Smartphones in Churches: An Affective negotiation around Digital Disruptions and Opportunities in Delhi Christian Churches

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal relations in a world of digital ubiquity have brought religious institutions into personal digital networks. The development of personal-religious networks has affected individual faith practices and altered religious responses. This article explores patterns of behaviour emerging from a collective sense of belonging and affective responses in online church networks where smartphones acts as an extension of self. It analyses the relationship between faith and visual practices/aesthetics impacting today's religious experience. It also explains affective loops that are consciously constructed by church authorities to shape collective action. The function of these loops is to create a deeper sense of connectedness between practitioners and the church through harnessing technology and its affective power.

Keywords: Church, Smartphones, Digital Content, Affective Response, Social Media, Intimacies, Delhi

Introduction

India is one of the fastest growing Internet markets in the world today with over 600 million Internet users (Arora, 2019). It has also been recognised as the fastest growing smartphone market in Asia Pacific (Singh, 2019). This increasing access has made digital[1] media ubiquitous in the lives of urban Indians. Today, even the clergy in India have become engrossed in digital networks especially in the urban centres of India (Rajan & Vaz, 2018). This inclusion has been driven largely by the grand narrative of modernity that is associated with technology in India. The churches in urban India want to be associated with the ideas of being contemporary and modern (Cheong, 2017; Rajan, 2015). Therefore, they have invested in learning about and utilising digital media to communicate with their congregations.

Technological mediums of print, broadcast

and digital have played a crucial role in supporting freedom to propagate religion. It has become an instrument of worship through Holy Scriptural application (apps), and Daily devotional content, which makes technology an affective presence in the religious space. Smartphone technology today has become indispensable in the Church's liturgy, music, services, and other activities. The interface between religion and social media has brought forth issues of affective control over individual lives, which is negotiated through smartphones. These smartphone-based provisions of spirituality are also a concern for religious authorities as technology also has profane uses such as pornographic, blasphemous content, and bad language, which are deemed deleterious to one's spiritual life.

Christianity in Delhi

The Indian subcontinent is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism. Christianity in India can be traced back to 50 AD. Hindu cultural traces are prominent in Christianity here, and these influences are not accompanied by the 'western nation states' ideas of modernity and Christian identity (James, 2010). Today, Hinduism is the dominant religion in India with about 966 million followers (79.8% of the total population). Islam is the next largest denomination with 173 million followers

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[1] The use of the term "digital" in this article is referring to a computer based networked software and hardware which has tangible components and immaterial codes. It has an embodied logic that shapes its codes of control which is editable and interactive. However, the "digital" is used as an adjective that has to be experienced through its mediation by touching of the screen, looking at the displayed content, holding of the device and so on. Therefore, the digital refers to digital space that shapes the experience of reality in encounters of material and immaterial objects .

(14.23%). Christians make up 27 million (2.3%) ; Sikhs a mere 20 million (1.7%) ; and Buddhists even fewer than 8 million (0.7%) (Lindsay, "Census of India: Religious Composition", 2017).

Delhi has had a long history of being a Muslim dominion. By the 13th century, the Delhi Sultanate was ensuring the political unity of northern India. Under the rule of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq, the Muslim dynasty reached as far as Madurai (Frykenberg, 2008). However, it was during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar that a Jesuit priest's presence in Akbar's court was first recorded (Frykenberg, 2008). Sir Thomas Roe, an ambassador to India during Jahangir's reign, noted that two of the princes had converted to Christianity in Jahangir's court and one of the converts was the King's nephew (Mukhia, 2004). Although Jahangir, and after him Shah Jahan, did not show any particular interest towards Christianity as a religion, Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's eldest son, had a great desire to become a Christian (Neill, 2004). He was greatly interested in many forms of religion and philosophy until his execution by his younger brother (Aurangzeb) following the battle of succession for the imperial throne (Neill, 2004).

Moreover, the Mughal Mission by the Jesuit priests did not leave behind a significant trace of Christianity in Delhi. Most of the Christians who came to India were more focused on philanthropic mission work than on establishing churches and forming communities (Webster, 2002). The Christians who were found in Delhi during this period were mostly travelling-army men; it was only after the British had captured Delhi in 1803 that the first mission work through Rev. James Thompson began in 1818 (Webster, 2002). Nonetheless, the mission concentrated on evangelising rather than setting up churches that would develop a local body of Christians in Delhi (Webster, 2002). The next mission work in Delhi was started by the Society for Propagation of the Gospel in 1852 formed by British residents in Delhi; however, the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 took its toll on the Christian community as they were specifically targeted by the Sepoys and killed during the mutiny (Webster 2002).

After the recapture of the city by the British, mission work in Delhi was stalled for a long period and it took time to gain momentum again. However, Delhi today has a diversity of churches with large congregations of groups such as the Syro-Malabar Church, the Syro-Malankara Church, the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Mar Thoma Church, the United Church of South India (CSI), the United Church of North India (CNI), the Methodist Church of India, the Lutheran churches, the Baptist churches and the Evangelical Church. The Third General Assembly of the World Council of Churches was celebrated in Delhi in 1962. The hosting of such events has made Delhi a significant place on the map of the Christian world. The Internet has brought the larger Christian world closer to Delhi, and with the popularity of smartphones, most of the religious networks and websites are now easily available to the churchgoers.

Recently, Christian communities in Delhi came into the limelight for demanding democratic expression of religion (Rajan, 2016). 2nd December 2014 and 5th February 2015 saw massive mobilisations of churchgoers in Delhi due to continued attacks on churches in Delhi that were politically motivated for gaining votes (Rajan, 2016). These mobilisations, according to some youth leaders, were consequences of social media (Rajan, 2016). Education and easy access to smartphones had made the Christian community influential on social media during the period of the protests. This visibility carried over to the mainstream media and gave the marginalised minority group some representation.

These forms of representation online have provided an opportunity to engage with various belief systems, producing a bricolage of affective [2] encounters that assisted in collating one's identity. Smartphones have played a significant role in generating the affective intimacies and encounters for religious engagement through participatory spaces.

Towards a digitized mobile practice
The digital India drive initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to improve

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[2]Affect is the ability to affect as well as be affected by digital content in encounters. The affective content is articulated with a focus on emotional appeal on the audience.

India's connectivity and job opportunities, and bring e-Governance projects to most parts of India. This initiative has seen the smartphone subscription base expand to 404.1 million in 2017 (Indo Asian News Service, 2018). The smartphone has become a very intimate device for most of its users. This attachment is driving the users' participation in the digital spaces. For instance, finances, entertainment, dating, job searches, education and other aspects of social life are consumed on digital platforms. Therefore, one is emotionally invested in digital spaces and its effect can be seen with the physical body. Smartphones are governing the bodies' internal sense of movement in how it receives a digitized information, which further leads the body to alter itself accordingly and ultimately derive gratification from digital spaces (Hansen, 2004). This is part of the personalised computer revolution, which was brought about by cloud computing, broadband networks and increased access to smartphones. The role of the human body is not just limited to being at the receiving end of the information created within the digital space. Instead, the body is a partner with the digital in filtering the information that the users receive. The embodied experience of processing information through an interface provides the body with the agency to filter the digital information, which further decides whether that filtered image can be rendered perceptible or not (Hansen, 2004). Millennials are excellent representatives of the intimacy between digital devices and bodies. They being "digital natives" (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008, p.35) are familiar with manipulating the digital which they use to curate their experience of smartphones and social life. For instance, handing a child a photograph might illicit a response such as pinching and expanding the image with their forefingers to expand it. The expectations of the child from the photograph is similar to digital images, which enlarges and shrinks on smartphone screens. With children, the familiarity with smartphones and the skills to manipulate the digital environment is increasing year by year (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008). This has increased the intimacy and attachment one feels with the surrounding digital world at a young age. Now, the intimacy shared with a smartphone has increased to such an extent that it has become a humanized extension of ourselves. In these cases, the smartphone can be compared to a benevolent genie tasked with entertaining you and giving you simultaneous access to all your desires. It also provides constant simulation, which can be utilised to avoid unwanted personal interaction. Most people pretend to use their phones to avoid having to talk to people (Gayomali, 2017). Phones, very often, are the means to escape a difficult situation. It is quickly becoming a device that is dictating one's self-worth and focus by determining how one gets perceived, accepted, wanted and liked on social media (Turkle, 2005). The psychological attachment to phones expressed through "nomophobia" is growing widely in India (Kanmani, Bhavani and Maragatham, 2017, p.12). The symptoms are displays of panic and desperations when separated from their mobile phones, appearing distracted in conversations and from work, and constantly checking phones for notification. Most people with nomophobia also display cellphone vibration syndrome where they might think that their phone is ringing when it is not (Kanmani, Bhavani and Maragatham, 2017). The anxiety and intimacy attached to smartphones also have attributes of managing one's agency, self-efficacy and privacy in the ubiquitous digital landscape. This motivation is providing a rich platform for religious institutions to utilise their apps to propagate their religious mandates digitally. This technological perception is finding a growing presence in India as well as worldwide in becoming an alternative space for religious practice. The digital access has witnessed churches in Delhi adopt the technology to connect with individuals and churchgoers (Rajan & Sarkar, 2017).

Methodology
This article is interpretative in nature, grounded in qualitative research, which seeks to bring forth affective intensities permeating contemporary churches and their functions. In order to understand the communication of the church as well as its congregation's digital interactions, 70 in-depth interviews were conducted in the year 2017–18, across nine different church denominations in Delhi. The purpose of this study was to understand the affective encounters of social media in the lives of churchgoers. The snowball sample had 70 respondents (35 Catholic and 35 Protestants), all of whom were social media users on smartphones. The age demographic of the respondents consisted of those

belonging to the age groups of 20–29 years (59%), 30–39 years (14%), 40–49 years (13%), 50–59 years (10%), above 60 years (3%) and one under 20 years (1%).

Interviews were chosen as the basic mode of inquiry. Moreover, in-depth interviews provided an understanding of their lived experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Myers, 2009). It also provided an insight into how the participants made sense of affective experiences and into their changing conditions and relations with religious structures (Manen, 1990). Vignettes from these in-depth interview sessions were used in the analysis to substantiate the findings. However, the identity of the participants will not be disclosed on account of the ethical dimensions of this research. These vignettes express the congregations' understandings and their perspectives on social media and religious encounters.

Analysis: Affective Phones

The smartphone can be located in one's embodied existence, shaping patterns of sensation that an individual feels. It is a source of knowledge that shapes the ways of knowing one's environment and helps navigate the circuits of power in one's networks. This engagement with the device is shaping digital responses that are dictated by feelings, sensations and emotions, sometimes beyond the grid of reason and language. For instance, one of the interviewees states that,

> The interaction on our church's social media is sometimes very powerful. I feel compelled to listen and do as instructed. I do protest but it is like an overwhelming force that makes me do things that I would not otherwise do. Especially with the whole confession process. (Informant 29. Personal Interview. 9 August 2017).

The body is perceptive and sensitive to the smartphone. The church's phone presence has drastically reduced the idea of self-sovereignty. Therefore, the smartphone and its content are dominating one's assemblage[3] of

feelings, taking away the sovereignty of certain decisions, bodily reactions and feelings about certain things. This situation is because most people are closer to their phone emotionally than to other information communication technologies. Some people see these devices as an extension of their body by the way they hold and feel the smartphone even when it's not in use. The depth of intimacy shared with a smartphone is reflected by the physical proximity that people share with the device. It is never too far from the user, except while charging. The smartphone is intimate with one's body, and, therefore, people are usually falling asleep with their devices or even waking up at odd hours to check messages on their phones. The device is used to avoid eye contact in social encounters; the awareness generated by the device of one's social life determines how one organizes one's social life and its encounters in efficiently. Therefore, the phone becomes part of people's identities, their individualism, their lifestyles and sociality. Some even refer to the smartphone as a reflection of "who they are." So traditional providers of identity like the Church are finding ways to be on smartphones to maintain their place in the social reality of the people. As one of the interviewees mentioned,

> Earlier when I used to have a bad day, I felt like reading the Bible but we do not always carry our Bible. Now it is so easy because every time I feel low, I take my phone out and read my favourite verses. I can also create a reading plan on it based on themes, with reminders, which is like an alarm clock forcing me read the holy scriptures. (Informant 56. Personal Interview. 18 September 2017)

The influx of smartphones into the church has brought innovative ways to connect with one's congregation and authority. The local churches have moved beyond Sunday meetings and are now closer to an individual's life, in terms of proximity, access and intimacy using digital means. The presence of the smartphone has made religious content available on-demand. It also shares content

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[3]Assemblage theory states that within the body, the interrelationships of the constituent parts are not stable and fixed; rather, they can be moved and replaced within and between other bodies, thus approaching systems through external relations.

across multiple digital devices, transcending physical limitations and time constraints. The use of smartphone has increased the use of applications (apps) for religious engagements such as Bible apps. Commentaries on the sacred text, audio versions of religious texts, faith memes, faith videos, and digital religious communities are circulated through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Hangouts, Viber, and others. The apps are primarily being used to communicate information about upcoming events, meetings, festivals, congregational celebratory occasions, worship songs, religious memes, faith-inspiring videos, and links to other useful websites that reaffirm the church's mission digitally. With digital smartphones, the church is also attempting to affectively shape the congregation and vice-versa, where the congregation is seeking to influence the church in this growing digital arena of social capital exchange. The social capital provides mobility for individuals in the hierarchies of the local church structure (Cheong 2013). This capital is accumulated through the relationships in digital space, such as daily salutations, constantly maintaining dialogues with leadership in churches, and so on.

Smartphones in Church need to be understood from the perspective of the individual's self-organising practices where the self needs to adapt or modify to its environmental perturbations; it is a movement that maintains a sense of distinction between one's identity and environment, where the components of smartphone conflates with the body's endogenous configurations (Hansen, 2004). The digital cannot be isolated from the basic perceptions through which we see the world as it is bound in human embodiment. This embodiment is enmeshed with cognition, and we have sensorimotor capability that enables cognition of our surroundings. This has brought forth new and enhanced ways to sense our environment. Therefore, one can state that digital technology structures our perception (Varela, 1999). Smartphone technology that we encounter in our daily life is generated and functions within social systems, which enables its embodiment. Therefore, digital is an embodied reality that has consequences on the participation and representation of self.

The church is tapping into the 'magic' of the smartphone the same way digital marketeers target consumers. It looks to bring faith content into people's digital life where response to inner thoughts, beliefs and aspirations can be done with just the mere touch of a finger. Who turns off a phone anymore? Most people when threatened with depleting battery life immediately seek an electric socket to charge their phone. The loss of a phone is treated as literally losing a part of one's life, which is digitally lived. This sacrality towards smartphone has happened due to the convergence of the digital life with the physical device. Smartphones in the digital age have formed an intimate relationship with their users. Turkle (2015) calls them the "intimate machines" (p. 9). These are often, she argues, "experienced as both part of the self and of the external world" (Turkle, 2005, p. 5). However, the intervention of institutions and their guidelines might force individuals to put the smartphone on silent or flight mode. Nonetheless, despite these moments of limitations, the device always transports one's desires beyond their time and space constraints. As one of the interviewees admits:

> We were always earlier told by the pastor to put our phone on silent. But these days we have to access the Bible on our phone, However, in that process we suddenly find ourselves being distracted by the messages and notifications that suddenly pop up on the screen. From reading the Bible, I often end up reading Facebook messages or WhatsApp messages. I even end up browsing through Amazon shopping or searching for famous holiday destinations etc. (Informant 44. Personal Interview. 27 September 2017)

Such disruptions from spiritual engagements due to the proximity and intimacy shared with Smartphones is a growing concern for the clergy. The network maintains that the user is always connected to their interests. These engagements have made the smartphone's presence felt in almost all aspects of one's existence.

The device in the pocket is blurring the boundaries between public and private spaces

depending on the way the apps decide to represent the individual. Mark Poster (1995) argues that, "culture is increasingly simulational in the sense that the media often changes the things that it treats, transforming the identity of originals and referentialities" (p. 30). The smartphones have become so intertwined with our day-to-day affairs that the way smartphone represents content becomes our conception of reality (Gershon, 2010). This authenticity of reality is reflected in the intensities people feel towards the device. The smartphone has become part of the meaning-making process; the cognition of the meanings establishes the intensity of personal practices on a device. A participant shared "I used to constantly feel like I was on a 'hot seat'; my bible apps, church's WhatsApp group, and Facebook with church members constantly confronting me about my spiritual journey." (Informant 20. Personal Interview. 17 August 2017). The phone has become a meditating tool of one's faith; it acts as an extension of one's body, which is connected to one's church life.

Digital Connections
The growing access to individuals through digital networks has increased the range of influence of the church. The sheer pervasiveness of the gadget and its diffusion at an unprecedented rate has encouraged the clergy to use it to meet the churches' evangelical mandates. The connectivity of the smartphone has enabled it to engage with individuals in a deeply affective form of social interaction. This unavoidability leads to the popular narrative about the inclusion of social media apps in the church's life. The smartphone extends into one's functionality, which is inclusive of one's relationships, cognitions and public representations, as well as emotional responses in digital social networks.

The urban Church is an information-intensive environment, which is driven by hyperspeed of content creation and distribution. This pattern is a self-reinforcing system that maintains the role of smartphones to meet the daily routines of life, which are socially and technically interwoven. The church, seeking to become part of the information-intensive environment, is contributing to the complex, high speed interactions with its own religious content. Technology is demanding more

enhanced ways of communication from the church. The church is trying to cater to those demands due to the acceptability of this digital existence, which has formed ways of life by the intimate relations between technological embodiment, which shapes one's understanding and perception (Richardson, 2012). In the context of a religious institution, several studies have marked that the online behavior of religion projects the changes that it implements in its practices and interactions with the general society (Campbell, 2012). For instance, the use of slangs like Oh My God (OMG) to express shock or surprise is considered profane by the church as the name of the lord cannot be taken in vain (Rajan & Vaz, 2018). Nevertheless, the exponential use of the slang by the youth in formal church Whatsapp groups can be seen as a conscious effort to promote a tolerant image of the institution in order to present their religion as being attuned with contemporary cultural changes (Rajan and Vaz, 2018). The church recognises that the youth exists as a socio-technical hybrid where the body and screen are constantly gazing at each other, acting as mirrors and windows into one's reality. The content one shares becomes a window for others to look into and, likewise, the representation is a mirror of the self. Thus, a church that is seeking to influence and guide people in their religious journey wants to access these windows so that it can shape the core values of its congregation. Ideally, the church aspires to see its beliefs and values mirrored in peoples' virtual lives. For instance, one of the participants said,

> My social life is not separate from the church anymore, the church has become more alive and active. We have lots of fun programs and hangouts that are organised in the church's WhatsApp groups. It is also where we have deep talks and discussion about our lives and issues we are facing. (Informant 54. Personal Interview. 17 August 2017).

This phenomenon of mirrors and windows beyond the gaze is based on the work of Daniel Palmer (2012). Smartphones organise and record one's everyday life. These devices make micro-coordination of church life possible. They enable coordinated timing of arrivals at church meetings, properly

organised meetings with congregational leaders, the delivery of faith content or devotional material, and the discovery of digital spaces that need an evangelical approach or faith inputs.

The recorded and shared life moves beyond fixed spaces into what Palmer (2012) calls a "portable personhood, " (p. 87) — personhoods that are constantly on the move. It is this portable personhood with whom the portable formats of faith content are shared so that the religious community is constantly in touch with their own spirituality. Like one of the participants said, "Through smartphone we can connect to our congregation on the go. I can discuss the itinerary for the next prayer meeting group from any part of the country and not worry about physically meeting them to decide" (Informant 33. Personal Interview. 21 September 2017).

The availability of apps that circulate the sacred scriptures, motivational content and even humorous memes is a consequence of the church's adaptation to its portable congregation. This is a mutual adaptation of smartphones in churches' life, with the institute and the congregation coming together on the same platform. This has implications on how the medium's functions are utilised for church work. The smartphone brings forth cognitively enriched elements into communication from the church that makes the space intelligible for the congregation. For instance, a participant shared:

> Having Internet, and access to biblical commentaries at my fingertips during church helps me understand the etymological and historical aspects of what is being taught in church. However, if I lose my phone, I feel lost not only from the teaching but also from the church community at large. (Informant 14. Personal Interview. 21 September 2017)

The loss of phone in the church is an emotional process where other members of the network feel like they have lost someone. There is a religious logic of perpetual contact to teach and preach, which is enabled through the smartphones' form of communication. When these forms of communication are

affectively, they induced begin to approximate a 'pure communication' where one mind is shared and connected with others in their digital community (Elliott and Urry, 2010).

This connection of mind, according to Katz and Aakhus (2002), is a consequence of connection and awareness of people in the digital religious community. It is this hyper-existence with digital religious-logic that affectively alters an individual's engagements in the virtual. The smartphone engages the sensorimotor in a continuous manner such as listening to religious content with earphones while on the move, sitting in a digitally enhanced car, which connects with the smartphone, connections at home, office, on the drive to work that make the smartphone an extension of one's body. The church wants to be one such extension through which individuals see and live their social life. This religious content consumed by people enables them to focus on their desires, emotions, and cognitive recollections. As a participant mentioned, "I like to use the frame of reference that the church provides when viewing the world. Otherwise, I struggle to show sensitivity towards my environment and get boughed down by the pain surrounding me." (Informant 47. Personal Interview. 7 September 2017)

These mixtures of spirituality induced reality touches, moves, and mobilises individuals in the digitally lived religion. The hyper-existence makes us affected by the content that we constantly turn to on our phones. It is this digital intimacy with a smartphone and its religious content that interplays with our feelings and desires to generate bodily alterations to take us into a religious experience in our technologically embodied life.

Affective Touch

Affect in the smartphone network works through digital encounters, which has shaped our ways of embodiment, knowledge and perception. The affective state is induced by intimate associations and consciousness of others in the network, such as the perpetual contact through smartphones to religious structures. The proximity with one's religious community provides opportunities to become affectively altered through encounters with digitised religious content.

Affect as used in this article is discussed by Spinoza (2000) in his work on ethics. Spinoza's theory of affect is inclusive of material and immaterial alterations that occur in the body during its encounter (Bertelsen and Murphie, 2010). Affect itself is non-representational but it carries immediate effectivity of affect on the body (Spinoza, 2000) in its encounter with digital religious content. The church communities have multiple narratives of affective encounters and its alternations experienced by the congregation digitally, as mentioned below.

> The video that our prayer group circulated uplifted me. I was under chronic depression and couldn't get out of bed. However, once I saw the video, it moved me out of my bed and back onto the streets. I got my life back due to that circulation, and I have encouraged and even forced others to watch that video. (Informant 62. Personal Interview. 25 August 2017)

The growing appropriations of smartphones with everything we do, everywhere we go, everyone we aspire to be and even how spiritual we want to become is digitised now. Therefore, the kinesthetic-tactile experience of the touch on the smartphone shapes the experience of religious encounters. This becomes the core form of self-conception as we humans always rely on media for solving problems and for data-storage (Grossberg, 2010). The smartphone and older media technology such as a notebook is an example of this human dependency on technology that shapes ones' reality, giving insight into a mechanism for self-conception. Neurological research argues that the regular use of smartphone remaps one's brain to include the device as part of the body schema (Clark, 2004). A participant reinforced the same,

> It does not matter if I am carrying the Bible or not to a church event. However, I cannot imagine going to any service without my phone. I have highlighted parts of the Bible on it. I have saved worship music. We also share notes from our spiritual encounters. My questions, research, my personal information,

everything is at the tip of my finger. I feel that even if we are in the same room the phone connects all of us in a better spiritual manner. Now I can't imagine going to church or anywhere without my phone. (Informant 37. Personal Interview. 13 September 2017)

The incorporation of the smartphone as a body schema is a historical shift for the self-conception that forms identity. According to Clark (2007), identity has moved from being 'given' towards becoming a "task, " which requires construction to make a self-constituted identity or a selection of it from an aspirant models of identity. The representation of oneself has become heavily mediated with multiple layers of networks, which are reshaping and influencing the identity digitally (Palmer, 2012, p. 90). The ease of access to one's mind in networks, primarily religious ones, has seen an affective turn for its users. This is due to the friendly religious interface on smartphone or religious WhatsApp communities where the user is active. The emersion directly affects the user's reality due to the multimedia and multi-sensual attributes they engage with within the digital (Lange, 2004). This engagement in the digital is also understood as the aestheticising strategy of ubiquity (Laśen, 2010). The objective is to take the users into dream reveries, which are distant from the physical reality, inward and towards a pleasurable world where they have agency. The users are taken away from the limitation of physical historicity to a space where there is a certainty of past, real or digital that is safe in its engagement with the senses (Laśen, 2010).

A participant expressed that,
> Since the church has started social media groups and pages, we constantly have access to teachings and videos shared in the past. I feel that with the network and its connections I am able to feel and experience God more intimately and this helps in making right decisions for my life. (Informant 17. Personal Interview. 29 August 2017).

The smartphone's dependency in the religious practices of its users brings forth a crystallised version that is an elaboration of earlier

practices of people, which involved their senses (Bull, 2007). These spaces carry images and liturgy from the physical that generate contagious environments of affectively induced semiosis in which systemised affective priming takes place to bring forth an altered state of being (Stern, 2003). This being is constituted by stimulated encounters that present the religious content as more refined, more advanced and more accessible. The engagement in these spaces is constituted on interaction at somatic, emotional and intellectual levels (Stern, 2003). The religious content on the smartphone becomes part of the ambient intimacy with which the individual engages. It can be described as "an intimately audio, visual, sometimes haptic, 'hand' and visceral awareness, a mode of embodiment which demands the ontological coincidence of distance and closeness, presence and telepresence, actual and virtual" (Thrift, 2010, p. 56).

The role of affect in relation to the ways in which religious content interfaces functions of the phone portrays how affective encounters can be altered in the digital. Moreover, religious institutions are transforming in an attempt to capitalise on the affective relations and intensities potentially fostered on digital spaces. The body and affect have always been technological. Technologies of the body circulate affect, producing flows and forms of feeling that are religiously and socially situated. A participant found that,

> Sometimes the church shares some pictures or videos with us. I remember this one video I saw. It was about father's love. I cannot explain what happened to me but I could not stop crying for around 30 minutes and I was also having this problem with my leg. It completely disappeared after that session. I was so excited so I further shared this video and asked what this video did for them. Those who had seen it had encouraging stories to share. That video was unique and powerful. It was God working through those videos in us. (Informant 53. Personal Interview. 19 August 2017)

People subjectively experience new feeling of their bodies intermingling with technology

and its matter (Clough, 2007). These are accompanied with religious objectives in a church network. These feelings on a network expand into loops of circulation and it acts as a sticky affective glue. This glue puts together ideas, values and objects, and arranges them for collaborative experiences of affective forces in the network. The network and its response maintains a loop and gives an opportunity to increase intimacies with the digital content circulating in the community.

Conclusion
Today, the landscape of digital media is filled with affective intensities of varying speeds and lengths, from click-baits to heated Facebook exchanges, viral Twitter messages and Tinder swipes. Affect, as the capacity to relate, impress and be impressed, is creating dynamic connections between human, non-human and religious bodies. Focusing on these connections, their intensities and trajectories in the context of networked religious communications showcases that there are affective responses, loops and contagions that are digitally induced in churches. The affective use of smartphones by churches portrays how affect circulates and generates value across social media platforms.

The church is generating the affective congregation as contagious articulations of feeling that bring forth more or less a temporary sense of community, connection and spirituality. One such experience is shared by a participant.

> I come to church primarily to participate in worship, it gives me an opportunity to express the struggles that I am facing in my life, I get to confess it during the worship session. I usually end up breaking down and weeping, it not something I plan to do, but it happens to me as I feel encouraged at that time to openly express myself. I very comfortable doing it as I feel supported and connected as one body with the rest of the congregation. (Informant 43, Personal Interview. 29 September 2017)

The religious institutions believe that the digital cannot make up for the physical, as

they see digital interactions as a cold form of interaction. It is unlike face-to-face interactions, which are seen as a more desirable means of attaining religious objectives as the individual is emotionally charged in physical encounters. Despite the apprehensions expressed by the churches, the continued online presence of religious authorities can be located in their personal interest of subverting critical viewpoints against it and supporting viral content that propagate the religious institution's philosophy and ideology (Cheong, 2013). Further, the followers of this pro-authority viral content in the form of memes, videos, posts etc., foreground the church's authority and in the process, make them present in a space where they are physically absent (Brummans et al. in Cheong, 2017). Another reason for the churches' need to be digital is that the smartphone acts as an extension of the self, finding affective interactions and encounters to consume affective information with digital agency. This agency assists in connecting with others in the religious community as well as to manage the impression they make on others. Hence, the churches in India have embraced digital media, overcoming their reluctance in order to manage different groups and maintain their membership amongst the churchgoers in the online and offline spaces (Rajan, 2016). The smartphones digital architecture enables the users of religious apps to become immersed in the sacred scriptures in a hyperlinked reality so that it can affect changes in their daily practices. The use of smartphones in churches has become a norm in urban Delhi. The narratives mentioned above are reflective of how affect is central to the construction of identity and religious experience online. In this article, the church and its congregation, through their narratives, present how affect plays an important role in determining the relation between them and the social, religious environment. This article is also an expression of a technology-induced cultural shift, which is driving a new digital expression for churches in India.

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