

Facegloria: Facebook for Brazil's Evangelicals

July 4 2015, by Rosa Sulleiro



A man looks at his profile on the social network for evangelicals Facegloria, in Sao Paulo, Brazil

Fluffy clouds waft across a blue sky as you log in and while you chat with friends, Gospel music rings out: welcome to Facegloria, the social network for Brazilian Evangelicals.

The new website's homepage bears a passing resemblance to the global

phenomenon Facebook.

But Facegloria, which has attracted 100,000 users in its first month, was set up to serve those who find billionaire entrepreneur Mark Zuckerberg's version sinful.

There's no "liking" on Facegloria. Here, you click "Amen."

"On Facebook you see a lot of violence and pornography. That's why we thought of creating a network where we could talk about God, love and to spread His word," one of the founders, web designer Atilla Barros, told AFP.

It all started three years ago when Barros and three other devout Christian colleagues working at the mayor's office in Ferraz de Vasconcelos, near Brazil's financial capital Sao Paulo, decided there was a market for a squeaky-clean version of Facebook.

Given that 42 million of Brazil's 202 million people are estimated to be Evangelicals—and the fervent Protestant movement continues to make inroads into traditionally dominant Catholicism—they might be right.

With help from the Ferraz de Vasconcelos mayor's own pocket, they set up a business with about \$16,000 in start-up money and Facegloria was born.

Online patrolling

Anyone can sign up to Facegloria.com, but if they do, they better mind how they behave.

Swearing is banned—there is a list of about 600 forbidden words—as is any violent or erotic content, or photo or video depictions of homosexual

activity.



(From L) Thiago, Davis, Daiane and Atilla, creators of the social network for evangelicals, Facegloria, pose for a photo during an interview in Sao Paulo, Brazil

"We want to be morally and technically better than Facebook. We want all Brazilian Evangelicals to shift to Facegloria," Barros said.

Behind the scenes, more than 20 volunteers patrol online to weed out bad language and to decide whether or not to allow potentially risque selfies and bikini shots. Even pictures showing tobacco and alcohol get scrutinized for possible removal.

But the morality cops don't have a hard job.

"Our public doesn't publish these kinds of photos," said one of the volunteers, Daiane Santos, 26, who spends six hours a day working for Facegloria, in addition to his job at the town's commerce department.

Ten million souls

Brazil has the world's biggest Roman Catholic population.

However Evangelicals, who numbered just six percent of the population in 1980, are now 22 percent, while the Catholic total has dropped from 90 percent to 63 percent.

At that rate, Evangelicals will become the majority by 2040 and Facegloria hopes to be riding the wave.

"Evangelicals have spread because of the intense urbanisation over the last 50 years," said Edin Abumanssur, an expert on religion at Sao Paulo's Catholic University.



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"The Pentecostal message which is preached in the outskirts of cities and the favelas puts a lot of emphasis on the individual as being responsible for his behavior if he wants help from God too.

"This kind of faith works well in cities."

The religious movement's influence is seen everywhere.

The biggest-selling books in Brazil over the last two years have been autobiographical works by Edir Macedo, who founded the powerful Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in 1977, and owns the country's third-biggest media group.

In parliament, politicians from the Evangelical wing have growing clout, while on the football pitch superstar Neymar has a cross tattooed on his neck.

Barros expects Facegloria to become online Brazil's go-to site.

"In two years we hope to get to 10 million users in Brazil. In a month we have had 100,000 and in two we are expecting a big increase thanks to a mobile phone app," he said.

Acir dos Santos, the mayor of Ferraz de Vasconcelos, says there's no limit.

"Our network is global. We have bought the Faceglory domaine in English and in all possible languages. We want to take on Facebook and Twitter here and everywhere," he said.

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