Introduction

The aim of the paper is to discuss the prevailing communication trends in Jainism and the methods used in new media for religious communication. The paper will also highlight use of new media communication for spreading social as well as religious messages. In addition, the paper will attempt to examine as to how new media communication could be beneficial for the Jain youth in the present context. The paper is based on the analysis of selected websites which propagate Jainism through new media since its inception up to the present time.

According to Binod C. Agrawal,

There are three communication technology perspectives of new media in the context of Indian democracy. First, the notion of ‘new media’ has been referred to as by several names, depending upon the context and professional background. New Media has often been referred to as ‘digital media’ and ‘social media’ though all have accepted that at the core of new media is a rapid growth of digital technology communication innovations and new technology applications accelerated by global market forces. Today, the rate of obsolescence of digital technology is astronomical. I think soon the new media will become ‘traditional media’ and will be transformed into something new ‘biometric media’. Further, expansion of New Media has crossed...
Religion and Social Communication

Religion and Social Communication

Komal Shah

used in religious communication. The second section of the paper focuses on quantitative and qualitative research analysis of existing new media use and the role it plays in religious communication and information dissemination. Possible contributions of new media in a theoretical framework has been attempted and presented to illustrate how it plays in determining the content of religious communication and information. The third section identifies some elements of Jain religious communication which may influence the way religious communication is imbibed by lay Jains. This section also includes an examination of possible relationships between Jain religious communication and the process by which a lay Jain interprets the social reality around him or her. At the end, a brief summary of the whole process of Jain religious communication through new media, the promotion of religious communication in Jainism and its effectiveness has been presented.

Jain Way of Life: A Brief Discussion

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion that emphasizes on non-violence (ahimsa) and the ascetic life. It began somewhere in the 6th century BC in India at about the same time Buddhism was developing. Jainism shares similarities with Hinduism and Buddhism, due in large part to the historical and cultural context in which it arose. Jainism, however, doesn’t have as many followers as Hinduism or Buddhism nor has it made as many inroads into the Western world. Jains derive their name from the Jinas, spiritual conquerors who have achieved liberation and perfection. Included amongst these Jinas are the twenty-four spiritual leaders called Tirthankara1. The last of the Tirthankara was Mahavira (599-527 BC), a contemporary of the Buddha and the man generally considered to be the founder of Jainism.

There are three aspects that distinguish a Jain follower from others. These can be identified at the individual, community and social levels:

(1) Individual identity - conduct and behavior conforming to the basic principles.

(2) Community identity - group activities such as prayers, worship, study of scriptures and celebration of festivals organized by temples and Jain centers.

1 Tirthankara are special Siddhas (liberated souls) who has attained omniscience and guides the other souls to save them from the cycles of repeated earth existences (rebirth).
(3) Social Identity - recognition by the society at large as a group that practices the virtues of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, purity of body and mind, and non-possessiveness; maintains a vegetarian diet and abstains from drinking, smoking and drugs; and believes in contentment rather than rampant desires for money and materials. (Dedhia, 2007)

There are certain ethical conducts being stated in the religious scriptures of Jainism for a lay person to follow. These encompass six religious activities to be conducted on daily basis, eight forbidden or tabooed attributes to be avoided, and the observance of five vows all Jain followers should adhere to in their day-to-day activities. At present Jains are divided into two major sects namely Swetamber and Digambar. The religious practices among them differ though common rituals and festivities are imperative to be observed by all Jains.

In the last 150 years since census was started in India by the British, the total population of Jains remained very small. As late as 2011, the Census of India reported a total population of Jain below five million in a population of 1.2 billion. In terms of literacy, way back in 1891, the Census of India recorded a literacy rate of only 1.4% amongst female Jains and of 53.4% amongst male Jains. In 2011, the female literacy rate has risen to 90.6% and for the Jain altogether to 94.1%. Today, Jains are the best educated community in India apart from the Parsees (Census of India, 2011).

Religious Communication in Jainism: A Brief History of 2,500 Years

In the last 2,500 years, the Jain religion was professed through oral communication and through performing arts and repetitions. As Jainism is based on the principle of non-violence, the practice of writing was avoided due to the pain incurred to the microcosms. Only in the last five hundred years, with the advent of industrial printing, has there been a major push to record and write the stories of Jain religion, songs and poetry. Print media has made possible for many Jains to have books which are being used by Jain followers all over the world since the early 20th century (Shah, 2013).

It is often said that Jains are very enthusiastic about erecting temples, shrines or upāśraya (meditation centre) but not much interested in promoting Jain religion and converting others to Jainism. Jains are especially not interested in the modern study of Jainism. It is not so because when a Jain studies in a historical perspective, the Jain promotes the beliefs in local language for a better understanding of its philosophies and to spread its religious practices. This has limited scope to promote Jainism beyond a given linguistic region of the sub-continent unlike Buddhism which has a pan-Indian language of Sanskrit as religious communication.

Prasannanshu (2010) states:

One of the first thing a student of communication reads is about the barriers to communication and how to overcome them. A look at the history tells us that Jain preachers took a bold step of using ‘Prakrit’ the then language of the masses to send out its messages... which perhaps motivated the Jain to pray, preach and prepare their canonical literature in a language which in general was looked down upon and could in no way have been considered fit for serious discourses like propounding abstract entities such as religious philosophies.

Jainism is promoted by self-realized individuals who have attained perfect knowledge, omniscience and self-control by personal effort and have been liberated from the bonds of worldly existence. In the present context, one finds a new trend of substituting English over Hindi due to the demands of the information-based economies of the Euro-American countries, and because of the vast improvements in the formal educational standards of Jains in India.

Today, Jainism is no more dependent on face-to-face sermons of the monks to promote its religious philosophies. One can now access various print and electronic media like newspapers, magazines, television and radio together with the new media which have opened up instantaneous sources of information pertaining to Jainism, mostly in three languages—English, Hindi and Gujarati. Though all the media act as mediator in delivering Jain sermons, they do permit interpersonal, face-to-face communication and immediate feedback. New media interactions have made it possible for the Jain disciples to use various forms of interpersonal communication through personal mails, chats, messages, blogs and miniature commenting sites.

Analysis of Selected Jain Websites

A few years back, Jainism was conspicuous by its absence in new media but today, anyone in any part of the world can access information, articles, texts,
pictures, even music at the touch of a button about Jains and Jainism. There are many websites, blogs, Twitter accounts and Facebook pages on new media dedicated to Jainism and its various activities. The actual figure of new media sites dedicated to Jainism is not available on any website or physical resources. To have a better understanding of the usage of new media, one can access the statistical figures of the Indian Internet users in comparison to international users. Asians (45.1%) top in the list of Internet users according to Internet World Stats (Stats, 2014) among the Asians, the Indians (243,198,922) stand at the third position on the country’s share of Internet users which is topped by China (641,601,070). Indians, regardless of their religious beliefs, are fast adapting to the virtual world as the country’s share of World Population figure stands at 17.5%. (Stats I. L., 2014) As the Jains are considered to be most literate population within Indian and in the Indian diasporas, it is safe to assume their presence in worldwide web.

New Media and Religious Communication

A number of scholars in new media and religion have identified the tendency of religious communities, churches, and individuals to use the Internet as a means of information dissemination or transmission of religious ideas. These studies have focused on the phenomenon of religious communities utilizing the Internet mainly for the purpose of exchanging information.

Smith’s (2007) study measured non-profit organizations’ use of Internet websites who used Kent and Taylor’s (Kent, 1998) criteria for the analysis of effective web communication. Smith found that many religious non-profit websites were underutilizing their potential for two-way communication and surmised that this was the case because non-profit organizations depended on more traditional one-way religious communication media.²

The method and style of new media communication are similar to those of the pre-Internet period, but the only difference is that, it is now faster, and can take place anywhere at a reduced cost. At present, it is nothing new to observe about religious organizations utilizing New Media to try and connect with as many people as they can.

In a world where new media helps to connect friends, neighbours and relatives living in any part of the world, it has also helped connecting various diasporas having similar religious faith, especially in case of the Jain community. New media is built on network of friends with common interest. The moot question is, as to how effectively new media can be used to bring together believers of a religion and others. Rev. Michael White, a United Methodist pastor and author of Digital Evangelism: You Can Do It, Tool, noted that “People of faith can use such social media as Twitter, YouTube, blogs, etc. to reach out both to ‘seekers’ (those looking for more information about religious faith) and believers alike to share the tenets of their faith, encourage deepening one’s religious faith, answering questions of doubt, and much more” (White, 2011).

Research

The present research was carried out on two new media sites (Facebook pages, see Appendix 1) which were dedicated to the promotion of Jainism, especially amongst the Jain youth. The sites chosen were based on the consideration that the selected sites had reported maximum number of likes, a minimum of two years have elapsed since the Page was created and the publisher (person, organization, entity) of the Facebook page is based in India. The abovementioned criteria were best fulfilled by two Facebook pages selected for the present study namely: Jain Site and Jain Gyan.

‘Jain Site’ started on May 9, 2001 and is inspired by a Jain Muni Bhagyachandra Vijay M.S. Jain Site has a parent website (www.jainsite.com) published from the city of Mumbai, (Maharashtra, India) and caters to the age group of 18-24 years old. ‘Jain Site’ had post in Hindi, English and Gujarati. ‘Jain Site’ has a mission to promote the religion amongst the youth of Jainism.¹

‘Jain Gyan’ started on July 4, 2011, and has a parent website (www.jaingyan.com) published from the city of Ponda, (Goa, India). Jain Gyan does not state the age group it caters to, thus it is published for all age group users who fall under the religious category ‘Jain’. ‘Jain Gyan’ has posts in English and Hindi. ‘Jain Gyan’ has a mission to promote Jainism and can be used as a good resource site.²

¹ In addition to religious nonprofit websites, there are many more research studies conducted on new media and religion, according to its use by different religious groups. Studies have begun to address different uses of new media in religious communication. One can refer to the following studies for further clarification on the use of new media for religious communication: Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007; Baab, 2008; Frobish, 2006; Hutchings, 2007; Kim, 2007; Smith, 2007; Sturgill, 2004; Campbell, 2005a; Kim, 2005. The Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet published a special issue dedicated to rituals on the internet (Volume 02.1).

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Study Duration

For the purpose of analysis these two sites namely ‘Jain Site’ and ‘Jain Gyan’ were studied for three months starting from 1st of June until 31st of August, 2014 (92 days). This period of analysis was considered to be appropriate as the study covered major Jain festival of Paryushana3 falling on the month of August or Hindu month of Bhadrapad. The analysis was compared with non-festival period to understand religious communication activities of the Jain followers and publishers of these two Facebook pages.

Method of Analysis

The content analysis method4 of research was followed while observing and collecting the data for the present research. Since both the Facebook pages under observation were live sites, therefore the researcher noted the posts, likes, comments and shares of these Facebook pages at 9 o’clock in the evening for 92 days. The present research relied on data which was actually collected at the end of each day, therefore any alterations made by the page administrator between two consecutive observations could not be tracked. In the present research the various posts were being categorized for the convenience of the researcher under the following heads:

- Information about auspicious days as per Jain tradition
- Photographs of Jain God
- Photographs of Jain Monk
- Video preaching’s of Jain Monk
- Music (Stavan5) video of Jainism
- Quotations on teachings of Jainism
- Information on health and medicines as per Jain scriptures
- Information on Jain pilgrimage places
- Promotion of Jain websites
- Publishing of online religious scriptures
- News updates on Jainism and Society

3 Paryushana is observed for Self purification and upliftment, annually.
5 A eulogy written and sung in praise of God.

Findings

The posts on these two Facebook pages can be broadly categorized as posts on Jain scriptures (sometimes explained in simpler terms), textual information on the rituals and its importance for a Jain, the news and happenings around prominent Jain Munis (monks) and their followers, news on the important acts being passed by the government for Jainism and Jain followers, information being imparted on Jain religious pilgrimages and the happenings around those places. The Jain followers were intimated early in the morning with posts on the Facebook pages about the five prominent auspicious days of the month (Tithis)6 as this helped Jain followers to renounce green vegetables for the day and observe fast if possible. Enlightening quotations too were posted every day, to help explain the main principles of Jainism. The quotes were posted in any of the three languages viz. English, Hindi and Gujarati. Every day one photograph of a Jain Thirthankar was posted for sight (Darshan).

The quantitative analysis of data collected for the present research of 92 days in presented in Tables 1 to 4. Table 1 shows that the total number of posts on ‘Jain Site’ was 113 while on ‘Jain Gyan’ were 198 or on an average one new post was published on ‘Jain Site’ while two new posts were published on ‘Jain Gyan’ per day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Jain Site</th>
<th>Jain Gyan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posts in June</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts in July</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts in August</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Posts</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Posts per day</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that the total number of likes on ‘Jain Site’ was 79313 while on ‘Jain Gyan’ were 31417 or on an average each post of ‘Jain Site’ received 701 likes while ‘Jain Gyan’ received 158 likes.

Table 2: Likes on Jain Site and Jain Gyan

6 Tithi translates to “lunar day.” Due to the lunar high tide on certain days of the month, it is believed that green leafy vegetables retain more water and therefore, more living beings. To limit violence against these beings, Jains may abstain from consuming green vegetables on the days of Tithi. This is a practice of discipline over the attachment to taste.
Table 3 shows that the total number of comments on ‘Jain Site’ was 2,137 while on ‘Jain Gyan’ were 853 or on an average each post of ‘Jain Site’ received 19 comments while ‘Jain Gyan’ received four comments.

Table 3: Comments on Jain Site and Jain Gyan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Jain Site</th>
<th>Jain Gyan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments in June</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments in July</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments in August</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Comments</td>
<td>2137</td>
<td>853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Comments per post</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that the total number of posts shared to other Facebook profiles from ‘Jain Site’ was 8,442 while from ‘Jain Gyan’ were 2,322 or on an average 75 posts were shared to other Facebook profiles from ‘Jain Site’ while 12 posts were shared from ‘Jain Gyan’.

Table 4: Posts Shared to Other Facebook Profiles from Jain Site and Jain Gyan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sharing of Posts</th>
<th>Jain Site</th>
<th>Jain Gyan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posts shared in June</td>
<td>2106</td>
<td>894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts shared in July</td>
<td>3864</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts shared in August</td>
<td>2472</td>
<td>886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Posts shared</td>
<td>8442</td>
<td>2322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Posts shared</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further observations indicate that the highest number of likes was received on both the Facebook pages for the post of ‘Photographs of Jain Thirthankar,’ Jain Site (48,906) and Jain Gyan (23,828) as per Tables 5 and 6. Similarly the highest number of comments were received on both the Facebook pages for the post of ‘Photographs of Jain Thirthankar,’ Jain Site (911) and Jain Gyan (578) as per Tables 5 and 6. The highest number of shares as well were recorded on both the Facebook pages for the post of ‘Photographs of Jain Thirthankar,’ Jain Site (2,982) and Jain Gyan (1,273).
Dominant Pattern

The three dominant patterns of religious communication on the two Facebook pages were observed. These were categorized as; ‘one-to-one between the Internet user and the Page publisher’; ‘one-to-one amongst the Internet users’; and ‘group communication amongst Internet users and Page publisher.’

The Jain Site was observed to be more active in terms of likes, comments and shares as compared to Jain Gyan (Tables 5 and 6). This can be attributed to the place of origin of Jain Site which is published from Maharashtra and has the biggest population of Jain in India (1,301,843). The categories of posts on Jain Site were much diverse with respect to Jain Gyan. There was a total of thirteen categories of posts on Jain Site, while Jain Gyan has eight categories of posts. Taking into consideration number of posts, likes, comments and shares, there was around 75 percent more activity happening on Jain Site as compared to Jain Gyan.

Qualitative Analysis

The interpretations of the researcher based on her exposure to Jain religion are separately presented. This is the most important aspect of analysis as it provided the action scenario of Jainism in new media.

Worship of Tirthankara. Through the virtual posting of photographs of Tirthankara on the Facebook pages, the first ritual of worship by a householder is fulfilled. It was observed that these posts got the maximum likes. These likes can be converted to the number of followers visiting the site for virtual Darshan of Tirthankara without physically going to the temple. Further, these photographs had maximum number of shares which again can be attributed to the use of android mobile systems which automatically saves the photograph in its gallery for reuse. Though Murti Puja (Image Worship) finds a prominent place in some sects of Jainism, but here a follower can perform Bhaav Puja (Spiritual Worship) through these photographs.

Worship of preceptors. Through the posts on prominent Jain Munis (monks) and their photographs, the second ritual worship by a householder was fulfilled. Here too the number of likes were many in comparison to other, these again can be interpreted as virtual salutations to the preceptors.

Study of religious scriptures and performing rituals of Pratikramana and Samayika. Through the posts of Jain scriptures in audio-visual and textual formats the followers can fulfill their daily ritual of religious study. This simplifies things as one can access the scriptures anywhere, anytime. The importance and teachings of religious scriptures were explained in simple language for a better understanding of the Internet user. The Jain follower could also perform the rituals of meditation by just listening or reading out these scripture texts. Most of the texts had meanings attached to it, thus it becomes easier for a laymen to comprehend the religious teachings.

Practice of self-control, austerity, non-violence and truthfulness. Through various quotations and real life inspiring stories, the religious followers were motivated to walk on the path of self-control, austerity, non-violence and truthfulness, and the vows to be observed in the daily life of Jain laymen. There was a news post on Jain monks agitating for ban of consumption of non-vegetarian food near a prominent pilgrimage (Palitana, Gujarat) place. This post was well supported by Jain followers through likes, comments and shares. The thought inspiring religious quotes had maximum shares on Facebook pages.

Practice of Vegetarianism and importance of drinking filtered water. The posts on health benefits through ayurvedic (Indian method) treatments and drinking boiled water inspire a Jainism follower to lead a simple and ascetic life. There was a news post of a few Muslim sculpturers who abandoned non-vegetarian food, after etching an idol of Tirthankara for a Jain temple. Such inspiring stories motivate the followers to ascribe to the Jain way of living and help to build a consensus amongst the Jain youth towards the beliefs of Jainism.

Celebrating Paryushan Parva online. During the auspicious festival of Paryushan, the number of activities had increased in both the Facebook pages starting with announcements of Religious Guru’s welcome ceremony for Chaumasa (four monsoon months), to reminder calls for the upcoming festivities, to announcements of fasting period, posting photographs of Angi (Decorations) of Tirthankara at prominent temples, to posting the online scriptures which help in performing the Pratikamana (sacred meditation)
ritual at home, last the sacred ritual of *Michaami Dukkadam* (begging for forgiveness) got maximum number of likes and comments. These all point towards the acceptance of virtual platform as the next place for religious promotion. Though there were only a few followers on these sites as compared to the actual population of Jains in India and the world over, it surely points towards a new beginning.

**Reminders for auspicious days.** The five *Tithis* and *Kalyanaks* were always mentioned as separate postings early in the day for a Jain follower to organize those days on the path of renunciation and fasting.

**Promotion of parent website.** The Facebook page ‘Jain Site’ has continuously promoted its parent site. There was at least one post each month. There were dedicated followers too who helped in spreading the word by clicking in likes and sharing the said posts. The other Facebook page (Jain Gyan) did not adhere to such practices. The reason for the same cannot be analyzed here.

**Jain identity through the promotion of Jain i-cards.** The next big activity on the Jain Site was for the application and distribution of Jain Site i-cards which was linked with the minority status application (for Jain) and benefit information. On these posts maximum comments and questions were being asked from India and from other countries too. This proves that the Jains living abroad too are interested in such activities taking place in its motherland and wants to be an active participant in Jain social life. Thus the new media forms a great neighborhood for the Jain follower all over the world.

**Use of comments section as marketing corners.** In the comments section it was observed that the Jain salutations (*Jai Jinendra, Namo Jnanam*) were most prominent. Other than these there were users, posting advertisements on religious books, matrimonial sites and best pilgrimage packages in the comments section. As these comments were not deleted by the Facebook page administrator, it can be assumed as an official approval from the publisher’s end.

**Conclusion**

The number of activities on both Facebook pages under observation are not sufficient enough to demonstrate how new media promotes Jain religion. There were very few theological discussions on the Facebook pages, thus offering no space for community interactions. There is a complete lacuna of heuristic perspectives on communication of Jainism in new media. The expression of the followers in new media is limited to only likes and shares for religious communication of Jainism. The followers of Jainism in new media have still not caught up with the concept of contextual theology with respect to the study of *Tirthankara* rather propositional truths established via tradition or sacred scripture are taken for granted. Communication of Jainism in new media can be conceptualized as just transmission of religious knowledge, ideas, and information; it completely lacks Jain communal and meaning-making view of the followers interactions.

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8 Kalyanaks means auspicious events that took place in the lives of Tirthankars (liberated souls).
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Appendix 1

ENDNOTES

1 Details of two Facebook pages
Email Contact: info@jainsite.com
Number of total Page likes as on Aug 31, 2014: 55,258
Number of profiles talking about this Page as on Aug 31, 2014: 882

2 Email Contact: news@jaingyan.com
Number of total page likes as on Aug 31, 2014: 13,084
Number of profiles talking about this page as on Aug 31, 2014: 1,752
Social Media Use in Religious Communication: 
The Christian Migrants of Kerala, India

Leslin Bastian

The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more St. Paul’s exclamation: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.”

1 Corinthians 9:16

Pope Benedict XVI
2010 World Communication Day message

The advent of the 21st century has witnessed various developments in the digital media technology. Satellite television has become a household name in Asia and India. The web of the Internet has tapped everyone who could afford to own and use it. Cyberspace communication has been growing steadily during the past decade with new technology and features added everyday. WE are in the middle of unprecedented communication revolutions since the advent of the printing press. Today, Facebook has over 750 million used while three billion YouTube videos are watched everyday across the globe.¹ Digital media have turned out to be the fourth estate of communication. Information is available at a lightning speed. Today, religious communication has moved from Church to television to social media.

The Church has taken various steps in the recent years to tap the social media which is hardly known for the speed with which it adopts modern technology; the Church is surely, but slowly, joining the masses on social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. There are now more social network accounts than there are human beings on the earth and

¹ Church and New Media. http://www.churchandnewmedia.com/#sthash.Cf3bYnkN.dpuf

Leslin Bastian, MA is a research associate at the TALEEM Research Foundation, Ahmedabad, India.