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Religious Apps for Smartphones and Tablets:

Transforming Religious Authority and the Nature of Religion

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Abstract

This article focuses on the intricate and close relationship between religion and technology. It examines the use of religious applications (often referred to as "apps") for smartphones and tablets. Apps are computer programs that are either free or available for purchase from places like the Apple iTunes store. Smartphones and tablets are easy and convenient ways to access information on the Internet and to connect to other users around the world. Religion has not been excluded from the coming of these new types of technology. There are hundreds of religious apps focused different faiths available. This article recounts the experiences of Christian and Muslim university students living near Washington, D.C. who self-report using religious apps on a regular basis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews between 2014 and 2016. Using their experiences, we argue that religious apps are changing how religious authority is defined and are altering who is considered to be a religious leader according to our participants. We suggest that because of the portability of smartphones and tablets, the nature of religion has shifted from being located primarily in the public (i.e., institutions) to the more private spaces of their everyday lives. Moreover, given our sample, we also try to show how these students make sense of religions in a neoliberal age of media.

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New technologies are emerging all the time and many of us utilize multiple different types of technology every day—from surfing the Internet on a laptop computer to listening to music on a smartphone to checking our email on a tablet. Smartphones "have become the fastest-selling gadgets in history, outstripping the growth of the simple mobile phones that preceded them. They outsell personal computers four to one" ('Planet of the Phones' 2015). The beginning of "smartphones came in January 2007, when Steve Jobs, Apple's chief executive, in front of a rapt audience of Apple acolytes, brandished a slab of plastic, metal and silicon not much bigger than a Kit Kat. 'This will change everything' he promised" ('Planet of the Phones' 2015). Indeed after just a short eight years, it is estimated that fifty percent of the global adult population owns a smartphone. This number is projected to increase to eighty percent by 2020 ('Planet of the Phones' 2015). Moreover, the adoption of tablets, such as the iPad, has also increased dramatically in recent years—even faster than smartphones. In 2009 it was estimated that three percent of the global population had some type of tablet and this number had increased to six percent in 2013 (Heggestuen 2013).

Smartphones and tablets are convenient ways to access the Internet and information and to become connected to other users from across the globe. It seems "the transformable power of smartphones comes from their size and connectivity. Size makes them the first truly personal computers" ('Planet of the Phones' 2015). A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2013 showed that fifty percent of American smartphone owners use them to download different apps, eighty-one percent use their phones to send or receive text messages, and sixty percent use theirs to access the Internet. Younger adults tend to use smartphones more often than older adults. A 2014 survey in Great Britain showed that those between sixteen and twenty-four years old use their smartphones for roughly four hours per day, but those between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-four use theirs for only two hours per day ('Planet of the Phones' 2015). Smartphones and tablets have changed the way that their users engage with the world, each other, and technology in general; they have altered the ways that users create meanings in their everyday lives and their own identities.

One domain that has been impacted by the increased use of smartphones and tablets is religion. Mattijs van de Port points out that the "religious imagination has become entangled with the expressive and communicative possibilities of new media technologies" (2006:33) in his ethnographic work on Candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian spirit-possession cult. Like van de Port observes, many world religions "have embraced digitization—in the form of apps, social networks, and day-to-day practices…it's all part of the broader 'digital shift'—in this case, a paradox between age-old practices and 21st century adaptations" (Larson 2013). Scholars of religion and new media argue that there is a need to constantly adapt religious practices to the digital age in order for religion to remain relevant in people's lives (Bunt 2003, Cheong et al. 2012). The anthropological study of religion today is "undergoing what might be remembered in a generation's time as 'the media turn'" (Engelke 2010:371). Heidi Campbell argues, "In an era marked by social media we see that religious self-expression and representation has become an accepted part of religious identity and practice…So as new media have become infused into our daily patterns, technology helps extend our abilities to integrate spirituality into our everyday lives in new ways" (2012:10). Smartphones and tablets are portable and many users take them wherever they go. Integrating such devices into religious practice, through the use of apps or websites for instance, can allow faith to be a central part of practitioners' daily lives.

BACKGROUND

I (first author) first became interested in the use of religious applications—often referred to as just "apps" (as will be done in this article)—for smartphones and tablets after conducting an interview with an Imam from a mosque in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area for a research study on Muslims' diverse experiences during serious illness and the end-of-life within the U.S. health care system. Apps are downloaded to your smartphone or tablet and allow you to carry out a set of specific tasks. There are various kinds of apps, such as those for shopping, entertainment, sports, particular establishments, and online services.[1] During our conversation he brought out his iPad on different occasions to show me an app for the Qur'an. The app translates verses from the Qur'an from Arabic to English (and other languages), reads aloud the verses in Arabic, and provides guidance on how to interpret them. This type of app is important for many who attend the mosque because Arabic is not their first language and they are unable to read the Qur'an without translation. The recitation in Arabic can help them learn the language in which Allah revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Mohammed.[2] I was struck by how much the Imam referenced his iPad to find verses and play them aloud for me. I was taken back by how easily he had integrated this app into his faith practices. The Imam invited me to the mosque. I went to attend *tafsir* one Friday evening after *maghrib* (sunset) prayer.[3] As I was waiting for it to begin I spoke to a woman originally from Sub-Saharan Africa. During our conversation she took out her smartphone to show me an app she uses that includes a compass so she knows is facing Mecca during prayer and also prayer times that are updated every day depending on her location. (The app will use her phone's GPS.)

After my experience in the interview and at the mosque, I then started to become more aware of how well individuals around me in my everyday life have integrated smartphones and tablets into their faith practices. At a women's group at the Methodist church I attend with my family in northern Virginia, I realized that oftentimes the members would mention an app they use regularly for their faith. Some women have apps that can easily search through the Bible and provide study notes and context to the verses. Others have apps that send them daily devotionals (usually a first-person story paired with a Bible verse to provide a particular message or lesson), a Bible verse to memorize each day or week, or inspirational messages to help them get through the day. Many women would keep their smartphones or tablets next to them to reference websites or use apps during the s meeting. In 2014 when I first told the group about my idea for a research study on the use of religious apps, many of the women shared that they use a variety of Christian apps every day—at home, at work, or while on the go—and mentioned the ease at which these apps help them lead the religious life that they want. It is no longer just about attending church on Sunday or this group, but it is also about how they can integrate Christianity into every day of the week and therefore change their outlooks and ways of life.

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[1]   Apps are particular computer programs. Some are free and some must be purchased. Some of the apps that must be purchased will allow users to download a free version that may not contain all the features. They help the device perform more than was built into it. There are over a half-million apps for the Apple iPhone spanning a wide variety of content (shopping, entertainment, sports, etc.) and there could be even more if you count other kinds of phones that have their own types of apps (Android and Windows for instance).

[2]   "We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so you people may understand" (Qur'an 12:2).

[3]   *Tafsir* is the presentation of commentaries on the Holy Qur'an and an interpretation of the text. Traditionally it is an exegesis of the Qur'an. The Imam at the mosque in the D.C. area led the *tafsir* I attended.

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE USE OF RELIGIOUS APPS

New forms of technology have become a major focus of much scholarship in the social sciences, and in particular anthropology (e.g., Boellstorff 2009; Fader 2013). There have been many calls for scholars to address "the arrival of new technologies of communication as an object of study" (Axel 2006:354). Given the discipline's attention to human experience and relationships as well as its holistic approach to research, anthropology is often considered to be "uniquely suited for the study of socioculturally situated online communication within a rapidly changing context" (Wilson and Peterson 2002:450 quoted in Axel 2006:354).

The present article explores the use of religious apps for smartphones and tablets—a burgeoning area of study given the number of apps available and the increasing number of users. In their study, Heidi Campbell et al. (2014) collected information on 488 religious apps from the iTunes store, but searching for such apps may prove difficult because religion is not one of the major categories to choose from. We examine data collected through a qualitative study of religious app users who are university students in the greater Washington, D.C. area. The primary objective of the study is to interrogate the role that technology plays in religion with particular attention to how apps aid users in developing, learning about, or living out their faith in everyday life. The study also aims to investigate how these apps have become integral to individuals' religious practices and have altered the ways that they actually practice their faith.

We will further detail findings that have developed out of the qualitative data we conducted between 2014 and 2016. The first is that the use of religious apps has caused users we interviewed to re-consider what and who counts as religious authority. We discovered that a theme present in almost all of our interviews was how religious apps have replaced more traditional religious leaders in our participants' lives. Now they more often than not look to apps for guidance rather than to someone at a religious institution or to a family member or friend who they previously viewed as a religious authority. The second finding concerns the fact that participants stated (directly and indirectly) religious apps have made religion a much more private experiences for them than it was in the past. They are becoming more personally, or individually, connected to religion through their apps rather than looking to authority figures or others. With the use of apps it becomes less about the religious community they belong to or identify with or the actual relationships with others who share their faith, but rather, it is more about how religion can be integrated into daily life without the need to consult with other individuals or go to a place of worship.

In bringing together these two findings we argue that apps have made religion much more individualistic for the users in our research and less of a community experience. This is significant to studies of technology and religion because many scholars in both areas emphasize how they can create connections and communities among individuals who may not have been linked due to cultural, economic, or geographical barriers. For example, Victoria Bernal (2005) explores the use of the website Dehai among the Eritrean diaspora. She writes, "Eritreans on Dehai are writing in the margins and experimenting with political freedoms and a new kind of transnational political community in ways that might suggest new forms of citizenship, democracy, and the public sphere emerging out of the new technologies and the heightened mobility of the 21st century" (2005:672). Bernal emphasizes the creation of new Eritrean communities online that bring together those who are geographically separated from their homeland, but connected to its political activities through the website. She draws on Benedict Anderson's (1983) "imagined communities" and argues her study shows "that new media…[is] altering the lived experience of citizenship, community, and nationalism as well as the ways in which these can be collectively imagined" (2005:661). Our argument is ultimately linked to the fact that smartphones and tablets are small and portable; they can be taken and used just about anywhere. It has become much easier for us to just look at a device in our hand rather than seek out a person to talk "offline." The portability of these devices allows them to be used in various public and private spaces.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What is striking is that the use of smartphones and tablets is disrupting the commonly held idea that religion is a form of community building and is to be experienced in relation with other individuals who share the same faith or even with those from across faiths. Sadia Kidwai, et al. writes, "spiritual life" may be "central to the formation and maintain of strong and effective cross-community relationships" (2014:10). In a similar vein, in his study of religion in Southern Asia, Christopher Candland examines how faith can be social capital, "Social capital arises in a variety of manners—as a response to the perception of a common threat, as feelings of duty, respect, and loyalty, or as norms of solidarity or service. Given the affective character of many of these social bonds, it is somewhat surprising that little attention has been devoted to faith as a basis for social capital formation" (2014:355). Candland analyzes how "the establishment of state religion may be the basis for binding people together in Asia" (2014:356). In these cases, religion facilitates relationships between diverse individuals and is a way to unite people in community who may otherwise not be brought together.

Anthropologist Victor Turner (1967) is well known for his work on community formation through religion and ritual. He draws on the concept of *communitas* to describe "a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions" (1967:100). Since Turner, anthropologists have applied *communitas* in different ways—such as being taken to resemble fellowship or referring to 'an embodied experience' that is often found in worship and religious rituals (Lewis 2008 cited in Bigger 2009). Religious experiences can build a community and form bonds between people. There is an intense feeling of connection between members that arises during religious experiences and rituals. But, our research shows that the use of religious apps causes the opposite to occur given they do not encourage them to look to their fellow faith practitioners for community or to seek others out for religious guidance (whether at a place of worship or elsewhere). Rather, they provide this information for them right in the palms of the users' hands. This is somewhat ironic given that we often hear the coming of new technologies like smartphones and tablets—technologies able to connect users to the Internet—will encourage us to become more connected with our families, friends, local communities, and even the world.

Several participants noted the importance of being able to use religious apps anywhere they choose. Places mentioned in interviews include their cars, their rooms, and at their desks in class. Many stated they use the apps much more often then going to a place of worship or participating in some other religious activity, such as a Bible study on campus. Religion has both "private and public qualities" (Cochran 1990: ix), meaning that it operates in the public sphere as well as private life. Clarke Cochran writes, "Because religion manifests itself in character, narratives, and institutions, it intersections the conventional distinction between private and public life. More precisely, religious suffuses private life, yet itself is a public thing" (1990:ix). Anthropology has shown that religion traverses the boundaries between the public and private, thus demonstrating that it may not be a binary or an either or, but rather, the borders between the domains are fluid. Suzanne Brenner (2011) masterfully demonstrates this in her work on Islam, gender, and sexuality in Indonesia. She observes, "In recent decades, the Indonesian public sphere has been transformed by a confluence of religious, social, and political movements that initially emerged under the rule of a repressive regime...As a result, the influence of global Islam became increasingly visible in both public and private realms" (2011:478). Likewise in her research on Islamic education in Jordan, Fida Adely (2012) emphasizes that religion permeates both the home lives of girls and the public as instructors and students at public schools teach them what it means to live piously as Muslim women.

In this article we synthesize work on technology and the public/private nature of religion. We also draw on the literature that shows how technology and media allow religion to be brought into people's daily lives (Meyer 2004, Schulz 2006). This is contrary to religion being practiced purely within institutional settings, such as a church, synagogue, or mosque. Religious apps further demonstrate a complicated and blurred boundary between the private and public. Here when we use the terms private and public, we are using them within the context of the faith community and the bonds and networks that religion can facilitate. Susan Gal reminds us, "public and private are relative and indexical linked terms. They are 'dependent for part of their referential meaning on the interactional context in which they are used'" (2002:80 quoted in Engelke 2012:159). Like other anthropologists, we approach the private and public as constructed domains whose definitions have been shaped by social and historical dynamics. We follow the ways our participants described the spaces in which they utilize religious apps in that we use the term "public" to reference more institutional settings linked with religion, as compared to the more private spaces of their lives, which were typically not associated with their faith. We show that apps are further complicating the boundaries between the public and private, the individual and community, within religions.

RESEARCH METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

Our research consists of conducting semi-structured interviews with participants and asking them to use or describe the religious apps on their smartphones or tablets so that we can have a better sense of how they work. Data for this article are drawn from thirteen interviews conducted between 2014 and 2016.[4] All interviews took place at George Mason University. All but one of the interviews was conducted with current students. (To reduce repetition we will use "Mason" in the article.) Mason is located in Fairfax County, Virginia. It is the largest public research university in the state. Participants were recruited in two main ways: announcements about the study were made in introductory anthropology courses and flyers were posted in high traffic areas on campus. It was decided that only those who identify as three major Abrahamic faiths would be included in this study: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. This was because Mason was "named one of the most diverse public universities in the country by U.S. News & Word Report, we serve students of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds. In fact, we enroll nearly 34,000 students from 130 countries and all 50 states,"[5] and we would be unable to recruit all faiths represented on campus fully. This study could certainly be expanded in the future.

We opened the study to anyone who wanted to participate who was over 18, identified as one of the faiths listed above, and used religious apps on a semi-regular basis. All but one participant identified as female. The sole male is faculty and was the only participant outside of the age range of 18 to 24. We do not use participants' real names and we only give enough background information about our participants to provide context. All participants agreed to have their interviews recorded and transcribed word-for-word. The transcripts were then double-checked for accuracy by someone who did not do the original transcription before being analyzed qualitatively for key themes and patterns. (The first author conducted six of the interviews. The fourth and fifth authors co-conducted

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[4] This research was supported by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Office of Research and Development, and the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University. The Mason Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research.

[5] In many of its brochures and publicity, George Mason University notes that it is one of the most diverse universities in the United States. While this mostly refers to ethnicities and nationalities, the student body also includes a large number of active duty military and veterans, non-traditional students, students who live off campus, and part-time students as well as a diverse range of socioeconomic statuses. One participant in our study stated that diversity is one of the main reasons she decided to attend Mason even though she had other offers. For more on diversity at Mason, please visit: https://www2.gmu.edu/about-mason/diversity.

one interview and the second author conducted the rest.)

An interview guide was used, but the interviews were designed to be open-ended to allow participants to freely discuss their faith, religious practices, and their use of apps. Participants began by telling the interviewer basic information about their background (age, childhood, hometown, etc.) and their faith (such as whether or not they considered themselves to come from a religious home). They were asked about the types of apps they use, how they found them, how often they use them, and for what purposes. This made up the bulk of the interviews, but we also inquired about their views on the relationship between religion and technology in general. A few of the Christian participants offered that their pastor at their home church told them about one or more of the apps. One of the Muslim participants stated the app was something her mother had found and another said that she just searched for an app online. Another, Mariam, who is a freshman originally from Pakistan, explained, "When I came [to college], the first thing my mom told me was you can have as much fund as you want, but don't forget to pray. And the only way I can do that is if I'm reminded twenty-four-seven that yeah, it's prayer time…so the first thing I did was, as soon as I got my phone, [was] get a prayer app. That was the first thing that came up actually [when I searched]." After discussing these topics, participants were then asked to describe the apps they use in detail or to walk the interviewer through the app and talk about how it works as they did so.

We structure the rest of the article around the experiences of our participants. We chose these quotes and stories to share because they are exemplary of the two main themes we found in the majority of the interviews: reconstructing religious authority and making religion a private experience. We try to present ample data from the interviews, which are organized according to the main factors that contribute to this reconstruction and shift: time constraints, lack of a faith community at Mason, ability to search and find, and the need to live a religious life every day. We do not attempt to make far-reaching generalizations, but instead, we use their experiences and words to raise points and questions about how religious apps are changing the ways people understand and live out their faith.

FINDINGS

Time Constraints in Everyday Life

Nearly all of the participants in our study stated they are unable to attend the mosque or church services on a weekly basis. Most cited this was because of time constraints and the busyness of their lives with trying to balance courses or work with other commitments. Not being able to go to a place of worship because of a lack of time is a primary reason why religious apps have become integral to their faith.

Christine is a sophomore at Mason who identifies as Christian. She is originally from the Virginia coast. She is involved with a Christian group on campus, but said, "They meet on Monday evenings. I have class. There are a lot of night classes so I can't attend very often." Christine said she grew up in a "Christian home" and her faith is very important to her. She explained that she can easily consult an app for Bible verses and daily devotions before her classes. She often will use the app in her seat as she waits for class to begin. Christine does not need to set aside time to attend worship since she can read the Bible and receive inspiration on her phone at her leisure. She also expressed her phone is portable and she always has it with her, making the app even more convenient to access.

Mariam lives in Northern Virginia with her brother at a relative's house while she is attending university. Her parents live in Pakistan. When people ask her she says she identifies as Sunni, but personally she does not believe in sects. "When Islam came into being, the Prophet did not divide and say, 'Ok I am preaching to a certain cast of people…[He] did not specify certain sects. And so

that is the belief I share." Mariam went on to explain, "I'm a liberal Muslim. I grew up in a liberal and religious background [in Pakistan]. So my parents gave me the liberty to do whatever I want, to do as I please, but within the boundaries of my religion." Mariam seldom attends the mosque except on Islamic holidays. She has not attended a mosque on a regular basis since moving to the United States for college. Like Christine, she explained that this is due to time constraints. Between classes and homework, she has little time to focus on her faith during the day, let alone to seek out other Muslim students or attend the mosque for prayers. Mariam uses two apps regularly: one for prayer times and direction and the other to read the Qur'an. The latter will bring up verses from the Qur'an; she can either search for particular verses browse through the different chapters. The apps allow her to bring her faith into her everyday life even though she may not have time to build community with other Muslims on campus or at a mosque.

Lack of a Faith Community

Participants reiterated that because of their busy schedules they are unable to become part of a local faith community. This was particularly true for those whose hometowns are not within easy driving distance from Mason. When we talked about faith communities, the participants referred to two different types. The first is a traditional community you may find in a church congregation. The second referred to the familial unit. Anthropologists and other scholars have demonstrated the family has an impact on people's religious beliefs and practices. One research study showed that parental religious beliefs are a main indicator of the religiosity of college age students (Milevsky, Szuchman, and Milevsky 2008). However, Dean R. Hoge, Gregory H. Petrillo, and Ella I. Smith found while the family has an impact on individuals' religious beliefs, "children evidently get their values from extrafamilial culture as much as their parents" (1982:578). There is a balance between the transmission of religious beliefs within the family and outside the family, but without a faith community in either sense, the participants tended to look to religious apps for guidance and as a surrogate for religious authorities; this is in comparison to the religious leaders at their home churches or mosques.

Sarah is a junior at Mason who identifies as Christian and more specifically as Baptist. She rarely attends church or any Christian groups on campus now that she is away from home for college. She was active in her home church, in another region of the state, but said that her parents do not go to church as frequently now that she and her siblings are away from home. Sarah explained, "Freshman year I tried to go to a Bible Study a few times. I don't know because I've only ever gone to my church, so I'm only comfortable there. On campus I don't really go to that stuff. I mean occasionally I'll go to a Bible Study." She continued, "I feel like Baptists are really community centered, being with other people [is important]. I wish I could go to Bible Study or church instead of just reading it on my phone." Sarah desires a faith community, but does not feel comfortable with those on campus because she only ever attended her home church.

Sarah uses an app that sends daily devotionals and another app that helps her read through the Bible. She said that many of her friends at Mason are not religious and that it is "kind of weird" to talk to them about her faith or to ask them to attend church with her, as she does not want to go alone. This is the opposite of what it was like in her hometown where many of her public school friends were involved in her church as well, "A lot of the people I hung out with in high school were in my youth group [at church]." While Sarah wants a close connection with other Christians on campus and in the area—she even noted that she considers Baptists to be very "people oriented"—she finds it nearly impossible because of her comfort level. Therefore, the apps have helped her continue to practice her faith even though they are not ideal in her opinion.

Mariam, the Muslim student originally from Pakistan, said that the app for the Qur'an she uses is particularly important to her because it "actually plays the *adhan* [Islamic call to prayer] whenever

it's time. It's beautiful because it is something I heard five times a day back home and I am not getting to hear it anymore…it just keeps me connected to my faith." When asked about how the use of this app has changed the way she practices her faith, she responded, "It definitely has because you're away from your family, you're away from your Mom, you're away from her teaching you every day. Be a good Muslim, be honest, have something to hold on to in order to keep in touch with your faith." When Mariam was living with her family in Pakistan she would look to her mother for religious guidance and growth and she considered her to be her religious teacher. However, now that she lives far away from her mother, she draws on the app to grow and maintain her faith—something that her mother instilled in her.

Similar to Mariam, Houda looked to her parents for religious guidance prior to college. She is a Muslim student who was born and raised in the United States. Her parents are from Morocco. She lives off campus with her family. Houda stated that she uses an app to remind her when it is time to pray and the direction that she should face. She mainly uses it when she is on campus and away from her family. She believes it is her responsibility to pray at the proper times even though her parents may not be constantly reminding her to do so. Given that she has class every weekday, she explained that she spends more time on campus than at home with her family. The app has reminded her how to "bring faith into daily life," to use her words. It has also helped her practice faith properly since for her, praying five times a day is central to being a good Muslim.

Search and Find Features

Several participants mentioned how the apps allow them to search and find verses in the Bible or Qur'an. They find it easier to electronically search for key people, words, or phrases rather than flipping through the physical pages of books. This is also because sometimes they cannot remember an entire story, but just know some of the main points. The search and find feature on apps makes it easier for them to retrieve these stories because they can just type in words. There is also the portability of the app as compared to the Bible or Qur'an. Although pocket-sized versions are readily available, the participants are rarely without their smartphones or tablets, so they can always have the apps with them, instead of having to remember to carry the physical book no matter what the size.

Emma moved to the United States from Africa with her family. She was raised in New York and is now a freshman at Mason. She explained that reading the Bible has always been a regular part of her faith. She said, "I like flipping through the pages, but sometimes you land on a page you weren't even expecting to line up [with what you were looking for], but sometimes the answer probably is [where you expected]. But with the app, it is like it tells you the book. It tells you the chapters." Reading the Bible offers her the spiritual guidance and inspiration that she needs, especially when she has a problem. However, she prefers to have the ability to search for things in the Bible through the app instead of needing to go page by page. Emma mentioned, "[The Bible is] thick, so you can't take it everywhere with you. Like if you have a backpack with your Biology book then you are heavy loaded with more weight." Her sister was the one who pointed out that Emma was not taking her Bible with her all the time. She encouraged her to get something more portable, "I got it because at first my sister said, 'You're not taking the Bible with you, I know that for sure.'"

The Bible is integral to Emma's faith and the app enables her to easily find things in it that she may not have found by just searching through the actual pages. The app has taken the place of the physical book she previously used. Emma's experiences echo that of the Imam's, which were recounted at the start of this article, as he uses the app for the Qur'an on his iPad and carries the device around with him rather than the physical book; this we would suggest illustrates our tight physical link to technology and the need to be "connected" constantly.

Personal Connections to Religion

Several of the participants stated they like to use religious apps because they serve as reminders of how to live a religious life every day, even though they are surrounded by outside influences. Some of the apps, like the ones used by Mariam and Houda, have reminders as to when to pray. Another participant who identified as Muslim, Hajjar, talked about an app that is "sort of like an alarm clock. You pray when the sun rises. You pray throughout the course of the day and you pray when it sets. [The app] gives times for the future. Like it tells you when the next alarm is going to be." Some Christian participants, like Sarah, have apps that send them daily devotionals and Bible verses. Because the participants often said they lack a faith community in northern Virginia, these types of apps enable them to bring religion into their daily lives. It became more important for them to live a religious life than for them to attend a particular place of worship.

Samira is a senior at Mason and identifies as Muslim. She uses an app that reminds her when to pray. When asked if the app is primarily on her phone, she responded, "Oh, absolutely, because I use my phone—my phone is with me 24/7." She continued, "It notifies me when to pray and I don't know that on my own. You know, we're all busy. As students we're doing anything but paying attention to religion because we're working or going to school. I think it has helped me focus on religion better in terms of actually praying." Samira has found the app to be an invaluable tool in helping her integrate her faith into her everyday life. Prayer was a main theme in her interview and plays an important role in how she defines herself as Muslim and in her faith practice. She said, "I don't have to guess what times of day I need to pray….[the app] has all the things we do in Islam that are [at the core] of it."

Emma admitted that she rarely makes it to church on Sunday mornings. Emma said that in her hometown, she was part of the youth group, but while at college, she rarely participants in such activities. Emma uses an app every day to read the Bible and to help her pray. Like Samira, prayer was very important for Emma, as prays every night before going to bed. Religious apps enable Emma to make faith part of her daily routine because they provide her with prompts for prayers, but at the same time, the faith community has become less salient in her current faith practices.

Madison identifies as Baptist and is originally from southern Virginia. Similar to Emma, she explained that she attended church since she was young, "Originally I went to a Methodist day care and then I started going to a Presbyterian church because my father went to a Presbyterian church. My Mom was Baptist so as we got older we all kind of started going there because they had a bigger youth group, and it just was better for a child." Madison mainly uses a Bible app. She said, "Every day if you click on it, it tells you a different verse." She tries to use it daily, but sometimes she gets behind and has to "catch up." It is somewhat difficult for her to maintain her faith while away at college because she lost the connection with those at her home church and has not been able to plug into a faith community while at Mason. When asked what role the app plays in her faith, she responded, "For me it's just more so to maintain [my faith] because being at college, especially in a place liberal like D.C., it's not always present. So for myself, I try to remind myself, 'This is what I did at home, this is who I am.' It's more so like every day in the morning [I do this]. Looking at my phone, [I think] 'this is how I want to live.'" The app is a means for Madison to bring her faith into the everyday and it helps teach her how to live a Christian life. It is not so much about finding a faith community for Madison as it is about learning how to be a good Christian on her own.

Christine was extremely close with her pastor and those she grew up with at her home church in Virginia. She remains in contact with her pastor through email and text while she is away at college. He suggested a Christian app to her, so now instead of calling him for guidance, she refers to the app for devotionals or Bible verses. She said the app is a simple way to be reminded regularly

about, as she described it, "how to live a Christian life." It keeps her "grounded" in her faith because she can use it anywhere at basically any time. What is striking about Samira, Emma, Madison, and Christine's experiences is that they each highlight how religious apps have enabled them to continue to practice their faith, but more privately than they did before in their hometowns. It has become much more about integrating religion into daily life and remind them how to live a religious life than attending a formal place of worship or religious activities or groups on campus.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Together the findings outlined in this article demonstrate that religious authority is being reconstructed with the use of apps and that apps facilitate users to think about religion more in terms of the everyday as opposed to the institutional. The restoration of faith to fit daily life through the use of technology is attractive to our participants. The experiences of our participants show that religious authority does not particularly lie in the hands of prominent figures in the age of technology, such as pastors or Imams, but rather they are taking it upon themselves to answer their questions about faith through the use of apps. The ability to search and find gives the user the opportunity to research the answers themselves. Moreover, we discovered that religion is being shifted out of the institutional and into the everyday, which also causes the faith communities for our participants to diminish. The portability of smartphones and tablets relinquishes religious institutions from being the main source of information.

A recent study found that when "asked which media they would miss the most, British teenagers pick[ed] mobile devices over TV sets, PCs and games consoles" ('Planet of the Phones' 2015). Younger men and women in particular are finding that the portable appeal of smartphones intensely overpowers the appeal of stationary technology—as well as people. The ease of access that the smartphone and tablet provide was incredibly important to our participants and their faith. They all viewed religion as an important aspect of their lives and were willing to dedicate time and energy to it, as long as it was convenient and easily accessible.

We contend the issues raised by our participants—who were mainly of college age—are common among people in varied age groups, but one limitation of our study is we did not have the opportunity to explore in depth the experiences of those who fall outside of this age range. Only one of our participants identified as being above 18-24 years old. A group whose use of religious apps could be explored is those who are over 60 years old. In their study of a Baptist community in North Carolina, Kathy Brittain Richardson and Carol J. Pardun (2015) report a wide understanding and acceptance of technology's new role in religious practice. They state the motive for adopting technology in this community was ease of access. Given their advanced age, access to religious content without having to leave the home or add additional tasks into daily activities could prove beneficial. The use of religious apps coincides with shifts in cultural attitudes toward the use of mobile technology.

Our participants expressed a desire to maintain their relationship with their faith while at the same time being able to cope with hectic lifestyles and being exposed to individuals of many different backgrounds (and feelings towards religion). As technology's influence continues to grow, there will undoubtedly be more opportunities for religious practitioners to embrace their own beliefs and sense of self with the aid of mobile app developments. When surrounded by a dynamic social and political environment as our participants are in northern Virginia, it is critical to maintain a sense of self and identity. Using technology to integrate religious beliefs into everyday life allows each individual to practice their beliefs uniquely and sometimes in more private and intimate spaces, such as a dorm room, but this also breaks the traditional faith community. The insertion of mobile apps into religion is indicative of the current time period in the 21st century and the ways that technology changes how we engage with the world and the people around us.

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