

The Faces Behind JewBook

An Exploration of Online Jewish Communities

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"The showing up for each other and being there together is more than I could have ever expected from this work."

Research Question: How do members of online Jewish spaces describe their connection to Jewish community through online platforms?

Method: Qualitative semi-structured interviews

Why study online Jewish communities?

- Online Jewish spaces are examples of interactions between technology and religion
- Perspectives from active users provide insight on how these spaces function as communities
- Pandemic lockdowns forced people to meet their needs for community through online platforms

Participants

Jet- 33 year old man who hosts a popular podcast which covers issues related to 21st century Judaism

- Spoke about the online Jewish world as a geographic region with neighborhoods
- Positioned himself as an advocate for online Jewish engagement seeing online space as underserved and decentered
- Expressed excitement about the opportunities that the internet has given and continues to give the Jewish community

Alyssa - 29 year old woman who runs an online Torah study organization with weekly classes

- Devoted to utilizing online platforms to make her Torah study classes a place where people can build community
- Does not identify as an "online community person" but shared stories of watching strong relationships form and feeling supported by her online community
- Emphasized the ways that online community is important for people who do not have access to Jewish community where they live

Moyshe - 27 year old non binary person who is active in Jewish facebook including moderating groups

- Has built and maintained close relationships through "JewBook," or Jewish Facebook
- Expressed gratitude for the role online Jewish community has played in their sense of self and relationship to Judaism
- Prefers in person communities but sees online and in person Jewish communities as relying on each other

Highlighted themes:

Relationships

- Sense of community for all participants came from relationships
- Participants formed meaningful relationships through online platforms
- Relationships motivated participants to engage with and contribute to online Jewish communities

In Person vs Online Community

- Participants had different opinions on the value of online communities compared to in person communities
- None of the participants saw online Jewish engagement as an alternative to in person community
- Participants emphasized the accessibility of online community especially for people who do not have a Jewish community in person or who do not always feel welcome in Jewish spaces



"[JewBook] feels so strongly like community that it's almost hard to describe where that sense comes from."



"I conceptualize digital Jewish space as the main geography where my Jewish life happens"

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15 celebrate();
16
17 digital jewish space = geography;
18
    
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1. Community in Code
2. Web of Jewish Experience
3. Virtual Shtetl
4. Hug through the Screen
5. Map of Online Judaism
6. Demystifying Online Friends
7. Beyond the Profile



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