

Sharing Christian Faith Through Social Media: Influence on Young Adults Who do Not Identify as Christians

Glen A. Bowman, Grand Canyon University, Arizona

Tyler J. Sheppard, Liberty University, Virginia

Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study examines how young adults who do not identify as Christians describe the influence that encountering Christian faith sharing through social media exerts on their thoughts and behaviors. Four themes emerge: when they perceive faith sharing through social media positively, they typically regard the posts as encouraging, culturally relevant, helpful, clear, and/or passionate; when they perceive it negatively, they view the content as condescending, demanding, judgmental, dishonest, and/or hypocritical; when they do not seem opposed to Christianity, they nevertheless often dislike how faith sharers conduct themselves online; and when this faith sharing influences them toward Christianity, they typically report positive cognitive responses, but when it influences them away from Christianity, they often report negative emotional responses. Overall, three themes developed from the non-Christians' behavioral data: they often exhibit a fight or flight response when they perceive Christian online faith sharing negatively by either challenging the faith sharers or avoiding them and their religion; when they experience faith sharers online positively, it often results in them practicing the teachings posted and imitating the faith sharers' Christianity; and they often seem unaware of the Christians' online faith sharing influence or underestimate its magnitude.

Keywords: behavior, evangelism, Internet, persuasion, religion, social change, social learning theory, social networking sites (SNS)

Introduction

Social media use has become commonplace in contemporary society, with billions of users globally (Bowman 2019) and four out of five people that have access to the Internet using social media (Lim 2017). Internet users spend far more time on social media than for any other purpose and many users daily spend many hours on social networking sites (Vidyakala and

Nithyakala 2016). This explosion of social media use provides enormous potential for creating change within society. Consequently, many users have successfully utilized social media as a tool to promote societal change, even within the context of religious causes (Deaton 2015; Lim 2017). Seeking this potential means for impact, Christians have used this continually growing platform for sharing their faith, often in response to the biblical mandates in this area (Bowman and Sheppard 2021; Previte 2017). Christians have increased their use of social media to convey religious information, often with the hopes of converting others to their faith (Brubaker and Haigh 2017). However, Christians often share their faith without understanding their intended audiences' thoughts and desires (Lie 2017; Previte 2017). Accordingly, their faith sharing techniques have produced mixed results, often receiving intense criticism and persecution from others (Lehtipuu 2016; Philips 2015).

Since this ongoing conflict between people who share their Christian faith and those who encounter their message occurs frequently (Lie 2017), it is pertinent to study how social media users describe the influence of encountering Christian faith sharing through social media. Young adults seem to receive more influence through social media overall based on their frequent use of social networking sites and greater inclination towards change (Kelly 2015). In addition, younger generations tend to encounter religious ideas through digital media more often than they receive religious teaching from their families and churches (Lövheim 2012), showing a greater potential for influence through social media. However, despite the growing practice of Christian faith sharing through social media (Bowman, Osueke, and Baires 2021), there has been a noticeable decline in Christian practices such as prayer and worship among young adults (O'Brien and Noy 2015; Twenge et al. 2016). This societal shift implies that Christian faith sharing through social media has not greatly impacted younger social media users and may sometimes push them away from faith practices.

Several articles have described techniques that Christians use when sharing their faith through social media but often fail to mention if their methods produced a noticeable influence (e.g., Efiang 2015; Lie 2017; White, Tella, and Ampofo 2016). However, very few articles have described the influence on those who encounter Christian faith sharing through social media. Lim (2017) strove to measure the effectiveness of churches' faith sharing posts on Facebook, but merely counted the quantity of likes and comments in their measurement of effectiveness. Bowman, Osueke, and Baires (2021) studied the effects of Christian faith sharing through social media on college students but only used a brief quantitative survey for data collection. Bowman and Sheppard (2021) qualitatively studied this influence at a Christian college, but the sample seemed biased towards Christians as faith sharing recipients. Understanding this topic, especially connected to young adults who tend to use social media more often, could engender positive social change and empathy between Christian faith sharers using social media and

young adults who encounter their faith sharing. This could also create greater productive dialogue and evangelism to bridge the division between non-Christian young adults and negatively perceived Christians who share their faith through social media. Most young adults do not identify as Christians (Voas and Chaves 2016), and the gap in the literature for understanding the influence on this significant group prompted this study.

In this research, the term Christian is defined as any person who claims to follow Jesus Christ and his teachings (Mayhew et al. 2017; Previte 2017). Faith sharing describes the process of conveying facts, religious practices, and beliefs about the Christian religion to others for any reason, but it often includes the purposes of evangelism or discipleship (Bowman 2020; Previte 2017). Based on the framework of social learning theory, which explains how the external environment influences observers' thoughts and their consequent behaviors (Bandura 1963, 1965, 1971), the following research questions guided this qualitative study:

RQ1: How do young adults who do not identify as Christians describe the influence that encountering Christian faith sharing through social media has on their thoughts?

RQ2: How do young adults who do not identify as Christians describe the influence that encountering Christian faith sharing through social media has on their behavior?

Methods

Semi-structured interview and focus group questions were composed to answer the research questions based on both previous research of Christian faith sharing through social media (Hutchings 2017; Previte 2017) and the theoretical framework of Bandura's social learning theory. These questions were reviewed by an expert panel and field tested twice, with appropriate changes made based on testing and feedback. The expert panel included two Bible professors, two Christian faith sharers with DPTs, a minister, a professor of psychology, and a professor of education. These questions were also used in a previous study (Bowman and Sheppard 2021), which provided a thick description when exploring a similar topic.

This study involved a qualitative descriptive design for conducting the research and the PI used bracketing and in vivo coding to reflect the participants' data. Recruitment for the interview and focus groups took place initially with convenience sampling through craigslist.org, listing the research as a "remote computer gig" near Albuquerque, NM. An advertisement offered a \$10 Amazon or Walmart gift card in exchange for participation in a study regarding Christian faith sharing encountered on social media. It indicated that applicants must not identify as Christians and be 18-25 years old. Participants provided an e-signature giving informed consent through Google Forms prior to their interview or focus group participation.

Contributing students also provided information through a demographic data sheet sent through Google Forms where they indicated their religious beliefs. Snowball sampling later occurred through some participants referring others to the study. Overall, fifteen subjects participated in a semi-structured interview and five subjects took part in a focus group, when it appeared that saturation had been reached in data analysis. One participant originally indicated his beliefs as both Buddhist and Christian, but his data was later omitted based on the strong Christian bias in his answers.

These young adults were asked to share their experiences and perceptions of encountering Christian faith sharing through social media. Participants received open-ended questions based on their encounters with Christian faith sharing through social media, with several questions focused on their positive and negative perceptions toward the content of those posts and how they perceived that their thoughts and behaviors changed as a result. The interviews and focus group were recorded using Zoom video conferencing software with prior participants' consent.

The interview and focus group recordings were transcribed initially through trint.com and received further editing from the first author to correct errors yielded by the transcription software. After data transcription, member checking took place with the interview subjects to confirm the accuracy of subjects' transcribed responses. Thematic analysis was then used to organize the data in codes, categories, and themes based on the six-step method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the researchers took certain precautionary measures. During data collection, the PI tried to convey neutrality while conducting the interviews and focus groups through his word choices, voice inflection, and by turning off his camera while collecting data to prevent him from providing any non-verbal cuing for certain types of responses. After data collection and transcription, each interviewee was given the opportunity via email to conduct member checking to confirm the transcription accuracy. Finally, a concerted attempt was made to avoid any deductive reasoning in coding beforehand to prevent bias during the coding process.

Results

Twenty young adults participated in the study, with one participant and his responses excluded from the data as explained above. For the nineteen that remained, thirteen identified as male and six as female. Regarding race, sixteen students reported as Black, two as White, and one as Native American. The ages of participants ranged from 19-25, with a mean age of 22 years old. The subjects' reported their religious beliefs as follows: ten atheist, three agnostic,

two Muslim, two Jewish, one pagan, and one other. Interviews ranged from 21 to 36 minutes, with an average time of 27 minutes, while the focus group lasted 33 minutes. The data summary below contains an explanation of the findings, a listing of codes generated in the research, and a commentary to support the themes.

Research Question One (RQ1) Themes

Four themes emerged from the data in answering RQ1, which asked: “How do young adults who do not identify as Christians describe the influence that encountering Christian faith sharing through social media has on their thoughts?” These themes have been listed below, and each receives further elucidation and explanation in the subsequent subsections.

1. When non-Christian young adults perceive sharing faith online *positively*, they typically view the posts as encouraging, culturally relevant, helpful, clear, and/or passionate.
2. When non-Christian young adults perceive sharing faith online *negatively*, they typically view the posts as condescending, demanding, judgmental, dishonest, and/or hypocritical.
3. Non-Christian young adults who do not seem opposed to their understanding of Christianity nevertheless often dislike the ways that faith sharers conduct themselves on social media.
4. When this faith sharing influences non-Christian young adults toward Christianity, they typically report how it elicited a positive cognitive response, but when it influences them away from Christianity, they often report how it elicited a negative emotional response.

Theme 1

This first theme states that when non-Christian young adults perceive faith sharing through social media positively, they typically regard the posts as encouraging, culturally relevant, helpful, clear, and/or passionate. While a small percentage of their comments about positive faith sharing experiences did not fit any of these descriptors, almost all coded responses fell into at least one of these descriptions. Table 1 contains a complete listing of the codes connected to the positively perceived post contents used in Theme 1, along with the number of times that the PI used each code. When a code was created and used only once, it was either combined with another code (when possible) or discarded.

Table 1: Positively Perceived Qualities and Contents of Social Media Posts

#	Code	#	Code
8	Praising God	3	Trusting in God
8	Testimonies of positive impact	3	Attributing healing to God
7	Tell members to do certain good works	3	Expressing deep faith/emotion
6	Fundraising/helping the needy	3	Showing positive community
5	Hope	3	Bible verses/spreading the gospel
5	Giving	3	Praying
5	Posts that show practicing good works	2	Genuine posts
5	Crediting something to God	2	Clear message
5	Positivity/positive messages	2	Think about future
4	Thanking God	2	Love/loving one another
4	Relate Jesus with current situations	2	See faith sharers' succeeding
3	Encouragement posts	2	Persuasion

Overall, the faith sharing perceived positively seemed applicable to their lives and the culture around them. They especially appreciated posts that encouraged church members and others to do good works in the community. Benevolence requests that they received well included giving to the poor, both within the church and to others. Even posts showing Christians helping others (in a humble, non-boastful way) received a positive response from some of these non-Christians. Sometimes they appreciated faith sharers praising and thanking God for certain blessings, although Theme 2 shows that these opinions do not hold true for all participants.

Some teachings on biblical topics were also received positively, especially those that had a positive connotation, such as hope, trusting God, and love. They commented several times about their preference for positivity, positive messages, encouragement, and testimonies about positive works from God in the Christians' lives. Others appreciated the display of positive community, saying that "it works for them," and that they felt happy for Christians who enjoyed spending time with other "like-minded" people. In essence, presenting God and Christianity in a positive light tended to have positive results, whereas the negative focus that some faith sharers use seem to have an opposite effect, as noted below.

Theme 2

The second theme noted that when non-Christian young adults perceive faith sharing through social media negatively, they view the content as condescending, demanding, judgmental, dishonest, and/or hypocritical. Of course, these evaluations also depend on perception, but it seems reasonable from their comments that the content often included these traits. Less religious participants tended to report more negative comments about encountering

Christian faith sharing through social media, as previous research also suggests (Bobkowski and Kalyanaraman 2010). Table 2 includes the codes used for this theme, which describe their negative perceptions of these social media posts and their faith sharers, along with the number of comments given for each code.

Table 2: Negatively Perceived Qualities and Contents of Social Media Posts

#	Code	#	Code
13	Lying/deception	4	Exaggerating
11	Posts requesting/demanding a response	4	Telling others how to live
8	Judgmental	4	Asking money for poorly perceived causes
8	Attribute positive events/too much to God	4	Condescending/self-righteous
7	Showing off good works/overdoing it	4	Bragging
7	Questioning God/complaining	4	Saying that others aren't going to heaven
7	Condemnation	3	Turning people against each other/divisiveness
7	Hypocrites	3	Offensive
6	Pressure to change beliefs/be like them	3	Negativity
5	Demeaning other religions	2	Extreme posts
		2	Posting Bible verses

The most common code in this theme describes the lying and deception which they believe that Christians employ. Some of the comments seemed to fit this categorization well, especially when posts promised a specific blessing if someone responded online in a certain manner. This also corresponds with the second most frequent code, in which faith sharers requested or demanded a response. Sometimes, these posts promised blessings if people liked or shared a post, but other times they pronounced curses for those who did not respond in the requested manner. Several participants also mentioned how Christians' questioning of God or complaining about God caused them to view Christianity and/or the faith sharers negatively and used persuasive arguments for why this seemed destructive in faith sharing.

While some non-Christians enjoyed Christian testimonies, as noted in Theme 1, many did not believe their testimonies or felt like the Christians posted them with impure motives. For example, some subjects described Christians as "bragging" or "showing off" when they attributed certain blessings to God, such as a new car or job. Others complained that Christians posted too much about their faith and said they would receive faith sharing better if these Christians posted content on topics other than their faith as well. This objection is strengthened by some non-Christians blocking social media users who created faith sharing posts repeatedly.

Most of these participants had a strong awareness that Christians wanted to convert them, which some disdained but others allowed based on the Christian worldview. Many did not like the condemnation that faith sharers pronounced of other religions, specific sins, or

certain people, especially when faith sharers denounced specific individuals or groups. They sometimes viewed these people as hypocrites, which caused a couple respondents to hate Christianity overall. The contrast between their understanding of Christianity and what many faith sharers practice is examined further in the next theme.

Theme 3

The third theme developed from the data is that non-Christian young adults do not seem opposed to their understanding of Christianity, but they often dislike the ways that faith sharers conduct themselves online. Some used the word hypocrite to describe them, which comes from a Greek word literally meaning to play a part on stage (Bloomfield 2018). Several respondents mentioned encountering people on social media who presented themselves as spiritual and/or virtuous at certain points through their posts, but did not maintain that spirituality/virtuosity in other online posts or offline. Interestingly, Miller, Munday, and Hill (2013) found that Christian young adults with less devotion to God had a greater likelihood of using social media sites than more devout Christians, which could increase the likelihood of other young adults encountering hypocritical Christian faith sharing. Table 3 contains codes used in this theme, with some codes receiving more explanation below.

Table 3: Attributes that Participants Disliked, Thought Changes, and Views

#	Code	#	Code
6	Disliked frequent faith sharing (FS) posts	2	View certain FS online as inappropriate
5	Less likely to believe in religion/Jesus	2	Liked only occasional FS online
5	Question faith sharers' (FSs) motives	2	FSs not basing argument on facts
4	Increased motivation	2	Post FS in inappropriate SNS groups
4	Believe FSs are ignorant of Bible's teachings	2	Affirms that religion can be negative
3	Believe that Christianity works for them	2	Think that FSs shouldn't post about faith
3	Increased negative view of Christianity	2	FSs can be positive or negative
3	More energy/desire to work hard	2	Don't generalize FS posts to all Christians
3	Hard to understand		

Some of the non-Christians' positive comments about thought changes in this theme come from their negative view of faith sharers and wanting to do better, as seen in the codes of increased motivation, more energy/motivation to work hard, and liked only occasional faith sharing posts. Most of these respondents did not mind faith sharers expressing their views as an aspect of their lives shared online, showing their belief that the Christian faith is just one characteristic of what could/should appear on their social media pages. Many believe that Christianity works for Christians, so almost all the religious, agnostic, and atheist accepted less aggressive, occasional faith sharers. Some participants did not think that Christians should share their faith at all, others found it unusual, but most accepted when faith sharers used

Theme 1 traits and not Theme 2 traits. One last theme for RQ1 further elucidates the dichotomy between these non-Christian positive and negative thinking changes.

Theme 4

The final theme for RQ1 notes that when faith sharing influences non-Christian young adults towards Christianity, they typically reported how their thinking changed in an objective manner, but when influenced away from Christianity, they passionately reported negative changes in their emotions. In a similar research study involving primarily Christians as faith sharing recipients (Bowman and Sheppard 2021), the participants reported far more positive emotional changes based on Christian faith sharing through social media, but that may have resulted from having a worldview that aligned with many faith sharing posts. Table 4 lists the codes from this theme, which shows various negative emotions and positive thought changes connected to Christian faith sharing through social media.

Table 4: Thinking and Emotional Changes in Non-Christian Young Adults

#	Code	#	Code
6	Annoyed	3	Find humorous
5	Increased faith/belief	2	Feel bad
5	Some persuasion, esp. from # of people posting	2	Impact critical thinking/open mind
5	Consider more if God is real	2	Feel challenged to do more good
4	Upset	2	Intrigued
4	Angry/furious	2	Consider becoming a Christian
4	Mostly affected towards Christianity	2	Weighing behavior changes
3	Frustrated	2	Forgive others
3	Be more understanding/less judgmental	2	Hate/detest Christianity more
3	Consider attending worship services	2	Often reflect on faith sharing posts
3	Think they may be more blessed if they believe	2	Increased interest in Christianity

The emotional changes in these non-Christians seem frequent and strong, which includes becoming annoyed, upset, angry/furious, frustrated, and feeling bad. A few participants sounded incredibly angry at times while reflecting on these experiences, but most could still give some positive results of faith sharing when they calmed down. This contrast appears in the rational, positive thoughts coded, such as increased faith, some persuasion, feeling challenged to do more good, being intrigued, increased interest in Christianity, forgiving others, weighing behavior changes, and impact on thinking. They also considered more if God is real, attending worship services, greater blessing if they believe, and even becoming a Christian. Typically, the participants with the most negative emotions had fewer positive things to say about faith sharing, but a few mentioned that they had their thinking profoundly changed

towards Christianity, sometimes just by a single post or faith sharer. These changes in thinking are sometimes manifest in the behavioral changes highlighted in themes connected to RQ2.

Research Question Two (RQ2) Themes

Research question two asked: “How do young adults who do not identify as Christians describe the influence that encountering Christian faith sharing through social media has on their behavior?” Based on the theoretical framework of Bandura’s (1971) social learning theory, Christian faith sharing in social media should produce changes in the non-Christian young adults’ thinking that could then alter their consequent behaviors. Based on this clearly documented process in research data, three behavioral themes emerged and appear below, followed by discussion of each theme.

1. Non-Christian young adults often exhibit a fight or flight response when they perceive Christian faith sharing through social media negatively by either challenging the faith sharers or avoiding them and their religion.
2. When non-Christian young adults have positive experiences with Christian faith sharers online, it may result in them practicing biblical teachings mentioned in the posts and imitating aspects of the faith sharers' Christianity.
3. Non-Christian young adults are often unaware of the influence of Christian faith sharing through social media, or they underestimate its magnitude.

Theme 1

The first theme from research question two reveals that non-Christian young adults often exhibit a fight or flight response when they perceive Christian faith sharing through social media negatively by either challenging the faith sharers or avoiding them and their religion. Sometimes when responding to interview questions, these young adults reported their changes in thinking and immediately connected them to their changes in behavior without prompting. The codes used for this theme appear in Table 5 below, followed by an explanation of these two common reactions when this faith sharing has a negative effect.

Table 5. Codes for Negative Behavioral Changes from Christian Faith Sharing Posts

#	Code	#	Code
13	Try to correct FSs online	2	Rationalize atheistic beliefs
8	Avoid/ignore FS posts	2	Move away from Christianity
7	Rarely respond online	2	Change SNS settings to see FS less
5	Argue with FSs online	2	Cautious in talking to religious people
5	Avoid FSs/outwardly religious people	2	Fight against FS influence
5	Correct/argue with FSs in person	2	Avoid churches
4	Don't engage online	2	Rude/abusive towards Christians
3	Ignore FSs in person	2	Study about other religions more
3	Stop attending worship/push Christians away	2	Criticize FSs to others
3	Sticking to path that they chose apart from God		

Several of the non-Christian young adults manifest a “fight” response when they perceive Christian faith sharing online negatively and confront faith sharers. This occurs through social media by trying to correct them, arguing with them, and acting rudely/abusively towards them. This behavior sometimes transfers into in-person interactions with Christians, as evidenced by the codes for correcting/arguing with faith sharers in person and criticizing faith sharers to others. Some even react by moving away from Christianity mentally by rationalizing atheistic beliefs and studying other religions, and/or physically by no longer attending worship services and disengaging Christians away, rationalizing atheistic beliefs, and studying about other religions more.

Conversely, avoiding Christians and their online faith sharing also occurs frequently. This appeared through codes such as avoiding/ignoring faith sharing posts, rarely responding online, not engaging online, and even changing SNS settings to see faith sharing less. In person, some of these young adults become cautious talking to religious people, avoid churches, avoid faith sharers, and avoid outwardly religious people. One participant went into detail about how Christian missionaries would come by his house periodically, but he would hide until they eventually left. Avoiding confrontation when perceiving faith sharing negatively seems like a common reaction from even Christian young adults based on another research study (Bowman and Sheppard 2021). However, the positive behavioral changes from these non-Christian young adults must also be examined and explained.

Theme 2

The next theme states that when non-Christian young adults have positive experiences with Christian faith sharers online, it often results in them practicing biblical teachings mentioned in the posts and imitating aspects of the faith sharers' Christianity. This corresponds well with Bandura's social learning theory, which describes how changes in the external environment affect thoughts, which then alters consequent behavior (Bandura 1963; 1965). Table 6 lists the codes used for describing these changes, which the participants typically self-reported as positive.

Table 6: Positive Behavioral Changes from Posts Sharing Christian Faith

#	Code	#	Code
5	Give more often	2	Ask FSs about their posts
5	Imitate positive FS behavior	2	Make them a better person
5	Affirm truth of FS post	2	Become friends with/closer to FSs
4	Reform/repent	2	Grow towards helping others
3	Discuss Bible with others/debate	2	Act kinder towards others
3	Discuss post with friends/family	2	Do good more discreetly
2	Study the Bible	2	Occasionally engage with FSs in person
2	Talk about post well with others	2	Acknowledge beliefs without judging
2	Behave more humbly	2	Dialogue about beliefs

Some of the behavior changes occur online, notably in the codes such as imitating positive faith sharing behavior, affirming the truth of posts, asking about faith sharing posts, dialoguing about beliefs, and even establishing relationships with faith sharers they encounter. Other codes sometimes occurred online, as multiple participants described giving more often when a need appears in a post and occasionally clicking a link to contribute. However, many behaviors took place in the individuals' personal lives or during in-person interactions, including repentance, studying the Bible, discussing the Bible with others, making them a better person, and causing them to behave more kindly, humbly, and discreetly in doing good. One participant mentioned that he began attending worship services because of Christian faith sharing online. Another said that he was "85%" convinced about Christianity through the posts that he encountered, and his behavior during the interview seemed to reflect that. While some participants seemed to easily acknowledge both the positive and negative effects from online Christian faith sharing, others had more difficulties recognizing any changes or the extent of changes as noted in the next theme.

Theme 3

This final theme states that non-Christian young adults often seem either unaware of the effects of Christian faith sharing through social media or they underestimate its magnitude.

The concept that young adults' thoughts and behaviors can be influenced beyond their recognition has a basis in empirical literature (Bowman and Sheppard 2021; Gilder and Heerey 2018). Some participants commented that they did not perceive their thoughts changing much, but some of their other comments showed significant shifts in thinking and consequent behavior. Table 7 provides the codes used in developing this theme, with more explanation to follow.

Table 7: Codes for Not Recognizing or Underestimating the Influence of Sharing Faith Online.

#	Code	#	Code
9	Did not notice behavior changes	3	Neutral to FS
6	Did not notice FS influence at all	3	Rarely reflect on FS
4	Reflect on FS, but only while reading it	2	Small influence
4	Large/deep influence		

The first code listed in Table 7 comes from nine different subjects who commented that they did not notice any of their own behavior changing based on Christian faith sharing through social media. However, all subjects reported some consequent behavioral changes at some point (often upon follow-up questions) and multiple subjects coded for not noticing any behavioral changes subsequently mentioned multiple behavior changes. Six subjects did not even believe that this faith sharing had impacted either their thoughts or behaviors at all, but every participant mentioned a change in their thoughts. This unawareness of influence or its magnitude has also been noticed in a similar study (Bowman and Sheppard 2021), but these non-Christian participants differed in that many believed that the faith sharing had zero influence on them based on their comments.

Despite the codes mentioned above, answers varied widely when asked how much influence Christian faith sharing through social media had on their lives. Based on the participants' feedback overall, it does not seem that all non-Christian young adults have a poor perception of this influence. Since several participants have chosen an atheistic lifestyle while understanding a Christian worldview (to some extent), it seems that some have internal struggles when encountering Christian faith sharing through social media. For example, one mentioned that "the magnitude of the influence is big. And, But, I'm... trying to be me and, and trying to live my life as I feel like living." When the PI thought he had finished and attempted to move on, he interjected, "I can say. It's. It's so deep sometimes. It hits so deep." Clearly, Christian faith sharing through social media has a strong impact in the thoughts and behaviors of some non-Christian young adults, even if they seem unaware of its influence or strive to resist that influence.

Advice for Christian Faith Sharers using Social Media

As a probing question, the PI asked some participants for their personal advice about how Christians could improve their faith sharing through social media. The PI created codes for this question separately because of the differing nature of their comments, and they appear in Table 8 below. However, the responses do not directly answer either research question, so this subsection has been kept separate while seemingly worth noting for those interested in the advice of non-Christian faith-sharing recipients. Interestingly, many of the comments made by these self-identified non-Christians align with biblical teaching, which all Christians should follow consistently.

Table 8: Advice from Non-Christian Young Adults for Sharing Faith using Social Media

#	Code	#	Code
7	Use positive testimonies	2	Don't show off anything
6	Post positively to others	2	Don't be offensive
5	Persuade others with reasons	2	Don't try to persuade
4	Be tolerant of others/welcoming	2	Don't claim that events are miracles
3	Follow biblical teachings	2	Lead by example/be role model
3	Be genuine/pure/candid	2	Be kind/polite
3	Don't undermine/compare selves to others	2	Do good
3	Don't criticize/ridicule others	2	Make message simple/clear
3	Don't condemn others	2	Correct hypocrites
2	Don't demand a response	2	Post about/promote equality

Discussion

Several insights come from these data based on the thick description of non-Christian young adults who participated and the dearth of previous research in this area. Clearly, since the significant thoughts and behavior changes mentioned previously can occur based on Christian faith sharing posts, it indicates that Christian faith sharing can influence non-Christian young adults through social media. One participant explained that "I have a friend that's, right now is a Christian. He was someone that did a lot of drugs and was doing all this gangster s**t. But...he converted to Christianity...from a Facebook post and right now he is a changed person." While most social media posts may not have that deep of an impact, clearly the potential for profound change exists.

These young adults clearly favor positivity and encouragement in these types of posts and react poorly to condemnation, judgment, and negativity. If Christians desire to impact the world positively, they should cater their faith sharing techniques towards practices that produce positively perceived outcomes and consider avoiding negatively perceived approaches

when posting online. It would behoove those sharing their faith to focus their practices on aspects of their faith that non-Christian young adults perceive favorably to engender positive changes in their thinking and behavior, such as hope, love, and kindness. Faith sharers can facilitate positive thinking and behavioral changes through many mediums besides social media (Bandura 1963; 1965), so Christian faith sharers could take advantage of social media and other forms of communication congruently to achieve the greatest positive influence.

Despite this potential for positively perceived change, Christians can also portray themselves and their religion as negative and hurtful, so it may also behoove Christian faith sharers not to post when angry, since it may cloud their judgment in posting. Christians could consider the biblical topics perceived negatively online and teach them face-to-face for possibly achieving more effective outcomes, since nonverbal cues could convey love and compassion often lost in words posted on social media (Bowman 2020). This change in approach would also benefit non-Christian young adults who would appreciate Christians' faith sharing posts more and continue to engage faith sharers more often online instead of blocking, unfollowing, or unfriending them. In addition, Christian faith sharing through social media can influence thinking and behavior outside of non-Christian young adults' conscious awareness, so it may have greater effects than its recipients realize and even beyond the findings discussed in this article.

The advice that non-Christian young adults gave noted in Table 8 greatly overlaps the codes used to answer RQ1 and RQ2, but a few ideas seem worth noting. These non-Christians encouraged the use of positive testimonies (stories of God helping people), but do not like when Christians label the events as miraculous. Consequently, Christians could let their testimonies stand alone, allowing space for non-Christians to interpret and internalize them. Also, these participants did not like Christians demeaning or condemning other religions and beliefs. Therefore, Christians could share what they believe without emphasizing their assessment of other beliefs as inaccurate, much less their perceptions of consequent condemnation. Finally, these young adults want Christians to display moral behavior online and explained that spiritually consistent faith sharers have a greater positive influence. Christian faith sharers who practice all aspects of Christianity will probably have greater success in person and through social media if their life matches their message.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

This study had various strengths that contributed positively to the data and research findings. The PI used a wide range of reviewers in the expert panel to refine the interview and focus group questions, including an agnostic education professor experienced in studying young adults' religious beliefs and perceptions. Also, the emphasis in advertising to recruit young

adults who had experience encountering Christian faith sharing through social media probably resulted in participants who could provide a more comprehensive description in answering the research questions. Furthermore, the PI did not convert to Christianity until after college, giving him ample life experience from both a non-Christian and Christian worldview, which may have enabled him to have a more objective view of the non-Christians' data.

However, this study also contained limitations based on the methodology, design, and other factors outside the researchers' control. The method of convenience sampling through Craigslist and snowball sampling to recruit additional subjects may have resulted in a non-representative sample of non-Christian young adults. Also, multiple participants asked questions after the interviews indicating that they believed Christians may have initiated the study, which could have caused them to answer differently or less openly during data collection. However, the PI made a strong emphasis before collecting data that participants should answer the questions freely according to their beliefs and perceptions. Despite attempts at minimizing these factors, they should probably be considered weaknesses of the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study may generalize to other groups, but it would behoove researchers to expand upon these findings in different respects to examine that possibility. Further qualitative research could study the influence of other religions' faith sharing through social media to compare with these findings. Additionally, future research could focus on teenagers or older generations instead of young adults to gain a broader perspective on those who do not identify as Christians. Quantitative studies could use more subjects to explore if these thinking and behavioral changes from encountering Christian faith sharing through social media generalize to the non-Christian young adult population. In addition, a pretest-posttest design could take place using a control group, delivering Christian faith sharing posts through social media to non-Christian young adults for a set number of days. Those surveys could determine if thinking and behavioral changes resulted from this added exposure, using this study's findings as a basis for creating positively perceived posts and behavior modification. Expanding this research in this way may also create greater productive dialogue and evangelism, especially because a significant divide is apparent between non-Christian young adults and negatively perceived Christians who share their faith through social media.

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Direct correspondence to Glen Bowman at gbowman@york.edu