Mediated religion: motivations for religious web site usage: an exploratory study of Christian web site users

Michael Jerome Laney

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Michael Jerome Laney entitled "Mediated religion: motivations for religious web site usage: an exploratory study of Christian web site users." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communication.

Dhyana Ziegler, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Rosalind Hackett

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
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Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School
Mediated Religion: Motivations for Religious Web Site Usage

An Exploratory Study of Christian Web Site Users

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Michael J. Laney
December 1998
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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examines the motivations behind Internet use by those who visit Christian Web sites. The study examined usage of religious Web sites within the context of the colorful historical lineage of mediated religion dating back over 25 centuries ago to Africa and the use of drums. The drum was used as the earliest form of mediated religion and was devised specifically to satisfy the spiritual needs and gratifications of the users; Web sites are arguably the latest in this long line of media.

This study is based upon a self-selected and non-random online survey of 912 respondents visiting Christian Church Web sites listed in the Goshen Net Directory. The respondents come from nearly every state and 23 locations outside of the United States. The respondents represent 45 Christian denominations, with over 96% claiming to have experienced spiritual or religious conversion.

Comparisons between the results of this study and other Internet studies were offered where appropriate. While the results may not be generalizable to usage of the larger World Wide Web, this sample may be generalizable to the population of users of Christian Church Web sites. The results may be used to generate additional studies on the use of Internet for religious purposes, and argues for more religious Web uses and gratifications research.

In examining uses and motives of visitors to Christian Web sites, the uses and gratifications paradigm is an appropriate theoretical perspective and informs this study. The understanding of these religious users’ media motives can contribute to a better understanding of this new medium and forum for religious communities and can also
have practical value through enabling religious organizations to attract both religious and non-religious users to their Web sites. While this study employed standardized uses and gratifications measures, the measurement issues raised in this study point toward different gratifications associated with Web use, even for the religious television viewer.

These respondents rank “Religious Web Use” as the most important reason to go online. While some entertainment and information elements are embedded in their online experience, religious overtones permeate the Christian Web users’ encounters. For these respondents possible motivations for religious Web site usage may be found in visiting Web sites as a reaction, to reinforce faith, and as a possible alternative to traditional religious services for some. Gratifications achieved by the Christian Web user may best be understood in terms of two or three major motivations, such as faith, community, and religious belief, which drive their selection of media content.

The results of this study are framed in terms of religious uses and gratifications sought by the user of religious Web sites. The understanding of these motivations and their connections to these users serves to build the body of knowledge for both religious studies and communications research literature.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Media and religion have become big business. Mediated religion is already a growth industry. The curve may have gone down some during the scandals of the 1980s, but Christian television and radio are here to stay. It’s not only a growth industry in America, it’s also a growth industry around the world, according to a member of the board of directors for the National Religious Broadcasters. (C. Richardson, personal communication, July 22, 1996)

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivations for religious Web site usage among users of Christian Web sites. Americans today are faced with unprecedented amounts of information being delivered by mass media. Television, newspapers, radio, movies, books, and the Internet are delivering information faster and in greater volume than ever before. But despite this increase in information, we still know too little about how the World Wide Web affects the way we view our world, particularly our religious worlds. However, a growing need exists to explore the intersection of media and religion, particularly where it converges on the Internet.

The research proposes to contribute to the knowledge contained in existing studies on the uses and gratifications of media users by examining the gratifications sought by user of Web sites on the Internet. Unlike past uses and gratifications studies of religious radio and television usage, this study focus its attention on the motivations for Christian Web site usage.
Religious Diversity on the Web

More than “9000 Christian-related Web pages are registered with CrossSearch, a popular online search engine that directs users to Christian sites;” however, only 102 Christian church organizations are listed with CrossSearch. (CrossSearch, 1997, p.1). If one does a search on “God,” one will get 410,000 hits, and 146,000 hits will appear from the name “Jesus Christ.” More religious Web sites are coming online every day (p. 1).

Like schools, businesses, governments, and everyone else it seems, religious groups are rushing online, setting up church home pages, broadcasting teachings, and establishing theological newsgroups, bulletin boards and chatrooms. Almost overnight, the electronic community of the information superhighway has come to resemble a flea-market of the sacred and secular. Visitors to religious Web sites and Internet chatrooms ostensibly gather to fuss and fume about the mundane and the ridiculous, as well as faith and religious belief.

Time writer J.C. Ramo analyzed the unique evolving nature of the Internet and the World Wide Web within the religious global community: “The Web may represent an astonishing act of technological and intellectual mainstreaming that is changing the character of the Internet, and could even change our ideas about God” (Ramo, 1996, p. 61). Ramo says the Web is experiencing tremendous religious growth and usage which mirrors its secular growth and use patterns as well. Seemingly everyone is online:

Lutherans to Tibetan Buddhists now have a home page, many crammed with technological bells and whistles. Mormon sites offer links to vast genealogical
databases, while YaaleVe’ Yavo, an Orthodox Jewish site, forwards prayers to be affixed to the Western Wall. Two Web sites are devoted to Cao Daiism, a small Vietnamese sect that worships Victor Hugo as a saint. A handful of sites probe the mysteries of Jainism, an Indian religion that supports reincarnation, along with the technophobic Amish and a Vatican site “E-mail the Pope,” which is wildly popular. (Ramo, 1996, pp. 61-62)

In an effort to appreciate this plurality of mediated religion online and how we have arrived at this spiritual cornucopia, some background about the genesis of religious communications and uses and gratifications is necessary.

**From Drums to Cyberspace**

Humanity has developed religious systems to explain everything from the creation of the cosmos to life and death. Religious systems developed hierarchies of God, which in turn have been used to provide various uses and gratifications for individuals. Within the context of religious expression, the uses and gratifications model posits that users of religion have certain needs and drives that are satisfied by a system of beliefs, rituals, language, customs, and the use of sacred objects, to name a few.

In some sense it could be argued mediated religion, as defined in (Appendix A), originated in Africa over 25 centuries ago. The earliest existing written record, surviving in Greek translations of the use of the drum in sacred ceremonies, occurred 24 centuries
ago off the coast of the present-day "Horn of the West"—Guinea-Bissau. After the tenth
century, references to drums are common (Dagan, 1993, p. 44).

At the most basic level of the religious system, the drum as an instrument of
religion may represent the earliest application of the uses and gratifications paradigm. In
perhaps one of the earliest examples of uses and gratifications theory, the drum was seen
as having been given to humankind as a gift from the gods. Yoruba folklore credits
Shango, the God of Thunder, with the invention of the drum. Shango, the legendary
fourth king of the African Old Oyo Dynasty, is believed to have played the drum while
on the earth to frighten his adversaries. It may have been Shango’s followers who first
recognized the drum as a form of mediated religion. The sound of the drumming
replicated thunder, and the brass accoutrements adorning his sacred Bata drum, an
instrument of worship, represented his capture of lightning. It is still believed that the
spirit of the tree, which is used to fashion the Bata drum, for example, will inhabit the
created instrument. Drumming the sacred drum is an act of worship that summons beings
in the spirit world. Drums, which are revered as sacred objects of worship, are used in
healing, spiritual and religious practices and for divination. The sacred nature of the
drum required that

Asante craftsmen also propitiate tree spirits. The rites of propitiation further
continue when the talking drum is completed, for the wandering spirit is invited to
reenter the material substance it once inhabited. (Hackett, 1996, pp. 40-41)

Divination is essentially using material objects to obtain gratifications in the
supernatural realm. According to Baer (1992), the ancient African religious concepts and
practices such as ancestor worship, magical rituals for seizing spiritual power, and ecstatic ceremonies enlivened by rhythmic dancing, drumming, and singing have influenced both Pentecostal and Afro-Baptist religion and worship. Baer argues that these African retentions continue to persist in their original or modified forms in the New World in music and Afro-Baptist religious celebration (pp. 1-2).

This record of documentation establishes the African drum as the first communication device in civilization. The widely-used African talking drums "speak" African languages. As carriers of information, they are often referred to as telephones, radios, newspapers, and even loudspeakers. They recite verses understood only by people of one linguistic group and are often defined as a speech surrogate for many African languages, which are tone languages, those in which tone is as much a part of word formations as vowels and consonants. Thus, tone can distinguish meaning and grammatical or syntactical functions (Dagan, 1993, p. 15). This research suggests that the drum as a communication device predates the printing press, and the radio as a technological device appropriated for mediated religion, by several centuries.

**Historical Background of Media and Religion**

While extensive research on mass media audiences dates back to the Payne Fund Studies in the 1920's, published scholarly research on audiences of religious broadcasting is limited (Rogers, 1994, pp. 190-192). The literature reveals that some of the earliest research concerning religious broadcasting began between 1950 and 1960 (Bennett et. al., 1954; Boyd, 1957; Weber, 1958; Lenski, 1961; Samuelson, 1964; and Smith, 1969).
These studies were comprised mainly of histories of religion and economics, as well as biographies of religious media personalities. Televangelism, riding on the backs of religious movements, persuasion theory, and critical theory, caught the attention of the national media, and social science once again turned its attention to the role of religion in the media. For the purposes of this study, televangelism is defined as "the exclusive use of television or cable television for the transmission of the gospel by a television evangelist" (Schmidt and Kess, 1986, p. 5). Religion has been a part of the American broadcasting mosaic of radio and, later, television for decades. Despite this, intensive study of the phenomenon by communication researchers continues to be relegated to token efforts at best.

Religious programming has been part of the American landscape since the first religious service was transmitted over radio KDKA from Pittsburgh's Calvary Episcopal Church on January 2, 1921 (Ward, 1994, p. 208). Religious broadcasting has been in existence for more than 75 years; however, its potential as a true growth industry evolved with the advent of commercial television in 1948 (Boyd, 1957).

A brief historical background concerning the alliance between mediated religion in Christian organizations and technology is required to fully appreciate this topic. Communication historian David Paul Nord’s (1985) technology research has carefully analyzed the appropriation of mass communication by religious elements in American history. Nord’s greatest influence on an appreciation of history is his examination of the power of religious communication for the purposes of evangelism and revenue generation. His detailed examination of this topic asserts that the earliest religious media owners were leaflet-distributing Pentecostals and evangelicals after 1815. These
religious media practitioners were pioneers in the use of print technologies, and provided many people’s first exposure to modern mass media. The vast benevolent media-owner empire which evangelicals built in the 19th century paved the way for the radio and television evangelists of the future (Nord, 1990).

The shaping role of evangelical enterprises such as the American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, and other voluntary associations, through their sophisticated use of new printing, papermaking, and stereotyping technologies, played in the popularization of print and the creation of the mass media in America. (Nord, 1984, pp.1-2)

The linkages between the histories of religious broadcasting and economics are intrinsic to the phenomenon of mediated religion itself. In the early days of radio broadcasting, the National Broadcasting Company’s (NBC) policy of free airtime for religious groups “unofficially, but quite effectively” cut off evangelicals and Pentecostals from access to the networks while it spoiled mainline denominations (Ward, 1994, p. 59). NBC recognized three faith groups—Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—and divided (free) sustaining time for religious programs between them. The program was called the National Radio Pulpit. The network considered the Federal Council of Churches to be the sole representative of Protestantism and would not sell airtime to evangelical or Pentecostal broadcasters. (Ward, 1994, p. 17)

Dr. Walter A. Maier became an owner/operator and established KFUO an acronym for Keep Forward, Upward, Onward, on December 14, 1924. Maier’s operation
resulted in the first religious radio station, broadcasting from the attic of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod’s Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. To finance the operations, appeals for money soon dominated this program. Maier’s fund-raising efforts soon became the model for others and ushered in paid religious electronic evangelism versus free time programs on a regular basis (Ward, 1994, p. 44). Maier’s station was only the beginning, as ministers and hucksters began flooding the spectrum to make their mark in religious radio.

The problems created by religious broadcasters have been varied: attacks on minority groups, sentiments against labor, attacks on competing religious groups and their leaders, and more recently, the advocacy of political viewpoints, some quite outside of the mainstream. According to legal scholar R. Smith (1969), these various abuses have been

...sufficiently dangerous, varied, and have occurred over such a long period of time that it is doubtful if anything short of external regulation can serve to prevent them. These experiences make us reluctant to extend “religious liberty” to broadcasting. When the evidence strongly suggests that we will pay for the liberty in terms of abuses if such liberty means the absence of regulation. (Smith, 1969, p.2)

Since the inception of radio, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has a long history of wrangling with religious broadcasters over the issue of whether the over-all programming of a religious applicant or licensee will serve the public interest. One of the earliest cases concerned the innovative use of radio by the first woman to gain
a FCC broadcaster's license and deliver a sermon over the air in San Francisco. Her name was Aimee Semple McPherson (Melton, Lucas, & Stone, 1997, p. 223). McPherson brushed with Herbert Hoover, who at the time (1927) held the post of Secretary of Commerce which held regulatory authority over radio.

Hoover criticized the evangelist for arbitrarily changing the frequency of her station (a common occurrence in the relatively unregulated milieu of early radio). In response to this criticism, McPherson sent him a telegram that read: "Please order your minions of Satan to leave my station alone. You cannot expect the Almighty to abide by your wavelength nonsense. When I offer my prayers to Him I must fit into His wave reception. Open this station at once." (Melton, Lucas, & Stone, 1997, p. 224)

Another celebrated case was that of Father Coughlin, a Catholic priest from Detroit, Michigan (see Howard & Ogles, 1984). Historical reports claim that in 1934 at least 10 million regular listeners tuned in to hear Father Coughlin's words each Sunday afternoon.

One journalist estimated in 1935 as many as 30 million listeners for some programs. Even in 1932, after a single radio address about Herbert Hoover on February 14, 1935, the priest received one and one-quarter million letters, according to that same reporter. When a single station, KSTP in St. Paul, deliberated about selling airtime for the programs, listeners were asked to write the station about the possible discontinuance of the series; the station received
137, 882 letters, all but 482 demanding that the series continue. (Brown, 1980, p. 202)

Father Coughlin's stirring messages mixed his political views with strongly anti-Semitic commentary. The president of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) had been placed under tremendous pressure by the FCC to "police" their own instead of getting government involved (Brown, 1980, p. 202).

Father Coughlin's programs were eventually curbed in 1938 when the radio station voluntarily agreed with NAB president Neville Miller to drop the programming or risk FCC interference in religious broadcasting. While a celebrated case, Father Coughlin's misdeeds were the exception. Many religious broadcasters, such as Clayton Russell, just wanted to spread the Gospel. Reverend Russell of KFOX, Los Angeles, earned the distinction of being the first African-American religious operator licensee, receiving his license in 1936 to transmit his church services (Ward, 1994).

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, who had been well known since 1930 for his radio program The Catholic Hour, was the first media star "televangelist." It was a Roman Catholic bishop, not a Protestant evangelical, who proved the value of personality and staging in the early days of televised religion during Sheen's shift to television in 1951 (Ward, 1994, p. 83).

A second forerunner of televangelism was Reverend Billy Graham, whose Hour of Decision began on radio but later switched to television.

As a role model for other revivalists, Graham demonstrated the utility and applications of television as a new measure to stir religious enthusiasm. On a trip
to Portland, Oregon, in 1950, where he was conducting a revival in a specially constructed tabernacle, he initiated a weekly nationwide radio broadcast and a series of documentary and fictional motion pictures in which his revival sermons were the principle feature. (Frankl, 1987, p. 73)

Today, we would call this a multimedia presentation, but in 1950 these were radically new techniques. Up until then, the only new technique which Graham had added was his use of a lapel microphone and a loudspeaker system in order to make his voice heard even when he whispered (Frankl, 1987, p. 73).

Other early pioneers of televangelism were Oral Roberts and his wife, Evelyn. Under the encouragement of fellow tent revivalist Rex Humbard, Roberts began to televise his 1954 crusade in Akron, Ohio. Robert’s television program was an immediate success. By 1957, it was being televised on 135 of the nation's 500 TV stations and reached 80% of the nation's potential television audience. By 1959, the ministry reported "more than 500,000 yearly converts attributed to the show" (Sweet, 1993, p. 325).

However, critics of mediated religion, such as Reverend Carl Richardson, often cite religious television's failure to fulfill its stated goal to bring new converts to Christ (Laney, 1997a). Electronic evangelists respond by saying their conversion rate is based on expanding their operations to reach a bigger audience (Schultze, 1991). Additionally, the same arguments are postulated by media organizations as rationale for maintaining an expanding presence on the Web.

According to Reverend Carl Richardson,
Televangelism speaks to members of the family. It is a family affair that excludes the unchurched outsider. The church is “narrowcasting.” The whole body of Christ primarily speaks, to itself and I say that after serving as a member of the Board of Directors of the NRB for the last 24 years. (C. Richardson, personal communication, July 22, 1996)

The literature certainly seems to support Richardson’s assertions, (Albert, 1980; Horsfield, 1984; Corry, 1987; Fishwick & Browne, 1987; Fore, 1987; Frankl, 1987; Hoover, 1988; Abelman & Hoover, 1990; Bruce, 1990; Schultzze, 1991; Janis, 1996; Moore, 1994; and Wuthnow, 1994), and the dollar amounts generated for religious broadcasting are in the billions (Ferguson & Lee, 1997, pp. 70-76).

The Roots of Mediated Religion in the Marketplace

The church has not always been a business per se, but particularly in the area of mediated religion it has typically been entangled in the business mentality of the day. The German sociologist Max Webers (1958) conducted seminal work on the role of the business mentality of the Protestant Church and the spirit of capitalism. The marriage of media and religion is the modern American version of such financial and religious amalgamation.

Mediated religion’s role in the marketplace of culture began in the 19th century as an effort to influence and in some cases ban Christians altogether from the bawdy markets that existed to make various forms of leisure and entertainment attractive.
Religious leaders were not themselves selling anything. Their censorship efforts and prescriptive commentary were intended to exert an independent control over what sorts of items and activities became available for consumption. In these endeavors they extended the hand of cooperation to all laypeople who shared their values and their view that just because people might be willing to pay to do something did not mean that they ought to be able to. (Moore, 1994, p. 6)

However, the work of religious leaders and moralists in the marketplace of culture was immediately entangled in a related but distinguishable enterprise, that of offering Christian alternative entertainment. Rather than remaining aloof, they entered their own inventive contributions into the market. Initially these were restricted to the market as reading material, but evangelical cultural production diversified as technological advances were made in radio and television. Religious leaders even sponsored non-profit organizations with moral and reform goals that competed with the appeal of popular entertainment. “By degrees, mediated religion itself took on the shape of a commodity” (Moore, 1994, p. 6). Based upon Moore’s observations the argument could be made that religious Web presence to some degree is used to establish name recognition for religious organizations and is employed to promote brand loyalty, between the Web site user and the Church for example.
The Televangelist Cometh

According to National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) historian Mark Ward, bureaucratic discrimination by mainline Protestants and the National Council of Churches (NCC) forced evangelical broadcasters to turn to paid religious programming (Ward, 1994, p. 41). Ward asserts that the NCC attempted to persuade evangelicals and Pentecostal broadcasters to modify their fundraising schemes, method and style of delivery, by leveling charges of hucksterism against their practices. Ever resourceful, evangelicals and Pentecostals took advantage of marketing research and innovative fundraising and eventually established the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) in 1944 to lobby regulatory commissions and fight the NCC’s policies. Schultze argues that the almost monopolistic place of evangelicals and Pentecostals on airwaves today is partly because of their rapid adaptation to the free enterprise system. The mainline establishment groups benefited from the network’s benevolence of free air time for so long that they had some difficulty in adjusting to having to finance their own media ministries (Schultze, 1991, p. 174).

The successful growth of evangelical and Pentecostal televangelism prompted liberal Protestants to raise one especially irrelevant charge. With embarrassing forgetfulness of fears they had ridiculed in the heady days of The National Radio Pulpit (NBC's donation of free airtime to the three major faith groups), they claimed that television ministers robbed local churches of their congregations and diverted donations (Ward, 1994, p. 42). The charge appears to be no truer then than it had been in the late
1920’s. However, no one knows the exact size of the audience for religious television, but estimates by secular broadcasters place it between 10 and 13 million (Fore, 1987).

Some think that as many as 20 million people watched religious television regularly at the end of the 1980’s, and viewing was on the decline at the time.

One sensible review of the evidence placed the figure at no higher than 13 million. (Hadden and Shupe, 1988, p. 150)

That would be about six percent of the national television audience or perhaps a quarter of the people who claim to be born-again Christians: “Most surveys suggest that the majority of viewers are over 50 and female, that they belong to a church, and that they make no contributions to the televised ministry” (Peck, 1993, p. 108).

Televangelist Reverend Jerry Falwell, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, converted under the preaching of religious radio evangelist Charles Fuller, founded the Thomas Road Baptist Church. In 1956, Falwell went on the air and named his program the Old Time Gospel Hour in honor of Fuller. By the mid-1970’s, Falwell was the largest syndicator, secular or religious, on network television. Rev. Falwell established Liberty University, a conservative Christian University and became its chancellor. A moral and social commentary leader, Falwell founded the grassroots political body the Moral Majority to draw attention to conservative political issues and candidates. Falwell later disbanded the organization in 1989 and returned to full-time pastoring (Ward, 1994).

Televangelist Marion “Pat” Robertson was a contemporary of Falwell’s. In 1960 he was co-host of the 700 Club and established WYAH-TV, the first licensed religious TV station in America. In 1977, Robertson became the first Christian satellite operator
and established the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN). Like Falwell, he also established a grassroots national political education movement, the Christian Coalition, to support his own political causes. Robertson has parlayed his religious broadcasting assets into a media conglomerate. At one time he owned a cable television channel, the Family Channel, two radio networks, a motion picture company, two international relief agencies Flying Hospital and Operation Blessing, and a public service law center, the American Center for Law and Justice. He also established Regent University, of which he is the chancellor, as is Falwell of Liberty University.

In any case, Falwell's and Robertson's audiences are not the people who have been leaving the Protestant denominations, which report declining membership. Southern Baptist churches would have suffered from the competition of televangelism before any others, because the bulk of the viewing audience at that time were Southern Baptist members. Instead of losing support, the Southern Baptist churches have remained a growing organization with a strong appreciation for the possibilities of media (Horsfield, 1984, p. 138).

Former President of the National Religious Broadcasters Ben Armstrong (1979) has defended the old "show biz" qualities of mediated religion. He believed that entertainment caught people's attention and put them at ease. It prepared the way for their receiving the gospel message. Armstrong notes that laissez-faire capitalism had enabled evangelical Protestant broadcasters to achieve their media victories.

Religion was dying in Europe because of the restriction placed upon it by state-owned broadcasting. The great genius of the American system was that it provided a choice of TV and radio stations, each working to capture its share of
the audience. Broadcasting in this country is unique because it operates as part of the competitive system of private enterprise. God blessed America for keeping its markets free. (Armstrong, 1979, p. 134)

That did not mean that Armstrong and his allies were prepared to countenance unregulated traffic in all areas of the cultural marketplace. Media analyst John Corry (1987) commented in the New York Times that he was rather appreciative of the successful marriage of media and religion, of faith and finances, after viewing the Praise the Lord (PTL) television ministry of Jim and Tammy Bakker. This was shortly after the couple had been exposed for the sexual and tax scandals that would wipe out their estimated 15 million viewers and result in an eight-year jail term for Jim Bakker. In reflecting on their past success, the analyst gave Jim and Tammy an “A” for their good-humored relaxed programs:

It was effective and sincere presentation, not fraud, that accounted for the willingness of viewers to send them money. The evangelists will continue, because they’re good at what they do. The sophistication, the slickness of wonderful packaging, and the suspected play-acting all might constitute a degradation of religion. The Bakkers and the other TV evangelists had merely moved with the times. We are a long way here from a revivalist tent show. (Corry, 1987, p. D5)

So just how far away is the electronic church from the old sawdust traveling revivalist tent shows? Nestled in the analysis of the Bakkers in the New York Times, as
well as in the usual hostile reaction to their work, is a concern about the growing
worldliness of religion. For Corry (1987), the hosts of televised religion had simply
learned the nuances of the rating game, how to appeal to a television audience based upon
the formulas utilized by successful talk-show hosts such as Johnny Carson. Carson has
repeatedly demonstrated just how far “sheer amiability” went in producing income for his
sponsors and himself. Folding up their revival tents forever, the Bakkers, Jimmy
Swaggart, Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, Rex Humbard, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson
upgraded their formats to carefully resemble that of the secular entertainment industry.

Individual televangelists retained their individual styles in the 1970s and 1980s,
but the trend was toward structured programs. Most dramatically, Oral Roberts folded up
his tent, built a university and a medical school, and became a Methodist. A totally new
television program followed in early 1970. Armstrong (1979) commented on the new
format for Oral Roberts’ programming style:

It was a sparkling new TV presentation that had everything that would guarantee
success for any series—bright contemporary music, attractive young people, a fast
pace, superb technical quality, and a well-known personality at the center.

(Armstrong, 1979, p. 137)

Armstrong had become enamored with the type of programming that Oral Roberts
developed and became an ardent proponent of the views of media theorist Marshall
McLuhan. According to Armstrong, (1979, p. 137) “Understanding media’s potential
relationship to evangelism was crucial to proselytizing the world in its last days.”
Fore (1987) noted that the so-called “televangelists” had accurately identified a spiritual hunger in the American people that the mainstream churches seem to have done little to satisfy (p. 89). Flamboyant and eye-catching as the electronic church may have been however, the fact remains that it was general television, not the broadcasts of the televangelist, that was “really challenging people’s belief systems” (Fore, 1987, p. 113). So little attention has been given to exploring the religious significance of this medium. Fore was surely not exaggerating when he said “theological analysis of media is one of the most important tasks of Christianity today” (Fore, 1987, p. 114). Perhaps the basis for Fore’s comment is that, increasingly, those who call themselves Christians are frequently deriving their frames of reference from secular media such as the Internet. However, Christians were involved in offering prescriptive religious alternatives to secular entertainment, as R.L. Moore (1994) noted. Today many Christians are drawing religious meaning from secular entertainment versus religious spheres of influence, and according to Michael Warren (1997), they are diluting their faith. The latest arena where religious communities contend for space in the public sphere is cyberspace, on the World Wide Web.

Cyberspirituality: Religion Goes Online

More and more people are turning to the Internet for information, online fellowship, and outreach. “The Net” is a handy resource for research, offering Bible studies, early church writings, and several versions of the Bible at a user’s fingertips. The Internet is also a gateway to a growing online religious community and an excellent
source of information about churches, missions and parachurch (e.g., Promise Keepers) organizations (Careaga, 1997, p. 39).

The Internet has come a long way from its early days. The United States government began it as a program to keep computers operational in the event of a nuclear attack. The network grew to include research universities and commercial services such as Prodigy, CompuServe, and America Online soon began connecting to this "network of networks" (Kane, 1994, p.5). A projected 200 million individuals will be using e-mail by the year 2000, according to the New York Times (cited in Sheehan and Hoy, 1998, p. 1). Additionally, the World Wide Web continues to grow, and is estimated to be anywhere from "400-500 million documents large" (Filman & Pant, 1998, p. 22).

Until recently, some Christians may not have given much thought to the Internet or the impact it would have on the Christian faith. When George Pytlik became director of Campus Crusade for Christ’s Momentum program in late 1994, he found only 200 Christian sites on the Web. He noted that only a few actually ministered in any real way. The rest were nothing more than advertising pieces for churches and ministries. In Pytlik's opinion, Christians did not understand the value of this new communication tool. While 1994 was very early for significant religious Web presence, many churches lagged behind the general population in their willingness to even employ e-mail capability within their ministries. (Careaga, 1997, pp. 39-40)

Despite this growing Christian presence on the Internet, some people are reluctant to venture into cyberspace. On the Internet, Catholics suddenly find themselves modem-to-modem with Satan worshippers and Jewish Zionists online with Islamic
fundamentalists. They are troubled by news reports about pornography and hate speech on the Net, and overwhelmed by the idea of having to learn the new technology. Says Quentin J. Schultze (1995), a professor of communications at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan and the author of the book Internet for Christians.

Churches have tended to shy away from technology. There’s this perception that the Internet is expensive and not worth the trouble. Besides, a lot of local church leaders are already overworked. The Internet is just one more stress. (Schultze, 1995, p. 10)

However, it is a misperception that other churches ignore at their peril, according to George Barna (1993). The faithful, according to a recent study by the Barna Research Group in California, are moving online every bit as fast as the rest of the world. After interviewing hundreds of wired Christians, Barna concluded:

Churches that don’t establish a presence in cyberspace will start to seem badly out of touch with their parishioners. The failure to do so sends an important signal about the church’s ability to advise people in an era of technological growth.

(Barna, 1993, p. 62)

There is no sure way to measure how the World Wide Web will change our lives, but as Harold Innis (1951) observed, the most basic truth in a technological revolution is that technology is not neutral and it will change everything it touches.

The Web is new and changing daily. Researchers are still struggling to make sense of it, as well as its implications for spirituality. Most traditional religious thinkers are skeptical about the impact of the Internet on faith. “I don’t think the computer
revolution has any cosmic implications for religion at all, we already know God” says Notre Dame’s Alvin Plantinga, professor of philosophy, cited in (Ramo, 1996, p. 67).

However, for an entire culture of gadget-loving, and in some cases, perhaps, technology-worshipping, American-futurists, Plantinga’s pronouncement smacks of blasphemy. A 1997 Gallup poll of 40,000 Internet users found that young adults age 18 to 24, in contrast to an older generation classified as 35-to-54-year olds, tend to see in the Internet something larger than themselves. They see it as an entity so much greater than the sum of its parts as to inspire awe and wonder (Reuters, 1998).

People see the Net as a new metaphor for God. The Internet exists as a world of its own, distinct from earthly reality, crafted by humans but now growing out of human control. God created a set of conditions from which life would emerge. Like it or not, the Internet is one of the most dramatic examples of something that is self-organized. That’s the point. God is the distributed, decentralized system, according to Dr. Sherry Turkel, professor of the sociology of science at M.I.T. (Ramo, 1996, p. 67).

“It seems as though the Net itself has become conscious,” says William Gibson, the science-fiction writer who coined the term "cyberspace" and used it, most famously, in his 1984 novel Neuromancer. Gibson observed “It may regard itself as God. And it may be God on its own terms.” Gibson (quoted in Ramo, 1996), hastens to add, however, that he is “carefully ambivalent about whether anything that exists solely on the Net applies to the real world” (Ramo, 1996, p. 67).
Spiritual Revival in the Land

An area in which perhaps billions of dollars is spent annually is the field of religious broadcasting and mediated religious communications. An exploration of the impact that media of all types can have on religion serves to contribute to the body of religious and communications literature. Given the way in which modern society has come to be increasingly televisual, according to Walter Ong (1982), it seems timely to consider the ways in which religious mass media may influence cognition, culture, and religion, especially amongst the generation of our future leaders. From a historical perspective, periods of media change underline the fact that media are not just neutral carriers of information, but that they may affect the way in which people think. The literature suggests that we are living at precisely such a time of media change with the rise of the Internet, and expanded cable channels (Ong, 1982).

Each weekend, some 75 million Americans and their families flock to synagogues, churches, mosques, temples, meeting houses, and fellowship halls. Each week at least 50 million faithful participate in small fellowship groups that study the Bible, Koran, Talmud, and other sacred texts, pray, and discuss spiritual issues (Wuthnow, 1994, p. 2). A growing number of people, particularly youths, are turning to cyberspace--the Internet--to find religious and spiritual guidance from online churches, in religious chatrooms, and through e-vangelism (electronic evangelism) (Janis, 1996, p.6). Even those who are not formally active in religious congregations manifest an exceptional abiding interest in the sacred. Hundreds of thousands of Bibles are purchased each year, and the “What Would Jesus Do” (WWJD) motto has spread from bracelets to bumper stickers. With a supporting WWJD Web site, and merchandise being
constantly sold out in Christian bookstores, the popularity for religious objects and Christian venues such as Christian Web sites appear to be enjoying a brief revival after a period of demise in the 1970s (Janis, 1996, p.6). Seminars, workshops, and the growing number of students enrolling in religion courses on college campuses attest to the continuing attraction of faith. Wuthnow believes that this revival in interest for religious material seems to indicate that Americans as a group are in short a deeply religious people (Wuthnow, 1994, p. 2).

Religion and spirituality may be experiencing a comeback in America based upon the tremendous growth in the market of supernatural and occult products, but religion has really never faded entirely from the American landscape (Moore, 1994). Evangelism's face used to be Billy Graham or Oral Roberts in a tent revival meeting. Today it is likely to be a $2 WWJD bracelet. Maybe it is a $16 "Newsboys," "dc talk," or "Yanni" compact disc. Or perhaps it is a $20 "Dr. James Dobson" self-help book or video. Moore categorizes this as nothing more than the on-going process of American commodification of religion (Moore, 1994). The themes of angels and religion are central in the popular 1996 movies Michael, starring John Travolta, or The Preacher's Wife, starring Denzel Washington and Whitney Houston, films that are popular with youth who tend to frequent the Internet (Ferguson & Lee, 1997, p. 70).

In poll after poll, Americans continue to describe themselves as religious people. The most recent poll commissioned by Free Inquiry, the international secular humanist magazine, continues to bear out what the researchers have said all along. The findings reviewed in the summer of 1996 are consistent with the past research by Gallup that found that about 90% of Americans consider religion to be important in their lives. The
results of the poll, which were based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,512 households, state that

92% of the respondents believe in God, while only 6% do not. Of those who believe in God, 86% have always believed. While 6% previously did not believe but now do. Among nonbelievers, 4% used to believe. To the question of a Miracle working God--89% of respondents, including 97% of Protestants and 89% of Catholics, who together made up 84% of the polling sample, believe that even today, God performs miracles. (Briggs, 1996, p. 6)

There is a huge interest in religious material and spirituality, says Phyliss Tickle, editor-at-large for Publishers Weekly. "It's been the fastest-growing segment in adult publishing for the last two years" quoted in (Ferguson & Lee, 1997, p. 70). Much of this revived interest in the metaphysical world involves an egalitarian blend of religious styles and practices known as the New Age, but it also includes a great deal that is mainline, evangelical, or otherwise Christian. It should also be noted that observant Jews and Muslims are also growing more vocal in the United States, and are moving onto the airwaves with their message (Ferguson & Lee, 1997, p.70).

Statement of the Problem

While literature about the Web is beginning to grow, religious usage of Web sites to date has received less examination by social science research. Further, Christian Web site usage research may serve to contribute positively to the nascent body of scholarly literature on the motivations for religious Web use. The primary media being studied are
Christian church sites on the World Wide Web. Thousands of dollars are being poured into the design and maintenance of a growing plethora of religious Web sites on the Internet. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are being spent by major organizations to "reach the lost at any cost" (L.M. Vest, personal communication, July 19, 1996). These ministries are funding the efforts of Christian Web sites for purposes of evangelization, yet the motivations of the visitors to these sites have not yet been examined scientifically or systematically.

Specifically, this project seeks to provide an exploratory study of Christian Web site users and their motivations for using this form of mediated religion. Uses and gratifications theory is one method available for systematically examining the motivations for the use of media by consumers.

In an effort to determine the motivations for media usage by this group of users, a revisit of previous applications of the uses and gratification paradigm is necessary. This research will attempt to provide a description of Christian Web site usage. An additional purpose of this study is to determine why these users visit religious Web sites. This study is an exploratory step in growing research on religious Web site usage and the motivations for its use.

Numerous studies will be required to obtain sufficient knowledge to fully understand this audience's motivations for embracing this latest form of mediated religion. It is hoped that this research will provide a starting point and contribute to the growing body of knowledge regarding the Internet and its societal implications.

Summary
In conclusion, several factors justify a study of the Christian Web site user. Research such as this may provide potential ministries with crucial information helping them to design their Web sites to meet the needs of their visitors. This information is currently only available anecdotally. Another reason for studying this group is to provide information to secular mass media outlets about the unique characteristics of this segment of the market. Finally this research may provide religious bodies with information regarding advertising potential and willingness of visitors to contribute financially to their organizations and ministries.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the overall body of knowledge contained in the existing studies on media uses and gratifications. The intent of this study is to examine the uses and gratifications paradigm from the perspective of the user of Christian Web sites located on the Internet. To date, researchers have only cursorily studied media and religion within the paradigms of either cultural theory or uses and gratifications, but the body of knowledge is slowly growing (Buddenbaum, 1981; Abelman & Neuendorf, 1985; Christians, 1985; Abelman, 1987; Hoover, 1988; Wuthnow, 1994; Hoover & Venturelli, 1996; O'Leary, 1996; Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996; Hoover & Lundby, 1997; and Warren, 1997). Due to its infancy, the Internet is beginning to draw the attention of researchers as a medium with rich potential as a research subject. Religious Web sites in general offer a wealth of topics for exploration from religious radio and television sites on the Web, to denominational headquarters for
churches and ministry organizations, to personal home pages (Goshen, 1998). While there are over 4,000 Christian church Web sites as of June 1998, scant research exists on the Christian’s usage of the World Wide Web (Goshen, 1998). Insufficient knowledge also exists about this segment of the population’s reasons for using this form of mediated religious communication. Motivations and gratifications for use of religious Web sites by this audience may be unique. Political pundit William Kristol, founding editor/publisher of the Weekly Standard magazine, says the sector of the public that uses religious media is opting out. In his words, "They are part of a parallel universe. Their members live a cultural world quite different from that reflected in the mainstream media. Marketers call it a heck of a niche. Religious radio stations have almost quadrupled over the past 25 years, and the number of religious TV shows increased fourfold in just one decade--the 1980s alone" (Ferguson & Lee, 1997, p. 71).

Unlike the studies mentioned above, this one will attempt to examine Christian Web site usage and specifically argue for a religious extension of the uses and gratifications paradigm. Further, this research endeavors to contribute positively to the nascent body of scholarly literature on the motivations for religious Web site usage.

Research Questions

The general research question concerning mediated religion is: "What are the motivations for religious Web site usage among Christian users of the World Wide Web? Specific research questions are:
1. Who is visiting Christian Web sites on the Internet? This question seeks to determine systematically who is attracted to Christian Web sites.

2. Why do the respondents visit Christian Web sites on the Internet? This question addresses the religious uses and gratifications being sought by those who visit Christian Web sites.

3. Is there a relationship between seeking reinforcement for personal motives and Christian Web site usage? This question seeks to determine if the same patterns hold for users of religious Web usage as it does for religious television and radio.

4. Is there a relationship between Christian Web site usage and religious conversion? This inquiry addresses the "faith factor" or the relationship between the user's personal, spiritual, or religious conversion experience and the usage of Christian Web sites.

5. Is there a relationship between Christian Web site usage and seeking companionship with others who are spiritually minded? This question seeks to determine if users of Christian Web sites are seeking companionship with others of like faith.

6. What is the relationship between Christian Web site usage and continued usage of Christian media? This question seeks to address future Christian media usage on the part of the Christian Web site user.

The answers to these questions can provide significant understanding about the users of Christian sites on the Internet and the uses and gratifications that are provided by these Christian sites to their users. The motivations for religious Web site usage should be of particular interest to the Christian organizations that are providing these sites. This study examines the attitudes of the users of Christian Web sites and whether the
gratifications they are seeking by using Christian Web sites are being met. This study is a first step, using strategies informed by a uses and gratifications perspectives to aid in the conceptualization of religious Web users' motivations and how the Internet may influence the methods of operation for religious organizations and their attending ministries.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter One presents an introduction to the concept of religious systems and beliefs as a type and form of the uses and gratifications paradigm. It is argued that religious uses and gratifications functions provided by the African drum pre-dates the electronic age of communications by nearly 25 centuries (Dagan, 1993, p. 44). Additionally, the historical appropriation of media technology by religious organizations for the purposes of evangelism has been documented. The chapter presented the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study.

Chapter Two presents the Review of Literature. The categories into which the literature are divided are uses and gratifications research, television and radio audience research, cultural studies, quantitative approaches, qualitative literature, historical narratives, and legal findings on religion and media. Some literature crosses group divisions, such as articles on religious media audiences, or Christian textual (interpretive) readings of media.
Chapter Three discusses Methodology. This chapter discusses the research design, sample, and survey questionnaire. Additionally, it provides the research questions and hypotheses this study seeks to answer and test, as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter Four presents the Results. This chapter analyzes the collected data. It details the results obtained from the coding of the data in both the factor analysis and surveys.

Chapter Five offers a Summary and Conclusions. It discusses the meaning and significance of the data results. A summary of the project is provided.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section synthesizes selected literature on uses and gratifications into a framework useful for identifying relationships between the current uses and gratifications concepts, dominant extensions of the uses and gratifications paradigm and the other disciplines contributing to uses and gratifications theory, with a particular emphasis on media gratifications. Uses and gratification theory provides the theoretical framework on which both the bulk of religious media research (Buddenbaum, 1981; Abelman, 1987, 1988; Hoover, 1988; Hamilton and Rubin, 1992; Hoover and Venturelli, 1996; Stout and Buddenbaum, 1996; and Walther, Knobel, & Emit, 1997) and a growing number of Internet studies (Kaye, 1996; King, 1998; McMillian, 1998; Murphy, 1998c; and Sheehan & Hoy, 1998), including this study, are based. Media system dependency formulation, in particular that strand of research that addresses the user’s motivations to seek out mediated information to meet needs and thereby foster a stronger dependency on the medium, is informed by this perspective. This study argues that religious Web site usage is a possible extension of religious uses and gratifications. This research is also informed by cultural studies approaches to the role of religion as it struggles for supremacy in the battle for meaning in society. Selected mass communication literature relevant to media gratifications also supports this study. Applicable studies in the quantitative (Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass, 1973; Rubin, 1977; Palmgreen, 1979; Rubin & Windahl; 1986; and Dimmick & Albarran, 1994) and qualitative tradition were reviewed as well (Howard &
Ogles, 1984; Nord, 1984; Wuthnow, 1994; Kellner, 199; O'Leary & Brasher, 1996; Klasnja, 1977; Melton et. Al, 1997; and Purves, 1998). The historical and legal approaches in this study are intended to focus primarily on media (radio/television) and religion, providing a rich narrative texture that rounds out the study. This section will conclude with a summary of the review, as well as a discussion of areas this study proposes to examine that have not yet been explored by previous research.

**Overview of Uses and Gratifications Studies**

The main theoretical or methodological perspective used as the basis for this project was uses and gratifications. While other approaches, such as cultural/critical, were considered for this topic, uses and gratifications is appropriate because, at its most basic level, religion is itself a system of uses and gratifications. In its simplest form, the uses and gratifications model posits that audience members have certain needs or drives that are satisfied by using both non-media and media sources. Uses and gratifications perspectives are borrowed from the areas of sociology and psychology. Sociology provided the tenets of functionalism and structuralism. Psychology provided explanations for behavior, motivation, and needs. This resulted in a large body of literature about this mass media theoretical perspective. This discussion will be more concerned with the religious application of media-related sources of satisfaction. The actual needs satisfied by the media are called media gratifications. Our knowledge of these uses and gratifications typically comes from surveys that have asked people a large number of questions about how they use the media. According to Dominick (1996),
several researchers have classified the various uses and gratifications into a fourfold category system: “cognition, diversion, social utility, and withdrawal” (p. 47).

Cognition is the act of coming to know something. When a person uses a mass medium to obtain information about something then he or she is using the medium in a cognitive way. Dominick (1996, p. 48) noted that:

At the individual level, researchers have noted that there are two different types of cognitive functions that are performed. One has to do with using the media to keep up with information on current events, while the other has to do with using the media to learn about things in general or things that relate to a person’s general curiosity.

To illustrate, the Abelman (1988) surveys had found that many people give the following reasons for using television: “(a) I want to understand what is going on in the world, (b) I want to know what religious leaders are doing and, (c) I want to know what political leaders are doing” (Abelman, 1988, p. 116).

These reasons constitute the current-events type of cognitive gratifications. At the same time, many people, according to the Hamilton and Rubin’s (1992, p. 674) surveys also report the following reasons for using television: “So I can learn how to do things I haven’t done before. Because it helps me learn things about myself and others. So I can learn about what could happen to me.”

These statements illustrate the second type of cognition: using the media to satisfy a desire for general knowledge.

Another basic need for human beings is diversion, which can take many forms. Some of these forms identified by researchers include: “(1) simulation, or seeking relief
from boredom or the routine activities of everyday life; (2) relaxation, or escape from the pressures and problems of day-to-day existence; and (3) emotional release of pent-up emotions and energy” (Dominick, 1996, pp. 48-49).

Psychologists have also identified a set of social integrative needs, including our need to strengthen our contact with family, friends, and others in our society, which the Internet may augment (Dominick, 1996, p. 51). The media function that addresses this need is called social utility, and this usage may take several forms. The media provide a common ground for social conversations, and many people use things that they have read, seen, or heard as topics for discussion when talking with others. This term is known as conversational currency (Dominick, 1996, p. 51). Other people report that they use the media, particularly TV and radio, but also the Internet, as a means to overcome loneliness (Murphy, 1998). As communication researcher Reginald Murphy (1998a) noted, radio keeps people company in their cars. People who might otherwise be deprived of social relationships find companionship in media content and media personalities. In fact, some viewers might go so far as to develop feelings of kinship and friendship with mediated religious figures. Users of religious media might react to televangelists, for example, as if they were actual friends. This phenomenon is called a parasocial relationship, and there is some evidence that it actually does occur (Dominick, 1996, p. 52).

As stated above, humans occasionally need to escape from certain activities and for this reason use media such as the Internet not only for relaxation but also for purposes best described as withdrawal uses. At times, people use the mass media to create a barrier between themselves and other people or other activities. Hamilton and Rubin
(1992), in their study of users of religious television, categorized this factor as avoidance: "I watch religious programming to avoid programs that are heavy in violence. I watch religious programming to avoid shows with lots of sex" (Hamilton & Rubin, 1992, p. 674).

In examining this phenomenon, it is important to recognize that it is not only media content that determines audience usage, but also the social context within which the media exposure occurs. For example religious programming such as cartoons, situation comedies, and musicals all contain material that the user can utilize for escape purposes. People going to a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque, however, might value the opportunity to socialize more than they value any aspect of the worship service itself. Here the social context is the deciding factor (Dominick, 1996, p. 52).

It is also important to note that the functional approach makes several assumptions, according to Dominick (1996):

1. Audiences take an active role in the interaction with various media. That is, the needs of each individual provide motivation that channels that individual’s media use.

2. The mass media compete with other sources of satisfaction. Relaxation, for example, can also be achieved by taking a nap. Joining religious clubs or playing basketball satisfies some media users’ social utility needs.

3. The uses and gratifications approach assumes that people are aware of their own needs and are able to verbalize them. This approach relies heavily on surveys based on the actual responses of audience members. Thus the research technique assumes that people’s responses are valid indicators of their motives.
4. A great deal of additional research needs to be done in connection with the uses and gratifications approach. In particular, more work is needed in defining and categorizing media-related needs or drives and in relating these needs to media usage. Nonetheless, the current approach provides a valuable way to examine the complex interaction between the various media and their audiences (p.53).

This four-fold category system overlays the map of mediated religion fairly well, making the uses and gratifications perspective perhaps the most appropriate perspective for this type of study and for answering the type of questions this research poses.

Blumler (1979) found uses and gratification researchers shared an elementary set of concepts. The most noted of these was that of an active audience who seeks out media for their purposes (pp. 11-12). Blumler argued that in the uses and gratifications paradigm the audience did not just passively consume the mediated images being broadcasted into free space. Uses and gratifications formulation suggests that audiences tend to use those media that serve a purpose in their lives. (For example, logging onto the Internet to track Academy Award winners serves the purpose of providing information and entertainment for the media consumer.) Another example might include reading a direct mail voter’s guide about a candidate’s voting record published by a conservative or liberal political coalition to obtain information about a candidate’s position on various topics in preparation for an upcoming election. Granted, not all uses of media are quite this specific. However, the uses and gratification theory recognizes that the user is actively using media to fulfill some need, whatever it may be.
Lasswell: Uses and Gratification Pioneer

The study of mass media use suffers at present from a glut of conflicting theories of social and psychological needs. Clearly, a winnowing of different levels of need and an elaboration of hypotheses linking particular needs with particular media gratifications is required (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 24). The psychologist Abraham Maslow (1970) proposed a hierarchy of human needs which holds promise and relevance for communication researchers. The pioneering work of Harold Lasswell (1948) specifying the needs that media satisfy has also proven useful (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 24).

Lasswell (1948) examined the relationship of communications to the social process. He identified two typologies, function and structure. Lasswell further categorized the primary functions of mediated communication into three arenas: surveillance, correlation, and transmission. Lasswell observed mediated communication as a type of sentry providing surveillance and vigilance of the environment. Transmission pertained to use of media as a tool for dissemination of cultural values, national identity, and social heritage from the native-born citizen to the new immigrant, to the next generation of offspring (Lasswell, 1948).

Lasswell (1948) saw people as living forms that maintained a state of internal equilibrium by modifying the environment in the process of need gratification (p. 43). He used the concept of values in reference to categories of relationships that are recognized objects of gratification (p. 43). In a similar way the use of religious Web sites
provides categories of religious relationship and recognized objects of gratification. Such seeking may provide reinforcement for a person’s religious motivations and beliefs.

Lasswell believed that efficient communication was a process requiring cognitive decision making grounded in value and goal orientation; in other words, uses and gratifications. His perspective makes it possible to see an active audience deliberately searching out religious radio as an alternative to some other activity, and making religious media choices that are grounded in moral value-added goal orientation (p. 43).

Under Lasswell’s schema of uses and gratification, audience members were no longer considered indiscriminate users of mediated communications. Lasswell postulated that people were using media for explicit gratifications and that such use was based upon their own needs. Media were used for the value they held in achieving an individual’s goals as well as for personal gratification. This paradigm embraced the notion of gratification via mediated communication and would be operationalized and further developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch.

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch’s Uses and Gratifications Research

Researchers again began to employ the uses and gratifications paradigm for media studies in the early 1970’s. During the intervening period several researchers’ studies received critical acclaim. Elihu Katz was a researcher working at the forefront of communications studies. He studied the use of mass media as an escape (Katz & Foulkes, 1965), and later worked with Blumler and Gurevitch. The operationalization of uses and gratification aided in the development of a methodological as well theoretical
schema for the paradigm (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974, p. 21). Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch were concerned with seven areas of uses and gratification research: origins, needs, expectations, mediated communication, media exposure, gratification, and consequences (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974, p. 20). In the area of origins, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) focused on both the social and psychological origins of the user of mediated communication. Regarding needs, and once again building on Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy and Lasswell’s schema, they attempted to identify the needs that individuals have for mediated communication. Expectations are generated by the mediated communication needs that audience members have, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch postulated. Differential patterns of media exposure or engagement in other activities were based upon cognitive decision making grounded in values and goal orientation. Need gratifications were the result of an active process on the part of the audience member. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch also explored the consequences of media effects, perhaps mostly unintended ones of media exposure.

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch’s typology began by specifying needs and then attempting to map the degree to which the audience members’ needs were gratified by mediated communication. Additionally Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch noted that other researchers observed gratifications as a genesis and attempted to reconstruct the needs that were being gratified by media. Still other observers, they noted, focused on the social origins of audience expectations and gratifications. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) concluded:

However varied their individual points of departure, they all strive toward an assessment of media consumption in audience-related terms, rather
than in technological, aesthetic, ideological, or other more or less 'elitist' terms.
The convergence of their foci, as well as of their findings, indicates
that there is a clear agenda here-part methodological and part theoretical-for a
discussion of the future directions of this approach. (p. 21)

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) observed
a clear agenda and eventually conceded that the absence of satisfactory bridging
concepts between the constraints arising from social situations and the
gratifications sought from the media. However, their observation of particular
patterns of use and likely effects was problematic for uses and gratification
research. (p. 30)

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch operationalized Lasswell's (1948) theory of an
active audience, formulating a uses and gratification paradigm in the early 1970's. This
paradigm stated: “The social and psychological origins of needs which generate
expectations of mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media
exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other
consequences perhaps unintended ones” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 20).

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch asked the question, “Do media actually satisfy their
consumers?” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 30). Katz, et al. strenuously denied
that mediated communication was a modern-day opiate of the masses. Such an
assumption, they postulated, “presupposed a media-output audience satisfaction nexus
that gratifications research treats as hypothesis rather than fact” (Katz, Blumler, &
Gurevitch, 1974, p. 30). Instead of depicting the media as severely circumscribed by audience expectations, the uses and gratifications approach highlights the audience as "a source of challenge to producers to cater more richly to the multiplicity of requirements and roles than it has disclosed (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 31).

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch's (1974) goal, to "map the degree to which the audience members' needs were gratified by mediated communication" (p. 21), bears upon this study as it attempts to determine whether religious Web sites are meeting the needs of a particular audience. Additionally, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch conceded the impact of the "technological, aesthetic, and ideological" (1974, p. 21) as two factors in the selection and use of media by the user. This observation may bear at least indirectly upon the factor of religiosity as a filter and as a factor in media selection upon users of religious Web sites. This study serves to further refine Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch's assessment of media consumption.

**Rosengren's Uses and Gratifications Paradigm**

Karl Rosengren (1974) expanded upon the paradigm by redefining uses and gratifications through a reexamination of Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs. Maslow distinguished five sets of basic needs: "(1) Physiological needs; (2) safety needs; (3) belongingness and love needs; (4) esteem needs; and (5) a need for self-actualization" (Rosengren, 1974, p. 270). In terms of Maslow's scale, the needs that Rosengren focused in were belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs, the last sometimes being characterized as growth needs versus physiological or deficiency needs. Expanding upon this scale, Rosengren recognized eleven sets of needs and identified them as: (1) "Basic
human needs; (2) individual characteristics; (3) societal structure; (4) perceived problems; (5) perceived solutions; (6) motives; (7) media behavior; (8) other behavior; (9) gratifications/nongratifications; (10) psychological set-up/social position/life history; and (11) media structure” (Rosengren, 1974, p. 271).

The importance of Rosengren’s (1974, p. 271) work for this study is his recognition of “motives; gratifications/nongratifications; psychological set-up/social position/life history; and media structure.” This study attempts to identify whether the motives for this particular use of media are driven by the religious belief system of the user. Rosengren’s work informs this study, in that use of the Internet is not only linked to gratifications, but that the psychological set-up along with social position and life history play a factor in selection and uses of media. Previous studies by Buddenbaum (1981), Abelman (1988), Rubin (1984), Hamilton and Rubin (1992), and Stout and Buddenbaum (1996) have argued for the role that religion plays in media selection, due to religion’s mapping over these particular needs mentioned above. This study will further extend this strand of research and is informed by Rosengren’s set of needs.

Rosengren differed from his predecessors in his development of a concept of higher and lower order needs. Rosengren’s typology reflected the more general assumption that individual’s motives for media exposure concern both self-maintenance and self-growth. Rosengren’s model allowed for the gamut of mediated communication usage needs as well as individual environments. Attempting to extend uses and gratifications research as well as Rosengren’s model, Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur’s (1976) examination of media usage in unstable environments would give birth to a new branch of the uses and gratification research paradigm.
Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s Extension of Uses and Gratifications

It is suggested that one of the reasons that there is such a lack of clarity as to whether the media have effects is that researchers have proceeded from the wrong theoretical conceptualizations to study the wrong questions. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s (1976) dependency model of media effects, or media system dependency theory (MSD), offers a sound theoretical alternative on the nature of the tripartite audience-media-society relationship. This relationship is assumed to determine many of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects that the media have on individuals, groups, and society (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 8). Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s extension of uses and gratifications focuses upon audience dependency on media information resources as a key interactive condition for alteration of audience beliefs, behavior, or feelings as a result of mediated communications. Audience dependency is said to be high in societies in which the media serve many central information functions and in periods of rapid social change or pervasive social conflict. Media-System Dependency attempts to systematically resolve and predict the phenomenon of audience dependency on media information resources as a key interactive condition for alteration of audience beliefs, behavior, or feelings as a result of mass communicated information (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

Access to information by media users is central to an understanding of MSD. The capacity of individuals to successfully attain their media goals is contingent upon the information sources of the available media system--those resources being the capacities to “(a) create and gather, (b) process, and (c) disseminate information” (Ball-Rokeach,
1985, p. 487). While Ball-Rokeach used the term “relationship,” Bates’ (1993) typology of access is perhaps more precise for this study in defining this interaction:

Access refers to the structural boundaries or restrictions imposed upon the access to the communication system and/or the information it contains granted to potential users. These boundaries, or limits, may be imposed by physical attributes to the medium employed or by the economic and/or political structures of both the communication system and other social systems within which the communication system operates. Further, access restrictions need not be absolute: they may impose only differing levels of difficulty in acquiring access to communication channels or their content. (p. 5)

Bates is correct. The mere existence of the Internet does not guarantee access. Lack of technical expertise in accessing computer-mediated information will result in blocked access to information; unfortunately Ball-Rokeach does not address these concerns in her paradigm.

Media-System Dependency theory postulates that “the potential for mass media messages to achieve a broad range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects will be increased when media systems serve many unique and central information systems needs (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 7). The fewer the sources of information in a media world, the more likely the media will affect our minds and thoughts, our attitudes and how we behave. Additionally that influence will have increased potential “when there is a high degree of structural instability in the society due to conflict and change” (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 7). However, just as the audience may be changed by information/messages it receives, in turn the media systems themselves are changed
according to audience response; the channel of information does not flow in only one direction. In the cognitive or intellectual sphere, MSD examines the following possible media roles and attempts to provide a conceptualization for media usage:

(1) The resolution of ambiguity, and relatedly limiting the range of interpretations of situations which audiences are able to make. (2) Attitude formation. (3) Agenda Setting. (4) Expansion of people's systems of beliefs (for example, the tremendous growth in awareness of spiritual matters). (5) Clarification of values, through the expression of value conflicts. (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, pp. 9-14)

Certainly, at critical decision making times such as elections, people have become increasingly dependent on the media, especially TV, for candidate information and guidance. Media-System Dependency theory presumes that “the greater the uncertainty in society, the less clear are people's frames of reference; consequently there is greater audience dependence on mediated communications” (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 7).

Persons, as members of media audiences, encounter mediated messages with both constructed social realities and considerable dependency on media information resources. The social realities people hold are the product of the processes by which the societal system enculturates and socializes persons and structures their social action. The dependencies people have on mediated information systems are a product of the nature of the sociocultural system, category membership, individual needs, and the number and centrality of the unique information functions that the media system serves for
individuals and for society. For example, a 1997 Gallup poll of 40,000 Internet users found

that Internet use pervades almost every aspect of the lives of young adults age 18 to 24 in contrast to the business approach of an older generation classified as 35-to-54-year-olds. The younger age group looks to the Web for many key aspects of their private and personal lives, including entertainment, socializing (via online “chat” rooms), recreation, plus news and information. The findings suggest that for the emerging generation of adults the Internet is becoming established as a complementary world to many vital “real world” activities. While the older generation of Internet users tend to use the Web as an applied tool for such things as searching for information and getting news, the younger generation tends to do almost everything they do in reality. (Reuters, 1998)

While the Gallup poll offered no explanation for the differences in Internet usage, MSD can shed light on these changing trends. Young adults, aged 18-24, represent the first generation to grow up with the computer and sophisticated mediated communications systems. The Gallup poll may point to the development of a media dependency tied to the Internet usage amongst 18-24 year olds. The younger generation has grasped the possibilities of the Net to “create and gather” their environment, “process” their desires, and disseminate the exchange of ideas that will shape their world” (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, p. 487). For them the Internet is not just a mere application but an extension of their reality. The Gallup poll results on Internet use may support Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s argument that the more a single medium such as the Internet
provides unique and central-information delivery services to the 18-24 year old user, the
greater is the dependency on that channel. Harold Innis (1951) in his seminal work, *The
Bias of communication*, offered a historical perspective on the replacement of central
communication systems and it impact such replacement has upon society and the
individual.

Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur’s present framework is a strong
working attempt to put forth a framework for a sociological theory. The outline is
sociological in the sense that both macroscopic and microscopic levels and their
interrelations are addressed, albeit in the form of an explanation sketch as opposed to a
fully specified theory. In order to account for more complicated effects, such as the
effects of cumulative exposure to many types of media content or effects upon
organizations, systems, or whole societies, MSD may have to broaden beyond the current
social science paradigm to other paradigms of social thought perhaps cultural theoretical
paradigms.

This study is informed by Ball-Rokeach and Cantor’s (1986) observation that
“the dependencies people have on mediated information systems are a product of the
nature of the sociocultural system” (p. 101). Additionally, Ball-Rokeach and Cantor,
(1986, p. 103) observed that “category membership, individual needs, and number and
centrality of the unique information functions that the media systems serves for
individuals and for society also are a factor”(p. 103). As Ball-Rokeach and Cantor
observed, the uniqueness of the information function may play a factor in such uses and
gratifications. This research seeks to examine whether the users of Christian Web sites
are seeking gratifications that differ from those provided by religious television and radio.

**Rubin’s and Windahl’s Extension of Uses and Gratifications**

Researchers Rubin and Windhal (1986) detected within the framework of MSD numerous possible areas that could be further delineated, as they built upon the work of Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur in the mid-1980’s. Alan M. Rubin and Sven Windhal developed a model that synthesized Sandra Ball-Rokeach’s and Melvin DeFleur’s (1976) media system dependency theory. This model offers significant utility in helping researchers understand the motives of users of religious Web sites on the Internet. This model furnishes fresh ideas about the origin and structure of user needs and motives and provides a framework for discussing the role of functional media alternatives and the consequences of such media use (Rubin & Windahl, 1986, p. 186). They called this hybrid of MSD and uses and gratifications the Uses and Dependency Model of Mass Communication. The Uses and Dependency Model examined user gratifications at the both the micro level and media dependency within society at a macro level. This view facilitates "a framework for discussing the role of functional alternatives and the consequences of media use" (Rubin & Windahl, 1986, p. 186). Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur were fond of using examples of developing countries experiencing political instability to draw a mental image of how this process might develop (p. 7). Some developing national governments support media operations with tax incentives or direct monetary payment. Dhyana Ziegler and Molefi Asante (1992) point to the fragile nature
of media outlet operations and the political instability in developing continents such as 
Africa, and the implications these have for users of information:

They were either missionary publications that seldom had outside 
news and rarely ever gave the African reader a point of view 
about the colonial situation, or they slung reactionary and racist 
commentary against anyone who dared believe in majority rule 
in Mozambique. (Ziegler & Asante, 1992, pp.22, 77)

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s theories postulated that the more people become 
removed from societal institutions the more dependent they become on mediated 
communication to maintain contact.

One profound difference between Rubin and Windahl’s (1986) uses and the 
dependency model MSD and the traditional uses and gratifications orientations is that 
Rubin and Windahl’s model aids in improved conceptualization of media effects. 
Dependency may help to determine what media and content are selected by a user, thus 
tracing media use back to social-structural influences. Use and gratifications, though, is 
volutaristic, allowing for a more active communicator. Different societal and media 
settings, though, can foster different gratifications-seeking behaviors. Uses and 
gratifications theory, then, adds a “volutaristic element to dependency, just as 
dependency adds a more deterministic flavor to uses and gratifications” (Rubin & 
Windahl, 1986, p. 186). Rubin and Windhal theorized that this distinction between uses 
and gratifications and dependency offers a conceptulization of uses and gratifications as 
more situational or context-bound:
This view, adopted in the uses and dependency model, shifts the notion of audience "need" away from the idea that human needs necessarily are basic and stable. Instead, we propose that people's needs and motives vary as they evolve in interactions with societal and communication systems. (Rubin & Windahl, 1986, p. 186)

In summary, Rubin and Windahl (1986) found that mediated communications played a vital intermediary role between society's various structural elements. "A uses and dependency model makes it possible to relate uses and gratifications' micro-perspective of individual media behavior to dependency's macro-perspective of the media operating in a society" (Rubin & Windahl, 1986, p. 186).

The uses and dependency paradigm undergirding this study is particularly malleable to Internet media because users must actively seek out information by logging on to the WWW. One could argue that this voluntaristic element of logging on to the Internet varies little from picking up a book, reading, a newspaper, or turning on the television or radio. The present difference may be in the level of user involvement and technical skill required at this particular point in time to access information on the Internet. Several technical skills are required to access information on the WWW that are not required for users of books, newspapers, television, or radio. However, as speech interface devices to computers improve, the level of technical expertise required to navigate the WWW may become negligible. Nonetheless as Rubin and Windahl (1986, p. 187, 191) conceptualized that

...dependency may result when an individual instrumentally seeks out certain communication messages or ritualistically uses communication channels.
Dependency is really a continuous concept since an individual may become dependent on communication channels or messages to varying degrees....

...Dependency may determine what media and content are selected by an audience member. It is not just dependency that achieves effects, but communication motives and the selection and use of certain channels and messages among available communication alternatives that are most important in determining the outcomes of media use.

This study is further informed by Rubin and Windahl’s (1986, p. 186) concept of “situational or context-bound” gratifications. Rubin and Windahl’s theory recognized that media use will vary and evolve based upon the needs and motives of the users. The history of mediated religion offers a description of the evolution of religious media based upon the needs of the religious user. Historical studies by Nord (1984, 1985, 1986, 1990) point to the recognition that the needs and motives of users of religious media have continued to adapt and become more sophisticated, from the dawn of the drum into the era of satellites and cyberspace.

Rubin and Windahl extended uses and gratification through a synthesis with Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s dependency theory. Their paradigm allowed for analysis at both the micro and macro levels.

While dependency may explain what media and content are selected by the user, tracing media use back to social-structural influences, use and gratifications, may allow for a more active communicator. The profound difference between the dependency and uses and gratifications orientations is that Rubin and Windahl’s uses and dependency
model helps better conceptualize media effects as it pertains to this study. Rubin and Windahl observed that user's with limited information seeking strategies and weak motivation to seek and use alternative sources, were more likely to develop a greater dependency on a source and adopt or maintain the beliefs that support the views presented by that source (Rubin & Windahl, 1986, p. 197).

A Selection of Uses and Gratifications

The literature concerning uses and gratifications is diverse, prolific and ranges across many disciplines. Researchers have applied the uses and gratification paradigm to a number of different media, including newspapers, radio, television, motion pictures, books, and magazines. The next generation of communication researchers have rediscovered and once again embraced the uses and gratifications paradigm as they explore the newest form of mediated communication, the World Wide Web. More than 15 studies, to date, were found regarding the Internet and the World Wide Web alone, and the list continues to grow (Kaye, 1996; McLaughlin, 1996; Mitra, 1996, 1997; Elmer, 1997; Lin, 1997; Walther, et. al, 1997; Kehoe, Pitkow, & Morton 1998; King, 1998; McMillian, 1998; Murphy, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; and Sheehan and Hoy, 1998.)

General literature on the application of religion and uses and gratifications to Internet use is considerably more plentiful in newspapers, popular periodicals, books, trade publications, and online than in scholarly publications at this point in time.

While few scholarly articles have been published to date concerning uses and gratifications and religion and Internet usage, this is not completely unexpected since the
Internet is a medium in its infancy. However, the research of Buddenbaum (1981), Rubin, (1984), Abelman (1987), Hamilton and Rubin (1992), and Wuthnow (1994), on the uses and gratifications of religious television is applicable with modifications to Internet research. Ableman (1987) was able to confirm that consumers of religious television programs fit into previous patterns of religious television program users as well as users of other secular-type television programs (pp. 293-307).

Recent popular and scholarly literature has noted that computer-mediated linkages presently provide new forums and new tools for the public advocacy of faith and for participation in public acts of what O'Leary (1996) calls “ritual communication that constitutes new, virtual congregations” (p. 782). Ritualized use of religious television has been studied by numerous researchers to include Rubin (1981, 1983, 1984) Abelman (1987), and others. O'Leary, building upon that body of research, extended ritualized viewing of television to embrace potential religious application for the Internet through the context of “virtual communities of faith” (1996, p.782).

O'Leary (1996) argued that:

As we move from text-based transmissions into an era where the graphic user interface becomes the standard, and new generations of programs such as Netscape are developed that allow the transmission of images and music along with words, we can predict that online religion will become more “Catholic” in Umberto Eco’s sense. By this I mean that iconography, image, music, and sound—if not taste and smell—will again find a place in ceremony. Surely computer rituals will be devised that exploit the new technologies to maximum symbolic effect. It does not seem too far-fetched to think of cyber-
communication as coming to play a major role in the spiritual sustenance of postmodern humans. The possibilities are endless. Online confessions? Eucharistic rituals, more weddings, seders, witches’ sabbats? There will be many such experiments. (p. 805)

These studies were important because they added to the body of knowledge about users of mediated religion. However, these studies researched religious television or Internet use solely for spiritual purposes. They did not explore the motivations for either Internet usage or religious Web site use nor any unique gratifications this medium may afford users of religious Web sites. Rubin, Abelman, and O’Leary’s work represented the development of a body of knowledge about the gratifications of the religious media user.

Judith Buddenbaum (1981) surveyed the religious television audience to determine its characteristics and media-related needs, utilizing the uses and gratifications paradigm. Buddenbaum (1981) observed that while the demographic characteristics for the audience of religious television programs were similar to those of the audience for television programs in general:

The needs found to be associated with viewing religious programs are quite different than those Weaver, Wilhoit and Riede, and Weaver, Wilhoit and de Bock found in their analysis of the same data set to be associated with television in general. From this it appears that the audience for religious television is a distinct subset of the general television audience composed of persons whose needs are similar to those of church members. (p. 271)
Buddenbaum's research points to a possible "distinct subset" amongst religious Web site users versus the general Internet user population, which is an area of interest for this study.

John Dimmick and Alan Albarran (1994) illustrated how audience members differentiated among media on the basis of gratifications obtained. They wanted to determine if gratifications or gratification opportunities were better predictors of choice of visual entertainment media. They determined that "gratification opportunities are important in determining preference for the entertainment media" (Dimmick & Albarran, 1994, p. 233). However, they noted that "it would be improper to suggest that gratification opportunities be equated on the same theoretical level as gratifications sought and obtained" (p. 233). They wrote, "Although gratifications sought and obtained are attributes of individual audience members, gratification opportunities reflect perceived attributes of a medium" (p. 233).

The studies by King (1998), and Murphy (1998) hold the promise for a second revival of uses and gratifications research in much the same manner that Blumler, Katz, McQuail, and others experienced in the 1970's. Whereas past researchers examined the application of uses and gratifications surrounding television, this new generation of communication researchers is examining a myriad of subjects via World Wide Web surveys. The present study of religious Web site uses and gratifications is largely informed by the work of Murphy and King. In their particular studies King (1998) and Murphy (1998) examined essentially the uses and gratifications of users of local television stations and radio Web sites. Their explorations could well be the first tentative steps taken toward an intensive study of the WWW, resulting in a new rebirth or
the possible extension of uses and gratifications as it applies to a growing community of
Web users.

The Internet and the Web are new media; they offer forms and conduits of
communications, and they offer content. Users can seek and receive news,
advertising and product information, and entertainment. They can send messages
and files to one another, or to large groups. They can post messages publicly or
privately. Thus, the Net and Web can be seen as extensions of current
communication applications, and as developing new applications and forms of
communications. It is likely to be in these newer applications and forms of
communication where the Net has its profoundest impacts. (Bates & King, 1995,
p. 2)

Additionally, Bates and King contributed to the body of literature by exploring
WWW uses and gratifications. Their examination from the standpoint of the provider of
mediated communication versus the consumer represented another major departure from
traditional studies. “Web users tend to be interested in making the fullest use of the
potential of the Internet and the Web, particularly in its developing abilities to utilize
audio and video clips, and to post still photos” (Bates & King, 1995, p. 13).

One of the first steps in uses and gratifications research is to describe the user
based upon the use of frequency tables. For King (1998) and Murphy's (1998) studies,
this was already accomplished, and researchers were able to concentrate on the
gratifications portion of this communications research area. The present study provides
an exploratory analysis of the motivations for Christian Web site usage upon which future studies on motivations for religious Web site usage gratifications may be based.

The Birth of the Web and the Growth of Christian Web Sites

The World Wide Web (WWW) is the fastest and perhaps the most important element of the Internet. The WWW is an interconnected set of computer servers on the Internet that adhere to a standard set of network interface protocols created by Tim Berners-Lee or TBL, as he refers to himself. While working as a software engineer with the high-powered European particle physics lab known as CERN in Geneva in October 1989, he proposed a new project dubbed the World Wide Web (Vivian, 1999, p. 226). His goal was to create a network that would allow physicists, on just about any computer around the globe, to access multiple computer networks, or internets, and browse freely through interconnected documents. Any individual or organization with Internet access can design a "home page" document or establish a presence on the Web, provided they employ the properly programming protocols which are refinements of Berners-Lee's original protocol. The WWW protocols include assigning the home page a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) derived form its TCP/IP Internet address, and employing a hypertext transport protocol (http) that enables the standardized transfer or e-mail and other text, audio, and video files (Pavlik, 1998, p.36).

The uniqueness of the Web is that the browser, not the programmer, or the editor, chooses which screen to view and which one to pass by, and in what order. Users do not need to proceed in a linear fashion from page one to page two. By employing various types of on-screen indexing and cross-referencing, the user can switch instantly to what
interests them. This degree of flexibility provides for an almost seamless migration through a greeting by Pope John Paul II to the Articles of Vatican II for example.

Vivian (p. 227, 1999) asserts that “every major mass media company has put products on the Web.” Not surprisingly religious organizations of various sizes and description have also established a presence on the Web. Thousands of local churches as evidence by a local search of Christian Web sites are establishing themselves. Additionally, the technology is becoming less complicated and the cost of access so inexpensive that thousands of the religious faithful have set up Web sites of their own (Laney, 1998a).

It was not until 1995 that Nielsen Media Research conducted an exhaustive study to determine just how many people were using the Web. The Nielsen study found that “17.6 million people over the age of 16 in the United States and Canada were using the World Wide Web” (Vivian, p. 236, 1999).

Religious organizations have taken notice as well and have recognized the cultural importance of the Web. Pope John Paul II (1990, p. 5) in an address titled “The Church Must Learn to Cope with Computer Culture, “ the pontiff noted that: “With the advent of computer telecommunications and what are known as computer participation systems, the Church is offered further means for fulfilling her mission.” Evangelicals with their lengthy history of media technology appropriation as described in this study have also seized upon this latest technology to help them fulfil their mission. According to the Billy Graham Center Institute for Evangelism the church must seize use of the Internet and the Web for evangelism. Billy Graham has always sought to effectively use radio, television and film and because the Web opens dramatic new doors for the spread
of the Gospel, he has challenged Christian leaders to explore both philosophical and practical issues regarding the use of this new medium. Dr. Graham specifically seeks to utilize the Web to "explore the unique culture, opportunities and challenges of the Web; review cases studies showing how the Web is already being used for evangelism; and host discussions with various religious leaders on possible ways of working together to most effectively use this new medium" (Graham, p. 1, 1997).

As background for this exploratory study a non-random sample of 200 Christian Web sites was conducted on May 26-29, 1998. The Web sites observed in this sample fell roughly into three categories, television and radio ministry, churches, and ministry organizations.

The television and radio ministry sites were sophisticated and tended to mimic their television programs by providing audio and video clips of religious programs as well as the sale of religious products. These sites were multi-paged and offered numerous links to their organization as well as evangelistic overtones such as "How to get to Heaven," "Keys to Salvation," etc. However, the television ministries in this sample did not provide chatrooms. While some of these television ministries did provide an email address, generally a form was provided for you to post a message to the webmaster. How often these posted messages are answered was not the focus of this study, but some anecdotal evidence based on open-ended responses suggests that some ministries are not responding to their mail. The 65 television ministry sites observed in this sample always provided a picture of the televangelist. Pictures of the pastor or rector were seldom observed with the local church Web sites. Examples of television and radio ministries sampled include: CBN: The Christian Broadcasting Network and The 700 Club; Christian
The 65 church Web sites observed in this sample tended toward a single page, and rarely more than two pages, with static content. These Web sites were representative of the sites that eventually participated in the Christian Web study. Directions to the church and service times were most readily observed, in some cases, church announcements were also posted. While a picture of the minister was observed in a few cases, the overwhelming majority did not have a picture of the pastor. If a picture was observed, it was frequently a picture of a building, usually graphics were observed. Only in a few instances were religious conversion appeals observed in the church Web sites. Chatroom, audio clips, video clips, and other interactive features were rarely found on these Web sites.

The remaining 70 sites identified as ministries tended to be eclectic in content and layout. Ministry Web sites ranged from Christian magazine publications, and recording artists, to Christian body builders. The ministry Web sites usually provided photographs and varying degrees of interactivity. Many of these ministry Web sites were interactive, featuring Chatrooms, hypertext (method of interrelating messages so users control their sequence), hypermedia (hypertext with sound, image and movie links), as well as products material for sale. Strong religious conversion appeals were frequently observed.
as well as monetary appeals in a few cases. The sites ran the gamut of sophistication, but tended be more sophisticated than the church Web sites, and in some cases more visually appealing than the television/radio ministry Web sights. These sights were more visually appealing than the church Web sites because many of them employed sound effects, vibrant colors, and animation. The ministry sites frequently offered an email address as well. Examples of ministry Web sites include: Campus Crusade for Christ International; Christian Connections; Christian Pirate Radio; Concerned Women for America; Charisma Magazine, Reginald B. Cherry Ministries; Eastman Curtis Online, Family Research Council; Jeffery C. Fenholt; Hip-Hop Zone; Jerusalem Mosaic; G-Rock; Mac Hammond Ministries; John Hagee Ministries; Nancy Harmon World Evangelism; John Jacobs and The Power Team; Bob Larson Ministries; Life Outreach International; Promisekeepers; ReaperNet; Alvin Slaughter Concert Ministries; and What Would Jesus Do?

Many of the Web sites in this non-random sample employed counters to measure the number of visits to the site as a way of gauging evangelistic outreach. Laney (p. 18, 1997a) in a study on Internet use and evangelism, observed that some Christian webmasters “employed the counter to illustrate the number of visitors, thus demonstrating the evangelistic outreach capability of the Web site.” But visits to sites and claims of evangelizing based on a counter are misleading. For example, one television ministry Web site says, “We would like to thank the 155,023 people who have visited our site!” At Joyce Meyer Ministries-Life in the Word Web site, 155,023 visits were scored on May 29, 1998, but that doesn’t mean that Joyce Meyer Ministries cyber-appeals
received exposure to 155,023 different people. According to Vivian (1999, p. 237) “many of the same people visit again and again on any given day.”

While this was a non-random sample it proved to be fairly representative of the actual types of sites that eventually participated in the Christian Web study. The participating Web sites in the study had many of the same features and content observed in this sample and also fell roughly into similar categories of, television and radio ministry, churches, and ministry organizations.

Religious Web Site Usage as Uses and Gratifications

As stated earlier, at the most basic level, the system of religion may be the earliest application of uses and gratifications theory, and earliest example of uses and gratifications regarding mediated religion may have occurred in Africa over 25 centuries ago.

Abelman (1987) noted that the earliest documented example raising the appropriateness of a uses and gratifications approach to religious broadcasting and its audiences. Such appropriateness was first intimated by researchers in the late 1950’s suggesting that: “There are logical reasons for listening or non-listening that go deep into the personal and personal-social situation of audience members, far deeper than their simple identification with Catholics or Presbyterians, or non-participants in any church” (Abelman, 1987, p. 295).

Other researchers, including Dennis (1961), Buddenbaum (1981), Stout & Buddenbaum (1996), and cultural theorists like Warren (1995, 1997), have also raised the
issue of the appropriateness of a uses and gratifications approach to mediated religion. The present study attempts to contribute to that small but growing number of researchers who suggest that uses and gratifications is not only appropriate for study of mediated religion but that it should be extended even more deliberately to embrace mediated religion. While Media System Dependency and uses and gratifications perspectives are particularly helpful in examining media use, especially Internet usage, the uses and gratifications paradigm and its many extensions have not been utilized to date to examine religious Web site usage on the Internet.

Extending uses and gratifications to embrace religious Web site usage may be appropriate due to this theory's past accommodation of differentiated audiences over other theories. The uses and gratification of media users vary. An attempt to appreciate the uniqueness of the religious audience, particularly individuals who are fervent in their religious beliefs, must be addressed. Thus the individual or their sub-groups, motivations, perceptions, and expectations need to be considered. The challenge has been, of course, how one measures God, faith, and claims to ultimacy. And yet it is those precise claims that influence those who are allowing their faith to influence their cognitive spheres. For religious faith comes to bear on attitude, goals, and needs in every facet of life, including media choice selection. Another challenge for researchers examining human behavior has been distinguishing the sincerely religious from the nominally religious. A few demographic questions in a lengthy survey will not adequately glean this information. Comprehensive survey data, supported by interdisciplinary methods research, may hold the key. The rich texture and descriptive portrait that cultural studies produce offer some potential for solving the problem.
However, an argument for the integration of these methods can be made to produce a more accurate picture via a more holistic approach.

A growing segment of the religious audience, albeit nascent, has always allowed the ultimacy of their religious beliefs to influence their selection of media. For some religious fervor may result in the total exclusion of media because they are “of the devil” and “worldly.” In addition, some segments of the religious faithful may reject the media offerings of secular society due to their increased portrayals of sex, homosexuality, nudity, profanity, and violent content. Additionally, programming that ridicules or stereotypes sacred deities or portrays the devout as mentally unbalanced, evil, or immoral, are being rejected in favor of media fare that reinforces the users’ spiritual needs and beliefs. The religious offerings on the Web and their content may become of greater significance for the religious users of the Internet than ever before. A need exists for uses and gratifications to be extended to embrace the realm of the sacred and the recognition that this audience is a unique one. A “one size fits all” approach to this diverse population will continue to under-report and marginalize these media users and this sector of society.

The studies by Casmir (1959), Robinson (1964), Gantz and Kowalewski (1979), and Buddenbaum (1981) found evidence of religious uses and gratifications. They indicated that personal needs and values might be important indifferentiating the audience for religious programs from the audience for more general television programs. These studies are consistent with the uses and gratifications interpretation of media use that people are generally active and purposive in their media use and frequently select
media content that meets their needs and is more consistent with their values

From this it appears the audience for religious television is a distinct subset of the
general television audience. Additional studies are needed to link religious
program content to personal needs and to determine if these programs create
needs and change or reinforce attitudes, beliefs and behavior. (pp. 271-272)

Also, uses and dependency theory/paradigm illustrated media’s relationships to
other societal institutions. These theories postulate that the more removed people
become from diverse societal institutions, other than the church, the more dependent they
become on mediated religious communication to maintain contact with those who share
their religious worldview.

Media use as cognitive activity is strongly identified with dependency theory.
Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976, p. 185) argued:

The more salient the information needs, the stronger is the motivation to seek
mediated information to meet these needs, the stronger is the dependency on the
medium, and the greater is the likelihood for the media to affect cognition,
feelings, and behavior. The more a single medium provides unique and central
information-delivery services to the audience [like the World Wide Web-author
emphasis], the greater is the dependency on that channel.

The extension of uses and gratifications for religious media applications,
particularly Web site usage, is intriguing for several reasons:
1. Those with a worldview linked to religious belief may seek non-secular alternative sources of entertainment and information. At times, they may even feel compelled by their religious worldview to reject secular media sources of entertainment or information. These seekers find media choices reflecting their world-view often limited and “biased.”

Stewart Hoover (1988) credited Robert Wuthnow (1988) for providing additional insight into the relative motivations for religious viewing and conventional religious behaviors. He investigated claims that the uses and gratifications of these programs involve dissatisfaction with the conventional settings of religious life. He found marginal evidence to support the claim, but, overall, no evidence that this dissatisfaction was attracting large numbers of “nontraditional” viewers (those other than the demographic types traditionally drawn to religious broadcasting), nor defectors from conventional churches:

Of those polled only 15% of the viewers and 14% of the nonviewers said they were dissatisfied with “the way things have been going in your local church or synagogue.” Despite whatever reservations people have about their churches they still overwhelming look to the Churches instead of religious television for spiritual guidance. (Hoover, 1988, p. 68)

2. With few choices to rely upon, the religious audience is perhaps likely to be influenced to a slightly greater degree by the possible combination of religious radio and television programming and religious Web site content, with its effects on attitude and behavior, than perhaps the non-religious Internet user. Buddenbaum (1981) noted that:
Those people most attracted to religious programs, and particularly to programs offered by the Christian Broadcasting Network [Pat Robertson’s the 700 Club], hold strong conservative values orientation that includes the belief that there is too much sex and violence on television and that stricter censorship of television content is both needed and acceptable. (Buddenbaum, 1981, p. 267)

3. Additionally, the influence of religious Web sites may have increased resonance for this audience when there is a high degree of structural instability in the society due to conflict and change (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 7). While the United States is not experiencing any noticeable structural instability in the government, religious conservatives such as Pat Robertson claim that America as a nation has lost its way and Christians have a mandate from God to enter the sociopolitical and cultural spheres (Hoover, 1988, pp. 111-112.) The birth of religious movements outside of the mainstream churches, led by non-clergy or “parachurches,” are increasing as the alliances between mainline religion, fundamentalist and evangelicals grow. For groups such as the Christian Coalition, Promise Keepers, Million Man March and March for Jesus, their mission is to “use any means possible to win the lost at any cost,” include the WWW (L.M.Vest, personal communication, July 19, 1996).

With the evangelical’s strong historical linkages between religion and mass communication, the migration to the Internet was the next logical step in this holy crusade. Buddenbaum noted that “the purpose of these evangelical programs is spiritual conversion, not mutual understanding or consensus,” and many Christian Web sites reflect similar formats (Buddenbaum, 1981, p. 267). This is where uses and gratifications may be helpful in determining the motivations for such usage. Perhaps, despite the
intentions of religious webmasters, the users of religious Web sites may not be visiting for purposes of conversion. A religious application of uses and gratifications would be helpful in examining religious motives. Perhaps religious uses and gratifications may uniquely explain how these sites have resonance for users who embrace religious goals and values. Do the sociocultural framework and cognitive effects of a religious conversion experience fuel the religious Web site user’s motive for visitation? Based upon the literature, this study seeks to determine if such effects can be measured for Web use.

In conclusion, conservative televangelists may have identified the spiritual needs of a large number of people and are attempting to feed their spiritual hunger. Conservative Christian religious Web sites continue to grow, with the Gospel Communication Network Web site registering in excess of “32 million hits” per month. However, compared to the TY Beanie Baby site, which registers in excess of 500 million hits a month, religious Web sites face strong competition from entertainment Web sites. (Media Metrix, 1998).

While the “Religious Right” does not speak for all who call themselves Christians, these previously-mentioned radio and televangelists have successfully pioneered the most popular religious Web sites on the Internet as extensions of their television ministries. Yet users of religious Web sites may not be interested in making a contribution to these sponsoring television ministerial organizations or in embracing their worldview in toto. Perhaps these users are merely searching for free information about religious news, current events and activities from a religious worldview that affects their lives. With the rise of a New Age religious presence on the World Wide Web, religious
programming on the Internet will continue to expand on a daily basis. More often than not, these religious Web site seekers may not be searching for churches, temples, mosques, or synagogues with which to affiliate. Perhaps they may have turned to religious Web sites because they are motivated to seek reinforcement for their spiritual beliefs and their faith.

The present study attempts to provide a description that will serve as taxonomy for researching media usage amongst the religious Web community within the framework of an extended uses and gratifications paradigm, tailored for religious media consumers.

The extension of uses and gratifications specifically for religious media applications, particularly Web site usage, is necessary to examine effectively a growing segment of the population that is increasingly deriving life's meaning from religious understanding, according to cultural theorists (Ong, 1982; Wuthnow, 1994; Warren, 1997; Klasnja, 1997). In arguing for an extension of uses and gratifications, an appreciation of the media needs of those who derive meaning from religious sources is necessary.

First, those with world-views linked to religious beliefs may seek non-secular alternative sources of information and entertainment in accordance with their faith commitments. Secondly, with limited choices of varied Christian television content to rely upon, the Christian audience is more likely to find resonance in the eclectic content of Christian Web sites. Such resonance may exert a greater degree of influence on the attitudes, actions, and behavior of the religious, than perhaps on the non-religious Internet user. Thirdly, additionally, the rapid expansion and influence of religious Web sites may foster increased resonance for the community of this study, users of Christian Web sites.
Ball-Rokeach's (1985), MSD theory informs this study in that such affinity may produce unique gratifications like a religious Web site dependency for those motivated to seek out Christian Web sites for spiritual solutions. Cultural theorists recognize that those who derive meaning and ultimacy from their faith may find that Christian Web sites provide a positive experience against spiritual tensions as they attempt to live out their faith in both their personal lives and within in society. This study seeks to determine if religious faith is a significant factor for the users of Christian Web sites.

The uses and gratifications studies examined in this selection serve to inform this study. This study argues for Christian Web site usage as a possible extension of the uses and gratifications paradigm, this literature provides similar themes for the application of their perspectives to Web usage. For the purposes of this exploratory study, the uses and gratifications studies of religious radio and television broadcasting will provide the model for this new mediated communication form. While the uses and gratifications literature places emphasis on one program, program type, audience, or access to mediated communication, this study places emphasis on the role of the user of the Christian Web interfacing with the Christian Web site in a collaboration resulting in the making of unique meaning. Previous uses and gratification studies have not gone far enough in providing these types of answers due to the newness of the medium. Many of the television uses and gratification studies reviewed in this study assume a passive audience versus a vigorously active user of such a medium as the Internet. This study seeks to determine whether the selection of Christian Web sites in particular and the media selection process of religious adherents in general is a motivated by the search for religious gratifications, lending additional support for a renewed interest in uses and
gratifications perspectives. Nonetheless, uses and gratifications theory has its share of critics.

**Criticism of Uses and Gratifications**

Blumler conceded that the uses and gratifications theory has its share of problems. Jay Blumler and other social scientists recognized that uses and gratifications was not a single theoretical formulation, but rather an all-encompassing umbrella term that subsumed numerous and divergent paradigms. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch noted that “Much uses and gratifications research has still barely advanced beyond a sort of charting and profiling activity” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 25). Blumler (1979) also noted that a plethora of theories about uses and gratifications abounded, but many were contradictory and convoluted. However, the central theme embodied in these uses and gratification theorems was the role of the participant as an active agent.

Blumler, along with Katz and Gurevitch, argued that “this effort does rest wholly on a body of assumptions, explicit or implicit. Uses and gratifications have some degree of internal coherence that are arguable in the sense that not everyone contemplating them would find them self-evident” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 21). These researchers also noted that at the time they documented their research a “revival of direct empirical investigations of audience uses and gratifications, not only in the United States but also in Britain, Sweden, Finland, Japan, and Israel was occurring” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 20).

Phillip Elliot critiqued uses and gratifications studies as nothing more than “atheoretical” data collection strategies with poorly defined concepts (Elliot, 1973, p. 72).
256). Additionally, he noted "as the approach is not informed by any initial social theory, findings have to be explained post hoc. Given an association between variables, the difficulty is to know what they mean" (Elliot, 1973, p. 252). Social scientists complain the theory directs too much attention to "intra-individual processes" resulting in low explanatory power (Elliot, 1973, pp. 252-253). Still other researchers challenged uses and gratifications' central component, that of the active audience (Carey & Kreiling, 1974, pp. 238-239). For example, the active audience may be one that consciously selects religious Internet sites as an alternative to secular sites because they are already religious, and these types of sites satisfy that particular gratification (McQuail & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 289).

Even today, the debate about the utility of uses and gratifications is still being waged in the academy, and these criticisms are valid. Nonetheless, despite some apparent weaknesses, conceptually, uses and gratifications theory provides the most useful explanation for measuring motivations for Internet use in general and religious Web site usage in particular, due to its emphasis on the active media user seeking media gratifications. While the present study is exploratory, additional studies informed by uses and gratifications over a period of time may give the theory increased predictive and improved explanatory power. Reviewing the contributions of cultural studies to mediated religion further strengthens this study by providing a frame of reference to understand the Christian Web user.
Cultural Studies Approaches to Media and Religion

Michael Warren (1997) is a cultural theorist who examines mediated religious communications. Like many cultural theorists, he tends to embrace theories of hegemony rather than the uses and gratifications paradigm. Warren’s theories are grounded in the sociology of religion, and are drawn to Raymond Williams’ (1975) writings, which looked at culture more through a sociological lens than an anthropological one.

Warren asked numerous thought-provoking questions concerning cultural assumptions in the role of secular and religious mediated communications and its meanings for religion. However, Warren’s work has offered little in terms of hard data to support his assertions or his suggestions.

Those on the Religious Right, such as the Christian Coalition, the Moral Majority, and The Family Research Council, as well as those on the Religious Left, such as the Liberation theologians, eco-feminists, and New Agers, have now come to see deep issues of power latent in cultural assumptions. However, it is the Religious Right in general that is becoming more and more alarmed at having their long-secured assumptions questioned. Indeed, an understanding of cultural agency has important political implications. In this climate, the churches, synagogues, and other religious groups have only begun to probe cultural studies theory’s implications for their members.

Warren (1997) stressed the centrality of judgment in cultural agency. Judgment is essential according to Warren because it evaluates quality or its absence, humanizing vision or its absence. Nowhere does Warren advocate censorship, but he does advocate judgment and action based on judgment through the text (Warren, 1997, pp. 130-135).
I encourage groups of any size to lay out their evaluation of signification: either positive or negative, and to make it public. The process can help sharpen judgment. If their judgment is negative, they can encourage or even organize protest or boycott. This is judgment in action, not censorship. (Warren, 1997, p. 5)

Warren suggests that religious tradition functions as only one among many influences in our society, and in many cases, as a weak one. The conclusion, for those struggling for the voice of religion to be heard in the marketplace of ideas, is a sobering one. Part of the problem for Christian churches in 1998 is being able to offer a compelling religious conceptualization of life in the face of other agencies offering attractive alternative imaginations. Additionally, one specific challenge that religion is faced with is that of the attractive alternative images offered by electronic communications, especially film and television, as they shape our world of meaning (Warren, 1997, p. 50).

Warren’s hypothesis is that “immersion in images cause people to search out metaphors and analogies which explain reality; cultural agency is increased when persons think about how metaphoric language and analogies work” (Warren, 1997, p. 159). While Warren did not offer any type of test to prove his hypothesis, his observations are engaging. His assertion that skill in the analysis of metaphor involved seeing in whose interest a particular comparison resides, whether the comparison is apt, and why these two matters are brought together for comparison at all. This skill is one that can be
developed and should be a basic conceptual tool in the age of mediated messages, according to Warren.

Warren’s examination of popular culture is mainly a continuation of the work of numerous seminal cultural and critical theorists, such as Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, Gustavo Gutierrez, Stanley Aronowitz, Robert Bellah, Margaret Miles, Clifford Geertz, Raymond Williams, and Jean Baudrillard (Warren, 1997). Warren contributed significantly to the field of knowledge with his insightful analysis of the essays of John Kavanaugh, Barbara Goldsmith, and Catharine MacKinnon (Warren, 1997). Warren’s contributions to the discipline came from his ability to integrate the role of the media and religion in his cultural analysis—an area hungry for more scholarship (Warren, 1997). Warren was particularly adept at utilizing his experiences as a cultural/critical theorist in analyzing the integration of media and religion through the lens of the signifying system.

Tension between the two signifying systems (secular society vs. sacred society) is not new, but the capacity of the wider culture to get its messages across via electronic media is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Religious leaders find that more and more of those who say they are religious are taking their life’s meaning not from religious understanding but from the wider culture of images mediated by secular culture. Perhaps one reason for this growing defection from the ranks of the faithful is the availability of choice. (Warren, 1997, pp.20-21)

For some Christian adherents, Jesus Christ’s vision of the possibilities of life can be overwhelming. This vision, never easily maintained in any period of history, can be
especially difficult in a mediated world. Christian “virtue” must struggle for space in a
time when social status, wealth, consumption, and domination are all prized and
continually reinforced in what Warren terms “electronically generated narratives”
(Warren, 1997, p. 21). While the current choices are not cut and dried, historically, they
never really have been. The religious culture is not the embodiment of all that is
virtuous, honest, good, or upholding the moral high ground. Nor is the wider secular
culture the personification of all that is false, corrupt, bankrupt, and unholy.

The rapid dissemination of mediated information over the WWW and the Internet
cuts both ways as the misdeeds of religious leaders are depicted in the national media
alongside such moving human interest stories as the Iowa community that rallied to
minister to the family of sextuplets, for example.

What must be considered in regard to the issue of religion as a beacon for culture
is religion’s explicit claim to ultimacy. However, the wider secular culture also claims
ultimacy for itself in an implicit way as well. This claim by the wider secular culture is
what Warren described as hegemony. Ironically, implicit claims tend to be more
persuasive than explicit ones, according to Warren. The covert claim, never openly made
but quietly assured, can have greater power because, never explicit, it is more seductive
and harder to resist. “When the wider secular culture’s covert ultimacy (hegemony) is set
forth in the vivid terms made possible by electronic media, religion can experience crisis”
(Warren, 1997, p. 22). While not stated explicitly, the major theme of many cultural
theorists is “beware of hegemony” (Warren, 1997, p. 169). Since this concept is
implicit, it becomes all the more seductive and attractive in the text. Warren (1997) is
attempting to develop the critical skills in the reader to allow for examination of the analysis of dominant cultural production and consumption from the following angles:

(1) the point of consumption, a necessary but insufficient angle from which to examine a particular cultural product; (2) the immediate points of production; (3) the intermediate points in the production process; and finally, (4) the history of the medium in question or the technology involved in it or of the institutions that support it. (Warren, 1997, p. 106)

It should also be noted that the tension between the two signifying systems (secular society vs. sacred society) is not entirely undesirable for the cultural theorist. Like the irritating grain of sand in the oyster, the friction between the two cultures at times produces a pearl of rich pluralism and diversity that serves to enrich both systems. “Critique is part of the call to be human, the call to become a co-producer of the world of meaning and not merely a consumer. To be co-producers of their own world of meaning is the vocation of persons of all ages” (Warren, 1997, p. 111).

Regarding possible implications of religious Web usage as an outlet in the making of meaning, critical theorist Colleen McDannell (1996) observed that the attempt to fix meaning is always in part doomed to failure, for it is of the nature of meaning to be always already elsewhere (McDannell, 1996). McDannell noted that people use religious media in many different ways. Such meanings, however, do not always help us understand the personal meanings that people find in their daily use of religious media (McDannell, 1996, p. 23). McDannell observed: People construct meaning using a set of theological and cultural tools to build responses to their own spiritual, psychological, and
social longings. Unfortunately, scholars are rarely privileged to see the 'blueprints' of that construction process. People infrequently preserve their feelings for posterity. (McDannell, 1996, p. 23).

Faith and religion hold the keys to transcending the distorted images that we have allowed to define people and which make the media so "bad," as Warren and so many critical theorists have dubbed it. However, Warren encouraged us to allow our faith to help us re-create "authentic" meanings that defy stereotypes. Warren suggested that while we may not live outside our culture, through activating our faith we can choose to define ourselves differently. We need not be cultural "dupes," uncritically consuming culture's hegemonic myopic vision of success and significance as depicted through media images. Warren elaborated further:

The religious imagination comprises an alternative vision of life as a reality "hoped for" and worked for in light of that hope. Such an imagination means that in spite of desperate and long-standing injustice and oppression, in the face of death itself, religious people can harbor an alternative understanding deeply contesting inhuman social structures, including [stereotypes]. From a religious point of view, one's religious vocation calls for one to protest and contest what are inhuman—even when one judges that little might be accomplished. No wonder those wanting to keep a social system unquestioned and unchanged find the religious imagination "dangerous." (Warren, 1997, p. 192).

Warren's work effectively served to open our eyes and stretch our imaginations to the possibilities for mediated religious communication and only offered a small sample
of the richness that critical approaches provide. The present study is informed by the cultural/critical perspective concerning the importance of religion in the satisfaction of media gratifications. Cultural perspectives articulate the religious sphere and its role as a shaper of meaning concerning the religious uses and gratifications of Christian Web sites users. Borrowing directly from critical/cultural thought, questions regarding the role that spiritual/religious beliefs bring to bear on religious Web site users’ selection of program content are examined in this study.

Other research traditions have examined the subject of media and religion, albeit not exclusively from the uses and gratification paradigm. However, the contributions made by those utilizing quantitative, qualitative, historical, and legal approaches, to mention a few, on the subject of media, money, and religion, are rich in texture and require recognition as they inform the present study on various levels. While different disciplines may not use the terminology of communication research to describe these mediated religious gratifications, their examples provide rich description that further illuminates this study.

Quantitative Approaches

The impact of mediated religion in our society is a topic that requires further examination by social science researchers primarily because of the strong religious roots of this nation and the presence and persistence of mediated religion in this country over the centuries. This is a challenge given the fact that traditionally the extent of religious persuasion has not been a subject studied by scholars to the same extent as agenda-setting for example. Most of the research on religion and media has appeared in
communications literature and religious and sociological journals. Due to the newness of
the Internet as a medium, currently very little data from the field of communications are
available that specifically examine the relationship between mediated religion and
Internet use. The bulk of the research on religion appears to be tied to uses and
gratifications theory.

The link between gratification and media choice, in the case of religious
broadcasting in general and broadcast television in particular, is well established.
Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rosengren (1980) identified 20 studies that showed
relationships between gratifications and “media exposure, medium choice and content
choice” (p. 11).

As mentioned previously, quantitative researchers have primarily focused on the
role of gratifications obtained in determining choice for a particular medium. Among
these studies are the classic work by Katz, Gurevitch, and Hass (1973) that showed how
audience members differentiated among five media based on perceived gratifications
obtained. Likewise, quantitative studies conducted by Rubin, (1977), Palmgreen,
Albarran, (1994) also illustrated how audience members differentiated among the media
on the basis of gratifications obtained.

Despite the appropriateness of a uses and gratifications methodology to media and
religion research, only a few studies have examined gratifications with potential
application for researchers examining motivations for usage mediated religion (e.g.,
Bantz, 1982; Levy & Windahl, 1984; and Rubin, 1984).

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Despite the fact that religion remains an important aspect of the U.S. social fabric, it is mentioned infrequently in quantitative studies of media audiences. Exceptions include Buddenbaum, (1981), Rubin, (1984), Abelman, (1987; 1988), Hoover, (1988), Hamilton & Rubin, (1992), and Stout & Buddenbaum, (1996), which all examined the television-viewing habits of religious conservatives and non-conservatives, thus recognizing, to a certain extent, the subtle complexities of the subject of religion.

According to Stout and Buddenbaum (1996), communication researchers often describe religiosity using "narrow, simplistic demographically measures that do not adequately reflect the role of religiosity in everyday life" (Stout and Buddenbaum, 1996, p. 27). When religion and media are addressed, it is generally in a footnote or a question in a much larger research issue. One questionnaire item inquiry about church membership or church attendance does not capture the full range of ways in which religion plays a part in how individuals use media. These narrow, superficial measures of faith ignore the theoretical development that defines belief systems in a multidimensional way. Behavior, belief, feeling, and social interaction manifest religion (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996).

However, even a couple of probing questionnaire items such as those offered by George Gallup in a Christianity Today survey can be very insightful (Gallup & Princeton Religious Research Center, 1981). Gallup devised the following categories: "Religious TV--Time Spent Viewing," and "Favorite Programs--based on those who watch religious television programs." Gallup asked the following questions of the participants who identified themselves as General Public, Orthodox, Conversionalist Orthodox, and Conversionalist: "About how much time per week, in hours and minutes,
do you normally spend watching religious shows on television? What is your favorite religious television show?” (Gallup & Princeton Religious Research Center, 1981, p. 45).

Quantitative research in the sociology of religion may provide mass communication researchers with new insights about the nature of faith and finances, and how media might help orient the fervent member to a particular worldview regarding media. For example, some sociologists recognize both personal and institutional modes of religiosity (Lenski, 1961), a distinction rarely described in mass communication research. According to Stout and Buddenbaum (1996, p. 29), “media scholars, because they tend to define religiosity in terms of institutional expectations only (i.e., church attendance, official membership, etc.) often fail to inquire about audience member’s religious beliefs, behaviors, and feelings that do not require official membership in a particular religious group.” The inference is that people may believe in a Supreme Being, engage in personal prayer time, donate money to religious non-profit organizations, and proselytize others to believe in a Supreme Being, but if they do not attend an identified denomination, they are likely to be tagged non-religious. Consequently, these people may be missed in communication research. However, this does depend on the question asked, since not all questions are limited to church attendance.

With further fragmentation of the broadcast and cable media and the growth of the Internet, the claim that the religious mediated environment has come to a place of prominence in social and cultural life would appear to be a valid one. It is certainly arguable, from a contemporary historical perspective, that mediated religion has asserted itself to an almost unprecedented degree as we enter the 21st century. Examination of
this topic from the quantitative persuasion invokes the notion of secularization, or the removal of the "supernatural element of faith" which enjoys wide tacit acceptance within the canons of social and cultural theory (Hoover & Venturelli, 1996, p. 251). This acceptance is not without some justification, in that there is an extent to which certain consequences of secularization are historical facts (Hoover & Venturelli, 1996, p. 251). However, secularization as an overarching theory has taken on an autonomous, formal status that could, according to Wuthnow (1994), benefit from "some careful re-thinking" (p. 252).

Few of the studies cited in this section use the kind of data or employ the kind of statistical analysis necessary to demonstrate a causal relationship between religious uses and gratifications and active media usage. However, taken as a whole, the studies cited may suggest that religion does have some effect on the selection and choice of mass media people use, the way they use the media and the content they prefer. But with the exception of the research using the secularization framework that suggests that modernization, only a few studies have directly examined media's effect on religious beliefs and behaviors of which the proliferation of mass media is a part.

An examination of mediated religion and the motivations for religious web site usage lends itself to the application of motivational theories, which could greatly enhance understanding of within-group differences. As stated earlier, uses and gratifications is one of the most commonly used approaches to understanding mass media uses. Concerning the number of quantitative studies that attempt to address the topic of mediated religion or that measure individuals' motivations for use of religious media, while the literature is limited, it appears to be growing. It appears that additional
quantitative research studies are required in order to explore the effects of media use of associational versus communal attachments to a religious organization (Web site) or of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations regarding faith.

In reviewing the literature, the literature suggests intriguing, potentially significant relationships between religion and secular mass media in general, and in the relationship of faith to finances in particular.

**Qualitative Approaches**

Soukup (1985) noted that the study of religion and communication has interacted qualitatively for the better part of 15 centuries and are mutually supporting disciplines. “Whether in studies of homiletics or in the application of the insights of human communication to the divine, students of communications and theologians have looked to one another for mutual illumination” (Soukup, 1985, p. 295). The interrelationship between motivation, religion, and financial incentives, in regards to media, is an area, comparatively speaking, abounding in qualitative riches.

Religious organizations’ integration of new mediated technologies have been well documented in over 45 studies alone over a 54-year period. The historical appropriation of the new technologies is rationalized as a tool to help the evangelists meet their basic needs of evangelizing the world population by spreading the Word of God, and has been examined by various researchers (Parker, 1944; Parker, Barry, & Smythe, 1955; Boyd, 1957; Braun, 1985; Berkman, 1988; Hadden & Shupe, 1988; Schultze, 1988; Bruce, 1990; Goethals, 1990; Voskuil, 1990; Guinness, 1993; Dorgan, 1993; Peck, 1993;
The bulk of qualitative research in the areas of religious motivation resides in the field of sociology and is based upon the seminal work conducted by the German sociologist Max Weber in 1904. Weber’s thesis concerning the link between the Protestant Ethic and the work ethic of capitalist societies was so dynamic and diverse that it continues to generate new kernels of research over 90 years later. The Weberian assertion of the motivations of religious practitioners and their adherents has provided both qualitative studies as well as historical research a continuing focus of controversy and fodder for the practitioner (cf. Green, 1959; Samuelson, 1964; Kim, 1977; and Hoover & Lundby, 1997).

A major qualitative study conducted in 1961 in the Detroit area supported Weber’s thesis. Lenski (1961) found that a higher proportion of Protestants than Catholics were represented in the upper-middle class, and Protestants were more upwardly mobile than Catholics (Lenski, 1961). Jackson and Crockett’s (1962) similar findings in support of Weber’s thesis were reported with data gathered by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan. Opitz (1970) concluded that religious preference had meaningful consequences for economic success, in that religion is a facet of the cultural complex, which defines not only ideology but also goals and objectives in the world of work. This may account for the fact that televangelism seems to be basically a large-scale American phenomenon versus an international one, as Evangelicals tend to openly embrace the capitalistic system in America.
Additionally, the work of communication researcher Marshall McLuhan has found utility in an area that even McLuhan might find unusual: religious Catholic instructional material. Pierre Babin and his colleagues at the University of Lyon have proposed new ways of teaching Christian doctrine to children, adapted to the information revolution as espoused by McLuhan (Soukup, 1985, p. 297). In like manner, religious Web sites provide a wide breadth of information on varied religious topics of all description (Ramo, 1996, p. 61). Murphy (1998c) and King (1998) postulated that the availability of free information might prove to be a strong motivation for usage of Web sites in general. The relevance to this study is that similar motivations may exist for the user of Christian Web sites.

The literature appears to indicate that the interrelationship of motivation, religion, and financial incentives, in regards to media, is an area, comparatively speaking, abounding in qualitative riches. The Weberian assertion of the motivations of religious practitioners and their adherents has provided both qualitative studies as well as historical research a continuing focus of controversy and fodder for the practitioner. Additionally, religious organizations’ integration of new mediated technologies is well documented. In like manner, religious Web sites provide a wide breadth of information on varied religious topics of all description (Ramo, 1996, p. 61).

**Historical Approaches**

The study of mediated religion and the uses and gratifications of the consumers of its products is potentially a historical gold mine. A body of literature regarding mediated religious uses and gratifications has slowly developed over the years within the rubric of
historical studies and religious studies. While the specific terminology "uses and gratifications" is not generally utilized in the histories recorded in this study, the basic premises of the paradigm have been applied. Much of the literature devoted to this topic is historical in nature and is grounded in the disciplines of religion, communication, sociology, psychology, history, or business.

Church historian Leonard Sweet (1993) noted that the contributions of religious journalists to the field of media and the impact of religion on media in general have been grievously understudied in historical circles, with significant exceptions in Protestant sources and numerous studies on Catholic journalism (Sweet, 1993). Historian Paul David Nord’s work may be unique in that it attempts to examine the historical roots of mediated religion and the uses and gratifications provided not only for those of faith but for the nation as a whole (Nord, 1990).

Nord (1990) has shown that the American heritage of freedom of expression had important religious roots. Nord’s detailed examination of this topic asserts that leaflet-distributing Pentecostals and evangelicals, after 1815, were pioneers in the use of mass media, as well as many people’s first exposure to modern mass media. As a result of their ability to recognize and satisfy the media uses and gratifications of their religious readership, Nord speculated that the vast benevolent media empire that evangelicals built in the 19th century paved the way for the radio and televangelist of the future.

In a theme reminiscent of Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s (1976) speculation about the impact of chaos in media selection and dependency. Nord (1986) drew a parallel between the industrial age and the information age. Nord’s (1986) research pointed to the role of the technological and societal changes during the Industrial Revolution that
stimulated evangelicals into new ways of thinking and acting and created organizational structures and styles of “systematic management” which pioneered modern media business practices. Nord noted the “shaping role that evangelical enterprises such as the American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, and other non-profit associations, through their sophisticated use of new printing, papermaking, and stereotyping technologies, played in the popularization of print and the creation of the mass media in America” (Nord, 1986, p. 157).

Nord explored how these non-profit organizations were innovators in mass communication and business management through distribution technologies that paved the way for modern business practices. The Bible distribution system required strong, centralized administrative controls and a highly reticulated information infrastructure. If traveling agents (the predecessors of rack jobbers) were to work and itinerant evangelists were to mount national public information campaigns, they would have to create new structures of accountability and information distribution, as well as exploit cheap printing and cheap postage. By succeeding in this area, Pentecostals developed the forerunner of networking and building special interest groups (from maternal to abolitionist) and blazed the trail in the mastery of machine-assisted communication devices (Nord, 1988).

Nord’s insight holds particular relevance for this study. Nord describes a record of innovation by the church, as the nation struggled through chaos, in providing for the mediated religious gratifications of religious users. Nord’s research recognizes that this pattern has continued with the development of new technologies, as religious organizations continue to determine the religious media gratifications of their users.
While Nord's characterizations of religious media barons as benign seem dubious, Howard and Ogles' (1984) examination of Father Charles Coughlin attempted to bring a more balanced perspective to the field. Howard and Ogles' description of the actions of a popular religious media figure, who attempted to satiate the religious audience's gratifications during a period of chaos in the United States, argued for greater dependency on media during times of chaos.

During the 1930's Father Coughlin became one of the most influential and controversial individuals to use radio up to that time. Howard and Ogles noted:

Clear parallels exist between the "radio priest" career and certain religious political movements of the present era. Although only cautious comparisons can be made because of significant changes in society which have occurred in the media over half a century, valuable lessons may be learned from the past. References to pro-Nazism appeared consistently beginning in 1934. Although related to pro-Nazism, references to anti-Semitism did not peak until 1937. (Howard & Ogles, 1984, pp. 280, 283).

Abelman, citing theologian Carl F. H. Henry in his essay "Heresies in Evangelical Fund Raising," noted that examples of religious broadcasters such as Father Coughlin who misuse religious media for their own purposes are not new (Abelman, 1987). Additionally, such incidents have only increased since the Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, and Oral Roberts televangelism scandals of the 1980's (Abelman, 1987). Robert Abelman, professor of communications at Cleveland State University, in a study of the
content of 40 leading religious shows in 1987, examined monetary appeals by religious broadcasters: Abelman observed:

...that during one hour, a televangelist asked each viewer to donate $328. The person who watches two hours a week over the course of a year is subjected to direct appeal for a total of $31,400 a year. If one’s two hour viewing fare consists only of revivals and preaching programs, that figure creeps up to an average of $33,361 per year (Abelman, 1987, p. 67).

Both Henry’s and Abelman’s observations concerning viewer reaction to televised religious appeals are important to this study, as it relates to user reaction to monetary appeals on Christian Web sites. Some of the monetary appeals on Christian church Web sites are based upon expanding the ministry to evangelize larger numbers of non-Christian visitors to the Web site (Goshen, 1998). This study seeks to determine what the respondents’ views on mediated religion and money and if they intend to provide financial support to media ministries on television that are connected to religious Web sites. Reverend Carl Richardson, NRB board member, often cite examples of the failure of mediated religion to fulfill its stated goal of bringing new converts to Christ. “TV preachers respond by saying the conversion rate is based on expanding their operations to reach a bigger audience, but televangelism speaks to members of ‘the family,’ it’s a ‘family affair’ that excludes the unchurched outsider” (Laney, 1997a, p. 25).

The research indicates some of the limitations of historical research in this area. Granted, while similar claims can be made for virtually any aspect of society as being
under-represented, the fact remains that the contributions of women and people of color
to the field of mediated religion appears to be lacking in the historical record and this
should be corrected.

Sweet (1993) noted that some of the most promising beginnings of historical
research have been generated by scholarly interest in Reverend Billy Graham.
Unfortunately the list of those on whom virtually nothing has been written, would fill a
page. Additionally, an analysis of Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the
Reverend Jesse Jackson, as religious media figures and as practitioners of media usage, is
long overdue.

Even studies that purport to study this only end up looking at Malcolm X, and
King’s rhetorical styles. In fact, it would be difficult to find any other way to
interpret Jesse Jackson’s life than in this context, since Jackson has no
institutional base other than the media. (Fishwick & Browne, 1987, p. 75)

While some women media pioneers such as journalist Dorothy Day, whose work
in The Catholic Worker was key to the success of the Catholic Worker movement are
recorded, the contributions of numerous women media figures remain to be examined in
studies of historiography. (Sweet, 1993). Conspicuously few studies on the “electric
sisters” exist—with the exception of pioneer evangelists such as Aimee Semple
McPherson and Kathryn Kuhlman. However, the contributions of a second generation of
media evangelists such as Kay Arthur, Marilyn Hickey, Tammy Bakker, Beverly
LaHaye, Gloria Copeland, Joyce Myers, Terry Cole-Whittaker, Mother Angelica and the
Eternal Word Television Network, and New Ager Elizabeth Clare Prophet also need
documenting (Fishwick & Browne, 1987, p. 116). Additionally, the contributions of African-American women evangelists (television/radio) appear to be lacking in historical and religious literature. Today women such as Shirley Caesar, Juanita Bynum, Barbara Amos, Jackie McCollough, Beverly ‘Bam’ Crawford, Serita Jakes, Maria Gardner, and Ernestine Cleveland Reems are making significant contributions through the successful synchronization of evangelism and media.

Historical research has provided additional insights into the nuances of mediated religious uses and gratifications by virtue of its rich, descriptive, narrative style. This form of story telling dovetails with the strong oral traditions prevalent in a comprehensive study of mediated religion. Historical research provides an appropriate contextual framework to understand the motives for religious usage of technology, such as Web site usage by religious organizations. Historical research points to the underpinnings and longstanding appropriation of technology by evangelicals as well as mainline Protestants users, of mediated religion in all of its subtleties. Additionally, historical research describes a pattern of creativity on the part of religious media enterprises in delivering mediated religious products to their publics in an effort to meet their religious uses and gratifications needs. Historical research informs this study by recognizing that religious use of the WWW, while new and expanding, represents a continuing historical pattern in the appropriation of communication technology by those of faith for religious purposes.

Legal Approaches

The review of legal communication scholarship serves to inform the study by examining legal views, which may shape respondents’ attitudes concerning the church’s
use of the airwaves, and now cyberspace, for the purposes of fund-raising activities. The
teleevangelism scandals of the 1980's are reviewed here from a legal perspective. These
events were highly publicized in the press during the 1980's and into the early 1990's.
Few users of religious media during the 1980's would have been unaware of these events
as they were frequently the subject of strong commentary by the televangelists under
investigation. Grounded in the inquiry of legal scholarship, the attitude of users of
Christian Web sites towards requests for money is being measured in this study. The
bulk of the legal research uncovered addresses First Amendment expression as it relates
to religion and speech, which is interpreted as media in the context of this discussion.

The First Amendment protects four fundamental rights of citizens that
governments throughout history have had the most reason to fear and the greatest
inclination to violate: freedom to worship, to speak, to come together, and to ask leaders
to overcome injustices. The amendment is short, just 45 words, of which 14 guarantee
freedom of expression (Pember, 1997, p. xiii). These words limit not only Congress but
also state and local governments, thanks to the Fourteenth Amendment passed in 1868,
which says, "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or
immunities of citizens of the United States...." Section 326 of the Communications Act
(which remains in effect under the Telecommunications Act of 1996) explicitly extends
the First Amendment's protection to broadcasting (Pember, 1997, p. 577). The freedoms
of religion, speech and the press included in the First Amendment were intended from the
start, and the courts have construed them since to encourage a wide-open "marketplace of
ideas" (Head et al., 1998).
The legal literature describes the clashes that religious broadcasters struggled with, and the regulations they encountered, while asserting their First and Fourteenth Amendment rights with the FCC. Doubly protected by the freedoms of speech and religion, religious webmasters and stations owned by religious groups have attempted to claim near-immunity from FCC requirements; however, they are subject to the same general regulations as any other broadcaster. Nonetheless, because of previous Supreme Court decisions regarding religion and broadcasting, such as Murdock v. Pennsylvania, Hernandez v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue, Follett v. McCormick, Lemon v. Kurtzman, and Sherbert v. Verner, they regard their rights of religious freedom (from any government action) as absolute. Though the FCC has held religious licensees to the same standards as all broadcasters, it has resisted close monitoring of all licensees, religious and non-religious.

However, the Commission has had a long history of wrangling with religious broadcasters dating back to the inception of radio. One of the more celebrated cases, previously examined by Howard and Ogles (1984), was that of Father Coughlin. Few subjects in recent years have brought greater public attention to constitutional law than that of religious expression, particularly the work of the televangelist. Evangelical broadcasters, notably Jim Bakker (PTL-Heritage Village v. FCC-1979) and Jimmy Swaggart (Jimmy Swaggart Ministries v. Board of Equalization of California-1990) have traded charges not only on the air but also in court.

Legal scholar Robert O’Neil argues that the special nature of religious expression calls for a degree of greater protection in opposition to forms of governmental judgement that would not be suitable for other forms of speech (O’Neil, 1989). One of the most
noteworthy cases that informs this study of Web users' views on church fund-raising was the federal investigation by the FCC of Jim and Tammy Bakker's PTL Television Ministry. Hosted by one of the most successful media ministers of his time, the Reverend James O. Bakker, an ordained Assemblies of God evangelist, founded a religious media empire that broadcast on "215 television stations in the United States, to more than 20 million people daily" (Armstrong, 1979). In 1979, the PTL Television Network became embroiled in a bitter legal controversy over its television fund raising. "The case involved a unique combination of First Amendment freedom of religion clauses and freedom of press issues and remains a renowned case for televangelists almost twenty years later" (Laney, 1997a, p. 38). On January 18, 1979, the Charlotte Observer, the newspaper serving the PTL's headquarters city of Charlotte, North Carolina, reported that the PTL had diverted $337,00.00 in contributions to uses other than those for which the funds had been specifically raised. "The newspaper alleged Bakker had sought donations from viewers to build a Korean PTL mission, that $281,000 was in turn earmarked for that purpose and sent in by a viewer, but not one dollar of that money was ever sent to South Korea" (Albert, 1980, p. 782). It was further alleged that Bakker had asked viewers for money to build a transmitter in Cyprus, that $56,000 was later received for that purpose in response to his pleas, but that the transmitter was never constructed. The Charlotte Observer charged that instead of spending the money for purposes represented on the air, Bakker used the Korea and Cyprus contributions to pay rapidly accumulating bills in America. "PTL was described as debt-ridden and mired in financial and management crises" (Hadden & Shupe, 1988, p. 48).
In response to that published report, the FCC launched a preliminary investigation into the PTL fund-raising program aired over the Canton, Ohio, station WJAN-TV. WJAN-TV became the focal point of the FCC investigation for three reasons:

1. It was licensed to a nonprofit religious organization (PTL of Heritage Village Church and Missionary Fellowship, Inc) doing business as the PTL Television Network.
2. Reverend Bakker was president of both PTL and WJAN-TV.
3. WJAN-TV broadcast the PTL Club programs that had featured the fund-raising appeals involving the Korean and Cyprus projects (Albert, 1980, p. 789).

Although the FCC does not assert jurisdiction over religious broadcasting networks per se, the operations of PTL and WJAN-TV were closely intertwined.

They share officers and directors; WJAN-TV shared office space with PTL in Charlotte; WJAN's mailing address was PTL Television Network, Charlotte, NC; some WJAN-TV records of fund-raising broadcasts were kept in Charlotte and not in Canton; two of the three day-to-day managers of WJAN resided in Charlotte rather than in Canton; PTL provided the funds to buy WJAN-TV in the first place; and PTL supplied the programming aired over WJAN that was called into question. (Albert, 1980, p. 800)

On March 12, 1979, FCC investigators arrived at the PTL and WJAN-TV offices in Charlotte to begin the investigation into the published reports of wrongdoing in the Charlotte Observer. They were neither permitted to interview the officers and employees they sought nor allowed access to pertinent records and videotape recording of PTL fund-
raising aired. Three days later, the FCC in Washington ordered WJAN to make all requested records and personnel available immediately. This order was so urgent that the FCC telegraphed it to WJAN. WJAN petitioned the Commission to reconsider the order (Albert, 1980, p. 800).

On March 30, 1979, the full Commission issued two decisions. First, it denied WJAN’s Petition for Reconsideration and ordered it to cooperate fully in the Commission’s investigation. Second, it designated the whole matter for closed hearing before an Administrative Law Judge. PTL and WJAN sought judicial review and invalidation of the FCC’s telegraphic order, but those suits were dismissed by the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. During this period, Reverend Bakker railed against the FCC’s attempted investigation on his television program. He called the FCC and the Charlotte Observer “agents of the devil.” He referred to the FCC attorney with primary responsibility for the case as an “agent of Satan” and “handmaidens of Satan” (Albert, 1980, p. 804). PTL-Heritage Village vigorously protested that the FCC lacked jurisdiction in the case. It argued unsuccessfully that, rather than being an investigation of their television broadcasting station WJAN-TV for wire fraud violations, the Commission’s inquiry was in reality intruding into protected PTL church activities, and therefore was barred by the free exercise of religion guarantee of the First Amendment (Albert, 1980, pp. 810-818).

In the months that followed, the American public saw a soap opera movie more bizarre and sensational than anything done in a Hollywood script. “Investigations were launched by the IRS, the FBI, the Justice Department, the Postal Service, the North Carolina Tax Commission, and the United States Congress” (Ward, 1994, p. 109). In the
end, Bakker became the tragicomic star of a humiliating public trial, and was sentenced to 45 years (later reduced to eight) for his financial misconduct (Ward, 1994).

The Bakker scandal rocked the world of mediated religion. However, before the controversy had died down, another highly visible televangelist was caught up in a sexual scandal. The case of Assemblies of God evangelist Jimmy Swaggart that bears on this research is Jimmy Swaggart Ministries v. Board of Equalization of California (1990), because it resulted in the payment of sales tax on products assumed by religious broadcasters to be non-taxable. The sale of resource materials is a source of considerable revenue production for these ministries to generate funds to evangelize unconverted television viewers, as the Swaggart case bears record.

The reported income for Jimmy Swaggart Ministries in 1982 was about $45 million dollars. Swaggart was on 223 TV stations in the United States and claimed to have about one million persons on his mailing list. Two-thirds of those who contributed to Swaggart sent in less than ten dollars per month; the average giving was about $45 per person a year. Swaggart said that about 95 percent of his support came from churchgoers. Of his $45 million income in 1982, he spent about $38 million--more than 80 percent, just keeping his programs on the air, that is, on production and distribution. For every two dollars contributed to feed the poor, he spent another dollar buying television time. However, thanks to his TV income, Swaggart said he was able to “feed 20,000 children a day in poor parts of the world and to build churches in those areas.” He regularly operated on 200 stations outside of the United States (Fore, 1987). The Swaggart case as it relates to tax exemption status has implications for religious organizations engaged in product sales and fund-raising activities on the Web.
The United States Supreme Court held that a state’s nondiscriminatory imposition of sales and use tax on religious organization’s sales of religious materials did not violate the Free Exercise or Establishment Clauses. Jimmy Swaggart’s fund raising success did not go unnoticed by the State of California. Jimmy Swaggart Ministries sold religious books, cassette tapes, records, and non-religious merchandise worth $1,943,503.00 to residents of California between 1974 and 1981. Approximately 12 percent of the sales of religious and non-religious merchandise were sold to residents of California through mail orders and were shipped from Jimmy Swaggart Ministries headquartered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. “At the time of the sales, Ministries was a religious organization affiliated with the Assemblies of God Church and was recognized a nonprofit religious organization under Louisiana Laws and by the Internal Revenue Service” (Paschall, 1990, p. 163)

Jimmy Swaggart Ministries asserted that donations often were mixed with payments for religious items and that the separation of sales receipts from donations would be burdensome. Eventually, a unanimous Supreme Court, in an opinion delivered by Justice O’Connor, concluded that the sales and use tax imposed on Ministries did not violate either the Free Exercise Clause or the Establishment Clause. The Court rejected the Ministries’ claim stating that the use of order forms and prices made separation possible and necessary for other purposes. Thus, the Court found no basis for determining that there was excessive government intervention in the free flow of religious broadcasting and ministry as Jimmy Swaggart Ministries claimed (Paschall, 1990, p. 167).
In its free exercise of religion argument, Ministries relied on Murdock v. Pennsylvania and Follet v. McCormick. These cases arose from challenges by Jehovah’s Witnesses regarding license fees on all persons canvassing or soliciting within a city. The U.S. Supreme Court held that taxes in Murdock and Follett to be unconstitutional violations of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Free Exercise Clause rights. Jimmy Swaggart Ministries argued unsuccessfully that these decisions extended to the California sales and use tax as burdens on the “evangelical distribution of religious materials” (Paschall, 1990, p. 171). The Supreme Court held that:

The California sales and use tax did not impose a constitutionally significant burden on Ministries’ religious practices and belief, nor was the State of California required granting an exemption to Ministries under the Free Exercise Clause. Based upon the above the Supreme Court denied Jimmy Swaggart Ministries’ appeal for a refund of the tax ($106,465.09), and the judgement of the California Court of Appeals was affirmed. (Paschall, 1990, p. 171).

The language of the Religion Clauses has been described as at best unclear, providing mixed signals to Courts and governing bodies as well as religious broadcasters.

The Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses, although intertwined, are frequently considered separately by the Supreme Court. Different standards have been developed for each Clause. Vacillation between neutrality and preferred position has contributed to erratic development of the standard. The result has been three standards for the Free Exercise Clause:

1. Absolute immunity for religious beliefs and no immunity for conduct.
2. Preferred position for religion with immunity for some forms of religious conduct.

3. Balancing test in which a compelling state interest can justify infringement on religious liberty (Paschall, 1990, p. 175).

This inconsistent redefining of such a fundamental principle poses legal problems for the legislature seeking to enact laws that are constitutional. Likewise, it leaves religious organizations uncertain as to their rights and obligations. Legal historian Stephen Paschall has asserted:

If one purpose of legal systems is to permit people to know with reasonable certainty if their actions conform to the law, the vacillation of the Court on the Religious Clauses marks a failure to provide reasonable certainty. Thus, the Supreme Court may become entangled in the same types of analysis that it has characterized as excessive government entanglement in religion (Paschall, 1990, p. 184).

The cases presented in this chapter represent high-profile legal entanglements for leaders of religious organizations. The review of legal scholarship serves to broaden this study in the area of religious users' views and attitudes regarding church fund-raising on religious Web sites. The impact of these scandals may have diminished within the last twenty years and may not influence religious Web users in the area of financial support for ministries. This study is enriched by legal scholarship in determining religious Web user reactions to the monetary appeals on some Christian Web sites hosted by religious organizations.
Summary of the Literature

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to this study. This literature included the study's theoretical perspective and related studies on media, religion, and Internet usage. This section synthesized selected literature on uses and gratifications paradigm into a framework useful for identifying relationships between the current uses and gratifications concepts, dominant extensions of the uses and gratifications paradigm, and the other disciplines contributing to uses and gratifications theory, with a particular emphasis on media gratifications. Uses and gratification perspectives provided the theoretical framework on which both the bulk of religious media research and a growing number of Internet studies, as well as this study, are grounded. Media system dependency formulation, in particular that strand of research that addresses the motivations to seek out religious mediated information to meet needs, thereby fostering a stronger dependency on the medium, informs this study. Religious Web site usage as a possible extension of religious uses and gratifications was postulated in this chapter. Critical/cultural studies/approaches to the role of religion as it struggles for supremacy in the battle for meaning in society were also reviewed to enrich the study. Mass communication literature relevant to media gratifications supports the underlying purpose of the study.

This chapter reviewed the criticisms of uses and gratification theory, then explored the early studies by Harold Lasswell in the 1940's on the structure and function of communications in society. The work of Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, (1974) and Rosengren (1974), were detailed as well as how they informed this study. Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Milton DeFleur's (1976) extension of uses and gratifications into media
system dependency formulation in 1976, and Alan Rubin and Sven Windahl’s (1986) development of the uses and dependency model in 1986, were also examined for application to religious uses and gratifications sought by users of religious Web sites.

Uses and gratifications perspectives are borrowed from the areas of sociology and psychology. Uses and gratifications theory is in an alliance with the grand process of analyzing human motivation contributed to by organizational theorists, psychologists and educationalists, and concerning lower and higher orders, cognitive (intellectual) and affective (emotional) dimensions, activity and passivity and external and internal responses (Watson & Hill 1997, p. 239). Psychology provided explanations for behavior, motivation and needs which is applicable to the cognitive need to seek out religious media to satisfy information gratifications.

Growing interest in the World Wide Web by communication researchers (Bates & King, 1995; Kaye, 1996; McLaughlin, 1996; Bates et al., 1997; Elmer, 1997; Laney, 1997b; Walther et al., 1997; Kehoe et al., 1998; King, 1998; McMillan & Downes, 1998; McMillan, 1998; Murphy, 1998c; and Sheehan & Hoy, 1998) may result in a revival and an extension of the uses and gratifications paradigm. Complementary studies in the quantitative and qualitative tradition were reviewed as well. The historical and legal approaches in this study were intended to focus primarily on media (radio/television) and religion, examining various uses and gratifications. Additionally, the review of legal scholarship serves to broaden this study in the area of religious users’ views and attitudes regarding church fund-raising on religious Web sites.

Chapter III will describe the methodology of this study, including research questions, analytical concepts and research design, survey instrument, sample and
population, self-selection, survey design, survey execution, data handling and analysis, and conclusions.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Methodology

In the last chapter, religious uses and gratifications were introduced as an explanation of media use among the consumers of mediated religion within society. A detailed study examining general aspects of religious uses and gratifications among Web users is useful to better understand the medium’s contribution to mediated religion. Consideration of uses and gratifications theory can help determine which method is most useful in examining motivations for Internet use in general and religious Web site usage in particular. Informing this study with uses and gratifications perspectives serves to focus attention upon the motivations of religious Web users, and the uses and gratifications that are derived through the use of Christian Web sites. Hamilton and Rubin’s (1992) seminal work in uses and gratifications among religious users of television detailed how religiosity affects Christian churchgoers’ motives for using television and their selection of program content. Religious uses and gratifications is consistent with uses and gratifications as a psychological communication perspective and may explain media choices and consequences among users of religious Web sites. Additionally, Hamilton and Rubin (1992) inform this research through their study which developed six measures of gratifications associated with television: “enjoyment, substitution, moral guidance, avoidance, information, and voyeurism” (p. 674). Abelman (1988) studied religious television viewers’ motivations for watching the religious talk show The 700 Club hosted by televangelist Pat Robertson. From that study emerged
certain measures of gratifications such as “reaction, entertainment, faith, habit, information, and escape,” an approach more directly associated with this exploratory study of Christian Web sites (Abelman, 1988, p. 117). Additionally, new studies point to the need for further study of the gratifications Internet users are seeking (Murphy, 1998; King, 1998; Beinhoff, 1997; Lin, 1997; and Kaye, 1996).

However, while examining Web users, these above-mentioned studies did not build a bridge between media uses and gratifications and religious gratifications or the motivations for religious Web use, which is the objective of this research. Although this study is exploratory, it is grounded in the literature of various disciplines that have informed communication studies. Key descriptive definitions for reflection and analysis have emerged from the literature. Where the literature has been silent on specific aspects of Christian Web usage that this study examines, modifications of existing definitions were developed by the researcher to aid in clarification, and are limited to the scope of this study. The definitions of terminology that is germane to the methods of this study are located in a glossary at Appendix A.

**Research Questions**

As an exploratory study, this survey will attempt to develop a baseline for additional research and greater understanding of religious Web site uses and gratifications and the development of future testable hypotheses. While uses and gratifications perspectives inform this research study, the Web is new and the systematic examination of religious Web site usage has not been conducted in much detail.
Conceptually it is challenging to make predictions regarding the application of uses and gratifications to religious Web site usage. In this type of exploratory venture, research questions are most appropriate. Therefore, the overarching descriptive research question is “What motivates users to visit religious Web sites, particularly Christian Web sites?” This question guides the development of the following subordinate research questions. Each research question is listed below with an explanation of the type of information that will help to answer the research questions posed.

Research Question 1. The Christian Web User

Who is visiting Christian Web sites on the Internet?

This question seeks to systematically determine who is attracted to Christian Web sites. Where possible, the demographics of these Christian Web users are compared to other surveys of Web use to determine how representative the sample is of the general Web population.

Research Question 2. Religious Web Uses and Gratifications

Why do the respondents visit Christian Web sites on the Internet?

The answer to this question provides a context within which the other research questions within this study will be examined. It is important to understand the motivations of Christian Web sites users in order to understand the uses and gratifications sought through Christian Web site usage.

Research Question 3. Reinforcement of Beliefs

Is there a relationship between seeking reinforcement for personal motives and Christian Web site usage?
Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) noted that people use media to “...satisfy their needs and to achieve their goals.” Cultural/critical theorists Williams (1975), Buddenbaum (1981) and Hoover and Venturelli (1996), to cite only a portion of the literature, suggest that religious media use serves the personal motives of the religious users. This question seeks to determine if the same patterns hold for users of Christian Web sites as it does for religious television and radio.

**Research Question 4. The Faith Factor**

*Is there a relationship between Christian Web site usage and religious conversion?*

Faith as a conceptual dimension has been used in previous religious radio and television uses and gratifications studies (France, 1955; Johnstone, 1972; Buddenbaum, 1981; Rubin, 1984; Abelman, 1987; Fore, 1987; Frankl, 1987; Abelman, 1988; Hamilton and Rubin, 1992; Hoover and Venturelli, 1996; Stout and Buddenbaum, 1996; and Warren, 1997). This question addresses the "faith factor" or the relationship between the user's personal, spiritual, or religious conversion experience and the usage of Christian Web sites. The role of the Web in conversion has not been extensively documented to date. The present study seeks to build a baseline for this strand of research as it relates to the religious Web gratifications being sought by some of the browsers of these sites.

**Research Question 5. Seeking Companionship**

*Is there a relationship between Christian Web site usage and seeking companionship with others who are spiritually-minded?*
This question seeks to determine if users of Christian Web sites are seeking companionship with others of similar faith. This research question addresses the concept of social utility, which has been previously discussed in regards to social integrative needs that humans possess. Christian Web use may provide space or a community for conversation about things that people have read, seen, or heard as topics for discussion when talking with others (Dominick, 1996, p. 51).

**Research Question 6. User Media Intentions**

What is the relationship between Christian Web site usage and continued usage of religious media?

This question seeks to address future religious media usage. As previously mentioned, religious programming has typically “called for action” on the part of the user of mediated religion. Respondents in this study were asked about their intentions and behavior regarding religious media usage within the next 12 months after visiting religious Web sites.

**Analytical Concepts**

While research in the area of Web uses and gratifications continues to evolve, informed by the studies of Murphy (1998c) and King (1998), conceptualizations which embrace religious Web use based on extending the uses and gratification paradigm is explored in this study. Conceptually this study parallels the existing uses and gratifications studies that examined religious radio and television users. While Christian Web sites are distinct from religious radio and television in many ways, Christian Web sites are similar in the variety of content available to the user. As such, the uses and
gratifications studies of religious radio and television methodologically and conceptually provide an appropriate framework for measuring the motivations of Christian Web users.

The support for instrument use in this exploratory study was guided by Abelman’s (1987) matrix of six factors that he developed to determine religious television viewing motives (Abelman, 1987, pp. 298-299). Abelman's (1987) examination of religious television usage found viewers who used religious television as a source of information, and those who watched television as a source of entertainment or out of habit. Abelman (1987, 1988) observed that the entertainment-motivated user was more concerned with the medium than the program content. However, for users who were motivated by information, the content was important and satisfied user religious needs. Abelman (1988) noted that information type gratifications are more closely associated with certain religious programs and the result is an increase in overall viewing of these religious programs by information seekers. For this research, the items which measured uses such as (reaction, information, entertainment, faith, habit, and escape) were modified utilizing the King (1998) and Murphy (1998) studies to reflect Web usage as opposed to television use.

**Research Design**

The goal of this research design was to determine the gratifications being sought by users of Christian Web sites. Examination of the user's motivations for visiting Christian church sites on the World Wide Web was the focus of this exploratory research. The uses and gratifications tradition employs survey research to measure respondent gratification, by asking the respondent a series of questions. Uses and gratifications research traditionally employs a Likert-type scale to measure the respondent's degree of
agreement or disagreement with the item, typically ranging from one to five, however, some studies utilize more precise intervals range from one to nine. This study employed a Likert scale; as an exploratory study, the conventional one to five interval described in uses and gratification literature was deemed appropriate with a value of one indicating strong agreement and five representing strong disagreement. As discussed in the literature review, survey research has been employed by communication researchers prior to Harold Lasswell (1948), and is widely used within the behavioral sciences. A major objective of survey research is to obtain a sample that is as representative of the general population as possible. When a sample is representative of the population, the results may be generalizable to the population from which the sample was drawn.

An issue for online studies is the difficulty of generalizing the results to the population. Where survey research is seeking to target online niche users, such as Christian Web site users, online studies directed toward small, unique users provide researchers with valuable data. Since a list of Christian Web users is not available to survey, a very large sample would be required in order to gather sufficient responses to conduct analysis, such a sample would be extremely costly. Online research allows the researcher to gather a sample of the target population for a fraction of the cost associated with standard sampling techniques, such as telephone or mail surveys.

Since online studies by their very design operate in a dynamic environment of self-selection on the part of the respondent, the survey researcher seeks to make the sample as representative as possible. Based upon research traditions employing exploratory studies (Kaye, 1996; King, 1998; McMillan & Downes, 1998; McMillian,
1998; Murphy, 1998c; and Sheehan & Hoy, 1998), a minimum target of 450 completed surveys was deemed necessary for purposes of analysis and further study of this topic.

The targeted user of this study is the visitor to the Christian church or ministry Web site. In an effort to reach this niche target audience, it was decided to solicit participation in the survey through Church Web sites. While this definition may initially appear at first glance to eliminate many categories, such was not the case. An issue with such self-reporting is the inability for the researcher to determine if the site is a bonafide church or ministry. For example, many Christian television and radio stations identify themselves as either a ministry, a church or both. Additionally, some large churches also own and operate media ministries as extensions of their ministries. For purposes of this study, targeted sites that were listed in online directories, such as GOSHEN Net (Global Online Service Helping Evangelize the Nations) or media publications, as Christian church or ministries were utilized. In an effort to make the sample as representative as possible, as many Christian denominations as possible were selected. Additionally, every fourth site was selected in an effort to provide a balanced target listing from three independent sources, online directories, and two religious media directories. The sample of 1,101 sites was drawn from online Christian Web directories, and Web addresses listed in Christian media directories, such as Charisma and Ministries Today, and National Religious Broadcasters. King (1998) and Murphy (1998c) in their Web studies found that in order to gather a minimum of 450 completed surveys, over 900 solicitations to webmasters, requesting posting of the survey on their Web sites was necessary. In an effort to maximize respondent exposure to the survey, King (1998) and Murphy (1998c) placed notices within television and radio trade publications. In this exploratory study,
advertising in trade publications was not employed because a single Christian church trade publication does not exist. While trade publications exist for Christian music and television, church webmasters are not the target audience for these publications. Instead efforts were taken to maximize exposure to the survey by increasing the number of solicitations and attempting to include as many Christian denominations as possible.

As such, 1,101 Christian church and ministry sites were contacted, 40 solicitations were returned due to "failed mail," or "incorrect addresses." Eventually, Christian webmasters from 1,061 churches in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand, (the New Zealand Web site belongs to a Canadian-based ministry) which matched the target users, listed in GOSHEN Net (Global Online Service Helping Evangelize the Nations) representing 45 Christian denominations, received an invitation to host the survey on their Web sites. After the webmasters acknowledged their desire to participate in the study, the online survey was forwarded by e-mail and they were contacted by e-mail to ensure that they had received the file and that the link was activated. Of those webmasters agreeing to participate, many expressed appreciation for the study and requested a summary of the results when the study was completed. Of the 1,061 sites contacted, 85 webmasters initially agreed to participate in the study, and ultimately 40 Christian Web sites were linked to the survey. While a failure to respond or reply may infer a refusal, it must also be understood that many webmasters do not check their sites frequently, particularly the smaller churches. In some cases the webmasters responded favorably but failed to install the link due to a "lack of time" or "technical ability" (Personal communications, June 8, 1998).
The 40 Christian Web sites that finally participated in the study represent 27 states within the United States, with one in Canada, and one Canadian-based ministry located in Auckland, New Zealand also participating in the survey. The participating Web sites compare favorably with the target Christian Web users in size, ethnicity, economics, and religious practices. A chart detailing the characteristics of the participating Christian Web sites is presented in Appendix B.

Sample and Population

The target populations for this study were visitors to Christian Web sites. The study explored the motivations of users of Christian Web sites that frequented religious sites identified as Christian churches or ministries.

While direct mail or random-digit dialing techniques are alternative survey instrument delivery methods, mailing list and phone rosters are usually the private property of information brokers, if such lists are available at all for this target population. Access to this material tends to be restricted, costly, and may not be current. Additionally, direct mail and telephone surveys may not specifically target the intended user of religious Web sites, in the same fashion that an online survey method allows for. With the target population consisting of users of religious Web sites, a survey posted on religious Web sites represented an appropriate delivery system.

Random sampling is desirable for purposes of generalizability to the population. This statistical capability is why random sampling is widely used in surveys. However, for the purposes of this study, generalizability to the population was not the objective, the whole purpose of this survey is to collect data specifically on Christian Web site users.
and have confidence that the results are representative of the targeted population (Stemple & Westley, 1989).

The servers of religious Web sites on the Internet were searched in an effort to obtain a detailed directory of Christian Web sites that targeted the user in this study. Multiple search engines such as Lycos, Yahoo, Hot Box, Cross Search, and Christianity Net were examined. While the other search engines offered lists of religious sites, Goshen Net offered the largest Christian Web database directory. The Goshen Net describes itself as "a comprehensive Christian Denominational Directory" (Goshen, 1998).

According to the June 10, 1998 online Goshen Denominational Directory, there are 4,032 international church Web sites listed in their directory, representing 45 various denominations: African Methodist Episcopal, Advent Christian, Adventist, Anglican, Apostolic, Assemblies of God, Association of Vineyard Churches, Baptist, Bible Church, Brethren, Calvary Chapel, Catholic, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Christian Church/Church of Christ, Church of Christ, Church of God-Anderson, IN, Church of God-Cleveland, TN, Church of God in Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Churches Online, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Eastern Orthodox Church, Episcopal, Evangelical Covenant, Evangelical Free, Foursquare, Greek Orthodox Church, Independent Unaffiliated, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, Lutheran, Mennonite, Messianic, Methodist, Orthodox, Pentecostal/Charismatic, Presbyterian, Quaker/Friends, Reformed, Russian Orthodox Church, Salvation Army, United Church of Christ, Wesleyan, and the World Wide Church of God.
To improve the study's validity and reduce bias on the part of the researcher, an online Web directory of predominately Christian Web sites directed toward the target user was utilized. It should be noted that neither a truly comprehensive religious directory, nor Christian online directory exists. For example, GOSHEN fails to list in their self-proclaimed "comprehensive" Christian directory, the Church of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), or the Jehovah's Witnesses, denominations that identify themselves as Christian.

Christian Web sites that submitted their name for inclusion in the 1998 Charisma Networking Directory were cross-referenced against Goshen Net. Additionally, religious broadcasters that are members of the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB), who operate both radio/television and church Web sites in the United States and Canada, are listed separately in the 1998 National Religious Broadcasters Media Directory and were also cross-referenced with Goshen Net.

The investment in terms of time and money for publishing an online survey on the Web are low, compared with the costs associated with either telephone or mail survey methods. Such savings highlight one of the strengths of the World Wide Web as an exceptional opportunity to collect data for communication survey researchers. Additionally, Web surveys can provide interactivity and allow respondents personal feedback. However, as a comprehensive centralized directory of Christian webmasters was unavailable, to glean 1,061 addresses, each Christian church Web site was visited and the address of the webmaster manually checked for an e-mail address to forward a solicitation. This task involved approximately 400 hours of labor on the part of the researcher.
Survey Instrument

This research project consisted of three components: a focus group, a pretest, and the online survey. First, a focus group consisting of a non-probability anonymous voluntary survey presented to a focus group of twenty-two consenting adults, undergraduate students primarily located in the Department of Communications and the Arts. The session was conducted at Lee University, a Christian liberal arts university in Cleveland, Tennessee, on June 4, 1998. The focus group was designed to improve the reliability and validity of the online survey instrument from the standpoint of a primarily homogeneous religious population, approximating the largest element of the target population in the sample that visits Christian Web sites. Secondly, a pre-test consisting of a non-probability anonymous voluntary survey was presented to a group of ten consenting adults, undergraduate students primarily located in the College of Communications. The pre-test conducted at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, was conducted on June 9, 1998. This session was utilized to improve instrument reliability and validity of the online survey instrument from the point of view of a predominately heterogeneous religious population, approximating an element of the target population in the sample that visits Christian Web sites. Finally, an online self-administered questionnaire linked to participating church Web sites in the United States, and Canada was placed online.

The methodology for the use of human subjects for focus groups and online survey was approved through the Internal Review Board on Research Involving Human Subjects at the University of Tennessee. All subjects completed a consent form acknowledging the purpose of the research and informing them that the researcher would
take every precaution to ensure their confidentiality. However, the subjects were made aware that complete confidentiality could not be guaranteed, due to the presence of others in the focus groups and the potential for intrusion into information networks. Their willingness to participate online and their signatures of informed consent in the focus groups acknowledged that their participation was totally voluntary and that they could decline to answer any question or terminate participation at any time. The goal of this notification process was to eliminate any concerns of coercion on the part of the researcher and put participants at ease. It was hoped that group members would feel more comfortable in answering and responding candidly about the survey instrument, resulting in a more reliable instrument, if the threat of duress was reduced.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the motivations for usage of religious Web sites by identifying the uses and gratifications of Christian Web sites users and whether these gratifications influence their use of religious Web sites in specific and religious media in general. The format and design of the four-section survey instrument was influenced by the uses and gratifications literature discussed in this study in regards to the type, and style of items utilized, as well as methods of analysis employed. The uses and gratification studies previously mentioned provided the questions and measurement items. Additionally, items from King’s (1998) and Murphy’s (1998) survey of participants in King’s local television and Murphy’s national radio station Web site studies, which were modified to include religious media use generated three survey items: "About how much time per week do you normally spend browsing the Internet, in general?" Also "About how much time per week do you normally spend browsing religious Web sites?; and "When did you first visit a religious Web site?"
The first section utilized 11 items addressing religious media use, which consisted of Web as well as religious television and radio usage-(see Appendix C for specific question wording). Additionally, the first section addressed religious conversion, asking, “Have you ever had a personally spiritual or religious conversion experience?”

The second part of the survey employed 12 items that measured respondent’s motivations for visiting religious Web sites in general. For example, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “I allow my spiritual/religious beliefs to influence my selection of program content” or “I am attempting to explore my faith,” or “I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded.” The range of respondent options varied from 1-strongly agree to 5-strongly disagree, on a scale tailored after the Abelman (1987, 1988) studies. The full text of all the questions is available in Appendix C.

The third part of the survey contained the religious gratifications sought by the respondent while visiting the Web site where the survey was posted and their intentions for the next 12 months as a result of visiting that Web site. The 27 items identified to measure motivations for visiting religious Web sites were adapted from a few studies exploring motivations for religious media usage (see Appendix C for specific question wording). Johnstone’s (1972) early study of religious radio audiences, employing Likert scales, examined the use of religious radio by Lutherans as well as their motivations for religious radio use, a three items were adapted from Johnstone’s study (1971, pp. 91-96), such as "About how much time per week do you normally spend watching religious shows on TV?"; and "About how much time per week do you normally spend listening to religious programs on the radio?" Buddenbaum’s (1981) study contributed survey items,
9, 10, 44, and 45, listed in Appendix C. Buddenbaum, employed both categorical and interval level data in her examination of the characteristics and media-related needs of the audience for religious television (Buddenbaum, 1981, pp. 266-268). A modification of Ableman’s (1988) television related survey items, used to measure the motivations for viewing Pat Robertson’s The 700 Club, was required for religious Web use. Abelman successfully employed Likert scale data as interval data, to measure religious television uses and gratifications sought by the audience members (Abelman, 1988, p. 115). Additionally, Abelman employed a single open-ended question, which was modified from religious television to the Web for this study, item 23, which asked respondents to share their motivations for visiting religious Web sites. A total of four open-ended items exploring user motivations and gratifications sought were incorporated, which yielded a wealth of qualitative data; where applicable, qualitative data was utilized to provide additional explanation of possible user motivations in an attempt to clarify underlying factors associated with Christian Web usage.

Future intentions regarding religious media use within the next 12 months was measured with two items from the Rubin (1984, pp. 69-77) study of ritualized and instrumental television viewing, (items 40, and 41 in Appendix C). Abelman’s (1987, pp. 295-296) survey of religious television uses and gratifications produced nine items which were utilized to measure motivations for usage of Christian television and the gratifications derived from the users, (for items 11, 18, 19, 20, 24, 26, 32, 34, and 36, see Appendix C). Gallup and Princeton Religious Research Center (1981, p. 43) studies provided six demographic items to identify those who use religious media, (items 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, and 58-see Appendix C).
The fourth part of the questionnaire was demographic and Web-use related, requesting information in ten areas: gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, education, occupation, income, religious denomination, state, and the location of the Web site that led the respondent to the survey. Item 58 addressed religious denominations; this item was borrowed from Gallup's study. However, Gallup recognized some denominations that were not part of this targeted audience, for example, Judaism and Mormonism. This study does not presume that users of Christian Web sites must be Christians, however, Christian denominations are the targeted population. Additionally, Gallup studies represent randomized samples whose results are generalizable. Gallup makes no distinction amongst the major denominations, and places the 900 Christian denominations within 17 categories. However, the history of mediated religion, as described in the literature review has been strongly associated with evangelical and Pentecostal denominations. This study examined the 45 Christian denominations listed in the GOSHEN directory, the majority of which are fundamentalist or evangelical. Historically, these groups have been in the vanguard of appropriating communications technology for religious purposes, therefore this study seeks to specifically identify as many denominations as possible to determine if this pattern hold true in regards to Christian Web usage.

Self-Selection

As stated earlier, since there is no centralized registry of all religious users of the WWW and religious users are spread out all over the globe, it becomes quite difficult to select users of the entire religious Web population at random. Additionally, this study
targets the Christian Web users, therefore access to the entire religious Web population is not required. To simplify target population identification most surveys of the Internet focus on a particular region of users, which in this case is the United States and Canada, though surveys of European, Asian, and Oceanic users have also been conducted (Kehoe, Pitkow, & Morton, 1998, p. 8). Still, the question becomes how to contact users and get them to participate.

Self-selection occurs when the sample size and composition is defined by the respondents, as opposed to the sample being defined by the researcher. Participant-referral bias may occur when a set of members in the sample decides not to participate by selecting the response button on the informed consent page, “No, I do not wish to participate.” If the behavior of the respondents is biased, this selection reduces the ability of the results to generalize to the entire population. This decrease in the confidence of the survey occurs since the group of Christian Web site visitors that decided not to participate may differ in some manner from the group that chose to participate. Kehoe, Pitkow, and Morton (1998) recognized that “self-selection occurs in nearly all surveys of people” (p. 8). Therefore, Web surveys, like other alternative survey methods such as telephone or mail-based surveys, involves self-selection.

Likewise, in this survey, some churches did not respond to the e-mail solicitation. Self-selection bias occurred here as well. Granted, with a self-defined sample, generalizability of the results remains problematic. This study targeted Christian Web user who opted to link to the survey form and invest the time and effort to answer the 61 questions. Thus, the potential for self-selection bias exists. While these issues are recognized in this method of survey research, they cannot be eliminated. Concerning
self-selection issues, researchers, such as the Graphic, Visualization, & Usability Center (GVU), argue that the validity of the online methodology is greater for studies that target precise populations (Kehoe, Pitkow, & Morton, 1998, King, 1998, Murphy, 1998c) as this study does by gathering data from Christian Web users.

The GVU researchers have conducted eight online surveys with responses from over 10,000 subjects around the world. As one of the leading research organizations involved in online surveys methodology, the GVU is an advocate for the operationalization of Web research as legitimate and defensible. While Kehoe, Pitkow, & Morton (1998) acknowledge the self-selection and sampling issues, they argue that the major concern is sampling. The GVU continues to employ a combination of strategies to mitigate these limitations, promotion and over-sampling. Through the use of a large advertising, and promotion campaigns, such as cash awards on the most prominent Web sites, as well as advertising placed in computer trade publications, the GVU has been able to increase their sample sizes. As an exploratory study, operating on a restricted budget, these strategies, while considered, were cost prohibitive, as sufficient data could be gathered through alternative methods. The Christian Web users survey was posted for and extended period of time and employed over-sampling to try and gather a larger sample. Over sampling is necessary to improve representation of user responses when target populations are very small, such as African-American Pentecostal denominations. An example of over-sampling consisted of sending an e-mail solicitation to all 15 versus every fourth Church of God In Christ Churches, a predominately African-American Pentecostal denomination, listed in the Goshen Directory. By employing this methodology the sample was more representative because some Church of God In Christ
members responded to the survey. The GVU employs oversampling effectively and has increased their number of respondents from the Third GVU Survey's, 23,000 to over "88,000 completed questionnaires," in the Seventh GVU Survey (Kehoe, Pitkow, & Morton, 1998, p. 10).

This study was informed by uses and gratification research, and as such emphasis is placed on the relationships and underlying factors for motivation for Christian Web site usage, as opposed to the development of generalizable conclusions about the population of all religious Web users. Additionally, the targeted sample are members of Christian denominations who have historically been the most motivated to use the technology, or early appropriation of communication technology for religious purposes. These are the users who are already visiting Christian ministry related sites, and that is the general population of interest.

As will be further described, steps were taken to ensure that this sample was representative of the target population, the Christian Web site user. As previously discussed, the demographics are compared in Chapter IV to other online studies to determine if this appears to be a representative sub-sample of Web users. Concerning religious Web sites, the link to the survey was the church or ministry Web site. As will be described, this link was how the vast majority of respondents found the study, with a high percentage able to identify by site domain, or church name, the site that lead them to the online survey. The literature suggests that no sample is perfect, however, this study appears to have sampled its target users based upon the available indicators. Therefore, it can be argued that the self-selection of the respondents and the non-random nature of this sample is mitigated to a certain extent. The success of the GVU studies argues that the
online survey method is valid and worthwhile for its ability to measure the responses of niche targeted audiences, such as this study of Christian Web users is designed to accomplish.

Survey Design

The researcher employed "S-Ware-Java Editor-Beta Release: WWW Survey Assistant" to create the survey instrument in late May 1998. "WWW Survey Assistant" allows a researcher without programming or Web-authoring skills to create World Wide Web surveys for the collection and distribution of information on-line. Survey Assistant builds the HTML document required to present the survey, and generated a sophisticated Common Gateway Interface (CGI) program to collect, manipulate, and present information, based upon information supplied by the researcher. The resulting survey software was specifically designed and written to overcome potential problems associated with survey research using the WWW (Schmidt, 1997b).

The focus groups conducted at Lee University and the University of Tennessee, as previously mentioned, were utilized to pre-test the instrument and the online methodology. In the final testing stage, approval for the survey was granted from the Office of Research, Compliances Section at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In accordance with the policies of the Internal Review Board on Research Involving Human Subjects, participation was restricted to adults, age 18 and older, and required a format to validate consent. A standardized informed consent page developed by Murphy (1998a) was employed, which stated that respondents were allowed to withdraw at any time (Appendix D). This was the first page survey respondents came to when they linked to
the survey from a Christian Web site or a search engine. The page concluded with a
"Yes, I would like to take the survey!" button that had to be selected to participate in the
survey. Choosing "Yes" implied informed consent. The key to informed consent is that
the respondent is informed that the online survey and the information they provide is
strictly voluntary, and that the respondent actively selects to continue to participate in the
study.

**Survey Execution**

The greatest challenge facing this study was the fact that the entire solicitation of
Christian Web sites was handled online, using e-mail as the sole survey solicitation
method. Since this was an exploratory study employing online methodologies, the
opportunity to examine the feasibility of online survey distribution presented itself. As
previously discussed, while, considered, neither direct mail nor any other form of media
advertising was employed in the course of this study; participation was based completely
on responses to an electronic solicitation from the researcher to the Christian
"webmaster/webmistress." The webmasters were provided with a colorful orange and
black "University of Tennessee College of Communications Religious Web Site Survey"
logo which was placed on the front of the participating Web sites. University of
Tennessee, Knoxville, doctoral candidates Reginald Murphy and Anne Cunningham
designed the graphic and modified it for this study (Appendix D).

The online survey questionnaires were distributed electronically to the
participating church Web sites and were linked to their sites. The survey was self-
selected by visitors to the church Web sites, thereby increasing the validity of the
responses, as these respondents tend to be highly motivated to participate and are capable of identifying their motivations. For example, many of the respondents wrote paragraph length responses to the open-ended questions. This method also provided uniform presentation of questions and avoided bias due to the presence of an interviewer (Stempel & Westley, 1989). Visitor participation was encouraged by ensuring respondents that "the ultimate goal of this very important project is to improve the effectiveness of the participating ministries in serving YOU!" (See Appendix C). The questionnaire contained 61 items and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Data collection took place during the period of June 14, 1998, through July 18, 1998.

The initial electronic solicitation went to 1,101 webmasters, the persons responsible for (creating and producing Web content, and site maintenance). Electronic solicitations were individually sent to avoid being rejected as “spam” or unsolicited bulk e-mail. Forty invitations never reached their intended users due to bad addresses, poor data input, or Internet service cancellation on the part of the user. From the 1,061 messages that arrived at the correct address, 85 Web sites initially agreed to participate. Instructions were sent to the webmasters on how to establish the link to the survey, and the link was usually activated within eight to twelve hours of receipt by the researcher once notified of the Web site's intent to participate in the study. Additionally, two reminders were provided if necessary, one by e-mail, the other telephonically. Despite initial enthusiasm and follow-ups, 45 webmasters declined to participate for a myriad of reasons. Some explanations ranged from lack of technical ability to other priorities. It should be noted that the majority of church webmasters in this study are volunteers for whom such an undertaking may be viewed with less enthusiasm than the full time staff.
church webmaster. Ultimately, 40 Christian Web sites participated in the study, with survey responses generated from 49 states, and several foreign countries. The survey responses represented a wide degree of diversity across denominations, regions, and nations (Table 3-1).

The software employed by the researcher, “World Wide Web Survey Assistant,” provided unauthorized access security protocols. These countermeasures protected the data from foreign servers and eliminated duplication of responses by survey participants. The software utilized for this study provided for response options to be required, which meant that if the data were left blank the questionnaire could not be submitted. After the pretest at Lee University, the survey was modified to a horizontal format to allow the majority of the items to display the responses, which allowed for faster submission. Additionally, the required response option was dropped for all demographic questions to reduce respondent fatigue. For questions associated with the pop-up menu that were not answered the default was “can’t really say” or “undecided,” which would be coded as “0.”

Data Handling

The participating Christian Web sites were notified on July 19, 1997 by e-mail to end promotion of the survey. An executive summary of the findings of the survey was
### Table 3-1
States of Religious Web Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>State/Country Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Oklahoma 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Oregon 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pennsylvania 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Rhode Island 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>South Carolina 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>South Dakota 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tennessee 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wash, D.C.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Texas 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Utah 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Virginia 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Washington 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wisconsin 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>West Virginia 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wyoming 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Australia 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Canada 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Egypt 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>El Salvador 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>England 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Estonia 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Finland 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Germany 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Guam-USA 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>India 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Indonesia 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Japan 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Malaysia 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Mexico 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>North Ireland 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>New Zealand 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Norway 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Puerto Rico-USA 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Senegal 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Singapore 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>South Africa 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Sweden 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total Valid N 912</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
provided to the participating sites on August 13, 1998 by e-mail. The total number of responses was 912, with respondents coming from 49 states, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the District of Columbia, as well as 21 countries.

Within the King (1998) and Murphy (1998) studies, various open-ended questions were added to the survey instrument to determine external validity in the sample. Respondents were asked to “Please type the Web site’s title (ex. GOSHEN) or the name of the Web site that lead you to this survey.” However, with open-ended questions, not every response matched the Christian Web sites participating in the survey. For example, some respondents marked “AOL-America Online,” as the site that led them to the survey, although AOL did not participate directly in the survey. With only nine respondents erroneously identifying the link to the survey as AOL, this issue was not problematic, however, it was noted in the discussion of the number of respondents who accurately identified the link that brought them to the survey in Chapter V.

Another method that King (1998) and Murphy (1998) employed was that of requesting the respondents to type in their state abbreviation, or city and country for those outside of the United States. For example, three respondents from outside of the United States and Canada listed countries and Christian Web sites that were not participating in the study. For example, respondents from the countries of India, Sweden, and Egypt responded to the survey but the Christian Web site link that they stated took them to the survey did not participate in the study. Perhaps respondents were on business or in school in the United States and just listed their home country as their address. Nonetheless, these three surveys were placed in the same categories as a duplicate submission and were not utilized for statistical analysis. By whatever means, these three
respondents found the survey without a readily-apparent Web link or search engine, a fact which, while intriguing, is beyond the scope of this current study.

Data Analysis

The data were read into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program for ease of editing and elimination of unnecessary columns, and then read as a file into SAS and SPSS for Windows. Numerous sets of variables were re-coded to correct for peculiarities of the Web survey software employed. Re-coding was executed with a series of automated "if then" type command statements in SPSS. This re-coding ensured that responses marked 1 equated with strongly agree, and that responses marked 5 equated with strongly disagree. Where categorical data was provided in the demographics section, non-responses were coded as 0. Some variables such as “When did you visit a religious Web site—Over one year ago” were displayed in the data set as one numerical higher than the true value, and were re-coded through SPSS’s subtraction program. The uses and gratifications items on the popup menu received values from 1 to 6, with 1 being the “choose from the following” default option. All “1’s” in this case were converted to missing values, and values 2-6 were adjusted to 1 to 5. Other open-ended items or typed responses had to be manually corrected. For example, item 59 in the demographic section asked the respondents to “Please type your state’s 2 letter abbreviation” (see Appendix C ). In numerous cases the abbreviation was mixed case, upper case, or lower case. For ease of analysis all abbreviations were manually adjusted to upper case. Additionally, some open text fields resulted in spacing problems, as several respondents wrote extremely lengthy comments. In one case a respondent utilized profanity and
exalted the work of Satan, however, the case was retained as the respondent completed the survey. The profane remarks consisted of qualitative data that were not utilized. This case, while explaining the motivation of a single respondent, is not representative of remarks made by the overwhelming majority of the sample. In a single instance a duplicate response submission was observed and eliminated, in addition to the three cases previously mentioned. Additionally, some qualitative information was lost when some free text comments exceeded the space parameters.

The largest number of missing values was found among the 27 uses and gratifications items on the survey. Perhaps as a result of the personal nature of the items or respondent fatigue some of the questions were skipped over as they proceeded to other sections of the survey. However, valid N's for each variable type are reported, where possible, in the analysis in Chapter-IV.

The primary statistical tools utilized in this study were chi square test, crosstabs, Kendall's Tau-b, Cronbach's Alpha, Spearman's rank order correlation, and rotated factor analysis. These methods are standard procedure in uses and gratifications literature, (Abelman, 1988; Hamilton and Rubin, 1992); however, factor analysis is open to criticism. Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991) and Long (1997) argued that factor analysis is "not truly statistical, but more artistic interpretation." (p. 110) Additionally, Long (1997) argued that factor analysis requires interval data and that Likert scale data, which are commonly used in social science research, provides ordinal data. Mitchell and Jolley (1996) described interval scale data as

Data for which equal numerical intervals represent equal psychological intervals.

That is, the difference between scoring a "2" and a "1" and the difference between
scoring a "7" and a "6" is the same not only in terms of scores (both are a
difference of 1), but also in terms of the actual amount of the psychological
characteristic being measure. Interval scale measures allow us to compare
participants in terms of "how much" of a quality they have. (p. 124)

The treatment of Likert scale data as interval, particularly when utilizing factor
analysis, is reflected in the uses and gratifications research of the last 20 years. While
Likert scales are clearly ordinal, for purposes of an exploratory study, where high degrees
of precision are not required to identify underlying factors, it is arguable that the data can
be treated as interval. Based upon Mitchell and Jolley's (1996) definition, the argument
can be made that data employing the method of summated ratings utilizing a 1 to 5 scale
of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" are valid in terms of determining and
comparing psychological characteristics. However, for purposes of this study, the
summated ratings generated need only identify whether underlying factors exist. In an
exploratory study, the impact of precise measurement does not carry the same degree of
significance on the results as in a standard study. The intent is this study is to analyze
this data with exploratory factor analysis, as opposed to confirmatory factor analysis, to
identify factors that may explain Christian Web use by applying standard uses and
gratification items.

Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991) argued that Likert scale data can demonstrate a
high degree of internal reliability when the method known as "item analysis" has been
used in constructing the questionnaire (p. 196). As previously stated, the majority of the
uses and gratifications items employed in this study were derived from the literature.
Both Abelman (1988) and Hamilton and Rubin (1992), while not specifically mentioning item analysis, did report "high internal-consistency reliability" scores.

Based upon the aforementioned researchers comments, the analysis in this study is exploratory in nature. The goal of factor analysis is to identify common variables among a myriad of potential items (Kerlinger, 1986). Factor analysis was employed in this study to identify religious Web gratification items. The factor solutions determined to be significant contributors to variance were converted into a series of summated indexes. These indexes form the basis of comparison for research questions two and six. Additional procedures for data handling and analytical decision making are discussed in Chapter IV.

Utilizing an exploratory factor analysis in this study to determine the underlying factors that motivate Christian Web site usage can aid in the discovery of patterns that may result in future research, and the development of new uses and gratification survey items.

Summary

The surveying of religious Web sites on the Internet provides for a unique opportunity to examine a group of people with a survey instrument that is tailored to the investigation of this particular area of interest. Now that growing numbers of people have access to the Internet, and in particular, to the World Wide Web, this type of survey may become increasingly more feasible for those surveying religious Web sites around the world.
The survey instrument was designed to measure motivations for religious Web site usage, as part of an exploratory study of Christian Web site users. The survey format and design as well as portions of the methodological design for the data analysis conceptualization were modified from Murphy's (1998c) and King's (1998) studies of radio station Web sites and television Web audiences. The study utilized the online four-section uses and gratifications items design template employed by Murphy (1998c), as well as the items concerning future media use intentions. The study modified King's (1998) methodological design addressing media usage from television Web usage to address religious Web site use. The online survey instrument was designed to answer the six major research questions posed in this study: (1) Who is visiting Christian Web sites on the Internet? (2) Why do the respondents visit Christian Web sites on the Internet? (3) Is there a relationship between seeking reinforcement for personal motives and Christian Web site usage? (4) Is there a relationship between Christian Web site usage and religious conversions? (5) Is there a relationship between Christian Web site usage and seeking companionship with others who are spiritually minded? (6) What is the relationship between Christian Web site usage and continued usage of religious media? This section discussed how each component of the data set was analyzed. The instrument was divided into four parts. Part one explored religious media uses. Part two examined their reasons for visiting religious Web sites in general. Part three explored religious gratifications sought by users of Christian Web sites. Part four assessed their demographic characteristics. The statistical procedures performed on each section were consistent with previous uses and gratifications research and their results are discussed in Chapter IV-Results. The research questions were derived from the studies of: France
Application of the online surveying methodology continues to grow in both the fields of applied research (Kehoe, Pitkow, & Morton, 1998) as well as academic research (Sheehan & Hoy, 1998; McMillian, 1998; King, 1998; and Murphy, 1998a). The objective of the sampling process was to obtain the most representative sample of Christian church Web sites and as many respondents to the online survey as possible within time and fiscal constraints. Unfortunately, due to the lack of a central database of all religious Web sites, the researcher utilized the online Goshen Net Directory of Christian Churches based upon Goshen’s claim to be “the most comprehensive Christian directory” (Goshen, 1998). An aggressive attempt to increase participation in the survey was made through an online canvassing of the 45 denominations represented in the Goshen Net Directory, as well as a cross-reference against churches listed in the 1998 Charisma-Networking Directory and the 1998 National Religious Broadcasters-Directory of Religious Media. Two focus groups were conducted and the online survey instrument was pre-tested online in a laboratory before the actual survey period began. During the survey period, 912 usable surveys were collected. As an exploratory study, the sampling and data collection process yielded sufficient data to determine the need for further studies in the area of religious uses and gratifications derived through Christian Web site users. Chapter IV details the results of the analyses of these data.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

An Examination of the Christian Web User

This chapter describes the results of the statistical analysis of a sample consisting of 912 responses from adults visiting Christian Web sites, mainly from the United States. Various statistical test were performed to measure relationships, identify correlations, and determine underlying factors associated with religious Web site uses and gratifications. Forty Christian Web sites associated primarily with local churches linked visitors to the survey and a small percentage found the survey through search engines or other methods. Of those who respondents who participated in the survey 96% filled the survey out completely. The data were entered into Microsoft Excel, a spreadsheet program, to allow the data to be entered as rows and columns for entry as a file into SAS for statistical analysis. While data was not changed in the process, some free text was lost due to column length restraints. The religious uses and gratifications of Christian Web site users were examined in detail to determine their motivations for religious Web site usage. The basic description of the users of Christian Web sites is presented first, followed by the results of the more specific research questions that examined the relationships of the factors and describe religious Web site usage.

As a self-selected online survey attempting to target users of Christian Web sites, the sample represented in this study is validated to the degree that it reached the intended users. A minimum target of 450 responses was considered adequate for performing the necessary statistical analyses this exploratory study required. With 912 responses from all
45 denominations, 49 states, various ethnic groups, and demographic categories, as an exploratory study the sample was sufficiently large enough for statistical analysis. To support this validity, the demographic results were analyzed and contrasted with other published online user studies that utilized standard random-sample techniques. The purpose of comparing this sample with published online studies serves to determine if the sample is representative of the general Web user population. Additionally this form of external validity examines whether the instrument is measuring the same phenomenon. The Graphic, Visualization, & Usability Center's studies (1997) (GVU) conducted by Georgia Tech University are the most widely known self-selected surveys on the Internet, with response numbers in excess of 10,000 from around the globe. The most recently competed study was conducted from October 10, 1997 through November 16, 1997 (Graphic, Visualization, & Usability Center, 1997). The Eighth GVU WWW Survey was utilized as a basis for comparison and contrast with this religious Web survey.

**RQ1. The Christian Web User—Who is visiting Christian Web sites on the Internet?**

This question determines systematically who is the audience for Christian Web sites and is reflected in Tables 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3. In light of this self-selected sample of Christian Web site users, it was anticipated that these users may differ in some ways from the general public. What identifies this population as a self-selected sample is the fact that the sample size and composition was defined by the respondents. However, this is more a consequence of self-selection than an identifier. Every Christian Web visitor to a host site had the opportunity to participate in the survey, those who
Table 4-1

Religious Web Survey Respondents by Gender Compared to GVU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>RWS</th>
<th>GVU*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>5891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>38.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>6217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>61.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>10,108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1997 GVU 8th WWW Survey Results-(http://www.gvu.gatech.edu)

Table 4-2

Religious Web Survey Median Age Compared to GVU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>RWS Male</th>
<th>RWS Female</th>
<th>GVU* Male</th>
<th>GVU* Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36.06</td>
<td>35.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max.</td>
<td>80+</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>80+</td>
<td>80+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1997 GVU 8th WWW Survey Results-(http://www.gvu.gatech.edu)

Table 4-3

Ethnic Background of Religious Web Survey Respondent Compared to GVU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>RWS</th>
<th>GVU*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>88.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-Racial</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Say</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1997 GVU 8th WWW Survey Results-(http://www.gvu.gatech.edu)
chose to participate appear to be representative of the target population when compared with other online surveys. King (1998) noted a “predominance of men online, and a skewing towards more well-educated and higher income users” (p. 172). In this regard, the survey respondents approximate those described by King (1998). The religious Web users are primarily male, college educated, and middle income users. Among the 912 valid responses, 56% of respondents were male and 44% were female. This finding varies only slightly from King (1998), who noted that “57% of the respondents were male and 43% were female” (p. 93). While the percentage of religious Web women users is 44%, slightly higher than the 39% cited in the GVU survey, the variance may be the result of growing numbers of women coming online since the GVU study was conducted (GVU, 1997). Johnstone (1972), Buddenbaum (1981), Abelman (1987), Frankl (1987), Hoover (1988), Hamilton and Rubins’ (1992), and Stout and Buddenbaums’ (1996) studies of religious radio and television found that women are the predominant users and that use may be reflected in the higher percentage of female respondents to the religious Web survey (Table 4-1).

A second standard measure is age. Based upon the Human Subjects guidelines provided by the University of Tennessee, only adults aged 18 and older were authorized to participate in the survey. Respondents had the option of clicking on an age category (see Appendix C), such as age 18-24 for example. The actual reported age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 80, with the average age of the respondents being 40 years of age. The number of religious Web browsers age 18-24 browsing. Just slightly over
10% of the respondents were between the ages of 18-24. Slightly over 20% were in the 25-32 age group.

Table 4-2 shows that Christian Web site user in this sample is representative of the targeted sample population. These findings also compare favorably with the findings of King (1998) who reported a “median age of 40.1 years,” (p. 93) and the GVU (1997) which reported a “mean age of 35.7 years for their respondents” (p. 1). While the GVU surveyed respondents as young as age 5, it is important to note that almost 7% of those surveyed by the GVU were respondents “under the age of 18 and some were as young as age 5,” ages below the cut-off for this survey. (Graphic, Visualization, & Usability Center, 1997, p. 1) This could tend to lower the GVU average. Overall, the ages represented in this Christian Web data were reasonably close to the median ranges depicted in other Web studies when consideration of respondents under the age of 18 is allowed.

The third demographic question in the sample asked about ethnicity. The majority of religious Web site respondents identified themselves as Caucasian/White (86%), while 88% of the GVU respondents identified themselves as Caucasian/White (GVU, 1997). The proportion of respondents who identified themselves as Black was 2.6%, Latino 1.5%, Asian 1.5%, and Native American, 1.1%. (Table 4-3). The number of respondents who identified themselves as Black and Native American was slightly higher than the GVU’s “1.9% for Black and .40% for Indigenous people or Native” but rates were comparably low (p.1).

The marital status of respondents is examined in Table 4-4. The proportion of married respondents was 70%, and 20% of the respondents identified themselves as
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>RWS</th>
<th>GVU*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>3561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70.00%</td>
<td>41.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>3101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>36.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>8.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>1.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with Another</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Other)</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>8.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Say</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>8510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1997 GVU 8th WWW Survey Results-(http://www.gvu.gatech.edu)

single, 5.6% of respondents as divorced, and .5% identified themselves as living with another. In contrast the GVU study 37% were single, 9% of the respondents were divorced, and 8% living with another” (p.1) (see Table 4-4). While the response rate among those who were married sharply contrasted with the GVU, the lower number of respondents who identified themselves as “living with another” would be expected in this targeted religious population.

The survey also examined the highest level of education completed by the respondent. Respondents selected from an ordinal scale of options ranging from “Grammar school” to “Doctoral or Professional Degree.” While 37% of the respondents had attended secondary school and some college, only 28% reported holding a bachelor’s degree (Table 4-5). Arguably those with degrees also attended secondary school and some college as well. There is not much of a difference in these figures from King’s (1998), who found that “more than one-fourth reported bachelor’s degrees, but nearly 50% had not completed any college degree” (p. 94). Both the religious Web survey and
the King (1998) education figures also compare favorably with the GVU (1997) which reported that “28% held bachelor’s degrees, but 47% had not received a college degree” (p. 1). The suggested variance between the higher education categories of graduate level degrees attained in the Christian Web respondents, 21.6% vs. 17.6% for the GVU, may be explained by the fact that the population of ministers responding to the survey hold advanced degrees (Table 4-5).

Table 4-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>RWS</th>
<th>King**</th>
<th>GVU*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>1.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>1246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>2944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special/2 yr. College Degree</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College 4 yr. Degree</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>2355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional or Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>not reported</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>2523</td>
<td>8711</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1997 GVU 8th WWW Survey Results-(http://www.gvu.gatech.edu)

Traditionally, a minister operating a pastorate is a seminary graduate, having earned the master's degree or a doctorate. Another explanation for the variance is that, occupationally, "ministers/clergy" represented the second largest category of Christian Web survey respondents, just behind the category of "professional."

Respondents were asked to "Which category best describes your total household income," in terms of ordered ranges. As in previous Web surveys, respondents have been reluctant to provide this information, with over 18% of the respondents (166) choosing the option "Rather not say." Respondents were provided with an ordinal menu of options ranging from "Less than $10,000," to "$75,000 or more" per year. The largest number of respondents, 14.7%, estimated their annual household income as between "$30,000-$40,000," about a 2% difference from the GVU users (Table 4-6). The results do compare favorably with the GVU. Although the GVU study used slightly different interval levels for income, the categories were close enough for rough comparison.

While 29% of Christian Web survey respondents reported from $20,000 to $40,000 total household income levels, 24% reported the same income levels in the GVU (1997) study.

Denominational categories in religious literature are frequently limited to only one category of Protestants. One exception is Gallup which utilizes 17 categories representing the Protestant denomination as depicted in Table 4-7 in the Gallup Poll Monthly (Gallup, 1997b). This study seeks to be even more specific in targeting Christian denominations than the Gallup studies.

This religious Web survey replicated the 45 categories listed in the Goshen Directory, providing for a greater degree of precision in measuring Christian religious
Table 4-6

Annual Household Income of Religious Web Survey Respondent Compared to GVU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income (x1000)</th>
<th>RWS</th>
<th>GVU**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $10K</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>5.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10-20K</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>6.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20-30K</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>11.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30-40K</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>1104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>12.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40-50K</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>11.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50-75K</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>1589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>18.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100K+</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>8.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Say</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>16.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>8510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1997 GVU WWW Survey Results-(http://www.gvu.gatech.edu)**

Table 4-7

Religious Web Survey Respondents by Denomination Compared to Gallup Poll Monthly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baptist</th>
<th>Methodist</th>
<th>Presbyterian</th>
<th>Episcopal</th>
<th>Lutheran</th>
<th>Evangelical</th>
<th>Church of Christ</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPM*</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWS</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Gallup, 1997 Gallup Poll Monthly-(Frequencies not provided)* Valid Total's Only
denominations. The choice of the Goshen Directory categories of Christian
denominations serve to enhance the sample by making it more representative of the range
of diversity among Christian Web site users. Additionally, the religious Web study
offered a category for the respondents who are either non-denominational or non
Christian. When the categories of respondents who identified their denominations as
“evangelical” or “Pentecostal charismatic” were collapsed, this group comprised almost
29% of the religious Web respondents. Almost 22% of the respondents identified
themselves Baptist, and 12% identified themselves as “Other.” In the latest polling of
religious respondents available from Gallup, 45% of the respondents identified
themselves as “evangelical,” 22% of the respondents as Baptist, and 5% identified
themselves as “Other” (Gallup, 1997b). While the evangelical category in the Gallup poll
is larger than the Christian Web survey, some of the variance may be explained due to
Gallup’s item terminology, “Would you describe yourself as ‘born-again or evangelical?’
(Gallup, 1997, p. 43). For example, a person may describe him or herself as “born-again”
and belong to a denomination that is not traditionally identified as evangelical, such as
Catholic, Anglican, or Presbyterian. Although the Gallup Poll Monthly uses fewer
denominational groups, only nine categories are consistent with the Christian Web survey
and where possible comparisons were made in these nine groups (Table 4-7).

The last demographic question asked the respondents to type in their two-letter
state abbreviation and asked for Non-U.S. residents to type in their country. The regional
location of the respondents living within the United States and outside of the country is
provided in Tables 4-8 and 4-9.
Table 4-8

Regional Location of U.S. Respondents to Religious Web Site Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-West</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid N= 823

Table 4-9

Location of Respondents to Religious Web Site Survey Outside of the USA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Zealand</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto-Rico</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid N= 84
While not addressing religious Web site usage, a recent poll by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill showed that “Southerners are more religious than people who live outside the South” (Associated Press, 1998).

Based upon telephone interviews with 844 adults in 12 southern states and 413 adults in the rest of the United States, the survey results contain a margin of error of 5%. The poll results show 88 percent of Southerners believe in God, compared with 78 percent of non-Southerners. Ninety percent of Southerners believe in answered prayers, compared with 80 percent of non-Southerners. (Associated Press, 1998, p.1)

With 44% of the respondents indicating they live in the 12 Southern States, these religious Web users would appear to fit the profile observed in the UNC-CH study. The state with the greatest number of responses to the religious Web survey in the United States was Tennessee in the south with 79 responses. The state of New York had the largest number of responses among northern states, with 16 submissions. Ohio led the mid-west with 36 religious Web surveys submitted, and California led the west with 53 completed religious Web surveys. While Tennessee represents perhaps the buckle of the “Bible Belt,” the high rate of response may be in part associated with a certain amount of name recognition with the University of Tennessee. Religious Web sites that posted the survey were provided with a prominent University of Tennessee logo that was placed on the front of each Web site. For example, a midwest male respondent stated, "I saw the UTK logo and took the survey because I love the Lady Vols!"

As stated previously, the survey was also posted on religious Web sites within Canada and a Canadian-based ministry site located in New Zealand. These two countries
provided the majority of the responses from outside of the United States, with Canada providing 35 responses, Australia with 13 responses, followed by neighboring New Zealand with 8 responses (Table 4-9). Response rates from outside of the United States accounted for 9% of the survey respondents. The fact that the survey generated such a range of responses, while not being widely publicized in the media nor promoted beyond the e-mail solicitation provided to churches in the United States and Canada points to the expanding use of religious Web sites and the Internet outside of this country. Of particular interest to missionary-minded evangelicals may be the presence of visitors to Christian Web sites from countries that are primarily non-Christian, such as India, Indonesia, Japan, Senegal, Singapore, and Egypt.

RQ2. Religious Web Uses and Gratifications—Why do the respondents visit Christian Web sites on the Internet?

The answer to this question provides a context within which the other research questions within this study will be examined. It is important to understand the motivations of religious Web site users in order to understand the uses and gratifications sought through Christian Web site usage. The 27 items used in the survey were modifications from those used in the Abelman (1987, 1988) and Hamilton and Rubin (1992) studies of religious television. The items pertaining to Web use resemble those used by King (1998) and Murphy (1998c), and were varied slightly to embrace religious applications on the Web. In one section, the respondents were asked to select the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with certain statements regarding their motivations for visiting religious Web sites. The default response when a question was not answered was
“Choose one of these responses,” which was coded as missing. For example, when presented with the item, “I visit this religious Web site… because this Web site provides reinforcement and strengthens my spiritual beliefs,” the options were “1 (strongly agree),” “2 (agree),” “3 (somewhat agree),” “4 (disagree),” and “5 (strongly disagree).”

An exploratory factor analysis was utilized to reduce these items into more basic measurable units of gratification. The employment of factor analysis was based upon uses and gratification research literature cited since the mid-1970s. The emphasis here on factor analysis was its use as a research tool to determine whether an underlying relationships existed between various uses and gratification items. The assumption in this study was that while this research was examining religious Web usage, some items may be similar to religious television use, while some items may be completely unique to Christian Web use. The employment of exploratory factor analysis is useful in gleaning these types of underlying patterns and are useful in developing future research questions and hypotheses for testing, as well as improving and developing new uses and gratification items.

Some of the items contain missing values, which may be indicative of the sensitive nature of some of the questions, since the survey addresses issues of religion and faith. The total number of missing cases on any single item ranged from 2 to 317. As such, pairwise deletion of cases was employed in the factor analysis, allowing for the maximum amount of variance on any single variable. Valid N’s are reported in the tables to depict the missing values. In Table 4-10, univariate statistical analysis of the 27 uses and gratification items, ranked by means and depicting standard deviation, illustrated
### Table 4-10

**Ranked Means of Religious Uses and Gratification Item Agreement in Religious Web Site Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Uses and Gratification Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because this Web site offers messages that are positive and uplifting</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because this (conversion)experience is still important to me in everyday life</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because this Web site agrees with my religious preference/denomination</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because this Web site provides reinforcement and strengthens my spiritual beliefs</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.052</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because this Web site has links to other Web sites I like</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>.996</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For research information</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.996</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a spiritual person</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td>907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For sacred verses and texts</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because this Web site is entertaining</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.923</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For information about religious community events</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.070</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am familiar with this Web site’s ministry/organization</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.224</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For prayer requests</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.082</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire spiritual/religious training</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>.953</td>
<td>895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational music and graphics</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.087</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative family oriented activities</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.998</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am attempting to explore my faith</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.063</td>
<td>898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in receiving free information</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.255</td>
<td>894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in making a purchase from this Web site’s ministry</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>.929</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in making a monetary contribution to this Web site’s ministry</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>.838</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am doing research (academic, professional, personal, etc.)</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.464</td>
<td>811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire personal spiritual or religious conversion</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.488</td>
<td>782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am searching this Web site for a church, synagogue, temple or mosque to affiliate</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>.863</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am searching for an alternative to traditional religious services</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.367</td>
<td>891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in making a purchase</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.220</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I allow my spiritual/religious beliefs to influence my selection of program content</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.327</td>
<td>894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in making a monetary contribution</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>.941</td>
<td>875</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response means are for agreement with statements "I am motivated to visit a religious Web site because.."

1-strongly agree  2-agree  3-somewhat agree  4-disagree  5-strongly disagree
Based on these data, respondents were generally not interested in purchasing resource materials, nor were they interested in making any financial contributions. However, when asked, a follow-up question on item, 21 “Should ministries be allowed to sell products/resource materials?” almost 80% of the respondents indicated agreement, see Appendix C. Items associated with searching for an alternative to traditional religious services or personal spiritual or religious conversion are the next highest-ranked reasons, while items related to the Web’s interactive capabilities ranked next.

The principal factor method was used to extract the factors, and this was followed by a varimax rotation to differentiate underlying factors. A varimax rotation, which is the common procedure utilized in uses and gratification literature to aid in identifying commonality in factors, was employed. Based upon the literature, the most common criteria suggest that factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 be retained. However, caution is advised to ensure that the “factors that are retained are of practical value” (B. Bates, personal communication, July 22, 1998). The scree test results suggested four meaningful factors, so only these factors were initially retained for rotation.

The four extracted factors possessed eigenvalues of at least 1.0, accounting for 35% of the total variance (Table 4-11).

Principal factors were used to identify the number of factors. Varimax rotation, is employed to identify which items load on which factors, thereby establishing a more rigorous criteria for identifying factors. Based upon the literature, the most common criteria suggest utilization of factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 be retained. This
study of Christian Web users was an exploratory one and was informed by uses and
gratification literature that aided in the

Table 4-11

Four Factor Extraction for Uses and Gratifications of Religious Web Site Users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>%Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-12

Reliability Analysis for Scales of Uses and Gratifications Among Religious Web Site Users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reliability Coefficient for Cronbach's Alpha

determination of the items and the allocation of factors. In this study, a “primary loading
above .45 is considered significant” and was checked for reliability using Cronbach’s
Alpha (M. Singletary, personal communication, July 30, 1998). See Table 4-12. These
parameters were also employed by Kaye (1996) in her study of Web uses and
gratifications. In light of these considerations, assignment of factors was based on two
major criteria: (1) Primary and secondary loadings above .45, and (2) Conceptual
matching predicated upon the literature, context of the question and personal judgement. This action reduced the total number of religious uses and gratification items utilized for the factor analysis to 23.

While the factors were initially labeled in accordance with Abelman (1988) and Hamilton and Rubin’s (1992) studies of religious television, these conventions did not always provide for easy mapping on religious Web sites. Additionally, neither King (1998) nor Murphy’s (1998c) of studies of Web uses and gratifications mapped seamlessly over the first factor, which appears to be a combination of some entertainment and information items with a religious flavor. Using these criteria, nine items were found to load on the first factor, which was subsequently labeled “Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information.” Three items loaded on the second factor, which was labeled “Reaction.” Five items loaded on the third factor, which was labeled “Faith.” Seven items also loaded on the fourth factor, which was labeled “Alternatives,” however, one item was a secondary loading. The loading of these items into a four-factor solution accounted for 35% of the total variance (Table 4-13).

Factor One—"Religious Web Uses/Entertainment/Information". The assigned item factor loadings employed in this study are roughly consistent with Abelman’s (1988) study of religious television viewer motivations for viewing the 700 Club, Evangelist Pat Robertson’s Christian program. Roughly consistent loading implies that the four entertainment items utilized from the Abelman study also loaded on Abelman’s factor one as well. However, these findings are very different from Hamilton and Rubin’s (1992) study on the influence of religiosity on television viewing. While both Abelman (1988) and
Table 4-13

Religious Uses and Gratifications Rotated Factor Matrix for Religious Web Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Uses and Gratification Rotated Factor Matrix</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>F4</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1 (Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For sacred verses and texts</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because this Web site is entertaining</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For prayer requests</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational music and graphics</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages that are positive and uplifting</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For information about religious community events</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative family oriented activities</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web site has links to other Web sites I like</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For research information</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2 (Reaction)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a monetary contribution to this Web site’s ministry</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>-.1</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a purchase with this Web site’s ministry</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in making a monetary contribution</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.2</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3 (Faith)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am seeking reinforcement for my personal beliefs</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am attempting to explore my faith</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire spiritual/religious training</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire personal spiritual or religious conversion</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>-.1</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 4 (Alternatives)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrees with my religious preference/denomination</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement and strengthens my spiritual beliefs</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am familiar with this ministry/organization</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.3</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministries selling products/resource materials</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My beliefs influence my selection of program content</td>
<td>-.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages that are positive and uplifting</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An alternative to traditional religious services</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.46</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Strongly agree 2- agree 3-somewhat agree 4-disagree 5- strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Responses are for agreement with statements "I am motivated to visit a religious Web site because.."
Hamilton & Rubin (1992) identified these items as entertainment related, they did not detect any underlying religious usage factor, as described in the religious Web study. Conversely, Abelman (1988) and Hamilton & Rubin (1992) conflict with one another, but some of this is due to employment of different scale names and targeting slightly different user gratifications. While Abelman and Hamilton & Rubin also utilized rotated factors; for retention, their factors required a minimum eigenvalue of 1.0 with “at least three loadings of .40 or greater” (Abelman, 1988, p.116). Hamilton and Rubin (1992) accepted “at least two loading of .50 or greater beyond any secondary loadings above .30” (pp. 674-675). The religious Web study criteria were based on retaining eigenvalues of 1.0 with at least three loadings of .45 or greater on all factors.

Abelman (1988) identified factors labeled “Escape,” and “Habit” that were two factors eliminated in the Christian Web site study with the refinement and adoption of a four-factor solution. However, Abelman (1988) did not identify a specific “Religious Entertainment/Information” factor. This factor appears somewhat consistent with traditional “Information-Learning,” factors, and was found in the Christian Web survey and may be unique to Christian Web use. Hamilton and Rubin (1992) identified a factor labeled “Voyeurism,” which was not found. “Voyeurism” items pertained to sexual content in programming and due to survey length considerations and topic selection, these items were not considered germane for inclusion in this study. “Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information” motivations received some of the highest levels of agreement with regard to possible motives for Christian Web site use (Table 4-13). It is clearly reported by these users as a major gratification that shapes and articulates their online experience. In this regard media-system dependency theory may provide some possible insights concerning
what behaviors are being observed. The purpose of an exploratory factor analysis is to discover what is bubbling up from beneath the surface. Therefore we must look at what the items are measuring in regards to Christian Web use in this category of "Entertainment/Information," or what appears to be loading as a new category, "Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information," or simply "Religious Web Use." Perhaps from the perspective of the Christian Web site user, visiting these sites to learn, pray, and be entertained are all integrative behavior, a part of their worldview. However, this observation is only speculative at this point. Since religious television is a medium dominated by religious entertainment, the expectation would be that "Entertainment" use by Christian Web users might encompass a rather complex dimension. It appears that additional refinement and an expansion of items to specifically determine what this "Religious Web Use" is may be suggested by this research. It appears that these "Religious Web Use" gratification items are measuring shared aspects of entertainment, spirituality, and information. The development of an instrument targeting these particular areas should result in improved scores and greater clarity regarding the underlying factors involved. The discrepancies latent in the items and factor reported between the religious Web survey and those studies mentioned in Table 4-14 suggest that Christian Web uses and gratifications may actually be entirely different from religious television uses and gratifications and that these gratifications are evolving into a distinct identity. Thoughts on this possibility will be addressed throughout this discussion.

Factor Two--"Reaction." "Reaction" motivations had the highest factor loadings (Table 4-13), the majority of the respondents are against "making a monetary contribution to
Table 4-14
Comparison of Religious TV Uses and Gratifications Items
Between Religious Web Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it entertains me</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it relaxes me</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages that are positive and uplifting</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative family oriented material</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction/Alternatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a purchase with this ministry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a monetary contribution to this ministry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Not a factor</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in making a monetary contribution</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An alternative to traditional religious services</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid programs with lots of sex</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Spiritual Guidance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For moral support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement for religious beliefs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrees with my religious preference</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Not Reported</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.it helps me learn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.conduct personal research</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.it helps me learn about what could happen to me</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


this Web site’s ministry.” With 79% of the respondents indicating disagreement with making a contribution, the mean for this response was 4.8 with a standard deviation of .941. Concerning the “purchase of religious resources or materials from this Web site’s ministry,” the most frequently occurring response was 4.4 with a standard deviation of 1.220, with responses from 80% of the respondents. This finding is not completely unexpected, based upon religious literature describing financial contributions by those who attend religious services.

Factor Three—"Faith"- a basic consideration in research question three is part of the general motivation for religious Web use. This question is analyzed in greater detail in research question three.

Factor Four—"Alternative." Among the 440 Christian Web respondents, 49% agreed that a motive for their religious Web use was “searching for an alternative to traditional religious services,” with a mean response of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 1.36. However, when responding to the items, “I am searching this Web site for a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque to affiliate with,” 11% indicated agreement but over 89% disagreed, resulting in a 4.2 mean response and a standard deviation of .863. Further, when asked their intentions within the next 12 months, whether they planned to “visit a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque, now that I have visited their religious Web site,” 86% replied, “No.”

Once again, any statements made regarding factors with an eigenvalue of 1.35, combined with low factor loadings, and seven items loading must be qualified (Table 4-13). However, based upon item responses, what respondents appeared to be saying is that while roughly half of them may be “searching for an alternative,” they either have not
found what they are looking for or the gratification being sought is being met through the use of the religious Web site.

The uses and gratification items employed in this study measured some underlying factors throughout the analysis. The loading of these items into a four-factor solution accounted for 35% of the total variance, as depicted previously in Table 4-13; however, the threshold level loading and modest eigenvalues may have rendered these factors as perhaps marginally acceptable in a major confirmatory study. However, as an exploratory study, these loadings indicate underlying factors are present and as such are acceptable as an exploratory study. Abelman (1988) and Rubin (1981) both employed three item scales in their studies of religious media uses and gratifications, so a case can be made for its usage here. Consideration was given to conceptualizing the formulation of summated scales in accordance with uses and gratification literature. The literature suggests that a greater understanding of gratification and interaction will be provided when summed scales are employed. Ideally, the gratification factors from the religious Web survey would be summated into a scale matrix.

However, as an exploratory study, such precise interpretive language is not necessary at this point in the study. To interpret further, without a confirmatory study would be premature and unwise. In this exploratory factor analysis it appears that Christian Web gratifications are not well defined by the users of this new medium at this point. These data seem to indicate that the majority of Christian Web gratifications as yet may not be crystallized in the mind of the Christian Web site user. This may be the result of a lack of familiarity with the medium, since over 50% of the respondents indicated that they had only visited religious Web sites for six months.
RQ3. Reinforcement of Beliefs-Is there a relationship between seeking reinforcement for personal motives and Christian Web site usage?

In this exploratory factor analysis, as previously stated, ultimately 24 uses and gratification items were examined to determine the presence of underlying factors using a varimax rotation. After the four-factor solution was run, four items relating to religious motives loaded on factor three, “Faith,” with an eigenvalue of 1.91, this may account for portion of the total variance, or 3.7% (Table 4-13). The purpose of the factor analysis was to determine the factors contributing to Christian Web use as it relates to religious motives.

In his religious television motivation study, Abelman (1988) utilized a factor known as “Faith.” In that study “Faith” loaded as factor three in a six-factor solution. This religious Web study was consistent with Ableman’s (1988) factor components in this area. His summated table does not provide the loadings per item in this factor, but a means comparison is provided at Table 4-15. A comparison of the two tables points to a certain degree of consistency regarding the “Faith Factor” as a driving motivation for the religious television user and religious Web site users as well. Over 94% of the religious Web respondents (N=838) indicated agreement on a Likert scale of one (strongly agree) and two (agree) with utilizing religious Web sites as motivation due to their “desire for spiritual/religious training.” Ableman (1988) noted that religious television users viewed the 700 Club for many of the same reasons that Christian Web users browse. The opportunity that religious Web sites allow for users to “explore their faith,” found agreement on a Likert scale of one (strongly agree) and two (agree) with 805 respondents, or 90% of the target audience. Some slight variance in reported means,
Table 4-15

Comparison of Ranked Means of “Faith” Between Religious Web Survey and Other Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Uses and Gratification Items</th>
<th>RWS Mean</th>
<th>Abelman Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am attempting to explore my faith</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire spiritual/religious training</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am seeking reinforcement for my personal beliefs</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


.68, does occur between the religious Web users and religious television viewers in regard to how each group utilized media for “seeking reinforcement for personal beliefs.” With 85% indicating agreement, on a Likert scale of one (strongly agree) and two (agree) the religious Web users, in short periods of duration, are slightly more prone to browse the Web in search of friendship. Additionally, while both media offer some degree of reinforcement, the Web offers the advantage of interactivity with another person, a capability that is not widely resident in the average religious television user’s home. Respondents in the religious Web survey, like religious television users, indicated high levels of agreement that they utilize religious Web sites because they “desire friendship with others.” While over 94% of religious Web users indicate agreement on a Likert scale of one (strongly agree) and two (agree) with seeking out companionship, when single items against single items were correlated using a Spearman’s correlation of time spent in religious Web sites, against seeking friendship, a negative relationship was observed, r = -0.150, which was statistically significance at the p < .01 level. However, while statistically significant this is a fairly low correlation and neither direction nor
causality may be inferred. King (1998), in his study of TV station Web users, observed agreement on the “Companionship” scale, indicating that “TV station Web users do not go online to find companionship” (p. 164). For King’s (1998) TV station Web users, the need for “Companionship” did not appear to drive their Web use. The exploratory factor analysis seems to suggest that “Faith” is an underlying motive, which could possibly drives religious Web users in search of religious Web gratifications, some degree of caution is advised based on the factor loadings as the two factors are close to .45 threshold for retention (Table 4-20). Respondents were asked “What motivates you to visit religious Web sites…?” The highest item loading on factor three with a factor loading value of .59 was “I desire spiritual/religious training.” A total of 94% of the respondents indicated agreement with this response, with 60% registering “strong agreement.” With 90% of the respondents indicating agreement with the item “I am attempting to explore my faith,” this factor received a loading of .58. Over 94% of the respondents, (N=895) indicated that they are motivated to visit religious Web sites because of a “desire for friendship with others who are spiritually minded.” This item received a much smaller factor loading of .48 than the desire for spiritual training and faith exploration,” indicating a weaker relationship to the factor. Finally, 85% of the respondents, (N=886) indicated a strong level of agreement with “seeking reinforcement for personal beliefs,” as motivation for Christian Web usage. This item received a factor loading of .47, which is an indication of strength in relationship to the factor of faith. The highest additionally loading for this factor was for item 15, “I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded. This item received a factor loading of .21, see Table 4-13. This
lading was almost a tertiary loading in the sense that was ranked under the category of (Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information). Furthermore when the single item of time spent in religious Web sites against personal motives (belief) was correlated utilizing Kendall Tau b Correlation Coefficients, a relationship was observed, $r = -0.256$, which was statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level, which is a low to moderate correlation, even if it is statistically significant. Based upon these exploratory findings the results indicate that a relationship exists between seeking reinforcement for personal motives and Christian Web site usage. Some quantitative data gleaned from this study that suggests that some respondents clearly utilize Christian Web sites as a method of reinforcement. Clearly direction or causality at this point cannot be determined as a result of such a low correlation and further study with a larger sample and additionally items may be required to determine the nature of or existence of such a relationship.

**RQ4. The Faith Factor- What percentages of religious conversions are related to Christian Web site usage?**

As a follow up question to “Have you ever had a personally spiritual or religious conversion experience?,” the respondents were further asked, “Did this personal spiritual or religious conversion experience occur while online, or offline later, either today, or in the past?” While over 91% of the respondents selected “My conversion experience was not Internet related” almost 3% of the respondents (N=27) identified that their spiritual or religious conversion experience occurred while “online” or “offline later.” Reliable comparisons could not be made for this variable against religious radio
or television, as those figures are largely self-reported from the various televangelist and media ministries and are difficult to independently corroborate.

In response to the item “I desire personal spiritual or religious conversion,” while 40% of the respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with this statement, 60% of the respondents indicated that they did not desire religious conversion. In the ranking of religious Web uses and gratifications items the respondents ranked this item as 4.0 with a standard deviation of 1.488. However, it must be noted that 130 cases were missing for this item and caution in interpreting this ranking as a possible explanation for religious Web use is advisable (Table 4-16). While these findings are modest, they may serve as a baseline for further research in regard to the role of the Web in religious conversion and as it relates to the Christian Web site gratifications being sought by some population of visitors to religious Web sites (Table 4-17). The 27 respondents who indicated that they were “converted” were not compared in this study against others in the group to probe for differences in motivation or usage. However, in future studies, with larger samples, this may be an area of interest to determine if the motivations of users who indicate conversion as a result of an online experience differs in anyway from users who indicate that their conversions were not Internet related.

Table 4-16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Religious Web Survey Respondents Desiring Conversion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA-A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWA-SDA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 11. “I desire personal spiritual or religious conversion”
1-Strongly agree/2-Agree/3-Somewhat Agree/4-Disagree/5-Strongly Disagree

166
Table 4-17

Percentage of Religious Web Survey Respondents Converted Online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Converts</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Online</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Offline Later</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Conversion</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t Say</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Internet Related</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 7 "Did this personally spiritual or religious conversion experience occur while on-line, or off-line later, either today, or in the past?" 1-Can’t say/2- I do not recall experiencing conversion/3- Yes, online/4- Yes, off line later/5-My conversion was not Internet related.

RQ5. Seeking Companionship-Is there a relationship between Christian Web site usage and seeking companionship with others who are spiritually minded?

To determine if users of Christian Web sites are seeking companionship with others who are spiritually minded, an initial chi-square test was run against two single items. Both of these measures are ordinal. Item number 2, “time per week spent browsing Christian Web sites” versus the single item, number 15, “I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded,” were analyzed utilizing chi-square to determine if any relationship existed. The initial chi-square test .12, indicated a statistically significant relationship at the $p < .01$ level, however, three of the cells in column five had counts ranging from 0-3. Based upon the initial chi-square test results a Pearson correlation was conducted, resulting in a statistically significant measure of $r = -0.178$, statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level. One of the largest number of cells reported 117 respondents browsing “30-60 minutes per week” indicated that their religious Web site use was associated with “seeking friendship” (see Table 4-18). The largest number of cells reported 236 respondents browsing sites “more than 60 minutes per week,” who were motivated to visit religious Web in “seeking companionship with others who are
spiritually minded.” The survey instrument scales for time spent in religious Web sites per week did not offer respondents the option to clarify time spent online in excess of 60 minutes, other than “greater than 1 hour.” The absence of additional instrument response options does not appear to be statistically significant based upon the strength and range of responses in the “30-60 minutes per week” and the “more than 60 minutes per week” categories, see Table 4-18. Additionally, 94% of the respondents (N=895) indicated agreement with visiting religious Web sites because they were motivated by a “desire for friendship with others who are spiritually minded.”

Table 4-18

Table of Time Spent Browsing Religious Web Sites By Seeking Friendship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRWS</th>
<th>Seeking SA</th>
<th>Seeking Friend A</th>
<th>Seeking Friend SWA</th>
<th>Seeking Friend D</th>
<th>Seeking Friend SD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 min</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-15 min</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-30 min</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 min</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 hour</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 15. “I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded.” 1-Strongly agree/2- Agree/3-Somewhat Agree/4-Disagree/5-Strongly Disagree  Frequency Missing = 52

The results of the findings in this study appear to support the existence of a relationship between Christian Web use and seeking friendship and companionship with others who are spiritually minded, as a possible motivation for religious Web usage.
However, neither direction nor causality can be determined at this point in this exploratory study.

RQ6. User Media Intentions—What is the relationship between Christian Web site usage and continued usage of religious media?

To determine if a relationship exists between visiting Christian Web sites and the future use of religious media, survey respondents were asked to indicate their religious media use intentions within the next 12 months (Tables 4-19 and 4-20). One item permitted the respondent to indicate whether or not they “planned to reduce usage of religious media,” however this data was strictly categorical in nature. The respondents were presented with four items that attempted to measure continued usage of religious radio, television, religious Web sites in general, and their favorite religious Web site in particular. For example, the item consisted of “I plan to increase my browsing of my favorite religious Web site.” The response options were ordinal and ranged from “1. None,” “2. 5-15%,” “3. 20-50%,” and “4. >50%.” These options were provided in a pull-down menu which required the respondent to click on the option desired, and the default was “choose from the following,” which along with the “undecided” response option was coded “0” as missing. Perhaps due to respondent fatigue in this section a large number of cases are missing. Regarding the item “I plan to increase my listening of religious radio programs,” 297 missing cases occurred. For “I plan to increase my viewing of religious TV programs,” 284 cases are missing. In reference to “I plan to
### Table 4-19

Future Religious User Media Intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% increase</th>
<th>Religious Radio</th>
<th>Religious TV</th>
<th>Religious Web Sites</th>
<th>Favorite Religious Web Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(None) -0%</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-15 %</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-50 %</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50%</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N's</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>677</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Responses are for the statement “In the next 12 months I plan to increase my..”

### Table 4-20

Spearman Correlations of Future Religious User Media Intentions against Time Spent in Religious Web Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religious Radio</th>
<th>Religious TV</th>
<th>Religious Web Sites</th>
<th>Favorite Religious Web Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R=.123</td>
<td>P=.0025</td>
<td>R=.104</td>
<td>P=.03</td>
<td>R=.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=595*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Responses are for the statement “In the next 12 months I plan to increase my..” against “time spent browsing religious Web sites” * Correlation is significant at p<.05 level ** Correlation is significant at p<.01 level
increase my browsing of religious Web sites,” 209 missing cases are recorded. In response to the last question about “browsing their favorite religious Web site,” 235 frequencies are missing. In light of these missing cases, prudence is advised in examining the relationships between Christian Web usage and future use of religious media. A Spearman’s correlational analysis was performed to determine whether or not a relationship existed between Christian Web site usage and future religious media usage, see Table 4-20. Additionally, the single item of time spent in religious Web sites was correlated against future religious media usage. As stated earlier, these four items were not truly uses and gratification items, and were not represented as interval level measures for the purpose of factor analysis. However, for purposes of this study they were identified as “Media Intent.” These items may represent a different set of behaviors and actions that, with additional research, may point to a type of symbiotic relationship between religious Web use and future religious media usage.

User intent does not always equate to action. It is important to note that while respondents at the time of the survey indicated a desire to increase their use of religious media over the next 12 months, for various reasons they may not. Nonetheless, a relationship exist between the amount of time spent browsing religious Web sites and user intent to increase future usage of religious media. The relationship between future media use tended to be strongest for users who spent more than an hour browsing religious Web site, with the exception being religious television.

When asked about their intention to increase their "usage of religious radio," the table suggests a statistically significant correlation, thus a relationship, albeit weak related to any significant additional usage in the future for the 80 respondents who use
religious Web sites more than one hour per week. However, 341 respondents, or 58% of the valid responses, indicated that they plan to increase their listening in the future (Table 4-21).

Table 4-21

Table of Future Religious User Media Intentions Correlated against Time Spent Browsing Religious Web Sites - Religious Radio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent in RWS</th>
<th>Religious Radio None</th>
<th>Religious Radio 5-15%</th>
<th>Religious Radio 20-50%</th>
<th>Religious Radio &gt;50%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 min</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-15 min</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-30 min</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 min</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 hour</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency Missing = 317 Statistics for Table: Spearman Correlation .123 p<.01

Additional ordinal scale data supports the correlations. When asked to provide scale data to the question “how much time per week, do you normally spend listening to religious programs on the radio,” 14.8% or 131 respondents, indicated that they “don’t listen.” Over 161 respondents or 18.2% listen “less than thirty minutes per week to religious radio.” Only 90 respondents listen between 30 – 60 minutes, however 124 respondents of 14% listen between “1 and 2 hours per week.” Additionally 11.9% of the listeners or 105 respondents spend “2-3 hours per week listening.” The largest number of respondents, 275 was found among those who listen to religious radio more than 3 hours per week, comprising 31%. Murphy (1998), in his study of radio station Web sites,
"observed a relationship between the use of media, particularly Web sites and the radio station listener" (Murphy, 1998c). This is a topic for future study, perhaps. Based upon Murphy's (1998c) observations, if the number of Christian radio stations online increase, a stronger relationship between Christian Web site use and religious radio may also be observed as users spend more time browsing their favorite religious radio stations.

Additional ordinal scale data supports these correlations. When asked "how much time per week, do you normally spend watching religious shows on TV," 20.9% or 183 respondents, indicated that they "don't watch." The 303 respondents, or 34.7% watch "less than thirty minutes per week of religious TV." The 157 respondents who view between 30 – 60 minutes, comprise 18%, and 100 respondents, or 11.4% view between 1 and 2 hours per week." Only 5.6%, or 49 respondents spend "2-3 hours per week viewing, with 82 respondents, viewing religious TV more than 3 hours per week, comprising 9.4 % or respondents in this study. Religious television Web sites tend to mimic their television programs in appearance and content and serve to provide some linkage between the religious Web user and the televangelist. However, with missing cases, caution is advised to prevent over-interpretation. Historically, user gratifications provided by religious television have matured over decades of continuous use (Arthur, 1995, pp. 98-103). Christian Web users may need more time to clearly identify those gratifications they desire to obtain through the use of religious Web sites. Regarding future "usage of religious television," (Table 4-22), based upon the Spearman's correlation of time spent on line against future intention for religious TV viewers, these data, suggests a weak relationship between time spent on line and user intentions to increase usage of religious TV.
Table 4-22

Table of Future Religious User Media Intentions Correlated against Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRWS</th>
<th>Religious TV (None)</th>
<th>Religious TV 5-15%</th>
<th>Religious TV 20-50%</th>
<th>Religious TV &gt;50 %</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 min</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-15 min</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-30 min</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 min</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 hour</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency Missing = 305
Statistics for Table: Spearman Correlation .104j)< .01

Respondent intentions concerning "Religious Web site," future use in general tends to offer a clearer picture of user intent. Additional ordinal scale data supports these correlations. When asked “how much time per week, do you normally spend browsing religious Web site,” 6.6% or 58 respondents, indicated that they “spend less than 5 minutes.” Over 12% of the respondents, 109 spend “5-15 minutes per week browsing religious Web sites.” The respondents who spend between 15-30 minutes, browsing comprise 16.7%, or 146 respondents, and 21.5% browse between “30 and 60 minutes per week.” However, the over 42.6%, or 372 respondents spend “over 1 hour browsing religious Web sites. Based on a Spearman correlation analyzing time spent on line against intent to use religious Web sites in a future, a moderately strong relationship of .203 which is significant at p<.05 level was measured. Based upon the data presented in Table 4-23, religious Web site usage will experience moderate increase in the future.
Table 4-23

Table of Future Religious User Media Intentions Correlated against Time

Spent Browsing Religious Web Sites - Religious Web Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RWS</th>
<th>Religious Web Site None</th>
<th>Religious Web Site 5-15%</th>
<th>Religious Web Site 20-50%</th>
<th>Religious Web Site &gt;50%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 min</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-15 min</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-30 min</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-60 min</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 hour</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency Missing = 238 Statistics for Table: Spearman Correlation .203 p<.001

With 151 religious Web users indicating a 50% or greater increase in their future usage of religious Web sites, the possibility for further study of this topic appears brighter as Christian user gratifications become more mature and sophisticated. As Christian Web users become more aware of religious Web sites on the Internet, their religious Web usage should increase. At this point in time, 50% of these respondents have been visiting religious Web sites for less than one year.

Finally, respondents were asked about their intentions concerning future use of their "favorite religious Web sites." While 262 cases were missing, 166 respondents signaled that they intend to increase their usage by more than 50% within the next year (Table 4-24). Based upon these data, religious Web site usage should experience a strong increase from these respondents in the future. With 543 Christian Web users indicating an increase in their future usage of religious Web sites, the opportunities for further
examination of these trends represent a tremendous opportunity. A positive relationship was demonstrated between religious Web use and intent to increase certain aspects of religious media use in the next year (Table 4-24). The strongest relationships were found for increased use of religious Web sites and favorite religious Web sites, respectively. Intent and favorite religious Web site use are positively at .216, which is statistically significant at $p < .01$. However, with 262 cases missing some degree of caution is warranted. As Christian Web users become more accustomed to these sites and acquainted with the gratifications they provide, spending more time visiting favorite religious Web sites is likely. A similar observation was made regarding visiting different religious Web sites in the future. The users’ “intent to visit religious Web sites in the future” was positively correlated at .203, which is statistically significant at $p < .01$, however, with slightly more cases to work with here, $(N=674)$ this relationship may present a slightly clearer picture of future intent. Familiarity with other religious Web

Table 4-24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRWS</th>
<th>Religious FRWS None</th>
<th>Religious FRWS 5-15%</th>
<th>Religious FRWS 20-50%</th>
<th>Religious FRWS &gt;50 %</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 min</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-15 min</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-30 min</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 min</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 hour</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency Missing = 262 Statistics for Table: Spearman Correlation $r = .216, p < .001$
sites should refine Christian Web user gratifications, and some users will begin browsing various religious Web sites until they find a venue that satisfies their needs.

Respondents seemed to have little desire to increase their future use of religious radio and television, based on their time online in religious Web sites. Users of religious radio demonstrated a weak positive correlation of .123, significant at p. < .05. This appears to indicate that heavier religious radio user are more likely to increase their use of religious radio or religious television, “30 minutes to 2 hours per week of listening.” This use duration appears to be drive-time listening radio behavior. However, with 317 cases missing, prudence is advised.

Interestingly, a few televangelists established a presence on the Web almost 10 years ago. Some religious television programs that are linked to religious Web sites tend to imitate their parent television program. While some emphasis on promotion and sales of religious material related to the program occur, many of the gratifications respondents indicated as important are present in the Web sites hosted by televangelists as well. However, based on these data, the browsing of a “Bishop T.D. Jakes” Web site may not signal intent to increase viewing of the religious television program “T.D. Jakes-Get Ready,” for example. However, with 305 missing cases, the picture of intent by Christian Web users is less clear. There is cause for optimism as 84% of the respondents indicated “No, I do not plan to reduce my usage of religious media in the next 12 months.”

Religious media content providers have a window of opportunity to strengthen the relationships between religious Web sites and religious media if the content providers begin to act upon the motives that drive religious Web use.
Summary

These findings have accomplished the major objectives of this exploratory study. A sample of Christian Web site users has been drawn which demonstrates some behaviors and characteristics that correlate with religious television studies, Gallup polls, and the Georgia Tech GVU Web studies. In this chapter demographics and descriptive patterns of the Christian Web user have been analyzed. The most significant areas of analysis have been in the religious uses and gratifications area as well as future intention of visitors to Christian Web sites in regards to their media usage, particularly Christian Web site usage. These areas have been collapsed in chi-square and cross tabs tables where appropriate for analysis and into categories that are consistent, meaningful, and logical. Finally these areas have been analyzed against each other as well as against the literature.

Based upon these findings, in summary, the Christian Web user is predominately a Southern, white, middle class, college-educated, married, evangelical or fundamentalist, between the ages of 33 and 50 who has experienced religious conversion. While the Christian Web site user is more likely to be male, female Christian Web users are quickly closing the gap.

The Christian Web site user, while concerned about information and entertainment, appears to be using Christian Web sites for a combined purpose that loaded on the factor, "Religious Web Use." These indices comprise elements of "Information and Entertainment" with spiritual and religious overtones. While religious use is clear, some users may turn to Christian Web sites as a "Reaction" to religious
television and its strong monetary appeals. While respondents do not object to ministries making financial appeals or the sale of products or resource materials, few users are interested in availing themselves of these services. While respondents are saying that they are using Christian Web sites to satisfy their “Faith,” the range of these uses appears to be in the early stages of development. Some Christian Web users, like their religious television counterparts, appear to be using Christian Web sites as an “Alternative” to traditional religious services. Additionally, an overwhelming number of Christian Web users, 85%, appear to be saying by their “Media Intentions” that within the next 12 months they have no intention of reducing their religious media usage. The respondents indicate that they plan to increase their use of religious Web sites over the next year, with religious radio and television use remaining at current levels.

The patterns that appear to be emerging from this data are currently of a fairly mainstream “Christian user,” who uses the Christian Web sites as an adjunct to their religious experience, and religious media to satisfy religious gratifications. However, what is also emerging from the data is a slightly blurred image of a type of mosaic embracing a younger, inexperienced user who is not a Christian white male, nor a member of any religious denomination, but has experienced spiritual or religious conversion. The numbers of Christian Web users that will challenge the prevailing demographics are growing. Christian Web users are novices, still exploring, formulating, and attempting to identify the particular gratifications that Christian Web sites offer; therefore, this phenomenon is worthy of greater scrutiny.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations for religious Web site usage among users, particularly of Christian Web sites. This research began with the premise that users of Christian Web sites may seek to obtain certain religious and non-religious gratifications through browsing the rapidly expanding numbers of Christian sites on the WWW. Since the advent of the drum in Africa as the earliest form of mediated religion 25 centuries ago, to the steady growth of Christian Web sites and virtual religious communities in cyberspace, religion continues to be utilized by adherents to provide a myriad of gratifications. Uses and gratifications paradigms aid us in conceptualizing a framework to chart the motivations for religious Internet utilization.

The religious Web user who visits Christian Web sites located on the World Wide Web is the focus of this study. These respondents provide valuable research information to webmasters online concerning specific gratifications being sought through the browsing of Christian Web sites in particular and religious Web sites in general. Understanding of these user motivations can result in greater effectiveness in the delivery of religious Web services, which is a new form of outreach ministry for the 21st century. As previously discussed in Chapter IV in the section on Self-Selection and Survey Design, rigorous steps were taken to ensure that this sample was representative of the target population, the Christian Web site user. The design of this study and the results describing the Christian Web user argue for the generalizability of this sample to
Christian Web users. Respondents come from nearly every state in the union and 23 locations outside of the United States. The respondents represent 45 Christian denominations, with over 96% claiming to have experienced spiritual or religious conversion. The Christian Web respondents look very much like their general Internet user counterparts in terms of their ethnicity, age, gender, education, occupation, and income. Based upon this rationale, and others reported in the results, these remarks are predicated on the basis that this sample is a representative one and valid for the study of this topic. Granted it is a self-selected group of the target population, Christian Web users, but it can provide specific findings that serve to identify the motivations of the Christian Web users and articulate their specific uses and gratifications to the extent that it is representative.

These remarks argue that the uses and gratifications paradigm is an appropriate theoretical perspective to explore the motivations for media use by the user of religious Web sites. The uses and gratifications perspective envisions the user of media as an actor, cognitive, active and deliberate, and as such able to self-report his/her motivations for using Christian Web sites. In light of this assumption, the discussion that follows is basically framed in terms of all uses and gratifications, including religious, that have been gleaned from this study. Audience research data regarding general media use, user demographics, and their relationship to particular uses and gratifications are well documented. The understanding of these motivations and their connections to who these users are may enable ministries to attract both religious and non-religious users to their Christian Web sites, and keep them coming back long after the novelty of the bells and whistles has worn off.
Research Question 1— The Christian Web User, attempted to systematically determine who is attracted to Christian Web sites. Based upon these findings, 44% of the respondents indicated that they reside within the 12 Southern States. The Christian Web user tends to be white, middle class, college-educated, married, evangelical or fundamentalist, between the ages of 33 and 50 and has experienced religious conversion. While the Christian Web site user is more likely to be male, the number of female Christian Web users is likely to increase as the number of female Web users in the general population increases. This finding varies only slightly from King (1998), who noted that “57% of the respondents were male and 43% were female” (p. 93). While the percentage population of women users is 15%, slightly higher than the 39% cited in the GVU survey, the variance may be the result of growing numbers of women coming online since the GVU study was conducted (GVU, 1997). Additionally, 13% of the respondents (N= 122) identified themselves as clergy/minister.

A second standard measure is age. The actual reported age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 80, with the average age of the respondents being 40 years of age. Table 4-2 shows that Christian Web site user in this sample is representative of the targeted sample population. These findings also compare favorably with the findings of King (1998) who reported a “median age of 40.1 years,” (p. 93) and the GVU (1997) which reported a “mean age of 35.7 years for their respondents ”(p. 1).

The third demographic question in the sample asked about ethnicity. The majority of religious Web site respondents identified themselves as Caucasian/White (86%), while 88% of the GVU respondents identified themselves as Caucasian/White (GVU, 1997). The number of respondents who identified themselves as Black and
Native American was slightly higher than the GVU’s “1.9% for Black and .40% for Indigenous people or Native.”

The proportion of married respondents was 70%, and 20% of the respondents identified themselves as single. The proportion of the sample which was married sharply contrasted with the GVU.

The survey also examined the highest level of education completed by the respondent. In the religious Web study, 13% of the respondents (N= 122) identified themselves as clergy/minister. Both the religious Web survey and the King (1998) education figures also compare favorably with the GVU (1997) which reported that “28% held bachelor’s degrees, but 47% had not received a college degree” (p. 1). The higher education categories of graduate level degrees attained in the Christian Web respondents, 18% vs. 15% for the GVU, may be explained by the fact that the population of ministers responding to the survey hold advanced degrees.

Respondents were asked to describe total household income. While 29% of Christian Web survey respondents reported from $20,000 to $40,000 total household income levels, 24% reported the same income levels in the GVU (1997) study. The results do compare favorably with the GVU and the categories were close enough for rough comparison.

Respondents were asked to identify their denominational preference if they had one. This study utilized the Gallup poll as a basis for some rough comparisons, however, this study was more specific in targeting Christian denominations than the Gallup studies.

This religious Web survey replicated the 45 categories listed in the Goshen Directory, providing for a greater degree of precision in measuring Christian religious
denominations. Almost 22% of the Christian Web respondents identified themselves Baptist, and 12% identified themselves as "Other." In the Gallup study, 45% of the respondents identified themselves as "evangelical," 22% of the respondents as Baptist, and 5% identified themselves as "Other" (Gallup, 1997b).

Research Question 2—Religious Web Uses and Gratifications, examined the religious Web uses and gratifications sought by visitors to Christian Web sites. The examination of this question provided a context within which the other research questions within this study were examined. While the factors were initially labeled in accordance with Abelman's (1988) and Hamilton and Rubin's (1992) studies of religious television, these conventions did not always provide for easy mapping on religious Web sites. Additionally, neither King's (1998) nor Murphy's (1998c) of studies of Web uses and gratifications mapped seamlessly over the first factor, which appears to be a combination of some entertainment and information items with a religious flavor. Using these criteria, nine items were found to load on the first factor, which was subsequently labeled "Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information." Three items loaded on the second factor, which was labeled "Reaction." Five items loaded on the third factor, which was labeled "Faith." Seven items also loaded on the fourth factor, which was labeled "Alternatives," however, one item was a secondary loading. The assigned item factor loadings employed in this study are roughly consistent with Abelman's (1988) study of religious television viewer motivations. Both Abelman (1988) and Hamilton & Rubin (1992) identified these items as entertainment related, they did not detect any underlying religious usage factor, as described in the religious Web study. This factor appears somewhat consistent with traditional "Information-Learning," factors, and was found in
the Christian Web survey and may be unique to Christian Web use. "Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information" motivations received some of the highest levels of agreement with regard to possible motives for Christian Web site use. It is clearly reported by these users as a major gratification that shapes and articulates their online experience.

In this exploratory factor analysis, it appears that Christian Web gratifications are not well defined by the users of this new medium at this point. These data seem to indicate that the majority of Christian Web gratifications as yet may not be crystallized in the mind of the Christian Web site user. This may be the result of a lack of familiarity with the medium, since over 50% of the respondents indicated that they had only visited religious Web sites for six months.

Based upon some of the open-ended responses in the study, it appears that some of the respondent's qualitative comments support the findings of this study. For some Christian Web users, "Religious Web Use" is the most important reason they go online. One respondent remarked, "I'm a new user and I was surprised by the vast range of Christian resources that are available on the Internet" (Male Christian Web Respondent). Another respondent noted, "Religious Web sites are great for me because they allow me to find out what is going on in the different denominations and religions" (Male Christian Web Respondent). Another respondent commented, "I like the interaction in the chat sessions, being on the Net offers me excitement and vibrancy" (Female Christian Web Respondent). These comments support the observation that information and entertainment elements are embedded in the online experience; however, what distinguishes this user from the general Internet user is that religious overtones permeate.
the Christian Web user’s online session. This study has observed that gratifications associated with the Christian Web user may best be understood in terms of two or three major motivations such as faith, community, and religious belief influencing media content selection. Concerning the role of faith as a motivation for Christian Web usage, one respondent commented, "The sites make me feel closer to God, with the prayer partners on the Net and visiting Web sites that are religious is the best way to grow in faith" (Male Christian Web Respondent). Regarding the importance of community, one respondent remarked, "It is a place where I can be blessed by others—and can bless other people" (Female Christian Web Respondent). Several respondents commented that their religious beliefs influence their media content selection, for example; "I like to visit Christian Web sites because they do not have pornography or promote values contrary to my Christian values" (Male Christian Web Respondent).

Research Question 3—Reinforcement of Beliefs, attempted to determine if there was a relationship between seeking reinforcement for personal motives and Christian Web site usage.

The purpose of the factor analysis was to determine the factors contributing to Christian Web use as it relates to religious motives. The exploratory factor analysis seems to suggest that “Faith” is an underlying motive for Web users in search of religious Web gratifications, however, some degree of caution is advised as because possible bias may exist in this non-random sample.

study point to a certain degree of consistency regarding the “Faith Factor” as a possible motivation for the religious television user and religious Web site users as well. Respondents in the religious Web survey, like Abelman’s religious television users, indicated high levels of agreement that they utilize religious Web sites because they “desire friendship with others.” King (1998), in his study of TV station Web users, observed agreement on the “Companionship” scale, indicating that “TV station Web users do not go online to find companionship” (p. 164).

One respondent’s possible motive for using Christian Web sites, was to obtain counseling and safeguard his privacy in the process:

I had a serious problem that I could not share with anyone in my town. I needed to pray with someone about it, so I visited a Christian Web site, but the ministry never followed up and contacted me. I visited another site and got an automated response promising me that they would contact me within 48 hours, but they never did. I still need someone to pray with me… (Male Christian Web Respondent).

Few individual respondents shared such detailed personal anguish concerning their possible motives for Christian Web use. However, the Web affords a degree of anonymity to those seeking to discuss sensitive issues. A respondent who noted “The major reason I visit a Christian Web site is to grow in the Lord” (Female Christian Web Respondent) summarized the religious gratification that Christian Web sites appear to offer some respondents. “Religious Web Use/ Entertainment /Information,” which is an extracted factor, received some of the highest levels of agreement in regards to possible motives for Christian Web site use in this study. Several respondent comments appear to
support this summated scale; for example, "Christian Web site provide me with information to make decisions for my family. It's great to be able to have religious Web sites. It makes the Internet time such fun" (Female Christian Web Respondent).

Concerning the religious information gratifications being sought by visitors to Christian Web sites, these respondents remarked: "Christian Web sites provide access to religious oriented news/information that the secular press refuses to discuss or elaborate on" (Male Christian Web Respondent). Access to religious information is clearly reported by these users as a major gratification that shapes and articulates their online experience. In this regard media-system dependency may provide some possible insights concerning what behaviors are being observed.

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s (1976) media-system dependency theory (MSD) assumes that the potential for mass media messages to achieve a broad range of “cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects will be increased when media systems serve many unique information needs.” (p. 7). Based on these data, the Christian Web user may be attempting to utilize Christian Web sites to provide these "many unique information needs" (p. 7). Perhaps the Christian Web user is attempting to gratify needs other than the strictly informational ones alluded to by Ball-Rokeach and De Fleur (1976). Based upon studies of religion’s concept of community, (Groothuis, 1997; Goethals, 1990; and Stout and Buddenbaum, 1996), these elements provide some illumination on these submerged factors. Over 95% of the respondents agreed that the opportunities to receive “messages that are positive and uplifting," and “alternative family oriented activities, ” are almost as important as “inspirational music and graphics.” Additionally, 92% of the respondents indicated agreement with functioning in an
environment that “agrees with my religious preference/denomination.” Over 88% of the respondents indicated an interest in sites that provide “sacred verses and texts.” While not as high, almost 77% of the respondents identified religious Web site use as an opportunity for “prayer requests.” Based upon the open-ended responses as well as the demographic data these respondents appears to be represent a community of Christian Web users who share a common belief in Jesus Christ and embrace the fundamentalist religious tradition. Demographically speaking, these Christian Web users are fairly homogeneous and share a familiar religious lexicon. Based upon a cautious interpretation of the exploratory factor analysis, the religious Web site experience for the majority of these respondents appears to complement rather than compete with their traditional religious services. The Christian Web user appears to value the power of information and anonymity that Christian Web sites provide, as well as the community of faith that cyberspace potentially embraces. These users are active in selecting their choices of Christian Web sites and state that they intend to tell others about what they have experienced online.

Research Question 4—The Faith Factor, addressed the “faith factor” or the relationship between the user’s personal, spiritual, or religious conversion experience and the usage of Christian Web sites. Reliable comparisons could not be made for this variable against religious radio or television, as those figures are largely self-reported from the various televangelist and media ministries and are difficult to independently corroborate. While over 91% of the respondents selected “My conversion experience was not Internet related” almost 3% of the respondents (N=27) identified that their spiritual or religious conversion experience occurred while “online” or “offline later.”
The 27 respondents who indicated that they were “converted” were not compared in this study against others in the group to probe for differences in motivation or usage.

The Christian Web study research suggests that 96% of the users' have experienced religious conversion. Hamilton and Rubin (1992, p. 667) noted that religious faith “helps to structure cognitions by which people approach communication and construct their realities.” It may be argued that spirituality or religious conversion may predispose some Web users to consider using Christian Web sites.

In his religious television motivation study, Abelman (1988) utilized a factor known as “Faith.” Over 94% of the religious Web respondents (N=838) indicated agreement with utilizing religious Web sites as motivation due to their “desire for spiritual/religious training.” One respondent noted, "Of course I want to strengthen my beliefs-but I want to be challenged also" (Female Christian Web Respondent). Another observed, "I would like to see more academic Biblical research aids better search engines to Christian Web sites" (Male Christian Web Respondent). Ableman (p. 116, 1988) noted that religious television users viewed the 700 Club for many of the same reasons that Christian Web users browse, “salvation,” and “feeling close to God”. The opportunity that religious Web sites allow for users to “explore their faith,” found agreement with 90% of the target audience (N=805) respondents. This respondent noted, "Fellowship and keeping in touch with others is greatly enhanced through the Internet. It helps one to realize just how many Christians are out there" (Male Christian Web Respondent). Additionally, while both media offer some degree of reinforcement, the Web offers the advantage of interactivity with another person, a capability that is not widely resident in the average religious television user’s home.
Research Question 5—Seeking Companionship, examined the relationship between Christian Web site usage and the search by the Christian Web site user for companionship with others of similar faith. This research question addresses the concept of social utility, which has been previously discussed in regards to social integrative needs that humans possess.

Parks and Floyd (1996, p. 85) in their study of online users seeking friendship, found that personal relationships were common. They found that nearly “two thirds (60.7%) reported that they had indeed formed a personal relationship with someone they had “met” for the first time via an Internet newsgroup.” Additionally, the likelihood of developing a personal relationship did not differ across the groups examined. Parks and Floyd (1996, p. 86) noted that “These findings lend more credence to images of relationships liberated than to images of relationships lost.” The results of the findings in this study appear to support Park and Floyd’s (1996) observations of the motivation of some Web users is the search for friendship. A relationship between Christian Web use and seeking friendship and companionship with others who are spiritually minded, as a possible motivation for religious Web usage was also found in this study. However, neither direction nor causality can be determined at this point in this exploratory study.

To determine if users of Christian Web sites are seeking companionship with others who are spiritually minded an initial chi-square test was run against two single items. Based upon the initial chi-square test results a Pearson correlation was conducted, resulting in a statistically significant measure of $r = -0.178$, statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level. One of the largest number of cells reported 117 respondents browsing “30-60 minutes per week” indicated that their religious Web site use was associated with
"seeking friendship.” Additionally, 94% of the respondents (N=895) indicated agreement with visiting religious Web sites because they were motivated by a “desire for friendship with others who are spiritually minded.” For example, "I visit Christian Web sites to be with people of like minds and hearts” (Female Christian Web Respondent). Those religious Web users indicating agreement with “desire for friendship...” were slightly more prone to browse the Web for short periods of duration. King (1998), in his study of TV station Web users observed a mean of 1.57 on the “Companionship” scale, indicating that “TV station Web users do not go online to find companionship”(p. 164). For King’s (1998) TV station Web users, one form of differentiation, the need for “Companionship” did not appear to drive their Web use.

**Research Question 6— User Media Intentions**, addressed the relationship between Christian Web site usage and future religious media usage. As previously mentioned, religious programming has typically “called for action” on the part of the user of mediated religion. Respondents in this study were asked about their intentions and behavior regarding religious media usage within the 12 months following visiting religious Web sites.

As stated in Chapter IV, these four items were not truly uses and gratification items, and were not represented as interval level measures for the purpose of factor analysis. However, for purposes of this study they were identified as “Media Intent.” These items may represent a different set of behaviors and actions that, with additional research, may point to a type of symbiotic relationship between religious Web use and future religious media usage.
A Spearman's correlational analysis was performed to determine whether or not a relationship existed between Christian Web site usage and future religious media usage. Additionally, the single item of time spent in religious Web sites was correlated against future religious media usage. User intent does always equate to action. It is important to note that while respondents at the time of the survey indicated a desire to increase their use of religious media over the next 12 months, for various reasons they may not. Nonetheless, a relationship does exist between the amount of time spent browsing religious Web sites and user intent to increase future usage of religious media, as observed in the Spearman correlations discussed in Table 4-20. The relationship between future media use tended to be strongest for users who spent more than an hour browsing religious Web site, with the exception being religious television.

When respondents time spent browsing religious Web sites was correlated against future religious Web sites and favorite religious Web sites, a strong relationship of .203, which is statistically significant at p<.05 level, was measured. When asked about their intention to increase their "usage of religious radio," a weak positive relationship of .123, p<.01, was observed. Murphy (1998c), in his radio station Web site study, measured a relationship between the radio station listener and their favorite Web sites.

When asked "how much time per week, do you normally spend watching religious shows on TV," 20.9% or 183 respondents, indicated that they “don’t watch.” The majority of the respondents, 303 watch “less than thirty minutes per week of religious TV.” Regarding future "usage of religious television," based upon the correlation of time spent on line against future intention for religious TV viewers, these data suggest a weak
relationship $r = .104, p<.01$, between time spent on line and user intentions to increase usage of religious TV.

The strongest relationships were found for increased use of religious Web sites and favorite religious Web sites, respectively. Intent and favorite religious Web site use are positively at $r = .216$, which is statistically significant at $p<.01$. However, with 262 cases missing some degree of caution is warranted. A similar observation was made regarding visiting different religious Web sites in the future. The users’ “intent to visit religious Web sites in the future” was positively correlated at $r = .203$, which is statistically significant at $p<.01$, however, with slightly more cases to work with here, ($N=674$) this relationship may present a slightly clearer picture of future intent.

Familiarity with other religious Web sites should refine Christian Web user gratifications, and some users will begin browsing various religious Web sites until they find a venue that satisfies their needs.

As Christian Web users become more aware of religious Web sites on the Internet, their religious Web usage should increase. At this point in time, 50% of these respondents have been visiting religious Web sites for less than one year. One respondent noted,

I just LOVE visiting Christian Web sites and getting different perspectives on current Christian issues, especially from other women. I plan on visiting more sites, but I'm a computer novice and actually stumbled into this site. (Female Christian Web Respondent)
Historically, user gratifications provided by religious television have matured over decades of continuous use. Christian Web users need more time to clearly identify those gratifications they desire to obtain through the use of religious Web sites.

**Web Usage as Possible Extension of the Uses and Gratifications Paradigm**

This study has built upon the lengthy research tradition of the uses and gratifications theory. The items and measures employed here have been largely taken from the television measures refined by Rubin (1977, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1986) and utilized by Abelman (1987, 1988) and Hamilton and Rubin (1992). These published measures provided standardization and were deemed appropriate as the established religious Web sites were based upon television ministries, and mimic television. The Web measures in this study were borrowed from King (1988) and Murphy (1988c), as they were the most current published standardized items available measuring Web use as it relates to uses and gratifications theory.

Despite the employment of these standardized uses and gratifications measures, the measurement challenges described in this study point toward different gratifications associated with Web use, even for the religious television viewer. While this study was modeled methodologically after the Abelman’s (1988) study of motivations for religious television usage, Abelman did not identify an extracted factor such as “Religious Entertainment/Information.” Additionally, standardized items to measure interactivity such as “prayer requests,” “inspirational music,” or “searches for sacred verses and texts,” have not be published for uses and gratifications studies.
The summated scale, "Religious Web Use/Religious Entertainment/Information," in this study were distributed in television studies into the separate areas of voyeurism, information, reaction, habit and entertainment. However, based upon the exploratory factor analysis, these Web users do not appear to distinguish these aspects of Web use as discrete concepts. This lack of specificity has resulted in too many items measuring "Religious Web Use/Religious Entertainment/Information"- loading nine items- and too few, three, measuring an important scale, "Reaction." This study argues that this distinction is much more than a conceptual or methodological device, but may provide some evidence that some aspects of Web use are unique and as such may warrant the development of measures distinct from television measures.

Perhaps these measurement challenges may indicate that the Web is not like television and therefore the Web is unlike television. Perhaps it may be extrapolated from these data that, in the mind of these Web users, the Web experience is not the same as the television experience and the motivations for use are different. There is evidence here that the Web is serving different gratifications and as such this study argues for Web use as a possible extension of the uses and gratifications paradigm.

**Implications for Uses and Gratification Research**

The pliability of uses and gratifications perspectives recognize that the user's means of employing technology for satisfying gratifications needs vary from person to person. An attempt to appreciate the uniqueness of the Christian Web user, particularly users who consider themselves as "spiritual," needs more attention by researchers. The instruments that researchers employ to measure these gratifications must now begin to evolve to embrace a new technology and a new application. This study was informed by
religious television items of measurement largely from Abelman (1988), Hamilton and Rubin (1992), and adapted for the Web based upon Kaye’s (1996), King (1998), and Murphy’s (1998c) research on Web user gratifications. The items adapted from religious television were utilized based upon their high reliability and a strong research tradition in uses and gratifications. In some ways religious Web use may mirror some aspects of religious television use.

Hamilton and Rubin’s (1992) study attempted “to explain the nature and consequences of religion in the individual’s life” (p. 667). Hamilton and Rubin found partial support for a relationship between religiosity and television use. “Conservatism in religious beliefs related negatively to voyeuristic viewing, and religious conservatives watched fewer sexually oriented TV programs than non-conservatives” (p. 677). Consistent with uses and gratifications, their findings showed a selective viewing pattern whereby religious conservatives choose to watch less sexually-oriented programming. “Based on social values and beliefs, religious conservatives may choose to avoid TV content that they find morally offensive” (Hamilton & Rubin, 1992, p. 677).

It is important to note that religious publishing and television companies preceded local churches and other ministries by more than 10 years in some instances with a presence on the Internet. As such, the Christian Web sites of some religious publishing houses and television ministries are as sophisticated today as secular television Web sites. While age does not imply sophistication, time has allowed these television ministries to experiment with various formats. These Christian television Web sites offer many of the same religious media gratifications that religious television offers today. Some of the same gratifications that respondents indicated were important to them, such as sacred
verses and texts, sermons and testimonies, inspirational music and visuals, and family-oriented fare, are available on religious television programs already. Nonetheless, in many ways Christian Web sites both converge and diverge with religious television, perhaps at the point of interactivity.

Despite the apparent format similarities between Christian television programming and Christian Web content, the challenges documented in attempting to measure the driving motivations for Christian Web use among a sample of users who were raised on television are have proven complex, due to the lack of appropriate items. Christian Web users appear to portray users as engaged in a quest for something unique, yet uncertain as to whether they have attained exactly what they were searching for.

The Abelman (1987) study of religious television viewers borrowed the items from Rubin (1983) that informed this research so strongly. Abelman (1987) observed "Reaction" with an eigenvalue of 5.51. The Abelman study ranked dissatisfaction with commercial television, avoidance of commercial television, spiritual guidance, and moral support as the primary factor, for religious television use. In the religious Web study "Entertainment/Information" ranked as the primary motivation for users of Christian Web sites. Unfortunately, Abelman was not clear in the development of Rubin’s (1983) scales concerning the religious application of “Reaction.” The underlying distinctions between how “Faith” drives the religious user to avoid viewing commercial television, or how watching religious television is indicative of a “Reaction” toward commercial television, was not addressed in Abelman’s research.

The measurement challenges in this study point to a phenomenon that is not quite the same as the religious television experience as we know it today, to something unique.
and slightly different. The answer may lie in the interactive nature of the Web. King (1998) observed structural and contextual parameters concerning the TV Web site and identified the factor "Interactivity" (p. 166). This study did not focus on the technical aspects of Christian Web sites or "Interactivity" as a motivation amongst users of Christian Web sites. However, some degree of these attributes are emerging, as users indicated high levels of agreement with the more "interactive" features of Christian Web sites such as "sacred verses and text" as well as "prayer requests." In reviewing the numerous typed comments by respondents, the ability to "download Scriptures" or ask someone online to interpret the Scriptures they had just read was very important to some of the respondents. The capability to pray online with someone when a respondent had a need was mentioned repeatedly in Christian Web user comments. These remarks appear to be the beginning of religious media gratifications description which are different from what Abelman (1988) observed with Pat Robertson's 700 Club. While Christian Web users may not know exactly what they want, they seem to be saying that religious television is not supplying it. The evidence suggests that Christian Web sites users are pursuing a different set of gratifications from those provided by religious television and that religious Web sites provide unique and distinct gratifications.

The data here argue that the majority of those who visit Christian Web sites range from age 33 to 50, and are more representative than the general Web audience in terms of gender. These Christian Web users are mostly college-educated and overwhelming are married. Although 96% identify themselves as religious converts and evangelical/fundamentalist, few attributed their conversion experience to the Web. As increasing numbers of people migrate to Christian Web sites, potentially the number of religious
conversions may also grow. While not posed directly, it can be safely inferred that these white, middle class, evangelicals probably have children who are beginning to visit Web sites and explore family alternative fare online. The opportunity to reach these emerging young visitors is an area of increasing interest among some religious organizations today, and this demographic represents a tremendous opportunity for early proselytizing (Laney, 1997b).

These respondents in the religious Web study are also Internet users with 71% of these users spending more than an hour per week browsing non-religious Web sites. Growing familiarity with the Internet may help these respondents to further refine their religious Web gratifications, by observing varied Web content. These respondents indicated that they have less than a year's experience in browsing Christian Web sites. This lack of depth and sophistication can become problematic for religious Web content producers. A previous pilot study observed some of the ramifications of this inexperience and uncertainty on the part of Christian Web content providers. In a growing environment of religious Web sites, venues ranged from church bulletins to interactive sites replete with audio-streaming capability and numerous links to other religious resources (Laney, 1997).

The Christian Web site user is a member of a Christian denomination or has some religious preference and visits the Christian Web sites that agree with his or her religious preference.

The Christian Web site user is currently both a novice and a light user with 43% of users spending more than one hour per week browsing Christian Web sites. While this
online exposure may not be lengthy, it aids in building brand loyalty and online as well as offline relationships with these religious Web sites and their ministries.

While scales such as "Religious Web Use" may provide additional clarification in the discussion of unique Christian Web gratifications, in an exploratory study cautious is advised in the application of summated scales labeling these uses and gratifications. However, this description serves to direct attention towards the development of scales that will recognize aspects of media use that are adequately measure the phenomena being observed. With continued refinement, testable hypotheses may eventually emerge to give birth to more predictive models of religious Web gratifications. The term identified in this study for this observed behavior, "Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information," may not effectively describe the precise underlying dimension, but it provides a point of departure for discussion and research.

Clearly, uses and gratifications, while appropriate for informing this aspect of communication behavior, must continue to expand to embrace Web use as discrete behavior and religious Web use as a distinct subset of this phenomenon. For now the current survey items require refinement. Greater degrees of conceptualization and analysis of religious Web activity are necessary. The language of the users motives requires interpretation and the tools of analysis must mature.

Conclusions

Part of the justification for this study was the need for religious organizations with outreach ministries on the Web to understand their visitors better in order to more effectively minister to them by providing them with the religious gratifications they are seeking. From
the data gathered here, we can assume that these users of Christian Web sites represent the early pioneers of cyber-spirituality amongst evangelicals and fundamentalist Web users. It is important that the motivations and gratifications that these spiritual cyber-pilgrims are seeking in their forays into Christian Web sites be well understood by religious organizations and their Web content providers. The understanding of these strategies will equip religious bodies to minister more effectively as both of these entities embrace and enter cyberspace in the 21st century.

1. The Christian Web users in this study tended to be predominately white and middle class. The Christian Web user is college educated, probably with a degree, and is married. These Christian Web users identified themselves with an evangelical or fundamentalist denomination and reside in the southern portion of the United States. These Christian Web users have experienced previous religious conversion which was non-Web related. These Web users tend to be between the ages of 33 and 50, and have been browsing religious Web sites for less than one year. While these Web users are more likely to be male, female Web users are quickly bridging the gap.

2. The Christian Web user ranks "Religious Web Use" as the most important reason they go online. While some apparent entertainment and information elements are embedded in the online experience, religious overtones permeate the Christian Web user’s encounter. For these respondents religious Web site usage may be categorized as an example of a "Reaction," to items related to monetary appeals, however, caution is advised based upon only three items loading on this factor. With the majority of the respondents opposed to "making a monetary contribution to this Web site’s ministry." The role of faith as a possible motive for explaining religious Web sites ranked third amongst these users. Seeking
reinforcement for personal beliefs received the highest loading in the five items loading on faith factor, with the desire for personal or religious conversion receiving the lowest. Among the 440 Christian Web respondents, 49% agreed that a motive for their religious Web use was “searching for an alternative to traditional religious services,” the "Alternative" factor. This factor pertained to the possible motives for use being found in religious preference, allowing beliefs to influence selection of program content, and possible usage as an alternative to traditional religious services for some. Overall gratifications associated with the Christian Web user may best be understood in terms of two or three major motivations such as faith, community, and religious belief influencing media content selection.

3. These Web users may consider these Christian Web sites as resources that serve to reinforce their personal religious motives and beliefs. They express a high degree of preference for interactive control over Web content, through such channels as prayer requests, inspirational messages and music, as well as search tools to sacred verses and texts.

4. These Christian Web users are already converted, so these sites are speaking to "the choir." However, these users desire to explore their faith in a greater way within a positive virtual community that holds sacred and provides the same religious teachings that the Christian Web user prefers. While community is important, the longer the Christian Web site user remains online, the less interested he/she appears to be in their search for friendship with others who are spiritually minded.

5. While the Christian Web user is basically a novice concerning Christian Web sites, the experience for the majority of these users appears to be a positive one. Christian Web users stated that they intend to increase their use of religious Web sites, and particularly, their favorite religious Web site, within the next 12 months; however, they are
less inclined to increase their listening and viewing of religious radio and religious television programs.

**Seek Out Motivations**

"My whole life is centered around my faith."-Female Christian Web Respondent.

Christian Web site usage may represent both specific and non-specific religious usage. The opportunities for effectively serving larger numbers of users lie in targeting the specific drives articulated by the respondents. Granted, these elements may change as these users become more mature and selective, but this study provides a baseline. Christian Web site users represent an audience that is largely converted. However, the bulk of Christian Web sites place evangelization as their number one priority, perhaps at the expense of providing the gratifications being sought by these users (Laney, 1997).

What do Christian Web site users want? Motivated by "Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information" drives, these users desire sites that provide sacred text and positive messages. Within this environment, these users seek to access inspirational music and graphics. The opportunity to submit prayer requests and receive feedback in a supportive virtual community appears to be important to some of these users. Venues that are entertaining and diverse enough to minister to adults as well as the entire family are ranked highly. Access to information about religious community events, as well as links to other religious sites, whether for academic research purposes or personal edification, are important to the Christian Web user. Web sites that affirm the religious preferences/denomination of the Christian Web user are important and serve to provide some measure of reinforcement regarding beliefs deemed important to these users.
While some visitors to Christian Web sites may visit because they are curious about conversion, the overwhelming majority, or 96% of these respondents, appear to be visiting because they have already experienced conversion and are motivated by other needs. If these are indeed the two most distinct groups found in this study, Christian Web content providers must determine how to equip themselves effectively to serve these diverse motivations. Christian Web sites will always have to compete with other visually appealing religious sites within the boundaries of this medium. However, it is religious content that is of prime importance, and the data presented here argue that religious content matters as much, if not more, for these users of Christian Web sites.

Knock-down Obstacles

It appears that Web site usage is not the same as television use and Christian Web site users may be developing and seeking unique gratifications through their online experience. While mediated religion has historically been driven by the appropriation of technology for the primary purpose of evangelism and religious training, Web sites offer the opportunity to provide much more that just that. This technology offers the opportunity for religious bodies to change the way they communicate, but it also challenges them to knock down the obstacles to changing how they think in terms of this technology and those who use it.

Church Web sites represent the outreach ministries of the information age. A Web site can be visually appealing as well as interactive. Search engines to the Bible and other sacred texts, inspirational music, and a listing of referral services, with a contact button, e-mail address and phone number for follow-up might be helpful, based upon respondent comments.
Web sites represent the means to provide effective internal and external communication channels between the church and the community. Organizations can provide information and links to upcoming religious events within their religious communities and regions. Additionally, maps with points of contact information and directions to events could be provided (p. 16).

Christian Web sites represent the means to build the virtual community of the 21st century. The dynamic communication of online prayer in the time of need and the provision for nurturing moral support builds the virtual community, strengthens relationship with the Web site's religious organization, and draws the virtual community together (Zaleski, 1997).

Web sites represent the means to provide education on a global scale. The opportunity to provide instructive material to help people build their faith in cyberspace has global implications. With respondents accessing Web sites from Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia, Central America, and North America, the ability to disseminate information globally at low cost is within the capabilities of local churches. With audio-streaming and CD-ROM technology, messages can become global. Religious "Web-casting" begins to resemble religious broadcasting, blurring lines and stretching the imagination of the active user. This material can provide opportunities for inquiry and learning as well as more advanced material to help the religious convert strengthen and build their faith (Wilson, 1998, p. 16).

Web Sites are here and their presence on the Web is growing. Technology updates and news reports point to the fact that users are online and that Christian Web use has attracted a portion of the religious media marketplace. However, the mere act of posting a Web site is not sufficient for a religious organization to be competitive and viable in this
emerging medium. These Web users are developing gratifications pointing towards
interactive, sophisticated, virtual religious communities that deliver inspirational music,
graphics, chat capability, and retrievable resource information at no cost to the user. The day
of the static Web site resembling electronic Yellow Pages offering a photo of the building, a
church calendar and a map to the church location with a phone number has passed. Web
content providers must begin to understand and appreciate the motivations of these
respondents use and act upon them. They must begin to conceptualize this mission in the
light of a new medium and not the fading shadows of religious television and radio. Granted,
the Web allows access to sites that these respondents indicate they would find repugnant, but
the time for testing whether the "Web is of God" or something else has passed (Purves,
1998). These respondents state that they intend to increase their Christian Web site use in the
future, some by as much as 50% or more. If this is the case, and as these users develop more
exposure to Web sites as the literature suggests, passive motivations begin to diminish and
the desire to exploit the capabilities of mediated religion begin to increase. Religious
organizations that maintain Web sites must move beyond the traditional Web genres that
mimic television. Such static Web content lacks creativity and interactivity and fails to
actively engage the religious imagination of the user as a collaborator in the making of
meaning. While Web sites will eventually mature, reticent religious organizations, slow to
knock down the obstacles, may find that the virtual pews are empty as the progressive
cyberchurch of the 21st century comes online.

Limitations of the Study

As an exploratory study informed by the uses and gratifications tradition, this
study has three major limitations. As has been previously discussed, the measurements

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utilized in this study are based on religious television models. Culture studies models were described in the literature review, and seek to inform this study as well. Unfortunately, the current state of cultural studies research provides few applicable item to measure the subtle dimensions of faith integration as they pertain to media choice selection. Conversely, the existing religious television models are often secular communication models that insert the term "religion" in front of the medium. Unfortunately, this act of substitution may fail to conceptualize adequately the media motivations of those of deep faith. These niche users utilize both religious programming and non-religious programming to satisfy media gratifications that may be different. Christian Web site use may point to a set of unique gratifications being sought by the active user of a religious Web site.

Additionally, these Christian Web users also utilize the Internet for ostensibly different gratifications. While one may argue that these distinctions are subtle, the lack of adequate instruments available to measure these dimensions hamper the process. The current religious television models, while serving as a point of departure for study, are not entirely appropriate for measuring religious Web gratifications and can become problematical. Kaye’s (1996), King’s (1998), and Murphy’s (1998c) studies of the Web provide a more appropriate framework for future study of the Web. To date, a religious Web model has yet to be developed. Hopefully this study has advanced the conceptualization for the development of such a model. In the absence of appropriate religious Web models, some aspects of the users’ motivations for religious Web usage will remain undiscovered and ignored.

Extending uses and gratifications to embrace religious Web site usage may be appropriate due to this theory’s past accommodation of differentiated audiences over other
theories. The uses and gratification of media users vary. An attempt to appreciate the uniqueness of the religious audience, particularly individuals who are fervent in their religious beliefs, must be addressed. Thus the individual or their sub-groups, motivations, perceptions, and expectations need to be considered. The challenge has been, of course, how one measures God, faith, and claims to ultimacy. And yet it is those precise claims that influence those who are allowing their faith to influence their cognitive spheres. For religious faith comes to bear on attitude, goals, and needs in every facet of life, including media choice selection. Another challenge for researchers examining human behavior has been distinguishing the sincerely religious from the nominally religious. A few demographic questions in a lengthy survey will not adequately glean this information. Comprehensive survey data, supported by interdisciplinary methods research, may hold the key. The rich texture and descriptive portrait that cultural studies produce offer some potential for solving the problem. However, an argument for the integration of these methods can be made to produce a more accurate picture via a more holistic approach.

The second limitation is the utilization of factor analysis. Factor analysis is not a true statistical technique and requires a certain degree of interpretation of the part of the researcher in the labeling and identification of factors for retention. In this study some subjective judgement on the part of the researcher was applied concerning the exact number of factors retained in the study and how they were loaded. This interpretative nature may result in another researcher deriving conflicting conclusions, making factor analysis as a technique problematic when replication of findings are desired.

Finally, the third limitation is that the results may not be generalizable to the larger World Wide Web population, given the fact that the sample for this study was self-
selected and non-random on the part of respondents visiting Christian Church Web sites listed in the Goshen Net Directory. However, the results may be used as the first step in a series of additional studies on Internet religious usage with greater generalizability. This sample may be generalizable to the population of Christian Church Web sites on the Web. Additionally, it may be one of the first projects executed that examines the motivations for Christian Web site use and argues for religious Web uses and gratifications.

Recommendations for Further Research

Rafaeli and Newhagen (1996, p. 6) described the "inviting empiricism inherent in Net behavior, and the marvelous research opportunities the WWW offers. " There is a strong research tradition for examining new media through the architecture of existing media. Based on the correlations observed in this study, a segment of the religious audience, albeit nascent, has been motivated to some degree by of their religious beliefs which may influence their selection of media, in this case Christian Web sites. In addition, some of these respondents based upon their open-end responses selected Christian Web sites as an alternative. A segment of these religious faithful claim to reject the media offerings of secular society due to their increased portrayals of sex, homosexuality, nudity, profanity, and violent content. The religious offerings on the Web and their content may become of greater significance for the religious users of the Internet than ever before. A need exists for uses and gratifications to be extended to embrace the realm of the sacred and the recognition that this audience is a unique one. Clearly, continued reliance upon traditional measurement uses and gratification tools, based upon a television approach to this diverse Web population will continue to under-report these media users and this sector of society.
The uses and gratifications of these respondents, while not overtly theoretical are useful to the field as they provide the early steps to begin to make some limited predictions about religious Web gratifications sought. For example, King (1998, p. 168) in his TV Web study observed the salient feature of “Interactivity.” While this terminology was not utilized in this study, such a dimension may exist as an underlying motivation in the summated scale of “Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information.” Additional rigor, and refined items and improved measurement may result in more predictive communication models. The data suggests that “Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information” motivations, such as access to “sacred verses and texts” or “prayer requests,” have the strongest observed relationship to those in this demographic.

The results of these data provide us with certain aspects of a unique group of Web users. While exploratory in nature, these data have describe discrete Web usage, choices and content usage by Christian Web uses, and argues for the extension of uses and gratifications to embrace religious Web usage.

This exploratory study attempted to build on this line of thought by examining a select group of Christian Web users and describe the motivations that drive their religious Web usage with greater clarity. English-speaking Christian organizations and churches listed in Goshen and located in the United States and Canada were selected for this study because of the challenges they face in understanding the role of the Web and its relationship to their function and mission in society. While the uses and gratifications paradigm has been primarily employed here, this study has been informed by cultural and religious studies. In terms of the cultural and religious studies disciplines’ worldviews, the religious user functions as an actor shaping meaning through the lens of mediated religion. Additionally,
this study has argued for Christian Web site usage as a possible extension of the uses and gratifications perspective. This study represents a point of departure for the examination of an area for future research. As stated earlier, the field must continue to move forward and develop new measures for new technologies, define terms, and develop more sophisticated tools for analysis. By the further refinement of existing models, and the development of new items, this study serves as a bridge to understanding a new technology and the gratifications users seek from it.

In the process of data collection, many of the 912 respondents provided a wealth of rich qualitative data that provided valuable insight for the refinement of a future religious uses and gratifications instrument for Web usage, independent of religious television models. The use of focus groups and case studies are two possible methods toward analyzing the motivations for religious Web usage. Those in cultural studies and communications should direct their focus upon greater definition of measurement items to clearly delineate religious Web use in general, as these gratifications appear to be different from religious television gratifications. The development of reliable Web gratification indices will provide the necessary baseline for the refinement of a religious Web instrument. Attempts should be made to accurately determine whether "Religious Web Use/Entertainment/Information" is a unique gratification being sought in an attempt to accurately describe this phenomenon.

Second, with improved instruments that dimensionalize religious media use, a study of Christian radio Web sites and their users would become feasible. Already, Christian radio stations in the larger markets of the U.S. are establishing a presence on the Web. As the number of visitors to Christian Web sites continues to grow, this is a niche that will develop. As these Christian Web users become more sophisticated and astute in
identifying their religious Web gratifications, they may begin to turn to Christian radio Web sites as well. This study found tentative support that users of religious Web sites plan to increase their use of religious radio. If so, perhaps this will announce the genesis of a potentially new symbiotic relationship between Christian radio stations and Christian Web sites. The relationship between Christian Web site use and religious radio stations was not examined in sufficient detail in this study to draw any inferences. However, the existence of symbiotic relationships and the understanding of these alliances is vitally important to audience researchers and media corporations. As the Christian media market continues to do a brisk business amongst business entities of various sorts, knowledge of the existence of such symbiotic relationships is fruitful. The findings presented in this study serve to illuminate a growing niche of active, deliberate, spiritual actors, for whom faith factors in their selection of media is an increasingly competitive and converging media-rich environment.

Finally, religious organizations must recognize that the Web need not be viewed as an obstacle or the enemy, depleting tithes and financial offerings and reducing attendance at worship services. The Christian Web site is an opportunity for ministry to the religious and the non-religious browser in cyberspace. As the number of users grow, the financial issues of maintaining a presence on the Web may eventually resolve themselves, via donations, the sale of resource material, or even advertising by Christian businesses. Local churches equipped with determined and visionary leadership provide a special flavor and unique opportunity upon which to build brand loyalty within their churches and communities that exceed the concern of how many attended services today. By understanding the motivations for religious Web site use and the unique gratification needs of Christian Web
users, churches can launch the architecture to build a vast number of cybersaints--spiritual celebrants united in purpose towards expanding the virtual global community of faith. However, this will involve a three-step process: Develop a plan, identify the people, and execute the plan.

Ultimately, religious Web use today takes its place in the colorful lineage of mediated religion. It is part of a sacred imperative that originated 25 centuries ago when the legendary Shango, the African God of Thunder, used the drum to draw closer to God and to satisfy his spiritual needs. The religious Web offers tremendous potential for disseminating a portion of this sacred imperative to those courageous enough to harness the lightning and thunder of cyberspace and carry the vision of Shango into the 21st century.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
Glossary of Terms

**Brand Loyalty**: favorable and positive recognition of a religious body or institution; identification with the ministry or organization; one who provides fiscal support, prayer support, or emotional support through calls, letters, repeat visits (more than once) to the Web site or program; sends electronic messages of encouragement.

**Communication Motives**: motives are the expectations generated for communication behavior. A need for belongingness, for example, may produce a motive to use communication channels to seek companionship. Motives are not a singular phenomenon (Rubin and Windahl, 1986, p. 191).

**Culture**: the signifying system through which a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced. While culture communicates a particular social order, that order itself is, in turn, shaped by its system of signifying (Warren, 1997, p. 50).

**Cultural Agency**: the act of noticing, examining, and critical analysis of the actual reception of media, so as to account for ambiguous, even contradictory effects (Warren, 1997, p. 159).

**Cyberspace**: coined by science fiction writer William Gibson in 1984 (Neuromancer), to refer to the space in which computer-mediated communications occurs: that is, to the interface between digital bits and human consciousness, silicon and soul (Groothuis, 1997, pp. 13-14).

**Cyberspirituality**: on-line culture that values the concept of belief in spirituality, and faith that is not grounded in traditional religion and may consider traditional religion narrow-minded and irrelevant.
Electric Church: a complete social institution with defined organizations, a variety of occupations and roles, and a set of beliefs and values. Its goal is to produce a special and new type of Christian commercial broadcast, espousing evangelical-fundamentalism theological, social, and sometimes even political positions to the mass audience (Frankl, 1987, p. 7).

Electronic Church: term coined by Ben Armstrong, author of the book The Electric Church, for the religious television broadcasts of evangelicals; traditionally accompanied with telethons, personality-based programs, and strong advocacy programs by a television evangelist for example, (Jim and Tammy Bakker-PTL Club, Jimmy Swaggart-A Study In the Word, Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson and the 700 Club) (Armstrong, 1979, p. 100).

E-vangelism: Christians who visit secular chat rooms and newsgroups to share the gospel with non-Christians.

Evangelism: zealous preaching and dissemination of the gospel, as through the use of mediated religion to convert to Christianity. For example "to win the lost at any cost" (Vest, 1996, p. 1).

Evangelist: one who preaches the gospel, who evangelizes.

Evangelical: of relating to, or being a Christian church believing in the authority of the Bible, in salvation through regeneration, and in a transformed personal life through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior and lord.

Growth Company: a religious entity that grows at a greater rate than the economy, as a whole and that usually directs a relatively high proportion of income back into that religious entity, it is demonstrably competitive.
**Growth Industry:** the amalgamation of mediated religion for the sole purpose of generating tax-free profit with the intent of obtaining the widest possible audience reach and market share through proselytizing, proclamation, and perpetuation of a group or sects teachings, doctrine, norms and customs; extremely entrepreneural, fiscally flexible, aggressively advertised via mediated means, and demonstrably competitive.

**Hegemony:** leadership or predominant influence, especially when exercised by one group over another group (Warren, 1997, p. 169).

**Media Use:** the selecting, consuming, processing, and interpreting of media and their content (Rubin and Windahl, 1986, p.195).

**Mediated Religion:** the means of information dissemination, a tool, or a channel such as radio, television, Internet, World Wide Web, Web sites, newspapers, magazines, film, recorded music, books, billboard, electronic bulletin boards, etc., that are used by religious organizations and individuals to reach one or many people in the hopes of perpetuating their religion, proclaiming their teachings and doctrine, and generating revenue and “brand loyalty” for their religious organization.

**Megachurches:** religious entities serving 2,000 or more parishioners weekly (Ferguson and Lee, 1997, p. 70).

**Pentecostal:** of, relating to, or being any of various Christian congregations whose members seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit, in emulation of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost.

**Religion:** an organized body of people or institutions adhering to a set of religious teachings and doctrines that seek a degree of ultimacy to the questions of life, that regularly collect funds, reinvesting a substantial portion of those funds back into the
organization; believes in self-perpetuation; believe in the freedom to publicly proclaim
their beliefs through the use of all aspects of media apart from government (federal, state,
local) intervention; believes it is exempt from paying taxes; and expects its members to
conform to a unique set of codified norms and customs.

Religious programming: faith-based programming that fulfills a spiritual need in the
viewer’s life (Wiles, 1996, p. 21).

Religious Web Site: presence in graphic, video, textual, or audio format on the World
Wide Web of religiously oriented material presented by a professionally organized
religious body, or institutions adhering to a set of religious teachings and doctrines that
seek a degree of ultimacy to the questions of life, that regularly collect funds, reinvesting
a substantial portion of those funds back into the organization; either mainline,
independent or non-denominational.

Televangelism: the exclusive use of television or cable television for the transmission of
the gospel by a television evangelist (Pat Robertson and the 700 Club, Paul and Jan
Crouch & Trinity Broadcasting Network, TD Jakes Ministries-The Potter’s House, Dr.
Fredrick KC Price-Ever Increasing Faith, Robert Schuller-Hour of Power, etc) (Schmidt
& Kess, 1986, p. 5).

World Wide Web: the Web organizes information based on a hypertext model. That is
you can jump from page to page based on key word links embedded within a document.
Netscape is one of the leading graphical front-end interfaces to the Web, called a Web
browser (Baker, 1995, p. 26).
APPENDIX B

ROSTER OF PARTICIPATING RELIGIOUS WEB SITES
The Broadcasting and Religious Studies Research Group-U of Tennessee-Knoxville recently conducted a survey of people who visit Christian websites. From June 12, 1998 - July 18, 1998, the following U.S. and Canadian Religious Web sites placed a link to our on-line survey on their web sites.

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<th>Organization</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
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If you would like more information about this survey or have any questions, contact the Survey Director, Michael Laney: mlaney@utk.edu PH (423)974-4291

The University of Tennessee College of Communications Religious Web Site Survey is property of Michael J. Laney.
APPENDIX C

SURVEY INSTRUMENT
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this very important project. The ultimate goal is to improve the effectiveness of the participating ministries in serving YOU! If you have reached this page, then you must be 18 years or older. This survey should take you approximately 10 minutes. Please answer the questions as best you can. Again, thank you for your participation. God Bless You.

Survey Director.

1. About how much time per week, do you normally spend browsing the Internet, in general?
   [ ] Low
   [ ] Medium
   [ ] High

2. About how much time per week, do you normally spend browsing religious Web sites?
   [ ] Low
   [ ] Medium
   [ ] High

3. About how much time per week, do you normally spend watching religious shows on TV?
   [ ] Low
   [ ] Medium
   [ ] High

4. About how much time per week, do you normally spend listening to religious programs on the radio?
   [ ] Low
   [ ] Medium
   [ ] High

We want to know something about your use of religious media. Click on the response that best matches your REASONS for visiting religious Web sites.

5. When did you first visit a religious Web site?
   [ ] Less than 1 month ago
   [ ] 1-6 months ago
   [ ] 6-12 months ago
   [ ] Over 1 year ago

6. Have you ever had a personally spiritual or religious conversion experience?
   [ ] Yes
   [ ] No

7. Did this personally spiritual or religious conversion experience occur while on-line, or off-line later, either today, or in the past?
   [ ] Online at the time
   [ ] Offline later

8. If not online, or later off-line, where did this personally spiritual or religious conversion experience occur?
   Type in your response

9. This experience is still important to me in my everyday life.
   [ ] Strongly agree
   [ ] Agree
   [ ] Neutral
   [ ] Disagree
   [ ] Strongly disagree

10. I am seeking reinforcement for my personal beliefs.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

11. I desire personal spiritual or religious conversion.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

We would like to know what motivates you to visit a religious Web site. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

12. I am a spiritual person.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

13. I desire spiritual/religious training.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

14. I am attempting to explore my faith.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

15. I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

16. I am searching for an alternative to traditional religious services.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

17. I allow my spiritual/religious beliefs to influence my selection of program content.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

18. I am doing research (academic, professional, personal, etc.).
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

19. I am interested in making a purchase.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree

20. I am interested in making a monetary contribution.
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Neutral
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Strongly disagree
21. Should ministries be allowed to sell products/resource materials?

[ ]

22. I am interested in receiving free information.

[ ]

23. Here, you may type in other reasons why you are motivated to visit religious Web sites.

Now, we would like to know why you visited the religious Web site you are currently browsing. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

24. This Web site provides reinforcement and strengthens my spiritual beliefs.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

25. I am searching this Web site for a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque to affiliate with.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

26. This Web site offers messages that are positive and uplifting.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

27. This Web site provides information about religious community events.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

28. This Web site provides inspirational music and graphics.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

29. I am familiar with this Web site's ministry/organization.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

30. I am interested in making a purchase with this Web site's ministry.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

31. I am interested in making a monetary contribution to this Web site's ministry.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

32. This Web site offers alternative family-oriented activities.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

33. This Web site has links to other Web sites I like.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

34. This Web site is entertaining.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

35. This Web site agrees with my religious preferences/denomination.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

36. This Web site allows for prayer requests.

[ ] strongly agree  [ ] agree  [ ] somewhat agree  [ ] disagree  [ ] strongly disagree

8/6/98 12:53:40 PM
50. Please type the Web site's title (e.g. GOSHEM) or the name of the Web site that lead you to this survey:

51. What is your gender?
♂ Male ☐ Female

52. What was your age in years on your last birthday?

53. Which of these racial or ethnic groups best describes you?

54. What is your marital status?

55. Please indicate the highest level of education completed.

56. Which category best represents your primary occupation.

57. Which category best describes your total household income?

58. Are you yourself a member of the following religious group, sect, denomination, etc?

59. If you live in the United States, please type your state's 2 letter abbreviation. Non-U.S. residents type "XX" in the box and answer the NEXT question.

60. If you do NOT live in the United States, please type in your city & country here.

61. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience visiting religious Web sites? If so, please write in the space provided.
Religious Web Site Survey with Response Options

We would like to know something about your use of religious media. Please indicate the correct response.

1. About how much time per week in hours and minutes, do you normally spend browsing the Internet, in general?
   - 5-10 minutes
   - 10-15 minutes
   - 15-30 minutes
   - 30-60 minutes
   - Over 1 hour
   - Don’t visit
   - Can’t really say

2. About how much time per week, in hours and minutes, do you normally spend browsing religious Web sites?
   - Less than 5 minutes
   - 5-10 minutes
   - 10-15 minutes
   - 15-30 minutes
   - 30-60 minutes
   - Over 1 hour
   - Don’t visit
   - Can’t really say

3. About how much time per week, in hours and minutes, do you normally spend watching religious shows on TV?
   - Less than thirty minutes
   - Less than one hour
   - 1 hour - less than 2 hours
   - 2 hours – less than hours
   - 3 hours or more
   - Don’t watch
   - Can’t really say

4. About how much time per week, in hours and minutes, do you normally spend listening to religious programs on the radio?
   - Less than thirty minutes
   - Less than one hour
   - 1 hour – less than 2 hours
   - 2 hours – less than 3 hours
   - 3 hours or more
   - Don’t watch
Can't really say

5. When did you first visit a religious Web site?
   - Today
   - 3 months ago
   - 6 months ago
   - over 1 year ago
   - A week ago
   - 6 months ago
   - A month ago
   - between 6-12 months ago

6. Have you ever had a spiritual or religious conversion experience?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Can't say

7. Did this spiritual or religious conversion experience occur while on-line, either today, or in the past?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Can't say

8. If not on-line, where did this spiritual or religious conversion experience occur? Write in your response ________________________________________________________________________.

9. This experience is still important to me in my everyday life.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

10. I am seeking reinforcement for my personal beliefs.
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

11. I desire personal spiritual or religious conversion.
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

We would like to know what motivates you to visit a religious Web site. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

12. I am a spiritual person.
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Disagree

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13. I desire spiritual/religious training.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

14. I am attempting to explore my faith.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

15. I desire friendship with others who are spiritually minded.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

16. I am searching for an alternative to traditional religious services.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

17. I allow my spiritual/religious beliefs to influence my selection of program content.
   - 0 percent of the time
   - 25 percent of the time
   - 50 percent of the time
   - 75 percent of the time
   - 100 percent of the time

18. I am doing research (academic, professional, personal, etc.).
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

19. I am interested in making a purchase.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree

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20. I am interested in making a monetary contribution.
   Strongly agree  Somewhat agree  Strongly disagree
   Agree  Disagree
21. Should ministries be allowed to sell products/resource materials?
   Strongly agree  Agree  Somewhat agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
22. I am interested in receiving free information.
   Strongly agree  Agree  Somewhat agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
23. Here you may type in other reasons why you are motivated to visit religious Web sites.

Now we would like to know why you visited the religious Web site you are currently browsing. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

24. This Web site provides reinforcement and strengthens my spiritual beliefs
   Strongly agree  Agree  Somewhat agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
25. I am searching this Web site for a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque to affiliate with.
   Strongly agree  Agree  Somewhat agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
26. This Web site offers messages that are positive and uplifting.
27. This Web site provides information about religious community events.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

28. This Web site provides inspirational music and graphics.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

29. I am familiar with this Web site’s ministry/organization.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

30. I am interested in making a purchase from this Web site’s ministry.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

31. I am interested in making a monetary contribution to this Web site’s ministry.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

32. This Web site offers alternative family-oriented activities.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

33. This Web site has links to other Web sites I like.
34. This Web site is entertaining.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

35. This Web site agrees with my religious preference/denomination.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

36. This Web site allows for prayer requests.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

37. This Web site offers sacred verses and texts.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

38. This Web site offers research information.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Somewhat agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

39. Here, you may type in other reasons why you visited the religious Web site you are currently browsing.

Now thinking about the religious Web site(s) you like to visit, please click the response that best matches your INTENTIONS in the next 12 months.
In the next 12 months I plan to...
40. I plan to increase my listening of religious radio program.
Yes  No  Undecided

41. I plan to increase my viewing of religious TV programs.
Yes  No  Undecided

42. I plan to increase my browsing of religious Web sites.
Yes  No  Undecided

43. I plan to increase my browsing of my favorite religious Web site.
5-15 percent  20-50 percent  50 percent or more

44. I plan to reduce my usage of religious media.
Yes  No  Undecided

45. I plan to visit a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque, now that I have visited their religious Web site.
Yes  No  Undecided

46. I plan to financially support the organization that hosts my favorite religious Web site with either a purchase or a monetary contribution.
Yes  No  Undecided

47. I plan to talk to others about religious Web sites I have visited.
Yes  No  Undecided

48. Have you ever contributed monetarily to a religious organization after visiting a religious Web site?
Yes  No  Undecided

49. Did the layout/graphics of the religious Web site factor in your decision to contribute to that religious organization after visiting the site?
Yes  No  Undecided  Not applicable

50. Please type the Web site's title (ex. GOSHEN) or the name of the Web site that lead you to this survey.

Only a few more questions and then we are done. We want to know a little about you and your faith. Remember, this survey will remain anonymous and your answers will be very helpful.

51. What is your gender?
   Male  Female
52. What was your age in years on your last birthday?
1. I’d rather not say
2. 18-24
3. 25-32
4. 33-40
5. 41-48
6. 49-56
7. 57-64
8. 65-72
9. 73-79
10. 80 or more

53. Which of these racial or ethnic groups best describes you?
1. I’d rather not say
2. White/Caucasian
3. Black/African-American
4. Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
5. Asian/Pacific Islander
6. Native American
7. Bi-Racial
8. Other

54. What is your marital status?
1. I’d rather not say
2. Married
3. Single
4. Divorced
5. Separated
6. Widowed
7. Living with Another

55. Please indicate the highest level of education completed.
1. I’d rather not say
2. Grammar
3. High School
4. 2 year- Associate Degree
5. Some College
6. 4 year-Bachelor’s Degree
7. Master’s Degree
8. Doctorate (Ph.D./D.Min)
9. Professional Degree (MD, JD)
10. Other

56. Which category best represents your primary occupation.
1. I’d rather not say
57. Which category best describes your household income?
1. I’d rather not say
2. Under $10,000 dollars
3. $10,000-$20,000 dollars
4. $20,000-$30,000 dollars
5. $30,000-$40,000 dollars
6. $40,000-$50,000 dollars
7. $50,000-$75,000 dollars
8. $75,000-$99,000 dollars
9. $100,000 or more

58. Are you, yourself, a member of the following religious group, sect, denomination, etc?
1. None
2. African Methodist Episcopal
3. Advent Christian
4. Adventist
5. Anglican
6. Apostolic
7. Assemblies of God
8. Association of Vineyard Churches
9. Baptist
10. Bible Church
11. Brethren
12. Calvary Chapel
13. Catholic
14. Christian and Missionary Alliance
15. Christian Church/Church of Christ
16. Church of Christ
17. Church of God-Anderson, IN
18. Church of God-Cleveland, TN
19. Church of God in Christ
20. Church of the Nazarene
21. Churches Online
22. Congregational
23. Disciples of Christ
24. Eastern Orthodox Church
25. Episcopal
26. Evangelical Covenant
27. Evangelical Free
28. Foursquare
29. Greek Orthodox Church
30. Independent Unaffiliated
31. International Pentecostal Holiness Church
32. Lutheran
33. Mennonite
34. Messianic
35. Methodist
36. Nazarene
37. Orthodox
38. Pentecostal/Charismatic
39. Presbyterian
40. Quaker/Friends
41. Reformed
42. Russian Orthodox Church
43. Salvation Army
44. United Church of Christ
45. Wesleyan
46. World Wide Church of God
47. Other
48. I’d Rather Not Say

59. If you live in the United States, please type your state’s 2 letter abbreviation. Non-U.S. residents type “XX” in the box and answer the NEXT question.

60. If you do not live in the United States, please type in your city & country here.

61. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience visiting religious Web sites? If so, please write in the space provided.

You are done! Thank you for your opinions!
Click below to SUBMIT your responses to this important study and GO BACK to your FAVORITE RELIGIOUS WEB SITE.
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT PAGE
Thank you for stopping by our Religious Web Site Survey. We are conducting a national survey on how people visit religious web sites. We want to know what you think about the religious web sites you visit. Please be reminded that your responses are anonymous and the results will remain confidential. Your responses will be used for research purposes only. You must be 18 years or older to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may end the survey at any time. Completion of the survey constitutes consent to participate. After you complete the survey, there will be a link provided for you to go back to the religious web site you were visiting.

Yes! I would like to take the survey!

No. I do not wish to participate.

If you have any questions about this survey, please feel free to contact the Survey Director:

milanev@utk.edu PH:423-974-4291

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APPENDIX E

SAMPLE RELIGIOUS WEB SITE PAGE WITH LOGO
Welcome To Mt. Olive Ministries

Cleveland, TN, USA

A progressive world demands that a church have a progressive program. Mt. Olive ministry is built on the belief that man's world and God's world are worlds apart. The only hope for this information age is to be informed about the relevancy of Jesus in everyday life. Our goal is to help bridge the gap between man's world and God's world by every means possible. The info-highway is one of those progressive moves. Come and visit us often. We hope that our ministry ideas will enhance what you are doing to reach others for the Kingdom.

Senior Pastor,
Gary Sears

For the next few weeks we are participating in a religious web site survey conducted by personnel at the University of Tennessee, USA. We urge you to participate in this survey during you visit to our site. Thank you for visiting us and come back often.

Seniors Pastor,
Gary Sears

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest......Matthew 11:28
Michael Jerome Laney was born in Flushing, New York, on April 26, 1955. He attended Ludwigsburg Elementary School in West Germany. Upon returning to the United States, he attended schools in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, and graduated from Bridgewater-Raynham Regional High School in 1973.

He enrolled in political science and journalism courses at the University of Massachusetts, North Dartmouth, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in 1977. In 1979, while enrolled in the Army Reserve Officer Training Program, Laney earned a Master of Arts degree, with a major in television and radio from Michigan State University. Upon graduation he accepted a commission in the United States Army Signal Corps as a second lieutenant and entered active duty. Laney served in a variety of communications and information management related positions with the Army. He retired as a major on October 1, 1995. While in the military, Laney was called and ordained into the ministry in 1987. He pastored churches in Germany, Korea, and Arizona. In 1995, Laney accepted a position as Instructor of Communications at Lee College, in Cleveland, Tennessee. Laney entered the doctoral program in communications and religious studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the summer of 1996. Laney completed the Ph.D. in communications, with a major in broadcasting, at UTK in December, 1998. He was an Appalachian College Association, Mellon Fellow while at UTK from 1997-1998.
In 1998, Laney was named assistant professor in the Department of Communications and the Arts at Lee University. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in broadcasting and electronic media.

The author is a member of Kappa Tau Alpha, National Religious Broadcasters, and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Laney is married to the former Leonora Denise Suggs of Hampton, Virginia, and they have three children, ReAnna, Mikaela, and James-Michael.