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by

Charlie Everett Dunn

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**Using Christianity As A Marketing Platform
On Emerging Media**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Gary Wilcox

Isabella Cunningham

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by

Charlie Everett Dunn, B.S. Adv.

Report

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Using Christianity As A Marketing Platform On Emerging Media

Charlie Everett Dunn, M.A.

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Supervisor: Gary Wilcox

Christianity has a long history that often became intertwined with the development of modern day media. This paper aims to draw a comparison between the use of Christianity as a marketing device during the Middle Ages and modern times. Using McLuhan's timeline of media epochs we are able to trace the changes of media through human history. This timeline provides us the means to analyze the ways in which Christianity was used as a marketing device to advance the adoption of new mediums. The Middle Ages' reliance on Christian networks to spread information enabled Gutenberg to gain widespread adoption of his printing press. The recent transition to the electronic age also shows how new mediums can use this same network to perpetuate messages. In modern times the electronic age has reproduced an environment conducive to the spread of Christian messages. Social media networks like Twitter exhibit increased interaction levels among prominent Christian leaders. The comparison of these two periods in time showcases the strength of the Christian network, even today. Furthermore it provides evidence of the prediction made by McLuhan that the interconnectedness of the electronic age would bring about a new type of oral tribe culture. This global village brought about by the Internet allows ancient communication practices to flourish once more.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

There is an old Flemish proverb that goes, “Soo D’oude Songen Soo Pepen De Jongen,” or translated, “as the old sing, so the young twitter.” The subject of many famous 17th century Flemish paintings, the proverb often depicts several partygoers celebrating around a crowded banquet table. The celebration includes both old and young revelers. Basking in the merriment, the group is seen dining, singing songs, drinking wine, smoking pipes, all of the things typically associated with 17th century frivolity. The scenes in each painting feature children imitating the actions of their older partygoers. In Jacob Jordaens’ interpretation of this proverb, the children are seen playing flute-like instruments, twittering, as they try and keep up with the older members of the group who sing aloud and play heftier bagpipes (Library of Congress). Jan Steen’s more condemning interpretation of the proverb shows a child playing a pipe, a musical instrument, in unison with an older pipe player, all the while another child learns how to smoke a pipe of tobacco from an older pipe smoker (Steen). Each interpretation of this old Flemish proverb employs the children a little differently to make its point, but the overarching theme of each painting remains constant. The proverb and the activities on display in each painting remind us that the actions of the older generation are rekindled in the younger. The actions of the new generation are merely imitations of the former. Habits, traditions, culture, everything, is an echo of the past.

This view even holds true when analyzing the most modern aspects of our culture. Social media, still in its infancy, is already making its impact. From well-established industries to actual governmental upheavals, social media holds true to its billing of being

revolutionary (Enda and Mitchell) (Howard, Duffy and Freelon). Having introduced new and innovative means of connecting and communicating with one another, social media has turned multiple industries on their head. But even something as modern as social media has remnants of the past embedded within it. Despite the drastic change we experience on a day-to-day basis from the release of new technologies, phones, tablets, or social networks, certain mainstays seem to persist.

An interesting phenomenon found amid this shift in technology and communication comes from one of the oldest practices known to humankind -- religion. A study conducted by Twitter to understand why some tweets are more popular than others bore an interesting result. While wading through the tweets of actors, world-class athletes, and pop musicians, a group of tweets belonging to Christian leaders were gaining as much, if not more, traction than the expected high achievers (O'Leary). These Christian-based accounts were able to achieve retweet rates similar to those of mega-stars like Katy Perry or Justin Bieber (O'Leary). In fact, the influence found among Christian leaders on the social network was so great that Twitter dedicated a senior executive, Clair Díaz-Ortiz, to provoking new Christian leaders to join the micro-blogging service.

Using the past as a guide, we can find congruency among today's social media use and the adoption of past mediums. Following McLuhan's timeline of media epochs, we are able to trace the primary changes of media through human history. Christianity played a major role in the transition to the printing press in the middle ages. Its use as a marketing tool at this juncture in time is not dissimilar to its use today in gaining widespread participation on social media. In both instances pre-existing Christian networks were leveraged to share and spread information.

Christianity has a long history that often became intertwined with the development of modern day media. This paper aims to draw a comparison between the use of Christianity as a marketing device during the Middle Ages and modern times. Chapter 2 describes the circumstances that led to the entwinement of Christianity and the media. Chapter 3 details the creation and adoption of Gutenberg's printing press and its use of Christianity as a marketing tool. Chapter 4 highlights the transition to the Electronic Age and the judgment of influence in the Electronic Age based on Twitter. Chapter 5 analyzes the influence wielded by Christian leaders on Twitter. Chapter 6 provides a demonstration of the ability to activate the Christian audience on social media to spread and share their beliefs through Invisible Children's Kony 2012 campaign. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the parallels found between the two periods and draws conclusions as to why modern Christian leaders benefit so greatly from social media usage.

Chapter 2

Pre-Gutenberg Media

The relationship between modern media and Christianity stretches far back into the reaches of history. In fact, it goes so far back that when referring to Christianity's innovations in media we are often talking about alphabets or books and not twitter or social media. The evolution of modern media was molded by the Church's involvement. Investigating the link between Christianity and the advent of modern media begins to paint a picture of the inherited traditions that new media still imitate to this day.

The Church was instrumental in forming the foundation upon which modern media was built. The intersection of media and Christianity came to its climax with the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15th century. Gutenberg's invention enabled the printed word to be mass-produced and is often heralded as one of the greatest achievements in human history. His first mass-produced piece was the Bible. Having already exerted its dominance over the media landscape of the 15th century, the Christian religion maintained a stronghold on all available media outlets. This reality appears to have been taken into consideration by Gutenberg when preparing his invention. Mass-production of the Bible equipped the Christian religion with the ability to spread its practices throughout the world, but it also enabled Gutenberg to spread his products throughout the world. Inspection of this period in time is important not just for the prominence of the Christian Church in media culture, but also for the role it played during the birth of modern media. The Church's involvement during the embryonic stage of modern media's creation may lend insight into the popularity seen by Christianity in today's social media channels. Before delving into Gutenberg, his Bibles, and their role

in establishing modern media, it is worthwhile to look at why Gutenberg's invention was relevant in the first place. Like all good Biblical tales this one starts "in the beginning..."

Oral Tribe Culture

Written human history can be traced back all the way to 9000 years BCE. Over the centuries many different materials were used to try to keep knowledge intact for future generations. Stone walls, clay, sheep's skins, and eventually papyrus were all used to hold ancient writings (Harry Ransom Center). Whether too limited in supply, too delicate, or simply too difficult to write on, each proved to be a less than adequate material to easily preserve and share. In addition, writing remained a limited practice during ancient times. Reproduction of written material was virtually impossible, hindering the ability of knowledge to be shared and spread. Mankind had to rely upon word-of-mouth to pass on information. This period of time before the wide adoption of the written word is referred to as the oral tribe culture (McLuhan). This term, coined by Marshall McLuhan, alludes to the fact that ancient man relied tremendously on the spoken word for communication. During this period humans were predominantly illiterate. Information was primarily passed on via orators. Stories and information were not recorded but told out loud: "In the beginning, then, the epics we cherish as books took shape not as silent texts but rather as audible story-performances" (Foley). The passing of knowledge relied heavily upon memory, which took the form of rhymes, poems, or songs. This process for passing on knowledge, however, made it extremely malleable. This is demonstrated by the discrepancy found among early works of literature. Many of the early epic poems, like the Iliad and the Odyssey, or Beowulf, were the product of a number of authors. Each addition and subtraction through

recitation changed and morphed the message of the stories as they were passed down: “a generations-long process of composition in performance. Think of the Homeric oral tradition as a living inheritance, passed down from one epoch to another and refashioned by each performer” (Foley). This style of knowledge transfer did not bode well for accuracy. The refashioning of stories and accounts may have updated them for a current audience, but factually significant information was lost. Additionally, the process of spreading information was slow. It relied upon one person with an expert knowledge of one story to retain and pass along that information. The lack of ability to quickly and accurately record and pass along information slowed the spread of knowledge during the oral tribe culture period.

Manuscript Culture

The second epoch McLuhan refers to is the “manuscript culture” epoch (McLuhan). The “manuscript culture” grew out of a need to store and preserve knowledge. The development of this culture was a long process that began with the development of simple communication mechanisms like a standardized alphabet, and by the end had developed a means of producing printed material. The production of printed material, however, was still cumbersome. In order to reproduce any written material during these ancient times the entire document still had to be re-made. For example, a book had to be completely recopied word-for-word by hand in order to be reproduced (Harry Ransom Center). The accuracy and preservation of information did improve significantly during the manuscript culture epoch. The rapidity with which information could be shared, however, was still painstakingly slow. The slow production process meant written material was fairly rare. The scarcity of written material amplified its

value and made it an item only available to the wealthy. Even as late as the 15th century books were a luxury item only available to a select few. The general population had very little access to written material. Consequently, this meant that the general population had very little access to knowledge or information. The manuscript era ensured the preservation of knowledge and information going forward, but was still hindered by the slow reproduction process.

Meanwhile, the world had changed. The tail end of the manuscript culture epoch was characterized by a period of intellectual stagnation known as the dark ages. This period was ushered in by the fall of Rome (Gibbon). It was also during this period that the Christian Church took hold of the world's communications network. The Church's rise was largely a byproduct of the fall of Rome in the 5th Century (Burke and Ornstein). The Roman Empire was the first to take advantage of the benefits that came with the formation of the manuscript culture. It built large communication networks throughout its empire to maintain control over its many conquered territories. Tremendous amounts of records and documents were required to keep track of the far-flung provinces of the Roman Empire. When Rome fell the dark ages began (Gibbon).

As Rome lost its grip on the Western world, a void in the information and educational systems administered by the Roman Empire appeared. The Church seized the opportunity and began to restructure itself to emulate the infrastructure of the rapidly decaying Roman Empire. It molded itself in the image of Rome's system of provincial government. In this new network the basic unit of the Church became the diocese, ruled by a bishop. Dioceses were grouped together as provinces and ruled by an archbishop. Groups of provinces formed vicariates and were seen over by metropolitan archbishops.

This system continued on upwards, with each lower level required to report to their overseer (Burke and Ornstein). Using this network of bishops and dioceses the Church was able to build a communication network throughout the medieval world: “A widespread and well-organized message network, operating from bishop to bishop, was set up by Pope Gregory the Great in the seventh century” (Burke and Ornstein).

Controlling the lines of communication gave the Church an unprecedented amount of influence in this new age. Even powerful figures, like kings and emperors had to rely upon the clergy for communication purposes: “It was easy for the church, primarily through its monastic communities and bishops, to control the illiterate world...Knowledge was now in the hands of a tiny fraction of the population, it was exclusively religious in purpose, and gave the church a monopoly control over those aspects of social life that required literary and learning” (Burke and Ornstein). With the literate population of the time made up almost entirely by the clergy, the common man’s access to information relied entirely on the Church: “The clergy were, in a sense, the 15th-century’s TV screens, the displays that conveyed the news” (Rosen). The channels by which information travelled were strictly Christian-based. In order to gain any kind of widespread popularity in the Middle Ages one had to first go through the Church. By the time Gutenberg upended the manuscript culture with his printing press the Church had near absolute control over the world’s communication channels.

Chapter 3

Gutenberg Galaxy

Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in the 15th century changed the course of human history. The end of manuscript culture was a direct result of Gutenberg's invention. In fact, McLuhan's next epoch of human communication is named after Gutenberg, naming it the Gutenberg Galaxy (McLuhan). Gutenberg's invention was the catalyst for the age of enlightenment and the subsequent renewal of interest in education and knowledge among the masses. It is often cited as the dividing point between ancient history and modern history. It is for this reason that Gutenberg's development of the printing press is so studied. The harbinger of the era of mass-production, Gutenberg's invention fundamentally changed the way the world was perceived. The circumstances surrounding its adoption are rooted in the media culture of the time. In this chapter we explore the effect Gutenberg's printing press had on the media landscape and the reasons for printing the Bible as his first printed work.

The Importance Of The Printing Press

The spread of information accelerated once Gutenberg introduced the world to the printing press. The process of using moveable type to exchange letters on a page streamlined the process of printing, and led to the first mass production of books. Pages could be printed at a much higher rate. In the 1600s a printing press could produce between 3,200 and 3,600 pages in one working day (Wolf). As a result, printed material became much more abundant. Prior to Gutenberg's invention, "it [had] been estimated that there were perhaps 30,000 books in all of Europe...less than 50 years later, there were as many as 10 to 12 million books" (Harry Ransom Center). The flood of books in

the European market meant that knowledge and information could be replicated and passed on unhindered. This led to a much freer exchange of ideas. With greater access to printed material, information and knowledge could spread among the general population. Information could be shared much more readily than it ever had been in human history. The repercussions were felt almost immediately. Gutenberg's invention empowered outspoken individuals with a way to share their ideas. The perfect showcase of this power came with the publication of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses in 1517. The mass distribution of Luther's refutation of the Catholic Church's practice of indulgences and other clerical abuses was not possible prior to the printing press. The printing press enabled Luther's work to be widely read. His sixteenth century media campaign swayed public opinion against the practices of the Catholic Church and sparked the protestant reformation. The Ninety-Five Theses is an early example of the printing press's ability to generate mass appeal and spread information rapidly among the population.

Cause For Printing The Bible

There is no doubt about the impact Gutenberg's work had on the world, but what about the impact that the world had on Gutenberg's work? The Church's control of the spread of information had reached its apex when the printing press was introduced. Gutenberg's invention may have made the protestant reformation possible, but it was not invented to combat the Church. Gutenberg's first prints were of the Bible after all. In fact, the primary buyer of Gutenberg's work was the Church. Gutenberg was able to make use of the Church's vast communication network to market his product. The adoption of Gutenberg's printing press, and its eventual place as the steward of the

modern era, came about because of Gutenberg's strategic use of the Middle Age's Christian dominated channel of communication. After all, what good is revolutionizing the process for printing a book if no one reads it?

This begins to answer the question of why Gutenberg printed a Bible in the first place. The literate population at the time of Gutenberg's invention consisted mainly of those that held a religious interest: "the greatest users of books included monasteries, universities, nobility, and princes of the church" (Harry Ransom Center). Understanding the dominance the Church held over the medieval literate world, Gutenberg realized that if he were to make any sort of profit with mass-produced printed literature he must cater to the only market that would have a use for it -- the religious market.

Ownership of an entire Bible was fairly uncommon in Gutenberg's day. Most churches made use of missals. These liturgical books contained select passages and texts needed for the celebration of Mass through the year. The particular missal used varied from region to region. Realizing the amount of Bibles he could produce with his invention, Gutenberg perhaps realized it was futile to start small. Instead he aimed his mass-production project at capturing an international market instead of catering to the specific liturgical needs of each region. His sales in individual regions might prove smaller, but this meant the possibility of attaining a much larger market across Western Europe (The British Library). This marketing strategy is supported by Gutenberg's presence at the Frankfurt Fair, later the Frankfurt Book Fair, in 1454 (Weidhaas and Gossage). At the Frankfurt Fair he showcased his works to an international audience. This was an attempt to increase the demand within the international community. This strategy appeared to have worked too. In a letter dating back to March 12, 1455 Enea

Silvio Piccolomini, who would later become Pope Pius II, wrote to the cardinal for which he worked, Juan de Carvajal, about Gutenberg's printing press. He mentioned a man promoting his work on the Bible in Frankfurt. He described Gutenberg's Bibles as having such neat lettering that cardinal Carvajal would be able to read it without the aid of his glasses. Piccolomini also reported that all copies had been sold (The British Library).

Further evidence suggests that Gutenberg did not have buyers lined up prior to his first printing press project. Most of what we know today about Johannes Gutenberg comes from financial and legal documents. Through these records it is known that Gutenberg took out loans in the years preceding the printing press' reveal. These loans were likely used as capital to fund his project. Based on historical records, there is also reason to believe that Gutenberg worked for the Church in the period immediately preceding the invention of the printing press. Evidence shows that he was employed by Nicolaus Cusanus, a prominent German cardinal, to print indulgences (The British Library). Indulgences were ready-made receipts issued by the Church in exchange for prayers or donations of money. They served as evidence that one's sins were forgiven. These simple to print documents would have been an easy way to maintain an influx of cash for a printer that was about to embark on a capital-intensive venture, like building a movable type printing press. It also could suggest that Gutenberg maintained an apathetic stance towards the Church's system of indulgences, the very thing his invention would be employed to combat. All appearances by Gutenberg in the financial records prior to his invention paint a picture of a man in need of money. Typically a printing job would require a guarantee of some kind by the printed work's buyer. This guarantee

would enable the printer to procure the appropriate materials for the project, ink, paper, etc. Gutenberg more than likely would not have been scrambling to amass money if his project was contracted ahead of time. He would have been paid up front for the purchase of the appropriate materials to complete the job.

The formatting of Gutenberg's Bibles paints a similar picture. When comparing Gutenberg's Bibles to the handwritten manuscript Bibles that were the standard during the 15th century, Gutenberg's adhere closely to the handwritten manuscript formatting. Where the two differ is indicative of Gutenberg's cost saving measures. Gutenberg added extra lines of text to each page, increasing the standard number of lines from forty to forty-two (The British Library). Additionally, he forewent page breaks between books of the Bible (The British Library). These practices indicate that Gutenberg was attempting to save paper. Again, this reinforces the notion that Gutenberg did not have a buyer lined up prior to printing, as it was customary for the buyer to cover paper expenditures prior to printing. It also suggests that Gutenberg was spending everything he could from his initial round of funding on the development and procurement of the equipment he needed to build his invention. This would have left a tight budget for paper. Knowing the importance of perfecting the printing press, Gutenberg forsook basic printing costs to build his invention.

The lack of predetermined buyers as well as the abundance of inventory that Gutenberg could produce with his new invention mandated that Gutenberg choose a product that would appeal to a wide audience. The Bible filled this role spectacularly. Gutenberg was able to take advantage of the religion-dominated media channels of the

time to increase the potential of his new product and invention. Both quickly spread throughout Western Europe and ushered in the modern era of media.

Chapter 4

Electronic Age

In describing the Electronic Age McLuhan forecasts that, “the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village” (McLuhan). The collapse of communication in the modern era reveals an efficient structure where everyone is closely linked. This communication structure, resembling that of a small village, easily facilitates the communication between far-flung parties. McLuhan’s idea of an interconnected electronic village is reflected in the modern advent of social media. The micro-blogging service Twitter is especially illustrative of McLuhan’s prediction of an interconnected global village. For this reason we analyze the influence found on Twitter in order to understand the dichotomy of the oncoming global village.

Measuring Influence on Twitter

Modern media has evolved to the point that anyone can reach the masses -- and can do so with less than 140 characters. Sharing knowledge with the public is no longer hindered by technology, but is instead a fight for attention waged with technology: “The ever-increasing amount of information flowing through Social Media forces the members of these networks to compete for attention and influence by relying on other people to spread their message” (Huberman, Romero and Galuba). Everyone can reproduce a message on a mass scale in the digital world. In this crowded and cluttered world the ultimate goal is to achieve virality. Also known as viral marketing or “going viral,” the term encapsulates the nature by which content reaches levels of extreme popularity.

Content is shared from person to person and spreads in much the same way a virus spreads.

There is no surefire way to achieve virality. The wide-range of content that has gone viral showcases no concrete patterns. From Korean pop videos to a ‘grumpy cat,’ a cat that always appears grumpy, there appears to be no rhyme or reason to predicting virality. The pursuit of large marketing teams or the accidental accomplishment of a parent with a video camera, the ability to “go viral” is fairly random. The closest thing to a guaranteed viral hit is content propagated by mega-celebrities. Current pop superstar Justin Bieber is the most followed account on Twitter. He is confirmed to have entire servers at Twitter dedicated to his content. Tweets from and about Justin Bieber use up around 3% of Twitter’s total server infrastructure (Mashable 2010). Considering that 400 million messages are sent per day via Twitter, 3 percent is nothing to balk at (Geron 2012). Justin Bieber is the gold standard when it comes to popularity on Twitter. But sometimes popularity alone is not enough. For individuals to become influential they must not only obtain attention and thus be popular, but also overcome user passivity to spread content to others. We demonstrate that religious affiliated accounts are able to overcome the passive nature of Twitter users to encourage certain types of interaction and thus demonstrate more influence than many high profile celebrity accounts.

Bieber’s wide reach on the Twitter platform makes him an easy figure to analyze and compare levels of popularity. Interestingly the use of celebrities as a unit of measurement on social media is fairly common. Famed MIT media professor Ethan Zuckerman uses Kim Kardashian as a unit of measurement for the amount of media coverage particular issues receive. He posits that, “Kardashian is an exemplar of

attention disconnected from merit, talent or reason.” For this reason Zuckerman explains that Kardashian represents the perfect barometer by which to judge media attention because, “The Kardashian mentions how much attention is paid, not how much attention is deserved.”

For our immediate purposes we will use Justin Bieber to illustrate and compare levels of influence. As mentioned above, Justin Bieber’s twitter account is the most popular account on Twitter. As of this writing his account has 39,633,924 followers (Twitter 2013). This means that every time Justin Bieber sends out a tweet 39,633,924 twitter accounts receive his message, at least in theory. Twitter usage is a finicky thing to measure. Anyone familiar with the service is aware that just because someone has an account does not mean they actively use it. Using the User IDs assigned to each account upon sign-up we can determine how many registered Twitter accounts exist. By recent count Twitter has at least 640 million registered accounts (Wasserman 2012). This is only the number of people who have signed-up though, not who actively use the service.

Determining the number of people who actively use their accounts is a little harder. Not only is this metric hard to calculate, but it is also hard to define. How often do you have to log in to your account to be active? Do you have to tweet as well? Twitter supplies us with a partial answer. In December 2012 Twitter self-reported that its service had topped 200 million active monthly users (@Twitter 2012). While still a vague metric, it is not evident whether a monthly user is someone who logged in or tweeted, it does give us a little bit clearer picture of active Twitter usage. With these two numbers we can conclude that Twitter roughly has a 31 percent monthly active user rate. In other words, of the people that own a Twitter account 31 percent use it in some

capacity at least once a month. When applying this figure to Justin Bieber's followers it is plausible to think that only 12,385,600, or 31 percent, of his followers are actively engaged on Twitter.

This measurement though does not give a good indication of how active Justin Bieber's followers are with him in particular. This measurement is only an estimate of how engaged Justin Bieber's followers are with the Twitter service. For example, one of Justin Bieber's followers may log in to Twitter once a month and post a picture of her cat. She does not read her timeline, she does not retweet anyone, nor does she mention or retweet Justin Bieber. This person would still count as a Justin Bieber monthly active user.

Because of this imprecise look at interaction, other methods of engagement can be used to paint a clearer picture of influence on Twitter. In a study of user influence conducted by analyzing over 54 million users and 1.7 billion tweets, researchers came to the conclusion that an account's follower count may provide a false indication of influence (Cha, Haddadi and Benevenuto). Dubbed the "million follower fallacy," researchers set out to accurately judge the influence a particular user holds by using several different metrics. The methodology they devised relied on three main measures of influence: indgree, mentions, and retweets.

Indegree

The first metric, indgree, is simply an account's follower count. The research team's analysis of indgree expands on the idea set forth earlier in this paper that large numbers of followers do not always produce high levels of engagement. The conclusion was reached that an account's follower number was simply a measure of the account

holder's popularity. This claim is supported by the current list of the most followed accounts on Twitter. Twelve of the most followed accounts are popular musicians. The rest of the accounts are public figures, such as Barack Obama or Oprah. The list is rounded out by the accounts of popular online services, like Twitter's own account or the official YouTube account. Oprah's quick 28-day climb to one million followers is the perfect example of the relation between followers and popularity (Siegler). Her incredible fame and position as an American tastemaker rocketed her to the top of the Twitter follow charts immediately after joining. Ashton Kutcher, who famously became the first user with one million followers after challenging CNN, took nearly four months to achieve the same mark (Hoffman). The number of followers these users gained in such a short amount of time mirrors their level of fame. Using fame to amass followers does not explicitly translate into influence, but it does help. An account with at least 1 million followers is almost guaranteed one retweet per post no matter the tweet's content (Bray, *When Is My Tweet's Prime of Life? (A brief statistical interlude.)*). A link between popularity and influence has been established. On average an account should receive 1.3 retweets for every 10,000 followers (Bray, *Justin Bieber Gets 32K Retweets Per Tweet - Can You Beat That?*). So popularity does play a role in determining influence. It is just not the most correlative measure of influence.

Mentions

Mentions are another metric used to determine influence. Mentions are, “the number of mentions containing one’s name.” This metric “indicates the ability of that user to engage others in conversation” (Cha, Haddadi and Benevenuto). A user generates mentions as a function of popularity, similar to accumulating followers. The difference, however, lies in the activeness of that fame. For example, Lady GaGa has amassed the second largest following on Twitter. Over the past month, however, her mentions count is fairly low because she is not currently engaged in promotion-oriented activities. She

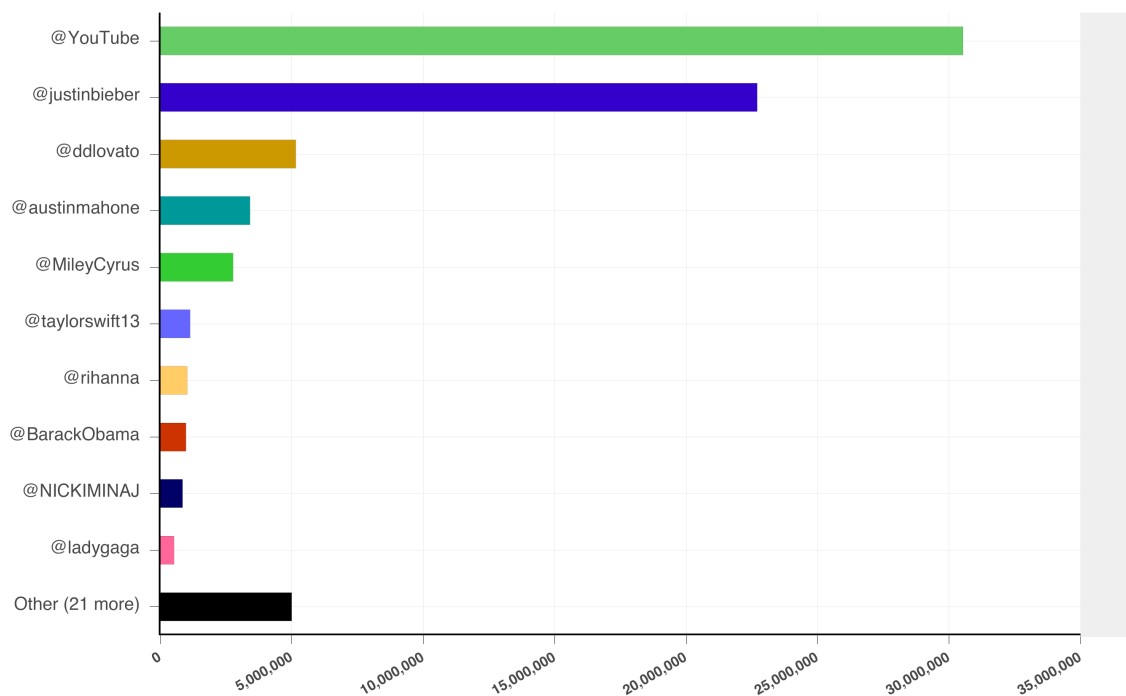


Figure 1: Twitter Mentions (June 1 - June 30, 2013) - Radian6

does not have a hit single or a new album. Nor is she on tour. Conversely, teen star Demi Lovato has a particularly high rate of mentions despite having significantly less followers than Lady Gaga. This is likely due in part to two high-profile events that occurred in June 2013 surrounding Lovato. First, Lovato won the International Video of the Year at the MuchMusic Video Awards, a Canadian version of MTV (Huffington

Post). This was followed by a tragedy involving the death of Lovato’s father (Schwartz). These two events position Lovato as a more newsworthy figure, thus garnering more mentions on Twitter.

This ability to spark online conversation is of much more influential value than simply being followed. It evokes action among audience members, and non-audience members. You don’t need to follow someone to mention them. Partly a function of celebrity, partly a function of one’s ability to hold people’s attention, mentions are much more indicative of a user’s prominence in the media.

A subset of the mention is the reply. A reply is a direct response to a tweet from another user. It is characterized by the user’s username appearing as the first word in the tweet (Campbell). Measurement of replies reveals the ability of a user to drive conversation on Twitter. The ability to drive conversation is a major indicator of influence on social networks. After all, it is the intent of social networks to facilitate conversation and dialogue between members. When looking at the top 50 most followed twitter accounts as ordered by replies per last 100 tweets we see a very different list than those that inhabit the top follower list.

User	Followers (Rank)	Replies / 100 tweets (Rank)
Lady Gaga	38,775,041 (2)	139,431 (1)
Chris Brown	12,650,130 (28)	73,402 (2)
Justin Bieber	40,995,576 (1)	52,723 (3)
Harry Styles	13,755,955 (27)	45,891 (4)
Twitter	20,547,955 (12)	44,113 (5)
Lil' Wayne	11,578,928 (36)	43,188 (6)
Drake	11,047,342 (41)	41,857 (7)
Adele	14,164,808 (26)	36312 (8)
Niall Horan	12,040,523 (34)	35,752 (9)
Taylor Swift	29,097,614 (7)	35,476 (10)
*Data sourced July 1, 2013		

Figure 2: Most Replies Among The Top 50 Most Followed Twitter Accounts

Lady Gaga rules the list of replies. Having built a strong supportive community of fans that call themselves “little monsters” this comes as no surprise. What is remarkable is that only three of the users with the most replies were among the top 10 most followed users. In fact, a majority of the list is comprised of accounts not even among the top twenty-five most followed accounts. This further negates the assertion that the number of followers an account accumulates is a worthy gauge of influence. Because of the Twitter API’s limitations we were limited to only sorting the top fifty accounts by their replies, but this does make one wonder whether accounts that lie outside the top 50 are able to generate even more replies.

Retweets

The final metric used to gauge influence is the retweet. A retweet is a forwarding of another’s tweet to one’s own followers. The number of retweets that a user receives is an indication of one’s content value. While an account’s follower count suggests a certain level of popularity, a retweet indicates that an account’s audience is engaged and attentive. Such a high value is placed on that particular content that the audience feels the need to pass it along to their own audience.

For example, the most retweeted message in the history of twitter was president Barack Obama’s tweet of “Four more years” at the end of election night in November 2012 (Twitter). President Obama sent this victorious message prior to his speech affirming his successful re-election bid. Gaining over 810,000 retweets, the tweet marked an important occasion in the United States and the world. Retweeting it served as an outlet for those that had voted, volunteered, and supported the president to express

their elation over his victory. A retweet of the President's message was a mark of victory and an expression of joy.

The amount of interest taken in this particular tweet is significant. The president of the United States is arguably the most recognizable person in the world, and certainly the most powerful (Forbes). Being the most powerful person in the world means that people will follow you on Twitter. Since starting his Twitter account in March 2007, President Obama has made full use of the new platform to attract young voters and communicate with the American people. Central to both his 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns, he has collected over 33 million followers and has remained active on the service, averaging four tweets a day since first signing up (most tweets are sent by his staff). During this time the President's account has covered many significant events. Some of the highlights include the 2008 economic crisis, the killing of famed terrorist Osama Bin Laden, and the closing of the Iraq war. Through all of these events none of Obama's tweets reached the level of prominence that his re-election tweet did.

Measuring public interest can be quantified by looking at Google search query data. The volume of searches for a particular query on Google is a good indicator of public interest. In looking at Google search trend data we can see how the volume of queries for "Barack Obama" fluctuated during Obama's first term in office. The highest spike comes at the beginning of his term, during his inauguration in January 2009. Twitter did not have the widespread usage that it has today during the 2008 election and 2009 inauguration so it is difficult to gauge the correlation between retweets and public interest at that moment in time. Outside of the 2009 inauguration the highest point of interest comes in November 2012 during the presidential elections (Figure 3; Point A).

The high volume of retweets surrounding Obama’s victorious message mirrors this spike in searches. The public interest in the November election correlates exactly with Obama’s record-setting tweet. In fact, five of Obama’s top retweeted tweets revolve around the November election.

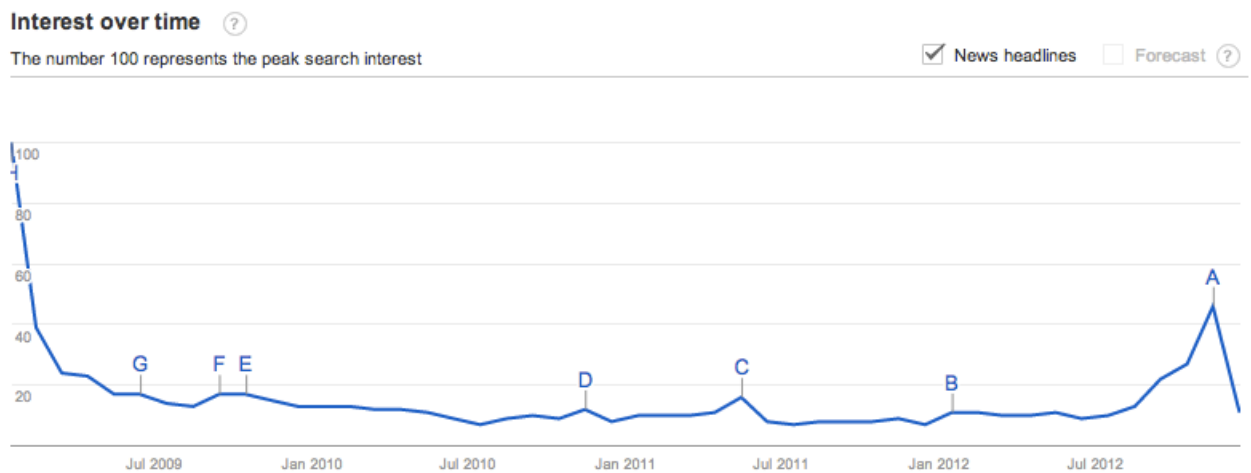


Figure 3: Google Trends Search Data for “Barack Obama”

For this reason it is easy to see why the measure of retweets gives such a good indication of audience engagement. A follower is much more likely to retweet a message that resonates with them in that exact moment in time. More than any other medium, Twitter is reliant on timing. The half-life of the average tweet hovers around only eighteen minutes (Bray, When Is My Tweet's Prime of Life? (A brief statistical interlude.)). The cross-section of interest and timing that the retweet metric allows for gives one of the most exact measures of an audience’s focus on Twitter.

The ability to coerce others to spread another’s content is what makes the retweet such a powerful instrument in the world of social media. A message’s potential readership is magnified significantly with every retweet. Furthermore, retweets are fairly rare. An average Twitter user only retweets one link for every 318 links they encounter

(Huberman, Romero and Galuba). This means that only about 10% of a user's timeline consists of retweets (Bray, Justin Bieber Gets 32K Retweets Per Tweet - Can You Beat That?). This becomes important in creating virality as the correlation between URL traffic generated by a tweet and its rate of retweets is strong at 0.7 (Bray, Social Authority: Our Measure of Twitter Influence) The retweets ability to spread information and generate web traffic make it a valuable social resource. Coupled with its relative scarcity, the retweet is the most complete means of measuring influence.

Chapter 5

Christian Influence on Twitter

Surveying a list of the most retweeted accounts it becomes quite apparent that the power of influence has shifted from the list of most followed. Justin Bieber is still at the top, but new names appear. Right before you reach common chart toppers like Britney Spears and Rihanna you find Joyce Meyer, a prominent Christian leader from St. Louis. Or the Pope, who's number of retweets is second only to Justin Bieber. These religious figures appearances are not atypical. When analyzing retweets Christian leaders perform significantly better than the average Twitter user. Even in comparison to the mega celebrities, Christian accounts fare particularly well.

Using the Cognos system, a crowdsourced method for finding topic experts, a list of top Christian leaders was compiled (Ghosh, Sharma and Benevenuto). The top twenty Christian leader's follower and retweet statistics were examined and compared against the top 20 most followed accounts on Twitter.

Overall, the top 20 most followed accounts have more total retweets. This upfront evaluation of total user retweet volume, however, may not reveal everything when considering the passive nature that the audiences of the most followed accounts sometime exhibit. The inherent ability of a celebrity to attract attention and gain followers gives them a definite advantage in creating retweetable opportunities. If a retweet must reach the right person at the right time then a user with 10 million followers has 20 million fewer opportunities to create this specific moment than a user with 30 million followers. Christian leaders as a population simply do not have the following of celebrities and pop stars and thus do not have as many opportunities to create these

retweetable moments. The Average Christian leader has a following of around 250,000. In contrast a Twitter user that ranks among the 20 most followed accounts has an average following of about 21.5 million.

Therefore, to accurately compare the efficiency of a user's message his or her audience size must also be taken into account. It has already been established that the average Twitter user receives about 1.3 retweets per 10,000 followers regardless of the tweet's content. By using this rate we can determine a user's projected retweet rate based on their number of followers and compare it to their actual retweet rate to see how they perform against the standard twitter retweet rate. For example, the most followed religious account is the current Pope -- Pope Francis. He has a following of 2,656,325 on Twitter. With this level of followers we can predict that he would generate around 345 retweets per tweet, but in actuality he generates 7,837 retweets per tweet (n=85). He is gaining retweets at a 2170% higher rate than is predicted at his level of popularity. In comparison, pop superstar Rihanna has significantly more followers than the Pope. Her 30 million followers should put her retweet rate at around 3,941 retweets per tweet. Instead she only receives 2,742 retweets per tweet (n=186). This is 30% below her predicted value.

Top Followed Accounts					
Name	Followers	RT/Tweet (Avg. User)	RT/Tweet (Actual)	Performance	
Justin Bieber	41,719,236	5,423.5	42,701.4	687%	
Lady Gaga	38,942,650	5,062.5	7,746.5	53%	
Katy Perry	36,888,051	4,795.4	5,823.5	21%	
Barack Obama	33,991,971	4,419.0	2,424.3	-45%	
Rihanna	30,315,393	3,941.0	2,742.3	-30%	

*Data Sourced July 14, 2013

Top Followed Christian Accounts					
Name	Followers	RT/Tweet (Projected)	RT/Tweet (Actual)	Performance	
Pope Francis	2,656,325	345.3	7,837.3	2170%	
Joyce Meyer	2,146,058	279.0	1,921.2	589%	
Bishop Jakes	1,090,129	141.7	187.9	33%	
Rick Warren	903,252	117.4	791.8	574%	
Max Lucado	677,500	88.1	361.5	310%	

*Data Sourced July 14, 2013

Figure 4: Retweet Performance Of The Top Followed Accounts Vs. The Top Followed Christian Accounts

The ability of Christian accounts to outperform their projected retweet rate shows that the content value of Christian accounts is high. They are able to capture the attention of their audiences much more effectively than some of the top celebrities found on twitter. The follower count of these Christian leaders is significantly lower and yet they are able to rival accounts with significantly more followers. But why are Christian-oriented accounts able to achieve such a high pass-along rate? Comparing these rates against other similar topic areas may give us a clue.

Politics, like religion, is a subject in which people often take a passionate interest. Opinions and points of view about politics are easily extended and quickly defended in an aggressive manner during discussion. For this reason one could assume that the same fervor is present among those who use social media. As shown by the record-setting number of retweets President Obama accumulated when announcing his re-election, politics is a topic area in which the users of Twitter have displayed a previous interest. When turning to the data, however, a different picture is painted.

Top Followed Political Accounts				
Name	Followers	RT/Tweet (Projected)	RT/Tweet (Actual)	Performance
Barack Obama	33,991,971	4,419.0	2,424.3	-45%
The White House	3,704,876	481.6	278.6	-42%
Al Gore	2,619,458	340.5	226.9	-33%
Rachel Maddow MSNBC	2,509,984	326.3	494.5	52%
Bill Maher	1,987,132	258.3	902.2	249%

*Data Sourced July 14, 2013

Figure 5: Top Followed Political Accounts Retweet Performance

Despite their ability to mobilize people to vote, political figures seem particularly un-motivating on Twitter. The most followed political accounts, President Obama, the official White House account, and Al Gore, all underperform in achieving their expected retweet rate. Political punditry is a little more successful in extending its message. Talk show hosts Rachel Maddow and Bill Maher prove popular, each outperforming their projected retweet rate. Maher comes the closest to replicating the success seen by top Christian accounts. This trend continues on the other side of the aisle as well. Conservative political pundit Glenn Beck, while only having about half the followers of Maddow or Maher, outperforms his projected retweet rate by 89%. This chart as a whole is probably more indicative of the political leanings of those that use Twitter. It is no surprise that the top political figures all hold liberal ties as the Twitter audience generally skews younger and more liberal. Nevertheless, we can see from comparing one niche topic area to another that the retweet rates of Christian accounts remain astonishing.

Chapter 6

Kony 2012

The power this Christian group can exert on social networks is extraordinary. The viral video Kony 2012 owes much of its success to the strong Christian presence on social media. Kony 2012 proved to be the result of a highly engaged audience inspired to spread and pass along content.

In the spring of 2012 the non-profit group Invisible Children released a video calling for the capture of Joseph Kony. Kony, a notorious war criminal and leader of the Ugandan militant group the Lord's Resistance Army, had been dodging authorities for years. The video brought to light the methods used by Kony to recruit for his army, including abducting children and forcing them to serve as soldiers. Invisible Children hoped to aid in the capture of Kony through by increasing global awareness of his deeds through a promotional campaign.

To say the video was an overnight sensation would be an understatement. Topping 100 million views in only 6 days, the Kony 2012 video became the most successful viral "campaign" in history (Visible Measures). The video had everything working against it too. It is a 30-minute long video about a fairly dark subject. It is certainly a far cry from its fellow record-setting viral sensations like the Justin Bieber's music video for his hit song "Baby" or the infamous "Charlie bit my finger" video. Nevertheless, the video went on to accumulate 97 million views on YouTube and 18 million views on Vimeo. At one point a variation on the Kony hashtag occupied five of the worldwide trending topics on Twitter at the same time. What's more amazing is that the Kony campaign was able to do this at a time of the year when the most influential

people in social media converge in Austin for the annual SXSW Interactive conference. Posted three days prior to the start of SXSW, Kony easily eclipsed the social buzz generated by this epicenter of social buzz (Lotan).

So how did Kony 2012 gain all of this viral attention in such a short period of time? In a blog post detailing the spread of Kony 2012, data scientist Gilad Lotan points to Invisible Children's pre-existing networks as the catalyst of Kony 2012's initial success (Lotan). Interestingly instead of gaining online traction by mobilizing the typical set of tech trendsetting cities like New York, San Francisco, Austin, etc., Kony 2012 first came to prominence through small to medium-sized cities. Not often thought of as trendsetters, Birmingham, AL; Pittsburgh, PA; and Oklahoma City, OK, laid the foundation for the success of Kony 2012 (Lotan). Having already built a strong base in these communities through the use of Invisible Children "roadie" teams, Kony used these cities as a launch pad for its social campaign (Underwood). The common thread found between the cities? They are the most Christian cities in America. Of metropolitan areas totaling over 1 million, the Birmingham, AL area has the second highest proportion of citizens that identify as Christian. Oklahoma City is the third, and Pittsburgh is fifth (2010 U.S. Religion Census). Once again we see the propensity of a Christian audience to share at a massive scale. This scale is also achieved with relatively few numbers. The Pittsburgh, Oklahoma City, and Birmingham metropolitan areas respectively rank 22nd, 42nd, and 48th in population within the United States (United States Census Bureau). The engagement power of Christian audiences, even on a small scale, can produce huge results.

Once Invisible Children mobilized this Christian network they relied on them to activate key influencers called “tastemakers” with a barrage of social mentions. Top influencers like Justin Bieber, Barack Obama, Rihanna, Oprah, etc. were identified and a website was set-up to encourage users to send links of the Kony 2012 video to each of the celebrities. Several “tastemakers” responded and helped to grow the reach of the Kony campaign. Eventually the video escaped the confines of the Internet. Mainstream press began to report on the massive trend. Oprah even featured the video on her show.

By activating a highly engaged network and motivating that network to pass on the message to key influencers the Kony campaign was able to achieve gargantuan results. The Invisible Children account by itself is fairly small. It only has around 300 thousand followers, certainly not enough to reach the level of virality achieved by Kony 2012. By taking advantage of every type of social influence, Kony was able to build an enormously successful campaign. Building a communication network, Invisible Children was able to send its message efficiently through the online world. This intricate network began with a message spread among small, but engaged communities. The passion these small communities felt for the cause of Kony 2012 ballooned the message to prominent levels. In conjunction, the increase in the number mentions the “tastemakers” received from this highly passionate community encouraged them to also share the Kony 2012 video. In doing so their large community of followers were able to propel the Kony 2012 campaign into being the fastest video to ever accumulate 100 million views. Kony 2012 exemplifies the impact this small, but highly engaged Christian audience can have on the promotional success of a message.

Chapter 7

Discussion

This new exciting time in worldwide communication has opened so many avenues for connecting with one another. The ability of social networks to form connections between individuals and communities has had awesome consequences, even in its infancy. But has the actual way in which we communicate really changed that drastically? Is the phenomenon of social media merely another case of the young imitating the old?

Structured Spread of Information

The rapidity with which information can spread is the most noteworthy change brought about by social networks. The means of spreading this information, however, may not be that different. The analysis of Kony 2012 gives the most comprehensive view of how a Christian network perpetuates a message to the masses. Using a hierarchical model of communication to pass along valuable content to higher ranking and more influential individuals is not something new. This model is fairly reminiscent of the Catholic Church's model of communication during medieval times. Before the advent of mass-produced communication, pre-existing networks, aka church congregations, were relied upon to spread messages through the population to the higher-ranking members of the clergy. The clergy were the "tastemakers" of the middle ages. They were the ones that controlled the flow of information and regulated what was to be deemed acceptable to the public. In spreading the Kony 2012 campaign, Invisible Children used the same strategy as the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages to structure its communication. It mobilized

pre-existing, highly connected groups to spread a message to the “tastemakers” of the time. Kony even duplicated the use of congregations as the pre-existing networks responsible for the activation of tastemakers. An old model of spreading information adopted for modern day technology still proves effective.

The nature of communication on social media is reminiscent of communication in the middle ages. It just happens at a much faster pace. The fairly anarchical means of passing along information means those with the most structure surrounding their messages’ distribution survives. Much like the middle ages and the fall of Rome, it is the church that is able to capitalize on its pre-existing structure to maximize its voice in a chaotic world.

It was these same pre-existing ecclesial networks that spread and popularized Gutenberg’s new printing technology. The ability to mass-produce the Bible catered to the interest of the cultural tastemakers of the middle ages. The technology needed to become a “viral” hit in order to gain widespread adoption. It was the clergy that could facilitate this. As communication technology progressed, however, it left religion behind. It became a means to spread all kinds of information and was no longer exclusively religious. Meanwhile, the structure of the Church remained intact. Now it is no longer the technology that needs the Church, but the Church that needs the technology. Twitter and other social networks are where the people are, so that’s where the Church has gone. The Pope’s adoption of social media shows the Catholic Church’s recognition of social media as an important medium for sustaining the relevance of the church. Furthermore, protestant Churches have been quick to adopt social media as a way to communicate with congregants.

As Marshall McLuhan so famously put it, “the medium is the message.” The message is forever linked to the medium by which it was transferred. So as social media grows and flourishes it moves from being viewed as a new trend to a more viable and faithful means of communication. Its growth as an authentic means of information transfer is what draws world leaders, such as the Pope to the medium. Twitter is, “everywhere at once and everything to everyone: a public broadcast platform, a private messaging service, a way to share photos...” (Patel).

Twitter As A Global Village

Increasingly the presence of figures like the Pope on social media makes the medium a more accurate reflection of the real world. We are realizing McLuhan’s ideas of an electronic age. Social media is becoming an extension of our collective consciousness in the digital space. To hail this as a “revolution” may not be entirely accurate. It may be more apt to call it a repetition. As we enter an entirely digital culture it may not be that preposterous to think that we have begun again in an electronic tribe culture. Social media holds many of the qualities as that of the original oral tribe culture in which humans existed. McLuhan’s forecast of an interconnected global village seems to be taking shape in the form of social media. This repetition of tribal culture carries with it some of the same themes and ideas that were so powerful early in human history.

The selection of the new Pope was the second most talked about event of the past year on Twitter behind the re-election of President Obama. After the announcement of Pope Francis, the world knew within minutes. Announcements like this are just as big now as they were nearly 1,000 years ago (Rosen). As social media grows to reflect the world in which we live it brings with it the beliefs, prejudices, and viewpoints present in

the actual world. The global interconnectedness facilitated by social networks brings everyone closer together. This togetherness facilitated by modern media could be viewed as a step towards global harmony. On the other hand our increased togetherness may further exacerbate conflicts and confrontations that already existed.

Christianity's adoption of a modern form of communication does not necessarily mean that its viewpoints have been updated as well. Though circulated by a new generation, the messages and ideas remain the same. In preparation for World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro the Pope announced that indulgences would be granted to those that attended. Youth receive a reduction of the time spent in purgatory for their sins in exchange for their attendance (News.va The Vatican Today). Further showcasing the Church's modernity, the Pope also declared that, "the faithful who are legitimately impeded [from attending the event] can obtain the plenary indulgence if...they follow these same rites and pious exercises...always with appropriate devotion, by the new means of social communication" (Caccia and Watson). The practice of granting indulgences, a practice that reached its height around the time Gutenberg was printing his first Bible, is still very much alive. Now as the youth imitate the customs of old they no longer figuratively twitter. As the old sing, the youth quite literally twitter to imitate the practices of old.

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