'Neither cold nor hot':
An Analysis of Christian World Wide Web Sites That Address GLBT Publics

Douglas J. Swanson, Ed.D, APR
University of Wisconsin, La Crosse

Swanson is an Assistant Professor in the UW-L Department of Communication Studies
319 Center For The Arts
University of Wisconsin, La Crosse
La Crosse, WI 54601

'Neither cold nor hot':
An Analysis of Christian World Wide Web Sites That Address GLBT Publics

Abstract
This research analyzes Christian Web sites addressing gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered publics. The study involved content analysis of visual, operational, and informational enhancements and a frame analysis to assess issues of intent, consistency, accuracy, and validity. Web sites emphasized information dissemination rather than evangelization or proselytization; were overwhelmingly framed as collections of linked resources, rather than as online destinations for users seeking spiritual comfort; were almost completely devoid of traditional Christian symbols, scripture, and testimony; and failed to acknowledge in depth the complex debate over same-sex relationships.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!
The Bible, Revelation 3:15 (NIV)

Introduction

The World Wide Web is a fairly new technological advancement, so it has only been within the past few years that much scholarly research has focused on its use. There still are many gaps in the literature. In particular, there has not been a great deal of attention paid to the subject of how religious organizations use the Web for information dissemination, evangelization, and proselytization–three primary strategic goals for a religious entity.

Within this subject area, the issue of how Christian groups use the Web to address gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) publics is especially pertinent. There is intense debate within the Christian community about whether GLBT worshipers should be accepted in the church–and whether their interpersonal relationships should be affirmed (Higgins, 2002; Maloney, 2001). Some Christian groups welcome GLBT worshipers. Others do not, because they view homosexuality as unpardonable sin. Both sides believe there is Biblical authority for their philosophical position. Without a doubt, the acceptance and affirmation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people in the Christian community is "the most controversial issue facing the church today" (Davis, 2001, p. E1).

This study seeks to provide some understanding about one aspect of the issue by examining World Wide Web sites operated by Christian organizations that specifically address GLBT publics. A group of Web sites representing a wide range of denominations was chosen for study. Sites were subjected to a content analysis of visual, operational, and informational enhancements to determine the presence or absence of these dimensions that, together, significantly impact users' perceptions of Web site content, functionality, and value (Swanson, 1999). As a result of content found, conclusions can be made about intent, consistency, accuracy, and validity (Cutbirth, Shapiro & Williams, 1983) of religious content as framed in the World Wide Web site.

The findings of this research should allow greater understanding of the controversial issue of how Christian organizations address GLBT publics, and how those worshipers are included in different Christian communities. It should also allow Christian groups that actively seek out GLBT worshipers to assess their online communication strategies and become more effective in fulfilling the wants and needs of this population.

The Online Experience

In the past few years, there has been tremendous growth among consumers who use the Web as an information resource. Between 2000 and 2002, CommerceNet estimated a 40% increase in users worldwide–with 349 million people now using the World Wide Web. One-third of those users are in the U.S. (CommerceNet. . ., 2002).

While it is difficult to quantitatively estimate growth in online content, researcher R. H. Zakon estimated that somewhere between 35 million and 40 million Web sites existed online in March, 2002. This represents a 100% growth since March, 2000 (Zakon, 2002).

The establishment of a World Wide Web site is a technological endeavor that transforms reality "for practical ends" (Christians, 2002, p. 38). The hosting of a Web site allows people to indirectly define themselves as individuals (Papacharissi, 2002) or as members of a group.

The Web site hosted on behalf of a Christian group is a distinct cultural 'reality' that can accomplish three key objectives. The first is information dissemination. A Web site can present information to create an inward sense of community, allowing those who share the same faith to communicate about their experiences. The Web site can have an outward evangelistic role, as well–as it can communicate persuasively with followers and the general public about the group's theology and organizational structure. Finally, the Web site can allow for proselytization, through which the organization can identify and recruits new followers.

The Web site can allow a Christian movement to be legitimized in a number of ways. It can help build a dialogue with the public, solicit volunteers, encourage study of the issues, and even raise money and sell merchandise to further group objectives or work against the objectives of an opposed religious theology or organization.

The Religious Experience

The need to believe in an ethereal being or God is "a part of our nature, built into our neuronal mainframe" as human beings (Shermer, 2000, p. 47). Human beings want to believe in a greater power, and, at the same time, want to share this religious experience. This sharing allows humans to integrate spirituality into their personal and professional lives (Schneiders, 1989).

For most religious people, this shared experience takes place within the organizational structure commonly referred to as the church. Within the church, followers develop their spiritual beliefs in accordance with the theology of the host denomination (Neck & Millman, 1994). Followers align their values with the organization, to reflect "emotional investment" in its structure (Dehler & Welsh, 1994, p. 22). Followers submit to and participate in "relationship- based organizing" (Sass, 2000, p. 201) which connects participants, their values, and activities in socially meaningful and supportive ways. The result is a religious organization that can interpret the world and its relationships for followers and the general public (Appelrouth, 1999).

At the same time, the organization creates a religious identity for itself. In the U.S., Caplovitz observes that this identity rests on two foundations–"a commitment to religious beliefs and practices and a feeling of kinship with a social group united by a common religious tie" (Caplovitz, 1977, p. 181).

In recent years, Christian churches have faced a number of troubling issues. Beginning in the early 1980s, a progression of moral scandals caused many Americans to lose faith in religious denominations and those who led them (Gamson, 2001; Lord, 1987). These scandals involved financial misappropriation (Fraser, 1999; Barr, 1988), sexual misconduct by leadership (Gamson, 2001), the public expression of impolite comment by leadership (Goodman, 2001), and accusations of intellectual dishonesty (Swaggart accused of. . ., 2001). A world-wide scandal even left the once-sacrosanct Catholic Church to be widely perceived as manipulative and corrupt to its very core (Collins, 2002).

Public support for religious denominations has been shown to drop dramatically in the wake of scandal (Fan, Wyatt, & Keltner, 2001). It has also been suggested that in recent years, at least partially in response to scandal, an increasingly cynical public has been shying away from some denominations and churches based on the perception that they "cause more problems than they solve" (Barron, 1993, p. A1). Worshipers who happen to be Christian and gay find themselves in a particularly difficult situation. They face widespread negative public stereotyping at the community level (Yang, 1997; Stipp & Kerr, 1989). They also can find themselves unwanted in church because they're gay (Tubbs, 2001) and are "shut out by the gay movement" because they're Christian (How fundamentalists. . ., 2002, p. D8). Some of the most prejudicial attitudes toward gay Christians are expressed within the GLBT community itself (Maynard & Gorsuch, 2001).

It could be argued that the recent social and cultural climate is quite favorable to the development of religious organizations that address specific concerns common to GLBT publics. A gay-friendly Christian church would offer these worshipers comfort and support that they may not find within mainstream denominations, churches, and theologies.

Christianity, GLBT Issues, and Apostasy

An apostate is a person who at one time identified with a particular religious denomination, but for one or more reasons subsequently severed his or her relationship. The apostasy process begins with "individuals experiencing doubts about the viability of religious life and their own commitment to that life" (Bromley, 1988, p. 15). The highest level of apostasy is that of personal "disengagement" (p. 16) from the religious denomination. Apostasy involves more than church membership. "Apostasy implies a rejection, not just of religious identity, but, in part, of the dominant culture's values" (Bromley, 1988, p. 30).

It is not unusual for those who become apostates to experience great personal and emotional suffering. Apostates often break from the established group during times of rapid social change that are already difficult for people to deal with (Wright, 1988). They are commonly rejected by family members and friends (Lobdell, 2001) and in some situations are accused of having psychological problems (Witham, 1998).

The media add to the difficulty of the situation by commonly categorizing apostate groups among sects and cults in a way that can make them be perceived as deviant (Witham, 1998). Witham says this editorial treatment results from news media logic that seeks to draw attention to unusual behavior that results in social conflict. It also results from input by family and friends of religious group members who pressure media to expose alleged wrongdoing by dissenters. The process is exacerbated by mainstream religious groups that "add the aura of established religious authority to criticism of small groups" (1998, p.3).

While apostasy is not a direct concern of this research, it is a related issue. Certainly some Christian denominations hold the theological viewpoint that homosexual behavior is sinful. A Christian group that claims to be housed within such a denomination–but at the same time uses its Web site to communicate affirmation of same-sex relationships–would technically be engaged in apostasy. This concern, and similar moral and ethical questions raised by Web sites studied, will be dealt with through exploration of issues of Web site intent, consistency, accuracy, and validity.

Research Design

This research required an objective means of determining the level of Web site enhancements perceived by site users. The content analysis method was chosen because it allows for measurement of communication content in a manner that is "objective, and quantitative" (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994, p. 164). Content analysis is widely favored among researchers investigating electronic or published media content because it allows for a "systematic examination of materials that are more typically evaluated on an impressionistic basis"–such as Web sites (See Babbie, 1990, p. 30).

An additional method of analysis was needed to allow for broader qualitative generalizations to be made about Web site content. The method chosen was frame analysis–a strategy whereby the investigator proceeds to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text" in order to define and interpret communication content (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

A frame serves as a means for organizing information that allows members of publics to adopt particular beliefs. A frame can organize key words, phrases, or themes (Scherer, 2002); audio/ visual messages (Hung, 2001); graphic images such as photos or cartoons (Ragan, 1979); or sources from which information originates or to whom it is attributed (Entman, 1983). Frames can be used to describe or characterize the communicative relationships that take place as a result of gender (Devitt, 2002) or ethnicity (Moody-Hall, 2002) or any of numerous other explicit or implicit variables (Hung, 2001) that result in- and result from- communication.

In this research, frame analysis was used as an organizing device to make conclusions based on what was found in the content analysis. Specifically, it was used to assess issues of intent, consistency, accuracy, and validity (See Cutbirth, Shapiro, & Williams, 1983) as found in the Web site. It allowed the researcher to isolate issues that Web sites portrayed as salient for public discussion from those that were not (See Tankard, 1997) and allowed an overall characterization of how Christian Web sites addressing GLBT worshipers select and emphasize "certain aspects of experience or ideas over others" (See Andsager & Smiley, 1997. p. 2). Research Questions

Four research questions were posed in regard to Christian groups' use of World Wide Web sites to address GLBT publics:

RQ 1: What types of visual, operational, and informational enhancements are commonly used to address GLBT publics?

RQ2 What quantitative differences exist among sites in regard to the use of visual, operational, and informational enhancements to address GLBT publics?

RQ3: What similarities and differences in regard to perceived intent, consistency, accuracy, and validity of content can be identified among World Wide Web sites addressing GLBT publics?

Methodology

An extensive search was made on the World Wide Web to identify Web sites for study. The author sought to identify religious organizations that demonstrated a national base of support–rather than those whose support was isolated in a particular community, or directed toward a localized GLBT public.

Although the Web-based search for qualified organizations was not random it was exhaustive. This search began with inquiries via Yahoo and Google to identify Christian organizations that communicated specifically that they were reaching out to gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered publics. From an initial sample of more than 100 organizations, the researcher identified 12 Christian groups, all of which identified a national base of support. The groups represented a variety of different religious denominations across the wide theological spectrum of Christian worship. Subject Web site names, group names (if different), URL addresses, and statements of purpose as found on Web sites are shown in Figure 1.

Existing content analysis designs located by the author were insufficient to fully extrapolate the visual, operational, and informational elements of these Web sites. Therefore, the author created a content analysis instrument and procedure similar to that used in previous studies of Web sites (See Swanson, 1999 and Mitchell, 1996).

The content analysis procedure identified presence or absence of 12 types of visual enhancements, 20 types of operational enhancements and 17 categories of information which are commonly found on religious Web sites. Sites were scored to receive one point for each enhancement type present, regardless of the number of instances of the enhancement which were evident. No points were given for enhancement types not present. The enhancement categories measured are shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

The final procedure carried out was a frame analysis. The frame analysis served to identify the intent, consistency, accuracy, and validity of each site based on its claims and in comparison with the enhancements offered (See Cutbirth, Shapiro, & Williams, 1983).

Because the Web is a constantly changing medium, it was important to conduct the content analysis procedure in a way that would come as close as possible to obtaining a 'snapshot' of all the sites' content at a single point in time. All analysis of site content was conducted by the author during a six hour time frame on a single day–January 31, 2003. Each site was viewed once, for 30 minutes. Access was accomplished on an IBM Thinkpad PC using Internet Explorer 6.0 on a local area connection at 100.0 Mbps.

A content analysis form for each accessed site was completed manually as each site was accessed and analyzed. All sites were accessible without delay on first attempt.

Results

Web sites were electronically accessed and scored individually. Presence or absence of visual, operational, and informational enhancements was recorded by category, both individually and collectively. Qualitative observations were made, and written comments recorded, in regard to content and context of observed enhancements.

RQ 1: What types of visual, operational, and informational enhancements are commonly used to address GLBT publics?

Visual enhancements

The most common visual enhancements found on Web sites were lines/ borders (12 sites, or 100%), graphic icons such as bullets and pointers (10 sites, or 83%) and frames and static photographs (each used on 9 sites, or 75%). Use of still photos (9 sites, or 75%) and illustrations (8 sites, or 67%) also were common. Half of the sites (6, or 50%) made use of a specific denominational symbol, such as the Methodist 'flaming cross' or the Jehovah's Witness 'Watchtower.'

None of the sites was found to include live audio/ video or a Web camera, even though these visual elements are commonly used on the World Wide Web. None of the sites was found to use recorded video, and only one site used recorded audio clips to address the faithful. The most surprising discovery was the almost total absence of generic Christian symbols. Although the Christian cross would be the most universally-recognized symbol of the Christian faith, the cross was not found on any of the 12

sites analyzed. The only generic Christian icon identified on any site was the icthus, or fish, used on the Lutherans Concerned site.

Operational enhancements

The most common operational enhancements found on Web sites were links to e-mail (12 sites, or 100%), links to organizational sub-groups (11 sites, or 92%), and links to similarly-aligned religious groups (10 sites, or 83%). Other commonly-used operational enhancements included downloadable files, and links to assist the user to be included on the group's mailing list (each used on 9 sites, or 75%).

Only four sites (33%) were found to offer navigational assistance to users. Only two sites (17%) were found to indicate a date of last revision, and one of these two indicated its last revision was in 1997.

Informational enhancements

The most common informational enhancements found on Web sites were the group's postal address and telephone contact information, tracts/ interpretive scriptural texts, organizational news, and 'frequently asked questions' items. Each of these were found on 11 sites, or 92%. Other commonly-found informational enhancements included a doctrinal statement (10 sites, or 83%), organizational goals statement (9 sites, or 75%), and activity/ social calendar (9 sites, or 75%).

Only 5 sites were found to contain direct testimony from believers (42%), and even fewer sites were found to offer personal life profiles of followers (3 sites, or 25%). Religious sermons were found at only one site. None of the sites was found to offer a religious year calendar, and none was found to have an organizational chart showing the structure of the sponsoring religious group. While quotes from scripture were commonly found on Web sites, none of the 12 sites was found to contain a full text version of the Bible.

RQ2 What quantitative differences exist among sites in regard to the use of visual, operational, and informational enhancements to address GLBT publics?

Individual site visual enhancement scores ranged from a low of 2 to a high of 8. The group mean was 5.58. The standard deviation was 1.97.

Individual site operational enhancement scores ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 17. The group mean was 9.29. The standard deviation was 3.84.

Individual site informational enhancement scores ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 11. The group mean was 8.25. The standard deviation was 3.19.

The sum of individual site visual, operational, and informational enhancements ranged from a low of 7 to a high of 34. The group mean was 23.75. The standard deviation was 8.05.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the enhancements observed during content analysis, and the frequency with which those enhancements were found displayed within the subject sites analyzed.

RQ3: What similarities and differences in regard to perceived intent, consistency, accuracy, and validity of content can be identified among World Wide Web sites addressing GLBT publics? Intent

Most of the 12 Web sites addressing GLBT publics were perceived to frame their content in the context of information dissemination, rather than evangelization or proselytization. This was evidenced by the fact that visual enhancements that would symbolically support evangelization or proselytization were seldom used (e.g., specific denominational icons or logos) or not used at all (e.g., the generic Christian cross).

Operational enhancements that would facilitate evangelization and proselytization would include any functional tool that would expedite the process through which the site visitor could join the group. Items of this type would include 'Refer a Friend' links and multi-lingual text. These items were not found in use on the vast majority of sites. Even the use of an access counter would quantitatively communicate to site visitors great interest by others in a particular group's religious message–but only one of the sites was found to have an access counter visible.

Informational enhancements that would offer primary persuasive support for evangelization and proselytization (e.g.,, testimonies, full-text scripture, sermons, leader profiles, and follower profiles) also were found to be used infrequently among all sites. Site informational enhancements most often used (e.g., news, interpretive texts, frequently asked questions) tend to be explanatory rather than persuasive.

Consistency

The 12 Web sites addressing GLBT publics were, as a group, consistent in that each was perceived to be framed as a collection of linked resources, rather than as an online 'destination' for users seeking spiritual comfort. This was evidenced in a number of ways.

Visual elements that would potentially provide comfort or enlightenment to a spiritual seeker would include photos and illustrations–particularly of other like-minded people receiving comfort, use of religious icons or logos to facilitate a strong sense of identification with the organization, and live or recorded downloadable audio/ video messages. Yet these were the visual enhancements most infrequently found–or not found at all–on the Web sites analyzed.

As a whole, operational enhancements were by far the most frequently found enhancements on Web sites. Eleven of the 20 categories of operational enhancements were found on at least half of the sites analyzed, and only one of the 20–the people search tool–was not found on any site. Although the research design did not allow for counting numbers of enhancements used on sites, each of the 12 sites had numerous operational links. On some sites, individual subordinate pages consisted of dozens of hyperlinks to resources both on-site and elsewhere on the World Wide Web.

As a whole, the level of informational enhancements among sites was second only to the level of operational enhancements. Nine of the 17 categories of informational enhancements were found on at least half of the sites analyzed, and only three of the 17 categories were not found on any site. While it is difficult to objectively measure the theological or philosophical consistency of informational content on individual sites, as a group the sites analyzed were perceived to be fairly consistent in that their content was seen as providing information only and not supporting evangelization and/or proselytization. This is evidenced by the fact that no site contained a full-text version of the Bible or a religious year calendar, only one site was found to contain sermons, and few sites made use of testimonies and personal profiles. Accuracy

As is the case with informational consistency, it is difficult to objectively measure 'accuracy' in regard to content of World Wide Web sites. We can, however, examine whether enhancements on Web sites function in accordance with common user expectations (Forsythe, Grose, & Ratner, 1998).

Almost all of the 12 Web sites evaluated in this research had visual elements that were consistent with common expectations of users. Each of the sites had an identifiable visual theme–although there was a wide range of colors, type styles, and organizational structures employed. Several of the sites employed especially vibrant color schemes that were consistent throughout the opening page and subordinate pages.

Only one site was perceived to be visually problematic. The Jehovah's Witness A Common Bond site used a dark, undulating multi-colored background on which was superimposed paragraphs of text that varied in color throughout the site. The researcher found the site to be awkwardly organized, with text that was difficult to read and even more difficult to navigate; links could not be clearly identified due to the constantly changing color of the body text.

Operational accuracy was determined by whether graphic elements appeared on site as they were intended to. Operational accuracy was also determined by whether hyperlinks worked as designed, and linked to the item(s) they were supposed to.

All graphic elements found on sites appeared normally and seemed to function as they were intended. None seemed optically disproportionate. None seemed contextually out of place. Due to the huge number of hyperlinks on sites and the limited time available for examination of each site, hyperlinks were verified randomly as needed to identify presence or absence of specific enhancement categories.

Although the problem of inoperable or 'dead' hyperlinks has been noted in past research (Swanson, 1999), only two of the 12 sites analyzed in this study were found to have inoperable links. One of these sites had one inoperable link to an information content area of minimal significance.

Another site, the AXIOS Eastern and Orthodox Gay and Lesbian Christian site, had numerous inoperable links. One was supposed to connect with 'On Being Orthodox and Gay'–something that clearly would be a main informational item of concern for any site visitor. Most of the AXIOS inoperable hyperlinks appeared to connect with information stored off-site. Given that the AXIOS site listed its date of last revision as 1997, it is perhaps not surprising that these links to off-site elements were no longer functioning.

As a whole, site informational content was perceived to be 'accurate' in that no copy errors were noted (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax). Aside from the exceptions noted above, no sites were found to contain any enhancements that would be inconsistent with typically-accepted practice on the World Wide Web (See Whitaker, 1998; Aikat, 1997).

Validity

Logical validity is a relationship between a premise and a conclusion such that if the premise is true, then the conclusion is true. The analysis of Web sites identified no large-scale problem issues with visual, operational, or informational enhancement validity. Site enhancements deliver rewards to users that are consistent with the contextual frame in which sites operate. As a whole, these sites were perceived to be primarily informational resource sites that provide basic information about religious groups and connect users to other, related resources. The visual, operational, and informational content was perceived to be consistent with that outcome. Sites were framed to be more social than spiritual, more focused on news about movements than on content about doctrine–and, above all, unquestionably accepting of a wide spectrum of personal behavioral choices.

None of the sites was found to criticize GLBT individuals, their attitudes, or the wide range of behaviors related to same-sex attraction. None of the sites was found to contain any kind of statement condemning sexual promiscuity, although several sites made statements in support of "committed relationships" between partners.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that these World Wide Web sites operated by Christian groups seeking to engage in a dialogue with members of publics who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered can be characterized as 'neither cold nor hot.' The sites' content was informational, not persuasive. Content was overwhelmingly social, not spiritual. The sites were perceived to be established primarily as collections of linked resources rather than electronic "interpretive communities" (See Beck, 1995) that would allow members of the groups to interact with visitors in a way that would allow site content to enliven and enhance discussion and debate.

Throughout all these sites the researcher found no substantive debate–individually or collectively–of the range of issues related to same-sex attraction argued vigorously in the general community of Christian believers. While the sites did acknowledge that individual GLBT Christians might find others in disagreement with their same-sex desires, the sites did not acknowledge in any substantial way the range of accompanying theological, doctrinal, social, cultural, medical, legal, or economic concerns.

If we accept Andsager and Smiley's premise that framing of communication can emphasize "certain aspects of experience or ideas over others" (See Andsager & Smiley, 1997. p. 2) it becomes clear that the Web sites analyzed for this study emphasized informative communicative content delivered in a fairly analytical way with the apparent primary goal of connecting GLBT users with GLBT-friendly resources. Sites de-emphasized communicative content that would be perceived as evangelistic or proselytizational, overtly spiritual, or would trigger a wider debate of theological or denominational issues.

Most of these sites represent Christian groups that identify with–but are not organizationally aligned with–a particular Christian denomination that does not recognize the Biblical acceptability of same-sex relationships. In that sense, then, most of the 12 sites represent apostate groups. Because apostasy "implies a rejection, not just of religious identity, but, in part, of the dominant culture's values" (Bromley, 1988, p. 30) it would be relevant for these sites to discuss the issue of apostasy itself, and its impact on group members and visitors. Discussion of apostasy would help sites to unite behind a common purpose and build a sense of community that is critical to retention of the faithful (Caplovitz, 1977). However, none of these sites was found to take advantage of this opportunity.

This study has hinted at a number of research areas which merit further investigation. It is important to remember that this research was preliminary and limited to a very small number of sites chosen in a non-random manner. The uniformity of the findings was somewhat surprising, however. Therefore, it would be helpful for there to be an effort to more comprehensively evaluate Christian sites that address GLBT worshipers. It would also be beneficial to track these sites over time, to see on a continuing basis how the content, functionality, and value of these sites changes as a consequence of changes in site enhancements. A Web site could potentially be altered on a daily basis, and one of the subject sites in this research was altered extensively less than two weeks after the content analysis was completed. Existing literature offers no understanding of the extent to which site enhancements may be changed over time to address different user wants and needs. This is a subject area that warrants attention.

There should be additional research work to compare the visual, operational, and informational enhancements of Christian sites addressing GLBT publics with Christian sites that address non-GLBT worshipers. Surely some interesting comparisons and contrasts could be found.

Beyond that, we must attempt to quantify why Christian Web site creators may the choices they do when developing enhancements and framing related issues. We should attempt to uncover the specific social, organizational, administrative, procedural, theological, or doctrinal variables that affect the decision-making process.

All these issues are important in a general sense, in that the investigation of them will help us better explain our world and the people living and worshiping within it. But the issues are critical to the future survival of the modern Christian church, which has been threatened in many ways in the recent past and needs to create a more effective online presence in order to make the connections necessary with the worshipers of the future. References

Aikat, D. (1997, August). Organizations in Cyberspace: An informational content analysis of academic, government, and commercial World Wide Web pages on the Internet. Paper delivered to the Communication Technology and Policy Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Chicago, IL.

Andsager, J., & Smiley, L. (1997). Evaluating the public information function: How media agents framed the silicon breast implant controversy. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Baltimore, MD, July 30-August 2.

Appelrouth, S. A. (1999). Shifting frames and rhetorics: A case study of the Christian Coalition of New York. Social Science Journal, 36:2, 329-341.

Babbie, E. R. (1990). Survey research methods (2nd ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Beck, Christina S. (1995). You make the call: The co-creation of media text through interaction in an interpretive community of 'Giants fans.' Electronic Journal of Communication, 5(1) (not paginated).

Barr, R. (1988, Feb. 23). Religious scandal extends 'credibility crisis.' Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel, p. 3A.

Barron, A. (1993, July 4). Church flocks thinning family, cultural changes cited. Greensboro News-Record, p. A1. Bromley, D. G. (1988). Religious disaffiliation: A neglected social process. In D. G. Bromley (Ed.) Falling from the faith: Causes and consequences of religious apostasy, pp. 9-25. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Caplovitz, D. (1977). The religious drop-outs. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Christians, C. G. (2002). Religious perspectives on communication technology. Journal of Media and Religion, 1(1), 37-47.

Collins, D. A. (2002, August 11). The church's power play. The Washington Post, p. B06.

CommerceNet WorldWide Internet Population (2002). Retrieved November 26, 2002 from www.commerce.net/research/statistics.

Cutbirth, C. W., Shapiro, M. E., & Williams, W. (1983). The ethics of media framing of issues of the 1980 presidential campaign. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Dallas, TX, May 26-30. (ERIC document ED 233 412)

Davis, D. (2001, April 1). A test of faith. The Santa Fe New Mexican, p. E1.

Dehler, G. E., & Welsh, M. A. (1994). Spirituality and organizational transformation: Implications for the new management paradigm. Journal of Managerial Psychology, 9(6), 17-26.

Devitt, J. (2002). Framing gender on the campaign trail: Female gubernatorial candidates and the press. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 79, 445-463. Entman, R. M. (1983). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. Journal of Communication, 43, 51-58.

Fan, D. P., Wyatt, R. O., and Keltner, K. (2001). The suicidal messenger: How press reporting affects public confidence in the press, the military, and organized religion. Communication Research, 28(6), 826-852.

Forsythe, C., Grose, E., & Ratner, J. (Eds.), (1998). Human factors and Web development. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Fraser, C. (1999). God's perfect child: Living and dying in the Christian Science Church. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Gamson, J. (2001). Jessica Hahn, media whore: Sex scandals and female publicity. Critical Studies in Media Communication. 18(2), 157-173.

Higgins, R. (2002). Tied in knots. Christian Century, 119(8), 8-9.

How fundamentalists, gays sit at same 'family' table: Arthur Dong explores conflicts in latest documentary. (2002, Oct. 9). San Francisco Chronicle, p. D8.

Hung, K. (2001). Framing meaning perceptions with music: The case of teaser ads. Journal of Advertising, 30(3), 39-49.

Lobdell, W. (2001, Dec. 1). Losing faith and lots more. Los Angeles Times, p. A1.

Lord, L. J. (1987, April 6). An unholy war in the TV pulpits. U.S. News & World Report, pp. 58-65.

Mahoney, D.M. (2001, Oct. 1). God and gays: As the church debate swirls, some congregations open their arms. Columbus (OH) Dispatch, p. 1C.

Maynard, E. A., & Gorsuch, R. L. (2001). Prejudice or preference? Attitudes of gay and lesbian Christians. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, CA, August 24-28.

Mitchell, B. K. (1996). Cyberspace: Its impact on the public relations functions of state departments of transportation. Unpublished Master's thesis, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.Moody-Hall, M. (2002). British v. U.S. newspaper framing of arabs in coverage of the Middle-Eastern conflict. Paper presented to the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Miami Beach, FL, Aug. 7-10.

Neck, C. P., & Millman, J. F. (1994). Thought self-leadership: Finding spiritual fulfillment in organizational life. Journal of Managerial Psychology, 9(6), 9-16.

Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The presentation of self in virtual life: Characteristics of personal home pages. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 79(3), 643-660.
Ragan, S. (1979). A frame analysis of New Yorker cartoons. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, San Antonio, TX., Nov. 10-13. (ERIC document ED 178 991)
Sass, J. S. (2000). Characterizing organizational spirituality: An organizational communication culture approach. Communication Studies, 51(3), 195-217.
Scherer, M. (2002, March/ April). In review: Framing the flag. Columbia Journalism Review, p. 10.
Schneiders, S. M. (1989). Spirituality in the academy. Theological Studies, 50, 676-697.
Shermer, M. (2000). How we believe: The search for God in America. New York: W. H. Freeman & Co.
Stipp, H. & Kerr, D. (1989). Determinants of public opinion about AIDS. Public Opinion Quarterly, 53(1, Spring), 98-106.
Swaggart accused of plagiarism (2001, August 30). The Chattnooga Times, p. A2.
Swanson, D. J. (2001). Standing porter at the door of thought': The social order of Christian Science. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Western Social Science Association, Reno, NV, April 18, 2001.
Swanson, D. J. (1999). World Wide Web sites and social order within higher education journalism and mass communication programs. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University. Tankard, J. W. (1997). PR goes to war: The effects of public relations campaigns on media framing of the Kuwaiti and Bosnian crises. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Baltimore, MD, July 30-August 2.
Tubbs, S. (2001, July 22). A battle for blessings. St. Petersberg (FL) Times, p. 1F.
Whitaker, L. A. (1998). Human navigation. In C. Forsythe, E. Grose, & J. Ratner (Eds.), Human factors and Web development (pp. 63-71). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (1994). Mass media research: An introduction (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
Witham, L. (1998). Manipulating the media against small religions. Speech delivered at the International Coalition for Religious Freedom Conference, Washington, DC, April 17-19, 1998. Retrieved September 20, 2002 from www.religiousfreedom.com/Conference/DC/witham.htm.
Wright, S. A. (1988). Leaving new religious movements: Issues, theory, and research. In D. G. Bromley (Ed.) Falling from the faith: Causes and consequences of religious apostasy, pp. 143-204. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Yang, A. S. (1997). The polls-trends: Attitudes toward homosexuality. Public Opinion Quarterly, 61(3, Fall), 477-507.
Zakon, R. H. (2002). Hobbes' Internet timeline v.5.6. Retrieved November 26, 2002 from www.zakon.org.

and hetrosexism..."
Lutherans Concerned/ North America
http://www.lcna.org/
"...Lutherans Concerned/North America stands as a community of faith, modeling the gospel with the church and within the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities. We seek to employ the Gospel's principles of inclusiveness and justice, celebrating God's gifts of sexuality and diversity..."
Metropolitan Community Churches
http://www.ufmcc.com/
"...a worldwide fellowship of Christian churches with a special outreach to the world's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities..."
More Light Presbyterians
http://www.mlp.org/
"...seeking the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith in the life, ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA)..."
Rainbow Baptists
(American Baptists Concerned)
http://www.rainbowbaptists.org/
"...a website providing support, information and advocacy for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Baptists, their family and friends..."
Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc.
http://www.sdakinship.org/
"...Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International is a support organization devoted to the spiritual, emotional, social and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT)..."

Figure 4
Web site informational enhancement categories
and the frequency with which enhancements were found
(n = 12 subject sites)