

Why are so many of the most influential moms on the internet Mormon?

## **Influencer culture and LDS theology fit together surprisingly well.**

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [November 3, 2021](#) issue



(Photo by Jessica Rockowitz on Unsplash)

In 2011, Jordan Page, then 24, decided to start a family finance blog.

Page and her husband had recently recovered from what she commonly calls their “financial disaster.” They had put all of their savings into building a home they ultimately couldn’t buy and then accrued \$15,000 in credit card debt trying to stay afloat as Page quit her job to stay at home with the couple’s first child and her husband launched a new start-up business.

None of the advice from the celebrity finance gurus had worked for the Pages, so they had pieced together their own money management system. And it worked. Page was excited to share what she had learned with other moms, and thus Fun Cheap or Free was born.

“I started this blog really more as a creative outlet—as a way for me to simply help other moms while still being a stay-at-home mom,” she says. “And it was great, this hobby blog.”

Today, Page has eight children and what was once a hobby blog is now her job.

She has 915,000 subscribers to her YouTube channel and a combined 950,000 Instagram followers across her six accounts devoted to tips and tricks for making motherhood more manageable. She has appeared on both the *Today Show* and the *Rachael Ray Show*.

On her website, Page now sells budgeting and productivity boot camps along with planners and a baby carrier that she designed. Her company, the Page Company, has 20 employees and is one of the 500 fastest-growing private companies in the United States, according to *Inc.* magazine.

Perhaps the only thing more surprising than the astronomical growth of her brand over the last decade is the fact that Page is Mormon—and that this isn’t really an anomaly. About four years ago, people started noticing a trend: a lot of the most influential moms on the internet were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Like Page, some of these women had amassed hundreds of thousands of followers on social media by sharing their tried-and-true motherhood tips—sometimes in posts sponsored by companies like Hershey’s, Unilever, and Lowe’s. And, also like Page, many of them had spun their internet fame into real-world businesses or book deals.

“Genuinely asking,” queried one Reddit user in October 2017, “why are there so many Mormon bloggers?”

It would be easy to assume that Mormon mothers are prevalent on the internet because they tend to have large families (almost twice as large as the average family in the United States, according to the Pew Research Center) and they are encouraged not to work outside the home if they can help it. Of course some of them might use their downtime to post online about mothering.

And yet, other religious groups hold similar values about family size and motherhood, and the mothers in those other groups haven’t become the darlings of the internet—at least not at the same rate as Mormon women. Why?

As it turns out, there's no one, definitive answer. But it seems that over the last decade, there's been a symbiosis of internet culture in general with aspects of Mormon culture and theology in particular. One could say Mormon mothers are simply having their Esther moment: their church has helped form them for such a time as this.

The internet has become an integral parenting resource. Catherine Archer, who studies social media at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, says that in the absence of a physical village, mothers around the world are now creating digital villages to help them shoulder the load of raising children.

"It's really a liminal time," Archer says of motherhood. "You're going through so many changes that you're really hungry for information; you want reassurance. You're almost, in some ways, vulnerable as well. So there is that need to reach out and have that community."

It didn't take long for advertisers to realize that the digital communities created by mom bloggers like Jordan Page (and later, social media influencers) represented a veritable goldmine.

Mothers control 85 percent of household purchases in the United States, with their spending power topping \$2.4 trillion. In the mid-aughts, many a hobby blog suddenly became a source of income for the women who ran them as brands decided to partner with them in an effort to reach their loyal and engaged audiences.

Pretty soon, it was commonplace to see "mompreneurs" (as Archer calls them) getting paid to post photos of certain products to Instagram or including personalized discount codes alongside product reviews on YouTube that ensured they would get a cut of whatever sales their video generated for a company. Selling motherhood became a potentially lucrative cottage industry that anyone with an HD camera could try her hand at.

This cultural moment dovetailed perfectly with the Mormon belief that the intentional, public sharing of joyful motherhood is something akin to a religious duty. For advertisers, it was a match made in heaven, and Mormon women were quickly ruling the algorithm game.

"The culture of Mormonism encourages a kind of genre of family life," says Laura Vance, author of *Women in New Religions*. "It's such an oversimplification to call it

an all-Americanness, but this way of being family I do think is very appealing—especially in the modern world, where the reality of life is so much more complicated for many, many people.”

In Mormonism, mother work is integral to God’s plan of salvation.

It’s not that Mormon mothers don’t share hard things on the internet. When a 2008 plane crash left Stephanie Nielson, a Mormon mother of three, with 80 percent of her body severely burned, she chronicled her painful physical and emotional recovery on her blog NieNie Dialogues. In 2018, Corrine Stokoe, a Mormon mother of four, used her blog and Instagram account to share the devastating effects of her husband’s pornography addiction. But undergirding these stories and others like them is a tenacious faith in God, God’s goodness, and the deep importance of family.

That isn’t an accident. Within Mormonism, there’s a belief that every member of the church ought to act as a missionary in their particular sphere of influence. For women, that’s traditionally been in the home, but increasingly, it’s been among their social media followers too.

The idea that motherhood is a woman’s highest calling may not be unique to Mormonism. But Ann Duncan—associate professor of American studies and religion at Goucher College and the author of an upcoming book on women who view pregnancy as a spiritual experience—says the Mormon conceptualization of motherhood is truly distinct, and it’s one of the reasons Mormon women are so conspicuous online. They have a strong sense that their voices matter.

“If you think about evangelical Christianity or you think about Catholicism, there’s certainly a strong patriarchal tradition that confines women . . . to maternal roles—[but] that doesn’t necessarily elevate the mother and motherhood at the same time,” Duncan said. “But it absolutely happens in Mormonism.”

The structure of the LDS Church is undeniably patriarchal: women cannot be ordained, and LDS leadership remains entirely White and entirely male. But where other religious groups say they revere motherhood only to turn around and relegate mother work to a place of lesser importance than the work of the church or even the work of capitalism, in Mormonism, mother work is integral to God’s plan of salvation.

In 1995, LDS Church leaders issued *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, which codified the church’s view of the family. Families, they declared, were “central to the

Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."

At the church's general conference the following year, LDS leader Robert D. Hales expanded on this idea in a talk on the LDS doctrine of the eternal family—the belief that if Mormons make and keep sacred covenants in a Mormon temple, their families will be together forever in heaven. It has always been God's plan that family love and companionship continue into eternity, Hales said.

"If we return home alone to our Heavenly Father," he said, "we will be asked, 'Where is the rest of the family?'"

The role that mothers play in this ethos is of cosmic importance. It is in birthing children that women allow premortal spirits to be embodied. It is in raising faithful, Mormon children that women are securing the happiness of an eternal family not only for themselves but for generations to come.

The result of operating within this paradigm is that Mormon mothers feel empowered within their religion, says Duncan. "I wouldn't say they use the term *feminist* necessarily, but it's certainly not a position of submission," she says.

Laid on top of this sense of empowerment is the fact that Mormonism encourages women to document their lives for a public audience. It tells them that their lived experiences are worth documenting because their lives can inspire faith in others, including non-Mormons. It's an ethic that works well on the internet and social media, although it predates both.

Nancy Ross, a former member of the LDS Church who is now an ordained elder in the more liberal, LDS-adjacent Community of Christ, said that multigeneration Mormon families often count the diaries written by their 19th-century foremothers, who trekked out west to Salt Lake Valley, to be among their greatest treasures.

"These are precious," Ross says. "Mormon women's writing has always been precious to Mormon women. And sacred."

Adolescent Mormon girls are strongly encouraged to keep a journal, many of them with the understanding that the true audience for their journals is their future descendants. Even before the emergence of social media, Mormon mothers used blogging platforms like Blogspot and WordPress to share photos and family updates—a sort of proto-Instagram that helped them evangelize about the joys of

motherhood.

Being a Mormon mother on the internet isn't all cute photos and cushy sponsorships.

Page, the home finance blogger, says that the whole point of starting her blog was to share her personal experiences in order to help other women navigate the chaos of motherhood. She never intended to build a brand. She never intended to build a company. But, she says, the entire purpose of the Page Company is to help build stronger families, and that's what keeps her invested in it. If her advice or products can help just one woman to streamline her household responsibilities, thus giving her more time and energy to prioritize her kids and husband, then it would all be worth it.

"We're not here to sell planners, we're not here to make YouTube videos, we're not here to beat our sales from last year," Page says. "We're here to build stronger families—and then all of those things have happened organically."

Of course, being a Mormon mother on the internet isn't always cute family photos and cushy brand sponsorships. By putting themselves out there so publicly, Mormon mothers open themselves up to mom shaming from strangers, potentially millions of them.

Page says that when her audience was smaller, she almost never got comments from trolls. But now the insults come frequently. In fact, there are online forums, housed on multiple platforms, where people do nothing but bash Page and her parenting. Page says it's hard not to let that get under your skin.

"You can tell me all day long that you hate my face. There's nothing I can do about that; I was born that way," she says. "But it really is a punch in the gut when it's something like parenting that maybe you feel self-conscious about anyway. Because there's no rule book, there's no perfect way. You figure it out—and make mistakes a lot."

Mormon social media influencers also have to deal with the psychological effects of constantly performing for a digital audience. In her research, Archer has found that some mom bloggers—exhausted by the endless drive to market themselves and grow their audiences—have started retreating to closed Facebook groups, where they have relative privacy.

“They don’t want to upset the brands, and they don’t want to upset their readers. But they still want to do what they did originally, which is to have that shared space,” Archer says.

Because documenting their lives for public consumption is tied to their religious devotion, Mormon mothers aren’t likely to be among those influencers retreating to private groups. But several women have shuttered their blogs completely as the cracks in their marriages and in their faith made holding up the facade of perfection too much to bear.

In 2016, Natalie Lovin, then Natalie Holbrook, shut down her popular ten-year-old blog Hey Natalie Jean after she and her husband divorced. She had left the LDS Church two years earlier, writing at the time that she was a square peg who was a “member of a very round church.”

When Lovin resurrected her blog in 2018—this time repackaged as a “love letter” to herself, now a tattooed single mom—she described its previous, ultra-curated iteration as a “self-flagellating prison.”

Page admits that blogging and social media are hard. She counts her job as her biggest blessing after her family, but she doesn’t recommend it. When other women come to her for advice on launching their own brand, she laughs and tells them to take up knitting instead.

“It’s really fun, and nobody stalks you on the web,” she says.

And yet, Page says she has seen a “beautiful shift” in the ways Mormon mothers use social media, a shift toward something that seems healthier and more sustainable, though she wishes that Mormon moms felt free to be more explicitly religious online, instead of hoping to entice people with the happy family life that is the fruit of their faith.

“Every once in a while, I will go on and hit the Jesus thing hard,” she says. “But because our religion is very highly scrutinized, we’re very careful to try not to be too preachy. We are already looked at as very strange, and I think we want to try to fit in as much as possible and teach by way of example.”

Overall, Mormon mothers on the internet seem to be embracing a less exacting vision of motherhood—and sharing that vision with their followers.

“Motherhood is freaking hard,” Page says. And more and more, Mormon women are starting to feel comfortable being honest about that, about the times that their houses are messy or they haven’t liked their husbands or they haven’t had it all together.

“Jesus Christ and my Heavenly Father are perfect, and the principles they teach are perfect,” Page says. “Beyond that, everybody’s flawed.”

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