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Social Media as a Tool for Evangelism Among Youth and Young Adults

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COMM 488 - Mass Communication and Society

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to answer the question of which social media platforms youth prefer and what types of content they prefer. Using data collected from a quantitative survey, this research seeks to identify the most-used social media platforms and most appealing formats of content so that Seventh-day Adventist churches, media organizations, and digital missionaries can more effectively utilize social media as a tool for evangelism among youth, defined as 15 to 24 years of age.

## **Introduction**

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gave His disciples a Great Commission saying, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Today, 2,000 years later, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church faces the challenge of how to effectively continue this mission.

## **Literature Review**

For the purpose of discovering the remaining gaps, this literature review synthesizes a number of sources from the existing body of knowledge in the area of religion and new media. Previous research has explored the communication methods employed by the SDA Church to spread its message throughout history, and whether or not social media has become as popular of a communication channel for churches and religious topics as it has among other organizations and social issues (Reddy, 2019; Tudor & Herteliu, 2016). This literature review examines two main themes: first, the SDA Church’s prevalent use of traditional media and underutilization of new media and second, the growth of social media use and the need to invest in digital evangelism on such platforms.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory, which was chosen as the theoretical framework for this research, was first introduced by Elihu Katz (Katz et al., 1973). When it was introduced, this was a contemporary idea. Previously, audiences were thought of simply as passive consumers of the media. However, this theory considers the notion that people use media for their benefit to fulfill specific needs unique to each individual. In this case, the members of an audience have active control and can dictate what information they would like to consume and for what purposes.

## **Use of Traditional Media**

The SDA Church has made thorough use of traditional media but underutilized newer technology, like social media, in spreading its message. Mike Megrove Reddy (2019) presented compelling statistics for the SDA Church's early growth and its use of various forms of communication: "The Seventh-day Adventist Church maximised all types of communication in order to spread and sustain their values and beliefs" (Reddy 2019, p. 9). Reddy accounts for 25,769 literature evangelists, 62 publishing houses and branches, 20 radio stations, 15 television stations, nine major internet websites, and three media production houses, as of 2014. However, the only mention of the SDA church's social media use in Reddy's (2019) research was the existence of a few official church accounts. Further, Reddy did not conduct an analysis studying the levels of engagement with any known social media accounts, and no conclusion was reached concerning their effectiveness in reaching their intended audiences.

Mihaela-Alexandra Tudor and Agnos-Millian Herteliu (2016) studied the European country with the largest SDA membership, Romania (Reddy, 2019). Their survey sought to find out "whether the dissemination of the Adventist religious spiritual message in general is adapted to the contemporary level of technological development" (Tudor & Herteliu 2016, p. 212). The survey revealed that printed materials are still preferred by Romanian clergy for devotionals, Sabbath School, and sermon preparation. However, they have utilized new media platforms such as livestreams, YouTube, and Facebook for watching evangelistic programs. Tudor and Herteliu also found that while 96.8% of the Romanian SDA Church leaders used Facebook, only 6.5% use Instagram (2016).

Only 21% use the internet regularly (at least once a week) to promote religion and only 9% share their faith experiences online. David R. Dunaetz (2019) introduced the Mum Effect as a viable explanation for why social media is not more widely used to spread the Gospel. The

Mum Effect occurs when a person is reluctant to share bad news. This is often due to his instinct to protect his reputation. According to Dunaetz, given the pervasive negative stereotypes on social media about Christians, many of them are reluctant to share their faith publicly online. This suggests that Reddy's (2019) conclusion that the SDA Church has successfully utilized various forms of communication to spread the Gospel is incomplete, as it fails to recognize the potential still to be gained from social media.

A 2017-2018 study by the Global Church Member Survey indicated that 49% of SDA Church members never read or respond to SDA social media, 56% of SDA Church members never respond to Christian social media of any or no denomination, and only 25% of SDA Church members use social media multiple times per day ("Social Media," 2018). At first, this may seem to suggest that social media is not an effective tool for evangelism, since few church members regularly use it. However, these statistics are not shocking when considered along with the fact that the average age of an SDA believer in the U.S. is 50 years and the majority of social media users are younger (McChesney, 2016).

In another study, Emmanuel-Lugard Nduka and John McGuire (2017) found five themes among Catholic college students, three of which are highly relevant to this research: 1) the everyday use of new media, 2) the Catholic Church buried in tradition, and 3) failure to program toward youth. The first of these themes focuses on the prevalence of technology in the lives of college-age young adults. Nduka and McGuire (2017) found that the Catholic college students in their sample would like the Catholic Church's message to be disseminated in "our [their] language." The second of these themes is that the Catholic Church seems to be "buried in tradition." This aligns with Dunaetz's (2019) research, which concluded that social media and other forms of new media are not regularly used to address religious topics. The third theme

Nduka and McGuire's (2017) college-age sample concluded was that the Catholic Church's failure to cater the message to their age group. The messages "need to be directed toward young adults specifically in order to captivate their interest and hold their attention" (p. 8).

### **Growth of Social Media Use**

While such research has revealed the unfilled potential of social media as a tool for evangelism, other research demonstrates why it is important to use social media to spread the Gospel. According to the Media Richness Theory developed by Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel (1984), various forms of media can be placed along a richness continuum, measuring various factors such as the speed of feedback and the ability to present uniquely tailored messages, among others. Consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, John Carlson (1999) added to this, developing the Channel Expansion Theory which explains that different people perceive different channels for communication more or less "rich" than other forms of media.

Research by Common Sense Media found that the percentage of teenagers who reported using social media multiple times per day increased by 36% between 2012 and 2018 (Richter 2018). Presumably, the widespread use of social media among teenagers would indicate that this demographic perceives social media as having high media richness for the purpose of fulfilling their needs, according to the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Lance Strate (2017) adds insight to this in his analysis of Marshall McLuhan's book *Understanding Media*. Strate (2017) observed, "We generally ignore the medium or technology and only pay attention to its content or the way that it is used, but it is the medium that has the greater impact" (p. 1). Given social media's high level of information richness and the importance of selecting an effective medium for a message, it is crucial for the SDA Church to utilize social media for evangelism among youth.

Amanda Ratcliff et al. (2017) also used the Uses and Gratifications Theory to analyze how people use social media to satisfy specifically their religious needs. They explored what they called “personalized religion,” religion tailored to meet personal needs with weak adherence to religious authority. They found that positive attitudes toward social media decreased as religiosity increased. This would indicate that those with a lower level of self-reported religiosity are the ones who use social media more frequently and consistency. This is the precise group that needs to be better reached with the Christian message, thus reinforcing the notion that social media is a good place to invest in efforts of evangelism.

LifeWay Research (2018) found, from a survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors, that 84% of churches had a Facebook page. However, in another study, the Pew Research Center cited 44% of Facebook users between the ages of 18 and 29 deleting the Facebook app from their mobile phones sometime in the past year to engage with content on other platforms (Perrin, 2018). Unfortunately, LifeWay Research’s survey showed that few churches used platforms other than Facebook. For example, only 13% used Instagram. Further, simply having a social media page does not guarantee that it is effective.

This research addresses this problem in two ways. First, it seeks to identify which social media platforms are currently most used among youth. And second, it seeks to identify what type of content youth prefer to see. In doing so, this research aims to unite youth with the Seventh-day Adventist Church by bringing them its message in the places they spend their time, and in the format(s) they enjoy.

### **Research Questions**

A review of literature concerning religion and new media suggests that religious



organizations have not successfully harnessed the capacity of social media as a tool for evangelism, despite the growing need to invest in ministry across digital platforms. This research aims to answer the question of how SDA social media pages can utilize their platforms to more effectively engage with their audiences in order to build stronger digital spiritual communities that attract youth to the Church. The primary question for this research is: How can SDA churches, media organizations, and individuals more effectively utilize social media as a tool for evangelism among youth? More specifically, this research will explore the questions of 1) Which social media platforms do youth prefer? and 2) What kind of content do they prefer?

From its founding, the Adventist movement began utilizing the communication resources available for evangelism. The SDA Church has been at the cutting edge of communication technology throughout history and in order to fulfill the Great Commission, it is critical that the Church continue to stay up to date. As youth grow their presence on social media, the Church must find a way to approach this audience with content that appeals to their demographic. This study examines the most effective way to fulfill the potential of social media so that SDA social media content resonates with the younger audience that the Church is trying to reach and bring in.

### **Methods**

Having analyzed previous studies, this research administered a quantitative survey through Google Forms (see Appendix D) collecting data from 375 high school and college-age students to seek answers to the primary questions: 1) Which social media platforms do youth prefer? And 2) Which formats of content do youth prefer? The researcher also included three open-ended questions to gain deeper insight into survey responses. Finally, the researcher conducted an email interview with the owner of a Christian-themed Instagram page with an

88.3K following, and a Zoom interview with Seventh-day Adventist social media content creators Justin Khoe and Kaleb Eisele.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This research was limited to schools in the U.S., but not limited to U.S. citizens, as international students studying in the U.S. may be included in the sample. The findings from this research should not be generalized as true for all youth without acknowledging that the SDA Church is a global organization. Because of this, social media may not be an effective platform for evangelism if it is not a prevalent communication channel among youth, due to limited internet access or other factors.

This research is also limited in its definition of “youth” as 15- to 24-year-olds, the assumed age of high school and college students. This research assumed that participants answered all survey questions as accurately as possible. And finally, this research was limited in its control of the participating sample. The researcher reached the sample by sending recruitment emails to 102 SDA high schools and eight colleges across the U.S. (See Appendix A). From this group, nine high schools and three colleges proceeded to disseminate the survey among its students. The researcher also shared a link to the survey on a personal website and personal social media accounts, encouraging snowball sampling from there.

Finally, this research is limited because social media trends are ever-evolving. What is popular in April of 2021 will not withstand the test of time. So, it is crucial that similar surveys be distributed periodically so that creators remain up-to-date with what their audience is looking for. In addition, future research could also study the use of social media among people under the age of 15 and over the age of 24. Finally, since the SDA denomination is a global church, further research could also explore similar social media use trends in other countries.

## Findings

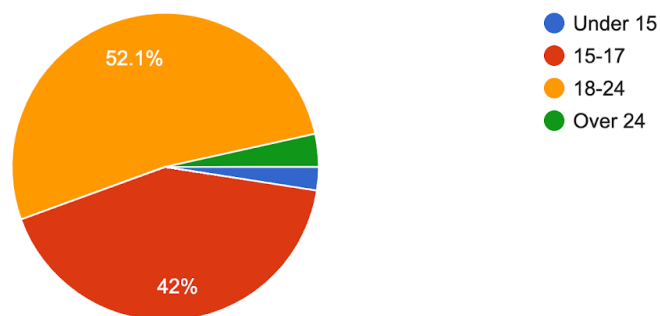
The survey was divided into four sections: demographics, levels of religious interest/affiliation, general social media use, and the intersection of religion and social media.

### *Demographics*

The quantitative survey collected 375 responses. Forty-two percent of respondents were ages 15 to 17, and 52% of respondents were ages 18 to 24. One error in the survey design was corrected part-way through the data collection. The first four questions of the survey were intended to serve as filtering questions and were designated to send respondents outside of the target demographic to the end of the survey. However, by not creating a new section after each filtering question, 21 respondents (6%) managed to complete the entire survey although they were under the age of 15 or over 24.

What is your age?

405 responses



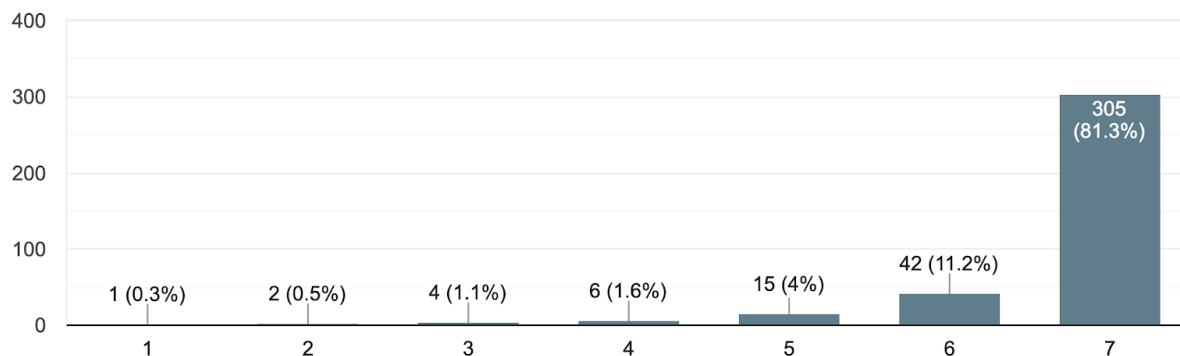
All respondents reported that they currently live, work, or study in the U.S. Responses were female dominated: 65% identified as female, 33% identified as male, and 2% preferred not to answer.

### *Religiosity*

On a scale of one to seven, 93% of respondents were already very familiar (six or seven on the scale) with the SDA Church before beginning this survey.

How familiar are you with the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

375 responses



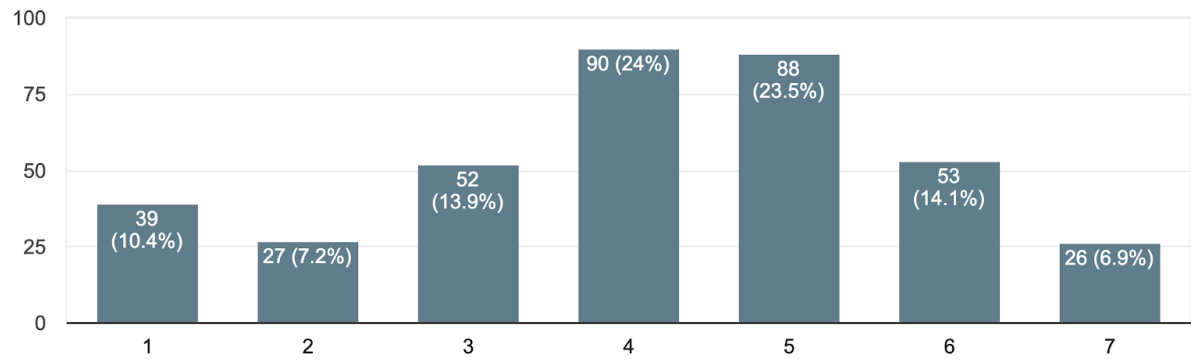
### ***Perceived Impact***

When asked how strongly their media consumption impacted their faith, responses were scattered. However, 24% of respondents selected the middle option, four, and 24% selected five. This would suggest that many believe their media consumption does impact their faith, but not strongly. This is interesting to note since, whether or not it is accurate, the self-perception among youth is that their religious media consumption does not strongly impact their faith. So, there is the possibility that even if SDA creators share appealing content on the appropriate platforms,

even social media will not be an effective tool for evangelism.

The religious media I consume strongly impacts my faith.

375 responses



### ***Preferred Media***

The most popular platform for religious media consumption was music; 75% selected this option. Traditional presentations and sermons were the second most popular platform, as 61% selected this option. Books and audiobooks came in third with 50.7%, and social media came in fourth with 37%. However, only 23% said they use social media for spiritual inspiration.

### ***Preferred Platforms***

Instagram was the most popular platform, as 47% answered that they spent more time there than on other social media platforms. TikTok was the second most popular as 20% selected it as their most-used platform, and YouTube was third with 16%. According to the survey, 73% do not regularly use Twitter and 70% do not regularly use Facebook.

### ***Format***

The most preferred formats are short videos (80%) and photos (79%). However, responses indicate that respondents dislike blocks of text, defined as three sentences or longer, and videos longer than three minutes.

### ***Content***

Quotes, facts, and infographics were the second most popular type of content (59%). This may seem like an unusual result. However, it lends itself well to evangelistic content. Formatting a brief message as a photo for posting as a quote, fact, or infographic may help to catch the eyes of young adults who would otherwise overlook written text.

The most popular type of content was memes/comics. To explore this result further, an email interview was held with the owner of the Instagram account @ChristiansWhoCurseSometimes (CWCS) which, as of May 2 2021, has 88.3K followers. “The name is important because cursing is one thing that we tend to be so judgmental when we

hear others do it,” noted the owner. “Yet many Christians do it themselves and don’t want to be judged for making a mistake. I think that’s how all Christians should strive to be, loving but not overly judgmental.” The owner of this account strives to maintain anonymity but introduced himself as a thirty-something-year-old married father of two from Minnesota. With a background working in television and radio while volunteering for various young adult ministries at church, the CWCS owner launched an Instagram account that harnesses the power of humor and dedicates its profile feed to Christian-related memes. However, CWCS also explores deep, insightful topics on the Instagram Stories which expire after 24 hours: “There isn’t much strategy to how I present deeper topics in contrast to the memes, I just like them being two different experiences,” he said. “The timeline is for the funny posts, and the stories are for the deeper topics and community building. I prefer putting them in stories because stories are so much more interactive and easier for people to tell me their thoughts. It feels safe and anonymous to share how they really feel, knowing it could be shared anonymously.”

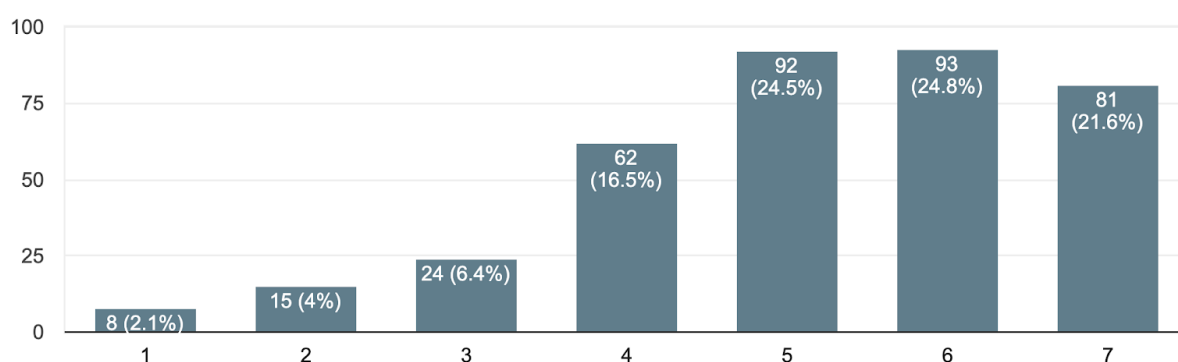
He says the mission of the CWCS page is “for Christians to have a safe, nonjudgmental space to support others, but also feel excited to ask questions and grow their faith on topics most churches don’t talk about...I think, as Christians, we need to be more open to learning. We can get stuck in our segmented denominational thinking, and social media can make our faith deeper and stronger than ever when we talk and share with others.”

### ***Perceived Effectiveness***

Justin Khoe is an SDA YouTuber who strives to “embody the principles of the Kingdom” with his content and seeks to target the “spiritually curious.” In his interview, Khoe observed that, “If the Church is to survive, there needs to be a shift in the way ‘church’ is defined” (J. Khoe, personal communication, April 20, 2021).

When asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “Social media is an effective platform for evangelizing,” on a scale of one to seven, 25% of respondents answered five, 25% answered six, and 22% answered seven. This totals to 71% answering on the “agree” side of the scale.

Social media is an effective platform for evangelizing. \*For the sake of this survey, evangelism refers to the explicit advocacy of the Gospel (i.e. d...mony, sharing Bible verses or religious topics etc.)  
375 responses



### **Reasons Social Media is an Effective Platform for Evangelizing.**

A follow-up question to this allowed respondents to submit open-ended explanations for why they believe social media is or is not an effective platform for evangelizing. Those who answered that it is an effective platform pointed out that many people use social media, specifically youth, and that it is an efficient method for reaching a large quantity of people from all over the world with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

One respondent wrote, “Christians on IG [Instagram] have become very popular because of their vulnerability and transparency and a lot of people appreciate that because they are relatable. Social media gives people a chance to connect with other Christians around the world or from different states that, without social media, they may have not had the chance to. It’s a great



opportunity to find and relate to other Christians and share the gospel with a bigger audience!”

They also pointed out that social media is accessible, free, fast, convenient, and posts are easy to reshare. They observed it is a safe way to evangelize when people are encouraged to socially distance due to COVID-19, and they appreciate that it is non-confrontational, since people can simply unfollow an account or scroll past a post. “Through social media, people can freely browse whatever material they wish or simply scroll past,” explained one respondent. “Since on social media, you aren’t forced to watch or listen to something, I feel like people would be more receptive to religious topics. Look at TikTok. There are all sorts of religious videos and I’ve seen many non-Christians express interest or have genuine inquiries through their comments.”

Many respondents, personally testified that social media had positively impacted their spiritual lives. One respondent wrote, “Social media, specifically TikTok, has brought me closer to God and has inspired me to read my Bible more often, while still respecting my beliefs and not imposing one specific viewpoint on me.” Another wrote, “Something as simple as an inspirational spiritual quote or a Bible verse on Instagram that I see, can help me get through the day.”

### **Reasons Social Media is *Not* an Effective Platform for Evangelizing.**

Those who believe social media is not an effective platform for evangelizing expressed concerns that social media, as a whole, is too distracting and shallow of a platform for discussing religious topics and that since technical algorithms seek to provide people with content that aligns with their existing interests, it would be difficult to reach people who do not already consume religious content. They also suggest that social media is too secular of a platform and that people will become defensive if they see religious content in a place where they were not

planning to.

“Social media is the last place my friends and I would go to learn about religious matters or grow spiritually,” wrote one respondent. Another respondent wrote, “Social media isn’t a good platform for evangelism because people normally get on social media to pass extra time. People aren’t going to pay attention unless it is shown in a creative way.” Some pointed out that poorly designed content reflects badly on Christianity, in general, and that much of the content they have seen is “cheesy,” or “forced.” Others suggest that when religious content is portrayed on social media it is impersonal and individuals who openly share about their religion may make an impact, but that organizational accounts that do not have a “face” associated with them do not: “People are not looking for a sermon, they’re looking for someone just like them,” said one respondent.

Others expressed concern that it is difficult to explain religious concepts in a short amount of time and that attempts to do so may misrepresent God and mislead people. Some shared their frustration with social media content that portrays a “holier-than-thou” attitude. Still others observed that religious content may “conform to worldly expectations,” and lose its potency as a form of evangelism in an effort to attract attention.

Finally, some who answered in the middle, proposed that social media is an effective tool for evangelism in the sense that it is a good place to start building relationships. These relationships can then grow into face-to-face conversations, which they maintain are the most effective forms of evangelism. One respondent explained, “I believe the best evangelical opportunities come with intimate conversations between a few people, and that effect can’t be accomplished with a post directed at thousands.”

Inspired by Brandon Stanton’s project, “Humans of New York,” Kaleb Eisele launched

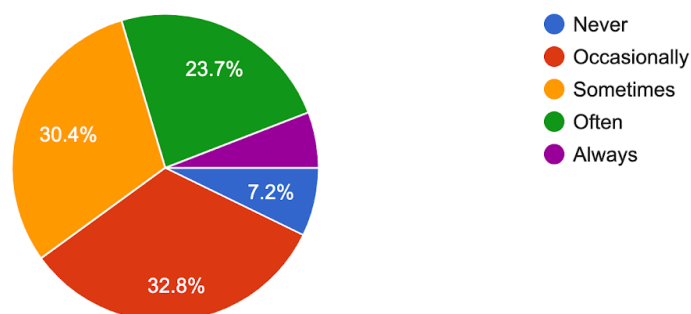
“Humans of Adventism” with the goal of building long-lasting relationships between Adventists (K. Eisele, personal communication, April 20, 2021). Eisele’s project began on Facebook and attracted 13K followers, and has now expanded to Instagram where it has attracted 6.7K followers. “When you use social media, especially with religion, you need to use it intentionally; not in a reactionary way,” Eisele said. “...Learn as much as you can about how it works, and use that in a way that matches how Jesus would live His life and interact with people.”

### ***Current Exposure to Religious Content on Social Media***

When asked how often they saw religious content on social media, 33% said occasionally, and 30% answered sometimes. This suggests that they are not regularly exposed to religious content on social media.

How frequently do you see religious content in your social media feed?

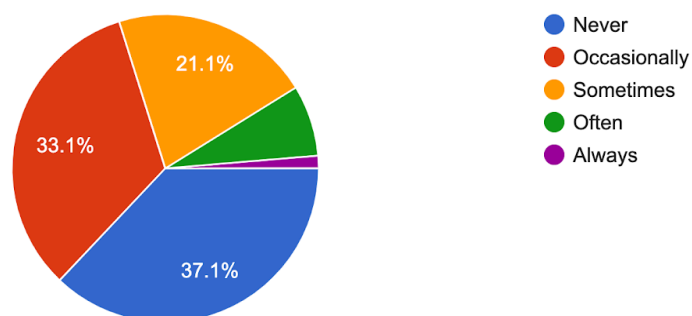
375 responses



Further, when asked how often they themselves post or reshare religious social media content, most responses were never or occasionally.

How frequently do you share/re-share religious content on social media?

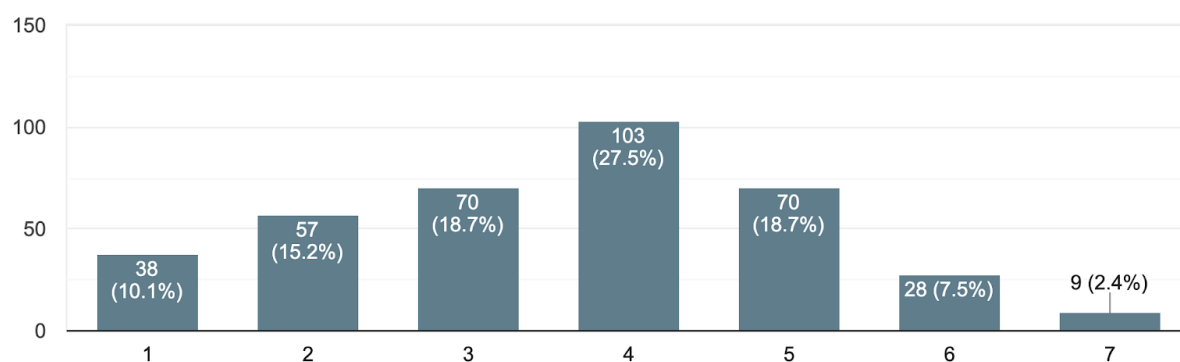
375 responses



When asked to rate, on a scale of one to seven, the SDA-affiliated social media content they had seen, the most responses fell in the middle at four (28%). And on either side, three and five each received 19% of the respondents' votes. Further, when asked, overall, how well the Seventh-day Adventists have utilized social media as a tool for evangelism on a scale from one to seven, most respondents answered three or four.

How appealing (interesting, aesthetic, relevant, etc.) is the Seventh-day Adventist social media content that you have seen?

375 responses



### *Requested Topics to Address on Social Media*

One open-ended qualitative question asked what topics respondents would like to see SDA social media content creators address. Analysis of these responses yielded eight themes: theology, social issues, taboo topics, relationships, personal testimonies, everyday life, spiritual growth, and service. For an extensive list of the suggested topics in each of these categories, see Appendix B.

One respondent wrote, “I think that we need to start talking about harder topics even if we don’t know all of the answers. ...The conversation tends to be more about ‘saving’ teenagers instead of empowering them to lead their peers to Jesus. ...There are systemic failures in our [the SDA] church. When teenagers see the world making more progress in equality and having the hard conversations that our church, in general, isn’t having, it looks like we are saying that these things are okay and that nothing can change. Discussions with multiple points of view will not only talk about things that are interesting to teens, but will also show them that we can live in harmony even if we disagree.”

### ***Suggestions for Improvement***

Another open-ended qualitative question requested feedback for how Seventh-day Adventists can better utilize social media as a tool for evangelism. Most responses fell into one of three categories: content, activity, or attitude. For an extensive list of the feedback given under each of these categories, see Appendix C. “Seventh-day Adventists should be encouraged to share more religious topics on social media, and I think that having a large variety of SDA bloggers, YouTubers, content creators, etc. can help draw many more people to the faith,” wrote one respondent. “I also think that the SDA church should put a bigger emphasis on witnessing/evangelism in general, and what easier place to start than one’s social media accounts.” Responses also encouraged content creators to glean inspiration from the Instagram

accounts @HerTrueWorth, @Forerunner777, @HumansOfAdventism, and @TryTheWay.

“One of the saddest things I found out is that whenever there is a new technology, one of the first industries to utilize it for their agenda is the pornography industry, and one of the last to get involved with new technology is churches,” wrote the owner of CWCS. “Most churches have the impression that there is no need to be on Instagram, TikTok, or anything else, but can you imagine how many lives could change if they took the time to use social media to teach and lead others to Christ? It’s free, it’s easy to use, and nearly everyone is there. So, why wouldn’t people use it for evangelism?”

Finally, according to this survey, nearly three out of four youth in the United States between the ages of 15 and 24 spend at least one hour on social media each day. Further, only 23% currently use social media for spiritual inspiration, 62% would like to see more religious content on social media, and 74% say that seeing more appealing religious social media content would improve their view of the Church. All of these statistics suggest that there is a compelling opportunity for Seventh-day Adventist churches, media organizations, and digital missionaries to utilize social media as a tool for evangelism. This may involve training and educating church leaders who are willing to invest in learning the trends, or encouraging members to take advantage of their personal accounts as platforms for witnessing.

The data collected from this survey indicates that, right now, evangelistic social media content will be most effective if it is delivered through Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. When deciding what type of content to post, creatives should consider sharing memes, quotes, facts, and infographics in the formats of short videos and photos. And when selecting what topics to cover, creators should reference the list of suggestions gathered, through this survey, directly from the target audience.

Youth have questions and crave conversations that surround the real issues they are facing. By taking all of these factors, as well as direct suggestions for improvement, into consideration, SDA social media managers will better understand their audiences, and be better equipped to create content that appeals to youth.

### **Conclusion**

As technology continues to develop, the SDA Church must continue to adapt in order to strategically place the message of the Gospel where people will find and hear it. “Social media is the most effective tool the Church has encountered, other than the Holy Spirit, since the Great Commission,” Khoe said (J. Khoe, personal communication, April 20, 2021). As social media becomes an increasingly popular channel for connecting with and communicating to mass audiences of a younger demographic, it seems also to be an ideal platform for evangelizing to the rising generation of future Church leaders.

This research is particularly timely due to the COVID-19 pandemic requiring churches to be exceptionally creative and resourceful in their communication methods during a time when people are advised to limit face-to-face interaction. Further, on a larger scale, the implications of this study may help to spread the Gospel, via social media, more quickly and more widely in order to expedite the second coming of Christ.

Returning to the framework for this research, the Uses and Gratifications Theory understands that people actively pursue the media that will satisfy their needs. In order to reach youth effectively with evangelistic social media content, creators need to deliberately cater content to meet their needs. If Seventh-day Adventists can curate appealing content, perhaps it will attract the eyes of youth on social media and the hopeful message of the Gospel will fulfill the spiritual needs of sinful, broken human lives seeking answers and truth during their young, developing years.



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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Email

To whom it may concern:

I am a mass communication major at Southern Adventist University working on my senior research project and I would like to include students from [name of school] in the sample. My research aims to answer the question: which social media platforms do youth (defined as 15 to 24 years of age) prefer and what types of content do they prefer? Using data collected from a quantitative survey, this research seeks to identify the most-used social media platforms and most appealing formats content so that Seventh-day Adventist churches, media organizations, and digital missionaries can more effectively utilize social media as a tool for evangelism among youth. The larger my sample, the more accurate my results will be. So, please consider sharing the link below with your students. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me via email at [trisneybocala@southern.edu](mailto:trisneybocala@southern.edu). Attached is a PDF sample of the survey for your review.

<https://forms.gle/gTqK5LHdiZH3SoBfA>

Thank you for considering!

Trisney Bocala

## **Appendix B**

### **Religious Topics Youth Would Like to See Addressed on Social Media**

#### ***Theology***

- Clarifying myths of out-of-context verses
- Clarifying myths/attacks on Ellen White
- Historicity of the Bible
- SDA-unique doctrines explained
- Reconciliation of Old Testament and New Testament God
- Satan/how the Devil works
- Second Coming/Last Day events/Daniel and Revelation
- What it means to keep the Sabbath/what's allowed and not allowed
- Are other denominations going to heaven?

#### ***Social Issues***

- Homosexuality and the LGBTQIA+ community
- Intersectionality/racism and racial diversity
- Gender roles/sexism/misogyny (and women's ordination)
- Social justice
- Generational gap in Church leadership
- Interpersonal relations with other faiths, religions, etc., including non-religious people and atheists. Generally, how to coexist with others without feeling attacked when someone doesn't believe the way you do. How to respect others who do not believe in/do not practice your faith.

#### ***Taboo Topics***

- Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
- Anxiety & depression
- Sex
- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Bullying
- Cursing
- Pornography
- Drums/rhythm in music
- Jewelry and tattoos
- Abortion
- Meat consumption

### *Relationships*

- Parenting
- Finding wholesome friends
- Singleness
- Dating
- Marriage
- Divorce

### *Testimonies*

- Personal stories of God's work in someone's life
- Missionary miracles
- Outreach successes

### *Everyday Life*

- Navigating a secular workplace as an Adventist
- Hope during current events in light of God's promises
- School/value of education
- Intersection of career and calling
- How to be cheerful and enjoy life
- Diet and health message

### *Personal Spiritual Growth*

- How to continue growing your relationship with God when you have a pretty good relationship with Him. How do you “fall in love” with God? How do you not get bored with God and Church? How do you “spice up” your devotion time? What are a lot of different ways you could do devotions?
- Salvation/God's personal love and grace, accepting others
- Ways to build a relationship with God other than church and Bible study
- How to start a relationship with God
- How to approach those in sin without judgment
- Prayer life/how to pray
- How to study the Bible
- Encouraging verses/quotes/daily reminders
- Christlike character/Fruits of the Spirit/not being “of the world”
- Navigating grief
- Forgiveness
- Spiritual stagnation

- Finding/feeling peace
- Avoiding temptation

### *Service*

- How youth can get involved
- Media projects
- How to witness
- Outreach ideas
- How individuals can use social media as a tool for evangelism

## Appendix C

### **Suggestions for How Seventh-day Adventists Can Better Utilize Social Media as a Tool for Evangelism**

#### ***Content***

- Discuss “relevant” topics (see suggestions in Appendix B)
- More interactive content/trivia/Q&A sessions
- Make content aesthetically pleasing, give the account a theme and a professional look  
youth are more likely to reshare content that is aesthetically appealing
- Give posts better titles
- Write longer captions and add value beyond just quoting a Bible verse
- Share multiple perspectives on a topic
- Use humor/memes
- Videos (music videos, short videos, TikToks, by teens for teens, daily devotionals)
- Encourage individuals to be influencers for Christ/digital discipleship/individual contributions: show us the books used for devotionals, meals, lifestyle
- Just post more outings with the church to bring in people from the community
- Hosting events on social media
- Build on previous posts to provide long-term content in small chunks that encourage people to watch for future posts

#### ***Activity***

- Have youth create the content
- Interact more consistently with followers
- Encourage youth pastors to interact on social media



- Pay for promotion/advertising/sponsorship
- Be consistent and persistent
- Just put out more content
- Invest in social media managers who are informed about the current trends

### **Attitude**

- Make it a safe place for anyone to come to (this may include turning off comments to prevent audience from engaging in hostile arguments)
- See teenage phone use as an opportunity for evangelism, not an addiction
- Be raw, have emotion, and have passion

## Appendix D

### **Social Media as a Tool for Evangelism**

This survey is part of a research study seeking to determine how Seventh-day Adventists can most effectively use social media to attract youth and young adults to the Church. Please answer each question as accurately and honestly as possible. All responses are anonymous. The survey takes approximately 10 minutes. By proceeding with this survey, you agree that your participation is voluntary. Thank you!

\* = required

My decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary.\*

- Yes
- No

### ***Demographics***

What is your age?\*

- Under 15
- 15-17
- 18-24
- Over 24

Do you currently live, work, or study in the United States?\*

- Yes
- No

Do you regularly use at least one social media platform?\*

- Yes
- No

What is your sex?\*

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer
- \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnicity? (check all that apply)\*

- Asian
- White or Caucasian
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Prefer not to say
- \_\_\_\_\_

***Religious Interest***

How familiar are you with the Seventh-day Adventist Church?\*

- 1 (never heard of it)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 (very familiar)

The media I consume strongly impacts my faith.\*

- 1 (strongly disagree)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 (strongly agree)

How do you prefer to consume religious media?\*

- Books/audiobooks
- Magazines/pamphlets
- Blogs
- Vlogs
- Film/TV
- Music
- Podcasts
- Presentations/sermons
- Social media
- \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Social Media Use***

For what purpose(s) do you use social media?\*

- Share photos/videos
- Share thoughts, opinions, and/or advice

- Keep up with friends
- Keep up with news
- Follow celebrities/influencers
- Career networking
- Entertainment (exclusively for amusement)
- Shopping
- Spiritual inspiration
- \_\_\_\_\_

Which social media platform do you spend the MOST time on?\*

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- TikTok
- Snapchat
- Pinterest
- YouTube
- \_\_\_\_\_

Which social media platform(s) do you NOT use regularly?\*

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- TikTok
- Snapchat

- Pinterest
- YouTube
- \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how much time do you spend on social media each day?\*

- 0-30 minutes
- 30 minutes - 1 hour
- 1-3 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 5+ hours

What formats of content do you prefer?\*

- Photo
- Short video (less than 3 minutes)
- Short audio (less than 3 minutes)
- Short text (less than 3 sentences)
- Longer video (3+ minutes)
- Longer audio (3+ minutes)
- Longer text (3+ sentences)
- \_\_\_\_\_

What formats of content do you dislike?\*

- Photo
- Short video (less than 3 minutes)
- Short audio (less than 3 minutes)
- Short text (less than 3 sentences)

- Longer video (3+ minutes)
- Longer audio (3+ minutes)
- Longer text (3+ sentences)
- \_\_\_\_\_

What specific types of content do you prefer to see on social media?\*

- Landscape photography
- Portrait photography
- Candid people photography
- Art/illustrations
- GIFs/animations
- Quotes/facts/infographics
- Tutorials
- Links to external content
- Opinions/advice
- Poetry
- Livestreams
- Personal stories (written or documentary)
- Short-form videos
- Vlogs/longer videos
- Memes/comics
- Quizzes, polls, contests, challenges
- \_\_\_\_\_

What specific types of content do you prefer NOT to see on social media?\*

- Landscape photography
- Portrait photography
- Candid people photography
- Art/illustrations
- GIFs/animations
- Quotes/facts/infographics
- Tutorials
- Links to external content
- Opinions/advice
- Poetry
- Livestreams
- Personal stories (written or documentary)
- Short-form videos
- Vlogs/longer videos
- Memes/comics
- Quizzes, polls, contests, challenges
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Religion and Social Media

Social media is an effective platform for evangelizing. \*For the sake of this survey, evangelism refers to the explicit advocacy of the Gospel (i.e., discussing God, prayer or salvation, telling a personal testimony, sharing Bible verses or religious topics, etc.)\*

- 1 (strongly disagree)
- 2



- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 (strongly agree)

What is the reason for your previous answer?

---

How frequently do you see religious content in your social media feed?\*

- Never
- Occasionally
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

How frequently do you share/re-share content on social media?\*

- Never
- Occasionally
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

Would you like to see more religious content on social media?\*

- Yes
- No
- \_\_\_\_\_

How appealing (interesting, aesthetic, relevant, etc.) is the Seventh-day Adventist social media content that you have seen?\*

- 1 (unappealing)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 (very appealing)

If Seventh-day Adventists (individuals and organizations) produced more appealing religious social media content, would it improve your view of the Church?\*

- Yes
- No

Overall how well have Seventh-day Adventists utilized social media as a tool for evangelism?\*

- 1 (very poorly)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 (very well)

What religious topics would you like to see discussed on social media?

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How can Seventh-day Adventists better utilize social media as a tool for evangelism?

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If you are willing to be interviewed to give deeper insight into survey responses, please share your email.

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April 8, 2021

**Principal Investigator:** Trisney Bocala

**Research Project:** Social Media as a Tool for Evangelism Among Youth and Young Adults

**IRB Tracking Number:** 2020-2021-056

Dear Trisney,

It is a delight to inform you that your research protocol titled "Social Media as a Tool for Evangelism Among Youth and Young Adults" has been approved by the Southern Adventist University Institutional Research Board according to the proposal. You are now authorized to proceed with the project as outlined. This approval expires May 31, 2021.

As a principal researcher, you have the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the study, adherence to ethical standards, and protection of the rights and welfare of human participants. As you proceed with your research, you are expected to:

- 1) Conduct the study according to the approved protocol.
- 2) Make no changes to the approved study. If changes are necessary, proceed with one of the following:
  - a) For minor changes to this protocol, please notify IRB by submitting an IRB Form B and proceed after its approval.
  - b) For substantial changes, submit a new IRB Form A and proceed after its approval.
- 3) Use the approved procedure and forms for obtaining informed consent and data.
- 4) Promptly report any significant adverse events to the IRB within five working days of occurrence using an Adverse Report Form.

All forms must be submitted to [irb@southern.edu](mailto:irb@southern.edu).

We wish you many blessings as you move forward with this study and look forward to reading your findings when they are ready. If there is anything else we can do to assist you with this research study, please contact us.

Always in His service,

*Cynthia M. Gettys, PhD*

**Director, Center for Teaching Excellence  
and Biblical Foundations of Faith and Learning  
Chair, Institutional Review Board**  
Southern Adventist University

**office.** 423.236.2285  
**cell.** 423.227.2352  
**address.** PO Box 370, Collegedale, TN 37315

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel and watch over you." Psalm 32:8

**Responsibility – Input – Strategic – Learner – Achiever**