

# Media Appropriations of Lived Religiosity in the Digital Society\*

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## ABSTRACT

*This essay proposes an approach to lived religiosity as it relates to practices of media consumption, based on an analysis of religious discourse and practice among believers in Lima, a city marked by an intense process of religious pluralization and re-signification of what it means to belong to traditional communities of faith. Our analysis emphasizes how the consumption of mediatized religious goods shapes or re-signifies the beliefs and practices of believers in everyday life. We analyze the implications and impact of the appropriation of technology by religious actors in the processes of interaction between the secular and the sacred, as well as in the modes of belonging to a religious community. This essay will focus on the findings of the Peruvian case study, posing the following questions: How does the consumption of symbolic goods that portray the sacred produced by cultural industries impact the re-signification of religious beliefs, symbols, and practices in everyday life? How does the experience of consuming mediatized cultural goods shape or re-signify both the interactions that are built between the secular and the religious, as well as the sense of belonging to institutionalized religion?*

**Keywords:** *Religious mediatization, Media consumption, Lived religion, Digital society*

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## Apropiaciones mediáticas de la religiosidad vivida en la sociedad digital

### RESUMEN

*Este ensayo propone un acercamiento al fenómeno de la religiosidad vivida desde las prácticas del consumo mediático, basado en un análisis del discurso y las prácticas religiosas de creyentes de diversas expresiones confesionales, especialmente católicas y evangélicas, en Lima, una ciudad caracterizada por un intenso proceso de pluralización religiosa y de resignificación de lo que significa pertenecer a comunidades de fe tradicionales. Nuestro análisis pone de relieve cómo el consumo de productos religiosos mediatizados configura o resignifica las creencias y prácticas de los creyentes en la vida cotidiana. Analizamos las implicaciones y el impacto de la apropiación de la tecnología por parte de los actores religiosos en los procesos de interacción entre lo secular y lo sagrado, así como en las formas de pertenencia a una comunidad religiosa. Este ensayo se centrará en los resultados del estudio de caso peruano, planteando las siguientes preguntas: ¿Cómo influye el consumo de bienes simbólicos —ligados al mundo de lo sagrado, producidos por las industrias culturales— en la resignificación de las creencias y prácticas religiosas en la vida cotidiana? ¿Cómo la experiencia de consumir bienes culturales mediatizados configura o resignifica tanto las interacciones que se construyen entre lo secular y lo religioso, como el sentido de pertenencia a la religión institucionalizada?*

**Palabras clave:** *Mediatización religiosa, Consumo de medios, Religión vivida, Sociedad digital*

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The analysis presented in this article is primarily based on the findings of a study conducted by a team of researchers from four universities (Boston College, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, Catholic University of Córdoba, and Catholic University of Uruguay). The study aimed to explore the meaning of religious practices through the everyday experiences of South Americans. The research draws on the theoretical and methodological framework of sociologist Nancy Ammerman (2014), who studied the implications of lived religiosity among residents of the U.S. cities of Boston and Atlanta.

The study, which was conducted in the cities of Córdoba (Argentina), Montevideo (Uruguay), and Lima (Peru), focused on the analysis of narratives of spirituality—that is, the stories people tell about their religious, spiritual, and non-religious practices linked to their particular conception of the transcendent. Likewise, we collected the autobiographical narratives of the people who participated in the study, with an emphasis on the continuities and ruptures in their religious and spiritual experiences (Rabbia *et al.*, 2019, p. 18).

In the case of the research into evangelical believers in Lima, we collected the stories of believers from evangelical communities or congregations located in the upper/middle and lower socioeconomic strata. The sample, which was selected according to pre-determined criteria, included a variety of ages, genders, and life situations (single and married people, with and without children, natives and migrants). Likewise, we included members from the 12 denominations within Lima's evangelical community.

## THE CONVERGENCE BETWEEN MEDIA AND RELIGION

Stewart Hoover (2006) argues that there is an increasing convergence between the worlds of media and religion. He argues that both religion and the media have

become fields where individuals interact with symbols and cultural practices that sustain their sense of spirituality in everyday life. From this perspective, both the media and religion are constituted as fields of social construction of reality, which allow the sacred and the secular to encounter one another without tension or conflict (White, 1997; Hoover, 2006; de Feijer, 2007).

This convergence supposes, on the media side, that “the media configure a place where cultural identities are created, communities are reconfigured, and social actors are constituted” (de Feijer, 2007, p. 88). In this sense, the media “constitute a sort of cultural window or forum through which social relations are articulated and negotiated” (Hoover, 2006, p. 10).

Viewed from the religious sphere, this implies understanding religious activity as a cultural practice and as a process by which “the faithful or believers can interact or negotiate among multiple, complex, and varied meanings of spirituality” (Clark & Hoover, 1997). This convergence between media and religion can be noted in the way mediatized religious practices show that media culture has been incorporated into religious ritual and that religious rituality itself emerges and is legitimized in the public arena, through the media.

Heidi Campbell (2012) argues that the Internet is creating new religious leaders and new faith communities, which affects not only the reconfiguration of roles but also of the authority structures and organizational patterns on which churches and religious groups have traditionally been based. She notes that more than simple rejection or acceptance of the use of new communication technologies, religious communities are developing strategic negotiations with the new forms of appropriation of belief that are being fostered by social media networks.

Roxana Reguillo (2004) observed that, historically, the media have become the new spaces from which a kind of management of beliefs is organized. Along the same lines, Joaquín Algranti (2013) notes that contemporary religious actors build what are effectively communication industries of religious belief, thereby becoming vehicles for the distribution of cultural goods, including publishing houses, music producers, record companies, businesses selling Santería paraphernalia, etc. According to Algranti (2013), religious merchandising allows them to expand the universe of potential consumers/believers of the cultural goods they produce, for which they develop a communication strategy that creates branded or generic merchandise for each believer profile.

Studies on religious mediatization in Latin America show an enormous variety of uses and appropriations of the media to legitimize religious representations and practices. The traditional versions of tele-evangelists and media creators of

spiritual content have been replaced by contemporary religious “influencers,” displacing proselytizing spectacles staged in mega temples and evangelistic crusades in sports stadiums with religious rituals on digital platforms. In addition, one observes the emergence of diverse communities of mass religious consumption that are built on social networks, the media ritualization of political/religious events, new digital shrines for the devotion of “saints” especially linked to popular Catholicism, emerging trends across the full spectrum of the religious music industry, as well as the large Catholic and evangelical publishing market.

This growing variety in the modes of production and content creation within contemporary mediatized religious practice has generated—from the believers themselves—new forms, strategies, and itineraries of consumption of religious goods (De la Torre & Gutiérrez 2005; Cunha 2007; Bellotti 2016; Oosterbaan 2017; De la Torre 2018; Algranti & Setton 2021; Bahamondes 2021), producing a decentering of religious authority in the public space, as well as new routes and senses of belonging to faith communities.

This phenomenon invites us to think not only about how much the media has impacted religious discourse and practices, but also about these same media have spawned micro-alterations in how encounters with the sacred are communicated. Moisés Sbardelotto (2016) has described this process as a “mediamorphosis of faith,” through which everyday religious practices evolve and become increasingly complex as they interact with broader socio-media practices and processes.

Likewise, recent studies on digital religion (Jong, 2025; Paz & Olivas, 2024; Sbardelotto, 2023) reveal that actors in the religious sphere are not only increasingly deterritorialized—i.e., no longer limited by the idiosyncrasies of a particular geographic context—but have also become content managers and creators.

As mentioned by some of the authors, the digital space and social media platforms are blurring the institutionalized asymmetries of religious experience and eliminating intermediaries in communication processes. Therefore, the subject is reclaiming their role not only as a consumer but also as a producer and designer of information flows. In such cases, religious actors become a type of user-manager of the diverse narratives that we find in digital networks. The contemporary believer, who traditionally limited themselves to using or practicing institutionalized religious narratives and knowledge, has today become a digital religious subject capable not only of interacting with diverse sources of communication through which symbolic assets related to the sacred are constructed and reconstructed, but also of participating in the (re)elaboration and production of religious discourse.

Therefore, we cannot say that we are dealing with a type of believer who is moving away from a passive role toward a more active and critical one. Rather, this is a process in which the media consumption of sacred objects has become a space where the believer constructs a process of reinterpreting the practices of appropriating symbols based on a constant negotiation between the discourses produced by traditional religious institutions and those created through media platforms.

In this sense, analysis of the contemporary religious field not only reveals certain discursive continuities with how the media have been employed traditionally to manage belief, but also how religious actors now rely on new communication technologies for the strategic appropriation of the resources and tools used in the processes of reconstruction or resignification of the religious practices of believers (Campbell, 2012).

Several studies (Algranti, 2013; Pérez Vela, 2016; De la Torre 2018; Cunha, 2019; Sbardelotto, 2023; Paz & Oliva, 2024; Bellotti, 2016; Barcenás, 2019; Martino, 2020) on the mediatization of religion in Latin America confirm the increasingly active presence of religious actors in the mediatized public space, in which they not only compete with other content producers, but at the same time have enjoined the battle of disputing narratives in the so-called networked society. The new practices of religious actors in the virtual world pose new methodological challenges in this field. On the one hand, digital ethnography represents a methodological invitation to analyze not only the practices and meanings generated by religious diversity, but also the multiple representations generated around the intersection between religion, rights, and freedoms demanded by emerging groups as they take ownership of the digital space (Bárcenas, 2019). On the other hand, there is a need to pay attention to how traditional institutions reconstruct their religious narratives, by adapting to or resisting the new socio-digital scenarios (Paz & Oliva, 2024). This generates new spaces from which religious goods are produced and consumed, constituting instances and spaces of re-sacralization of beliefs and faith practices (Barbero, 1995; Hoover, 2006; Campbell, 2016).

These changes and the multiple cases of resignification of religious practice generated by the process of mediatization occur not only at the level of the reconstruction or repositioning of religious rituals in the public sphere, but also in the way in which new understandings and practices are constructed growing out of the varied senses of belonging to faith communities, participation in traditional rituals and the modes of legitimization of public representations of religious authority (Hjarvard, 2008; Hoover, 2009).

This communication phenomenon occurs in a scenario marked by an enormous diversification and pluralization of religion. Several researchers (Levine, 2009; Parker, 2018; Romero, 2009; Burity, 2016; Morello, 2020; Boas, 2023) agree in arguing that the new processes of plurality and pluralism are reconfiguring the public face of religion which, on the one hand, is increasingly hybridized but, on the other hand, is being inserted with greater fluidity and impact in the spaces and instances of civil and political society.

This process shows us not only an increasing visibility of the various religious faces and practices in the region, but also the deployment of a greater capacity to exert influence in various instances of society, for which an increasingly strategic positioning in mass media networks is observed.

In this sense, contemporary mediatization of religion poses two epistemological challenges. On the one hand, the need to interpret mediatized religious practices from representations of faith practices whose construction transcends the media; i.e., from cultural fields not limited to institutional religion, but that interact with a plurality of subjects drawn from multiple trajectories, traditions, and religious beliefs (Panotto, 2015; Semán, 2013; Frigerio, 2020). On the other hand, it is necessary to note that believers today are nourished by cultural artefacts and sources whose production is not limited to the scope imposed by traditional institutions, as a consequence of —among other reasons— multiple communicational mediations and referential frameworks that form part of historical memories that become re-signified over time through daily devotional practice (De la Torre, 2002).

These changes and re-significations of religious practice occur not only at the level of the re-construction or repositioning of religious rituals in the public sphere, but also in the way in which new senses of belonging to faith communities are constructed and the ways in which representations of religious authority are legitimized in a context of intense pluralization of the market of beliefs (Hjarvard, 2008; Hoover, 2009; Livingstone & Lunt, 2014; Martin-Barbero, 1995).

The process of mediatization of contemporary religion is producing, at a more general level, a kind of rupture of religious monopolies that does not necessarily translate into the absence of a primary referent in the religious market but, rather, in the multiplication of instances and spaces of regulation of beliefs. William Mauricio Beltrán (2010) points out three key regulating instances that help us understand the dynamics of belonging and representation in the current religious field: the state, religious institutions, and the market.

In this scenario, Mauricio Beltrán observes a process of reconfiguration of the role of the “religious faithful” and “followers of the faith,” in that they become not only distant consumers of institutionalized religious narratives, but also co-producers of symbolic goods originating not only from traditional institutional sources, but also from other cultural environs.

This repositioning of the faithful as producers and consumers of the “goods of faith” has led religious movements and organizations to develop various strategies to offer more attractive goods and services, insofar as they are in competition with other symbolic goods that also seek to retain the devotion of the faithful while also seeking to gain new followers (Mauricio Beltrán, 2010).

For this reason, from the perspective of religious mediatization, it is possible to argue that the media today are not mere channels for the dissemination of religious ideas and beliefs. Their mediating role is contributing significantly to shape the new articulations of religion, where traditional myths, symbols, and rituals are being re-signified and inserted in other scenarios, beyond the traditional spaces of the sacred.

In this context, churches and faith communities are experiencing an accelerated process of migration to the digital sphere. The context of the pandemic has not only made this reality visible but has exacerbated it. Several churches are implementing media production strategies that generate significant change not only in terms of discursive strategy but also with respect to the relocation and re-signification of rituals. In this sense, there is a process of desacralization of religious language and of displacement of those temple-centric narratives and rituals to the digital sphere. On the one hand, the sense of religious community building begins to be de-territorialized, which makes groups assume a sense of belonging beyond the local sphere. On the other hand, religious digitalization has generated the emergence of religious actors built on digital platforms that compete with the authority derived from traditional religious institutions.

However, it is important to consider that the processes of religious mediatization precede the digitization of society and culture, as is the case of church-sponsored radio stations or para-church organizations that have an important history in the processes of representation of religion in the public sphere. It is important to note that the media initiatives built by religious organizations experience an interesting turn, reflecting a remarkable transition as they now seek to appropriate space in the public sphere.

In order to gain a significant public presence, transcend marginality, and influence the spheres of power, various religious groups have begun not only

to insert themselves in the public debate on certain social problems, but also to re-think their evangelistic strategies and build new relationships with political actors and civil society. In this way, they are generating new ways of gaining public recognition while also incorporating their positions on current issues and problems on the public agenda into their religious rites and celebrations.

In this sense, most religious groups consider the media not only as instruments for the dissemination of their beliefs, but also as spaces to build public legitimacy, from which they seek to make their practices and discourses visible, engage with other actors in secular society, as well as influence the spaces of power.

## MEDIATIZED AND DE-TERRITORIALIZED RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Our study shows that a wide sector of Lima residents constructs their religiosity and spirituality out of a perceived need for new senses of belonging to the religious community, which brings with it a re-signification not only of institutionalized religious space, but also of religious experience itself in everyday life.

On the one hand, it is important to mention that believers are nourished by cultural registers and sources that are not subject to traditional institutions; that is, through multiple communication mediations and referential frameworks that previously seemed to be very distant from the specific contexts in which religious identity is constructed (De la Torre, 2002).

The religious histories and itineraries of our interviewees reveal that contemporary believers can easily transit between different religious affiliations. Such movement allows them to affirm their faith by sharing in the rituals of distinct faith communities, whose doctrinal referents come from multiple sources. Many of the cases show that the experience of consuming religious goods through technology becomes an important mediating support for this new way of practicing religious experience and interacting with transcendence.

Marta, a neo-Pentecostal evangelical believer, finds in religious media consumption the possibility of nourishing her interreligious exploration beyond the frameworks allowed by her congregation of reference:

I listen to the messages of Pastor Rodolfo Gonzales, that of [TV channel] Bethel, of the World Missionary Movement...I also tune in to the program where Pastor Bullon preaches, who is an Adventist, and I also like to listen to the messages of a church in Miami on the Internet. He is a priest, but he has some tremendous messages as well (Marta, evangelical believer, August 6, 2016).

It is interesting to observe how the media have become a vehicle for the extension of religious experience beyond not only the environment of the nearest ecclesiastical community, but also beyond the confessional territory itself. In this sense, the consumption of religious media can create a space that gives permission to believers that are inclined to consider interreligious exploration and belonging.

On the other hand, the appropriation of narratives and spaces, built to appeal to the markets created by the digital industries, has helped strengthen the bonds between believers who join faith communities that are seeking to satisfy new religious sensibilities and cultivate a sense of belonging.

Most of the interviewees suggest that one of the basic reasons for their participation in the shared tasks derived from belonging to a specific religious community has to do with the affective relationships and mutual support fostered by these shared tasks.

Juanita has been a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance church for more than 20 years. She is involved in the team that runs the nursery provided by the church during the Sunday service. Juanita says that what she enjoys most about this service is the time she shares with “the sisters” outside the church.

We have formed a nice group with the sisters from the children’s support ministry. Thanks to WhatsApp we can keep in touch. It’s not like before when we only saw each other on Sundays. Of course, I can share any problem or anything going on in my life with them right away, with confidence, and, well, they have also helped me a lot with their words (Juanita, evangelical believer, August 4, 2016).

Other interviewees reveal that the use of social networks, facilitated by contemporary technological devices, has allowed them not only to maintain links with their reference group, but also to re-create religious life in community. This is the case of Judy, who has been attending a Catholic parish in Lima since she was a child. She is part of a women’s prayer group that regularly meets at the parish, although they no longer do so as often as they used to, due to the new dynamics of daily life in the city.

We are always united, and suppose, for example, if someone is ill or something, we pray for them. I don’t know, but that’s why it’s called a circle of love because that’s the ultimate expression of loving another person and we all get to know each other that way. Somebody is ill and that’s it... Now we have a WhatsApp group too and we can pray for someone who is sick, who is ill. That way we don’t have to wait until we meet in person at the parish (Judy, Catholic believer, August 3, 2016).

Catalina, a Catholic believer, has found Facebook to be a suitable communication tool not only to nurture or expand her knowledge of issues related to her involvement in the faith community she is a part of, but also to spread it to others,

I use Facebook a lot. I have a lot of Catholic pages, a lot, I subscribe to a lot of these pages, I get a lot of things from there. For example, one thing that I do, as part of my participation in the community that I am part of, is to send them tips through Facebook, as part of the training program of our group. We are 15 women (Catalina, Catholic believer, August 14, 2016).

Judy and Catalina's experience reveals that the mediatization of the practices of lived religiosity generates new spaces and meanings from which interactions among the faithful are constructed. It is interesting to note how the collective religious experience occurs in a decentralized and displaced manner. In this process, the media play the role not only of mediators of belief but also become spaces that lead to the re-sacralization of secularized media (Martin-Barbero, 1995; Reguillo, 2004).

Along the same lines, the consumption of cultural goods to which the faithful have access through the media allows them to connect for the first time or to reconnect with those cultural memories that have been stigmatized or buried in the collective subconscious because of the barriers that traditional religion can erect between the secular and the sacred.

This is the case of Blanca, a migrant woman who arrived in Lima in the 1980s. She grew up in a traditional Catholic family in the Peruvian Andes. Upon arriving in Lima, she converted to evangelical Christianity and joined a Pentecostal congregation in an impoverished urban neighborhood of Lima. After her conversion to the evangelical world, she distanced herself from certain practices that were considered sinful by her new faith community. In recent years, her church has become a little less rigid in its prohibition of certain non-religious cultural practices. In this context, Blanca has reconnected with her friends from school, with whom she had enjoyed the popular festivals in her provincial hometown.

Now I'm listening to music from my homeland that I haven't heard on the radio in a long time. I couldn't do that before. That makes me remember that since I was a child I always enjoyed the *huaynitos*<sup>1</sup>. I have always loved listening to the sound of the harp. So, I always thought: "Someday I'm going to play the harp." I always liked to listen to it. Now, I listen to the music I used to listen to back home. Now we get together with my friends who also came

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<sup>1</sup> A musical genre native to the Andean region of Peru.

to Lima and we remember how we enjoyed parties. We danced a lot (Blanca, evangelical believer, August 15, 2016).

It is important to note that the consumption of certain symbolic goods produced by cultural industries, as in the case of music, becomes a space of cultural mediation where believers can interact with cultural memories that some fundamentalist religious communities have stigmatized or banned.

Many churches, as in the case of Blanca's congregation, have begun to soften their prohibitions on such norms and practices because contemporary believers—who interact with secular media more than ever before—demand an ecclesiastical space in which it is possible to reconnect the traditional practices of daily life with faith experiences.

In this case, we can observe that cultural consumption mediated by technologies makes it possible to build bridges between behavioral rules that had been legitimized by traditional religious institutions and memories derived from other cultural practices where the sacred and the profane interact with greater fluidity.

At this point, it is important to mention that mediatization has brought up a new dimension of the religious experience for the faithful, by linking their religious beliefs with other cultural practices. As Luis Sá Martino (2020) argues, media consumption allows some believers to embrace popular culture as an element closer to their new religious views. In this regard, the cases we studied reveal that this type of religious mediatization is not disconnected from local social and cultural processes and memories. The community that believers have built beyond the media plays an important role in reclaiming non-sacred symbols and reconnecting with those practices of the secular world that the religious institution to which they belong has sought to delegitimize. This cultural dimension of mediatization gives way to an “intersection between media and religion that has created new ways of experiencing religion by articulating it with a broader media culture, including popular cultural products: Mediatized religion has found new ways to speak contemporary media language” (Martino, 2020, p. 10).

## FROM TRADITIONAL CONSUMER TO RE(RE)INSTITUTIONALIZED “PROSUMER”

María Luz is a member of a Lutheran community in a low-income neighborhood in Lima. She uses social networks to share images portraying the reality of her community. Her intention is not only to share what is happening in her

neighborhood, but also the evangelistic and social service work carried out by the network of women in the congregation to which she belongs. The interesting thing is that she began to do this work when, after opening a personal account on Facebook, she realized that this could be a valuable tool to share her faith experiences beyond the neighborhood. Here, she found just the right medium to produce religious messages “her way”:

I take pictures of the things that happen here in Marquez [her community] and then I post them on Facebook. Friends tell me that they like it, what I do is good. I try to share posts about social problems and what we do with women in my church network. My photos, for example. I have taken photos of the Chillon River, a very polluted river. So, I want to call attention to this reality that many people don't know about and what we are doing. In one of the photos, my granddaughter is next to the river. There she is with her arms outstretched praying (María Luz, evangelical believer, August 14, 2016).

This case shows, on the one hand, that the new communities emerging on the religious frontier are fed and sustained by new media that produce and reproduce, create and re-create religious experiences. From this perspective, believing “implies situating oneself, perhaps at the center, at the side, near or on the margins, with respect to the range of relationships and its strong definition of ‘the real’” (Algranti, 2013, p. 41).

On the other hand, they reveal that identities are constructed as persons ascribe to a diverse and fragmented collection of de-territorialized beliefs and practices while negotiating, simultaneously, the deregulation of the institutional religion (Hervieu-Léger, 2004).

In this process, the mediatization of the practices established by believers, “feeds a religiosity in movement, which constructs the figure of the ‘spiritual seeker’ whose journey, often long and winding, stabilizes, at least for a time, in a chosen community affiliation that serves both for personal and social, as well as religious identification” (Hervieu Léger, 2004, p. 127).

This religiosity in movement, generated by media consumption, allows many of the believers to reactivate the passages of personal memory that authoritarian religiosity had placed on pause. It is noteworthy how those believers that had experienced a radical religious conversion, once they are given the opportunity to reassert their autonomy, are beginning to reconnect with secular cultural practices rooted in their past, without renouncing their more recent religious affiliation.

This case shows, on the one hand, how believers who insert themselves into digital social networks find the possibility not only of redefining their evangeli-

zation strategy, but also staking out a new role for themselves in their religious community. This is a type of believer who lives and shares their faith not only by transcending existing discursive norms, but also the authorized communication platforms built by the religious institution.

Here we can see a type of believer who builds their identity, public representation, and sense of belonging within the framework of the many available media offers and spaces that facilitate and generate our interlocutions, especially those not subject to religious boundaries or the immediate context of the offline community.

Many believers like Maria Luz, who live their faith experience from the spaces and references shaped by the technologization of everyday life, experience a new way of being a believer, which breaks with the logic of the passive faithful dependent on knowledge instituted or regulated by a traditional, usually hierarchical, religious institution.

The traditional consumer of religious radio or television programs is today displaced by what specialists in media consumption would call a “religious prosumer” (Aguilar *et al.*, 2027; Rahim, 2025). This is a type of believer who, as García Canclini (1995) would say, when consuming religious goods, assumes the role of co-producer, modifying and re-signifying them at the moment of appropriation.

In this way, as García Canclini argues, a more individualized and autonomous type of consumption takes root, leading to the emergence of a type of consumer that continues to participate in the production of existing materials while also producing new digital content that is shared virtually.

This displaces the passive believer who is a recipient of institutionalized narratives and knowledge, with a parishioner capable not only of interacting with various communication sources, but also of intervening in the (re)elaboration and dissemination of religious discourse in spaces and with interlocutors defined by the believers themselves.

The itinerary of Edgard, who grew up in a conservative Nazarene community, allows us to appreciate the way a mediatized believer not only builds his faith from the frontier zones of religion, but also recreates his theology in a way that transcends the authority of the institutionalized sacred text.

After leaving high school and entering college, Edgard began to distance himself from his church. One of the reasons was his disagreement with the top-down leadership style. His lived experience outside the institutional church led him to rethink how he consumed and appropriated the sacred. Edgard, a long-time

consumer of traditional evangelical radio programs, began to partake of the symbolic goods distributed by secular media.

At the same time, Edgard met up with a group of friends who had attended his same church youth group when he was young. Some of them now lived in Sao Paulo, Brazil and one of them was a leader of an independent evangelical church there. Edgar decided to join this congregation. He has found that physical distance has not been a barrier to his sense of belonging to this church, because he has found there a group of friends who are looking out for him.

Edgard decided to become a member of this church even though he lives in Lima. He often participates in worship services via the Internet. He listens to the sermons and some Sunday services via YouTube.

I now consider myself more than a believer, a practitioner of the faith, because I believe that it is not enough to believe. The apostle James said that even the demons believe. Now, I consider myself a Christian practitioner, not by imposition as before. I live the faith from the place where I am and I freely decide what I want to follow (Edgard, evangelical believer, August 2, 2016).

As in his younger days, when his evangelical militancy was limited to a Nazarene congregation in Lima, Edgard continues to be a regular consumer of evangelical radio programs. The difference is that today he has decided to follow those preachers who include in their sermons comments on the relationship between the spiritual and social and political issues.

One of the turns in Edgard's life has been his link with music. He became a consumer of rock music and found there not only another way to connect with transcendence, but also new ways to reconstruct his theological worldview by studying the Irish rock band U2's song lyrics.

"I have changed a lot. I used to listen only to Christian music. Now I listen to other genres, and I find a lot of theology in them," he says. Edgar has come to consider himself a follower of Paul David Hewson, whose artistic name is Bono, U2's lead vocalist:

U2's songs have a very strong spiritual force. Many of the lyrics of Bono's songs lead me to think about theology, about the image of God in our lives. For example, "Beautiful Day" is a beautiful song. How much richness is there to think about life. There are profound phrases, like: "After the rain come the colors" (Edgard, evangelical believer, August 5, 2016).

This type of believer moves in innovative ways in the marketplace of religious offerings, modifying and reconstructing in their own way the messages received and adapting institutionalized religious norms to their own needs and expectations.

From this perspective, the practices of media consumption by believers generate the construction of what García Canelini (1995) calls “interpretative communities,” which accounts for believers, who in the process of consuming symbolic goods, rethink their faith, develop new ways of relating to the transcendent, and autonomously connect their beliefs with their daily lives.

Finally, Edgard’s case, like the others documented in this study, would invite us to deepen our understanding of two aspects of digital or technologized religiosity.

On the one hand, the role of so-called “influencers” is key in the process of resignification that leads to the development of the new identities generated by media consumption. In many cases, these religious entrepreneurs become *de facto* religious leaders despite never having been “blessed” or authorized by established religious entities.

On the other hand, the type of believer described here becomes a kind of religious pilgrim in the networked society. In this regard, Manuel Castells (2000) states that “in the network society, the organization of media systems and their evolution depend to a large extent on the way in which we socially appropriate them.” Therefore, it is interesting to observe how contemporary believers use technology not only to evangelize but also to build a sense of community. By using Facebook, Maria Luz not only becomes a mass propagandist of her faith, but this platform allows her to empower herself and become an actor in the emerging public sphere that is built from social media.

In the case of evangelicals, it is interesting to note that the image of a network is very familiar, because most of them understand their local congregation as being part of both interdenominational and transnational communities. That is, most members of evangelical denominations have constructed their sense of belonging around the understanding that they form part of a broader community than the one circumscribed by their own local congregation. What is new here is that the construction of religious identity is no longer confined to institutional religious sources but now draws on secular networks outside the church walls.

## BELIEVING FROM MULTIPLE REFERENCES AND TRAJECTORIES

By analyzing the different types of communities sought by contemporary believers in the context of religious pluralization found in today's urban world, the experience of most interviewees suggests that the notion of belief is built out of multiple subjective trajectories, diverse traditions, and a variety of ideas that coexist in the same space and time. In this process, the degree of autonomy exercised by individual believers is highly variable, but it is precisely this variability that allows them to interact in different ways with "traditional" religious referents and narratives (Seman, 2013).

In this process, traditional reference groups (family, friends, ecclesial and para-ecclesial networks, etc.) are being re-signified and re-positioned by emerging media platforms and are playing important roles in the mode and logic from which religious practices emerge and from which belief is conceived and practiced.

It is precisely in this web of relationships, built around reference groups, where religious experience is produced and reproduced, created and recreated. From this perspective, as noted earlier, "believing implies situating oneself with respect to the range of relationships" (Algranti, 2013, p. 41) and the deregulation of institutional religion (Hervieu-Léger, 2004).

Such communities allow us to see the religious field as a space from which it is possible to recognize new ways of inhabiting, transiting, and belonging to a particular urban environment and the world. In this sense, religions, and the spaces in which they are practiced, constitute important referents and instances of mediation in which one can deepen a sense of belonging to a wider community.

The cases studied reveal that the experience of the sacred in the urban fabric of contemporary Lima confirms that secularization in our context occurs on the basis of a social dynamic in which popular uses of religion constantly produce new syntheses between the foreign and the familiar, the traditional and the modern; but, above all, they also promote the sacralization of secular spaces and the desacralization of certain religious practices (Parker, 2018).

All this leads one to posit that contemporary religious practices are constructed today within a framework of scenarios without territorial boundaries and with notable hybridizations of religious practices and discourses (García Canclini 2005). From this perspective, religious hybridization implies a constant interaction between religious narratives and actors and other symbolic goods, cultural memories, and circuits of communication that transcend traditional sacred spaces and are permeated by the contemporary process of cultural mediatization.

## THE MEDIA AND FRONTIER RELIGIOSITY

The analysis of the interviews conducted for our study reveals that the mediatization of lived religiosity feeds the construction of what some scholars call frontier religious communities, which allow us to observe “practices at the crossroads, decentered, interstitial and in displacement... within the vast social extension where the daily life of the subjects takes place” (Solís & Martínez, 2012, p. 14).

Edgard’s experience shows that contemporary religious practices are built from processes of the deterritorialization of practice and belonging, in which technology serves not only as a means to connect people but also as an instance of cultural mediation, in which a variety of interactions, the reconfiguration of symbolic goods, the activation of cultural memories and communication circuits, which move beyond traditional institutional sacred spaces, are put into play.

Catalina, the Catholic believer who found in Facebook a tool to expand her involvement in her faith community and to share that knowledge with others, adds:

On my Facebook, I have my cover photo, I am playing bass and the whole wall is full of letters, I have done it in Illustrator; all full of letters that have meaning for me in my life, they also have to do with God, they say, you loved me first, divinity, peace, goodness, love, things of God, things that I think. I do try to transmit in some way with what I post, what I am (Catalina, Catholic believer, August 5, 2016).

These changes and re-significations of religious practice, resulting from mediatization, occur not only at the level of the re-construction or repositioning of religious rituals in the public sphere, as other studies show, but also in terms of the way in which new senses of belonging to faith communities are constructed, the search for and contact with transcendence, beyond the framework instituted by the religious institution, and the ways in which traditional practices are re-signified (Hjarvard, 2008; Hoover, 2009).

Thus, this is a type of religious consumer who constructs their practice from the logic of a decentered circularity in which those who receive a message can modify it and reintroduce it into networks or elsewhere, thus reconfiguring and recreating the religious object or discourse (Garcia Canclini, 1995).

For all these reasons, from the perspective of religious mediatization, it is possible to argue that the media today are not mere channels for the dissemination of religious doctrines and beliefs. Their mediating role is contributing significantly to the shaping of new public articulations of religion, where traditional myths,

symbols, and rituals are being re-signified and inserted into other scenarios, beyond the traditional spaces inhabited by the sacred.

This indicates that we are dealing not only with a meeting of cultures, but also with diverse modalities of narrative. There are now two oralities, a primary orality, that of interpersonal communication; and that of the mass media, which Walter Ong (1982) calls “secondary orality.” In this way, Jesús Martín Barbero maintains that the Latin American masses are being incorporated into modernity not through the Enlightenment but through other projects in which the urban masses and the cultural industries are allied. They are “elaborating a secondary orality, an orality grammaticalized not by the syntax of the book, of writing, but by audiovisual syntax. Secondary orality thus constitutes the space of osmosis between memories, long memories of life and story, and new audiovisual narrative devices, between archaic narratives and postmodern technological devices” (Martin-Barbero, 1995, p. 15).

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

The view of religiosity lived from the practices of consumption and media appropriation constitutes a new challenge for the study of religious identity and belonging, since it means paying attention to and interacting with, simultaneously, both “the frameworks of identities of belonging with the referential registers of the new identifications, and the new identities that such interaction produces” (De la Torre, 2002, p. 79).

We consider it necessary to study in depth the profile of the contemporary believer, who no longer exclusively consumes symbolic goods produced by a particular religious institution. Our interviews show that today’s believer not only consumes those goods but also generates new religious narratives, while creating new routes for consuming the symbolic goods needed to satisfy perceived needs that are not solely religious in nature.

In this process, we must pay attention to the itineraries of consumption of symbolic goods documented in this essay, whose logic breaks with that used by traditional believers to conceptualize and practice their faith. The existence of this type of religious faithful calls into question the model of fixed and stable identities and suggests the appearance of more open and generative dynamics of religious identification and loyalty (De la Torre, 2013). It also challenges us to rethink religious communication studies from the perspective of the cracks in

the border wall, the in-between spaces, the interstices (Bhabha, 2002). Therefore, “more than studying specialized fields, we must study the spaces of intersection and interaction between fields, for it is there where the battles are fought and where we can appreciate the dynamisms” (De la Torre, 2021, p. 277).

Religious practices constructed from the production and consumption of mediatized symbolic goods have an impact today on the configuration of a new type of religious faithful—those who move in social networks and consume the goods of cultural industries without completely disaffiliating themselves from their non-virtual religious community. We observe that many believers have found in social media networks a propitious space in which to reconnect with those deeply rooted symbolic worlds and cultural goods that traditional religious institutions had ignored or attempted to stigmatize in their attempt to impose a kind of ideological or theological hegemony on the faithful. This more flexible and pluralistic environment in which the faithful are increasingly actors in the creation of symbolic goods may be forcing these institutions to become more flexible and pluralistic in their pastoral practice.

In this way, the cases studied show us other ways and meanings of contemporary religious mediatization, which not only have to do with the massification and ‘spectacularization’ of religious rituals, but also with the way in which new senses of belonging to faith communities are constructed, in which the religious experience occurs beyond both the temporality and the traditional geographic territory inhabited by the community.

In this scenario, the believers find not only the possibility of making their faith visible in a framework larger than that of the local community, but also the opportunity to move beyond regulated institutional frameworks—which often do not allow believers to develop their own communication strategies to make their faith experience visible in other territories— and to explore new ways of thinking, living, and sharing their encounter with the sacred.

Likewise, these findings invite us to study media-religious processes and practices as a way of “accessing a reality that conceals a broader social environment” (Gomes, 2012, p. 18), from which the faithful or believers interact or negotiate between multiple, complex, and varied meanings of spirituality and diverse ways of constructing the sacred (Clark & Hoover, 1997).

Finally, our study invites us to recognize that digital structures and cultures now permeate all areas of daily life, but at the same time they are challenging the traditional structures of religious institutions. The accounts allow us to appreciate not only the rearrangements that come to light in new spaces of interaction with

the sacred, spaces where the sacred is made visible, but also the resistance to hierarchical ecclesiastical modalities. It is interesting to observe socio-digital religious communities not only adapting but also resisting the narratives of hegemonic ecclesiastical power. There is not only a dispute over narratives, but also over social imaginaries, new ways of believing, and new ways of experiencing spirituality. In this regard, this study allows us to recognize the emergence of those disruptive imaginaries that claim a place in the field of the construction or reconstruction of the sacred.

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