

LDS conference abuzz with Twitter activity

Social media » Mini-messages light up the Web with every talk and announcement.

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"Worst. Conference. EVAH! #LDSConf."

That's probably something leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would not want to see tweeted during one of the church's biannual General Conferences.

But the fact is, there have been far worse messages on Twitter about LDS conference, and of course, far nicer. With the explosive popularity of Twitter and other social networks giving free expression for an international audience, Mormon conference themes and news have become popular topics of discussion as the sermons are happening.

During April conference, more than 128,000 tweets were sent with #LDSConf, which has become the default Twitter hashtag for banter about LDS conference, according to Lyman Kirkland, senior media manager for the LDS Church's Public Affairs Department. That was up from 88,400 tweets sent during the fall conference in 2012 with that hashtag. It's become the most-common hashtag for conference discussion; even the church uses it, knowing that's where most of the Twitter readers go.

"The discussions by church members resulting from General Conference seem to be growing on all social media channels," Kirkland said.

Expect the chatter to grow even louder now that LDS leaders are urging the faith's full-time missionaries to spend more time courting potential converts through Facebook, Twitter and other platforms.

One of the big Twitter breakthroughs for conference-related tweets came in October 2012, right as LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson announced the lower missionary age. The news reportedly became one of the fastest-trending topics for all of Twitter that day ("trending" refers to how quickly a particular topic will rise in the number tweets).

"Whenever there is a big announcement about temples, things like the missionary-age change, increased focus on missionary work among members — anytime there seems to be some theme from conference — it seems to gain a lot of traction," said Larry Richman, who runs the Mormon-related blog, LDSMediaTalk.com. "It does seem to snowball. People start to comment or share, or they pick up on it. In social media, it expands exponentially as more and more people talk about it."

Most tweets about conference are positive, said Farmington resident Emily W. Jensen, a contributor to the Mormon-related blog *By Common Consent*.

"You mostly see the quotes [from conference talks] that are meaningful to who is tweeting it. You will see summations of the talks and the announcements," she said. "The last few years, they [those on social media] have gotten the Twitter hashtag #LDSConf to trend. It gets bigger every time."

Kirkland said the LDS Church doesn't try to control or steer the Twitter conversation simply because it can't.

"The conversation taking place on Twitter is a natural result of the enthusiasm church members have for sharing and discussing the messages from General Conference," he said. "The conversation happens there with or without the church's participation, and church tweets represent just a small fraction of the total discussion."

While positive reinforcement of conference themes makes up a large part of the tweets, there are also healthy doses of quirky observations and downright mockery. After all, this is the Internet.

@Chase_Observes's tweet summed up the overall theme of April's General Conference: "Basically, guys, just tell satan to SWERVE."

Even state Rep. Spencer J. Cox, R-Fairview, quipped about the past conference on Twitter. "We love playing 'Name That Accent' during #LDSconf," he tweeted. "Although every time I guess a foreign country it turns out to be Idaho."

Then there is snarky commentary from Telestial State, a now-semi-retired blog and Twitter feed that likes to "poke fun" at the LDS Church and Mormon culture. Here are some of the tweets during the April conference from Telestial State team:

- "Do you want to feel my power of procreation?' is the greatest pickup line ever. #LDSconf"
- "If you give your life for your God, you better make sure it's the right God. Otherwise it's gonna be aaaaaaaaaaawkward. #LDSconf."
- "So, to summarize [President Thomas S. Monson's] talk: obey, obey, obey, obey, obey, obey, obey, obey, obey, obey. #orelse #LDSconf."

Naturally, the authors of Telestial State have gotten as many hate emails and tweets as supportive ones.

"We're not anti-Mormon at all," said Ryan Shattuck, 32, a social-media manager and former Utahn now living in Ann Arbor, Mich., who co-wrote the Telestial State blog and Twitter feed. "We all grew up in the Mormon church. But we kind of feel like politicians in Utah and religious leaders in Utah take themselves so seriously, and we wanted to poke fun at that."

Negative tweets come with the territory of trending on social media, said Jesse Stay, a social media expert who used to be in charge of social media for the LDS Church.

"Those against the church like to troll during conference on occasion," he said. "There are also hashtag spammers that get involved to try and link-bait [put out controversial statements to get people to click on their hyperlinks] since #LDSConf and similar terms trend. Trolls will be trolls — nothing new there."

But even with all of the vitriol and cynicism that can flood the social media landscape, Richman said Mormons — who he says can be a particularly tech-savvy group — are always eager to use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and more to spread their views about their faith.

"We're a missionary church, more than others," he said. "We're just in tune with the idea of talking and socializing and sharing in general just because of the Mormon culture. We see these tools as another way of connecting with friends."

Or as [@allenjblodgett](#) tweeted last week: "I'm stoked for #LDSconf! Who else?"

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