

This research plan was developed by the EFC's Centre for Research on Church and Faith for the partnership convening on the *#influencing_faith_study (IFS): How Social Media Engagement Affects the Faith of Youth Participating in Evangelical Youth Ministries.*
For more information, please visit www.theEFC.ca/IFS

Proposed Research Questions: (1) How does social media engagement affect the faith of youth participating in Canadian evangelical youth ministries? (2) How do Canadian evangelical youth ministry workers working with Canadian youth use social media in their ministries that, in their view, assist in the faith formation of youth and how are the youth responding to it?

We endeavor to answer these questions by asking respondents to demonstrate their use of social media and to reflect on the faith-related effects of their engagement. This study aims to:

1. Understand how social media engagement affects the faith of Canadian youth. We will do this by asking youth respondents:
 - how youth understand social media and how they use it (i.e. Who they are following; what content they are interacting with, what content they are posting, etc.),
 - how youth understand faith content and how they engage and interact with it (i.e., Apps they use; accounts they follow, comments, post/share faith content),
 - how youth understand their engagement on social media as Christians and how their self-presentation (anonymity, anthropology) affects their engagement,
 - how youth interact with their youth group or youth ministry on social media (i.e. Apps used by their youth group or youth ministry, what kind of content they engage with there, topics of their conversations, etc.),
 - and how youth use faith content in their interactions with their friends apart from their participation in youth ministries.

2. Understand how Canadian evangelical youth ministry workers (YMWs) working with Canadian youth use social media in their ministries. We especially want to know how YMWs believe it assists them as they seek to form the faith of the youth in their care. We will ask YMWs:
 - how they see youth engaging on social media as Christians,
 - how they see youth interact with faith content on social media platforms (i.e. accounts their youth follow, what their youth post, comment and share),
 - how their youth ministry uses social media during and apart from youth group,
 - how they believe they are assisting the faith formation of the youth through social media platforms (i.e. what kind of content they are posting/sharing, conversation topics) and how their youth are responding to it, and
 - what policies the youth ministry they serve with has for their engagement with youth on social media.

By asking these questions (1) and (2), we hope to learn more broadly:

- to draw faith formation implications based on how the youth talk about their engagement with faith content on social media and the use of social media in general,

- how youth and youth ministry workers understand how social media is affecting youth faith formation,
- And about causation through the eyes of our respondents.

Respondent populations:

We will sample the following populations to be sampled according to the research proposal.

1. **Youth (40 interviews, national survey):** After securing parental consent, we will interview Canadians, aged 12 to 18 and in grades 7 to 12, participating in a youth-oriented ministry affiliated with one of the EFC's affiliate denominations, congregations, or ministry organizations.
2. **Youth Ministry Workers (20 interviews, national survey):** Youth ministry workers refer to those who at the time of data collection have regular ministry responsibilities in EFC-affiliated¹ denominations, congregations or ministry organizations for youth as described in the youth population description above. Youth ministry workers include paid/non-paid youth pastors, youth directors, youth interns and youth volunteers.
3. **Ministry expert population (12 interviews):** Ministry experts include: church leaders, denominational leaders, youth ministry organization leaders, subject matter experts and influencers, speakers, and academics nominated by research partners and recruited through EFC's affiliate denominations, congregations, or ministry organizations, and research partner networks.

Significance: Robust research on this topic will help us:

- learn how social media affects the faith formation of youth and their relationships with the youth ministries they participate in,
- gain insight about the efficacy of current YMW social media engagement for faith formation, and compare our findings with the growing body of literature on the negative effects of social media on teen health and wellbeing,
- identify obstacles and opportunities that social media bring to youth and youth ministries,
- and identify ways social media can be used positively in youth ministry.

¹ <https://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Affiliation/Our-affiliates>