

Cyber God?: Emerging Trends of the Virtual Church

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Methods

Web-based survey sent to 236 randomly selected UW-Eau Claire students.

- ❖ Internet survey distributed through Facebook and emailed to participants.
- ❖ Asked questions in reference to internet use, beliefs about church, and general communication styles.

Measures

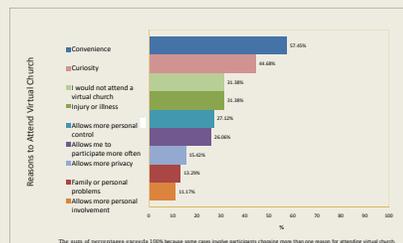
- ❖ Audience Activity Measures Scale (Levy & Windaw, 1984).
 Example: "It is important for me to attend church from beginning to end." Scale Response: Strongly Agree-Strongly Disagree
- ❖ Communication Anxiety Scale (Booth-Butterfield & Gould, 1986).
 Example: "I speak out during small group meetings." Scale Response: Almost Always-Almost Never
- ❖ Television Affinity Scale (Rubin, 1977, 1979).
 Example: "Going online is very important to me." Strongly Agree-Strongly Disagree
- ❖ Television Viewing Motives Scale (Greenberg 1974, Rubin 1977, 1979).
 Example: I would attend a physical/virtual church because it relaxes me." Scale Response: Exactly-Not at All



Abstract

Research shows that by 2010 as many as 50 million individuals may rely solely upon the Internet to provide all of their faith-based experiences (Campbell, 2004). This relatively new phenomenon of virtual church has been of interest to scholars throughout the last decade, however little is known about those who engage in it. Some studies have shown that people attend virtual church for convenience, sharing of knowledge and social interaction (Wise, Hamman, & Thorson, 2006). This study explores motives for using a virtual church instead of the traditional "brick and mortar" church. For the purposes of this study, we have defined 'virtual church' as follows: "research sites, extensions of local church communities, online sermons and event information, chat rooms, prayer request sites, and religious information sites."

Percentage Breakdown for Reasons People Would Attend a Virtual Church



http://newsmg.bbc.co.uk/media/1/0/2009/09_04140483_cyber_god_pray_303.jpg

Research Questions/Results

RQ1: Is there a relationship between motives for attending a physical church and an individual's willingness to attend a virtual church?

RESULT: We conducted an analysis of variance and found a significant difference in willingness to attend virtual church based on motives. $F=19.28(4)$, $p < .001$ (See table below)

Analysis of variance of motives for attending physical church and the willingness to attend virtual church

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|------|
| Between Groups | 25.829 | 4 | 6.457 | 19.280 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 36.507 | 109 | .335 | | |
| Total | 62.335 | 113 | | | |

n = 113

RQ2: Is an individual who has a higher affinity or attraction to the internet more likely to attend a virtual church?

RESULT: There was no significant relationship between internet affinity and likelihood to attend a virtual church.



RQ 3: Does the companionship motive have an effect on likelihood to attend a virtual church?

RESULT: Pearson correlations show that companionship motive is significantly and negatively related to likelihood to attend virtual church. $r = -.33$, $p < .001$