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Abstract

Mobile phone applications are providing users many different choices in how they go about their everyday lives, including their spiritual lives. This research explores the factors Evangelical Christians consider when choosing an iPhone app, how they actually use the app, and how their app expectations compare with their app experience. Modified diary reports, using the iPhone Voice Memo app, and in-depth interviews were used in order to examine the research questions. The Uses and Gratifications theory, as well as the Religious Social Shaping of Technology theory, were used as lenses for the study. After navigating the process of finding an appropriate app, users were most concerned with using the app for spiritual impact, encouragement, and as a sort of spiritual toolbox that, for the most part, resulted in helping them navigate their own spirituality and religious practice.

Pocket Full of Jesus: Evangelical Christians' Use of Religious iPhone Applications

by

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applications to navigate their spirituality?

There may be moments in our day when we need a little encouragement or inspiration. The iPhone application Pocket Full of Jesus claims to provide these moments of respite with more than 800 Biblical quotes available at the touch of a button on the iPhone. This isn't the only religious iPhone app out there. When searching under the keyword "religion" in the iTunes store, thousands of results are returned for Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindis, and Buddhists, and more are being created everyday.

Although apps did not even exist until 2008 when Apple launched the iPhone 3G with support for third party apps, more than 25 billion apps have been purchased or downloaded as of March 2012 (Silvka, 2012). There are apps for banking, social networking, weight loss, and learning just to name a few. So the fact that people are creating and seeking out apps to help them with their religious lives should not be a big surprise.

Because apps are such a new phenomenon, research on them is lacking. We do know that more than 95% of the U.S. population is estimated to have a mobile phone plan (Washington & Miller, 2009, p 70). More than a 100 million of those (or almost 36% of the population) use mobile Internet (Washington & Miller, 2009, p. 70). According to 2010 Leisure Market Research, 54% of people between the ages of 14 to 25 use their cellphones for entertainment. When it comes to apps, 73% of smartphone users have downloaded one, 52% paid up to $5 for an app, and 10% paid up to $20 (Washington & Miller, 2010, p. 237). Obviously, people are using apps, and the same market research shows that users download game apps most, followed by music, entertainment, weather, navigation, news, and many others (Washington & Miller, 2010, p. 237). Religion isn't mentioned anywhere in the market research. However, Bellar's (2012) textual analysis of Christian, Jewish and Islamic iPhone applications found that many religious apps are categorized under reference, books, lifestyle, education and

others. Therefore, religious apps are inherently included in the market research although not as a distinct category.

Just because 95% of the U.S. population has mobile phone access doesn't mean they are all Evangelical Christians who use religious apps. However, we do know that at least 78% of U.S. adults identify as Christian (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). The same report shows that 32% of the population is affiliated with an evangelical denomination, which includes everything from Protestants to Baptists. Unfortunately, the Pew report did not summarize religious persons use of media. However, if we look at the statistics on phone users and the statistics on those who identify as Christians, we can logically conclude that the two overlap enough to say that there are Christians who use religious apps. This is also supported by the fact that many of the Christian apps are rated and reviewed by users on iTunes' app pages (Bellar, 2012).

Other scholarly research on apps focus mainly on technical development (Yuchul, Yoo-mi, Hyun Joo, Byung Sun, Jinsul, 2010), mobile advertising (Laszlo, 2009), web browsing (Chen,2007; Evens, Schuurman, De Marez & Verleye, 2010) and mobile digital publishing (Mussinelli, 2010). Therefore, this current study will build on Bellar's (2012) work on religious iPhone apps and will help fill the gap on research concerning this particular phenomenon.

While research specifically related to apps is limited, research on how individuals interact with mobile technology is available and may provide insight into new studies on smartphone apps. Cumiskey (2005) looked at the emotional attachments people have with their phones as well as the emotional responses to other's use of phones in public. Park's (2005) study attempted to find the threshold between normal use of mobile phones and when that use crossed over into addiction. He found that mobile phones could be used as a mood stabilizer and emotional pacifier for some (pg. 267). The fact

that emotions can be so tied to mobile phone use may support the idea that people can seek and find a spiritual connection through phones as well.

The intersection of religion and media is another important area of research that will inform the current study. Many may see the interaction between media and religion as one of conflict, but other scholars have observed that religious communities have used and continue to use media technology to suit their own needs and agenda (Campbell, 2010). The explosion of religious iPhone applications seems to support the latter view. Also, research about how religious communities interact with the Internet (Campbell, 2005, 2006b; Cho, 2011; O'Leary, 1996) may also inform the current study.

Spirituality and religion are not just part of people's lives, they are products that are sold and bought on a daily basis. Religious iPhone apps are just one example of the commodification of religion. As Thomas (2009) asserts, Christians may see this new product as "an expression of human creativity" that "mirrors God's plans, and, as such, "it is a vehicle that needs to be embraced and deployed to spread God's kingdom on earth," (p. 66). This view is one that needs to be understood and acknowledged in any study of Christian products.

The current study is limited only to Evangelical Christians for several reasons. First, qualitative methods of research attempt to go in-depth and retrieve rich data. It is not concerned so much with breadth as with depth. Therefore, trying to study more than one religious group is beyond the scope of this research. Second, Christians from various denominations have historically been eager to use new media to further their faith (Campbell, 2010; Hoover, 2006b; Sturgill, 2006). This can be seen as far back as the printing press when Protestants used the technology to print the Bible so everyone could read it (Campbell, 2010, p. 36). More recently, Christians have adopted the Internet to create online churches and form communities of faith (Campbell, 2010, p. 35). Third, Evangelical Christianity is the religion with which I am most familiar. As a researcher,

this will help me not only recognize the vernacular used when communicating with participants, but it will also give me insight into the right questions to ask in response to participant answers.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to discover what Evangelical Christians consider when looking for and choosing a religious app, and how they actually use and interact with these apps to navigate their spirituality. At this point, religious apps will be defined as software that is downloaded to an iPhone specifically for the purpose of engaging with material geared towards Christian ideas and practices. Evangelical Christians are people who are "in agreement with the gospel especially as it is presented in the four Gospels" of the Bible (Evangelical, *Merriam-Webster dictionary online*). Salvation through belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a main tenant of Evangelical Christians, along with the belief that the Word of God, the Bible, is inerrant and complete. Spirituality encompasses "sensitivity or attachment to religious values," and "the quality or state of being spiritual" (Spirituality, *Merriam-Webster dictionary online*). Spirituality can be attainted through spiritual practice such as prayer or study of a holy book. The purpose of many religious apps is to help users with these religious practices (Bellar, 2012).

Therefore, the research questions this study will explore are as follows:

RQ1: What are the factors individual Evangelical Christians consider when choosing a religious iPhone app?

RQ2: What experience do individual Evangelical Christians seek from religious iPhone apps?

RQ3: How do individual Evangelical Christians actually use religious iPhone apps to navigate their spirituality?

These questions will be explored by recruiting Evangelical Christians to choose and use a religious application for one week and keep a diary of the process. Then, in-depth interviews with the participant will seek to clarify and explore the diary data and further elucidate the research questions.

Religious iPhone applications are providing new ways for people to learn about and engage religion. Understanding the process individuals go through when approaching this new medium and its content is important in explaining how people make sense of their religious lives and how they relate to others.

Literature and Background

Media can be used as a way to make sense of and communicate cultural and religious identities, and have been used in this way for thousands of years (Hoover, 2006a). This has been shown from the apostle Paul's first letters to the early Christian churches to the first printing of the Gutenberg Bible, from the rise of the radio preacher to television evangelists (Hoover, 2006a), and from online religious communities (Campbell, 2006; Cho, 2011) to religious iPhone applications (Bellar, 2012).

History of Religion and Media

As Hoover (2006a) points out, our current understanding of media and religion has been shaped by developments in economics, politics, and technology (p. 237). For example, the printing press led to the spread of literacy through the Reformation. The tracts, posters, pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines that followed gave the less privileged a way to understand and participate in politics and, therefore, in the economy as well. The development of the printing press was instrumental in the development of Christianity as a "religion 'of the book'" because it allowed the printing and distribution of Bibles (Hoover, 2006a, p. 238). The historical connection of the printed word and the Christian religion speaks to the way Christians interact with media today (Campbell, 2010).

While the Reformation led to the rise of literacy, Industrialization led to mass communication (Hoover, 2006a). The first example of this is the mass-market newspaper, which could be produced and distributed at remarkable speeds. At the same time, telecommunications were being developed, followed quickly by film, radio, television, the Internet (Hoover, 2006a), and mobile technology (Campbell, 2010).

Religion was involved in these changes from the beginning, specifically within the Christian faith. In print, it was evidenced in tracts, which are small pamphlets used to tell others the Good News of the Gospel. Other examples include text books which used

religious stories to teach school children, and daily devotionals, which were usually written works by religious theologians designed to introduce 'quiet times' spent with God in Christians' everyday lives.

Religious stories moved from the page to the big screen with movies like *The Ten Commandments* and *Samson and Delilah.* Hoover (2006a) maintains that these films, and others like them impacted religious media in two ways: a) created a film audience out of religious skeptics and b) gave this audience an example of "mediated religious imagery and a sense that mediated religion was thinkable and doable," (pg. 239). Experiencing religion through media is an important concept particularly when studying how Evangelical Christians are using new media like iPhone apps.

As Americans were driving to the movie theater to watch these religious films, they may also have had their radios tuned to religious broadcasts. Christian programing was on the airwaves of the first radio stations in the U.S. and was often included as a public service in Europe as well (Hoover, 2006a). Radio preachers of the 1920s used this new medium as a way to present the Gospel across the nation, and even across the world (Hoover, 2006a). Today, entire stations, like KLove and Air1, are devoted to playing "positive" music for a Christian audience, and include religious news and devotion-like commercials. These radio stations also have apps available for the audience to access content on their mobile phones.

Television followed radio as a tool for Christians to spread their faith. Billy Graham is the religious leader that may be most famous for his televangelism. Graham was well known for using every means possible to spread the Gospel to the world. In his 1997 autobiography he writes, "If Jesus were here today, I have no doubt He would make use of every means possible to declare His message," (Graham, 1997, p. 722; Hoover, 2006a, p. 240). From televised revivals with Billy Graham flowed shows like the *700 Club,* which tailors content to news its Christian audience needs to be aware of in order

to best proclaim Jesus' message. Networks also used religious-themed shows like *Touched by an Angel,* and *Joan of Arcadia* to appeal to religious audiences (Hoover, 2006a). However, Hoover (2006a) also points out that shows not necessarily intended for a religious audience tackle questions of religion and spirituality as well.

The next phase of advancement in communication technology provided yet another way for religion to be explored: the Internet. This is the newest medium that has been the subject of extensive academic research. Because this is the latest medium to be studied, it may be more similar to iPhone application technology and consequently very important in informing this study. Therefore, this section of the literature will be discussed in depth.

Religion and the Internet

The 1980s gave rise to the Internet and also to discussions of religion in online forums, also known as Bulletin Board Systems (or BBSs) (Campbell, 2010;Reingold, 1993). This online discussion of religion in general attracted participants from many different faiths who wanted their own online space to talk about their specific religions. Different groups developed their own forums, which then led to the creation of email lists, virtual congregations, and various religious websites in the 1990s (Campbell, 2010).

The last decade has seen the development of religious blogs, podcasts, more cybertemples and churches, religious ritual in computer games such as *Second Life* (Campbell, 2010), and even Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. Perhaps, mobile applications like iPhone apps are the most recent media technology featuring religious content. Therefore, in order to design a quality study of religious iPhone app use, it is important to explore how researchers have been studying the recent interactions of religion and the Internet.

Cho's (2011) *New Media and Religion: Observations of Research* identifies five different heuristics applied to the study of religion and the Internet including, a)

information transmission, b) online and offline religion, c) online influence of offline, d) online-religion and religion-online, and e) Internet as a medium. Researchers have approached these areas of study with many different methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative (i.e. Bedell, 2000; Campbell, 2005; Horsfall, 2000). Some of the most interesting studies, and those which provide support for the current study, include virtual ethnographies (Kluver & Chen, 2008; O'Leary, 1996) and case studies (Campbell, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Helland, 2006).Kluver and Chen (2008) conducted a virtual ethnography of The Church of Fools, an online congregation. Their research showed that people have the ability to have religious experiences online. Helland's (2006) case study and O'Leary's (1996) virtual ethnography reiterated these finding by showing that the online environment is conducive to living out religious beliefs and practices in the virtual world. The fact that people can have these types of experiences may indicate the same result from interaction with religious iPhone applications.

Although studies of mobile communication generally do not include religious communication, recent studies have confirmed that people do form emotional attachments to their mobile phones (Cumiskey, 2005; Park, 2005; Vincent, 2005). These studies may also support the assertion that people can have emotional spiritual experiences through iPhone apps as well.

Religious iPhone Apps

As mentioned in the introduction, most scholarly studies of mobile applications focus on technical development, advertising, and mobile Internet browsing. However, one other study (Bellar, 2012) conducted a qualitative textual analysis of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic iPhone apps in order to discover what these apps where saying about religion and how the apps were attempting to help users in their everyday spiritual practice. Four universal themes were found and all of the religions were also analyzed separately for unique themes.

First, Bellar (2012) found spiritual proximity, or getting closer to and knowing God, to be the most prominent theme across all three religions. This spiritual proximity seems to be achieved by studying religious holy texts and praying or communicating with God (Bellar, 2012). Therefore, some Evangelical Christians may be drawn to religious iPhone apps with a study or information gathering function.

Second, the way apps help achieve this spiritual proximity is by providing easy access to the holy texts, making religious practice such as praying or meditating convenient, and being able to personalize the app to meet the users specific needs (Bellar, 2012). This mode of spiritual proximity, as Bellar (2012) calls it, may provide insight into the types of factors Christians may be looking for when choosing a religious iPhone app.

The third theme, translation, accentuates the need for app content to be accurate and authentic (Bellar, 2012). This may manifest itself in the factors Christians take into consideration when choosing an app, such as requiring a certain Bible translation, like the King James Version (KJV) or New International Version (NIV). Some Christians may deem one version more authentic and accurate than another, and this theme relates back to Campbell's *core patterns and beliefs* area of examination (mentioned on p. 18).

The last universal theme Bellar (2012) found is sharing. Many apps provide the user a way to content with others via email and social media, such as Facebook or Twitter. It will be interesting to see if this factor is important for Evangelical Christians when choosing and using iPhone apps.

In accord with other research findings and historical interactions of Evangelicals and media, Bellar (2012) discovered evangelism to be a theme unique to the Christian iPhone apps studied. Perhaps these recent findings, taken within the context of historical media interaction, predict Evangelical Christians picking apps that are

developed specifically for starting conversations with non-believers and presenting them with the Gospel message.

Now that the major historical developments in the intersection of religion and media have been explored, and recent research on religion and the Internet and religious iPhone apps have been examined, the discussion turns to the best framework in which to situate the current research on Evangelical Christians' use of religious iPhone apps.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory is perfectly situated to inform the current study. First, it is concerned with why people use certain media and also what motivations they have making that choice. The theory also considers the gratification, the results, people see when using media. What people use media for, and the gratifications they seek from that media use, mediate the effects that media have on the user. Rather than the message having complete control, there are other social and psychological factors that "mitigate mechanistic effects," (Rubin, 2009, p. 165). This theory, usually credited to Herzog (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 245), is central to exploring and understanding what motivates Christians to download a specific app and the religious experiences they seek to have by using that app. Many researchers since Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch outlined the theory in 1974 have utilized the uses and gratifications theory to explore typologies of media use including why people read newspapers (Berelson, 1949), the helpfulness of media (Kats et. al, 1973), and the social uses of television (Lull, 1980). The point is these typologies were used to describe and explain why people used certain media. More recently, media research in this area has extended from why people use certain media and the outcomes of that use to understanding the effects of media use. This includes comparative analysis of newer technology like the Internet (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005), interactive media (Cowles, 1989) and mobile platforms (Campbell, 2010).

In order to apply the uses and gratification paradigm to the current research, there must first be an understanding of the assumptions intrinsic to the theory. First, it shifts the focus from the message to the receiver and therefore shifts the view of those receivers from passive to active (Fisher, 1978; Rubin, 2009). Receivers, or users in this case, are not just sitting idly by while being exposed to messages, but rather they are actively choosing and rejecting messages based on a number of variables. For this study, those variables could include gender, age, education, strength of faith, technological comfort level and so on. This leads to the second assumption: media use is motivated (Rubin, 2009). There is a reason one person will choose a daily devotion app over a prayer app. Additionally, even if two people chose the same app they may have different motivations for doing so. Third, the factors that mediate these behaviors are both social and psychological. The fourth assumption suggests different types of communication compete with each other for the attention of the user (Rubin, 2009). One devotional app may be more visually appealing, or the app may not be able to compete with traditional forms of devotionals in terms of content. What is available will influence user choice. Fifth – "people are typically more influential than the media in this process," (Rubin, 2009, p. 167) A user's creativity intervenes with the forms their media use takes and also with how the messages they receive affects them.

Kats (1973) had two additional assumptions for the uses and gratifications approach that are more methodological in nature. First, users can accurately identify their reasons, or motivations, for the media that they use (Kats, 1973; Rubin, 2009). Therefore, self-reported data, such as the ones used in this study, are a valid way to understand the interactions of users and media. Secondly, Kats et. al (1973) warns the researcher that "value judgments about the cultural significance" (p. 511) of media should be suspended until researchers understand the motivations and gratifications of users media use.

For this research it is understood that the level of activity among users is not the equivalent nor is it static. As Rubin (1993) suggests, users are variably active and they fluctuate on a scale between passiveness and activeness. Many researchers view motives as correlated rather than separated and are described as "complex viewing orientations" (Rubin, 2009; see also Perse & Rubin, 1988).

Two widely accepted orientations, ritualized and instrumental, are used to describe media use including the amount and type of media used as well as the attitudes and expectations of the user (Rubin, 1984). According to Rubin (2009), ritualized media use can be characterized as diversionary and a way for the user to pass the time. It also assumes the user has an attraction to a certain medium and will be spend longer periods of time using it. Instrumental, on the other hand, suggest that a user is seeking out a certain type of media in order to gain information (Rubin, 2009). Instrumental media use suggests a greater level of user activity and that user are very intentional and involved in their media choices. In terms of this study, users will most certainly fit within the instrumental orientation.

However, just because the user is active and aware does not mean that they will not be influenced by the media content. It also does not ensure that users will not at some point fall within the ritualistic orientation.

Understanding of the uses and gratifications theory greatly influenced the approach and design of this study. However, it is also important to use a cultural studies lens as well because religion is a culturally produced artifact. While the uses and gratifications theory informed the questions and methodology used to answer those questions, the cultural studies lens will be used to enrich the analysis of the data.

Cultural Studies Approach to Religion and Media

The nature of the research questions proposed and the topics of religion and media, as mentioned above, lends itself to the use of a culture studies lens. However, in

order to support this claim, an overview of other theoretical frameworks must be discussed as well. Hoover (2006b) examines different approaches taken in the study of media and religion in his book *Religion in the Media Age,* (p. 14 – 22). He notes how many scholars approached the study with the assumption that religion and media are in a constant state of struggle and one must prevail against the other. This view could be identified as positivistic and related to the magic bullet theory. Examples of this approach include *All God's Children and Blue Sued Shoes* by Ken Meyers and *Habits of the High-Tech Heart* by Quentin Schultze. Another way to approach the study of religion and media is to look at the effects each area has on the other. So, how is religion affecting media and how is media affecting religion? As Hoover (2006b) also suggests, George Gerbner developed a significant amount of work in the 1970s by focusing on the "social and ideological power," (p. 14) of religion. This approach has also been extensive for researchers looking at news coverage of religion (Buddenbaum, 1982, 1996). Finally, religion and media have also been considered in terms of forming social and religious identities. Hoover (2006b) proposes these formations of identity result from ritual and is based on the work of Emile Durkheim, which suggests "religion is integral to the form and shape of society," (p. 15). This approach focuses on "questions of identity and social solidarity, with social rituals being the context where these issues are worked out, (Hoover, 2006b, p. 15).

Cultural studies, however, is concerned not with how media and religion as separate entities affect life, but rather how media and religion are integrated into life and how people make sense of the experience of this integration (Hoover, 2006b). Cultural studies assume media and religion can both form culture and meaning and also be a product of that culture and reflect meaning (Kellner, 1995; Hoover, 2006b; Campbell, 2010). It allows the relationship between religion and media to be seen as flowing in both directions, not just from one to another. Therefore, this study's research questions

are best explored through a cultural studies lens because they are concerned with: a) how users make sense of their religious culture and how that sense-making influences their decisions about religious apps; b) users lived experiences with the apps and how they make sense of those experiences; and c) if initial app expectations are upheld in the users actual app experience.

As Hoover (2006b) suggests, cultural studies often utilize qualitative methodologies in order to explore research problems (p.16-17) and there are several reasons qualitative methods are preferred for the current study of religious media. First, the audience has a voice. Second, questions surrounding religion and media tend to be complex and multi-dimensional and not easily operationalized for quantitative studies. Third, patterns, even those the researcher does not expect, can be interpreted. Fourth, it sets the study within social, cultural, and historical contexts. Fifth, the multifaceted issues of meaning and identity are allowed to be investigated.

Religious-Social Shaping of Technology

In keeping with the cultural studies lens, Campbell (2010) sets up a framework, which she calls the religious-social shaping of technology, in order to study how and why religious communities use media in certain ways. The religious social shaping of technology (or RSST) derives from a theory known as the social shaping of technology (or STT). STT, according to Campbell (2010), suggests that technology is shaped by the interaction of different technical and social factors. Therefore, social groups can take media technology and shape it to their own personal needs and desires (this is also seen in the Uses and Gratifications theory). Rather than just apply STT to the study of religion and media, Campbell (2010) asserts that the theory needs to be adapted more from the religious side of the equation because "religious communities are unique in their negotiations with media due to the moral economies of these groups, and the historical and cultural settings in which they find themselves," (p. 58). Therefore, she proposes

four main areas researchers should examine while studying religious communities and media: a) *history and traditions*; b) *core beliefs and patterns*; c) *the negotiation process*; and d) *communal framing and discourse* (Campbell, 2010, pp. 60-66).

First, researchers must study the *history and traditions* of religious communities' interactions with media (Campbell, 2010, p. 60). The way a religious group have adjusted and incorporated the use of text (i.e. the Bible for Christians) into rituals and traditions may inform how they make decisions about interacting and adapting newer technologies. Campbell (2010) says a religious communities' decisions about early forms of media may explain the contemporary standards set for that groups current media use.

Second, *core patterns and beliefs* must be taken into account. How does the religious group, or individual, live out their everyday religious practices and how do those practices dictate how the group, or individual within the group, use media? As Campbell (2010) asserts, new technologies and media services are giving users many different choices, and those choices may support or conflict with the community's core beliefs. Therefore, researchers need to be aware that these core beliefs can encourage or discourage religious communities from using technology all together, or from using it certain ways.

Sturgill (2006) defines Evangelical Christians as, "Protestants who believe that sharing the story of Jesus Christ is crucial in bringing about personal salvation for others," (p. 136). This definition poses a problem in that we now have to define Protestantism. Therefore, Protestantism has four defining characteristics according to Smith (2006) including a) a conversion experience or salvation, b) believing the Bible to be the divine Word of God, c) evangelism, and d) redemption from hell through the death of Jesus Christ. The conversion or salvation experience involved a person praying to Jesus and admitting to belief in his life, death, and resurrection as the only way to Heaven and asking Him to "come into your heart." Believing in the Bible as the divine

Word of God may not necessarily mean all believers agree on the correct interpretation of Bible. However, it is the book by which Christians should seek a relationship with God and the guide by which to live their lives. Evangelism is sharing the story of Jesus Christ with others so that they may be saved. The staunch adherence to this tenant, according to Sturgill (2006), is what sets Protestants and Evangelicals apart even though Protestants may see evangelism as an important part of their faith as well. Finally, Protestants, and therefore Evangelicals, believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provides redemption from hell for all who believe. This is why salvation and evangelism is so important to Christians: people must be saved from hell and separation from God. Understanding these core beliefs gives insight into the population being studied and will help inform data analysis.

Continuing the RSST discussion, support of and conflicts with core beliefs leads to the third area of examination: *the negotiation process*. This process is informed by the former three areas of examination needed in RSST. If the new media technologies reflect older forms, then the group may use its old rules of engagement. However, if it is significantly different, Campbell (2010) says that group must negotiate "what factors of uses of the technology can be accepted and which ones might need to be rejected," (p. 61). The community may also choose to re-shape the new technology to fit in with its history and core beliefs. In later chapters of *When Religion Meets New Media,* Campbell discusses the "accept and appropriate" negotiation process Evangelicals use to spread the gospel (2010, p. 114). The accept and appropriate process can be seen throughout the religious community's history beginning with the printing press (Sturgill, 2006), as discussed earlier and also with the religious iPhone apps that are designed for Christians to use in spreading the gospel (Bellar, 2012). Another negotiation approach seen within the Christian faith is to "reconfigure and innovate," (Campbell, 2010, p. 122). The virtual cathedral, Epiphany Island, on *Second Life* is just one example of the reconfiguring of

religious practice online (Campbell, 2010, p. 123). The new virtual environment provided by Epiphany Island raised the question, "Can people truly worship in an online environment?" and began the reconfigure and innovate negotiation process for the Anglican Church, which sponsored the virtual cathedral. This negotiation process points out that not only do religious communities shape technology, but technology can help shape current forms of religious practice too.

Finally, the fourth area of examination in RSTT is *communal framing and discourse*. New technologies will lead to new ideas and new ways to practice religion and will therefore lead to new ways the community thinks about and talks about religion. Campbell (2010) asserts this final area of investigation is the culmination of the RSTT process that helps the community "frame and justify its approach to new media," (p. 62).

Methodology

A cross sectional study using Voice Memo diary reports and in-depth interviews was utilized to explore the research questions. Using these two methods provided richer data, and therefore, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Also, using two different methods also served to triangulate the research findings (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 51), which will increased the validity of the study.

The following sections give a brief overview of sampling, data collection including diary reports and in-depth interview methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, and the role of the researcher.

Sampling Procedures

This study utilized a convenience sample of Evangelical Christians who had access to an iPhone or iPod touch and who were interested in religious apps. Participants were recruited from churches in a mid-sized northeastern city, a mid-sized south-central city, and from Christian organizations at a large northeastern university. Flyers were distributed in church bulletins and displayed on message boards at the churches, at the university's chapel, and also on Facebook.

Data Collection

The data collection phase of this study took place in three steps. First, participants were asked to choose and download a religious iPhone app. Participants were reimbursed for the price of the app up to $5 after providing a copy of the receipt. Second, participants recorded a Voice Memo diary report every day for a week to report on the process and factors that informed their decision. The Voice Memo app comes standard on every iPhone and participants recorded their responses to prompts about their religious app experience. They then emailed the memo diary directly to me using the email option on the Voice Memo app. Third, in-depth interviews took place at the end of that week to further explore the app use and the emotional and spiritual

experiences the app evoked. At least 20 diary reports and in-depth interviews were conducted from October 2011 through February 2012.

Diary Reports. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) describe the diary report as "a method where participants routinely record their experiences and feelings," (p. 177). According to the SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, diaries have been used to track and explore how people choose what food to eat, what they do on the Internet, and even dating experiences (Smith-Sullivan, 2008). Diary reports can be collected from a period of a day to years, but for the purposes of this study, it was used for one week.

The major benefit of using the diary report method is that data can be collected as the experience is happening, where it is happening (Bolger, Davis, Rafaeli, 2003). Researchers gain an "enlarged and detailed 'snapshot' of what people have experienced," (Smith-Sullivan, 2008). However, this method also requires more time and effort from the participant than other methods. In order to offset the demands, participants were offered a $25 gift card incentive. Also, the diary report process was simplified so that the participants can use their iPhone directly after using the religious app to record their responses. A detailed guide was provided to participants who were uneasy about using the Voice Memo App (see Appendix D) As mentioned earlier, participants were given prompts and questions to answer using the Voice Memo app on their iPhone. Using the Voice Memo app means participants did not have to carry around cumbersome paper and pen and have the added stress of communicating their experience through writing. The voice memos also provided richer data in that tone of voice, pauses, and other verbal cues can be taken into consideration during transcription. All voice memos were transcribed and analyzed as they were received. In order to clear up any confusion about the diary voice memos, and to obtain richer data for analysis and triangulation, the diary report was followed with in-depth interviews.

In-depth Interviews. Interviews were scheduled within three days of the end of the diary report. Before the interviews, I examined the diary report and made notes about any answers that needed clarification or more in-depth responses. The interview was semi-structured and contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions. All interviews were be audio recorded and transcribed within three days of the interview. I also took personal notes during the interview.

In-depth interviews were issue oriented (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) and provide, "authentic accounts of lived (subjective), inner experience," (Schwandt, 2007). As Hesse-Biber and Leavy suggest (2011), these interviews were more of a conversation during which I engaged in "active asking and listening," (p. 94). The interview was about the participant's actual experiences and feelings, not about my own ideas or agendas.

Data Analysis

All diary voice memos and interview transcripts were be imported into Nvivo, which is qualitative research analysis software. The data was then analyzed using an open coding scheme that allows themes to emerge (Smith-Sullivan, 2008). Interpretation of these themes was concurrent with the analysis by writing memos during the coding process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This was an inductive process that occurred throughout the study. Approximately 118 nodes were coded for and multiple node queries, including compound and matrix queries, were used to organize and analyze the data.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were required to sign a consent form before taking part in the study and all procedures will be approved by IRB before recruitment and data collection begin.

In order to prevent the participant from feeling overwhelmed, I met with each one and explained the diary instructions and also answered any questions they had. I will

also had the participant complete a test voice memo and email it to me in order to ensure their iPhone and apps are working properly. All participants were provided with an email address and telephone number in order to reach me of they encountered any problems or concerns during the week they reported on their app activity.

Keeping all diary voice memos and transcripts in a password-protected file on my computer protected participant's confidentiality. Also, each participant was assigned an alias, which is used to identify him or her in the written report. Only my research adviser and myself have access to the participant's information.

Role of the Researcher

I grew up in the "Bible Belt" – that part of the country that adheres to Biblical principles and acknowledges Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the only way to heaven. Part of this upbringing comes with the theology that insists that there is Truth that is knowable and consistent for everyone, and anyone who does not acknowledge this Truth is wrong and should be corrected or avoided.

As I grew up and was exposed to other points of view, I realized that truth is subjective. People are not wrong or bad just because they do not believe as I believe: they are just different. Being able to understand this difference and respect it is very important to me as a researcher.

Because I am familiar with the Evangelical Christian faith and vocabulary, I was able to understand and communicate more effectively with participants. My goal was not to persuade them or dissuade them from any particular point of view. Rather, my goal was to understand their point of view and their iPhone app experience.

Findings

Once again, I stress that the goal of this work is not to generalize the following findings to a general population, but rather to explore and explain the findings in relation to this group of people with the hope of gaining a greater depth of understanding in regard to this particular phenomenon. The following findings include the description of the participants and the apps they chose, the main themes that emerged in relation to the data gathered from all the participants, and other minor themes particular to a certain type of participant or group of participants.

The 20 participants in this study comprised 15 women and five men between the ages of 22 and 64 from four different states, including Texas, New York, California and Pennsylvania. One participant lived in New York but is originally from Korea. The average age was 40.9 with seven participants in their 20s, four in their 30s, one in her 40s, six in their 50s, and two in their 60s. The participants were all self-proclaimed Evangelical Christians, with the exception of one who considered herself both an Evangelical Christian and a Catholic. Fifteen participants indicated they had been practicing their faith for 10 years or more, and about five participants indicated they had been Christian for 30 years or more. Most of the participants (75 percent) considered themselves comfortable to very comfortable with technology while three said they were somewhat comfortable and two said they were not at all comfortable.

The majority of participants chose daily devotional apps (7), followed by Bible reading apps (5), Bible promise apps (4), Bible study apps (3), and a prayer app (1). Most participants were looking for some kind of daily devotion app that would provide them with a verse for the day that they could ponder, or a scripture reading with commentary and a prayer. A few of them found the apps lacking, while others were quite satisfied.

Of all the apps chosen, one stood out in terms of references specifically for the Bible reading apps. Four participants chose to use The Bible App and referred to it as YouVersion. A visit to the iTunes app page shows that more than 48,000 people contributed to its five star

rating and more than 182,000 users made comments. Its obvious popularity on iTunes is reflected by the fact that four participants chose this app for the study and 11 other participants mentioned that they had used or were still using this app.

Bible promise apps were the next most popular choice for this study. Three of the four participants in this group chose the same app, John 3:16 Bible Promises, and the other participant chose an app called iTalktoGod. Essentially these Bible promise apps function in the same way. The app provides a category list of emotions a person could be feeling and then provides scripture verses about those emotions. Diana, who uses conventional promise books as well as the app version, described it like this:

> You go straight to -- for instance if you're angry, not that I would ever use that one (laughs) – but it gives you all the Bible verses… on anger so that you can read those and whatever that brings to you personally. Instead of going to your Bible looking in the concordance, looking up the verse, it's all right there.

Three participants wanted apps that would help them delve deeper into the scriptures in their everyday study. The study apps chosen were Strong's Concordance, Olive Tree Bible Reader, and Bible Heroes. Even though the apps can be classified as study apps the users did apply them in different ways.

Lastly, one participant decided to use a prayer app that would help him keep track of daily prayer requests. This wasn't something that he just stumbled across. Rather, when he decided to participate in this study he had this specific purpose in mind.

Now that the participants have been described and the types of apps that they chose have been mentioned, the following section will discuss the main and minor themes found as relating to the research questions.

RQ1: What are the factors individual Evangelical Christians consider when choosing a religious iPhone application?

Before a person can even consider the factors that are important to them when choosing

an app, they have to be able to find religious apps, which as participants pointed out, can be

problematic.

The Search. The problem can be narrowed down to one issue: the iTunes store

contains no category for religious or spiritual apps. Rather, as Bellar (2012) found, the religious

apps are scattered across categories such as reference, lifestyle, books, etc. This posses a serious

problem for those users who may not be as comfortable with technology, and can even be

irksome to the most technologically savvy because the search results can be overwhelming to

navigate. Seth, who considers himself very comfortable with technology, said,

> You know, sometimes I think about going to the app store and browsing
> through. But honestly, it's so jumbled up in there that I don't feel like
> hacking through the bushes to find one that I might like. It'd almost be
> easier to go to the bookstore and buy a book.

Tessa was not completely satisfied with the app she chose for the study and attributed it

to confusing search results. She said:

> Like I said for someone that doesn't go to the app store very often it would
> be easier if they say, 'Here's the religion apps.' And I don't care if they
> throw it in with Hindu, Buddha, whatever. But just a place where you
> could go to a religion category and then pick Christianity.

Most participants, with the exception of two who consulted their children for help,

searched specific key words such as "Christianity," Religion," or "Devotions," with varying

results. Others knew exactly what they were looking for and typed in very specific searches such

as "Our Daily Bread."

Once they found the apps, some participants did not feel as though there were any that

really interested them. Alice was not sure what she wanted when she began her search and was

left wanting with the results. "Well, it's kind of interesting because when I went into... I tried to

search for a new app for your deal, and there was nothing that appealed to me. Absolutely

nothing. It was very interesting." Abby shared her sentiments and said, "Sometimes I would

mention that I browsed for other Christian apps, specifically when I started doing this, to sort of see what was out there. I didn't see any that I was like, 'Oh I really want to download that.'"

However, after getting past the initial hurtles of searching for and finding religious apps, there were three common factors that every participant took into consideration before deciding which app to download: a) ratings and reviews, b) word of mouth, c) and cost.

Ratings and Reviews. In terms of deciding which app to download, participants overwhelmingly said the ratings and reviews section was the most important. iTunes allows users to rate the app from one to five stars. It also shows how many people have rated the app as well as the breakdown of how many rated it five, four, three, two, or one stars. Below these ratings, customers can read reviews made about the current and previous versions of the app. It also shows how many comments were made, and offers other users a chance to comment as well (see Figure 1).

It may not be surprising that this is a major factor when choosing an app. Consumers generally want to see what other people think about a product, how they use it, and what they like and don't like about it before committing to buy it. Abby put her consideration of the ratings and reviews this way:

> Well, I looked at the little stars to see how people were reviewing them,
> and a lot of the religious apps had low reviews so... There were a lot that
> didn't have any reviews and then there were some that would have maybe
> three starts out of five. I usually really like, take that into consideration.

Interestingly in this case, ratings and reviews were important not only for those who chose apps that cost between $.99 and $4.99, but also to those who chose free apps. "But you know it's, or even if it was free it's still going to take space up on my phone. It's one of those things that you don't want to download something and you're like that wasn't worth the wasted time," Mark said.

Even if the participants were looking for other factors like cost or a specific function like highlighting or journaling, the final decision usually came back to ratings and reviews. Janine

says it was what finally convinced her. "I think one of the things that convinced me that this was the one I wanted to choose is that it had very high ratings. A lot of people had rated it and it had really good reviews for what I was reading."

Although ratings and reviews are an important factor to consider before deciding on a new app, Mark pointed out that you have to look at reviews with a critical eye.

> So before we actually go and purchase anything, we look for reviews and even in the app store we'll go through five or six pages of reviews of what people say. Of course we have to throw out the fat and chew on the meat because you know there are going to be stupid people that are making comments there. So, you have to kind of wade through all that, but because in the end it's money.

In the end it is money, and this was reflected in the findings in that ratings and reviews were often mentioned in conjunction with the cost.

Cost. More than half of the participants chose free apps with the others ranging in price from $.99 to $4.99. Most mentioned the fact that they consciously stayed within the range of $5 because that was the limit they would be reimbursed for their participation. Only one of the participants, Jenny, mentioned any interest in looking at apps that cost up to and sometimes more than $20.

> I was really looking more for a commentary because after I did the Strong's Concordance I thought what I really need is a commentary. But I don't think I found, I mean I looked, but I don't think I found what I needed. There was one called an iBundle. It was a Bible bundle and it was like $40 and I was like I'm not going to spend that if I don't know I'm going to use it or not.

The Strong's Concordance app is a little different than most of the apps the other participants chose in that it is a well-known resource for serious students of the Bible. The app she ended up downloading was called Strong's Concordance Lite and it was free. On the third day of keeping her voice memo diary, she decided to try the full version that cost $4.99. "Then I thought well, I'm going to buy the regular one. It was $4.99 and I thought OK that'll have more references, and it was exactly the same." The only difference Jenny noticed between the free version and the

$4.99 version was the lack of advertisements in the later. Because she did not find new content, she said it made her leery of buying more expensive apps in the future.

Word of Mouth. "You know, I think search engines are great and you could sell a little bit there but you can sell so much more if someone comes up to you and says, 'You gotta get this app.' It's the word of mouth thing," said Mark. About seven of the participants relied on the advice from their friends and family in finding and choosing an app. Two of the older women, ages 57 and 64, who were not comfortable with technology, relied solely on their sons for help. Jenny's 21-year-old son walked her through the process step by step.

> I mean stuff like that when you get a certain age kind of boggles your
> mind and it kind of weighs you down when you're not comfortable. Or
> once you learn it, or just do it. I mean there was really nothing to learn, it
> was just doing it. I didn't know how to do it and as soon as my 21 year old
> sat me down and said, "Ok, push this, then push that." I was like, wow you
> can get all those apps. That's cool.

While Jenny's son was very hands-on in showing his mother how to use an app, Cindy relied mostly on her son for the actual choice of what to download. "I chose this app over others because my son had it and it had different translations." Cindy wanted to know someone who used it and said it was an app worth using, rather than relying solely on the ratings and reviews of strangers.

The other participants who mentioned talking to friends and family were more casual and did not necessarily agree with or take the advice that was given. Rusty said, "I talked to one other friend who had recommended an app, but after looking at it decided it wasn't for me."

Learning about the app from others through ratings and reviews, hearing from friends and family through word of mouth, and considering the cost all made a big impact on the choice of the participants regardless of what type of app they were looking to use. After the choice comes the expectations, and thus, the discussion of the second research question.

RQ2: What experiences do Evangelical Christians seek from religious iPhone apps?

Trying to extrapolate an answer from the mass of data seems overwhelming because of the diversity of the participants' expectations. However, there were a few main themes that emerged. First I will explore the common concerns participants had in terms of convenience and usability before moving to a discussion of the shared spiritual expectations.

On the Fly. Many researchers have noted that society has entered into a mobile era that is connecting us with others and with media content through shared space (Campbell, 2006; Campbell & Ling, 2009), and how people develop, interact and practice their faith is no exception. Spirituality is becoming mobile, just like banking, gaming, and shopping. The participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that convenience and accessibility were key expectations. As Mark notes, it is just a way of life now.

> I wanted, I guess, we've become an instant gratification kind of world
> and especially now that school is going. We've gone from laptops in the
> classrooms now to iPads and I'm pretty much 100% dependent on my
> phone. I run my whole business off my phone – I get my emails, I get my
> faxes, I get my manuals, I do everything from my phone. So it's with me
> at all times, including my Bible. You know, it's on my phone.

Christians are just as busy as the rest of the world and they try to find scraps of time to fit in their spiritual practice. Thus, the mobile phone becomes a lifeline to their faith through quick snippets of time. Seth finds his quick spiritual moments at work.

> But it was just a, something simple that I could use on the fly. I don't get
> to use my phone at work a lot. But if I got some downtime and I just
> wanted to pull something up real quick. That's a big plus for me.

Convenience. In addition to the quickness of having a devotion or the Bible on their phone, participants also pointed to its sheer convenience. The mobile phone takes up exponentially less space than a Bible, a devotion book, a journal, highlighters, a concordance, or whatever else a person may need in the course of the spiritual practice. Alice prefers the phone to books.

> I just really wanted to make it convenient for me to be able to use my
> phone instead of actual books. So, as long as the content is what I needed
> – which it was because it was a Bible version – then that was my

>expectation to just be able to use that and just take the phone, just use
>the phone and not anything else.

The student participants echoed this sentiment. They have enough books and notebooks and laptops to carry around with them on their backs. While they do not want to call carrying an actual Bible around an inconvenience, they do acknowledge that it is easier to carry the Word of God in digital form. Matthew explains:

>Because my lifestyle or any college student lifestyle. You're always busy.
>You're already reading enough books as it is. For me I'm not real big on
>paper books. Being a college student I have plenty that I have to look
>through. So it's just very simple on the phone. Getting into the Word of
>God and opening up your Bible... for me, not that it's a hassle, but it's very
>simple to do on your phone.

>**Does it work? Does it work well?** It may provides quicker access, it may be smaller

and more manageable in terms of transport, but if it does not work none of the former matter.

>I think the factor that I considered most is if it would work. If it was
>going to be as thorough or if it was going to be as easy to use and also I
>was interested in clear instruction on how to use all the features.

Jenny was not alone in this sentiment. She was the oldest participant at the age of 64 and yet, perhaps the most experienced when it came to actually trying out religious apps. Jenny mentioned trying a different concordance before this study that just kept freezing or would take too long to bring up the information she was looking for. These types of problems are called bugs and were the most common complaint in terms of expectations not being met. Bugs are mistakes made during the development and can cause the app to freeze, shut down unexpectedly, and cause slow processing among many others.

Cleaning out the bugs and basic design makes for easier navigation in the app as well. Many participants, like Barbara, remarked that the app was so intuitive that they learned new skills. "But I did learn how to bookmark stuff and highlight stuff, things like that that I had never even thought about before but it was available to do. And I thought, 'Oh I can do that.'"

Katy was one of the older participants who was not at all comfortable using technology, but the intuitiveness of the interface on the app she chose gave her the confidence she would

need to seek out other apps. "It pushed me into doing something out of my comfort zone and it was something so simple. And I hope to use more Bible apps and I'm going to dial some more up because I know how to do it now."

The convenience and usability aspect of the app are important to satisfaction with the app, but even those aspects did not guarantee satisfaction of the spiritual expectations participants had. This section of the paper speaks both to the second and third research questions.

RQ3: How do these Evangelical Christians actually use religious iPhone apps to navigate their spirituality?

Expectations lead naturally into experience. Although not all participants said their chosen app met their expectations, most said there was some sort of benefit whether it was spiritual or not. An exploration of the participants' expectations is necessary in order to explicate the relationship between the second and third research questions.

Spiritual impact. Whether the participant was looking for a Bible reading app, a daily devotion, or a prayer app, there were several spiritual expectations that connected their experiences. Reading the Bible was the most referenced theme specifically in relation to keeping track of a daily practice, daily devotionals, and also for more intense learning and study. These practices were associated with the spiritual benefit of being closer to God, encouragement, and connecting with others.

Bellar (2012) found that most Christian, Jewish and Islamic applications promised the spiritual benefit of spiritual proximity - engaging the Almighty, a closeness to God - through the use of the app. In this study, participants corroborated her finding in that being closer to God was a main expectation of app use. Most often, participants sought spiritual proximity through apps that helped them read the Bible and apps that helped them address emotions and situations with Promise books.

Reading the Bible. As mentioned before, Bible reading was definitely the practice for which most of the participants used their app. However, reading the Bible could mean anything from reading a specific set of scriptures for the day, reading and getting commentary about scripture such as in a devotion, or studying specific scriptures in depth.

Straight-up reading. For Alice, Abby, Barbara, Cindy and Paula, the main purpose was to use the app to read the Bible – plain and simple. Daily Bible reading is seen as an important spiritual practice in the Christian faith, and getting closer to God by reading the Word is one of the main benefits.

> Anytime you read the Bible - that to me is a spiritual experience. I believe anytime you read the Bible that those are the words of God. I believe that the Bible is inspired by God. So, yeah, it's absolutely a spiritual experience."

Three participants, Alice, Abby, and Paula, used the Bible App and all three chose a different Bible reading plan offered within the app. Alice says, "I expected to use the app to read the Bible. And that's exactly what I got out of it. There were several different read-the-Bible-in-a-year plans and this one is just a generic one." Abby explains why using the app for this purpose is important to her and impacted her spirituality.

> In the past when I would read the Bible I didn't have the schedule set up so there was no real direction in where I was going with the reading. So the reading of the passages was sort of sporadic. In those times, it was sort of 'whatever' and I didn't really get anything out of it. Somehow, just having that schedule helps me really focus in on what I'm reading and not just saying, "Oh I'll just read that chapter," or "I'll just read this other book today." So sometimes it's just having direction and being able to think more about what I'm reading.

Keeping track. In addition to having the created reading plan ready to go, the app also helped them kept track of their progress. Most plans either let the user check off the scriptures read that day or kept a percentage of the total plan that the user can see before and after they read their daily allotment. Keeping track seems to be one of the things these participants liked best. Abby said:

> I am thinking that this app is really helping me keep track of reading. For the first time, I'm actually reading almost every day. I have missed a day

here and there, but for the most part, I'm keeping on track. I feel that the
app is important to me because it shows my progress and that helps me
keep going.

Paula said it was her favorite thing about using the daily reading plan. "That is my goal with this

app. I think it is really helpful to see how much Bible I read so far," she said. A while after the

study concluded Paula emailed to tell me she had read 25% of the Bible. Abby found checking off

the boxes to be immensely satisfying as well. "It has the cool little circles and as I read I can

check off the scripture with a check mark."

Daily alerts were another way participants wanted the apps to help them keep track of

their daily reading. Apps offer everything from an alarm the user can set themselves to just a

silent app signal the user can see when they pull out their phone (see Figure 2). This was most

important because of the hectic pace of the participants' lives. "Well I wanted something that

would send me an alert everyday. That was a big thing. Because I thought if it just sat there I

wouldn't think about going and looking it up," Janine said. For Tessa, the alert was the deciding

factor in the app she chose.

The most important factors- I mainly was more concerned about
something that would be easy as far as reminding me to do this at a
certain time everyday. I chose Word Alert daily bible scripture; it's by
"Fingoware" something like that. The reason I chose this over the others is
because it did have the option of sending me scripture without me having
to actually open the app. I like the idea of it reminding me at a certain
time of day and it would pop up.

While these participants sought out apps with alerts, it didn't always work out as

planned. Time change was one factor for Tessa.

But it also – when the time change hit – it's supposed to remind me at
9:15 but it didn't update with the phone. So now it dings at 10:15 every
night even though you go in there and you look and it's set to ding at 9:15.

Paula liked the fact that her app had an alert, but she just wanted it to be "stronger." Her app did

not make any noise or vibration to alert her that it was time to read, rather it just displayed a

number next to the app icon on her phone to alert her that there was something new (see Figure

2). These are called notifications and are controlled by the app developers. Users often have the

option to opt out of them.

Daily devotions. Reading the Bible was also a main goal for many of the other

participants, but they wanted some type of commentary or story to go along with the scripture.

Participants who were looking for this type of experience most often referred to them as

devotional apps and they also wanted them for a daily spiritual experience. Matthew said, "So

for this project I'm mostly interested in a daily devotional app, something to guide me each day

in my spiritual life. Reading it is a very awesome, uplifting experience. Just kind of taking

strength in the Lord." Mark was looking for the same thing, and as mentioned earlier,

accessibility was also a concern. "I would like a daily devotional to be able to provide a fresh

daily devotional in my pocket, which is on my iPhone. It would be accessible to me at any time of

day." Traditionally, daily Bible devotionals begin with a scripture reading, followed with a

commentary or story illustrating the point of the scripture reading, and end with a prayer or

inspirational thought related to the teaching. The goal of these devotions is to teach the reader

more about the Bible and God and how to apply scriptures and teaching to their everyday lives.

A short online search for daily Bible devotions pulls up sites that say devotions are "a quick read

in an effort to love and serve God's people amidst the rush of life," (Bell, Loftis, & Pounds, 2012),

and that it "helps readers spend time each day in God's word," (RBC Ministries, 2012). The idea

is that these devotions provide encouragement and help Christians stay on a spiritual path.

Diana's voice became very animated as she talked about her expectations for a spiritual

experience.

> If I received a verse or a devotion that met my needs spiritually that day,
> I'm going to be all over that. It's kind of like when you open up the Word
> to read that day, you want God to speak to you, whether it's in a small way
> or a big way.
> I don't want to just sit down and read and get up and go well, that was
> nice. I want a spiritual experience and I'm choosing to expect a spiritual
> experience. And I think, actually, I'm choosing to expect that with an app.
> So I want an app that will do that.

For Janine, the rush of life left her with little time to seek out this experience and she was

hoping a quick daily devotional would help ease her back into a more regular routine.

> I'm hoping that the Bible app will get me back into reading my bible and, I
> mean I have a pretty solid prayer life, but just getting back into the Word
> and just getting more into memorizing scripture. So that's kind of what
> I'm hoping for that.
> Several participants had a specific devotion in mind when looking for their apps.

Lucinda, Mark and Vicki all chose the app Our Daily Bread because it was something with which

they were familiar. Lucinda said, "Actually, the Daily Bread I started getting at Faith (a church

she attended recently) in a little book years ago." Mark told a similar story:

> Yeah, like I had mentioned I had done the paper pamphlet (Our Daily
> Bread) several times in the past, over the years. I never had a subscription
> or did it regularly. But you know, every time I'd see one or they had them
> for free, I would always pick one up and go through it. I've always enjoyed
> it. So when I was looking for a daily devotional I didn't realize… I had no
> idea they had an app for it actually. So when I saw it I thought you know
> that's actually familiar and something I might enjoy.

Vicki said she chose this app because it was familiar. "I actually thought about when I was a kid

and I actually went to a little Baptist church. They would hand out Our Daily Bread every

month." However, she wondered if it was really as good as she remembered it being when she

was a child. "I kind of went into it with a snotty attitude of I know so much more than I knew

then and it can't really have any meaning for me today," she said.

While those three participants were successful in finding the specific app they wanted,

others tried to find specific apps related to a favorite church, pastor or theologian. Matthew

explains the process he went through when decided what kind of app he wanted.

> Obviously I wanted something each day to a help me in my spiritual life,
> but I didn't know if I should do the Bible or some devotional. So, then, I
> was watching TV and saw my favorite pastor – I enjoy listening to his
> sermons – Pastor Joseph Prince. So I thought maybe, hey, there might be
> something with him or his church. So I searched him but there is nothing
> for Joseph Prince apps. (Then I) searched his church, New Creation
> Church, which is in Singapore and there was an app for that church. So I
> looked at it. It was awesome. It gives you daily devotionals along with a
> calendar for the church, announcements for the church, and also special
> messages from Joseph Prince on the app. So that is why I chose that app.

Rusty also was successful in finding an app by his favorite pastor, although his experience with

the app did not meet his expectations.

> I chose this app over others because I know Tozer to be a solid
> author/preacher with good insight on how to grow in spiritual depth. The
> app seemed to provide small nuggets of his work and provide me the
> opportunity to look at a single day or multiple days if I chose to spend
> more time on it.

Even though Rusty failed to get that "spark" from the app that would help him grow, he tended

to blame that dissatisfaction with his own frame of mind and not on the app.

> While Alice settled on the Bible App, she first sought out apps from theologians like A.C.

Sprouls and Al Mohler but could not find what she was looking for. She explains why she thinks

these types of apps could be beneficial.

> But if someone has a question and you're not really sure how you feel
> about it, but there are theologians that you trust, it would be nice if they
> had apps or something where you could look it up by topic and get all of
> their thinking's on it just so you can be directed – not just because they
> believe it, you have to believe it or anything – but they might pull more
> areas of the scriptures together for you so that you can analyze it yourself
> without having to do all the legwork.

Paula, who is originally from Korea but attending graduate school in the U.S., also chose the

Bible App for the study. But she says she also has apps from her favorite church back in Korea.

> Other participants may not have known the specific app they wanted, but did know that

they wanted something that would apply to their everyday life. "Just a daily devotional with a

little explanation of how it could tie into daily life. And it usually does. It hits some part of me

that I've been thinking about, worrying about, praying about," Lucinda said. However, not

everyone had success meeting this expectation, yet were reluctant to place the blame on the app

itself. Lindsey, for example, said it was not necessarily something the app could give her, but

rather it was a tool for her to learn to use.

> I feel like I'm not real good at finding places in my life to apply the things
> I always hear about. It's hard to explain this. I don't… Our pastor often
> talks about looking at your life and where you see God's blessings and
> where do you see God's hand in your life? And that's a very similar thing
> to where the Bible reading was today which was in those tough times

where do you see God's hand in your life. And I'm not good at noticing those kinds of things, I think that's what I'm coming to the conclusion of and that's one of the things I'm realizing I'm needing to work on.

Rusty was also looking for his app to shed some light on how he should handle things in everyday life. He did not find what he was looking for, yet he also blamed himself and not the app for this frustration.

Because I don't think that the content was horrible but I just needed something to relate to me and where I'm at and just my own spiritual journey. So it would have been better if it had been something that yeah, I felt I could relate to and was speaking into moments in my life that I was going to be facing that day. Or you know the things that I feel during my day and how it could speak into it. I think it had everything to do with me. Because it's not like this is a bad app and that's why I didn't get any spiritual experience out of it.

Promise Books. Other participants took this concept of life application to another level. They specifically sought out apps that would provide scripture readings directly related to their emotions or life situations. Most of the apps chosen for this purpose mirror Promise Books, described earlier. Instead of just hoping the daily Bible reading would apply to their lives, users actually selected from specific categories, which would provide scriptures that were directly related. Diana had experience with Promise Books in the past and that is why she chose her app. "It's something that I've used for 20 years. I have sort of variations so you can see why having it on my phone would be very convenient." Laura and Seth also chose Promise Book apps but were unfamiliar with the concept. Laura explains the impact she was hoping her app would have.

In terms of affecting my spiritual life I'm just hoping that by going deeper into His Word and finding what he says about anything ranging from our emotions to how we should act. It will really enhance my spiritual life and my walk with God.

Laura looked up everything from temptation to anger and also about how she should behave in terms of her relationships with family and friends. She explains how this helped when she was worried about visiting with family during a holiday.

So when I went to the app I was just kind of worried especially with this holiday coming up and you know I put in I was worried and its so great... it gives you a category of well "how were you worried? Were you worried

> in the realm of your parents?" I clicked the parent's category and it gives
> me all of these verses so that I can know what God says about just
> continually honoring your parents no matter what the situation is. And
> how there are no exceptions. You know there's no exceptions to God's
> Word.

Seth also used the app for his emotions and says it was able to help him put his feelings in

perspective.

> I ended up looking through loneliness cause you know I'm all by myself.
> I'm going through some relationship stuff. I feel kind of alone. So I went
> to the loneliness chapter and I found Psalm 25:16-17. 'Turn to me and be
> gracious to me for I am lonely and afflicted. Troubles of my heart have
> multiplied, free me from my anguish.' That's just kind of where I am right
> now. Like I felt really lucky to just kind of see that and it just kind of
> echoed the way that I felt right in that moment.

Being able to take the scripture and see where it fits into today's problems, issues and emotion

seems to provide the participants with a deep sense of peace and comfort. Janine explains how it

is helping her through the depression she's faced since going through a divorce.

> It was a Bible verse - I guess the topic was depression - and it was just
> talking about how God is always with you and do not fear. That's just an
> area of my life I constantly struggle with. I struggle with depression just
> with all the stuff that I've been through just the last couple of years. It was
> really nice just to be reminded of that and take comfort in that Bible verse.

> *In-depth study.* Two of the participants, Barbara and Cara, were looking for apps that

would really help them "dig deeper" into God's Word. The apps were used in conjunction with

preparing Bible study lessons that they would present to others in a Bible study group. Barbara

explains what she was looking for:

> I'm interested in these apps primarily as study tools and research tools as
> I'm doing particular lessons. I often speak to women's groups and need to
> have the correct scripture references and the correct context and that type
> of thing. So I believe that using this for research is a very efficient way of
> getting answers quickly.

Barbara used her Strong's Concordance app to look up references and also the Greek and

Hebrew translations of words in specific scriptures in order to gain a better

understanding. While this app use is definitely not for a quick daily pick-me-up, it was

important for it to have the same functions as those type of apps. Cara said, "I think it will

help me with the my Bible study and keep me from having to look up different versions and just have it all in one spot to answer my questions as I'm doing Bible study."

While both women used it to prepare Bible studies for others and go more in-depth, the final goal remained the same – getting closer to God.

> I think that any time we begin to seek God's Word and his will for us in this life that this is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to speak to us and to teach us. I know that it will give me a greater understanding of God's word and his work and that that is always good.

Katy also chose an app that was more focused on in-depth study, but in a somewhat different way. She chose Bible Heroes, an app that focused solely on the different characters of the Bible and learning more about their lives and the roles they played in Biblical times. While this was not necessarily reading the Bible it was studying about people written about in the Bible and therefore was included in the "study" uses. Katy still expected this to impact her spiritual life and relationship with God. "I am expecting this app to affect my spiritual life by helping me to remember the important facts of every Bible person or hero and summarizing it for me to further my spiritual life," she said. "They (the Bible characters) are the witnesses and they are the ones that wrote the books of the Bible and the others did things in the Bible that are apparently what the Lord wanted us to learn."

The exception. Cara also chose an app that would help her study scripture, but its purpose was not necessarily to learn more or develop her relationship with God. She chose an app called Twisted Scripture, which gave examples of scripture and explained how different religions used that scripture. It would then show the 'correct' interpretation and how the user could counter-argue against those (i.e. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc.) who were misusing the scripture.

> I really just wanted to learn stuff that I didn't know. Like, when I was reading one of the things that caught my eye were the three different levels of heaven and hell. So I wanted to know what they thought about that. After I downloaded, I just wanted to see what kind of information I could get from it.

Cara was the exception to the rule as far as using the app to further her spirituality or develop her relationship with God. It was strictly for information purposes only.

  Translation. While translation was not an issue for everyone, there were a few participants who felt strongly about the translation their app would use. Others were concerned that the app provide more than one translation for comparison and study.

  In order to understand this better, a little bit of history about Bible translations is needed. According to Metzger (2010), the greatest number of translations of the Bible occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. While it is difficult to estimate the exact number, some say there have been more than twelve hundred published since 1945, although most scholars agree it is best to stick with the traditional few (i.e. King James Version, New King James Version, American Standard Version, etc.) developed in the 20th century (Daniell, 2003). However, today's bookshelves, digital or otherwise, give users have the options of KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASV, and The Message to name a few.

  Most participants who mentioned translation said they would like to have as many different translations available so that they can see the similarities and differences and better discern the meaning of scripture. For example, Barbara said, "I like having different versions, because sometimes I won't understand something. Just for clarity, when I'm reading, sometimes, if I'm not quite grasping it I like to be able to go to a different version." Having all of the translations available on one app takes the hassle out of having to carry around and look through multiple Bibles in order to see a simple comparison. Cindy explains:

> I like that I can switch around with the versions and read it different ways. That's real convenient because otherwise I'd have all these different Bibles open. And this way I can just switch around and read different versions and see how different they are. And it'll even tell you the Greek for different words. And I like that.

Lindsey said having access to other translations was also helpful during group Bible studies, where there was the possibility that everyone in the group was reading from a different translation.

> Different people prefer different translations, so they'll talk about what they read in a certain area. It's much easier for me to carry either my iPhone or my iPad to check on it than it is to try and carry all those Bibles around. Not so much to check on it but to look at it and try to get a sense of what they're talking about. So that's why I did it. Rather than try to buy all those Bibles and carry them all around.

Lindsey also said it was important to make sure that the translation they were reading was accurate and authentic.

> Most important factors – to me it's that it's going to be accurate. To me I don't want to be loosy goosy about this thing and have to go check it someplace else to make sure that what they're saying is appropriate or correct or whatever. So, no I'm not a literal translation person, but I don't want somebody to change "thou shalt not kill" into "thou shalt kill."

Laura also said that the app she chose had to have the King James Version because it was the most authentic. "Because I am most comfortable with a King James Version translation. For me that's the most authoritative and that's the one that I feel really speaks God's truth. Not so much a religious affiliation, but more so a Biblical translation," she said.

> Others like Matthew and Abby were not as concerned about the authenticity as much as they were about their experience. They just preferred reading one translation more than another. Abby explains:

> YouVersion allows me to choose what version of the Bible I want to read from. Other apps only give devotions or verses from versions of the Bible that I don't typically read from. It was important to me to have an app that allows me to select my preferences.

> Only one participant, Paula, mentioned that her app also translated the Bible into another language. Although she was talking about the Korean translations, her reasoning for enjoying the translations was similar to the other participants.

> I was just surprised that they had so many different versions. I don't know about in English, but in Korean sometimes you cannot understand the different words. Because they translated like 100 years ago so they use really old Korean words. But they also have a new Korean version so you can easily understand what the words mean. I think that's helpful.

Translation can be a tricky topic for Christians. While some argue only one translation is the true translation, others seek out as many interpretations of scripture as possible in order to gain a better understanding.

Hearing the Word. While this was not a major theme, several participants mentioned the fact that they could listen to a reading of the Bible or devotion for that day. Cindy initially said that she like having the feature but would rather read the scripture herself. But she did eventually experiment.

> Today I kind of did something different and I read the chapters and I went back and had the app read it to me. You know the app has a voice that reads it to you. And so I kind of wanted to both see it visually and hear it and audibly which I think kind of cements it in your mind. And also I was thinking I would like that as I'm driving in the car that I could listen to the Bible as I drive.

Lindsey and Mark were also excited about using the audio features on their apps but glitches in the software, and in life, seemed to get in the way. In Lindsey's case the feature on the app, called Today: A Daily Bible Devotional, just did not work.

> I listen to more books than I actually read. I can put the books on my iPhone and I can go out and work in the garden and I'm actually listening to a book. I don't know if its just not functioning right or what it is. So I'm going to jot a little note to the people that run this and find out.

She actually tried to contact the developer to find out if there was a way they could fix the problem but she never heard back from the company. For Mark, it was the exhaustion of a long day at school, work, and cycling that prevented him from fully taking advantage of the audio feature.

> Again, I did the devotion. It's got another button to listen to the devotion. And I tried to do that because I was tired and to be more of a passive user of it. It was not actually able to hold my attention and I found myself actually dosing off. So I had to forgo the listening to the devotion – although it's a great feature and I'll try it again another evening. But I basically had to turn it off and just finish reading the app, the devotion, so that I could get through it.

Reading the Bible, in all its different forms, was definitely the most referenced purpose for using an app. It was accomplished in many different ways, even when the participants were

using the exact same app. With the exception of Cara, developing a closer relationship with God

was the main expectation.

Encouragement

While the ultimate goal of using these apps is to know God more, all the participants

mentioned the expectation, and many times the result, of feeling encouragement in their lives.

Feeling closer to God provided the added benefit of feeling better about life and the ability to

handle the stress and heartache life can sometimes cause. This type of motivation can be

referred to as a type of mood management (Rubin, 2009). At least 18 participants mentioned the

fact that they needed a little pick me up, a dose of inspiration for the day to keep them going. It

seemed as though the most encouraging app use was when participants could relate the content

to their lives. Cindy said:

> It was very encouraging to me today to read about the apostle Paul. He
> was in the middle of difficult circumstances. He was falsely arrested.
> There were storms on the sea. He was shipwrecked. There were lots of
> false accusations but Paul remained faithful and kept teaching in a bold
> and honest way.

Even when the content is familiar it could have an encouraging effect. Janine explains how

rereading verse she had known since she was a girl affected her day.

> So it was a great encouragement to actually get that kind of verse. I found
> that to be kind of funny. So it was a really good reminder. Then I actually
> went back to it and read it again in the afternoon. It's one of those verses
> that I've actually grown up memorizing. So I just know it in my heart but
> just to be reminded of it on a day like today, it was just very encouraging.
> It was very good. I though it was a very appropriate scripture for today.

Katy also had this kind of experience as she was studying Bible characters she's learned

about her whole life. "After I reminded myself, my mind was going over it and

remembering and it made me feel kind of warm and good just to think about the Lord. I

love this Bible app."

Anxiety over facing obstacles in life was another reason participants sought out the app

content for encouragement. Janine describes trying to finish a run and feeling defeated; yet this

is what happened when the verses she had been studying on her app that week came to mind:

> One time when I was out running, scripture was just going through my
> mind and I was like, 'Wow. I know that Bible verse.' It was because I was
> running ten miles at the time and I was feeling defeated. I felt like I
> couldn't finish. So it was just like, "I can do it, I can do it, I can do all
> things through Christ," and then it was like, "Be strong and courageous."
> And I was just like whoa. So it was really cool.

Many described a feeling of peace that descending on them as they soaked up God's

Word through as mediated through the app. Seth described this as solace. He said, "Kind of

peacemaking. Or it kind of gives you a sense of peace or a measure of healing. It's comfort.

Comforting and you feel a little bit like your being put back together."

Two participants encouragement came in the form of reminding them about times that

were relaxing and encouraging. Using the app helped them travel back in their mind to their

vacations and experience the joy and encouragement all over again. This was most true for

Katy, who says she chose the Bible Hero app in part to learn more about the Bible, but also to

remind of her spiritual journey to Israel. She mentions standing in the same doorway historians

believe Abraham stood in as he journeyed to the land God promised him.

> I just got back from Israel this week and saw so many wonderful places
> and heard about so many wonderful Bible characters and what they did
> and was able to stand where they did it or very near where they did it. And
> I wanted to refresh my memory on who everyone was and go over it and
> replay it all in my mind to fit the places that I had seen and stood in and
> the places that I had touched and experienced. So it was fun to actually
> read about Abraham and remember standing there looking through this
> doorway. I specifically just used the app to refresh my memory about the
> high points of Abraham and his life and where's he's mentioned in the
> Bible and also to bring back the memory of being at the city of Dan.

While Katy's journey was very religious in nature, Mark's experience took him back to nature

and seeing and enjoying God's creation.

> I don't know about the app, but today's devotion was about the wonder of
> nature and God's glory around. So while using this app and reading this
> devotion, did strike me just to stop and pause at the beauty of

> Fredericksburg where I was last week. But also just around town today, it is spring. As dry and dusty as it was last year from the drought, it definitely does feel good to have and to see God's nature and spring come forth.

Encouragement is vital to a successful experience with a religious app. When user did not feel it, they did not really want to use the app anymore. Rusty experienced this more than any other participant. The following are excerpts from different days of his diary.

> This days reading was not overtly profound nor did it have a lasting impact on my mood or thinking during the day.
> I felt distant from what the app had to say. I think most of my day was pretty rotten for the most part, and the app did not help me deal with or cope with any of the emotions I was feeling.
> Feels like homework. My life isn't matching up with what the app has to say on a daily basis, and even when it sort of hit on target today, I've come to expect it to not and therefore it had less of an impact than I had hoped from a topic that related to me.
> When I read the app I sort of just felt like I probably should have found a different app to use the past week because it obviously hasn't been much of an encouragement to me the last week.

As mentioned before, instead of blaming the app for the unmet expectations, Rusty tended to blame himself instead. "I think it had everything to do with me. Because it's not like this is a bad app and that's why I didn't get any spiritual experience out of it," he said.

Spiritual Toolbox

The app itself is not seen as spiritual; rather participants view it as a tool to use to engage the spiritual. This view is right in line with the way Christians have historically viewed new media technology (Campbell, 2010). From the printing press to apps, Christians have sought to use these technologies to further the kingdom of God through printing the Bible, radio preachers, and televangelism among others (Hoover, 2006a; Park, 2005). When asked if they had a spiritual experience with the app, participants qualified their answers. Abby explains:

> I mean the app itself is sort of neutral. It doesn't necessarily ... I don't feel anything from the app, but it does help me accomplish a goal to read the bible everyday. So it helps me accomplish the spiritual goal by just being there and giving me the little check boxes to keep track and letting me see my progress everyday.

Others explain that it is God working through the app to reach out and touch their lives through

it's content. Laura says it is just an inanimate object that can be used for evil or for good.

> No I mean it really just made me think that even things that might be
> what I consider secular can still be used for God's glory. You know my
> pastor was talking about Facebook and how people like, think it's a tool to
> spread hatred, but it's also an awesome tool that could spread God's
> Word. You know when people put up verses and what not for everybody
> to see. So…just realizing that and knowing that if He really wants He
> could probably use any tool to share the Gospel.

Rusty made the point that an app is just one way to experience and engage the spiritual realm

and help Christians develop their spiritual lives. To him, man cannot live by app alone.

> It's really people who are going to influence you the most and have an
> impact on who you are, where you're going and what you're doing in your
> life. So I don't think an app can foster that accountability. I don't think it
> can foster that motivation that you need. I don't think it can give you the
> camaraderie that you need to like walk through. Because I think if you're
> walking though faith on your own, it is a really lonely journey and I feel
> like it probably won't last. You know an app is not capable of being a
> person that can walk through that journey of faith with you, or even
> prompt you to walk through that journey. Even if it is has that social
> aspect like Twitter or Facebook, you're still walking it on your own.

> **Social media**. Rusty makes a good point: app developers are trying to give Christians

the ability to engage with others in their faith, but are participants using the features provided?

For this group of participants the answer is, not really. Out of twenty, only one really engaged

the features to connect with others. Paula said:

> The other option that I really like is for example if you think this verse,
> Genesis 4 chapter 13 is helpful for you or it's good for you, you can
> actually punch this verse and it will give you lots of notes that are written
> by other users. So I punched this one verse and I read how other people
> felt about this verse and how they applied this verse to their real lives. So I
> think it's really good for me to relate myself to others and you know think
> about this verse.

Paula took advantage of this feature and even posted back to other users. However, when she

heard back from strangers about her thoughts on the scripture, it made her feel a little

vulnerable. "It is so funny because when I first saw that somebody responded to my notes, I felt

a little bit naked. Exposed. Because it was all about how I feel about this verse and how I feel

about my life right now. Very personal."

Seth was the only other participant to test out the feature, but he did not make it a part of

his daily use.

> If you find a verse you like you can send it to a friend or post it on
> Facebook or Twitter. So I threw one up on Twitter and sent a text to one
> of my friends of one of the verses. It worked pretty seamlessly so I was
> pretty happy with that.

While the option to use social media feature like Facebook and Twitter were inducements

to download the app, most users did not take advantage of it.

> Even though I wasn't looking for that and I didn't really care that I couldn't email
> it to my friends everyday, that still deterred me from getting certain ones. Cause I
> was like some people are dissatisfied with that. Mine had those features but I
> never used it. I didn't feel like I had anything worthwhile to share.

Tessa was another participant who was familiar with the social media features because she read

her friends posts on Facebook from the religious apps they used. She said that she was looking

for something more like theirs and had her app had the content she liked, she may have utilized

the sharing features. "I think I'm getting more out of reading, being logged on Facebook, and

seeing other people's daily scriptures being posted on their verses than the ones I'm getting off

of here."

Other users like Diana may just be what Rogers (2003) referred to as late majority or

laggards in his theory of the diffusion of technology. Rogers supposed there were five types of

adopters of technology: a) innovators, b) early adopters, c) early majority, d) late majority and e)

laggards (Rogers, 2003, p. 282-284). The late majority and laggard groups are described as

those who are skeptical of the technology and their ability to use it (Rogers, 2003, p. 284). Diana

described herself as being apart of one of those groups. "I'm not saying I won't. Because I tend to

be slower just in general with electronics, you know any of that. I just tend to not do it right

away, you know everybody else will be all excited," she said. Katy also described herself as

scared of technology, and as mentioned before, had to have someone help her to download the actual app.

Just because the app provides social media functions does not mean that people want to or will use it. It may just be a matter of personal comfort with technology. Some may argue that age is a factor on whether users will adopt the social media functions on these apps. While is it true in this study that the younger participants seemed more familiar and comfortable talking about their social media use, the oldest participant in the study seemed to be the most knowledgeable. Jenny, 64, had used more apps and in more situations than another of the other participants and she knew exactly what she wanted and how she wanted it to work for her.

> It's gotta be fast. I mean I want it to be fast and easy to navigate. I'd like to
> be able to switch from… If I have a question on one thing I like to be able to
> get it answered by just pushing a button, you know, going to another point.
> You know sometimes you have to go completely out of the app and come
> back to the app and then go back to home. So I'd like to be able to see
> where I can get to a table of contents or I can get to an application. I like it
> where I can take notes on it, you know with a keypad, so that I can
> remember what I was thinking when I go back and look at it. And you
> know with like my iPad for the iPhone where I take notes, you have to get
> out of the app to go to that.

This familiarity and ease with technology may be explained in the fact that Jenny is an early adopter of technology. The point is, just because a person is older does not mean they do not understand and are not interested in using these new technologies. One of the interesting aspects of this study is that many of the participants were older, putting the average age at 40.

Another reason the social media functions may not have been utilized is because many participants view the app as a tool for personal use only. They do not use it to connect with others: they use it to develop their personal spiritual lives. Alice noticed that this might be a hindrance to religious users.

> I think that could be one of the drawbacks. A lot of times what the apps
> are really designed for is to connect you with other people. And that might
> be a drawback for religious people because, some people might want to be
> able to share that kind of stuff, but I have a feeling that for the majority of
> people those are very personal things.

This sentiment is mirrors how Paula felt when a user read her personal feelings on a verse, which resulted in a feeling of vulnerability.

Apps in church. While using apps at home or on a work break may seem natural, participants say they are still getting used to seeing them used in church. Tessa recounts an experience she had when her husband first pulled out his phone to access his Bible app one Sunday. "I remember when (he) first did it and I was like, people will think you're playing on your phone. And he was like it's the Bible right here. I said I know but people will think you're playing on your phone!" Cindy had a similar experience at her husband's mother's funeral.

> The funny thing, when Dave's Mom died, we went to her funeral. And
> we're on the front row and Dave's on the end at the center aisle and he
> was struggling, you know. He was looking, he had his Bible app on and he
> was looking through his phone, and you know trying to take comfort in
> the scripture. And I'm sitting there thinking these other people don't
> know him and they think he's just looking at his phone! His mom would
> have died! She's like from a real old church, all the old people. They
> probably think he's just on his phone.

The sight of phones and tablets being used at church is becoming more commonplace. Some participants said their pastors are even incorporating apps into their sermons. While Tessa was uncomfortable with app use in church at first she, and she says many other members of her church, use it every Sunday. "I have the Bible app that we use at church that downloads the sermon apps. Our pastor puts scriptures on there from Sunday and then you just kind of go on and follow his sermon through there."

Although her initial purpose for downloading the app was to help her with personal Bible reading, Abby said it came in use one day when she forgot her Bible.

> Having forgot to bring my Bible, the app proves to be a great way to have
> an electronic Bible during church. I can get to the reference quickly by
> going to the table of contents and the process of going back and forth from
> different passages is quick. I noticed a lot of people at my church are using
> their phones and iPads during church. I used to think that was weird, that
> we should be using Bibles. But honestly, the YouVersion app is really cool
> and I am starting to think that whether you use a Bible or an app like
> YouVersion, makes no difference.

Conventional book v. app. So what is the difference between reading the Bible or using a prayer app instead of conventional books or paper? According to the participants, it is all about convenience, which was discussed earlier, and usability. Cindy mentioned that sometimes it is easier to use her regular Bible, and sometimes it is easier to use the app.

> Well, I guess the only difference is the looks. I would rather read a real book than like, read one on an iPod. But I see how convenient that is at times to do it the other way. I think that's great you know. When I, in the mornings I might use my phone because it's just convenient because I don't have to juggle so many books. But if I'm just going to sit down, I read the Bible, because I like the touch of it. I like the feel of it. I have a lot of cross-referenced a lot of stuff my self.

Some participants mentioned this tactile sense, the feeling that their conventional Bibles was an extension of their spiritual selves because they have used it and marked in it and know it so well. There is also a sacred factor, in that the Holy Bible is seen as God's Word and is therefore an extension of His holiness. Tessa explains what this meant to her and how she treated her conventional Bible growing up.

> We'll we all grew up Baptist. You know you had the Bible and you had that tacky little cover with the handles on it you know. It was like Grandma's flannel material around it. Then you had your highlighters you know, if your parents would let you write in the Bible. My parents were like, don't you write in the Holy Bible!

Christians and those of other religions with holy book have long debated the holiness of those books and the proper treatment required when handling them. Is it the actual book that is holy or is it the words and ideas contained within the book that warrants reverence? This is definitely one area of research that deserves further investigation as these holy books are created, used, manipulated, and sometimes disrespected in digital formats. Vicki says she mostly used the app to read the Bible and while it is convenient, it also helps her protect her conventional Bibles.

> I think they're helpful. And they're so handy. You know you've got your phone with you all the time. That's why I think they're so handy because at Bible study I carry a lot. I'm a leader and I carry a lot of stuff. Bibles are big and heavy. Plus, carrying back and forth you damage them a lot. When you're carrying a lot of other things too. So I just have it on my phone now. I don't carry a bible back and forth to Bible study, ironically enough.

Evangelism. Bellar (2012) found that evangelism was intrinsically tied to Christian apps on iTunes. One of the basic tenants Evangelical Christians are known for is to share the Good News, a command issued by Jesus before ascending to heaven in the last chapter and verses of the book of Matthew. However, participants in this study did not seem concerned with, or really even aware of apps that offered to help them evangelize others. The only time evangelism was mentioned was when participants were asked during interview if they were aware of evangelistic apps. The resounding answer was, "No." This is not to say that all Christian are not interested in these types of apps. It may be that it was just a phenomenon unique to this group of participants. One could also argue that Christians may view apps as more personal in nature, as discussed before, and not a way to engage others in conversations of faith. More research will need to be conducted in this area to fully understand the users who are interested in these apps and how they actually utilize them in this area of their spiritual lives.

Prayer (odd man out). As mentioned earlier, one participant chose a prayer app. While this obviously is not a major theme, it is still important to explore because there are others out there who are interested in these types of apps. Other participants also considered some prayer apps in their initial search but passed on them in favor of Bible study/devotional apps. This section will also explore their reasoning for doing so.

Brandon was another participant who knew exactly what he wanted when he agreed to participate in the study – a prayer app. Rather than opting for the prayer apps that provide users with pre-written prayers, Brandon was looking for something that would help him remember his prayer requests and be faithful in his commitment to "bring those concerns before the Lord." He explains what drew him to the app Pocket Prayer Pro: Prayer Journal for Christians.

> Well, it helps with the memory. I had it at my fingertips. I always had it
> with me. Whereas prayer lists that we do for Sunday school is on the
> computer. It's out of sight, out of mind. You don't see it. I don't have it out
> in front of me. I don't print it out; it's just on the computer. I thought it
> would be a neat way to be able to keep a better record of the prayer
> requests.

Even though this app is fundamentally different in nature than the apps chosen by the other participants, the reasons Brandon chose to use it do mirror those who wanted Bible reading apps. "I think it's my responsibility to help friends and family with their burdens and take them to the Lord. Plus, I'm supposed to communicate with God. So the intercessory part of the prayer life is very important to me." Communicating with God, just like reading God's Word is a spiritual practice that in turn brings you closer to God and can offer encouragement for the one praying and for those he is praying for. "I think prayer is always a religious or spiritual experience because you get closer to God as you communicate with him. It's just like talking to a friend," Brandon said. Another area of overlap was in keeping track of the spiritual practice. "And I like the deal where you could check them as answered but you still have a record of what you prayed for. So you could kind of look back at your milestones or different prayer requests or whatever."

As far as connecting with others, Brandon was most concerned with his Church family. He did not really have any interested in using social media along with this app.

Other users did consider Prayer apps but, for one reason or another decided they would not be as beneficial to their spiritual lives. The prayer apps Alice considered were geared more towards sharing prayer concerns with others.

> Well, there were a couple of them that were like prayer-wise and prayer
> journals that I thought were interesting. To me, this is a personal feeling,
> my prayers are very personal and these were much more communal and I
> didn't feel comfortable with other people being able to see.

Prayer is obviously a spiritual practice that Christians are concerned about. However, specifically within this group of participants, most did not think an app would be as helpful in this area. It will be interesting to see more research emerge in this area in order to examine the spiritual practice of prayer and how it is mediated within the digital realm.

Using Voice Memo Diaries

One unique aspect of this study is that it utilized a relatively new way to use diaries as part of the methodology. As described in the Methodology section, users recorded their diaries on the Voice Memo app that comes standard on every iPhone or can be downloaded for free on iPods. In order to help those who had never used this app before, I provided a guide to get them started (see Appendix D)

As a researcher, I feel this technique offered unique insights not available in written diaries. For one, I could hear my participants – their nervousness, their excitement, their exasperation, and their disappointment. The subtle nuances in their voices gave me insight into their words and feeling about their experiences. While some people may have had some aptitude at communicating those things in written form, I believe it was more beneficial for me to hear it rather than read it.

Another nuance that emerged involved the participant getting some kind of benefit in talking about their experience. Lindsey said she "got more out of" the app than she may have normally because she was required to talk about and analyze it afterward.

> One of the things that I kind of liked about it was very seldom do I have anybody to talk to about my daily devotions. It's usually internalized. So I kind of felt like I was talking to somebody, which was kind of different. So that was kind of nice.

Lucinda said doing the Voice Memo diary helped to keep her accountable in her daily Bible reading. "I found it interesting it made it stick with me better. So I'm going to continue to do that, rather than just reading." She mentioned that she is now sending memos about her daily Bible studies back and forth with her daughter.

Not everyone was comfortable with the recordings when they first began, but as the memos continued to turn up in text messages or in my email in box, I could tell that it became more comfortable and routine. One of the drawbacks is that some participants would record their memo, listen to it, and decide to delete it and start over because they did not like it. This means that I may not have been privy to all of the insight that they had about their experiences,

or that they may have altered them to "sound better." Others also wrote out their memos first before recording them because they said it helped them analyze their thoughts and feelings about their experience and that it helped them communicate those with me in a better way.

The Voice Memo diaries, while limiting in some ways, were invaluable in providing insight into the types of questions I needed to ask in the follow-up interviews. Interviews alone would not have resulted in the rich, descriptive data collected because without the insight of the diaries, I would not have known the right questions to ask. On the other hand, using diaries alone would not have resulted in the same rich descriptive data either. The two methods worked hand in hand to retrieve the most complete, in-depth data to explore this phenomenon and I encourage other researchers to utilize them in conjunction as well, and to be cautious when using them as stand-alone methodologies.

Conclusions

Data gathered from the 20 participants in this study suggests that there are many different factors they considered and that influenced their choice, use, and experience with religious apps.

First and foremost, users who want to find religious apps had trouble doing so due to the navigation and categorization issues on iTunes. However, after users located religious apps, they then took into consideration the ratings and reviews, cost, and word of mouth from others before making their choice.

 Next, users had to figure out what kind of experience they were really looking for an app to provide. Like many other media users in this mobile era, participants were concerned with having their religious experience at their fingertips. The apps readily met this need by being downloadable to a mobile device that users could carry anywhere, anytime. Convenience was also a huge draw in the type of religious experience users sought. The app provided them with multiple versions of the Bible, commentaries, devotions, and more all with the push of a button. Finally, users wanted to make sure their experiences were uninterrupted by usability and quality issues. Some users ran into bugs in the software, poor navigation, and unintuitive interfaces.

Participants actually utilized their apps to gain spiritual impact, encouragement, and a spiritual toolbox that, for the most part, resulted in helping them navigate their own spirituality and religious practice. Spiritual impact and the experience of spiritual proximity resulted mostly from users reading the Bible through their apps. They did this with apps that provided Bible reading plans, daily devotions, Promise Books, and in-depth study tools. Main concerns for the participants included keeping track of their spiritual practice, controlling the translation of the Bible they used or having access to multiple translations, and using the audio feature to listen to the Word of God. Encouragement was an expected and sought after byproduct of spiritual impact. Users

who experienced encouragement tended to feel better and more inspired, felt more comfortable about behaviors and life choices and facing challenges, and generally had a more positive outlook throughout their day. The apps also seemed to provide a type of spiritual toolbox, which helped participants to connect with the spiritual realm. While the app itself is not a spiritual object, God working through the app could provide a spiritual experience. It also connects users with others through sharing and social media options. Although not many participants utilized this function, they were concerned that it was available to them. For most, apps seemed to provide a personal, rather than social, experience. This is an especially surprising finding given the nature of apps as providing ways for users to engage with others through social media. Once again this could be a phenomenon associated with this group specifically, or that the individuals are considered late adopters or laggards. There is also a shift taking place in that using apps on mobile devices or tablets is more common in church or Bible study settings. Some churches are even trying to capitalize on this trend by providing their own apps that users can access during services. This toolbox also served users in that it provided a convenient alternative to conventional books. Although evangelism is a main tenant of the Evangelical Christian faith, users in this study did not seem particularly aware of these types of apps, or have the inclination to use them.

Once again, I would like to stress that there are limitations to this study. While qualitative research does provide in-depth, rich data, it is not generalizable to the population. This means that while the findings in this study apply to the 20 participants, those same findings may not apply to Evangelical Christians in general. The use of Voice Memo Diaries also provided its own set of limitations as discussed previously.

Although the findings are not generalizable, they do provide exciting implications for future research. Replication of this study with other groups and denominations of Christians would help to refine, as well as validate, the findings. The analysis should also

be utilized within the realm of quantitative research in developing survey questions and scales in order to be able to generalize across the population.

      This study is just the beginning of exploring the new realm of digital spirituality and how spiritual experiences are mediated through media technologies. More research is needed on prayer and evangelism apps and the effects they have on users. Also, more research needs to explore the use of social media and how and why religious users are or are not utilizing these features. These studies need not be limited to Christianity, but rather should incorporate other religions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. The realm of spirituality is varied and immense, and the possibilities of inquiry only increase when spirituality is being experienced through the use of digital media.

Appendix A: Religious App Diary Voice Memo Prompts and Questions

Please state the following information and answer the following questions as a voice memo before choosing your app. Then email the voice memo to wrbellar@syr.edu.
State your name and the date and time.
1. Are you familiar with religious iPhone apps? Y/N
        If yes, have you used one before?
        If yes, what app was it?
2. What kind of app are you most interested in for this project? (ex. Prayer app, Bible app, etc.)
3. How are you expecting this app to affect your spiritual life?
Please answer the next section of questions after you choose and download your app.
1. How did you go about finding the apps you were interested in?
2. What were the most important factors to consider when choosing an app? (ex. price, religious affiliation, Biblical translation, etc.)
3. What app did you choose?
4. Why did you choose this app over others?

Daily Use Report

Please record your information and responses to the following questions each time you use your app.
State your name, date and time you used the app.
1) Where were you when you used the app?
2) What kind of mood were you in when you used the app?
3) How did you feel when you used the app?
4) Did the experience meet your expectations? Why or why not?
5) What specifically did you use the app for (if the app provides more than one function)?
6) Please discuss any general observations you have about today's experience.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

All interviews will be semi-structured using the following interview guide. Other
questions may be asked in reference to diary reports and interviewee answers.

Key Topic: Knowledge and attitudes about apps in general and religious apps specifically
- How familiar are you with iPhone apps in general?
- What kind of apps do you generally use?
- How familiar were you, before this study, with religious apps?
- What is your general attitude toward religious apps?

Key Topic: Factors influencing religious app choices
- When choosing the religious iPhone app, what specifically did you look for?
- Were there any "must haves" for picking a particular app?
- What features caught your attention when you were looking for apps that you didn't think about before?
- Was there anything you saw that you didn't like or agree with when looking at religious apps?

Key Topic: Expectations of religious apps
- What were your expectations for the app you chose?
- Do you think it is important for apps to provide a spiritual experience for users?

Key Topic: Actual religious app use
- Did you have a spiritual experience while using the religious app?
    - What was that experience like?
    - If not, what do you think prevented a spiritual experience?
- Did using this app make you feel closer to God?
    - If yes, in what ways?
    - If no, did this disappoint you?
- Did this app make you feel more connected with other Christians?
    - If yes, in what ways?
    - If no, did this disappoint you?
- What was your favorite thing about using the religious app?
- What was your least favorite thing about using the app?
- Will you continue to use this app after this study is complete?
- Do you think you will seek out and use other religious apps?
    - If yes, what will you be looking for and why?
    - If no, why not?
- Would you recommend religious apps to other Christians?
    - Why, or why not?

Appendix C: Voice Memo Directions
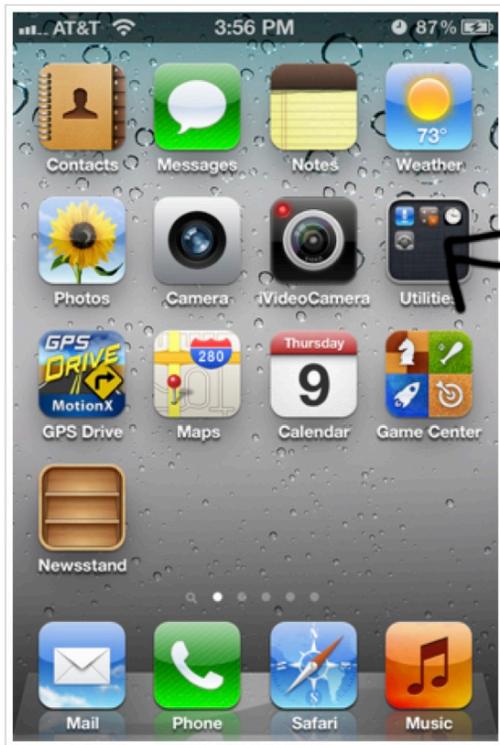
2. Open Voice
   Memos

3. Press
   Record
   Button
   To start
   Diary

4. Press
   stop when
   finished

5. To see recordings, press the menu button

(click play to listen)
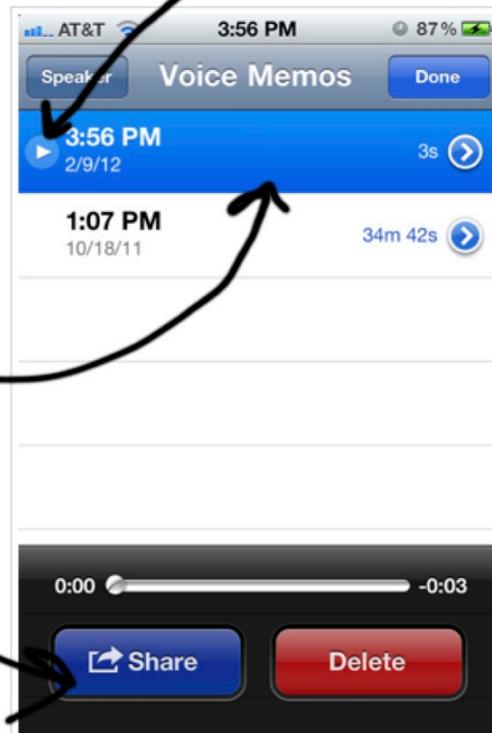
6. Choose the recording, then press Share
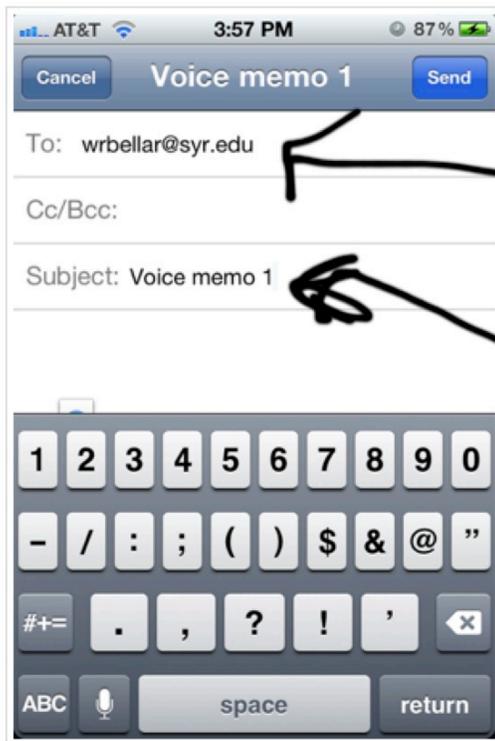
Put in email address and subject

8. Press Send!

Figure 1: iTunes Ratings and Reviews section
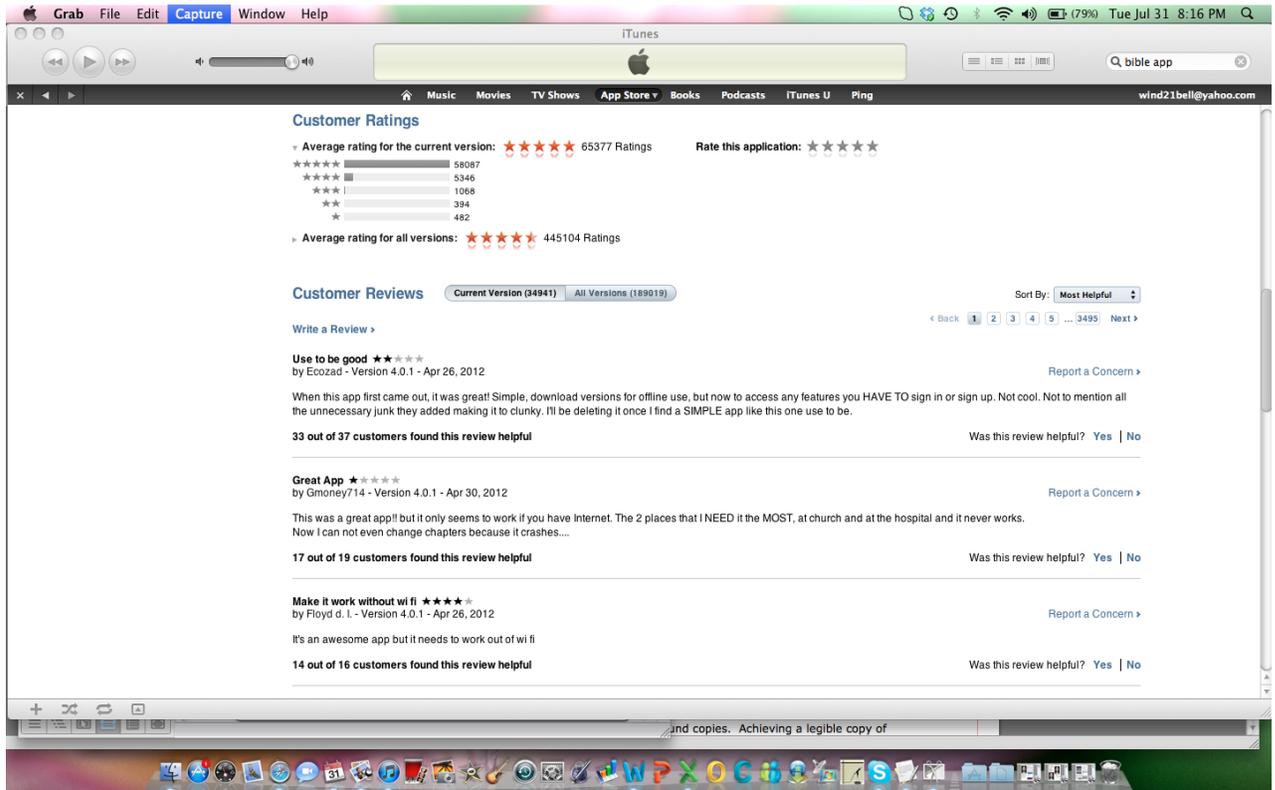
Figure1. This picture shows an example of the iTunes stores ratings and reviews section users see when searching for an app. Ratings and reviews were one of the most important considerations for users to decide which app to download. It shows the ratings in terms of one to five stars as well as how many users have rated the app. It also shows reviews from customers for every version of the app that exists.

Figure 2: iPhone app alerts
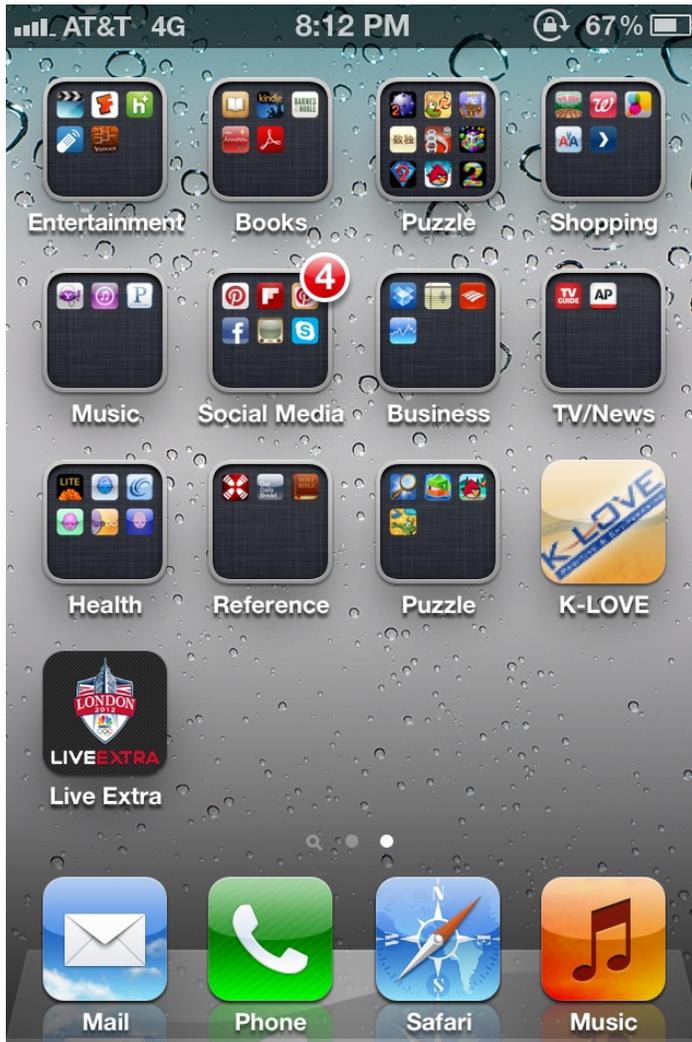
Figure 2. Alerts were sometimes silent and took the form of a number (depending on the number of alerts available) in a red circle placed on the upper right hand corner of the app icon. In this figure, there are four alerts for social media apps.

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Education

PhD – Communications, Texas A&M University   projected – 2016

MA – Media Studies, Syracuse University   December, 2012

BA – Mass Communication/Print Media (Cum Laude), West Texas A&M University   May, 2006

AA – Liberal Arts, Amarillo College   August, 2003

Academic Positions

Research Fellow – Network for New Media, Religion, and Digital Culture Studies
Aug. 2012 - Present

Research Assistant – "There's an App for That" Project, Sponsored by the Initiative for Digital
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Aug. 2012 - Present

Public Speaking, *Graduate Instructor*
Aug. 2012 - Present

TAMU Department of Communication

- Develop and deliver lectures.
- Develop projects and instruct and evaluate students as they complete those projects.
- Prepare exams.
- Build and maintain Blackboard course site.

Communications Law for PR and Advertising Professionals, *Instructional Associate*

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications
August, 2011 – May, 2012

- Assisted professor in the class preparation.
- Graded all case briefs and exams.
- Responsible for uploading class readings and keeping track of grades of Blackboard.
- Met with students on an individual basis to answer any questions about grading or class concerns.

Broadcast and Digital Journalism, *Instructional Associate*

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- Assisted professors in the newscast, production, and reporting classes.
- Made sure the equipment worked properly and created manuals to help BDJ professors use the monitors, recorders, and other media in the BDJ labs; created and graded daily current events quizzes.

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- Trained students on video cameras and editing software; helped troubleshoot editing and writing software (ENPS, Audacity, Avid, FormatFactory); built graphics for student newscast using Adobe Photoshop.

Invited Talk: COM 346 Race Gender and the Media

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications   November 28, 2011

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Professional Experience

Executive Producer/Primetime Producer,

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- Reported to News Director.
- Worked closely with producers to make certain each newscast maintained an independent look.
- Mediated any creative dilemmas or disputes among producers, or between producers and reporters where it related to format questions or concerns.
- Approved scripts and answered general news questions.
- Produced the 6 and 10 newscasts by conforming the work of the assignments manager and reporters into a comprehensive and cohesive news broadcast.
- Worked closely with reporters and determined and executed their live shots for the newscast.
- Formatted each show according to brand and refused any script that did not meet newscast standards.

Master's Thesis

 Pocket Full of Jesus: Evangelical Christians' Use of Religious iPhone Applications

A qualitative study using voice memo diaries and in-depth interviews to better understand the way Evangelical Christians choose and use religious iPhone applications.
- Adviser - **Brad Gorham**
         Chair Communications
- Committee - **Dennis Kinsey**
          Director of Public Diplomacy
         Gustav Niebuhr
         Director Carnegie Religion and Media Program

Under Review

Bellar, W.R. "Holy App: An Exploration of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic iPhone Applications." (Journal of Religion and Media).

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Conference Papers

Bellar, W.R. "Holy App: An Exploration of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic iPhone Applications." (Presented at AEJMC 2012 Conference in Chicago, IL)

Weaver, C., Arnould, K., **Bellar, W.R.**, Chagnon, K. "Media & LGBT Youth Suicide: A case study of media coverage surrounding LGBT suicides in September of 2010." (Presented at the Pop Culture Association 2012 Conference in Boston, MA)

Works in Progress

Bellar, W.R. "Losing Yourself: An Explication of the Transportation State." (Submitted to ICA, 2013 Conference)

Bellar, W.R. "A Deeper Relationship With God: A Q Study of What Evangelical Christians Want in Religious iPhone Applications."

Bellar, W.R. "Media Frames and Uses by Church Leadership."

Activities and Honors

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society   Gamma Beta Phi Honor Society
Maintaining 4.0 GPA   Alpha Chi Honor Society
TAPB KFDA Best Spot Coverage "Bushland Blast" '09 – '10   Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure
Feed My Starving Children

References

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