

## Article

# The Mediatization of Religious Practices in Urban Daily Life: The Peruvian Case

Rolando Perez-Vela 

Communications Department, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, San Miguel, Lima 1801, Peru; rperez@pucp.edu.pe

**Abstract:** The public face of religion in Latin America is undergoing constant transformation, and its relocation in the public sphere is part of a broader process of cultural and social change. This contemporary religious scene is characterized by a plurality of voices generated not only by traditional ecclesiastical institutions, but also by diverse practices and discourses where mediatization processes play an important role. This paper will examine how urban believers—mainly Catholics and evangelicals—are reconstructing and negotiating their religious identity and belonging, as well as their interactions in everyday life as participants in wider social contexts beyond traditional religious institutions in Lima, Peru, South America. It addresses questions such as how mediatized religious practices shape and re-signify religious identity, and how mediated religion facilitates the creation of new meanings, forms, and approaches of public engagement. I will also discuss how lived religion shapes the communicative practices and strategies of believers who are living out their beliefs in ways that go beyond traditional sacred places and spheres of secularity. This paper is part of a research project called “The Transformation of Lived Religion in Urban Latin America: A Study of Contemporary Latin Americans’ Experience of the Transcendent.”

**Keywords:** lived religion; religious mediatization; urban religiosity; Latin-American religiosity



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## 1. Introduction

Studies on religious mediatization in Latin America show an enormous variety in the use and appropriation of the means to legitimize religious knowledge and practices, such as spiritual counseling programs on the radio, the resurgence of televangelists, the appearance of religious communities that are built on social networks, emerging trends in the rituals of civil religions, new sanctuaries for the devout masses, emerging trends across the full spectrum of the religious music industry, massive religious music concerts, the so-called religious ‘youtubers’, the phenomenon of religious influencers, etc. This growing variety of the modes of production of mediatized religious practice has generated—from the believers themselves—new forms, strategies and itineraries of consumption of religious goods (De la Torre and Gutiérrez 2005; do Nascimento Cunha 2007; Bellotti 2016; Oosterbaan 2017; De la Torre 2018; Algranti and Setton 2021; Bahamondes and Marín 2022).

The current religious field not only accounts for the traditional use of the media to disseminate and manage beliefs or for the symbolic appropriation of mediated public spaces, but also for the resources provided by new communication technologies in the processes of reconstruction or re-signification of the religious practices of believers (Campbell 2012).

Several studies (Pérez 2016; Algranti 2013; De la Torre 2018; do Nascimento Cunha 2019; Sbardelotto 2023) on Latin-American religious mediatization reveal a variety of uses and appropriations that believers make of the media in general, and of digital technologies in particular. These are: the consumption of radio and television programs that highlight the discourses of various spiritual practices, the construction of religious communities that are built on social networks using new communication technologies, the consumption of the religious music industry, as well as literature produced by organizations linked to faith communities.

Joaquín Algranti (2013) notes that in the evangelical context, religious industries are being built which are becoming economic agents for the production of cultural goods, just like publishers, music and video producers, record companies, etc. According to Algranti, religious merchandising allows them to expand the universe of potential consumers of the cultural goods they produce, for which they develop a communication strategy that creates marked or unmarked merchandise for each profile of believer.

All this shows that mediated religion is generating new spaces from and senses in which religious goods are produced and consumed. Here, the media play the role of mediators of belief and constitute spaces for the re-sacralization of contemporary cultures (Martin-Barbero 1995; Hoover 2006; Campbell 2016). This perspective is based on the theory of mediation in exploring the meaning-making function of media (Hoover 2006). “The mediation of meaning perspective presents media as an important resource helping people negotiate and express religious beliefs and values within culture. While media consumption may be deemed as problematic by some groups, it still serves as an important resource for articulating what religion is and is not in contemporary life” (Campbell 2016, p. 19).

These changes and the re-significations of religious practices as a product of mediatization occur not only at the level of the reconstruction or repositioning of religious rituals in the public sphere, but also in the way they are constructing new understandings for what it means to belong to faith communities, to participate in traditional rituals and to legitimize public representations of religious authority (Hjarvard 2008; Hoover 2009).

Latin America is confronted with an enormous diversification and pluralization of religion. Several researchers (Levine 2012; Parker 2018; Romero 2009; Burity 2016; Morello 2020; Boas 2023) agree that the new facts of plurality and pluralism are reshaping the public face of religion in Latin America, as they intersect with the equally new facts of pluralism in politics and civil society. “A plurality of churches, social movements identified with religion, and voices claim the moral authority to speak in the name of religion; a pluralism is increasingly evident in civil society and in lower barriers to entry into public spaces” (Levine 2012, p. 101).

Latin American scholars (Burity 2016; Pérez-Guadalupe 2017; De la Torre 2018; Parker 2018; Rabbia et al. 2019; Morello 2020) describe recent transformations in the religious field, including not only the emergence and increased visibility of diverse religious faces and practices in the region, but also their increased capacity to exercise influence in society at large, including media networks, far beyond the traditional role played by religion in society. Especially noteworthy, they argue, is the evolving role that religion plays in the public sphere.

We live in a society that, far from having cast aside the search for an encounter with transcendence, now demonstrates increasingly diverse expressions of religiousness and spirituality in everyday life. However, “the growing presence of popular religiosity and ‘lived religion’ not only have to do with the crisis of many churches and the disaffection toward institutions, but also with the influence of new symbolic languages, diversity of rituals and body-oriented practices whose vector has been the modernization process itself” (Parker 2018, p. 100).

Thus, contemporary religious practices should not be read from the perspective of an isolated subject, but as a plurality of active subjects that interact from multiple subjective trajectories, multiple traditions, and multiple beliefs (Panotto 2015; Semán 2013; Frigerio 2020).

Considering a context marked by an intense process of mediatization of the Latin American religious field, this article pays special attention to two aspects: first, how the consumption of these sacred goods produced by the cultural industry affects the re-signification of beliefs, symbols and religious practices in everyday life; and second, how mediatized religious experience affects interactions between the secular and the religious, the public and the private, the individual and the collective, and the ways of belonging to institutionalized religion. Additionally, key to this are the memories of cultural consumption lived on a daily basis as they are maintained or transformed in the urban experience.

Additionally, I will observe the implications of media consumption in the configuration of lived religion in the urban context, focusing especially on the processes of mediation of cultural industries—musical goods, editorial production, mass rituals, religious media programs, mass devotional sanctuaries, pilgrimages, etc.—as constructed and produced in the region (Sierra 2008; do Nascimento Cunha 2007; Algranti 2013; Bahamondes 2021; Sbardelotto 2023).

## 2. Data Collection and Methodological Approach

The research that provides the main source for this article is a study called “The Transformation of Lived Religion in Latin America”, carried out by 11 researchers from four universities (Boston College, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Universidad Católica de Córdoba and Universidad Católica del Uruguay) between 2015 and 2017. The study had the purpose of exploring the meaning of religious practice according to the everyday experience of South Americans. The research builds on the theoretical and methodological proposal of a ‘lived religion’ approach (Ammerman 2014; McGuire 2008), that is, a view that takes the focus away from the perspectives or logics of religious institutions and places it on people. Particularly, in their perspectives and daily experiences in which they select and adapt, reinterpret, and reappropriate proposals from various religious traditions and beliefs to make sense of what is happening with their lives in the complex societies in which they live (Dacosta et al. 2019).

The study, which was applied in the cities of Cordoba (Argentina), Montevideo (Uruguay) and Lima (Peru), focused on the analysis of narratives of spirituality, that is, the stories people tell about their religious, spiritual, and non-religious practices linked to their particular conception of the transcendent. Likewise, we collected the autobiographical narratives of the people who participated in the study, with an emphasis on continuities and ruptures within their religious and spiritual experience (Rabbia et al. 2019).

The research focuses on the stories people told to explain their religious practices and experiences. To collect these stories, we conducted two series of encounters with the individuals themselves. The research collected information from Latin Americans belonging to different socioeconomic strata, who identified mainly as Catholics, Protestants, adherents of other traditions (Jews, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Adventists, Muslims, Buddhists, etc.), or unaffiliated (believers not identified with any tradition, disaffiliated, agnostics and atheists) (Morello 2020).

For the Peruvian case study, we interviewed Catholics (45), Non-Catholic Christians from different denominations (20), other religious groups (10), and not belonging or non-believers (10), taking into consideration the distribution of religion in national data, socioeconomic status for each of the four groups, and age and gender for the whole sample.

In each of them we interviewed people from different socioeconomic strata (two groups, one of low socioeconomic level, the other of medium and high socioeconomic level) and different religious self-identifications.

Using stratified quota sampling, we ensured the inclusion of people from (non)religious minority groups, who are often underrepresented in quantitative sampling. We sought a variety of ages, gender, and life situations. The sample was purposive, which means that it is not representative of the entire society studied. It will not tell us what percentage of the entire population believes or does not believe in this or that way, but it does allow us to affirm what practices and beliefs are present in that society and how they are understood by the people interviewed.

The interviews consisted of two meetings with each person, following a semi-structured guide, exploring the most important moments in their personal history: major decisions, challenges, frustrations and rewarding aspects of their work, the impact of their beliefs on their lives, significant moments of media interaction and consumption, among other events. It should also be noted that the interviewees were asked to tell the story of their lives, past and present, through the eyes of today. Their accounts are analyzed as subjective

constructions mediated by the general as well as the particular context of each interview (Rabbia et al. 2019).

#### *About Religion in Perú*

Perú has a population of about 33 million people. The transformation of the religious domain, documented through census and survey data, shows a slow but definitive growth of non-Catholic religious groups in Peru and, especially, in Lima. The 2017 national census reported 77% Catholics; 14.1% Protestants; 4.8% other religious groups (Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Buddhism, Judaism, Muslims); and 5.1% nonreligious. Regarding the city of Lima, capital of Peru, with a population of more than 10 million, the national census reported 77% Catholics; 10.8% Protestants; 0.54% other religious groups, and 6.27% nonreligious.

Lima is a vast urban center that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. Most inhabitants were born outside of Lima; they are either first- or second-generation internal migrants that have joined a small number of middle-class wanderers attracted by the apparent buoyancy of the country (Romero et al. 2017). This population lives in a sort of cultural kaleidoscope, analogous to any other modern cosmopolitan city, but marked by characteristic idiosyncrasies. Religion is one of the constitutive dimensions of Lima's diversity (Romero 2016).

Religion in Peru continues to be mostly Christian and preeminently Roman Catholic, but marked by the growing influence of Evangelicals and an increasing number of disaffiliates (Lecaros 2022). As in other Latin American countries, Perú is characterized by a growing religious pluralism. Many scholars (Fonseca 2018; Espinoza 2018; Romero 2009; Lecaros 2022; Romero et al. 2020; Barrera 2022) observe that this pluralism has not only an interreligious component, but also demonstrates increased heterogeneity within the confessions or denominations themselves.

We also observe a greater diversity in religious representations in the public space, generated mainly by actors and voices that do not come from nor are they authorized by traditional religious institutions, but rather are emerging from secular movements, para-church collectives, or political organizations. Frequently they are social activists who dispute the re-signification of religious capital and discourse in the public sphere. (Pérez-Guadalupe and Amat y León 2022; Lecaros 2022; Pérez-Vela 2022; Barrera 2022).

### **3. Meaning and Identity in the Context of Mediatized Religion**

Our analysis is based on the culturalist perspective on media and religion studies that considers the media as spaces of cultural interaction—hence social practices—and considers religion as a cultural discourse intertwined with individual and collective processes that assume that there is a fundamental interaction between cultural practices of mediation and practices of religion (Hoover 2006). This approach is built on the assumption that culture and religion are inseparable from each other (Clark and Hoover 1997).

The focus on cultural meaning-making has an important influence in this approach, understanding religion and media as practices that produce cultural meaning. From this view, cultural identity is seen as an important location for the interaction between media and religion. Likewise, it considers the need to understand how cultural meanings are produced and reproduced through the instruments and contexts of the culture (Hoover and Clark 1997; White 1997; Morgan 2008; Hoover 2008; Hjarvard 2008; Meyer and Verrips 2009).

To Hoover, the practice of identity construction is an articulation between the context of individual experience and broader contexts of social and cultural life, including claims made by the culture about symbolic meaning (Hoover 2006). This is connected to Anthony Giddens' reflexivity theory in which he seeks, as Robert White (1997) argues, "to avoid both the imperialism of subjectivity and the imperialism of social structure by defining social practices as a process of reflexive positioning and negotiating between one's personal existence and social rules as one goes about the practical affairs of life" (p. 41).

The cultural approach to communication developed by James Carey (1989) is relevant in this theoretical framework. His ritual view of communication, in contrast with the "trans-

mission model”, conceives of communication practices as cultural processes integrated into the fabric of daily life (p. 58). He characterizes the transmission view as, “‘imparting,’ ‘sending,’ ‘transmitting,’ or ‘getting information to others’”. The ritual view is characterized as “‘sharing,’ ‘participation,’ ‘association,’ ‘fellowship,’ and ‘the possession of a common faith’” (Carey 1989, p. 18).

This approach is connected to the Geertzian theory on cultural reflexivity. Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasizes the importance of observing the process of the production of meaning in the context of cultural construction and social representations. Following Geertz (1973) approach, Carey argues that “[a] ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (Carey 1989, p. 18). Hence, communication is a “symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (p. 23).

From this perspective, as Hoover asserts, the analysis and interpretation of contemporary religion depends more on accounting for both the practices individuals engage in, and their own definition of the object of their engagement in cultural meaning (Hoover 2006, p. 36).

It is very important for this theoretical perspective to assume that both media and religion are fields of social and cultural construction (White 1997; Hoover 2006; Clark and Hoover 1997; De Feijter 2007). Hence, media constitute a “locus where cultural identities are created, communities are configured, and social actors are constituted” (De Feijter 2007, p. 88).

This approach allows us to connect with important Latin American scholarly contributions. Scholars such as Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993, 1995), Nestor García Canclini (2000, 2005), Reguillo (2004), and De la Torre (2018) have analyzed the practices of mediatization from a cultural perspective. In this way, they agree that media became important mediating spaces for cultural encounter and the interplay between the production of symbolic meaning and cultural consumption.

In order to understand the cultural implications of the mediatization process in Latin America, it is important to take into account García Canclini’s view that “in contrast to hegemonic conceptions of identity, the Latin American logic of difference theory is open to the possibility of various different affiliations, circulating among identities and mixing them” (García Canclini 1995).

As part of his argument about hybrid cultures and oblique powers, García Canclini suggests that:

we [Latin Americans] would be living in postmodernity, not exactly because we have superseded modernity, but due to the fact that postmodern problematic [sic] has become pervasive. In other words, heterogeneity, pluralism, fragmentation, and hybridism have come to stay and displaced the former concern of modernity with homogenization and a unilinear overcoming of the past, related to the traditional experience and practices. (García Canclini 1995, p. 10)

From this understanding of the cultural and social dynamic produced by modernity in Latin America, García Canclini proposed the idea of the hybridization of culture. He prefers this term to others such as syncretism and mestizaje, because the former “includes diverse intercultural mixtures—not only the racial ones to which mestizaje tends to be limited—and because it permits the inclusion of the modern forms of hybridization better than does syncretism” (García Canclini 1995, p. 11). His studies seek to understand under what conditions and in what direction the processes of de-territorialization and re-territorialization occur, as well as the hybridization of traditional heritage. He observed that in many Latin American countries both happen.

In this regard, Heidi Campbell contends that religious hybridity can occur as practitioners combine religious language rituals, ideas, and artifacts from multiple traditions or interpretations, even those previously seen as non-religious (Campbell 2012, p. 67).

Another key theoretical issue is related to mediatization theory. From the sociological understanding of the role that media play in religion, Stig Hjarvard (2008) stresses that



“modern media do not only present or report on religious issues; they also change the very ideas and authority of religious institutions and alter the ways in which people interact with each other when dealing with religious issues” (p. 3).

In the Latin American context, the relationship between mediation and mediatization indicates that culture became a fundamental factor in understanding the interplay between the production, circulation and consumption of the cultural discourses and practices. German Rey points out that “culture—or rather, cultures—have increased their presence, both socially and conceptually, in Latin America. Socially, this has come about through phenomena such as multiculturalism, the processes of hybridization and *mestizaje*, and the sociocultural movements that daily increase their social and political prominence or through the convergence of widely diverse cultures that make up dense and complex intercultural realities in the continent” (Rey 2004, p. 84).

For this social and political dynamic, it is impossible to disconnect our understanding of mediatization from other cultural, social and political mediation processes. For this reason, the history of mass media is connected to the perspective of cultural practices as articulators of the communication practices that can be either hegemonic or subaltern to social movements. This connection allows us to recognize not only the multicultural nature of cultural practices but also the form of institutional constructions and realities of daily life, as well as the subjectivity of social actors and the multiplicity of loyalties that are operating simultaneously. This perspective contrasts with the ‘mediacentricism’ approach that considers mediatization beyond the media product itself. From this approach, mediatization is part of the broader process of cultural mediation through communication.

In this way, Martin-Barbero (1993, p. 216) proposes an analysis of three places of mediation.

The first place is *the daily life of the family*, due to the fact that, for the great majority of people, family viewing is the prime context for recognition of sociocultural identity. He believes that it is not possible to understand the specific way that the media, especially television, appeals to the family, without analyzing the daily life of the family as the social context of fundamental import to the popular sectors.

The second place of mediation, *social temporality*, refers to the developing of communication practices taking into account the relationship between the different tempos of development within the plurality of cultural matrices. He considers that when we observe the time of the daily life, it is important to consider the routines and rituals of the socialization process.

The third place, *cultural competence*, implies a connection between the mediation process and the cultural matrices from which people produce and consume messages. He critiques the culturalist tendency that situates communication projects outside of the social meaning of cultural differences.

This theoretical perspective is important for this study because we are interested in observing the appropriation of the media beyond its instrumental or diffusionist use. From this approach, media are not just a phenomenon of commercial or ideological manipulation, but are, rather, a cultural phenomenon (Martin-Barbero 1997).

Hence, media “are the places where many people construct the meaning of their lives. The media offer the opportunity for people to come together to understand the central questions of life, from the meaning of art to the meaning of death, of sickness, of beauty, of happiness, and of pain . . . That is, the medium is not simply a physical amplification of the voice, but rather adds a quite new dimension to religious contact, religious celebration, and personal religious experience” (Martin-Barbero 1997, pp. 108–9).

Likewise, the culturalist perspective that we adopt for this study distances itself from the theories that see audiences as more passive, reactive, and manipulable. To observe and document how one consumes contemporary digital media, from this perspective, demonstrates how media are increasingly interrelated with the larger range of products of visual and material culture, many of which constitute the elastic and growing symbolic and iconographic inventory of contemporary religion and spirituality (Hoover 2008; Campbell 2013). Here,

we can observe “a kind of dialectical relationship between the autonomous actor and the historically rooted symbolic and other cultural resources” (Hoover 2008, p. 33).

In this way, mediatization is about the long-term process of changing social institutions and modes of interactions in culture and society due to the growing importance of media in all strands of society. Hence, it is the process of social change that to some extent subsumes other social or cultural fields into the logic of the media (Hjarvard 2008).

Other scholars (Clark 2007; Couldry 2008; Hoover 2009; Livingstone and Lunt 2014; Martin-Barbero 1997; Morgan 2008, 2013) agree that mediatization cannot be simply instrumental but must recognize the general integration of the media into other social spaces. Thus, media play a role of mediating between the individual and their culture.

Martin-Barbero argues that “the media must be analyzed as a process of creating cultural identities and of bringing individuals into coherent publics that are ‘subjects of action’. To conceptualize the relations of modernity, religiosity, and media, one must see the media as a central factor in the constitution of social actors” (Martin-Barbero 1997, p. 102).

With regard to religious mediatization, we can observe at least three aspects:

First, mediatization should be observed beyond institutional contexts in order to develop more complex, nuanced, and layered understandings of the interplay between media, religion and culture (Hoover 2009). This understanding will allow us to rethink how communicational mediations shape the particularities of religious beliefs, practices, social interactions, and imaginaries that are grounded in material cultural forms. “[They] are interlaced sets of collective representations around particular issues—such as the nation, ethnicity, the city, the family, sickness and well-being, the divine, the occult, and so on—that underpin the moral and intellectual schemes and sensory modes that govern people’s ways of being in the world and that thereby ‘make’ this world” (Meyer 2015, p. 14).

Second, the public engagement of religious movements, as Hjarvard observes, may be considered a part of a gradual secularization. Hjarvard (2008, p. 3) contends that

... it is the historical process in which the media have taken over many of the social functions that used to be performed by religious institutions ... Rituals, worship, mourning and celebration are all social activities that used to belong to institutionalized religion but have now been taken over by the media and transformed into more or less secular activities.

Third, most of the religious groups that have more fluidity with the public sphere are part of the historically excluded social sector. Their appropriations of media spaces, their participation in the spheres of the state, and their construction of relationships with influential public leaders constitute a way of obtaining a place as visible citizenship actors.

This implies, as Martin-Barbero (1997, p. 102) observes, that

... the media are not just economic phenomena or instruments of politics. Nor are the media interesting simply as one more instance of rapid technological change. Rather, the media must be analyzed as a process of creating cultural identities and of bringing individuals into coherent publics that are “subjects of actions”.

From this perspective, mediatization, as Silverstone (2002) stated, describes the fundamental, but uneven, dialectical process in which institutionalized communication media are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life.

#### 4. New Meanings and Belongings from Mediatized Lived Religions

An important group of our interviewees understand their religiosity and spirituality as a search for new ways of interaction and belonging to a religious community. These believers are nourished by cultural registers and sources that occur beyond traditional institutions, as a consequence of multiple mediations and frames of reference that previously seemed far away from the contexts where religious identity is built (De la Torre 2013; Pérez 2019).

Marta, a neo-Pentecostal evangelical believer, finds in the consumption of religious media the possibility of feeding her desire for interreligious exploration beyond the frames established by her congregation of reference:

I listen to the messages of Pastor Rodolfo Gonzales on [TV Channel] Bethel from the Worldwide Missionary Movement . . . I also tune into the program where Pastor Bullón preaches that he is an Adventist and I also like to listen through the Internet to the messages of a church in Miami. He is a priest but he has tremendous messages too. (Marta)

The religious histories and itineraries of our interviewees reveal that contemporary believers can easily transit between diverse religious belongings and affirm their faith by sharing in the rituals of communities of faith whose doctrinal references come from different sources. In many cases we found that the experience of the consumption of religious goods through mass media has become an important mediating support for this new way of practicing religious experience and for interacting with transcendence.

It is interesting to observe the way in which the media have come to facilitate the extension of religious experience beyond not only the environment of one's closest ecclesiastical community, but also the confessional territory itself. Thereby, religious consumption through the media constructs an adequate space for those believers motivated by the logic of interreligious exploration and belonging. The appropriation of the discourses and spaces constructed within the digital marketplace has helped to strengthen the bonds that are built between believers who ascribe to communities of faith that seek to satisfy new affectivities and foment a sense of belonging.

The majority of interviewees suggest that one of the fundamental reasons they participate in the tasks of a religious community has to do with the affective relationships of mutual support that are built among the members of the community.

Juanita has been a member of the evangelical Christian and Missionary Alliance church for more than 20 years. She is involved in the church's childcare ministry. Juanita says that what she most enjoys about this ministry is that she has found a group of sisters who have become her closest friends.

We have formed a nice group with the sisters of the children's ministry. Now with WhatsApp we can keep in touch. It is not like before when we only saw each other on Sunday. Of course, any problem, whatever I have had, with that confidence, I can tell them immediately and, well, they have helped me a lot with their words of encouragement. (Juanita)

Other interviewees reveal that the use of social networks, fostered by technological devices, has allowed them not only to maintain the bonds of their reference group, but also to recreate religious community life. This is the case of Judy, who has been attending a Lima Catholic parish since she was a child. She is part of a prayer group of women who regularly meet at the local parish, although not as often as they used to due to the new dynamics of daily life in the city.

We are always united, and if someone is ill or something, we pray for them. I don't know, that's why it's called a circle of love because that's the ultimate expression of loving another person and we all know each other that way. Someone is ill and now . . . Now we have a WhatsApp group too and we are already praying for someone who is sick. So, we do not have to wait until we meet in the parish. (Judy)

Catalina, a Catholic believer, has found in Facebook a suitable communication tool not only to feed or expand her knowledge of the issues confronting her faith community, but also to spread it to others,

I use Facebook a lot, I have a lot of Catholic pages, a lot. I'm subscribed to many of these pages, I take a lot of things from there. For example, one thing I do, as part of my participation in the community that I am part of, is to send tips



through Facebook, as part of our group's training program. We are 15 women.  
(Catalina)

The experience of Judy and Catalina reveal that the mediatization of the practices of lived religiosity generates new spaces and new meanings from which the interactions between the faithful are built. It is interesting to note how the collective religious experience occurs in a decentralized and displaced way. Here, the media plays the role not only of mediator of beliefs but also constitutes spaces for re-sacralization of secularized media spaces (Martin-Barbero 1995; Reguillo 2004).

In the case of those individuals that have changed religious affiliation or experienced conversion, the consumption of cultural goods that the faithful access through the media allows them to connect or reconnect with the secular cultural world they were part of before their conversion to a type of spirituality constructed from conservative religious groups. This is the case of Blanca, a migrant woman who arrived in Lima in the 1980s. She grew up in a family of Catholic tradition in the Peruvian Andes. When she arrived in Lima, she converted to evangelical Christianity and joined a Pentecostal congregation in an impoverished urban neighborhood of Lima. After her conversion to evangelicalism, she moved away from certain practices that were considered sinful in her new community of faith. In recent years, her church has become a little less rigid regarding the prohibition of certain cultural practices. This has caused Blanca to reconnect with her friends at school, with whom she enjoyed the popular festivities in her provincial town of origin.

Now I am listening to music from my land that I had not heard on the radio for some time. I could not do that before. That reminds me that as a child I always enjoyed the *huaynitos*<sup>1</sup>. I have always loved listening to the sound of the harp. Then, that's how I thought: "someday I'll play the harp". I always liked to listen to them. Now, when I'm alone, I listen to the music I used to hear in my land. Now we get together with my friends who also came to Lima and we remember how we enjoyed the party. We danced a lot. (Blanca)

It is important to note that the consumption of certain cultural industries, such as indigenous music, becomes an instance of cultural mediation where believers interact with their cherished memories while deciding how to ascribe to the cultural norms of the religious institution.

It is also worth noting that many churches, like in the case of Blanca's congregation, have begun to relax their norms and practices because their leaders have met with parishioners who, in their interaction with secular cultural contexts and the media, demand an ecclesiastical space capable of reconciling the autonomous practices of daily life with the norms of the religious institution.

In this case, one can see that cultural consumption mediated by technology allows the construction of bridges between those religious memories legitimized by the traditional institution and the other memories that are built by interacting with other cultural references where the sacred and the profane interact more fluidly.

## 5. Autonomous Religiosity from New Media Platforms

María Luz is a member of a Lutheran evangelical community in a low-income neighborhood in Lima. She uses social networks to share photos that illustrate the daily lived reality of her community. Her intention is not only to make known what is happening in her neighborhood, but also to lift up the solidarity work being done with the poorest members of her community by her congregation's women's group.

It is worth noting that María Luz started doing this work after opening a personal account on Facebook. She quickly realized that this could be a valuable tool for sharing her experiences of faith beyond the neighborhood. On this platform she found a means to produce religious messages "in her own way".

I dedicate myself to taking pictures of the things that happen here in Márquez [their community] and then I upload them to Facebook. Friends tell me that they

like it, that what I do is good. I try to share about the social problems and what we do with the women in my church network. The photos I have, for example, now that they have been taken are photos of the Chillón River, a very polluted river. So, I want to draw attention to this reality that many do not know and about what we are doing. In one of the photos my granddaughter comes out next to the river. There she is with her arms outstretched praying. (María Luz, evangelical, lower class)

These cases show, on the one hand, that the new frontier of religious communities nourished and supported by the new media lead to the religious experience being constructed from undefined cultural references. From this perspective, believing “implies, in the first place, situating oneself, perhaps in the center, on the side, halfway or on the margins, with respect to a network of relationships and its strong definition of ‘what is real.’” (Algranti 2013, p. 41) On the other hand, it reveals that identities are constructed by ascribing to a multiple and fragmented variety of de-territorialized beliefs and practices and the deregulation of the institutional religious field (Hervieu-Léger 2004).

In this way, the mediatization of the practices established by believers feeds “a religiosity in movement, which builds the figure of the ‘spiritual seeker’ whose journey, often long and winding, stabilizes, at least for a time, in a chosen community affiliation that is worth as much as personal and social, as well as religious identification” (Hervieu-Léger 2004, p. 127).

This religiosity in movement, generated by media consumption, allows many believers to re-visit those passages of personal memory that had been put into parentheses by rigid and authoritarian religiosity. It is remarkable to observe how many evangelical believers who underwent the experience of a radical religious conversion eventually rethink their autonomy and begin to reconnect with past cultural worlds without renouncing their new religious affiliation.

This case demonstrates the way believers who insert themselves into social networks built by the digital society discover not only how to re-signify their strategies for evangelization, but also how to build new roles for themselves in their religious communities.

We are witnessing the emergence of a type of believer who lives and shares their faith, transcending not only their community’s established discursive norms, but also those advocated by the media and communication platforms built by their religious institutions. In effect, these believers seem to construct their identity, their public representation, and their sense of belonging not only within the framework of those media spaces that facilitate and generate conversations, but also draw upon sources beyond the religious territory and the context of the offline community.

Many of the believers, like María Luz, who live their experience of faith in the spaces and with the referents shaped by the technologization of everyday life, experience a new way of being a believer, breaking with the logic of a faith community that is passive and dependent on the knowledge instituted or regulated by a traditional—and usually hierarchical—religious institution. Religious mediatization constructs a new type of believer who, as García Canclini would say, by the very act of consuming religious goods assumes his role as co-producer, modifying them, and re-signifying them at the moment of appropriation. In this way, García Canclini (1995) argues, a more individualized and autonomous type of consumption is consolidated than had existed previously. Therefore, a type of consumer is emerging that intervenes in existing material while, at the same time, producing new digital content and sharing it virtually.

In fact, people have always negotiated multiple religious identities and experienced different degrees of hybridization of belief and practice. But established hierarchies have had sufficient cultural power with which to stigmatize or otherwise punish the public expression of the same. Now decentralized social media platforms allow people to be both consumers and producers of meaning in new ways.

The itinerary of Edgard, who grew up in a conservative Nazarene community, allows us to appreciate the way a mediated believer not only builds his faith from the fringe areas

of religion, but also recreates his theology and his reading of the sacred text outside the frame of institutional religious authority.

After leaving school and entering college, Edgard began to distance himself from his church. One of the reasons was his discomfort with the vertical style of church leadership. His pilgrimage outside the ecclesiastical institution led him to rethink his practices of consumption and appropriation of the sacred. A frequent consumer of traditional evangelical radio programs, he became a massive consumer not only of religious programming, but also of the secular cultural content he encountered on social media. Edgard, at the same time, was reunited with a group of friends who attended the same congregation when they were young. Some lived in the Brazilian city of São Paulo and one of them was the leader of an independent evangelical church in that city. Edgard decided to join this congregation. He says that physical distance is not a barrier to staying linked to this church, because he has found there a group of friends who are hanging out with him. "Thanks to the Internet, I can talk two or three times a week with many of them. Every time I want advice, I can call them to talk . . . I look forward to vacation to travel and spend a few weeks in São Paulo." Edgard has decided to become a member of this church even though he continues to live in Lima. He regularly participates in their worship service through the Internet. He listens to sermons and other parts of Sunday services via YouTube.

I consider myself now more than a believer, a practitioner of the faith, because I believe that it is not enough to believe. The Apostle James said that even demons believe. Now, I consider myself a Christian practitioner. I do it willingly, not by imposition as before. I live the faith from the place where I am, and I freely decide what I want to follow. (Edgard)

As in his youth, when his evangelical militancy was limited to the Nazarene congregation in Lima, Edgard remains a regular consumer of evangelical radio programs. The difference is that today he has decided to follow those preachers who focus their sermons on the perceived relationship of the spiritual realm with social and political issues.

One of the main shifts in his life was music. He became a consumer of rock and roll and found there not only another way to connect with transcendence, but also new ways to reconstruct his theological worldview.

"I have changed a lot. Before, I only listened to Christian music. Now I listen to other genres, and I find a lot of theology in them," he says. Edgard is a follower of Paul David Hewson, artistically known as Bono, vocalist of the rock band U2.

The songs of U2 have a very great spiritual strength. Many of the lyrics of Bono's songs lead me to think about theology, about the image of God in our lives. For example, "Beautiful Day" is a beautiful song. How much depth there is in the lyrics of each song that invites us to think about the value of life. There are deep phrases, such as: After the rain come the colors. (Edgard)

Here we observe a believer who navigates through the universe of religious content differently, modifying and reconstructing in his own way the messages received and adapting institutionalized religious norms to his own needs and expectations.

The type of mediatized spirituality that these believers build beyond the traditional ecclesiastical institution poses a new perspective on the notion of religious community. As [Morello \(2021, p. 77\)](#) asserts, this community might not be what [Durkheim \(1965\)](#) considered a 'church'; perhaps it looks more like [Ammerman's \(2014\)](#) 'religious tribes' that gather around some sacred stories.

If the cultural available practices to express one's interiority are changing, we can assume that the role of the community and its configuration is also changing. [Ammerman's \(2014, p. 291\)](#) suggestion of understanding the separation between sacred and profane as a continuum, more than a dichotomy, can be also applied to the communal aspect: more than a dichotomy between 'magic' and 'church', we might have a continuum, from accidental gatherings to highly structured moral communities.

From this perspective, the practice of media consumption by the religious believers generates the construction of what [García Canclini \(1995\)](#) calls “interpretive communities”, where believers who are in the process of consuming religious content begin to rethink their own faith together with others, including both believers and non-believers. They elaborate new ways of relating to the transcendent and autonomously connect their beliefs with their daily tasks.

Edgard’s case, like that of other believers we interviewed, invites us to pay attention to two aspects related to digital or technological religiosity.

On the one hand, the role of so-called influencers in the process by which media consumption leads to the creation of new identities, especially taking into account that—as in the case of Edgard—Bono essentially becomes his new spiritual leader, a leader who has not been “blessed” by any ecclesiastical entity.

On the other hand, a type of believer is configured here who becomes a kind of religious pilgrim in the new networked society ([Castells 2000](#)). Here a modality of digital religious practice is configured that “goes beyond adherence to traditional religious rituals and institutions to incorporate the performance of religious belief outside traditional structures. This tendency has been described as “lived religion”, meaning many religious symbols and narratives become freed from their traditional structures and dogmas and so become tools for reconstructing spiritual meaning” ([Campbell 2012](#), p. 66).

In this regard, it is interesting to observe the social use of technology by the believer. By using Facebook, Maria Luz not only becomes a massive disseminator of her faith, but empowers herself in a sphere that transcends the power available to her within her own church or local community.

In the case of evangelicals, many are already very familiar with the image of the network, because this community is characterized by already-existing inter-denominational and transnational networks. The majority of evangelical believers understand themselves to form part of a wider community than that which is formed by their own local congregation. What is new here is the construction of identity and the sense of belonging with spaces and subjects that do not necessarily move in traditionally institutionalized religious spheres.

Here we can observe what [Juárez et al. \(2022\)](#) call ‘hinge religiosity’, where the religious experience is understood as being relational in nature; the individual religious experience and that person’s expectations enter into a negotiation with the system of accepted norms and institutional values, while simultaneously adapting those traditions and, without feeling the need to seek prior authorization from the religious institution, the individual adapts those traditions, transforms the faith and even generates transforming action in secular environments.

It shows us these believers find not only the possibility of making their faith visible in a framework larger than that of their local community, but also the opportunity to abandon regulated institutional frameworks—which often do not allow them to develop their own communication strategies for making visible in other territories their experience of faith—and explore new ways of thinking, living, and sharing their religious experience.

As William [Beltrán \(2010\)](#) observes, it shows us a process of reconfiguration of the role of the religious believer, becoming not only distant consumers of institutionalized religious discourse, but also co-producers of sacred goods that originate not only from the traditional spaces where media discourses were long produced, but also from other sources rooted in everyday life.

Some media scholars have coined the category of “prosumers”. We could very well speak of religious prosumers, since we find that many of the faithful engage in a permanent re-elaboration and re-signification of religious discourse ([Semán and Battaglia 2012](#)). Thus, this is a type of religious consumer who constructs his practice from the logic of decentered circularity in which those who receive a message can modify it and reintroduce it into the networks or put it in another place, thus reconfiguring and recreating the religious object or discourse.

All this leads us to think that contemporary religious practices are constructed today in scenarios without territorial borders and marked by hybridizations, which implies a constant interaction of religious discourse and actors with other symbolic goods and with other cultural memories and communication circuits, which move beyond the spaces of traditional sacredness and are permeated by the contemporary general process of mediatization of culture.

## 6. Believers from Multiple References and Trajectories

Analyzing the different types of communities that contemporary believers seek in the context of religious pluralization that characterizes the contemporary urban world, the majority of interviewees report a tendency to embrace a notion of belief that builds multiple subjective trajectories and diverse traditions; varieties of belief that coexist in the same space and time. Here, the degree of autonomy of each believer is highly variable, but this variability is precisely what allows them to operate in very different ways in relation to their referents and “traditional” religious discourse (Semán 2014).

In this case, the reference groups (family, friends, ecclesial network, extra-ecclesial circles, etc.)—relocated and re-signified by the new media—play important roles in the way and logic from which religious practices are configured and beliefs are conceived and thrive.

The believing subject thereby constructs his identity from different sources of meaning. It is “a religiosity in movement, which builds the figure of the ‘spiritual seeker’ whose journey, often long and winding, is stabilized, at least for a time, in a chosen community affiliation that is worth as much as personal and social identification, as well as religious” (Hervieu-Léger 2004, p. 127).

These communities allow us to appreciate the religious arena as a space from which it is possible to recognize new ways of living, traveling and belonging to the city and the world. Religions and the spaces from which they are practiced constitute important referents and instances of mediation from which to configure belonging to a broader community.

These testimonies reveal that the mediatization of the practice of lived religiosity generates, in the first place, new spaces and meanings from which interactions among the faithful and with other not necessarily religious agents are constructed. Likewise, the media plays, as Martin Barbero argues, the role not only of mediators = of belief, but also becomes a space of re-sacralization of secularized media (Martin-Barbero 1995; Reguillo 2004).

On my Facebook, I have my cover photo. There I appear playing the guitar, and all my wall is full of very beautiful letters. I did it with Illustrator. There you can read the messages that mean a lot to my life, and they also have to do with God. There I put: “You loved me first; you are love and peace for me”. I try to transmit in some way what I am and what God is for me. (Rosa)

Secondly, these changes and re-significations of religious practice, a product of mediatization, not only occur at the level of the re-construction or repositioning of religious rituals in the public sphere, as other studies show, but also show the way in which new senses of belonging to faith communities are constructed, including the search for and contact with transcendence, and the ways in which traditional practices are re-signified, beyond the framework instituted by religious institutions (Hjarvard 2008; Hoover 2009).

Many of these cases reveal that this religious pilgrimage through technological networks generates significant changes not only in the construction of their religious knowledge, but also in the configuration of their own identities. This fact is relevant if we take into account that many of the religious consumers come from faith communities where traditionally the voices or practices that differ from the norms of the ecclesiastical institution have been censored or silenced.

In this way, the media open spaces to rethink and reconstruct new and old religious memories, as in the case of Edgard; to build new senses of solidarity beyond the times and



logic of institutionalized pastoral action, as in the case of Judy; and to strengthen capacities and nurture mutual knowledge, as in the case of Catalina.

## 7. Conclusions

Within the field of studies on religious mediatization, this study provides empirical evidence that confirms what scholars of religious mediatization have warned, in the sense that contemporary believers appropriate the media not from a diffusionist or proselytizing logic of belief, as observed in the past, but from the understanding of the media as a space for interaction with others discourses and actors, with other symbolic goods, with others social networks, with other cultural memories and communication circuits, which move beyond traditional spaces and institutions (De la Torre 2013).

In this way, I would like to emphasize the following contributions.

First, our study confirms that the practices of lived religiosity from the Latin American processes of mediatization show the intense process of mobility in the religious field, in which believers develop faith practices, recreate narratives of spirituality and interact with others in creative tension with traditional established religious institutions (Morello et al. 2017).

Second, we have found the mediated religious practices in the context of Latin America configure a new type of believer, one who moves through social networks and consumes the goods of the cultural industries without completely disaffiliating him/herself from his/her offline religious community. Thus, we observe that religious believers have found in social networks the proper space for reconnecting with those worlds and cultural goods that traditional institutionalized religion tended to exclude or tried to marginalize in its attempt to avoid the migration of their believers to other religious or non-religious spaces. This confirms what scholars of media and religion maintain in the sense that religious mediatization does not have to do only with the massification and spectacularization of religious rituals, but also with the way in which the new meanings of belonging to communities of faith are made, in which the religious experience occurs beyond daily temporality and traditional community territory. The congregation or the parish is not the only place where spirituality is built or nourished. Mediatized religiosity legitimizes other spaces that had been desacralized by traditional religious institutions (Martin-Barbero 1997).

Third, this finding allows us to argue that the media today is not a mere channel for the dissemination of religious doctrines and beliefs. Their mediating role contributes significantly to shaping new public articulations of religion, where traditional myths, symbols and rituals are being re-signified and inserted in other scenarios, beyond the spaces of traditional sacredness.

This would suggest an interesting phenomenon in which we are dealing not only with the interplay of cultures, but also of dual narrative modalities: a primary orality, that of interpersonal communication, and that of mass media narratives, which Walter Ong (1982) calls “secondary orality”.

This view of lived religion from the practices of consumption and media appropriation constitutes a new challenge for the study of identities of belonging, since it purports to attend simultaneously to and to interact with the referential registers of the new identifications, and the new identities that such interaction produces (De la Torre 2018). Thus, the consumption constitutes not only a communication scenario, but also a cultural matrix from which new religious identities are constructed and new codes of recognition and senses of belonging to the religious community are established.

Fourth, this study confirms that the contemporary religious believer is no longer the exclusive consumer of religious goods produced by the traditional religious institutions. Our interviews show that these believers not only passively appropriate the religious offer, but also generate new discursive constructions, while generating new consumption itineraries to satisfy certain needs. Through their consumption itineraries they take, cut, incorporate, amalgamate and shape new menus of beliefs, whose particular meaning is the result of their experience within a socio-cultural context and in the light of their personal history. As Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2004) argues, each person composes his or her

religious oratory according to his or her expectations, interests, aspirations and social and cultural resources.

In this way, we observe that religious believers have found in the social media networks a space conducive to reconnecting with those worlds and cultural goods that traditional institutionalized religion either failed to incorporate or tried to prohibit in order to maintain their power over the faithful and keep them within the fold.

Here you can clearly see how what Heidi Campbell (2012) calls a kind of “networked religion” is configured, which “involve the complex interplay and negotiations between the individual and the community, new and old sources of authority, and public and private identities in a networked society” (p. 65). Since the media are strongly intertwined with everyday life, the communication practices of the believers studied here reveal that online technology use and choices cannot be easily disengaged from offline contexts.

It constitutes, on the one hand, a new challenge for the study of religious identities and belonging, since it means simultaneously paying attention to and interacting with “the frameworks of belonging identities with the referential registers of the new identifications, and the new identities that such interaction produce” (De la Torre 2002, p. 79). On the other hand, it challenges us to pay attention to daily life is a path to explore Latin America’s religious transformation. As Gustavo Morello and his colleagues point out, it is in everyday life and not necessarily inside traditionally institutionalized religious spaces that contemporary Latin Americans negotiate their religious identities and their personal boundaries, and reconstruct their religious orientation to make sense of the multiple challenges they face in urban societies. “People select and adapt religious traditions for use in their complex societies to make sense of what is going on with their lives” (Morello et al. 2017, p. 9).

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## Note

<sup>1</sup> Traditional musical genre of the Andean region of Peru.

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