

Central Material

CHAPTER 1

The rise of communication technologies and the demise of religion

When considering the influence of religion in society and its slow demise, it should be looked at in the context of communication technologies. Communication technologies are any mediums used for the transmitting of information and entertainment between senders and receivers. This typically includes media forms such as internet, radio, cable, broadcast, social media, or any form of technology that fosters communication.⁴ The prevalence and increased use of these technologies is perhaps becoming a threat to the waning influence of religion in society.

The exposure of such technologies into Australian culture has largely been a result of the modernisation and globalisation processes which have exposed individuals to these tools, allowing for the technological advancement of society. This can be validated on a meso level as 97% of the researcher's Year 12 peers have access to at least two or more forms of identified communication mediums, the most common being a phone.⁵ On a macro dimension, this is corroborated as 76% of teenagers aged 12 to 14 years own a mobile phone.⁶

Results from the questionnaire revealed that 44.5% of respondents used their phone for more than 5-6 hours every day to access communication sites such as Facebook.⁷ This unequal distribution of time devoted to technology not only represents an attachment to communication mediums but in analysing questionnaire results where 58.5% of respondents said they devoted less than 1 hour to their faith, it also suggests that devotion to faith is not as high of a priority in one's life in an increasingly modernised society. This suggestion is

⁴ *Society And Culture Stage 6 Syllabus*. NSW: Board of Studies, 2013. Web. [Accessed 19th February] http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/society-culture-st6-syl-from2015.

⁵ Primary research: open and closed-ended Questionnaire [conducted 8th March]

⁶ Abs.gov.au. '8146.0 - Household Use Of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13'. N.p., 2015. Web. [Accessed 3rd May].

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8146.0Chapter12012-13>

⁷ Primary research: Questionnaire [conducted on 2nd June 2015]

observed nationally where only 1 in 5 Australians regularly participate in the practices of their traditional religion.⁸

Theodore Rivers, Theology Professor at Fordham University and author of 'The Future of Religion and the Religion of the Future' expands on this suggestion by claiming that "Although technology does not possess a religious mechanism, it does possess characteristics that can be used religiously".⁹ Rivers' thesis highlights that an individual's interaction with technology in their micro, meso and macro environment is severing their connection to their religious belief system. Paired with this view is a statistical analysis of the Facebook website, revealing it is home to 936 million active users daily who cumulatively spend 10.5 billion minutes online each day.¹⁰ Such staggering results echo Rivers' suggestion of society's infatuation and exposure to communication technologies which are being used 'religiously'.

This is not unlike the 'familiarity principle' developed by psychologist Robert Zajonc who maintains the theory that a personal preference for something is derived from increased exposure to it.¹¹ The principle suggests that the more contact one has with these technologies, the higher the interaction and use of them. The theory can be validated via a study conducted by the University of Adelaide into the changing attitudes towards new technologies expressed by 50-60 year olds. 48% of the people surveyed in this study agreed that communication technologies were useful in their lives with a rising change of 79% agreeing to the statement after a two week trial of technology in their home.¹² Hence, a large contributing factor to the rise in communication technology use is because of one's exposure to it within society, which is mostly a result of globalisation and modernisation through the sharing of resources.

⁸ Chaves, M. 2009, 'Congregational snapshot', *Christian Century*, 126, pp. 28-31. Religion and Philosophy Collection, EBSCOhost, [Viewed 29th May 2015]

⁹ Rivers, Theodore. *The FUTURE of RELIGION and the RELIGION of the FUTURE*. 1st ed. America: University press of America, 2011. eBook. [accessed 26th March]

¹⁰ Newsroom.fb.com., 'Company Info | Facebook Newsroom'. N.p., 2004. Web: [accessed 19th May 2015] <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>

¹¹ Wikipedia., 'Mere-Exposure Effect'. N.p., 2015. Web. [accessed 12th June] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mere-exposure_effect

¹² Australian Population & Migration Research Centre., *OLDER PEOPLE'S USE OF NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES: Research Findings & Policy Implications*. Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2013. Print. Vol. 1, No. 8. [accessed 17th June]

An intriguing correlation was derived from the results of the Adelaide study on the Baby Boomers' use of technology. Links can be made between their minimal exposure to technology and their high church attendance rates. Secondary research reveals that 45% of Australians aged 65 and older do not have access to the internet at home¹³ and in conjunction with this data, the average age for Catholic church attenders sits at 53.¹⁴ This suggests that those who have less access to technology, in which case it is commonly the older generation, are likely to be more affiliated with their faith or church. This conclusion poses an inquiry into the future and sustainability of the Catholic Church whose aging adherents form the majority of congregational numbers.

Bernadette Murray, a weekly churchgoer and Religious Education Coordinator within the Parramatta Diocese for over 20 years, illuminates the common resistance of this generation to these technologies by stating that, "*A lot of people in my church that are older particularly, say that they [projector screens] are distracting and draw away from the mass*".¹⁵ Unexpectedly, this was not the case in a cross-cultural comparison of the Pentecostal variant where the average age of attendance sits at 39 years old. In contrast to Ms Murray's own Parish church, communication technologies are more embraced at Hillsong Church where, in an observation of a Hillsong service, there was an incorporation of 5 multimedia videos which accumulated to 16.6% of the total service time.¹⁶ Therefore, through observation and statistical analysis of the variant, it may be presumed that the integration of modern technology into Hillsong services could be a contributing factor to the young congregational age average within the variant which sits 14 years younger than the Catholic average.¹⁷

In an analysis of low adolescent attendance rates in the Catholic Church, only 25.2% of generation Z respondents said they attended church weekly.¹⁸ This figure is contrasted to the high association of this generations' use of communication technologies with 81% of

¹³ Abs.gov.au., '8146.0 - Household Use Of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13'. N.p., 2015. Web. [accessed 3 May].

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8146.0Chapter12012-13>

¹⁴ Zwartz, Barney. 'A Thinning Flock Of Catholics At All-Time Low'. *The age* 2013: 1. Print. [accessed 18 May]

¹⁵ Primary research: Unstructured interview with Bernadette Murray [conducted 17th May] [NAME USED WITH PERMISSION]

¹⁶ Primary research: Observation at Hillsong Church, Baulkham Hills [conducted 24th May]

¹⁷ Mccrindle.com.au., 'Church Attendance In Australia [INFOGRAPHIC]'. N.p., 2015. Web: http://www.mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/church_attendance_in_australia_infographic [accessed 19th May]

¹⁸ Primary research: open and closed-ended Questionnaire [conducted 8th March]