2010 Undergraduate Fellows Report

Bridging Babel: New Social Media and Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding

A project of the Doyle Building Tolerance Initiative
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**BERKLEY CENTER FOR RELIGION, PEACE, AND WORLD AFFAIRS**

**The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs** at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in March 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion and the promotion of interreligious understanding. Through research, teaching, and service, the Center examines religion as it relates to global challenges of international diplomacy, democracy and human rights, and economic and social development. Two premises guide the Center’s work: that deeper knowledge of religion’s global role is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious traditions with one another and with the wider society can promote peace. Thomas Banchoff, associate professor in the Department of Government and the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, is the Center’s founding director.

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**THE DOYLE BUILDING TOLERANCE INITIATIVE**

**The Doyle Building Tolerance Initiative** is a campus-wide effort to promote tolerance and intellectual engagement with diversity in the curriculum and outside the classroom. A collaboration between Georgetown College, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, and the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS), the Initiative is generously funded by alumnus and Board of Directors member William J. Doyle (C’72). The Berkley Center’s Doyle programs encompass the Junior Year Abroad Network (JYAN), the Undergraduate Fellows program, and the Undergraduate Learning and Interreligious Understanding project. The **Undergraduate Fellows** program brings faculty and students together for joint research projects that explore the broader political and policy implications of cultural and religious diversity. The **Junior Year Abroad Network** links students studying abroad, and their encounters with new cultures around the world, back to the Georgetown community. The **Undergraduate Learning and Interreligious Understanding** project is a five-year longitudinal study to track student attitudes towards religious diversity and their evolution in response to experiences at Georgetown in and outside the classroom.

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About this report

The Berkley Center’s 2009–2010 Undergraduate Fellows Program provided a select group of Georgetown undergraduate students with the resources to study new social media and interreligious and intercultural understanding. Beginning in September 2009, the Fellows defined their areas of research inquiry, elected project managers, and assigned roles and responsibilities within the team. They met bi-weekly throughout the academic year, researching and analyzing the fields of both new social media and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, in a process of lively debate and discussion around their approaches, analysis, and results. They conducted 39 in-depth interviews with scholars, religious and interfaith leaders, and technology experts to provide qualitative insights into an emerging field of research. The Fellows also conducted research and outreach through a paper survey at the 2009 World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne, Australia, and online through Facebook, Twitter (@BridgingBabel), and LinkedIn. With direction and editorial assistance from Michael Nelson, Visiting Professor of Internet Studies in Georgetown’s Communications, Culture, and Technology Program, Sara Lichterman, a Master’s candidate in the Communication, Culture, and Technology Program, and Melody Fox Ahmed, Director of Programs and Operations at the Berkley Center, the Fellows developed the following report. Further resources can be found at the project’s New Social Media Knowledge Resources page on the Berkley Center website: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/

Acknowledgements

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ON THE COVER

“The Tower of Babel” (1563) by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria, depicting the story from the Hebrew Scriptures in which God punished the prideful people of Babylon when they tried to build a “tower to the heavens.” To stop them, God decided to “confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” (Genesis 11:8). The Undergraduate Fellows chose the title “Bridging Babel” for this report to symbolize how the Internet can help address the miscommunication that often arises when people from different faiths and cultural backgrounds come together.
Interfaith understanding is about communication, and communication is increasingly about new social media. If we want to support dialogue across religious divides on the world’s most pressing policy challenges, we need a better grasp of how technology connects people and mobilizes them for action.

—Thomas Banchoff, Director of Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue is not only urgent but critical to the survival of the human species. In our globalized, blended world, where different religions and cultures encounter each other daily, you will have nothing but turmoil and violence unless you actively promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue to achieve harmony and understanding.

—Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, American University
Introduction

Religion and culture can provide deep meaning and richness to our lives. Yet, throughout history, they have also been flashpoints for conflict and misunderstanding. In the wake of tragedies such as the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, there is heightened interest in finding new ways to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Unless ignorance and hatred can be overcome by tolerance and understanding, religious and cultural conflicts are likely to continue—and intensify.

New technologies propel our interconnected world, with the Internet giving us powerful ways to connect to a diversity of people, places, and ideas. New social media has become a versatile and increasingly important part of our online lives. Websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube allow users to communicate, engage, and create content and information at an unprecedented level of speed and accessibility.

This report documents the approaches individuals and organizations are taking to foster interreligious and intercultural dialogue using new social media. In our research, we interviewed a number of scholars, religious leaders, interfaith leaders, and technology experts about the challenges and successes they have experienced or observed. After compiling and analyzing our research findings, we identified “best practices” for people who would like to use new social media to promote dialogue and understanding. Many established interreligious groups—and some technology experts—feel new social media is limited to supporting offline dialogue. Others believe new social media could open a new channel for interreligious and intercultural discussions and engage people who are currently not part of the conversation.

This is not a comprehensive review of the opinions of all experts in these fields. However, we endeavor to convey an accurate “mapping” of current dialogue efforts and provide the best available source of information on how, and how not, to use social media to bridge gaps in understanding between people of different religions and cultures.

While the experts’ perspectives on new social media and its influence on interreligious and intercultural dialogue vary, there is agreement on several key themes.

Consensus: Common Ground

The majority of our interviewees emphasize the importance of finding a “common ground” as a starting point for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, whether offline or online. In addition, basic levels of respect, trust, and openness are essential to personalize “the
other” so that participants relate to one another in a positive way. After this foundation is established, they can move into in-depth discussions about their particular religious and cultural beliefs.

While views vary on how best to promote dialogue online, all interviewees believe that the Internet and new social media have no inherent positive or negative power. Online tools themselves do not make people more or less tolerant. Their impact depends on the people who use them—and how they use them.

For example, even the debate over whether the Internet fosters more tolerance in general is less about technology than it is about human nature. In our interviews, the experts who believe that new social media would make people more tolerant do not base their argument on technology, but rather on a belief that most people are basically tolerant and want peace. Likewise, those who disagree base their arguments on a less optimistic view of human nature.

Many Viewpoints, Many Opportunities

Beyond the importance of establishing an initial “common ground” between individuals, there is little consensus on how to maintain and develop the conversation using new social media tools.

The experts’ views tend to align with their generation and area of expertise. For example, more experienced faith leaders believe that the “impersonal” nature of online communication significantly limits the potential for substantive dialogue, stressing the importance of being able to physically see and hear “the other” in an offline context. Younger interfaith leaders tend to view new social media more positively, as a tool for initializing, building, and maintaining positive dialogue. We found that most new social media experts not involved in interreligious and intercultural dialogue tend to hold less optimistic opinions of its utility for dialogue, emphasizing that online tools are used for vastly different, and often opposing, purposes.

Among those who use new social media for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, we found a distinction between those who favor “purpose-specific” sites designed expressly around a shared purpose or interest, such as Bridge Builders and Beyond Tolerance, and those who prefer general social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Advocates of purpose-specific websites highlight the importance of establishing a monitored, “safe place” for dialogue and the advantage of a community that shares a common interest. Other experts believe that general social networking sites, with their popularity and accessibility, should be the preferred mechanism for sharing interreligious and intercultural information and promoting in-depth discussions even between people who do not expressly seek out interreligious and intercultural dialogue online. One interviewee notes that users tend to either want to engage in discussion on a general site like Facebook among trusted friends, or to do so anonymously by commenting on blog posts and articles.

In recent years, interest in talking about religion, faith, tolerance, and dialogue on a variety of websites, pages, and social networking tools has increased rapidly. Popular fan pages and groups on Facebook, such as Faithbook, Beliefnet, and Peace, demonstrate that people are interested in discussing their faith and culture on the same website they use to post their spring break pictures and connect with old friends. On Twitter, searching for the term compassion or other dialogue-related terms yields a wealth of information and opinions. A recent YouTube search found over 2,000 videos posted on “Muslim Christian Dialogue.” Additionally, many in the religious community see the utility in having a new social media presence, as evidenced by the increase in churches, synagogues, and mosques using sites like Facebook and Twitter to connect with their congregants and reach out to new members. Overall, respondents recognize that the opportunities—and challenges—represented by the use of new social media for dialogue are important, and many are working to carve out their most effective niche in this rapidly evolving field.

New Social Media

There is no single, agreed-upon definition of “social media” or “new social media,” and existing definitions will no doubt evolve as technologies and business models evolve. That said, there is agreement that social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, provide powerful new ways to communicate and collaborate online—and that they are fundamentally different from decades-old Internet applications, such as e-mail.
Tim O’Reilly, who has been describing the evolution of the Internet for more than twenty years, coined the term “Web 2.0” in 2005 to describe the new technologies, standards, and applications that underlie and enable many of the most exciting forms of new social media. Web 2.0 technologies dramatically lower the effort required to combine different pieces of Web-based software and content, making it easier for users to hold two-way, interactive conversations online.

Technological innovation is not the only development that sets new social media apart. Another key difference is control. The new social media sites that have grown explosively over the last four or five years have been the ones where the owners have ceded control to the sites’ users. User-generated content has been the key to their success. Many of these sites, Facebook and Twitter chief among them, have no editors; the users are expected to flag inappropriate or indecent content. When there are inaccuracies and omissions in a posting, the sites’ users post comments to point them out. New social media means that “everyone is a publisher” and “everyone is a critic.” The third critical difference between new social media and more traditional content—both online and offline—is that new social media sites such as Facebook and Flickr are supported by very targeted advertising. Because these sites can track users’ interests by recording which pages they visit on their sites (and by the interests of their friends), these sites can display ads that are much more likely to be of interest to their customers. This means more revenue can be generated with fewer (but more effective) ads.

To understand how revolutionary new social media is and how profound its impact could be, it is useful to think of the Internet’s evolution in three phases. In the first phase, from 1969 until roughly 1994, e-mail and remote log-on to large computer systems were the dominant uses of the Internet. Almost all the traffic on the Internet consisted of such one-to-one connections. Then the Web launched the second phase of the Internet, and Web servers were able to broadcast Web pages to thousands of Web surfers at the same time. The addition of such “one-to-many” applications and
the graphics on most Web pages marked a tectonic shift and led to a hundred-fold increase in the amount of traffic carried by the Internet in 2–3 years in the mid-1990s. With new social media, we are entering a third, game-changing phase characterized by “many-to-many” applications, which enable all sorts of different groups to quickly self-organize and then share content, ideas, opinions, and software from sites all around the world. A single Facebook page might have contributions from a dozen people pointing to dozens of different websites and software applications. That is the real magic of the new social media, which is only beginning to be realized.

As with most new technologies, new social media has found its first—and most popular—application in providing entertainment. But, it is already changing the way government services are delivered, how companies provide customer service, how students learn, how non-governmental organizations do their work, how political campaigns are run, and how religious institutions connect to their members.

**Framing the Issue: Interreligious/Intercultural Dialogue and New Social Media**

Determining what constitutes “dialogue” was a key question throughout our research as we sought to reconcile notions of traditional, face-to-face dialogue with the many new forms made possible through new social media. Interviewees agree that dialogue is an open conversation on a shared subject between two people or groups of people, with a goal that participants learn from the other so that they may change, grow, and come to better understand their own beliefs in a greater context. We started with traditional perspectives on interreligious and intercultural dialogue and discussed how these may grow and change when new social media tools become part of the process.

Throughout the course of our research, we noted that interviewees described different types of interreligious engagement, and we created the definitions in the box on page 7 to represent these varied perspectives, applicable to both offline and online dialogues.

**SOCIAL MEDIA: WHAT IS IT?**

The following, in no particular order, is a list of the 10 most popular forms of Social Media:

- Microblogging (Twitter)
- Bookmarking (Digg)
- Video (YouTube)
- Photo sharing (Flickr)
- Search (Google, Yahoo)
- Professional (LinkedIn)
- Purely social (Facebook)
- Web forums
- Gadget news and reviews (Engadget)
- ListSers
Religion Online

In the past few years, there has been an increased demand for accurate religious information online, as many believers and non-believers turn to the Internet to learn about different religions. One example of the increased interest in discussing religious issues online is the *Washington Post*'s popular “On Faith” page, offering commentary from a panel of leading religious authorities and academics. Religious groups and individuals are increasingly turning to the Web to share information about their beliefs and practices in an effort to explain and alleviate negative perceptions of their faith.

According to “Faith Online,” a report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project conducted in April 2004, nearly two-thirds of the 128 million Americans online use the Internet for faith-related purposes. Americans use the Internet to send e-mails with spiritual content, to read news about religious affairs, to find out about how to celebrate religious holidays, to locate religious services, to make online prayer requests, and to make donations to religious organizations.

The Pew report finds that more than half of Americans using the Internet for religious reasons identify themselves as spiritual, and view the ability to use the Internet to learn more about and discuss religion as a positive part of their lives. New social media offers a unique advantage to spiritual individuals because it allows them to create religious communities online. Through a virtual community, followers of a faith can find spiritual support and guidance. However, the Pew Report argues that online religious engagement has not replaced offline religious life, but rather complements it.

Who Is Using New Social Media and Which Sites Are They Using?

The Nielsen Company’s report “Global Faces and Networked Places: A Report on Social Networking’s New Global Footprint,” published in March 2009, finds that two-thirds of the world’s online population visit a social networking or blogging site. According to their findings, the social networking sector now accounts for almost 10% of all Internet time. Furthermore, member networks are attracting a broader and more diverse audience.

A recent Pew report on “Social Media and Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults” finds an increase in teen usage of social media. For example,

**WHAT IS INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE?**

Many views exist on what constitutes interreligious dialogue. The Rev. Dr. and Canon Trond Bakkevig, pastor of the Lutheran Church of Norway, provides this perspective drawn from his extensive experience facilitating dialogue between Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious leaders in Israel and the Palestinian National Authority:

“Dialogue can establish a common foundation, affirm our common humanity, sort out religious elements in a conflict, and open space for the other in one’s own religion. Dialogue can deny space for religious incitement, and create space for constructive solutions where the integrity of all, religious or non-religious, can be respected. In short: Religious dialogue can clear the way for political decisions.”

— Rev. Dr. and Canon Trond Bakkevig, “Religious Dialogue and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East” (lecture, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, April 26, 2010)

**DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERRELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT**

**Interreligious Dialogue:** A conversation between individuals from distinct traditions for the primary purpose of engaging religious difference in order to deepen one’s own faith while expanding knowledge of the other.

**Interreligious Cooperation:** When individuals from different religious traditions work together around advocacy, social justice, public health, and other issues. Particularly notable in regions where religion is a divisive force.

**Interreligious Interaction:** An exchange between individuals from distinct religious traditions that focuses on personal interactions in the social arena without attention to the theological dimensions of these relationships.
In addition to the groups discussed in this report, there are many other organizations with diverse approaches to interreligious dialogue for understanding and peace-building. Some examples include:

**American Jewish Committee:** Although not a comprehensive representation of Jewish America, this group acts as the official voice of their faith. The AJC participates in dialogue and works to present a unified position on theological issues.

**Anti-Defamation League:** A primarily Jewish organization that fights all forms of antisemitism but often responds to events that impact religious communities in general, either alone or in collaboration with other groups.

**Clergy Beyond Borders:** A non-profit organization that brings clergy together from various traditions and backgrounds to raise awareness of and embrace their similarities and differences.

**InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington:** This group’s focus is on uniting local clergy through their respective religious traditions to find solutions to challenges facing humanity as a whole.

**Interfaith Families Project of Greater Washington:** This organization brings children of different religious backgrounds together to learn about each other’s traditions, while also offering educational opportunities for adults.

**Rumi Forum for Interfaith Dialogue and Intercultural Understanding:** Promotes the mission to foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue, stimulate thinking and exchange of opinions on supporting and fostering democracy and peace all over the world. The Rumi Forum also provides a common platform for education and information exchange.

**Tony Blair Faith Foundation:** The Faith Acts Fellows program brings youth together to combat issues of hate and indifference from a platform of religious pluralism.

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Committee on Church Relations:** This group takes a unique approach to combating religious intolerance, using the example of the Shoah (Holocaust) to demonstrate reoccurring themes of religious intolerance so these elements can be identified in current events.

**Washington National Cathedral:** The Cathedral offers many interreligious initiatives to the public, such as a women’s interfaith book club.
73% of “wired” American teens, ages 12–17, now use social networking sites. There has also been an increase in young adults and adults using social media websites. The Pew report finds that 40% of online adults, age 30 and older, use social media sites as well as 72% of young adults ages 18–29. Moreover, a large percentage of each demographic uses a social media site on a daily basis.6

The majority of online adults use more than one social networking site and maintain more than one online profile. Facebook is the most popular site among adults. The Facebook Data Team, which gathers and analyzes statistics on Facebook, reports that 1 out of every 50 new Facebook users is over the age of 65.7 MySpace is the second most popular site, but is more popular among young adults than older users. Additionally, people who earn less than $50,000 a year are more likely to have a profile on MySpace.8 The website LinkedIn is used primarily by adults ages 30 and over. Men are more likely to have a profile on LinkedIn than women, while women are more likely to have a profile on Facebook than men.9 Users spend more time on Facebook than any other social networking site.10

While only 8% of teens online use Twitter, one-third of online 18–29 year olds and 19% of adults ages 30 and above post updates on the website. The Nielsen report finds little variation in the usage of status update services (such as Twitter) based upon race, gender, or socio-economic class.11

Within age demographics, the report finds that men and women are equally likely to use social media sites, as are whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics.12 The Facebook Data Team notes that diversity on Facebook increased significantly in 2009.13 Among adults surveyed in the Pew report, usage of networking sites varied by level of educational attainment. Adults with a college education were slightly more likely to use social media sites. The report also found that teens from lower income families are more likely to use online social networks than teens from wealthier households.14

While the social networking trend first took off in North America, it is quickly gaining worldwide participation. In the past year, the use of social networking sites has increased by 66% in the Middle East, 35% in Europe, and 33% in Latin America. Facebook, MySpace, Hi5, Friendster, Orkut, Bebo, and Skyrock Network have experienced the most growth internationally in the past year.15

Even with so many people online, it is easy for Internet users to become pigeonholed into certain groups. Danah Boyd, a Social Media Researcher at Microsoft Research New England and a Fellow at Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society, has often focused her research on how people view social networks from their own participation. She notes, “I interviewed gay men who thought Friendster was a gay dating site because all they saw were other gay men. I [have] interviewed teens who believed that everyone on MySpace was Christian because all of the profiles they saw contained biblical quotes. We all live in our own worlds with people who share our values and, with networked media, it is often hard to see beyond that.”16

A wealth of articles and opinions exist on how to best utilize new social media, with a common theme that different forms of new social media are appropriate for different messages. With a recent suggestion that social media is dominating people’s morning routines (“Social Media Survey Finds Use in Bed, on Waking”) the question of how to best utilize social media arises.17 Former Apple Fellow Guy Kawasaki is fond of stating, “There are two types of Twitter users: those who want as many followers as possible, and those who are lying.”18 Even charity competitions have gotten in on the act, with
the PepsiRefresh Grant competition offering advice to participants on how to maximize their presence.23

**Religion and New Social Media**

Pete Warden, an independent computer programmer, gathered and cross-analyzed data on the 210 million public Facebook profiles of people living in the United States. According to his study, God is the most popular Facebook fan page in the southern United States. In Utah, where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is one of the dominant faiths, the Book of Mormon is a top fan page. When asked what motivated his research, Warden replied, “I am fascinated by how we can build tools to understand our world and connect people based on all the data we’re just littering the Internet with.”20 The Facebook Data team has recently noticed that Facebook users have fewer status updates about themselves and more about religion. Facebook believes that the rise in Facebook users over the age of 30 explains the increase in the use of religious terms.21

Online blogs have also become a popular new forum for discussing religion. Popular blogs exist for mainstream faiths, such as the evangelical Christian blog Christianity Today, as well as for minority beliefs, such as the Pagan blog “The Wild Hunt.” The Social Science Research Council recently conducted a study examining 19 religious blogs. The majority of the bloggers included in the study began to write blogs on religious issues because they noticed a need for more religious information on the Internet. The bloggers also wished to share new and different religious perspectives. They continue to maintain blogs because they feel as though their blogs have fostered a sense of community online.22

Blogs offer individuals an opportunity to express their personal spiritual beliefs and practices. Reading another person’s blog on religion can inspire deep spiritual reflection and thought-provoking online discussions. As Paul Harvey, Professor of History at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs explains, blogs lead to “the democratization of religious expression, the relative flattening of authority, and the basic impulse to internalize religious traditions in a personal way.” Harvey also notes that social networking sites, as opposed to blogs, can promote religious authority through features such as Facebook fan pages because, unlike the decentralized blogosphere, Facebook fan pages endorse the views of well-known religious figures.23

Many Christian churches have used the Internet to build a sense of community within their parish. For example, many churches connect their members through a Facebook page, providing updates on the community and a forum where parish members can reach out to one another for support.

“Godcasts,” sermons recorded into easily downloaded podcasts, are becoming increasingly popular among religious communities. Pastor Nick Fatato observes that, on average, two hundred people attend his Boston area sermons. However, around five hundred people download his sermons and listen to them for free on their own time. Fatato also states that close to 90% of his new parishioners attend his masses because they heard about them on the Internet. Godcasts represent an interesting intersection between marketing, social media, and religion.24 A Barna Study found that 38% of evangelicals and 31% of other born again Christians

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**GIVING THE INTERNET A SOUL: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND NEW SOCIAL MEDIA**

The Catholic Church has begun to recognize the importance of having an online presence. In January 2010, Pope Benedict XVI issued a proclamation urging priests to use social media to spread the Gospel. He told priests to “give a soul” to the Internet by using blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. The Pope referred to social media’s capacity for dialogue. His message made a powerful statement about the potential for the church and new social media.25

The Church has answered the Pope’s call to action, and several priests and religious organizations now maintain blogs. For example, the United States Council for Catholic Bishops, maintains a media blog, is active on Twitter, and its website offers daily video reflections on the day’s readings.26 Furthermore, as part of the Pope-to-You initiative, the Vatican is introducing a Facebook application, which sends messages from the Pope, as well as a YouTube page.
have used a podcast to access a sermon or church teaching, compared with 17% of other adults. This translates into about 45 million Americans accessing Godcasts. Churches are finding them to be a very effective way of spreading their message and attracting new adherents. For example, in April 2009, Trinity Church in New York City used Twitter to perform the Passion of Christ. The Episcopal parish also offered a Web version of the Stations of the Cross.

There are currently over 30,000 churches on My Church, Facebook’s leading religious application. This application is used by churches to post church bulletins and share prayers. The application has over 7,000 fans and nearly 60,000 active users. Applications such as this demonstrate churches’ increased understanding of the Internet as a marketing tool. Churches have a presence online not only to speak to people of different faiths, but also to spread their own message and market themselves.

Social media, likewise, is changing the ways in which synagogues and their members connect. For example, Congregation Ner Shalom in Cotati, California uploads its prayers and blessings onto YouTube so that its members can learn the melodies before a High Holy Day or Shabbat service. Congregation Adath Israel updates its members about the status of its eruv (an enclosure that enables Jews to carry items on Shabbat) via Twitter. Twitter has also been a useful way to spread information on services and other upcoming events in the Jewish community. Rabbi Menachem Creditor of Berkeley, California’s Congregation Netivot Shalom claims, “Technology allows us to connect more deeply to each other.” His Congregation uses Facebook, Twitter, Google Calendar, and Ning.

Along with Christians, Jews, and other religious communities, Muslims have also created their own virtual communities online. Muslims use these communities to connect to others within their faith and to explore their religious identity. One example comes from Imam Suhaib Webb, who uses his website, www.suhaibwebb.com, to enhance the spiritual development of Western Muslims through balanced Islamic teachings and to provide Muslims a forum to freely ask questions about Islam.

However, the Islamic community has particularly benefited from the Internet because it provides the opportunity to confront harmful anti-Muslim stereotypes that have emerged since 9/11. Muslims use social media to help others understand their faith and to promote a positive image of Islam. For example, in 2001, the website AltMuslim.com was established to promote, amongst Muslims and non-Muslims, a critical analysis of issues regarding the Muslim world. Furthermore, Muslims have found the Internet to be an effective way to combat radicalization and aggressive ideologies.

While many Muslim websites and social networks focus on explaining Islam, Muslim use of the Internet is as diverse as any other religion’s use. According to Fatemeh Fakhraie, Editor of Muslim Media Watch, “there is something for everyone” in the Muslim blogosphere. Additionally, the youth in Muslim-majority countries have found new social media to be an excellent way to express themselves.
Where Do We Fit In?

This report rests at an intersection between a field of study where much research has been done, interreligious dialogue, and the emerging field of new social media. One of the challenges of this work is that new social media is constantly evolving. While research, such as the Barna Technology Study, has been done on religion and social media, most research on social media has focused on marketing; even studies on new social media and religion have primarily focused on how social media is being used by Christian churches to attract new parishioners.

Our research recognizes that the intersection of new social media and interreligious and intercultural dialogue is increasingly important in both the online and offline worlds. With over thirty-one billion e-mails sent daily and a new blog created every second, large amounts of information can be transferred at lightning speed and communication has never been easier. Thus, it is important to learn what this communication is about and how it will affect different aspects of daily life, such as the promotion of dialogue and understanding.

Our Research:
The Interview Process

The interview process for this research began with compiling a list of key interviewees, which was then split into three categories: academics and faith leaders, interfaith leaders, and new social media and advocacy groups. From there, each member of the team contacted individuals and set up interviews. Because there has been little previous research on the intersection of new social media and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, the group sought out the most pertinent people in associated fields and asked each to point the project in the right direction and suggest further contacts for interviews. As the project progressed, the original list of interviewees expanded into a large web of new contacts. Although the Berkley Center determined the topic of the research, the interviews guided the project to find new information, perspectives, and real world use of new social media for interreligious and intercultural dialogue in many forms.

AS OF APRIL 2010:

- 31 billion e-mails are sent daily, and a new blog is created every second.
- YouTube has passed 150 million monthly visitors, with more than 100 million videos viewed every day.
- There are 2 billion Google searches each day.
- Wikipedia has 2.7 million articles in English—10 million altogether in 260 languages. There are 75 thousand active contributors, and in 2008, Wikipedia had 684 million visitors.
- Facebook has more than 200 million active users in 170 countries. Half visit the site every day, and people spend an average of 20 minutes on the site.
- Twitter has had more than 3.1 billion tweets.
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Interreligious Milestones</th>
<th>Technology Developments</th>
<th>Political Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Usenet, first successful host of e-mail lists, begins</td>
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<td>1985</td>
<td>Well.com, e-mail-based virtual community, started in the Bay Area</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>The Community of Sant'Egidio begins an annual international “Prayer for Peace” gathering based on Pope John Paul II’s Assisi World Day of Prayer</td>
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<td>First Intifada breaks out, Palestinian Territories</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tim Berners-Lee creates the World Wide Web</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>More than 8000 people mark the centennial celebration of the 1893 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago</td>
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<td>1993</td>
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<td>First church and religious Web sites appear</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>Interfaith Youth Care founded by Eboo Patel</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>The Parliament of the World’s Religions meets in South Africa</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Pope John Paul II makes his historic pilgrimage to the Holy Land, praying at the Western Wall and visiting Yadvashem, the Israeli national Shoah (Holocaust) memorial.</td>
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<td>Second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, begins</td>
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<td>2001</td>
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<td>Attacks on World Trade Center sparks call for better understanding of Muslim world</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>At least 1000 people killed in Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>The Parliament of the World’s Religions meets in Barcelona, Spain</td>
<td>ConnectU, which later became Facebook, is launched at Harvard</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>International Council of Christians and Jews held (CCJ) international conference in Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Center for Global Justice and Reconciliation (CGJR) founded at the Washington National Cathedral, focusing on poverty, social justice, and peacemaking initiatives around the globe to address the root causes of human suffering</td>
<td>YouTube is launched</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>The Washington Post and Newsweek launch “On Faith” website, an online religion forum featuring a multifaith panel of distinguished figures from the academy, the faith traditions, and journalism</td>
<td>Benkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs founded at Georgetown University</td>
<td>Twitter debuts</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Tony Blair Faith Foundation founded - a major initiative is interfaith cooperation to prevent deaths from malaria</td>
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<td>Pope Benedict XVI’s Regensburg University lecture criticized throughout Islamic world</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>Interfaith dialogue initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia includes religious leaders of many different faiths in Madrid, Spain</td>
<td>World Economic Forum and Georgetown University publish “Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue”, first-ever global reference that seeks to advance Muslim-West communication and promote collaboration around global challenges</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>The Parliament of the World’s Religions meets in Melbourne, Australia</td>
<td>Charter for Compassion is launched, the result of Karen Armstrong’s TED Prize</td>
<td>President Obama states that his Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Initiatives will not only support US nonprofits, but will also reach out across the world to advance interfaith cooperation</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>Iran’s “Twitter Revolution”</td>
<td>Iranian Presidential Election</td>
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Depending on the individuals’ background and expertise, the questions varied somewhat, though the central focus of the questions was, what is the interaction of new social media and intercultural and interreligious dialogue today? We sought to address the following crucial points: Who is using social media? Does discussion using new social media promote tolerance? How are groups using new social media to bridge gaps between religions and cultures? What are the positive and negative effects of new social media on interreligious and intercultural dialogue?

The questions were designed to be open-ended and unbiased, and were ultimately left up to each interviewee’s interpretation. This allowed each interview’s content to be an original, honest, and accurate interpretation of the individual’s thoughts, findings, and experiences. Through compiling and analyzing these interviews, our research is able to incorporate many different views on new social media and intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Other Approaches

In our exploration of new social media’s role in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, we attempted to not only interview those with an active presence in the world of new social media, but to utilize these tools ourselves.

The researchers started a Twitter account, a Facebook group, and a LinkedIn group, learning firsthand the difficulties of sustaining an active and engaging web presence. Maintaining an effective presence proved to be extremely time-consuming, underscoring a common theme found in our interviews: small organizations struggle to find the time to dedicate to new social media, while larger organizations that can afford it find that a full time “social media person” is necessary. Our group of busy students found it difficult to keep up with the rapid online conversations. In the end, the Fellows used the tools more for observation, although the group was able to spark discussion on various forums by asking questions such as: Do you think the Internet make people more tolerant in general? How often, if ever,

### Sample answers to a question Fellows posted on LinkedIn:

**Question:** Have you used social networks like Facebook and Twitter for interreligious or intercultural dialogue?

**Response 1:** My husband did and it failed really bad, people get so defensive and then they start attacking some people are very ethnocentric meaning that they believe that their beliefs/ religion/ culture is the best when they forget that we live in a very diverse world where we all should be more tolerant, accept, understand, respect and celebrate our similarities and differences as human beings. My husband’s question was how do you feel about an interracial/ inter-religious marriage since we are a couple from 2 different worlds.

**Response 2:** I have friends from all around the planet on Facebook and Twitter so I guess I sometimes do have intercultural dialogues. I think I did that more on Pownce (now defunct) because there was no character limit and we could have long threaded discussions. I try to avoid religious discussions simply because they can be so volatile. I have friends with beliefs quite different than mine and we agree to disagree and to focus our Tweets on other topics such as Web development. For rigorous discussion I think blogs are more suitable. Character limits create a lot of room for misinterpretation. When discussing something like religion I think people really need more space to clearly delineate their ideas, link to resources backing up their arguments, etc.

**Response 3:** I haven’t experienced any religious dialogue. Culture is very important. I have read the constitution of the United States because I want to understand the country and my friends there better... My friend in Sydney, Australia runs a computer business and is on LinkedIn. I found him today on here, he is also on 3 other social networking sites I belong to... Generally speaking, social networking breaks down cultural barriers. The Internet does stereotype certain nationalities though or appears to. Nigeria for example is synonymous with all kinds of scams. I get offers of marriage and that sort of thing in messages on some social networking sites and know they come from Internet cafes in Nigeria.
do you discuss religion online? Do the benefits of new social media outweigh the risks?

**Twitter**

The group’s Twitter account, BridgingBabel, followed primarily social media, interfaith, and religious experts. We followed 35 people and had 22 followers. See the Berkley Center’s New Social Media Knowledge Resources Page for a list.

**Facebook**

Initially we created 3 groups: one for Fellows that proved helpful in the initial brainstorming sessions and for sharing links, although we quickly determined this was best done using e-mails and Google groups. A second group was formed for the anticipated support team (Berkley Center Support Team—Bridging Babel) upon whose discussion boards topics were posted, although they did not result in dialogue. A third, general group (Bridging Babel) was created but did not attract large membership, and while it initially enjoyed frequent posting, interaction all but disappeared by the end of October. We hope to use this group to stimulate discussion about this report and build upon our research. The researchers’ involvement in maintaining a new social media presence proved illuminating in terms of highlighting the significant effort involved with maintaining an active presence and underscored the achievements of those with large followings.

**LinkedIn**

The Fellows also created a LinkedIn group that aimed to provide academics, interfaith leaders, and students with a network and forum for interreligious discussion. The group learned that maintaining an active LinkedIn group requires effort and time commitment. LinkedIn’s professional-oriented online culture may not make it the ideal tool for promoting in-depth interreligious dialogue. However, we did receive interesting answers to questions we posted on the site—see the box “Dialogue on LinkedIn.” LinkedIn has strong potential for being a powerful networking tool for the interfaith and religious community.

All of the fellows also maintained personal Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn profiles.

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**Interview Results: New Social Media Experts**

New social media provides many possibilities for promoting interreligious and intercultural tolerance and understanding. While experts agree that the positive or negative impact of online tools depends primarily on the motive of the user, there is significant disagreement about whether the Internet and new social media have the ability to increase tolerance in society in general.

**On Tolerance vs. Understanding**

There are many views on how to best engage in dialogue and what the desired outcome should be. Leo Brunnick, CEO and founder of the religion information website Patheos.com, identifies three levels of interreligious dialogue. The first level is tolerance and requires a basic respect for the right of “the other’s” religion to exist without interference or hostility.

*THREE LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT*

According to Leo Brunnick of Patheos.com, there are typically three different outcomes of positive interreligious engagement:

- **Tolerance**: Respecting the right of the religion of “the other” to exist without interference or hostility.
- **Understanding**: Being able to empathize with and understand the religious beliefs of “the other.” The goal of many interreligious organizations is to go “beyond tolerance” to a higher and deeper level of understanding.
- **Acceptance**: Incorporating and adopting, to at least some degree, the religious beliefs of “the other.” Neither a realistic nor desirable goal.
The second level is understanding, requiring knowledge of and empathy for the religious beliefs of “the other.” Acceptance, the last level, consists of adopting, at least partially, “the other’s” religious beliefs, though Brunnick asserts that this is neither a realistic nor desirable goal for interreligious dialogue, emphasizing the importance of religious diversity.

Deciding if, when, and how to use new social media for interreligious and intercultural dialogue depends on whether the intended outcome of the dialogue is to establish tolerance or to reach a deeper understanding of “the other.” Simon Cohen, Managing Director of Global Tolerance, an ethical communications agency which utilizes media to build interreligious understanding, argues that tolerance can be placed on a continuum, starting with basic tolerance—seen as simply “putting up with the other.” At the other end of the spectrum, the most advanced form is interreligious understanding that respects and understands difference wherever it lies.36

While tolerance may be easier to achieve than understanding, it does not always translate to openness towards a whole group or religion. Tolerance tends to be based on positive individual relationships rather than knowledge of religious beliefs. For example, having a friend of a different faith may not result in actually understanding that religion. In contrast, real doctrinal understanding may lead one to have empathy for the “other.”

However, without tolerance as a prerequisite for understanding, achieving real respect for difference is unlikely. It is crucial to choose the appropriate online tools and approaches to reach one’s desired audience.

**Does New Social Media Have Positive Power?**

While few dispute that the Internet connects people at an unprecedented level of ease and accessibility, the greater debate over whether, in general, using new social media makes people more tolerant or open-minded continues.

On one hand, the increased access to people, content, and information that new social media provides can promote tolerance. Noam Shore, the Founder and Chief Conversant of Ideologue Inc. affirms, “Online social media tools offer tremendous potential to build connections and bridge gaps between people in ways not possible historically.”37 The quantity and diversity of information on the Internet makes it difficult to avoid encountering “the other.” Similarly, Brunnick believes that while there may always be a minority of intolerant people, “on balance [the Internet] will have the effect where the [vast majority] of people exposed to that information will become more tolerant... [as
they] become more aware of the world at large and [gain] a better appreciation of different perspectives.” 38 Tim Brauhn, a Faith Acts Fellow at the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, believes that while some people use online media for less than admirable goals, most people fundamentally desire tolerance, peace and understanding and are more likely to respect differences than to reject them.39 On the other hand, other experts believe that users tend to seek like-minded people and are less open to different cultures, religious beliefs, and people.

The Democratizing Influence of the Internet and New Social Media

New social media empowers users by providing accessible ways to engage and create content, start discussions, and express their opinions to a large audience. As a result, Matt Armstrong, publisher of the public policy and social media blog Mountainrunner.us, asserts that new social media “democratizes influence; the gatekeepers are challenged, bypassed, or ignored today.”40

Increasingly, the flow of information has become more user-focused and user-dependent. Armstrong notes how the protests against the Iranian presidential election in 2009 were not covered by mainstream news outlets until Twitter users brought it to their attention.41 CNN.com recently launched a section of its website called “iReport” that uses images captured by average users (often on cell phones) to help “shape how and what CNN covers everyday.”42

The proliferation of information online also shapes religious identities. Peter Mandaville, Co-Director of the Center for Global Studies at George Mason University, observes that many young Muslims find information from a multitude of sources with varying perspectives on their faith.43 As a result, traditional religious hierarchies break down and many religious activists and intellectuals are establishing their own websites and Facebook pages in order to communicate their interpretation of their faith. While they recognize the loss of editorial control online, these individuals and groups create forums to keep discussions in their own space and respond to comments when necessary.

Unfortunately, this democratization of information and the increase in user-generated content also makes it easier for misinformation and negative content to proliferate online. Access to a wide-range of media makes it easy for local political and religious issues to attract global attention. Dalia Mogahed, Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, observes “there is more consciousness of a global community as a result of access to new media,” with polling finding that “civilian deaths in Iraq are making Malaysian Muslims mad at the US.”44

Furthermore, the less personal nature of online communication makes it easier for information to be distorted or misinterpreted. Armstrong notes, “You lose control of your message when you put it [online]. If you are intending to engage a religious leader, you have to accept that he or she may interpret what you are trying to achieve as something else. And it may go sour on you.”45

Brunnick acknowledges that finding reliable sources about other religions can be a challenge on the Internet. However, he asserts that overall, new social media and online religious information sources “allow people to come to the [interreligious] conversation with a lot more [ease], knowledge, and context than before.”46 Furthermore, he believes that misinformation can be
overcome by directing people to trustworthy websites that provide unbiased, accurate information on different religions. In the same way that WebMD has become a trusted source for basic health information, he hopes that his website Patheos will serve a similar function by providing unbiased, accurate information on a variety of religious beliefs.

Mandaville uses the term “iPod Muslims” to describe the impact of online information sources upon the faith of some Muslim users. These users mix and match their support for Islamic scholars and views accessed online in ways that would often be incompatible in their real life. The widening of reference points provides the masses with an opportunity to shape the nature of interreligious debates online. However, these discussions may not necessarily result in greater tolerance of the religious “other.”

While new social media tools can help make users more aware of different people and ideas, some believe that increased exposure may actually exacerbate tensions between groups. Clay Shirky, Adjunct Professor in the Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University and esteemed writer on the effects of Internet technologies, explains, “Sometimes, more information makes things worse.” There are some radical individuals who react negatively to any information about the group or groups they hate. In contrast to those who laud the potential of the Internet for dialogue, Shirky believes that new technologies have had a “fairly catastrophic” effect on intercultural dialogue. He notes, “The historic pattern is [that a] new communication tool comes along, [and everyone thinks that] this will benefit mankind because we can understand each other. Then, the opposite happens, and everyone is surprised. When people can be territorially separated, the question of hatred becomes lessened.”

Like-Minded Communities

The Internet enables anyone with an online connection to access a broad range of information, people, and perspectives. It also provides a forum for like-minded individuals to form communities online. Armstrong explains, “We talk about everybody getting together because of the Internet… and to some degree that’s true because barriers are breaking down, but on the other hand the opposite is also true. The reason is that I can find and exclusively associate with people who think like me.”

EXTREMISM ONLINE

Unfortunately, terrorist organizations have recognized the power of the Internet, and it is increasingly used as a key tool for radicalization and recruitment. Before 9/11, al Qaeda only had one website; currently, the organization is present on more than 50 different sites.

Bruce Hoffman, an expert on terrorism at Georgetown University, claims that “virtually every terrorist group in the world today… now has its own Internet website and... maintains multiple sites in different languages.” Arab and Islamic terrorist organizations have the largest presence online. For example, Hezbollah maintains twenty different sites in three different languages.

Neil Doyle, an author who studies the way terrorists use the Internet and modern technology, claims that terrorists’ websites not only encourage Muslims to join violent jihads, but some will even show young men how to effectively carry out a terrorist attack via online training courses. Terrorists’ websites are an important means of propaganda and indoctrination. Terrorist organizations use the Internet to promote a message of violence and hate; Doyle explains that many sites broadcast footage advocating for and depicting attacks on American targets.

A profound, and recent, example of radicalization online is the case of Colleen LaRose, the Pennsylvania woman who met violent jihadists online under the name “Jihad Jane.” The FBI arrested LaRose after she had spent months using e-mail, YouTube, MySpace, and electronic message boards to recruit radicals in Europe and South Asia to “wage violent jihad,” according to a federal indictment. Michael B. Farrell of the Christian Science Monitor argues that the case of “Jihad Jane” suggests a rise in “Jihobbyists,” people drawn to the online “theater” of violent jihad, and who become more radical as they delve deeper into web forums. LaRose acted on her own, without any training beyond what the Internet provided, demonstrating the terrifying reality of terrorism online.
Some people believe the prevalence of like-minded online communities may diminish the potential for new social media to promote tolerance. As Shore (his company Idealogue, Inc. created Beyond Tolerance) explains, “The variety of online communities and ease of finding those with specific interests is also helping people to self-select into like minded groups, lessening the ability to interact and learn from those with different perspectives and opinions, and be exposed to other voices.” Armstrong suggests that, before the Internet, “Pressures to assimilate were greater. The Internet today, along with greater concentrations of émigrés, facilitates constant engagement with societies and cultures around the world. Diasporas may be connected, empowered, and even created by this new accessibility.” For example, Mandaville has observed that some Muslim communities that may feel marginalized or ignored offline find each other and a forum to express their views on their faith and establish a community online. Online communication and new social media allow niche communities to exist with little or no interference from society. Sectarian factions reproduce themselves easily online. Armstrong affirms that there are groups that spread both positive and negative behavior online.

It is difficult to say whether new social media will create more tolerance on a global scale. Rabbi Brad Hirschfield of the National Jewish Center of Learning and Leadership notes, “On one hand, online communities are real and can create more barriers and more walls; on the other hand, the Internet has ability to lower these barriers because it takes less initial effort to enter conversations you wouldn’t necessarily be in otherwise.”

In addition, there may be a disconnect between online and offline behavior. As Mogahed observes, “There is definitely a gap between the intense prejudice that is voiced on the Internet and how people deal with each other in the public space [where] they are forced into a community where some things are not acceptable.” For example, she notes that while there is a substantial amount of anti-Muslim hate on the Internet, the extent to which this intolerance is carried into the public sphere is fairly limited. Laws and offline social norms likely contribute to a distinction between online and offline behavior. Therefore, fear about the Internet giving extremists an outlet to express deviant views and find like-minded people must be assessed in light of how online behavior translates offline.

**Importance of Offline Engagement**

Although many individuals and organizations are active online, they considered offline, “face-to-face” interaction ideal for successful interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Armstrong believes that while new social media expands our ability to network and make initial connections, “in-person engagement [is ultimately required] to establish meaningful relationship[s] because it puts a face on the connection, [and] replace[s] a virtual handshake with a real one” that feels more legitimate and authentic.

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After Mannville conducted a Pew study, he observed that even among young Muslims who discuss religion online, the majority still consider their local imam as their primary religious authority and influence. While Brunnick agrees that “physical proximity is always better than online contact only,” he stresses that online social tools can be a practical, useful alternative to offline engagement. Cohen maintains that using both online and face-to-face dialogue to supplement each other may often be the most effective approach.
at the US Institute of Peace, believe that as online communication becomes increasingly widespread and advanced, it may replace offline engagement as the primary tool for interreligious dialogue. He notes the potential for intercultural and interreligious dialogue to be integrated into school curriculums by using online video conferencing to connect students with their peers on the other side of the world.65

While anonymity can encourage unproductive, bitter online exchanges, it might also be liberating for users encouraging honest discussion of religion or beliefs. Furthermore, while text-based conversations may seem limiting to some, the popularity of cell phone text-messaging, instant messaging, and discussions carried out through social networks indicate that these tools have an everyday utility for users.

Building Tolerance through Common Ground

By allowing users to find personal common ground, new social media can be used to foster a basic form of tolerance. Since many people are not explicitly interested in interreligious dialogue, Brunnick emphasizes the importance of “engag[ing] people where they are[…] because they do not learn about other religions through intent but exposure.”66

Brunnick further states, “[while] people don’t care about the Muslim perspective, per se, they are fascinated to read an article about a Muslim athlete who couldn’t participate in a particular event because of a religious reason, or the Jewish team who had to forfeit a game because it was on a particular religious festival.”67

Cohen agrees that sports, music, and film are often effective ways to break down perception boundaries and bring people together. He argues, “Depending on the objective of the dialogue, you may need to work through explicitly non-religious mechanisms such as Facebook to build tolerance of ‘the other.’”68

Global Tolerance’s initiative “Faithbook” is one example of utilizing new social media to promote understanding. Launched on Facebook in 2008, it seeks to provide an online forum for debating religious issues and permits members to upload media and join the conversation.

Another example comes from Odyssey Networks, www.odysseynetworks.org, the nation’s largest coalition of faith groups dedicated to building bridges of understanding among people of faith through media. Nick Stuart, Odyssey’s President and CEO, spoke of promoting dialogue and action on Odyssey’s website through the creation of “spaces where things happen.” On the site, visitors can learn about and get involved with a variety of causes such as malaria, peace, compassion, and faith and environment. People of all faiths can be connected and provided with knowledge and resources for action around causes of common interest. Odyssey also promotes the commonalities among faith group responses to important issues such as climate change and immigration reform. Odyssey will launch its own application and channel for mobile phones in early summer 2010.69

Common ground does not necessarily have to be religious for it to have positive impact upon attitudes of “the other.” While not focused on new social media, Gallup conducted research throughout the Muslim world, and their findings suggest that understanding the life and interests of “the other” may have a positive impact on tolerance. In a 2006 poll, many respondents held a negative view of the United States government but a strongly positive opinion of American people. Instead of conflating the U.S. government with its citizens, the respondents made a distinction. Extensive qualitative research also finds that access to U.S. television programming and pop culture makes people feel as if they “know” what the average American is like and consequently make this distinction.

In this way, causes that focus on religious similarities and encourage multi-faith humanitarian action may be an effective way to promote tolerance. For example, the Tony Blair Faith Act Fellows is a religiously diverse group who work for malaria eradication. However, many people we interviewed believe that these initiatives are less likely to achieve substantive interreligious understanding without explicit recognition and discussion of religious differences.

From Tolerance to Understanding: Achieving Pluralism

Interreligious and intercultural interaction may lead one to accept “the other” as a friend, but this sentiment may not translate to real tolerance toward that person’s religion or culture.
The distinction between purpose-specific and general networks is becoming increasingly blurred. Brunnick observes that users “don’t want a separate sphere of interaction.”74 He further argues that they are engaging less on forums, preferring to either comment directly (and often anonymously) on blog posts and articles or discuss a topic within a trusted, closer group of friends as on social networking sites like Facebook. Brunnick notes, “Like many sites built expressly for interfaith dia-

General social networking sites such as Facebook do not expressly encourage users to acknowledge, contemplate, and embrace difference “wherever it lies.” Brauhn argues that there is a distinct advantage to establishing a purpose-specific “safe place” online governed by rules of conduct and respect that is used specifically for in-depth interreligious and intercultural dialogue.70

Beyond Tolerance is an example of a purpose-specific site that encourages users to go beyond the goal of “how we can get along in ways where we don’t injure each other” by establishing a “place of engagement where people have to wrestle with differences, without doing away with the differences.”71 As opposed to “putting up” with other beliefs, this form of engagement encourages people to understand difference and “see the world through the other’s eyes.”

Such efforts are distinct from interreligious cooperation initiatives that tend to focus on commonalities and avoid addressing religious differences. Indeed, a common misperception of interreligious dialogue is that it attempts to “water down” religions by emphasizing similarities and ignoring key differences. However, Brauhn argues, “If this is the case, we have failed in our mission.”72 As Brunnick advocates, “The answer to interfaith friction is [not] to go post-religion… [or only] talk about the parts we agree on, and ignore all the rest. Ultimately, that skips over… the understanding that is required” for substantive knowledge of other religions and peoples.73
Interview Results: Religious and Academic Leaders

Is There a Future for New Social Media in Dialogue?

Although new social media is increasingly being used for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, our interview data indicates that among religious leaders and academics there is a strong technological divide along the lines of age and occupation. Frequent use of the Internet for interpersonal communication unrelated to employment is most common amongst those between the ages of 18–34.78 In the course of our research, we have observed that new social media is most frequently used for online dialogue by professionals at faith-based or faith-inspired organizations, such as religious program directors and outreach coordinators. Within faith communities, new social media seems to be aimed primarily at teenagers and young adults in their twenties and early thirties. For instance, Sinai Temple in Los Angeles recently held an event on parenting that attracted 350 participants, and they attributed the high attendance to successful advertising through Facebook.79 However, the fastest growing population on Facebook is adults aged 35–54 years old, whose representation increased by 276.4% over the last 6 months of 2008.80 There is potential, by extension, for this age group to increase their use of new social media for interreligious and intercultural outreach. Several factors, such as the experience, knowledge, and existing networks held by this group make it possible for them to exert a positive influence among their peers and the younger generation by using new social media tools to conduct and maintain online dialogue.

Lessons in Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue

Some religious leaders expressed that interreligious dialogue is best when it occurs naturally and spontaneously. According to Rabbi Harold White of Georgetown University, interreligious dialogue can be especially beneficial to the parties involved when conducted on the grassroots level as opposed to within formal, organized conference settings. “If you have a colloquium…and then break up into small groups, it is the small group response which is effective.”81 The potential for small groups and grassroots campaigns to create a continuous dialogue may account for this. In order for interreligious dialogue to truly have an
impact, it cannot be conducted on a one-time basis but must consist of a prolonged exchange. This continual commitment is the essence of effective dialogue.

Many academics and faith leaders agree that the goal of interreligious dialogue is not only about finding common interests or values. According to Rabbi White, the goal of interreligious dialogue is “not to just look for similarities, but to see the differences and be able to embrace the differences.” Dr. Peter Phan, Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, affirms that the goal has always been mutual understanding, enrichment, and sometimes correction. Individuals who participate in interreligious dialogue aim to correct existing misconceptions about other faiths while simultaneously “[enriching] their understanding of their own religion.” The purpose should not be to convert or proselytize; to do so would undermine the principles of interreligious dialogue, and everyone who participates in dialogue must understand this because it requires an open, honest environment.

New social media’s potential role in interreligious and intercultural dialogue is a point of contention for some academics and faith leaders, who maintain that true interreligious dialogue requires face-to-face contact. Dr. John Borelli, Special Assistant for Interreligious Initiatives to Dr. John J. DeGioia, President of Georgetown University, supports this view and argues that new social media can serve at most only an auxiliary role:

“Dialogue is interpersonal communication, and it happens face-to-face. Hard work must be put in person-to-person or in groups of people, face to face. I don’t see how electronic communication can ever replace that.”

“Coming into the same room, traveling and meeting with someone, is hard to replace. That is a commitment.”

According to White, the importance of face-to-face meetings lies in the ability to perceive others’ honest reactions. “You are actually seeing the people. You are seeing their facial expressions; you are seeing their body language. If you do not see the person, a great deal is lost.”

Perspectives on Dialogue

Daniel Madigan

According to Fr. Daniel Madigan, SJ, Facebook can be a useful forum for at least one form of interreligious dialogue. “When a lot of people live together as neighbors in
An excerpt from an informal interreligious conversation prompted by a Facebook status update

Nick Smith Is there any greater desire in human life than to return to the grace and presence of G-d?

(March 2, 2010 at 8:03pm · Comment · Like · Remove Tag)

Fiona Lockyer If you hold religion in esteem, then no, but it depends on your values there...

Nick Smith Well, this is in general directed at my religious friends who might see this. I suppose the real question is: If the Lord comes like a thief in the night, do I, not knowing when anything will happen, use my time to pray and study the works of G-d in eager anticipation, or do I, accepting that the end will happen regardless of what I do, go out into the world and just live my life as I think best?

Shelly Shore In regards to living in study or living life as you see it best, is there a reason why those two can’t coincide? For some, praying and studying the works of G-d is living life in the best way they can think of. For others, experiencing life to its fullest is the best way to honor the gifts that G-d has given us, because what better gift is there than the world we live in, the people around us? But is waiting for an ultimate showing of G-d’s power, some expected great arrival, just taking away from the human experience of everyday life? If one buries oneself in study, anticipating what is to come, does one then miss out on all of the little miracles, the little works of G-d that happen every day, every moment?

David Aslan French I think of course the answer is kind of “both”, but I think it has to be a synergy between the two, not merely a compromise between the two. Since the conversation is study vs. works, how about a third addition, grace? Works, grace, and study? What contrast or balance between those three?

Nick Smith In terms of salvation, I fall firmly into the “works” camp. To me, it doesn’t matter how much I believe in G-d (in whatever form I choose to believe in him). It matters that I put the faith into action. I don’t think it matters hugely what form the works take, be it community service, taking holy orders, prayer on behalf of others, or any number of things. As for grace, I believe that the saving grace of G-d is available to all, but that at the final judgment, the grace of G-d will go to those who have earned it through works.

Shelly Shore I know the debate you’re referring to. There’s a line in one of the morning blessings, after a list of acts that are rewarded by G-d, that reads, “v’talmud Torah k’neged kulam”, which translates (roughly, Hebrew speakers, don’t hurt me!) to “and the study of Torah is equal to them all [because it leads them all].” However, I question the idea that study is greater. If all of one’s time is spent studying, what chance does one have to go out and perform those acts which study has led him to?

Nick Smith I completely agree that good works done without religious motivation are no more or less meritorious than those done with said motivation. That being said, is a life spent in the study of scripture wasted, or does study become a work in itself after a point?

Shelly Shore Wasted? I don’t think so. But I would counter that with another question: what is the point of knowledge if it is never put into action? If you spend your life in study, but never pass on your knowledge or put it to use, how is it beneficial to you or to the world?

David Aslan French It seems to me that the non-believer who does good works for the purpose of good, rather than for mercenary purposes is in fact doing better than the “faithful man” I would say that doing good for the sake of good is an act of faith, while doing something for mercenary reasons (not wanting to get hurt) is not faith. If you define faith that way though, it is necessary though. Both faith and works are completely necessary. But faith is more than just believing a set of facts, and works is more than doing a set of acts.

Nick Smith If we accept the symbiotic relationship of faith and works, then yes, I agree with you.

David Aslan French Cool. We should grab coffee sometime. Its nice finding people who like asking questions like this.

Nick Smith If you can settle for a place that also sells tea, then I’m down.

I like the big questions. So much more fun.

(March 2, 2010 at 9:35pm)
that space it can become a useful forum for the Dialogue of Life.” The Dialogue of Life, as distinct from the three other forms of interreligious dialogue identified by Fr. Madigan (deeds, theological exchange, and religious experience), involves “believers from different religions living as neighbors, sharing each other’s joys and sorrows.” For example, one might discuss and cooperate with friends of other religions in solving some of life’s daily problems, thus fostering mutual understanding and “an atmosphere of freedom and openness conducive to future collaboration.” Fr. Madigan cites two specific examples: “My Muslim friend just had a baby, so I spoke to her about it on Facebook; when my father died last year, a lot of my Muslim friends wrote to me.”

### Phillip Seib

Phillip Seib is the Director of the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy, Professor of Journalism and Public Diplomacy, and Professor of International Relations. Seib’s research interests include the effects of news coverage on foreign policy, particularly conflict and terrorism issues. He says that within Islam, the greatest concern is interreligious dialogue between Sunni and Shia. There is not much dialogue, but there is a lot of tension. Muslims are more interested in the Muslim world than Jews or Christians are. However, there are exceptions. He notes, “During the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, there was a concerted effort on both sides to start a political and religious dialogue, and they did this online, pre-Twitter and pre-Facebook. That goes on all the time. It tends to be fairly visible, but I wonder how many people it really reaches... It's hard to separate political and religious; they often merge.”

### Arun Gandhi

Arun Gandhi, a former journalist for The India Times and an advocate of nonviolence, is the fifth grandson of Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi first joined Facebook to keep in touch with his grandchildren. However, he soon recognized the value of new social media as a way to guide people towards more positive interactions in their day-to-day lives. Gandhi regularly posts a proverb for reflection and encourages people to respond to it with their thoughts. Because Gandhi has almost 1,500 friends on Facebook, the proverbs and resulting comments reach a broad audience. People often respond to Gandhi’s quote by drawing from the cultural and religious experiences that guide their everyday behavior, without necessarily speaking explicitly about religion. By viewing other people’s responses, a user is exposed to a host of other religious and cultural viewpoints.

### Haroon Moghul

Haroon Moghul is a Ph.D. candidate in Middle East and South Asian Studies at Columbia University and Executive Director of the Maydan Institute, a communications and consulting firm aimed at increasing understanding and improving relationships between Muslims and the West. He uses Twitter one to two hours a day, primarily to stay current on topics of interest. By “following” people with similar interests, he gains access to a much larger knowledge base from articles that members of his network post on Twitter to promote discussion. Moghul cites three additional benefits of new social media: it provides a virtual community of like-minded people interested in a given field, which allows for collaboration and brainstorming on issues of religion, dialogue and coexistence; it allows faith and interfaith leaders to coordinate a response to crises, such as 9/11 or an attack on the New York subway system within hours as opposed to days, which has a profoundly positive effect on interfaith dialogue; and it allows individuals who feel their views are misrepresented within their own community to find a virtual community that is truly in agreement with and representative of their views. In some cases, online dialogue may be the only opportunity an individual has to interact with other faiths and cultures.

### The Importance of Action

Words alone are not enough to create substantive change. Moghul notes that translating dialogue into action is the most desired outcome of interreligious dialogue. Community actions that bring together different religious groups for a common cause are not necessarily interreligious dialogue; however, the informal interactions at such events can create a strong foundation for continued exchanges. These interactions build a sense of common humanity and normalcy between different groups as they work side by side.

The process must be two-fold: personal communication helps combat stereotypes, and common action creates the mutual trust necessary to continue building these relationships.
Interview Results:
Interfaith Organizations

Eboo Patel, Founder of the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), describes interreligious dialogue primarily as the meeting of theologians or religious leaders to draft documents on behalf of their respective faith communities. Patel suggests that this approach is insufficient: “There has to be a movement of people at a variety of levels who care about understanding and cooperation.”\(^92\) The theory behind interreligious dialogue at the senior level is that lay people will follow the guidance of their faith leader.

New social media’s emergence as a means of engaging in dialogue affords lay people the opportunity to lead and take ownership of the process of interreligious dialogue. Some organizations, such as IFYC and the Parliament of the World’s Religions, have launched their own social networking sites specifically for those seeking to engage in interfaith dialogue.

Getting People Involved

One of the challenges an interfaith organization faces when experimenting with a new form of engagement is getting people interested and involved. As Amber Hacker, Network Engagement Coordinator for the IFYC explains, many people become involved with the organization through their social networking site, Bridge-Builders. After seeing Patel on television or reading his articles on interreligious dialogue, people seek more information by joining Bridge-Builders, referred to by Hacker as an “interfaith Facebook.” In addition, many of the members of Bridge-Builders were first part of a conference or retreat sponsored by IFYC.\(^94\) Similarly, Project Interfaith encourages participants in their Interfaith Youth service projects to continue engaging in interreligious dialogue via the Internet. “For many interfaith organizations, new social media is used as a tool to follow-up from previous engagement in dialogue in face-to-face settings,” explains Beth Katz, Founder and Executive Director of Project Interfaith.\(^95\) Intersections International, a multi-faith initiative of the Collegiate Church of New York, finds that the most organic roots for interaction on new social media begin in the aftermath of conferences and training, preferring face-to-face interactions when possible. Sam Simon, a Fellow at Intersections, states, “it is harder to hate someone if you have met them face to face.”\(^96\)

Layalina Productions seeks to promote understanding between the Arab world and the United States. To this end, they use new social media as a tool to promote

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A goal of those participating in interreligious and intercultural dialogue has been to use new social media to connect online dialogue to offline action. Some social movements adapt really easily; interfaith dialogue and intercultural work are not that example. Very few people will on their own volition [engage in inter-religious dialogue]. What inspires people to engage in this work are peace and reconciliation—very seldomly has it been catalyzed through an online relationship. People need something more dramatic. I have seen the interesting relationship between current events and interfaith dialogue.”

—Daniel Tutt, Project Manager of 20,000 Dialogues, Unity Productions Foundation.\(^93\)
because credibility is always at stake. New social media affords the opportunity to easily access important literature from an imam yet cannot rival face-to-face interaction. Several interviewees note that the trust necessary to begin discussing a topic such as personal faith is difficult to develop using the Web. The challenge is initiating dialogue without the need for interpersonal connections fostered through personal interaction and without the benefit of previous experience with interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In addressing this challenge, the IFYC has invested much time and effort into understanding how to best use Bridge-Builders as a tool to overcome the challenges of conducting dialogue online.

In order to understand how to create the relationships necessary to begin dialogue, interreligious and intercultural organizations are exploring the use of various social networking tools for different purposes, such as Twitter and Facebook. Tutt notes, “Recently, the founder of Twitter said, ‘the reason I created Twitter was because we needed a device that didn’t make people feel guilty about putting out a message and not getting a response.’ Twitter is a vehicle of one-way communication. In Twitter, dialogue is difficult to foster. Facebook is the same, but it can be used for catalyzing real-world dialogue. The most successful examples that I have seen are the private chatrooms designed around a small community to talk about one issue of importance to them—such as the United Religions Initiative or Israel-Palestine talks.” This last point about finding common ground around important issues was a recurring theme among interviewees.

Some organizations face difficulties in their initial forays into the world of new social media. As Reverend Clark Lobenstine of the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington explains, “As to social media, we’re a little slow on the uptake on that. We have a Facebook page for the InterFaith Conference (which someone set up for me), but both were maintained by an Atlas Service Corps Fellow we had for 7.5 months and not much has been done before she had to finish her year at another location.” Project Interfaith relies on interns to update Facebook because they lack staff capacity to focus on social media. They use Facebook Pages and Causes to interact with users but admit uncertainty about which aspect of Facebook is best to
connect people for interreligious dialogue; however, they prefer to use Twitter. Project Interfaith uses Twitter to connect with other interfaith professionals, to share resources with the interfaith community, and to follow other professionals on Twitter to learn how they engage in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The relationships developed between professionals on Twitter occasionally extend into the offline world as well. Project Interfaith uses Twitter to pose thought provoking questions such as: “What are some of the challenges and opportunities of interfaith marriage?” Those who follow Project Interfaith respond, and the organization re-tweets their response to reach a broader community in hopes of generating further discussion.104 Using Twitter in this way has the advantage of quickly capturing people’s attention with honed messages, but the rapid pace of exchange and 140 character message limit may cause conversations to remain surface-level.

For interreligious and intercultural organizations to truly benefit from Twitter use, they need a staff member assigned primarily to Twitter. Therefore, Lyzz Schwegler, Production Coordinator of Layalina Productions, notes that small, non-profit organizations find it more difficult to be active on Twitter, as they often lack a staff member with the time to effectively use it.105 Scholar Katherine Marshall, Senior Fellow at the Berkley Center and blogger for the Washington Post On Faith website, also finds the utility of Twitter questionable. She “doesn’t understand why people sit around reading it.” She rarely encounters interesting articles from the people that she follows on Twitter; instead, she primarily uses Facebook and is fascinated by it because so many “different people use it for different purposes.”106

In contrast, Tutt thinks that Facebook’s many utilities can complicate rather than catalyze dialogue, “In some

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**Twitter**

- Microblogging tool
- Dialogue uses: Sharing interreligious and intercultural links, articles and other information with as may people as possible
- The 140-character limit can hinder extended dialogue

**Twitter** is a social-networking platform created in 2006 to relay real time information to users. The platform was inspired by creator Tim Dorsey’s introduction of an SMS-based concept that allowed members of his then-company, Odeo, to keep tabs on one another. The name “Twitter” comes not from the chirping of birds but is used to describe a “short burst of inconsequential information.”

The fundamental component of Twitter, the tweet, is a 140-character message that replicates the brief nature of an SMS text. Twitter prompts, “What’s happening?” and the response is a tweet. If you like a tweet you see, you may also retweet someone else’s thoughts. As the Twitter community has grown, the platform has come to include more capabilities, such as the ability to direct a tweet towards a trending topic by adding a hashtag and the topic. A typical tweet, therefore, may look like the following: “Went to UnityWalk today #interreligiousdialogue.”

People can search various topics in the search bar, such as interreligious dialogue, and see what people are saying about a given topic at that moment. A key component of Twitter is the community that it creates. Your tweets are visible in your profile page. People can choose to “follow” your tweets and keep an eye on what you are posting. Should you want to call a specific tweet to someone’s attention, you can include @insertusernamehere to your tweet, and the person will receive your update. As a result, tweets can be used to convey messages to a broader community as well as to specific people.
cases there are grassroots movements that adapted well to new social media, or social media working in a natural way—for [interreligious dialogue] it’s the opposite of that. It’s organizational-centric. People don’t go to Facebook planning to have an interfaith exchange. They need to be directed in that encounter by a facilitator, third party or mediator- some established institution or organization that has received a grant.”

The IFYC uses its social network Bridge-Builders to challenge their members to view global issues through a different lens much as Project Interfaith uses Twitter. The IFYC posts news articles on their dedicated network and challenges users to think about current events with interreligious understanding in mind. The Bridge-Builders forum allows users to post their own topics, articles, and video clips and thereby direct the dialogue themselves. This feature gives members a medium to express their opinions in more depth and provides them ownership of the dialogue on this social network. A sense of ownership of the space, says Hacker, is a crucial component of successful interreligious dialogue online. Interfaith Youth Core Staff and Bridge- Builders’ members alike also use the website to advertise events and exchange best practices. This social networking site is controlled—the network is private and membership is restricted through

FACEBOOK

Facebook is a social networking site created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and co-founders Chris Hughes, Dustin Moskovitz, and Eduardo Saverin while students at Harvard University. The original concept for this social media platform came from the idea of a “face book,” a printed book containing all of the photos and listings for students and faculty at a particular school.

A user begins by creating a profile where he or she can post pictures and give information such as interests, birthday, religion, political beliefs, gender, sexuality, academic history, and work experience. Facebook’s social aspects begin when a user either “friend requests” another person or receives such a “request” from a user.

Facebook was originally used primarily by college students, but has now blossomed into a dynamic social networking site with a wide range of users and purposes. Users can friend one another, post public notes on each other’s walls, send private notes to friends, create events, create and join groups, and become fans of various well-known figures and causes.

Facebook’s site states that its mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.” In this spirit, Facebook created the site Peace.facebook.com as part of Stanford University’s Peace Dot Project. The Peace Dot Initiative has created a network for groups which are promoting peace in various ways; they hope that through combined efforts they can build world peace within 30 years. The site includes data on the many interreligious and intercultural connections formed on Facebook. For example, the site noted on March 20, 2010, at 8:00 PM that 632 Sunni-Shiite; 66,562 Muslim-Christian; 35,222 Christian-Atheist; and 873 Muslim-Jewish friend connections were made in the past 24 hours.

Facebook gives organizations the ability to have an interactive online presence on a social media platform which can provide a link to their websites and blogs and also serve as a forum for discussion. For example, Beliefnet, Patheos, and Faithbook, a page affiliated with Global Tolerance, all have active Facebook presences with 18,807; 1,044; and 4,654 fans respectively as of March 22, 2010.
moderator approval of potential members. This feature is meant to establish a safe space for all to engage in sensitive topics of religion, but it does not allow the public to view the potentially educational and informative dialogue of those on Bridge-Builders. Other complications can arise from custom-built sites with different features. While interreligious organizations are now actively using social media, shown by the creation of new websites such as the Parliament of the World’s Religions PeaceNext, they are hampered by the fact that the sites often require an initial investment of time or effort. Interviewees agreed that busy people may not have the time to learn and use new sites. For example, Marshall noted she had joined PeaceNext but had not yet been able to devote time to figuring out its intricacies.108

Rather than creating a new social network, Layalina focuses on Facebook, Twitter, and an RSS feed as a means of promoting its online publications. While filming its flagship series On the Road, which portrays the experience of Arab students traveling through America, Layalina maintained a blog of the production experience. Layalina finds that the RSS feed, to which anyone can subscribe, is the way in which half of its subscribers are notified about new publications. While Schwegler finds the RSS feed most useful for the organization’s needs, the advantage of Twitter is that it can reach people who would not normally be one of their readers; Twitter can be read by anyone while the RSS feed is only for subscribers.109 Additionally, Layalina maintains a mass e-mail list to release publications, though it finds e-mail not quite as useful considering that the RSS feed is longer and contains more information. Within the RSS feed, one can publish a whole story, but this can have the downside of keeping people away from the main website. Schwegler further finds that little dialogue occurs on Facebook, which Layalina uses primarily to broadcast updates to people. She reports that most of Layalina’s Facebook fans are young people who don’t care enough, and comparatively the On the Road blog has more dialogue.110

Fr. Lefebure, the Matteo Ricci, SJ, Professor of Theology at Georgetown University, discussed the importance of listservs for the interreligious dialogue community, noting their effectiveness for coordinating events. For him, the most useful application of new social media is for planning events in real time.111 Stanton believes that using various forms of new social media creates a digital “surround sound”—increasing the Journal of Inter-religious Dialogue’s visibility on as many websites as possible, realizing the different benefits and drawbacks to each. As Stanton explains, “The more ways we can reach people the better—someone sees us on Facebook then on Twitter, comes to the Journal, see articles on us in Reuters, articles we wrote—we then enter their consciousness in a higher, more direct way—this has the amplifying effect of putting speakers in different places, so many more people just hear about us casually.” He recognizes the power that informal networks cultivated through social media can potentially exert on policy.112

New Social Media: The Demographic Divide
Project Interfaith and Interfaith Youth Core serve a similar demographic. Most members of these networks are Christian, Muslim, or Jewish and range in age from 16–30.113 Students and young professionals are particularly active with interfaith organizations on Facebook and Twitter. Interfaith practitioners and professionals also engage in interfaith dialogue using new social media, using it to build upon their offline work. Other active participants include teachers, youth allies, and ministers, all of whom seek to learn how to integrate an interfaith component into their groups, congregations, or classrooms.114

Layalina finds that the main demographic reached by new social media is young adults in their 20s and 30s, noting that this presents both benefits and drawbacks to dialogue. Because new social media mainly reaches one sector of the population, it relies on users with access and the technical competence to use the sites. Al Shugaa uses new social media to interact with the global Muslim community. He observes that social media functions as an equalizer, bringing together diverse opinions, and can promote voices of often marginalized groups such as women and students. However, this proverbial level playing field also gives those with what Wadhah deems a “dark philosophy” a pulpit.115 He has found no one central group for people of multiple faiths and cites the chief benefit of his new social media usage as exposure to Islamic culture in other regions. Ultimately, Al Shugaa finds
Tutt reinforces the idea that a distinct generational gap exists regarding comfort with using new social media. “The vast majority who use new social media are early teens through 35-year-olds, the cusp of Generation X; the vast majority of Echo and Generation Y definitely use social media; baby boomers use social media.... Across the board I have seen the most changes in the Gen X’s—the people in their early 30s. Some couldn’t conceptualize the power of new social media. Popularity has convinced them of its importance.... Comfort creates a much different experience for a user. Baby boomers are overwhelmed and don’t tend to know what to do. They listen in but don’t participate. The technology is too much. New social media has to adapt to make it more user-friendly.”117

Marshall echoes the belief that new social media such as Facebook is used more by the younger generation. While at the Parliament of World’s Religions conference, she noticed younger people frequently using new social media; the older generation, she notes, is “much more mixed” on its view towards it. She remarks that some people are more fascinated by it and draw from it as well as put out their own ideas to the world. However, some in the older generations actively oppose networking sites such as Facebook, while others may simply “dabble.” Ultimately she finds Facebook and new social media to be “an effective communication tool for some” and there are people who use it aggressively, but also, those who use it passively.116

The Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue seeks to reach multiple demographics. As Stanton explains, the site is open

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional networking site that enables users to manage their contacts, join affinity groups, and participate in online forums. Launched by Reid Hoffman in 2003, it is one of the oldest social networking sites. More than 60 million users worldwide, approximately half outside the US, have posted their profiles on the site and linked to other members. In some countries, such as the Netherlands and Iceland, more than 30% of the population uses LinkedIn.

By linking to their friends and colleagues, LinkedIn members can get updated contact information when acquaintances move or change jobs. More importantly, they can find out who their friends know and use LinkedIn to send a friend’s friend an Internet version of a letter of introduction via their friend. Many users have hundreds of immediate friends who can introduce them to hundreds of thousands or even millions of “friends of friends” in countries around the world. This is one “killer application” of LinkedIn, which is particularly helpful to job-seekers, recruiters, or people looking for experts in a particular field. LinkedIn groups allow organizations to create online affinity groups that can be used for discussions. School alumni groups and clubs often use LinkedIn to maintain an always up-to-date directory for their group. One reason LinkedIn has grown quickly is because it enables users to maintain tight control over their privacy. LinkedIn users can specify exactly which information they want to share—and with whom they share it. There is never a need to share your e-mail address, so LinkedIn users do not need to worry about receiving more spam if they sign up for the service.
to all, but certain elements are geared toward different audiences. Academics and leading non-profit civic leaders are the primary audience for peer-reviewed articles. The weekly column is aimed at graduate students, undergraduates, and younger students interested in the politics of inter-religious dialogue. The Journal is also setting up interactive panel discussions that are comprised of an interview with an academic or faith leader, and a panel of 12 emerging thinkers in their 20s and 30s who respond in 100—200 words. Anyone and everyone can view the videos on the Journal’s YouTube site.

Although a variety of demographics are represented in new social media, and organizations are stepping up efforts to accommodate those who are not as comfortable using these tools, our anecdotal evidence reveals that it is most widely received by a relatively young user set. It is too soon to tell what effect, if any, the growth of new social media will have upon interreligious dialogue.

Interfaith organizations agree that there is a certain unparalleled power in face-to-face interaction. However, they also see that new social media plays an important role in furthering dialogue. There is an ongoing debate over the choice to use public, multipurpose websites versus private, dedicated networks for engaging in online interreligious dialogue. Additionally, there is no consensus on whether the exclusive use of one website or engagement on multiple sites generates more productive dialogue. It is recognized that new social media is becoming increasingly widespread, although currently the younger demographic is generally more comfortable and present in new social media.

Frequently Asked Questions about Using Social Media to Foster Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue

In the course of this study, we have learned many lessons about various efforts to use the Internet to foster dialogue across religious and cultural barriers. Some of these efforts have been successful; many have failed—and in both cases valuable insights can be gained.

Among the people we interviewed were experts in the use of new social media and leaders of some of the most successful online forums for interreligious and intercultural dialogue. They made it clear that new social media is not magic. It does not erase all the barriers that inhibit dialogue between people of different faiths and cultures. Nor does it eliminate the misunderstandings that occur both online and offline. Some of the successful projects went through a period of trial and error before finding a formula that really worked. We have tried to summarize some of the best practices (and worst practices) that we learned in the course of our interviews in a series of Frequently-Asked Questions (FAQs).

1. **How do you decide who your audience is?** This is without a doubt the first and most fundamental question to ask when exploring how to use new social media to foster interreligious dialogue. The approach you use and the tools you adopt to link together a few dozen established leaders in the interfaith community is very different than the approach you would use if you were trying to engage a much broader audience of thousands of people who may have had little opportunity in the past to really get to know people of different faith traditions. Part of determining the audience is deciding the scope of discussions that will be encouraged (or allowed) in a particular forum. In our interviews, we found that many of the most successful sites had seen the scope of discussion expand well beyond their initial intentions—and that seems to be one of the reasons for their success. (However, that can only work if the site uses a forum that allows users to opt-in and opt-out of those discussion threads that matter to them. Otherwise, participants could easily be overwhelmed by posts that do not interest them.)

2. **What is the purpose of your project?** You cannot determine your audience until you have clearly defined your goals and your reasons for using new social media. Are you trying to use the Internet to sustain and strengthen relationships that have been established elsewhere (through face-to-face meetings and conferences or through traditional e-mail listservs)? Or will you be using new social media to connect people who haven’t and who may never meet face-to-face? In
give people reason to get to know (and respect) people of different faiths traditions and cultures.

3. how do you establish trust? One recurring problem that undermines efforts to foster communication across religious and cultural barriers is the difficulty in building trust online. If only one or two people start to harass or denigrate participants in an online discussion, it can poison the process and cause the conversation to die. Trust is an essential ingredient of any serious, honest discussion about cultural or religious differences. But it is a fragile thing. Among the ways to foster trust:

a. Adopt a clearly-defined code of conduct, which participants must agree to before being able to contribute to a website, a Facebook page, or an online discussion. Specify that participants who violate the code of conduct will be removed from the discussion. A very useful foundation to build upon is the “Ten Commandments” of interreligious dialogue summarized in the adjacent box.

b. To facilitate online communication between a like-minded group of people working to foster interreligious and intercultural communication.

c. To organize offline activities such as conferences, lectures, and events.

d. To debate theological points and thus better understand the beliefs of others.

e. To generate online content that can help explain the basic beliefs of different faiths and how they vary.

f. To find common interests with little or no linkage to religion (e.g. sports or politics), which can give people reason to get to know (and respect) people of different faiths traditions and cultures.

our investigations, we found new social media being used in a number of different ways:

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b. To organize offline activities such as conferences, lectures, and events.

c. To debate theological points and thus better understand the beliefs of others.

d. To generate online content that can help explain the basic beliefs of different faiths and how they vary.

e. To invite people of other faiths to experience sermons, lectures, and worship in different faiths

f. To find common interests with little or no linkage to religion (e.g. sports or politics), which can give people reason to get to know (and respect) people of different faiths traditions and cultures.

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b. Limit the membership in a social network to those people who are known to at least one or two of the existing members of the group. This is much more feasible for a small group of people who are already connected by existing organizations or common interests.

c. Build on existing social networks, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Users of social media sites expend a considerable amount of effort to build their social networks and improve their online reputation. Someone with a reputation for obnoxious behavior on an online forum will have a harder time getting “friended” if their behavior is evident to dozens or hundreds of Facebook or LinkedIn users. This is a particularly effective deterrent against inappropriate behavior on LinkedIn discussions, since many LinkedIn users want to use their LinkedIn contacts for professional purposes (job searches, recruiting, publicizing their company—or themselves).

d. Require some kind of offline identification so that participants cannot hide behind anonymous nicknames.

e. Require participants be vouched for by someone from their employer, their school, a religious institution, an NGO, or a professional organization.

4. **When should online discussions be moderated? And how?** Another very effective way to establish trust—and avoid trust-destroying comments and behavior—is to moderate comments posted on online forums and social media sites. Having a core group of respected moderators who review every comment before it is posted can very effectively block inappropriate behavior. It can also slow down dialogue, frustrate users, limit the growth of the group, and burn out the moderators. That is why many forums rely on readers to flag inappropriate comments, which can then either be removed immediately or reviewed by moderators. Just the possibility of having someone’s comments “taken down” can lead to more reasonable, respectful behavior online.

5. **How to motivate online participation?** Another recurring theme in unsuccessful efforts to use new social media to foster online dialogue was the difficulty in finding a critical mass of people willing to participate—and motivated to continue participating over months and years. It is far easier to launch a new Facebook group than to keep it interesting and meaningful for its members. In our interviews we found several things that helped:

a. Linking the online discussion to offline activities (such as face-to-face meetings or conferences) or synchronous online communication via conference calls or video-conferencing. Human beings are social animals—face-to-face contact and the spoken word are very powerful means to engage people and build trust and teamwork.

b. Focusing the online discussion around specific questions and goals.

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**THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

by Father Dennis McManus, Imam Yahya Hendi, and Rabbi Harold White, Georgetown University

1. The goal of interreligious dialogue is exchange rather than disputation or debate.
2. Dialogue is built on a “partnership” style relationship where both parties consider each other equals.
3. Admit your limits on what you know, even of your own tradition.
4. Learn your own tradition well in order to be a knowledgeable and helpful partner in dialogue.
5. Never apologize for what is authentic in your own tradition.
6. Raise criticisms as questions.
7. Don’t take the religious opinions of your dialogue partner as personal slights.
8. Avoid raising up your own tradition by negatively comparing it with that of another.
9. Be quick to apologize and slow to judge.
10. Do not presume to explain another’s tradition; instead, ask whether your understanding of it is correct.
c. Setting a time-limited window for discussing a specific topic, after which the highlights of the discussion will be summarized and published online (or elsewhere).

d. Linking the discussion to real results. One model is IBM’s Innovation Jam, in which more than 100,000 of IBM’s 340,000 employees participated in a three-day online forum that was designed to identify 10 high-priority technology initiatives that split $100 million in research and development funding.

e. Highlighting the most popular or most useful comments and insights. The Amazon.com book reviews provide a model. Readers of different reviews can indicate if they found a particular review useful and the reviews that get the most positive votes are displayed first. Twitter, which makes it very easy for readers to “retweet” a message to share it with a broader audience, provides similar psychic rewards by spotlighting interesting, provocative tweets. Some sites go so far as to tally up contributors’ scores, in much the same way online games do.

f. Another way to motivate conversation is to have reasons to discuss topics outside the realm of religion and culture. For instance, neighborhood Facebook groups or listservs, where residents are united by common concerns about local schools, crime, local events, and new restaurants or stores, can be a surprisingly fruitful forum for incidental, ad hoc discussions about religion, politics, or culture.

g. One of the most effective ways to demotivate participants is to have long, meandering comments on topics of interest to a small number of group members. It is often essential to have a moderator or a core group of members who can steer the conversation and start new discussion threads for off-topic arguments.

6. What content to generate? How to build on others’ work? Some interfaith groups have tried to become the single “go to” site for all questions in their area of interest. They have devoted a great deal of time and effort to generating reports and white papers, which unfortunately often don’t get widely read. Rather than focusing on building an audience and linking to similar groups, they have built “an island.” Unleashing the full power of social media requires connecting to and helping support the work of other groups and organizations. When two groups link, both organizations benefit. Metcalfe’s Law, named for Internet pioneer Bob Metcalfe, states that the power of a network increases as the square of the number of people in the network. So a network with twice as many people isn’t just twice as useful and powerful; it is four times more powerful. David Reed has proposed Reed’s Law, which many argue applies to online social networks. He argues that the power of a network increases even faster, five, ten, or even twenty times faster than the growth of the number of network users—because it enables more different groups to combine in a more and more powerful ways.

Many of the most successful users of new social media (e.g. Facebook, Slashdot.org, etc.) do not focus on creating their own content—they focus on giving more and more people simple, easy ways to share and comment on content from anywhere.

One of the best ways to build your audience and enhance your creditability is to get established groups to link to and highlight your work. Do not underestimate how important cultivating such links and endorsements can be—and how much time and effort it can require.

7. What platform(s) to use? As explained above, no new social media strategy can succeed without clearly defined and agreed-upon goals. Likewise, it is not possible to select the “right” social media tools without a clear sense of what you want to accomplish. Some “rules of thumb”:

a. “If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.” Many established, closed groups have been using e-mail and listservs for years. If such an approach is working well, there is no need to try and migrate the group to Facebook or some new social media platform just because social media is cool or provides additional capabilities (that might not be needed).
b. One of the most powerful aspects of social media is that it provides a way to leverage the existing friendships and relationships of a core group to expand the group and reach a larger audience. So, new social media tools are increasingly useful as you try to engage more of the general public. Likewise, social media like Twitter are particularly useful for broadcasting short and simple messages to groups and individuals that might have a limited interest in religious issues.

c. If your goal is to increase the visibility of your group or project, Twitter can provide an inexpensive way to spread the word—but only if you take the time to identify high-profile Twitter users who might care about what you’re doing. The name of the game with Twitter is to increase both the quantity and the quality (or visibility) of your followers. But to get followed you have to follow (and retweet) what others post—and that takes time and effort.

d. If your goal is fostering a true, multi-way dialogue, it is best to go where the audience is—particularly if you are not just trying to better connect an existing community. Too many groups have tried to create a unique social network site to serve a particular community for a particular purpose. But that requires each user to make a special effort to establish an account on the network—and keep logging in to follow the conversation. That can work for a small, closed, motivated group—but often does not—and it almost never works if you are trying to reach thousands—or tens of thousands—of people. To do that, you need to leverage existing social network sites (such as Bridge-Builders has done by building on the Ning social networking platform, or Peace.Facebook).

e. Blogs and wikis can be very effective means to build consensus around short documents (such as a statement of principles or an annotated bibliography of references regarding a particular topic).

f. For international dialogue, there is often a need for translation. This can be very expensive—or
it can be provided by bilingual members, if they are properly motivated and recognized for their contributions.

g. For broadcasting video, YouTube has become the default platform. Even if you already post video on your organization’s Web site, it makes sense to also post it on YouTube (and provide a link back to your site for more context, etc.)

8. **How to measure success?** In our interviews we found different groups had very different metrics which they used to assess progress. These include:

   a. Number of participants
   
   b. Number of new participants per month
   
   c. Number of postings (or tweets)
   
   d. Amount of increased traffic back to the organization’s Web site
   
   e. Number of press stories in the mainstream media
   
   f. Depth and impact of the dialogue (often the most important, but hardest to measure metric)

9. **Who should manage an organization’s social media presence?** Until recently, creating a new social media presence for interfaith organizations has not been seen as a priority and is often relegated as a task for interns. Yet staff of interfaith organizations, such as Hacker, recognize that in the future, dedicated full-time staff members might be needed to more precisely focus on how their organization can better utilize new media tools for outreach and advocacy. Only full-time staff will know whom to ask when a particular issue or problem arises. Obtaining the money and appropriate resources for this effort is often a challenge, but a worthy one. The ability for new social media to connect people globally and expand one’s definition of community is a benefit of promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue via new social media outlets.

Further Research

Researchers interested in new social media are in a “target-rich environment.” Everywhere they look there are unaddressed questions—and in many cases, mountains of accessible, useful data. Yet, at the same time, it is not easy to track developments in a field where technologies and trends are changing so quickly. It is even more difficult to investigate religion online, because there are literally millions of Web sites and organizations to examine. It is a classic example of what Chris Anderson calls the “long tail.”\(^1\)\(^1\) The diffuse nature of online discussions about religion makes it difficult for researchers to generate valid statistics on who is saying what where. This is one reason for the relatively small amount of research that has been done on the use of the Internet and social media for religious purposes. (Another factor, of course, is that researchers tend to follow the dollars —e-commerce, entertainment, and e-government are more profitable.)

As we indicate above, the vast majority of online dialogue between people of different religions and different cultures that is happening on social media sites is happening on sites that were not created to facilitate interreligious or intercultural dialogue. Random online exchanges between people of different backgrounds happen every minute of every day on Facebook, on news blogs, on Twitter, and on other sites. These exchanges may be triggered by a news story or by idle curiosity. While they are not easy to find or quantify, they are very important and definitely warrant further study. The work being done by Professor Diana Owen at Georgetown and Steve Ward of the Oxford Internet Institute on political discussion on US football discussion lists and UK soccer discussion lists might provide a model to emulate.\(^1\)\(^2\) At a minimum, mining some of the aggregated data that PeaceFacebook collects on cross-cultural conversations could provide basic information on the number and distribution of such conversations on Facebook.

In comparison, examining how groups promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue are using social media is quite a bit easier. While this report has highlighted some case studies in which interfaith groups are using social media, much more could be done, particularly for non-English speaking communities. It would also be helpful to delve more deeply into the cases where groups tried and failed to use Facebook...
and similar sites to bridge religious and cultural differences. Since failures tend to be much less publicized than successes, even finding the right people to interview will often be difficult.

Perhaps the place where further research is most needed is in assessing the short and long-term impact of the online dialogue that occurs on social media sites. While it is relatively easy to find anecdotes of how a chance exchange between people of different faiths or different cultures can change one person’s perspective of “the other,” it is difficult to know how often such encounters happen and how likely they are to have an impact. Designing a rigorous experiment—with controls—probably is not possible, and making inferences from the clearly inadequate data would be difficult. Yet, this is the critical question. If online-only exchanges do not have a lasting impact, then groups probably need to focus on how the online world can lead to face-to-face conversations and other offline activities that have proven effective at lowering the barriers between faiths and cultures.

**Conclusion**

This project’s goal has been to explore the intersection of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and new social media. Through our research and interviews with scholars, religious leaders, interfaith leaders, and new social media experts, we sought to map ongoing work, identify best practices, and note challenges when new social media is used as a tool to foster understanding and dialogue.

We found that a key challenge in both offline and online interreligious and intercultural dialogue is establishing a basic level of respect, trust, and openness. Experts agreed that online tools have no inherent positive or negative power, and that dialogue depends less on the particular online medium than on the quality of the conversation and the goodwill of the participants. In many cases, online conversation has spurred people to productive offline action—and vice versa. What is clear from the success stories we documented is that there is great potential to use the Internet to foster dialogue if goals are well-defined and if the tools are chosen carefully. Flexibility and the willingness to experiment are also key.
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Interreligious Dialogue


Interviews Conducted

Akbar Ahmed, American University
Wadhah Al Shugaa, Georgetown University
Matt Armstrong, Mountainrunner Institute
John Borelli, Georgetown University
Tim Brauhn, Faith Act Fellows
Leo Brunnick, Patheos.com
Jane Chesher, Peace Dot, Stanford University
Simon Cohen, Global Tolerance
Arun Gandhi
Vicente Garcia, 9/11 Unity Walk
Dahlia Greenbaum, Sinai Temple
Amber Hacker, Interfaith Youth Core
Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, The National Jewish Center of Learning and Leadership
Beth Katz, Project Interfaith
Victor Kazanjian, Beyond Tolerance
John Kelly, Morningside Analytics
Sahar Khamis, University of Maryland
Leo Lefebure, Georgetown University
Rev. Clark Lobenstine, InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington
Daniel Madigan SJ, Georgetown University
Peter Mandaville, George Mason University
Katherine Marshall, Georgetown University
Dalia Mogahed, Gallup
Haroon Mohgul, Maydan Institute
Eboo Patel, Interfaith Youth Core
Peter Phan, Georgetown University
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Roland Schatz, Media Tenor
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Clay Shirky, New York University
Noam Shore, Idealogue, Inc., Beyond Tolerance
Sam Simon, Intersections
Joshua Stanton, Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue
Nick Stuart, Odyssey Networks
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Hailey Woldt, American University
FACULTY ADVISOR  Professor Michael Nelson, Visiting Professor of Internet Studies in Georgetown's Communications, Culture & Technology Program, serves as Faculty Advisor to this project.

Prior to 2008, Prof. Nelson spent ten years as Director of Internet Technology and Strategy at IBM, where he managed a team helping define and implement IBM’s Next Generation Internet strategy. Before joining IBM, Professor Nelson worked as Director for Technology Policy at the Federal Communications Commission and served as Special Assistant for Information Technology at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, where he worked with Vice President Gore and the President’s Science Advisor on Internet-related issues. He has a B.S. in geology from Caltech, and a Ph.D. in geophysics from MIT.

PROJECT LEADER  Melody Fox Ahmed joined the Berkley Center in June 2006 and serves as the Director of Programs and Operations. Her responsibilities include overall Center management, student programs such as the Junior Year Abroad Network and Undergraduate Fellows, and interfaith outreach. Previously she worked at the Corporate Executive Board and with the Buxton Initiative, an interfaith dialogue organization in Washington, DC, and studied and worked in Spain, Mexico, and Brazil. She received her B.A. from Vanderbilt University and her M.A. in Global, International, and Comparative History from Georgetown University, with a focus on Latin America and the Muslim world.

GRADUATE ADVISOR  Sara Lichterman is a graduate research assistant at the Berkley Center and a second year Masters student in the Communication, Culture and Technology program at Georgetown. She received her BA from Dartmouth College with a major in Film and Television Studies and worked in the film industry in New York, both in production and at a talent agency. Sara’s academic interests are media and telecommunications policy and ways in which political and cultural groups use old and new media to communicate. In her spare time, Sara enjoys movies, politics, cooking and travel.

Emily Bertsche is an International Politics major who hopes to get a certificate in International Development, hailing from the frigid but lovely Chicago, Illinois. When not working at the Berkley Center, she is busy working at her local YWCA, tutoring Latin, or at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies.

Rebecca Cohen, from Charlotte, NC, is a junior in the College, majoring in Philosophy and Theology with a concentration in Religious Studies on the Abrahamic faiths. She was a participant in the Brandeis University Interfaith Leadership Development (BUILD) program and was a contributor to the interreligious relations committee in the Boston Archdiocese in the fall of 2008. Currently, she is a member of the student Interfaith Council, and she is interning with the Committee on Church Relations in the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. She plans to continue study in Roman Catholic Theology and Religious Pluralism with the goal of pursuing a career in interreligious dialogue on an international level as a way to promote peace.

Alexandra Dimodica, from Lexington, MA, is a senior in the College. She is majoring in Government with a minor in Italian and spent second semester of her junior year studying in Siena, Italy. As a radio show host for Georgetown’s radio station, WGTB, a former intern at National Public Radio, and as the current new media intern at the U.S. Department of the Interior, Alexandra is passionate about media. While participating in the Berkley Center’s Junior Year Abroad Network, Alexandra wrote on the intersection between religion, politics, and culture in Italy. She is very interested in intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the ways in which new media can play a role in this incredibly important communication.

Marisa Edmonds is a sophomore in the College from Branford, CT. She is majoring in American Studies and minoring in Justice and Peace Studies. Her chief involvements are with service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega, the Georgetown Global Living Community, non-profit development, and initiatives focused on bridging inequities in education and society. Her research interests were sparked by personal use of
new social media to continue dialogue after work with Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab-in-Israel students at an international conference on peace in the modern world. She has a passion for promoting cosmopolitanism that transcends borders while embracing cultural particularities, and looks forward to effective utilization of new social media in building global understanding.

Lane Feler, from Memphis, TN, is a sophomore in the School of Foreign Service. She is a Science, Technology, and International Affairs major with a focus in Global Health and hopes to one day go to medical school. In the meantime, she is a member of the Georgetown University Dance Company, on the marketing committee for Relay for Life, and a Resident Assistant, as well as a huge fan of the technological masterpiece, InDesign.

Eric Hoerger, from Chapel Hill, NC, is a sophomore in the School of Foreign Service. He is majoring in International Politics and hopes to pursue a certificate in International Development. Eric is also a research assistant at the Berkley Center, and is active in the Jewish Student Association and Club Lacrosse. His primary research interest is the intersection of economic development, interreligious dialogue, and human security.

Daniel LaMagna, from Gaithersburg, MD, is a freshman in Georgetown's College of Arts and Sciences. He would like to major in Philosophy, Theology or Sociology. His other interests include art, music, photography and film. While attending Georgetown Prep, Daniel interned at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and worked in the NetSmartz Workshop. This program designs various media and conducts outreach to empower and educate children and teens to stay safe online. On one particular project, his team focused on the way teens use social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. This experience sparked his interest in new social media, and he is excited to continue learning how the Internet affects religious and cultural groups, as well as society in general.

Michael Losco, from Muncie, Indiana, is a senior in the College. He is majoring in Government with a double minor in Italian and Theater. This year he will be writing an Honors thesis in Government dealing with the use of social media technologies in the House of Representatives. In particular, he looks forward to exploring the role of social media in facilitating a dialogue between Muslims and Christians around the world.

Gerard McCarthy is an exchange student from Sydney, Australia, majoring in Government & International Relations and Urban Sociology. Gerard has previously researched the emergence of web-based religious-environmental groups within Australia and was instrumental in the establishment of weekly community suppers aimed at bringing Sydney’s homeless and student communities closer together. He is currently conducting research into gang violence and community building in southeast DC and co-hosts a weekly show, “Artists in Exile,” on Georgetown’s student radio. He is interested in the role of information and communication technologies in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, and hopes to travel to south Sudan to conduct field research into militia demobilization in November 2010.

Lauren Reese is a sophomore in the College from Raleigh, North Carolina. She is majoring in Sociology concentrating in Social Justice and minoring in Justice and Peace Studies and Spanish. She is involved in theater on campus and is active in H*yas for Choice, GU Pride, and Georgetown Multicultural and Biracial Organization. Lauren is the Marketing Coordinator on the executive board of the Student Commission for Unity and helps lead the pre-orientation program Young Leaders in Education about Diversity. Lauren will be studying abroad in South America in the coming year.

Michaella Seaman, from Manhasset, NY, is a senior in the School of Foreign Service. She is majoring in International Politics with a concentration in Security Studies. She also has a certificate in Muslim-Christian Understanding and is interested in increasing opportunities for interfaith dialogue within her generation. Michaella studied in Turkey the fall of her junior year and while living in Turkey taught English at a local elementary school. This summer she interned for Layalina Productions, a non-profit organization that works to improve U.S.-Arab relations through television programming, documentaries, publications and various cultural initiatives. Michaella is currently an intern at the American Bar Association and a board-member of the Senior Class Committee.
Glossary

Blog A Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.

Comments An observation or remark expressing an opinion or attitude. For instance, used in reference to comments made to posts on Facebook.

Flaming The use of hostile and insulting interaction between Internet users, usually in the context of social conversations and over polarizing topics.

Following An action taken within the Social Media Site Twitter that allows a user to view the tweet posts of the user profile they wish to follow on their Tweet Deck.

Friends Individuals on Facebook whose profile you can view and comment on. A “Friend” is added when one user sends a friend request and the recipient approves access to their profile.

Hashtag A tag embedded in a message posted on a microblogging service, consisting of a word within the message prefixed with a hash sign (#compassion)

Internet Forum An online discussion site in which the content is user-generated.

MMO A massively multiplayer online game capable of supporting thousands of players simultaneously.

Moderated Forums An internet forum in which a “moderator” filters posts onto the website to enforce the rules of the website.

New Social Media A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

Online On the Internet, or currently on the Internet (depending on its usage).

Profiles Accounts that allow a user to upload pictures, send posts and messages, and gain access to discussions in New Social Media.

Post Text, pictures, videos, documents, or applications uploaded by the user onto a website.

Sharing The act of making a document or multimedia available to users of a website on the Internet.

Tweet A message or a link to an article posted on Twitter. Must be 140 characters or less. Appears on the homepage of a person who is following the said user.

Unmoderated Forum An internet discussion page in which there are no administrators filtering and removing content that may violate the ground rules of the discussion board.

User An individual who uses the internet or a particular website.

Web 1.0 The general state of the web until around 2004, Web 1.0 includes static pages, the use of framesets, and all internet pages before Web 2.0. Definitions of Web 1.0 are generally websites that are not included in the term Web 2.0.

Web 2.0 Web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the Internet. Examples include web-based communities, web applications, social-networking sites, blogs and internet forums.

Webinars A one-way web conference, typically via webcast, from a speaker to users at their computers at home.