Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion

"I'm a Mormon Feminist": How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement

Jessica Finnigan*

Institute of Continuing Education
University of Cambridge
Cambridge, United Kingdom

Nancy Ross

Fine Arts Department
Dixie State University
St. George, Utah

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*jessicafinnigan@gmail.com

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Jessica Finnigan

Institute of Continuing Education
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Abstract

In this article, we explore ways in which Mormon feminists balance their membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and their desire for gender equality. We examine how Mormon feminists used social media in their activist campaigns of 2012–2013. This study includes the first academic survey of online Mormon feminists, comprising 1,862 self-identified Mormon feminists. We also studied Mormon feminist Facebook groups and blogs from 2004 to 2013. The findings show that Mormon feminists used social media to connect with one another and vet ideas as they navigate the potential pitfalls inherent in religious feminist activism.

In December 2012 the *Los Angeles Times* published an article entitled "For Mormon Feminists, Progress with an Asterisk" (Glionna 2012). The same day, *Jezebel* published a similar article, "Mormon Women Are 'Admired' but Still Not Equal" (Baker 2012). Baker asks, "So how can self-described feminists also be Mormon?" She concludes that Mormon feminism is an oxymoron and an unattainable identity, as Mormonism is a religion that is steeped in patriarchal authority. The same question has been reiterated in a number of publications over the last few decades (Basquiat 2001; Bell 1976; Dodwell 2003; Stack 1991). The same message is heard by Mormon feminists from their orthodox friends and family and from the leadership of the Church of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Such questions rely on a false binary between liberal feminism and a conservative religion, implying a lack of possible overlap or middle ground.

The situation for Mormon feminists today is different from that of previous generations. Mormon feminists use social media to connect previously isolated individuals and bring them into online communities that function as support networks. Mormon feminists started using blogs in the 2000s and recently expanded into closed Facebook groups. The use of Facebook groups coincides with the recent wave of Mormon feminist activism at the beginning of 2012.

There is some scholarship on how the Internet disrupts organized religion (Campbell 2010), but there is none on how social movements, such as Mormon feminism, use the Internet to advance and promote their cause within a larger religious community. In this study, we tracked the development of online Mormon feminist activism and identified how Mormon feminists use the Internet to raise awareness of issues and promote campaigns. We located Mormon feminist communities in different forms of social media and examined how they interact online. We concluded that social media make up an essential element in how Mormon feminists navigate the middle ground between conservative Mormonism and liberal feminism.

BACKGROUND

Activism within the LDS Church has a complicated history. Early female leaders mounted internal battles against polygamy in the 1840s, resulting in the disbanding of the Relief Society, the LDS Church's organization for women, from 1844 to 1868 (Derr, Cannon, and Beecher 2002; Newell and Avery 1994). Many scholars comment on the pro–women's suffrage position of LDS Church members and leaders in the United States, but they fail to recognize that this activism existed outside LDS Church policy and doctrine (Iversen 1984).

The ratification process and the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1970s and early 1980s, specifically the active anti-ERA position of the LDS Church, brought forth a resurgence of Mormon feminist activism. This included

civil disobedience, writing, and public speaking in favor of the ERA and in opposition to LDS Church leaders (Bradley 2005). In 1979, involvement in pro-ERA campaigns resulted in the excommunication—the most severe ecclesiastical punishment—of Sonia Johnson, an outspoken advocate for the group Mormons for ERA (Bradley 2005). Johnson's excommunication served as a warning to other feminists and pushed Mormon feminist conversations back into living rooms and small discussion groups (Bradley 2005).

After the failure to ratify the ERA, Mormon feminists continued to write, speak, and publish despite fear of church discipline (Bradley 2005). LDS Church leaders spoke openly about the dangers of church members reading non-church-approved texts and attending symposia that had not been officially endorsed by the LDS Church (Lindholm 2010). High-ranking LDS Church officials referred to feminists as one of the three greatest dangers to the Church (Packer 1993). Publications such as *Women and Authority* (Hanks 1992), which explored Mormon women's relationship to authority in the LDS Church and the decline of women's authority in the 20th century, resulted in a renewed round of church discipline. Six scholars were excommunicated in September 1993 (Lindholm 2010; *New York Times* 1993). The pattern of backlash and the accompanying high social cost to individuals who participated in Mormon feminism during those decades pushed visible collective movements underground and caused some commentators to ask whether Mormon feminism was dead (Stack 2003).

The Internet has reshaped Mormon feminism. In 2004, Lisa Patterson Butterworth founded the *Feminist Mormon Housewives* blog, providing 21st-century Mormon feminists with a discussion space (Cohen 2005). In subsequent years, Mormon feminists started other blogs, such as *The Exponent*, *Zelophehad's Daughters*, and countless others. Facebook added another dimension to the Mormon feminist community, allowing previously isolated individuals to meet and discuss issues in private groups.

LDS Church leaders were aware of Mormon feminist activism as a result of a series of campaigns in 2012 and 2013. In January 2013, Elaine Dalton, then General Young Women's President, stated:

> Young women, you will be the ones who will provide the example of virtuous womanhood and motherhood. You will continue to be virtuous, lovely, praiseworthy and of good report. You will also be the ones to provide an example of family life in a time when families are under attack, being redefined and disintegrating. You will understand your roles and your responsibilities and *thus will see no need to lobby for rights* (Dalton 2013; Stack 2013b).

In August 2013, Elder M. Russell Ballard, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said that Church members should be wary of the power of persuasion that is inherent in the Internet (Clegg 2013; Holman 2013). Ballard's talk

also demonstrates the often contradictory statements about womanhood and female identity in the LDS Church, as he emphasizes the importance of women and at the same time limits their roles in the church.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To some scholars, the combination of liberal feminist and conservative patriarchal Mormonism appears to be an oxymoron (Basquiat 2001; Bell 1976; Dodwell 2003; Stack 1991). The wider literature on women and religion has often drawn the same conclusion (Israel-Cohen 2012). Previous sociological literature on Mormon feminism is limited, and scholars have yet to document the complex identities and lives of Mormon feminists. Mihelich and Storrs (2003) discuss women's embedded resistance within the LDS Church. Some scholarship hints at the possible impact of the Internet and social media on Mormon feminism (Dodwell 2003).

Women within Mormonism occupy a space that is both similar to and different from that of women in other conservative religious traditions. Mormon theology offers uniquely female features, such as the belief in a Heavenly Mother (Hoyt 2007), although this doctrine has been less frequently addressed in recent years (Paulsen and Pulido 2011). Other Mormon scriptures make fleeting references to women, potentially barring LDS women from fully integrating into the Church (Anderson 1994). However, literature on feminist Mormon activism is quite limited.

Other religious communities have a history of feminist activism. For example, 18th-century Quaker women advocated the recovery of their former authority (Mack 2003). Israel-Cohen (2012), writing about feminism and orthodox Judaism, captures the nuance and complexity of active and passive resistance to gender-segregated religious norms. Some contemporary Muslim feminists look for empowerment through veiling, which Westerners have seen as a symbol of women's submission (Read and Bartkowski 2000; Jacinto 2006). Cadge (2004) has researched the effects of shifting gender boundaries between different cultural groups within Buddhist and non-Abrahamic traditions. Academic studies have not yet linked online activism with religious feminism in any tradition. In this article, we explore this relationship through an examination of online Mormon feminist activism.

Campbell (2010) addresses the topic of disruptive technology within religious communities. She highlights the negotiation process as essential to a religious community's ability to navigate the disruption of new technology. Negotiation occurs at both individual and institutional levels to overcome the disruption. The Internet has challenged the manner in which religious communities control their public image by providing a platform for disagreement and opportunities for members to report abuse to the public (Campbell 2010; Cheong et al. 2012; Rauch

2009). The Internet has affected the formation of individual and collective religious identities (Lovheim and Linderman 2005).

Social movements predate the Internet (Earl and Kimport 2011). Some scholars believe that the Internet's impact on activism is a case of business as usual, predicting that there will be no long-term impact on social movements (Earl and Kimport 2011; Diani 2000; Myers 1994; Tarrow 1998). Other scholars argue that the Internet has reshaped activism (Schussman and Earl 2004). Earl and Kimport (2011) show that the two bodies of literature are shaped by the different ways in which researchers measure success.

Early Internet tools for coordinating social movements, such as e-mail and conferencing systems, were seen as low-cost means to foster grassroots activism (Downing 1989). Some scholars warned about the potential abuse of the Internet (McCullough 1991). Gurak (1997) documented the great speed at which online social activism was able to take place.

As the Internet became more widely used, the academic literature moved away from the utopian-or-apocalyptic binary into a more complex understanding of how the Internet was being used (Earl and Kimport 2011). Bimber (1998) and Barber (1998) took the field a step further, demystifying the technology by arguing that the impact of social media should be examined in terms of existing social science frameworks. Further research explored how Internet communication technologies (ICTs) could be used directly by activists to find new audiences, increase the number of people who could be reached, and increase the speed at which those individuals could be reached, thus reducing costs (Salter 2003; Van de Donk et al. 2004).

Studies began to examine how activists could disseminate information directly using the Internet, even in hostile environments, as ICTs were able to provide concrete benefits to social movements without high social or physical costs (Danitz and Strobel 1999; Norris 2002; Van Aeist and Walgrave 2002). Bennett and Fielding (1999) explored nontraditional ways in which social movements are formed and studied how groups of individuals who engage in activism may have been dismissed as unimportant or remained hidden in previous models.

Hasian (2001) explored how the Web quickly and powerfully facilitated social connections in comparison with offline relationships, providing a platform for creating connections that would previously have been impossible. The literature also shows that the Internet allowed the formation of anticorporate activist groups as social movements existing outside a political arena (Rosenkrands 2004). Studies have shown that the Internet has increased participation in online and offline activism (Klein 2001; Leizerov 2000; Norris 2002).

Earl and Kimport (2011) argue that the evolution of the Internet and social media requires a new metric for the success of online social movements. They

suggest that resolution of the social issue is not required for a movement to be successful but that activists gain identity and empowerment through their efforts.

The adaptive social change framework, which uses these new methods for determining success, is appropriate for analyzing religious social movements that, particularly in conservative religious communities, are often complex and have been overlooked in traditional social movement literature (Earl and Kimport 2011; Israel-Cohen 2012; Schuster 2013). This study attempts to fill the gaps in the existing literature by examining the various ways in which Mormon feminists are using the Internet and social media to engage in activism.

METHODS

In this sociocultural analysis, we combined quantitative and qualitative methods. We examined survey data as wells as blogs and social media sites. Owing to the hidden nature of the Mormon feminist community, the survey was posted on the following blogs: *Feminist Mormon Housewives*, *The Exponent*, *Mormon Women Scholars' Network*, *Nickel on the 'Nacle*, and *Modern Mormon Men*. A link to the survey was posted on the following closed Facebook groups: Young Mormon Feminists, Feminist Mormon Housewives Society, fMh in the Academy, MoFAB, All Enlisted, Exponent II group, Mormon Stories Sunday School Discussion, The Mormon Hub, A Thoughtful Faith Support Group (Mormon/LDS), Supporters of Ordain Women, Mormon Feminists in Transition, MO 2.0, Exploring Sainthood, and Mormon Stories Podcast Community. The survey was posted on July 7, 2013, and closed a week later, on July 14, having received 1,864 responses. One respondent was aged under 18 and one person posted twice, so responses from these two were removed, leaving 1,862 responses. The survey attempted to capture fundamental questions about Mormon feminist identity, religiosity, activist participation, and reactions to Mormon feminist activism. The spreadsheet results were converted to a database and queried by using SQLite.

Because of the hidden nature of the online Mormon feminist community, it was necessary for us to use snowball sampling, in which existing study subjects recruit other subjects. To correct for the sampling bias, we chose to conduct a follow-up e-mail survey. The first survey was analyzed to identify individuals who represented diverse groups within the data. Potential participants were identified through the use of five variables in the initial survey: gender, age, marital status, religiosity, and quality of free responses. We conducted the follow-up survey from July 15 to July 17, 2013. Of the 153 surveys that were sent out, 54 were returned. After analysis, seven surveys were removed because of duplication and blank responses. Forty-seven e-mail surveys were analyzed by using primary and secondary codes to ensure intercoder reliability.

Because of the lack of academic literature on online Mormon feminism, we conducted a qualitative analysis of Mormon feminist blogs, Facebook groups, mainstream media articles, and statements and publications from the LDS Church. The literature was analyzed and coded to capture historical background, size, scope, identity, and growth of the online community; reactions from LDS Church leaders; and the process of Mormon feminist activism. We used these criteria to analyze the archived material from the two largest Mormon feminist blogs: *Feminist Mormon Housewives* and *The Exponent*. The process was then replicated in the examination of newspaper articles, Facebook groups, LDS Church publications, and official LDS Church statements. The qualitative examination of this data paired with the survey results allowed us to create a more complete timeline and nuanced narrative of online Mormon feminism.

DISCUSSION

Demographics: Breaking Down the Myths of Mormon Feminists

There are long-standing stereotypes that have been used to characterize people who participate in feminist activism (Israel-Cohen 2012). Conservative individuals within the LDS community identify Mormon feminists as a group of angry women who have no religious belief, are not active in their religious communities, are antifamily, do not attend church, and want simply to be ordained to the priesthood and steal power from men (Isackson 2013; Wilson 2013). Data from our study suggest that these stereotypes do not reflect the lives of the majority of Mormon feminists.

Mormon feminists are not exclusively female; 19 percent of those surveyed were male. Seventy-nine percent were aged 40 or younger. Ninety-five percent lived in the United States, and 91 percent identified as White/Caucasian. Eighty-one percent attended church at least two to three times per month, and 70 percent currently held a calling (a responsibility within the local congregation). Eighty-seven percent probably came from LDS families, as they reported having been baptized at the standard age of eight years. Seventy-seven percent reported levels of belief that are consistent with those of the mainstream population (Pew Research Center 2012). Ninety-one percent of married Mormon feminists were married in an LDS temple, a sign of faithfulness and orthopraxy. The majority of respondents (62 percent) were parents.

Of all the stereotypes, the only one that holds true is that most Mormon feminists want women to be ordained to the priesthood: 59 percent of survey respondents believe that women will be ordained to the priesthood in this life or the next. A further 26 percent believe that women already hold the priesthood. Only 16 percent believe that women will never hold the priesthood. These numbers are

very different from a random sampling of Mormons by the Pew Trust, which found that just 13 percent of American Mormon men and 8 percent of Mormon women thought that women should be ordained to the priesthood (Pew Research Center 2012).

The most common emotion that was expressed in the open-ended response questions was fear. Mormon feminists fear that if they express their feminist views, they will be ostracized by family members, Church leaders, and friends. Only a minority of respondents (38 percent) had approached local leaders with feminist concerns, and of that group, only 37 percent reported that they felt heard and that their local leaders had made a positive change. Mormon feminists fear being denied or released from callings in consequence of their questions about gender. These fears are justified; 56 percent of Mormon feminists reported experiencing negative consequences as a result of expressing feminist views.

Despite their fears, a majority of Mormon feminists (74 percent) are hopeful that the LDS Church will in the future be more inclusive of women, and 58 percent of respondents feel that local leaders are including women in ward-level decisions. Respondents exhibited a high level of belief and participation, providing counterevidence to the stereotypes of Mormon feminists. Interview respondents also reported that their gender issues began organically and that finding online Mormon feminism sites allowed them to resolve their counteractive feelings and remain active in the LDS Church.

Mormon Feminists and Social Media

The literature on online social movements focuses on political movements. Analysis of political activist websites has provided scholars with valuable snapshots of how particular movements are using the Internet (Earl and Kimport 2011). Owing to the hidden nature of Mormon feminist communities, the first step in this research was to identify them.

The top Google search results for the phrase "Mormon feminist blogs" were *Feminist Mormon Housewives*, *The Exponent*, *Young Mormon Feminist*, *Ask a Mormon Girl*, *Adventures of a Mormon Feminist*, and *Mormon Child Bride*. Each blog appeared to provide a slightly different take on Mormon feminism. The follow-up surveys showed that the three most-read blogs were *Feminist Mormon Housewives*, *The Exponent*, and *Zelophehad's Daughters*. These blogs appeared to play a pivotal role within the Mormon feminist community.

Lisa Patterson Butterworth founded the *Feminist Mormon Housewives* (FMH) blog in 2004 (Cohen 2005). Nine years later, the blog was still very active and was the most frequently cited by respondents. In summer 2013, the blog had ten permanent bloggers, five occasional bloggers, various guest bloggers, and eight emeritus bloggers (*Feminist Mormon Housewives* 2013). The monthly number of

blog posts varied from a low of five posts in August 2004 to a high of sixty-five posts in December 2008. The average number of monthly posts from August 2004 to July 2013 was thirty-six, with a total of 3,846 posts. There were 75 different topic tags, including 118 posts tagged as "Activism." These "Activism" posts cover topics such as seeking equality inside and outside the LDS Church, international humanitarian aid, and discussions directly related to the campaigns that are discussed later in this article. FMH blog administrators report that in August 2012, the blog received 18,601 unique visitors. In December 2012, during the "Wear Pants to Church Day" campaign, the FMH blog received 45,393 unique visitors (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Unique Visitors to Mormon Feminist Housewives Blog
(August 2012– July 2013)
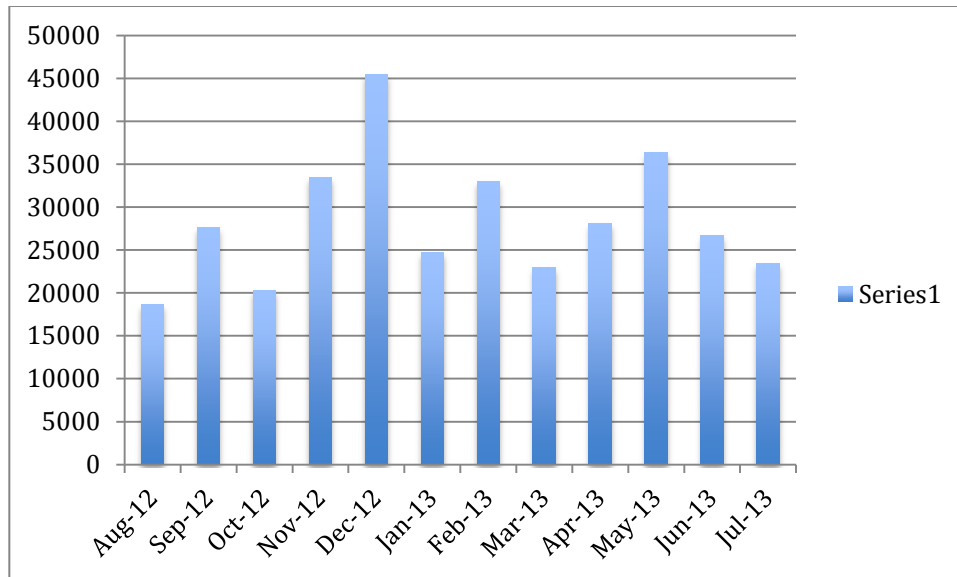
The second most cited blog, *The Exponent*, was started in January 2006 as an online presence for *Exponent II* magazine, which began in Boston in 1974 (*The Exponent* 2006). In summer 2013, this blog had twenty-seven permanent bloggers. Their topics, which differed slightly from those of the FMH blog, included feminist-friendly church lesson outlines in addition to standard feminist blog posts. *The Exponent* had forty-three topic tags, and the most tagged subjects were feminism, gender roles, and motherhood.

The third blog, *Zelophehad's Daughters*, was also founded in 2006. This blog takes its name from the Bible story of five sisters who, after the death of their father Zelophehad, petitioned Moses for inheritance rights (Numbers 26–27). They were eventually successful in securing female inheritance rights in families that

lacked a male heir (*Zelophehad's Daughters* 2006). In summer 2013, the blog's archives listed more than 130 topics. In addition to the topics that were covered on other blogs, this blog covered unique topics such as chicken patriarchy, statistics, legal issues, scouting, science, and a variety of wider theological topics. The blog had eight active bloggers and seven semiactive bloggers in addition to a bouncer. The profiles of these bloggers differed from those of bloggers on the previous two blogs in that the contributors to *Zelophehad's Daughters* were extremely well educated. Of the sixteen listed bloggers, nine had doctoral degrees or were currently in doctoral programs. The writing style and topics that were covered on this blog reflected the education of the authors.

Many Mormon feminists participate in discussions in closed Facebook groups, which give the participants a degree of privacy. We identified eleven Facebook groups that are dedicated to Mormon feminism, nearly all of which are closed. These included Feminist Mormon Housewives Society, Young Mormon Feminists, MoFAB (Mormon Feminist Action Board), Wildly Speculative Feminist Mormon Theology, Feminist Mormon Missionaries, I'm a Mormon Feminist, Mormon Feminist Memes, Mormon Feminist Book Club, Healthy Mormon Feminists, The Exponent, and Humanistic Mormon Feminist Caucus. The four largest Facebook groups were Feminist Mormon Housewives, with 2,455 members; The Exponent, with 690 members; Young Mormon Feminists, with 688 members; and MoFAB, with 554 members. Owing to the closed nature of the groups, it was impossible to determine crossover in membership. Groups to which follow-up survey respondents referred included Ordain Women, All Enlisted, We Daughters, Provo Feminists, and Agitating Faithfully.

Mormon feminists become members of these closed Facebook groups through several steps. The process begins when a prospective member goes to the appropriate Facebook page and clicks "Join Group." Group administrators then approve membership. This is the process for joining most Facebook groups, but the FMH group has a more elaborate process. Those who want to join the group have to add their name to a document that outlines community rules. Only then will administrators approve requests. FMH does this to protect the privacy of group members.

Analysis of the blogs and Facebook groups, combined with the fact that we received 1,862 responses in seven days, indicates an active and well-linked network of Mormon feminists online. Mormon feminists also use Twitter, Pinterest, and Tumblr, though not to the same extent as blogs and Facebook groups.

MORMON FEMINIST ACTIVISM CAMPAIGNS

Although the LDS Church has a long history of bottom-up innovation, this seems to have faded from memory (Christensen 2009). The current social and hierarchical framework of the LDS church clearly discourages grassroots activism,

members are officially discouraged from engaging simple techniques, such as letter writing or personally attempting to contact church leaders at the highest levels (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2010). Mormon feminist activism operates within these tensions. The following is an analysis of activist campaigns that demonstrate how Mormon feminists have used, mastered, and adapted to the limitations of activism in the LDS Church through the use of social media.

Temple Baptisms and Menstruation

The first online Mormon feminist campaign took place in February 2012. Its goal was to get the LDS Church to clarify its policy on the participation of menstruating women in temple baptisms. Although many religious communities place restrictions on participation of women while they are menstruating, the LDS Church does not have any such policy. Nevertheless, many women reported having been excluded. Bloggers and commenters described in emotional terms their own experiences as teenagers, many of which included shame, humiliation, and feelings of being unworthy (Layne 2012). Survey respondents referred to their own shame at being excluded and were motivated by these negative feelings to participate in the campaign. Respondents did not want other teenage girls to have the same experience. One survey respondent said:

> Because as a teenager living in MO [Missouri], I worked all summer long to earn money to go on a temple trip to Dallas only to be told when I got there that I couldn't do baptisms because I was on my period — it was humiliating and degrading — most of the other kids thought I didn't participate because of worthiness issues — I knew boys on that trip that weren't worthy to participate but they still got to do it — I was worthy but because I was a girl menstruating I was denied. I do think the campaign helped but my own girls have recently been told they couldn't participate — they were armed with the knowledge that they could and told the temple workers that it wasn't policy but there are sooo many girls that don't know, and the problem persists.

Mormon feminists created a Google spreadsheet listing 142 operating LDS temples that were contacted by telephone, with space to record the temple's policy, the name of the individual who called the temple, and additional comments on the phone call (Elisothel 2012). Twenty-eight individuals contacted sixty-eight temples on five continents. The data revealed inconsistent policies, some of which were exclusionary. Fifteen temples did not allow girls to participate in baptism during menstruation, sixteen temples allowed girls and women to participate if they used a tampon, five temples had other restrictions, and twenty-seven temples had no restrictions. The campaign resulted in a *Salt Lake Tribune* article that elicited a policy clarification from the LDS Church, stating, "The decision of whether

or not to participate in baptisms during a menstrual cycle is personal and left up to the individual" (Stack 2012).

According to the traditional social movement literature, this movement was successful because it accomplished the goal that it set out to achieve. However, the real success of this campaign resides in the way in which Mormon feminists demonstrated their ability to come together online and coordinate activist campaigns.

Although the temple baptism campaign did not start until February 2012, it was the result of years of blog conversations. The campaign was triggered by the use of a new social media mechanism: the closed Facebook group. In October 2008, the FMH blog created an open (meaning public) Facebook group (fMhLisa 2008). In summer 2013, this group listed just 503 members, and group conversations were inactive. In September 2011, FMH had started a closed Facebook group, creating a level of privacy for discussions (fMhLisa 2011). Five months later, on February 1, 2012, the FMH blog reported 755 members in its closed Facebook group and noted the decline in comments on the blog as conversations moved to Facebook (fMhLisa 2012). In August 2013, the same closed Facebook group had 2,477 members. The privacy of the closed Facebook group is an attractive feature for Mormon feminists whose friends and family might not approve of their feminist conversations or involvement in activism.

Facebook groups allow for conversational flexibility that is not possible on blogs. Authors of blog posts set the topics of conversation, and comments follow. Comment areas on blogs do not allow commenters to initiate their own conversations, an activity that Facebook groups facilitate. The idea of the temple baptisms campaign came from blog posts and comments over a long period of time, but the discussions about coordinating the campaign occurred over a few weeks and took place in the closed Facebook group. The FMH blog reported campaign updates, allowing campaign participants to remain anonymous.

The "All Are Alike unto God" Petition

Petitions have a long history, and many social movements have used them (Earl and Kimport 2011). The Mormon feminist petition "All Are Alike unto God" is based on a scripture found in the Book of Mormon that indicates the equality of the sexes in the eyes of God (2 Nephi 26:33). The petition, which is ongoing, outlines twenty-two different areas in which the LDS Church could move toward gender equality, with further suggestions for implementing change (What Women Know 2012). One survey respondent explained why she had chosen to sign the petition:

> I believe the LDS church is a living and growing church and that changes in policy reflect changes in the hearts of members, we are given what we can handle when we are ready. The changes I have seen recently seem to reflect that and have encouraged me to be more outspoken and exploratory regarding my own doubts/concerns in regard to policy within the church. I was glad to have a chance to add my voice to the others asking the leaders of my church to reconsider what I feel are out dated systems.

As of July 2013, the "All Are Alike unto God" petition had 1,035 signatures. The only item that the LDS Church had addressed was a narrowing of the gap between the ages at which men and women can serve missions (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2013). The *Los Angeles Times* dubbed this "progress with an asterisk" (Glionna 2012).

The format of this online petition closely resembles the model created by Mormon feminist blogs. It provides a platform to present information and a place to add signatures, but it does not provide a forum for wider discussion. The temple baptism campaign demonstrated that flexible discussions are necessary for coordination, vetting ideas, planning, and increasing involvement. The closed Facebook groups remove individuals who leave offensive comments and allow for a more complete vetting of ideas and actions within the community, producing campaigns that are more focused and nuanced. They also help campaign organizers to navigate the potential social costs and external media outlets.

Wear Pants to Church Day

On December 5, 2012, responding to a *Jezebel* article (Baker 2012), a blogger for the *Mormon Child Bride* blog wrote, "Mormon feminists, I think it is time for some good old-fashioned Civil Disobedience" (Lauritzen 2012). Four days later, Mormon feminists created a new closed Facebook group called All Enlisted to discuss activism (Whitelocks 2012). They launched a campaign-specific Facebook page called Wear Pants to Church Day,[1] and an event was scheduled for a week later, on Sunday, December 16 (Gray 2012).

Women who wear pants to LDS Church services are not breaking any rules, but they are violating social norms. The LDS Church issued a statement in 1971 stating that women are free to wear pantsuits to church (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1974). This statement was reiterated in December 2012 in response to the Wear Pants to Church event (Gray 2012).

Wear Pants to Church Day was reactionary and operated within a very small time frame. Although it was discussed in multiple Facebook groups, the initial idea lacked clear goals and was not well vetted over time by the Mormon feminist

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[1] www.facebook.com/WearPantsToChurchDay.

community. This makes it difficult to measure the movement's success by traditional metrics.

Negative comments played a significant role in the "Wear Pants to Church Day" campaign. Campaign organizers received numerous negative comments on the event's Facebook page, and one organizer received a death threat (Gray 2012). In our survey, many respondents reported that they were not intending to participate in Wear Pants to Church Day but changed their minds when they learned of the negative feedback. Two respondents wrote as follows:

> Originally, I wasn't planning on participating, but then I saw the backlash and realized that the people who were so upset were in people's wards. I felt I needed to show that Mormon feminists were everywhere.
>
> *****
>
> I saw women being treated terribly on Facebook by fellow church members for daring to have a voice in a church they are supposed to give equal consent to. I saw a microcosm of a larger problem play out. I wore pants because I wanted people to know which side of this ugliness I stood on, and I wanted any woman in my ward who had ever felt marginalized by the culture police to know that she had a friend in me.

The "Let Women Pray" Campaign

The "Let Women Pray" campaign sought to address the fact that a woman had never, in its 183-year history, offered a prayer at an LDS General Conference, the LDS Church's semiannual churchwide meeting (Stack 2013a). Previous policies preventing women from praying in church meetings were revoked in 1978 (Gardner 1978), and the LDS Church handbook specifically permits women to give opening and closing prayers in all church meetings (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2010: Section 18.2).

Letter-writing campaigns as an act of protest are a distinct form of activism with a rich heritage in social movements (Earl and Kimport 2011; Staggenborg 1991). Many online activist campaigns have shifted from letter-writing to e-mail campaigns (Earl and Kimport 2011). The "Let Women Pray" campaign combined traditional letter-writing and e-mails, collecting both traditionally posted letters and printed e-mailed submissions. In an attempt to circumvent the restrictive letter-writing policy within the LDS Church, which specifically prevents members from writing letters directly to LDS Church leaders, coordinators mailed packets of letters rather than individual ones (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2010).

Analyzing the success of this campaign is problematic. Statements in a January 2013 *Salt Lake Tribune* article indicated that prayers for the April meeting had been assigned months in advance (Stack 2013a). The LDS Church's statement did

not indicate the gender of the individuals who were scheduled to pray. Just before the scheduled meeting, an LDS Church spokesman stated that women were indeed scheduled to pray (Stack 2013c). Two prayers at the April 2013 General Conference were offered by women (Berkes 2013), but the cause and effect of this cannot be determined from the available data. One respondent wrote: "I don't know if they would have allowed a woman to pray at general conference without the campaign or not, but I wanted my children to participate in a church where the question of why a woman has never prayed in conference before never even had to be asked."

The "Let Women Pray" campaign was a result of multiple conversations on Facebook. In these conversations, organizers discussed past campaigns, adapted their approach, and vetted 182 years of historical data, processes that were possible because of the flexibility offered by Facebook. This campaign introduced new forms of social media into Mormon feminist activism, including the creation of "Let Women Pray" memes and the use of warehouse e-petition sites (e.g., www.change.org), showing continued adaptation within the activist campaigns.

The "I'm a Mormon Feminist" PR Campaign

In 2011, the LDS Church launched a worldwide public relations campaign known as "I'm a Mormon" (Coffman 2011). Mormon feminists created their own public relations campaign: "I'm a Mormon Feminist." This campaign builds not only on the LDS Church's campaign, but also on the "I Need Feminism" project (Porteous 2013). "I'm a Mormon Feminist" is a campaign that attempts to remove the negative stigma of feminism within the LDS Church. One respondent wrote:

> I think that Mormon Feminism sometimes gets lumped all together and that the mainstream body of the Church gets turned off to the more militant parts of the movement. I would like everyone in the Church to see that if they value women and the role of women in the Church, they are part of the feminist movement. If they think that women should be educated and valued, they are feminists. They can still be okay with women not holding the priesthood (which I am) and still be feminists. They can wear dresses to church (as I do) and be feminists. They can also like to bake and have kids. They just have to understand their own femininity as a daughter of God as separate from cultural expectations and express their role of women as it fulfills them and their role in eternal family and gospel structures.

The "I'm a Mormon Feminist" campaign involves a website, a Facebook page, a Twitter account, a Pinterest pinboard, and a YouTube channel. The

website[2] provides a platform for individuals to submit a profile, stating why they identify as a Mormon feminist. In an attempt to further demystify Mormon feminism, the website also has a section entitled "MoFem 101," which includes a lengthy list of feminist and Mormon feminist terminology.

This campaign utilized new forms of media, including photographs and videos. It was also the first time that a website in a feminist campaign deactivated the comments section on a public page. Mormon feminists are still attempting to navigate public activism, exploring methods that help to mitigate the negative backlash and personal emotional toll associated with visible activism.

The "Ordain Women" Movement

The priesthood in the LDS Church has had a long evolution but has become inseparably linked to LDS male identity (Prince 1995). The "Ordain Women" campaign parallels similar movements in other religious traditions (Lee 2013). The issues that previous Mormon feminist campaigns addressed were restricted to policy and cultural norms. The "Ordain Women" campaign calls into question core LDS doctrines, challenging long-standing gender roles. Analysis of Mormon feminist blogs indicates that female ordination is a controversial topic that is still being debated in the online community (fMhAdmin 2013). Respondents to the survey expressed the same conflicted discussion as the blogs, as can be seen in the following three responses:

> I am undecided on this issue. I worried when I first heard of it that it was too much too fast and it might make it easy for those opposed to the feminist point of view to dismiss female ordination as too radical. But I believe with all my heart that the status quo is not what The Lord wants for women.
>
> *****
>
> At first I didn't support it because I was unsure how to feel about the idea of women holding the priesthood. After reading a lot of Church History, I actually have come to support the Ordain Women campaign, but am still not participating in it because my bishop has made it very clear to me that he feels that the Ordain Women campaign is an apostate group and that my participation in it would make me ineligible for a temple recommend [TR]. I could simply participate in secret and hope he didn't find out—after all, there's no requirement to mention it in the TR interview . . . but that feels dishonest
>
> *****
>
> I'm not prepared to debate it without leaning heavily on online sources. I don't have an audience. Who can I talk to, to make a difference? No one. If I spoke about it, questioned it out loud to family or church leaders, I would become a

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[2] mormonfeminist.org.

pariah. And it's not the hill I want to die on in regards to my Feminism. I often talk about women having the priesthood in the temple, however, especially to young people (my kids, YW who babysit if I can sneak it in . . .). I don't know if the church in general is ready, because they certainly are sexist with a capital "S"

The center of the "Ordain Women" campaign is a professionally designed website that mirrors the look of official LDS Church websites ("Ordain Women" website 2013).[3] The site presents profiles of individuals giving their support to female ordination as well as a clearly worded mission statement, a FAQ section, a resource section, links to blogs, and links to media coverage. The website also provides resources beyond Mormonism, including a link to "198 Methods of Nonviolent Action" (Sharp 1973). In July 2013, the site displayed 108 profiles and had received over 250,000 views. This website is not interactive; comments cannot be left on posts or profiles. Despite the lack of conversation on the page itself, the website links to seventeen separate blog posts and one podcast that discuss the complexity and offer a platform for debate surrounding the "Ordain Women" movement.

The inherent complexity of a campaign that advocates female ordination in the LDS Church requires a movement that is moderated and vetted by many voices. Previous Mormon feminist campaigns and existing social networks refined the movement and provided a level of sophistication that was necessary for the successful formation and launch of the "Ordain Women" campaign.

The organizers of the "Ordain Women" campaign have a much broader age profile than did the organizers previous campaigns (Winslow 2013). Given the technological platforms on which online Mormon feminists congregate, it is not surprising that 79 percent of the survey respondents are under the age of 40. However, the 20 percent who are over 40 often bring broader life experiences. Together, these individuals provide a combination that has the potential to create a well-balanced set of campaigns within the movement.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored a subset of Mormon feminists who participate online. The nature of the survey sampling resulted in 1,862 survey participants, who primarily read Mormon feminist blogs and visit relevant Facebook groups. It is difficult to determine the size of the online Mormon feminist population, but the readership of the FMH blog may give some clues. Between August 2012 and July 2013, the FMH blog received an average of 29,831 unique visitors per month (see Figure 1). It is likely that some regular FMH readers are not Mormon feminists,

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[3] ordainwomen.org.

but these figures are the best available indicator of the size of the online Mormon feminist community.

The total number of the Mormon feminists is difficult to assess, since many Mormon feminists do not participate in online communities. *Exponent II*, a magazine that was founded in 1974, has historically operated from a pre-Internet readership. It has roughly 600 print subscribers. In addition, the figures in this article do not include individuals who are Mormon with feminist leanings but who do not self-identify as Mormon feminists. Further studies are required to accurately access the number of Mormon feminists, both online and offline.

We have shown how social media play an essential role in religious activism. Analyzing how religious groups use social media to vet, carry out, and sustain activism can advance the field of digital social movement theory. The six examples of Mormon feminist campaigns described in this article reveal the benefits and limitations of using different kinds of social media. Mormon feminists used social media in the public sphere for eight years before branching out into activism, which was facilitated by flexible private discussion spaces on Facebook.

Mormon feminist blog topics from the last nine years form a cyclical pattern as the community continually revisits particular issues in Mormonism. The blog comment sections often display the disdain some readers have for the repetitive nature of the topics. However, a careful comparison of blog posts from FMH's early years with posts since 2012 show that the same topics are discussed on a semiregular basis but that the conversations surrounding the topics has evolved significantly since 2004. The tone and style of writing have become more professional, posts reveal a more thoughtful composition, and the arguments are more complex, producing a more sophisticated conversation. The repetitive conversations appear to be creating an upward spiral rather than an infinite loop. This improved articulation is useful to Mormon feminists as they practice their conservative religion while embracing feminist principles.

Mormon feminists navigate a difficult space between conservative religion and liberal feminism. Previous generations of Mormon feminists had to navigate this territory alone or in small groups, but today's Mormon feminists can find significant support online. One of the biggest myths about Mormon feminists is that they leave the church. Our survey shows that the overwhelming majority of Mormon feminists are attending church and engaging in their local religious communities. Those who seek out blogs and groups online are looking for support. They find this support in conversations that validate their feelings and beliefs. These social media outlets serve as a support group that allows for sharing experiences and problem solving in addition to activism.

Mormon feminism is well archived in blogs, but the use of Facebook is not conducive to historical record keeping, especially in fast-moving, closed, or disbanded groups. In a vibrant and active Facebook group such as the FMH Society,

only the most recent discussion threads are visible, and they are continually reordered according to popularity. The closed nature of the group also creates ethical boundaries for both reporting and access. This study of online Mormon feminism demonstrates that the only way to examine these conversations is to witness them as they are happening.

Every religious community will experience the impacts of the Internet (Campbell 2010) and the modernization of gender roles in a unique manner. The combination of liberal feminism and conservative religious communities provides a level of complexity and nuance that is essential to the larger theory. The further study of online religious feminist activism will add an essential dimension to the study of digitally enabled social media movements.

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