Final Report: The 50-Day Social Media Ads Outreach Experiment (Phase I) New York Yearly Meeting, Quakers, July 2017

Introduction: The Stats

The 50-Day Social Media Ads Outreach Experiment ran from May 12 – July 1 of 2017.

Meeting	Number of local people under age 40 reached by ads	Number of local people who interacted with the ads (liked, commented, visited meeting website)	Estimated number of local people who now remember that there are Quakers in their area ¹	Total Cost
Albany	19,607	115	1,961	\$225.85
Conscience Bay	15,221	78	1,470	\$219.86
Montclair	14,463	114	1,571	\$230.19
Old Chatham	4,115	133	680	\$243.88
Scarsdale	15,371	88	1,549	\$240.77
Wilton	21,244	97	1,880	\$235.66
Total	90,021	625	9,111	\$1,396.21

Executive Summary

Social media represents an unprecedented platform for witness and ministry. Many people under the age of forty use social media as their exclusive source of information and communications.

Six monthly meetings in New York Yearly Meeting participated in an 50-day experiment using social media ads as Quaker outreach. See the results above. At the end of this experiment, we now have proven examples of effective social media ads as well as a stronger understanding of the medium generally. Among other things, we have learned that Facebook (for now) is the ideal social media platform on which to focus Quaker resources.

The next steps involve working directly with meetings to coordinate ads with a consistent, meaningful Facebook presence and developing monthly meetings' independent capacity to engage effectively with social media.

¹ Based on an estimate from Facebook, which is in turn based on an algorithm commonly used in advertising to estimate ad retention

Part I: How the Experiment Came About

At the beginning of January 2017, Gabi Savory Bailey and I launched a series called QuED Days (Quaker Exploration and Discourse). At the time, we were serving New York Yearly Meeting as co-Young Adult Field Secretaries.

QuED Days, which take place once a month on a Saturday in various locations around New York Yearly Meeting, were designed to build meaningful connections between older Friends and younger Friends, Friends from the host meeting and Friends from far away, and Friends who could travel long distances and Friends who couldn't. Each QuED Day consists of three speakers sharing testimonies in the morning, a period of questions and answers, lunch, and open time in the afternoon for spontaneous conversations and connections.²

Gabi and I also saw a need to make the series accessible to Friends who could not participate in person, especially those with chronic illness and those who worked weekend jobs. For that reason, we used Facebook Live to make the morning talks available for viewing online in real time and after the fact.

To build interest in the series, I began lifting quotations from the talks, superimposing these over images, and sharing the newly created "memes" on Facebook. Some of these memes were shared multiple times and were viewed by thousands of people. They became a *de facto* form of outreach.

I wondered what would happen if we used quotations from modern Quakers as outreach more deliberately, through social media ads, especially if we connected those ads to local meeting websites so that a person viewing the ad could immediately learn more about their local meeting. I brought a proposal for such an experiment to New York Yearly Meeting's Ministry Coordinating Committee in April of 2017. (The Ministry Coordinating Committee coordinates the efforts of a number of yearly meeting committees, including those responsible for outreach, and it controls a small budget for that purpose.)

Part II: Approval, Funding, and Accountability

The Ministry Coordinating Committee agreed to fund the 50-Day Social Media Ads Outreach Experiment up to \$500, allowing a maximum of \$250 each for up to two meetings. In return, I agreed to report back to MCC in July of 2017 regarding the experiment and what I had learned. Working in conjunction with Robin Whitely and Arlene Johnson, co-conveners of NYYM's Outreach Working Group, I offered participation in the experiment to monthly meetings that were already involved in OWG. The first two meetings to respond were Old Chatham and Scarsdale, and these meetings' participation was immediately approved. Two other meetings, Albany and Conscience Bay, also responded to the offer and ultimately chose to participate by funding the experiment themselves through their monthly meeting budgets.

² Learn more at www.facebook.com/nyymqued/



In addition, I discovered that a pre-existing grant, *Fostering Vibrant Multigenerational Meetings*, also known as the Partner Project, had funds in place for outreach efforts in the monthly meetings that were part of that project. These two monthly meetings, Wilton and Montclair, agreed to participate in the experiment as well, and their participation was funded through this separate grant.

My time on the project was funded through staff time allocation, as I was serving as New York Yearly Meeting's Interim Young Adult Field Secretary at the time. In keeping with the staff role in which I served, I targeted the ads to people between the ages of 18 and 40.

All six monthly meetings approved (in various ways, in accordance with each meeting's usual procedure) the first six ads—the QuED quote ads (see Index A). Each also approved my making changes to the ads, the targeting, the placement, etc. according to my own judgment, with the understanding that all of this information would be shared with the meetings after the fact.

Part III: Why Social Media?

According to the Pew Research Center³, around 70% of people living in the United States use social media⁴ on a regular basis. Compare this to 5% in the year 2005 and 50% in the year 2011.

When we consider social media use by age, 86% of those 18-29 use social media, and the percentages drop steadily as we study older users. 34% of those ages 65+ use social media regularly.

Facebook is the most popular platform by far. 68% of people living in the U.S. use Facebook, including 88% of those aged 18-29. (In recent years, it has become popular to say that Facebook is no longer relevant to younger generations. It may be true that Facebook is no longer considered "cool" among young adults, but that change in perspective has not resulted in a statistically significant drop in use.)

Final stat: nearly 80% of people who have social media accounts use them every day.

Because social media combines social connection, current events, general information, and entertainment, the increase in social media use has resulted in a decrease in use of newspapers, websites, books, and television. Traditional forms of communication are no longer reaching many people.

Some Friends have wondered whether we should actively resist the use of social media because there are ways in which its use might be in conflict with our testimonies.⁵ For some individual

³ http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/

⁴ The term "social media" does not include traditional websites or search engines. Social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Tumblr, Snapchat, etc. ⁵ There are very real concerns about social media, particularly the ways in which the algorithms are contributing to political polarization. More generally, the misuse of mathematical algorithms and computer programming are a significant threat to social justice throughout the world. Further exploration of this is outside the scope of this report, but I am eager to discuss these concerns with those who are interested.

Friends, this might be a rightly-led path. But as a Religious Society, we must be aware that we have now reached an era in which most of the world (and definitely the United States) is organized around social media. *Many people under the age of forty use social media as their exclusive source of information and communications.* If we do not engage meaningfully with social media, they will never know we exist.

To cast the same question in the light of opportunity rather than fear: social media represents an unprecedented platform for witness and ministry. Refer back to the introduction to get an idea of the potential scope.

Part IV: How Facebook/Instagram Ads Work

Facebook makes its ad system fairly easy to use. It does not take a professional to set up the ads, but it is important that the user is pretty comfortable with technology.

Setting up a Facebook ad involves answering a set of clear questions: first, identifying factors like the purpose of the ad (in our case, simple brand awareness); second, defining an audience; third, setting a timeframe for the ad; and fourth, setting a daily budget and a maximum total budget. Once these steps are complete, the user types in text for the ad, uploads one or more pictures, and attaches the link page (in the case of this ad campaign, the local meeting websites).

Facebook and Instagram are owned by the same company. Ads placed on Facebook can now be placed automatically on Instagram as well, though this may not be the best choice for most Friends' meetings (see Part VI).

It's important to understand what can be done in the process of defining an audience for the ad. The audience can be targeted by zip code, by age, and by literally thousands of other demographics and interest-based factors. For this experiment, I targeted only by age (18-40) and zip code. (I recommended to meetings that they target zip codes within a twenty-minute commute of their worship spaces. Some meetings did exactly that. Others asked me to include zip codes farther away.) I did not target by any other factors.

One of the most popular questions around Facebook ads is, "How much do they cost?" The answer is, "Not much." But it's essentially impossible to respond to this question precisely or to predict the cost of an ad ahead of time. Pricing is controlled by an internal (and proprietary) algorithm and changes based on a number of variables, including day of the week, time of day, placement of ad, device used by the ad viewer, etc. Fortunately, because it is very simple to set a maximum budget, the user can be certain of not spending more than is affordable. In the 50-Day Experiment, ads cost about a penny per viewer.

Once the ads are running—and this happens within minutes of submission—the system begins automatically generating data. Facebook provides ad performance data in 200 categories, many of which are not relevant to any given user. I tracked about ten categories on a regular basis (such as number of people reached, number of people taking action based on the ad, total cost of campaign, etc. See Index B.)



Part V: What I've Learned About Working with Facebook Ads⁶

Within the first five minutes of the experiment, I discovered that text can't be superimposed on the photos used. This was a surprise because text-over-photo is very common on Facebook, but it's not permitted for paid advertisements. I suspect that this is because Facebook is legally liable for the content of such ads but runs so many that it's impossible for each to be checked by a human being; text submitted separately from images can be scanned for potential concerns by a computer. Keeping the text separate probably also allows Facebook to mine more data from its ad users. Therefore, the initial ad placements didn't look as I had anticipated they would (see Index A).

The next thing I learned is that all ads, even those linked to an off-Facebook website, must also link to a Facebook page. Most of the meetings in Phase I of this experiment did not have Facebook pages, so I linked to the QuED page (see Part I). This worked well for Phase I but is not a good long-term solution (see Part XI).

You'll find a lot more information about Facebook Ads in Part VII.

Part VI: What I've Learned About Working with Instagram Ads

In the beginning, I listed all ads on both Facebook and Instagram. This is easy to do because both social networks are under the same corporate ownership, and it seemed ideal because many young adults prefer Instagram to Facebook. However, because New York Yearly Meeting Quakers do not have a meaningful Instagram presence, the ads were ultimately less effective on that platform, and I stopped running ads on Instagram as of June 1st.

This naturally raises the question, "Why not develop a meaningful presence on Instagram?" Doing so is undoubtedly possible, but in my opinion, the time investment required is not advisable at this time. Instagram deliberately differs from Facebook in a number of ways. Instagram posts can't be scheduled ahead of time; Facebook posts can. Instagram posts can only be made from a phone; Facebook posts can be generated through a computer. In other words, a meaningful Instagram presence would require a dedicated person to post, comment, share, etc. multiple times each day, seven days a week, from a cell phone. That would be extremely difficult for NYYM staff and for most monthly meetings.

⁶ A Facebook ad is not the same thing as boosting a post on Facebook. Boosting a post involves a onetime payment to increase viewership of a particular preexisting post on a page (since under ordinary circumstances, the Facebook algorithm only shows page posts to about 10% of those who like the page). A Facebook ad involves a daily payment for any period of time for a special post that appears in the newsfeed of people who have no preexisting relationship with the page originating the ad. The 50-Day Social Media Ad Outreach Experiment was limited to ads and did not involve boosting posts.

Part VII: What Worked? What Didn't?

Because this was a first-time experiment, and because many Friends have limited experience with social media, I kept the participation requirements for meetings very low. I did not ask the meeting itself to have a Facebook presence, although I did require the meeting to have a website to which I could link the ads. Because Facebook ads must link to a Facebook page, even if they also link to an off-Facebook website, I linked all of the Facebook ads to the QuED page (see Part I). I suspect that the overall response to ads would have been higher if each ad had been linked to an active, engaging Facebook page specific to the local Quaker meeting (see Part XI for a proposal on how this could be done easily.)

One of the most important pieces of the experiment was discovering which types of ads draw the most attention. I began with the initial six QuED quotes (see Index A). Of these, the first Christocentric quote performed best; the first Universalist quote also performed well. The other four QuED quotes performed moderately, except for the second Social Justice quote, for which response was very low.

The weekend of June 3rd, immediately after the United States announced its withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, I began experimenting with query-based ads connected to earthcare. A few days later, I added query-based ads along other themes, including community. Not all of the query-based ads performed well. However, the earthcare queries performed better than most of the QuED quotes had, and the community queries were the highest-performing ads yet (see Index A to view all ads).

By June 5th, I had started the process of testing query-based ads in sixteen themes. Those themes were Activism Testimonies, Children, Community, Earthcare, Families, God and Holy Spirit, Important Decisions, Integrity, Jesus, Learning and Sharing, Peace, Personal Testimonies, Respecting Other Perspectives, Service, Valuing All People, and Welcoming.

I tested between two and five different queries in each category to determine which performed best. The queries were pulled from New York Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice and Britain Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice. Most were slightly modified to be comprehensible for a non-Quaker audience.

When I initiated the query-based ads, I also added a "call to action." Marketing research proves that, in general, ads are considerably more effective if they contain some sort of command. For these ads, after some experimentation, I settled on "Come ask the questions with us."

The query-based ads, as a whole, worked considerably better than the QuED quote ads. The response was higher and, in one case, even generated a conversation in the comments. I suspect the query-based ads could be refined further with professional-level access to things like focus groups, but ultimately, I don't feel this is necessary. The Religious Society of Friends, as a whole, doesn't really function as a unified brand, and most Friends don't want us to. It seems to make more sense to have a basic set of ads that can be tweaked, controlled, and commented upon by members of local meetings in a personal manner; in other words, a home-grown sort of ad is more true to who we are as a people.



I experimented with one other type of ad for three of the six meetings. This was an event-type ad, in which I modified the query-based ad approach to include details about a specific gathering to which the neighborhood community was invited (see Index A). The online response to these ads was moderate. I do not know whether the ads resulted in increased attendance at these events (especially since some of the events will take place in July, after this report is written and submitted).

Naturally, a common question after all this work is, "Did anybody new come to the meeting?" All six of the participating meetings had at least some new visitors during the fifty days of the experiment. None of the meetings were able to say for certain that these new visitors came because of the ads.

It's important to remember that marketing professionals commonly state that it takes six to eight "touches" before a sale is made—that is, six to eight encounters with a business before a person might become a customer. In the case of Quakers, this likely would translate to needing to hear about the local Quaker meeting—or at least about Quakers generally—at least six times before considering the possibility of attending. With the exception of Old Chatham (which is located in an area where the population density is very low), none of the ad campaigns came anywhere near six touches per viewer (see "viewing frequency" in Index B).

Using Scarsdale Monthly Meeting as an example, we can begin to get a sense of how long it would take to reach six to eight touches. Facebook estimates that about 14,700 regular Facebook users between the ages of 18 and 40 live within the zip codes we targeted (those within a twenty-minute commute of Scarsdale meeting). At a maximum budget of \$5 per day, Scarsdale's ads are being shown approximately 960 times daily. Therefore, it would take about 92 days for each user to view six ads and about 122 days for each user to view eight ads.

Depending on local population density, and provided the daily budget was set consistently at a \$5 maximum, we would need to run ads in most local meeting areas for 3-4 months before expecting to see a significant increase in meeting attendance.

Part VIII: Developing a Meaningful Presence on Facebook

To learn more about social media generally, I turned to the Social Media Church Podcast⁷, a regular series produced by two full-time employees of evangelical mega churches, each of whom is (or has been) exclusively devoted to forty hours per week doing church work through social media. I listened to dozens of podcasts and supplemented this with online research.

I've come to believe that, for Quakers, developing a meaningful presence on Facebook is essential⁸. Facebook has more users than any other social media platform; it can handle text, photos, videos,

⁷ http://socialmedia.church

⁸ Social media demands agility and adaptation. For now, Facebook is the dominant social media platform and arguably the most useful social media platform in which to invest resources. That will not always be the case. We need to reassess at least yearly—is Facebook still the best platform for us?

events, conversation groups, and ads; and because posts can be scheduled ahead of time, a monthly meeting can develop a meaningful presence through one Friend's dedicated efforts of about an hour per week (ideally, broken up to a few minutes per day).

When I use the phrase "meaningful presence," I mean developing a Facebook page that is kept in a timely manner and is used for information, communications, pastoral care, and outreach.

Information—the Facebook page is regularly updated with upcoming events and announcements. For events, the administrator invites Friends individually so that everyone is sure to see it. Announcements are tagged with relevant Friends' names. The "about" section contains clear information about worship times and has a single-sentence welcoming message.

Communications—the page administrator is responsive to private messages that come through the page as well as to comments on posts. At least a few other Friends in the meeting visit the page regularly, liking, commenting, and sharing. Statements from the monthly meeting, quarterly meeting, yearly meeting, and larger organizations are shared on the page. The administrator of the page also shares Quaker epistles from other groups.

Pastoral care—when potentially traumatizing events occur, whether they are international events or something closer to home, the page administrator is ready with relevant and spiritually grounded posts. These don't have to be created; they already exist. Ideally, the page administrator has a list prepared of queries, statements, videos, Scriptures, quotations, etc., arranged topically, so that it's easy to post grounding messages about peace or grief or climate or whatever else is needed, very quickly.

Outreach—the page administrator posts content several times per week that will speak to a curious seeker who has stumbled upon the page. Examples of this content are QuakerSpeak videos, blogs, queries, brief passages from Faith and Practice, etc. These posts arrive consistently (and can be scheduled ahead of time quite easily).

A couple of other notes about a meaningful Facebook presence: photos and videos tend to be far more effective than text alone, and time of day matters. For most meetings, the best time to post will be shortly after the dinner hour when more people are using social media, though this could vary. By finding the timing 'sweet spot' and posting at that time only, you will increase the viewership of your posts considerably.

Part IX: Beyond Facebook (Websites and Landing Pages)

Each of the Facebook ads in this experiment linked to the QuED Facebook page (see Part I) and the local meeting's website. In Index A, you can see that Facebook automatically pulls the first seven to eight words from the website to place in the link at the bottom of the ad. This is a good reason to be very careful about choosing those first seven to eight words. If you're strategic, you can sneak in the name of your meeting <u>and</u> a welcoming message. It's probably best to avoid "monthly meeting" in that intro, given that most people won't click the link and find out that "monthly meeting" doesn't mean a meeting that meets monthly. Albany Monthly Meeting simply



changed its own name, for the purpose of the website, to "Albany Friends Meeting." Problem solved.

Another trick is to embed a pop-up form in your homepage that says something along the lines of "send us a message" or "can we answer any questions?" Such a form has a place in it for the user to enter their email address, and a pre-designated member of the meeting can respond quickly. While such a pop-up is somewhat annoying to your regular users, research indicates that it's also extremely effective for seekers.

Other quick tips for a homepage—either update it consistently (every week), or avoid putting announcements on it altogether. This way, the site never gets out of date. Place information about worship (time, place, welcome message, childcare) in a dominant location. Choose one font and stick to it. Limit your color palette to about three complementary colors. And *use photos of people*. Pictures of buildings aren't nearly as eye-catching and don't provoke an emotional response.

Part X: Further Questions

There are a few things that Phase I of this experiment couldn't cover, and so these remain as unresolved questions. Some might be explored in Phase II, and others will have to be left to the future.

- 1) What are the relative benefits of targeting ages 18-40 as opposed to some other age group? And what if we eliminated the age targeting entirely? One major benefit to the 18-40 age range is that each user sees the ads more frequently and is therefore more likely to remember seeing them. It would take considerably more time and money to achieve the same frequency of views for a wider age group. But might widening or narrowing the range have some other unforeseen effects?
- 2) What might happen if we experimented with more specific targeting? Facebook ads can be targeted by tens of thousands of different factors, some of which feel directly in conflict with Quaker testimonies—targeting by income, for example, or housing type. Other potential targeting factors seem neutral and irrelevant, like favorite television series. But others might be worth exploring—for example, targeting family-related query ads to parents with young children.
- 3) What if Quakers experimented with Facebook-based video advertising? What kind of videos would be relevant to seekers?
- 4) How might the ad effectiveness change if local meeting members followed up through Facebook with every individual who liked or commented on an ad?
- 5) How much difference would it make if, in addition to being linked to the local meeting website, every ad were also linked to a highly effective local meeting Facebook page?
- 6) How can we provide support for local meetings that want to explore social media based outreach but don't have any Friends with the necessary skills?



Part XI: A Proposal (Phase II)

Within New York Yearly Meeting, I hope to move forward with a formal Phase II, supported by the yearly meeting organization and funded 50% through local meetings and 50% through the yearly meeting.

However, I believe that the basic concept behind Phase II is replicable anywhere, and therefore, I'm going to detail it here. This model presupposes a local meeting or church that is interested in experimenting with social media based outreach and that has at least one member with some familiarity with Facebook and time to volunteer. This model also requires a Friend from outside that local meeting or church who is familiar with Facebook advertising and who can serve as a partner for multiple local meetings and churches simultaneously.

Step #1 – The local meeting/church appoints one co-admin for its Facebook page, and the Friend from the outside—the "consulting Friend," for lack of a better term—serves as the other co-admin. If the meeting doesn't already have a Facebook page, the co-admins establish one.

Step #2 – The local meeting's co-admin takes responsibility for posting timely local information (announcements, events) and for responding to messages and comments by seekers or meeting members/attenders on the page.

Step #3 – The consulting Friend co-admin takes responsibility for posting a consistent stream of Quaker content (queries, blogs, QuakerSpeak videos, etc.) and managing the Facebook ads.

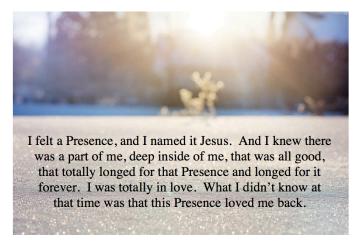
Step #4 - The meeting appoints 2-3 additional Friends who agree, on an informal basis, to visit the meeting's Facebook page at least once a week and comment on, like, and share the materials on the page.

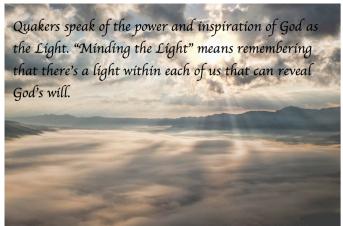
Step #5 – The co-admins remain in constant communication, and the local Friend slowly begins to take some responsibility for the stream of Quaker content and managing the ads, with help from the consulting Friend.

Step #6 – Ideally, the consulting Friend will step away from the project entirely within a couple of months, with the local Friends now having the necessary skills to maintain the ads and the Facebook presence without help.

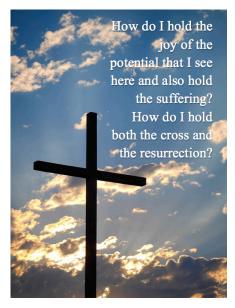
Index A: The Ads

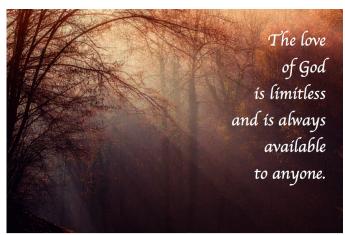
The original QuED Quote memes. "We commit to the demanding..." is not a QuED quote but instead a passage from a statement issued by NYYM's clerk and general secretary called "Quakers Reject the Politics of Division."

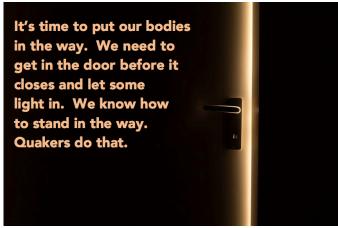




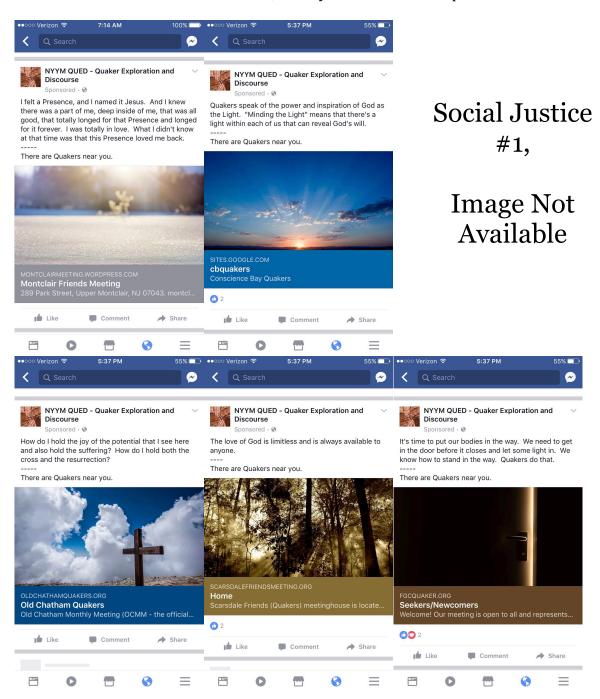




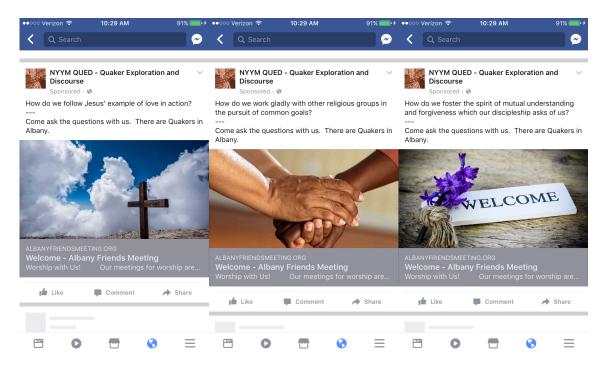




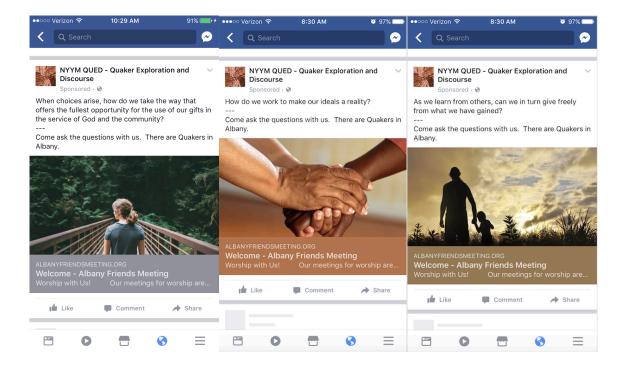
The original six "QuED Quote" ads, based on these memes, of which Christocentric 1 and Universalist 1 were the most effective, as they were seen on cell phones:



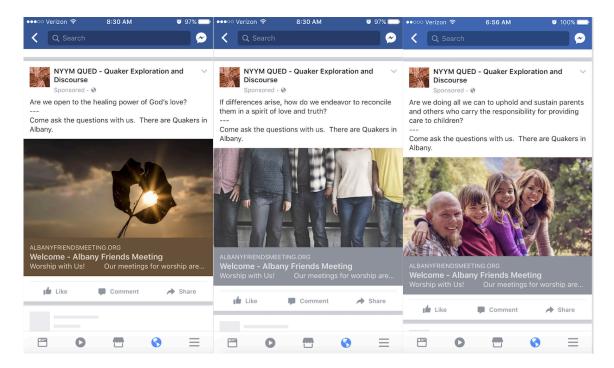
The best of each of the query-based ads, by category, as seen on cell phones. Categories in this row are Jesus, Respecting Other Perspectives, and Welcoming:



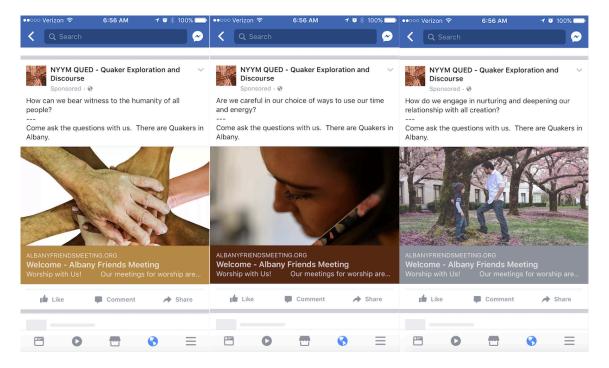
The best of each of the query-based ads, by category, as seen on cell phones. Categories in this row are Important Decisions, Activism Testimonies, and Learning and Sharing:



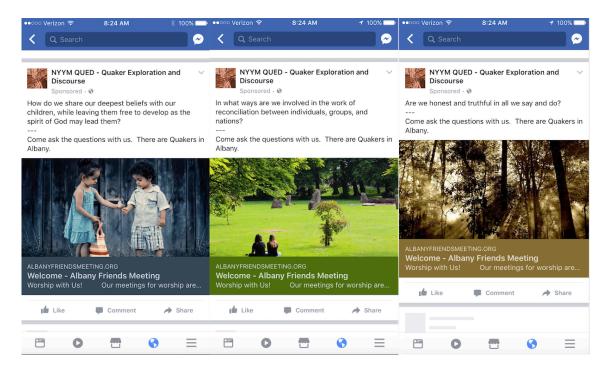
The best of each of the query-based ads, by category, as seen on cell phones. Categories in this row are God and Holy Spirit, Community, and Families:



The best of each of the query-based ads, by category, as seen on cell phones. Categories in this row are Valuing All People, Personal Testimonies, and Earthcare:



The best of each of the query-based ads, by category, as seen on cell phones. Categories in this row are Children, Peace, and Integrity:



The best of each of the query-based ads, by category, as seen on cell phones. This is the ad for the Service category:



Index B: The Data

Data, broken down by local area campaign:

Meeting	Reach	Amount Spent	Estimated Ad Recall Lift	Viewing
			Rate ⁹	Frequency
Albany	19,607	\$225.85	10%	2.52
Conscience Bay	15,221	\$219.86	10%	2.66
Montclair	14,463	\$230.19	11%	2.94
Old Chatham ¹⁰	4,115	\$243.88	17%	7.34
Scarsdale	15,371	\$240.77	10%	2.98
Wilton ¹¹	21,244	\$235.66	9%	2.66
Total	90,021	\$1,396.21	11%	3.52

Meeting	Actions	People Taking Action	Post Reactions	Post Comments	Post Shares	Link Clicks
Albany	115	105	24	2	2	84
Conscience Bay	78	71	24			53
Montclair	114	99	25		1	85
Wilton	133	114	24	2		99
Scarsdale	88	86	25			63
Old Chatham	97	94	17	1	1	72
Total	625	569	101	5	4	457

¹¹ Wilton Meeting's reach is startlingly high given the area's population density, but this is because Friends at Wilton meeting chose to include a significantly wider geographic area than the other meetings. My recommendation was to limit the ads to a twenty-minute travel radius; Wilton extended beyond that. Based on our limited data, it's not possible to theorize what effects this choice might have had.



⁹ Percentage of viewers who would, if asked, remember viewing the ads two days later.

¹⁰ Careful examination will show that Old Chatham's data is an outlier. This is because Old Chatham is in a rural area with very low population density. A smaller number of viewers reached meant that each viewer saw between 6 and 7 ads, as opposed to other areas, where viewers saw between 2 and 3 ads. This appears to have led directly to a higher number of actions and a higher ad recall lift rate. I would theorize that the actions and ad recall lift rate for other areas would increase given additional time, because additional time would increase the viewing frequency.