

The Word to the World: An Analysis of the Websites of Five Philippine-Based Catholic Communities

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This textual analysis identifies the key design elements of five Philippine-based websites, namely Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon (www.lnp.ph), Light of Jesus (www.lightofjesus.net), Couples for Christ (www.cfcglobal.org), Elim Community (www.elimglobal.org), and El Shaddai (www.elshaddai.dwxippfi.org). These elements include text, layout, graphics, page length, color, animation, interactivity, and navigational tools. An analysis of these community websites' contents showed that the communities' vision, organizational culture, and charism have been reflected on the Internet. To a limited extent, offline relationships have also been shown in the websites.

Introduction

Internet usage and access have been vastly increasing in the past I years. Recent Internet statistics show that there are more than one billion Internet users all over the world. Europe dominates with more than 300 million Internet users, followed closely by the United States with 209 million (World Internet usage, 2007). China, Japan, Germany, India, and United Kingdom are among the top countries in terms of Internet users.

In the Philippines, as of 2006, there are 7.82 million Internet users, or about 9% of the population (Internet usage stats, 2007). Though the Philippines has a low personal computer penetration, the proliferation of Internet cafes has provided Filipinos access to the Internet.

The word “religion”, with 89.7 million hits, based on the number of Google hits (as of August 28, 2005), is more commonly

used in search queries on the Web than “sex” (75.2 million hits). Religion has been of pervading interest to man for a long time. Peoples across cultures are in continual search for meaning in life. The use of new media in this quest is an interesting field of study.

The huge presence of religion online may be due to the presence of religious groups and communities online. Catholic communities have made efforts to keep abreast with the new media. They have attempted to gain significant impact by maximizing social communications, first, to further their agenda to current members and second, to evangelize to non-believers. But while there is undeniable, religious presence on the Internet, owing partly to the religious groups and communities, the relationship between new media and religious organizations has not been firmly established. This study looks into religious information as it relates to the use of the World Wide Web as a new medium. It examines how useful the Internet is as a tool for connecting members of religious affiliations from all over the world and how effective it is in attracting new members to join the organization and in convincing current members to stay active.

The study covers the five official websites of Catholic communities, namely Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon (www.lnp.ph), Light of Jesus (www.lightofjesus.net), Couples for Christ (www.cfcglobal.org), Elim Community (www.elimglobal.org), and El Shaddai (www.elshaddai.dwxippfi.org). These are all Philippine-based communities with websites maintained by Filipinos. Though they are open to people of various nationalities, their membership is predominantly Filipino.

Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon (LNP) is a family-based trans-parochial covenant community in Metro Manila, Philippines that grew out of the vibrant charismatic renewal experience of the early 1970s. Starting out with 41 men and women in July 1975, the Ligaya now counts some 1,900 members with diverse socio-economic backgrounds bound by the common desire to live the Christian life to the fullest and to serve the church as a body. At present, Ligaya’s apostolate focuses on evangelization and

community building, with special emphasis on service to the poor—an involvement affirmed during the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines. Ligaya ng Panginoon belongs to the Federation of Trans-parochial Communities in the Archdiocese of Manila. Together with its Partners-In-Mission, Ligaya ng Panginoon is a member of the Council of the Laity of the Philippines (Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon, 2007). Interestingly, Couples for Christ began as an outreach program of LNP until its separation in 1993.

The Light of Jesus Community, whose branches extend far and wide today, began in September 1980. A small prayer group of 20 attendees was formed in the garage of No. 56 Chicago St., Quezon City, the home of Gene and Pilar Sanchez. Bo, their 14-year old son, led those Tuesday night prayer meetings. The name Light of Jesus encapsulates the group's primary mission to this day: to share the Light of Jesus to others as effectively and widely as possible. Today, the community seeks "to share the Light of Jesus to others as widely and effectively as possible, through evangelism, discipleship, community, ministry, and worship" (About Light of Jesus, 2007).

Couples for Christ is the only Catholic community in Asia that has been recognized by the Vatican as a lay community for the faithful. It was founded in 1981 by 16 couples who initially only wanted a community that would help them enhance their marital relationships through a deep spiritual foundation. Twenty-six years later, it has almost one million members and is present in 157 countries with missionaries spread all over the world. Its primary goal is building the church of the home through its family ministries for kids, youth, singles and mature men and women, and building the church of the poor through Gawad Kalinga, its work with the poor program and its social ministries. Its leadership is highly decentralized into chapters. It is led by a seven-person International Council with Joe Tale as the CFC Director (Couples for Christ, n.d.).

Elim Community is a Catholic renewal community that began in 1981. In biblical times, Elim was the second encampment of the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15:27). Their first stop was Marah where there was bitter water. But in this oasis, they found refreshment from its 12 springs of water and 70 palm trees. Just as the Israelites were refreshed in that place, Elim Community today is a spiritual oasis where people can dwell and be revived by the rivers of living water. The website of the Elim Community (formerly known as Elim Revival), presents a vision to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel through the World Wide Web. As Elim surges towards its vision for revival and national renewal, Elim Global (the name of the website) seeks to be an active part of this mission. Elim was founded by Willy Nakar with wife Luli and children Didi, Dondi, PY and Dondon. The Nakar family is at the forefront of the work of the Elim Community (The vision, n.d.).

The El Shaddai DWXI Prayer Partners Foundation International, more popularly known as El Shaddai, is a Catholic charismatic renewal movement. It envisions a revival of the true Christian spirit in the Catholic faith. El Shaddai aims to raise a community of believers who will be faithful and committed to Jesus Christ as recorded in Acts 2:42-47. El Shaddai has now been established in many areas worldwide with Bro. Mariano “Mike” Z. Velarde, the founder and servant-leader, as its spiritual head. As such, he is said to be the principal symbol of true discipleship. His role is to deliver the good news of salvation at the prayer and healing rallies and fellowships of the foundation and to draw up guidelines for its service volunteer workers to follow (About DWXI-PPFI, n.d.).

Current efforts to study religious organizations online have not been comprehensive. While the Internet and the World Wide Web are fast becoming ubiquitous, attempts to study behavior patterns within these organizations, and the extent organizations manifest themselves offline and online, have been very limited.

Review of Related Literature

The new and different often attract people. Change is a given and technological change is at the heart of this novelty. Technology has enormous benefits for society and the improvements they have made over the years to improve the quality of people's lives cannot be ignored (Ettlie, 2000).

Media and technology have the capability of reconfiguring relationships, as well as the notions of effective and meaningful communication. Media and computers can influence perception of communication, alter interaction preferences, and reformulate ways of thinking and knowing (Gamble & Gamble, 2002).

Religion online manifests itself through the presence of religious communities on the Internet. These local voluntary associations and nonprofit groups have established rules of governance for the group and roles for participants. Offline, community rules and roles migrate naturally into the online community (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003). For example, a formal organization, like a church that has a sizable membership and hierarchical structure with clear entry and exit strategies for membership is likely to set up rules of governance online that reflect its offline rules. (Kavanaugh, Carroll, Rosson, Zin & Reese, 2005). The roles of online group members in a networked community typically reflect their roles offline. An organization's leaders tend to send the bulk of information and communication to members online. The role-playing continues online. The Internet bridges the online and offline relationships of members (Bortree, 2005).

For community members, online activity enhances emotional attachment to a community. Community attachment is multidimensional. A person becomes attached to a community through institutional ties, social activities, local intimates, and affective response to feelings about the place. The longer a person belongs to a community, the more opportunities there are to develop and cultivate such ties and associations. Furthermore,

the longer the exposure to the same set of people whether online or offline, the more the relationships are cultivated. In traditional communities, people also live together and make compromises and accommodations to get along. Electronic communities require such accommodations (Wood, 1998).

Studies have been made on the characteristics, behavior, and interests of people who experienced increased levels of social participation and community involvement since going online. Comparative studies have been made between websites exhibiting various cultural characteristics based on design elements and usage.

Web Design and Layout

Web design and layout are important in the online experience (Mitra, Wilyard, Platt & Parsons, 2005; Faiola & Matei, 2005). Their presence, absence or misuse all contribute to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of online users.

As this research endeavors to determine how religious groups have maximized the use of the Internet, strategies were studied with regard to how the religious websites used text, layout, content, structure, graphics, page length, color, and navigational tools.

Language, both verbal and written, is an important tool in message analysis. At the same time, various types of photographs signify specific meanings. Close-up shots signify intimacy, medium shots signify personal relationships, long shots of settings and characters signify public distance and full body shots signify social relationships (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998). The active role of images in processes of representation and communicated meanings has to be considered due to the highly visual nature of today's audience.

Animation, interactivity, content, and structure (Sundar, 2004) are also key features of message design. These reflect a certain localization of the website as it pertains to the charism of the specific website under study. Localization is the process of

adapting a product or service to a particular language, culture, and desired “look and feel” (Cyr & Trevor-Smith, 2004). Given animation’s potential to attract attention, interactivity would result in higher interaction when calls to interactivity are signified by animated, rather than static, icons. One could further theorize interactivity as impacting attitudes by way of enhancing user involvement with the information (Sundar, 2004).

There is some evidence in both the US and Japan that suggest that more evangelical traditions adopt the more interactive features of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as part of their strategy for attracting and converting new members, while less evangelical traditions develop more static websites that archive authoritative texts and resources. This suggests possible correlations between the “style” of faith and use of CMC (Ess, Kawataba, & Kurosaki, 2005).

Variations in the cognitive style of Web designers as reflected in the Web content, may create cultural biases that can be detected at the level of Web design, and that can be measured in the degree of efficacy and comfort with which cross-cultural users engage online content. Exploration of issues related to Web designers’ cultural cognitive styles and their impact on user responses have been studied. The results of an online experiment that exposed American and Chinese users to websites created by both Chinese and American designers indicate that users perform information-seeking tasks faster when using Web content created by designers from their own cultures (Faiola & Matei, 2005).

In a related study, researchers have explored Web usage among students; Web design and layout being primary considerations for staying within the website (Mitra, et al., 2005). No other studies have been found among religion seekers on the kind of websites surfers would browse longer.

Since the World Wide Web is a new medium and religious websites are not very popular areas for study, there had been few studies conducted on this topic. An analysis of the presence of religious organizations online is therefore in order.

Research Questions

This study seeks to provide more information on the role the Internet plays on the dynamics of a religious organization and how its charism is evident in online transactions. How have the websites of five Catholic communities been able to package themselves on the Internet?

Specifically, this paper seeks:

- 1) To describe how the Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon, Light of Jesus, Couples for Christ, Elim Community, and El Shaddai communities represent themselves on the Web;
- 2) To find out how religious communities use principles of Web design and layout to connect to their members; and
- 3) To analyze the similarities and differences in the design and content of the websites as they pertain to the charism of the specific communities under study.

The emergence of new technologies such as the Internet continues to shape the means of communication of Christians worldwide. Christian groups, Catholic communities included, have made attempts to use the World Wide Web to reach their target audience as a way of updating themselves in the new media technologies that are altering the nature of human communication. Christian groups need to cope with the progress of technology and media patterns.

Research Method

In this study, qualitative method was employed to investigate the nature of five Catholic websites based in the Philippines. Textual analysis provided an in-depth analysis of the implicit meanings of information as packaged by some popular religious organizations and translated into the specific Catholic websites under study.

Hall (Griffin, 2000) first developed textual analysis as an interpretive method that allows researchers to take account of all aspects of content including omissions. For this study, the significant stylistic, visual, linguistic, presentational, and rhetorical features of each website was analyzed.

For the purpose of this study, the websites investigated were:

- Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon (www.lnp.ph);
- The Light of Jesus Community (www.lightofjesus.net);
- Couples for Christ Global Mission Foundation (www.cfcglobal.org);
- Elim Community (www.elimglobal.org); and
- El Shaddai DWXI Prayer Partners Foundation International (www.elshaddai.dwxippfi.org).

The selection was based on the perceived popularity of these Catholic communities and the availability of websites to support the study.

The following elements were studied in detail: text, layout, graphics, page length, color, and navigational tools (Cyr & Trevor-Smith, 2004). As previous studies showed, these combined elements determine the representation any organization makes within its website. Text is crucial in any website as a community's or organization's beliefs are expressed through it. The latter has information necessary to understand the contents and advocacies of a specific website. An organization's personality, on the other hand, is expressed through its typography, while emphasis on and importance of issues and concerns are expressed through the layout and graphics used. Layout communicates the importance of the stories contained on the page and guides the readers through the page. Graphics, on the other hand, help create a dominant center of interest. A large dramatic photograph or a special typographic effect helps emphasize the priority messages of an organization. Page length enables users to go through a specific page without scrolling too much. Some websites may have shorter pages and

more links. Decisions to keep articles short or breaking long stories into several short stories maximize the non-linear feature of the Web. Color draws attention to the content. It is often used as an accent that connects related elements and enhances the meaning of the content. The presence of navigational tools on various pages of the website makes it more user-friendly. A linear method dictates to the users the sequence in which they navigate the site through the use of “back” and “next” buttons at the bottom of the screen. The non-linear navigation option affords the users a variety of ways to navigate the website depending on their interests (Eveland, et al, 2004).

Animation, interactivity, content, and structure were also studied. Such interactive devices on the interface invite users to think about the courses of action to take or the choices available to them on the site. The content and structure of prevailing themes are necessary elements to be studied as they refer to information, features, and services offered on the website and represent another form of communication between the user and the website (Cyr & Trevor-Smith, 2004). The content and structure present a community’s organizational culture which should be evident on its website.

These characteristics were carefully studied to determine how Catholic communities package religious information to generate the interest of non-members and to sustain the renewal of existing members. Underlying themes and insights were generated through the close analysis of the aforementioned elements.

The home pages and corresponding links of each website were studied in a linear manner. On second reading, however, when the El Shaddai’s official website could not be viewed, its Geocities-hosted website was used for further analysis. On the final stages of data gathering, www.lightofjesus.net was under construction, thus explaining its limited visual elements.

Results of the Textual Analysis

In doing the textual analysis, a study of prevailing themes, text, layout, page length, color and navigational tools (Cyr & Trevor-Smith, 2004) was done. Initially, browsing through the websites was done in a manner similar to how people would occasionally surf through websites of interest. Leisurely viewing enabled the researcher to determine which issues are emphasized and which photos or graphics are central. Then, a thorough reading of the Web pages was done to look for major concepts and features. On third reading, a search for patterns and priorities in its prevailing themes and concepts happened. Lastly, a final review of insights and a validation of reflections were conducted to confirm the findings.

As the analysis of the various websites was made, other prevailing concepts surfaced. These included the use of animation, photos, interactivity, messages, and, surprisingly, selling activities.

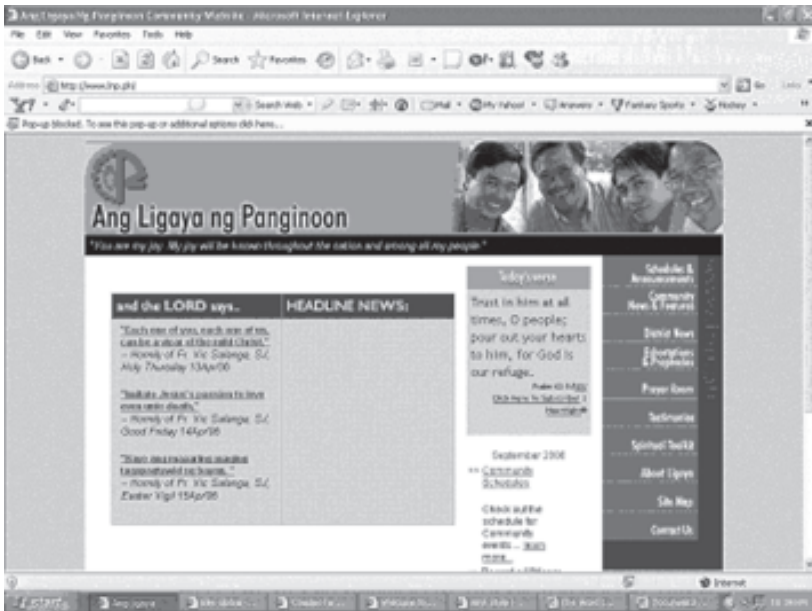


Figure 1. Home page of Ligaya ng Panginoon's website.

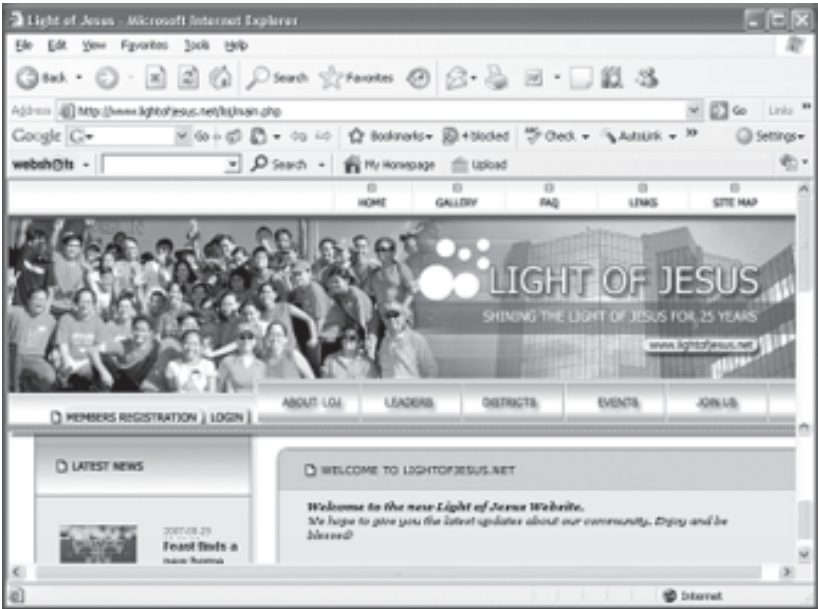


Figure 2. Home page of Light of Jesus' website.

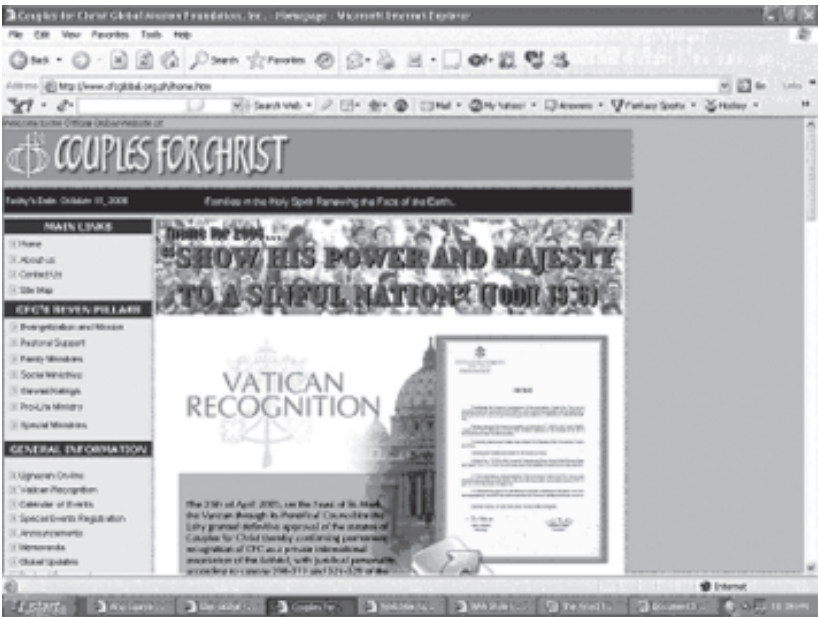


Figure 3. Home page of Couples for Christ's website.



Figure 4. Home page of Elim Community's website.

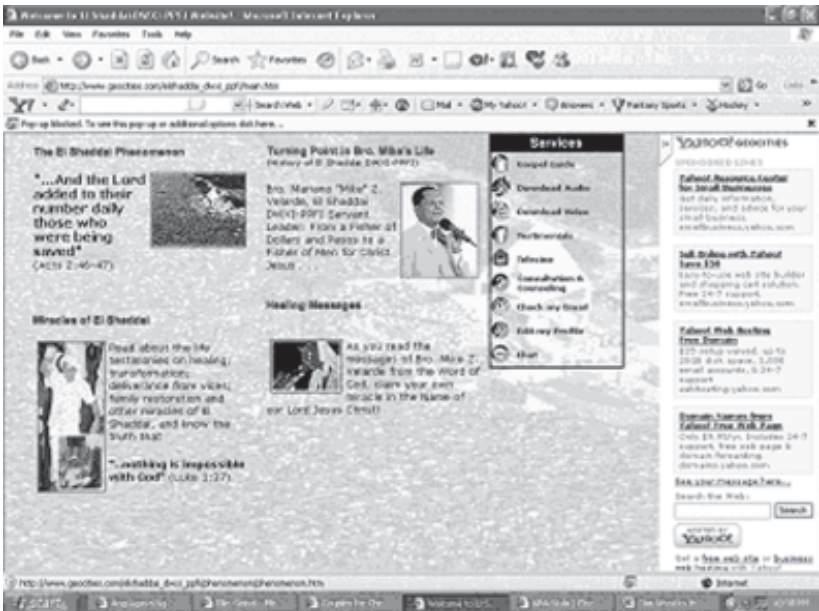


Figure 5. Home page of El Shaddai DWXI-PPFI's website.

Color and Connotation

Elim Community has green as its predominant color; El Shaddai has purple/pink, while the other websites use blue as their dominant color. Green connotes hope, growth, freshness, generosity, and responsiveness while purple/pink connotes royalty, sophistication, and religion. The dominance of blue in various shades connotes coolness and freshness; green and blue both express hope. The variance of these shades contributes to the over-all appeal of the websites. Generally, the websites exhibit calmness and peace, tranquility, love, acceptance, patience, understanding, cooperation, comfort, loyalty, and security.

The use of verses in the Bible brought about a sense of solitude and calmness. Lnp.ph emphasizes, “You are my joy. My joy will be known throughout the nation and among all my people”.

Acts of Interactivity

Of the five websites, only Elim manifested a desire to connect with its audience through its member log-in program and its invitation for e-group membership. The rest may have contact details but they do not seem to be very inviting for technically savvy people.

The notion of interactivity undermines the classical assumption of a passive media audience, to the point of changing the label of communication receiver from “audience” to “user” (Sundar, 2004). Such concept has not been skillfully maximized by the four other websites, which is ironic because the term community supposedly mirrors unity within each group.

Photographs and the Primacy of Personality

Mike Velarde has two photographs on El Shaddai’s website, Bo Sanchez’s close up shot is predominantly displayed as the Light of Jesus website unfolds, while Willy Nakar’s smiling face is displayed

on every page of Elim's website. The close-up shot of Bo Sanchez connotes a perception of intimacy and closeness; further on the next page of the same site is a full body shot of Bo Sanchez again. As mentioned earlier, a full body shot expresses a social relationship. On the other hand, Willy Nakar's medium shot on all pages of Elim's site signifies an effort to establish a personal relationship.

On El Shaddai's website, a low-angle shot of Mike Velarde in trademark orange shirt is noticeable. Camera shot is below eye-level to ascribe power and stature to the subject, showing Mike Velarde as larger than life. Another photograph on the same webpage is also taken from a low angle showing the same leader reaching down to members from the stage, again signifying a posture of power and authority (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998).

Noticeably, three of the five websites showed faces of their leaders, to whom the growth of these religious communities have been attributed. El Shaddai's phenomenal growth has truly been attributed to its leader Mike Velarde. Meanwhile, Light of Jesus Community's anchor is its media ministry hence the framing of Bo Sanchez as its charismatic leader and author of best-selling books. The Elim Community is known to be led by the Nakar family, thus Willy Nakar's image on all pages. Ligaya ng Panginoon and Couples for Christ advocate a faceless and anonymous leadership. Tony Meloto of Gawad Kalinga and a prominent member of CFC, has a photograph three scrolls down on CFC's home page a month after receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Award. However, in subsequent readings, his photograph had been removed from the homepage.

The use of photographs exemplifies the personality-based nature of El Shaddai, Light of Jesus, and Elim while the absence of photographs suggests the conspicuous nature of the leadership in Couples for Christ and Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon.

Only Couples for Christ had a wide array of photographs uploaded in its website. The extensive picture gallery of CFC's home page discloses an important feature of the community – its

dynamism and vibrancy. Such photographs are missing in the three other websites. Meanwhile, Ligaya ng Panginoon's photographs on the upper right hand seem permanent but whenever the website is revisited or refreshed, a different set of photographs is displayed, providing a creative way of displaying its picture gallery.

Displaying the Dominant Discourses

The Catholic communities under study may have different reasons, objectives and purposes for coming up with their respective websites as evidenced by their contents. The website of Light of Jesus seemed to have been constructed primarily to inform existing members as it contained announcements of specific activities and corresponding dates in two pages. Elim's website contained interactive information aimed towards encouraging its members to interact online. Ligaya ng Panginoon had various Bible verses and "today's verse" with an attempt to include "headline news" which was blank. El Shaddai's home page contained an introduction to the El Shaddai Phenomenon, Miracles of El Shaddai, Turning Point in Mike Velarde's Life and Healing Messages all in one page, probably geared towards a would-be or an existing member discovering the extraordinary and life-changing experiences within the community. Couples for Christ's dominant theme was its theme for the year "Show His Power and Majesty to a Sinful Nation" as taken from Tobit 3:16. CFC's home page was the longest at five pages down and contained a variety of information for members as well as for other users who would want to know what CFC is all about. It has prominently displayed its recent Vatican Recognition as proof of its integrity as a community.

The vision of each of the five religious communities set the tone for the websites' contents, and to a great extent determined the kind of information that had been made available. In turn, the information made available online reflects the priority of each community, its way of setting its agenda for the benefit of visitors who may take interest in becoming members.

As mentioned earlier, the feeling of community translates online as a variety of information is presented to the website visitors. The expertise in Web design and layout of the Web developers contributes to the “stickiness” of the site. It contributes to the length of time a user stays within the website to navigate the various pages and the level of excitement and satisfaction that the user feels.

Content Organization

The manner by which the websites were organized reflects the nature of the organizations and, in a way, the manner in which they present ideas. The use of navigational tools in the website should help the readers go through the pages in a manner most comfortable to them. A linear manner for some of the websites may seem impossible with the magnitude of the information the specific community wishes to present to its audience. Without a clear and facilitated path to information, users become lost within the Web structure and may not be able to connect to the community (Bernard, 2002 in Cyr & Trevor-Smith, 2004).

For the CFC and Elim websites, the pages seem too numerous and may constrain the readers from browsing all of the pages. Elim even has repetitive menu selection horizontally and vertically. It is like presenting a menu with so many choices, such that the reader ends up overwhelmed. El Shaddai’s website, with a variety of links spread out in the various pages, comes across as more organized, simple, and user-friendly.

Animation

There is very little effort among the websites to have animation. Except for CFC’s, all of the websites have very flat graphic designs and no animation at all. For CFC’s website, the watermark photo behind the theme changes, CFC’s vision of Families in the Holy

Spirit Renewing the Face of the Earth scrolls and its picture gallery automatically changes every two to three seconds.

Corporate Culture Online

Noticeable in the analysis is the various types of stories encountered in the study. There are different ways by which a website communicates with its audience. Personal stories of conversions, collegial stories in web log or “blog” entries and corporate stories of the community are evident.

Corporate stories abound in cfcglobal.org. These are information, events, and announcements that its top leaders from the global foundation would like to share with the members around the world, like its Vatican Recognition wherein the community’s 13-page statutes as approved by the Vatican is downloadable. Photographs of events surrounding its 25th anniversary celebration have also been dominant in its home page. Efforts such as these enable the organization to have an avenue to express itself to its global community. Its sharing of corporate stories online helps the community establish and maintain a steady source of information to service its members in 157 countries.

Personal conversion and miracle stories abound in lnp.ph, with a featured story per week. These are easily accessible to the users of this website because the link is aptly titled personal testimonies. One such story is titled “A Story of Hope”:

Last February 27, the impossible became possible; my pregnancy test came out to be positive! ‘Are you sure?’ I questioned the medical technician. ‘We waited for this for six and a half years!’ The clinic was filled with my laughter; I didn’t mind that people looked at me as if I was crazy. It was a crazy experience and it felt like heaven! When I broke the news to Dino, he hugged me so many times - the most hugs he ever gave me in our entire marriage. ‘Are you sure?’ was also his question. One thing’s

for sure, this pregnancy is a miracle, a gift from God,
an answered prayer.

The personal stories fulfill a purpose — the hope that the readers would be able to relate to the writer’s story. The Story of Hope is a story of an answered prayer, a joyful experience of a couple whose patient prayers have been answered. El Shaddai also has personal stories such as the personal conversion story of its founder and servant-leader Mike Velarde. Stories like this give the communities a certain character and a face in the otherwise cold and impersonal medium.

Collegial stories abound in elimglobal.org through its members online. Here is one such entry:

hello Davao singles! I praise and thank the Lord for this totally new look which is really updated and has a more user-friendly format. I may not be posting as frequent as the others but having this elimglobal.org website is truly amazing and i cannot thank the Lord enough for this blessing to community.

may we continue to reach out to one another and upbuild one another towards accomplishing our vision of drawing more souls for the Lord and with this blessing of a new website, we can interact anytime, anywhere...as often as we please.

may the Lord bless us all with a double portion of His kind of generosity for us to truly give our all for His greater glory.

Access to this kind of information enables the users to see that there are relationships formed offline within the religious organization which continues online. The posting of messages creates an atmosphere of openness, intimacy, and friendship because of the conversational tone that most entries use and the

presence of their personal photographs. It ensures that relationships built offline will be enhanced during their online encounters.

Advertising and Selling Activities

Three of the five websites all placed advertisements of their products at the last part of their respective home pages. CFC promotes its 25th anniversary coffeetable book; Elim advertises its Springs bookstore which sells its teaching materials like books and CDs; and Ligaya ng Panginoon encourages subscription to its publication.

Each community's representation of itself on the Web is determined by the interplay of the identified elements. A mix of these factors enables a website visitor to experience satisfaction, navigate through the website longer and possibly revisit it. User satisfaction also translates to a digestion of the information relayed within the website and a positive perception of the community in general.

The very nature of each community is manifested in various ways through the website's design, message and contents. El Shaddai's membership is predominantly "masa", hence the simplicity of its website. Ligaya ng Panginoon is the most conservative of all the communities chosen which is unconsciously reflected in the presentation of its website. Light of Jesus is heavily anchored on its media outfit Shepherd's Voice, thus limiting its website to a schedule of its activities and a short message from its leader Bo Sanchez. Elim's website offers a variety of information and is interactive, strengthening the impression of the community as technically savvy, due to its Class AB membership. CFC seems to be anything to anybody with a wide array of activities and ministries to choose from as can be seen in its home page.

As mentioned earlier, minimal observations have been inferred on www.lightofjesus.net because the site was under construction when revisited for analysis.

The matrix below summarizes the salient features of each website studied:

Features	Ligaya ng Panginoon	Light of Jesus	Couples for Christ	Elim	El Shaddai
Color	Blue	Blue	Blue	Green	Purple/Pink
Photos	Photo of four smiling men	Bo Sanchez close-up shot	Activities with many members	Willy Nakar's smiling face on all Web pages	Two pictures of Mike Velarde on the same page
Dominant Discourses	Various Bible verses	Announcements of ongoing activities	Theme for the year: "Show His Power and Majesty to a Sinful Nation"	Interactive information meant to encourage members to interact online	Stories of miracles; El Shaddai phenomenon and Velarde's life story
Content Organization	Vertical links 10 items	Vertical links: Home page is 1 page click down	Main links through the 7 major headers; pages were long (5 scrolls down)	Each webpage is within the screen; menu selection repetitive	Various links spread out in various pages
Animation	Minimal picture changes	Flat; no animation	Watermark picture changes; picture gallery automatically changes pictures	Flat; no animation	Flat; no animation
Corporate Culture	Personal conversion and miracle stories abound	No information available	Corporate stories about	Collegial stories	Personal stories of conversion
Selling Activities	Subscription to Heartlight	None	Silver Book promo	Link to Springs Bookstore	None

Note: Details as of March 2007.

*Discussion of Findings:
Agenda-Setting and the Religious Communities' Websites*

The mass media enable people not only to think but present them with what to think about. The function and effects of mass communication on its audience has been very evident as the results of the study were discussed.

The Agenda-Setting Theory of McCombs and Shaw (Griffin, 2000) is relevant in the current study. McCombs and Shaw believe that the “mass media have an ability to transfer salience of their news agenda to the public agenda” (Griffin, 2000). They established that position and length of a story create prominence for a specific set of information and that the media have the ability to set aside the substantive issues from those that are not. Agenda-setting employs an important tool in media – the framing of information. A media frame is the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Griffin, 2000).

The application of the Agenda-Setting Theory by the Catholic community is apparent in the websites' ability to highlight specific issues, events, and people. The media were able to set the agenda for public thought and attention. The medium's gatekeeping function was utilized. The Web developers and webmasters of the Catholic communities served as gatekeepers as they screened messages, stories, and ideas that are presented to their Internet audience in the belief that these will shape the audience's perception and ideas about the Catholic community and its members.

The Cultural Approach to Organizations by Clifford Geertz and Michael Pacanowsky (Wood, 2000; Griffin, 2000) is also used in this study. Geertz perceives culture as systems of shared, or common, meaning. He says that cultures are ways of life that are sustained through stories, rituals, and other symbolic activities that

continuously uphold shared meaning among members (Wood, 2000). The corporate culture of the religious organizations is obvious in the messages that they translate online. Organizations, viewed as cultures, present opportunities for cultural interpretation. An organization, which can be a way of life for its members, creates a shared reality that distinguishes it from other cultures (Littlejohn, 1998). The culture is learned through the use of stories or metaphors used to convey the messages the corporation wants to share with its members. There are many indicators organizational members use to create and display their understanding of their culture. This is apparent in the way communities express their offline personalities online. Couples for Christ's use of more corporate stories than any of the other four websites implies the desire to present a serious corporate image. The prevalence of personal stories in El Shaddai and Ligaya ng Panginoon projects a personal and intimate culture. Elim, through its participative and interactive leanings, obviously addresses an internal audience.

As offline community rules and roles are translated into the online community, there is a natural transfer of such roles to the online community. The personal and intimate culture that is reflected in the websites of El Shaddai and Ligaya ng Panginoon is also apparent in their offline communities, as the researcher has proven in her personal encounters with these Catholic communities. Elim transmits a very personal and participative culture which is also apparent in the impressions of said community in their offline dealings.

Organizational rituals are also expressed in each website. The challenge to Web designers is to communicate the organization's message to non-members. The use of shared codes and jargon only understandable to members prevents non-members from understanding the expressed culture, but at the same time encourages existing members to enjoy navigating within the website because they could relate to and identify with its contents.

The extensive use of corporate, personal, and collegial stories within the website enables the community to express its corporate culture online. It also enables outsiders to identify and understand the kind of culture the community has. These stories can help attract new members or discourage would-be members from getting involved depending on how they perceive such stories. The decision to include more of any of these types of stories in the website manifests the gatekeeping function of the community's team, while the presence of these stories manifests the organizational culture of the community.

Summary, Conclusions and Implications

To a limited extent, the Catholic communities studied were able to reflect their offline nature in their websites. Their organizational culture was conveyed through the elements of Web design characteristics analyzed in this study. However, more dynamism and creativity could still be used. The medium's accessibility for the convenience of the audience, as well as its interactivity, color, navigational ease, and ability to express themes through text and photos could still be maximized.

The sense of community depends on members and how they feel about community. It is obvious that interaction within traditional communities is more relational. The essence of a traditional community is seen personally by the member or would-be member very concretely, unlike a virtual community which may be cold and static. The concepts in Geertz' Cultural Approach to Organizations is very much evident as communities translate their culture offline to online and vice versa. The prudent use of corporate, personal, and collegial stories has helped express the offline corporate cultures of the Catholic communities under study.

The basic aspects of sex, race, age, physical appearance, and others – as well as the feelings of love, affection, and sharing – are vivid in offline communities. In online communities, there

should be more efforts to show these aspects of community. Truthfulness may also be an issue. Personal sharings posted on websites and e-groups may be fabricated and deceiving because contributors can hide behind the stoic computer screen. On the contrary, to some people, anonymity may increase one's openness and truthfulness.

The understanding of Agenda-Setting Theory is important in maximizing websites to help fulfill the community's vision, mission, and goals.

Stickiness and usability should be considered by the Web designers in ensuring the effectiveness of the World Wide Web as a new medium of evangelization. With the dependence of organizations on the Internet, Web designers should realize the persuasive power of design elements in a website as they appeal to the user's logic and emotions. There is much reason to seek better understanding of user preferences related to design elements (Cyr & Trevor-Smith, 2004). With the prevalence of preference for interactivity, Catholic communities need to pursue more aggressive website development for evangelization.

The probability that the Internet might be the first encounter an individual will have with a specific Catholic community grows higher since accessibility to the Internet is growing at a faster pace. It is crucial that the Catholic community understands how to maximize the use of its website in shaping the community's corporate personality and culture.

The use of technology by religious organizations has great potential. The emergence of global villages and e-communities will heavily shape an individual's faith experience in a few years' time as access to the Internet becomes more prevalent and mastery of the new media increases. The use of websites by Catholic communities will become more of a necessity than just an option.

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