

8-2017

Mormons and YouTube

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MORMONS AND YOUTUBE

by

Ryan B. Reeder

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

American Studies

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2017

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ABSTRACT

MORMONS AND YOUTUBE

by

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Utah State University, 2017

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Department: American Studies

As the internet's second-most trafficked site, behind only Google in both the United States and globally, and with 600,000 hours of content uploaded and one billion hours viewed daily by more than one billion monthly users, YouTube's reach and scope is vast. Growing out of a need to better facilitate the production and distribution of online video, YouTube was able to become dominant through a combination of factors including the implementation of innovative features, an ability to capitalize on popular videos hosted on its site, and good timing in managing to become a key component of the social media revolution. YouTube, through its ubiquity and ease of use, has provided the tools for institutions, professionals, and individual members of society to tell their own stories, to share their own talents, to play their own music, both literally and figuratively, and to otherwise express themselves as never before. In translating their culture onto YouTube, Mormons have been able to do all of this, with an additional focus on sharing their beliefs, values, and religion, both directly and indirectly. While elements of Mormon belief, history and society can be found reflected in their YouTube videos, Moreover, YouTube has allowed Mormons and other cultures to refine and add new

dimensions to their cultures, which in turn has helped to reshape their societies. In this symbiotic process, culture continues to develop the societies that create it.

(148 pages)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In writing this thesis, I have received support and encouragement from a number of people. The idea for this topic first struck me in an American Studies course taught by Dr. Victoria Grieve, in which I was exposed to the Vivian Sobchak essay that opens this work. Administrative work from Dr. Christine Cooper-Rompato and Candi Checketts was timely and appreciated. In selecting my committee, I chose experts in the areas of Mormon Studies, Digital Folklore and Technical Communication. The suggestions and feedback of Dr. Philip Barlow, Dr. Lynne McNeill and Dr. Jared Colton have been invaluable, particularly the work and efforts of Dr. Barlow, my committee chair, whose advice and guidance have strengthened the thesis considerably.

Family members have also been supportive. Dr. Brent Muhlestein spurred me to renew my educational pursuits. Hyrum and Becky Checketts have provided numerous instances of support and encouragement. On a visit, Brent and Nancy Pearce provided useful, insightful questions that helped to focus my research. My parents, Brent and Carma Reeder, have always been supportive. And my wife, Rachel Checketts Reeder, deserves all of the praise I can give and more for sticking with me through moments of frustration and many long hours of work (and trying to work) while we maintained a busy schedule in other areas. A few of her insights made their way into the work. I love you forever, and I expect to love you more, OK?

Finally, many prayers answered by moments of insight and continuously opened doors also lead me to credit and acknowledge the hand of my Heavenly Father, through whom all things are possible.

Ryan Reeder

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1980, Vivian Sobchak made the case for the inclusion of Film Studies within the canon of American Studies. “Film Studies is as integral a part of American Studies as American Studies is a part of Film Studies,” she wrote. “American film and American culture are considered mutually interdependent, each illuminating and providing a context for the other.” She went on to say further, “The cinema doesn’t just illustrate but has been and is American art, history, politics, culture, and institution from 1895 to the present. It does not seem too strong to say that without the inclusion of film, American Studies is not studying America” (Sobchak 280-281, 300).

By the time Sobchak wrote, American cinema had been well established. It had passed through its early Silent Era, enjoyed a Golden Age, and was well on its way to the modern Blockbuster Period. Film had certainly earned its place to be regarded as a major component in the study of American culture.

With the advent and popularization of the internet in the mid-1990s, a new phase in American Studies began to emerge, which has also become vitally important to the understanding of America. The impact of the World Wide Web on society can hardly be understated. Vast storehouses of information have become instantly available to everyone. It has transformed and reshaped the ways we communicate with each other, both professionally and privately. And it has provided a medium through which film has been created and disseminated on a scale heretofore hardly imaginable.

Just as the study of film had earned its inclusion in studies of American society by 1980 (if not long before), the internet has now long merited its place in the canon. Online

video has become one of the most dominant features of the internet, and YouTube is the dominant provider of online video. In February 2017, YouTube, now the second-most trafficked site on the internet (Alexa), noted that its viewers were watching more than one billion hours of video per day (Goodrow), and the Wall Street Journal predicted that it would soon eclipse American television's 1.25 billion daily hours (Nicas). Not only has YouTube dominated online film, but in the twelve years since its creation, YouTube has grown to become a major part of both the internet and film.

The development of YouTube has created a platform through which both individuals and institutions can tell their own stories without being filtered by an established media system. Therefore, YouTube as a venue has the potential to more closely parallel actual human society than any other medium. Print media reveal much, but visual media tend to reveal more. Motion pictures can reveal even more than still pictures. And motion pictures, freely and easily available for anyone to use without outside control, provide an optimal platform for societal self-expression.

Within society, nearly every culture, ethnic group, nationality, age group, religion or other category or class of people is represented on YouTube. YouTube's accessibility allows for every culture to be present, from the most sophisticated highbrow to the most ingenuous novice, and from the cosmopolitan urbanites to the tiniest towns in America, the smallest islands in the ocean, and even to uncontacted tribes in the Amazon, all are represented on YouTube. The availability of practically every societal group on YouTube and its ease of access provides an unprecedented resource for understanding humanity. Thus, studying the presence of a particular community on YouTube becomes an excellent method of studying the community itself.

This essay examines how the culture of a particular community, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has been transferred onto YouTube, particularly within the United States. While every group is worthy of study through its online videos, Mormons present a very interesting case. Like YouTube and the internet, Mormonism is highly available. Every year, tens of thousands of missionaries assist hundreds of thousands of people in joining the faith, and the 2012 *Religious Congregations and Membership Study* showed that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the fastest-growing religion in most US states (“US Religion Census,” Barooah). Although this statistic may reflect the Church’s “aggressive” membership reporting practices (retaining individuals on membership rolls who no longer attend Church meetings, for example) as well as statistical anomalies (a percentage of increase may appear much more significant with a small initial base) (Walker, Joseph), the Church has nevertheless increased its membership in the United States by nearly a million members during the period under study, from 5.311 million members at the end of 2001 to 6.229 million at the end of 2011 (*Deseret News Church Almanacs*, 2003 and 2013). The Church also espouses an apotheostic doctrine of limitless accessibility and potential. In everyday terms, this often leads to a culture of pursuing perfection, developing talents, and striving for excellence. YouTube provides a broad space in which these ideals can be practiced, in which users are limited only by their imagination and resources. Finally, while the Church is becoming more widespread, a significant portion of the population is still contained within a limited geographical region. About 35% of American Mormons live in Utah, while 76% live in western states (Liu). This concentration has allowed for the development of a particular culture that has found expression in various forms of media

over many years. The transference of Mormon culture onto YouTube forms an important component of the current state of American LDS culture.

Studying a culture's YouTube presence may provide the most informative method of accessing that culture, and for the reasons mentioned above, American Mormon culture provides a very rich and accessible group for ethnological study. To gain a more complete understanding of both YouTube and Mormon culture, it will be helpful to look at the history and development of each. Prior to 2005, there was no YouTube. A decade before that, there were no online videos. But there was film. There was media and popular culture. And a particular popular culture niche developed within LDS society. An understanding of the development of that popular culture segment in its various manifestations will help to understand and appreciate how it is now being manifested through YouTube.

This essay will recount the development of film and viral video on the internet, how YouTube was created and how it became successful. The essay will also cover the development of multiple facets of Mormon popular culture, from which the Mormon experience on YouTube evolved. After looking at some of the personalities, trends and motivations involving Mormons on YouTube, including my own experience, the essay will conclude with an examination of some of the cautions regarding YouTube as well as hope for its future.

Theoretical Framework

In media studies, the idea that "the medium is the message," first advanced by Marshall McLuhan in 1964, has become a foundational theoretical concept. It states that it is the medium itself that "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association

and action” (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 9); the content of the medium is incidental. The various forms of media that have been introduced—from books, newspapers and pamphlets, to radio, movies and television, to the internet, social media and YouTube—have been created by society and have in turn shaped society. They have also shaped Mormonism, whether produced by official Church channels or the lay membership.

Each new medium brings about “new perceptual habits,” (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* vi), which fundamentally alter the society as it had previously been constituted. “The major advances in civilization are processes that all but wreck the societies in which they occur” (McLuhan, *Massage* 6). The adoption of each new medium in Mormon society has, in turn, disrupted that society. When a new medium is adopted, proponents of previously established mediums claim that the “new technology [has created] an environment that [they regard] as corrupt and degrading” (*Understanding Media* viii). They see it as “threatening the old values and reversing the old values” (“This is Marshall McLuhan”). Indeed, the historical record shows that the written word, the printed word, television, and other forms of media have all been decried as inferior to more established modes of communication. But while they may create enormous disruption, they replace old modes of thinking with something new. These perceptual changes and their effects on society are more extensive than the corruption perceived in their contact, and yet they pass beneath the notice of most people.

YouTube, as a form of new media, has created a major shift in perception. And yet, as is typical with new mediums, people are generally unaware of this. They are being massaged, as it were, by the medium. A new medium “does something to people, it takes hold of them, it roughs them up, it massages them, it bumps them around, as it

were chiropractically,” but they are “always completely unaware of this” (“This is Marshall McLuhan”). YouTube, for example, has, among other things, removed the barriers of publication. It has allowed massive amounts of information and production from the past and the present to converge in a single site. And it has allowed people to be their own editors, to filter or not to filter whatever they want from their content. But people don’t think of these and other matters because they focus on the content.

And what is that content? McLuhan states that “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium” (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 8). He perceives that the content of the telegraph is print, the content of print is the written word, and the content of the written word is speech. Similarly, a drawing is repackaged as a painting, a painting is repackaged as a photograph, a photograph is repackaged as film, and film is repackaged into digital media, such as YouTube. Each new medium repackages its predecessor in a form of remediation, which Bolter and Grusin define as “the representation of one medium in another” (45). The very name of ‘YouTube’ even evokes its repackaged predecessor, television. So it is the old medium of television and other forms of media that make up the content of YouTube, and these, of course, are “highly observable, highly noticeable, but the real roughing up and massaging is done by the new medium and it is ignored” (“This is Marshall McLuhan”).

Some might believe that “the computer so far surpasses other technologies in its power to make the world present that the history of earlier media has little relevance,” that digital technology “completes and overcomes the history of media” (Bolter and Grusin 24). But this is not the case. Since the medium has repackaged its predecessor, what is seen in the new medium is the past. “The new [technology] turns its predecessor

into an art form” (*Understanding Media* viii). McLuhan stated further, “when faced with a totally new situation, we tend to always attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past.” The reality of the past becomes an art form for the present media as “we march backwards into the future.” We “look at the present through a rear-view mirror” (*Massage* 74). At the time of McLuhan’s writing, television westerns such as *Bonanza* were popular, and McLuhan saw that “a modern suburbanite . . . lives not in modern suburbia; they live in Bonanza-land, one stage back,” finding it “emotionally much more gratifying and secure.” In another example, Plato turned oral dialogues into an art form, ironically even using the new medium of writing to advocate for the superiority of orality (Havelock 111). McLuhan stated further,

Every time a new environment forms, or a new medium, people go back and live in the old one. When the Cartwrights were actually running the USA, say back in 1850, 1870, people weren't living on the frontier at all. They didn't live in Bonanza-land when Bonanza-land actually existed. They were living back in Jeffersonian democracy (“This is Marshall McLuhan”).

One additional reason why “new perceptual habits” are a result of a “new medium” is because when a new medium is created, all of its initial users are amateurs. There are no professional, experienced users. The users set the new ground rules, which later professionals will “accept uncritically.” Professionals become a response to amateurs, once the amateurs have created the environment. Amateurs are a response to a new medium. And thus, new mediums create new societies (McLuhan, *Massage* 93).

Looking particularly at the Mormon experience with media generally and with YouTube specifically, certain shifts emerge in response to changes in media. By understanding what those shifts are and how and why they came about, we are in a better position to understand the changes taking place in Mormon society.

CHAPTER II

VIRAL VIDEO AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTUBE

In order to understand how and why Mormons use YouTube, it is first essential to understand what YouTube is. A sense of this is perhaps best achieved by understanding how it developed and why it was needed. Film has been available on the internet from its early days. Although limited bandwidth and connection speeds in most personal computers rendered the development of a site like YouTube unfeasible for a few more years, viral videos still spread as email attachments or as people waited through a lengthy downloading process. One early example was “Dancing Baby,” released in late 1996, and popularized following its repeated appearance on the television show, “Ally McBeal,” beginning on January 5, 1998. This video depicts a computer-animated image of a baby dancing, often accompanied to the song “Hooked on a Feeling” by Blue Swede. Another early example was Victor Navone’s “Alien Song,” in which a green alien lip-syncs to Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” for forty seconds before being crushed by a disco ball. (The alien, Blit Wizbok, “sustained no permanent injuries”) (Navone).

Popular culture provides other early examples of film on the internet. As the internet developed in the late 1990s, so did the highly anticipated film, *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*. Following their initial releases between 1977 and 1983, the first three films in the trilogy were ranked in the top six films of all time. (George Lucas and his associate, Steven Spielberg, also created the other three highest-grossing films—*ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Jaws* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). While *The Phantom Menace* was in production in 1997, Lucas released new versions of the original trilogy, pushing their rankings from #4 to #1 (*A New Hope*), #15 to #8 (*The*

Empire Strikes Back), and #8 to #6 (*Return of the Jedi*) on the all-time domestic charts (boxofficemojo.com). Anticipation was high for the new film, to be released on May 19, 1999. Many new films were created in response to this enthusiasm, resulting in new developments for viral video. Kevin Rubio premiered his ten-minute film, “Troops,” a mockumentary combining Star Wars Stormtroopers with the TV show, “Cops,” on July 18, 1997 at the San Diego Comic-Con; it was subsequently released online and was well received. The trailers for *The Phantom Menace* were released on November 18, 1998 and March 12, 1999, causing major internet congestion (Empire, Salon). Joe Nussbaum’s eight-minute short film, “George Lucas in Love,” which parodied the 1998 Best Picture winner *Shakespeare in Love* with a fictitious storyline of George Lucas coming up with the idea for *Star Wars*, was released in June 1999. All of these raised the profile of internet video. These films, however, had all been created professionally, whether as studio-made trailers, or as independent productions by people with experience in the industry, as with *Troops* and *George Lucas in Love*. But the widespread embrace of amateur video was soon to begin. And it would be another Star Wars-themed video that would start the trend.

On November 3, 2002, overweight teenager Ghyslain Raza recorded himself on a VHS tape in his high school’s TV studio in Trois-Rivières, Quebec, exuberantly swinging a golf ball retriever as though it were a light saber. Another student discovered and copied the tape, and soon began spreading it around their school, much to Raza’s chagrin. By April 14, 2003, it appeared on the internet, ushering in a new era of popular amateur viral videos. By November 2006, *Star Wars Kid* was the most-viewed viral video of all time, with over 900,000,000 views across all media platforms.

Raza, however, refused to participate in the ensuing media attention, perceiving himself to be a victim of cyberbullying. In fact, while talent and creativity continued to be gateways to recognition, many early viral videos spread as the result of people mocking the foibles of human nature. “Numa Numa,” uploaded December 6, 2004, featured another overweight teenager, Gary Brolsma, who had recorded himself dancing in his seat to the Romanian pop song “Dragostea Din Tei.” While Brolsma had uploaded his video himself, when the video received over two million views in its first few months, Brolsma was reportedly “distracted” and “embarrassed” at his celebrity (Feuer and George). However, he eventually embraced his notoriety, recording a sequel on September 8, 2006 (“New Numa”), followed by others, including one as recently as July 18, 2016 (“Numa Numa Reunion”). By November 2006, “Numa Numa” was the second-most viewed video of this period with 700 million views.

By this time, YouTube had become popular and an online video culture had begun to develop. Three particular videos were uploaded in 2007 and were widely seen due in part to mockery of the central individual. On April 22, 2007, Tay Zonday uploaded “Chocolate Rain,” in which Zonday, with his deep voice and boyish looks, sang an original, repetitive song. He explains his idiosyncratic movements with on-screen text reading, “I move away from the mic to breathe in.” Groups on the internet, “known for their absurdist and sometimes cruel frat-house humor,” spread the video online, resulting in twenty million hits within its first year, and 112 million by this writing (March 2017) (Burgess, “Chocolate Rain”). But it wasn’t just people who looked or sounded funny who were mocked online. In August, beauty pageant contestant Caitlin Upton was representing South Carolina as one of the five finalists on the Miss Teen USA Pageant,

when she was asked a question regarding American geographical ignorance. A bit overwhelmed by the situation she was in, her words came out as a nonsensical stream of phrases, and the result has had over 65 million views. Finally, on September 10, 2007, Chris Crocker, a flamboyantly gay young man recorded his own angry tearful rant demanding that people “Leave [pop star] Britney [Spears] Alone!” The result was widely parodied and mocked.

Each of these videos featured an individual who provided insight into some unique aspect of human nature. Despite widespread mockery, they blazed new trails in online celebrity while highlighting their own individuality. The rock band Weezer featured Brolsma, Zondag, Upton, Crocker and other subjects of early viral videos in their song, “Pork and Beans,” released in June 2008, which celebrated people’s expression of themselves without being constrained by others’ opinions. The lyrics, “I’m a do the things that I want to do/I ain’t got a thing to prove to you . . . I’m fine and dandy with the me inside./One look in the mirror, and I’m tickled pink/I don’t give a hoot about what you think” (Weezer) encapsulate these sentiments.

Individuals have always had their quirks, but the distribution of these moments was facilitated through means that had been heretofore unknown. During the early years of the internet, individuals needed to have specialized technical skills and programs in order to release their video creations online, but, beginning in 2005, prominent websites created tools to aid producers in the creation and distribution of their videos. These included Google Video on January 25, 2005, YouTube on February 14, 2005, and Yahoo! Video on June 1, 2006.

Google and Yahoo! were already dominant players in the online business world, but YouTube soon grew enough to eclipse them both in the online video market. YouTube originated in conversations among PayPal employees Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim. They had noticed “how easy it was to share photos with your friends online but what a pain it was to do the same thing with video” (Grossman, “People’s Network”). They sought to create a site that would provide users with a space to upload and host their online videos. They registered the domain name of YouTube on February 14, 2005, only a few weeks after Google Video had employed their search algorithms to focus on online video, and uploaded the first YouTube video on April 23, 2005, a clip of founder Jawed Karim standing in front of an elephant exhibit at the San Diego Zoo (“Me at the Zoo”).

While YouTube’s success came quickly, it wasn’t immediate. The founders tried pitching the site to *Wired* writers, without success. Then they tried advertising on Craigslist, telling attractive females that they would pay them \$100 for posting ten videos. No one responded (Burgess, “YouTube,” Gannes). YouTube began offering a beta test to the public in May 2005, and acquired a small second-story office, above Amici’s East Coast Pizzeria and Ni-Mo Japanese Cuisine at 71 East 3rd Avenue in San Mateo, California, a space now occupied by Lumity, a benefits consulting firm. But it wasn’t the only video-hosting site around. Castpost, ClipShack, DailyMotion, Grouper, OurMedia, Revver, Vimeo, and Vsocial, among others, also competed for internet traffic (Arrington, “Comparing”). In August 2006, LightReading ranked YouTube fourth among forty-five distinct video-sharing sites (Harvey).

So what made YouTube successful? In a talk given at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in October 2006, Jawed Karim, co-founder of the site, attributed the company's success to four key features added in June 2005. First, a "related videos" list offered recommendations to users based on the videos they were watching or had watched in the past, increasing the time users spent on the site. Second, a one-click sharing option was added, which enabled users to bring friends and associates onto the site, allowing videos to spread virally. Comments and other social networking tools were a third key to success, creating possibilities for YouTube communities to arise. Finally, YouTube enabled its videos to be played off-site through an embeddable link. Internet users could watch YouTube videos on a friend's blog or through other social media through this innovation.

YouTube's traffic began to increase, and on August 8, 2005, Michael Arrington wrote a positive profile of the site in the tech journal *TechCrunch*. In the review, he praised YouTube's "significantly faster" upload times and its sharing network, called the service "excellent," and concluded by saying, "we love it" (Arrington, "Profile-YouTube"). The article was picked up by Slashdot, and word of the site spread. Then in November, Sequoia Capital, a venture capital firm, invested \$3.5 million into the site. YouTube moved out of Beta in December, at which point it was logging eight million video views per day. Sequoia would invest an additional \$8 million five months later in April 2006.

Another key to YouTube's early success was a string of videos that became viral hits. One of the earliest came on June 25, 2005, when two Chinese young men filmed themselves in their dorm room wearing red Houston Rockets jerseys and lip-syncing to

the Backstreet Boys “I Want It That Way.” Then, in September, Nike uploaded a 2:45 second commercial in the style of an amateur video in which Brazilian soccer star Ronaldinho laces up with a new pair of Nike shoes and then proceeds to perform an impressive display of soccer skills. This video became the first YouTube video to reach one million views. Also in 2005, Matt Harding, a former software developer, uploaded his first video depicting himself dancing in locations around the world. The TechCrunch article noted it as their “absolute favorite.”

But perhaps the video that gave YouTube its greatest notoriety in its early days was “Lazy Sunday,” in which a new Saturday Night Live cast member, Andy Samberg, employed some friends from his comedy group, “The Lonely Island,” as well as fellow cast member Chris Parnell to create a rap video “which boasted, gangster-style, of the wimpiest activities imaginable,” including patronizing a movie theater to watch “The Chroni-(What!)-cles of Narnia” (Grossman, “30 Seconds”). The clip first aired on Saturday Night Live on December 17, 2005, and was quickly bootlegged onto YouTube, where it racked up over five million views before being removed two months later. This video resulted in YouTube’s visits increasing by 83% (Cloud, “YouTube Gurus”).

YouTube also benefited from good timing in the cultural, technological, and social arenas (Grossman, “People’s Network”). A cultural revolution, in which people consumed raw, unfiltered footage, rather than having “talking heads spoon-feed passive spectators ideas about what’s happening the world” was taking place. Affordable recording technology and software was becoming increasingly available. Digital cameras had begun to outsell film cameras. Many phones and computers had embedded cameras in their hardware, and video-editing software was often bundled with computers.

Additionally, a social media revolution was taking place. New websites, part of the internet's Web 2.0, grew up with YouTube. "Many viewers linked to YouTube from their MySpace pages, and YouTube's growth piggybacked on MySpace's" (Cloud, "YouTube Gurus"). Facebook, after limited launches among college and high school students beginning in February 2004, debuted a public version of its social networking site in September 2006. Twitter launched on March 21, 2006. Blogs, which had existed for a while, also began increasing in popularity. These, along with other social media sites, helped spread YouTube videos, while YouTube helped provide users of these sites with content to share. Through this mutually beneficial network, YouTube became a major part of the social media revolution.

YouTube was beginning to be noticed. *Time* magazine, in particular, ran several articles about the media site in 2006. For its April 24, 2006 issue, it covered YouTube and viral videos in an article titled "How To Get Famous in 30 Seconds." In this article, it warned, "Seriously. Don't go to YouTube if you don't have some time to kill, because whatever time you have, YouTube will kill it" (Grossman "30 Seconds").

In the issue dated November 13, 2006, *Time* again focused on YouTube, recognizing it as the Invention of the Year for 2006. This was the same day that Google, in its largest acquisition to that date, finalized its purchase of YouTube for \$1.65 billion, as announced the previous month. One of Google's rivals, Yahoo!, had recently started its own video-sharing service, and, perhaps to ensure dominance, Google sought to acquire the up-and-coming website. By this point, 70,000 videos were being uploaded to YouTube per day, and it was receiving 100,000,000 video views per day, up from ten million just the year before. The company had sixty-seven employees, who had just been

moved from their overcrowded second-story office into new company headquarters in San Bruno, California (Goo). *Time* honored YouTube as “the fulfillment of the promise that Web 1.0 made 15 years ago” for creating “a new way for millions of people to entertain, educate, shock, rock and grok one another on a scale we’ve never seen before” (Grossman, “The People’s Network”).

Then, for its December 25, 2006/January 1, 2007 end-of-the-year issue, *Time* honored “You” as its Person of the Year, recognizing the transformations that Web 2.0 and YouTube in particular had made on society. That issue’s cover image depicted a computer with a reflective Mylar mirror for a screen, meant to display an image of the person holding the magazine. Underneath the screen were YouTube-like controls, with a timer having playback set at the beginning of a 20:06 video. Most of the image was displayed in white, including the computer, graphically symbolizing the clean, technological future that awaited. This new world was just beginning, and people were excited by the possibilities.

CHAPTER III.

PEOPLE, POSSIBILITIES AND POTENTIAL: WHY MORMONS USE YOUTUBE

What was the promise of Web 1.0 that YouTube fulfilled? What were the possibilities that excited people? As the internet was in development, people theorized about what it might mean for society. In 1994, MCI produced a series of commercials featuring a 12-year-old Anna Paquin talking about “a road that will not connect two points—it will connect all points. . . . It will not go from here to there—there will be no more there. We will all only be here” (MCI 3). “Every book, every movie, every piece of knowledge in the universe—right here” (MCI 1). “Data, digital technology, information superhighway—it’s not about data, digits, technology; it’s not even about highways; it’s about you, and me, and Uncle Jack, and everybody” (MCI 2). The promise of the internet was that every person and every piece of knowledge would be connected in a way previously almost unfathomable. YouTube may have fulfilled Andy Warhol’s 1968 prediction that “in the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes,” although it may have adapted it to “everyone is famous to 15 people” (Tyranigel). YouTube allowed people to bypass the traditional barriers that had prevented people from telling their own stories in their own ways. Web 1.0 was about connecting information. Web 2.0 was about connecting people.

Taking an autoethnographic approach in sharing my own experience with YouTube may provide an example of the experience of YouTube users generally and Mormon YouTube users particularly. Autoethnography “is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis). This approach grew in the late 20th century as

scholars began to recognize a need to move away from a sterile, authoritarian methodology in which only one perspective was viewed as credible, to a more inclusive, dynamic system that recognized the variety and diversity of human experience. The autoethnographic process emphasizes stories rather than theories (Ellis). This is particularly fitting in the context of a discussion of YouTube. Its longtime slogan of “Broadcast Yourself” (2005-2012) directly encouraged users to participate and share those things particular to themselves. Furthermore, with the advantage of personal familiarity, I can display how a part of the YouTube story is my own. I can provide nuances of detail to better illustrate different aspects of my story, such as some of my initial caution and hesitation in dipping a toe into this new media ocean. I can also demonstrate firsthand some of the aftereffects and potential of using YouTube, and describe some of the motivations which I, as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, had in using this new medium. This will lead to a general discussion of the motives Mormons collectively and individually have had in using YouTube. Through understanding why Mormons use YouTube, we are better positioned to understand their values, culture and identity.

I started using YouTube in 2006, after I became aware of it through reading the April 24th, 2006 *Time* magazine article. I was one of the people who were inspired and inquisitive regarding the possibilities and potential of this new medium. My usage of the internet, however, had begun long before that. In 1997, the year I joined the online community, I learned some Html programming and created my own Geocities website. I began corresponding on message boards in 1999, at first one associated with the *Star Wars* fan community, and then one connected to the writings of Eric D. Snider, a popular

humor columnist, movie critic and sketch comedian at BYU, the university I was attending. In 2003, I created a website to host *Forty Years Among the Indians*, an autobiography written by my ancestor, Daniel Webster Jones, along with accompanying relevant information. I had begun contributing to Wikipedia before I read the April 24, 2006 *Time* magazine article. At about the same time, on April 29th, I purchased a digital camera, which I immediately began using to photograph pictures of grave markers of past leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from Salt Lake City cemeteries and upload them to Wikipedia. I had become quite comfortable and accustomed to the lifestyle of an internet user and appreciated the opportunity it afforded me to create and contribute as well as to consume.

I registered my own YouTube channel on June 26th, 2006. Cautious at first, I used a pseudonym (“ThronD”), and did not begin uploading videos immediately. After moving to Logan, Utah on June 4th, I visited nearby Preston, Idaho on July 8th for its Second Annual Napoleon Dynamite Days, in honor of the 2004 film that had been set and largely filmed there. On October 10th, 2006, I uploaded my first experimental video to see what would happen, a clip of two Napoleon Dynamite impersonators on a stage. It was viewed a few times (it currently has about 5,000 views) with no perceivable negative consequences. Satisfied that the medium was safe to use, I decided to engage with the medium in a more personal manner.

On November 9th, 2006, I uploaded a video in which I recited a “Speed Talking” list I had memorized by about 1993, and had periodically used as a kind of parlor trick. In the video, I rapidly name the books of the Bible, The Book of Mormon, the fifty US states, the alphabet backwards, and the US Presidents in one minute. In its first nine

days, it recorded over 1500 views; currently it has over 48,000. Interested in what the reaction might be to a more polished video, I slowed down just a little and added subtitles and visuals to increase intelligibility. I also added a list of Best Picture Oscar winners that I had been working on to my list. I uploaded the video to YouTube on November 18th, calling it “Speed Talking 2.0.” I also uploaded copies to Google Video and Yahoo! Video.

The video received some attention. I found it noted on a few blogs and other sites. One day, it even registered over a thousand views. Then, on February 21st, 2007, a roommate told me, “You need to go to Yahoo.com.” Yahoo!, at that time still the most popular site on the internet (Jensen, K. Thor) had selected my video to display on its main home page, accompanied by the captions, “How much can one man say in two minutes? You might be surprised” and “Is he cool or annoying? Do tell.” In the next couple of hours, the video registered over 200,000 views. Copies of the video began turning up on other sites, including one clone on YouTube that registered 120,000 views before the uploader took it down (to date, the original YouTube video has 86,000 views). Morning radio shows began calling me, beginning with KTYD in Santa Barbara, California on March 1st, whose host, Matt McAllister, had himself created a viral video where he wore 155 T-shirts one morning in September 2006, although this fact did not come out in the interview. (His video was among those referenced in Weezer’s “Pork and Beans” video). Between March 12th and March 14th, I had additional radio interviews with KFNY and Q in the Morning, both based in New York City, as well as WXLO in Boston and KZL in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Later, there would be additional media attention, including some from overseas, such as a video produced in August 2007 by thisisaknife, a web show produced by the UK's Channel Four (orieltim). Another British web series, "Get Your Island On" used my video in their program in October 2008 (since removed). There was a 756-word article written in May 2010 in Süddeutsche Zeitung, the largest daily national subscription paper in Germany (Kortmann). Oceanstar Entertainment in South Korea contacted me in February 2012 about doing a commercial for LG telecom, although nothing came of it. There were multiple occasions when I was recognized by strangers and asked to perform my stunt. In 2010, I was asked to perform in front of hundreds at my company's Christmas party. About that same time, I was asked by producers of *America's Got Talent* to perform for their show, which I did in March 2011. I was booed by the audience and eliminated by the judges within about twenty seconds. Howie Mandel said, "that was speed judging." The judges complained about the lack of intelligibility of the act; Piers Morgan saying that he could recite the next forty Presidents of the United States ("blthblthblthblthblth"). My segment was never aired (Set News).

I continued creating YouTube videos, however. On the day of my last radio interview, I created a music video for "Mr. Bright Guy," a parody of "Mr. Brightside," written by Brandon Flowers of the Killers. Eric D. Snider, whose works I was still following, wrote the lyrics. The song was about Ken Jennings' historic 2004 run in which he won 74 consecutive games on the American quiz show Jeopardy!. Notably, Flowers, Snider, Jennings and myself are all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

One of my primary motivations in using YouTube, was, in fact, to help spread the message of the Church. I was familiar with the talk delivered by then newly set apart President of the Church, Spencer W. Kimball in April 1974, “When the World Will Be Converted,” in which he urged Church members to “move forward and expand much faster than we now are.” He urged greater use of the technology of the day, including “satellite and related discoveries to their greatest potential and all of the media—the papers, magazines, television, radio—all in their greatest power” and promised that the Lord would “put into our hands inventions of which we laymen have hardly had a glimpse” to further assist in propagating the message of the Church (Kimball).

I saw YouTube as potentially being the fulfillment of these statements. I had often been complimented on my reading voice, and considered that I might read The Book of Mormon on YouTube. I even recorded six videos of myself reading the preliminary material in The Book of Mormon. However, I hesitated in uploading them to the site, since I had received no special authorization. Instead, I created and uploaded the Speed Talking videos. Not long after, however, I saw a video from fellow YouTube user Seth Adam Smith encouraging members of the Church to share their testimonies, or bear witness of their beliefs, on YouTube. This too had been among my own ideas for potential uses of YouTube. Prior to this time, I had noticed that videos speaking critically of the church seemed to outnumber those speaking in favor. In February 2007, MormonWebTV.com claimed that Anti-Mormon videos outnumbered other videos about the Church “at a ratio of more than 9:1” (archive.org). I was in favor of Church members speaking for themselves rather than having others speak for them. Consequently, I uploaded my video entitled “Some Things I Know” on June 24th, 2007.

Late that year, on December 15th, a high-ranking official within the Church, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, delivered a commencement speech at BYU-Hawaii. In that speech, he recognized that the Church has “adopted and embraced” tools that “facilitate the spreading of the gospel” including “print, broadcast media, and now the internet.” The internet, he said, “is revolutionizing society.” It “allows everyone to be a publisher, to have their voice heard,” making “it possible for nearly anyone to publish or broadcast to either a large or a niche audience,” and “facilitating a world-wide conversation on almost every subject including religion.”

“The challenge,” Elder Ballard went on to say, “is that there are too many people participating in conversations about the Church for our Church personnel to converse with and respond to individually.” So he invited Church members to “join the conversation by participating on the Internet, particularly the New Media, to share the gospel and to explain in simple, clear terms the message of the Restoration.” He suggested blogging, sharing Church videos, responding to media sites that report on the Church, and recording and posting “testimonies of the Restoration, the teachings of The Book of Mormon, and other gospel subjects on popular video-sharing sites,” including in languages Church members might have learned on their missions. By having Church members tell their own stories, they could “help demystify the Church.” He declared, “we have a major responsibility as Latter-day Saints to define ourselves, instead of letting others define us.” “May the Lord bless you,” he concluded,

To guide you and inspire you and enlighten your minds that you will know how to participate in this vast, worldwide conversation that is going on. That you may make your contribution wisely, carefully, lovingly, filled with the promptings of power of the Spirit of God, that you too can join in declaring with your words and your voice, the great and glorious message of the restoration to the earth of the fullness of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ (Ballard, “Using New Media”).

That night, as I read the published report of his talk, I felt moved upon that this was the authorization that I had been lacking, and the next day, I uploaded The Book of Mormon videos that I had recorded previously, and created new ones of the first two chapters of The Book of Mormon. In the next three weeks, I recorded videos of the first 27 chapters (67 pages) of The Book of Mormon, through 2 Nephi 5. I slowed down a bit after that, eventually completing my recordings on August 15th, 2008, eight months later. The next year, I began recording the text in Spanish as well, a project that I have not yet completed as of 2017, but intend to. The views on these videos have been relatively limited, but their cumulative total is around 275,000 (an average of about 685 views each).

My story is one of many stories of Mormons who have used YouTube. Our usage of YouTube shares many purposes, results, and circumstances, though there is also much of variety. Some of these are illustrated in my story.

Church members use YouTube to help spread the message of the Church, that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fulness. My videos share the Church's message directly, as in my reading The Book of Mormon online or sharing my testimony. I also do this indirectly, as in the four seconds of my "Speed Talking" video when I hold up the Bible and The Book of Mormon side by side while reciting the names of the books of The Book of Mormon. There is a subtle moment in the video, after I have completed naming the books of the Bible and have begun naming those in The Book of Mormon where I slightly dip the Bible in my left hand. I had thought to change the focus to The Book of Mormon, the current object of my elocution and remove the Bible from the frame—then reconsidered and held both together. This is an illustration of the LDS

concern with legitimacy. The first sentence of the Introduction in The Book of Mormon declares, “The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible.” That is not a statement with widespread acceptance outside of the Church, hence the desire of the Church institutionally and its members individually to be all the more assertive about its legitimacy. Thus, my choice in the manner in which I held the books is a visual reference that they are both scripture of comparable stature.

Another example is the Ken Jennings “Mr. Bright Guy” video, which promotes a Church member whose accomplishments on Jeopardy! were widely noted. Such recognition helps to “demystify the Church” to those who might be familiar with Jennings’ achievement, but not as familiar with his religion. By knowing someone in the public eye as a member of the Church, the Church becomes less of a mysterious other. My speed talking videos may also serve to create an impression of Mormons as having particular skills, (though they may do little to decrease the perception of Mormons as strange).

My story also illustrates some of the central paradoxes that Terryl Givens explores in *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture*. One is that many Church members have a desire to contribute and engage with the world, while simultaneously maintaining an aloofness from its imagined dangers. My initial reserve in using YouTube was counterbalanced by a desire to contribute and share my individuality and myself with the world. Another of Givens’ paradoxes is setting authoritarianism against individualism. Church members are encouraged to “be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:27), and yet, I was hesitant about moving forward with my

Book of Mormon videos until I read of Elder Ballard's talk. Prophetic authority and individual license, in this perspective, illustrate some of the interesting dichotomies in Mormon thought.

Another aspect of YouTube highlighted in my experience is outside media attention. Often, this occurs because once someone has proven their marketability through views on YouTube or other metrics, traditional media forms become available to supplement their work and become tools of celebrity. In my case, my Speed Talking video was noted by Yahoo!, morning radio shows, blogs, newspapers, web series, a commercial casting agency, and *America's Got Talent*. All of this resulted from my creation of a YouTube video at home, by myself, with a computer, a camera, and little technical knowledge. Weezer's music video gathered many early YouTubers, including Church member Tom Dickson's Blendtec® Blenders ("Will It Blend?"). Some Church members, such as Lindsey Stirling, The Piano Guys, or the cast members of Studio C, have become quite well known through their participation in YouTube, but they have also gained prominence through exposure in traditional media. Lindsey Stirling and the Piano Guys have created CDs and had concert tours; Studio C's YouTube presence has grown up alongside its popular BYUTV sketch comedy show, which has provided it with the tools it needed to develop and produce its work. Media exposure outside of YouTube has had a significant impact on whether individual talents gain celebrity or remain in obscurity. Thus, new mediums do not necessarily replace the mediums that precede them. Books, radio, television and other mediums still thrive despite the arrival of more technologically advanced mediums. Old and new media can and do work together, as in these examples, to synergistically produce more than either could in isolation. The

process of remediation is thus one of cooperative progress; each new medium becoming more than it would be on its own. As has been observed, “the marker of success for these new forms, paradoxically, is measured not only by their online popularity but by their subsequent ability to pass through the gate-keeping mechanisms of old media—the recording contract, the film festival, the television pilot, the advertising deal” (Burgess “YouTube” 24).

Still, the potential for self-expression on one’s own terms is greater with YouTube than when relying solely on the tools and channels of old media. In his talk, Elder Ballard spoke of the norms of old media, where a six-second sound bite might be all that is preserved of a sixty-minute interview. But the tools of new media allow “organizations and individuals to completely bypass the news media and publish or broadcast their message in its entirety to the intended audience” (Ballard “Using New Media”). Through creating videos and participating in the online conversation, Church members have been able to tell their own stories. Although my segment may never have been aired on “America’s Got Talent,” my video on YouTube remains available indefinitely. I created the video in my own way, with my own resources, without outside influence or control. My video received over half a million views, and outside attention was both a cause and a result of the increased views of the video. The attention, while not massive, was substantial. Lindsey Stirling, another “America’s Got Talent” loser-cum-YouTube celebrity has a much more dramatic story.

Stirling, whose performances combine her violin playing with creative dance, had shopped her music around to various record labels, but was rejected for being “too different” (Philipkoski). In 2010, however, she thought she had her break when she was

selected to perform on the fifth season of “America’s Got Talent.” She made it to air and passed her audition, becoming one of 48 contestants selected to compete in Las Vegas—but didn’t make it any further. She was eliminated in the quarterfinals and told that she wasn’t “good enough,” and that her act wouldn’t “fill a theater in Vegas.” Lindsey described her reaction at the time as “heartbroken . . . humiliated, absolutely devastated; I honestly didn’t know if I could get on a stage again, I was so embarrassed” (Philipkoski). So she “went back to square zero,” playing in low-key gigs at college cafeterias (Krewen).

About a year later, in May 2011, Devin Graham, a cinematographer and fellow student at Brigham Young University, contacted Lindsey about making a video for YouTube. The video, released on Graham’s channel, “devinsupertramp” as “Epic Violin Girl-Lindsey Stirling” on May 17, 2011, and on Lindsey’s channel as “Spontaneous Me-Lindsey Stirling (original song)” on May 18, 2011, has now received a combined 37.6 million views, and has helped both Graham and Stirling become two of the most successful LDS YouTube content creators. Graham’s 248 videos, many of which deal with extreme sports such as parkour or BASE jumping, have received over 900 million views with 4.5 million subscribers—an average of 3.6 million each. Lindsey’s 86 videos currently have 1.7 billion views and 9.1 million subscribers, an average of 20 million views each.

After Lindsey became successful, record labels that had once rejected her sought to establish contracts. But it was too late; she had built her own business and no longer needed a label to promote her. She had “100 per cent creative control” and could “self-fund everything.” Through YouTube, Lindsey had been able to develop her own music

with freedom and control. She has been able to tell her own story without outside filters. As she has stated, “I stumbled upon YouTube because I didn’t know what else to do, and it’s the best thing that ever happened to me” (Krewen).

Lindsey’s beliefs have informed her performances, which permeate many of her videos through rich, powerful symbolism. For example, in “Beyond the Veil,” Lindsey is guided by a younger version of herself into an underwater realm through which she is given a vision of great knowledge. This accords well with the principle of revelation. The Book of Mormon records that “whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (3 Nephi 9:22). In her video “Shatter Me,” Lindsey portrays a ballerina trapped in a music box encased in a glass sphere. Eventually, she is able to break free of her artificial environment through a realization that her fears are not real and that her gifts have the power to release her. Similarly, Lindsey has stated that her realization of her worth as a daughter of God and His love for her helped her to overcome some of her personal struggles. In the recent 2017 sequel to “Shatter Me,” “Lost Girls,” the ballerina wanders through a forest with a heightened awareness of the beauty she had previously been missing. However, she learns that sometimes the world can be a threatening and hostile place. When given the opportunity by a malevolent being to return to her old safe, glass sphere, she refuses, reshatters herself, and instead encourages others who are shattering through glass spheres of their own. This illustrates an application of the teaching of Jesus Christ to Peter at the Last Supper that, “when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).

In a video for the Church’s “I’m a Mormon” campaign, Lindsey stated, “The only thing that actually lasts are those core beliefs that I have worth, and for me, that actually

comes from knowing that I am a daughter of God.” She believes that “this idea that you can express yourself for who you are has completely changed the way my music is” (Mormon.org).

Lindsey’s “I’m a Mormon” video was one of 158 that the Church released between October 2010 and June 2014. This multilingual video series highlighted the lives of individuals and families “drawn from every walk of life, from different ethnicities and nationalities” in order to provide an opportunity for people to identify with members of the Church who are like them (Otterson). In the profiles, they talk about their lives, their interests, their struggles and their faith. A few of the subjects, like Lindsey Stirling or Brandon Flowers, are well known; most are not. YouTube facilitated this conversation by establishing a culture of connection with real people. This created an environment in which a campaign like the “I’m a Mormon” videos can thrive. To date, the videos have been viewed over 89 million times. All of the videos have been viewed at least 20,000 times, with Lindsey Stirling’s at 4.6 million having the most views of English-language videos (two videos recorded in Spanish have a higher viewcount). The videos have a median of 159,000 views and a mean of 564,000 views. While these videos may have had institutional Church backing, their whole focus is on individual members telling their own stories.

Those critical of the Church have produced a similar series under the YouTube channel “iamanxmormon,” in which they also tell their stories. For comparison, these 44 videos have been viewed a total of 3.1 million times, with the average video receiving 71,000 views. The video of Emily Pearson, daughter of Gerald and noted writer Carol

Lynn Pearson, has been viewed the most at 601,000 times, with five others receiving over 100,000 views.

YouTube users have the ability to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and have complete creative control over their work. For some, this may mean the ability to avoid censorship, within certain community guidelines. For many Latter-day Saints, this allows them the opportunity to uphold Church standards in their work without the pressure to compromise that may be present in many other venues. Such pressure may explain the recent dearth of active Church members who are regularly involved with major film productions, although several lapsed or former members have been very prominent recent actors, including Ryan Gosling, Amy Adams, Katherine Heigl, Aaron Eckhardt, Eliza Dushku, and the late Paul Walker. Most active Church members seek to uphold Church standards in their work and would refrain from situations where they might be required to perform in ways contrary to their beliefs. For this reason, Mormon artists may tend to gravitate towards artistic fields where they are not pressured to compromise their standards. YouTube is ideal in affording them that opportunity. Mormon artists can tell their own stories, set their own standards and create their own art on their own terms.

Lindsey Stirling has stated:

When I first started to perform and I saw that it was actually starting to go somewhere, I actually remember making a promise to myself and a promise to God that I would keep, you know, this is where the line is, this is where I'm going to draw it, and that's where it's going to stay. And it's actually been amazingly protective . . . these standards really have protected me, they've kept me safe, they've kept me sane ("Face to Face with Lindsey Stirling").

James Perry explained the importance of clean comedy for the cast of Studio C: "because . . . we have the beliefs and the values that we have . . . what we think is funny is also going to be clean. You know, we're not going to go to the more crass jokes and all

that stuff.” He also recognized that “very few of [those in the entertainment industry] provide comedy . . . that’s funny to all of us, but that people can watch together” (“Face to Face with Studio C”). Matt Meese agreed, “we really wanted to fill a niche that’s not being occupied anymore . . . not as many people are doing family entertainment” (teamcoco). Mallory Everton added that this helps show “that Mormons are normal . . . that you can still do sketch comedy if you’re Mormon, you can still be in the arts and the film industry and stuff like that.” Stacey Harkey reflected, “you can be who you are and not have to sacrifice your standards; . . . you can be passionate about something and still be successful at it without having to . . . sacrifice on some places” (“Face to Face with Studio C”). Because it allows them to set their own standards, YouTube is an appealing medium for many LDS artists.

Mormon YouTube users also create content for the same reasons that any YouTube user does—for education, for entertainment, to market a product, or for profit. Tom Dickson has been marketing his Blendtec® blenders since October 2006, for example. In his ongoing “Will it Blend?” series, Dickson inserts various user-suggested objects to demonstrate the capabilities of his blenders. His 180 videos have received an average of 1.57 million views each. Recognizable LDS content is rare, however, a February 2012 episode depicted Dickson playing basketball with the Harlem Globetrotters in an LDS gymnasium, complete with hymnals (Blendtec).

In May 2007, YouTube launched its Partner Program, which allowed video creators to share profits from advertising with YouTube. YouTube’s policy is to share 55% of the net revenues from advertising for eligible videos that have been enabled for monetization, as long as the balance owed is at least \$100 at the end of a calendar month

(Monetization). While it is unknown exactly how much most YouTube content creators have earned, Forbes releases a list of the top YouTube earners, each of whom earns millions of dollars. For the year ending in June 2015, Lindsey Stirling ranked fourth on the list, with \$6 million.

Since its organization, twin forces of proselytization and opposition have been a part of Church history. The Church has actively sought to fulfill its commission to preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people (Revelation 14:6, Doctrine and Covenants 133:37). And it has often had to do so in the face of mob violence, government prosecution, or forces of misunderstanding, misrepresentation and mischaracterization. Whether such forces have been deliberate attacks against the Church, or occasioned by sincere differences of belief, YouTube has changed the conversation. Members of the Church and its opponents are able to share their messages and to represent themselves with greater freedom and to a potentially greater audience than they ever have before. Additionally, being able to authentically express oneself is both a core feature of YouTube and a key component of LDS doctrine. The document “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” issued by the Church on September 23rd, 1995 has found widespread use in the Church for its succinct reiteration of key components of Church doctrine. Among these doctrines is that “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.” A desire to realize and actualize that “divine nature and destiny,” as well as an opportunity to “define ourselves instead of letting others define us” and to “share the gospel” and “the

message of the Restoration” (Ballard, “Using New Media,”) are key components of understanding both why Mormons use YouTube and who Mormons are.

CHAPTER IV

PRECEDENTS, PURPOSE AND POPULAR CULTURE: WHY MORMONS AND YOUTUBE MATTER

To understand more fully who Mormons are and how and why they use YouTube, it is instructive to look at the development of Mormon culture as a whole. Mormon use of YouTube has grown out of and is a part of the long and varied history of Mormon use of media in many forms, extending from the use of printing, notably and especially with The Book of Mormon, to theater, and later into film and television. While initially reserved in literary works outside of religious-oriented tracts and periodicals, Church members began to develop a home literature following a notable speech given by Orson F. Whitney in 1888. Not long after, motion pictures made their entrance upon the scene and were soon adopted both by the Church institutionally as well as by its antagonists, with Church members also contributing through significant technological advances. Still, despite some notable advancements, the development of a corpus of Church literature and art grew slowly until the 1970s when Church President Spencer W. Kimball renewed the call for “A Gospel Vision of the Arts.” Since that time, a significant flowering of production both institutionally and by individual Church members in music, visual art, literature, kitsch and film has resulted in a niche popular culture market. With the burgeoning and fading of an independent, theatrically-produced Mormon cinema movement in the 2000s, the culture had paved the way for the institutional church, professional artists, and rank-and-file members to begin using the leveling tools of YouTube.

An inclusion of some of the highlights of LDS cultural history is essential to understand and appreciate current developments in YouTube and elsewhere. The Church has long emphasized the narrative of its early history. “We can derive great strength,” taught Elder Ballard in 1995 “from understanding our Church history” (Ballard, “Hyrum Smith”). Names such as Haun’s/Hawn’s Mill, Liberty Jail and Carthage Jail, or the Martin and Willie handcart companies have deep resonance among the Latter-day Saints. Stories of pioneer sacrifice and of remaining faithful in the face of opposition and even death encourage these values in the actual and spiritual descendants of those who went through “the trials of Missouri” and “the courage of Nauvoo” (*Hymns*, 248). This foundation lends purpose and meaningfulness to the current activity of the Church.

The foundation of cultural history is analogous. Without understanding what happened before, efforts of the Church and its members on YouTube may seem flighty, impermanent and without importance. That which has gone before gives their works weight in context, grounding in precedence and substance in significance. It is the reason why they matter.

However, for the foundation to be effective, it must be remembered. Its mere existence does little good in giving consequence to the present. Many of those who have gone before have passed on, but their works remain. An awareness of and an appreciation for that work are imperative for a proper understanding of Mormon culture today.

In analyzing the history of Mormon culture and interaction with media, it is useful to have a historical framework in place. This will help to “contextualize discussion” and “reveal historical patterns” (Astle, “A History” 18, “Mormons and Cinema” 2). Randy

Astle, in his 152-page article “A History of Mormon Cinema,” published in *BYU Studies Quarterly* in 2007, and revised in 2013 as the lead chapter in the two-volume set *Mormons and Popular Culture*, proposes a five-wave model for categorizing the history of Mormon cinema. Each of these waves has helped in creating an environment that has fostered the development of Mormons and YouTube. While Astle wrote primarily of the history of cinema, the model can be adapted and adjusted to include other areas of Mormon popular culture and to explore the shifts that have emerged in Mormon society in response to changes in media. Astle uses the term “waves” to imply a connection and flow of talent and personnel between one wave and another, and to connect with the term “new wave.” Just as when one wave crests, a succeeding wave starts to form underneath it, so too does each wave of Mormon cinema foster the development of its succeeding wave. Each new wave creates a fundamental artistic shift during which the background against which players work eventually changes significantly. Although the transitions between the waves are indistinct with fuzzy edges, they are marked by particular characteristics, which create a pattern for determining proper points of inception. This pattern consists of at least three major elements. In some way, a new wave is first, signaled by a shift in how Mormons engage with the world, second, heralded by a new generation with different priorities, and third, marked by a new technological medium to remediate the message. The net effect of these becomes a shift in Mormon society. By understanding what those shifts are and how and why they came about, we are better positioned to understand the changes taking place in Mormon society through YouTube and other forms of digital media.

The first wave begins around 1890, with a number of changes in how Mormons engaged society. It includes the 1905 release of *A Trip to Salt Lake City*, the first fiction film featuring Mormon content. It continues with the anti-Mormon films of the silent era and the work that the Clawson brothers performed on behalf of the Church, ending with the 1929 fire that took the life of Shirl Clawson and destroyed much of their work.

The second wave (1929-1953) saw relatively few official Church productions, future Church President Gordon B. Hinckley's work on the Church Radio, Publicity and Mission Literature Committee notwithstanding. Hollywood's adoption of the Hays Code led to reduced depictions in mainstream media as well, with the major exception of *Brigham Young* (1940). The period ended with the filming of the Temple endowment ceremony and the creation of the Church's motion picture studio at BYU.

The third wave (1953-1974), which Astle calls the Classical Era, is characterized by the work of Wetzel "Judge" Whitaker heading the Church's motion picture studio. The Mormon Pavilion at the New York World's Fair was a particular highlight of this wave, as were the work of artists Minerva Teichert, Arnold Friberg, and Harry Anderson.

The fourth wave (1974-2000) begins with the Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball and his call for more and better Mormon artists. It is characterized by a continuing output of media from the institutional Church, and an ensuing explosion of mass media from Church members. Many Church writers, musicians, artists and filmmakers became well-known and flourished during this period, though most primarily directed their work at other members of the Church, creating a unique niche segment of popular culture, which was sometimes criticized for its kitschy flavors.

Finally, Astle posits that the fifth wave (2000-present) begins with Richard Dutcher's production of *God's Army* and the introduction of Mormon cinema. It also presented a new generation of successful, mainstream Mormon writers. After the Mormon cinema movement had flashed and begun to fade, Astle was left undecided as to whether this constituted a premature end to the fifth wave and the beginning of a sixth, or if the ensuing digital and social media revolutions simply represented a shift in focus, as online media became the chief characteristic of the wave.

In adapting this wave model to Mormons and media generally, I would propose two fundamental alterations at the beginning and at the end of this model. I choose to retain Astle's numbering for consistency, as it has meaning for film and other forms of modern media, but recognize 19th century media with the addition of a 0th wave, which would later be repackaged through remediation in the ensuing waves. Non-fictional text works characterize this wave, beginning with the works of scripture produced by Joseph Smith and continuing with the various pamphlets, periodicals and books employed to promulgate that message. Relatively little art was produced during this time, and most of that which was produced, such as the paintings of C.C.A. Christensen and the architecture of various chapels, tabernacles, and the four temples in St. George, Logan, Manti and Salt Lake City, was employed directly in the building up of the Church.

The second change would be an adjustment in the interpretation of the fifth wave. Because the movement of Mormon cinema that followed Richard Dutcher's release of *God's Army* (2000) appears to have been short-lived, lasting until about 2007, I believe it is more appropriate to classify it as another manifestation of the fourth wave of mass media. The rise of online video, including YouTube, and other forms of social media

coincided with the decline of this movement, and I believe that this period, beginning about 2006, provides a better starting point for the beginning of the fifth wave. It more closely follows the pattern of transitions associated with a new wave. It has been adopted by a new generation with new priorities. While the fourth wave was concerned with the commercial acquisition of material objects in the niche popular culture of the fourth wave, the fifth wave is more connected to the sharing model encouraged by digital media, a model more fully embraced by a new generation of young people. It marks a change in the way Mormons engage with the world, continuing the shift of increasing populism begun in the fourth wave. While the fourth wave was marked by an expansion from Church-created media to include Church members who would become professionals in their fields, the fifth wave continues this expanding trend to include non-professional Church members. And it is clearly marked by a new medium, whereas the Dutcher phase of Mormon cinema was marked merely by a new use of an existing medium.

To better understand the development and transitions taking place in Mormon culture and society through media, a more detailed study follows. This will allow greater understanding of the ways in which Mormon society has created its culture, and the ways in which that culture has in turn shaped the society.

The 0th Wave

The founding narrative of Mormonism begins with Joseph Smith reading James 1:5 in the King James Version of the Bible (“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God”), which led to his First Vision. The King James translation of the Bible in 1611 was a massive undertaking, and “in respect of both equipment and method” it “was made

according to the highest standards of scholarship and the most advanced knowledge of the day” (MacGregor). Teams of dozens of scholars worked on the translation for a period of seven years, and by the time Joseph Smith read it in 1820, it had “established complete dominance in public and ecclesiastical use in the English-speaking Protestant world” (Utley).

Subsequently, Joseph Smith would publish *The Book of Mormon*, using the medium of printing to begin the work of the Church. In order to finance the initial publication of 5,000 copies, Martin Harris, a friend and benefactor of Joseph Smith, mortgaged his farm for \$3,000. By 2011, 150 million copies had been printed, reaching 110 languages in 2015 (“150 Million Copies,” “110 Languages”).

During the half-century following the printing of *The Book of Mormon* and the organization of the Church, most Mormon publications consisted of tracts, periodicals, or documents used to advance the work of the Church. Scriptural records included *The Book of Commandments*, published in 1833, which was an incomplete record of Joseph Smith’s revelations; the printing was in process when the press was destroyed by a mob. It would be replaced with *The Doctrine and Covenants* in 1835. *The Pearl of Great Price* was first compiled and published in 1851 and canonized in 1880.

Following a directive given through a revelation in July 1830 (Doctrine and Covenants 25:11-12), the prophet’s wife, Emma Hale Smith, compiled the first “Collection of Sacred Hymns,” which appeared in 1835. It has been noted that “of all artistic endeavors, then, music may justly be named as the first to claim divine support and prophetic direction for its development in the fledgling LDS Church” (Givens 118). More hymns would follow as poets and musicians such as Eliza R. Snow, William W.

Phelps, Parley P. Pratt, William Clayton, Ebenezer Beesley, George Careless, Evan Stephens and many others penned and composed sacred music for worship. At least twelve newspapers were published by or on behalf of the Church during Joseph Smith's lifetime (including *The Messenger and Advocate*, *The Times and Seasons*, and *The Millennial Star*) while another twelve periodicals (including *The Deseret News*, *The Juvenile Instructor*, and *The Woman's Exponent*) were published prior to 1880 ("List of Latter Day Saint Periodicals").

Nearly all of these publications were non-fictional, used to proselytize, inform or otherwise encourage the Saints in living their religion. One partial exception was "A Dialogue Between Joseph Smith and the Devil" written by Parley P. Pratt in Boston in the spring of 1844, and first published in the *New York Herald* on August 25, 1844, nearly two months after Joseph Smith's martyrdom. While the document is essentially another tract, discussing Mormon doctrines, distinguishing between the Church and the creeds of other Christian churches, addressing the Solomon Spaulding manuscript controversy, and other matters, it uses the fictional device of having Joseph Smith meet the devil in passing and strike up a conversation, and as such, has often been credited as the first work of Mormon fiction (Larsen). Although the dialogue concludes with Joseph Smith wishing that the devil "be forced to put to sea in a stone canoe with an iron paddle, and may the canoe sink, and a shark swallow the canoe and its royal freight and an alligator swallow the shark and may the alligator be bound in the northwest corner of hell, the door be locked, key lost, and a blind man hunting for it," Joseph Smith's amiable character is such that he creates a frenemy of the devil, who invites him for a drink of spruce beer, and says that the Prophet "would almost make me forget that I am a devil,

and make a gentleman of me, while he gently overthrows my government at the same time that he wins my friendship.”

This fictional treatment of Mormonism did not set a new trend in Mormon literature, however. While many members wrote their stories in journals and life histories, and some even published their autobiographies, such as Parley P. Pratt (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 1874) and Daniel Webster Jones (*Forty Years Among the Indians*, 1890), fictional novels were almost non-existent. Some even pointedly warned of the dangers of novel reading. The *Millennial Star* republished an article in this vein from “The Western Watchman,” a weekly newspaper out of Ayr, Scotland. “You subject your purity of mind to a fearful trial,” through reading novels, the author averred, because “it is hard to discriminate between the good and evil in novels.” Additionally, the reading of novels can spark an insatiable appetite for more fiction. “The novel appetite being once formed, it craves all,” making the reader “enamored of the pleasure it affords” to the point where “other reading becomes dull and lifeless.” Furthermore, “where the novel writer leaves off, the devil commences, and instills far more polluting thoughts,” and the mind, through reading novels instead of non-fiction, stunts its reasoning capacity, becoming “dwarfish and unfit for the actual duties of life” (E. B. R.) As other forms of media appeared, similar criticisms would arise.

Another reason for the reluctance of Latter-day Saints to widely adopt literature during this period may have been because of the sheer difficulty of carving out a living in the desert. “To many among a people which prided itself on practicality and common sense,” opines Richard H. Cracroft, a BYU English professor, “fanciful writing must have seemed frivolous, . . . an unneeded frill.” It would be “like tucking a rose in the

soiled brim of the farmer's hat or affixing delicate gingerbread trim to the hard-used bed of a wagon" (Cracroft, "Seeking the Good").

However, recreational life was not entirely incompatible with pioneer life. Brigham Young believed that "the people must have amusement as well as religion," (Jensen 762), and, in an 1862 speech, he gave a lukewarm sanctioning of the reading of novels, stating, "I would rather that persons read novels than read nothing," although he expressed a preference that the people read "reliable history" and other "books that are worth reading" (Young 9:173).

An account from the life of John Taylor, third Church President, illustrates some of the changing attitudes towards novels. About the time Taylor became President of the Church, his son, Frederick W. Taylor, brought home a copy of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* from school and was reading it when his father confronted him.

'You shouldn't read such,' said his father. So Frederick put the book down and went to bed. When he arose in the morning, he went into the parlor, and there was his father still reading the book! John commented to Fred, 'That's a good book, son, you may read it' (Taylor).

Frederick Taylor would later be instrumental in founding the Provo City Public Library (bwmarshall).

The visual arts were also represented during the 0th wave, perhaps most notably by Danish convert C.C.A. Christensen. Born in 1831 and baptized in 1850, Christensen traveled to Utah in 1857 with the Christian Christiansen handcart company. Christensen painted scenes from the Bible and *The Book of Mormon*, but is best known for a series of 23 large paintings depicting events in Church history. In 1878, he began touring through Mormon settlements with the paintings on a canvas roll while giving lectures on Mormon

history. Following his death in 1912, they remained in storage in Sanpete County until they were acquired by Brigham Young University in the 1950s and eventually were displayed in many American art museums beginning in 1970. His paintings have been praised for capturing “the simple, reverent feeling he had for his spiritual heritage” (Anderson, Packer).

Among the arts, Brigham Young particularly endorsed theatrical performances, stating, “If I have any fun, I wish my brethren and sisters to make it” (Jones 130). He oversaw the building of the Salt Lake Social Hall, the first public building in Utah, which was dedicated on January 1, 1853, a few months before construction on the Salt Lake Temple commenced (Alford). It was used for “dances, social events, and theatrical productions,” (“Tribute to Salt Lake City’s Social Hall Planned”), continuing a practice which had existed in Nauvoo. In Nauvoo, Brigham Young himself had played the role of the Peruvian High Priest in an 1844 production of *Pizarro, or the Death of Rolla* (Bell 163). The Social Hall would be replaced in 1862 with the much larger Salt Lake Theatre, through a redirection of funds initially earmarked for a Seventies Hall. President Young justified the expense, saying “If I were on a cannibal island and had the task of civilizing it, I would straightway build a theatre for that very purpose” (Jones 121). The Seventies Hall was never built (Alford).

President Young particularly favored the genre of melodrama, finding that it could “aid the pulpit in impressing upon the minds of a community an enlightened sense of a virtuous life, also a proper horror of the enormity of sin and just dread of its consequences” (Jones 122). To “legitimize and sanctify” his endorsement and to “overcome imbedded prejudices against acting,” he even “required his ten oldest

daughters to participate in shows” (Jones 142-143). However, Brigham Young “never suggested that Mormons create a Mormon-specific genre, nor did he call for Mormon playwrights to create Mormon plays” (Jones 122). The manifestation of a corpus of literature by, for and about Latter-day Saints would need to wait for a new generation.

The First Wave

Perhaps the impetus for the creation of this literature came from Orson F. Whitney in his June 3, 1888 speech, “Home Literature” delivered at the YMMIA (Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association) Conference. Whitney, then a 32-year-old reporter for the *Deseret News* and a Bishop in the LDS Church, was also the grandson of two prominent deceased Church leaders, Newel K. Whitney (1795-1850) and Heber C. Kimball (1801-1868). He himself would later serve as a member of the Church’s Quorum of Twelve Apostles (1906-1931).

At this time, however, he represented the vanguard of a new generation. In its time, Whitney’s stirring speech was as much of a landmark address as Elder Ballard’s message to “join the conversation by participating on the internet . . . to share the gospel” would be 119 years later. As a basis for his text, he used the scriptural injunction to “seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). According to Whitney, the mission of the Church is “the spiritual enlightenment of a world, the salvation of the human race, the education . . . of all who can be persuaded to enter the garden of God and partake . . . of the Tree of Knowledge, which, in the truest sense, is also the Tree of Life.” To accomplish this mission, Art and Science would need to flourish “side by side with pure Religion; . . . Music, poetry, painting, sculpture,

oratory and the drama . . . natural flowers and fruits of the work which God had planted” must “go forth, like shafts of light from the bow of the Almighty, as messengers and ambassadors to the nations.” After all, “Mormonism . . . is not only the gospel of truth, but the gospel of intelligence and culture.” The accomplishment of this objective would rest upon “the youth of Israel,” the offspring of the first generation of Mormonism, who would build a superstructure “upon the foundations of the fathers.”

“It is by means of literature that much of this great work will have to be accomplished,” he continued. “And a pure and powerful literature can only proceed from a pure and powerful people. Grapes are not gathered of thorns, nor figs of thistles.” And so he issued a call for “the formation of a home literature.” Latter-day Saints “must read, and think, and feel, and pray, and then bring forth our thoughts, and polish and preserve them,” with the Holy Ghost as “the genius of Mormon literature.” He urged his listeners and readers to “write for the papers, write for the magazines--especially our home publications--subscribe [to] them and read them. Make books yourselves that shall not only be a credit to you and to the land and people that produced you, but likewise a boon and benefaction to mankind.”

“We will yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own,” he promised. “God’s ammunition is not exhausted. His brightest spirits are held in reserve for the latter times. In God’s name and by his help we will build up a literature whose top shall touch heaven. . . . Be true to yourselves and loyal to your mission. Ye are the ‘hope of Israel.’ The heavens are watching you, and the earth is waiting for you” (Whitney).

This speech, along with a number of other consequential, contemporaneous events, marks the end of the 0th wave and the beginning of the 1st wave. In this speech, a

young representative of a new generation of Mormons recognizes that the time has come for “the youth of Israel,” the offspring of “the massive foundations of the past” to “build upon the foundations of the fathers” something that would be different from what their fathers had built, “as the foundations of a building must differ from the walls and spires” (Whitney). That this speech occurred shortly before the accession of Wilford Woodruff to the Presidency in 1889 and the subsequent official ending of polygamy in 1890, which led to Utah’s statehood in 1896, gives further credence that this was a time of change. Indeed, Terryl Givens, in dividing the history of Mormon culture in his book, *People of Paradox*, also chooses 1890 as a line, noting as well the sending of art missionaries to Paris to acquire skills for the completion of the Salt Lake Temple murals in 1893 and the reduction of the call for converts to gather to a single geographical region (xvi). All of these had in common a shifting from nearly a half-century of isolation in the wilderness of Utah to an engagement with broader society. They “reversed the trend of Mormon cultural self-sufficiency and alienation from the larger society” (xvi) replacing it with a “process of Americanization and accommodation” (192). During this time, Mormonism underwent a “daunting transition from reactive heroism to the terrors of complacency” (Givens 192). With less focus on the needs of immediate survival, the generation following the pioneers gave greater focus to the arts “and they became an instrument for engaging the world rather than a simple diversion” (Givens 192). This was the shift in how the new generation of Mormons engaged with the world, and it was ushered in with the new medium of film.

One of the first to heed the call for a corpus of Mormon home literature in this first wave was B. H. Roberts, who was set apart as a General Authority in the First

Council of the Seventy in October 1888 at the age of thirty-one. In 1889, he published the novella *Corianton*, a 17,100 word melodramatic work based on characters and situations described in Alma 30-42 in *The Book of Mormon*. In 1897, Julia A. MacDonald wrote “A Ship of Hagoth,” continuing the story of Corianton based on a later mention in Alma 63. These two stories would be combined and adapted by Orestes Utah Bean into a play in 1902, which was panned by critics, but popular among Utah audiences. Full of ambition, Bean would later adapt the play (now titled “An Aztec Romance”) for a six-performance run on Broadway in 1912, and finally, in 1931, it would resurface as a 147-minute motion picture, “Corianton: A Story of Unholy Love” (Parshall, Swensen).

Another notable work from this period is Nephi Anderson’s *Added Upon*, which first appeared in 1898. This popular book, which could be considered as the first Mormon young adult novel (Pilcher 24), uses the Mormon conception of premortal, mortal and eternal life to tell its story in a structure which would later be used in the stageplays *Saturday’s Warrior* (first produced by Lex de Azevedo and Douglas Stewart in 1973) and *My Turn on Earth* (created by Carol Lynn Pearson and Lex de Azevedo in 1977).

Added Upon was published in the same year that Mormons were first depicted on film. The American Mutoscope Company created a number of journalistic films of soldiers in Florida preparing to engage in the Spanish-American War, among which was one of a Utah company of 86 men titled *Salt Lake City Company of Rocky Mountain Riders* (Astle, “Mormons and Cinema” 2). This first film would be followed by the first narrative depiction of Mormons, *A Trip to Salt Lake City* (1905), a comical treatment of

the difficulties a polygamist family must endure when traveling by rail. Many films that were much more critical of the Church and its members followed in the next few years, such as *Tilly and the Mormon Missionary* (1911), *A Victim of the Mormons* (1911), *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1912), American and British versions of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1914), *A Mormon Maid* (1917) and *Trapped by the Mormons* (1922), among others.

The Church also used the medium of film to create productions favorable to its image. The first of these was the 1913 photoplay *One Hundred Years of Mormonism*, followed in 1915 by *The Life of Nephi*, the first attempt to translate The Book of Mormon to film. This film was produced by Shirley and Chester Clawson, younger half-brothers of Elder Rudger Clawson of the Quorum of the Twelve and grandsons of Brigham Young. The Clawson brothers had been filming Church leaders at General Conference as early as April 1910, and the Church would soon sponsor their production outfit, the Clawson Film Company. Their projects continued until 1929 and included many films of General Authorities, when a fire on October 23rd destroyed much of their work and claimed the life of Shirl Clawson, who left behind a family of five children, including two-year-old Grant Romney Clawson (1927-2016), who would become a noted LDS artist. His brother, Chet, injured in the fire, never made another motion picture in his remaining thirty-two years. Some of their surviving work, however, was discovered and compiled by Frank Wise into a 1947 Church film entitled *Latter-day Saint Leaders Past and Present*, which has now been remediated on YouTube. With footage from the 1910s and 1920s, the film presents some of the earliest motion picture footage of Church leaders available.

The Second Wave

With the twin setbacks of the loss of the Clawsons and the onset of the Great Depression just six days later, the Church's filmmaking efforts were reduced, and the second wave of Mormon media culture began. This period represented a time of relative retrenchment for the Church. During the years of the Great Depression and World War II (1930-1945), an average of only 792.6 missionaries were called per year, compared with an average of 1760.3 during the decade consisting of the five years before and after this period (1925-1929, 1946-1950) (2013 *Deseret News Church Almanac*). No new temples were completed during the nearly eighteen years spanning October 1927-September 1945. Those few who were writing, such as Vardis Fisher, Maurine Whipple and Virginia Sorensen, became known as the "Lost Generation," because, while they received some national attention, they were seen among Mormon critics as "too compliant with the voices of criticism and cynicism" (Givens 297). Mormons who worked in the film industry generally worked for other organizations, such as the Walt Disney Company, where some, notably Wetzel "Judge" Whitaker, gained skills that they would later use in the employ of the Church. Boyd K. Packer may have been referring to artists of the Lost Generation in 1976 when he lamented that they had "missed doing what they might have done and they ha[d] missed being what they might have become." They had struggled to reach the top of the ladder "only to find it [was] leaning against the wrong wall" (Packer). Even the negative attention that the Church had previously received, when Mormons practically became stock villains in silent films, was diminished. The relatively positive

portrayal, *Brigham Young*, is said to have underperformed at the box office, “even in Utah” (Corliss). To many people, the Church was starting to become somewhat of a cipher. Like their pioneer forbears in the 0th wave, people during this time may have had more pressing concerns, resulting in a disengagement with the outside world.

There was one notable area of exception, however. The Church had begun making inroads in the medium of radio. It had acquired KZN, the forerunner to KSL, in 1922, and began the still-running broadcast of “Music and the Spoken Word” featuring the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on July 15th, 1929, just three months before the Clawson fire. During this time, radio was the new medium that defined a generation.

The Church also continued with some limited involvement with cinema, filming its 1930 centennial pageant, *The Message of the Ages*, as well as producing filmstrips for missionaries the same year, a medium that had been introduced in individual missions as early as 1911. Filmstrips and other materials such as these prompted Joseph F. Merrill, then serving concurrently as a member of the Twelve and President of the European mission, to assign one of his newly returning missionaries, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, to meet with the First Presidency to discuss the need for improved and additional audiovisual and other materials in the missions. This interview, on the morning of August 20, 1935, would prove to be a turning point in Gordon Hinckley’s life. In response to the meeting, the First Presidency formed the Church Radio, Publicity and Mission Literature Committee, with six members of the Twelve as committee members. Gordon B. Hinckley was offered the position of secretary, but “he would be expected to shoulder the day-to-day workload” (Dew 77, 84-85). He himself would be called to the

Twelve in 1961, and later, as President of the Church (1995-2008), he would be recognized as one of the most media-savvy leaders the Church had ever known.

Meanwhile, the treatment of Mormons in the popular cinema had ameliorated somewhat. The adoption of the Hays Code by the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) between 1930 and 1968 resulted in strict guidelines regarding what could and could not be shown in American-produced movies. Among these guidelines were stipulations against the “ridicule of the clergy,” which was interpreted as any negative portrayal of religious faith, as well as restrictions on positive portrayals of polygamy or institutions that endorsed the practice. This effectively ended the many anti-Mormon films that had been produced, but it also curtailed positive depictions of Mormonism.

The major exception to this was the Twentieth Century Fox film *Brigham Young*, released on September 27, 1940. It was produced with a large \$2.5 million budget and starred well-known Hollywood actors, including Vincent Price, in an early role portraying Joseph Smith, Dean Jagger—who would join the Church in 1972—as Brigham Young, Tyrone Power, who had been named the second biggest box office draw the year before (“Top Ten Money Making Stars”), and Linda Darnell, his frequent co-star. While it took some artistic license with its historical retelling of the pioneer trek from Nauvoo to Utah, Church leaders and historians were consulted in its production and generally pleased with its result. In the Church’s General Conference, held a week after the film’s premiere, Heber J. Grant called it a “very wonderful and splendid moving picture.” Particularly in consideration with how Mormons had been treated in the past, “it is a very marvelous and wonderful thing.”

Church members were also involved with the technological aspects of film production. Two in particular, Philo Farnsworth and Harvey Fletcher played particularly prominent roles. In 1873, Elder Orson Pratt of the Twelve, himself an accomplished scientist, stated:

There must be something connected with the sounding of this trump that is miraculous in order that all nations may hear it. . . . [it] will manifest a power which we know nothing of . . . I do not know that the sound will be so much louder than some we have heard, but it will be carried by some miraculous power so that all people will hear it (Pratt 16:327-328).

Farnsworth and Fletcher would help bring such powers into reality. Philo T. Farnsworth was inspired as a teenager by the rows he was plowing in a field, imagining that he could draw similar lines on a television screen using electrons. He would file patents for a television system in 1927, begin transmitting images by September of that year, and on July 2, 1929 demonstrated the first all-electrical television system. (Godfrey 75-81). Harvey Fletcher, a physicist known as the father of stereophonic sound, created his first stereophonic recordings in March 1932 with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He would also create the first live stereo sound transmissions, the first vinyl recording and guided the development of the hearing aid (“Stokowski”). These developments would transform the potential of media in film, television and music.

The Third Wave

While the Church’s involvement with film production was somewhat limited in the 1930s and 1940s, two major developments in the 1950s led to an intertwining of the Church with film. The first began with the Church’s 1952 announcement that its ninth temple would be built in continental Europe in Bern, Switzerland. This temple would

serve the needs of members of the Church throughout the European continent. However, unlike the Church's previous temples in the western United States and Canada, the needs of European members would necessitate that temple rituals be performed in many different languages. Temple workers acting in particular roles, similar to a play, had heretofore presented one of those ordinances, the endowment ceremony. However, the many languages of Europe would make a live presentation difficult. President David O. McKay, who had recently become President of the Church in 1951, conferred with Gordon B. Hinckley to determine how the problem could best be resolved. After much study, Gordon Hinckley recommended that the endowment ceremony be presented on film. On assignment from President McKay, and with a few others, Hinckley then filmed the endowment ceremony in multiple languages inside the Salt Lake Temple, and then personally brought the films to Switzerland and oversaw their implementation in the new Temple. Later, the new process would become so successful that, although redubbing would replace filming in separate languages with separate casts, now it is the only method of presentation in all but two of the Church's (June 2017) 156 temples. The filmed endowment has made possible the proliferation of temples around the world, as well as a culture of frequent temple attendance. According to Randy Astle, "given the centrality of the temple to Mormonism, there is a direct connection between the filmed endowment and the vitality of the global Church" (Astle "Mormons and Cinema," 19).

The second major development of the 1950s was the founding of the Church's own motion picture studio. This in and of itself could be considered as the new medium of the third wave. The Church had created a few films, and had begun the process of televising its General Conference in 1948 and 1949. As the Church's use of film

continued to expand, however, the need for such a studio became more and more apparent. Wetzel “Judge” Whitaker, a Disney animator, had hosted three members of the Twelve (Elders Harold B. Lee, Mark E. Petersen and Matthew Cowley) in a tour of the Disney studios in 1946. The apostles were interested in creating a film to promote the Church Welfare program, and Whitaker agreed to create what became two films, released in 1948. Subsequently, Church leaders asked Whitaker to head up the Church’s new motion picture studio, hosted at the Church’s flagship University, BYU, in Provo, Utah. Inspired by a blessing he had recently received from his stake patriarch in which he was told that he would “be called to an assignment which [would] literally revolutionize the teaching methods of the Church,” Whitaker accepted the assignment, left Disney, and began working at the studio on January 3, 1953 (Astle “Mormons and Cinema,” 18-19, Hunter “Mormon Influence at Disney,” 56-57).

Before his retirement in 1974, Whitaker would oversee the production of numerous Church films, including *Windows of Heaven* (1963) about President Lorenzo Snow’s emphasis on tithing, *Pioneers in Petticoats* (1969), released in observance of the centennial of the Young Women organization of the Church, and *Johnny Lingo* (1969), a film depicting a Polynesian trader’s obtaining his wife Mahana for the extravagant sum of eight cows, which went on to become something of a cult classic in the Church. Many of these films found ready audiences through the seminaries and institutes of the Church Educational System (CES) (Astle “Mormons and Cinema,” 20-22).

But perhaps the most notable film of this era would be *Man’s Search for Happiness* (1964), produced for the Mormon Pavilion at the New York World’s Fair in 1964. This 13-minute film was designed to provide answers from LDS doctrine to the

questions “Who am I?”, “Why am I here?”, and “Where am I going?”. It was highly successful: it was seen by 5.8 million visitors in the second-most viewed exhibit of the fair, it contributed to many conversions, it improved the Church’s public image, and it became the forerunner and pattern for the Church’s 44 visitors’ centers and historic sites (Kogan 217-219, “Locations and Schedules,” Top).

In the visual arts, Minerva Teichert painted hundreds of works during the second and third waves between 1927 and 1970 in her family’s ranch home in Cokeville, Wyoming, and perhaps best represents Church artists of this period. As an art student under Robert Henri in New York City, she had felt commissioned to be the one to tell “the great Mormon story.” Although “widespread recognition” of her art was “slow in coming,” and she was unable to get the Church to publish her forty-plus series of scenes from *The Book of Mormon* (eventually donating them to Brigham Young University to pay for the tuition of her children and other family members), she was commissioned in 1947 to paint murals in the Manti Temple. Today she is considered to be “one of the very best artists we’ve ever had” (Pinborough).

Arnold Friberg also bridges the period between the second and third waves. He had begun to gain exposure in Western-themed art when he was commissioned in 1949 to create a depiction of the first pioneer Sunday School in observance of its centennial. Adele Cannon Howells, General President of the Church’s Primary organization, was so impressed with the painting that she asked Friberg to create a series of twelve paintings depicting scenes from *The Book of Mormon* to be published in *The Children’s Friend*, the Church’s magazine for children. As with Teichert, funds were not available from the Church to pay for such a project at this point late in the second wave, so Howells

arranged for the paintings to be completed through the sale of her property. She then passed away on April 16, 1951 without ever seeing a preliminary sketch. Although the project was interrupted when Cecil B. DeMille, after having noticed some of the first paintings, hired Friberg to be his chief artist and designer on the film *The Ten Commandments* (1956), Friberg returned to finish the set in 1957, later completing an additional painting of his own accord depicting Christ appearing to the people of *The Book of Mormon*. His paintings have been reproduced millions of times in the Church's missionary editions of *The Book of Mormon*, and have helped create the imagery of *The Book of Mormon* for Church members around the world (Swanson, Toone).

Another notable artist for the Church during this period wasn't even a member. Harry Anderson joined the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in 1944, and began painting pictures of Jesus Christ. His first painting, "What Happened to Your Hand?", depicts Jesus in a garden setting with three children in modern dress, a choice which at first received mixed reactions. Later, his work was noticed by LDS Church leaders, who in 1962 commissioned him to paint a depiction of Christ ordaining his apostles, to be displayed at the Mormon Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair. Eventually, the Church would commission or gain the rights to thirty-nine of Anderson's paintings which depicted scenes from the life of Christ or other biblical scenes. Anderson's paintings are widely reproduced in Church publications and houses of worship, including six *Ensign* covers in the magazine's first six years of publication (1971-1977). Anderson would also recommend several of his Danberry, Connecticut neighbors, including Tom Lovell, Ken Riley and John Scott, to create additional paintings that have likewise become some of the most widely reproduced in the Church (Black, Toone).

During the third wave, with the end of the Depression and World War II, Mormons began to re-engage with the world. Individuals who had acquired media skills in the second wave, particularly Gordon B. Hinckley and Wetzel “Judge” Whitaker employed their abilities to help the Church move into a new era. One of the distinctive features of this period, however, was that while the Church was beginning to engage with the world, its members, by and large, were not. The pattern of who in the Church was engaging with the world through media resembles a target with concentric rings (see figure 4.1). During the 0th wave, the Church was in a period of isolation, particularly after the migration to Utah. Then, in the first wave, there were pioneering efforts in which the Church began to engage using film and other media, but withdrew again somewhat during the second wave. In the third wave, the Church re-engaged with media, establishing itself on a firm footing by creating its own motion picture studio and linking film to its most sacred ordinances in its temples. As will be seen, media use was then extended in the fourth wave as leaders invited Church artists to produce and likewise engage with the world. Finally, with the advent of social media, including YouTube, leaders have invited the general Church membership to engage with the world, completing the process of moving from isolation to integration.

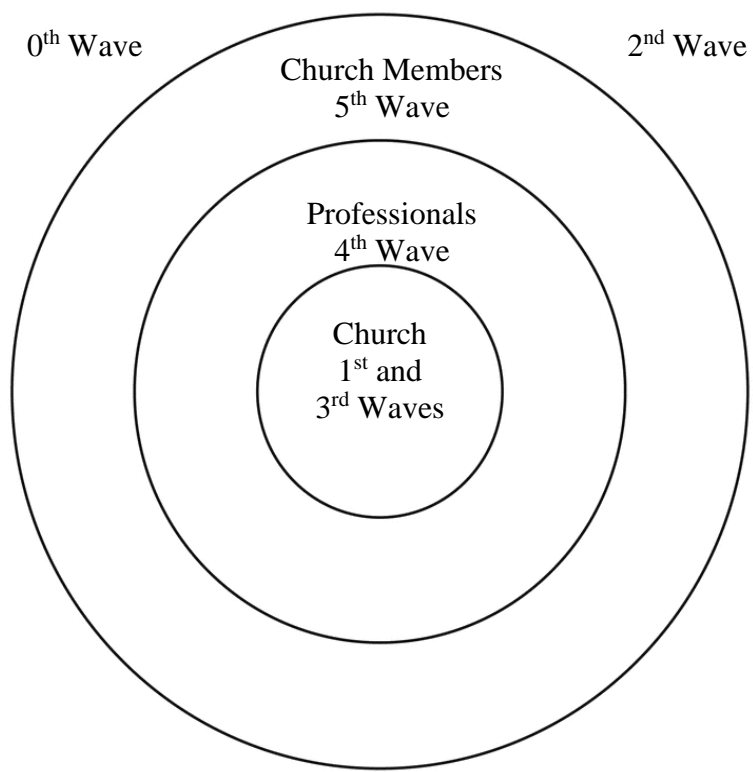


Figure 4.1 Expansion of Engagement

During each of the later waves, there was no pullback. The Church has continued to engage through media during the fourth and fifth waves, and professionals continue to engage online during the fifth wave. Each outer ring continues to contain all of the inner rings that preceded it.

The Fourth Wave

Whitaker’s retirement on September 4, 1974 came just five months after new Church President Spencer W. Kimball’s aforementioned address, “When the World Will

Be Converted,” and one month before its publication for the readership of the general Church membership in the October 1974 *Ensign*. In this talk, President Kimball advocated for increased use of present and future technology in the Church’s proselytizing efforts. This was followed by the *Ensign*’s July 1977 publication of “The Gospel Vision of the Arts,” itself an adaptation of an address entitled “Education for Eternity” delivered to BYU faculty and staff ten years earlier on September 12th, 1967. In this message, President Kimball developed some of the themes that his older cousin, Orson F. Whitney, had emphasized 89 years previously in his “Home Literature” speech of 1888. In the message, President Kimball reviewed the contributions of some thirty great writers, artists, composers, singers, scientists and statesmen of the past, from Leonardo da Vinci to Albert Einstein, from William Shakespeare to Abraham Lincoln, and from Richard Wagner to Enrico Caruso, and then referenced George Bernard Shaw, who said, “Other people see things and say ‘WHY?’ But I dream things that never were and say, ‘WHY NOT?’” President Kimball then said “we need people who can dream of things that never were and ask, “WHY NOT?”

President Kimball cited Church President John Taylor, who prophesied, “You mark my words, and write them down and see if they do not come to pass. You will see the day that Zion will be [as] far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters.” With the influence and gifts of the Holy Ghost, President Kimball believed that Church members could create works that would “equal or surpass” those of the great men and women he mentioned. “Our day, our time, our people, our generation, should produce such,” he claimed, “as we catch the total vision of our potential and dream dreams and see visions

of the future.” “Members of the Church” he went on to say further, “should be peers or superiors to any others in natural ability, extended training, plus the Holy Spirit which should bring them light and truth.” Many of the great artists of the past had achieved greatness despite moral turpitudes. “What could be the result if discovery were made of equal talent in men who were clean and free from the vices, and thus entitled to revelations?” He prophesied of “inspired Saints [who] will write great books and novels and biographies and plays,” and of “motion picture specialists,” who, “with the inspiration of heaven, “should tomorrow be able to produce a masterpiece which would live forever,” “run[ning] for months in every movie center, cover[ing] every part of the globe.”

“We have the raw material,” he declared, “we have the facilities, we can excel in training. We have the spiritual climate. . . . If we strive for perfection—the best and greatest—and are never satisfied with mediocrity, we can excel” (Kimball, “Arts”). With these words echoing Orson F. Whitney’s call for “Miltons and Shakespeares of our own,” President Kimball summoned a new wave in Mormon media use, and Church members’ artistic works during this new fourth wave, a comparative trickle in previous waves, began to be a flood in all creative genres—music, art, literature, film and others—creating an entire subculture of popular culture, with occasional forays into a mainstream audience.

This subculture itself became the new medium of the fourth wave. Mormon society had always had a culture, but a mass marketed popular culture was something new. It was and is quite insular in nature, mostly run through bookstores that were located in and catered to areas where Church members lived in high densities. But there

was enough of a presence there to create a viable market. Much of the media produced was largely inaccessible to outsiders, but there were a few, such as the Osmonds and Orson Scott Card, who found a wider audience. As with all new mediums, proponents of established mediums were threatened by it and sought to discredit it as kitsch. But the new medium was only repackaging what had previously existed. And it changed Mormon society.

One of the forerunners of the fourth wave was the musical Osmond family. From beginning in 1958 as four young boys singing around Ogden, Utah to raise money for their older deaf brothers to obtain hearing aids, a string of serendipitous events led to their becoming regulars on “The Andy Williams Show” between 1962 and 1969. This was followed by a string of hits in the early 1970s, a semi-rivalry with the Jackson 5, whose music theirs resembled, a Saturday morning cartoon show, and a variety show and breakout careers for teenaged siblings Donny and Marie. While the Osmonds produced for a mainstream audience, they remained devout and open about their faith, even producing one album in 1973 (“The Plan”) overtly about Mormon doctrine.

Many of the singers and songwriters who followed the Osmonds were similarly young, following the pattern of inexperienced amateurs creating new rules for a new society. These included Jeff Goodrich, who as a high school student wrote “I Heard Him Come” in 1974 for a seminary devotional assignment (“100 Greatest”). Joel McCausland and Kevin Peay, began singing together as Afterglow as high school juniors around 1978 (“About Afterglow”). Their most notable song, “I’ll Build You a Rainbow” was featured on a seminary filmstrip about the doctrine of eternal families (Oldjarhead0302).

But not all were young men. Janice Kapp Perry was a 38-year-old homemaker when she broke her ankle playing basketball at the same time that the family television went out. Looking for a fulfilling activity, she began writing music for her local ward's road show. After a positive response, she began entering and winning Church song-writing contests. Over the next 35 years, she would write more than 1,300 songs, a prodigious output of nearly one every week. One of her songs ("As Sisters in Zion") was included in the Church's 1985 hymnbook, and ten songs are included in the 1989 *Children's Songbook*, including the well-known songs among Mormons, "Love is Spoken Here," "A Child's Prayer," "I Love to See the Temple," and "We'll Bring the World His Truth." According to Craig Jessop, former director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, "other than the General Authorities of the Church, by using simple songs that bear testimony, [Janice Kapp Perry] has touched more lives in our faith than any living person I can think of" (Winters).

Michael McLean was a commercial writer for the Church's "Homefront" campaign, a series of commercials that focused on the Church's emphasis on families, many with the tagline "Family: Isn't it about—Time?" As he recounts in one of his songs, "You Must Believe There are Miracles," he "got kind of bold and dreamed a tale could be told with the star of *It's a Wonderful Life* [Jimmy Stewart]." The result was *Mr. Krueger's Christmas*, which has been broadcast on network television and remains a perennial Christmas favorite. McLean then went on to become a prolific singer and songwriter, with many of his songs referencing gospel-related topics. He produced his first of thirty-two albums to date, *You're Not Alone*, in 1983.

Since the mid-1970s, many more LDS musicians have gained prominence, including Julie de Azevedo, Lex de Azevedo, Jenny Oaks Baker, Dallyn Bayles, Kurt Bestor, Alex Boyé, Peter Breinholt, Kenneth Cope, Elenyi, Jenny Frogley, Rob Gardner, Roger Hoffman, Peter Hollens, Bryce Neubert, Jenny Phillips, Brett Raymond, Jon Schmidt, Greg Simpson, Felicia Sorenson, Lexi Walker, Hilary Weeks and many others. In 1997, multiple-Grammy award winner Gladys Knight joined the Church, and has since included LDS hymns in her discography. David Archuleta gained national exposure during the seventh season of *American Idol* in 2008. Following a mission in Chile from 2012-2014, he has resumed his career, including both mainstream and devotional music in his oeuvre. Groups such as Jericho Road, Moosebutter, the Nashville Tribute Band, the One Voice Children's Choir, Ryan Shupe and the Rubber Band, Spire Music (Rob Gardner), BYU's Vocal Point and Voice Male have become well-known. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir, a fixture at Presidential inaugurations and famously dubbed "America's Choir" by Ronald Reagan, has continued to expose the Church to millions worldwide. Mormons have also fronted or been significant parts of popular mainstream rock and country bands, including The Aquabats, Arcade Fire, Tal Bachman, Bachman-Turner Overdrive, Diamond Rio, Dishwalla, Due West, Fictionist, Imagine Dragons, The Jets, Kaskade, The Killers, Maroon 5, Neon Trees, Panic! at the Disco, SheDaisy, and Tiffany Alvord, although their Church activity levels and membership status have tended to fluctuate.

Mormons also made significant contributions in visual arts during the fourth wave. As noted, some, such as Christensen, Teichert, Friberg, and Anderson had done so in earlier waves. In 1976, one year before President Kimball issued a call for more artists

in the Church, Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Twelve noted that “frequently nonmember painters [such as Harry Anderson and his friends] receive the commission” for artwork needed by the Church, and asked why there were not more artists in the Church. He responded that he was certain that it was not “because we have not had talented people,” but rather because many gifted and talented artistic members of the Church had their ladders “leaning against the wrong wall;” they wanted to follow the styles of the world and call attention to themselves more than they desired to seek inspiration from the Lord. Consequently, “we move forward much slower than need be.” But the greatest works of art, Packer felt, had not yet been written. So he encouraged those who were gifted to “go to,” to “cultivate your gift,” but to do so in a way that would “bless others with it[,] set a standard of excellence” and to “be a standard to the world,” while never using their gifts “profanely” or “unworthily” (Packer). “It was following the historic addresses of Packer and Kimball,” notes Eugene England, “that there occurred the first major blossoming of a mature Mormon literature” (Givens 298). Thus, the fourth wave grew and expanded through the encouragement of Church leaders.

In addition to statements from Church leaders, the Church began sponsoring art contests through its magazines and the Church History museum. With this encouragement, more Church painters began to appear. Among some of the most notable are Del Parson, Greg Olsen, Simon Dewey, Liz Lemon Swindle, Robert Barrett, Grant Romney Clawson, Clark Kelley Price, and Walter Rane. Paintings by fantasy artist James Christensen and political artist Jon McNaughton have become popular with mainstream audiences, but often include religious themes. Many early Mormon adopters

of YouTube, including SethAdamSmith, 1Nephi, and Dan Sage, remediated paintings by LDS artists with music by LDS musicians in their videos.

Novelists, too, proliferated during this era. Brothers Blaine and Brenton Yorgason were seminary teachers in their early 30s when Blaine published *Charlie's Monument* in 1976. Brenton joined him on their next novel, *The Bishop's Horse Race* (1978), and together they would publish over 50 novels before Brenton passed away in 2016. Jack Weyland, a physics professor at Ricks College (now BYU-Idaho), published his first of 33 novels, *Charly*, in 1980, which became a film in 2002. Susan Evans McCloud, Anita Stansfield and Rachel Ann Nunes are among popular writers of Mormon romance novels. Lee Nelson published the first in his seven-volume *Storm Testament* series in 1982 and Chris Heimerdinger published the first volume in his long-running young adult fantasy series, *Tennis Shoes Among the Nephites* in 1989, currently awaiting its thirteenth volume.

One author that significantly altered the ground rules of Mormon novels was Gerald N. Lund. Lund began publishing early in the fourth wave, completing his first novel, *One in Thine Hand* in 1982, followed by a few more popular books in the 1980s. During the 1990s, however Lund published the immensely popular nine-volume series *The Work and the Glory*. These historical fiction novels tell the saga of the fictional Steed family interwoven with events and characters of Church history between 1827 and 1847. His success led many other authors to create similar series of historical fiction novels, including David G. Woolley's *Promised Land* series (5 volumes, 2000-2011, 1st Nephi period of The Book of Mormon), Ron Carter's *Prelude to Glory* series (9 volumes, 1998-2010, Revolutionary War), Nancy Campbell Allen's *Faith of our Fathers* series (3

volumes, 2001-2003, Civil War), Dean Hughes' *Children of the Promise* series (5 volumes, 1997-2001, World War II) and *Hearts of the Children* series (5 volumes, 2001-2005, Vietnam War), and Lund's own *Kingdom and the Crown* series (3 volumes, 2000-2002, ministry of Christ) and *Fire and Steel* series (currently 4 volumes, 2014-2017, World War II). Following the publication of the *Kingdom and the Crown* series, Lund was called as a General Authority for 6.5 years (2002-2008). He has continued writing since his release.

Perhaps the most prolific and successful writer of this period has been Orson Scott Card, with over 70 novels, who also began writing in the late 1970s. His first two books in the *Ender's Game* series earned him back-to-back Hugo and Nebula awards, the most prestigious awards in the science fiction writing community. Unlike most of his colleagues in the fourth wave, however, his works found a mainstream audience, and, since 1983, he has resided in Greensboro, North Carolina, making him one of the few members of this wave to live and work outside the centers of Mormon population. He has, however, included Mormon themes in his work, including a Mormon historical fiction novel (*Saints*, 1983), a series that translates events from The Book of Mormon into a science fiction setting (*Homecoming*, 5 volumes, 1992-1995), and an alternate history/fantasy series retelling the Joseph Smith story (*The Tales of Alvin Maker*, 6 volumes, 1987-2003).

A significant subset of Mormon culture with particular relevance to the development of YouTube has been Mormon humor. Humor has long been a part of the Mormon condition and its place in Mormonism can be traced back to its first prophet, Joseph Smith. While he sought to balance his "native cheery temperament" with a

propensity for “levity” within himself (Joseph Smith History 1:28), he also sought to pull down the “super-abundant stock of sanctimoniousness” which characterized many others of his day. On one occasion, as related by President Jedediah M. Grant of the First Presidency in 1854, a Baptist priest had come to visit Nauvoo and meet the Prophet. In a long tone meant to demonstrate his piety, the priest importuned, “Is it possible that I now flash my optics upon a Prophet, upon a man who has conversed with my Savior?” Joseph Smith replied, “Yes, I don’t know but you do. Would not you like to wrestle with me?” after which Smith proceeded to “whirl [him] round a few times.” When asked why he had been treated thusly, the prophet pointed out to him the dangers of “the so-called Christian ‘follies’ of the time . . . excessive piety and fanaticism” (Grant 67, Arrington, “Looseness of Zion”).

While accounts of individual members finding humor in their day-to-day lives are plentiful (the Church History website features several accounts of “Humor on the Plains”) (“Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel”), perhaps the next major development in Mormon humor came with the appointment of J. Golden Kimball to the First Council of the Seventy in 1892. Kimball, a son of Heber C. Kimball (and uncle to Orson F. Whitney and Spencer W. Kimball) broke new ground with his humorous quips and occasional salty language (which he claimed to have acquired during his years working as a mule skinner, as it was the only language the mules would understand). Although many of the stories told about him are of questionable authenticity, they remain popular among many Latter-day Saints today. While he may have caused some consternation at times among his brethren of the General Authorities, he was popular among the Saints, and his funeral

in 1938 is said to have been the most well-attended in Utah since Brigham Young's in 1877.

One of the earliest humorous novels on Mormon life may have been "Heaven Knows Why" (1948) by Samuel W. Taylor, a grandson of third Church President John Taylor, who also wrote "A Situation of Gravity," the story from which the Disney movie "The Absent-Minded Professor" (1961) was based. Apparently, the reception in its time was mixed, which Taylor attributed to a reluctance of many Mormons of the time to find humor in their own foibles. While occasional compilations of humorous stories or poetry appeared over the next several years, it wasn't really until the call for Mormon artists and the ensuing mass-media explosion of the fourth wave that Mormon humor really began to come into its own. The Church magazine for youth, *The New Era*, regularly includes a page of jokes and cartoons. Beginning in 1971, *Especially for Mormons* compilers Stan and Sharon Miller included a section on humor in their compilations of Mormon-themed poetry and prose. Character actor James Arrington (son of historian Leonard Arrington) began doing one-man shows on Brigham Young, J. Golden Kimball, and the stereotypically Mormon Farley family in the late 1970s. Other speakers, such as John Bytheway, began lacing inspirational messages with humor during presentations at youth conferences, firesides, and "Especially For Youth" programs (which themselves began in 1976, at the beginning of the fourth wave). Writers, such as Joni Hilton (*As the Ward Turns*, 1991) and Robert Farrell Smith (*Baptists at our Barbecue*, 1996) wrote stories with humorous plots, and Taylor republished his book in 1979, hoping that "Mormons have matured to the point where we can now chuckle rather than bristle at some of the foibles and conceits of our culture" (Cracroft, "Heaven Knows Why"). Humorous songs

appeared, such as “Mormon Rap” (Walter and Hays Band, 1988). A few cartoonists received national audiences, such as Brian Crane, author of “Pickles,” which often includes Mormon elements such as temples in the background of the strips, or web cartoonist Howard Tayler (“Schlock Mercenary”). Editorial cartoonists Cal Grondahl and Pat Bagley began drawing for the Ogden Standard Examiner and the Salt Lake Tribune, respectively, often dealing with quirks of Utah or Mormon life. Both have published collections of their work, beginning with Grondahl’s “Freeway to Perfection” in 1978. Pat Bagley has also published the *I Spy a Nephite* series, conceptually based on the *Where’s Waldo?* series by Martin Handford. Robert Kirby began writing a regular humor column in the Salt Lake Tribune in 1994, and has also published collections of his work.

Meanwhile, films by, for, and about Mormons continued to undergo many developments. During the first decade or so after Judge Whitaker’s retirement from the Church’s Motion Picture Studio, many films produced under the direction of Peter N. Stay, his successor, were not specifically religious, as with *The Phone Call* (1978), and often had a maudlin quality, as with *Cipher in the Snow* (1974) or *The Mailbox* (1977). A notable exception was *The First Vision* (1976), which retold the Joseph Smith story.

With the expansion of home video in the 1980s and early 1990s, Church institutional films proliferated significantly, with many films produced with a distinct religious message. Some significant titles included *Our Heavenly Father’s Plan* (1987), *How Rare a Possession: The Book of Mormon* (1987), *Together Forever* (1988), *Nora’s Christmas Gift* (1989), *Labor of Love* (1989), *The Prodigal Son* (1990), *Called to Serve* (1991), *On the Way Home* (1992), *The Mountain of the Lord* (1993), and *Lamb of God*

(1993). Also in 1993, the Church released the film *Legacy*, a heroic retelling of the early years of church history, originally shown exclusively in the new Legacy Theater built within the newly remodeled and renamed Joseph Smith Memorial Building (formerly the Hotel Utah). After playing for seven years, it was replaced in 2000 by the epic film *The Testaments: Of One Fold and One Shepherd* and in 2005 by *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration*.

But in the fourth wave, the Church was not alone in producing film; independent Mormon films began to come out at this time as well. One of the most notable video productions was *Saturday's Warrior* (1989), itself a film of a stage production based on the original play by Lex de Azevedo and Doug Stewart in 1973. Other theatrical productions turned into Church videos included Janice Kapp Perry's *It's a Miracle* (1984), Carol Lynn Pearson's *My Turn on Earth* (1986), Steven Kapp Perry (son of Janice)'s *Polly: A One-Woman Musical* (1993), and Richard Dutcher's *Eliza and I* (1997). Also, in 1987, Richard Rich, a director of the Disney features *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) and *The Black Cauldron* (1985), began producing films for Living Scriptures, Inc., beginning with a series of twelve VHS films based on stories from *The Book of Mormon*. Stories from the Old and New Testaments followed, as well as other Church-related and non-Church related productions, many of which were marketed to a general audience.

Other Church members have sought ways to provide clean entertainment. Sensing a need for more G-rated fare, Forrest S. Baker III invested \$400,000 in the film *On Our Own*. When the film failed to obtain a theatrical release, he edited the film to ensure it was profanity-free and promoted wholesome values and started a business,

Feature Films for Families, to market it in July 1988. In the following years, the business produced a number of other films, including *Rigoletto*, *The ButterCream Gang*, *Seasons of the Heart*, and *Split Infinity*, and acquired distribution rights to many others (Campbell). Feature Films for Families seeks to market their products to a national audience through telemarketing tactics, for which it has recently come under fire.

Other businesses seeking to sanitize entertainment have run into additional difficulties. CleanFlicks, ClearPlay, Clean Films, and other companies like them began selling edited movies in the late 1990s, and had a strong foothold in Utah before being closed by court order in 2006. Earlier, the Varsity Theater at BYU had shown edited R-rated movies, but had ceased the practice in 1998 after requests from film producers and distributors (Carter). Despite some setbacks, providing clean entertainment still remains a focus of many LDS filmmakers, and some companies, such as VidAngel, seek to use fifth wave models to bypass previous restrictions.

When the Hays code was rescinded in 1968 and replaced by the ratings system, Mormons again began to occasionally appear in mainstream productions. One of the first was *Paint Your Wagon* (1969), a western musical centered around a former polygamist wife who decides to take on two husbands. Another film about Brigham Young appeared in 1977 (reworked as “Savage Journey” in 1983). References to Mormons intended to be comedic turn up somewhat regularly in major film and television productions (including, for example *The Golden Girls* (1985), *Fletch* (1985), *Star Trek IV* (1986), *Cheers* (1989), *Frasier* (1998), and *Ocean’s Eleven* (2001)) (Petersen and Moore) but major film releases have tended to be rare. Films openly critical of the Church have appeared occasionally, notably the video productions *The God Makers* (1982) and *The God Makers*

II (1993) and the film *September Dawn* (2007). Trey Parker and Matt Stone have mixed mockery with affection in depicting Mormons in their productions, beginning with *Orgazmo* (1997), which received an NC-17 rating for its depiction of a Mormon missionary turned porn star. Their long-running Comedy Central series *South Park* (1997-) has depicted Mormons or made references to Mormons repeatedly, including in the episode “All About Mormons” (2003). They also produced the Broadway play, *The Book of Mormon* (2011), which won nine Tony awards and, at \$493.1 million, and is currently the seventh highest-grossing Broadway play of all time (Geier). Although the first production dealing with Mormons to receive major acclaim was profane and misrepresented Mormon doctrine, the Church took a measured response, releasing an official statement prior to its debut stating, “The production may attempt to entertain audiences for an evening, but *The Book of Mormon* as a volume of scripture will change people’s lives forever by bringing them closer to Christ,” (Kirkland) and taking out good-humored ads in the production’s playbills stating, “You’ve seen the play, now read the book,” “The book is always better,” “They left out the best parts,” and “Our version is sliiiiightly different” (Book of Mormon advertising, Osmond).

On March 10th, 2000, Richard Dutcher released *God’s Army* into theaters and created a new phase in Mormon cinema. *God’s Army* became the first film made by, for and about Mormons to obtain a regional theatrical release. At the time, Dutcher’s website at Zionfilms.com boldly proclaimed to fulfill President Kimball’s prophecy, which was paraphrased as “a day when Mormon filmmakers, with the inspiration of heaven, would produce masterpieces which will live forever.” The website proclaimed that past endeavors had “achieved only mediocrity,” and had certainly “never strengthened nor

celebrated our faith.” But now the day had come “to set a new standard of artistic, technical and moral excellence.” Zion Films would “truly become the reason movies were invented” (Zionfilms.com).

God’s Army was produced on a budget of \$300,000 and grossed over \$2.6 million in limited release in and around Utah. It depicted a coming-of-age story of a Mormon missionary which was neither a glowing hagiography nor a slanderous exposé, but simply a straightforward story, depicting life as a missionary as being at times lackluster and uncouth and at others inspirational and transformative—an assessment which rang true for many viewers.

Dutcher followed up on the success of *God’s Army* with *Brigham City* the next year (April 6th, 2001), a murder-mystery set in a small fictional Utah town, in which Dutcher portrayed a bishop and the sheriff in the town. Later that year, *The Other Side of Heaven* was released on December 14, 2001. It was based on the memoirs of Elder John H. Groberg, a General Authority, about his time as a young missionary in Tonga in the 1950s. It grossed \$4.8 million and starred Anne Hathaway in an early role. Then the first Mormon cinema comedy, *The Singles Ward*, was released on February 1, 2002, grossing \$1.25 million on a \$500,000 budget, and Mormon cinema was off and running.

A flurry of films was released in the next five years or so. Some were based on well-known LDS books or plays, such as *Charly* (2002), the three films in *The Work and the Glory* series (2004-2006), *Baptists at our Barbecue* (2004) and *The Best Two Years* (2004). Chris Heimerdinger’s *Passage to Zarahemla* (2007) loosely followed the plot of his *Tennis Shoes Among the Nephites* series. Other comedies followed from Halestorm, the producers of *The Singles Ward*, including *The RM* (2003), *The Home Teachers* (2004)

and *Church Ball* (2006). There was a documentary, *New York Doll* (2005), mockumentaries, *The Work and the Story* (2003), and *Sons of Provo* (2005), films drawn from Mormon scripture or history, such as *The Book of Mormon Movie* (2003), and *Handcart* (2002), and some that barely touched on their Mormon connections, such as *Down and Derby* (2005), *Saints and Soldiers* (2004), and *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004). This last, with its quirky humor set in the predominantly Mormon community of Preston, Idaho, became the most successful of this movement grossing \$44.5 million, but other than a T-shirt depicting Ricks College (BYU-Idaho since 2001), had no overt references to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Although *God's Army* was released more than a quarter century after Spencer W. Kimball became president of the Church, sparking a new and exciting movement in Mormon cinema, it did not constitute a new fifth wave. Dutcher himself ties his production to President Kimball's statements which initiated the fourth wave, and the defining medium of the fourth wave, the marketing of the film primarily to LDS audiences in their niche popular culture, was apparent with this film and most of those that succeeded it. The short life of the movement is also evidence that it was not strong enough to constitute its own wave.

Eventually, the Mormon cinema movement began to lose steam. Many of the aforementioned films fared poorly at the box office, as did later films *Mobsters and Mormons* (2005, \$410,000), *Suits on the Loose* (2006, \$79,000) and Richard Dutcher's *God's Army 2: States of Grace* (2005, \$203,000). Following the reception of this film, and an inability to obtain funding for a film on Joseph Smith, Richard Dutcher became disenchanted with the faith and announced his departure in an editorial in the Provo Daily

Herald on April 11, 2007, leaving words of encouragement and advice to other Mormon filmmakers.

Since that time, films in the Mormon cinema movement have been less common, although there are signs of a limited resurgence beginning about 2013. Those films that have been released include T. C. Christensen's trio of Mormon historical films, *Emma Smith: My Story* (2008), *17 Miracles* (2011) and *Ephraim's Rescue* (2013). The latter two told stories of the Martin and Willie handcart companies and their rescue; the former recut footage from the production of the official Church film *Joseph Smith, Prophet of the Restoration* (2005). He also released a story of a more modern miracle, *The Cokeville Miracle* (2015), about an incident in 1986 where children held hostage at an elementary school in Cokeville, Wyoming were miraculously preserved. Two other historical modern stories, *The Saratov Approach* (2013) and *Freetown* (2015), recounted the stories of missionaries held hostage in Russia or seeking to escape a West African civil war. *Once I Was a Beehive*, a comedy about a Young Women's Girl's Camp, was released in 2015 and a film version of *Saturday's Warrior* was released in 2016. Significantly, *Meet the Mormons* (2014) was the first theatrically produced film by the Church itself. It was essentially a series of expanded vignettes along the lines of the Church's "I'm a Mormon" campaign, and, with \$6.05 million in box office receipts, outperformed all other Mormon cinema films (depending on whether *Napoleon Dynamite* is counted) and reached #32 among all documentaries. Net proceeds from the film were donated to the American Red Cross ("Church Donates").

Along with the increase in music, art, novels and film has come an explosion of a wide array of marketable products. This "carnival of pop culture" has included "CTR

rings, scripture cases, videos, music CDs, art candles, sheet music, t-shirts, tie tacks, puppets, genealogy aids, recipes, key-chain oil vials, refrigerator magnets, wheat grinders, dolls, cassette tapes, scrapbook supplies, etc.” (Burton and Kramer 5), as well as board games, card games, video games, talk tapes, coloring books, comic books, children’s books, novels, romance novels, young adult novels, DVDs, movies, stand-up comedy, sketch comedy, documentaries, mockumentaries, posters, ties, action figures, figurines, trinkets, inspirational quotes for wall displays and even “beer mugs and shot glasses” (Riess 36). Anything that can be marketed with a Mormon theme is sold, often in bookstores catering to such products, such as Deseret Book or Seagull Book. Many of these products have been given the derisive sobriquet of kitsch by those perceiving it through the lens of earlier mediums, and by those standards, much of it probably is. This is an instance of the conflict between the old and the new, which occurs because “we approach the new with the psychological conditioning and sensory responses of the old. This clash naturally occurs in transitional periods” (McLuhan, *Massage* 94).

Kitsch is understood to be a lower art form, meant to appeal to consumers through mass marketing rather than having the aesthetics commonly associated with high art. It is usually considered garish, or in poor taste, “blatantly sentimental,” “intended to appeal to popular tastes,” or “junk art” (Schlinker 4-6). And there has been a strong market for the products. By 1999, Mormon retailers and publishers were competing for a share of a \$93 million market (Burton and Kramer 5)—particularly significant as many of these markets were confined to the geographical centers of Mormon population.

In some circles, kitsch has not merely been disregarded, but has been actively castigated as “a ‘corrupter of the most treasured experiences’ of man” (Schlinker 84). In

a 1971 interview, respected Church scholar Hugh Nibley observed that in the Church, there was no “harmless kitsch. It’s all harmful” (Schlinker 60). Religious kitsch creates a kind of “marzipantheologie [sugar-coated theology]” which causes the Christian faith to “receive a quite fateful flavour of saccharine” (Schlinker 74). People pick up on an imitation and allow it to substitute for the true; allowing the image to become the object. Children and the uneducated (those untrained in earlier modes of thinking) are especially susceptible, according to this line of reasoning, because while an adult “will realize that this is just bad art and it was just done for maybe visual help and will tolerate it” children will “take it for real because they have much more faith. They believe that what they see is right” (Schlinker 38). Kitsch may reinforce some doctrinal concepts while simultaneously introducing speculative or other non-canonical views, as has been the case with charges leveled against *Saturday’s Warrior*. Sentimentality becomes a substitute for truth, and if a person does not correct it, “it will begin to affect and etch into his whole life;” he becomes a “kitsch-man” (Schlinker 79). Additionally, the corporate marketing aspect of kitsch is seen as suspect. “If this business power ruling the world is not to be overcome in the Church any more,” says Lori Schlinker, “it should be a clear sign that the Church has become like the world. No worse can happen to a Church founded by Jesus Christ!” (Schlinker 81).

“Yes, it is kitsch,” agrees David Morgan, professor of religion and art at Duke University, “but so what? They are not about artistic expression, but about community, about prayer, about devotional feeling. These images are the intimate symbols of the community to which [Mormons] belong” (Winston). Their ubiquity can be reassuring, forming the “mental furniture” and “a kind of backdrop to the faith.” They help Church

members feel a sense of belonging to a common community, “creating an important universal bond through shared representation.” Over time, images passed on through generations help members “maintain their sense of identity.” And they become worthy of study as a kind of folk art; their consumption and use “reflect how ordinary Latter-day Saints express their religious selves” (Winston, Riess 36, 45).

Additionally, the art carries a different purpose from high art; “it is intended first to teach and then to inspire.” It doesn’t carry the aesthetic burden of a work by Michelangelo because the viewer perceives it differently. “We come to it with a believing gaze, with a Mormon gaze,” says Laura Allred Hurtado, curator of the Church History Museum. The discriminating tastes and highbrow values of previous generations are often left out of the equation in an effort to teach principles and concepts.

There is still a place for high art, however. President Kimball’s “Gospel Vision of the Arts” includes the need for “purifi[cation] by the highest critics.” He admonished members to “never be satisfied with mediocrity” or “shabby and shoddy” work. Mormons “won’t get a great artistic culture until we have a great critical culture” to “winnow the wheat from the chaff” (Burton and Kramer 12,4). But great art has to come from somewhere. Kitsch, as “the ‘normal’ art of our time” may be “the obligatory starting point of any aesthetic experience;” Mormon kitsch “can help Mormons make their way to ‘good’ art” (Morris, “Reckless Theorizing”). Kitsch can become the stew from which high art emerges; in fact, the low art of one generation has sometimes itself become the high art of succeeding generations. Shakespeare, for example, in his own day was enjoyed “by all sorts of people old and younge, rich and poore, masters and servants, papists and puritans, wise men, etc., churchmen and statesmen” (Levine 24). In frontier

America, Alexis de Tocqueville found that “there is hardly a pioneer’s hut that does not contain a few odd volumes of Shakespeare” (Levine 17). Shakespeare was a part of the same popular culture “inhabited by magicians, dancers, singers, acrobats, minstrels, and comics” (Levine 23). It was the popular art of the time. But, according to historian Lawrence W. Levine, “the primary categories of culture have been the products of ideologies which were always subject to modifications and transformations, the perimeters of our cultural divisions have been permeable and shifting rather than fixed and immutable” (Levine 8). This is certainly to be expected as each new generation sets new rules as new media disrupts old societies. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, just as new mediums came into use, greater distinction began to be made between elitist, highbrow art and popular, lowbrow art, and the highbrows claimed Shakespeare for their own. Such recognition was not limited to Shakespeare; works by Dickens, Beethoven, Verdi and Longfellow underwent similar conversions from popular art to high art. As the fourth wave of Mormon media developed its medium of a mass popular culture market, they experienced a similar period of resistance, because fourth wave artists were expected “to do a job demanded by the new environment with the tools of the old” (McLuhan, *Massage* 95). When their work fell short of the standards of pre-fourth wave eras, they were dismissed as inferior.

But as with previous eras, talented artists in the varied fourth wave mediums, as well as the YouTube artists of the fifth wave, may find that their work becomes more recognized over time. Their very popularity may become the impetus to spur greater sophistication in popular art, so that “as more people demand” it, “greater quality will come” (Sessions).

The fourth wave of Mormon media culture was characterized by a mass marketed popular culture. This culture was both a cause and an effect of the society; the society produced the culture and the culture in turn reshaped the society. While most of what was produced was geared toward Mormons themselves, it provided experience and skills for dealing with the global market that would become available with the internet. More importantly, it changed the mindset of Mormons themselves. Mormons were no longer an isolated people in the American mountain west. They had a community and a culture and something to offer and contribute to broader society. The Mormon society created by the culture of the fourth wave was dynamic, reflecting the business-driven model of its culture. It fostered the development of the Mormon celebrity, as individual artists had to become well-known to successfully market their products. The society was also increasingly international, and this international character would become increasingly important as the Church transitioned into the fifth wave. However, a study of the fifth wave without the context provided by the experiences of the earlier waves would have lacked sufficient grounding. An understanding of the foundations of LDS culture that led to its use of YouTube enables us to more fully understand and appreciate Mormons and YouTube.

CHAPTER V

MORMONS AND YOUTUBE: THE FIFTH WAVE

As Mormon society transitions from the fourth wave to embrace and adopt the mediums of the fifth wave, certain changes can be detected. The online media world has certainly provided a shift in focus in production, marketing and distribution both for institutions and individuals. For example, between 2003 and 2005, the years immediately preceding the advent of YouTube, the Church had distributed four DVDs, films produced during the fourth wave, with the *Ensign*, its official magazine. YouTube made such methods unnecessary. These films are now readily accessible on YouTube and other sites. Individual artists no longer need a commission or approval for publication for their work to be reproduced and disseminated worldwide. Significant outlays of capital and promotion are no longer required for people and their work to become established. The viral world of online media has made it possible for anyone to be almost instantly catapulted from anonymity to celebrity.

As with prior mediums, YouTube has also changed Mormon society itself. Because YouTube does not focus on commercial products as the fourth wave did, there is a decrease in the need to acquire material objects. Because YouTube and other forms of social media encourage users to broadcast themselves and to build their own online identities, it can be identified as a possible cause for the Church's increase in focus on individuals in much of its marketing and elsewhere. Because of the ready availability of critical information and other concerns through YouTube and other online sources, the Church has taken a more proactive stance to inoculate and help members deal with various historical, social or doctrinal issues they might encounter which could potentially

challenge their faith. The Church has set forth its position on some of these issues in a frank, straightforward, balanced and scholarly manner through eleven Gospel Topics essays (some with multiple essays) on matters such as race and the priesthood, plural marriage, and issues with the translation processes of LDS scripture. Elder M. Russell Ballard directed Church educators to “know the content in these essays like you know the back of your hand” so that they would be able to “help students avoid and/or deal with questions, doubt, or faith crises they may face in this information age” (Ballard, “Opportunities and Responsibilities”). The availability of information through YouTube and the internet and the emphasis on countering this through disseminating viewpoints on these topics favorable to the Church may also lead to a decrease in speculation on non-canonical topics. In the same address, Elder Ballard further instructed Church educators “not to pass along faith-promoting or unsubstantiated rumors or outdated understandings and explanations of our doctrine and practices from the past . . . do not teach things that are untrue, out of date, or odd and quirky” (Ballard, “Opportunities and Responsibilities”). This may have been partly in response to an incident concerning BYU Religion professor Randy L. Bott in 2012.

During Mitt Romney’s campaign for President, the *Washington Post* asked Bott about why priesthood racial restrictions had existed prior to 1978. Bott spoke of some the reasons that had previously been promulgated, as Elder Ballard put it, “outdated understandings and explanations of our doctrine and practices from the past.” The next day, 29 February 2012, the Church issued a statement stating that Bott’s comments “absolutely do not represent the teachings and doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” and that “BYU faculty members do not speak for the Church”

(Horowitz, “Church Statement”). Rapid online dissemination of information, including through YouTube, necessitated a quick response, as well as a long-term plan for preventing such instances in the future.

YouTube has also expanded Church members’ ability to reach and connect with people around the world. In one example, five BYU students who had served missions in the Cebu region of the Philippines created the “Hey Joe Show” channel in 2014 and began uploading videos. Soon, they were famous in the Philippines, with over 13 million views on their 50 videos recorded in the Cebuano language, while still living in relative obscurity in Provo, Utah (Rollins). Such displaced celebrity may be uncommon, but it would be almost unthinkable before YouTube. Other groups outside the United States also exist, such as the Сион (Zion) choir in Mongolia, which made it to the semifinals of *Mongolia’s Got Talent* (Chou). Their story was covered in Church media, such as the *Deseret News*. Such incidents of glocalism, through which a global message or other content becomes localized to a particular individual or region, separate from or in addition to its point of origin, is made possible through YouTube. YouTube allows “the voice of the Lord [to go forth] unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:2). Content is sent out to the entire world, but received individually. Use of this medium disrupts and changes the old society, reshaping it into a new world.

As the development of Mormon culture has adapted to the emergence of YouTube, interesting trends have appeared. The opportunities afforded by the institutional Church, established professionals and casual amateurs to appear side-by-side

are remarkable. The thumbnail icon or the viewing screen of a YouTube video is no different for a novice creating their first video than they are for those of the Church's official videos. The circle of those engaging with the world has expanded from the Church and professionals to include all who wish to engage. Some have used YouTube to advance their careers in ways previously unavailable. Others remain in relative obscurity, perhaps with a video or two to show for their fifteen minutes of fame, or they may be almost entirely unnoticed. Some with more established followings appear to be content to continue to use media tools of earlier waves, with their YouTube presence mostly run by others through fan channels. As individuals and groups primarily known for their YouTube presence have gotten their footing, an interesting development of a community of collaborative effort has begun to take shape. In these ways and others, Mormons use YouTube to continue to shape their cultural identity.

A thorough analysis of Mormon videos may be outside the scope of any project. As of this writing, nearly twelve years after YouTube's first video was posted, a keyword search for the word "Mormon" is said to return "about 1,400,000 results." Exactly what this means, however, is difficult to determine. Top results include material both supporting and criticizing the Church. Additionally, that total wouldn't include many videos created by members of the Church that don't feature the word "Mormon" in their titles. YouTube has a limited category system, with about ten general areas, such as "Music," "Comedy" and "Sports," but they don't cover all categories and aren't featured prominently as channel identifiers. There is no active catalogue of Mormon-themed videos. Kent Olmstead ran a site at MormonWebTV.com, which was praised as "well-designed" and "fairly easy to navigate" (Astle, "Mormon Cinema on the Web"). By

2008, the site featured a selection of 357 Mormon-themed videos, but the site has been defunct since 2011, according to results at archive.org.

Consequently, there is no readily discernible way to present a thorough analysis of content on YouTube dealing with Mormons or virtually any other similarly broad topic. However, a sampling largely based on my own exposure may be profitably presented in order to show some of the ways in which Mormons are using YouTube.

The Church itself has been one of the most prolific producers of content dealing with Mormonism. There are at least eight official YouTube channels in English, besides 29 channels in other languages. As of April 18th, 2017, these eight channels—FamilySearch, LDS Church History, LDS General Conference, LDS Youth, Mormon Channel, Mormon Newsroom, Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Mormon.org—contain a combined 10,305 videos, 1,102,602 subscribers and 456,087,365 views with average views per video at 44,259. The Spanish language channel—the largest non-English channel, has 222 videos with 152,038 subscribers and 79,951,340 views, with average views per video at 360,141. (The higher views per video in Spanish are likely due to there being far fewer videos available in Spanish). Not all videos remain active. The Mormon.org channel, registered on November 19th, 2005, may be the first Mormon-themed channel on YouTube, but the oldest video currently available on that channel was uploaded October 1, 2010.

One current series of videos on the Mormon Channel addresses problems that people struggle with which have often been taboo, such as depression, suicide, homosexuality, post-partum depression, or family members leaving the faith. Like the “I’m a Mormon” campaign, these videos focus on the stories of real people to present a

message of support, encouragement and caring. Other recent series include Easter and Christmas campaigns to focus on Christ and his teachings, a series of videos reenacting stories from the New Testament, and a “Face to Face” series presenting interviews about matters of faith with Church leaders and members such as Lindsey Stirling, The Piano Guys, and the cast of Studio C.

Additionally, there are subsidiary channels, entities that are owned by the Church, though not directly controlled by it, such as channels for Brigham Young University, Deseret News, Deseret Book, or KSL. Studio C, “Random Acts,” and other BYU TV programs have their own channels, but as productions run by BYU Broadcasting, they are also linked to the official Church. Other BYU campus programs and departments include “BYUEducationWeek,” “BYUSpeeches,” “BYUWomensConference,” and “BYURelEd.” Deseret Book runs “TimeOutforWomen.” William Hamblin, a professor at BYU maintains a YouTube channel, which includes some of his work related to Mormon studies scholarship and apologetics. “FAIR LDS” contains over 1500 videos dealing with Mormon apologetics and scholarship, which is also the focus of “themaxwellinstitute” and other channels.

There are also independent channels which run material directly related to furthering the work of the Church. My channel, in which I read the text of The Book of Mormon, may fall in this category, as would that of “BookofMormonReader,” a woman who completed a similar project at about the same time. “TheBackyardProfessor” presents many ideas of Kerry Shirts relating to Mormonism and chess. As the Church has announced that the material in its library “has been cleared for use by members without seeking permission from the Church” (Bednar), some rebroadcast or adapt older

Church films, such as “TheLDSLife – I Am A Mormon” (730 videos) or “Hard-to-Find Mormon Videos” (766 videos). These have made readily available many Church films from the third and fourth waves. Finally, “Stephen Jones” has created an animated chart showing a history of changes in the LDS First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve between 1830 and 2010.

Criticism of the Church is also plentiful on YouTube. Some push for a particular cause, such as the OrdainMormonWomen channel titled “Eliza R. Snow.” “Mormon Leaks” created a small stir in October 2016 when it obtained and uploaded fifteen videos showing private meetings of Church officials. YouTube is one of the venues in which John Dehlin’s “mormonstories” is distributed. In this series of interviews, Dehlin conducts interviews with faithful, lapsed and former members of the Church. His interviews sometimes delve into controversial topics, which may have contributed to his excommunication in 2015. “Brother Jake” takes a satirical approach in criticizing Church doctrine, while other critical channels, such as “Thinker of Thoughts,” “Zelph on the Shelf,” “The Mormon Informant,” “FlackerMan,” and “Dan Vogel,” take various other approaches in their critiques of Mormon belief. Finally, Brian Keith Dalton has created a series of humorous sketches in which he portrays a Supreme Being known as “Mr. Deity.” In the series, Dalton, a former Mormon himself, criticizes Christianity generally, but often takes aim at Mormonism specifically. While criticism of the Church (or anti-Mormonism) has existed since its earliest days, YouTube has provided these critics new tools to use in making their arguments.

Mormon comedy has also transferred into the medium of YouTube in a multitude of ways. Perhaps the first Mormon humor video on YouTube is “Funny Mormon

Missionary,” uploaded by dbalca on February 13th, 2006, which simply depicts a missionary inflating a surgical glove strapped over his head. Other early Mormon humor films on YouTube include a commercial for the “Settlers of Zarahemla” game uploaded April 9th, 2006, Rich Wilson’s “Mormon Mafia,” uploaded May 14th 2006, tonykim1978’s “Book of Mormon – Dancing – Pepsi Commercial Spoof – Directed” uploaded September 8th, 2006 and “Napolean [sic] Dynamite goes on a mission” by John Evers, uploaded October 9th, 2006. While earnest, these films contain a distinctly amateur flavor characteristic of early YouTube videos.

Many videos dealing with Mormon humor can trace their origins back to the sketch comedy tradition at BYU, now nearly a quarter of a century old. In the fall of 1992, Eric D. Snider, a new freshman at BYU with previous experience in performing and writing sketch comedy was “inspired by a friend’s stories about a comedy troupe at a college he was attending, [and] decided to start one at BYU.” With the encouragement and assistance of floormate Braden Jacobs, the first comedy troupe in BYU’s history was formed in November 1992, and named “The Garrens” after Joyce Garren, the head resident at the now-defunct Deseret Towers Q-hall dorm where they lived. Their first performance was on January 22, 1993 and they would continue to perform weekly shows of sketch and improvisational comedy as well as songs and song parodies until disbanding in March 2001. Aaron Woodall, a former president and current performer of Humor U, “a stand-up comedy collective based out of Brigham Young University,” has stated an appreciation for the Garrens as “the grandfathers of BYU comedy and the ones that started everything” (Sessions). His group’s YouTube Channel, TheofficialHumorU, has had 1.45 million views for its 415 YouTube videos. Many Garrens alumni have also

posted Garrens and other material on their YouTube channels, including Eric D. Snider (“ericdsnider”), Lincoln Hoppe (“Lincoln Hoppe,” “kerblink”), Daryn Tufts (“Daryn Tufts”), Lisa Valentine Clark (“Pretty Darn Funny”), and Ken Craig (“Ken Craig”), as well as channels like “The Garrens Comedy Troupe,” or “JPMorganVideoLibrary,” although most Garrens material have low views. In their other material, Lisa Valentine Clark has done fairly well, with a few of her nearly 300 videos having garnered over 100,000 views, although she is also featured in a Chatbooks commercial which has had a viral 9.8 million views. Lincoln Hoppe teamed up with Mormon cinema fixture Kirby Heyborne in the channel “kerblink,” but those 61 videos have an average of only about 2,000 views, with only two over 10,000. Eric D. Snider, Daryn Tufts, and Howard and Randy Tayler have also continued to be involved in comedic endeavors.

Inspired by the early success of the Garrens, freshmen Randall S. Davis and Greg N. Peterson started a second sketch comedy club in 1994 named Divine Comedy, focusing more on scripted shows and held just once per month. This organization proved to have longer staying power than the Garrens. In March 2007, Joel Hilton, who had recently finished his time with Divine Comedy, began posting Divine Comedy recordings on the YouTube channel “mst3kjoel.” One of his first videos, “CTR Wars” was also his most successful and one of the first successful Mormon comedy videos on YouTube. A spoof mixing Star Wars with the Missionary Training Center (MTC), it has received about 167,000 views.

Divine Comedy added an official YouTube channel in October 2008. These achieved their highest popularity with a series of six music videos released between February 2010 and April 2011, each of which have had over 290,000 views, and the most

popular, “Provo UT Girls” (a parody of Katy Perry’s “California Girls”) reaching nearly two million views. With that success, cast member Matt Meese approached Jared Shores, Content Development Coordinator of BYU TV, about producing a sketch comedy show on the cable and satellite channel (Shores). BYU TV had been launched by BYU Broadcasting in 2000 and expanded significantly in 2007 with BYU TV International. By 2006, it had a reach of approximately 100 million Americans and millions more international viewers. However, because of budgeting constraints, much of its content consisted of “stale lectures, roundtable discussions and old football games” (Astle and Burton 152-153). With the broad gap between its wide availability and its prosaic content, BYU TV was “one of the greatest untapped resources for the global dissemination of Mormon cinema” (Astle and Burton 153).

Shores himself had experience with online media. He had starred in the 20-episode transmedia web series *The Book of Jeremiah*,” a Mormon-themed student-produced conspiracy thriller that drew praise from *The New York Times*, which called it “a tight, suspenseful little series.” Randy Astle even suggested it might prove the harbinger of the next major wave in Mormon cinema. Shores had been working for BYU Broadcasting for about a year when Meese approached him.

Shores accepted Meese’s proposal for a sketch comedy show, and the first *Studio C* episode aired on October 8, 2012. Simultaneously, Studio C began putting videos from their TV episodes on their YouTube channel, and they have enjoyed enormous success. Their 701 videos have an average of 1.27 million views. The channel has 1.4 million subscribers. Only two videos have fewer than 200,000 views, and the top video,

featuring a soccer player named Scott Sterling (played by Meese) who is regularly hit in the face has nearly 52 million views.

Song parodies are another popular medium for Mormon humor. Some examples include Stan Way, who retold the story of the Jaredites from *The Book of Mormon* to the tune of “Gilligan’s Island” (“Jaredites Tale (Like Gilligan’s Island)”) in November 2006. “LoganDBeck” did parodies of Psy’s “Gangnam Style” (“Mormon Style”) in November 2012 and Taylor Swift’s “I Knew You Were Trouble” (“I Knew You Were Mormon”) in May 2013. Young women in the Fishers 1st Ward in Fishers, Indiana uploaded a parody of “Royals” by Lorde with a song about Mormon life (“Mormons”) in October 2014. Also in October 2014, LDS Smile hosted a video created by actively serving missionaries parodying Meghan Trainor’s “All About that Bass” with a song about *The Book of Mormon* (“All About that Book”). And in April 2016, “Joseph & Smith” (Marcus Joseph and Korey Smith) uploaded a song about missionary work parodying Adele’s “Hello” (“Adele – Hello (Mormon Missionary Parody”).

Some song parodies created by Mormons address popular culture subjects instead of Mormon themes. One of the most successful, “Dark Lord Funk,” a parody of “Uptown Funk” by Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars, was created by BYU student Keith Allen (“KFaceTV”). Dealing with Harry Potter confronting Lord Voldemort, it has been viewed 13.12 million times and has earned praise from J.K. Rowling herself, who called it “a work of genius” (Kenner). KFaceTV has also created other videos on pop culture topics, including Star Trek, Batman, The Hunger Games, and a series of Star Wars Rap Battles. Like Studio C, although KFaceTV avoids explicitly Mormon themes, it does maintain clean comedy.

Not all humorous Mormon songs on YouTube are parodies. Jim Bennett uploaded a version of his 1990 song “Javelin Man,” about the story of Teancum in *The Book of Mormon*, for a stake Film Festival, with popular LDS singer Jenny Jordan Frogley on vocals and his father, the late US Senator Bob Bennett, in a cameo. In March 2007, Ted Sowards shot a video retelling “Some Postman” by the Presidents of the United States of America as a story about a postal worker withholding letters from missionaries. Sowards has also created ads for the Mesa Institute, a series of videos about a Mormon Ninja (Ninjormon) answering questions (a parody of the “Ask a Ninja” series), and one of many lip dubs of LDS young men singing One Direction’s “What Makes You Beautiful.”

Most of the LDS musicians who established themselves in the fourth wave now have YouTube channels to supplement their work, or others have created videos promoting their work on their behalf. But perhaps the musical artist who has most successfully made the transition from being a fourth-wave regional musician performing mostly for LDS audiences to major success through YouTube has been Jon Schmidt. Schmidt was born on July 9, 1966 to German immigrants Werner and Lieselotte Pruess Schmidt, who had grown up as active Church members in Nazi Germany. His older sister, Rose-Anne, trained him on the piano from about the age of six and he began creating his own original compositions at age eleven, about the same time President Kimball expressed in his “Gospel Vision of the Arts” his “secret hope to live long enough to hear and see at the piano a greater performer than Paderewski.” Rose-Anne passed away suddenly of a heart attack on September 18th, 1985, about the same time Jon was beginning his LDS mission in Norway.

Upon his return, Schmidt studied English in college with plans for an MBA while doing occasional benefit shows, when his music began to take off. Taking a leap of faith, he rented out Abravanel Hall in Salt Lake City and presented his own concert. Following that success, he released his first album, *August End*, in 1991 followed by *Walk in the Woods* in 1993 and began his career mainly on the LDS musician circuit.

By 2006, Schmidt was regularly performing onstage with Steven Sharp Nelson, a cellist who had begun his career around 1993 by playing backup in Peter Breinholt's band when he was about fifteen. Also in 2006, Nelson released his first solo album, *Sacred Cello*. Schmidt and others were among his collaborators.

In 2009, Schmidt and Nelson decided to try out the potential of YouTube, expecting a few thousand hits. Schmidt decided to combine Taylor Swift's *Love Story* with Coldplay's *Viva La Vida*, and uploaded a performance of the two of them to YouTube. The video was massively popular, registering over a million views before it was eventually removed for copyright issues, (though copies still exist, one with 3.8 million views).

Soon after, Jon was preparing for a concert in St. George, Utah, and went into a piano store run by Paul Anderson called The Piano Guys to practice. Paul and Jon had developed a prior friendship, and Paul had seen Jon's video. He proposed that they create more such content, which would include travel to exotic locations. Jon pulled in Steven, who had recently begun working with his new neighbor, Al van der Beek, who had a home recording studio. The four of them joined up, letting their solo careers be merged into the new group, The Piano Guys, named after Anderson's store, in 2011. As of March 2017, their YouTube channel has 5.5 million subscribers and 1.2 billion views

on their 65 videos, an average of 18.6 million views per video, with their top videos at 60-90 million views. Their albums have consistently topped both Classical and New Age charts in the US, and they were among the performers at the 2017 Presidential inauguration (Rogers).

Many Mormon videos have followed trends or techniques begun elsewhere online. For example, both the “MrJosephSim” and “Mormon Girls Say” channels have followed the “Stuff [. . .] Say” template to take a humorous look at Mormon language patterns. Some use the technique of recutting existing videos or interviews to humorous effect. In 2010 Cameron Sawyer recut a Tom Cruise interview to appear to be about his thoughts on home teaching (“Tom Cruise on Home Teaching”) while LDS Smile hosts a recut video portraying Taylor Swift’s thoughts on visiting teaching. Brothers Brett, David, John and Randy Roberts and their friend Richard Sharrah created “Bored Shorts TV.” In a twist on voice redubbing, their “Kid History” segments depict children telling stories and themselves or other actors performing the stories with the children’s voices. This popular series has 325 videos on two channels totaling 186.6 million views and 574,000 average views per video. Videos depicting people’s reactions to anesthesia following dental surgery have been popular in the wake of “David After Dentist” (2009)’s success (135 million views). Tylan Gline (one of the members of the “Hey Joe Show”) posted two “Mormon on Drugs” videos after his wisdom teeth were removed. These have a combined 1.22 million views, although they have recently been removed.

Other Mormon-themed videos have come out of additional real-life situations, such as missionaries displaying their skills at basketball (“Mormon Missionary Ballers (ORIGINAL)”) or breakdancing (“Elder Gus Garcia, Mormon Missionary, Holding His

Own Break Dancing”). “Hand Clap Skit – The Original!” was performed at a youth conference talent show in Wyoming. It featured six seated young men performing an intricate, rhythmic hand clap dance, and has received over 7.5 million views. While on a road trip from Logan, Utah to Boise, Idaho, Travis Chambers documented his wife Chelsea’s confusion with the question, “If you are traveling eighty miles per hour, how long does it take you to go eighty miles?” (“The real meaning of MPH- The Original-TCHappenings”). That video has been viewed 11.9 million times. Another Utah State University student, Patrick Romero, sought to find out “Why Men and Women Cant [sic] be friends?” His video, filmed at the USU library, has received over 9.55 million views. A regular theme of Stuart Edge has been to document the reactions of strangers to his interviews and other antics. His 96 videos have become quite popular, with 2.51 million subscribers and 256.5 million views. His first listed and most popular video, “Mistletoe Kissing Prank (ORIGINAL),” was filmed at the BYU Wilkinson Center, and has received 28.4 million views.

Other real life situations include mission calls and marriages, two very significant events in the lives of young Mormons. For example, following the lowering of the age at which missionaries can serve in October 2012, Danielle Chard created a video compiling over 100 members of her class at Olympus High School receiving their mission calls (“Titan Missionaries from Olympus Class of 2012 Opening the Mission Call”). That video has over 220,000 views. She also created a video of their return in 2015 (“Titan Missionaries of 2012 Coming Home”). Some videos show prank mission calls, with new missionaries being called to Antarctica, the Bermuda Triangle, Middle Earth, and elsewhere.

Many Mormon YouTube channels focus on particular individuals in their regular lives, similar to reality TV shows. Some of these have become quite successful. Identical twins Brooklyn and Bailey McKnight began with their mother's fashion channel, "CuteGirlsHairstyles," which has 962.5 million views on 462 videos. Their lifestyle vlog, "Brooklyn and Bailey" has enjoyed similar success with 526 million views on 237 videos. Shay Carl Butler runs two channels, "ShayCarl" and "Shaytards" in which he vlogs about his life and that of his family. These have been running since December 2006, and have been quite prolific, recording 2906 videos at a rate of one every 1.27 days until beginning a hiatus in February 2017. They have also been very popular, registering 2.917 billion views, an average of over one million views per video. "Ellie and Jared" are a third highly popular Mormon vlogging family. Their 1,164 videos since October 16, 2011 have been viewed 425 million times. They average over 365,000 views per video with a new video every 1.73 days, with an additional 31.4 million views on two separate channels.

Other Mormon vloggers have more focused themes. Two that commonly deal with Mormon topics include convert Al Fox Carraway, sometimes known as "The Tattooed Mormon" who focuses on messages of faith and inspiration and "James the Mormon" who has an assortment of humorous, music (rap/hip-hop) and informational videos explaining LDS beliefs. Mark Rober's 57 science-focused videos average nearly 5 million views per video. Finally, the "Trick Shot Titus" channel focuses on Titus Ashby, a young boy with an impressive talent for shooting basketball shots. With videos documenting his abilities from as early as eighteen months, Titus has been featured on

Jimmy Kimmel Live!, *The Ellen Degeneres Show* and others. His own channel has three videos with more than 17 million views each.

One characteristic of some of the more established LDS YouTube content creators has been a tendency to cross over between channels. This cross-pollination has the mutually beneficial advantage of drawing fans from one YouTube channel onto those of other channels. If viewers are already fans of both channels, they are even more likely to watch these crossover videos. The practice also helps create a sense of community among content creators. By networking and building relationships, they may be able to create greater opportunities than they would on their own.

One of the biggest collaborative projects was given the title “Over A Thousand People Came Together To Break a Record And Bring This Moving Christmas Hymn To Life,” hosted on *The Piano Guys* page. This video was done to support the Church’s 2014 Christmas campaign to “#ShareTheGift and focused on a large nativity scene. It featured Peter Hollens, David Archuleta, and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing a medley of “Angels from the Realms of Glory” and “Angels We Have Heard on High,” with The Piano Guys providing music. Among those in the large cast were Jeremy Warner and Natalie Madsen of Studio C, Alex Boyé, Shay Carl Butler and his family (“The Shaytards”), Ellie and Jared Mecham, the McKnight family, Stuart Edge, the Roberts brothers and Richard Sharrah of “Bored Shorts TV,” and Sheri Dew of Deseret Book. Devin “DevinSuperTramp” Graham was involved with the filming, and the Harmon Brothers were involved with the production, direction, writing and editing of the film.

The Harmon brothers have been behind some of the most successful humorous long-form commercials on the internet. Their business began in 2009 when Dr. Bob Wagstaff approached a marketing class at BYU to sell his OraBrush product, a tongue-brushing device used to prevent bad breath that he had spent years unsuccessfully trying to market. Jeffrey and Neal Harmon thought that the product could be marketed successfully through a YouTube video. Jeffrey got his roommate, Devin Graham (who had not yet started his own YouTube channel), to film their first video, “Bad Breath Test – How to Tell When Your Breath Stinks,” uploaded September 10th, 2009, which currently has 26.6 million views. OraBrush went from being a product with no sales to being sold in 30,000 stores in 25 countries.

The Harmon Brothers left OraBrush in 2013 to form their own advertising business. One of their first clients was Poo Pourri, a bathroom freshening product. On a recommendation from BYU theater professor Ben Hopkin, they hired Scottish red-haired student Bethany Woodruff to be the spokeswoman for their product (Walker, Jakob). The resulting video, released September 10th, 2013, now has 39.3 million views. The channel’s 27 videos have a total of 96.6 million views. The makers of Squatty Potty, a toilet stool, thought that their product might have similar success to Poo Pourri’s. A video for their product, featuring an ice cream-defecating unicorn, was released October 6th 2015, and now has 30.7 million views. They created the aforementioned Chatbooks ad, starring Lisa Valentine Clark as a busy mother, which has received 9.8 million views in its first six months. Three of their campaigns have featured Studio C actors. FiberFix, a super-strong tape, features Jason Gray in an ad “Redneck Drives a Duct Taped Car Off a Cliff” with 2.25 million views. Purple mattresses’ ad “How to Use a Raw Egg to

Determine if Your Mattress is Awful - #Purple” stars Mallory Everton as Goldilocks and has received 42 million views in its first year. Other Purple ads have featured Jeremy Warner. The Harmon Brothers themselves founded the company VidAngel, a content filtering service that allows customers to use VidAngel’s software to edit their own films. While the final outcome of their case is still entangled in legal battles with major Hollywood studios, VidAngel complied with a court order and stopped streaming filtered movies on December 30th, 2016. VidAngel’s 18 YouTube videos, many of which feature Studio C’s Matt Meese, have received 4.7 million views.

Studio C has worked with many other YouTube content creators. Their second-most viewed video, a Scott Sterling sequel, featured Jared Mecham as the opposing team’s coach during a volleyball game. Brooklyn and Bailey McKnight performed in Studio C’s third-highest viewed video, “Prom Dress Gone Wrong,” as well as “DANCE BATTLE: Boys Vs Girls,” “The Other Parent Trap,” and “High School Boyfriend Drama,” while their mother Mindy restyled Jeremy Warner’s mustache in “Mustache Makeover.” Mark Rober engineered exotic devices in “Stranded on a Deserted Island with Mark Rober,” Shay Carl Butler filmed himself in “The Vlogfather,” Titus Ashby shot hoops in “Game of Horse With Trick Shot Titus,” and Lexi Walker sang “Amazing Grace” in “Celine Dion Upstaged by Daughter.” Studio C has been featured in videos on Stuart Edge’s channel in “Star Wars Magic,” and in Bored Shorts TV in “Waiter” and “State of the Union Address 2016.” In “The Piano Guys Behind “ThePianoGuys,” the Studio C cast portrayed the hapless piano movers for “ThePianoGuys.” Lindsey Stirling has not yet appeared in a Studio C episode, although Whitney Call Meek did portray her in “Lindsey Stirling Sister Debut.”

Lindsey Stirling, has however, performed with the Piano Guys in a *Mission Impossible*-themed video. She has also performed with “Bored Shorts TV” in “Lindsey Stirling Makeup,” with Alex Boyé in “Grenade” and three times with Peter Hollens in “Skyrim,” “Game of Thrones,” and “Star Wars Medley.” She also took the “Eat it or WEAR IT Challenge” with Brooklyn and Bailey and complimented strangers with Stuart Edge in “Complimenting Strangers with Lindsey Stirling.”

The Piano Guys have also performed with Alex Boyé in “Coldplay – Paradise (Peponi) African Style” and with One Voice Children’s Choir in “Only Hope.” Boyé appeared with One Voice Children’s Choir in “Let It Go – Frozen – (Africanized Tribal Cover).” Al Fox Carraway was featured in Boyé’s video “Promised Land” as well as James the Mormon’s “You Should Watch Conference.” Bored Shorts TV featured Ellie and Jared Mecham in “Wedding Toast.” The Mechams and the Shaytards appeared together in “SHAYTARDS UNITE WITH ELLIE AND JARED!!” The Shaytards have met up with Stuart Edge a few times, including in “MEETING APOSTLE JEFFREY R. HOLLAND!” at the occasion of a VIP premier for *Meet the Mormons*. Stuart Edge, who had a role in KFaceTV’s “Dark Lord Funk,” teamed up with Alex Boyé in “Street Musicians Perform with Man in Need.” And Alex Boyé appeared with Tiffany Alvord in Bored Shorts TV’s “The Voice featuring Madilyn Paige, guest judges Tiffany Alvord and Alex Boyé.”

Other areas of Mormon culture have undergone notable changes during the fifth wave, perhaps most notably in the mainstream popularity of the works of several Mormon authors of young adult and speculative (which includes both fantasy and science fiction) literature. The success of novelists in this genre might be due to writing in the

wake of the increase of attention given to these types of novels following J.K. Rowling's publication of the *Harry Potter* series between 1997 and 2007. Stephenie Meyer may be the most apparent beneficiary of this success. Hailed by the *Daily Telegraph* in 2008 as "the spiritual successor to Harry Potter," (Profile: Stephenie Meyer") Meyer published her first novel, *Twilight*, in 2005. The franchise became a major phenomenon, selling more than 250 million books (biography.com), with the accompanying films grossing more than \$3.3 billion worldwide (boxofficemojo.com). James Dashner began publishing in 2003. The first two films in his *The Maze Runner* series have grossed \$660.6 million dollars (boxofficemojo.com). Brandon Mull, who was also a former Divine Comedy member, began publishing novels in 2006. His *Fablehaven*, *Beyonders*, *Five Kingdoms* and *Candy Shop Wars* series have been New York Times bestsellers. Brandon Sanderson also published his first novel, *Elantris*, in 2005, then began his *Mistborn* series in 2006. Following the 2007 death from cardiac amyloidosis of Robert Jordan, author of the unfinished twelve-volume series *Wheel of Time*, begun in 1990 and one of the most popular fantasy series of its time, his widow, Harriet McDougal was tasked with finding someone to complete the novels. Sanderson's posted eulogy to her husband led to her reading *Mistborn*, which led to Sanderson's being tapped to complete the series with three additional novels. Sanderson has continued to be rather prolific in his writing, typically turning out two or three new novels each year.

Did their success have a common source? All four of these authors are about the same age; Dashner was born in November 1972, Meyer in December 1973, Mull in November 1974 and Sanderson in December 1975. They all attended and graduated from BYU, where they were all students of David Wolverton. Wolverton (who wrote under

the pen name David Farland), had begun receiving awards for his writing during his time as a BYU student and, in 1989, began writing novels after winning the prestigious L. Ron Hubbard “Writers of the Future” prize (created by and named for the founder of the Church of Scientology). At the time these four best-selling authors were taking his classes, he was beginning his *Runelords* series, which concluded with a ninth volume in 2012. Sanderson called Wolverton “one of the most influential figures in my writing career . . . he gave me tools to understand what it is that I was already doing instinctively . . . And he gave me the confidence that I could do it.”

Wolverton himself has credited faith as the *prima causa* of great writing. “I have a belief that you can’t be a great writer without being a great person,” he has stated. “I think that my faith makes me a better person and because of that it makes me a better writer” (Tullis).

Perhaps LDS authors are drawn to speculative fiction because of parallels with their own beliefs. As Terryl Givens opines,

speculative fiction . . . is the literary form best suited to the exposition and exploration of ideas at the margins of conventional thinking, whether in technology, ethics, politics, or religion. And indeed, some Mormon doctrine is so unsettling in its transgression of established ways of conceiving reality that it may be more at home in the imagined universes of Card than in journals of theology (Givens 320).

Another reason why LDS authors write in these genres is because of the genres’ general conventions to avoid pervasive profanity and other objectionable content often found in contemporary adult novels. In this way, Mormon authors of young adult fiction may be similar to Mormon YouTube creators. They may also share this trait with many Mormon participants in reality show contests, who are likewise not normally required to compromise their standards. Mormons have seemed to gravitate toward this medium

during the fifth wave just as they have with YouTube and young adult literature; in 2014, a *Deseret News* article identified more than ninety such reality contest participants in a non-comprehensive list (Christensen, “A Look”). By looking at changes regarding Mormon participation across different mediums in the fifth wave, one major distinction that becomes apparent between Mormon creators in the fourth wave and creators in the fifth wave is a tendency to share their talents while still seeking to maintain their standards with a wide, mainstream audience, instead of just the Mormon popular culture niche. Sharing talents has long been a part of Mormon culture; it is one way in which Mormons seek to develop their “divine nature and destiny” (“Proclamation”). In earlier waves, for various reasons, Mormons did not engage with the media in large numbers. In the 0th wave, the outside world was often perceived as hostile, and a tendency towards isolationism predominated. During the 1st wave, the outside media viewed Mormons with suspicion. The Great Depression and World War II limited Mormon engagement during the second wave. Mormons might have engaged more with the media during the third wave, but they lacked a strong media tradition. They also comprised a significantly smaller percentage of the total US population; global Church membership compared with the US population in 1950 was 0.73%. In 2016, US Church membership compared with the US population was 2.04%, with even more Church members living outside of the United States (2013 *Deseret News Church Almanac*, mormonnewsroom.com, “Membership statistics (United States),” “Demography of the United States”). During the fourth wave, Mormons developed a media tradition generally limited to those within their own culture. And in the fifth wave, Mormons are engaging with the world, through the media, but on their own terms, with greater freedom to remain true to their ideals.

Throughout its cultural history, an understanding of Mormon identity has taken shape, developed and shifted. Key developments, including technological advancements, marketing trends, prophetic leadership, and individual artistic vision have contributed in forming and manifesting this identity. However, prior to the advent of YouTube, the field was largely confined to the Church institutionally or to professionals. Individual Church members with a desire to share their artistic talents needed to become professionals or create businesses in order to have their work made publicly available. Even so, due to marketing limitations, that work was often confined to the geographical heartland of the LDS Church in the western United States. YouTube has changed that. It has provided a new field through which amateurs can become professionals, as was the case with Lindsey Stirling, or regional professionals can become more widely recognized, as with The Piano Guys, or YouTube users may simply remain as amateurs, as with many of those described here who create successful videos but don't parlay those successes into careers.

However, the voices and presence of all of these, telling their own stories and exploring their own talents have resulted in tremendous value for both insiders and outsiders to more fully understand and appreciate what it means to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, CONCERNS AND CONFIDENCE: THE FUTURE OF MORMONS
AND YOUTUBE

The development of YouTube has come at a time when masses of people are being restructured into a new global paradigm. Approximately half, or 3.7 billion of the world's 7.5 billion people, use the internet ("Internet World Stats"). These include about 81% of the population of developed countries and 40% of the population of developing countries ("ICT Facts and Figures 2016"). YouTube's reach is vast, and the interconnectedness of the internet means that a video's next view may just as likely come from Mozambique as Montana, regardless of whether the video has previously received little or much attention. In just the last seven days (May 12th-May 18th, 2017) for example, YouTube's analytics tell me that my videos have been viewed 609 times in 27 countries. Since my videos have existed, YouTube has registered that people have viewed them in 204 countries. And my channel is much smaller than many of those that have been discussed. While I have focused on YouTube creators in the United States, YouTube's global audience is significant.

The Church has made efforts to establish itself internationally since its earliest days, with missionaries entering Canada in 1832 and establishing an overseas presence in the United Kingdom in 1837 (Mormonnewsroom.com). Since February 1996, there have been more Church members outside the United States than within (Todd). YouTube has provided a medium through which the institutional Church and its members can reach people inside and outside of the Church throughout the world. Through creating a new

society in which the inhabitants of the world can be accessed in ways that were not previously possible, it has enabled that society to be fundamentally altered.

As with any new medium, however, widespread adoption of YouTube has not come without some opposition. Arguments against or cautions regarding its use have primarily fallen in two main categories, which John-Charles Duffy labels as highbrow and pietistic objections. Although his article, “Mormons and American Television,” primarily looks at television use, he indicates that these arguments also apply to online media. Indeed, the highbrow argument, that adoption of new mediums presage the abandonment of values embraced through more established mediums, has existed throughout recorded history at the transition period for each new medium, as noted by McLuhan. For example, in *Phaedrus*, Plato writes of Socrates decrying the written word in favor of rhetoric. In a tale of the Egyptians when writing was invented, Theuth claimed that writing would make people wiser and improve their rhetoric. However, Socrates points out that words carried not a power of memory, “but of reminding.” Writing would “produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory.” It would “discourage the use of their own memory within them.” Ignorant people without instruction would gain the appearance of wisdom and “seem to know many things,” but it would only be an illusion. Additionally, unlike in speaking with wise people, written words would not be able to respond intelligently and answer questions. To Socrates, putting ideas in people’s minds was much more valuable than writing them on paper.

In the years after Gutenberg invented the printing press, many people favored hand-produced books to his “cheap printed books” (“Johannes Gutenberg”). Later, as

mentioned earlier, novel-reading was considered a dangerous pastime to be eschewed in favor of non-fiction. After that, television was considered to be inferior to printed works. Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, argued that the epistemology of television was “dangerous and absurdist,” and warned that as it moved to the center of society and print moved to the periphery, the “seriousness, clarity and, above all, value of public discourse” in America would dangerously decline from “generally coherent, serious and rational” to “shriveled and absurd” (Postman 16-29). LDS Church leaders also expressed concerns about “shallow programming, violence, and a decline in viewers’ participation in more imaginative, social, or healthful recreational activities” (Duffy 95).

Such warnings have also been raised many times concerning the internet. In one such instance, during a 2009 discourse to young adults, Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles warned of neglecting “eternal relationships for digital distractions, diversions, and detours that have no lasting value,” and of the “potentially stifling, suffocating, suppressing, and constraining impact of some kinds of cyberspace interactions and experiences upon our souls.” Such misuse of media could cause people to “disconnect gradually and physically from things as they really are,” and “miss the richness of person-to-person communication,” of opportunities “for developing and improving interpersonal skills, for laughing and crying together, and for creating a rich and enduring bond of emotional intimacy” (Bednar, “Things As They Really Are”). Additionally, sometimes YouTube content creators are looked down upon as being somehow less worthy than those who have established themselves using more traditional media channels.

Pietistic concerns have also been raised on moral grounds, such as pornography, immorality, profanity, drug use or excessive violence. These concerns have also existed and been applied to many other forms of media. In connection with YouTube, Mormon concerns on these matters were perhaps most manifest with BYU's ban on YouTube beginning in the fall of 2006. Citing a desire "to protect students from inappropriate material" and to preserve bandwidth, the ban remained in place for nearly three years until June 2009 when it was removed because of YouTube's increased use for educational purposes.

Such concerns have not been unfounded. New mediums do create changes in society, not all of them desirable. Plato was correct about some of the disadvantages of writing. Non-fiction teaches truths more directly than fiction does. Reading requires a level of active engagement that television-watching does not. Internet usage can take time away from personal interactions. Objectionable content is plentiful for those who seek it. And YouTube, despite having guidelines prohibiting nudity, makes "exceptions when it is presented in an educational, documentary or artistic context," and has no rules against profanity (Fambro).

However, much is also gained with each new technological step. Writing allowed words and ideas to be transmitted across space and preserved through time. Printing allowed for those ideas to be disseminated to the people generally, rather than limited to the elite. Fiction can allow for ideas to spread in more palatable ways than non-fiction. By allowing images and sound to be transmitted, television revolutionized society. The internet and the ensuing social media revolution which it engendered, including YouTube, made possible a global network which could potentially connect all individuals

to each other. According to McLuhan, much of the conflict between mediums is simply the result of “striving to force the new media to do the work of the old” (*Massage* 94).

These advantages have not been lost on Church leaders. In warning of the dangers of online media, Elder Bednar acknowledged, “neither technology nor rapid change in or of itself is good or evil.” In a subsequent address, “To Sweep the Earth as with a Flood,” delivered during BYU’s Education Week on August 19th, 2014, he went further, recognizing that technological advancements “are part of the Lord hastening his work in the latter days.” He referred to previous Church presidents, such as David O. McKay and Spencer W. Kimball, who had prophesied of discoveries that would “stagger the imagination” and “make possible the preaching of the gospel to every kindred, tongue and people,” and had urged their use in doing so. Referring specifically to YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest as five examples of such tools, Elder Bednar confidently declared,

I believe the time has come for us as disciples of Christ to use these inspired tools appropriately and more effectively to testify of God the Eternal Father, His plan of happiness for His children, and His Son, Jesus Christ, as the Savior of the world; to proclaim the reality of the Restoration of the gospel in the latter days; and to accomplish the Lord’s work.

After describing examples of ways these tools might be employed, such as by missionaries using Facebook in their proselyting efforts, and providing guidelines for their usage, such as being authentic and consistent, wise and vigilant, respecting intellectual property and being edifying and uplifting in messages, Elder Bednar reiterated that the warning he made in 2009 was even more valid in 2014. But while the “perils indeed are real, . . . so too are the opportunities.” What had heretofore been produced in media channels was “a good beginning,” but it constituted “only a small

trickle.” Elder Bednar urged members to “help transform the trickle into a flood.

Beginning at this place on this day, I exhort you to sweep the earth with messages filled with righteousness and truth—messages that are authentic, edifying, and praiseworthy—and literally to sweep the earth as with a flood.”

This message is representative of how Church leaders view YouTube and other tools of the internet and social media. “The divine purpose of technology is to hasten the work of salvation,” declared Randall L. Ridd in the April 2014 General Conference.

The Lord expects you to use these tools to take His work to the next level, to share the gospel in ways that are beyond my generation’s wildest imagination. Where generations past influenced their neighbors and their town, you have the power through the internet and social media to reach beyond borders and influence the whole world (Ridd “The Choice Generation”).

The Church has long recognized that its message would be “proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:23). The “callow youth” who serve as missionaries “carry no element of deception,” President Gordon B. Hinckley declared in 1995.

They speak with no element of sophistry. They speak out of their hearts, with personal conviction. Each is a servant of the living God, an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their power comes not of their learning in the things of the world. Their power comes of faith, and prayer, and humility (Hinckley “Of Missions, Temples, and Stewardship”).

The internet has added another dimension to this, by which “the weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:19). The Church’s bold assertion, confidence in its message and belief that the Lord has put new technological inventions into the hands of its members at least in part for the furtherance of his work have been characteristic of the Church since its founding. In a famous 1842 statement, Joseph Smith declared that “the truth of God will

go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* 444). YouTube has allowed this to be accomplished in ways never before seen.

The future of Mormons and YouTube will continue to unfold. As the internet’s second-most trafficked site, behind only Google in both the United States and globally (Alexa), and with 600,000 hours of content uploaded and one billion hours viewed daily by more than one billion monthly users (Nicas), YouTube’s reach and scope is vast. Growing out of a need to better facilitate the production and distribution of online video, YouTube was able to become dominant through a combination of factors including the implementation of innovative features, an ability to capitalize on popular videos hosted on its site, and good timing in managing to become a key component of the social media revolution. YouTube, through its ubiquity and ease of use, has provided the tools for institutions, professionals, and individual members of society to tell their own stories, to share their own talents, to play their own music, both literally and figuratively, and to otherwise express themselves as never before. In translating their culture onto YouTube, Mormons have been able to do all of this, with an additional focus on sharing their beliefs, values, and religion, both directly and indirectly. While elements of Mormon belief, history and society can be found reflected in their YouTube videos, Moreover, YouTube has allowed Mormons and other cultures to refine and add new dimensions to their cultures, which in turn has helped to reshape their societies. In this symbiotic process, culture continues to develop the societies that create it.

In the future, Mormon culture will continue to evolve and expand. The Church and its members will continue to share their beliefs, entertain, educate, conduct business, and tell their own stories in varied and creative ways. While it may be difficult for any one person to note all of those stories, the vast availability, accessibility, reach and scope of the message and the medium make the study of Mormons and YouTube invaluable to better appreciate and understand this particular people within society. And by better understanding groups of people within society, we are better poised to understand society and humanity itself.

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