

# Technology and Religion

## Lesson 9: Connected Through Social Media

4.16.2023

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**Objectives:** Arab Spring as case study exploring social media's impact in connecting people.

**Materials:** Flipchart, laptop/flatscreen, lesson attachments.

**Time allotments:** Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 20 minute closing service (end class around 9:50/11:50 to begin chapel 9:55/11:55).

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### 1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
  - ▶ What is your favorite YouTube video?
  - ▶ Have you uploaded and shared photos, videos, or posts? Which ones?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

### 2. Silly Fun: Never Have I Ever (5 minutes max)

Youth play one round of “Never Have I Ever” (aka Five Fingers) to see how well they know one another:

- a. Ask everyone to hold up five fingers and keep that hand up throughout the game.
- b. The goal is to think of things YOU (not others) have **never** done or experienced that others will likely have experienced, thus making you unique. Go around the room, taking turns, each person sharing ONE “Never Ever,” hoping that others will have done it. Whoever HAS experienced that thing must put one finger down.
- c. After you go around the entire room, see who has the most fingers still up. That person is quite unique!

### 3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

**Teacher reads:** (from Craig Detweiler, professor of communication)

*“In its first five years, YouTube had amassed more hours of video than the entire history of American television programming ... Now anybody can have his own show or network.”*

(from Saleem Kassim, activist and author of “*Twitter Revolution: How the Arab Spring was Helped by Social Media*”)

“We use Facebook to schedule the protests and Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world.”

#### 4. **Power of Social Media to Change the World?: Case study of Arab Spring** (25 minutes)

Before viewing the following clip, invite youth to take a minute and share whatever they have heard and know about Arab Spring.

**View clip:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1SVFleEzIA> (1:50 minutes)

**Teacher Reads:** Many have pointed to Arab Spring to argue how powerfully new social media can connect us as never before. The power of social media spread throughout 2011 in what has been celebrated as Arab Spring. *YouTube* and *Twitter* turned smartphone cameras into a news device for the world to see. Where we traditionally relied on professional photojournalists to document such historical events, social media allowed short messages and videos to go viral and connect us to one another in ways that shape world history.

**Small group activity:** Divide youth into groups of 3-4 to read over the two news articles that convey popular sentiment about the power of social media to change the world:

- 2009 Green Revolution of Iran in which protesters demanded the removal of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad after fraudulent elections.
- A proud father who named his newborn child “Facebook” to credit social media for the removal of Egypt’s president Hosni Mubarak.

Instruct each group to make their best determination to this question: *How important was the role of social media as a connecting, liberating, democratizing force?* Ask each group to present their case to the large group.

#### 5. **Now... Some Really Interesting Findings** (20 minutes)

Have youth volunteer to read (from handout copies):

- Researchers at the University of Washington looked at 6 million tweets on protests in seven Arab countries during Arab Spring: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen. When the data was sorted by location, researchers discovered that most of the tweeting was happening OUTSIDE those countries. Twitter was buzzing with reports from mostly outsiders participating in breaking news, but far removed from the actual location of protests. Out of 80 million Egyptians, less than 15,000 of them were tweeting. (*The Guardian, February 2011*)
- Blogger Hamid Tehrani estimates that less than a 1,000 people actually in Iran were Twittering during Iran’s Green Revolution. (*The Guardian, June 2010*)

### Questions for discussion:

- What do you make of this?
- What do you think about these opinions? (Have youth volunteer to read following from handouts:)
  - “The West was focused not on the Iranian people but on the role of Western technology. Twitter was important in publicizing what was happening, but its role was overemphasized.” (*The Guardian*, June 2010)
  - “Instead of talking about religious, demographic, and cultural forces that were creating protest sentiment in the country [for years in the making], all we cared about was Twitter’s prominent role in organizing the protests and its resilience in the face of censorship.” (Evgeny Morozov, author of *The Net Delusion*, 2011)
  - “If social media was such a democratizing force, why has the revolution in Syria drawn out so long? Why did Twitter use decline when the fight took much longer than expected?” (Evgeny Morozov)
- Some have debated: Was **democracy and freedom** in Arab Spring what was “trending,” or was it our fascination with **technology** as the hero that would come and save the day? What do you think?
- When protests erupted in Russia following contested elections in 2011, researchers discovered that out of 46,846 Twitter accounts that weighed in on the issue, 25,860 accounts –that’s more than half of them! – were Twitterbots (automated posts on the Twitter that are spam or promotional links). And these Twitterbots posted 440,793 tweets of *disinformation*. (*Slate*, October 2012) What does that suggest?
- As we listen and follow the crowd on what is trending, what is important to know about crowd behavior? Are crowds wise and/or foolish? What is the difference between a crowd and a mob?
- Social media does connect us like never before. But what are its gifts and what are its drawbacks?

### 6. Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

### 7. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets