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Address all communications, manuscripts, reviews, and journals for exchange to:

Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication
St. John's University
Ladprao, Bangkok 10900
Thailand

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How to Communicate in the Age of Web 4.0?: Challenges and Possibilities for Religions in Asia

Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo

Asia today is fast becoming digitalized, as the figures from the Digital in 2017 Global Overview study indicate. More than half of the world's Internet users are from Asia and almost half of the people in Asia are Internet users. As such, in the emerging context of a highly digitalized Asia, this article explores the challenges and possibilities that the Internet offers to the religions in Asia, many of which have begun to use the Internet. Among these is the serious threat of Internet addiction as well as those that come with the specific features of the various stages in the development of the Internet from Web 1.0 to Web 3.0. Finally, it attempts towards a sketch of the coming age of Web 4.0 and what new questions and concerns this can imply for the religions in Asia.

The Internet and social media penetration figures for Asia presented in the *Digital in 2017 Global Overview*¹ are quite revealing. According to the study, Internet penetration in the Asia-Pacific Region has reached 46% (1.909 billion) while social media penetration has reached 36% (1.514 billion) of the population. In terms of Internet usage, the Philippines recorded the highest

¹ *Digital in 2017: Global Overview* is a quantitative study of Internet and social media penetration worldwide jointly made by We Are Social, a marketing and PR agency specializing in social media platforms, in partnership with Hootsuite, a company that specializes in social media integration. In true digital fashion, the report is available online in the form of several hundred infographic slides at <http://wearesocial.com/sg/blog/2017/01/digital-in-2017-global-overview> (accessed 3 April 2017).

Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo holds a Master of Arts degree, Major in Theological Studies from the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University. At present, he teaches Theology, Philosophy and Sociology at the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas in Manila where he is also taking up doctoral studies, major in Theology.

number of hours spent daily on the Internet, with an average of nine hours, closely followed by Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia at the third, fourth and fifth places. In terms of social media penetration, the United Arab Emirates, South Korea, Singapore, Hongkong and Malaysia, occupied the top five places while the Philippines emerged again as the top country when it comes to time spent on social media with an average of four hours per day. Saudi Arabia showed the highest growth in the number of social media users, with a whopping increase of 73% compared to 2016, followed by the United Arab Emirates, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Today, more than half of the world's Internet users are from Asia and almost half of the people in Asia are Internet users.

All these figures indicate that while various factors such as cultural and linguistic barriers, lack of infrastructure, and costly telecommunication charges have slowed down Internet and social media penetration in the continent,² Internet use in Asia has been growing rapidly and will continue to grow in the next few years. In fact, the same study predicts that the halfway mark for Internet penetration in the Asia-Pacific region will have been crossed by the latter part of 2017. This makes the Internet a formidable force to reckon with for all religions in Asia, especially with the looming threat of Internet addiction.

“A growing epidemic”

Also referred to as “PIU” (Problematic Internet Use) or “CIU” (Compulsive Internet Use), “internet addiction,” simply put, pertains to “excessive Internet use that interferes with daily life.”³ However, we must note that “internet addiction” as such has yet to gain formal recognition and definition from the field of psychiatry. In the fifth and latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) that came out in November 2013, “internet gaming disorder” has been included as a “condition for further study,” i.e. a probable mental disorder subject to confirmation, while addiction to the Internet itself was not mentioned.⁴

² See Peng Hwa Ang and Chee Meng Loh, “Internet Development in Asia” https://www.isoc.org/inet96/proceedings/h1/h1_1.htm (accessed 3 April 2017).

³ Sookeun Byun et al., “Internet Addiction: Metasynthesis of 1996–2006 Quantitative Research,” *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2009): 204.

⁴ See American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed., (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 797–798.

Nonetheless, addiction to the Internet is becoming even more noticeable. In Western and more Westernized civilizations, this can already be observed in what is called Generation Z or *Post-Millennials*, born around the years 1995–2012. They were the first to be dubbed as “digital natives” who became adept at using cyber technology from an early age. What is even more worrisome in Asia is that according to some studies, Internet addiction may affect Asians more virulently than their Western counterparts. For example, students in China were said to experience a higher rate of Internet addiction than their counterparts in the United States who have been using the Internet for much longer. Many of them now preferred online to offline social interaction and resorted to overuse of the Internet as a means to escape societal pressure.⁵ As such, although Asia has long been on the other side of the so-called “digital divide,” what is happening now in the other side of the globe may be taken by us as an early warning on what can happen soon to our own people, especially the youth:

Addicted to pocket computers, such as smartphones and tablets, anxious teenagers are constantly monitoring their popularity among their peers, tormented by feelings of inadequacy and doubt. Easy access to pornography fosters this paranoia, offering a distorted image of human bodies and relationships. Unchecked, all of this transparent neurosis can lead to a disastrous loss of privacy, to the torture of being bullied, to self-harm and despair.⁶

Interestingly, a psychological study done in 2014 linked Facebook use to depressive symptoms.⁷ Even without any cyberbullying, self-esteems fluctuate as people see the posts of others and the reactions these get and unconsciously compare themselves. In line with this, we also have the phenomenon of “FOMO” or the “Fear of Missing Out,” rooted in the same dynamics of social comparison. “They’re having exciting experiences that you’re not. They attended the hottest concert in town and you didn’t... Person after person is having the time of their

⁵ See L. Zhang, C. Amos and W.C. McDowell, “A Comparative Study of Internet addiction between the United States and China,” *Cyberpsychology and Behavior* Vol. 11, No. 6 (2008): 727–9. For a similar study, see also Cheng-Fang Yen, Ju-Yu Yen and Chih-Hung Ko, “Internet addiction: ongoing research in Asia,” *World Psychiatry* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2010): 97.

⁶ Daniel O’Leary, “Missing the Point,” *The Tablet*, 25 January 2014, 8.

⁷ See Mai-ly N. Steers, Robert E. Wickham and Linda K. Acitelli, “Seeing Everyone Else’s Highlight Reels: How Facebook Usage is Linked to Depressive Symptoms,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 33, No. 8 (2014): 701–731.

lives. And you? Well, not so much.”⁸ In spite of this, people remain hooked to the Internet and to social media, constantly checking for updates, lest they also miss out on the latest “trending,” thereby ending up trapped in a wide open cage. As Stuart said in the British sitcom *Vicious*, “They make me nervous, all these young people, skittering about like mice, desperate to get back to the Internet.”

If such can be said of Generation Z, what more can be said of the upcoming generation they propose to call Generation A? These are the literal “digital natives” raised by “iNanny” who learned their rudiments from popular online applications such as “ABC Letters” “Busy Shapes” and “E-Flash Apps.” From the onset, the digital world for them has been cradle, home and school. While there may be efforts on the part of some parents and educators to adopt a more analog or at least a mixed approach, the trend is pointing to a progressively wider and deeper influence of technology on this generation that is likely to be even more attached to digital technology than the previous one.

Thus, while formal recognition and definition from experts is pending, Internet addiction has been gaining wide acknowledgement and attention from many clinical practitioners. For instance, Dr. Richard Graham, the psychiatrist responsible for the first rehabilitation center for technology addiction in Britain at the Catio Nightingale Hospital in London, has identified five major indicators of internet addiction, namely: lack of interest in other activities, constant talk or distraction about technology, mood swings, withdrawal symptoms and devious or maladaptive behavior. Among all these, Dr. Graham singles out withdrawal as the clear sign of addiction, evidenced by signs of “severe distress and agitation” whenever separated from the Internet. This is analogous to how drug or tobacco dependents crave a “hit” at regular intervals.⁹ As such, even prior to its formal recognition as a mental disorder in the DSM, many practitioners have begun to recognize and in fact address what the Center for Internet Addiction has already called “a growing epidemic.”¹⁰ Such an alarming and yet at the same time promising phenomenon as the

⁸ Linda Sapadin, Ph.D., “Fear of Missing Out” <https://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2015/10/12/fear-of-missing-out/> (accessed February 28, 2017)

⁹ Victoria Woollaston, “The five signs your child is addicted to their iPad - and how to give them a ‘digital detox’” <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2479109/The-signs-child-addicted-iPad--digital-detox.html> (accessed February 28, 2017).

¹⁰ See <http://netaddiction.com/>

Internet cannot but cause deep concern for all religions in Asia today, given the rate that Asia has been catching up for the years it has lagged behind in terms of Internet and social media penetration.

At this point, we can briefly mention some of the efforts that have been made to address this. In November 2011, a symposium entitled “Buddhism and Digital Media” was held in California State University regarding the practice of Buddhism in the Internet. In March 2014, a conference entitled “Digital Islam: How the Internet and Social Media are Reshaping the Islamic Marketplace in Central Asia” was held in the University of Michigan. Here in the Philippines, the University of Santo Tomas in cooperation with the St. Joseph Freinademetz Communication Center has held two conferences entitled “The Gospel in Digital Society: Asian Realities and Challenges” and “Sharing Faith in a Modern Age: New Ways of Communicating” in October 2016 and March 2017. All of these efforts manifest a concern on the part of Asian religions to come to terms with the opportunity and threat that is the Internet vis-a-vis their faith communities. However, these initiatives remain scarce and inadequate at present, and largely confined to the academic setting.

From Overcoming to Transforming

In London, Dr. Graham runs a 28-day “digital detox” program for children addicted to the Internet which was worth £16,000 in 2013. It begins with an initial seven-day stage involving an “outright ban on all technology” and also includes therapy sessions, chaperoned trips to retrain the patients to function normally in the real world, as well as “digital hygiene” classes aimed at “finding the root of the problem and *teaching healthier ways* of using the Internet.”¹¹ We note that the “outright ban” is only an initial stage in the program, which then moves forward to a more productive reintegration of Internet and life.

Hence, in contrast with other rehabilitation programs, the difference of treating Internet addiction from treating other addictions is clear. In the case of

¹¹ Gemma Aldridge, “Inside Britain’s first internet rehab for kids where a ‘digital detox’ costs £16k for 28 days” <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/inside-britains-first-internet-rehab-1844778> (accessed February 28, 2017). Emphasis added. In the Philippines, we also have rehabilitation centers that already offer programs for Internet addiction such as “Kaya Rehab Philippines” in Itogon, Benguet. See their website <http://www.kayarehab.com/>

Internet addiction, the goal of recovery is not cessation or quitting but finding a path to a more creative use that does not interfere with but rather enriches life. Such an approach that is more “enabling” instead of “restrictive” has been found even in children to be more effective, empowering them to deal with risks while maximizing opportunities.¹² After all, there is clearly no turning back from the Internet for anyone today, with this technology expanding its influence over us even more, for ill or for good.

The question then is how to harness the power of the Internet in the service of faith and use it as an effective means to promote the dignity and wellbeing of persons. In this regard, it may be helpful here to briefly trace the development of the Internet in its first three stages and the challenges and possibilities that it opens for religions in Asia, while providing some illustrative examples.¹³ Note however that each of these developmental stages builds on the previous stage and usually retains the features and capabilities of its precedents. They are also not mutually exclusive and often overlap. Thus, a specific online platform such as Facebook or Google may exhibit the characteristics of more than one stage since these platforms need to develop to keep themselves updated. Afterwards, we will try to sketch a picture of the horizon before us:

a. The first stage or Web 1.0 has been termed the “web of information connections”¹⁴ or what I would call “informative web.” It consisted mainly of webpages with “read only” content that made the Internet itself not only an immense universal library but a potent “information highway” for sharing

¹² See Sonia Livingstone et al. “Maximizing Opportunities and Minimizing Risks for Children Online: The Role of Digital Skills in Emerging Strategies of Parental Mediation,” *Journal of Communication* 67 (2017): 82-105.

¹³ The framework we are proposing here, which follows the development of the Internet, is to be distinguished from a seemingly similar but very different framework proposed by Lytle, which follows the development of human communication in general. In Lytle’s framework, Faith Formation 1.0 corresponds to oral communication, 2.0 to written communication, 3.0 to mass media and 4.0 to interactive communication. See Julie Anne Lytle, *Faith Formation 4.0: Introducing an Ecology of Faith in a Digital Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2013).

¹⁴ These descriptors are taken from Sareh Aghaei, Mohammad Ali Nematbakhsh, and Hadi Khosravi Farsani, “Evolution of the World Wide Web: From Web 1.0 to Web 4.0” in *International Journal of Web & Semantic Technology*, Vol. 3, No.1 (January 2012) available online <http://www.ftsm.ukm.my/ss/Book/EVOLUTION%20OF%20WWW.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2017), 1.

knowledge even across the globe. Many religions the world over have learned to take advantage of this potential by coming up with their own websites to establish their online presence and make key documents and other important information available to their followers. In the age of Web 1.0, a personal computer or mobile phone can become the faith community’s bulletin board or newsletter, which can be accessed more conveniently than its analog counterpart. Making essential information available such as worship schedules, calendars, and current news may seem very basic but they are important not only in keeping our members well-informed but also in building their sense of belonging and community. As Eilers said, “informed people are happier people because they feel part of the Church and/or the organization they belong to.”¹⁵ Web 1.0 makes it so much easier for faith communities to achieve that. Another fine example of Web 1.0 faith use is the application *Quran Majeed* which has been downloaded more than three million times. It features text and audio versions of the Koran not only in Arabic but in the other languages, making it more accessible to Muslims whose first language is not Arabic.

However, such a massive and liberal diffusion of information can lead to a “democratization” of access to information, often with little or no direct guidance or mentoring, which seems to pose a threat to established religious authority. Believers who are now more informed can become not only more intelligent but also potentially more critical. After all, anyone who has an internet connection can now have first-hand access not only to primary religious texts but also to other sources of doctrine, commentaries, and theological discussions. There is now in the Internet a veritable theological library for at least all the major religions—better equipped, efficiently searched, and readily available—than the libraries we find in local communities, even those in the local seminaries or training institutes we have for religious leaders. “For the first time, lay people can easily separate religious commands from tradition by looking at holy texts and scholarship rather than relying on local preachers.”¹⁶

Thus, the democratization of access to information that came with Web 1.0 often comes with an attendant flattening of the world when it comes to authority. Having the tools of an expert, anyone can now feel like an expert

¹⁵ Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD. *Communicating in Ministry and Mission: An Introduction to Pastoral and Evangelizing Communication* (Manila: Logos Publications Inc., 2009), 180.

¹⁶ “Islam and Technology: The Online Ummah,” *The Economist*, August 18, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21560541> (accessed February 28, 2017).

but may not necessarily be one. Gone are the days when dissent was unthinkable and religious leaders held a kind of absolute “magisterium” over the people, being looked up to as experts with dogmatic authority who lead out the ignorant from the cave of nescience to the light of truth. Where Web 1.0 is, no one is ignorant anymore and some people have the impression that the truth is just a click away. In an age of trolls and bots, numbers and trends can give an illusion of credibility which in turn gives an illusion of veracity. How open are we to welcome and how ready are we to address the questions and opinions, even dissenting beliefs, that arise from such democratization? How ready are we also to promote truth and correct error where it occurs in this democratized web, without antagonizing people and driving them away?

b. The second stage or Web 2.0 has been called the “web of people connections” or what I would call “interactive web.” With the addition of a “write” feature, the Internet has become bi-directional and thus more dynamic. People could now upload their own content in various online platforms such as Friendster, Multiply or Blogger—and later in YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, other users can now interact with them in different ways such as liking/reacting, asking or commenting. This key development has given rise to online communities or “networks,” societies bonded by what is aptly termed “social media,” bringing together the people we call “netizens” into a virtual “global village.”

On their part, quite some religions did not fail to make their presence felt in these virtual spaces. Many religious leaders and institutions now maintain their own social media accounts, whether directly or indirectly, which allows them to reach and interact with their flock. Web 2.0 is thus the Internet of cybersanghas, online ummahs, virtual “dioceses without borders” and the like, all reaching out to what Pope Benedict XVI has called the “digital continent,”¹⁷ arguably the largest with its 3.773 billion citizens and counting. Thus, the “digital continent” is also the most important mission frontier for any religion today, with more and more of the people in our planet spending more and more of their day online.

However, while it is obvious that we need to establish an online presence, we also need to pay attention to some important issues that arise with the emergence of these online religious communities. For instance, there is the crucial question of

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *44th World Communications Day Message*, 24 January 2010. See also his *43rd World Communications Day Message*, 24 January 2010.

legitimate religious authority, especially for religions that are not highly centralized, and even for those that are. When literally anybody can setup a social media account, the question remains as to who can validly interpret sacred texts for others, who can rightly issue religious and moral prescriptions, who are truly competent to offer spiritual guidance? Whitaker expressed the dilemma that such a situation presents, in the case of Islam:

...For some this introduces an element of democracy; for others, anarchy.

Potentially it opens up the field for all sorts of new and alternative interpretations of Islam alongside the more traditional versions.

Potentially, too, it can open the eyes of Muslims who are entrenched in their local brand of Islam to the diversity of their religion in its global form - though that in itself is highly controversial.¹⁸

Besides the question of religious authority, we also have the serious issue of breeding religious fundamentalism in the Internet at high-speed digital pace. For instance, there is concern over the practice of what has been termed as *e-jihad*, which can range from spreading jihadist propagandas and campaigns online, launching cyber attacks by means such as hacking and cracking, to using the Internet as a means to organize terrorist operations.¹⁹ We also have the rise of online trolls, now known as “Internet Hindus,” who rally under the banner of *Hindutva* and attack websites they deem offensive to Hindu religion and culture.

Also, there are the people who visit the websites of religious communities for non-religious motives such as to gain knowledge, overcome loneliness, to relax, or even to escape reality and isolate themselves from others.²⁰ Would such “profane” and at times also “antisocial” uses of religious websites, particularly of those that can be classified as prayer websites or online chapels and temples, which are considered by believers as sacred space, be acceptable? Besides, not everyone believes that

¹⁸ Brian Whitaker, “Islam at the electronic frontier,” *The Guardian*, 11 August 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/2003/aug/11/comment.worlddispatch> (accessed February 28, 2017).

¹⁹ See Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).

²⁰ See M.J. Laney, “Christian Web Usage: Motives and Desires,” *Religion and Cyberspace*, ed. M. T. Hojsgaard, and M. Warburg (London: Routledge, 2005), 166–79.

online faith resources and communities can nurture faith and they continue to have a clear preference for offline religion and community. For instance, we find in a study on American Buddhism and the Internet:

Not everyone agreed that Buddhism online offered a spiritual connection to others. One respondent said that they only felt community online as they would with the rest of the world and that the Internet was for information and not communion. Another respondent said ‘I feel a sense of community when I look into one’s eyes.’²¹

c. The third stage or Web 3.0 is known as the “web of knowledge connections” or what I would call “intuitive web.” The Internet having reached more than one billion websites in 2014, the main feature of this third stage is its ability to link, structure and integrate the overwhelming amount of data available online in order to make it more relevant and responsive to its users, precisely by becoming “user-sensitive.” As such, you may or may not be aware that on the basis of standing online activity, search history, and other personal data that you may (or may not even) volunteer to them such as age, gender and location, websites such as Google and Facebook automatically filter, adjust, and refine the contents that it chooses to present to you specifically. In this way, they are already able to determine what pages you will likely find useful and interesting or what things to advertise that you are likely to purchase.

How many of our religious community websites develop or at least make use of the latest algorithms to know their users? Even more importantly, how many of religious communities have adopted a Web 3.0 orientation that emphasizes knowing our followers and adapting our strategies and approaches accordingly? In other words, how open are we to expressing our faiths in the language, medium and context of the people of Asia, today and tomorrow? To begin with, how well do we actually know this language, medium and context? This is a very crucial matter that we can no longer take for granted and it has become all the more urgent and elusive nowadays with peoples’ attitudes, habits and beliefs changing rapidly with rapidly changing digital technologies.

An example of development with this kind of orientation is the first International Congress on Religious Marketing held on April 21-22, 2016 in Madrid, organized by the Order of Preachers, a group of Roman Catholic priests and brothers.

²¹Ally Ostrowski, “Buddha Browsing: American Buddhism and the Internet,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 7, 1 (2006): 99.

The Congress sought to apply the secular techniques of marketing to sharing faith, enlisting the guidance of seasoned marketing professionals on how to make use of such techniques in the religious ambit. Some of the ideas that surfaced during the Congress are as surprising as they are exciting. For instance, one professor declared that the time of “encyclicals” or very long, traditional Church documents has now ended. “The public has changed and because of this, we need to find new ways, not to sell, but to relate with them.”²²

Yet another frontier is the *gamification* of religion, although this is often limited to religious instruction, which is presented in the form of games that are supposedly more attractive to today’s youth and aligned with their culture. However, there are questions as to its propriety as well as to its ultimate effect, which may in fact lead to banalization instead of appreciation, or even prejudice, polarization and aggressive tendencies in the case of war-and-conquest themed role playing games.²³ Another more simple and less-controversial attempt in this direction is the “Alabaster Bible,”²⁴ which consists more of pictures than texts and hopes to connect better with the so-called “Instagram generation,” most of whom belong to Generation Z who are characterized by shorter attention spans and a preference for video and images over text.²⁵ One more popular online medium nowadays is the “meme” which has been used widely by many religious social media accounts. It consists of a combination of evocative pictures and compact texts which are not only attention catching but thought-provoking. In all these attempts and initiatives, the real challenge is not only to transfer our faith to new media but to translate them in a “language” that is attractive and comprehensible to our public and at the same time faithful and rooted in our religious traditions.

Sharing Faith in Web 4.0

Having laid down in perspective the first three stages, what now is in store for us with regard to the future of the Internet? What will Web 4.0 look like and what

²²José Lorenzo, “¿Adios al tiempo de las encíclicas?,” *Vida Nueva*, 21-27 January 2017, 20.

²³Miriam Díez Bosch, «La religión digital, ¿es cool para los jóvenes?», *Vida Nueva*, 21-27 January 2017, 29.

²⁴ See their website in <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/519726203/alabaster-the-bible-beautiful> (accessed February 28, 2017).

²⁵ See “Step Aside Millennials: Gen Z Has Arrived” <http://www.ideasindigital.com/step-aside-millennials-gen-z-has-arrived/> (accessed October 7, 2016)

threat or promise does it hold for religions in Asia?

As early as now, we find emerging capacities, evolving from Web 3.0's increasing capability to link, structure and integrate data, but this time not only online but offline as well, with the Internet establishing and consolidating its influence more and more in the real world. Businesses, industries and households will now be run more online than offline. For instance, we now have *Uber* and *Grab* for transportation, or *Airbnb* for hotels. The operation of these giant global companies are purely online and they only need to network with actual vehicles and lodgings without directly managing them. Also, with the advent of Siri and other similar apps, anyone who has a tablet or smartphone can get a rather intelligent virtual secretary who is able to note, remember and analyze their habits and preferences, and from this data, to intuitively manage not only their day-to-day activities but more and more aspects of their lives.

In this way, Aghaei et al. envisage that the coming Web 4.0 will become a “web of intelligence connections,” or what I would call the “integrative web.” According to their forecast, it will be a symbiotic and not just semantic web that will be characterized by a much more permeable and seamless “interaction between humans and machines in symbiosis.”²⁶ The walls will blur between online and offline and there will be a “fusion of horizons” between the Internet and the world outside of it. Where will the religions of Asia be in the midst of this merging? Is God online or offline?

Meredith Gould, an expert in the faith use of social media among Christian denominations, has suggested that the distinctions between real and virtual worlds that were helpful when social media was still in its early stages are not helpful anymore. According to her, “online communities of faith are *real* to members who have come to rely on them for inspiration and support...”²⁷ Moreover, she mentions that in their September 4, 2012 #ChSocM Twitter chat, participants have begun to stop the use of the acronym IRL (in real life) and there has been a suggestion to replace it with ITF (in the flesh).²⁸ In other words, online human interactions, inclusive of the religious type, may not be physical but they are personal: involving real people and fostering real relationships.

It may still be an issue for digital migrants but it seems that digital natives no longer find it hard to see the reality of online relationships and their value, with many families and friends in global diaspora who remain connected through various Internet platforms. For them, the Internet is not only a “tool” but a “space” where people can meet and love each other. Can this also apply in the religious use of the Internet? Can it be more than just a tool but a space, a real and not just analogous “sacred space” where one can encounter and relate with the Divine? And if it was truly possible, how much religion can be authentically practiced online? Can religious rituals, prayers or sacraments for instance be done virtually?

For example, we now find websites that allow Hindus to order *pujas* through the Internet from an actual Hindu temple. Traditionally, a *puja* has three main components: seeing the deity in the sacred shrine (*darshan*), *puja* itself or offering worship in the form of food, and afterwards obtaining the blessed food and consuming it (*prasad*). In the virtual *puja*, the temple webcasts the *darshan* live on the Internet, the worshipper provides for the offering to be made through an online payment facility, and the *prasad* is shipped from the temple directly to the worshipper. Roman Catholics have also had a similar practice of televising and now streaming Eucharistic celebrations, at times with the consecrated bread brought afterwards, albeit always personally and never shipped. Such new practices that somehow break away from tradition do not come without questions and issues. How valid and efficacious are these online rituals for believers who avail of them? Are they equally valid and efficacious as those rituals performed and participated in physically? Is there a difference between celebrating a sacrament, or receiving a blessing “in the flesh” as compared to via online streaming? If Roman Catholics believe that a blessing can be received via radio, television or online broadcast, can they also validly confess to a priest via Facetime or Viber call, noting that the sacrament in its present form does not seem to require physical contact or face-to-face interaction?²⁹ Cannot the grace of God be mediated digitally, or perhaps yes, but not in its most important forms?

There are also other concerns which although more practical are no less replete with theological implications. In a *puja* for example, where “cleanliness”

²⁶ Aghaei et al., “Evolution of the World Wide Web: From Web 1.0 to Web 4.0”, 8.

²⁷ Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 30.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in paragraph 1448, identifies “two equally essential elements” in the structure and celebration of the sacrament that has undergone many changes over the years. The first element is conversion on the part of the one confessing with three subcomponents: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The second element is pardon on the part of God through the intervention of the Church.

is traditionally very important: “What if that same computer screen had been used fifteen minutes earlier to watch pornography? Can one ‘clean’ the computer, and erase all traces of one’s activity?”³⁰ Will making religion online not worsen the dichotomy that already exists between religion and life? If people can already practice religion online, what will be the place of offline religions in the future? As an interesting footnote, one study found that despite such developments as the online puja, local sites of Hinduism have not necessarily declined in importance but instead there has been “an interpenetration of the local and the global as a result of online Hinduism.”³¹

These are all emerging questions that our faith communities need to confront seriously and answer convincingly without falling into either of two extreme tendencies. On the one hand, there is the extreme tendency to always insist on physical, offline presence and play down the reality of non-physical online presence. On the other hand, there is the equally extreme tendency to overemphasize the reality of non-physical online presence and deny all distinction from physical, offline presence.

Beyond method

After briefly laying down the various stages in the development of the Internet and exploring the challenges and possibilities that it offers to religions in Asia, we now ask: how can religions in Asia continue to share their faith in the dawning age of Web 4.0, not only using Web 4.0 technology but with a truly Web 4.0 ethos that can connect with the Web 4.0 generation? In conclusion, allow me to propose three trajectories that I sense from my study and reflection:

1. The age of mere “information banking” which characterized Web 1.0, although it retains its basic value, is now insufficient. In fact, what we have to deal with now, more and more, as Pope Francis warned in *Laudato Si’*, is not lack of information but “information overload.”³² This of course was brought about by Web 1.0 itself by hosting and making accessible this vast and overwhelming amount of

³⁰ Jason Overdorf, “India: Meet the ‘Internet Hindus,’” *PRI/GlobalPost*, June 18, 2012 <http://www.pri.org/stories/2012-06-18/india-meet-internet-hindus> (accessed February 28, 2017).

³¹ See Heinz Scheifinger, “Hinduism and the Internet: A Sociological Study” (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, Coventry, England, 2006).

³² Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 47.

data on the Internet. Nevertheless, and this is what I propose as the first trajectory, the Internet was able to move forward from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 by allowing greater participation.

Can we also apply this pattern to sharing faith by moving from a hierarchical “proclamation” model analogous to uploading content online, to a networks “conversation” model that proceeds by way of dialogue as a humble, hand-in-hand search for the truth? Franz-Josef Eilers proposed “From hierarchy to networks” in last year’s conference in the University of Santo Tomas that we mentioned earlier? How can we make our faith sharing not only “informative” but “interactive,” since after all our express aim is not merely the transmission of religious doctrine but facilitating encounter with God? After all, these doctrines are already available online and our followers have these information practically at their fingertips, but do not necessarily see their value and understand their true meaning. How do we equip them to appreciate and make sense of these teachings? How do we respond to their questions, deal with their confusion, and address any dissent? How much room can we make for lay members to participate freely, without giving in to tyrannical corruptions of democracy or insisting on antiquated models of hierarchy?

2. Secondly, from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0, what spelled the difference for the Internet is its new way of configuring the vast available knowledge, arising from its sensitivity to its audience. This in turn translates into new ways of communicating the given material in a more responsive and relevant way, which, I propose, is the next trajectory: from being “interactive” to being “intuitive.” Do we know how to listen? Are we willing and ready to allow audience “reception” or feedback to impact on the content and shape of the way we understand and practice our faiths? After all, if we really want to apply marketing techniques to make our religions more relevant today, we should know that market research is the foundation of marketing science. Must the content and shape of our faiths remain static or are we able to “link, structure and integrate” our religions in new ways without violating their integrity, especially in the context of a rapidly emerging and evolving digital Asia?

3. Lastly, I propose that we trace the lines of our third trajectory based on the emerging direction from Web 3.0 to Web 4.0—from being “intuitive” to being “integrative”—towards greater convergence and “symbiosis” on many levels: online and offline, virtual and real, digital and analog, religious and secular...

Perhaps we can reflect this too, not only in integrating religion sharing with the latest technology, but integrating faith itself with our lives, and our faith, technology and life in all its aspects, all together? With the grave danger compounded by the Internet and especially by Internet addiction of having a split-level existence, online and offline, how can we avoid the fatal dichotomy between religion and life? How do we integrate and consolidate our own online and offline presence as religions in Asia to help our people integrate and consolidate their own online and offline existence?

In the time of Web 4.0 and a rapidly digitalized Asia, religions cannot afford to stay offline. As early as 2005, a study observed that Internet penetration and evangelical Christianity tended to converge in certain Asian societies while tending to be absent in others. In these digitalized societies, effective use of the Internet in turn has tended to privilege these evangelical Christian groups, at the expense of more traditional religions like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism that used to dominate Asia. Hence, the religions that knew how to use the Internet are the ones that ended up thriving in more communicative and “open” Asian societies while the other religions that did not tended to become more and more isolated in the societies at the other end of the techno-cultural spectrum.³³ Given now that Asia and its peoples are fast becoming digitalized, where our own religions will be within that techno-cultural spectrum will greatly depend on our capacity and creativity to change, for as Confucius rightly said, “Only the most intelligent and the most stupid do not change.”³⁴

³³ See Robbie B. H. Goh, “The Internet and Christianity in Asia: Cultural Trends, Structures and Transformations,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, 4 (2005): 831-848.

³⁴ *Analects*, 17:3.

Buddhist Environmentalism in the Digital Age

Anthony Le Duc, svd

The environmental crisis is an ongoing problem facing humanity, and may be exacerbated in the digital age in which human preoccupation with the digital environment and cyberspace might trump care and concern for the natural environment. The environmental crisis is a complex issue that requires interdisciplinary approaches to address all of its dimensions—social, economic, political, and spiritual, etc. Religions have been enlisted in this effort because they are seen as an effective force in motivating people to change attitudes and behaviors that are environmentally destructive to those that are more benign towards ecosystems. Buddhism is among the world religions whose teachings have been perceived to be environmentally friendly. This paper sets out to consider the role of Buddhism in the effort to address the environmental crisis in the digital age. It does so by: (1) describing the danger of human and nature alienation in the Asian social-cultural context, where Buddhism is most practiced and has the greatest direct and indirect influence on the life of the people; (2) outlining basic Buddhist teachings that apply to nature; and (3) proposing that Buddhism can assert itself in the digital age in order to promote greater environmental well-being.

Keywords: Buddhism, environmental crisis, digital age, digital era, technological nature

The ecological crisis is an issue that has gained attention in the last fifty years and represents one of the greatest concerns of the modern digital era. In recent years, religious traditions have been enlisted in the multidisciplinary effort to address environmental concerns because religion is seen to be one of the major influences in people’s thoughts and behavior. The vast majority

Anthony Le Duc, svd, PhD is the assistant director of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication. Dr. Le Duc teaches at the Assumption University, Bangkok and Saengtham College, Bangkok.

of the people in the world still adhere to some particular faith, and religious ethics prove to be one of the most effective ways to motivate people to carry out certain practices. Among the many world religions, Buddhism—both its Theravada as well as Mahayana ambits—has been repeatedly turned to as a resource because aspects of its teachings are perceived as environmentally friendly. In this paper, I will attempt to examine how Buddhism can address environmental concerns in the digital age, especially in the context where the physical and natural environments are increasingly losing grounds to cyberspace in terms of people's consciousness of and preoccupation with these spaces.

As one can see, the ushering in of the digital era some three decades ago with the introduction and eventual prolific use of the Internet and its numerous applications has led to the creation of a new entity called cyberspace. This notional environment or metaphorical space is increasingly becoming an important place where people exchange information and experience a sense of social interaction and interconnectivity. People's lives, especially the younger generation, have become greatly attached to this non-physical environment as the place where they go for engaging in online activities, relationships, and finding news, information and entertainment. One of the questions that will be asked in this paper is whether the digital age might possibly result in greater alienation of nature from the everyday life of people, in the process causing more neglect of the needs of the environment. In addition, in view of this reality, how would a religion such as Buddhism play a role in fostering human-nature relationship in ways that promote environmentally positive attitudes and behaviors on the part of human beings?

The Digital Landscape of Asia

With its vast religious, cultural, political, economic, and geographic diversity, Asia is a pluralist continent in every sense of the word. This also holds true for Asia's technological development, in particular digital technology. With nearly 1.4 billion people having access to the Internet, Asia accounts for almost half of the global Internet users.¹ Asians also spend a significant part of their day on the Internet both for work and leisure. Of the top ten Asian countries, Korea is lowest clocking in at 3.1 hrs/day while Filipinos spend over a quarter of their day online (6.3 hours). Thailand is a close second with 5.5 hrs/day, and Vietnamese follow suit with 5.2 hrs/day.

¹ <http://www.go-globe.com/blog/digital-landscape-asia/>

Social media is also extremely popular in Asia. China's massive population accounts for nearly half of all the social media users of Asia. Southeast Asian users total about 201 million, while South Asians number approximately 166 million. The top four countries in terms of time spent on social media all come from Southeast Asia, namely the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. India rounds off the top five. Asia's technologically advanced countries, such as Korea, Singapore, Japan, and Hong Kong, not only have high rate of smart phone penetration but also much higher speed of internet connection compared with the global average. For example, Internet speed in South Korea is 25.3 mbps compared to the global average of 4.5 mbps.

Buddhist Thailand is an interesting case of the impact of digital technology on society, especially the young. Out of a population of 68 million, nearly 30 million Thais are now connected to the Internet. The population born between 1977 and 1994 make up the largest percentage of users (64%). It has been estimated that this group spends 2.26 days out of the week online.² Although not necessarily the top, Thailand consistently ranks high in a number of categories relating to digital technology. For example, it ranks fourth in Asia in percentage of people who have made purchases using a smartphone (59%).³ The vast majority of Thai Internet users also use social media (82.7%).⁴ Compared to other predominantly Buddhist countries in the region, such as Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, Thailand is far ahead. However, as development takes place and especially with political and economic reforms being implemented in Myanmar, it is expected that this country will experience much faster technological progress in the future.

Implications for human-nature relationship in the digital era

While technological development is inevitable, it is important to reflect on the ramifications of a technology based society. One must raise the question of what is the prospect of environmental degradation in an age where people seem increasingly removed from nature while opting for more technologically based methods of managing their lives as well as keeping

² <http://messepl.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/5.-Connect.W-2015-Global-Telco-Conference-AIS.pdf>

³ <https://digitalinasia.com/tag/thailand/>

⁴ <http://messepl.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/5.-Connect.W-2015-Global-Telco-Conference-AIS.pdf>

themselves entertained. Nature or the natural environment, as used in this paper is an extremely elastic category. While there is a variety of senses depending on whether one refers to nature philosophically or scientifically, for the purpose of this essay, nature, or the natural environment, is what we have in mind when we think of places that are untouched or minimally intruded by human intervention. In this sense, it may include not only wild nature, consisting of plants and animals species, that has not been interfered by human activities, but also eco-systems that, despite human interference, still retain characteristics that may be described as natural. However, in addition to animal and plant species, we can also consider material entities such as mountains, caves, sand dunes, the atmosphere, and so on. It is also these entities that we often think of when we think of environmental degradation, exploitation, or destruction that is taking place at this time.

The relationship between human and nature in many cultures, especially in the past, is characterized by intimacy, connectedness, and symbiosis, so much so that one can even claim that nature and human beings constitute a single entity or organism (Miller, 1991). This kind of horizontal human-nature relationship of interdependency is often seen in nomadic societies where environmental sustainability is essential to such a way of life. The role of the natural environment has always been important in the cultural sensibility of the people of Asia. In Vietnam, for example, the word for country “*đất nước*” is a combination of the two words “earth and water.” Another word combination that Vietnamese people often use to refer to their sovereign nation is “*sông núi*” which means “river and mountains.” The expression is indicative of Vietnam’s geography which comprises of thousands of rivers and long mountain ranges, which make up three quarters of the country’s land area. Vietnam’s two river deltas, the Red River Delta in the north and Mekong River Delta in the south are seen as the rice baskets that feed the people. Water geographical features have always been important to the Southeast Asian way of life. In Thailand, the original saying that expressed one’s optimism for the abundance that nature brought to their life is “There is rice in the field and fish in the waters.”

Modernization or urbanization which is a technology driven process is seen to create dynamics that go against the natural affinity that human beings have towards the natural environment. George Monbiot (1995) calls this phenomenon the human “estrangement from the ecosystem” in which there is

a “gradual loss of meaningful involvement” with nature with the benefits as well as dangers that it presents. While this process of estrangement may have started as early as the beginning of the agricultural revolution and escalated during the industrial revolution, it is manifesting itself dramatically in this digital age. In this era, relationships (whether human-human or human-nature) are less and less the result of direct interaction and increasingly mediated by digital technology. In the past when infants cried, they were picked up by grandmas and aunts who would comfort them so that they would stop crying. Nowadays, when children cry, they are more likely to be given a smartphone to watch YouTube videos so that the adults can go about doing their business. Many children of Burmese and Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand are only able to see their parents a few times a year because the parents have to migrate to neighboring countries to make a living. Parent-child bond, instead, is mediated by digital social network applications such as Line and Facebook.

Human-nature relationship, likewise, is affected in the digital age. In the past, children in Vietnam and the Philippines used to amuse themselves by making rifles out of banana leaf stalks and duel with one another. Now, children are more likely to get their adrenaline rush by racing cars on a tablet or a smartphone. In the past, people went to sleep and woke up basically in accordance with the natural cycle of day. However, with digital technology presenting distractions such as on-demand entertainment programs, online video games, and social networks that allow continuous connection with people all over the world, many forget the natural body rhythms for work and rest that have evolved over millions of years. One must admit that in certain cases technology has helped in promoting environmental sustainability and conservation. The development of the light bulb, for example, consumes 50 times less energy than the kerosene lamp used in many developing countries. The ability to send correspondences by email reduces the need for paper products. Nowadays, the International Anti-Poaching Foundation (IAPF) trains Green Army rangers to use surveillance technology such as thermal imaging cameras and drones to monitor animals and their habitats in order to prevent poachers from hunting endangered species. The Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) uses sophisticated sensors to monitor the pH levels of the Pacific Ocean in order to help take preventative measures to preserve marine ecosystems.⁵ Digital technology

⁵ <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-ways-tech-will-save-environment/>. Accessed November 10, 2016.

has also helped us to see and experience nature in wonderful ways, allowing us to discover details that were unavailable to the average person before. Access to information, photographs and videos of natural places all over the earth are available with a few clicks or touches on the smart phone or tablet.

Despite all the positive things that technology, especially digital technology has brought to human life and the effort to promote environmental sustainability, the question remains whether these technological developments have reduced the feeling of estrangement and drawn us back into a more intimate relationship with the natural environment. In many ways, one can argue that technology has further hindered opportunities for encounter between human beings and the natural environment. Nowadays, people can easily take a tour of any part of the world—both natural and man-made—by searching for videos on YouTube and other Internet applications. One can even take virtual tours of the majestic redwood forests in California or the awe inspiring Son Doong Cave in Vietnam. Technology has enabled us to “experience” the most extraordinary events and places in the world with just a click of a button. Such digitally mediated encounters often serve as the only mode of interaction between human and nature. After all, why spend money and time getting on a ship heading into the ocean for days on end without knowing if you’ll actually encounter a blue whale if you can see it up close and personal via YouTube? In fact, the virtual tours and the recording of natural places and events are oftentimes much more picturesque and exciting than the experience of going to the actual place. Many have been let down after having seen photos or taken a virtual tour of a particular place only to be sorely disappointed upon making the actual visit to that place. For those who do get to the place, many are more concerned with taking selfies of themselves and loading the photos onto social networks than really taking the time to engage in anything meaningful with that particular place. The natural setting becomes nothing more than an interesting background to highlight one’s own image to be broadcasted to friends and followers. Therefore, the irony of the digital age for human relationship with nature is that while it seems to help bring us closer to nature intellectually and even physically, this closeness often does not translate into emotional connection and intimacy.

Buddhist teachings and environmentalism

In response to increasing environmental degradation and the immanent environmental crisis in the digital age, Buddhism, like many world religions,

has been asked to delve into its teachings to make a contribution to solving the problem. The Buddhist understanding of nature is elastic and multi-layered. Buddhist nature has been identified as “loka” (“world”), and is comprised of physical as well as non-physical spheres of existence (De Silva 1987, 9). The late Thai monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu refers to nature as the Dhamma itself, which is inclusive of four aspects: nature itself (*sabhavadhamma*), the law of nature (*saccadhamma*), the duty of living things in accordance with nature (*patipattidhamma*), and the results that come about as a result of these acts (*pativedhadhamma*) (Santikaro Bhikkhu 1996, 159). In this interpretation, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has in mind something totally profound and all-encompassing, not just restricted to the physical reality, but also to the mental and spiritual dimensions of the universe. The Thai scholar monk Phra Prayudh Payutto sees nature as something that at the same time that human beings are a part of, they also enter into relationship with. In an article entitled “Buddhist Solutions for the Twenty-first Century,” he pointed out that “the perception that mankind is separate from nature, and must control, conquer or manipulate nature according to his desires” is one of the factors that lead to the ecological crisis (1994, 92). In order to address environmental degradation, Phra Prayudh exhorts human beings to look at themselves as being part of nature itself. He writes, “If we have the insight that we are part of nature, and we see that changes in nature must also have an effect on us, our actions will be constrained, clearly defined and balanced” (107). For Phra Phrayudh, despite human beings being a part of nature, there is still a sense of self-identity that allows human beings to enter into relationship with nature. In the talk entitled “Thai People and Forests,” Phra Prayudh speaks of human being as “friends of nature,” living out a mutually beneficial relationship instead of doing things that lead to oppression and destruction (2010, 20). Another Thai monk Phra Dharmakosajarn refers to human beings as protectors of nature. He writes, “Nature was for humanity to foster and develop for the necessities of living. Humanity is more like a warden or guardian to protect nature; humanity was not developed to be masters of the universe. This is the correct and positive way of thinking in Buddhism” (2011, 29). Phra Dharmakosajarn calls for recognition and living out the symbiotic relationship between human and nature stating, “The fact is clear: living beings and the proper environment cannot be separated. They must live and survive together. Living beings depend on their environment and the environment relies on living beings too” (12-13).

While there is no single unified understanding of the Buddhist notion of nature as a general category, Buddhist teachings that apply to nature in the

environmental sense are abundant. In the Buddhist tradition, nature is intimately connected to the life and livelihood of humanity. In the canonical texts, the human situation was often explained with analogies derived from observable events in nature (Sahni 2007, 68). For example, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, it is said that just as a seed sown in a field is able to sprout due to the factors of soil, nutrients, and moisture, human life comes about due to certain causes.

*As when a seed is sown in a field
It grows depending on a pair of factors:
It requires both the soil's nutrients
And a steady supply of moisture:
Just so the aggregates and elements,
And these six bases of sensory contact,
Have come to be dependent on a cause;
With the cause's breakup they will cease. (S.I.9)*

Another example from the same *Nikāya* shows how human spiritual achievements come about as a result of processes that parallel with those in nature:

*Again and again, they sow the seed;
Again and again, the sky-god sends down rain;
Again and again, ploughmen plough the field;
Again and again, grain comes to the realm.
Again and again, the mendicants beg;
Again and again, the donors give;
When donors have given again and again,
Again and again they go to heaven. (S.I.12)*

These nature analogies serve to help the human person better understand the operational mechanisms of cause and effects in his life and the human person is subjected to a natural law that encompasses every entity in the universe. Contemplating the events that take place in nature is essential to individual spiritual cultivation. According to David J. Kulupahana, natural settings not only create fewer distractions when it comes to sense pleasures, but also “provide a natural experiential ground for realizing impermanence and dependent arising, that is, the nature of the world” (2009, 5). Indeed, the Buddha encouraged his monks to increase their virtue by resorting to “the forest, the root of a tree, a mountain, a ravine, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle thicket, an open space, a heap of straw” (M.I.181; I.346; I.441; III.4; III.116). Resorting to such

places and things is not always necessarily for aesthetic appreciation as some people who have a notion of a romanticized Buddhism are led to believe. The contemplation on these aspects of nature, especially on the lives of animals reveals a reality of life characterized by impermanence and suffering, the realization of which is essential for any effort at self-cultivation and self-transformation. Life led in a natural setting with its inconveniences and challenges may help the person to come to deeper understanding of the true nature of reality. For example, when monks reside in the forest, they are faced with nuisance from pests and insects that damage their abode and beddings. However, monks are reminded to contemplate on this reality as reflecting impermanence of all things and to persevere in their difficulties. At the same time, leading a forest life also leads to the danger that comes from wild animals. Monks are told to be aware of this situation, and by contemplating on the fear aroused from this danger, they can be led closer to the dhamma (Harris 1991, 106). The important role of nature in this effort is seen most clearly in the life of the Buddha himself. When associating nature with the life of the Buddha, writers will always point to the fact that the Buddha was said to be born, achieved enlightenment, and died under various types of trees, lived and taught in natural environments, and often taught his disciples using examples from nature. The Theravadin forest tradition in which monks build temples in the wilderness or in a forest setting where they live and teach, especially as seen in Thailand, is a legacy of the important role of nature since the earliest days of the religion.

Nature as a target of personal virtue

For Buddhism, evidence of one's progress in the effort of personal self-cultivation is in the virtues that he demonstrates in his relationship with others. To this extent, the state of the natural environment can function as indication of the state of human virtuousness. In his sermons, the Buddha made connections between these two realities. For example, in the *Cakkavattasihanada Sutta* (D.III.58-77), the Buddha said that when people behaved degenerately, filling their actions with ignorance, anger, and hatred, what resulted were war, famine, epidemics and other calamities. However, when people changed their hearts and their way of living, nature was restored to balance, and humanity experienced prosperity and peace.

The claim of the state of nature as manifestations reflecting human virtuousness can also be seen in other suttas of the *Anguttara*. In one sermon, the Buddha asserted:

Bhikkhus, when kings are unrighteous, the royal vassals become unrighteous. When the royal vassals are unrighteous, brahmins and householders become unrighteous. When brahmins and householders are unrighteous, the people of the towns and countryside become unrighteous. When the people of the towns and countryside are unrighteous, the sun and moon proceed off course. When the sun and moon proceed off course, the constellations and the stars proceed off course. When the constellations and the stars proceed off course, day and night proceed off course . . . the months and fortnights proceed off course . . . the seasons and years proceed off course. When the seasons and years proceed off course, the winds blow off course and at random. When the winds blow off course and at random, the deities become upset. When the deities are upset, sufficient rain does not fall. When sufficient rain does not fall, the crops ripen irregularly. When people eat crops that ripen irregularly, they become short-lived, ugly, weak, and sickly. (A.II.74)

Similarly, in another sermon of the same *Nikāya*, the Buddha warned:

When people are excited by illicit lust, overcome by unrighteous greed, afflicted by wrong Dhamma...They take up weapons and slay one another resulting in massive human deaths; sufficient rain does not fall leading to famine and lack of grains; wild spirits are let loose harming human lives. (A.I.159-160)

In Buddhism, exercising virtue towards nature is no less important than towards fellow human beings. The *Jataka* tale of the hungry tigress illustrates very poignantly how one is called to display mercy and compassion towards animals.

One day, when wandering in a forest along with his disciple Ajita, the Bodhisatta saw from the top of a hill that a tigress was lurking to kill and eat her own cubs out of hunger. Moved by compassion he thought of sacrificing his own body to feed the tigress and save the cubs. So, he sent away his disciple in search of some food for the tigress lest he might prevent him from his sacrifice. No sooner than Ajita left the site, the Bodhisatta jumped from the precipice in front of the tigress and offered his body. The noise of the fall caught the attention of the hungry tigress, who in no time scooped over him and tore him off in pieces and feasted upon them with her cubs.

When Ajita returned and did not find his *guru* in the same place, he looked around and was surprised to see that the tigress no longer looked hungry. Her cubs were also frolicking. But soon, he was shocked to detect the blood stained rags of his *guru*'s dress scattered there. So, he knew that his *guru* had offered his body to feed a hungry tigress and protected her young ones as an act of great charity. Now, he also knew why was he sent away by his *guru*.⁶

As a person trains himself in the Noble Eightfold Path and understands that the life of sentient beings is characterized by suffering, he is encouraged to practice loving kindness and compassion in his life. Loving kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karunā*) are two of the four sublime abodes (*brahma-vihāra*) that all Buddhist faithful must aim to attain in his journey towards spiritual progress. A person filled with loving kindness and compassion sincerely desires that all sentient beings be freed from any suffering in their lives. Loving kindness is to be directed towards other creatures regardless of their strength, size, or proximity. It is to be wished upon others whether they are seen or unseen (S.I.8). The text that one often encounters when discussing about loving kindness is from the Suttras which states:

I dwell pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to myself, I dwell pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, vast, exalted, measureless, without enmity, without ill will. (A.I.183)

For each of these as well as the other sublime virtues, the Buddha exhorted the monks to assiduously train themselves so that they are able to carry out these virtues beyond their immediate neighbors, extending to the entire world (Sahni 120). Monks are enjoined also to have loving kindness even in the face of challenges and difficulties (M.I.123). Simon P. James points out that someone who is truly compassionate extends his compassion to human as well as non-human beings. If he is only compassionate towards human beings, then he would not be considered a truly compassionate person. Thus, a person's dealings with non-human sentient beings, i.e. animals would reflect on his level of virtuousness (2007, 457).

⁶ Vyaghri Jataka *Jatakamala* No.1. This tale is found online at this website: <http://ignca.nic.in/jatak025.htm>

Closely related to loving kindness and compassion is the virtue of gentleness. Gentleness can be seen as the positive derivative of the non-violence (*ahimsā*) precept, which is the first precept in Buddhism. In the *Dhammapada* one is reminded that just as a person recoils at the thought of pain and treasures his own life, so do other sentient beings (Dp.129-130). Thus, inflicting suffering on others is morally wrong and should not be done, may it be in our daily dealings with other people or animals or in means of livelihood that require intentional harm done to others. Buddhist teachings ask that people refrain from making a living by trading weapons, trading human beings, trading flesh, trading spirits and trading poison ought to be avoided (A.V.177). In addition, earning a living as pig and sheep butchers, hunters, thieves and murderers result in terrible consequences to the individual that no water ablution can eliminate (The.242-3). A person filled with the virtue of gentleness is expected to not just limit this positive trait to sentient beings. One would expect that those who display gentleness towards people and animals would also extend this demeanor towards plants and even non-living things like a historic boulder or a cave.

Another virtue that greatly affects the well-being of nature is generosity (*cāga*) in giving (*dāna*). According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, the spiritual quality of generosity is important because “the goal of the path is the destruction of greed, hate and delusion, and the cultivation of generosity directly debilitates greed and hate, while facilitating that pliancy of mind that allows for the eradication of delusion” (1995). True generosity is the underlying impetus for the practice of *dāna parami*, the perfection of giving that brings about wholesome *kamma* essential to the path of enlightenment (Jootla, 1995). Indeed, giving is an admirable act and Buddhism focuses a great deal on giving. However, the kind of giving that Buddhism is interested in is not just any act of giving, but those acts of giving that are motivated by the genuine internal disposition of generosity. There is no question that without nature, human beings cannot survive. Without the oxygen produced by plants, human beings would not be able to breathe. The processes taking place in nature is also extremely conducive to the spiritual progress of human beings when they meditate and reflect on them. The service that nature offers to human beings is constant and unceasing. Human generosity through acts such as planting trees and preserving forests demonstrate a sense of gratitude towards and an awareness of reciprocity in dealing with the natural environment. As the *Khuddaka Nikāya* states: “A person who sits or sleeps in the shade of a tree should not cut off a tree branch. One who injures such a friend is evil.”

Buddhist intervention in the digital age

Religion and technology has always gone hand in hand, usually with religion making use of available technology in order to promote its teachings and spread its presence to new territories. The digital age that the world now finds itself in is having profound impact on how religion presents itself and reaches out to humanity. By employing digital technology and mass media, religions are able to support their adherents in understanding and practicing their faith, but also introduce themselves to potential faith seekers in every corner of the world who can manage a broadband or 3G/4G connection. In a globalized world, religions can also impact the society with teachings that address spiritual, social, and political dimensions of human life. According to Daniel Veidlinger (2016), “Buddhism has long had an affinity for the latest technologies and has used every means at its disposal to transmit the Dharma far and wide.” Just as Buddhist monks and laypeople took to the Silk Road to spread their teachings, they are now doing the same on the information highway to communicate its truths to people of all sorts of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In the same manner that the printing press made the Bible accessible to all kinds of people, digital technology has now put the Pali Canon in multiple languages at the fingertip of anyone with Internet access. In the scholarly community, the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* established in 1994 was the first online peer reviewed journal in Religious Studies. As a religion that has always kept up with technological developments, Buddhism is in as good of a position as any not only to understand, employ, but also critique digital technology and its ramifications for human-nature relationship in this new social milieu.

What Buddhism has clearly demonstrated is that at the same time that it values technology and technological development, the role and place of nature in human life is essential to human self-cultivation and self-transformation. This human spiritual progress in turn affects the flourishing of nature. In the digital age where the human interaction with the natural environment is increasingly being facilitated through the digital environment or replaced by preoccupation with cyberspace, Buddhism needs to reflect on its basic teachings and traditions in order to promote healthy and wholesome human-nature relationship. One might argue that the digital environment with its ever changing content and shifting identities can represent just as good a means for reflection on impermanence as the forest environment. One might also argue that “technological nature” such as a virtual tour of a nature site or a

plasma “window” with a view of nature is an adequate replacement of the actual experience. If such were the case, there have not been any known studies that would demonstrate the truthfulness of these assertions. What has been shown, however, is that interaction with authentic nature can lead to improvement in one’s mental and physical health. Even minimal exposure to nature such as looking at it through a glass window has been shown to help hospitalized patients to heal faster, decrease the rate of illness of prisoners, and promote health in the workplace (Kahn et al. 2009, 37). Young children, studies have shown, are especially drawn to animals and enjoy interaction with them (Myers 2007). They also value a great deal animals, plants, natural landscapes, and rivers, etc. Children across cultures and social settings displayed some level of meaningful and moral relations with nature and were concerned about environmental degradation (38). While benefits of interaction with nature has been proven persuasively, studies that compare the benefit of technological nature with authentic nature have shown that the former brings fewer enjoyments and benefits, even if the presence of technological nature is better than having no nature at all.

One might assert that since experiencing actual nature is becoming increasingly rare due to urbanization and modernization, we have to settle for technological nature, which is better than having no nature at all. However, by accepting technological nature as the primary way to be exposed to nature in our life, we put ourselves in danger of what Daniel Pauly (1995) describes as the “shifting baseline syndrome.” Pauly describes this syndrome in relations to fisheries in which each successive generation of fisheries scientists examine the composition of stock size and species at the beginning of his/her career and takes that as the baseline upon which to evaluate changes. Because the composition changes with each successive generation, the baseline continually shifts and accommodates for the loss of stock and species. Indeed, this shifting baseline syndrome can be applied to other phenomena such as air quality, moral and ethical standards, or spiritual well-being. Accepting technological nature as a legitimate substitute for actual nature puts us in a situation of accepting a shifting baseline rather than working to retain what has been proven by religious teachings, scientific demonstration, and human experience and wisdom to be valuable and irreplaceable. Likewise, one can propose that cyberspace is as good an environment as the natural forest to meditate on the nature of reality, but chances are we will suffer from the shifting baseline syndrome mentioned above.

In this digital age, Buddhism is called to retrieve, re-evaluate, and apply its age old teachings to the new social context. As a religious tradition that knows how to make sense out of and employ technological developments, Buddhism is also asked to challenge those tendencies in technological developments that lead human beings away from spiritual progress and ultimate emancipation. Buddhist teachings on nature must be emphasized and highlighted in the new social milieu in order to counter against further alienation of the natural environment from the daily experience of people. While cyberspace and virtual reality are legitimate entities of modern human society that must be accepted, it does not serve us well when our daily life is overly consumed by these notional spaces as to lead to further separation of human beings from the natural environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this paper, I have suggested that as technological development continues to take place in Asia, the digital landscape will take shape in more apparent ways. The digital environment and the associated entity called cyberspace will in some ways distract or even draw people away from the natural environment, causing further human alienation from nature. Facing this prospect of alienation and estrangement, Buddhism can play a vital role in reminding its adherents of the importance of nature in one’s spiritual development. Buddhism, as a religion that understands and knows how to use technology in propagating its teachings, can advance ideas that promote healthy and wholesome human-nature relationship to counter against negative inclinations brought about by increasing preoccupation with the digital environment at the peril of the natural environment. By actively bringing environmental issues to the forefront and emphasizing the fundamental need for a healthy human-nature relationship, Buddhism can serve as a force to prevent apathy towards environmental degradation and a catalyst for promoting environmental well-being. Buddhism can do this best in the Asian social-cultural context where a large percentage of the population is either practicing the religion or has been influenced deeply by the tradition.

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A Study on the Usage of Online Media by Selected Hindu Temples in South India.

Padma Rani

The history of religion on Internet can be traced back to the 1980s when religion enthusiasts began to explore ways the Internet could be used to promote religion, faith or belief. Media is used for sharing common religious themes and experience, and also for interaction and connection. Today every religion, no matter how small or unusual has a presence online. Online digital media is interactive and effective medium for religious communication. For millions of believers, the digital media has become a platform where one can easily find God—or at least his followers and participate in public spaces in a private and free manner.

The aim of this paper is to carry out qualitative and descriptive analysis of four cases of Hindu religion in India. These include Tirupati Balaji, Udupi Krishna Matha (temple complex), Meenkashi Temple, Madurai and Rameshwaram Temple, Rameswaram .

Tirupati Balaji is considered as one of the highly visited temple in India and abode of one of the richest Gods. Udupi Krishna Matha is a well-known pilgrimage site, particularly famous among the Hindu Vaishnava sect. Lately Udupi Krishna Matha has attracted international devotees, from those countries where there is an International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) membership. The Meenkashi temple is a highly revered temple and is one of the famous pilgrimage of Southern India. Rameshwaram temple is under the four religious sites of the country which every Hindu is supposed to visit in his lifetime.

The case studies of the temples will be analyzed to answer and understand the ways in which digital media are being used for the promotion of religion. Further how digital media is efficient and effective among the devotee users and in what way the digital media has aided religious practices and beliefs. The analysis of case studies has helped shed new light to examine the central question as to how digital media empowers and challenges religious institutions.

Introduction

Various aspects of human life like beliefs and practices have evolved over a period of time. Communication methods have evolved from oral to written and to the audio-visual. In the contemporary era, communication is done with the aid of the Internet. Religion is now widely spread on the Internet. It has given rise to various online religious communities. Even if the politics of identity and community exists in online religious sites because of the struggles between and within groups for domination of ideas. The Cyberspace is considered a more democratized version given its mass-participatory nature (Kong, L., 2001).

The history of the relationship between religion and the Internet can be traced back to the early 1980s when the religious enthusiasts began to explore ways the Internet could be used for religion or faith or belief. The first religious-orientated online group was the Usenet 'net.religion' discussion list (Stout, D., 2006). Churches and denominations worldwide have established websites in the hope of reaching the maximum number of people who are part of the community and converting non-believers. The entire spectrum of religious purpose on the Internet is based on one principle: to go into the entire world and preach the gospel to everyone. Even though Christianity is the only religion that has dominated the electronic media, in e-space it cannot claim this superiority and "it is not an exaggeration to say that almost every religion, no matter how small or unusual has a presence online." Stephen O'Leary one of the first scholars to analyze the role of new media for religious communication claims that the advent of the Internet has been as revolutionary for religious growth and dissemination as was the invention of the printing press (cited in Hackett, 2006). The Internet's interactive nature may prove that it is an effective medium for religious communication since the ordinary participant can take an active role in the communication process. For millions of believers, the Internet has become a place where one can

easily find God—or at least his followers and participate in public space in a private and free manner. Religion has become so prevalent on the Internet that according to a statistics gathered by the Time Warner Company estimate, there are almost three times as many as Internet sites concerning God than there are about sex (Selvan, A., 2003).

Religious engagement through TV, radio, music and the Internet generally complements—rather than replaces—traditional kinds of religious participation, such as going to church. Americans who said they frequently attend religious services were more likely to engage in these electronic religious activities than those who said they attend religious services less often (Pew Internet Research, 2014).

Review of Literature

Religion has evolved over and changed the way it is expressed with the advent of technology.(Scott Thumma). The Internet can be used for religion because of its multi-dimensionality, multi-functionality and multi-disciplinarity. The concept of proselytization—to disseminate one's religion has grown largely (Rosalind Hackett, 2006).

There exists both positive and negative aspects of the relationship between religion and the Internet, commercialization of the medium, trends among the online users for religious purposes have been discussed. Websites were able to reach outsiders, whereas e-mail is used most successfully among the congregation, To attract new young members online sites need to be attractive.

Mark Williams talks about the important characteristics of virtual pilgrimage and how different is the experience there. Virtual pilgrimage on the Internet is the new way of being spiritual in the postmodern world. The four key characteristics are: (1) it creates a mythscape, an immaterial mental geography that originally comes from sacred oral or scriptural traditions; (2) it exists as an interactive visual-auditory medium for experiencing a sense of sacred presence; (3) it generates symbolic forms of entertainment that are liminoid in character; and (4) as a leisure activity of individuals 'Net surfing' from their home or office computers, it can create 'virtual travelling communities' of pilgrims who use the discourse of *communitas* to describe their experience.

How religion is portrayed on the Internet and how it is different from the traditional ways of preaching religion has been discussed widely.

In a study conducted in 2000 in the United States regarding the usage of the Internet for religious purposes by the Pew Internet and American Life Project suggests that the Internet has become a vital force in many faith communities. Students of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research conducted a study in 2000 on Religion and the Internet. The findings were:

- None of the webmasters surveyed reported that their congregations contracted with professional web design firms outside of their membership to create their sites.
- The layperson had the original idea for a congregational website. Pastors were the catalyst for the website in just 30 percent of cases, with the remaining 20 percent included team members, committees, and individual staff members.
- As stated above, in the majority of cases (75.8 percent) a skilled member of the congregation was responsible for the site creation, with an additional 21 percent made by congregational staff members. In slightly more than half cases, the congregation as whole was encouraged to contribute to the website creation and construction process.
- The majority did not spend extensive time planning their websites.
- A majority of webmasters, a few who were not the original creators of their sites, stated that it was comparatively easy to get the original material for their sites. Several of those surveyed voluntarily reported that it is a difficult task to get continual new material to update their sites. The responsibility of generating web content was shared in over half the cases. The webmaster was responsible for this effort in a quarter of sites, a pastor was in 15 percent and a secretary was in 10 percent of the sites surveyed.
- Nearly 50 percent of webmasters stated that their sites were equally aimed at the public and at their own members. Another large group of sites (43.5 percent) were seen as more for the public, with only 7 percent stated that they designed their sites mostly for an internal congregational audience.
- The congregations reported that they used 2 to 6 different methods to publicize their sites.
- Webmasters overwhelmingly reported a mix of outsiders and congregational members using their sites, although a quarter thought

most of their traffic was from non-member visitors. Nearly a third of webmasters did not know which pages on their sites were the most popular.

- 13 percent claimed to have gotten first time visitors because of the website and all but one of these eight said the congregation gained new members directly because of the site

The Pew Internet and American Life Project conducted another study in the end of 2003. The findings are as follows:

- 64 percent of Internet users in the U.S. have used the Internet for religious purposes.
- Majority using the Internet for religious purposes are mostly women, white, middle aged, college educated, and relatively well to do.
- People using the Internet for religious purpose are devout and they mostly use the Internet for personal spiritual matters more than for traditional religious functions or work related to their places of worship.
- 26 percent of online religious users seek information about the religious faith of others. Most of them are doing this out of curiosity.

In a follow up question about the motives of those who got information about others,

- 51 percent said they did it out of curiosity,
- 13 percent said they did it for their own spiritual growth
- 31 percent said both reasons were important to them.
- The majority of online religious users describe themselves as spiritual and religious.
- Evangelicals are among the most passionate Internet users for religious and spiritual purposes.

It found evidence that the online environment is facilitating interactions of a religious or spiritual nature for a variety of people who are actively engaged in traditional religious contexts and bodies.

The Pew Internet Research Group study on Religion and Electronic media in 2014 revealed the following findings: 20 percent of Americans said they had shared their religious faith on social networking websites or apps (such

as Facebook and Twitter) in the past week while 46 percent said they had seen someone else share “something about their religious faith” online. The percentage of Americans who shared their own faith online is similar to the proportions who said they watched a religious TV program (23 percent), listened to religious talk radio (20 percent) or listened to Christian rock music (19 percent). Even more (40 percent) said they shared something about their religious faith “offline, in a real-life setting.” Young adults (ages 18-29) are about twice as likely as Americans ages 50 and older to see people sharing their faith online. This pattern reflects broader generational differences in technology adoption and media consumption with young adults using the Internet more than older people do. By contrast, watching religious television is considerably more common among older adults than among those under 30.

Aleks Krotoski explains how the urge to know everything is human nature and is supported by the web by providing answers to it. Similarly, the web is providing almost all the answers related to religion.

Most of the studies in this field are conducted on Christianity. However, there are articles which focus on different religions and rituals affected due to the Internet.

Christopher Helland, in his paper on ‘Online Religion as Lived Religion-Methodological Issues in the study of Religious Participation on the Internet,’ talks about how due to the ever changing face of the technology makes it difficult to study religion online as religion has also changed online and also the changes that has taken place over the period of time.

In the feature ‘Treading Online an Act of Faith’ available on ‘Insights into Religion’ talks about how church leaders are presented on the Web with mixed emotions of reaching the masses and losing investment in the local congregation. The media in the countries like India where religion is a way of life for many is quoting incidents and pointing out at the benefits of religious sites. It is not only about religious sites but also about the design and the sites that help in designing such sites. In 2007, the Hartford Institute of Religious Research conducted a research on trends for church web designs. It was that none of the webmasters surveyed reported that their congregations contracted professional web design firms outside of their membership to create their sites. The web sites are “homegrown” grassroots projects of committed and motivated members. Often, the congregational sites are

little more than electronic brochures, rarely are they made appealing and interactive. In either case, it is certain that with increasing use of the Internet greater attention needs to be paid to the method and manner by which this process happens.

Methods

Descriptive content analysis was utilized for four cases of Hindu religion in India. These include Tirupati Balaji, Udipi Krishna Matha (temple complex), Meenkashi Temple, Madurai and Rameshwaram Temple .

Tirupati Balaji is considered as one of the highly visited temples in India and abode of Balaji—an incarnation of the Lord Vishnu, one of the richest Gods.

Udipi Krishna Matha is a well-known pilgrimage site and particularly famous among the Hindu Vaishnava sect. Lately, Udipi Krishna Matha has attracted international devotees from those countries where there is International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) membership. The Meenkashi temple is a highly revered temple and is one of the famous pilgrimage sites in Southern India. Rameshwaram temple is one the four religious sites of the country which every Hindu is supposed to visit in his /her lifetime.

The websites were analyzed for the content, the display and the information they provided as well as the accessibility and the navigation feature the language of the site etc.

Analysis and Interpretation

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam has a website (www.tirumala.org) copyrighted in 2015 under the name of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD). As of 4 February 2017 at 8.30 AM, the number of visitors is 20,320,460; it also has details about visitors of the day. These numbers are a reflection of the volume of traffic this site has been attracting. It also shows the popularity of the webpage and also that devotees are using online media for various religious purposes. At the bottom of the page it has provision by which one can directly go back to the top of the page. The navigation through the various toolbars is very easy and smooth.

The mast head of the page has the logo of TTD on the left hand side and on the right corner a photo of Padmavathi and Lord Balaji are placed. In the middle, the words Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam is written both in Telugu and English. Otherwise the rest of the text on the page is only in English.

Below the mast head various options of scrolling down are given with a drop down menu: Temples, Pilgrim Services, Online services, News and Events, TTD Management, Photo Gallery and General Information.

Below it is a photograph of the sanctum sanctorium. As soon as one opens the page, the background music starts playing. Just below the photograph there is a scroll which has information about vacancy in seva (refers to the offerings both in the form of prayers and service that can be performed at a place of worship) as well as some pertinent information related to the temple for the devotees.

Three numbers of call centers are given. Next to the numbers are the other headings--Online Booking facility, E-publication and Srivari Seva Services. Sevas, Darshan and Accomodation. Tirumala updates are also mentioned. Below these are: Siddhanta Panchagam, Schemes/Trusts, Social Services, Day Schedules.

In a box is mentioned the latest updates, notification and tenders. Below that a table of contents is put up which can be expanded as per the requirement of the reader.

At the bottom of the page are other links and information below that are given the mandatory information about copyright and the browsers in which the website can be best accessed such as Chrome, Mozrilla and Firefox.

On the right hand corner of the homepage, three options are given: Survey, Feedback and Map

Each of the options mentioned on the homepage has a drop down menu. The first option is 'Temple' which has three options under it: At Tirumala, At Tiruchanoor and At Tirupati. Under At Tirumala, various sub-headings are given which are further sub-divided and has complete explanations under it.

At Tirumala has the sub-heading of Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple; Sri Bhu Varaha Swamy Temple and Sri Bedi Anjaneya Swamy Temple.

Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple has the following sub-headings under it: Temple Legend, History, The Srinivasa Kalyanam, How to Reach Tirumala and Places to Visit Around Tirumala. The Temple Legend sub-heading traces the legend behind the temple in a very simple language. It is further divided into various sub-headings which makes it easier for the reader and also makes understanding of facts easier.

The 'History' sub-heading traces when the temple was established and the significance of the various structures in the temple. It is again divided into various sub-headings and explained in two to three simple sentences,

The Srinivasa Kalyanam depicts the story of the marriage of Lord Venaktewara, also known as Lord Srinivasa, with the Goddess Padmavathi. It has texts and pictures. The pictures depict the story. It has seventeen pages and the reader can navigate by clicking on next and previous buttons. On each page, there are three pictures depicting the story mentioned in the text.

The 'How to Reach Tirumala' sub-heading talks about the various modes of transport by which one can reach Tirumala like road, rail, air and by foot. It mentions the distance and other information required by a traveler to reach the place. It also gives information that people who want to go by foot will be provided assistance in the form of luggage transportation, medical help, canteen, toilet and other facilities required on the way.

The 'Places to Visit Around Tirumala' sub-heading mentions some of the must visit places in Tirumala Swami Pushkarini, Sri Bhu Varaha Swamy temple, Sri Hathiramjee Mutt, Sri Bedi Anjaneya Swamy Temple, Srivari Sikhara Darshanam, Sila Thoranam, Dharmagiri, Narayangiri, Papavinasanam, Akasa Ganga Waterfalls, Temple Museum, Asthana Mandapams and Gogarbham Gardens. Tirumala also has various theerthams which can be visited by visitors.

Under the 'Sri Bhu Varaha Swamy Temple' sub-heading, tells of a legend that it must be visited before visiting Lord Venkateswara Swamy Temple. It also gives the timings and the special abhishekam (a special prayer for special occasions) performed in the month of Shravan.

Under the 'Legend' section of the 'Sri Bedi Anjaneya Swamy Temple' sub-heading mentions why one should visit this temple, the timings, special puja on Sundays and the special occasion is the Hanuman jayanthi which is celebrated once every year.

At Tiruchanoor the temple to be visited is the Sri Padmavathi Ammavari temple. It mentions the legend of the temple as well as the sevas and other temples.

At Tirupati the temples mentioned are Sri Govindarajaswami Temple, Srivari Padalamandapam Temple, Sri Lakshmi Narayan Swamy Temple, Sri Vinayak Swamy Temple, Sri Kapilswaraswamy Temple and Sri Kodandarama Swamy Temple. It also mentions three other temples which comes under the TTD in Kadappa and West Godavari district. TTD has temples outside Tirupati their names and location with brief details is provided.

Under 'Pilgrim Services' the various subheadings are 'Darshan,' 'Sevas,' 'Accommodation at Tirumala and Tirupati,' 'Transport' and 'Others.' Darshan has details about 'Sarvadarshan,' 'Special Entry Darshan,' 'Divya Darshan for Pedestrians' and 'Special Darshan for Physically Challenged and Aged.'

The different types of sevas under the same heading are: 'Arjitha Sevas,' 'Daily Sevas,' 'Weekly Sevas' and 'Annual or Periodical Sevas.' The schedule of sevas throughout the week is given. It also mentions that the seva could go beyond 1 AM depending upon the demand. The rates for the sevas are not mentioned but there is a mention that the rates are subject to change from time to time.

Accommodation is provided both free and on payment basis. The various options with their rates are quoted. The free accommodation is for the dormitory type. There are provisions for marriage halls as well as halls of various sizes depending upon the group.

Under the 'Transportation' sub-heading, it describes how a person can reach Tirupati by air, rail and road. There are free bus services from the railway station to Tirumala with an interval of 30 minutes. A number of buses with good frequency ply from different places directly to Tirumala.

Under 'Online Services' the various facilities provided are 'Sevas,' 'Darshan,' 'Accommodation,' 'Hundi,' 'Donation,' 'Publications,' 'Kalyana vedika,' and 'Kalyanamandapam.' One can access the online services by registering with a valid email ID. A registration link is sent to the email for verification and activation. The registered mobile number will get the one-time password (OTP) verification process. Seva tickets can be booked three months in advance while donations can be done online

Under 'News and Events' is the tab for the S. V. Museum which houses 6,000 items of historical interest ranging from archaeology to contemporary items.

Bramhotsavams are special days throughout the year. It provides details like timings of various events. A brochure is maintained by the PRO of Tirumala. However, on the website it has not been updated since October 2016.

Sri Venkateswara Bhakthi channel is multi-lingual: Telugu, Tamil and English. It has options for YouTube videos and Live TV on Android. The site is svbc.tirumala.org. and the number of visitors since 2014 is 870,758 as of 4 Feb 2017.

The TTD news page has eight sub-headings 'Home,' 'Brahmotsavams,' 'Darshan,' 'Utsavams,' 'Special Articles,' 'Events,' 'Photo Albums,' and 'Press Releases.' The archives has been maintained since May 2010. This page has been copyrighted since 2013 and was designed by O/o EDP Manager TTD. The news section is divided into 'Latest News,' 'Temple News,' 'General News,' 'Board News,' and 'VIP news.'

Under the 'TTD Management' sub-heading, the following can be found: 'Administration,' 'TTD Trust Board,' and 'Board Resolutions.' The administration is done by the chief executive officer of TTD. He is assisted by two joint executive officers, chief vigilance officer, conservator of forests, financial advisor, chief accounts officer, chief engineer and a host of other people to help in the maintenance of twelve temples and sub-shrine and employs around 14,000 persons. The administrative works are from 10 AM to 5 PM from Monday to Saturday. The temples and choulities work round the clock throughout the year. The office address and phone numbers are also mentioned.

The Trust Board members are listed: the chairman, members and ex-officio members. The new Trust members have been appointed in April 2016.

The various resolutions passed by the board since 1995 are also put on the site.

The 'Photo Gallery' sub-heading is categorized into 'Past-Present,' 'Unique Photos,' and 'News Album.' They are further categorized as 'Brahmotsavam,' 'Temple,' 'Culturals,' 'Nature,' and 'Pilgrims.'

The 'General Information' sub-heading has the following drop down menus under it: 'Do's and Don'ts,' 'FAQs,' 'Dress Code,' and 'Contact Us.'

The 'Do's and Don'ts' lists out certain things that need to be done in Tirumala and inside the temple. The FAQs are related to 'Donations,' 'Online Bookings,' and 'Subscription' and a link has been provided for more FAQs. The 'Dress Code' was formally introduced in 2013. For men, it is dhoti or pyjama with upper cloth. For women it is saree or half-saree or churidar with pyjama and the upper cloth.

In 'Contact Us' a list of all the officials with their email IDs and phone numbers is given.

Shri Krishna Mutt, Udupi

There are a number of websites you get as you type Sri Krishna Mutt on Google Search. The official website at present is the www.pejavaraparyaya2016.com. The Sri Krishna Mutt has a system of rotation and whoever is the Seer in-charge of the temple runs the website. Each of the eight Mutts have their own websites and whoever is in-charge of the temple runs the official website also. At the bottom-left side of the page mentions that it is copyrighted in 2015 and designed by Leobots Technologies.

The website has a mast head with the photo of the senior seer (priest-in-charge of the temple) on the left side and the junior seer on the right side. In the center there is a small photo of Udupi Krishna, below it is written Jagadguru Sri Madhwacharya Moola Samsthana, Sri Krishna Matha, Paryaya Sri Pejvar Adhokshaga Matha, Udupi.

The various options available at the Homepage are 'Home,' 'Daily Alankara,' 'About Matha,' 'Paryayotsava,' 'Events,' 'Timeline,' 'Seva List,' and 'Contacts.'

Below mentions 'Sri Krishna matha-pejavara paryaya 2016' and 'Sri Krishna janmastami programme live streaming.'

Below that in a box download is written in bold letters with the following text '3 easy step: 1. Click Downloads; 2. Download On Our Website; and 3. Get Free File converter.'

On the right hand side corner of the page is the 'Gallery Categories.' Under it are the following: 'Muhurthas,' 'News and Events,' 'Meeting,' 'Sri Vishvesha Teertha Swamiji Peejavara Matha,' 'Govardhanagiri Trust,' 'Nilvara,' 'Daily Events and Cultural Programme,' 'Invitation,' 'Articles,' 'Pejavara Maha,' 'Dignitaries' Visit,' and 'Sri Krishna Pooja.'

Just above that is a box with a maroon background and white folded hand with 'E-SEVA' written on it. When one clicks on the 'E-SEVA,' it directs to a page which on the left side has 'Seva Details,' 'E-Seva,' and 'E-kanika.' It also has a small box which says 'Donate.' There is a provision on the Seva app through which sevas can be booked. At the bottom of the page it has contact details like address, phone number and e-mail id.

'Online Seva Bookings' has the following: 'Worship,' 'Amount,' 'Seva Performed' and 'More Details.' It lists all the sevas that can be done in the temple.

'E-Kanike' lists five categories under it. In order to do any of them the devotees have to give their details with their photo. There is an option if they would take the Prasad in person or want it posted for them.

When one clicks on the 'Home' button, it directs to a page which has an invitation card in kannada. On the right side, there are images with recent updates under three headings: 'Today's Programme,' 'Alankara,' 'Mahapooja,' and 'Event Archives.' It has a calendar that when one clicks on a date it shows the person to the events of that particular day.

The Alankara drop down menu has photos of Puja performed on the various occasions of the day. It is listed chronologically.

‘About Matha’ has the following drop down menu: ‘Pejawara Adhokshaya Matha,’ ‘About Pejavara Matha,’ ‘Guru Parampare,’ and ‘Sri Sri Vishwaeshatheertha Swamiji.’ ‘Peejawara Adhokshaya Math’ details about the temple, the various mathas and the deity worshipped in the temple. ‘About Pejawara Math’ talks about the history of the math in brief. It also lists the various activities that they do like running educational institutions, hospitals, and orphanages, marriage halls, goshalas (a combination of cow shed and diary for a non-commercial purpose), Gurukul (an educational institute where education and training is imparted in the Hindu religious texts), temples, monasteries and chatra’s all across the country. ‘Guru Parampara’ lists all the 34 gurus of the Matha. ‘Sri Sri Vishwestheertha Swamy’ gives a brief account of the worldly life of the seer. It then talks about his spiritual journey and his achievements. It also sheds light on his paryaya and how this is his fifth Paryaya. It describes the various services he has rendered to humanity.

The ‘Parayayotsava’ sub-heading has details about the ‘Udupi Krishna Matha Paryayotsava,’ ‘Paryaya History,’ ‘Madhavacharya’ and ‘Ideology,’ ‘Sri Krishna Matha,’ and ‘Astha Matha.’ This section briefly gives the idea about the origin of the temple, its history and the matha system established by Madhavacharya the founder who runs the administration of the temple, the other work he assigned them was to propagate and promote Dvaita philosophy. Every two years, on January 18th, the change of administration takes place at the temple and it is a big affair which lasts for ten days culminating in honoring people who have contributed in public life. It also has a documentary on the Udupi temple history.

‘Events’ is the largest sub-section under it, it has ‘Pryaya 2016-18,’ ‘Srikrishna Pooja,’ ‘Dignitaries’ Visit,’ ‘Articles,’ ‘Invites,’ ‘Muhurthas,’ ‘News and Events,’ ‘Meeting,’ ‘Sri Vishvesh Teertha Swamiji,’ ‘Govardhanji Trust,’ ‘Daily Events,’ ‘Cultural Programme,’ ‘Mahapooja,’ and ‘Invitation.’ This section also has videos which can be downloaded for viewing. There is an option for subscribing to the newsletter. It has a number of photographs in each section.

‘Timeline:’ Timeline of Pejavara Paryaya 2015-16; various religious and cultural programmes.

‘Seva List:’ The various seva available in the temple are listed with their corresponding cost. It seems like a notice has been pasted online. There is a provision here to book seva online.

‘Contacts’ has address, phone number, email id, the URL of the temple as well as details of banks through which donations could be made.

At the bottom right side is ‘Contacts’ and ‘Donations.’

The options for language are mentioned on the top left hand corner. The website can be accessed in Kannada and English. Kannada is the local language of the state of Karnataka.

The temple provides free food to all the visitors but there is no mention of it on the website.

Though the Sri Krishna temple is an ancient temple, its website has been developed recently. Within a year, it has been continuously updated and still needs to be improved in terms of its aesthetics. There are no information regarding how an individual can reach the place, accommodation, etc. The devotees are mainly people whose origin is Kerala and Karnataka. Now that its reach is widening, it should also include such information.

The Meenakashi Temple

The official website of the temple is www.maduraimeenakshi.tnhrce.in. It was copyrighted in 2015 and created by ISRY techies. The website is only in English. Visitors as of 3 February 2017 at 8 AM is 294,073.

The masthead has the name of the temple “Arulmigu Meenakashi Sundareshwarar Thirukkoil, Madurai.” It also has photos of deities. On the right side of the page it has ‘Home,’ ‘Mail,’ and ‘Sitemap’ each one of them has a drop down menu. The sitemap gives a clear idea to the reader about the contents of the site. The centre of the page has images of various parts of the temple which scroll continuously. The other things listed on the page are ‘Home,’ ‘History,’ ‘Worship,’ ‘Festival,’ ‘Services,’ ‘Administration,’ ‘Gallery,’ and ‘Location.’

The page when clicked on www.tnhrce.org directs to the page of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu. A body instituted by the government to run the administration of various religious bodies and properties in the state.

The 'Home' has moving images below with the recent news scrolling horizontally.

Below that on the right side you have 'E-donations,' 'E-booking,' 'Temple Worship Timings,' and 'Temple Highlights' which is about the annual festival celebrated around April and May and attracts around one million visitors. On the left is a brief description about why the Goddess has been named Meenakshi and her various names. Below this is a detailed Puja schedule of the day. A video on Meenaksahi Sundraeshwarar temple which has a classical music played in the background highlighting the various towers of the temple. The temple is known for its tower's size and grandeur. The towers have carvings of various mythological scenes from Indian epics. It also has a view of the areas around the temple. On the left side the heading 'Halls and Sculptures' mention about the importance of the various halls and sculptures in the temple. On the right side the heading is 'Towers' which explains about the various towers in the temple also known locally as gopurams. There are four majestic towers or Rajgopurams and there are ten other gopurams out of which two are made of gold.

Below this are moving images of the temple.

At the bottom the other things mentioned are 'Festival,' 'Gallery,' 'Site Inscriptions,' 'Temple Towers,' 'Holy Tank,' 'Pooja,' 'Administration,' 'Tourist Places,' 'Tourist Structures,' 'Transport' and a map of the temple location in Madurai which can be expanded.

The other things on this page are 'Thirukoil Magazine,' 'Tenders,' 'Warnings,' and 'Property Register.'

The 'History' drop down menu has 'Temple History,' 'Shrines and deities,' 'Stone Inscriptions,' 'Holy Tank,' 'Temple Structure,' 'Temple Towers,' and 'Halls and Structures.'

'Worship' has in its drop down menu pooja time and procedure for worship which tells a devotee on how to go around the temple in which sequence.

Under 'Festivals,' is the Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Thirukkoil – Festivals with corresponding photos. During the 12 months of the Tamil calendar year, every month there is a festival in the temple. The whole list with links with further information are displayed in a tabular form. Some of the most popular festivals of the temple are Chitra Festival, Avanimoola Festival, Masi Mandala Festival, Float Festival and Navarathri Cultural Festival.

The most important festival associated with the temple is the Meenakshi Thirukalyanam (the divine marriage of Meenakshi) that is celebrated in April of every year. The wedding of the divine couple is regarded as a classic instance of south Indian female-dominated marriage—an arrangement referred as "Madurai marriage." During the one month period, there are a number of events including the Ther Thiruvizhah (Chariot Festival) and Theppa Thiruvizhah (Float Festival). Major Hindu festivals like Navrathri and Shivrathri are celebrated in the temple. Like most Shakti temples in Tamil Nadu, the Fridays during the Tamil months of Aadi (July–August) and Thai (January–February) are celebrated in the temple by thousands of devotees. An example is the Avani Moola Utsavam, a 10-day festival mainly devoted to Sundareshwarar which describes his various Thiruvilayadal meaning Shiva's sacred games.

'Services' has in the drop menu 'Annadhanam-The Scheme' was launched in this temple in March 23, 2002. Subsequently the scheme was extended in two sub-temples, Arulmigu Marriamman Temple - Theppakulam, and Arulmigu Thiruvappudaiyar Temple-Sellur. A table displaying the rates for feeding people is put up. Donations for Annadhanam can be sent either by cheque/demand draft drawn in favour of "The Joint Commissioner / Executive Officer" Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Temple, Madurai. The bank details are provided for reference of the devotees.

Free Marriage schemes at the temple are for the benefit of indigent Adi Dravidars, Adivasis and backward classes. Under this scheme the couple undergoing free weddings are gifted with new clothes, Thirumangalyam and

other presentation at a cost of Rs.3,000. Twenty guests are also fed at the temple's expense. On February 17, 2002, grand free weddings were conducted for 70 couples. On that day, the temple also bore the cost of the wedding of 72 couples in Chennai. So far 175 couples have benefitted from this scheme. Application forms for assistance under this scheme are available at the temple office.

Moral education classes are conducted for children every Sunday from 4.00 p.m. to 5 p.m. More than 35 children are benefitting from these classes. This scheme was also extended to the Arulmighu Mariamman Temple at Teppakulam. There are about 35 children attending these classes. Karunai illam- A new building has been built for providing free education shelter and dress to poor and girl children.

Joint prayers to seek the blessings of the deities are held for the quick recovery of patients at the emergency wards of the Government hospital, Madurai joint prayers are conducted at 5.30 p.m. every Friday. This facility is also extended to patients at other places. They can send their details to the temple and prayers will be offered on their behalf. Prasad will also be sent to them by post.

'Carrieall Car Service' is an off-road Electric Vehicle (EV) and All Terrain Vehicle (ATV). This service aims to help tourists especially the senior citizens. It goes around the four chithirai streets of Madurai in order to view the four temple towers.

'Other Activities' under which various activities undertaken by the temple authorities are mentioned like water tank at the entrance of each tower, Birla Vishram lodge for pilgrims; discourses arranged by spiritual leaders and academicians; the temple-run school for girls, homes for girls, guides for people in Tamil and other languages and free marriages. In order for pilgrims to understand the importance and history of the temple, audio, video cassettes as well as maps are provided. Special prayers are offered on the birthdays of Alwar saints.

Under 'Administration' the details of the office of the Executive Officer and Joint Commissioner who is appointed by the government to administer the temple. 'Gallery' has two drop down menus: 'Photogallery'

and 'Alangram's Photos.' The 'Photo Gallery' has photos of various areas of the temple. 'Alangram's Photos' are exclusively of the deity decorated on various occasions in various forms.

'Location' has details on 'Contact,' 'Transport' and 'Tourist Places.' 'Contact' has details of the executive officer. 'Transport' has details about how to reach the area by road, rail and air with the help of map and text. It also gives the location with timings within the limits of Madurai. Under 'Tourist Places' other places other than the temple are mentioned like the Gandhi Museum, Amusement Park and other temples in Madurai.

At the bottom of the homepage there are certain things, some of which are already described like stone inscriptions. There are about 44 stone inscriptions on the corridors of the Sundareswarar Shrine and that of Meenakshi Amma Shrine. These inscriptions contain details of lands donated to the temple, the rituals for worship, the list of articles used for performing neivethiyam, the religious status of the people in ancient days, government procedures and social habits.

'Temple Tower' The temple has four Rajagopurams or majestic towers, there are five towers on top of the sanctum sanctorum of the Lord, three on top of the sanctum sanctorum of the Goddess and two golden towers or gopurams, all which have been exquisitely designed and sculptured. All fourteen towers have been segregated based on the stages they are:

- Nine tier gopurams- four
- Seven tier, Chittirai gopuram- one
- Five tier gopurams- five
- Three tier gopuram - two
- Golden gopurams- two.

It goes on to further who built these towers, the dimensions of the tower and what the tower contains.

Other things like 'Temple Tank,' 'Halls and Structure,' 'Pooja,' 'Administration,' 'Tourist Places,' and 'Transport' are also provided at the bottom with a map and contact details. The link to the site of the Hindu Religious Endowment and Charitable Department is also there. The tender

system for the temple is completely online. The property register of the temple in complete details is maintained in eight parts.

'Thirukoil Magazine' is a monthly magazine under the name of Thirukoil is published by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Administration Department since 1958. Eminent scholars regularly write articles on Hindu religion, temples and spirituality in this magazine. Thirukoil Magazine is the only magazine published by the Hindu religious and endowments. All information about the temple activities are published in the Thirukoil magazine.

There is a warning mentioned at the bottom of the page with the following information:

Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Thirukoil-A Kind Appeal. This is the only official Website of Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Thirukoil, Madurai. This temple is under the control of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department, Government of Tamil Nadu. The contents of this Website belong to this temple. Misuse and reproduction of contents and photographs are prohibited. Devotees are informed that this is the only official website, which is linked with www.tnhrce.org, an official website of HR&CE Department, Government of Tamil Nadu. The request for donation by using this temple by name the other private website is punishable under Rule 5 of Collection of Income and the Incoming of Expenditure Rules (G.O.Ms No.4065, Revenue, dated 26th September 1961)

The Rameswaram Temple

Arulmigu Ramanatha Swami Temple, Rameswaram is more popularly known as Rameswaram temple. The official website is www.rameswaramtemple.tnhrce.in.

The masthead of the page has the name Arulmigu Ramanatha Swami Temple, Rameswaram. Under it are mentioned 'Home,' 'History,' 'Pooja Details,' 'Festivals,' 'Teertham,' 'E-services,' 'Gallery,' 'Location,' and 'Sitemap.' Below it the photographs of the different corridor and towers of the temple scroll. Overlapping the pictures are three boxes 'E-donation,' 'E-room booking,' and 'E-food donations.' Under that it has provisions to select the language. This is powered by Google Translate. Indian languages and other major world languages are mentioned.

There is a photograph of Arulmigu Parvathavarthini Amman and Arulmigu Ramanathan Swamy on the left side and on the right side a story about Ambica is mentioned.

Below it is the Temples inside threethams. It has the photographs of eighteen tanks which are inside the temple. Under the heading 'Latest News' are 'Temple Pooja,' 'News and Events' and 'Temple Important Festivals.' 'History,' 'Contact' and the location of the temple with a map is given. Department links to TNHRCE, Thirukoil Magazine, tenders and warnings are also present. At the bottom of the page is 'Home,' 'History,' 'Poojas,' 'Festivals,' 'Gallery,' and 'Contact.' At the bottommost corner is the copyright dated 2015 and developed by ISKY TECHIES.

On clicking 'History,' one is directed to a page which has two photographs on the left hand side and in the rest of the page it is about the origin of the temple. It also tells us about the towers of the temple when they were made, by whom, and why they were made. The dimensions of the tower and also when the towers have undergone renovations are also indicated. The temple and the island of Rameswaram have acquired this name because Lord Rama worshipped Lord Shiva, the God of Gods here on return from Sri Lanka. According to legend, after killing Ravana, Lord Rama returned with his consort Goddess Seetha to India first stepping on the shores of Rameswaram. To expiate the "dosha" of killing a brahmin, Lord Rama wanted to offer worship to Lord Shiva. Since there was no shrine in the island he dispatched Sri Hanuman to Kailash to bring an idol of Lord Shiva.

'Pooja Details' has two items in the drop down menu: 'Pooja Timings' and 'Pooja Details.' 'Pooja Timings' has 'Worship timings,' 'Pooja Timings' and 'Temple Timings.' It also mentions the facility of offering Ganges water to the Lord personally or through post. It also outlines the procedure to be followed for various offerings to the Lord either in cash or in kind. On the right hand side it mentions the E-sevas that are available. 'Pooja Details' give the list of various Poojas and its cost.

The 'Festivals' link has details about the seven main festivals that are held. It gives details about the beginning, ending and duration. Two festivals are mentioned: Mahasivarathri and Thirukkalyanam indicating that they are two very important occasions for this temple.

'Theerthams' has two categories under it: one inside the temple and the other outside. The inside the temple mentions 22 theerthams in a tabular form with location and significance. On the right side of the page there are photos of theerthams. Outside the temple 22 theerthams are also mentioned. The photos are placed on the left side of the page and in a tabular form their location and significance are also mentioned.

'E-services' are of three kinds: 'E-Annadhanam,' 'E-Accommodation' and 'E-Donation.' When one clicks on the 'E-Annadhanam' it leads to a page which has a calendar of the month and colour codes are used to mark the availability of dates. There is a small icon which says 'How to book' that leads to the 'Payment Gateway' and 'Terms and Conditions.' In the case of 'E-Accommodation' the same procedure has to be followed except that in case of rooms they can book a minimum of 3 days to a maximum of 45 days. In 'Terms and Conditions' it is clearly stated that once payment is done, they have to wait for clearance from the bank and make a print out. No cancellation can be done. In case of cancellation, no refund is possible. At the bottom of both the pages there are 'FAQs,' 'Privacy Policy,' and 'Disclaimer.' In 'E-donations' the various categories are 'General Donations,' 'E-Hundi,' 'Elephant Maintenance,' 'Karuna Illam,' and 'Kosalai Donations.' Clicking on any of them takes one to the payment gateway where one has to fill their details and make the payment. Payment has to be above Rupees 100.

Once you click on 'Gallery,' the photos of various corridors, platforms, and gopurams appear. Below it are the photos of the Kumbabishekam Festival which was held on January 20, 2016.

Under 'Location' the various headings are 'Contact Us,' 'The City Info' and 'Travel Info.' Under 'Contact Us,' the complete address, phone number, E-mail id and URL of the Joint Commissioner/Executive Officer of the temple are given. On the right hand side the 'E-services' are mentioned and below is a map which can be enlarged. The 'City Info' has general information about Rameswaram, the temple area, population, the climate, language spoken, post offices, hospitals etc. The various Social Welfare Schemes run by the temple are: ANNADHANAM a). Karunai Illam (Charity Home), Ayurvedic Hospital, girls' school, Thevara School, Library and Gosalas. It has a small map about the islands around Ramaseswaram.

'Travel Info' has details about flights to Madurai complete with timings, schedule and contact number of various airlines. It also gives information about trains from Madurai to Rameswaram and Chennai to Rameswaram. By road, the area can be reached from different places. There is a map on the page. For local transportation one can hire jeeps, auto, rickshaws and cycles.

'Tourist Info' has information about places in Rameswaram and around the temple. It also has details about Pamban Bridge and Dhanuskodi. The temples mentioned are: Arulmigu Subramania Swamy Temple, Thiruchendur Arultharum Mutharamman Temple, Kulasekaranpatinam, Arulmigu Sankararameswarar Temple, Thoothukudi, Arulmigu Mariamman Temple, Irukangudi. Arulmigu Andal Temple, Srivilliputhur, and Arulmigu Sundaramahalinga Swamy Temple, Sathuragiri. A brief write up and their weblink is provided for anyone interested in knowing more about them.

The 'Latest News' has information about timings of the various pooja done at the temple. Devotees can click on 'Read More' to get detailed information however, 'News and Events' is not regularly updated. The temple's important festivals are mentioned.

Conclusion

The four websites analyzed reflect the website design and content is related to the time when the website was started by the Temple Trust. The ones which were started early have improved over time and integrated various features on the website like streaming. The websites were designed by professionals.

All the four websites provide information on the history of the temple, and the schedule that is followed in the temple prayers. There are mentions of special occasions of the temple. It provides information on how to offer prayers in the temple, how to go around the temple, and the sequence to be followed in visiting the various deities.

The photographs are of the structure of the temple, its aerial view and the temple's main deity. Only in some cases do you have photographs of the temple surroundings (Madurai), devotees performing offerings and prayers are displayed only of special occasions. Both Tirupati and Udipi temples have photographs of some well-known personalities who visited in the past.

All of them have provisions for offering their service to the temple without being physically present. People can give donations for various activities of the temple, like free food, education, maintaining of the orphanage, hospital assistance and maintenance of elephants. All of them provide bank details through which a devotee can donate for various services. There are also provisions for e-payments. So digitization has been integrated by these websites in its financial dealings with the public. There is also a provision for devotees to get the Prasad delivered to their homes. The Rameswaram temple has a provision by which one can send River Ganges water to the temple that can be offered to the Lord on behalf of the devotees.

With the exception of Udupi Temple, all of them provide information about travel and accommodation to the places. All options are posted in detail. Provisions for booking in advance is also available. Rameswaram Temple has even laid down certain rules and regulations for booking and cancellation. It also gives details about various facilities available in the temple complex.

All of the websites are protected and copyrighted. The number of visitors to these sites reflect their popularity. They are also used to disseminate information about the various charitable activities undertaken by these temples. These websites are also multi-lingual like the Rameswaram temple which has options not only for Indian languages but also for foreign languages.

To conclude, the website of the temple is a form of virtual pilgrimage. The four key characteristics of virtual pilgrimage are: (1) it creates a mythscape, an immaterial mental geography that originally comes from sacred oral or scriptural traditions; (2) it exists as an interactive audio-visual medium for experiencing a sense of sacred presence; (3) it generates symbolic forms of entertainment that are liminoid in character; and (4) as a leisure activity of individuals 'Net surfing' from their home or office computers, it can create 'virtual travelling communities' of pilgrims who use the discourse of *communitas* to describe their experience. The websites are used by temples administrations to educate the people about the temple and its history. The service of experts led to the development of the websites which can be easily navigated. It opens in English as the digital presence of educated people is much more than illiterates. It is used to inform people about the various activities at the temple and the importance of certain days and certain ceremonies. In contemporary times, due to migration and globalization it help people to keep in touch with their place of worship and enable them to perform their religious activities.

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Multi-religious Expressions of Non-Christian Students in a Christian School: the Digital Dimension

Jose S. Destura Jr. and Nelson V. Arnante

This study examines the digital dimensions of the religious expressions, orientations as well the cultural diversities and commonalities among non-Christian foreign students in a Christian school in the Philippines-the De La Salle Health Sciences Institute (DLSHSI). In order to give light to their query random questionnaire, focus group discussion and in-depth interview were utilized. The results indicate that there exist an "open culture" DLSHSI which allows the non-Christians foreign students to demonstrate their religious convictions and orientations without fear of being discriminated or ostracized. Social media plays an important role in the expression of religious convictions of these non-Christian students. In fact, social media is a conduit for their religious conviction and orientation through the concept of "Avatar." The same principle applies when these students engage in some role-playing games or submit their performance task requirements to their teachers. The study also reveals that non-Christian students experienced some barrier and difficulties in the expression of their religious expressions because of academic pressures and the culture which is different from their own. Non-Christian students must therefore find some ways and means either to resolve these problems or integrate themselves to the prevailing orientations of the Institute. The process

Jose S. Destura, Jr, MA teaches at the Special Science High School and College of Humanities and Sciences of the De La Salle Health Sciences Institute in Dasmariñas City, Cavite, Philippines. He holds an MA in Theology major in Social-Pastoral Communication from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines where he also teaches at the Graduate School.

Nelson V. Arnante, MAEd teaches at the De La Salle Health Sciences Institute in Dasmariñas City, Cavite, Philippines. He holds an MA in Education from the De La Salle University-Dasmariñas, Cavite, Philippines. He is currently a doctoral student at the De La Salle University-Manila, Philippines.

of orienting and integrating themselves towards this end is determined by their nature as digital natives whose ways of lives are affected by technology and digitalization. The paper thus recommends that a thorough understanding of the digital natives' language and culture be promoted in DLSHSI in order to unlock their religious expressions and convictions.

Keywords: Avatar, digital dimensions, digital culture, digitalization, multi-religious expressions

Introduction

Religious expressions are essential part of our human communications. They reflect our specific beliefs, orientations as well as our convictions. Our religious experiences also indicate and reveal our self-expression and cultural inclinations. They are shown primarily in our ways of life and self-expression.

The process of self-expression is often compromised when one is uprooted from their cultural milieu or being surrounded with a majority of crowd whose cultural expressions is exactly opposite from one has been acquainted with. Self-expression is manifested in many aspects of our personal and social lives but it is particularly reflected in religious expressions of an individual. It is because religious expressions somehow serve as the guiding principles on how one will conduct their lives. In fact, Sharma and Guest (2013) attest that students affirmed their religious beliefs and practices as a means of coping up with the novelty and abnormality of the academic lives. They further claim that students draw on their existing religious resources (i.e. formalized beliefs, ritual practices, knowledge of sacred texts, denominationally specific language and more subtle behavioral cues), as their identities change and adapt to new contexts. These realities are particularly noticed in the lives of international students (IS) of De La Salle Health Sciences Institute (DLSHSI) in Dasmariñas City, Cavite, Philippines who are active participants in this simple intellectual endeavor.

In unraveling their self-expression, it will be inevitable to notice their multi-religious expressions having been from different continents and geographical locations. Yet despite these multi-religious and cultural diversities, they do manifest some similarities in areas pertaining to their utilization of technology and its influences to their academic lives. On this ground, we will try to account

the digital dimension of the multi-religious expressions of these non-Christian students in our Institute.

Method

The method used in this article is the combination of random questionnaire and in-depth interviews with some international students who are clustered according to their geographical origins. Group interview was also conducted to substantiate and confirm the results gathered in earlier method. Phenomenological approach has been utilized primarily in this simple inquiry.

In the last three years, the DLSHSI has been actively marketing their medical courses not only in the neighboring provinces but also in some prestigious schools within and outside the country to send their students for medical studies. In fact, the College of Medicine is known for recruiting several foreign students to finish their preparatory medicine courses and medicine proper in the same Institute. Some foreign students who are taking other allied medical courses are also being encouraged to pursue medicine in the Institute. These young students are exposed to the rigid academic life and need to cope with the various required curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Academic life cannot essentially be separated from other human realities that envelop them as foreign students. One of which is the religious expressions which form as part and parcel of their identity as individuals. Religious experiences reflect the distinctive culture and philosophy which an individual embraces and practices.

Religious expressions are integral part of human communications and constitute as inalienable right of the individual regardless if one is educated or not. It forms as the spiritual mantle which hovers an individual in dealings with others. Levin (2001) claims that religious practice is not just a joyful interruption in an otherwise secular life. It refers a spiritual worldview or belief system that permeates all aspect of our life, influencing what food we eat, who we marry, what we do, and thoughts we think about ourselves and the world. For such people, their chosen religious or spiritual path is not just a dimension of life—it is central and defining feature of their entire personality. This aspect will be the focal point of this study which is reflected from data gathered with the foreign non-Christian students of the DLSHSI.

International Students in De La Salle Health Sciences Institute (DLSHSI)

The participants in this research are the International Students (IS) of DLSHSI. This Institute is the only medical school owned and managed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools (FSC) popularly known as the De La Salle Brothers. To date, there are 100 international students in DLSHSI from 14 different countries like China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Ghana, Japan, Kenya, South Korea, Malaysia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, the United States of America and Zimbabwe. They are currently enrolled in 9 different allied medical colleges of the DLSHSI. Males constitute around 55 percent of the entire IS population while females constitute the remaining 45 percent. The majority of these IS are non-Christians and a few have no religious affiliation.

These research participants are digital natives whose way of living is marked and dictated by the use and influence of social media and digital form of communication. In fact, social media are digital platforms used for engagement and content delivery (Gould, 2015) which enable the research participants to communicate and interact with each other in real time.

Almost every aspect of their academic lives are determined and influenced by technology. From the set up in the classrooms to their library are e-learning capable. The Institute is equipped with online resources for medical and allied medical subjects which students can easily access. This is not to mention the outcome based education (OBE) which highly characterize the Institute. OBE orientation and approach require both educators and students to be technologically literate and capable because final output is an essential requirement to every subject matter or course. Besides final output can be done efficiently with the aid of information and communication technology. These features thus reflect the digital orientation of the students in the Institute.

Religious Expressions in DLSHSI

Religious expressions may refer to the ways and means of communicating our beliefs, convictions and orientations to some spiritual or higher being. It may be in a form of worship songs, ritual celebrations or any external actions of honoring and worshipping the superior being whom we adore and believe.

It is worthwhile to know what shapes our religious expressions and on

how do we express them. In the study “Variation in Religious Expression Across Interfaith Advocacy and Social Movement Setting,” the researchers claim that the presence of religious gatekeeping institution and the belief among participants in the need to maintain certain boundaries around their faith both shape and constraint the shared practices (Yukick and Braunstein, 2014). There may be no rigid gatekeeping mechanism in the DLSHSI but every student is encouraged to express their religious conviction. The former researchers however, find that expression of religion differs according to social context, which somehow dictates the manner by which an individual will demonstrate his/her religious convictions.

Many International Students claim that there is an existing “open culture” in DLSHSI which allow them to express their religious convictions without reservation. DLSHSI promotes religious tolerance and utmost respect for student’s religious convictions. Non-Christian students who are required to take religious education subjects are advised to consider the subject as part of their academic requirements. Professors are always mindful not to proselytize their students but rather invite the students to appreciate and discern meaningfulness of their belief as reflected in their daily lives. Perhaps this is the meaning of the Lasallian religious expression, “Live Jesus in our hearts.” And if you call your God or almighty being with a different name you may substitute the name “Jesus” in that in Lasallian religious expression as what a Muslim student did when claim, “Live Allah in our hearts.”

Here are some direct accounts from the students which exemplify the “open culture” in our institute .

In our school even though it is a Catholic school we are given the freedom to practice any kind of religious activities which is not Catholic and each student is encouraged to promote their own faith apart from Christianity. Students are free to share their own beliefs with their teachers and other fellow students and it is a really great opportunity to learn others religious beliefs too. In our school students are given the freedom to share their own beliefs. --S.L., Student

By chanting the name of Allah when I am free or in between break time. And after going home, reciting verses of the Qur’an. In addition, before bedtime chanting names of Allah and prophet Muhammad. Reciting Dua (prayer from the Qur’an) every morning. This is my practice of faith being in Lasalle. --M.B., Student

Lasallian values are all about being responsible and considerate human being and our religion preaches the same. --P.T.O., Student

Being a student of DLSHSI, the Institute gives me full freedom to practice my own religion unlike many other Catholic Institutes. They do not force us to believe in what they believe but give us full freedom to believe in our own beliefs. We are allowed to attend the holy mass and feel the presence of god. We do not feel that we are being discriminated by being separated from the other crowd. I do not feel that if I am not a Christian I am being discriminated in any way. I have the full freedom to express myself in fact, the teachers are really curious to know more about my religion and respect my personal space, no one criticizes that if you are a Hindu, what are you doing in a Catholic school. All that they say is all religions tell us that we are all brothers and sisters and we must not fight over religion or cause any harm to a living being. We all are humans and tend to make mistakes but we not see the faults of others rather should work for the upliftment of ones being. The peoples' good attitude, the school's non-interference with my religious practice and their considerate attitude towards our religious festivals allows us to practice our religion without any hesitation. I am proud to be a part of such institution. --A. K., Student

The “open culture” observation of the participants of this research is a result of the social and value transformation which has been promoted by the president of the Institute since his appointment. It is inclusive in his 14-point agenda which culminates in the vision and to transform the Institute as a “place where the experience of God is lived and shared” (Br. Gus, fsc 14-point agenda). This observation by far confirms that multi-religious expressions are not only tolerated but are also promoted in our Institute.

Barriers to Religious Expressions

Communicating one’s religious expressions may not always be easy as it appears. There are some significant factors as to why religious expressions may not always be possible.

Among the significant barriers to religious expressions is the predominant culture in the Institute. As part of the International Students’ community, it won’t be possible to simply express your religious inclinations and expressions for fear of being ostracized or misunderstood. An African student, for example, recalled her experience of being completely shocked to find out that she is the only foreigner in her class and was very hesitant to express her own religious inclinations till she found out that it is not.

Some Korean students who have been almost in the country for more than two years have a relatively easier way of coping with the culture of the Institute and to demonstrate their religious expressions.

Respondents in this study indicate that academic responsibilities and requirements are barriers to their religious expressions. It is because the academic culture of excellence is very much enforced among students and educators. In fact, it is a common joke among the educators to reply to various complaints of the students in matters pertaining to their academic lives with the expression: “Welcome to DLSHSI.” Holistic education, moreover, dictates that the drive for academic excellence do integrate spiritual dimensions. Along this line, the campus ministry department do organize periodic spiritual exercises and monthly Eucharistic celebration for every college in the Institute. And to cater to non-Christian students, the campus ministry intends to promote inter-religious activities and celebrations. To date, however, nothing has been done except for some religious educators who integrate inter-religious activities in their respective classes.

Technology and the Religious Expressions

The modern means of technology, particularly the social media, play an important role in resolving the issue on religious expressions. Very often, the social media are the last resort in order to fulfill our religious convictions and expressions.

A good percentage of the respondents reveal that modern technology is an alternative way to express their religious expressions. Their orientations and nature as digital natives somehow allow them to cope with the stressful academic life and different cultural milieu. Very often, students would resort to social media to get connected with their friends and relatives to confide their issues including religious matters. Online religion is a common practice for those who cannot fully express their religious convictions because of academic requirements and difficulties. Our Methodist students, for example, cannot partake of their Saturday service because their classes in DLSHSI last till Saturday. They confided that they fulfill their Saturday obligations by watching via YouTube the sermon and other religious services they fail to attend. Hindu students resort to same technique in order to express their religious orientations and convictions. Social media and mobile apps (applications) are helpful for their religious expressions.

There are some students however, who do not rely on social media in order to express their religious convictions. Some Koreans students, for example, treat social media with suspicions and reservations in matters pertaining to their religious convictions. For some of them, social media is a venue where one does not necessarily reveal their real selves nor their religious convictions. One can pretend and hide their authentic religious convictions and orientations because of one can be anonymous in social media. These students further claim that social media do not elicit the emotion and inner sensitivity which we experience in a face-to-face communication. This perhaps is the meaning of what Fr. Eilers talk about the concept of “revenge of the analogue.”

Digital Dimension

The present generation of digital natives are marked not only by their proficiency in communication technologies but also by their way of manipulating it. The same generation has grown past from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0 where the former is marked by interaction and engagement with use-generated content and the latter is known for its portable personalized content and search functions (Gould 2015, p. 4). Their ways and means of communication is characterized with digitalization.

The social lives of the millennials are driven by technology and their social interactions are dictated by their use of social networks, mobile phones, and other gadgets (Santos, 2016). Most of our Senior High School Students in DLSHSI are equipped with iPads which they use not only for academic performance tasks but also as a medium for their social interactions as well as for their spiritual or religious expressions.

Russell Belk's (2014) study on “Digital Consumption and the Digital Self” claims that digital technologies allow us to be effectively present even when our bodies are not. Online media, for example, has the ability to represent our concept of self both as presence and co-presence. Presence which is also known as telepresence refers to the ‘illusion of being there in the virtual world or online game.’ Co-presence meanwhile refers to the ‘perception of being in the shared virtual setting’ with remote others (Shultze, 2010, p. 4380). Accordingly, presence or telepresence is progressively embodied in the avatar that we use. Thus an avatar is not only the three dimensional graphic character that we manipulate on the computer screen but also all our online representations

of ourselves like blogs, social media profiles, ‘selfie’ photos and other online traces (Belk, 2014).

Kafai and others (2007) describe an avatar as another self in the virtual world that has a personality like a human. An avatar that reflects the user’s self-concept (like facial and body similarity) influence the degree of avatar identification in terms of a self-congruity perspective. This reality is very observable among these millennials or digital natives which is in turn is being reflected in their religious expressions. Take for example some online digital Android role-playing games like: *Tiny Dice Dungeon*, *Maiden: Legacy of the Beast*, *Inotia 4*, *Zononia 4*, *Final Fantasy Brave Exvius*, *Dungeon Boss*, *Pocket Mortys*, *Terra Battle*, *Nonstop Knight*, *Sword Art Online: Memory Defrag*, *Hoplite*, *Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes*, *Arcane Legends MMO-Action RPG*, *Super Awesome Quest*, and *Top Titans 2* (cf. Top 15 Best free Android RPGs/Android Role-playing games published on Mar 10, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USvp0KaNy-0>). While engaging in these role-playing games, they are unconsciously reflecting their religious conviction in the portrayal of the victory of good over evil. The concept of avatar are very much reflected in these role-playing games, which according to Fox et al. (2015) may function as interpersonal sources or as demonstrative models to inform or persuade a user.

Przegalińska's (2015) study on the “Embodiment, engagement and the strength of virtual realities,” posits that avatars are virtual representation of users, but are not limited to what users can do with them. She further claims that avatars offer a wide range of possibilities that are very often unexplored in real life but does not necessarily mean they are completely detached from real life. This type of mindset and orientations are very observable among the participants of this research. In our focus group sessions, a participant pointed out that religious expressions can actually be reflected in their virtual presence or representation, akin to the above mentioned concept of avatar.

The result of our random questionnaire and in-depth interviews with our International Students point to one reality that we are dealing with a generation of students whose lives are marked with digitalization. From the moment they wake up in the morning using the alarm from their mobile phone, the very first thing they check are the messages they missed to answer or Facebook post they failed to comment or like. Even while taking their morning rituals in the shower room, mobile phones are being used either to listen to music or to play games.

Our phenomenological experience as educators attest to this reality. In fact, we used to call them as the iPad/iFad generation because they are known for their iPad gadget manipulations and the fad they attribute to it. The same generation of students can transform the whole range of concepts and learnings discussed in the school through this mobile gadget. You will be amazed how they can produce a video presentation using only their iPads and come up with very professional presentations. Religious concepts and ideas are well developed and presented in most of their performance tasks and often exceed the normal expectations of their educators

The whole range of academic and social lives of research participants are indeed marked by digitalization. It is not surprising to know that even their religious expressions as students are governed by it. It is precisely on this account that then Msgr. Paul Tighe claimed that we need to recognize the significance of the “digital arena” where most of the young people are and communicating. Understanding their language will allow us to understand their religious expressions and convictions.

Perhaps looking at the language and religious expression of these non-Christian students in a Christian school like De La Salle Health Sciences Institute, one will be driven to examine the “avatars” that we are involved and preoccupied with.

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The Role and Impact of Digital Technology Use in Pilgrimages in Thanjavur Region, South India: An Investigation

Sebastian Periannan

In South India, the Thanjavur region is endowed with three major religious pilgrimage centers: Big Temple, Hindu center, Nagoor Dargha Islamic Center and the Catholic Marian Shrine at Vailankanni. This investigation observes how the latest technology on line leap into the digital world in these places where people of all walks of life throng as pilgrims. It focuses on the gap or missing element of technology use and to bridge the gap from a modern communication point of view. These three areas of investigation is supported with the participant observation, focus group discussion (FGD), online and off- line survey as to find out how digital technology is being used, how the religious centers are facilitated with, and what is the level of usage and impact. FGD is used to have an in-depth interview with a group of IT professionals based locally while online survey with the respondents was carried out to find out the impact and the missing elements. As a result, few strategies are recommended as vision, understanding media, communication competence, studies and research.

Keywords: digital transaction, pilgrimage, religious purpose, awareness, analysis, reflection and action.

Rationale of the Investigation

The Asian Research in Communication (ARC) takes up a theme every year for its Annual Roundtable Conference held in most convenient and suitable study atmosphere in a selected country. Last year and this year (2017), we concentrate on the same theme “Religions in Digital Asia.”

Asia is a home for several major religions. India as a country is a sub-continent by herself where we encounter major religions as a way of life. Digital technology

is a fact, a reality and a truth in existence of things and essence of communication. Internet penetration in India from an official statistical count is about 36% in the global scenario. Given this background, this paper tries to investigate and explore the role and impact of digital technology use in pilgrimages in Thanjavur region, South India.

India as a whole enjoys a lot of religious festivals and celebrations with millions of places of worship of different religious affiliations. One of the most important aspects of religious life in India is faced, experienced and focused with long and short pilgrimages. On a day-to-day experience, people at large use various ways and means to get information regarding their planned sometimes unplanned pilgrimages. South India and particularly the Thanjavur region is uniquely endowed with most important pilgrimage centers for Hindus, Big Temple in Thanjavur, Nagoor Durgha for Muslims, and a Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health, Vailankanni for Christians.

Objectives of this Investigation

1. To observe the digital technology online use for pilgrimages/ religious purpose in selected Hindu, Muslim and Christian centers.
2. To find out the gap or the missing element of technology use from a modern communication point of view.
3. To propose ways and means to bridge the gap for a better inter active and inter cultural exchange

Theoretical Standpoint

This investigation makes use of “multiplicity paradigm” and “globalization theory.” Jan Servaes (2008) sketches the multiplicity paradigms, which originated in 1980, with the approaches of post-modernism, anthropology, psycho-analysis and pedagogy. The emphasis is on internal, external and cultural variables. The main principle of this paradigm is tight to communicate. It follows the media theory of democratic-participatory theory.

Globalization theory has focused scientific attention on modern fundamentalism, which is seen as a critique of traditional and popular religiosity. However, the real effect of globalization has been the growth of heterodox, commercial, hybrid, syncretistic religions over orthodox, authoritative and

institutional versions of the spiritual life. The ideological effects and social consequences of these religions cannot be easily or effectively controlled by religious authorities, and they often have a greater impact than official messages, at least among the young. In Weber’s terms, it is the triumph of mass over virtuoso religiosity.

Methodology

The researcher has used participant observation, focus group discussion (FGD) and survey methods to elicit the responses to find out the use or purpose digital technology for religious use, gap or missing element, and to bridge the gap for the investigation. Observation here is meant as browsing and analyzing the available on line data about the Big Temple in Thanjavur, Durgha in Nagoor, Mary’s Church at Vailankanni. FGD was conducted with 9 selected IT professionals. Survey as a strategy was used in two ways, one was “on line” survey with questionnaire using Google survey form technique from 38 respondents and the other is “off line” survey of the same questionnaire administered to 150 respondents. Both the responses were collected and analyzed through qualitative and quantitative tools to secure the percentage level of technology use, gap and missing element, and needed strategy.

Pilgrimage as a Point of Religious Reference and Reflection

Pilgrimage is intertwined in the tradition, scripture, practices, beliefs and teachings of respective religions. Religious understanding of pilgrimage is underlined leading towards **heavenward (Moksha)** movement. Philosophically, a pilgrimage is an act of simple and enlightened people’s way of life. Theologically, it is a spiritual journey with the pastoral value of faith, joy, love and hope in fighting against evil.

It has a personal relevance as it is viewed as repentance of sins and renewal from thanksgiving being exercised and expressed on a personal basis. Personally speaking, it is about a change of heart and attitude inspired by the religious or sacramental life, coupled with expressing gratitude and offering gifts for the fulfilled vows leading to a holistic health.

From a sociological point of view, a pilgrimage can be investigated as multiplicity, plurality and connectivity as a result of **family** backgrounds. Socially,

it is valued for the common good, good will and tolerance of social fabric. Social development of societies, it does promote pilgrimage as social events and interactions. Culturally, it is an authentic expression of thinking, practicing and celebrating religious life, faith and experience.

Economic and marketing aspect of pilgrimage can be explored from production, distribution, consumption of religious articles, consumerism, social justice and critical look leading towards communal **harmony**. Economy thrives in and around a pilgrimage center without creating any communal disharmony or disturbance.

Now digital technology is used to promote distribution and tourism. Media or digital communication plays a vital role in promoting pilgrimage as spiritual tourism and inter-cultural avenues of communication for social change and **soul transformation**.

Digital Technology as Convergence and Divergence

We are in the age of e-learning and digital open house. Technology, both in terms of the processing power of the computer as well as the bandwidth of Internet connectivity, is a limiting and a major factor to be investigated.

How cellphones, social networks and the Web have influenced religion, across traditions, over the past decade:

It's more accessible. Religious groups are able to reach people where they are: online.

- Muslims today can hear the digital call to prayer, by downloading prayer schedules on their cell phones with an aptly titled application, iPray (Prayer times can change depending on location, season and adjustments like daylight savings.)
- Christians can look up Bible passages in an instant, without even knowing the exact verse, thanks to searchable online Bibles like BibleGateway
- The new mantra for Indian gurus is Social Media announces Reuters news. India has one of the fastest growing communities on Facebook globally, with more than 29 million registered accounts. India has more than 100 million unique users. In India, civil and political movements warm to social media. This was not the first time social media was

used as a megaphone for communal and religious hate. Al Jazeera (Jun 26, 2014) There has been considerable amount of research on how commodification and the Internet are transforming the religious lives of young people.

In modern societies, the principal characteristics of religion are its individualism in association with the decline in the authority of traditional institutions (specifically, the church, the liturgy, and the priesthood) and a growing awareness that religious symbols are social constructs. Robert Bellah's predictions about modernity have been strikingly confirmed in the growth of popular, de-institutionalized, commercialized and largely post-Christian religions. In fact, similar processes are at work in all the major religions.

There is a dark side to the Internet that exists alongside its good side. As Schultze puts it, "These are the two faces of the 'Net'—one repulsive and one attractive, one that reflects goodness and Grace, and the other that displays human sinfulness." Internet users, then, must be aware of the "dark side of the Web." The "dark side of the Web" refers to activities on the Internet that are often criminal in nature, violate the moral standards of the majority of the population, and clearly go against the principles of Christianity. According to an article published by U.S. News and World Report, the scope of this dark side of the Internet has not been comprehended by most people:

Locating the Investigation Area



Brihadeeshwarar Temple

(image from <http://undiscoveredindiantreasures.blogspot.com>)

BRIHADEESHWARAR TEMPLE (BIG TEMPLE), THANJAVUR

Brihadeeshwarar temple—popularly known as “**Thanjavur Periya Kovil**”—is the largest temple in India and is one of the greatest temples with an outstanding architecture in the country. The 1002-year old temple dedicated to the major Hindu deity, Lord Shiva, was built in 1010 AD by the Chola Emperor Rajaraja Chola I. The temple represents the brilliancy and excellence of Cholas who scaled major heights in a large scale as well as intricate architecture. The magnificent edifice not only has sculptures, a majestic Vimana (temple tower) and frescoes but also has inscriptions disclosing the richness and wealth of Tamil people during those days.

These enormous divine powered temples are the root cause for the diviners, mystics, sages, saints, Naayanmaars, Aalwaars and other pious religious devotees who were born in this sacred land during the last one thousand years.

NAGORE DARGAH



Nagore Dargah
(Image from Wikimedia Commons)

Nagore Dargah (also called Nagoor Dargah or Hazrat Syed Shahul Hameed Dargah) is a dargah built over the tomb of the Sufi saint Hazrat Nagore Shahul Hamid (1490–1579 CE). It is located in Nagore, a coastal town in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The dargah’s outer doors are always kept open. Inner doors are open from 4:30 am to 07:00 am and 6:25 pm to 9:30 pm. On Fridays alone, these doors are additionally kept open from 12 noon to 2:30 pm also.

Shahul Hamid is believed to have performed many miracles in Nagore and cured the physical affliction of King Achutappa Nayak, a 16th-century Hindu ruler of Thanjavur. He is locally referred to as Nagore Andavar, meaning the “god of Nagore.” Nagore Dargah, as it stands now, is believed to have been built by ardent devotees of Shahul Hamid with major contribution from Hindus. There are five minarets in the dargah with the Hindu Maratha ruler of Thanjavur Pratap Singh (1739–1763 CE) building the tallest minaret. The Dargah is a major pilgrimage center that attracts pilgrims from both Islam and Hinduism symbolizing peaceful coexistence between the two religions.

The most prominent event celebrated at Nagore Dargah is the Kanduri festival, a fourteen-day commemoration of the death anniversary of Shahul Hamid. Common worship practices at Nagore Dargah include the presentation of offerings accompanied by the playing of musical instruments like nadaswaram, atypical of Hindu religious tradition. The Shifa Gunta, a pool within the precincts of the dargah, is considered sacred and pilgrims take a holy dip in it. The hereditary Khalifa (Sufi saint), selected from among the descendants of saint Yusuf, performs all the official and religious duties of the Dargah. The administration and maintenance of the Dargah is governed by a committee which operates under a scheme decreed by the Madras High Court.

About the Saint

Hazrath Shahul Hamid Badusha Kaadiri was born to Hazrath Syed Hassan Kuthos Baba Kaadiri and Bibi Fathima at Manikpur, in the Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh. He was a 13th generation descendant of the renowned Sufi saint Hazrath Muhiyudin Abd al-Qadir al-Jalani. He had his Islamic education at Gwalior under the guidance of Hazrat Mohammad Ghouse. He left on a pilgrimage to Mecca and then moved to Maldives, Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu with his spiritual team. Historians Sayyid and Qadir Hussain (1957) place the date of his birth on 10 November 1504, his death on 10 November 1570 and arrival in Nagore during 1533–34. Other sources mention the year of his death as 1558, 1570 or 1579. He is believed to have led a simple and pious life and performing a lot of miracles giving him the name Nagore Andavar (meaning god of Nagore). His popularity grew outside Tanjore region during the period. He was also called Meera Saheb, Qadir Wali and Ganj-e-Sawai.

According to a local legend, hagiographical texts and historical records, Shahul Hamid is believed to have cured a Hindu ruler of Thanjavur, King Achutappa Nayak (1529–1542 A.D.), of his physical affliction caused by sorcery. Shahul Hamid found a needled pigeon in the palace believed to be the cause of the misery. He removed the pins from the pigeon, resulting in the improvement of the king's health. In remembrance of the event, the practice of setting pigeons free in the premises of the dargah is continued by worshipers in modern times.

History of the Dargah

Achutappa Nayak, the king of Thanjavur during the 16th century, donated 200 acres (81 ha) of land to the entourage of Shahul after the saint cured the king's affliction. The Dargah was built on a part of the land donated by Nayak. Shahul Hamid is believed to have predicted his death and advised his adopted son Yusuf about his burial location and rites to be performed after his death. Yusuf performed the rites as per instructions and decided to stay there for the rest of his life. A mausoleum was constructed over the grave. Devotees of Shahul, who continued to believe in his powers after his death, venerated the burial site. The shrine was initially a smaller one and gradually gained prominence. Pratap Singh (1739–1763 A.D.), the Hindu Maratha ruler of Thanjavur prayed for a son and built the tallest of the five minarets (locally called Periya Manara) with a height of 131 ft (40 m) once his wish was fulfilled. The Marathas of the later period were patrons of the Dargah with the Maratha king Thuljaji, the son of Pratap Singh, donating 4,000 acres (1,600 ha) of agricultural land to the Dargah. During the last quarter of 18th century, when there was conflict between European powers, the Nawab of Arcot, the Maratha kings and Tipu Sultan of Mysore over Thanjavur region, the Dargah was considered strategically important by all of them.

SHRINE BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF HEALTH VELANKANNI



Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni
(Image from Wikimedia Commons)

Though no historical records exist, according to an age-old and strong tradition, Our Lady appeared to two poor boys besides saving the Portuguese sailors from shipwreck in Vailankanni. This led to the origin of a Marian shrine at Vailankanni centuries back. A Chronicle in 1630–1635 composed by Paulo de Trindade and a letter of 1642 mention a Christian center at Vailankanni with a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Health. The Franciscan priests of Nagapattinam looked after Vailankanni which in course of time had a Franciscan priest stationed there. Later it came under the administration of the Diocese of Mylapore. Through the letter of Fr. Francesco de S. Ignez, from 1713 there was a clear indication that a separate priest was working in Vailankanni by stationing there. Though the commencing of the devotion to Our Lady is unknown, Fr. Antonio do Rosario and Fr. Nicolao de s. Rita have mentioned about the devotion in 1779. The diary of Rangappa Thiruvengadam Pillai 1760–1766 also mentions that Vailankanni was a pilgrim place.

In 1933, a spacious Gothic church replaced the old church by keeping the old altar intact constructed by the sailors. The shrine was raised to the status of a Minor Basilica in 1963 and a two – storied extension church was added to it in 1975 to accommodate the ever growing number of pilgrims. On the way to Our Lady's Tank, Stations of the Cross and Mysteries of the Rosary were constructed. The Shrine now has many quarters with convenient rooms at affordable rates of rent for the benefit of the pilgrims. The Shrine Retreat House and the Institute of Mariology

are milestones in the development of the Shrine. It is also to be mentioned that perpetual Eucharistic adoration and counseling centre were started and confessions in different languages are heard.

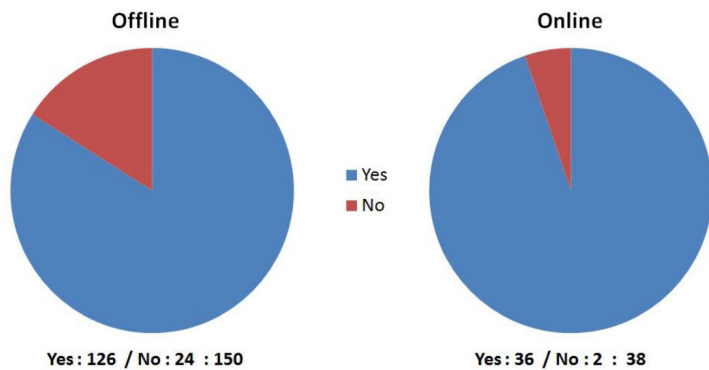
Findings and Discussion

Qualitative Analysis

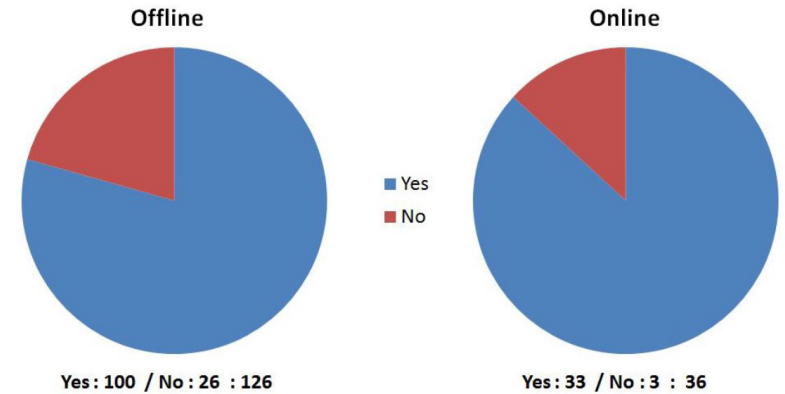
OBJECTIVE & METHODS	Participant Observation	Focus Group Discussion	Survey
USEAGE / PURPOSE	Religious purpose is not the priority. Occasionally used for the pilgrimage purpose. Individualistic, friendship, gossips	Commercial and user oriented, socialization. Limitedly used for religious purpose.	Many are Aware of the digital media for the religious purpose through various means on a regular basis. Democratic, anonymous
GAP / MISSING ELEMENTS	Lack of awareness and proximity, limited usage	Hybrid, lack of insights, lack of engagements, lack of current updates and not user friendly	Lack of connectivity & lack of Understanding, No monitoring, No regular updates
STRATEGY	Religious apps, cultural apps, community apps, aspiration, inspirational	Better quality leads, creative campaigns, Friendly apps, community website	Awareness & Up-gradation to the recent technologies, user friendly

Quantitative Analysis of Survey

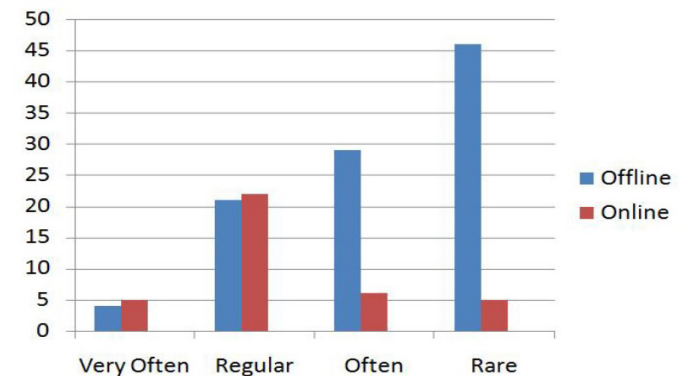
1. Are you aware of the use of Digital media for Pilgrimage (Religious) purpose?



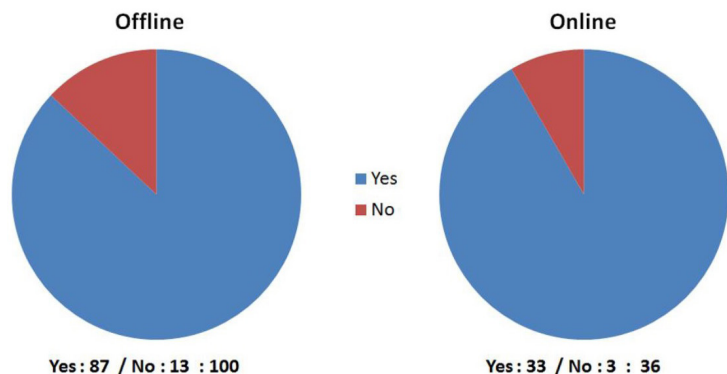
2. Have you used Digital Media for Pilgrimage (Religious) purpose?



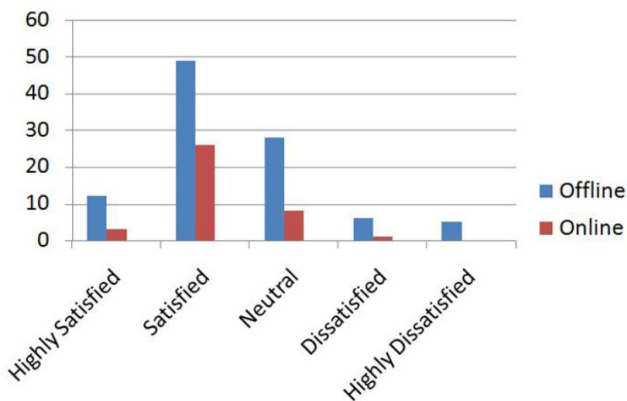
3. How often do you use Digital Media for Pilgrimage (Religious) purpose?



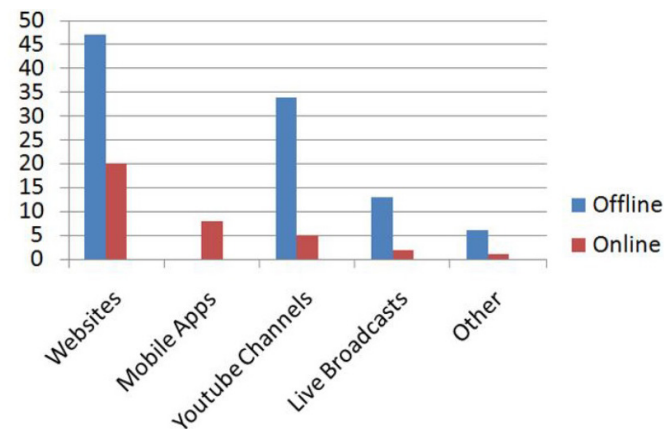
4. Was your purpose fulfilled?



5. Rate your satisfaction level.



6. What are the latest Digital Technology you have used?



Strategies and Recommendations

- Professional approach** is wanted and called for while sharing information, learning lessons, building communities and enabling collaborations of communication initiatives, educational endeavors, and developmental plans and projects. A clear cut policy will ensure the use of digital technology towards beneficial networks, which measure across devices and channels off line.
- Understanding media** in terms of theoretical underpinnings calling, “be there in the moment.” Social media becomes instructional and a virtual reality. Community media covers the cultural traits and up-to-date machine learning. Finally, personal media ranging from tradition to modernity envisages an all encompassing time, talent and technical management.
- Communication studies and research** must include specializing on brand authenticity, public relations, crisis management, automatic loyalty, content- message analytics, entertaining more or less, large data but little change demand for freewheeling, distracted disruption and anti-consumerism. Communication must be for change and development to ensure awareness of the trends such as Gen-Z, the power of emotions, data driven communication, rich media content, being in touch through live-video with the target audience, and virtual reality for a new story telling.

4. **Communication competence** must be given importance at all level. Taking into consideration of the multiple intelligence, communication innovation, ethics and disposition.

REPORTS

Communicators Reflect on the “Gospel in Digital Society”

Students and Faculty of the joint Master of Arts and Licentiate in Theology major in Social-Pastoral Communication Program of the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School and Faculty of Sacred Theology organized in October 27, 2016 at the Martyrs’ Hall of the UST Ecclesiastical Faculties a research symposium entitled “The Gospel in Digital Society: Asian Realities and Challenges.” It was attended by some one hundred participants—priests, members of different religious congregations and lay professionals—who were interested in the field of digital technology and its potential for pastoral and evangelizing communication.

The symposium started with an introductory presentation by Fr. Anthony Le Duc,svd, PhD from the Assumption University and St. John’s University (both in Thailand). His presentation was on *Cyber-theology – Theologizing in the Digital Age*. He believes that with the emergence of the digital age theological reflections are also needed and should be done.

For Le Duc, the cyberspace “is a metaphorical space that exists in our minds, especially when we are chatting with friends and feel as if we are meeting them in a particular space. While cyberspace is not physical, it is not necessarily virtual.” He reiterates Benedict XVI’s point that the cyberspace is not merely a parallel or visual world but it is part of the daily experience of people. With the Internet and cyberspace, families and friends update each other, people form new relationships, learn new things, and know the latest news. Le Duc admits that there are still only a few steps in the field of theology in cyberspace. Participants might have thought that the concept of *Cybertheology* is about religions/religiosity in the Internet or the potential pastoral opportunities herein. But *Cyber-theology* according to Le Duc is rather a “systematic reflection on the transformative impact of the digital age on the various dimensions of one’s faith life and his/her response to this ever changing milieu.”

Because of this exploratory researches and reflections are greatly needed in the emerging field of *Cybertheology*.

As one of the answer to this call, several students and faculty of the UST Social-Pastoral Communication program presented research prtoposals in various fields of study.

Three religious education teachers, Mr. Leo-Martin R. Ocampo, Mrs. Precilda Jimenez and Mr. Jose S. Destura, shared their personal experiences and reflections on the use of digital media and modern technology under the heading of “Sharing Faith in a Digital World: Catechesis and religious instruction.” The examples started with a two-year old child using already a “tablet” and being fascinated by it: What are the consequences for his development and later life as a person but also in classroom teaching of Catholic Faith? Their presentation was titled “Sharing Faith in a Digital World: Catechesis and Religious ‘Instruction.’” All three agreed that in this modern times, students are more likely to have in their fingertips readily the information they need in a particular subject and religion teachers need to be aware of their creative ability also for growing in their faith and spiritual life.

Another presentation by Sem. Dennis Rey Ortojan revolved around mobile applications or “apps”—most of which are intended for everyday needs (food, shopping, games, etc.). The presenter here explored apps developed for the Church such as prayer guides and missals among others, but also indicated further possibilities and challenges.

Beginning with Pope John Paul II’s concept of a *new culture of communication* in his Encyclical on Mission *Redemptoris Missio* also the development of the concept in six additional Pontifical Messages for World Communication Days (1990 to 2013) was presented by Mr. Ray Anthony Bofill as “food for thought” and in addressing the issue of the symposium.

The state of short wave radio was addressed especially by Fr. John Mi Shen in view of Radio Veritas Asia. In the coming years, the station will be shifting to radio streaming in the Internet and thus be able to also reach a wider and also more diversified audience.

Fr. Anh Vu Ta, a professor of Communication Theology at UST, asked in his considerations on whether God is online or offline. He concluded that even if online

communication may help in increasing faith in God and forming relationships with people; the reality is, however, that God can be found *offline* because “we are not created digitally, we do not live digital, and we do not die digital.” He says that God wishes to arrive and dwell in men’s hearts, and that is analog, though the digital can be a way to it.

Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd, the Social-Pastoral Communication program coordinator, presented reflections on a needed paradigm shift of Church communication “from Hierarchy to Networks.” There is a need for pastors to be “communicative persons,” embracing a network disposition—that is reflected in “sharing” instead of “proclaiming;” “asking” instead of “demanding;” “proposing” instead of “prescribing;” being a “servant-companion” instead of being “boss;” “searching” instead of “knowing everything;” “grouping” instead of “structuring;” promoting “creative action” instead of “obligations;” and having an “open mind” instead of having a “fixed opinion.”

This research symposium can be considered as start of a planned series of conferences on Social-Pastoral Communication needs of the Church in the Philippines and Asia.

Vince Henry M. Salles

International Journal of Asian Christianity (IJAC)

The *International Journal of Asian Christianity* (IJAC) is a new publication for scholarly studies and reflections on Asian Christianity: “While other major Asian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam have received great deal of international scholarly attention, Christianity is relatively neglected as a subject of study” the announcement flyer for the new publication says. The new periodical wants to “create a space previously unavailable to examine these dense and sophisticated linkages of religion and culture both in their rich distinctiveness as well as I a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary perspective allowing for broader generalizations and theorizations to emerge.” It is open to scholars of all persuasions.

The new journal intends to “provide a common platform and intellectual space wherein the particularities of Asian Christianity’s presence in the respective social-cultural-religious and political milieu can be brought together in one place for mutual dialogue, learning and enrichment.” The new publication is also “to explore the role of religion as identity marker and as a political means in conflicts/negotiations of power and to investigate the interface between Religion” and political life. Finally the periodical will encourage “discussion and analysis of societal issues, including human rights, gender and sexuality, marginalized groups, migrants and refugees as they relate specifically to Christian experiences in Asian societies.”

The Editor-in-chief and initiator of the publication is Professor Felix Wilfred, formerly at the State University of Madras, Chennai (India) and Founder-Director of the Asian Centre for Cross-cultural Studies in Chennai. He is also the main editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*. The Journal has also a group of 28 academicians as members of the Editorial Board. Beside seven from Asia, there are also eight each from the United States and Europe and a few from other continents.

The new periodical is published in Chennai. They can be reached via the e-mail address: christianityasia@gmail.com.

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

BOOK NOTES

Agrawal, Binod C. (Ed.). *Media and Religious Communication in Multi-Cultural Asia: An Eclectic Research Agenda*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2016. 182 pp.

The second volume of the *Religion and Social Communication* book series of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) presents mainly papers and considerations from the annual ARC roundtables and beyond.

This volume presents the content in three sections: 1.) Methods, 2.) Research in Societies, and 3.) Communication Networks. The book opens with some considerations for an “Asian Research Agenda on Religion and Social Communication” followed with “Religious Amplifications” and “Unfolding Religious Communication Systems. The “Research in Societies” brings samples and considerations from India, the Philippines and Thailand followed by Communication Network considerations from Indonesia and related Indian experiences on Islam, Jainism and Sikhism.

The presentations of this volume open “up a whole lot of new research questions and agenda for scholars to reflect and contemplate on the future direction of Religion in the midst of digital media” (Introduction). The book is therefore an invitation to further develop the field of religion and communication in Asia and to promote more studies and considerations not only in technical developments like the Internet but also on the communication dimensions of common needs and concerns in and for religions in view of a shrinking but also unifying world in and for Asia.

Carlsson, Ulla (Ed.). *Freedom of Expression and Media in Transition. Studies and Reflections in the Digital Age*. Goeteborg: Nordicom, 2016. 199 pp.

Over the years the Scandinavian countries have developed an impressive network of scholars and universities in the field of social communication studies which is exemplary and goes far beyond the boundaries of these countries. This development seems to have contributed at the same time to

a growing generation of young communication scholars who reach not only geographically but also academically beyond their countries of origin.

The present volume on the “Freedom of Expression” is an example along these lines. The editor, Ulla Carlsson is one of the pioneers of *Nordicom* and a recognized scholar in the field, now leading the UNESCO chair on Freedom of Expression, Media Development and Global Policy at the University of Gothenburg which is also the base for *Nordicom*.

The 199-page volume presents papers of 21 scholars which are—after considering the “Nordic Media Model” as a “Challenge to Democracy”—divided into three sections under the headings of “In Transition: Freedom of Expression, Media and the Public Sphere” with eight contributions, “Threats to Freedom of the Press: Control, Surveillance and Censorship” with six contributions and “Reporting War and Conflict: Safety and Civil Rights” with five papers. Many of the articles presented are one way or the other case studies or considerations on just one or a few aspects of a concern or subject. The authors are from different Scandinavian universities and many seem to part of a ‘younger’ generation though also classic ‘old-timers’ are represented like the Finnish Kaarle Nordenstreng calling to “Liberate Freedom from its Ideological Baggage” (pp. 61-65). The book does not go into any details of single Scandinavian countries though there is the exception of Tanzania (pp. 83-89), Syria (pp. 135-143) and the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (pp.145-152). Many of the issues raised in the different contributions have also bearings on Asia. Religion is not a special subject and addressed directly though related issues on ethical dilemmas, freedom of human rights and privacy play an important role.

The individual contributions of the collection are somehow case studies or related to just one concern without going into extensive research deliberations and study. Thus the book serves more as a ‘trigger’ for thinking and to stimulate more extensive research and considerations.

Every contribution of the book begins with an ‘abstract’ to indicate the main content of the text to follow. The collection stimulates thinking and invites to further and deeper considerations.

Jones, Steven E. *The Emergence of the Digital Humanities*. New York/London: Routledge, 2014. 212 pp.

The author of this publication comes from literature studies and relates them to the digital world in the field of “Digital Humanities” (DH). He calls his book an “extended essay”: “it isn’t a survey of or introduction to ‘digital humanities,’ arisen out of the combination of digital and physical dimensions of experience,” which “address the social, locative, embodied and object oriented nature of our experience in the networked world” (p. 14) “Networked technology.” After an introduction, the author presents chapters on ‘Eversion,’ ‘Dimensions,’ ‘People,’ ‘Places,’ and ‘Things.’ In his understanding ‘Eversion’ means “turning itself inside out” (p. 14) where “networked technology is becoming a integral part of everyday life” people take for granted. It “articulates a widely experienced shift in our collective understanding of the network during the last decade: inside out from a world apart to a part of the world, from transcendent virtual reality to mundane experience, from a mysterious, invisible abstract world to a still mostly invisible (but real) data grid that we move through every day in the physical world.” (p. 19).

The chapter on ‘Publications’ should be of special interest for communicators as it deals with traditional and e-books and e-publishing in relation to the ‘analogue’ in publishing with the touch and smell of the ‘real’ book which seems to be lost in the electronic version. “One of the promises of this book is that the so-called Web 2.0, movements such as Liberal Arts 2.0 and academic DH are all parts of a continuum of emergent practice and theories, evident on blogs and in journalism, and among designers and novelists, as much as in academic departments and interdisciplinary centers.” (p. 159).

Aside from a selected bibliography, the book has also an extended index.

Maher, Jennifer Helene. *Software Evangelism and the Rhetoric of Morality. Coding Justice in a Digital Democracy*. New York: Routledge, 2016. 204 pp.

Religious expressions and words seem to be appreciated by a growing number of communication scholars. Shelton Guaratne applied the concept of ‘mindful journalism,’ Stephen A. Ward used ‘ecumenical’ attitude in Christianity

for his global approach in *Radical Media Ethics* and Davis Sax discovered in his *Revenge of Analog* meditation even for the digital specialists in Silicon Valley.

Here now is “Evangelization” used in the title of a book of Jennifer Helene Maher on *Software Evangelism and the Rhetoric of Morality. Coding Justice in a Digital Democracy*.

“Evangelism” refers to ‘Evangelium’ (Greek: *Eu-Angelion*) as reflected in the Bible as the book of living and teaching of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and the Jewish God in the Old Testament. One might really ask if such a religious and theological expression and fact can be related to “constructing moral and political values that extend well beyond the boundaries of the development culture” in a book that is to build a “theory of evangelism” to be reflective of “proprietary software industry” (Abstract). One might, however, ask if using this expression for such a purpose is not ‘degrading’ and almost ‘abusive’ for a religious and theological expression which should be confined to her ‘field’ and not somehow ‘de-graded’ into a non-religious business-oriented field. “Eu-Angelion” is the Good News contained in the Bible as a holy book and is to be shared as God’s Word to nourish and build proper relations to and with God. It should not be de-graded into a development of a computer platform like Windows and Linux. If a certain attitude is to be indicated it could be with the more general word *missionary* but not “evangelism.” Evangelism brings the Good News of God’s Love and redemption but not computer systems!

The author describes evangelism as existing in the “realm of religion as an activity through which those of faith aim to spread divinely inspired ‘Good News’ in an effort to convert and thereby save souls of non-believers...” (p. 1).

Referring to Paul Ricoeur, the author later describes evangelism as “that practice that ‘re-animates’ the whole of the moral network, giving it a ‘dynamism’ through which the regeneration of freedom occurs” (p. 75). Exactly this can be labelled in other ways instead of using “Evangelization” which should be reserved to its biblical/theological origin! Nobody would try to do something like this with the Qu-ran of the Moslems!

There are other ways to express the present concern starting with a more general term like “missionary” which is not that theologically loaded and does go also beyond different Religions...

The general concern of this book, however, should be appreciated in the tensions between commercial and “free and open source” (F/oss) software. In this case the title of the book and the respective content would be adjusted avoiding “Evangelism” and substituting it with “Software *Concerns* and the Rhetoric of Morality” which would exactly fit with the existing sub-title: *Coding Justice in a Digital Democracy*. This should also do justice to the moral and ‘religious’ concerns of the author Jennifer Helene Maher in this *Routledge Studies in Rhetoric and Communication* series where the book is listed as volume 25.

Ward, Stephen J. A. *Radical Media Ethics. A Global Approach*. Malden, MA: Wiley/Blackwell, 2015. 239 pp.

The purpose of this publication is to “articulate an integrated, global media ethics.” For this it tries to present “a new framework for thinking about ethical issues in Journalism and Mass Media.” (p. XIV). The “radical” in the title refers to the originally Latin word *radix* and a “root” which seemingly reflects the main concern of the author who after “Theoretical Foundations” presents “The Shape of a ‘Radical’ Integrated Ethics” and finally “Principles of Global Integrated Ethics.”

Concluding the first part of this book, the author states his concern that we need “not a comforting, familiar Ethic but rather radical reform... a radical ethics” which leads to his “eight implications that follow from adopting these notions” which start with “respect for ethical thinking, egalitarian pluralism and holistic interpretation. The author states in his chapter on “Radical Media Ethics” that we are moving from “a pre-digital, parochial media ethics to a digital, global media ethics through the lens of this digital revolution” (pp. 93-118). In more detail he treats Journalism (p. 119 ff.) where he wants to “promote integration and reduce fragmentation” (p. 121). He sees “media needs” as 1. Informational, 2. Explanatory, 3. Perspectival, 4. Advocational, 5. Participatory and 6. Dialogic and calls for an “integrated ethics.” In this considerations he also uses the word “ecumenical” from Christian Theology meaning the “desire for unity,” recognizing “differences within a common framework of values” originally within and between different Christian denominations which he relates here also to a “search for unity between many ‘sects’ or approaches” also within Media Ethics. (p. 146).

The author summarizes his concerns and presentations in three steps: 1. Proposing a 'radical approach', 2. Describing the structure of "integrated Ethics" and 3. finally presenting "political and cosmopolitan principles." (p. 222).

The publication is an essential book also for religions being concerned and committed to proper ethics of communication also in and for Asian cultures.

BOOK REVIEW

Sax, David. *The Revenge of Analog. Real Things and Why they Matter.* New York: Public Affairs Publisher, 2016. 282 pp.

This book is a rich study and presentation of the analog in modern digital culture. It is based on research and interviews from the Americas as well as from Europe. The Canadian author has invested a tremendous concern in personal relationships and modern technology. He not only interviewed quite a number of people involved but also visited their places and work 'stations.' He shares his experiences and insights in a very readable and pleasant way which makes it a joy to read this challenging book.

Sax divides his book into two parts: 1. "The Revenge of Analog *Things*" and 2. "The Revenge of Analog *Ideas*." He asks: Does 'newest technology' always render the old obsolete? He also asks in his introduction: does the mere fact that "because digital technology has become so damn good" leave no room or a secondary place for analog? He states that "surrounded by digital we now have experiences that are more tactile and human-centric. We want to interact with goods and services with all our senses..." and because of this also the "Revenge of Analog" is very certainly at the heart of digital economy" (p. xvii f.). He is convinced that "analog experiences can provide us with a kind of real-world pleasures and rewards which digital cannot; analog sometimes simply outperforms digital as the best solution. When it comes to the free flow of ideas, "the pen remains mightier than both, the keyboard and the touchscreen..."(p. xvii.

Under the section on analog "things" the book handles vinyl, paper, film and board games, while the section on "ideas" treats print, retail, work, schooling and the "Revenge of Analog" in digital. One of the arguments for print is the fact that reading a paper gives the feeling and experience to finish a paper like an edition of the London-based magazine *Economist* while a website is 'endless' (p.110) and never gives a "finish-experience." Something similar can be said about simple notebooks which are selling because ideas noted there simply 'stay' which is hardly the case with a digital device. Smaller bookshops are opening and selling again because they give the immediate 'touch-feeling' of a book as well as the 'social interaction' with the experienced bookseller and the personal feeling of 'being at home' in

the welcoming environment of the shop which is completely missing in online operations... Similar things can be said about “retail” where the personalized shop gives ‘human touch’ (analog!) while the supermart never promotes any personal ‘relationship.’

The apparent “Ed-tech” developments in ‘schooling’ are also seen with a critical eye: just to hand out “laptops to poor children and expecting their lives to change... ignores reality” because “teachers know what works best in their classroom and they know what they need to improve the way they teach their students” (p. 190). “Where the real lasting innovation in education lies is not in hardware or software, but in new approaches to teaching that shapes how students learn” (p. 191 f.).

“Revenge of Analog” and Religion are not directly part of this book but it appears despite that when the author talks about his own Jewish Sabbath experience where the participants were required “to abstain from technology over Sabbath, the twenty-four- hours rest period between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday” which Sax found “so restorative that I regularly began observing my own digital Sabbath when I returned to Toronto...” (p. xii).

In the section on “Revenge of Analog in Digital” the Buddhist experience of meditation in a “Breathe” project of Adobe from 2008 is described where members spent 15 minutes in meditation which later further developed: “Meditation and its broader umbrella movement ‘mindfulness’ have become practically mandatory at the leading companies in Silicon Valley” like Google. “Facebook and Twitter have both meditation rooms in their offices, something that is even found in hedge funds and banks. Zen masters, monks and mindfulness gurus are in demand in Silicon Valley as personal trainers and Java script coders...” All this seems to reveal “a deeper truth about the digital technology industry and the people working there.” Sax concludes his presentation on “Breathe” the organization related to the meditations: “a fifteen minutes of silence a day was a life raft amid a sea of deadlines, interactions and expectations that washed over Adobe workers in endless waves,” because meditation gave them “a mental rest at a time of the day when it was needed most. It allowed them a step away from the stream of ideas...” (p. 209).

Sax admits that today “analog is now a conscious choice, requiring greater cost, both materially and in terms of our time and mental capacity, tha

digital default. And people increasingly elect it” (p. 238). The reasons for this he sees because analog “is pleasure” it “is profit” because of goods and services needed, but also “we are choosing analog for our health” but especially also “analog pursuits connect us to one another in a vastly deeper way than any digital technology can. They allow bonds to form in real time and physical spaces, which transcend language and our ability to communicate with just words and symbols...” (p. 239).

The word “revenge” in the title of this publication irritates a little bit. The dictionary explains “revenge” as “harm that you do to someone as a punishment” (Cambridge Dictionary). Should we see analog as a harm to digital? Can they not both rather complement each other and thus be seen as two sides of a same or similar human experience? At many instances also in this book analog and digital can be related to each other in a positive or complementary way but maybe the specifics need to be spelled out in more detail. Both might have to be seen and developed as a ‘tandem’ with, however, different aspect for the same or a similar identity.

The book has a selected bibliography (pp. 247-259) and index (pp. 261-282) which will help for further studies and deepening of the facts and thoughts presented.

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

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