Charismatic Technology

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In the past few decades, there has been a considerable amount of human activity focused on the interaction between technology, society, and the environment. Research on the influence of technology on society has been particularly prominent in recent years. The study of the ways in which technology impacts society and the environment has become increasingly important in recent years, as we witness the rapid development of new technologies.

The book takes an interdisciplinary approach in addressing the themes of technology and society. It explores the role of technology in shaping the world and the ways in which it interacts with society. The book also examines the ethical implications of technology and explores the ways in which technology can be used to address social and environmental challenges.

Chapter One

Chapter Title

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Marx. Thus, while Felix Guattari has argued that our engagement with machines makes possible new ways of existing, Bryan Pfaflenberger has criticized the ‘standard view’ of technology as either mechanical materiality or a body of techniques that stands in an exterior relationship to human subjectivity. The contributors in this volume take ‘technology’ to mean more than merely a set of specific techniques or machines. It is also tekhne, in the Heideggerian sense—an application of knowledge that connects us inter-subjectively with one another and with the material world, and in the process reveals to us our human essence. At the very least, tekhne involves embodiment and subjectivity in relation to our environment. Since religious practices and technological utilization are embedded within larger social and political formations, the various chapters here also seek to explore the ways in which the dynamic interaction between religion and technology articulates with wider social conditions.

Age of Technology

By describing the present era as the ‘Age of Technology’ this is not to deny the fact that technology has historically been central to all societies and cultures. One does not need to understand Marx’s views on the crucial role of the ‘forces of production’ that underpins social formation and change, or Lewis Morgan’s ‘ethnical periods’, to be aware of this. For archaeologists and anthropologists, the broad history of human evolution has been periodised in terms of technological advancements, so that we have the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, and so on. Oswald Spengler speaks of the Age of Machine Technics, and Marshall McLuhan talks about the Age of Electronic Communications superseding the Age of Gutenberg.

Without being reductionistic, the history of technology can be considered to form an important part of humanity’s cultural history. From the first tools for hunting, for making shelter and fire, to subsequent technologies of written scripts, physical violence, production, transport, trade, exploration, etc., humans have incessantly shaped their physical, social and cultural worlds. However, we must not then conclude that there is nothing qualitatively distinctive about the present epoch as compared to the past. One crucial difference is the centrality of technology to the continuing juggernaut of modern capitalist accumulation (e.g., Harvey, 1990). Modern capitalism and the concomitant consumer culture require unremitting technological innovations to improve efficiency in production and communication, as well as to constantly churn out new products for the consumer market. David Nye’s (1994) magisterial documentation of America’s enchantment with the ‘technological sublime’ goes beyond the experience of one society, to reveal a fundamental transformation of our relationship with technology in the present age.

An important scholar who provides an early reflection on our technological age is the French sociologist and legal scholar, Jacques Ellul. Like his more famous counterpart, Herbert Marcuse, Ellul wrote his seminal work, The Technological Society, at the height of the Cold War, when the threat of global nuclear annihilation provoked critical reflections on the political, economic, and sociological conditions that had allowed for the development of humanity’s technical capacity for self-destruction. While Marcuse in his One Dimensional Man (1991) focuses on technology’s important role in modern consumerism, advertising, and mass media in the creation a new type of man who is devoid of critical thought, Ellul adopts a more explicitly Hegelian approach that seeks to describe modern civilization in terms of its defining zeitgeist, and to diagnose its potential ‘dangers’. According to Ellul, the defining feature of the modern, industrial civilization is the domination of what he calls ‘technique’, of which technology or machines are a manifestation.

For Ellul, technique ‘does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining an end’, but refers to ‘a totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity’ (Ellul, 1964: xxv). Technique has come to dominate our lives through our relentless effort in improving means to achieve our goals. Ellul argues that the material/technical substratum has become so immense that humans are unable to cope with it as means, and have themselves to adapt to it. Technique hence possesses the ability to convert everything into means; and people’s practical activities, ideas, and values, under the dominance of technique, are worth pursuing insofar as they can serve as efficient means to achieve certain ends. We can appreciate this phenomenon when we consider modern societies’ emphasis on ‘performance’: from the evaluation of student performance to a country’s economic wellbeing,
CHARTERED TECHNOLOGY

The featured text discusses the concept of charismatic technology and its implications for the future of technology. It highlights the importance of charismatic technology in shaping the future of society and the role of technology in transforming society.

Key points:
- Charismatic technology is a form of innovation that is characterized by its ability to transform society.
- It is concerned with the relationship between human beings and technology, and how this interaction can shape the future of society.
- The concept of charismatic technology is important for understanding the role of technology in shaping society.

The text also includes a reference to the work of T. Amundsen, who has written extensively on the topic of charismatic technology.

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CHRISTMAS TOWN

The text at the bottom of the page discusses the concept of Christmas town and its significance in modern society.

Key points:
- Christmas town is a place where the spirit of Christmas is celebrated and maintained.
- It is characterized by the sharing of joy and goodwill among its inhabitants.
- The celebration of Christmas in Christmas town is a symbol of the universal values that underpin human society.

The text also includes a reference to the work of T. Amundsen, who has written extensively on the topic of Christmas town.

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The text on the right side of the page discusses the importance of technology in shaping society and the role of technology in transforming society.

Key points:
- Technology is a driving force in the transformation of society.
- It is important for society to understand the implications of technology and how it can be used to improve society.
- The focus of technology should be on improving the quality of life for all people.

The text also includes a reference to the work of T. Amundsen, who has written extensively on the topic of technology and society.

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The text on the bottom right side of the page discusses the concept of technology and its role in shaping society.

Key points:
- Technology is a powerful tool that can be used to improve society.
- It is important for society to understand the implications of technology and how it can be used to improve society.
- The focus of technology should be on improving the quality of life for all people.

The text also includes a reference to the work of T. Amundsen, who has written extensively on the topic of technology and society.
annihilation posed by nuclear and chemical weapons, as well as the present global environmental crisis, have all stimulated debates and critical voices about the problems caused by our pursuit of advances in military technologies and the industrial capacity to extract more resources to feed the consumption mill. However, the hold of charismatic technology entails the belief that the solutions to our social, economic, health, and environmental problems, are themselves technical ones.

In the recent annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a number of eminent scholars and industrialists were invited to discuss the technological challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. Among the fourteen challenges identified were the securing of cyberspace, improving urban infrastructures, making solar energy affordable, and the reverse engineering of the brain—all challenges related to improving the quality of human life. Much buzz was generated in the international media when Ray Kurzweil, the futurist, predicted in the meeting that machines could attain human-level intelligence in about twenty years time. Kurzweil also talked about the implantation of ‘nanobots’ into human brains to enhance intelligence, and called ours a ‘human-machine’ civilization. For those under the thrill of charismatic technology, predictions such as Kurzweil’s are welcome news indeed. And this enthusiasm is supported by global news media that play their part in the celebration of ‘high-tech’ by reporting the latest innovations that seem to push the boundaries of science and the potential utilization of new technologies for enhancing our material and bodily well-being. Recent developments in Internet technology, with its potential to allow the whole world to be ‘wired up’ into an Electric Gaia (Bauwens, 1996), have motivated those who wish to see the convergence of technology and spirituality to talk of the Internet as a spiritual space that engenders a united consciousness of humanity. Cyberspace is thus seen as facilitating humanity’s spiritual progress (Davis, 1998; Cobb, 1998).

The development and societal-wide adoption of new technologies are often the result of regulating and deliberate policy-making (Palmer, 1994; Lim, 2005). The media play their part as well in the celebration of technology and its popular dissemination. The national broadsheet of Singapore, the Straits Times, has a weekly supplement called ‘Digital Life’ which showcases the latest technological gadgets in the market. In this respect, the Straits Times is not unique among the news media. The Economist, whose primary journalistic concerns are economic and political, has its very own ‘Technology Quarterly’, while the BBC

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1 For a classic discussion of how technological artefacts can be considered agents—or ‘actants’—in their own right, see Bruno Latour’s seminal essay, Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts.
The Hype Around Social Networking: Why Social Networking Sites are Suddenly So Popular

Social networking sites have become incredibly popular in recent years. With millions of users worldwide, these sites offer a unique platform for people to connect, share information, and express themselves. However, despite their immense popularity, the true impact of social networking sites on society is still not fully understood.

The Explosion of Social Networking Sites

In just a few short years, social networking sites have transformed the way people interact with each other. These sites have given rise to a new form of communication, allowing users to connect with friends, family, and even strangers from around the world. As more people join these sites, the number of connections grows exponentially, creating a vast network of relationships.

The Benefits of Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites offer a range of benefits, including:

1. Connecting with friends and family:
   - Social networking sites provide a platform for people to keep in touch with friends and family members who live far away.
   - These sites allow users to share photos, videos, and other updates, keeping everyone informed about their lives.

2. Sharing information:
   - Social networking sites are great for sharing news, articles, and other information.
   - Users can easily share links to interesting articles, videos, and other content with their friends and followers.

3. Expressing themselves:
   - Social networking sites provide a space for users to express themselves creatively.
   - Users can share their thoughts, opinions, and even create their own content, such as blogs, videos, and photos.

4. Meeting new people:
   - Social networking sites are a great way to meet new people with similar interests.
   - Users can join groups, attend events, and connect with others who share their passions.

The Challenges of Social Networking Sites

While social networking sites offer many benefits, they also present several challenges:

1. Privacy concerns:
   - One of the biggest concerns with social networking sites is user privacy.
   - Users must be careful about what information they share on these sites, as it can be used by others.

2. Cyberbullying:
   - Social networking sites can be fertile ground for cyberbullying.
   - Users must be aware of the potential risks and take steps to protect themselves.

3. Addiction:
   - Social networking sites can be addictive, leading to a decrease in productivity and an increase in stress.
   - Users must learn to balance their online and offline lives.

4. misinformation:
   - Social networking sites can spread misinformation, leading to the spread of false information.
   - Users must be careful about what they believe and share.

Conclusion

Social networking sites have revolutionized the way people interact with each other. While these sites offer many benefits, they also present several challenges. As technology continues to evolve, it will be important for users to remain aware of the potential risks and benefits of social networking sites and to use these sites responsibly.

Further Reading

1. Facebook: The Power of Sharing
2. Twitter: The Art of Communication
3. Instagram: The Visual Storytelling
4. LinkedIn: The Professional Network
parlance, a 'standing-reserve' ready to be 'challenged-forth' to serve the needs of mankind.

Sevilla argues that, in the Age of Technology, not only is the world a standing-reserve; but that increasingly people tend to see God as standing-reserve as well. This is most clearly seen in the rise of the prosperity theology that inspires religious movements such as the El Shaddai. Founded in the Philippines by Brother Mariano Verlade, this Catholic charismatic movement with branches in more than 35 countries preaches that if one were to live a life of intense piety and to offer regular sacrifices to God (in practice this usually means financial donation to the organization), one would reap an abundance of both spiritual and material blessings (Coleman, 2000). For Sevilla, the central message of El Shaddai reveals its affinity with the technological age and modern-day consumerism — by establishing a transactional relationship with God, believers seek to constantly 'challenge' God to impart blessings. However, there is a dialectical twist at the end of Sevilla's chapter, much like in Heidegger's essay on technology, pointing to a possibility of pulling back from a techno-religious dystopia.

Developmental Asia

The specific ways in which technology takes on a charismatic aura is shaped by history, politics and place. The modern nation-state — as the preeminent political and social form of organization that caters to the functioning of global capitalism — is intensely engaged in the ideological and practical pursuit of economic growth as an important social goal, one that is to be achieved through harnessing the transformative powers of technology. The ideological practice of 'progress' for a secular state is intimately tied to technological advancements. For many countries in Asia the emphasis on technological progress articulates with the history of colonialism/imperialism and the ideological practice of modernization. More than two centuries of Western global dominance through colonialism and imperialism prompted those involved in the nationalist and anti-imperialist struggle in Asia and elsewhere to reflect upon the possible reasons behind Western economic and military superiority. One significant factor that was commonly acknowledged was the technological prowess of the West, which was given a boost in the post-

Enlightenment dominance of scientific rationality in certain European societies such as France, England, Scotland, and the Netherlands.

For many Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century reflecting on the series of 'humiliations' that their country had suffered under the hands of the Western powers (such as the defeat in the Opium Wars, the forced opening of treaty ports, and the ceding of territories), there were two important factors behind the superiority of Western powers: First, their democratic political systems; and second, their technological supremacy through the development of scientific rationality. In China, these two factors were personified in popular literature as 'Mr. Saf' ('Mr Science') and 'Mr. De' ('Mr Democracy'). A common refrain among many Chinese reformers at those heydays of imperialism was the need to acquire 'Western learning' (especially science and technology) for its alleged 'usefulness', while holding on to essential Chinese cultural elements. In socialist China, science and the pursuit of rapid technological progress to address the country's economic, social and geopolitical goals would attain new heights, but with tragic consequences in the form of the 'Great Leap Forward'.

In other parts of Asia, many of the first generation of political elites of newly independent countries had the chance to study, live and work in the metropolitan centres of the imperial powers, and to see for themselves the impact of technological progress (both positive and negative) on Western societies: Lee Kuan Yew and Jawaharlal Nehru in England, Sukarno in the Netherlands, Ho Chi Minh and a number of leaders of the Chinese Communist Party in Paris, and so on. In the throes of independence, many of the new nation-states set developmental goals, and embarked on programmes of modernization to 'catch up' with the West. In this era of 'Five-Year Plans', the attainment of developmental goals was as much to achieve economic and political parity with the West, as for the local political leaderships to legitimize their authority by providing material wellbeing to their citizens.

An important factor was technology. In such 'developmental' states (e.g. Henderson and Applebaum, 1992; Johnson, 1999), modernization and material progress was underpinned by the development of an advanced technological base through the skills and knowledge transfers of foreign direct investment (FDI), and through the establishment of an education system emphasising science and technology that would produce the necessary work force to contribute towards the country's
By applying the lessons of past and present, the vision of technological advancement is now a reality. The impact of technology on our lives is profound, changing the way we work, live, and interact. The evolution of information technology has not only disrupted traditional industries but also created new ones. The interplay between technology and society is complex and constantly evolving.

The integration of technology in education is a significant trend. The rise of e-learning platforms has transformed the way students access and process information. This has led to increased flexibility and accessibility in education. However, these advancements also raise concerns about the potential of technology to widen the gap between the haves and have-nots in terms of educational opportunities.

In recent years, the development of artificial intelligence (AI) has fueled discussions about the future of work. While AI is expected to revolutionize many industries, concerns about job displacement and the ethical implications of AI are also prevalent. The challenge for policymakers is to ensure that technological progress is inclusive and benefits all segments of society.

Technological advancement is not just about innovation; it is also about addressing global challenges. From climate change to healthcare, technology offers solutions that can make a significant impact. However, the equitable distribution of these benefits requires careful planning and prioritization.

In conclusion, the impact of technology is profound and multifaceted. As we continue to integrate technology into our daily lives, it is crucial to approach this development with careful consideration of its implications. The future of technology is exciting, but it is also a responsibility we all share.

REFERENCES:

a strong nation was to be achieved partly through the effective fusion of religion and technology in order to attain an economic modernity with a strong moral ballast.

The fall of the Suharto regime augured in a period known as ‘Reformasi’, characterized by great fluctuations in the socio-political spheres and the dominance of the neo-liberal economic paradigm. The unleashing of market forces in the political economy of the country saw the intensification of competition for resources not only between business enterprises, but also between civil society organizations that include religious groups. In this period of tremendous change, the previous passionate debate over the type of modernity that Indonesia should strive for continued unabated. Rudnyckyj’s chapter, Powerpointing Islam, examines how the rapid transformations in the social and economic realms have provoked intense ethical reflections in Indonesian society. The economic globalization of Indonesia was undergoing was considered by his informants—corporate managers, factory employees and spiritual reformers—as a religious problem.

Here again, Islam is the key; but an Islam that is spread through means that reflect its compatibility with ‘modernity’. Rudnyckyj investigates the ways in which the pursuit of a technologically advanced and Islamic modernity is personified in a particular group of ‘trainers’ and spiritual reformers, whose main business is to skillfully combine high tech, religion and entrepreneurship to impart Islamic morality to workers. In terms of our discussion of charismatic technology, the success of the trainer extraordinaire, Ary Gihanjar, the creator of a training company called Emotional and Spiritual Quotient (ESQ), can be seen to be as much founded upon his business acumen as his personal charisma augmented by charismatic technology. The very idea that there can be a quotient that measures the level of spirituality, similar to those that measure intelligence and emotion, and the popularity of courses like the ESQ, reflects how deeply the ideology of technique has seeped into religious spheres.

Mediating Piety

The above discussion brings us to the pertinent issue of how new modes of religious practice have evolved in tandem with the current saturation of technology in our lives, particularly the aspect of technology as a form of mediation. This issue forms the analytic focus of Nathan Cruz’s chapter, A Spectacle of Worship, which deals with the religious practices of the megachurches. Methodologically, Cruz takes the cue from Weber’s famous thesis on the Protestant ethic’s articulation with the spirit of capitalism, but looking at the reverse process: ‘the process through which the underlying rationality that drives technology, modernity, and the spirit of late capitalism...contributes to the shaping of the religious culture and organization of the megachurch...’. Rather than exploring the way that religious values shape economic behaviour, Cruz wants to examine how the broader ideological context and pursuit of modernity impinge upon religious practices.

Peter Beyer, drawing on the work of Niklaus Luhmann, has argued that modern society is partly characterized by increasing functional differentiation (an echo of Durkheim here), and that the secularization process entails the ‘slots’ of religion into its proper, privatized sphere, with the public sphere off-limits to it. This relates to the notion that the public sphere is an arena comprised of the exercise of Reason, in which the non-rational religious dogmas would have no part. For Beyer, one problematic relationship for religion and modern society is thus the tension between the ideological practice of secular modernity in delineating the proper role of religion in society, and the refusal of a significant number of religious followers to accept a form of modernity where religion has no place in public life. This tension is also attested to in the chapters on Indonesia by Amir and Rudnyckyj.

For Cruz, the global rise of the megachurches represents another way in which religion, in this case Charismatic Protestant Christianity, seeks to break out of its societal confines by appropriating the economic and technological rationalities that are among the key constituting features of late capitalism. One distinguishing and vital religious practice of the Charismatic movement—of which the megachurch phenomenon is a part—is the ‘praise and worship’ session where the latest multimedia and entertainment technologies are often utilized to induce a highly affective mode of religiosity. This religious mode, Cruz shows, is both performance- and experientially-oriented: not only do worshippers ‘perform’ in accordance with certain set scripts, they are supposed to feel an intensely personal, emotionally-charged relationship with the divine, in this case, Jesus Christ. Cruz terms this mode of religiosity, ‘techno-spirituality’. He argues that in techno-spirituality, technology functions as ‘the common ground of signification’ upon which a linkage between the church and the modern society can be established. Here, one important function of technology is to mediate between the
New Media, Religion, and Discourse Community

The relationship between the form of religion and the form of technology was a central focus of the 1990s, and continues to a greater extent in the 2000s. In this essay, I will discuss the impact of new media on the religious discourse of the early 21st century. The essay examines the ways in which new media technologies have transformed the religious landscape, and the ways in which they have been appropriated by religious communities. I will argue that new media have played a significant role in shaping the religious landscape of the 21st century, and that they have done so by providing new forms of expression and new ways of relating to one another. The essay also explores the ways in which new media technologies have been used by religious communities to engage with the public sphere, and the ways in which they have been used to challenge and resist dominant religious discourses. I will argue that new media technologies have provided new possibilities for religious communities to express their beliefs, and that they have done so in ways that are both innovative and challenging. The essay concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for the future of religion and new media.
political leadership has been concerned with the maintenance of racial and religious harmony as one of the main aims of governance. The Singapore government has adopted several measures in its effort to achieve that goal. For example, the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, the discourse of multiculturalism as the basis for a stable and well-functioning society, the designation of several religious festivals as public holidays, legal provisions for the prosecution of individuals or groups whose actions are deemed religiously and racially offensive, and the tight control of the mass media to delineate the legitimate forms of religious discourse in the public realm. In Singapore, therefore, historical experience and political governance have thus profoundly shaped the practice and discourse of religion. With the emergence of the 'new media', Chee and Chen want to investigate the ways in which the Internet alters religious discourse from the users' perspective.

The sensitivity of religious discourse in Singapore has influenced the ways the state-controlled media portray and discuss religious issues. Many informants in the authors' study expressed the view that the mainstream media tend to avoid sensitive issues and present 'stereotypical', one-sided views of various religions. They also noted a general lack of debate on religious issues in the press and on TV. This situation has prompted believers, non-believers, or seekers of information on religion to turn to the Internet to seek out information or discussions which are not available in the mainstream media. Religious debates held in Internet forums allow informants to contribute their views on their religion and to correct perceived misconceptions. This brings us to the issue of agency and authority: because of the nature of the medium, participants in religious discussions on the Internet often feel that they are able to espouse their views freely on the Internet and engage in debates, thus feeling that they are able to exercise their agency. As O'Leary puts it, 'in computer networks the global village has found its public square' (1996: 786). This also relates to one of the main points in Bryan Turner's chapter, that the new media technology can result in undermining traditional forms of religious authority as it is beyond the latter's control. Chee and Chen found that their informants are attracted to the Internet precisely for its 'democratic' feature that allows for the exercise of agency and individual control.

We can, however, have a rather different or nuanced understanding of this sense of 'freedom' on the Internet if we investigate the other side of the interactions, i.e. the providers of religious information on the Internet. This is the main focus of Jayeel Cornelio's chapter, The New FACE OF GLOBAL EVANGELISM: VIRTUALIZATION OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. It analyses how Christian evangelism is conducted in cyberspace through an in-depth study of TruthMedia, the Internet ministry of the Campus Crusade for Christ.

Cornelio shows that the previous missionary endeavour of physically reaching a place to convert the local people is increasing supplemented with missionary work in cyberspace—what he calls the 'new face of global evangelism'. If one gets the impression that the cyberspace is 'chaotic', that individuals enjoy freedom in their search of information and experience, and that the Internet allows for the 'democratization' of religion, this chapter shows how that impression has to be qualified. Online evangelical organizations such as the TruthMedia constantly seek to 'tame' the Internet by offering a highly systematic approach to gospel-sharing and community formation. In contrast to the informants' impression of freedom and democracy as expressed by many informants in Chee and Chen's study, in Cornelio's chapter we see how users or seekers are carefully guided by the online providers of religious information with the aim of forming stable relationships between the two parties.

In order to successfully utilise the Internet for global evangelism, a few basic criteria should be met. First, the particular website must contain attractive graphics and be easy to navigate in order to capture the attention of seekers. Multimedia tools such as sound and moving images are deemed essential. For TruthMedia, such strategies are employed to channel seekers to establish a dialogue with one of its many volunteers working in different capacities, so as to provide a 'personal touch'. To progress from the initial contact to a more stable pattern of interaction, it is essential to de-emphasize the differences between the volunteers and the seekers and to focus on the common purpose. At the same time, the volunteers must respond to seekers from diverse background in a culturally-sensitive way. Ultimately, the seekers are drawn into to participate in online Christian practices of discipleship, mentorship, prayer and Bible study within a Christian community. By examining the ways in which information is provided and seekers guided, Cornelio's study shows that in the new global online evangelism, there is a systematic method of control behind the apparent sense of freedom.

As the two chapters discussed above indicate, the interactivity that the Internet provides for its users can facilitate the formation of online religious communities where members share information, hold debates, provide mutual support, plan activities, etc., (Brasher, 2001; Bunt, 2000).
transmission society and the media, sociologist Ithiel de Sola Pool has shown that the practice of their profession has been transformed by the introduction of their profession has been transformed by the introduction of the web. Pool (1997) notes that the Web has become a central tool for social scientists, allowing them to share their research and collaborate with others. The Web has also become a platform for social scientists to engage with the public, sharing their research and insights with a wider audience.

Pool's work highlights the ways in which the Web has changed the practice of social science. He notes that the Web has provided social scientists with new tools for data collection and analysis, allowing them to conduct research in ways that were not possible before. The Web has also provided a platform for social scientists to share their research with a wider audience, and to engage with the public in ways that were not possible before.

Pool's work is important because it reminds us of the power of the Web to transform the practice of social science. It also highlights the ways in which social scientists are adapting to these changes, and the ways in which they are using the Web to advance their research and engage with the public. This is a trend that is likely to continue in the future, as the Web becomes an even more powerful tool for social science.

Given the importance of communication, it is clear that social scientists need to be trained in the use of technological tools and platforms to facilitate their work. This is a challenge that requires the development of new curricula and training programs that can help social scientists to stay up-to-date with the latest technologies and to effectively use them in their work.
claim of cyberspace as their sacred space is as much indicative of the
religion’s social position as their innovative approach to exploit the
new media technology to their advantage.

In contrast, currently most practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism,
according to Low’s study, do not consider cyberspace as a sacred space.
Mainstream opinions tend to regard Buddhism much more positively
than Technopaganism; Buddhism’s status is further entrenched by its
being discursively linked to the notion of ‘world religions’. In addition,
the much longer history of Buddhism has witnessed the centralization
of religious authority in the form of the clergy that defines the doctrinal
and ritual orthodoxy in each of the different Buddhist schools. For
the Tibetan Buddhists, a site must fulfil at least two conditions to be a
rendered a sacred space: it either serves as an abode to a deity or deities
(and is, hence, imbued with spiritual power), or it has been blessed by
a powerful and distinguished lama. These conditions are not met with
regards to Tibetan Buddhism online: the various Tibetan Buddhist
websites are neither blessed nor seen by practitioners as sacred sites
once they are left as web pages in cyberspace. The question remains
whether further advancements in Internet and multimedia technologies
might result in changes in the views of ‘Tibetan Buddhists’ of cyberspace
being sacred. For example, if advancements in the field of ‘virtual reality’
allow for the replication of all our vital senses—especially smell and
touch—might we one day witness the receiving of empowerment online,
or the blessing of the cyberspace by lamas using ‘virtual’ fumigation?

Concluding Remarks: Technology and Religion—Dialogue in
Mediation and Transcendence

From the studies presented in this volume and the discussion above,
we can see that there are at least two areas where technology and
religion can hold a meaningful dialogue, whilst often being in tension
with each other. These areas comprise matters relating to mediation
and transcendence.

Communication technologies such as the printing press, the radio,
television, and the Internet allows for the transcendence of geographical,
social and political boundaries in order to mediate the interactions
between different religious communities. I have proposed that the concept
of ‘charismatic technology’ can help us analyse the ways in which
an affinity can be found between technology and religion, and this is
seen in the area of mediation. In this volume, for example, we have
seen radio as the technology mediating the evangelistic community of
the FEBC and the Hmong in Vietnam, resulting in the latter’s mass
conversion. This was possible partly because of what the radio, as a
 technological artefact, signified to the Hmong: a symbol of ‘modernity’
that many in the community wished to pursue. In the phenomenon
of the megachurch, we see charismatic technology augmenting a form of
‘techno-spirituality’ that allows the megachurch to break out of the con-
fines that a secular-modernist society imposes on it. From the insights
of thinkers such as Marx and Heidegger, technology, in the sense of
technē, is itself a medium by which humans interact with the world
to gain self-understanding and, at the same time, to understand the
world. In other words, technology conjoins the self and the world in a
dialectical wholeness contrary to the dualism introduced by Cartesian
metaphysics. In this perspective, we can thus note the ‘deep affinity’
between technology and religion, for religion can also be conceptualized
as a medium, between the self and other selves, between the self and
the divine, and between the self, this world, and other world(s).

However, the act of mediation can at the same time be an act of trans-
cendence. Technology grants us the ability to transcend limits—be they
physiological, physical, social, political, or cultural. The transcendental
 feature of technology is essentially also transformational, of the self, of
social relations, and of the world. Religion involves the transcendence
of spiritual inadequacies, sin, defilement, and other human faults to
attain goals such as perfection in grace, everlasting life, nirvana, or
enlightenment. An important insight that can be gleaned from the
chapters in this volume is that the pursuit and goals of transcendence
in technology and religion can either converge or diverge from one
another, rather than there being a simple case of ‘techno-secularism’
increasingly displacing religion from both private and public life.
In nationalism, we see that they can converge in countries such as
Indonesia, where technology and Islam are conjoined in the pursuit
of nationalististic aims. Religion and technology can also come together
when the latter functions in its instrumental mode to aid religion in
its promulgation, as well as through the creation of both online and
offline communities. The potentially conflicting relationship between
technology and religion surfaces when the goals of transcendence of
one diverge from the other: when technology is seen as ‘playing God’
in blurring the boundaries between what is ‘natural’ (hence divinely
created) and artificial; and when religious mores and dogmas inhibit
REFERENCES

CHARACTERISTIC TECHNOLOGIES

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