Yeah I think it was the one when they took different paths... and then I don't remember...

*The group helped her identify that the message was from Elder Jeffery R. Holland.

Participant 7: Yeah it was that one and cause like I was having a hard time I was at the end of one road and I had to pray to get back to the other one, but it was just the perfect time just to watch that video so it just really stuck out.

Moderator: So the Mormon message?

Participant 7: Yeah.

Moderator: Would everyone agree, and please be open, that Mormon messages are the most powerful or most effective for sharing? Who would say they would agree with that? K, Participant 5, Participant 7, Participant 6.

Participant 8: I will be honest, I just don't know. I think that each person is different in a lot of ways. I think they are a great way to share the gospel, but I just don't know if they are the most. I'm just being honest.

Moderator: Ok

Participant 8: I just don't know if they are the most. I like them. I will use them, but I just don't know what the best method is.

Moderator: Thank you.

Participant 3: Agreed.

Moderator: So, from your experience what have you found to be the most effective? Participant 10.

Participant 10: So yeah I feel like Mormon messages are powerful if people are

taking time to watch them, but when I see them I don't always play them because they take too long, but I will take time to read a short quote. If it is more powerful than it is more effective I feel because more people will read it than watch.

Moderator: Great. So, quote on Facebook?

Participant 10: Yeah your status. So I always post a ton of quotes.

Moderator: Great. Participant 3.

Participant 3: So, there is a few things that I found to be really effective the first one is super simple just always keep it short, no one likes reading something long, even someone who loves the gospel will not read a long post. Another thing is like just to post something with a short message with your profile picture with something that everyone is going to see or like a cover picture everyone sees those things like more than just a simple status. Another thing that I found to be really effective was Facebook. I just add people I meet because I don't want to just add them because of whatever, but because I can share the gospel with them in a less intimidating way than just hey meet the missionaries.

Moderator: Great. Thank you.

Moderator: Participant 2, what do you think?

Participant 2: For me personally I always use Facebook in general just because i have found more social media I have the harder it is to share on every single one. I don't have Instagram or twitter

Also I have found Facebook personally. I have a lot of friends on there. i come from a background and have family that is not LDS so it allows me the opportunity to share simple messages with a picture with a quote. i find quotes are most effective form because it doesn't have to be a gospel quote just something uplifting. I feel that helps connect those who are not lds in general.

Moderator: so coming from a non lds background has quotes on social media like Facebook, influenced your conversion?

Participant 2: I would say so. It has definitely helped. I would say there is still a little bit of a fear when it comes to sharing on social media just because there's that aspect where there are people who are set in their religion as well and there could be some lash back so that it defeats it but it does help it to grow and strengthen your testimony.

Moderator: What is scary about sharing the gospel on social media as Participant 2 mentioned there is a fear?

Participant 7: In my family there are anti-Mormon family members. it is kind of scary

to post something because they automatically shut me down, but at the same time one of them is my father and he still respects that and I am just hoping it strikes him. I don't know how to say it but it is scary posting because I look up to him in different ways but i have seen it and am trying to help him out a little bit.

Moderator: It seems like there is a lot more fear if your family is not a member. Is everyone getting that vibe? is it easier to share the gospel via social media than it is in person?

Chelsea: Oh yea

Moderator: Why is that?

Participant 1: People when it is on social media, on the internet it is a lot less, it is easier, there is an aspect of even though your name is attached to it there is there is an aspect of ambiguity, there is an aspect and is not so much your face telling you the stuff, but people coming around from the side. And so I think people feel safer because they are not face to face with that confrontation. It's a lot safer of a way to get around it. We do not see the physical or verbal back lash.

Moderator: Ah, for those that are converts or come from a non-LDS background do you feel the same way that Participant 2 said. Do you feel less invasive?

Participant 2: I would agree with that there is more a sense of personal security

Moderator: Would you say that is why it is effective. Facebook vs Instagram is that less invasive

Participant 2: Yes, because I feel that I am more willing to share because of the confrontation aspect.

Moderator: Person to person

Participant 4: I think when I share post on Facebook or whatever I know that people sometimes say things they wouldn't say face to face so sometimes comments are more harsh if someone is disagreeing with you but on a topic of religion most people have a strong opinion about that and people are going to say something face to face or if it's on the internet. For me if somebody writes something hurtful or writes something that doesn't go with what my beliefs are through Facebook I have more time to think about my response and be more uplifting instead of going into an argument. I am able to collect my thoughts and write down something that is going to be constructive and not offensive to either party.

Participant 3: So on the other side of it like Participant 2 was saying, it is a lot easier for the people who are receiving it to open up or accept the gospel. on my mission

we got to be the missionaries on mormon.org and chat which was so cool. There are so many people who would come and were afraid to talk to members or missionaries even though they were so influenced by them on social media or were friends but they felt they couldn't talk to them so they would go online. That's where I feel it gets effective.

Moderator: Anyone have more on how effective gospel sharing on social media? also you can spout out your name and start that way.

Participant 2: Kind of going back to the second question you did about powerful I think stuff like Mormon messages and quotes are really good but kind of this hook to get you interested, but powerful wise it is your testimony and using quotes from the Book of Mormon but definitely testimony because testimony is something no one else can refute. it is a lot more personal and if someone sees or reads a quote from you, someone who loves you will be a lot more receptive willing to ask you about it because it comes from you and not just Joe Blow that they don't know.

Participant 5: I have seen the most effective way for me personally is when I don't post every single day but the most powerful things come when someone needs it the most. Like, recently I just posted that helped a lot of people that I worked with back home in Oregon that are not members of the church. And I talk about the gospel a lot. At subway I work with one other member and they know I am Mormon so we have lots of discussions about the church

Participant 11: I have a couple of comments: one, I'm obviously of a different generation than all of you, but I do use Facebook, and I find that one of the things that works for members and non-members alike is if you run across something that they're dealing with and then you can find a quote which is easy to do with our General Authorities that you can post that specifically references something that they're going through. For example, I have this quote that I posted from President Uchtdorf that says, um, something to the effect of 'it's not the adversity that you have in life but how you handle it which determines your character,' and you know, let's face it, I live in a very small community in Montana, so mostly non-members. People have adversity, and if they're Facebook friends with me and I'll say, "Hey! I just found this." Sometimes they'll even say, "Wow! Where did that come from or who said that? That's really cool!" And then, that open the door to say who this person is, you know. He's the leader of our Church, and then that can start things. The other thing I found, which is maybe not what you're focusing on today, but inactive members—I think a lot about converting them to the gospel as well. You know, we're really working a lot with inactive members, and some of the most effective things that I ever posted were just recently. For example, I think, in LDS Living about when your child isn't a perfect Mormon child. Now, as a parent, I can tell there are moments where we all go through that, and was just a really great article because I had a couple say, "Oh, my gosh! Thank goodness I'm not the only parent whose kid is doing this!" Because it can really shape a child's

testimony as well as the parent's testimony when they're struggling with that and with the kind of reception they might receive at church for example. When they say, "Oh, my gosh!" You know they're again there's this opportunity to open the dialogue and maybe reconvert somebody who might be really on the edge, or really recognize for example, a youth who's, man, they're really struggling with that testimony, and so it may not be specifically sharing the gospel as you're talking about, but you know that's what I've, that's what we've dealt with a lot.

Moderator: Thank you, Participant 11. So we're going to shift because in this focus group we're not looking for an answer—necessarily a specific one, so don't feel—please don't feel that you have to one up someone else, I got to say something good; I got to say something better, but we want to make this brute and honest, so we're going to shift it to what is working and what is not, okay? I'm going to do a little activity. On your card again, cardigan, please write down right now if you had a friend who was not investigating but was interested in God, and you knew this good friend. What would you post? What would you message him with? Using via social media

Participant 9: To me personally, I think one of the greatest ways to introduce the gospel to a friend would be by asking the questions to get them to think. For example, the Plan of Salvation, where did I come from? Have you ever wondered why you're here on earth? And where will you go after you die? These are questions that deserve very very serious answers, so with that you can use the Bible and the Book of Mormon, and with that you can explain the whole Plan of Salvation to him or her right there.

Moderator: So as a missionary aspect, I'm assuming that you served a mission?

Participant 9: yeah.

Moderator: what would you share?

Participant 9: I would share that all of us are here on earth for a very specific mission, and with the Book of Mormon and the Bible we can find out together is.

Moderator: Is there an effective video post you shared or is it just your testimony?

Participant 9: My testimony and also a wonderful message by Richard G. Scott. "How Can I Find Happiness?" One of my favorite Mormon Messages.

Moderator: Which of us have shared how can I find happiness? [Only Participant 9 raised his hand]

Participant 9: It's a classic.

Moderator: Participant 9's got it. Alright you got to share today.

Participant 8: This is what I wrote, I said, "I'm not sure because I can't say I've done anything. I like to chat with people too and get into long conversations with friends when permitting, but I'm going along with half of this I said I would message him with a quote hope or happiness. That's what I think.

Moderator: so we have happiness as a common theme.

Participant 8: yeah. That's what I thought of.

Moderator: Who would share something along the lines of happiness?

Participant 3: It depends.

Moderator: who would put something positive? [everybody raised hands] Okay dumb question. Who put something that was more emotional? 5. K. Participant 6, what did you put?

Participant 6: well for me, I'm a visual learner, so when I see like Mormon messages I'm like holding back tears, so and one of my favorite ones is the "because of him"

Moderator: Okay, "because of him," who shared that? Everyone, raise your hands. Does everyone remember how many retweets, how many shares they got, likes they got, how effective that really was?

Participant 3: we were missionaries when it came out, and we had ipads which are so awesome because we just like shared Mormon messages with people that we met, and so last Easter it was so effective like, "Hey, can we share this Easter message for you?" It was awesome.

Moderator: Participant 2, so what did you put?

Participant 2: Oh what did I put, okay. I'm Participant 2. Well it's kind of hard because you need to know the person and what they're asking and really looking for. I think something that is just always really good is using the Book of Mormon kind of a Book of Mormon quote or Book of Mormon scripture talking about how God is our Father. And I just talk about who God is. That way they can come to know Him. I think that's the most important thing to write for them.

Participant 5: I share. I just want to keep it simple and short and sweet because people don't want to talk to us forever. I served a mission, and so we want to get straight to the point, and so I put down I would share "Mountains to Climb," and I know it's like it's a happy but a sad but kind of an in between movie, and it helps

people to see the perspective of life and to know that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are there for them whenever they need help and that you know we can rely on Jesus Christ, and a scripture I'd post with that is First Nephi 3:7. Like we can't do anything without the Lord's help like the Lord is always going to be there to help us no matter what trials may come our way and that life isn't easy, but we can make it worthwhile.

Moderator: Participant 10, what has been effective for you personally on the receiving end of, via social media concerning the Gospel?

Participant 10: Good question. I really like the, what are they called? Memes. The little picture quote. I just love those, so I share those like every day because they are all over my news feed, and so I just share, share, share because I really like those because they're quick and easy.

Moderator: So you share out of convenience? Almost... I mean it's super easy to share it?

Participant 10: Yeah, it's so easy to share it.

Participant 11: The quote that I have effectively before is the one by Gordon B. Hinckley which says, we're not trying to I guess put down your religion, but we invite you to see if we can add more, and I find that if we're not coming from this, "oh, we've got it, you don't" attitude, and we say truth is everywhere, and we're delighted, you know, we're delighted, wherever you are they're Christian. And then we invite them to see if we can add more. What I found is that it really invites them to say, "Oh, what do you have?" You know, what do you have? That I as a Christian don't have? What do you know that I as a Buddhist don't know? You know, that to me, that kind of non-bashing approach I think is really effective. It's I've had a lot of really interesting conversations, not necessarily conversions, but who knows that one gulp at a time theory? I figure, hey a good, deep conversation with somebody who really sees that I'm not threatening what they have or bashing where they are but just you want to or just I'm in them, and so I think it's effective.

Participant 3: So I have found what is effective that is to look at the people to like your stuff and then follow up with them. Ask them questions, message them, so it's not just like you're shooting something into oblivion, but you're actually making progress with specific people.

Moderator: Because I find it funny that there is a line on Facebook of annoyance and interesting. Some people can go like, "I'm eating waffles right now," and take a picture of the waffles. Okay. I think that's kind of annoying, but I mean if it's a celebrity everyone loves it. Like, like, like, like. They like me. So who thought it was cool when the apostles had Facebook and started posting pictures of family saying things about it.

Participant 3: They don't have Facebook anymore?

Moderator: Yeah they do. Who thinks it's cool? Why is it cool then, and why is it effective?

Participant 6: I feel like just because we think that they're so above us and high up, and we never get to see them I think it makes it more relatable to, you know, peers or not our peers but people that are just people. They're just humans.

Participant 10: So I feel like it's, Facebook is more like a casual part of my life, and so I think it's cool to see oh! The apostle has one of these, so I should take it seriously. I try not to be just whatever on my Facebook. I've always tried to be that way, but then it makes you feel, I think, like what would the apostles do with their Facebook? And you try to follow their example too.

Participant 11: I think Participant 3 made a really good point, and that is the origin of social media was to actually engage, socially engage, and a lot of people who go on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram, they are there to see, but I think what she said about taking the time may be, even if you were to reach out to one person and have that social interaction which the media is created to do, would be, would elevate anything you did to something more, and I think it has that potential. We don't always use it that way; we just kind of look at it, but you know, it makes me think what she said.

Moderator: Personal engagement.

Participant 11: Yeah. What she said because I remember when, you know, when they started Facebook that was the whole idea, to engage. And businesswise, that's the whole idea. Businesses are on social media to engage, so what she's saying is that if we, if we move ourselves away from just kind of you know anonymously posting, which is not bad, and anonymously reading, which is not bad but actually take that next step, but she just made me think, so thank you.

Participant 3: The Spirit.

Moderator: Thank you. The Spirit. Okay who has had specific missionary moments? Through either Facebook or Instagram? We're going to separate this from a mission. So on your mission, what has gotten you the most success? What did you post that made someone respond?

Participant 9: Personalized it, makes things a lot more easier.

Moderator: Do you remember what it was that you posted that they liked?

Participant 9: It was something about trials and afflictions and then blessings. They

said it was something that they really needed to hear at this moment because I was going through a really hard time. And I responded that the blessings do come, you just have to be patient. So, it is something uplifting that they really needed at that moment.

Moderator: You served a mission, correct?

Participant 5: Yes

Moderator: Did you use social media on your mission?

Participant 5: No

Moderator: Did you use social media on your mission?

Participant 3: Yes

Moderator: For those who did not serve a mission, have you encountered a missionary moment through the use of social media? And what was the post you used?

Participant 2: My small missionary moment was actually doing this one where this woman was less-active and a good friend back home who was going through addiction recovery. I posted a video of a man who was a little older who was going through the same thing. I don't remember the name of the video. It was something along the lines of He Will Always Love You First or He is Always There. He basically talked about how he was on the verge of not wanting to be in this life anymore because of the addiction. This goes along with God and remembering that God loves us. He actually Facebook messaged me and I actually followed up with him by calling him and shared my testimony and it brought him back to church, and he went to priesthood.

Moderator: You had success.

Participant 2: Yes, I had success.

Moderator: So, let's tap into that because this is what we want. You shared your testimony and you used an addiction video. Do you remember what it was?

Participant 2: I don't remember if it was a Mormon message, but it might have been.

Moderator: Was it Mormon at all?

Participant 2: Yes, it was.

Moderator: So it was affiliated with the church?

Participant 2: It was affiliated with the church, but I don't think it was titled as a Mormon message but it was a video of recovery.

Moderator: Did you get it from lds.org?

Participant 2: Yes. I just can't remember the name of the video. It definitely was a church video though.

Moderator: And you followed up. Aside from this cool focus group, I want to commit everyone to if you get someone to like a video that is not a member, that you post or from a comment or a meme, follow up. I honestly have never done that. I need to. This has been great. I need to shake it off for second. Was there any more missionary stories?

Group member: For one too, did you share the message because it was you that was struggling? And did you share it with him personally or for everyone to see?

Participant 2: No, I shared it with everyone and I knew that he was seeing what I have been posting. Not everything was necessarily gospel oriented but this was my in, my door.

Group member: Has anyone else had success?

Participant 10: Something cool that I felt inspired to do last year, before conference last year, was to do the conference countdown event. I originally wanted to do this for myself where I just read a talk 30 days before conference and I was more prepared for conference. I was just going to share this was one or two of my friends. I put it on Facebook and I was hoping for 10 people to join but 500 people joined the group. It was amazing. It was the spirit that told me to do it and that is why it was successful. I would post a little video each day and make a reading chart, I still do this. This is the third time I've done this. It has been really cool. I don't keep track of everyone that is doing it because there are lots of people. There are people that come to me and message me to tell me that they love it. Another cool experience that I have had was my friend that messaged me and thanked me so much for doing it because her sister has been less-active and she said, "Hey look at what my friend is doing, we should do this!" She started doing the countdown and started to feel the spirit more in her life. That was just cool. People that I would never guess are affected by it!

Moderator: Any other successes?

Participant 7: Lately my step-sister has been going through some really personal issues that I have personally gone through as well. I knew how to go about that. She is on Instagram a lot more than Facebook. So, a couple of weeks ago I posted a picture of nature or something with a quote that has a really special meaning to me from Jeffrey R. Holland, which says, "If for a while, the harder you try the harder it

gets. Take heart. So it has been for the greatest people that have ever lived.” That really hit home for me. I posted that and once she liked it, I called her to talk about her issues with her. She has been in active because she lives with my anti-Mormon family. Her and my stepmom actually went back to church, went to young women’s and she is doing a lot better. It is actually kind of cool because it was last week when I went back home to Utah, and I was struggling and she was able to help me. Because we have that relationship now. She shared scriptures with me, which is great because she was in-active.

Moderator: Does she post things of the church now?

Participant 7: Every once in a while. Sometimes on Twitter even.

Moderator: Ultimately it was your love for her and your testimony that helped her, but would you say that initially it was that post? Or that like?

Participant 7: Yes. Because I haven’t really posted on Instagram about that church because usually it is just on Facebook, but I think that it was different and it really caught her eye. She caught onto that.

Moderator: Any more successes? We could learn from it.

Class member 1: it doesn’t even have to be success. It could be that they ask you questions about things that you posted.

Moderator: Any questions that you’ve been asked?

Participant 10: where do you get all these quotes? I guess they always ask that, “where do you find all these quotes?”

Moderator: where do you find them?

Participant 10: Just reading like conference talks or like books, church books and stuff.

Moderator: Do you make the memes or do you just type it in?

Participant 10: I usually just type it in.

Moderator: What’s more effective, a meme or a typed in message?

Participant 3: I think you need variety.

Moderator: Variety? What’s more effective a meme or a testimony?

Participant 7: I feel like if you could post a meme because they’ll read it and it’s

short, and then you'll have a caption with a portion of your testimony, and that kind of ties it.

Participant 2: I agree with that. I think it's good to have memes because a visual image is going to capture and bring it in, and that's when they're going to take the time to actually read it. If it's just words, a lot of times, I'm not going to lie to you; I just skip over it because I don't care to read words.

Moderator: Any questions that people have asked you?

Participant 7: I'm type 1 diabetic, and so November is national diabetes awareness month, so I posted just kind of like a brief thing saying I'm a diabetic, and it's hard, but, and for some reason I've gotten a lot of random followers who are diabetics, and they're not members since they messaged me "how do you like stay happy?" "Like it's so hard to deal with this," because it's a life trial like it doesn't ever go away or anything, so that way I just kind of share my testimony about just like the gospel, my highs and lows, and the priesthood that's helped my health recently, helped me get through it.

Moderator: It seems, the more real you are on social media, the more opportunities you have to share the gospel. You flatter yourself saying all these cool things like saying, "I'm going rock-climbing today," and you don't mention how you failed a test. Everyone is just going to see that you went rock-climbing and that you probably aced the test and that you're the coolest guy on earth, so would everyone say that being more real on social media gives you more opportunities?

Participant 9: Absolutely.

Participant 10: I think real in a positive way though because I don't like it when people are real and negative. Because you're not, because you're like, "okay, I'm sorry." We all have trials, you know. But it is good to be real like not act like your life is so glum.

Moderator: Okay. Real in a positive way.

Participant 2: I definitely agree because if you're always posting these things. "Oh, I did this awesome thing, and I did this other awesome thing," it almost gives this image of "I'm better than you, I don't have problems, I don't have struggles," but if you talk about problems that you probably have had and then you attach it to things that you've done to solve them using church quotes and stuff like that, it really people a chance to "Oh, I struggle with that too, I have problems too, I can turn to the Church, I can turn to the gospel."

Moderator: Have you had success doing that?

Participant 2: No.

Moderator: What would you say why you are not having success? Your reach?

Participant 2: Number one, I hardly have any non-member friends period, especially not of Facebook.

Moderator: Participant 2, coming from a non LDS background, do you have more friends that aren't members on your Facebook?

Participant 2: Almost everyone. A quarter are LDS, but everyone else isn't.

Moderator: What are you doing to find them and share the gospel?

Participant 2: Again, on being real on Facebook, I'm not afraid to share the wrongs in my life and the rights in my life and trying to put them in kind of in a combination. For example, last semester I didn't get into a nursing program and that was a huge piece or part of me. That was something I really wanted, and it wasn't a success, and I wasn't afraid to share my disappointment that that didn't happen, and I was able to also incorporate the fact that God has a plan for me, and I incorporated the Plan of Salvation within that, and I was able to relate to others in that sense that other religions that yeah, God does have plan for each one of us.

Moderator: Anything else that we need to cover?

Group member: You guys have really good things to say.

Moderator: If there's anything you feel inspired to say, please do.

Participant 3: I think the most important thing is just to always have the Spirit when you share the gospel on social media and to pray for opportunities. Pray for inspiration of what you need to share, and it will come.

Moderator: Participant 3 actually affected me in a way. She posted a picture of the Book of Mormon saying, "Happy Birthday, Book of Mormon!" When was this, what day?

Participant 3: September 22nd.

Moderator: so she posted a picture of the Book of Mormon and posted and put her little testimony on that, and I shared it and I liked it, and it was really effective, so creative ways really do help.

Participant 10: that's what I was going to say. To try and be creative if you can like I think prayer definitely helps with that because it's fun. People like the conference countdown because it's something more creative that they don't always see, I guess. But something I did want to share real fast that I felt inspired to do also was like a new thing because Conference only comes twice a year, and I kind of get sad that I only get to this twice a year, and so I started a new thing called "Voice of My

Servants,” and it’s another event. And it’s like the same idea but each week I just focus on a certain apostle and share like past talks of his. There’s so many good talks, you know, and then we forget about them, and so I post just like six or seven talks a week by that apostle, and so it’s like Elder Scott week, and like Elder Holland week, and so then we can be reminded and be like, so then people can become familiar with the Apostles and their words, so that’s another fun way. And you can keep going all year long; not just like twice a year. It’s good to watch it like one a day, I love it.

Moderator: Thank you. Thank you, all.

Appendix B

Consent Form

Purpose:

As Communication students we are conducting a study. You are invited to participate. The purpose of this study will be to discover how the gospel is being shared via social media. Specifically, we want to understand what methods are the most effective. We will use this information to gain deeper insight about this topic.

Procedures:

We will be requesting a room to conduct our focus group. If you participate in this study, you will be in a group of approximately 10–15 students. This meeting is expected to last approximately one hour. There will be a facilitator who will ask questions and facilitate the discussion, and note-takers to write down the ideas expressed within the group. The group discussion will be electronically recorded to provide for accuracy. If you volunteer to participate in this focus group, you will be asked some questions relating to your experience with sharing the gospel through social media. These questions will help us to better understand this subject. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time.

Benefits and Risks:

Your participation may benefit you and BYU—Idaho by helping to improve understanding about this subject. No risk greater than those experienced in ordinary conversation are anticipated. However, if something during the group causes discomfort, a list of campus resources are available where you can seek counseling. Everyone will be asked to respect the privacy of the other group members. All participants will be asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion, but it is important to understand that other people in the group with you may not keep all information private and confidential.

Confidentiality:

Anonymous data from this study will be analyzed by the Communication department staff and reported to Student Affairs administrators. No individual participant will be identified or linked to the results. Study records, including this consent form signed by you, may be inspected by the administrators. The results of this study may be presented at meetings and at a poster session; however, your identity will not be disclosed. All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential.

Consent:

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this focus group.

Participant's signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

James Richards 801-628-9349 or Weston Giles 805-433-3012

Email: ric12031@byui.edu

SHARING
THE GOSPEL
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA