Religion and Social Communication

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Vol. 12 No. 2, 2014

ARTICLES

REPORTS

NOTE

BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK NOTES

Religion in Social Communication Perspective
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The social communication dimension of religions can be studied and researched in many ways. There should be, however, a special need for this in Asia as the continent where most of the world's religions originated and where religion still determines in many ways life and society. The following are just some 'snippets' which might help to consider this broad field and hopefully stimulate some academic work and research in it.

In the recent book *Digital Religion* edited by Heidi A. Campbell, the chapter on religion by Gregory Price Grieve states that, "…Religion's current meaning is only a few hundred years old, and can be traced back to the European Enlightenment…" (105). The author categorizes religion in terms of metanarratives that possesses features or attributes of myth, ritual and faith and seems to reduce religion in view of the digital world to these categories.

In reality, however, religion is as old as humankind and the word dates back to the Roman times where Lactantius (Div. Inst. VII, 28) relates it to the Latin word *ligare* which means 'to bind.' "Re-ligare" or "religion" would then mean to re-connect to the origin of peoples and humankind. It would indicate the relation and connection to the origin, the absolute, a higher 'being', to a creator. Cicero relates religion to re-*legere* as "careful veneration of the Gods" (*De natura Deorum*, II, 72). This shows how religion was those days already very much part of culture and life. In fact these and similar considerations were followed over the centuries and were also expressed in recent times. Thus the German anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt (1912-1955) has a 12-volume work on the *Origin of the Idea of God* (*Ursprung der Gottesidee*) where he

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describes God not only as a person but also as a "power to determine our lives." Friedrich Heiler (1961) wrote on *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* and Mircea Eliade presents in three volumes the history of religious ideas starting from the Stone Age and through Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam to the modern times. Emile Durkheim (1984) divides the world into a holy and a profane part but also refers humans to be part of religious communities. He describes religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things." Rudolf Otto approaches religion under the perspective of the "Idea of the Holy" by developing the concept of the '*Numinosum'* which Stout uses in his *Media and Religion, Foundations of an Emerging Field* (2012) as an important element.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1985) defines religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." Here especially the communication dimension comes in and one might add that Geertz based his insights also on his anthropological studies in Indonesia, especially in Bali.

With all this we see Religion as a forceful field and essential element of any culture and human living.

All this holds for Europe especially in academic development. The very first universities dating back to the 12th century were founded for Philosophy and Theology – like also at a later stage the University of Santo Tomas in Manila where I teach which started 1611 as a theological school. Even medicine and ecology were Church related as the example of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) shows, who was a highly talented Benedictine nun who not only had religious vision but also developed natural medicine and ecology which is revived today all over the world. Even Caxton, the first printer in London, is an example because he started his printing press at Fleet Street which was those days the quarter of the clergy who were his main customers.

Recently (2012) Oxford University Press published *Handbook of Religion and the American News Media* with six sections and all in all 39 contributions. The sections are devoted to: 1. History, 2. The Media, 3. Religions, 4, Issues and Beats, 5. International coverage and finally 6. The Religious Press. All

this is in relation to North America. The background to it is described by the publishers in the following words, "whether the issue is the rise of religiously-inspired terrorism, the importance of faith based NGOs in global relief and development, or campaigning for evangelical voters in the US, religion proliferates in our newspapers and magazines, on our radios and televisions, on our computer screens and, increasingly, our mobile devices. Americans who assumed society was becoming more and more secular have been surprised by religion's raising visibility and central role in current events. Yet this is hardly new: the history of American journalism has deep religious roots, and religion has long been part of the news mix." It would be very interesting to also develop a similar publication like this American Oxford book for Asia and Social Communication in Asia. We have plenty of things to share but it needs also scholars and writers who know how to go about it.

For professional Communication organizations a similar observation can be made: Within the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) in the United States there is a special Religion and Media Interest Group (RMIG) with more than 100 academic members; they even have an own newsletter named after the group. The International Association for Communication Research (IAMCR) had in their last annual meeting in July 2013 in Hyderabad with the Religion, Communication, Culture Working Group some 40 papers. Nordicom, the Scandinavian Communication grouping, has after some 10 years of existence now beside different divisions also a temporary group for "Media and Religion" (Hornmoen, Harald & Orgeret, Kristin Skare 2014,287) .

For Asia, similar developments for communications should be expected since the importance and influence of Religion is without question as we can see for Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka and other Asian countries where it existed already long before Christianity. For India, Roshen Dalal (2006) has presented in the Penguin Dictionary series an extensive book *Religion in India* with the remark that his book is "not a purely academic study, but also looks at religion from the spiritual viewpoint. It reflects the ideas of the greatest thinkers and spiritual leaders of India, who saw that all religions are different aspects of One Truth, and that a truly religious person can never be divisive." "From the sages of the Upanishads," the text continues "to the Bhakti saints, the Sufi mystics, and the spiritual gurus of more recent times, they all emphasize the Oneness of life and the sense of universal love

that underlies every spiritual experience" (p. v). The book lists, beside the extensive Hindu section, also Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, the tribal religions as well as Islam, Buddhism and Christianity.

It is one of the concerns of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) to go deeper into these realities under the perspective of Social Communication which could be studied in historical perspective but also on the conceptional and experiential level in relation to modern times with the many new technical developments. We still seem to lack even general overviews, studies, and a proper awareness of these fields under social communication perspective. Where are the studies like Buddhist or Hindu perspectives of communication in general, or in historical view or on the factual level? Up until now there are some contributions mostly as case studies which constitute only a small part of a bigger picture. We still need studies on the role and function of Social Communication in broader perspectives for which we will have later an example by Wimal Dissnayake for Buddhism. Such studies might relate to history, teachings and practice. They could be done either from a theological, philosophical or even anthropological or sociological point of view which starts with a deeper understanding of *Social* Communication and goes far beyond mere media and technology use as we have outlined partly already in former years. Our new book series with the UST Publishing House might be a small beginning as also are our roundtables.

To give another example for a deeper approach: In the German language, we distinguish between *Geisteswissenschaft* and *Naturwissenschaft* which unfortunately cannot be properly translated into English without losing part of the meaning of these expressions.

Geisteswissenschaft refers to the humanities like Philosophy, Theology and related fields whereas *Naturwissenchaft* refers to the "natural" sciences which developed historically much later as special fields and were for some time even simply seen as a kind of 'appendix' to the forgoing. This seems to be the opposite today.

Many, if not most, studies by communication scholars and even so called 'training programs' today are technology determined (media) or based on sociological or at best cultural data but hardly any one takes note of a

philosophical or theological perspective. If it is true what Lundby says in the volume on *Digital Religion* which we quoted at the beginning of these considerations that scholars have "a pre-occupation with institutional Religion" (p.134) then we might ask "why"? Is it just they simply lack a philosophical or theological background themselves which would be needed in such academic work? Or is it lack of cultural (religious) insights, cooperation and mutual understanding or prejudice? ARC should go deeper into this and possibly help to bridge the gap.

The "mediatization" of Religion has been studied and presented in several recent publications and seems to develop in a special field of concern. Here the "media" stand at the center and the studies are concerned either on how the media are used by Religion or how they express Religion. The concern shows already in the name clearly an emphasis on *media* and thus technology but seems not to consider sufficiently the relation between Religion and communication as a *process*. Here it might be interesting to recall the history of the field of what we call today 'communication' in German speaking countries where it developed from literature and writing and not from Shannon and Weaver and a "mathematical model" of communication which somehow became the basis of our technology and media-determined field of 'communication' Who says what through which channel with what success"(Laswell) or the S-M-R models. The German expression was and still is *publizistik* which means "to make public" (Hagemann). This indicates a *process* and not means, technology or a single 'media.' Anything and any process of making something public is *publizistik* from speaking to each other and similar ways of human communicating regardless of the 'medium' used. With this understanding the field studies the *process*, content, effects of making something public even independent of any use of whichever means. The process of 'making public' relates to persons, culture, to the way of life, ways and effects of 'sharing' far beyond the means used. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger understands communication as *Mit-teilung* to 'co-divide' or 'to share' which once again indicates a process and is not at all fixed to any special technology or means, except the human person herself (Peters, 2000, 19). In all this Religion also plays a role as far as it is experienced and practiced among communicating humans and within society. Could this not be a good starting point also for deeper studies on Asian religions and cultures? Sri Lankan scholar Wimal Dissanayake (2013, 24) who has on several occasions reflected on the relation between Buddhism and Communications in studies

seems to point in the same direction when he writes

> The architects of these (western!) models claim objectivity for their models on the basis of this decontextualized rationality. The Buddhist view, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of contextual understanding, situated knowledge, and complexities of lived realities. Its sense of rationality cannot be separated from contexts of lived realities or emotional affiliations. In other words, it is much more a grounded and total rationality. We do not find such a rationality activating or underwriting the available Western models and theories of communication… It seems to me that the pathways of thinking promoted by Buddhism will enable us to move further in that direction.

To me here this is a very interesting and challenging way to also approach Religion and Social Communication as a process which is beside others reflected in religious practices like the so-called popular piety or even liturgy and similar services or common prayer practices as we experienced at our 2012 roundtable in the Buddhist University in Chiang Mai.

This are just a few reflections from a somehow European point of view but I am very much convinced that we can say similar and even more convincing things from the perspective of our Asian Cultures and Religions which are even today to quite an extent dominating and determining – directly or indirectly – our lives. Asian Religions and Cultures are not just recent but are as old as the continent and even older than Christianity. In most cases, Religion is still today at their center in one way or the other. My Chinese and Vietnamese students always impress me in our Intercultural Communication courses when they are asked to give an overview and present their own 2000 to 3000 year old cultures and how they also today still dominate their thinking and their lives…

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Thai Buddhism, the Mass Media and Culture Change in Thailand
Patchanee Malikhao

From a historical perspective, Thai Buddhism is a hybridization of animism, Theravada Buddhism, and Brahmanism. As Thailand has gone through four phases of globalization, from the archaic period, to proto-globalization, globalization, and contemporary globalization, Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices have also been modified accordingly.
This paper attempts to analyze:

(1) *How the Sangha, or the Buddhist body of Thailand, has been impacted since it has become part of the state during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V);*
(2) *How the economic and social development has an impact on Thai Buddhism, especially the animistic beliefs, cults, Hindu Gods, and astrology; and*
(3) *How the Thai mass media and new social media create hypes on Buddhism, animism, and the further commercialization of Buddhism.*

Introduction

Theravada (ways of the elders) or Hinayana (smaller vehicle) Buddhism has become the main religion of Thailand since the archaic period. According to King Ramkhamhaeng's script, dated 1291, the "Lankawong" doctrine or Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka was propagated to the archaic Sukhothai from Nakhon Si Thammarat in the South of current Thailand (Ishii 1986: 60). The soteriology of the Theravada doctrine is, "one's acts determine one's salvation" (Ishii 1986: 3). Theravada is the ways to cease suffering through the Noble Eightfold Path handed down by the Lord Buddha. Theravadians consider themselves Orthodox Buddhists; they don't mix the Buddhist philosophy with other Eastern traditions and philosophies like the Mahayana (greater vehicle) Buddhism practiced in East Asia.[1]

As Thailand has passed through many phases of globalization, Buddhism practiced in Thailand has also been affected as part of these cultural changes. Theravada Buddhism has blended with other religious practices such as Hindu, notions of power often borrowed from tantric types of Buddhism practiced in Tibet, and animistic folk beliefs in spirits (Baker & Phongpaichit 2005:9). This sort of hybridization is a result of culture change in many phases of globalization in Thailand.

Thai Buddhism in the phases of globalization

According to Appadurai (2001: 17), globalization is an interactive process in which 'locality' and 'globality' interact via the shrinking of space-time in the world system. Not only can globality influence locality, the latter can also induce changes in the global arena and this process is called globalization from below, local globalization or grassroots globalization. Locals get influenced by the culture of globals and become, therefore, 'homogenized', Friedman (1994: 210) argues. What happens within the locality is the logical connection process between the decentralization and fragmentation of identities. That creates a new process he refers to as creolization (see also Hannerz 1987). Nederveen Pieterse (2004) refers to the same process as hybridization. Hawkins (2006: 14) supports this view by stating globalization is multiple and hybrid. However, according to Stuart Hall's work, as studied by Proctor (Proctor 2004: 27) and Featherstone (1996: 47), globalization concerns both homogenization and hybridization/creolization. As a consequence, each locality is not being hybridized at the same time, speed or geographical space. This is what Appadurai (1966: 5) refers to as the disparity or disjuncture of globalization, meaning some parts of the world can be more globalized than others. The differences between localities are no longer vertical. Rather, they are horizontal in terms of cultural spaces or nodes connected by crisscrossing flows of people, goods and messages (Racelis 2006: 55).

Interestingly, globalization is not the same as Westernization. Dicken (2004: 17) states it is not planned; flows happen in many directions and with different degrees, and a globalized locality is not necessarily a Westernized (or Americanised) society. It can lead to some other form of hybridized society. Cohen (1991: 63) states clearly that Thailand did not develop in a Western direction but has fused its own culture with Western forms. Other societies, which have become modern without becoming very Western, are Singapore, Taiwan and Iran (Nisbett 2003: 224).

According to Hopkins (2002: 1-10), globalization denotes the following ongoing historical process: first, archaic globalization; second, proto-globalization; third, globalization; and fourth, post-colonial globalization. Hopkins explains further that archaic globalization occurred from Byzantium and Tang to the renewed expansionism of Islamic and Christian power after the 1500s. He identified proto-globalization with the political and economic developments that became especially prominent between about 1600 and 1800 in Europe, Asia and parts of Africa. The third historical process, globalization, he refers to as the colonial period from the 1760s onwards. Globalization that can be related to modernity started from 1800, according to Hopkins. It refers to the rise of the nation state and the spread of industrialization. The last process, post-colonial globalization, refers to the contemporary form that can be dated approximately from the 1950s.

The term "globalization" used in this paper is defined as a flow of ideas, services, cultural products and technology that includes the global diffusion and local consumption of culture, values, social, political and economic concepts. These factors have had an impact, via different communication modes, on a different locality in a different way at a different speed from the archaic past to the present (see also Malikhao, 2012).

The periods of globalization used for Thailand as adapted from Hopkins (2002) are (a) *archaic globalization*, starting from the ancient time to the 1500s; (b) *proto-globalization* starting from 1600 to 1768, when Ayutthaya was defeated by Burma for the second time and Siam (former name of Thailand) later shifted the capital city from Ayutthaya to Bangkok; (c) *globalization* starting from 1769 to 1945 ; and (d) *contemporary globalization* starting from the 1946, when King (Rama IX) ascended to the throne to the present. In each period hybridization can be observed and the current Thai Buddhist culture is a consequence of dynamic interplays among the polity, economic, beliefs, worldview, practices, and social change within the globalization and hybridization processes from archaic to present.

Let's start with the religious culture that has changed and hybridized in each globalization period:

In archaic globalization (before 1500s), there were many kingdoms and people had animistic beliefs before Buddhism arrived in the 13th Century

(Rajadhon 1988: 39)*.* The Sukhothai Kingdom can be highlighted as the starting point of the present day Thailand. Sukhothai Kingdom adopted Theravada Buddhism from southward Nakhon Si Thammarat. This adoption process denotes trans-nationalization. Sukhothai Kings had a reciprocal relationship with the Buddha's domain, which has the Sangha (Buddhist monk community) as the center. Sukhothai monarchs entered the monkhood and were supposed to rule with ten Buddhist virtues (Ishii 1986: 61-63). In this period, evidence from inscriptions has shown that the Monarchs conferred the titles of ecclesiastical rank to the Sangha domain. It was a starting point of "state Buddhism" and the hierarchical system in the Sangha (Ishii 1986: 62). Griswold (1967: 13) reports on bronze statues of Hindu gods found in old Sukhothai as good evidence of Brahmanic practices then. Wyatt (1984: 55) stated that although Brahmanism was given court patronage during the Sukhothai period, it did not seem to have any effect on Buddhism at that time. The works of Anuman Rajadhon (1986), Keyes (1978), and other scholars in Thai studies also report that animistic beliefs (such as the beliefs in ghosts –phi- and spirit cults) have been side by side with the Brahman rites and Buddhism since this period. The worldview of Thais in this period is based on King Lithai's Trai Phum cosmology from 1345 which consists of three worlds: the world of sensual desire, the world of material factors, and the world of non-material factors.[2] The first world is about seven realms of happiness: human being, four great kings, 33 deities, full joy, those who are delighted in their full creation, and those who are delighted in creations of others; and four realms of misery: purgatory, animals, suffering ghosts, and the realm of demons. The second world is comprised of 16 realms of Brahma (mind and matters) and the third world is about four stages of immaterial meditation.

The kingdom of Ayutthaya was founded in 1350 and later dominated and engulfed the Suthothai polity from 1438 onwards (Tambiah 1976: 89). In the early Ayutthaya period, Ayutthaya borrowed Khmer (old Cambodian) civilization through the trans-nationalization process. Tambiah (1976: 89) reports:

> …the Thai borrowed from the Khmers many features of their administrative and political institutions, art forms, system of writing, and vocabulary, especially that associated with honorific court language. Most importantly, they borrowed the major

[2] Ganwiboon 2014. http://www.academia.edu/2322014/ Cosmology_as_described_in_the_ Trai_Phum_Phra_Ruang, accessed Oct 1 2014.

features of the Khmer royal cult and imported Cambodian brahman priests to conduct the rites.

Although the indigenous Thai village culture is basically matriarchal (Klausner 1997: 64), it shifted to become patriarchal in this period. The impact of patriarchy on sexuality resulted in polygamy, which was recorded for the first time in the early Ayutthaya period. Baker and Phongpaichit (2003: 8) explain that, when one political Tai zone was defeated, the defeated ruler had to send a daughter or sister to become his overlord's wife as a tribute. In special cases, the overlord might grant the subordinate a royal or noble wife.

In the proto-globalization period (from 1600 to 1768), the power of Sukhothai shifted to Ayutthaya. Siam became a large Kingdom. Ayutthaya adopted the devaraja (God-King) cult of polity from Khmer as a starting point of the hierarchical system. This concept is incompatible with Pali Buddhist ideas (Tambiah 1976: 91). This is good evidence that hybridization between Theravada Buddhism and Hindu-Brahmanism occurred.

It was in this period that the *sakdina* system[3] was introduced reinforcing the lower status of females (Baker and Phongpaichit 2005: 16-17). Females in the lower class were subjected to the sakdina lords. It was a tradition that the royals had many wives to ensure the production of enough sons to assist with administrative tasks and enough daughters to build marriage networks within the elite.

Well-established relationships between the Ayutthayan monarchs and the Sangha were recorded in The chronicals (Ishii 1986: 63). In this period, King Boromakot dispatched a chapter of Buddhist monks to Sri Lanka (Ishii 1986: 64). This is evidence of grassroots globalization in this period. For female subordination, Ghosh (2002: 30-31) explains that, in traditional Siam, the number of wives and female servants indicated the prestige of a man. During this period, spirit-medium cults and magic must have been practiced as shown in a royal decree promulgated by King Rama I in 1782. The then King warned the Thai subjects not to pay much attention to spirits and magical things while ignoring the Buddhist teaching (Kitiarsa 1999:94).

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[3] The sakdina system was the hierarchical structure of service nobility codified in lists of official posts, each with its specific title, honorific and rank measured in areas of land they were allowed to possess (Baker & Phongpaichit 2003: 15, Ongsakul 2005: 115, Servaes & Malikhao 1989: 33, Servaes 1999: 211, Srisootarapan, 1976; Suwannarit 2003: 9-12).

In the globalization period (1769-1950), Siam (former name of Thailand) entered modernity. The power of Ayutthaya shifted to Dhonburi and later to Bangkok. King Rama I of *Ratanakosin* (the starting of the Chakri Dynasty with Bangkok as the capital city) era ordered all monks to have an ID. Bad monks were defrocked. Christian missionaries came in the late 1820s and that made Monk-Prince Mongkut reform the Sangha by establishing the Thammayut movement in the reign of King Rama III.[4] The Thammayut Nikaya is distinctively different from the Lankawong or Maha Nikaya (mainstream Lankawong Theravadin monks) in emphasizing stricter vinaya (disciplines) and focusing on meditation.[5]

King Rama IV, also known as King Mongkut (reigned from 1824 – 1868), reformed Buddhism in terms of the interpretation of Dhamma (the truth or nature of the world as described by the Lord Buddha) by editing ancient Buddhist texts and propagating a reformed version to suit the modernization era based on Science (Visalo 2003: 8-11). Meditation practices and metaphysical miracles were eradicated from the Buddhist studies curricula for monks. Heaven and hell were explained as a state of mind, rather than as the world out there after death. The worldviews of the people had changed to greater secularism and the image of Buddha and Kingship was reduced from divinity to a more human form (Visalo 2003: 18-30).

During the reign of King Rama V, also known as King Chulalongkorn (1873-1910), Thailand entered the modernization period. Out of fear of colonization by Great Britain and France, King Chulalongkorn initiated fiscal, education, communication and transportation reforms with Bangkok as the center (Charoensin-o-larn 1988: 139 and Sivaraksa 2001: 33-34). Although Winks (1976) suggests that the concept 'informal empire' can be used for such a reform, Holm (1991: 124) explains that the informal form of imperialism imposed on Thailand revolved mostly around the control of railway construction from Bangkok, and the degree of involvement was limited to the co-operation of the royal family and the upper aristocracy. A formal form of imperialism was imposed on Siam when it signed the 'Bowring Treaty' with the British in 1851. It aimed to reduce import duties and taxation and allowed British subjects to

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[4] (Ishii 1986: 65 and http://guru.google.co.th/guru/ thread?tid=59242e591b555f35, accessed September 23rd, 2014)

[5] (http://guru.google.co.th/guru/thread? tid=59242e591b555f35, accessed September 23rd, 2014).

reside in Siam and enjoy rights of extraterritoriality from the Siamese courts (Wyatt 1984: 184). Siam also signed Bowring-like treaties with the United States, France and a score of other states (Wyatt 1989: 184). Charoensin-o-larn (1988: 139) calls the way King Rama V transformed the traditional decentralized sakdina (Thai feudal) states into a highly centralized and unified state under absolutism as 'internal colonization'. I would rather call the way Kings Rama V, VI and VII rearranged the structure of the country to meet Western standards in the globalization period as a *hybridization of the Thai political-economy*.

King Rama V, with the assistance of his half-brother, the Monk-Prince Vajirananavarorasa, modernized the ecclesiastical education (Payutto 2001: 137). Payutto further reports that the Royal Siamese Tripitaka or the first complete set of the Pali Canon was published, a royal library was founded to preserve Buddhist sacred books and rare scriptures. However, Buddhist monks in Siam lost their important position in education when King Rama VI reformed national education from temple-based to school-based (Klausner 1993: 160, Payutto 2001: 137). Payutto (2001: 140-141) stated that Buddhist monks were considered part of the traditional Thai society. As the Thai education system aims at Westernization; Buddhist monks confined their activities to merit-making acts, preaching the Precept Five on basic morality, focusing on monastic affairs and construction of monastic buildings. Some monks engaged in superstition and astrology. Payutto (2001: 143) observes:

> Modern Thailand is, however, often branded with modernization without development or with misguided development. The lack of the monks' share in the process of development must have been a factor in this undesirable result.

In contrary to the modernity asserted by the elites in Siam, Crawfurd (1967), a British diplomat to Siam, reported the intermingled practices and beliefs of the Siamese and the Indian and Chinese immigrants in 1822. Crawfurd observed the worship of linga (phallic symbol) of Brahmanism, Hindu Gods and Goddesses and Chinese deity, such as Kuan Yin. Alongside with Brahmanism, animism and supernaturalism were being practiced as reported by Kitiarsa (1999:77-82).

In the contemporary globalization period (1946-present), Thailand entered postmodernity. From 1970s onwards Thailand has been under the flux of contemporary cultural globalization via modern telecommunication technology,

transportation, mass media and the Internet. Vuttanont, Greenhalgh, Griffin and Boynton (2006: 2069) explain Thailand in transition from:

> (1) feudal towards neo-capitalist political system[6]; (2) from restricted towards widespread information; (3) Buddhism towards multi-faith or secular; (4) from high towards low religiosity; (5) from rural towards urbanized geography; and (6) from the following social values to the new ones: from respect the old towards celebrates youth; from collectivism towards individualism; from trusting towards sceptical; from modesty towards self-expression; and from male dominated towards gender equality.

Bechstedt (2002: 238-261) explains that the hierarchical system of the past mixed with the emergence of new institutions formed by interest groups and new social classes. Those in power have money and access to profits, shares and stocks. Khun Ying Amporn Meesuk, a renowned Thai scholar, interviewed by Trisuriyadharma (2006: 17) suggests that now the whole Thai society worships money as God. Thai society is now facing a paradox between maintaining its traditional culture and adjusting to new changes. Techapira (2006), a well-known Thai social critic, states Thai society has suffered cultural schizophrenia as Thais are trapped in a double bind between Westernization and their own traditional culture. According to him, being traditional Thai means being authoritarian, being pragmatic, and being subservient as part of a patronage system. These characteristics are opposite to being egalitarian, self-reliant and ideological according to universal principles. Techapira calls the hybridized way of Thais adjusting themselves to universal principles but still maintaining some Thai characteristics a relativistic movement.

Baker and Phongpaichit (2005: 150-164) write that in this period, the US mainly supported economic development, educational development and bureaucratic infrastructure building for the promotion of development. The US also provided funding to fight communism during the cold war period. Thailand could be seen as part of an informal US empire in this period and accepted the Social and Economic Development Plan from the Free World Leaders (Thongchai 2001: 37). As a result of economic development, Thai-Chinese entrepreneurial groups were in control of the economy. It is fair to say that

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[6] Teharanian (2007: 91) explains neo-capitalism as the incorporation of capital and global reach of transnational corporations (TNCs), dominating state, civil societies, and communication networks; disembodiment of human relations into a nexus of digital numbers.

Thailand in this globalization period follows the Modernization paradigm, which sees the industrialized Western societies as the ultimate goal of development. As explained earlier, Thais worship spirits as part of their animistic beliefs since the archaic globalization. Urbanization and migration as part of Westernization have caused the booming of the urban-based spirit-medium cults in the past few decades as a moral and psychological refuge for the capitalistic desire of the urban population (Kitiarsa 2012: 16-17, 146). Two noteworthy points are (1) the rural spirit mediums are normally female who assert themselves from the subordination in the Thai patriarchal system to possess power above laymen but lower than Buddhist monks; and (2) the urban spirit cults incorporate the Chinese and Hindu cults, not the American nor the European ones due to the inaccessibility of less educated rural spirit-mediums and the surveillance of the Sangha to limit the hybridization form to the trio of Buddhism-Hinduism-animism (Kitiarsa 2012: 52-54, 147). Mahamakuta and Mahachulalongkorn Rajawittayalai were established as Buddhist universities in 1946 and 1947, the teaching and learning emphasized rote learning of Buddha-Dhamma (teachings of Buddha in Pali).

Consumerism associated with hybridized forms of Buddhism, supernaturalism, and animism can be seen in the growth of the expensive amulets and talisman industry, which involved famous magic monks (see Formoso 2000: 99, Suntravanich 2005 quoted in Prachachart 2005: 13). Magic monks, according to Kitiarsa's study (2012: 39-40), are those who perform all or some of the following: eliminating of bad omens/strengthen good fate (sado khro); fortune-telling (du duang); spraying or bathing a person with blessed water to ward off bad luck and protect the person from bad spirits (rot nam mon); enhancing the longevity and well-being (to ayu/suep chata); expelling or exorcising bad spirits (lai phi/khap pop); setting up a guardian spirit's house or altar (yok san phra phum); blessing a new car or new properties (choem rot/ban/sammak ngan); and providing tips for lotto numbers (bai huay/ hai chok hai lap). Pluralism of popular Buddhism is attested to by the emergence of more than 100 cults and sects of animism-Buddhism (Visalo 2003: 176). Kitiarsa studied the religious practices in the contemporary modernization period and collected popular spirit-medium cults (2012: 23-30); they are Buddha as the supreme deity; spirits of famous Buddhist saints or magic monks, Indian gods and goddesses, Chinese deities, royal spirits (spirits of late great Kings and Queens), and local guardian and tutelary spirits. This phenomenon coins with what Payutto (2001: 153) sees as extreme modernization that causes secularization or

even politicization. Kitiarsa (2012: 118) also confirms that amulets exemplify the growing worldliness of Thai religiosity and a junction of religious practice and political anxieties. The politicization of Buddhism can be seen from the involvement of the Santi-Asoke with the Palang Dhamma political party (*Matichon Daily,* February 27th, 2006) and the Dhammakaya with Phue Thai political party. The Thai-Chinese middle class was drawn to these new religious movements: Buddhadasa Bhikku, Santi-Asoke and Dhammakaya. The first one is an intellectual and self-taught Buddhist monk who focused on a vanguard interpretation of Buddhism, the second on a skewed interpretation of Buddha's teaching (later the abbot was defrocked); and the last one on commodification of Buddhism as well as a skewed interpretation of Buddha's teaching to serve material wealth (see Payutto 1988 & 2008, Formoso 2000: 101, Ekachai 2001: 93-104). Buddhadasa's work is in line with the ecumenical movement of socially engaged Buddhism that concerns both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism (Schober: 2012: 16). These later two movements attained some popularity because popular Buddhism had become tainted with sex, money, title scandals and astrology; and also because of the reluctance of the Sangha to reform itself to solve its so-called spiritual ailings due to consumerism and the materialism associated with capitalism as well as its reluctance to allow females to be ordained as monks (Ekachai 2001).

The mixture of Theravada Buddhism with Brahmanism, supernaturalism, and belief in spirits (animism) has played an important role in forming the Thai belief and values system as I will discuss in more detail next.

Thai Culture: a Mediatized Buddhist Culture

Klausner (1997), Mulder (1985, 1990) and Servaes (1999) studied Thai culture and described the culture as a village culture with mutual trust and informal social relationships among the inner groups, but with distrust and formality-oriented relations toward the outer groups. The distrust of strangers leads to the belief in supernatural power to protect themselves from dangers or the seeking of protection from wealthy or powerful people. The latter was known as the entourage concept or the patronage system in Thai society (Komin 1990: 155).

Servaes (1999:12) suggests that a culture can be analyzed by its four distinguishable but interrelated analytical components: a worldview

(*Weltanschauung*), a value system, a system of symbolic representations, and a social organizational system. For Thai culture, the worldview of Thais is comprised of patriarchy and a unique Buddhist worldview, which incorporates animistic, supernatural beliefs and Brahmanism (Malikhao 2007:63). Srichampa affirms that Thais have different beliefs (2014: 50-51): Buddhist beliefs, superstitious beliefs, sacred thing beliefs, deity beliefs, and astrological beliefs. For Buddhist beliefs,

Srichampa (2014: 50) explains that these are about the triple gems (Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha), karma law (do good get good, do bad get bad), reincarnation, law of nature which consists of the Law of Kamma (action), the Law of Season (utu), the Law of Seed (Bija), the Law of Consciousness (Citta) and the Law of Dhamma (States), and heaven and hell. For superstitious beliefs, Srichampa (2014: 51) explains that there are two types: magic beliefs—the beliefs of old scripts, and amulet beliefs. These can be called the popular Thai Buddhist beliefs. Even the current Prime Minister, Gen. Prayudh Chan-Ocha, revealed to the reporters on September 17th, 2014, that he carries an elephant hair bangle, Buddha ring made out of 9 gemstones (for good luck and prosperity), and a ring he received from the Queen (as the Queen's musketeer).

Mediums, amulets, magic monks, spirit-of-ancient-royal cults, ghosts-of-superstar cults mentioned earlier are symbolic representations of these beliefs. Stenges (2009: 4) studied King Chulalongkorn cult where people worship the spirit of the King and ask for his advice through mediums, and concluded that mediation between modernity and Thainess is the central theme in the King Chulaongkorn cult. Stenges (2009: 24) explains that "the King Chulalongkorn cult is but one among many 'junctions' that make up Thai public culture today. Since the 1960s and particular in the 1980s, the Thai religious realm has been flooded by a wave of cults around (historical kings, queens, monks, local heroes and heroines, gods and goddesses)".

The core value of Thais revolves around the core ideology of nation-king-religion adopted from England in the reign of King Rama VI or King Vajiravudh (Cohen 1991: 15).

Worldview is also a part of the construction of culture. It is directly influenced by long-established traditional beliefs and religion. Berger and Luckmann discuss in 'The Social Construction of Reality' (1966) the interaction between

thinking and action. Socialization within a tradition and culture shapes an individual's thinking, and at the same time, this internalized form is reflected in the manifestation of culture (Holm 1997: 75). This model stresses the importance of religion, as it provides a symbolic universe that explains birth, life, and death, as well as providing the individual with an identity. Religion explains the world through myths and legends and also through rational discourses. Therefore, Robertson (1972: 47) defines *religious culture* as: "… a set of beliefs and symbols (and values deriving there from) pertaining to a distinction between an empirical and a super-empirical, transcendent reality; the affair of the empirical being subordinated in significance to the non-empirical".

Smart (1983: 7-8) presents six dimensions of religion: the doctrinal, the mythic, the ethical, the ritual, the experiential and the social. A religion typically has a written system of doctrines; this is the doctrinal dimension. It has a special story with a sacred meaning to pass on to believers; this is the mythic dimension. It sets certain rules of do's and don'ts and precepts; this is the ethical dimension. It involves its believers in religious action such as worshipping, praying, singing hymns, listening to sermons etc.; this is the ritual dimension. McGuire points out many symbolic representations of religion in terms of discourses that we can observe and analyze, such as rituals, symbols, religious experiences, etc. (McGuire 2002: 124-125).

The mass media audience tends to follow the notion which Festinger (1957) proposed about cognitive dissonance, that people tend to avoid adopting messages and information that are not congruent to their existing worldview. Hence, people are looking for a confirmation of their bias, rather than for genuine information. Sets of cultural products shared among many localities are what constitute "popular culture" (which was in the past labelled as "low culture" – as an opposite to "high culture" shared by the elites such as classical music, opera, and ballets, etc.). The concept of popular culture has been discussed by scholars such as Burke, Evans-Prichard, and Geertz.[7] Nachbar, Weiser and Wright (1978: 6-8) explain that examples of popular mythologies are beliefs, values, superstitions, and actual myths; popular artifacts are for example product packaging, architecture, toys and icons and logos; popular arts and performing arts such as rock and roll, and films; and popular rituals such as the Olympics, concerts, holidays, and festivals. Therefore, Holmberg summarizes popular culture as follows:

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[7] http://www.answers.com/topic/popular-culture, accessed Jan 25, 2012

… popular culture includes the human activities, languages, and artefacts that grow and nourish people in communities and that generate observable, describable interest about its events and artefacts, within a community and between communities. (Holmberg 1998: 15).

The production and distribution of communication controlled by the communication industry promotes popular culture. The industry, according to Macbride, et. al (1980: 96-97), consists of printed media enterprises, radio and television companies, news and features agencies, advertising and public relations firms, syndicates and independent companies producing and distributing print, visual and recorded material for print and broadcasting conglomerates, public or private information offices, data banks, software production, manufactures of technological equipment and so on. Productions from the communication industry are also known as the cultural industry because they record and reproduce cornucopia of social interactions, representations and organization systems in diverse media forms such as books, arts, films, recordings, television, radio, the internet, plays, concerts and music. With the breakthrough of the new media as a consequence of the digitization revolution, the symbolic representations of popular culture rapidly transmitted by the information super highway create diverse interpretations of self and identity, sex, gender, sexuality, religious practices, beliefs, etc. The emergence of modern Buddhist institutions and social roles, worldviews, ethics was a reflection and inflection of the politico-socio-economic ideologies (Schober 2012: 16). I would like to contribute this effect to the framing and rituals of the communication industry. With the help of new media such as the internet and satellite TV, many new religious movements target their audience to world peace and social harmony (Schober 2012: 22, Agarwal 2014: 357-359).

Without the mass media as weaving threads in the globalization process, the beliefs, religious practices, values, and cults would not have had a great impact. Kitiarsa (2012: 66, 67, 92, 102,118,126, 143) studied three examples of cults around the spirit of Phumphuang Duangchan, the late country music queen, and the lotto mania; Luang Pho Khun, the famous magic monk and his amulets that bless people to become rich and free from dangers; and Chatukham-Ramathep, an invented Thep or divine spirit for commercialization purposes and concluded that the mass media had constructed and reconstructed the stories around these three personas and created hyperreality. The media cited are Thairath, Matichon,

Khao Sot newspapers, talkshows on TV such as the Cho Chai (pierce through the heart) program, Lok Thip (Divine World) and Mahalap (great fortunes), and Daraphapayon (movie stars) magazines. According to Kitiarsa (2012), the media framed the personal stories of these three examples to the interests of the public in spirit-medium cult and amulet cult. Couldry (2003: 26) discusses "media rituals" which he explains as a symbolic expression of any social relations by the media. The media created "myths" around the persona in question. In Phumphuang's case, the media enhance her tragic death through framing with supernaturalism; in Luang Pho Khun's case with his charismatic characters and magic amulets that induce good fortune, wealth and safety; in Chatukham-Ramathep with invented divinity that blesses good luck, fortune and wealth. The rituals of people giving gifts and worshipping the effigy of Phumpuang became the media ritual as well as people go for the holy knocking on the head and holy spray from Luang Pho Khun or the mythification/inauguration process of Chatukham-Ramathep amulets.

Kitiarsa (2012: 84) refers to the process by which the mass media enhance and create hypes around medium-spirit cults "mediation". According to him, mediation goes hand in hand with deification and commodification (Kitiarsa 2012: 84). I would rather use the term "mediatization" as it is the process whereby culture and society are increasingly dependent on the media and their logic in such a way that the degree of the social interactions within a given culture and society modulated by the media capital can be observed within social institutions, between institutions, or in a society (Hjarvard 2013:17). It is seen as a longer term process than mediation as the media's influence on the change of the social and institutional interactions is to be expected whereas the mediation describes only the concrete act of communication by using a type of media in a given social context (Hjarvard 2013: 18-19).

Mediatization, as a part of globalization, characterizes the postmodern culture industry. The productions and products of the communication and cultural industry record and reproduce cornucopia of social interactions, representations and organization systems in diverse media formats. Mediatization is closely related to individualization as I will explain next

Individualization can be traced back to the study of Carl Jung's work on individuation.[8] He stated that:

[8] (http://www.mindstructures.com/carl-jung-individuation-process/, access March 27th, 2014)

it is a process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology.

According to Jung, the ego is a subject of one's consciousness and a subset of the self, which includes both the consciousness and unconsciousness of the total psyche. Globalization increases this individualization process. Consequently, the German Sociologist Ulrich Beck proposed his individualization theory, arguing how individuals in the late modernity take their lives in their own hand (due to migration and economic opportunities) and thereby create a new identity of social life.[9]

With the breakthrough of the new media as a consequence of the digitization revolution, new formats of self-expressions have become popular as the audience gains recognition of his/her private, social and public achievements (Hjarvard 2013: 150). Hjarvard (2013:11) explains that the mediatization process affects an individual autonomy and social belonging in such a way that the individual gains more autonomy by relying deeply to the external world in the act of connecting to the large social networks available. He calls this phenomenon, *soft individualism*. Elliott and Lemert already observed a new kind of individualism in 2006. They propose that globalization has a profound impact on the individual level. They defined this *new individualism* as a highly risk-taking, experimenting and self-expressing individual underpinned by new forms of apprehension, anguish and anxiety. High levels of individualism can lead to *narcissism*. Twenge and Campbell (2009: 19) state in their book, "The Narcissism Epidemic", that the central feature of narcissism is a very positive and inflated view of self and this value is growing rapidly in the American culture fueled by the mass media, including the new media, and changes in parental approaches to upbringing that emphasizes self-expression. Symbolic representations of the new American culture of self-expression or participating audience/amateur journalist are the emphasis on celebrities in the media, the success of Facebook as social networking sites, the uploading of personal videos on YouTube, twitter (micro blogging and text-based social networking or SMS on the internet via its own website) and blogging (Twenge and Campbell 2009). In many cases the audience can be a target or a commodity when profit-making

and commercial values are built into the media system of advertising (Jackson, Nielsen & Hsu 2011: 63). The self or ego of the audience will in these cases be coupled with commercial products to increase self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem, etc.

The mediatization effect can be used to explain the booming of spirit-medium cults, amulet cults, and commercialized religious movements as external factors to help strengthen the new kind of individualism.

Conclusion

Trends of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand conform to the global trend that we see the rise in secularization but it is still within the realm of the trio of Theravada Buddhism-Hindu-Brahmanism-Animism. The hybridized Thai popular Buddhism is a consequence of the interplay of politico-socio culture from a historical perspective with the free market economy, advertisement, the mass media, and charismatic figures. Without a doubt, the mass media construct myths and reconstruct the personages to suit the framing of popular religious practices in the so-called mediatization process. The booming of talisman and amulet industry as well as new cults and religion movements as part of religious culture change is the answer to the new individualism in the postmodernity. Hence, this paper has answered the main research questions:

(1) The Sangha,or the Buddhist body of Thailand, has been impacted since it has become part of the state during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) through reformation of education and centralization.

(2) The economic and social development in the contemporary globalization process has created monetary needs and anxiety to compete in a postmodernity and the Thai popular Buddhism, especially the animistic beliefs, cults, Hindu Gods, and astrology, emerged to respond to the new social needs and new consumerism values.

(3) Thai mass media and new social media create hypes on Buddhism, animism, and the further commercialization of Buddhism via framing and media ritualization of icons to suit the needs for magic, refuge, blessing, good luck, and prosperity as the individual has changed into a new kind of individualism as a result of mediatization.

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Islam and Digital Technology:
Perception and Challenges to Religious Communication
Md. Irfan Khan

Islam has been communicated through oral means by religious scholars who also serve as custodians of the faith. As the times change, so do the means of communicating Islam to the faithful. This study aims to look at the influence of the modern means of communication to the faithful and the challenges they bring.

Introduction

So far the conflict between Muslims and the West has been continuously highlighted in the study of Islam though it is an outmoded belief and not relevant to the modern Muslim society in South Asia "…In fact, the ethical and religious values expressed in the Qur'an have much in common with those of so-called 'West'… Dialogue with Christians, Jews, Buddhists and philosophical Hindus would reveal to Muslims (and also to those with whom they dialogue) that all world religions face a similar challenge in modern times-not that of the "modern world" or the West per se, but the general desacralization of existence that contemporary man has produced" (Lawrence 1998: 498-499).

The Muslims in South Asia as well as in Malaysia and Indonesia share in common a single religious tradition based on the teachings of the *Qur'an* (the holy book verbally revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad through an angel) and *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad). In this respect, Asians pursue Islam and acknowledge the superior unifying force behind and within cosmos. Fifteen hundred years after the Prophet Muhammad (507-632

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AD), the only and the last messenger of God who spread the religious message globally in which South Asia became the biggest beneficiary of accepting Islam that includes India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. So far, South Asia had not faced any challenge of the kind that digital media has posed to *Ulema* (Muslim scholar trained in Islam and Islamic Law) and followers in the contemporary Muslim world including South Asia.

The paper attempts to analyze and describe some of the salient features of new challenges faced by *Mufti/Ulema* and Muslim followers of Islam that has led to differing perceptions of meaning and challenges posed by digital media use. The paper also tries to map out the digitization[1] and digital access having long term implications for religion of Islam.

The Last Sermon and *Qur'an*

The last sermon delivered by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on March 9, 632 (9th of *Dhu al Hijjah*, 10 AH) in the valley of Mount Arafat in Mecca in which one hundred and twenty-six thousand followers were present. The Prophet directed his speech to all human kind and used the term 'O people' seven times and did not use the term *"O Muslims'* or *'O believers.'* After praising *Allah* and thanking *Allah,* the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

> O people, lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and take those words to those who could not be present here today and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. I leave behind two things, the *Qur'an* and my examples, the *Sunnah* and if you follow these, you will never go astray.

This was a clear indication that distortion of religious messages in any form or re-interpretation of doctrines and practices has no space in Islam and the *Qur'an* will remain valid until the existence of this world in its present form.

The notion of *'ilm'* or knowledge is the foundation of Islam. The first revelation of Qur'anic verse upon Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was *Iqra*

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[1] The term digitization of Islam refers to all Islamic religious communication propagated, transmitted or transferred with the help of electronic media in any form after the communication revolution in South Asia.

(read). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) answered that he can't read as he was not literate and the Angel repeated thrice. This was the first communication between the Angel and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The entire 114 chapters (*sura*) of *Qur'an* was verbally revealed in parts one after another over a period of about 23 years. The same was narrated to the followers by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Some of the selected companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) wrote down the revelations during his lifetime and the first compilation took place in the regime of first caliph Abu Bakr. Copies were made from the original volume of the *Qur'an* and distributed to every Muslim province during the era of third caliph Uthman to ensure the authenticity and longevity of *Qur'an* teachings. The communication of teachings of *Qur'an* was purely oral delivered as and when revealed and/or on Friday prayer's gathering (of followers) during the Prophet's life time.

Spread of Islam

Islamic institutions and *Madarsas* took a leading role in spreading the learning and teachings of Islamic *ilm* or knowledge. Similarly *Khankah* (a place for spiritual retreat and character reformation) established by spiritual leaders played a leading role for spreading, learning and teaching of knowledge of Islam in most of the countries where Muslim live today. It continued until the 19th century in the form of *Sufism* (the doctrine, principles, and practices of Islamic mysticism). In the 20th century, *Khankah* system, as an institution for religious learning, faded away and was replaced to form new Islamic religious communication known as *'Tabligh.''Tabligh'* provides an opportunity to learn and practice Islamic way of life across the world.

The mission *Tabligh* started from Mewat city of India in 1926 with an aim of propagating and disseminating Islamic belief and practices as prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did during his life time. Its primary aim is to work at the grassroots level and reach out to all Muslims to bring them closer to Islam. In fact, '*Tabligh'* mission dispel the fear of losing religious identity and protect Muslim from the influence of majority Hindu traditions in India. It is an offshoot of Darul Uloom, Deoband movement in India.

A large section of religious leaders, academicians and intellectuals in South East Asia and South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia have taken a leading role to protect Islam through

Tabligh. Currently there are over 50 million (estimated) followers of *Tabligh's* movement in more than 150 countries.

The brief historical account of Islam clearly indicates that there has been an oral tradition of religious communication in Islam. Islam has been intervened by digital media only in the recent past after communication revolution.

Methodology

In order to address the questions raised earlier both primary and secondary data have been collected. Secondary data include detailed review of websites having information on Islam. Review of relevant speeches, lectures and public addresses of distinguished religious scholars and spiritual leaders uploaded on YouTube were made. Selected research papers and reports were also reviewed. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews of four religious scholars and spiritual leaders in the city of Ahmedabad, Gujarat during September – October 2014 to understand their perception on digitization of religious information on Islam.

Islam on Television

There are literally hundreds of television channels exclusively devoted to telecast religious teaching of Islam (see Appendix 1) which are viewed by Muslims across the world. Islamic television channels are viewed as an alternative source of religious information on Islam. It is available anytime, anywhere closer to the sight and heart of the viewers. These religious programmes on Islam are transmitted in local languages and dialects. Today, there is no taboo for watching religious television. There is live television telecast that Muslims can take part for seeking clarification related to day-to-day problems in the light of *Qur'an* and *Hadith*.

Research Studies Related to Islam

Studies related to Islam have shown that religious television has remarkable influence on the minds of the viewers. It seems faith towards God has increased considerably due to television viewing. Accordingly, a research study conducted in India (Khan and Agrawal 2012) indicated that:

Faith in God and religious practices are very strong among Urdu viewers which perhaps led to the strong preference for religious programmes such as recitation of Qur'an and Naat among the viewers irrespective of gender differences and geographical locations…almost 60.0 percent Muslim viewers indicted that viewing of Urdu television channels had strongly strengthened their belief towards Islam. While another 35.0 percent believed that, these channels had little impact on their belief towards Islam. On the whole, only five percent viewers did not agree that these channels really made any impact on the religious belief… Similarly more than half the viewers believed that their knowledge of religion of Islam and faith in God had improved "very much" by watching religious programme on Urdu channels. They also believed that Urdu channels had so much influence that the viewers desire to fulfill Islamic duties had increased "very much" and helped the viewers feel near to God.

Views of Religious Experts: Differing Perception

Islamic seminary Darul Uloom, Deoband in India however, disapproved of watching television even if the content of programme is related to Islam. They are of the view that viewing television brings more harm than good. Darul Uloom, Deoband recommends traditional methods of religious communication for acquiring information on Islam from *Mufti, Ulema*, spiritual leaders, religious teachers or participating in the activities of *Tabligh Jamaat*.

The in-depth interviews of religious scholars and religious leaders differ on the question of watching television. Differences of opinion depend upon the sects the experts belong to. A *Mufti* (Islamic scholar having authority to interpret Islamic Laws) belonging to Darul Uloom Deoband opined by quoting a *hadith* "one should circumvent good thing if a situation of good and bad prevails together". *Mufti* recommends avoidance of watching television for getting even religious information. According to *Mufti* one should choose another path to acquire knowledge of Islam like consulting library, *Ulema* and religious leader in person rather than sticking to television.

Religious scholars and leaders belonging to *Barelvi* and *Shia* sects do not approve the decree and views of Darul Uloom, Deoband. They opine that there

is no harm watching television for the purpose of acquiring information of Islam. The in-depth interview of a *Mufti* belonging to Sunni *Barelvi* sect indicated that there was a series of debates and seminars in the recent past and the *Ulema* and the religious scholars had agreed that there is no harm in watching Islamic programmes on television. Another scholar of the same sect felt that as long as there is no woman without proper dress in the television programme, the television can be viewed. These religious leaders and scholars were aware of the television channels exclusively transmitting religious programmes in which prominent Islamic scholars and religious leaders are giving discourse on Islam. They believe that this is the only medium for reaching out to a large number of followers to convey the massages of Islam. According to them Peace TV, QTV and ARY television channels in the Indian subcontinent have carved out a definite space for the viewers who believe in Islam.

However, there is no consensus among the religious leaders and Islamic scholars of different sects of Islam whether looking at women without *Hijab* (proper dress) even on television is *Haraam* (prohibited). In Islam as per the *Hadith* narrated in *Sahih al-Bukhari* (a collection of authentic *Hadith*) "do not look at women again except the accidental (first) glance." Under such logic *Ulema* of Darul Uloom Deoband do not approve watching television for any purpose.

Websites on Islam

There are innumerable websites on Islam available for searching desired Islamic information like "Moslems", "Islam", "Islam is Peace", "Moslem religion", "Tomorrow of Islam", "Know more about Moslem religion", "Islamic Social Centers" to mention a few. The information about Islamic Institutes and Islamic Centers worldwide are also available on these websites with details on teaching curriculum, faculty, research faculty and publications. Various Muslim sects have created their websites like www.dawateislami.net, www.muslimsocieties.org to mention a few.

www.al-islam.com is a site of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da'wah and Guidance in Saudi Arabia. It is one of the biggest Islamic website on the Internet. It contains more than half a million pages concerning different Islamic sciences, more than forty thousand contemporary *fatwa* (decree) regarding different Islamic topics and audio library of five thousand hours

of lectures and seminars delivered by well known scholars and thinkers of Islam. These websites are viewed in multiple languages like Arabic, English, French, German, Turkish, Malaysian and Indonesian. These websites provide very accurate and comprehensive alphabetic references and indexes of religious evidences, names of scholars, books, journals, issues, numbers including benefits and rules, verification of the texts and showing numbers of *Qur'anic* verses and sources of the *hadiths*.

In the context of India, there are several Islamic websites in various languages like www.islamreligion.com, www.irf.com, www.tauheed-sunnat. com, www.islamonline.net, www.islamicity.com, www.islamweb.net and www.harunyahya.com. The website in Urdu (www.magurdu.com) launched in Pakistan is also available for information on Islam. Several websites in Hindi launched in India to spread knowledge of Islam is also available like www. dharm.raftaar.in/religion/islam, www.hindi.webdunia.com/islam and www. islamicbook.ws/hindi/.

Islamic institutions and *Madarsas* (Islamic learning centers) in India continue to function in oral tradition of learning and teachings. These institutions have poor infrastructure as mostly they run from charity. Computerization remains a challenging task for these institutions. The scholars in *Madarsas* are not so well versed with the use of technology. Access and use of computers are limited to administrative work. During in-depth interviews, it was observed that *Mufti/ Ulema*/scholars and teachers are familiar with the use of computers and websites for learning and teachings of Islam but the access is not universal.

When asked about the benefits and access of information of Islam on website, literate Muslim first questioned the authenticity of website information. Meanwhile *Ulema*/scholars are of the view that understanding of Islam can come through traditional teaching and formal learning only. They were of the view that internalization of religious teachings to translate it into practice can not be achieved through any other mode of communication. It was, however, not clear as to what extent *Mufti/Ulema*/scholar's authority is threatened due to websites or they lose their religions prominence in the society due to alternate and easy access to Islamic information through digital media.

Mufti/Ulema/scholars expressed concern during the in-depth interviews, that they have heard that many of these Islamic religious sites have been launched as a conspiracy by the 'West' to malign the images of Islam. So only a few Islamic websites are authentic which an ordinary Muslim however, cannot distinguish from other spurious websites. According to a prominent Islamic leader of *Barelvi* sect, *Ulemas* and the teachers in *Madarases* are conscious about the content of authentic Islamic information uploaded on various websites. At the same time, they are working to curb misleading and damaging websites of Islam.

Islam and YouTube

YouTube provides recorded speeches, lectures and public addresses of distinguished religious and spiritual leaders and scholars globally. Translation and narration of the *Qur'an* in multiple languages including English are available. Lectures, debates and public addresses include topics like the history of Islam, Islamic *Sharia*, origin of humankind on earth according to the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. Other topics include sending of Messengers on earth by God from time to time, worshiping *Allah*, life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Miracle of Muhammad (PBUH) and Miracle of Islam. Belief in God and pillars of Islam, performance of *Hajj*, almsgiving in Islam, prayer in Islam, way to success are other topics covered. Judgment day, Rise and fall of Islam in the world, origin of sects among the Muslims, concept of racism in Islam, status of women and men in Islam, hell and heaven, Islam and faith, inspiration and spirituality, Islam and politics, Islam and science, and Islam and Christianity are some of other topics of discourse. Prescriptions for day-to-day life for Muslims include lecture topics like Islam and marriage, Islam and death, teaching of *hadiths*, Islamic doctrines, abrogation, salvation, immigration, raising children in Islam, *Halal* (permissible) and *Haraam* (Forbidden) in Islam and key to paradise. Amazing videos on nature, prayers call, events of *Hajj* and religious functions are also available on YouTube.

YouTube uploaded lectures of various scholars belonging to different sects. They support each other or sometime oppose the views expressed by other sects of Islam though their arguments are supported by *Hadith or Qur'an*. An average Muslim finds it difficult to understand the sectarian differences and remains in the state of dilemma. Consequently, they confine to their own sect and continue to justify and follow their practices.

The review of some of the prominent speeches, lectures and public address by Islamic scholars show that often they accuse each other. For example,

Sunni Barelvi and *Deobandi* accuse each other of deviating from the real path of Islam and justify their own action within the purview of Islam. The differences in practice in fact are influenced by the multi-cultural traditions in the Indian sub-continent though they do not differ on basic principles of Islam. For instance procession on the eve of prophet's birth day or offering *Chadar* and flowers at Khawaja's Shrine in Ajmer are justified by the *Barelvi* Sunni sect which is totally disproved and considered unlawful and wrongful innovations by the larger Deobandi sect in India. The Shia Muslim which constitutes 15-20 percent of the total Indian Muslim population however differs in both basic principles and practices of Islam. Hence, Shia sect has its own schools of thought and follows their own religious leaders. YouTube provides the platform for each sect to learn about Islam in their own perspective.

Islam and Wikipedia

Wikipedia provides information on every aspect of Islam, be it the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or the origin of Islam, the *Qur'an* or the *Hadith*. It also provides information about Muslim scholars, *Sufi* saints, disciples of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), historical perspective of Islam, Islamic schools and Branches, Islam in different countries, sects of Islam, Islam in India with authentic references. Wikipedia undoubtedly provides Islamic information with authenticity and has acquired a prominent space in digitization of Islam.

Islamic Call and Information Centers

The first Islamic call centre was established in Hydrabad in India in 2013. The call centre has a toll free number to which anyone whether scholars, students or professionals can call and raise their queries. Soon in future such call centers will be set up in other metros of India like Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Bangalore. Islamic Information Centers (IICs) have also been established in Karnataka, Mumbai and many other cities of India. The aim of IICs is to remove misconceptions about Islam amongst Muslim and Non-Muslim. It has conducted various events in the recent past. Online access to these centers is available to seek clarification on any Islamic subject/matter.

Concluding Observations

In the past it was difficult to have access to information about Islam and was restricted to religious institutions, mosques, Islamic scholars (*Mufti* and *Ulema*), religious teachers and *Imam (religious head)*. They were always viewed as religious information gatekeepers. With the advent of digital technology people of any religion can seek or learn about Islam, its principle and doctrines through television, Internet and YouTube. Digital media have given open access for all kinds of information of Islam without any restrictions. Now a Muslim is able to connect through social media too for seeking religious information of Islam.

However, *Mufti,Ulema* and religious scholars believe that the theoretical knowledge of Islam has increased among the Muslim due to the digitization of Islamic information, but internalization and translation of Islamic knowledge into practice is possible only through the interpersonal and face to face oral religious communication. This can only be received from *Ulema* or the scholars/teachers of Islam. Having such a strong belief on oral religious tradition, the religious institutions, religious scholars, teachers and spiritual leaders are not likely to loose their grip on followers, importance and credibility in coming years.

At present, it is in the realm of speculation as to what extent Muslim feel empowered in seeking religious solutions for their problems within the domain of Islamic jurisprudence after digitization of Islamic information. Also, limited information is available on the use of other media of communication like mobile phones, tweeters, 'whatsapp' for communicating information on Islam. A comprehensive study needs to be carried out to understand the impact of digitization of Islamic information with special reference to Muslim of South Asia.

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Appendix 1: Table1: Selected Country wise Islamic Television Channels

Sr. No.	Country	Television Channels
1	India	ETV and Peace TV
2	Pakistan	QTV, Madani Channel, Islamic Channel, Paigham TV, Haq TV, Hadi TV
3	Bangladesh	Islamic TV (Bengali) the first Islamic television station in Bangladesh
4	Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania	IBN TV an Islamic television channel
5	San Diego, California /Iraq	Ahl-e-bait TV, an Islamic Shia TV channel
6	Damascus, Syria	Iqraa TV (Arabic) Noor Al-Sham (Arabic) satellite television station
7	United Kingdom	Takbeer TV , Hidayat TV, Ahl-e-bait TV a Shia Muslim TV channel
8	Cairo, Egypt,	4shbab (Arabic) an Arabic-language satellite television station
9	Morocco	Assadissa (English),
10	Middle east	Almajd TV Network

Religions' Role in Korean Development and Mediatization
Sunny Yoon

This paper inquires into the role of religions in the development of the Korean society and how the mediatization of religion challenges institutional religions.

1. Introduction

East Asia achieved a fast development in the 20th century as illustrated by Japan becoming the second largest economy in the world, new "rising sun" China, and the growth of "four dragons" including Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Not only economic achievement but also cultural and spiritual aspects maintain Asian integrity in the developmental process. Religion has played an important role in extending modern development and balancing between material prosperity and Asian identity as shown in the model of Confucian development and the discourse of Orientalism.

Religion in South Korea will be the focus as a case study because it illustrates the most powerful and dynamic influence of religion in the social development among East Asian countries. The role of religion in other East Asian countries declined in the later part of the 20th century due to communism in China and nationalist Shintoism in Japan for example. South Korea illustrates strong Christianity recording 32.5% of Christian population of the total poulation. Additionally, Korean Christians are regular church goers with 70% participating in Sunday services every week (Jeon, 2013). The world largest church, *Yoido Full Gospel Church* with a congregation of a half-million

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members is Korean, and seven out of the ten largest churches in the world are Korean. Korea illustrates the success of Christianity from the perspective of outsiders, particularly people in the West where the Christian population has declined significantly. South Korea is presently experiencing a new and shifting phase of religious power in public life. This change was initiated by public criticism against Christianity in approximately the last five years. In Korea, one of the most frequently stated political criticisms is the discourse of *gaedokyo,* meaning dog (*gae*) + Christianity (*gidokyo*), which represents the social and political discontent of Korean people in addition to criticism against Christianity. The reason that Christianity became the target of political dispute lies in the historical role of religion in the course of modernization in general and against political authority in particular. Public criticism against Christianity peaked during the Lee Myung-Bak government between 2008 and 2013. The public discourse against ex-president Lee promulgated *gaedokyo* because he was a Christian. This was not an individually targeted blame, but a political criticism against class and ideological position of Christianity in the Korean society. There have been many accusations of church and missionary misconduct which reveals the social position of Christianity in Korea. Pastor John Jo, the founder of *Yoido Full Gospel Church*, was arrested for adultery and fraud along with his son who was the owner of a major daily newspaper. Ministers of the 10 largest churches have been accused for various reasons. The Christian population started to decline due to patriarchal and commercialized faith in protestant churches.

Public criticism against religion gears toward a power shift from religious institutions to media. Spiritual life is becoming mediatized when institutionalized religions decline. Media play a leading role in ritualization of spirituality as major religions lose their legitimacy among the public due to political and cultural reasons. Spirituality was revived in the media by the creation of a new discourse, namely "healing." Shamans and fortune-tellers once despised as superstitious and backward are becoming popular guests in TV entertainment programs and religious rituals are an integral part of public broadcasting. Public broadcasting frequently adopts Christian, Buddhist and other religious rituals in their popular shows such as "healing" programs. This may represent a general trend of post-modern diversity in media as demonstrated by the new age movements in Western societies, but was sudden and timely in Korea when the predominant religious institutions became the target of public criticism. This is different from other Eastern Asian countries

that have much smaller religious populations. Although East Asian countries share many spiritual symbols and beliefs, mediatization of religion in Korea is a unique phenomenon. Japan's Christian population is less than 1% compared to 32.5% in Korea even though the two countries had similar religious backgrounds in early modern history. China has a smaller religious population due to their communist history. Although all three countries share similar traditional cultures and native religions including shamanism and geomancy, Korea is unique in such that spirituality is encouraged with the use of public discourse and integration into public media.

2. **Religious role in economic development**

In early Asian modern history, Christianity played an important role. Affinity between Christianity and Asian modernization in the 20th century challenges the basic assumption of secularization theories (Chaves, 1994; Bruce, 1992). The role of Christianity in the history of modernization has declined in the East Asia as the existing social forces regained their power, except in Korea. China has suppressed Christianity since the communist revolution and Japan recreated a national religion, Shintoism, amalgamating native religion with world religious beliefs. However, in South Korea, Christianity continues to grow into the later part of the 20th century. Christianity created a leading class that included intellectuals and resistance members since independence.

Moreover, the role of Christianity in Korean development cannot be substituted by Confucianism or any other religion. Although many Western scholars consider Confucianism as the secret behind the economic success in East Asia, the logic behind the Confucianism-driven developmental model in East Asia is that it is found only in East Asia and not anywhere else. It is tautological to designate a model because of coexistence between geography and development. Kim argued that Confucianism is not the main force behind development in Korea (pp.197-219). I would argue that Confucianism is not the main cultural axis and has never been the religion for the lower class people.

Confucianism was dominated by aristocracy offering principles of governance during the Yi dynasty from the 14th to 19th century. Governors and intellectuals shared knowledge regarding Confucianism but ordinary people had no opportunity to learn about it when it was the principal governance

during the medieval age. This is also true in the modern period. Confucianism does not emphasize spirituality or transcendence over humanity as most religions do (Jeong, 2011; Hong, 2011).

People generally relied on native beliefs such as shamanism, geomancy and fortune-telling more than Confucianism for spirituality and religious life. Some Confucian rituals were integrated into native practices, particularly traditional shamanism. Buddhist monks frequently play the role of fortune-tellers and spiritual messengers. Christian churches also accept certain rituals of native beliefs as cultural tradition. For example, Korean Catholic churches have accepted annual ceremonies for ancestors and veneratr images from the early missionary period whereas Protestant churches have denied them.

The passion and success of Korean Protestantism may come from native religions particularly shamanism (Grayson, 1995). Elliot (1989) has designated John Jo, the minister of *Yoido Full Gospel Church*, a shaman. John Jo emphasizes his healing power and blessing in Church services. This church emphasizes material blessing and mystical experience, and speaking in tongue is a part of the service. The majority of Korean churches share similar characteristics and mysticism in Christian services. Christianity has been challenged in public discourse in Korea. Criticism against Christianity was so pervasive in the last five years. Although most criticisms target the Lee government and their allies, and religious institutions are also the target of criticism. Problems with churches such as church heredity and taxation for religious institutions were raised in addition to many accusations of criminal activity by church ministers as illustrated by the case of *Yoido Full Gospel Church*.

Additionally, Buddhism, the second largest religion in Korea (22% of total population) was involved in criminal cases and scandals during this period. Violence and embezzlement occurred as well as adultery scandals and *geisha* parties in which Buddhist monks were collectively involved. Although such criminal acts might be limited to a small number of Buddhist monks and Christian churches, people started to denounce religious institutions.

3. Media and discourse of healing

Media play an important role in contributing to spirituality by creating the "healing" discourse. Healing became the commonly used public theme in

the last couple of years in Korea. Publications, commerce, politics and most aspects of everyday life incorporate the theme of healing. The media inspired the creation of a TV program called *Healing Camp* which encompasses all the social areas.

Healing Camp adopted a new format of entertainment programming by ritualizing spirituality on TV. The uniqueness of the program is the focus on confession of the celebrities interviewed.

Healing programs on media resemble a religious service by introducing a sin or a mistake by a guest followed by their confession, repentance in tears and a healing ceremony as a symbol of redemption. Programs disclose personal matters and intense emotional distress in a confession. After emotional confession, the program ends with healing ceremonies and at the end of the program, all confirm their healing and happiness. For example, *Healing Camp* demonstrates strong narratives although its genre is talk show. Following Aristotle's three act structure, this talk show illustrates drama of life stories stronger than the narrative of a fiction. The narrative structure of this talk show can be analyzed applying mythological narratives that Joseph Campbell typified. After introducing felicity and career achievement at the first act of situation, the talks of celebrities prolong confession narrating their experiences of conflicts at the turning points and their experiences of despair at pintch points followed by healing ceremony and happy ending in the act of resolution.

Table 1> narrative structure of *Healing Camp*

3 acts	Narrative model	Byung Hun Lee case
Act 1	open- IP 1- IP2 –TP 1	greeting- success of Hollywood film- Korean film – slump in the past
Act 2	PP 1- middle point – pp2 – TP2	Fathers death, debt- mental problem –scandals –depression, medication
Act 3	Climax – climax effect - finale	Healing ceremony-regain happiness-healthy celebrity

IP= insighting point, TP= turning point, PP= pinch point

Table 1 illustrates the narrative structure of Byung Hun Lee's life stories who is Hollywood celebrity playing main role in films such as *GI Joe*, *Red*, and the upcoming *Terminator* series The narrative structure of life stories of Byung Hun Lee follows the typical three act structure. This shows dramatizing life stories by emphasizing conflicts and confession for the healing process.

Another world celebrity, *Psy* who was ranked second on the Billboard chart in 2013 and his song *Gangnam Style* has the world record for the most viewed music video confessed his wrongdoing with drug abuse and was convicted.

Table 2) Narrative Structure of *Psy*

3 acts	Narrative model	*Psy* case
Act 1	open- IP 1- IP2 –TP 1	greeting- success of Gangnam Style – Billboard 2– slump in the past
Act 2	PP 1- middle point – pp2 – TP2	Father's opposition against music- drug abuse– difficulty in study in US–jail due to drug abuse
Act 3	Climax – climax effect - finale	Healing ceremony-regain happiness- healthy celebrity

Table 2 illustrates narrative structure of Psy's life story. Although *Psy* has different experience, the narrative structure is similar by illustrating conflicts and confession due to drug abuse at the middle point and punishment and conviction at pinch points followed by healing ceremony and happy ending. As the examples above illustrate, *Healing Camp* is unique in that it ritualizes spirituality on network TV. Although guests are national heroes and world celebrities, they disclose their emotions and confess intimate and private problems for the nation-wide audience. They humble themselves through confession similar to Christian praying and Buddhist bows in religious rituals and are emotionally exhausted in the process. The show ends with healing ceremonies and guests confirm their happiness.

The TV program *Healing Camp* has a strong influence on Korean society. This program initiates making a genre of healing programs on Korean media. Network stations produced this type of 'healing program'; *Human Condition* on KBS, *Dad Where Are You Going* on MBC and *Thank you* on SBS. Although these programs have different formats, all attempt to show the healing process of recovering psychological distress and difficult relationships. Moreover, media become a main impetus of discussing spirituality.

The media show superstitions more than ever before since the "healing" started. Since September 2011, 13 new programs regarding shamanism and superstitions were introduced. Eight were talk shows with celebrities and professional shamans as guests. Typically, these programs are hosted by two or

three MCs talking with four to seven celebrities and three or four professional fortune-tellers and shamans.

Table 3> Spiritual program on television

Title	Channel	date	subject	format	genre
Exorcist	tvN	2008-2012	shaman	interview report	docu
Secret of Geomancy	TV Chosun	2012	geomancy	Staying at Old houses	docu
Touring Shamans	Living TV	2013	shamanism	Experience shaman	docu
Secret of God	JTBC	2012-2013	Before life, fortune telling	1 mc, 7 celebrities, 4 fortune tellers	Talk show
Head Butt and Edu Korea	JTBC	2012-2013	Geomancy, fortune telling	3 mc, 4 panelists	Talk show
Education committee	JTBC	2013	Face, fortune readling, saju	1mc, 8 celebrities, 4 panelists	Talk show
Enter Bright	Channel A,	2013	fortune dream name telling	3mc, 8 celebrities 7 panelists	Talk show
Combat Fortune	Living TV	2013	saju	2mc, 4 panelists	Talk show
Counseling You	Health TV	2013	Shaman, saju	1mc, 2 panel	Talk show
Counseling Men and Women	Health TV	2013	fortune		Talk show
Comic League	TVN	2011-p	comedy	Survival games of Ghost and busters	entertainment
PD Lee Solving in Logic	Channel A	2012	shamanism	1 PD reporting	journalism
Revealing The Secret	MBN	2012 -p	shamanism	1 reporter, interviews	journalism

The shamans and fortune-tellers interpret lives, dreams, perform face readings and read previous lives of celebrities in these entertainment programs. Three of the 13 healing programs are documentaries that portray mystery cases and exorcism. Another two have a journalistic format attempting to report shamanism and superstitions logically. There was only one TV program on shamanism before 2011, but superstitions became a popular subject on TV particularly between 2012 and 2013[1].

Media integration of shamanism and superstitions into entertainment and reporting programs is not coincidental. Spirituality became a popular subject for the media as the discourse of healing gained attention in Korean society. The media discuss new ways of life, such as adopting oriental traditions and superstitions in diet, health and belief as healing techniques. The media present instant versions of meditation, breathing exercises, and modified religious rituals as healing ceremonies in the program. Healing instructors on TV became so famous that people call them healing mentors and follow them. Several monks and writers on the TV healing programs became stars on SNS and have the most followers on Twitter and Facebook.

The discourse of healing led by media influences religious changes in the Korean society and is an example of mediatization of religion. Mediatization is a research trend different from conventional media studies which place attention on the window of the world depending on a stimulus-reaction formula. Media, by definition, are mediators in the world instead of having independent power. Therefore, media studies have been oriented toward social sciences by examining the use and effect of media in a pragmatic and short-sighted view. Mediatization is an alternative vision to this conventional approach by focusing on the strong influence of media integrated into social structure and long-term social changes. Schulz (2004) defines mediatization theory as "beyond causal logic dividing the world into dependent and independent variables." Hjarvard (2011) concurred with this view by defining mediatization as different from "mediation which describes the concrete act of communication by means of a medium in a specific social context". Mediatization represents the long-term social changes as a consequence of media influence.

Currently, media play a significant role in social, political and cultural lives more than ever before. More voters choose political candidates based on their media image; this is similar to consumers desiring products according to their advertised image. Religion is also affected by media; for example, Hollywood movies and celebrities portray certain religions and their symbols. Presently, not only simple mediation but also mediatization influences politics, religion

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[1] Among the 13 TV programs, one started in 2011, 6 in 2012 and 6 in 2013.

and social practices. Mediatization of politics, religion and of other matters became an emerging agenda in social studies (Couldry, 2008; Strömback, 2011).

Mediatization of religion was introduced because media play a stronger role in religion in post-modern and high-tech society than before. Hjarvard (2011) argued for mediatization of religion in a highly industrial Western society even if not universal in the rest of the world. He found that people engage in spiritual issues using media more than institutionalized religion.

Table 4) Spiritual Issues (Denmark, 2009)

Ways of engaging in spiritual issues	%
Discuss with family and friends	24.3
Watch TV	22.6
Reading non fiction books	10.5
Websites, interent	8.9
Attending church ceremonies	6.7
Read novels	5.8
Attend public lecture	5.2
Cinema	4.3
Radio	4.2
Reading the Bible	3.9
Other	3.0
Do no engage in such issues	50.4

(Hjarvard, 2011, p. 125)

Table 4 shows Hijarvard's survey in 2009 in Denmark. According to the survey result, 50% of people used media to engage in spiritual issues whereas 6.7% attended church services and 3.9% read the Bible. Hjarvard concluded mediatization of religion diverse ways of engaging spiritual issues by banality and secularization of religion in highly modernized societies.

In Korea case, the media play a stronger role by substituting institutionalized religions. Mediatization of religion challenges the predominant power of Christianity and other formal religions in the Korean society. The discourse of healing was created by the media presenting an alternative way of life. Spirituality was introduced into mass media which included the New Age type of spirituality borrowed from the West as well as traditional superstitions that have been publicly suppressed. Although the discourse of healing in Korea shares characteristics with Western societies, the difference is that Korea

promulgates it in mainstream venues as shown in network TV and best seller books whereas healing in the West applies to a minority of the population as observed in New Age movements and meditation institutes. Moreover, religion mediatization in Korea contends with secularization differently from what Hjavard and other theorists of mediatization argued (Hjavard, 2011; Lynch, 2011; Lundby, 2009). Unlike mediatization of religion in the West, Korean media promote sacredness in the media format by ritualizing spirituality in the TV programs which is how media began to replace institutionalized religions in Korea when public criticism against institutions was widely expressed.

4. Conclusion

Mediatization of religion urges to modify spirituality into the media logic which pursues entertainment and instant results. Media incorporate spiritual issues into an adaptable media format by presenting instant counseling, three-minute meditations and entertaining fortune-telling. The mediatization of religion eliminates the due course of learning spirituality in formal religions and instantly transitions into the state of redemption or nirvana. Jeong (2013) argues that the present healing discourse in Korea substitutes religious training by pursuing *sorter* (a savior) without dedication. This can be a variation of New Age exercises to achieve immediate ecstasy using drugs, meditation and hallucination. Mediatization of religion in the present Korean society conveys instant remedies for comfort and happiness by introducing diverse healing techniques.

The present mediatization of religion may mislead spirituality. According to Paul Tillich, spirituality is not a mystical and solely metaphysical world that one can control or benefit from. Spirituality represents fundamental being that an individual can meet only by dedicating oneself. Religion can be a method to discover the ultimate self; media and other cultural venues can be helpful in this endeavor. In this sense, Tillich (1955) argued that religion is the essence of culture and culture is the form of religion. Since institutionalized religion created flaws in history, media, presently the most pervasive means of popular culture, emerges as an imminent vehicle for spiritual life as an alternative. The problem is that media follow modernist logic to the extreme and transform all into entertainment, and exchange values for visible effects, while failing to encompass the fundamental being or ontology of human spirituality.

The present healing programs on media undermines the fundamental being or spirituality while ironically mystic media contents. Healing programs on TV and interactions on SNS present immediate remedies following the modernistic logic of effectiveness and functionalism; modernization is not necessarily the process of suppressing spirituality. The present mediatization of religion does not promote spirituality but modernist cognition while presenting mystic metaphysics and healing techniques. This is an extension of a particular line of thought from ancient gnostic to New Age and Korean healings. Mystic spiritual messages and techniques of these thoughts and media content do not delve into the fundamental self or spiritual being. They are not spiritual in this sense despite the metaphysical and de-secular contents of the media. This can be considered as a tool for self-comfort and worldly fortune that appeases the masses for short-sighted purposes and maintains the *status quo* of contemporary society.

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Media and Oral Tradition of Hindu *Satsang*: An Analysis of Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra *Avatar* in the Indian Civilization
Binod C Agrawal

This paper attempts to present a descriptive analysis on the nineteenth century Hindu religious preacher Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra and how his sermons were later transcribed by his followers not only in the written text but also in the digital media.

Introduction

In the several millennia old living civilization of India there has been a tradition of birth of new *avatar*[1] in the human body to lead the world within oral tradition. The process of such births are reinforced by the concept of transmigration of soul--one of the fundamental tenants of modern Hinduism. Unlike several other world religions, Hinduism can't be credited to have a single prophet unlike Christianity or Islam. In a long and meandering history religion remained a corner stone and inseparable component of the Indian civilization.

Religious ethos centered on day-to-day oral discourse, discussion and speculation about relationships of self and God. Without an *a priori* assumption the existence of *Brahma* or creator of the universe was by and large accepted barring exception of few skeptics. In this perspective religion remained in the process of continuous evolution.

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[1] *Avatar* literally means "incarnation of God on earth."

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Social contraction, political upheavals and external impositions, forced demand for revalidation of existing beliefs, means and methods of achieving salvation, world peace and harmony. These factors created conditions for rethinking of social ordering for human happiness, promotion of peace and look for path of salvation.

The quest continues even today in the sub-continent of India where multiple, religious traditions have appeared and disappeared within the Indian civilization as a continuing process largely through oral means of communications. Every now and then, some of these new religious traditions have grown having a large following within the Indian civilization. Some of them reflect serious concerns and reaction against the existing socio-political order, religious orthodoxy and above all quest for new religious philosophy within the broader Hindu religion. Some tenets of Hinduism got codified in the written text by scholars though far removed from the lay men and women who received religious messages orally.

Buddhism and Jainism

The earliest evidences of reaction against the then existing socio-political order and high degree of indulgence in ritualism was emergence of two religions like Buddhism and Jainism in India. "Protests were uttered by Mahavira and Buddha. They tried to purify Hindu religion and rid it of its impurities" (Radhakrishnan 1988:452), though both gave oral messages and shared views with their followers face to face.

Radhakrishnan (1988:453) an eminent philosopher and student of Hindu religion reported "Mahavira emphasized the relativity of religious truths, the doctrine of *ahimsa* or non violence…. He insisted on a life of austerity and self-control and compassion… who are afflicted and needy, who are the beset with fear and who beg for their lives" whereas "Buddha had a warm heart and powerful intellect" For him Buddhism is a religion of love and compassion. The *Dhammapada* says "all men tremble at violence, all men fear death; remembering that you are like unto them, do not kill, nor cause others to kill" (Radhakrishnan 1988:455). Buddha spoke at length with his followers in face to face interaction.

"…the Buddhist and the Jain systems believe in the possibility of attaining

bliss, *moksha*, *nirvana* which can be reached only by a saintly life of discipline. The perfect man is called *mukta, arhat, kevalim,* the *Buddha* or the *Jina* (Radhakrishnan 1988:455).

Islam

After frequent Muslim invasions of India which started in the tenth century, the Indian civilization confronted Islam as a new creed of religion having monotheism and social service as fundamentals of the religion inscribed in Holy Koran. Written text began to appear whether in marriage *Nikah* ceremony or in money matters. To some extent oral tradition was partially replaced by written text. Emphasis on recitation of Koran kept oral religious tradition alive in the Indian civilization. The period saw advent of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and host of other religious movement's within the Indian civilization to keep oral tradition alive.

Christianity

The struggle of European Christian nations to capture markets within the Indian civilization reached its zenith by the end of eighteen century as British colonial rulers by then had established their empire in the large part of India so was their efforts to spread Christianity. "The impact of Christianity brought about a religious awakening among the Hindu" (Radhakrishnan 1998:459). The challenge of Christianity was responded in multiple ways especially in Bengal where East India Company was operating and in Goa where Portuguese had established a small colony two century earlier. Apart from the spread of Christianity, they also propagated their language and culture moving away from oral tradition of religious communication including Bible and Church music.

Peep in History of Religion

The brief religious history of the Indian civilization and challenges it faced from within and external religious forces in last three millennia bring in sharp focus. "The richness, tolerance and profundity of Indian religion and its enduring roots…" (Radhakrishnan 1998:459). In oral religious tradition within Hindu religion and in the Indian civilization experienced uninterrupted birth of prophets, preachers and *avatar* to accept the challenges of multiple

religious doctrines and to correct the internal contradictions for its revival through oral communication.

Aim

The brief presentation attempts to provide a descriptive analysis of a nineteenth century Hindu religious preacher or prophet described as *Avtar* Sri Sri Thakur[2] Anukulchandra by his followers known as *Satsangi* (members of collective congregation). Today, they are spread across India though the largest concentration of *Satsangi* is in the eastern part of India having an estimated number of 100 million. The analysis is based on secondary literature available on the life of Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra who gave his sermon orally. His followers later transcribed these sermons into written text and in digital media. The analysis is supplemented by first hand participation of the author in Agratala, Tripura *Satsang* congregation and had interaction with a highly enlighten *Satsangi* members of collective congregation during the meeting who participated in a National Seminar on Sree Sree Thakur Anukulchandra

Socio-Political Context

After the First War of Independence in 1857 against the British colonial forces, a group of Indians especially Bengali of Undivided India continued their concerted effort to achieve independence from the yoke of British colonialism. Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra appeared on earth during this period in the village of Himaitpur of Pabna district of Bangladesh (formally East Bengal, India) on September 14, 1888. Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra began to grow in the midst of imposed Westernization, British Imperialism and onslaught of Christian missionaries. Early childhood was spent in rural environment under watchful and affectionate eyes of mother Manomohni Devi. Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra accepted his mother as *guru* (teacher) who was follower of Herzur Maharaj of Dayalbagh (Agra) several thousand kilometers away from Pabna in Uttar Pradesh, India.

In such a multi-foci, socio-political and British colonial India, there was loss of self-identity, imposed slavery and religious freedom. The search for liberation of soul became an essential need of the hour for young Sri

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[2] For detail see Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra Centenary Volume, Satsang 1987, editor Hari Ballabh Narayan (2006), Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra Centenary Celebration Committee Satsang, Deoghar, Jharkhand.

Sri Thakur Anukulchandra. Mother Manomohni Devi, Guru of Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra being follower of Radhaswami *Satsang* (collective congregation) gave the means to be followed as oral religious tradition that gave a ray of hope and sense of security to fight against oppression at grass-root level within cultural context of the Indian civilization to Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra.

Thakur *Satsang*

Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra on the lines of Dayalbagh *satsang* in which he was earlier initiated by his mother Manomohni Devi began to organize *Satsang* in and around villages of Pabna. After the partition of India, Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra *satsang* shifted *Satsang* to Deoghar Bihar India in 1946. Oral and visual methods of communication was used by Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra to preach and promote Hindu religious philosophy and doctrine who pronounced that "The Pillars and life growth…are Jajan, Jaajan, Ishtabhriti, Swastayani and Sadachar" which can be ensured by *Diksha* (initiation), *Shiksha* (Education) and *Vivaha* (marriage). For marriage he strongly advocated to follow *Varna* or caste system of Hinduism" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thakur_Anukulchandra accessed on August 24, 2014).

The brief analysis clearly indicates that from the early days Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra emphasized and advocated oral face to face means of communication for the promotion and propagation of his religious doctrine. His religious and philosophical messages were oral incorporating the ancient oral traditions of Hindu religion.

Satsang movement according to Jha (2006:168-69) "Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra is the fountainhead of the institution called *Satsang*. …The *Satsang* movement subscribers to the concept of a Living Ideal. There is an innate belief that Sri Sri Thakur is an 'anointed man' like Lord Krishna or Jesus Christ, that he bears the providential characteristics and is the Living Embodiment of the laws of Dharma. This belief is based on the hitherto accepted idea of incarnation... This doctrine envisages that all these Prophets emerge from providence and, therefore, They are essentially one but They differ from one another according to the needs of time, place and circumstances… The Satsang movement is based on tacit belief that surrender to the present Prophet inevitably leads to the surrender to all the past Prophets… Sri Sri

Thakur's fundamental teaching is based on His doctrine of *Dharma.* In His opinion, Dharma means the laws that sustain life and growth with every effulgence of personality, both individually and collectively…As a result, life becomes more and more Ideal-centric and eventually is completely absorbed in love for the Ideal, which ultimately leads to a state of trance (Samadhi)…He prescribed the five-fold path for Sadhana- Jajan, Jaajan, Istabhriti, Swastayani and the observance of Sadachar. The process of Jajan involves the repetition of the Holy Name and meditation; Jaajan means observance of such practices that would lead to the growth and development of the environment… The achievements of Satsang, in all these years, have been spectacular. In the span of forty-one years, the institution has flourished to such an extent that a new township has grown up in place of a solitary locality of the town and it is now known as Satsangnagar…The number of devotees and disciples of Sri Sri Thakur has grown ten times greater since His demise. But the institution has not been able to reach the target assigned by Sri Sri Thakur as yet, for He commanded His disciples to initiate at least ten crore people in the Holy Name to avert the calamity that is going to besiege the world."

Oral Religious Tradition and Television

In the oral religious tradition, within the Indian civilization, prayer and worship in the participatory mode, signifies highly ritualistic replication of Hindu religious belief. *Ramlila* (a drama performance of Hindu epic Ramayan) represents most vivid expression of oral religious tradition in North India participated and witnessed by several hundred million Hindu for about ten days culminating on *Dashara* or tenth day of the festival. Similarly in Western India *garba* (ritual prayer dance in the honour of Ambe goddess) are performed during same period. These are excellent examples of oral religious tradition being followed in Indian civilization. Similar illustrations can be found else where in the sub-continent.

Spurt of religious satellite television in India has mushroomed in last two decades in multiple languages. *Ramlila* is now not limited to 10 days annual festival. It is now spread around year in different time slots at the convenience of the viewers. In more ways than one, it has reinforced oral religious tradition and helped multiply access by breaking major literary barriers in the wake of rapid expansion of television. Media, especially new media, have helped absorb assimilate and confront a variety of religious interpretations, theories and doctrines. The oral religious traditions have moved into media mediated beliefs. Digital media especially new media have created access with ease and individualized experience. It has taken away the collective ethos and verbal sharing of religious experiences.

According to Agrawal (2010), "There has been an explosion of religious telecast especially of television in the 21st Century South Asia. Also major religious groups have started their separate telecast. One of the important features of the telecast are live telecast form religious worship places like Hindu temple, Sikh Gurudwara, Christian Church and Muslim Mosque. India is fast emerging as an important media hub in religious telecast having its reach and access in other South Asia and other Asian countries. Observations indicated that business interest largely dominates religious broadcast thereby jeopardizing meaningful religious broadcast and effective utilization. Also there is a visible conflict between religious dogma and scientific rational thinking among the viewers. At present, there is fairly appreciable number of religious television viewers of both sexes in all age groups who are attracted to view religious broadcast."

Religious telecast is a relatively recent phenomenon. It started with a brief religious singing and prayer in the morning telecast by Government of India controlled television--Doordarshan. However, after the turn of 20th Century, religious telecast has become round the clock telecast in over a dozen languages of all major religions in India. The religious telecast has in no way hindered the religious congregation, discourse, pilgrimages and visits to religious centre.

Oral religious communication continues to be the single most important means of sermon and to reach out to the devotees. In the case of Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra *Satsang*, oral religious tradition continues across India. The author has observed that the devotees of *Satsang* broke the conference proceeding in the middle for *Satsang* prayer in which all *Satsangis* present in conference hall participated and sang the prayer.

Closing Comments

So far, the implications of these media induced changes have been left to market forces without an effort to understand and comprehend likely effects of

media on Hindu oral religious tradition and its societal implications. Parallel efforts to evolve new methodological or theoretical perspectives have created difficulties to communication researches especially in Asia.

Observations support the view that media especially visual media seemed to have helped in refining and reinforcing the existing religious beliefs and have increased visual literacy uniformly regardless of age, sex and education of the viewers. It has also reinforced and reconstructed a new meaning of Hindu religion in a global context and allowed common sharing of values.

The *emic* theoretical framework suggested by Agrawal (1980) to study oral religious tradition has been used to question the validity of social and religious communication as a separate category accepted in the current debate. The author has argued that Hindu universe having multiple oral traditions, television has reinforced oral tradition in which religion, social and economic aspects can not be separated in day-to-day sacred and profane domains. It is further asserted and reemphasized that through visual medium of television while breaking literacy barriers *emic* religious Hindu categories begins to blur requiring new methods of analyses. Hence, there is a need for new paradigm to analyze media influence on religion in the context of Asia.

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Establishing an Interreligious Web Network as Manifestation of a Changing Culture in a Filipino Rural Community

Ma. Stella C. Tirol

A case study conducted in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines showing the perceptions and responses of members of different religions in establishing an interreligious web network.

Introduction

Religion and Communication

Religion affects the way in which people live their daily life. It is a set of organized beliefs, devotions, and rituals containing a moral code to guide the conduct of human affairs (Random House Dictionary, 2014). Religion provides a set of ideas, images, symbols, stories, and theories that illustrate and explain the meaning of life and governs how one should live life (Anh, 2014). Through the means of social communication, religious beliefs and values are shared and exchanged in the community. The advent of social media has inspired the Roman Catholic Church to utilize information and communication technologies, including social media, as tools for social communication. A number of studies have already investigated the potential and use of social media in the context of religious communication. In his opening message during the 6th International Roundtable on Religion and

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Social Communication, Eilers (2013), described social media as the third type of social communication media. Further, he described there are now producers and consumers, which he labelled as prosumers of social media. Today, users of social media act simultaneously as information or knowledge producers and consumers.

Interreligious and Interfaith Dialogue

To some, interreligious and interfaith dialogue has the same meaning. To others, both terms can take on different meanings. According to the World Council of Churches, interreligious dialogue pertains to action between different Christian denominations. On the other hand, interfaith dialogue refers to interaction between different faith groups such as Muslim and Christian or Hindu and Jew. Interfaith dialogue is the cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious faiths and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs at individual and institutional levels. It involves promoting understanding between different religions to increase acceptance of others.

Interreligious dialogue is often used with a similar meaning to interfaith dialogue particularly in academic circles. It encompasses more the philosophical, sociological, cultural and political aspects. Some scholars prefer to use the term religion to faith as they think that faith does not express the full plurality of culture (Trafford, 2004).

Weley (undated) defines interfaith dialogue as an encounter between people who live by different faith traditions in an atmosphere of mutual trust and acceptance. Dialogue was one of the ways to become informed about the faiths of others and to rediscover essential dimensions of one's own faith tradition (Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/ecumenical-dictionary-interfaith-dialogue?set_language=en).

Within this general framework individual theological explorations have yielded a variety of points of view. Some see dialogue primarily as a new and creative relationship within which one can learn about and respect others but also can give authentic witness to one's own faith. Others see it as an important historical moment in the development of religious traditions, in which each of

the faith traditions in dialogue is challenged and transformed by the encounter with others. Still others view dialogue as a common pilgrimage towards the truth, within which each tradition shares with the others the way it has come to perceive and respond to that truth (Weslwy, no date).

Trafford (2004) states that there are many ways in which interfaith may be defined since it operates at many different levels. For instance, interfaith is a process of coming together of people committed to their respective religions and spiritual paths for the purpose of mutual understanding, appreciation and enrichment. The dialogue has a positive and deliberate connotation, a sense of offering space, openness, and respect. It can be formal or informal. It can be internal to oneself, between neighbours, among community groups, or large international gatherings.

Interfaith networks have been organized at local and international levels. These networks can be organization-based or web-based. Interfaith networks exist in America, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific. In the Philippines, Internet search has revealed the existence of three interfaith web networks.

Several studies have been done on interreligious or interfaith dialogue – wherein their meanings have been used interchangeably. Most studies focused on interfaith or interreligious organizations. With the popular use of information and communication technologies today, interfaith networks have been set up through the Internet. However, very few studies have been conducted on interreligious or interfaith networks.

To bridge such research gap, this study explored how people in a rural community in a developing country respond to the establishment of an interreligious web network. Further, it tried to find out the implications of an interreligious web network on changing culture in the local community. It identified some manifestations of a changing culture based on people's response towards establishing an interreligious network.

Research Problem and Objectives

This study addressed two general problems. What are the responses of Filipino respondents in a rural community towards establishment of an interreligious web network? Based on the responses, what are the implications of establishing an interreligious web network towards a changing culture in the community?

The specific objectives were to: 1) describe how respondents from different religious denominations respond to establishing an interreligious network in terms of attitude or feeling and expectations; and 2) draw out indicators that manifest a changing culture among respondents in a rurban community.

Methodology

Research design

The descriptive research design was employed, in particular, survey method, in order to get a general picture of respondents' perspective about the establishment of an interreligious web network and its implications on a changing culture in a rurban community in a province in the Philippines.

Location of Study

A survey was carried out in the municipality of Los Baños in the province of Laguna in the Southern Tagalog region of the Philippines. The site was selected due to its accessibility, researcher's familiarity with the place; and availability of respondents willing to participate in a simple survey.

The town of Los Baños used to be the seat of the Spanish Governor-General because of its cool climate, hot springs, and beautiful scenery. It has also been the site for incarceration of prisoners of war during the Japanese period. As such, Los Baños has become part of the nation's rich cultural history. It has a mix of agricultural and commercial lands, including the Mount Makiling Forest Reserve. Today, Los Baños is home to the University of the Philippines Los Baños. By law, it has been designated as a special science and nature city of the Philippines. In this connection, it has also been declared as an agriculture, forestry, and life sciences community. The residents are mostly Tagalogs with migrants also from all over the country. In terms of religion, the top five in Los Baños include the following: 1) Roman Catholics – 100, 914; 2) Born Again Christians – 4,040; 3) Iglesia ni Cristo or Church of Christ – 1, 785; 4) Baptists – 639; and 5) Jehovah's Witness – 496. (Socio-Economic and Physical Profile or SEPP, 2010, Los Baños).

Figure 1. Location of Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines

Respondents and Sampling

A list of the top five religions in the Los Baños community was obtained from the Office of Planning and Development in the Mayor's Office. Based on the list, respondents would be comprised of residents from the following religious denominations: Roman Catholic, Born Again, Church of Christ, Baptist, and Jehovah's Witness.

Originally, a sample size of 10 respondents was set for each of the top five religions above. During the survey, some of the respondents failed to return their questionnaire on the deadline set. Thus, the final religious denominations of the respondents turned out as follows: Roman Catholic – 9; Born Again Christians – 9; Protestant – 5; Baptist – 3; Church of Christ (Iglesia ni Kristo) – 1, and Jehovah's Witness – 1. The total sample size for the exploratory study was 28.

Data Collection and Analysis

The respondents were Los Baños residents but were surveyed in their workplace which was the University of the Philippines Los Baños in College, Los Baños, Laguna. Three accessible places were randomly picked in the UPLB campus such as the old administration building, a college building, and the main library building. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed randomly to people who went inside the buildings and collected immediately after the respondents have answered them. Some respondents, however, did not opt to answer the questionnaire – they took the questionnaire but did not answer and return them.

Analytical Framework

Figure 2 shows the analytical framework used in the study. Respondents' response towards establishment of an interreligious web network was broken down into three measurable factors. These included attitude toward religion and interreligious web network, expectations from such a network, and comments or suggestions on establishing an interreligious web network. The fourth factor was the implications of such interreligious web network on a changing culture in a rural community. Implications were measured in the form of indicators that reflect the manifestations of a changing culture with the establishment of an interreligious web network in the Los Baños community.
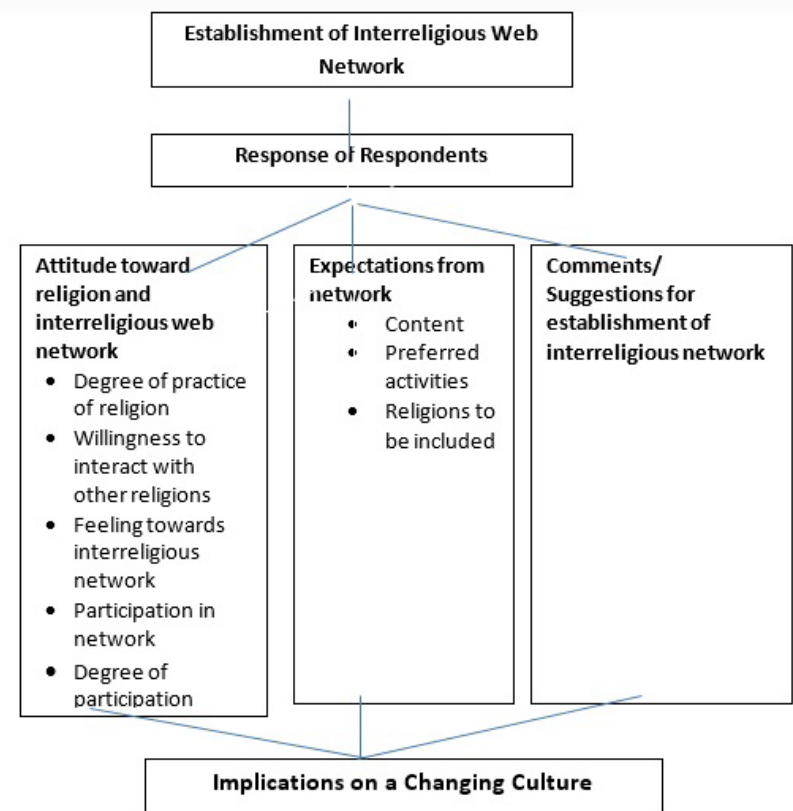

Figure 2. Analytical framework of the study

Results and Discussion

Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

The respondents were mostly young to middle aged (39 years and below) and equally represented by male and female gender (14 each). The larger percentage (32%) each comprised of Roman Catholics and Born-Again Christians. The rest were Protestants, Baptists, and members of the Church of Christ and Jehovah's Witness. More than one third each obtained a college and graduate education. Majority (72%) occupied professional, managerial, business or administrative work positions. Their estimated monthly income was P20,000 and below (47%) and P21,000-40,000 (32%). More than half (54%) were non-members of an organization. Those who were members belonged to a religious organization (25%). All of them were residents of the Los Baños rurban community in Laguna province, Philippines (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE
Age		
39 and below	15	54
40 and above	13	46
Gender		
Male	14	50
Female	14	50
Religion		
Roman Catholicism	9	32
Born-Again Christian	9	32
Protestantism	5	18
Baptist	3	10
Church of Christ	1	4
Jehovah's Witness	1	4
Education		
High school	6	21
College	10	36
Graduate	10	36
Vocational	2	7
Occupation		
Professional, managerial, business, or administrative job	20	72
Manual or hands-on job	2	7
Student	6	21
Monthly Income (in pesos)		
20,000 and below	13	47
21,000-40,000	9	32
Not applicable	6	21
Organizational Membership		
Non-member	15	54
Member	13	46
Type of Organization		
Religious	7	25
Professional	2	7
Civic	2	7
Student	2	7
Not applicable	15	54

Degree of practice of religion and reason

More than half (54%) of the respondents perceived themselves as modern or open in their practice of religion for two reasons. They could respect the religious beliefs of other people. And, they tried to listen and understand others' religious beliefs as well as pick out philosophies that complement my own religion (Table 2).

Among those who were moderate in their practice of religion, about 36 percent reasoned that they valued their religion as much as they valued the teachings and practice of other religions.

Table 2. Degree of practice of religion and reason

TYPE AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Modern or open	15	54
Moderate	10	36
Traditional or closed	3	10
Reason:		
Modern or open		
• Respect others' religious beliefs		
• Try to listen and understand others' religious beliefs and pick out philosophies that complement my religion		
Moderate		
• Value my religion as much as I value others' religious teachings and practices		
Traditional or closed		
• Believe that my Church is the true Church		

Willingness to interact with people from different religions and reason

Overall, the respondents (53%) wanted to interact with people from different religions. They were willing (28%) and very willing (25%) to do so because they: 1) could share their insights about their religion and learn from others' religion; 2) were interested to interact with people from different religions; 3) worked with and had friends from other religious denominations; and 4) could better understand one another (Table 3).

On the other hand, more than two thirds (43%) were neutral or undecided about interacting with people from different religions since they did not want to engage in any argument about religion or about what is right and wrong. Another reason was that their interaction would depend on similarity of beliefs or matters common to both of their religions.

Table 3. Willingness to interact with people from different religions and reasons

EXTENT OF WILLINGNESS AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very willing	7	25
Willing	8	28
Neutral/Can't say	12	43
Not willing	0	0
Not very willing	1	4
Reason:		
Very Willing		
• Work with and have friends from other religious denominations		
• It's a good way to better understand one another		
Willing		
• Can share my insights and learn from them, too, about their religion		
• Interested to interact with people from different religions		
Neutral/Can't say		
• Do not want arguments about religion and what is right or wrong		
• Interaction will depend on similarity of beliefs and matters common to us (e.g., belief in Bible and Koran)		
Not very willing		
• Believe in only one faith/religion		

Feeling towards the establishment of interreligious web network and reason

The same percentage (39%) each were in favour of establishing an interreligious web network and were neutral or undecided about their feeling about an interreligious web network (Table 4). Respondents favoured an interreligious network for the following reasons: 1) to know, understand, and gain new perspectives and to level off about other religions; 2) to open minds and gain respect about other religions; 3) to provide a venue for netizens to interact with people from different religions and discuss their respective faiths; and 4) to make use of technology in interacting with others from different religious denominations (Table 4).

The respondents who claimed to be neutral or undecided about establishing an interreligious web network mostly said that they had no idea yet about an

interreligious web network. Others mentioned that an interreligious network should not create conflicting beliefs or unnecessary debates online. Other reasons indicate that respondents were worried about how open-minded people are about their own religion. Further, a moderator for interreligious web network should observe rules and meet objectives of the web-based platform. Others opine that the establishment of an interreligious web network should be planned and executed properly since it can be used as venue for religious disclosure.

Table 4. Feeling towards establishment of interreligious web network and reasons

FEELING AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
In favour	11	39
Neutral/Can't say	11	39
Not in favour	6	22
Reason:		
In favour		
• To know, understand, gain new perspectives, and level off about other religions		
• To open minds and gain respect about other religions		
• Will be a venue for various netizens to interact with people from different religions and discuss things about their respective faiths		
• Can use technology to interact with others from		
Neutral/Can't say		
• No idea of it yet		
• Depends on type of network – should not create conflicting beliefs and unnecessary debates online		
• Important to be cautious since people have common and different beliefs about their religion		
• Not sure how open-minded people are about religion		
• Moderator has critical role to ensure members of network observe rules and objectives of the web platform are met		
• Good idea if planned and executed properly since can be used as venue for religious disclosure		
Not in favour		
• Need to believe in only one faith/religion		
• It's not necessary		
• Our religion does not agree with it		
• Can create misunderstanding and partiality in religion		

Participation in interreligious web network

More than half (54%) of the surveyed respondents were neutral or undecided about whether to participate or not in an interreligious web network. Their indecisiveness to participate can be traced to their lack of awareness or understanding of the value and usefulness of an interreligious web network. In addition, the respondents were unclear about the goal or purpose of an interreligious web network. Other reasons were: *might not have the time to participate in the network, depends on the representation of religious groups,* and *depends on whether the interreligious web network will unite people to only one God* (Table 5).

Nine (32%) of the respondents expressed their willingness to participate in an interreligious web network – in case it is going to be established in the rural community. They wanted to participate in the interreligious web network because they wanted to learn about the religion of other people and would like to open their mind to the concerns of other religions.

Only a very small percentage (14%) of the respondents will not participate in the interreligious web network since their religion did not allow it; they do not know what will be the content of the web network; and they had other priorities besides it (Table 5).

Table 5. Number of respondents who will participate in interreligious web network of Los Baños community and reasons

PARTICIPATION AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Will participate	9	32
Neutral/Can't say	15	54
Will not participate	4	14
Reason:		
Will participate		
To learn more about religion of other people (5)		
It is convenient to know about people and their religion through the web (1)		
Will open mind to concerns of other religions (1)		
No response (2)		

Undecided/Can't say
Not sure what value, usefulness, or good effect it will have for me (3)
Not clear about goal and purpose of network (2)
Might not have time (1)
Depends on representation of various religious groups and nature of discussion (1)
Depends on whether it will unite people to only one God (1)
No response (7)
Will not participate
Our religion does not agree with it (1)
Don't know what will be the content of the platform (1)
Have other priorities (1)
Joining network means one is not happy or satisfied with his/her religion (1)

Extent of participation in interreligious web network

When asked again about the extent of their participation in the network, regardless of their earlier response on willingness to participate, the respondents replied that they would opt for moderate (39%) to low (43%) levels of participation (Table 6). Their common reasons for moderate extent of participation were: a) busy with work or studies; b) depends on my availability for discussion; c) interested in sharing the Bible, not debating about its content; and d) want to minimize getting into argument with other religions (Table 6).

The low extent of participation was attributed also to having busy work and to being cautious about the process and content of the interreligious web network. Other reasons cited were *want to limit participation in terms of reading posts and being merely a spectator* (Table 6).

The moderate to low participation in an interreligious web network dominated among the survey respondents is brought about mainly by a busy work schedule, availability of the person for discussion, and some degree of cautiousness towards engaging into a new venture.

Table 6. Perceived extent of participation in interreligious web network and reasons

DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
High	3	11
Moderate	11	39
Low	12	43
No response	2	7
High participation		
More participation, more learning, more fun (2)		
No response (1)		
Moderate participation		
Busy with work, studies, and other things (3)		
Depends on my availability for discussion (3)		
Just interested in sharing the Bible, not in debate (1)		
Don't want to argue with other religions (1)		
No response (3)		
Low participation		
Busy with work, academics, and organization (4)		
Will see and observe first; am cautious (3)		
Will limit participation to reading posts; tend to be just spectator (2)		
Religion does not agree with it (1)		
No response (1)		

Expected content in interreligious web network

The highest number of multiple responses (13 out of 28) wanted the content of an interreligious web network to revolve on the teachings and practices of different religions. In addition, such network should also include information about the concept of interreligion as well as news and announcements on religious activities of different denominations (5 responses each) (Table 7). The same number of responses (5) indicated not having any idea at all on what the content of an interreligious web network should be.

The least mentioned topics for inclusion in the interreligious web network

were opinions and views of other religions on views or issues that affect all nations as well about news about the interreligious web organization or network. Apparently, there is an interest on issues or concerns of other religions especially if one is not familiar with them.

Overall, the participants shared only a few ideas on the possible content of an interreligious web network. This finding implies the respondents' lack of understanding about the concept of an interreligious web network. They may perhaps still be confused on what it is really all about.

Table 7. Content that respondents expect in interreligious web network

TOPIC	FREQUENCY* (n=28)
Teachings and practices of different religions	13
Doctrines	
Core values	
Beliefs and practices	
Culture and traditions	
Chronicles	
God's message from the Bible	
Who God is; God's purpose to His people	
Misconceptions about religion	
Don't have any idea	5
Concept of inter religion	5
Openness to other religions	
Understanding	
Tolerance	

News and announcements on religious activities and resources/materials	5
Religious holidays, celebrations and their purpose	
Christian songs	
Books (e.g., Bible, Koran)	
Opinions and views of other religions on issues that affect nations	4
News about the organization/network	2
Vision	
Mission	
Organization	
Resources	
Not applicable	6

*Multiple responses

Preferred activities in interreligious web network

The respondents seemingly had few ideas on the content of an interreligious web network. However, with regards to activities in an interreligious web network, the respondents gave several answers. In order of high to low frequency occurrence, having a forum or discussion board was highly preferred among the respondents (7 responses). Ecumenical and interactive activities that cut across various faiths or religions were preferred, too. According to at least three respondents, a question and answer portion about religious beliefs and activities could be included. One response each was given for the following activities: testimonials of God's work on people's lives, chat with other Christians, sharing of outreach programs, and information about the vision, mission, and objectives of the interreligious web network (Table 8).

The variety of activities that respondents preferred to undertake in the network shows potential interest in becoming prosumers of an interreligious web network.

Table 8. Preferred activities to be included in interreligious web network

ACTIVITY	FREQUENCY* (n=28)
Forum/Discussion board Development initiatives and experiences of different religious groups Sharing of papers	7
Ecumenical activities that would cut across various faiths Worship Prayer groups Bible sharing	5
Interactive activities that would unite religious groups ; games	5
Question and answers about religion, beliefs, and activities	3
No idea at all	3
Testimonials on God's work in people's lives	1
Chat with other Christians	1
Outreach programs	1
Information about network Vision, mission, and objectives	1
Not applicable	6

*Multiple responses

Specific religion to be included in interreligious web network

Of the 28 respondents, 11 wanted to include as many religions as possible in the interreligious web network. Their reasons were to: *fully understand the traditions, belief, and culture; learn more about other doctrines; and cultivate an open mind to information about other religions* (Table 9).

Some of the religions that should be included in the web network were Buddhism, Born Again Christian, Islam, Taoism, and Hinduism. The top reasons for inclusion of these religions were interest to learn about their

beliefs, traditions, and culture and to satisfy curiosity about other religions.

Table 9. Religions to be included in interreligious web network and reasons

RELIGION AND REASON FOR INCLUSION	FREQUENCY* (n=28)
All religions/As many as possible Majority of Los Baños population belong to these religions (Roman Catholicism, Born-Again Christian, Church of Christ, Baptist, Jehovah's Witness) To fully understand their traditions, beliefs, and culture To know more about their doctrines Explanations about doctrines can open minds of people to other religions Have a right to be heard To have more networks Want to know their views	11
Buddhism Out of curiosity I want to know about it To know their beliefs To find out similarities or differences in religion Might be interesting to interact with Buddhists	5
Born-Again Christian Want Born-Again Christians to be involved if possible so these souls that are called can be harvested by God	4
Islam Because it is rapidly growing To know their beliefs To find out similarities or differences in religion	3

Taoism	3
So people can learn about it	
To know their beliefs	
To find out similarities or differences in religion	
Hinduism	2
So people will know about it	
To know their beliefs	
To find out similarities or differences in religion	
The Church in Recovery (Local Churches)	1
Has high peak truth revelations	
Not applicable	6

*Multiple responses

Comments and suggestions on establishment of interreligious web network

Although only five comments in all were collected from the respondents, the respondents were distributed among such responses. Based on eight responses obtained, the interreligious web network should have strong rules, regulations, and policies that should be strictly followed for smooth discussions and sharing in the network (Table 10). Specific rules were also obtained such as equal treatment for all religions, adoption of open policy to religious doctrine, avoidance of conflicts or debates, and no attacks on each religion (Table 10).

Another suggestion was to create an attractive design for the interreligious web network (7 repsonses) so that people will respond to and understand it. An ergonomic, dynamic design with interactive discussions would allow for intellectual discourse. Lots of photographs and visuals were recommended, too.

There was also a suggestion to explain clearly the purpose or goal of the interreligious web network to promote unity and oneness of faith among various religions (Table 10).

A network moderator was proposed for an organized discussion. The moderator must be skilled in facilitation skills and open-minded. He/she must not be biased on a particular religion.

Prior to actual establishment of the interreligious web network, the need for it should be carefully studied. The mechanisms on how to set and operate the network should be well planned. The respondents may somehow be proposing the conduct of a feasibility study for such type of web network.

Table 10. Comments and suggestions for interreligious web network to be established

COMMENT/SUGGESTION	FREQUENCY* (n=28)
Have strong rules, regulations, and policies	8
Treat various religions equally	
Adopt open policy to doctrine or God's message	
Avoid conflicts/debates	
Focus on how to inspire members' spirituality	
No attacking against each other	
Strict against flammers and spammers	
Open to reports against them	
Create attractive design for web network	7
Make the design ergonomic and responsive	
Make it easily understandable to people	
Should be dynamic and interactive (discussion boards, blogs)	
Allow for quality and intellectual discourse	
Include lots of photos and visuals	

State clearly purpose of web network
 	
   Promote unity among different religions
 	
   Aim for oneness of faith
 	
   Not a platform to offend other religions
	3

Select and assign a moderator
 	
   Must be open-minded
 	
   Skilled in facilitation
	3

Study carefully how to set up and operate network
 	
   It is something new
 	
   It is a sensitive issue or matter
	2

	3
No comment/suggestion	
	6
Not applicable	

*Multiple responses

Summary of Expectations about establishing an interreligious web network:

Towards some manifestations of a changing culture

Table 11 shows the respondents' expectations about five attributes of an interreligious web network such as content, preferred activities, religions to be included, guidelines or policies for the implementation and use of such type of web network.

Despite having a vague idea of what an interreligious web network is, the respondents were able to provide a list of topics that should be considered. The topics ranged from religious culture, tradition, doctrines to issues, concerns, and opinions about religions to religious misconceptions, news, announcements, and Christian songs. These topics imply that potential users of the interreligious web network can both produce and consume (thus prosumers) the contents of the web network. Further, it appears that the interreligious web network manifests a culture that is becoming need-based and demand driven

in its need for religious information and social communication.

Meanwhile, the list of preferred activities turned out to be varied and interactive with the purpose of sharing religious information through forums, discussion boards, testimonials, games, and chatting. These activities connote a culture that is heading towards multi-media and interactivity in the use of a social network. The social media culture is changing towards the direction of one that involves multiple media combinations where prosumers can interact in various ways.

The expectation to include all kinds of religion in the web network seems to shape up a culture that is recognizing the presence or existence of other religions and that is valuing the right to be heard in the context of religion. A culture of understanding and appreciating other religions is finding its way into a rural community where the population is educated, unmarried, and gainfully employed.

Lastly, the provisions for a set of guidelines or policies for operation and maintenance of the interreligious web network also draws out certain manifestations of a changing culture in the context of religion and social communication. The culture is now one that appreciates the importance of policies in bringing order and logic to an interreligious web network. The culture is also one where space for equality, absence of bias, protection, and respect for religions is emerging. The culture reflects a fondness for storytelling and exchanging instead of merely one-way communication (Table 11).

As the results indicate, the establishment of an interreligious web network leads toward a culture that is changing in various ways. There could be even other manifestations of such a changing culture in the field of religion and social communication.

Table 11. Summary of expectations about an interreligious web network and manifestations of a changing culture in a Filipino rural community.

Expected Content	Manifestations of Changing Culture
• Culture and tradition • Doctrines, core values, beliefs, practices, and activities of different religions • Interfaith openness, understanding, tolerance • Opinions of others, their stand on issues that affect nations, views on what the Bible says • How other religions view life and other issues • Misconceptions about religion/faith • News and announcements of religious celebrations, feast days, festival and their purpose • Information about our books of faith and other resources • Christian songs-free download • Chronicles	• Development of pro-sumers • Needs-based, demand driven content
Preferred Activities	Manifestations of Changing Culture
• Discussion boards linked to vision, mission, and objectives of network. • Interactive activities like sharing of papers, development initiatives of religious groups and their experiences, outreach programs • Forum; question and answer regarding faith and activities • Testimonials on God's work in people's lives • Prayer groups • Worship exalting God • Ecumenical activities that would cut across various faiths • Bible sharing • Games • Chat with other faiths • Any other information as long as it is beneficial to every soul	• Multi-media culture • Interactivity in use of social network

Religions to be included	Manifestations of Changing Culture

• All faith communities should be in the network; all of them have a right to be heard.
• As many religions as possible for better understanding
   o Islam
   o Buddhism
   o Hinudism
   o Confucianism
   o Taoism
   o Zoroastrianism
   o Judaism
   o Church in Recovery (Local Churches)— have high peak truth revelations
	• Recognition of various religions
	• Value for right to be heard (religions)

Guidelines/Policies of Network	Manifestations of Changing Culture
• Have strong rules, regulations, or policies • Select a moderator for the network (open minded; skills in facilitation) • State clearly the purpose of the network • Aim for unity of faith, for the truth, and not for anything personal • Use network as venue to promote unity among different religions • Testimonials of God's work on people's lives • Allow for quality and intellectual discourse • Make design ergonomic and responsive • Make network dynamic • Include lots of photos/visuals • Put up discussion boards, papers, blogs • Make the network interactive • Make the network easily understandable to people • Focus on what would inspire members' spirituality • Treat various faiths equally • Guard against flamers and spammers • Report flamers and scammers • Network requires certain degree of open-mindedness	• Appreciation of policy guidelines in use of interreligious web network. • Equality, absence of bias, protection and respect for religion • Preference for story exchange

Conclusions

The respondents were mainly neutral or undecided about their willingness to interact with people from other religions as well as their participation in an interreligious web network. An equal number expressed they were in favour of establishing an interreligious web network and were indecisive about their feelings towards the network. The respondents settled for moderate to low participation in the interreligious network. The reasons for their behavior and attitude were varied and wide.

A number of topics as content for the interreligious web network emerged from the data of the study. Similarly, a variety of preferred activities for the network were interactive discussion boards, forums, games, and question and answer about religion. Policy guidelines were suggested for proper operation and management of the interreligious web network that should be facilitated by a moderator.

In view of the establishment of an interreligious web network, certain indicators that manifest a changing culture in the context of religion and social communication emerged in the study. Changes in culture were manifested in terms of the role of prosumers, needs-based and demand driven content, multimedia approach, interactivity, recognition of other religions and the right of every religion to be heard, equality and respect for various religions, and policy guidelines for the interreligious web network.

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Asian Religions and Social Media: Challenges and Opportunities
A Reflection

Chainarong Monthienvichienchai

According to an overview report on global digital trends published by *We Are Social*, a London-based social media agency with offices worldwide, out of the world's estimated population of some 7 billion people, there are 6.5 billion with mobile subscriptions in one form or another.[1]

Furthermore, in a United Nations study published last year, more people on earth have access to mobile phones than sanitary toilets. Out of the world's estimated 7 billion people, more than 6 billion have access to mobile phones.[2] Far fewer — only 4.5 billion people — have access to clean, working toilets.

There was also a tipping point last year that has major implications for businesses and Religion. This point will impact publishing and marketing and religious strategies and tactics in the future.

Last December 13, 2013, Beyoncé, one of the world's biggest music stars ignored the traditional mass media product launching process. She bypassed the "normal" mass media release of a radio campaign, multiple TV appearances and retail and consumer brand promotions that is the usual requirement for successful album sales.

[1] Simon Kemp in News on 9 January 2014, Social, Digital & Mobile in APAC in 2014 http://wearesocial.sg/blog/2014/01/social-digital-mobile-apac-2014/

[2] UN News Service, Deputy UN chief calls for urgent action to tackle global sanitation crisis, 21 March 2013 http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44452

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Instead she announced her new album on Instagram with just a picture, captioned 'Surprise!'. Amazingly, this one picture sent the music world into instantaneous meltdown. What she did was releasing her new album on iTunes with zero warning. An Instagram post was all she needed. Twitter reported a whopping 1.2 million tweets about the album in just 12 hours and the new album sold 828,773 copies in just three days, making it iTunes' fastest-selling album worldwide.

These "new forms of behavior" are posing an immense challenge and are also providing great opportunities for Religions and their messages. Our religions have not changed, even not our traditions. But our people especially our young are living in a new world.

In the history of Christianity people of the past made use of all forms of media to spread their convictions and faith – whether it be parchments and scrolls, art, stained glass, illuminated manuscripts, printing, television or radio. We must therefore welcome the use of so-called 'social media'. Many communities have websites. There are 'sacred spaces' on line, priests and gurus on TV programs, 'soul-waves' radio and many more. But all of this is no longer enough.

There are different ways of looking at the use of social media in Religion – one is to see the new media as yet another tool to reach people with a religious message. By means of the various forms of social media, we can reach out to the peripheries and draw people, so that they live and practice their Religion better. But despite all this we must remember that the best form of communication is still interpersonal.

Another way is to see the digital, online, or virtual world itself as a new space, is also for personal use and growth.

The former was called as "Religion online" (Drawson), the latter, however, is "online Religion".

The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 17:16-26) of the New Testament speaks about Paul going into Athens, the bustling capital of the ancient world. Paul is amazed to see that the city was full of idols. Yet Verse 21 comments: *All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas*. Pope John Paul II saw

also the internet as the 'new Athens', a new marketplace or *Areopagus* (cf. *Redemptoris Missio, 37c*), a 'global village' where people exchange ideas and talk to each other – but with "new languages, new Psychology and new ways of communicating". Like Paul, our challenge is to become aware of such a situation and see the need for dialogue with this digital culture.

Nowadays, people are spending huge and increasing proportions of their time in this virtual world. I believe many of us, if not all, keep our mobiles with us all the time. Many keep social networks open throughout the day in a distinct browser tab or app, so much that for them it is becoming increasingly the place where they live their lives. When they go to bed at night most of them check their phones one last time before placing it on their bed stand. What we call the real world of face-to-face seems often dull and uneventful to them and their secondary existence.

Thus social media have become the nervous system of our new culture, in which more and more people are expressing and exploring their identity, picking up and discarding their values and attitudes, expressing their feelings and prejudices, befriending and unfriending each other, measuring each other's status and importance, relevance and appearance. If our young people and people of all ages are living in this gigantic network, how is Religion there, interacting with the inhabitants of this world, with the men and women who dwell in the social media.

When we speak about the role and impact of Religion in social Communication, we more often than not think of the so called 'real world', but in reality billions of people now live in the social networks. These have been called as among the biggest countries in the world – and they are countries with no barriers. For example, more than 1.2 billion inhabit the world of Facebook. The majority of these people may never practice Religion or even become aware of it as essential part of life and society. Our challenge as communicators concerned about Religion and Social Communication has always been to reach out and encounter people wherever they are - and increasingly that means going online.

We might have been used to ask ourselves, "What do we need to tell people?" Now we also have to ask ourselves, "What do people want and how they want to hear from us?" They no longer wait for the evening newscast,

or the morning paper, or even the Sunday homily. They develop their own program and know where to find it! When people today need *information*, they will seek it and find it. When they need *guidance*, they look for it and consult their social networks. When they need *community*, they will connect to it.

For the Catholic Church Pope Francis in this year's Message for the 48th World Communications Day, speaks about 'Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter.' The Internet, in particular, he says, 'offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.'

He is saying that "today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ". We should encourage this encounter through technology and social media. Social media require technology, but they are not the same thing.

Our problem is that in general religious authorities do not distinguish between technology and the social media. We are still distinguishing between the tools and the cultures they create, while disregarding the latter. Long gone are the days when to connect to the Internet you had to fire up a modem and wait for the connection. Now we are always on. We are the Internet.

Yes you heard that right. We ARE the internet. We are no longer living in a world where you had a producer of content on a website and a number of consumers. Through social media we are the Internet. Each one of us is a consumer and a producer on the web. Our lives, real lives if you will, are creating content for the social networks to consume. Actions on these networks are extending our lives. Pope Francis states that "the digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people."

The challenges facing Religion in the digital culture and in order to effectively communicate our message and concerns in today's generation are that we need to learn the language of social media, which is conversational and interactive - to speak in a style that is accessible to a generation accustomed to 15 second commercials and 140 character texts or "tweets"- who prefer content that allows them to respond, comment and feel that they are interacting with someone that genuinely cares.

The Pope urges in his message "to dialogue with the men and women of today, to understand their expectations, doubts and hopes…." We should go out of our churches to dialogue with people in their own environment, in their own life. It really means: reaching out to people in their own environment and to the modern day peripheries.

At the same time, however, also the problems and drawbacks with authentic communication in the virtual world should not be neglected, for example – problems with achieving balance, fighting stereotypes, be aware of the ease with which people can isolate or 'barricade themselves' online 'behind sources of information which only confirm their own wishes and ideas, or political and economic interests.'

We need to "walk the streets of the digital highways, to encounter, like the Good Samaritan, those who are lying on the side of the road and witness to them in tenderness and love'. Thanks to the social media, Pope Francis says, 'Christian witness can reach the peripheries of human existence'. 'The digital highway is … a street teeming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for salvation or hope. By means of the Internet, the Christian message can reach "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).'

There is a temptation to see social media as simply as a possibility for bombarding people with religious messages. We have to go beyond this: 'Can we be available to them, hear their issues and problems, engage with their questions and doubts and their search for truth?'

From a Christian perspective Francis concludes: 'May the image of the Good Samaritan who tended to the wounds of the injured man by pouring oil and wine over them be our inspiration. Let our communication be a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine, which gladdens hearts.' He urges us: 'Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world… in order to dialogue with people today and to help them... We need to be Religions and people at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way.'

I would like to conclude with the communication message which Archbishop Eamon Martin of Ireland has upload on his twitter (on 19 May 2014) some useful suggestion for us to keep in mind a number of principles which might guide us in our presence in social media:

- Be positive and joyful. Remember that it is the 'Joy of the Gospel' that we are communicating. No 'funeral faces.'

- Remember 'Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.' Fill the internet with charity and love, always giving rather than taking. Continually seek to broaden and reframe discussions and seek to include a sense of charity and solidarity with the suffering in the world.

- Have a broad back when criticisms and insults are made – when possible, gently correct misunderstandings and errors.

- Pray in the digital world. Establish sacred spaces, opportunities for stillness, reflection and meditation online.

- Establish on-line connections, relationships and communities. Religions have always been about 'gathering' together– but it was never said where we should do this...

- Educate our young to keep themselves safe and to use the Internet responsibly.

- Witness to human dignity at all times online. We are well-aware of the pervasive prevalence of pornography on the Internet, which can 'pollute the spirit', destroy and degrade human sexuality and relationships, reduce persons to objects for gratification, draw millions into the commodification and commercialization of sex, and feed the monster that is human trafficking.

- Last but not the least be aware that with the help of the internet, social media messages have the potential to reach to the ends of the earth in seconds. In this regard, let us foster and call forth charisms in younger committed people who understand the power and potential of the social media to bear witness.

REPORTS

Religion at the 7th Public Relations and Advertising Forum
Mahidol University, Bangkok

The 7th International Forum on Public Relations and Advertising took place at the Mahidol University, International College, Bangkok from August 13 to 15, 2014. After earlier conferences in Wuhan (2007), Hong Kong (2008/ 2010), Macau (2009), in Amherst (USA, 2011), Taipei (2012) and again Wuhan (2012). It was the first time held in Thailand at the International College of Mahidol University, claimed as "one of the top research universities" in the country. With the theme "Media impacts on Culture and Social Communication" the conference went beyond a narrow PR-Advertising perspective of an organization which seems to be especially related to the Chinese language area. This is also reflected in the some 90 papers presented in parallel sessions which were somehow dominated by Chinese speaking participants which is understandable also because of the fact that beside the City University of Hong Kong also the Huazhong University of Science and Technology and the Shih Hsin University of mainland China and Taiwan were partners of the initiative. From here it also becomes clear that the meeting was fully Asian 'dominated', which is reflected also the themes of the papers presented.

Religion was also not left out in the papers presented. Thus there was a presentation on "Intercultural Communication for Sustainable Development in Buddhist Perspective" as well as one on "Marketing and Branding of Religions in Thailand: The Importance of Social Media." Many other presentations had an indirect relation to Religion like the ones on Ethics with the protection of privacy or the influence of Social Media on consumers and the communication process as was also highlighted in the presentation of Jan Servaes, head of communication and media department of the City University of Hong Kong, one of the organizers of the conference.

The academic quality of the papers, however, seemed not always being up to the expected standard which is understandable from the fact that by far the majority of participants were students and not professors, which is most of

the times the case in other similar conferences. But the mere fact that there a growing number of students from Mainland China and Taiwan indicates that there is a growing interest in social communication in Asia.

It should be also noted that many papers presented were one way or the other related to Internet and social media indicating a growing domination of these ways of communication possibly on the expense of traditional (mass) media.

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

IAMCR: "Religion, Communication & Culture"

Already at the Dublin International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conference 2013 it was proposed to change the name of the "Media, Religion, Culture" working group into "Religion, Communication, Culture" (RCC) which was accepted in Hyderabad by the organization as the new name for this concern. The purpose of the change was to widen the perspective and concern beyond 'media' and technicalities to a broader understanding of social communication which includes all ways and means of communication, a fact which is important especially in the field of Religion. An additional reason was the fact that the former name was already used also by other groups. The new name should also broaden the concerns of the study group in view of continents like Africa, Asia and Oceania. Like the other 15 working groups and 15 thematic sections of the organization the group will be responsible for the selection and content of respective presentations at the annual conferences of the IAMCR.

At the 2014 meeting held from July 15 to 19 at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre, the RCC working group had some 27 research papers approved by a team of reviewers, which included RCC convenors Yoel Cohen (Ariel University, Jerusalem), Victor Khroul (Moscow State University) and Domenica Dipio (Makerere University, Uganda).

The submitted papers on Religion were grouped into eight panels under these headings: 1. New Media and Religion, 2. Religious Identity, 3. Media in theological perspectives, 4. Covering Religion, 5. Communicating Christianity, 6. Cultural and anthropological dimensions of Religion, 7. Media, Religion

and Public Interest, 8. Film, Music and Religion. All was concluded with a panel on "Dimensions of Religion and Social Communication in Asia."

The presentations in Hyderabad had themes like a study on "Patterns of Hindu Religious Practices among Digital Natives" and "God in Facebook" by ARC secretary Anthony Roman. There was also a paper on "Communicating Deviance from Pulpits in Churches in Nigeria." ARC consultant Binod Agrawal presented a paper on "Media and Religious Communication in Asia: Future Implications." A presentation from Israel was titled "Communicating with Authority: The Origins of Prayer in the Bible-based Religious Traditions" and group coordinator Yoel Cohen presented a case study from Israel on Journalists and Religiosity. Pope Francis was subject of a paper from Frank Coffey, and from China came a study on "Christianity and Reconstruction of Rural Life: A Case Study of a Village in South China."

The relation between culture and religious communication was presented in papers like the one on Ramadan "Exploring the Dynamic Shades of the Holy Islamic Month in Hyderabad City" or the one on "Ritual Celebrations in West Africa in the New World of Media." More general themes were taken up on "Discovering Public TV principles in religious perspective" by RCC co-chair Victor Krouhl (Moscow State University), and "Competence in Religious Communication" by ARC director Franz-Josef Eilers (University of Santo Tomas, Manila).

The next IAMCR conference will be from July 12 to 16, 2015 in Montreal (Canada) where the group not only expects again a good number of participant an also papers. The project of a book with selected presentations of the work group is still under way under the responsibility of Guy Marchessault (St. Paul's University, Ottawa) a former chairman of the group and Maria Way formerly Westminster University.

Anthony G. Roman

"Social Communication Dimensions of Religions in Asian Cultures: An Exploration"
7th International Roundtable of the
Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication
Saengtham College, Samphran
Nakhon Pathom, Thailand
October 20 to 23, 2014

Home to the world's great religions, Asia is also known as a forerunner in the hi-tech revolution. China, Japan, Korea and India have always been at the helm of technology innovation and adoption. Other countries, while steeped in tradition, are also experiencing the benefits as well as pitfalls of modernity and digital communication.

Just how this phenomenon impacts faith practices and religious expression remains the continuing concern of ARC, but also the deeper reality that (social) communication underlies both history and dynamics of cultures and religions.

In organizing this year's 7th International Roundtable, which took the theme **"Social Communication Dimensions of Religions in Asian Cultures: An Exploration,"** the questions posed seek answers to how religions influence cultures, and conversely, do cultures reflect religious beliefs and practices. The "new culture" sweeping across the region with its new and digital ways/means of communication is also a field of study as it relates to changing religious communication. How young people and interreligious dialogue are effected by the digital revolution in Asia is also a viable subject of research.

These inquiries were laid out in a "Call for Papers" sent several months before the meeting. The responses came from scholars representing different religions notably Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Theravada Buddhism. ARC's review board then decided to invite those authors whose papers promise to give a unique and valuable contribution to the theme; thus was built the roster below.

	Title	*Author*	*Affiliation/Origin*
1	**Religions' Role in Korean Development and Mediatization of Religion**	Sunny Yoon	*Hanyang University (Seoul, South Korea)*
2	**Reporting Inter-religious Conflicts in Malaysia: The Different Framing by Mainstream and Alternative Newspapers**	Nicole Yang Lai-fong	*Taylor's College (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia)*
3	**Thai Buddhism, the Mass Media and Culture Change in Thailand**	Patchanee Malikhao	*Fecund Communication (Hong Kong)*
4	**Media and Oral Tradition of Hindu *Satsang*: An Analysis of Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra *Avatar* in the Indian Civilization**	Binod C. Agrawal	*Taleem Research Foundation (Ahmedabad, India)*
5	**Impact of Social Media on Buddhism**	Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai	*Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University – MCU (Chiangmai, Thailand)*
6	**Islam and Digital Technology: Perception and Challenges to Religious Communication**	Md. Irfan Khan	*Mudhra Institute of Communication Ahmedabad – MICA (India)*
7	**New Media to Promote Religious Communication in Jainism: An Exploratory Study**	Komal Shah	*Mudhra Institute of Communication Ahmedabad – MICA (India*
8	**Impact of New Communication Technology on the Shias of South Asia**	Nadeem Husnain	
9	**Playing with the Gods: The Making and the Unmaking of the *Baba***	Chandrabhanu Pattanayak	*Institute of Knowledge Societies Centurion University At. Ramchandrapur, (Bhubaneshwar Odisha, India)*
10	**Communicating Religious Dimensions of Culture in the Traditional and New Social Media: The Christian Experience in India**	Keval Kumar	*Mudhra Institute of Communication Ahmedabad - MICA (India)*

11	**Communicative Forms and Interactions Leading to Communication Transformation: A Theoretical Exploration**	Sebastian Periannan	*St. Peter's Pontifical Institute (Bangalore, India)*
12	**Methods of Sharing Religion to Ethnic Minorities in Thailand: A Case Study**	Agustinus Sugiyo Pitoyo, SJ	*Saengtham College, Samphran, Thailand*
13	**Competence in Religious Communication**	Franz-Josef Eilers, svd	*University of Santo Tomas (Manila, Philippines)*
14	**Asian Religions and Social Media**	Chainarong Monthienvichienchai	*Saint John's University (Bangkok, Thailand)*
15	**God in Facebook, Like it or Not: Filipino Youth Response to Socially Mediated Religious Messages**	Anthony Roman	*University of Santo Tomas (Manila, Philippines)*

Other abstracts/papers submitted for the conference, but whose authors could not attend, include:

1. **Traditional Customs of Chinese New Year and their religious meanings in Social Communication Perspective** by Mi Shen, *Pontifical University of Santo Tomas (Manila, Philippines)*
2. **Religion as Contribution to Community and Personality Development in Asian Communication Perspective** by Anh Vu Ta, *Pontifical University of Santo Tomas (Manila, Philippines)*
3. **Cybermedia and the Public Sphere in Indonesia: Case Study on Blasphemy Discourse in Detik.com** by Alamsyah M. Dja'far, *The Fahid Institute (Jakarta, Indonesia)*
4. **Social Media for Religious Communication (in Jainism)** by Abdur Razzaque Khan, *University of Chittagong (Bangladesh)*
5. **Establishing an Interreligious Web Network as Manifestation of a Changing Culture in a Filipino Rural Community** by Ma. Stella Tirol, *University of the Philippines at Los Banos – UPLB (Laguna, Philippines)*

This year's host *Saengtham College* is the academic wing of "Lux Mundi" National Seminary (est. 1972) of the Catholic Church in Thailand. It is located in Samphran, Nakhon Pathom province, which is about 40 kilometers west of Bangkok. [*Saengtham* is the Thai word for 'light of the world.' *Lux Mundi* is the corresponding Latin expression.

The college's academic delegation was involved in the local organization of this year's Roundtable. That included the President Fr. Dr. Chartchai Phongsiri, the VP for Administration and Student Affairs, Fr. Dr. Thammarat Ruanngam, and VP for Academic Affairs, Fr. Dr. Aphisit Kitcharoen. The Superior of the Jesuits' Dependent Region of Thailand, Agustinus Sugiyo Pitoyo, who is also a faculty member of the College presented a co-written research titled "Methods of Sharing Religion to Ethnic Minorities in Thailand: A Case Study."

At the October 21 opening, an interreligious rite was led by the Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut of Nakhon Ratchasima diocese, who also heads the Thai bishops' Commissions for Cultural Heritage and Interreligious Relations. Within the rite itself, prayer-petitions were heard from Hindu, Muslim, Jain and Buddhist scholars.

The Roundtable then proceeded to the presentation of respective papers, all of which drew quite an amount of response from the participants. Clarifications were made by presenters whenever solicited and this made the Roundtable a real forum for discussion and an occasion to understand each other's belief system and tradition. Coffee and tea break were also made an occasion to continue discussion albeit informally.

Observers in the proceedings included faculty members, administrators as well as education and research personnel for the study of religion and culture.

The Roundtable continued through October 22, and was capped off by a session titled "where do we go from here?" As in past Roundtables, this session was meant to hear general feedbacks about the proceedings and resolutions about future directions of the ARC. The salient proposals are the following:

1. Future Roundtables could focus on specific themes and consequently, papers need to be able to contribute specifically to selected themes.
2. Researches should attempt to address concerns and issues in religion and "social communication" and not remain on the level of the "media." Social communication is a broader field in that it encompasses the "process"

rather than simply the "means" of communication. Social communication is *the* concern of ARC.

3. Researches should contribute to building *Asian Theories of Communication* with respect to religion. We should slowly move from (re)validating pre-established theories mostly by Western scholars, the participants said.

4. Researches should likewise be forward looking by considering technological developments such as "virtual reality" which is slowly becoming a reality in the region. How do they affect religious traditions in Asia?

5. In this light, the participants unanimously agreed to have as theme for next year's Roundtable "Religions in Digital Asia." The dates and venue will be decided at a later time.

6. ARC Director Fr. Eilers said the center will continue coordinating with the "ARC Scholars' Network" through the "ARC Newsletter" and the bi-annual journal "Religion and Social Communication." Emails will be exchanged as well. For updates and other details, scholars may log-on to www.stjohns.ac.th/arc the official website of the ARC.

7. It was announced that the first two volumes of the planned "ARC Book Series" will be published by January 2015. The editor of these volumes, Dr. Binod Agrawal, was thanked for his valuable contribution, as well the new ARC secretary in Manila, Mr. Kenneth Rayco.

On October 23, the customary outing was done at *Santi Asoke* Buddhist Temple located in the suburbs of Samphran. The participants were received by the monk-superiors of the community in a formal meeting complete with video presentation and Q&A session in the end.

The group was also toured around the vast expanse (30 acres plus of land) of the compound replete with livelihood activities for the more than 80 families living there. The experience gave a glimpse into the reality of social communication deeply ingrained in religions and religious movements.

The participants later thanked the organizers for bring them together and giving them the opportunity not only to learn from each other but forge friendships as well.

Anthony G. Roman

NOTE

Religions in Digital Asia: An Exlporation
8th ARC Round Table
Call for papers

Since some seven years the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at St. John's University in Bangkok organizes an annual roundtable for invited Asian scholars to discuss and study the role and relation of Religion in Asian cultures and countries. The gatherings are limited to a maximum of 25 participants who are expected to present their papers and stuidies for discussion and information. Some of these papers are later published in *Religion and Social Communication* the bi-annual journal of the Center and in a upcoming book series (UST Publishing House, Manila). Proposed papers are evaluated and participation depends on the acceptance of the respective papers.

ARC Roundtables are not confined to any single religion but are limited to Asia as the cradle of most world religions. The theme set for 2015 is: **Religions in Digital Asia.** The dates foreseen for the meeting are from October 19 to 23, 2015. The place, which is normally a religion-related academic institution is still to be determined.

Since "Religion Online" and "Online Religion" (Dawson/Cowan 2004) quite a number of studies and books have been published on Religion and Internet, Social Media and/or 'Digital Religion'. Hardly any of these publications, however consider the situation of Asia and their challenges in a special way. The next "Round Table" of the "Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication"(ARC) at St. John's University in Bangkok want to go into this field with its theme *"Religions in Digital Asia, An Exploration"*. The conference with a limited number of invited participants tries to get a general overview of the situation but will also look into the challenges and experiences of different Religions face in Asia and how to respond to them.

For such an adventure some of the following questions might be asked:

1. How are Religions reflected in the digital means of communication in Asia?
2. How do Religions present themselves in the Digital World?
3. Do Religions 'use' digital means of communication for their own people and puposes. If yes how? When? Where? With what result?
4. Are there specific ways and means in the digtal world which are supportive of Religion or also inherent Asian cultures?
5. How do people (digital natives and immigrants) see and use the possibilities of the Digital World? Are there specific or also traditional Religious practices to be done in a digital way?
6. Are there ways of special "Asia-ness" in the digital World? If yes, which ones? How?
7. Are there already special and exemplary ways of expressing the concerns of Asian religious life?
8. Are there special forms of Asian Religions e.g. yoga, meditation lived and presented in a digital world or way?
9. Are there any announcements or declarations of Asian religious bodies or leaders on digital communications or fields of it?
10. Is there a special relation through digital means of communication to/ for migrants and Asians in "diaspora"? Where? When? How? With what effect?
11. Does Digital Religion exist in a very special Asian way? How is this Asian-ness expressed? How does it work on people?
12. What does the concept/fact of "digital" mean for Religion and how is it different from analogue religious experience and life?
13. Are there any Asia values and convictions which are especially related to the digital world? If yes, in what way and with what effect?

These and any related experiences are to be presented and reflected on during the next ARC Roundtable in October 2015 to be held at Assumption University, Bangkok.

Abstracts of about 300 words are to be submitted on or before April 30, 2015. Final papers are expected until August 29, 2015 at the latest.

For submission and further information kindly contact: arceilers@gmail.com or arcstjohns.bkk@gmail. com with the subject line: ARC 8th Roundtable.

BOOK REVIEWS

Campbell, Heidi A. (ed.): Digital Religion. Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds. London: Routledge, 2013. 273 pp.

Over the years religion and new media have been studied and observed. From religion in the cyberspace the studies went to 'religion online/online religion' and here now comes a further attempt under the heading 'Digital Religion.' The term indicates the "bridge that connects and extends online religious practices and spaces into offline religious contexts and vice versa." The book tries to offer "a nuanced reflection on how Religion is taking place in an digital environment and becomes informed by the key characteristics and ideology of new Media, which can alter not only the practice but the meaning-making process itself." The publication seeks to provide a full overview of the terrain of this subfield and the direction it is currently moving"(p.4).

The publication has three parts: the first section presents six thematic chapters, followed by two related case studies each related to these themes and concludes with additional thematc reflections on studying religion and new media.

The first part lays a foundation for the whole book and its considerations. Here the first theme treats "ritual" as "a purposeful engagement with the sacred"(p. 27). But one might ask if ritual Is really always related to the sacred. Are there not also rituals in human life and society which are not necessarily related to the sacred? Communication scholars might also miss in this considerations James Carey's considerations on ritual communication in relation to culture which seem not to be known by the author of this chapter (Christopher Helland).

Mia Loevheim on "Identity" sees a difference between identity in digital and face to face settings. She sees such a development in three waves (p41 ff) which are reflected first in the mid-90s with a plurality of religious symbols, narrative forms of interactions online as a spiritual marketplace 'disembodied' online. After this critical empirical studies follow with "acting out religious identities online" to be followed in the third stage with religious identities online as integrated into everyday life. Here digital and offline religion develop in her view alongside each other (p.50).

The section on "Community" is presented by the editor herself. She sees online communities as "technologically mediated gatherings of people around a specific topic or purpose with some level of commitment to that topic or purpose and each other" (p.58) but as a "basic act of social exchange" independent from space. She also sees three approaches in these studies: 1. Documenting and describing, 2. Critical analysis of the effects of community online (61f.) and 3. A theoretical turn towards community's online-offline relationship in a networked community. She sees righty the community as a network: "many people in contemporary society live among multiple religious networks that are emergent, varying in depth and highly personalized" (66). And on 'network' she states: "our ways of working, socializing, and identity building are formed through networks of diverse associations rather than relying on tight social ties and bounded relations". They are rather made up of connected individuals then embedded in group members (68).

The chapter on "Authenticity" (p. 93 ff) asks if bodily experiences can also be judged as authentic as offline experiences and questions; what is 'virtual' and what is 'real'?

The following and last chapter in this section is on "Religion" by Gregory Price Grieve and does not seem to be at the standard of this book when it states in the beginning that the concept of religion is only a few hundred years old (p104), referring to the understanding of the Enlightenment period in history and ending up with 'myth, ritual and faith' as main expressions and as seemingly "'non-scientific' stories" (108): "From this overview we synthesize that religion can be understood as based on the Enlightenment concept that categorizes religion in terms of metanarratives that possess features or attributes of myth, ritual and faith". For a book with the word Religion in its main title this sections should have been much more specific and professional: the concept, word and understanding of religion goes already back to the old Roman times (Cicero) and seems to be related to the Latin word *ligare* which means "to bind." It refers to a supreme being, the supernatural, to God or a supreme being, to the meaning of human life and society. It is this understanding which should be linked also to the digital world and not a very superficial understanding of religion. The first universities in Europe were erected already in the 12th century by Philosophy and Theology and not by "myth, ritual and faith" as seems to be suggested in this chapter! A solid foundation along these lines is needed also in the digital field!

Fortunately the considerations in the third part of the book with "Reflections on studying Religion and New Media (223-269) bring a further clarification and deepen the study in presenting 'theoretical frameworks' as well as considerations on the ethical issues and Theology. But also here it is stated that the different authors seem to avoid "a preoccupation with institutional religion"(234) which is not the case with editor Heidi Campbell.

Every chapter of the book has a section on "Recommended Readings" as well as extensive "References" which help for further studies in this field. It makes the publication a guide beyond its own presentations!

"Digital Religion" is a landmark publication at this stage of digital studies on Religion. It will be for some time a "must" for everybody involved in this field.

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

Merrin, William. Media Studies 2.0. London: Routledge, 2014. 207 pp.

The purpose of this book is made clear right from the beginning. It is not another textbook in the top-down mode but wants to confront the academe with a new digital ecology emerging. The first half of the ten chapters attempt to explain the elements of the digital revolution while the rest of the chapters reflect the implementation (p.6f.).

The book is written from a strong British background where the field of media studies emerged, partly from cultural studies but also inspired by Innis-McLuhan considerations where technology is seen as an extension of the human body. Each new technology creates a new human environment (p.44 f). Merrin is not content with just addressing the technological 'status quo' but sees in a convincing way also the role of Theology and Philosophy when he talks about the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages and sees her 'broadcasting' her message which is for him a "dominant broadcast form" already those days. Later this is replaced by mass media. Mass media studies are oriented towards consumption and the effects on receivers. But today receiver and effects studies are not any more at the center. In the new perspective of "Media Studies 2.0" the producer and the individual are at the center. The "Big Media" of the past were traditionally oriented at the audience as receiver. They were characterized by:

big media production, top-down delivery, one to many method, big volume (macro) standardized uniform production, preproduction filters, distribution availability for a limited time. They were built on economic, technological, political and socio-cultural monopoly.

The post-broadcast model, however, indicates the end of this dominance with new technologies and a need to re-think Media operations going from "Big Media" to "Small Media" in scale and production like for example publishing instantly, globally and permanently with the participation of the whole public on their own and with each other leading towards a "user generated content" for "horizontal media-communication between peers" (p. 69 ff.).

While the Reformation of Martin Luther led to the individualization of beliefs and convictions, we are living now in a similar way "through a seismic shift in which hitherto dominant model of production, distribution and consumption of information and arrangement of social connections give way to a more complex ecology which allows the creation of one-to-one and one-to-many links and networks centered around the individual and their relationships, operating outside, alongside or with older structures. Just as the ideal of 'every man his own priest' represented a fundamental assault upon the system, institutions, rules, hierarchies, interests, roles, economic and social privileges and the epistemological framework of an entire age, so too the idea of every man with his own video camera, cam phone and personal newsfeed represents an assault upon a system, a set of institutions, rules, hierarchies, interests, roles, privileges and the social epistemology and reality that dominated for the last century."(p 84)

The author presents a "new media ecology" with some criteria like: 1. "*Me*-dia" are a transformation of the dominant organizational mode of Communication. 2. Their emphasis is upon the individual: "Me-dia are to us more important than anything the main stream media can provide," 3. Promote social bond ("*Me*-dia" is always "*We*-Media"!) 4. Digital Media require continued management, taking up time and attention and need active response to others.

With all this it is important to learn how to 'control' what one does and says because social media expose the individual more. They have more of a 'bonding' and less a 'bridging' function.

Merrin is convinced that media lecturers today need "a detailed understanding of how digital technologies work, from the hardware level and its operation to the process of software production and implementation, to the content layer and the applications that run on it, their interrelationships and the platforms accessed through it" (p. 129) Here it is not anymore only the know "how to use the programs but how to *make* them"(131).

"Media Studies 2.0," the author maintains, " is a reflection of a changed media environment, exploring the post-broadcast digital area and its implications (133). This requires a re-making of the discipline and the way we approach research and teaching (136). It also calls for proper 'competence' in students and teachers beyond other competencies (On Competence cf. "Religion and Social Communication",Vo.12, 2014. pp.5-18).

William Merrin's considerations are born out of his experiences in Britain but have in many ways similar consequences also for Asia where they would still need further assessments especially also under the perspective of Culture and Religion with its strong roots in the life of people.

The word "media" carries with it always a certain amount of technology and are often determined just by the technical aspect while other perspectives like culture seem to be missing. One might therefore ask: if instead of numbering 'Media Studies' with 1.0 and 2.0 one could not find another and more balanced expression to indicate the shift. 'Communication studies' instead of 'Media' could be one step in this direction because it broadens the field in several ways even if a certain qualifier might be added like in "*Social* Communication" as the communication of and in human society.

This thought provoking book deserves more reflection. It also needs applications in an academic world which cannot escape in any way modern developments and experiences of people who are today empowered instead of being victims of unilateral monologues. This is a high order especially for Ethics and Religion which are very much in the lives and cultures of people in Asia.

William Merrin shows in his presentation a considerable understanding of historical, religious and philosophical developments in Britain and Europe which is very often missing in too many 'ad hoc' and 'here and now' studies

which neglect historical as well as theological developments in approach and thinking. But also this might be somehow indicative for a digital approach with 1.0 only and no relation any more to the before and after of a situation and developments in the 'analogue' approach.

Franz-Josef Eilers,svd

Molefi Kete Asante, Yoshitaka Miike, Jing Yin, (eds.): The Global Intercultural Communication Reader. Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2014. 586 pp.

This 586 page volume is of special academic but also geographical interest for scholars in Asia. It is not only edited by two Asians and an African scholar, but it also presents many contributions which are one way or the other related realities and situations outside the 'Western' world.

This second edition of the Reader on Global Intercultural Communication presents all in all 32 readings from the field. Most of them have been published before in different other periodicals but some are also original publications. The texts are presented in five sections: 1. The Emergence and Evolution of Intercultural Communication, 2. Issues and Challenges in Cross-cultural and Intercultural Inquiry, 3. Cultural Wisdom and Communication Practices in Context, 4. Identity, Multiculturalism and Intercultural Competence, and 5. Globalization and Ethical Issues in Intercultural Relations. The different contributions are not simply presented in full text but all are also introduced by a short summary which makes it easier to find a proper perspective and texts for the different subjects and concerns. All this is supported by an extensive bibliographical 'appendix' on "A selected Bibliography of Theory and Research" (pp. 515-556!) edited by Yoshitaka Miike.

The whole collection is further introduced by quite a thorough contribution on "New directions for Intercultural Communication Research" jointly written by the three editors of the book themselves. In this introduction they see beside others the following four directions for future research in the field: 1. integration of micro and macro levels of culture, 2. incorporation of indigenous theoretical perspectives into culture and communication studies, 3. examination of power and privilege and their impact on communication equality and mutuality in intercultural contexts, and 4. the articulation of

local and global ethics for humanistic connection and community building (p.2). Intercultural communication should be of special importance in a multicultural continent like Asia but also as one of the elements for the study of religion and social communication because religion is always also an essential part of culture.

Some contributions in this book might be of special interest in Asia, like Shuter's contribution on the centrality of culture in the 20th and 21st century or also the different other contributions on culture in the first section of the book. The "Asiatic Turn in Communication Studies: Shifting Paradigms and Changing Perspectives" by Yoshitaka Miike in the second section of the book. The whole section three should be of special interest also for studies in religion and social communication like the one of Hamid Mowlana on "an Islamic Perspective" on communication and cultural settings or on the "Functions of Silence in India" or the contributions on Confucius and the "Two Faces of Chinese Communication".

The conclusion of Yoshitaka Miike in his article on "The Asiacentric Turn in Asia Communication Studies: Shifting Paradigms and Changing Perspectives" indicates the spirit of the book and one of its three editors beyond the intercultural concern also in view of religion and communication when he refers to the Japanese Zen Master Suzuki and writes in the conclusion of his article: "Daisetsu Suzuki (1870-1966), who fulfilled his life in building a bridge between the East and the West through his voluminous work on Zen Buddhism, perfected a philosophy of intercultural communication in his final book, *Toyoyeki na Mikata* (The Eastern Outlook, 1963). His message was simple yet profound: "Outwardly, be open; inwardly, be deep" (Ueda ,2007). This philosophy aptly captures the essence of centrality that the present essay has delineated and resonates with many great Asian thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi who also ardently advocated rootedness and openness in communication across cultures as keys to 'unity in diversity' and 'harmony without uniformity.' Coincidently, Tehranian (1995) elegantly elaborated on the intention and implication of Suzuki's message: 'what the new age requires is not an escapist strategy to return to one's own cultural fortress but a confrontation with all of the other global cultural flows and an earnest search for finding one's traditions of civility the responses that are at once ecumenical in spirit and Indigenous in roots. This is a challenge that requires thinking globally and acting locally'" (p.126).

Wilfred, Felix (ed.): The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia. Oxford University Press, 2014. 657 pp.

Oxford Handbooks claim to be "a new initiative in academic publishing" which gives an "authoritative and state of the Art survey of current thinking and research in a particular" field. The present volume proves this claim and the editor of the volume, Felix Wilfred, is also a guaranty for this. Over some four years he contacted and coordinated the authors of the 37 different articles presented here.

The aim of the 657-page volume is "to give a first comprehensive mapping of the current state of Christianity in Asia" (p. 3). The presentations of the volume are not confined to only singular expressions of Christianity but try in a broader way to focus on "scholarship on the subject matter." Thus the emphasis of the contributions is "not so much on Churches and Communities themselves but on the interaction and social processes in the encounter between Christianity and socio-cultural contexts." The publication attempts "to identify the major trends and controversies the encounter has generated." Thus the book is not a kind of dictionary or encyclopedia but "has a perspective and its own opinions on various questions and issues" (p.5). Thus the book is not so much to inform readers on Asian Christianity but rather to help them to "follow its journey of many encounters."

The contributions of this volume are grouped into five parts: they start with the "Mapping of Asian Christianity" which is based on the different geographical parts of the continent: West, South, Central, Southeast and East Asia. Part two follows on "Cross-cultural socio-cultural flows and Pan-Asian Movements of Asian Christianity" followed by "social-cultural processes." The contributions of part four present in a special way "Asian Christianity in interaction with Asian religious traditions" like the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian heritage. Here also an article on "Christian Art and Architecture in Asia" is added. The book concludes in part five with "some future trajectories of Asian Christianity" which treat beside others "sacred books of the East," Asian ways of being religious, Asian Christian spirituality, Asian-focus of worship and music, "Asian Christianity and public life: the interplay," and "Migration and Asian Christianity."

All of these titles indicate the depth and range of the publication which begins all five parts with a special introduction to place the contributions into a proper perspective and give an appropriate background. Some of the 37 contributions of the book are relatively short but others are longer as can be expected in such a variety of themes. All, however, also have their own proposals for further readings which is a testimony to the thoroughness of the book.

For social communication scholars, some articles like the one on art and architecture (p.458 ff.) might be of special interest. Unfortunately, the text presented seems to be somehow confined mainly to India without referring to initiatives in other Asian countries like China, Japan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In fact there exists even a special Asian Christian art organization to develop and sustain this concern.

The 1970-founded Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and her approaches to Asian realities especially in its earlier years where editor Felix Wilfred himself was also involved would have deserved a special chapter as it reflects a clear and important contribution to Christianity in Asia which is e.g. reflected in its vision for a triple dialogue with people, especially the poor, cultures and religions. There are somehow extensive FABC sources in the index of the handbook but this does not substitute a special article on the subject where also communication dimensions like Radio Veritas Asia and the rich social communication office documents could come in.

Areas like political democratization (p. 273), education and social engagement as well as women are especially considered in part III of the handbook but social communication as 'the communication of and in human society' with its different 'branches' seems to be totally missing. Was it not Christianity who brought, for example, printing and the first books to Asia like in the Philippines, Thailand and other places? Christian anthropologists and linguists were often the first ones to codify languages, develop dictionaries, study cultures and even – like in the case of Vietnam - changed existing writing systems. Also the 're-discovery' and popularization of traditional philosophical and religious texts like in India was to quite an extent a special contribution of Christian scholars which is still reflected in institutions like Max Muller Bhavan in India.

The expression of "cross-communication" needs another comment from the field of communication. We distinguish between 'cross-cultural' and 'inter-cultural' communication. While 'cross-cultural' indicates the 'crossing' into

other cultures, often for selfish reasons 'inter-cultural' is based on a participatory perception: here we share with each other while a salesperson 'crosses' into another culture to sell her/his goods. In inter-cultural encounters, however, the partners are equals who share with each other on basically the same or similar levels (cf. Franz-Josef Eilers, Communicating between Cultures. 4th ed. Manila 2012, pp. 57 ff.).

The handbook has an extensive general bibliography (pp. 607-629) over and above the references of the different individual contributions of the book. It helps to further deepen and develop the different subjects of the publication.

All in all, this publication in the handbook series of Oxford University Publishing House is a milestone in studies on Christianity in Asia and we are grateful to Felix Wilfred and his cooperators to stimulate and this way deepen academic studies in the field.

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

BOOK NOTES

Watson, Diane (ed.): The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media. Oxford, 2012. 613 pp.

The *Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media* is a collection of some 39 articles which are divided into six sections: 1. History with five contributions, 2. The Media with 10 articles. Section 3 on Religions has 10 contributions while part three handles "Issues and Beats" with 8 article to be followed in part 4 with five articles on international coverage of Religion in American Media. A part on the "Religious Press" concludes the volume. The authors of the contributions are mostly university professors or academic students and researchers from different American universities. The book covers Religion in the colonial era as well as the 19th and 20th century.

"Read together," the introduction states, " the chapters offer insight into how stereotypes are set, norms are assumed, and power relationships are communicated. Moreover they reflect the dybnamism between Religion and Media at a particular historic puncture, shedding light on the hopes and fears, dreams and demons of contemporary Americans."

It would be a very interesting and helpful project to envisage something similar for Asia, though the continent is much more diversified in Religion and Culture than America. But the example of a similar volume on *Christianity in Asia* published these days by the same publisher with Felix Wilfred as editor indicates a possibility which some of us might take up!

Standage, Tom: Writing in the Wall. Social Media. The first 2000 years. New York (Bloomsbury). 2013.

Social Media are considered a *new* phenomenon and part of social networking and digital developments in Communication but this is not the case. In fact they exist already since some 2000 years in European history as Tom Standage, the digital editor of the London-based *The Economist* shows in his *Writing in the Wall*. He goes back to the old Roman time to show that already Cicero had "the means to stay in touch with.. Rome, because the Roman elite had developed an elaborate system to distribute information"

through social media. This were "letters and other documents which were copied, commented on, and shared with others…"(p.1). Even outside of Rome, Cicero "was kept informed by a web of contacts – the members of his social circle – all of whom gathered, filtered and distributed information for each other."(p.2) Thus Cicero was already "participating in a 'social media' system…! The author sees the early Christian Church in a similar system, followed by Martin Luther in the Reformation and many other examples in European history through poetry, but also attempts to regulate the news flow. Coffe house were another place for social media with their possibilities for chat but there are many other examples like the sentinels of the people and even the opposition of other 'small media' in opposition to 'big media' which developed with different growing broadcast technologies.

As he concludes his book the author is convinced, that "whatever social media takes in the future, one thing is clear: it is not going away. As this book has argued, social media is not new. It has been around for centuries. Today, blogs are the new pamphlets. Microblogs and online social networks are the new coffeehouses. Media- sharing sites are the new common place books. They are all shared, social platforms that enable ideas to travel from one person t the other, rippling through networks of people connected by social bonds.. The rebirth of social media in the internet age represents a profound shift – and a return, in many aspects to the way things used to be" (p. 250).

Goggin, Gerard and Larissa Hjorth (eds.): The Routlege Companion to Mobile Media. New York: Routledge, 2014. 558 pp.

There is no doubt that mobile media have developed "from a mere extension of the landline telephone into a device converging social and locative media" and "has grown into an important and unavoidable part of contempory culture practice" (Introduction). This "companion" reflects the 'state of the art' in 47 different articles, divided over seven parts. They present first the fields, followed by "infrastructures, economics and policies, reflect the role of new and old media in entertainment (3), the "art of mobile media" (4) to lead to "new social categories, identities and practices (5) to cultures and politics (6) to end with a section on geographies of mobile social media (6). With such a wide range and number of authors it is difficult to approach and qualify the different entries. Some are basically case studies like the one on the Philippines (Pertierra), others are more structural and analytic. All,

however, contribute to the overall picture which is covered this way and in this range probably for the first time.

The perspective of many authors comes from media studies but the volume tries to cover as many different mobile media as possible. Thus the contribution of Italian Leopoldina Fortunati summarizes different models of 'mobile' media and extends this with her own model where she inserts to the players of multiple role also the dimension of culture which should be of special interest as well as her inclusion of society, time and space into her own, new model (p.22-31).

The intimate sphere in a situation where everybody is available to each other is addressed by Rich Ling from Copenhagen while "the Nexus of mobile phones and social media" is analyzed by James E. Katz and Chih-Hui Lai from the United States. Completing the section on "fields of mobile media" are some overall aspects for research. The following sections of the book present studies on infrastructures, Economics and policies of mobile media which are of general interest as well as the new and old media in vies of entertainment. The section on the arts of Social Media with – besides others – also presentations on literacy in Japan and the 'emergence of mobile culture' might be of special interest also for Asia together with the example of the QQ service in China and presentations on children and the mobile Internet and the emotional identities and economics as well as "mobilities and race" (Judith A. Nicholson). The culture section also presents contributions from Hong Kong, Spain's 'indignados', South Africa and Haiti to be followed in the last section by studies from Kenya and Australia.

All this indicates the broad perception of this 'companion' which will be a 'must' for everybody studying and working in this field. The relation between Religion and mobile media, however, is unfortunately not yet included which should be done, considering the fact that quite a rich literature already exists in this field as books like Heidi A. Campbell's *Digital Religion*- also reviewed in this edition of the journal – proves.

Cohen, Elisa L. (ed) Communication Yearbook 38. Published by the International Communication Association. New York: Routledge 2014. 469 pp.

The Communication Yearbook is an initiative of the International Communication Association (ICA), founded in 1950 in the United States. This latest volume (No.38, 2014) presents 13 peer reviewed scholarly articles, divided in the following sections: 1. Theorizing Immigration, Cultural Brokering, and Communication, 2. Theorizing Talk: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Intergroup Communication, 3. Theorizing Communication in Health Contexts, 4. Theorizing Emerging Areas of Communication Research.

Under a perspective of Religion and Social Communication contributions like the one on "Language and cultural brokering in immigrant families" (Jennifer A. Kam/Nanja Lazarevic) as well as those on "Understanding argumentation in interpersonal communication" and "interpersonal ad Intergroup Communication" (Anlisa Arroyo/Jake Harwood) might be of special interest. Also the section on "Theorizing Emerging Areas of Communication Research" especially in its considerations on the Internet should be of interest. Some of the contributions of the book are case studies , others have a broader basis and perspective. There is e.g a study on "fat" talk – weight related communication (Arroyo/Harwood) but also a process approach to "Parent-Child Sexual Communication" (Tina A. Coffelt/Loreen Olson) and a contribution to "End- of- Life Health decisions" (A.M. Scott). The Internet is another fiekd treated and the new expression of "Narb" (Ananda Mitra) is introduces as "a small narrative bit" in the Net which might be of interest in analysis of people and happenings in the field of religion and communication.

All this shows quite a variety of concerns and gives an update of issues which are under study and concern to communication researchers.

Friedmann, Anthony: Writing for Visual Media. Fourth Edition. New York: Focal Press. 2014. 446 pp.

Focal Press books have been over years a stable, inspiring and reliable guide for communication practices and organization. This volume on *Writing for Visual Media* is no exception. The mere fact that it is already the fourth edition since 2001 is also a proof for this.

Visual Media are not only for the mass and commercial media but a growing practice for almost everybody who uses technical means in daily life like e.g. in digital and social networks. This volume refers in a special way to the "writing" for visual, which means necessarily "not to be read but to be made" – the script for the visual production but even more "making images" which "stand for words" (p.14).

After "Defining the Problem" the book proceeds to "Solving Communication Problems with Visual Media" (Part 2) followed by "Entertaining with Visual Media" (part 3) and "Writing for Interactive and Mobile Media" (Part 4), and concludes with "Anticipating Professional Issues" (Part 5).

The book can be used for introductory courses in the academe and practical training as well as for self-study and professional development with a special concern also for respective audiences. The book has a bibliography which helps for further study and professional development, a glossary as well as an extensive index. A special appendix is added on script formats and proves again the practicability of the publication.

Swann, Patricia. "Cases in Public Relations Management, The Rise of Social Media and Activism, 2nd ed." New York: Routledge, 2014. 596 pp.

Public Relations is a carefully thought endeavor employing managerial tools and real-life cases as basis for planning. Since the field was first recognized in the early 20th century, many if not all PR books which followed provide sample case studies involving both widely noted and lesser known corporate events. The present 596-page book is no exception.

This second edition written by former dean and now associate professor of Public Relations and Journalism, Patricia Swann, at Utica College is actually

called as such. In reality, however, it includes only few of the cases cited in the first edition. The author says that in that respect, the present book can really be considered new (Preface, xi). All in all, the present edition contains 27 new case studies and "few favorite cases" from the former edition.

Eleven chapters make up her latest work beginning with "A Brief Introduction to Public Relations" (Ch.1). The following chapters are then titled according to the sub-functions of PR, to wit: "Ethics and the Law" (Ch. 2), "Corporate Social Responsibility" (Ch. 3), "Media Relations" (Ch. 4), "Conflict Management" (Ch. 5), "Activism" (Ch. 6), "Consumer Relations" (Ch. 7), "Entertainment and Leisure" (Ch. 8), "Community Relations" (Ch. 9), "Cultural and Other Considerations" (Ch. 10), and "Financial Communications and Investor Relations" (Ch. 11).

What makes this book unique from the first, apart from its timely coverage of social media as a PR tool, are chapters on Corporate Social Responsibility and Activism. It could also make an exceptional contribution to PR training and critical thinking by the inclusion of a glossary as well as end-of-chapter exercises, embedded hyperlinks in eBook, and companion websites that are "seamlessly connected with the text."

In the spate of recent uprisings in the Middle East, readers will acquire insights into the dynamics of activism, the role of social media in furthering the cause as well as measures concerned organizations have undertaken.

The chapters are aptly introduced with a brief discussion on the branch of PR in question followed by a summary of the main points of the three to five cases included in the chapter. In the discussion, the author evokes PR theories and relevant thoughts of other thinkers in the field.

Swann also includes seven appendices which are an added bonus functioning like a tool kit that comes handy in the event of brainstorming and battle-ground decision making: "Guidelines for Case Study in the Classroom," "Case Preparation," "Ways Organizations Communicate," "Effective Communication Considerations," "Organizational Responses," and "PRSA Member Code of Ethics."

All this makes the book a valuable resource for scholarly research on the

one hand, even classroom instruction is made easy, but also actual planning for professional communicators. Religious communicators too will gain sufficient insights considering the examples not just about commercial enterprises but of NGOs and non-profit organizations as well.

Barrow, Sarah, Sabine Haenni and John White (eds.): The Routledge Encyclopedia of Films. London: Routledge, 2015. 665 pp.

This "Encyclopedia of Films" presents a description and evaluation of some 300 films written by some 80 different authors who are specializing in film studies. The selection pretends to present thr "most important, influential, innovative and interesting films of all time"(Introduction). Beside the usual production data especially the "historical, social, cultural and cinematic context" is given. Thus the different films arte not only placed into film history with the different authors but they are also placed in their respective cultural and historical environment. The entries are "suggestive rather than exhaustive" as the introduction says. With such a 'program' the book is much more than a simple reference work. It rather placed the different entries into their respective place in film history as well as into the proper social, even political and especially cultural context as for example the inclusion of Pasolini's *Gospel according the Matthew* shows also indicating religion as part of film history. Brien Hoyle, the author of this piece (p. 561-563), also refers to other attempts for biblical films and thus places the initiative not only into a proper historical perspective of Jesus films but also calls Pasolini's work which he produced in honor of Pope John XXIII who initiated the Second Vatican Council, "the most important and lasting of all the Jesus films."

Historically the presentations of this book begin with the American "Birth of a Nation" (1913) and the German "Kabinett of Dr. Caligari"(1919) and goes to productions up until 2011.

The volume has in the beginning three lists of the films presented: one in historical sequence, one with the titles of the films in their original language and one with the English titles of the films presented. Unfortunately none of this lists indicates the pages, where the respective presentation can be found in the book which is apparently alphabetically organized according to the titles of the films in their original language. An extensive index of some 30

pages, however, makes it easier to use the publication also a s a reference book beyond the titles of the films only.

This book of Routledge publishers confirms once again their important position within the market for publications in the broad field of social communication.

Religion and Social Communication invites contributors of studies and abstracts that provide scholarly insights into the fields of Religion and Social Communication in Asia. The journal serves as a discussion forum board for religion and interreligious dialogue in Asia. The ARC reserves the right to accept or decline submitted contributions in order to meet the standards of the publication. We gratefully acknowledge all contributions.

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