

MOBILE MINDFULNESS: PRACTICING DIGITAL RELIGION
ON SMARTPHONES WITH BUDDHIST MEDITATION APPS

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Mobile Mindfulness: Practicing Digital Religion on Smartphones with Buddhist Meditation Apps
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Smartphones have become constantly-present tool for news information, gaming, music and online communication. Users can tap into digital versions of their interests and activities, using smartphone applications (apps). But with this new medium comes changes in how certain practices are represented and enacted. In this thesis, I introduce and focus on the term “mobile mindfulness,” arguing that David McMahan’s elements of Buddhist modernism are intensified when practicing religion on the smartphone. These “mobile mindfulness” characteristics include the creation of transient experimental places of “play,” religious gamification, and increased individualization. After presenting examples of how Buddhist websites, virtual realities and smartphone apps intensify specific aspects of Buddhist modernism, I define what I mean by the term “mobile mindfulness,” through the analysis of two specific meditation apps, *buddhify* and *ReWire*. In these case studies, I show how digital religion on the smartphone is changing how users practice – and view – meditation in modernity.

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I. POPULAR TECHNOLOGY TO MANAGE YOUR MIND

Religion online, one of the newest form of religious expression, provides an open and unlimited arena for information, dialogue and community, for religious practitioners, the spiritually curious, and everyone in between. Alongside other religions, Buddhism has found its place in the virtual world. Digital representations of Buddhism are present in personal blogs, throughout social media sites, and in institutional websites. Anyone can download audio files of dharma talks, view instructional meditation videos, or read illustrated biographies of the Buddha. The site *BuddhaNet* offers a searchable “World Buddhist Directory,” *Tricycle* magazine’s website features articles on how to be Buddhist in a business-centric world, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama posts video lectures on transnational compassion. Many of these representations lack an anchor to any specific Buddhist tradition or institutional referent, even material accredited to traditional teachers.

One of the more interesting examples of Buddhism online is the expanding market of smartphone meditation applications (apps). Especially trendy in the West, these mobile apps pack Buddhist practice into the framing of a smartphone. And while this new medium features interactive components that other mediums lack, such as instant, quantitative evaluation and easy mobility, the smartphone medium and the app itself removes institutional framework and ritual elements of traditional Buddhist meditation. The apps offer portable meditation practice, without commitment to any religious institution, adherence to regular practice, or involvement in any religious community. With no institutional framework, the apps transform meditation into a spiritual and psychological self-improvement exercise and transports it into the middle of daily activities such as the urban commute.

In this thesis, I investigate these shifting perceptions and practices of contemporary Buddhist meditation, viewed through the analysis of two smartphone meditation apps, *buddhify* and *ReWire*. Both immensely popular in the meditation app market, these two apps embody the trio of Buddhist modernism: psychologization, demythologization and deinstitutionalization. According to David McMahan, Buddhist modernism alters Buddhist practices into a program for self-help and self-improvement (psychologization), removes cosmological framing and faith commitments (demythologization) and steps away from hierarchy surrounding organized religions and focuses more on the individual (deinstitutionalization). In line with McMahan's observations, many meditation apps, including our two case studies, are listed under *Health and Fitness* in the iTunes Store, presenting a practical, mobile approach to meditation while tracking individual progress through self-evaluation and quantitative scoring. This approach frames meditation in a secular and personal sphere of practice, geared toward the Buddhist-inclined but not necessarily the Buddhist-devout.

Throughout this paper, I build on McMahan's trio and demonstrate how the smartphone intensifies each aspect. I argue that the transition onto the smartphone platform results in three principal – and parallel – changes in the message of meditation, which intensify the effects of Buddhist modernism. The three elements that I identify in this thesis are: the mobile and transient creation of experimental places of “play,” where mobile practitioners can experience and improve their psychological health; religious gamification, or the play-like framing of meditation within the smartphone app, turning meditation into a quantifiable and competitive game; and meditation's increased individualization through the customization and portability features present on a smartphone. I call this new trio, “mobile mindfulness,” which builds on McMahan's definitions of Buddhist modernism.

By addressing these aspects of digital and mobile religion, I contribute a new approach in considering how contemporary society is using digital technology to customize religious practices to better fit into their busy lifestyles. Further, I suggest that increasingly interactive technology, both internally on our own devices and externally with others online through social media, is abating our need for communication with and affirmation from religious institutions in traditional offline environments. With this new technology, spaces for religious practice can be embedded within our everyday routines, instead of removing ourselves from daily life to participate in these religious activities.

THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis contains three main chapters, situating my argument within the theoretical discussion on contextualizing meditation apps within the broader spectrum of media and religion; Buddhism online; and analyzing in detail two meditation apps, *buddhify* and *ReWire*. Chapter Two, titled “Media and Religion,” provides the theoretical background as we begin to explore “mobile mindfulness.” This introductory section begins with a short historical summary of religion online and a review of terminology used in the field of media and religion. Reviewing this terminology will help situate this thesis among the scholarly work that has come before it, and provide explanation for any linguistic questions that may arise. A corresponding literature review will help situate my contribution to scholarship among leading voices in media and religion. I use the theoretical rubrics of scholars like Lorne Dawson, Heidi Campbell, and Christopher Helland to help set up the introduction of my own theoretical contribution, “mobile mindfulness,” encapsulated in the term that refers to the utilization of Buddhist meditation apps on a smartphone.

As communicative and informative needs have transferred onto the smartphone, and we are increasingly using apps to identify with or enact religious practice. I address this transformation as I unpack “mobile mindfulness” and highlight its three principal implications. The first is the creation of experimental places of “play,” or how the portable smartphone and the use of meditation apps encourages users to create experimental and ludic sites to practice, or “play,” in transit. I draw on Paul Emerson Teusner, Ryan Torma, Shaun Moores, Victor Turner and Gregor Goethals to construct my argument. I contest that through using mindful meditation apps, users create mobile “liminoid” places of experiment, in which meditation shifts from a modernist emphasis on improving psychological well-being in a quick contemplative space toward a health and fitness program nested within the activities of daily life. The second element is religious gamification, or the framing of religiously- or spiritually-inclined apps to resemble digital games, like video or computer games. Rachel Wagner’s work, especially in *Godwired: Religion, Ritual and Virtual Reality*, is extremely helpful in this section, as is Kevin Kelly and Gary Wolf’s concept of the “quantified self.” I argue that using religious apps on the platform of the smartphone, which hosts space for other game-like apps, has encouraged the gamification of religious practice. The third implication is elevated individualization, or the negating of religious community and institutional authority, in favor of the individual, customizable experience. Here, I draw again on Wagner, Goethals and Mark D. Johns. I argue that the isolating and portable features of the smartphone – along with the current cultural idea to pick-and-choose religious aspects to best fit one’s idiosyncratic lifestyle – has furthered the individualization our religious experiences.

In Chapter Three, titled “Digital Buddhism,” I bring Buddhism into the conversation. David McMahan’s “Buddhist modernism,” or contemporary interpretations of Buddhism as the result of interactions between Western modernity and Asian Buddhists, helps us look at how

Buddhism has transformed in contemporary society. Buddhist modernism, in McMahan's definition, entails the psychologization, or emphasis on Buddhist practices that encourage self-improvement and self-help, through meditation; demythologicalization, or the eschewal of the religion's cosmological and faith-based concepts to fit in contemporary times; and deinstitutionalization, or the movement away from the institutional hierarchy and community into a more individualized and self-tailored practice. I define each of these terms at length, and show how each of them has become heightened in the online world and in smartphone apps.

In this section, I also introduce a taxonomy of Buddhist websites to help illustrate this argument. I organize Buddhist websites into six categories: "Buddhazines," "Buddhist Boards," "buddhism without the 'b' word," "Buddha Blogging," virtual worlds, and virtual retreats. "Buddhazines" are informative magazine-like sites with regularly updated material; "Buddhist Boards" embody Christopher Helland's "religion online, as they are institutional sites presenting information to visitors; "buddhism without the 'b' word" are sites that display Buddhism in an informal, lighthearted and often satirical way; "Buddha Blogging" are Buddhist-inspired blogs of podcasts; virtual worlds, namely sites in the virtual world of Second Life, has become a digital space for Buddhist communities to gather online, and group or individual meditation; and virtual retreats, that bring a sense of online community and instructions for practice to meditators living in places where offline communities are not available or to the Buddhist-incline who prefer the flexibility of online participation.

With the transition onto the smartphone comes a heightening of McMahan's Buddhist modernism trio, and I discuss the implications next. It is here that I connect my three implications of "mobile mindfulness" with McMahan's three elements of Buddhist modernism. A heightened version of psychologization is seen in the creation of "liminoid" experimental spaces

within a portable device brought into everyday spaces to improve psychological well-being; a heightened version of demythologicalization is seen in the gamification of religious apps; and a heightened version of deinstitutionalization is seen in the individualization and customization of religious practices on smartphone apps.

With these parallels in mind, I discuss Buddhist smartphone apps on the market. I utilize Wagner's categorization of apps to create the following categories: quotation apps, sacred text (or sūtra) apps, instructional how-to apps, and meditation apps. I provide examples for each category, focusing my efforts on the final classification, meditation apps. I break down the meditation apps category into simple timers, self-reflection timers, and interactive guided meditations. With each of these subcategories, I decipher what degree of each of the "mobile mindfulness" elements applies appropriately.

Chapter Four, titled "Meditation To-Go," focuses on two app case studies: *buddhify* and *ReWire*. I look at each app through the framing of the "mobile mindfulness" element trio. I analyze the internal and external aesthetics, user experience, and how each app approaches mobile meditation. I also bring the apps' creators into the conversation. Creator background and inspiration, drawn from public articles and personal interviews, help us understand the overall intention and also gives life to each of the apps.

In the concluding remarks of this paper, I bring in two more modern Buddhist teachers, Tibetan Buddhist author and teacher Ken McLeod and Buddhist blogger Miles Neale, who have both recently spoke on the digital world's effects on Buddhism. My concluding remarks address how modern meditators situate themselves among essentialized Buddhist practices and more secular takes on meditation.

II. MEDIA AND RELIGION

Recent research has revealed great changes in religious self-identification in this country, specifically a jump in those who are unaffiliated with a religious institution (Pew 2011, 2012). Protestants and Catholics, among other denominations, are leaving formal institutions in record numbers, to practice individually without the institutional hierarchy, to explore other religions, or to become unassociated with any specific faith (Pew 2011). Religious unaffiliation rose four percent in five years, with more American adults self-identifying as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” (Pew 2012). This last survey option, of “nothing in particular,” received over half of the unaffiliation votes. This suggests that Americans are not necessarily moving away from religious affiliation altogether, but moving away from self-identifying with one particular religious institution. Contemporary Americans are instead experimenting with, or dabbling in, several religious identities, creating their own personal patchwork quilt of religious identification. One key platform is fostering this experimentation: the digital world.

Digital religion is flourishing. Religious information, community and practice have become a major component of the virtual world. According to the Open Directory Project (hdmoz.org/), “Religion and Spirituality” is the largest subcategory in “Society,” with more websites than “Education,” “Law,” and “Social Sciences” combined.¹ Sixty-four percent of Americans with Internet access have used the medium for religious or spiritual purposes (Hoover, Clark, & Rainie, 2004). In fact, digital religion contradicts the Internet’s most notorious reputation: almost two decades ago, Time Warner Company estimated that there were three times as many religious websites than pornography sites. And more recently, studies have shown that

¹ Data collected on February 24, 2013.

more people were using the digital world for spiritual reasons than online banking or dating (Helland 2007).

Which begs the question, why is there a reported decrease in institutional religion, but an increase in religion's presence online? What is it about religious practice, either performed individually or as a community online, that is more appealing to contemporary audiences? Digital religion provides something that offline and organized religion cannot offer: an informal, personal and customizable religious identity and experience. Heidi Campbell notes: "The Internet serves as a spiritual hub, allowing practitioners to select from a vast array of resources and experience in order to assemble and personalize their religious behavior and belief" (2012: 76).

Religious practice is not disappearing, nor is it being neglected by the "unaffiliated" or "none" Americans. Instead, those seeking to express themselves religiously are turning to new, less established, more fluid and more individualizing outlets, in order to create their own unique religious identification. The digital world provides an open and experimental arena, populated with every religion and every level of religious devotion imaginable, available to explore, connect and express oneself freely. This arena allows practitioners to dabble in various religions without institutional commitment: a diffusion of religious identification.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Religious discourse online began with the creation of ORIGINS, the earliest public bulletin board system online (Rheingold 1985). The conversations that occurred on this forum eventually became part of the USENET network, another early Internet discussion system, and spurred so much traffic that the network created the subsection, net.religion. In this topic-specific forum for religion, early dialogue reflected themes in still current dialogue: an ongoing debate over

general religious definitions, interpretation of scriptures, creation myths and the nature of miracles (Helland 2007). By the late 1990s, more than 1.7 million web pages covered religion in some way. The idea of religion online was not only normalized but had also fully emerged in the academic sub-fields of media and religious studies (Dawson & Cowan 2004).

Reviewing the terminological history of religious presence online will help us as we explore digital religion on the newest platform of communication and expression, the smartphone. What initially began with the expression “cyber-religion,” or the “not-so-real world” of religious practice created by digital technology, has grown into a small collection of academic terminology. This vocabulary and categorization helped pioneering scholars decipher which kind of practice they were studying, what audience the information was intended for, and what motivation the users had in using the medium (Campbell 2012). Michel Bauwens noted that “cyber-religion,” which is now an infrequently used term, referred to “new kinds of religious community and ritual,” and suggested that a new hybridity was forming as users integrated their spiritual lives into cyberspace (Campbell 2012: 13; Bauwens 1996). Christopher Helland separated and defined “religion online” and “online religion,” or institutionalized, informational one-to-many websites versus interactive, community, and non-hierarchical many-to-many forums (2000). Helland later filled in the terminological gap, noting that the most active and dynamic websites are those that incorporate authority, or some sort of authoritative information on the religion, and provide a space for virtual practitioners for discussion (2007).

The phrase “digital religion” is the current phrase of choice in describing religious authority, community and practice online, most notably headlining two recent volumes edited by Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong et al., and used in the Center for Media, Religion, and Culture’s 2012 international conference title. Stewart Hoover notes that the study of religion and

new media has transitioned from simply exploring the “digitalization of religion,” or how the new media has forced religious groups and practitioners to adapt to new mediums (Campbell 2012: 14; Hoover 2012) to deep analysis of “the actual contribution ‘the digital’ is making to ‘the religious’” (Hoover 2012: ix). In the introduction of Campbell’s volume, “digital religion” is described as “religion that is constituted in new ways through digital media and cultures” (2012: 14), an inclusive and thorough definition that helps frame our analysis of smartphone apps.

Two other important terms to address are “spiritual” and the trendy expression, “spiritual-but-not-religious.” I do not wish to personally define these terms, but rather to cite them in order to frame their usage in the remainder of this paper. When I use “spirituality,” I call on such scholars as Robert Fuller, Robert Wuthnow, and Wade Clark Roof. Fuller (2001), defines “spiritual” as a private and individual-based term that branches away from “religion,” a more public, institution- and community-based term. Both Wuthnow (1998) and Roof (1997) have noted a shift of contemporary American self-identifying as “spiritual” above “religious.” Wuthnow notes an emphasis in practice-oriented spirituality, or to “engage intentionally in activities that deepen their relationship to the sacred” (169). Roof calls our current society a “quest culture,” or a culture emphasizing spiritual seeking and exploring – something he notes that the Internet is only furthering (94).

For Fuller, “spiritual-but-not-religious” people are “unchurched spiritual” seekers who are more concerned with personal accessibility to the divine, religion and science, religion and cognitive matters, and are more likely to test and abandon their beliefs can be proven wrong (2001). Those that identify with “spiritual-but-not-religious” do not necessarily put their religious practice before other aspect of their life: “The point of spiritual practice is not to elevate an

isolated set of activities over the rest of life but to electrify the spiritual impulse that animates all of life” (Wuthnow 1998: 47).

SCHOLARSHIP IN DIGITAL RELIGION

Scholars took these terms and reinterpreted their meanings to best fit their multiplicity of research. Brenda Brasher describes the digital world as “monolithic and diverse”: its monolithic characteristics come from the physical and digital technologies, such as hardware or software, and its diverse tendencies come from variety of accessing this information and its interpretation. Brasher notes that online religion has altered to accommodate our changing “needs” in religious practice; there is more of an emphasis on integrating elements of entertainment, information, and community, because those spheres exist on the digital medium. This is seen clearly in smartphone apps, which exist on a medium that also functions as a tool for communication, information, and gaming, among other uses.

New religious movement scholars Lorne Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan see the shift from religious offline practice onto the online platform as a crisis of authority and authenticity (2004). As the Internet has no official mechanism to filter accuracy – though unofficial and voluntary whistle-blowers have emerged to keep the online world in check – there is a phenomena of “instant experts” (2004: 2). This has great implications about digital adherence to religious rules; with no authority figure, who is to label certain practices true to a religion? Or, perhaps, is this a non-issue to digital practitioners? After all, with the shift from institution to individual, there is more of an emphasis of “personal authority,” or keeping oneself morally in line.

Heidi Campbell has recently characterized religious practice online is “networked religion,” with a networked community, storied identity, shifting authority, convergent practice and

multisite reality, where “relationships, identities and realities are shaped through loosely bounded affiliations established by individual user preferences and connection over traditionally tightly bounded relations established through hierarchies” (2003: 83). Although this is an incredibly broad range of definitions, a grab bag that widely describes any sort of religious practice, Campbell’s section on “shifting authority” is applicable. Campbell describes “shifting authority” as a movement away from traditional “religious power structures” due to imposing, and usually, unverified gatekeepers (2003: 83). With religious smartphone apps, we see this not only with the app creators and promoters, who often times remain faceless and nameless behind a technology media company, but also with infusing authority in the individual user.

Stewart Hoover emphasizes our digital religious identity, noting that media has replaced religion as our tool for self-definition. Hoover suggests looking at family’s consumption of media, circumstances under which media is consumed, community consumption, and “common culture,” or a draw to be part of an overarching common conversation, to better understand our relationship with media and religion (2006). Hoover writes that emerging ways of “doing religion and spirituality” rooted in a “new paradigm” that brings together different dimensions into a frame of reference, centered on individual practice. Overall, “it no longer makes sense to look for religion in received, formal, inductive or essentialized categories” (2006: 149). Digital religion, especially on the smartphone platform, allows users to bounce between denominations, picking and choosing elements of certain religions that appeal to them, and patching together a religious identity totally unique to their ideology and lifestyle.

Christopher Helland’s largest contribution to the media-and-religion sphere was the aforementioned “religion online” and “online religion” distinction (2007), but his work on “virtual Tibet” is important here. Helland reports that scattered Tibetan Buddhists had created a sort

of “virtual Tibet” online, through new sites, social media sites and discussion forums, with the underlying issue of maintaining and creating identity (2007). This is an important aspect in smartphone use and app selection, as users create an identity through choosing certain apps, utilizing some more than others, and reporting any quantitative “scores” on social media sites achieved through use. Lövheim (2004) and Radde-Antwiler (2008) have also suggested that religion online allows for a greater flexibility in constructing religious identity and a fluidity of religious ritual performed online, and this sort of personal pliancy in expressing religiosity online has bled into offline attitudes as well (Campbell 2012). Smartphone apps allow for a heightened version of this fluidity, allowing users to download unlimited religious and spiritual apps and creating a flexible and multifaceted projection of religious identity.

These scholars provide us with theoretical framework for addressing religious smartphone apps, but there is the added complication of digital religion on the medium of the smartphone. Except for a few select scholars who are branching into religion on the smartphone platform (Wagner 2012, Teusner & Torma 2011), there is not much material in the current field of media and religion to serve us in the analysis of religious smartphone apps, and this includes proper terminology. Hoover & Echchaibi’s “third spaces” is useful here (2012), but the idea of a “third space” created between public and private, religious and spiritual, or institution and individual is so broad, that although it does encompass smartphone apps, we need something more specific to address the changing user environment that comes with the smartphone’s mobility, gaming characteristics, and an increased level of individualization and customization that comes with app use. Because this is such a new field of study – not only because of the smartphone’s recent invention, but also because of the constant rotation of new technology, hardware and software – researchers are just now dipping their toes into this subsection of digital religion, and

I have not found theoretical terminology that I can unconditionally apply to this new medium and these religious apps. I attempt to do so here, with the introduction of what I call “mobile religion.” A form of mobile religion is “mobile mindfulness,” a term which refers to the utilization of Buddhist-inspired meditation apps.

Considering this transfer onto the smartphone and, with it, the increased use of apps to identify with or enact religious practice in a Buddhist context, “mobile mindfulness” equates to three principal transformations. The first explores how the physical mobility of the smartphone changes how users practice meditation, especially in regards to the experimental “liminoid” space within everyday environments that these apps create; the second is the element of gamification, or play-like attitude that frames these apps, looking both at the external medium of the smartphone and internal way the apps are styled; and the third is the intensification of individualism and customization that both the smartphone and the app itself encourage.

MOBILE MEDIUM: CREATING EXPERIMENTAL PLACES OF “PLAY”

“Communication technologies mold the messages we deliver in unanticipated ways... crucially influencing our self-conceptions, notions of human relations and community and the nature of reality itself” (Dawson & Cowan 2004: 9)

The relatively recent yet habitual use of the smartphone as a medium for communication, information and entertainment has had an enormous impact in the last half decade. In this section, I analyze how the smartphone’s mobility affects user experience, especially with the cultural tenant that the device should be heterogeneous in its use and used in areas that are just as multifaceted and transient, and how this mobility encourages users to create temporary, experimental places, set within the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Marshall McLuhan famously emphasized the importance of the medium over the message; McLuhan argues, “the content of a medium is always another medium” (1964: 15-16) and that media has and always will be extensions of our human senses, bodies and minds (1984). Walter J. Ong (1982) observed our cultural tendency to privilege certain communicative elements as our standard mediums for communication change. For example, aural aspects took prominence in our culture’s oral storytelling before the invention of the printing press – and mass literacy – after which its importance reduced, only to rise again with the invention of and our habitual use of the radio as a communicative medium.

Looking at the physical medium of the smartphone, we see the communicative elements it emphasizes and those it negates: the device values individual aural, visual and sensory touch while disregarding permanency and community, an idea that Paul Emerson Teusner and Ryan Torma address in “iReligion” (2011). The authors note that the sense of touch, and the digital response generated from touch, elevates the user experience: “Users give meaning to religious text in an iPhone app through touching a portion of the screen and reading, viewing and/or listening to its response” (153). Smartphones also allow for slight physical manipulation; the simple ability to physically flip the screen, our portal into endless information and communication, is something users have never been able to do with an interactive medium. This puts an element of personal power and customization directly into the hands of the user. O’Leary (1996) notes that the digital world has generated an intensified awareness of the self and a subsequent alienation of this self from the external world. This aspect is elevated in the smartphone platform. With its personal-sized screen and unique-to-the-user app content, the smartphone privileges individual practice over communal practice.

The smartphone's physicality, especially its small screen, restricts how much content can actually be viewed. When viewing the Bible on one of the thousands of Christian scripture apps, for example, font must remain large enough to stay legible but shrink enough to fit within the tiny screen. As a result, users must continuously scroll down to read an entire book or chapter. Contrasting with a computer screen, the smartphone's screen size also limits multi-tasking abilities. Users can only interact with one app at a time, as one app typically takes up the entire smartphone screen. These are important physical restrictions when utilizing meditation apps, which encourage users to interact solely with the one app in order to increase overall attentiveness. The medium also removes much of the comforting and exhilarating sensory stimulation received from face-to-face communication or physical offline practice. Pauline Hope Cheong argues that some religious rituals, such as sacrament, are not being transferred properly onto the online platform (Cheong 2012). But, with its mobility, the smartphone allows users to create their own unique space of practice for meditation.

In many ways, the smartphone extends the workplace to the bus bench, expands the social circle outside a communal gathering, and stretches the temporal or spatial boundaries of family (Hemmet 2005). And with our case, the smartphone extends and adapts the practice space of meditation for mobile users. In "The Walkman Effect," Shuhei Hosokawa analyzes the autonomy of these mobile users. Although the intention of the Walkman and the smartphone differs – the former is purely for listening while the latter connects and communicates – Hosokawa is not interested in either, and focuses his analysis on the social disconnect and isolation of the Walkman user (1984). We see this "isolation" idea in the contemporary use of smartphones, and Sherry Turkle notes it in her recent book, *Alone Together: Why we Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Indeed, it is a common sight to see hauls of commuters with their

eyes glued to their smartphones or a group of teenagers “socializing,” phones in each of their hands. Smartphone use is isolating because each user is creating their own personal, temporary space of practice or “play.”

When using a smartphone, users are “place-making,” according to Shaun Moores (2012). Moores argues against the idea that contemporary existence is “placeless” and instead attests that new and mobile media allow us to create “new forms of dwelling” (70). Crucially, Moores defines “place” as “an experimental accomplishment, as something more than just a location... It is location that is made meaningful through repetitive, habitual practices” (2012: 104; Tuan 1977). Using a meditation app on a smartphone exemplifies this idea, as mobile meditation practice encourages users to create personal place of practice while in transit. These places attempt to become “cut off,” despite their placement among possible day-to-day chaos, due to the isolation of the necessary earphones and mental concentration to use these mindful apps. I wish to further this thought by arguing that habitual users of meditation apps create experimental places of “play.”

To explore this idea, it is important to review the contemporary use of “liminoid,” and “play.” Originally coined by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, the term “liminal,” is the temporary, transitional, space created in a rite of passage that allows for transformation between fixed categories of social roles. The “liminal” played a key role in Victor Turner’s (1974) ritual theory. Turner noted that in industrial societies, the “liminal” in ritual was giving way to secular “liminoid,” which he defined as experimental, autotelic and ludic. In this “liminoid,” there is a focus on the individual and a negation of any real socially recognized transformation, making the practice space into a secular, experimental, exploratory and playful one (Turner 1992: 160; 1982).

This notion supports Adam B. Seligman (2008) argument that rituals open up a subjunctive “as if” world: an exploratory, hypothetical and temporary arena for play.

The term “play” here represents not only the experimental nature of activity that occurs in the liminoid space, but also the framing that apps provide. Smartphone apps depict the practice of meditation as a game that users “play.” Apps boast player “profiles” that resemble video game dashboards, and users generate points through accuracy and duration in their meditation “performance.” With these apps, however, the somewhat superfluous term “play” comes with psychological benefits. In his discussion of popular ritual, Gregor Goethals asserts that through “play,” practitioners are temporarily removed from the time and space of everyday lives, and then return to the mundane world “individually renewed in spirit” (129). “Play” here has meaning: games, like religion, are interactive and shape the performer through his movement through the scripted experience (Wagner 2012: 6).

RELIGIOUS GAMIFICATION

“Through the institution of rules and the engagement with an idealized, structured mode of being, play, like ritual, offers us a temporary escape from the disorder in our daily lives” (Wagner 2012: 3)

Like the term, “play,” there is a certain level of trivialization that comes when the word “game” is included in a conversation about “religion.” Brenda Brasher argues that for the religiously inclined, “a computer-informed, globally networked world view can make some inherited religious traditions appear insufficiently comprehensive and therefore *less credible, less persuasive and* (at the most practical level) *less useful*” (2001: 142, my emphasis). The idea that virtual religious practice can and should only be seen as an accessory element to “real world” religious activity has flowed throughout the majority of scholarly work in digital religion (Wagner

2012). But these arguments are more conventional than actually fitting. In our spiritual activities and ritual, we are all, in fact, “playing” into the notion of religion. And the simulated world of the Internet, and the use of smartphone apps, makes it easier for all of us to play along.

With the increase in religious material in smartphone apps, there has been a shift in academic focus. Scholars are beginning to analyze religiosity used in mass media entertainment, video games and smartphones. Rachel Wagner addresses these issues in *Godwired: Religion, Ritual and Virtual Reality*, with the underlying question of how individual religious identity and community are created online and off, and how virtual reality provides a space for the “world building” aspect of religion (2012). Addressing religion in virtual gaming, Wagner asks if “our desire for the virtual can in fact be viewed at least in part also as a hunger for the real – for the sense of meaning, order and definition in our own real lives” (14).

Wagner, in fact, views religion itself as a form of virtual reality: people involved and participating in religious faiths and activities buy into and obey the rules of their particular religion, similar to the rules of a game, even if they are somewhat uncertain about its objective truth (2012). Using Bernard Suits “lusory attitude” theory, or “the state of mind whereby game players consciously take on the challenges and obstacles of a game in order to experience the play of the game itself,” Wagner compares “lusory attitude” to “faith attitude” in religion. Both assume a purpose to challenges, a discoverable set of rules, and both involve the voluntary submission to these mindsets. Wagner states that we use gaming as a “temporary escape from the disorder in our daily lives” (2012: 3).

While I do not wish to argue that, “practicing religion equals playing religion,” Wagner’s connection of “lusory” and “faith” attitude implicates an important dialogical connection when it comes to “gaming” and “religion.” This connection makes it easier to consider that religious

practice can be performed on the same platform and in the same way as *Angry Birds* or *Words with Friends*. Apps have always been playfully marketed as game-like escapes; Apple iPhone commercials show zoomed-in shots of users' hands tapping and interacting with the screen to enter a digital arena of imagination. It makes sense that religious apps adhere to this default and recognized framing that have made smartphone apps so popular. And with this game-like basis comes other design and technical elements of "play," such as quantitative scoring, recording, and ranking.

Later in *Godwired*, Wagner focuses in on one app, *Pray*. The app is simple in its technological sophistication and differs from the meditation apps we will explore in proceeding chapters, which encompass more of the gamification explored in this section. Wagner's analysis of the app, however, gives insight into why people use religious apps in the first place. *Pray* involves typing out a prayer, hitting send, but receiving no incoming message. The one-sidedness raises questions of purpose – why use an app with no external community engagement or internal technological response? What are the user benefits of one-sided "play"? Wagner responds: "[O]ur investment in online experiences has rendered them in some ways more authentic than real-life experiences." Because so much of our lives have "gone digital," experiences and practices that occur offline seem unverifiable, due to their absence from our online profiles. Culturally, we have developed a desire to invest in displaying facets of ourselves in digital realms, even if nobody ever sees them (Wagner 2012).

Kevin Kelly and Gary Wolf (2007) first introduced the idea of the "quantified self," or digitally tracking aspects of daily life, including input, performance, emotional and physical states, and argue that it has become more present in recent years. Wolf later argues that through quantifying various aspects of our lives and reflecting on the data, we become better versions of

ourselves (2010). Several of the meditation apps use this aspect of personal quantification. Apps record and score meditation practice sessions, and some even offer the option to upload quantitative scores to users' social media networks.

Internal scoring, along with user interface features that mirror computer and video games, “gamifies” these meditation apps. This framing secularizes meditation, as many apps assign points for factors like accuracy in or duration of practice, moving meditation further from its religious roots. Further, the gamification and playful branding of these meditation apps makes them more enjoyable to operate, possibly encouraging more frequent use, or “play,” in the future.

PICKING AND CHOOSING IN THE SPIRITUAL MARKETPLACE

“Today, religious identity is both reflected in and shaped by the technology we use, infused within the complex identity negotiations that involve our interaction with a host of new media components including apps and the mediated worlds into which these apps invite us” (Wagner 2012: 102)

As discussed in previous sections of mobile place-making and gamification, the Internet is a place where, for many people, identities form, memory becomes structured and attitudes become determined. The digital world provides endless opportunities for individualization through personal websites, blogs, social networking, and photo-sharing sites: “Self-presentation of identity online morphs easily into the creation of identity” (Bob 2012: 286). The smartphone encourages this idea, not only heightening aspect of individualization but also encouraging a multiplicity of user self-representations in mobile religious activity. The device's user interface is typically a patchwork-quilt of apps, displaying that user's unique choices in news, social media, gaming and, in many cases, religious apps. Diana Eck describes modern religiosity as a “pluralist response” in forming our identity through new media; mobile technology allows us to form our

identity online via our app choices (Wagner 2012). The very choice of selecting apps can reflect a pluralist engagement with the possibility of different modes of religious encounter.

Smartphones allow users to digitally download and tap into their chosen spiritual beliefs and create a customized “religious-self” behind the screen of their smartphone. The self is constructed through a collage of downloads. Just as the montage of religious elements you choose to follow is distinctive to you, so is the unique selection of apps on your smartphone. Wagner writes that smartphone technology supports and shapes individualized modes of self-understanding, especially in the form smartphones, which provide users with the ability to collect apps that support user beliefs, habits, and personal preferences (102).

Smartphones are very intimate devices, containing not only our network’s contact information, but also our personal photos, notes, and digital messages from loved ones. Apps add to this personalization, as each represents a different part of a user’s personality. Even within the iPod and iPad hardware, there is a huge emphasis on the individual, as discussed in the smartphone physicality and religious gamification sections. With their personal-sized screens, smartphones do not easily allow physical sharing, although a user can opt to share some virtually. And besides smartphone’s default communication capabilities like calling or text messaging, some scholars argue that most users neglect two-way communication in apps, even when it is a key feature. Mark D. Johns argues that much our digital activity is one-sided: user participation on Facebook stops after the ‘join’ or ‘like’ button. Johns says that most who “join” these groups online approve or vote affirmably for the group and what they stand for, rather than create some sort of online conversation or community (Johns 2012). This shows how isolating and individualizing digital communication can be, despite the façade of a “social network” community. Users may “join” or “like” to project a certain image of themselves to their social network, but they do

not engage in online communities or discourse. Thus, even the social network feature on smartphones is often extensions of creating a user's identity through digital media.

Wagner notes that today's religiously minded person is "a 'bricoleur' who 'cobble[s] together a religious world from available images, symbols, moral codes, and doctrines" (2012: 99). Think of a young American woman who was raised Catholic, practices yoga, owns a few used books on Zen kōans, and helps celebrate her partner's Jewish faith every Passover. Religious hybridity comes with strands of reductionism, as described in Tweed's "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures" chapter. Tweed describes religious "sympathizers" as dabblers in the surface philosophy of the religion, driven through their own personal, textual readings of both sacred text and popular literature (1999). These "night-stand Buddhists," a term which can be transferred to match any religious group, do not identify as Buddhists but project some sort of interest in the religion, such as practicing meditation or subscribing to a Buddhist publication (Tweed 1999). This is not to say that "night-stand" Buddhists are not sincere in their spiritual beliefs, they just are content with a different level of dedication, one that perhaps allows room for different forms of identity. Also known as "Dharma-hoppers," these people are spiritual-but-not-religious individual who are "shopping around for a magic key to happiness and peace of mind, then dropping out" of the more rigorous devotion that comes with fully committing to a religion (Laymen 1976: 203).

Goethals (1997) writes that in contemporary American society, ones religion is a personal, highly individual matter. Recent research (Barna 2011) reveals that more Americans are tailoring religion to "fit their needs," or match their unique lifestyle, whether based morally, culturally, or simply out of convenience or lethargy. Our private and personal smartphones encourage this idea,

allowing users to customize how to learn about, communicate with, and practice religion, as well as how to form their digital religious identity and how to project it into the digital world.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this chapter, I gathered theory on religion and media from the fields of anthropology, communication studies, media studies, and religious studies, to contextualize my contributions on “mobile mindfulness,” or digital religion within smartphone apps. What I seek to highlight in this thesis is that the physical facets of a smartphone allow users to create mobile, experimental spaces to perform popular rituals, even amongst quotidian hurry; that the platform of the smartphone and the customary tone of its apps encourage the gamification of app content; and that the smartphone itself and its internal set-up intensify individualization, through both the device’s personal-size and customization features in the user interface that fosters a digital space for users to pick-and-choose apps that speak to them, thereby creating a unique digital identity.

With this trio of concepts in mind, I argue in the succeeding chapter that these aspects are heightened examples of David McMahan’s three key aspects of “Buddhist modernism.” The experimental and transient space that the mobile smartphone creates is a pronounced version of Buddhist modernism’s psychologization; the gamification of religious apps is an elevated version of the religion’s demythologicalization; and the platform and content’s emphasis on the individual shows an extension of Buddhist modernism’s deinstitutionalization. In the chapter that follows, we turn our focus to Buddhism in modernity: I explain the three elements of McMahan’s Buddhist modernism, how digital media and the Internet has heightened these elements, and how smartphone meditation apps are the pinnacle of Buddhist modernism in current society.

III. DIGITAL BUDDHISM

BUDDHIST MODERNISM

The term “Buddhist modernism” is originally attributed to Heinz Bechart (1966), who described our contemporary interpretations of Buddhism as the result of interactions between Western modernity and Asian Buddhists. David McMahan continues this line of thought, emphasizing Western culture’s effect on Buddhism by describing Buddhist modernism as, “a hybrid tradition with roots in the European Enlightenment no less than the Buddha’s enlightenment, in Romanticism and transcendentalism as much as the Pali canon...and in the clash of Asian cultures and colonial powers as much as in mindfulness and meditation” (2008: 5). McMahan uses Charles Taylor’s (1989) “vessels of modernity” to explain how Buddhism evolved and gained popularity in North American cultures: Western concern with monotheism, particularly the Protestant Reformation; increasing rational perspective, particularly the dismissal of “pre-modern” religious mythology and mysticism; and romantic expressivism, or American counter-culture (2008: 10).

McMahan asserts that elements of Buddhism that many now consider central to the tradition—meditation, internal experience, individual authority—are so constructed because of the “gravitational pull of modernity” (44). These elements come through in three basic spheres: the psychologization, demythologicalization and the deinstitutionalization of Buddhism by contemporary, Western societies. In this thesis, I argue that each of these characteristics is heightened on the Internet’s digital platform, and most intensely exemplified on the platform of the smartphone. As stated in the previous section, I parallel these characteristics to the three transformations that have occurred with “mobile mindfulness,” or the transition onto the smartphone.

Buddhist modernism's "psychologization" of Buddhism is the paralleling of Buddhist ideas with concepts of modern Western psychology (McMahan 2008). Examples of this characteristic include an emphasis on Buddhist practices that encourage self-improvement, self-help, and mindfulness. McMahan writes that this emphasis lands centrally on meditation, "a development that not only has revived canonical meditation methods but also popularized and democratized them, making them available to all at uniquely modern 'meditation centers'" (2008: 7). Meditation is framed as a secular practice that helps generate mindfulness, reduce stress, and improve health by fixing numerous medical faults such as high-blood pressure, chronic migraines, and even cancer; all while overlooking meditation's original goal of attaining Nirvāṇa. We can see this in "mindful-based stress reduction" (MBSR), a medicinal meditative program, that creator Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn says is not spiritually based, despite its credited roots in Buddhism (Google 2007). MBSR has extended into hospitals and prisons, in hopes of alleviating physical pain and destructive mental behavior (Samuelson et al. 2007; Kalb 2004).

Buddhist modernism's "demythologicalization" is a general negation of the religion's cosmological concepts to fit in contemporary times, along with a "symbolic interpretation of traditional myths" (McMahan 2008: 7). Theologian Rudolf Bultmann first used the term "demythologization" in the mid-twentieth century, referencing the reinterpretation of the New Testament (Harvey 1997). Bultmann argued that the second half of the Christian Bible is laden with language and stories that "must be called mythological" (1997: 67). For Buddhism, this equates to the modern American dismissal of Buddhism's pantheon of buddhas, bodhisattvas and other deities, in favor of a more nontheistic understanding of Buddhism. The website *Nichiren's Coffeehouse and Gohonzon Gallery* (nichirenscoffeehouse.net/) offers up a solution for this mythical "worldview [that] can no longer be taken literally by Buddhists today": simply ignore Bud-

dhism's mythical elements or "demythologize the Dharma" (McCormick 2004). This online article, transcribed from a 2004 speech at the American Academy of Religions conference, goes on to say that one way of demythologizing Buddhism is to psychologize it:

In other words, to assert that the hells, hungry ghost realms, heavens, pure lands and so forth along with their supernatural inhabitants are not so much descriptions of geographical locations and actual beings as they are metaphors for states of mind and ways of viewing and interacting with the world based on our habits, tendencies and assumptions (McCormick 2004).

This site exudes an opinion that I believe is shared among many modern, American Buddhists: that one can self-describe as Buddhist or believe certain Buddhist ethics, but "do not have to accept that there is literally a fiery hell filled with ox-headed demons beneath our feet or heavenly palaces floating overhead" (McCormick 2004).

Buddhist modernism's "deinstitutionalization" is the movement away from the constraining regulation of institutional hierarchy and community into a more individualized and self-tailored practice. McMahan writes of a "modernist tendency to elevate reason, experience, and intuition over tradition and to assert the freedom to reject, adopt, or reinterpret traditional beliefs and practices on the basis of individual evaluation" (2008: 43). Deinstitutionalization minimizes social relationships, ritual and institutional authority, and emphasizes one's personal, spiritual path that ultimately improves one's day-to-day.

BUILDING ON MCMAHAN

We see a heightened version of each of these three characteristics online and in smartphone meditation apps. Digital Buddhism used "to promote their individual health and welfare, to heighten awareness of their own feelings, and to allow for more successful individual enlightenment," (Holmes 2010: 55) has proven to be a more culturally relatable framing, that has

allowed meditation to expand beyond institutional Buddhism and meditation centers and into secular spheres of hospitals, prisons and personal, unaffiliated practice. We see Buddhism's psychologization in websites like the *Transcendental Meditation® Program* (tm.org/), a popular celebrity-endorsed meditation program. The "all rights reserved" Transcendental Meditation® lists the following as meditational benefits: improved creativity, reduced stress, increased attentiveness and academic performance, and overall develops a "healthy, creative, peaceful individual." Additionally, the site for the magazine, *Psychology Today* has an entire subsection on "Meditation" (psychologytoday.com/basics/meditation), which includes the article "Buddhism and the Blues." The article states, "Buddhist psychology's core techniques of meditation and awareness may have much to offer ordinary Westerners."

Smartphone meditation apps play into this idea – the majority of meditation apps are categorized under the "Health and Fitness" section of the iTunes App Stores. Meditation apps not only tout meditation's psychological benefits, like increased attentiveness, but they also claim to solve many health issues, such as sleep apnea and chronic migraines. Meditation app users generate and improve upon these psychological and health benefits through creating a mindful, separate space of practice.

Even with the infinite multimedia capabilities of the online world, with the ability to display thousands of pages of sūtra in many languages or depict deities from different genres of art, there is still a tendency to remove Buddhist scripture and deities and simplify the religion's mythology. As seen in the example *Nichiren's Coffeeshouse and Gohonzon Gallery*, websites epitomize Buddhist modernism's demythologicalization by "ignoring" Buddhist cosmology and instead favoring a secular or psychological slant. The site *Buddha Brat* (buddhabrat.com/) reviews the six realms of existence in Buddhism, but chooses to focus on each realm's "emotional" im-

plications. The post also contains the sub-header “Different Strokes for Different Folks,” suggesting that, based on one’s personality, it is fine to dwell in different realms of hell. Additionally, the site *Reality Sandwich* (realitysandwich.com/) offers a playlist of “top music that takes you to a higher plane,” suggesting that this contemporary “techno” music can transport listeners to another religious realm.

Smartphone apps intensify Buddhist modernism’s demythologizing elements, continuing the to downplay Buddhism cosmology and miraculous elements, and favoring a game-like framing of religious practices. In one of the apps we explore, users pick and choose certain personal, mental strengths – such as clarity and connection – that they believe are improved upon with consistent practice. Meditation “flavors” are shown as brightly colored ice cream cones. These commended strengths improve other aspects of one’s mood, such as curiosity, joy and calm. In another app, meditation is turned into an interactive game, with styling and scoring similar to a video or computer game. There is no hint of religiosity or mythology in the app. Meditation sessions are quantified and shared with social media networks with a tap of the screen.

Buddhism’s deinstitutionalization involves the removal of hierarchal on the digital platform, a medium that Dawson noted is full of unofficial “instant experts” (2004), who more often times than not lack any formal training usually required of Buddhist teachers. Thus, the individual, or in some cases, these digital “instant experts,” claim religious authority through attempting to portray religious authenticity. For example, author and teacher Stephen Schettini’s website (schettini.com/) and blog (thenakedmonk.com/) offer Buddhist-slanted guidance and advice to readers. Schettini’s sites are cohesively branded, complete with book and reading lists, slogans (“Question life’s big answers: Expose yourself to doubt”), social media buttons, “private consultation,” and workshop advertisements. Posts like, “Buddha: the Self-help Guru,” featuring a

Buddha with a headset phone, play into Buddhist modernism's deinstitutionalization and psychologization. These values parallel those of Protestant Buddhism: a tradition that praises self-taught and heavily textual learning, instead of relying on a mentor-student relationship; private practice over public practice; and personal experience, over community experience (McMahan 2012: 116).

In smartphone apps, we see a continuation of this subversion of traditional institutions. No traditional authority exists within most smartphone meditation apps, and there is hardly any mention of Buddhism as an organized religion, community, or authoritative voice. Further, app imagery often depicts a sole meditator, sitting and practicing in isolation. In his definition of Buddhist modernism's deinstitutionalization quoted above, McMahan credits the individual as replacing institution: to "reinterpret traditional beliefs and practices on the *basis of individual evaluation*" (2008:43, emphasis my own). With smartphones, apps and the individual are the mechanism of authentic approval: not only is the personal platform of the smartphone incredibly individualizing, but also the self-evaluative feature of many of the apps brings validating power to the user.

BUDDHISM ONLINE

With the Internet's dexterous nature, Buddhism online takes on many shapes and forms. Although the Internet hosts traditional and community-oriented representations of Buddhism – those that emphasize some sort of community, doctrine and philosophy – the most popular Buddhist media follows McMahan's Buddhist modernism characteristics and, in the smartphone app examples, my paralleled implications for "mobile mindfulness." Below, I briefly outline representations of Buddhism in new media, categorizing different representations and highlighting

popular sites within each category. This list will show how digital Buddhism has furthered the religion's move away from rigorous dogmatism, especially so with meditation. This is an abbreviated summary, as Buddhism's presence online continues to grow every day.

BUDDHAZINES

First are the multifaceted websites I call, "Buddhazines," or informative magazine-like sites with regularly updated material. These sites depict Buddhism as a contemporary, trendy and culturally relevant guide to spiritual living. For the unbeknownst visitor, these sites project a sense of authority through their clean layout, regularly updated material and demonstration of a regular online following; they give off a feel similar to that of a respected online magazine or newspaper. The aesthetics of the sites themselves are usually modern, with landing pages that utilize one of the Internet's multimedia capabilities, such as video or podcasts. Material consists of newsworthy articles and informative blog posts from a variety of authors and covers current and thought-provoking issues that give Buddhism a fresh framing. Many of the news items have provocative imagery, such as modern neon paintings of the Buddha. Because of the constant cycle of new content, these sites feel more like online newspapers, magazines and social media sites, which continuously provide new reading material for visitors, than sectarian presentations of Buddhism doctrine and practice, highlighting their authority as unbiased.

For example, *Tricycle Magazine's* (tricycle.com) articles address social issues such as religious commodification, political equality, science and racism. The online magazine intends "to present Buddhist perspectives to a Western readership," through "creat[ing] forums for exploring contemporary and historic Buddhist activity, examin[g] the impact of its new context in the democratic traditions of the West, and introduc[ing] fresh views and attainable methods for enlightened living to the culture at large." Articles like, "Is Indian Citizenship the Next Step for

Tibetans in Exile?” “The Scientific Buddha,” and “Dharma Talk: Sexual Misconduct” fill up the site. The online magazine also offers online retreats and features “Daily Dharma” from non-traditional Buddhist teachers Larry Rosenberg, Jack Kornfield and B. Allen Wallace. Another example of “Buddhazines” is *elephantjournal.com* (elephantjournal.com/), “dedicated to bringing together those working (and playing) to create enlightened society.” The site offers subcategories like, “Yoga,” “Food,” “EcoFashion,” and “Non New-Agey Spirituality,” with a mix of religiously-inspired articles – “Why is the Buddha Smiling? (And How You Can Too),” provocative pieces “The Importance of Dying,” and secular cultural articles – “10 Signs you’re a true Hipster.” The site *Buddhist Geeks* (buddhistgeeks.com/) is popular among “tech-savvy Buddhists looking for a fresh perspective on being a modern-day Buddhist practitioner.” The site’s podcasts and articles apply digital media to Buddhist practice, usually with a comical, tongue-in-cheek twist: “Mind Hacking: Upgrading from Windows ME,” “#Hashtag Meditation,” “Buddhism, Technology, and Quarter-Pounders.” The site mixes Buddhist terminology – the site’s mission statement is titled “Our Koan” and is actually not a kōan but a question² – and science – or “experimental writings and reflections” articles under the category, “The Lab.” *Buddhist Geeks* has extended into the offline world as well, with its annual conference. The 2013 conference will feature Western Buddhist teachers Reggie Ray and Shinzen Young, along with neuroscientist Rick Hanson and contemplative scientist Dave Vago. During my time at the 2012 conference, I often heard people referencing each other with their Twitter handle or blog name. The phrase, “it’s good to finally meet you offline,” was a common one.

A subsection of “Buddhazines” are ecumenical activist groups appealing to young meditators. *The Interdependence Project* (theidproject.org/) focuses on meditative practice, bringing a

² “How can we serve the convergence of Buddhism with rapidly evolving technology and an increasing global culture?”

"secular and highly accessible approach to studying and practicing Buddhist meditation." The site connects Buddhism with social activism, nutrition, and technology. They have podcasts and videos, such as "Tibet's Time Machine and the Activism of Global Happiness," which follows in line with the organization's alignment with Buddhist social issues. *The Interdependence Project* also hosts "offline" events, such as its six-week series in New York, "Buddhism & Psychology: Spiritual Awakening NOT Spiritual Bypassing," with the tagline, "Transcending Confusion Without Avoiding Your Life." Users sign up online, access that week's readings online, and then attend offline seminars and meditation groups. Another example is the *The Buddhist Peace Fellowship* (buddhistpeacefellowship.org/). The site covers art, gender, and military among its comparative categories, while using crisp and modern cosmetics throughout the site.

These Buddhazines remove Buddhist institutional hierarchy in favor of individual and re-interpret Buddhist mythology as yogic, tantric and meditative practice. Most importantly, these sites stress the psychology of Buddhism through a community emphasis on social, cultural, and political issues in users' communities, and an individual emphasis on training users' minds to stay calm and open throughout the chaos of everyday, contemporary life. Although these sites are clearly Buddhist-inspired, they present content in a way that is accessible to users of any religious denomination. There is no complicated language or required services or steps. In fact, if one replaces the Buddhist terminology used in these sites with another religious or secular term, the sites could read as another topic entirely.

BUDDHIST BOARDS

If considering Helland's "religion online" or "online religion" dichotomy, this next grouping of sites – what I call "Buddhist Boards" – embody religion online, as institutional sites presenting information to visitors. In this type of educational Buddhist website, there is little

community and interactivity, and minimal effort paid to multimedia or modern symbolism that would make the site more aesthetically or culturally contemporary. Instead, these sites' main goal is to provide digital access to Buddhist text, invaluable for practitioners living in diaspora. These online resources for Buddhist texts do "fall short" for the multi-tasking Western user in two ways: they are simply a static textual collection, not using all of cyberspace's other interactive resources; and there is no real arena for community. These sites can be viewed as digital resources for Buddhists who already practice – either online, offline, or both – and specifically seeking out text to add to their Buddhist education.

The *Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center* (tbr.org/) boasts a lengthy scriptural catalog whose extensive breadth is only matched by its meticulous user-friendly interactivity and information. But this site falls short. The Theravādan site *Access to Insight* walks visitors through the pantheon of Buddhist texts, with articles like, "What is Theravāda Buddhism?" but, directly below this article, we see that the site emphasizes individual-learning: "Self-guided tour of the Buddha's teachings." Available in English and Chinese, the *Buddhist Association* (fpmtm-ba.org.hk/) lists Buddhist teacher biographies and offers PDFs of Mahāyāna teachings. This site differs from others listed above, in that it does have an active Facebook page, posting images, events and relevant Buddhist articles.

These "Buddhist Boards" actually push against much of McMahan's Buddhist modernism. There is institution; there is mythology; there is not a huge attempt to psychologize Buddhism. One important point, however, is the negation of the traditional teacher-student relationship. The sites, like many examples of digital Buddhism, encourage self-taught education and practice. "Buddhist Boards," unlike "Buddhazines," seem to appeal to visitors who already have

a background in Buddhism, whether that education was attained online, offline, alone or with the assistance of a teacher.

BUDDHISM WITHOUT THE “B” WORD

There is a growing number of informal, lighthearted and evasive Buddhist sites and blogs, or “buddhism without the ‘b’ word” sites. These sites contain no obvious authority figure and they like it that way. Users who frequent these kinds of sites practice Buddhism casually, through secular articles that use Buddhism peripherally and through parodying its more trivial representations. *Tiny Buddha’s* (tinybuddha.com/) website mostly consists of sunny, elated imagery and “life lists,” or lists with titles like “50 Things to Love about Life That Are Free” or “20 Things to Do When You’re Feeling Angry with Someone.” This self-help approach continues in articles like, “How to Love Your Authentic Self” and the subcategories *Healthy Habits* or the lengthy *Quotes* section. Buddhism, as a whole, is largely ignored in the site’s content. Rod Meade Sperry’s tongue-in-cheek *The Worst Horse* (theworsthorse.com/) collects and showcases “dharma burgers,” or commoditized pop culture “representations” of Buddhism. Documented moments of “buddhism,” like images of Volkswagen’s newest campaign, “Carma,” are sent in to Sperry, who posts the Buddhist representations with satirical commentary. The site does not have a space for public discourse, but visitors get the same feel of communal contribution from the user-generated photos and content. *Reddit’s* subsection “Buddhism” is completely community generated and uses site moderators loosely. Buddhism here is depicted in a similar fashion to *The Worst Horse* – with parody. Content is updated so quickly that top stories, voted on by *Reddit* users, change hourly. Community takes form in the comment section, as multi-user conversations go on for pages. Although *Reddit* does not host the most accurate information, it does provide exposure to Buddhism on a popular platform.

With these sites, Buddhism is a minor player, only used as a framing device for psychological self-help practice or religious parody. Here, Buddhism fully capitalizes on McMahan's first two modernism characteristics: the religion is void of all institution and mythology. Psychologization is seen in very banal terms as well, as seen in *Tiny Buddha's* "20 Things to Do When You're Feeling Angry with Someone," which incorporates ethical and moral concerns, but not necessarily ones that are religious or even Buddhist. Or in *The Worst Horse's* attempts of displaying trivial imagery of Buddhism for the sole pursuit of mocking its presence, saying that those that submit and view the imagery are somehow religiously or morally "above" those who consume or take the items seriously. "buddhism without the 'b' word" sites are Buddhist pop culture at its best, and at times, its worst.

BUDDHA-BLOGGING

Although "Buddha-blogging" or podcasting began before the invention of the smartphone, podcasts rose in popularity once they had the ability to go mobile. The *Zencast* podcast offers introductory and informational podcasts, voiced by Western Buddhist leaders like Jack Kornfield and Andrea Fella. *Zencast's* partner website (zencast.org/) has an emotional "Work with" category, featuring subcategories like "anger" and "doubt," and a "Develop" category, with "loving kindness" and "right speech." The *Buddhist Geeks* podcast reaches out to the Buddhist tech-nerd crowd, a surprisingly large niche community thanks to Buddhism's Western-created connection to science and technology. The podcasts follow much of the social-issue Buddhism in the Buddhist modernism websites with some lightheartedness: "Fifty Shades of Geek" and "Mindful Binge Drinking and Blobology." The *Secular Buddhist Association* (secularbuddhism.org/) offers articles like, "Metta and the Ethics of Killin," and book reviews on Buddhist and secular books alike, but mainly features podcasts. Topics of these lengthy podcasts range from "Bud-

dhism and ZOMBIES!” to “Spirituality for Atheists,” and usually feature a guest speaker, such as Faith Adele (“Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun”), Stephen Batchelor (“The Awakening of the West”) Brad Warner (“Sex, Sin and Zen”) and Tim Ward (“What the Buddha Never Taught”).

As for the placement among McMahan’s three aspects of Buddhist modernism, these podcasts are audio versions of the aforementioned “Buddhazines.” The podcasts do not specifically value Buddhist institution or mythology, but they do usually incorporate some sort of public authoritative voice, usually for the sake of a guest speaker for each show. There is also a clear prominence on secular, philosophical and psychological discourse in podcast topics, like *Buddhist Geeks*’ “Creativity Without Grasping,” “The DNA Sūtra” and “Meditating with God.”

VIRTUAL REALITIES

Virtual realities provide an alternative, digital platform for users to explore and participate in religious practices. The 3D virtual world Second Life (SL), provide an online gateway that allows practitioners to experiment with unfamiliar or remote spiritualities (Helland 2007). SL Buddhist temples and centers are mostly religious structures of pure imagination, although there are a few examples of digital recreations of real-life locations. For example, The Deer Park Tōdai-Ji Temple lists both in SL and in Nara, Japan. Imaginative locations include *The Buddha Center*, *Zenshi* and *Deer Park at Buddha Center Dharma Land*. *The Buddha Center*’s mission statement explains that the Center’s goal is to oversee that Buddhism is “unequivocally and purely taught by experienced monastics and lay people in Second Life” (The Buddha Center 2013). The site goes on to explain that the *Center*’s founders, Delani Gabardini and Zino March, believed no “Sim,” or Second Life user, was properly teaching Buddhism in the virtual world, but that it could and should be done. Gabardini and March wanted to bring universal teachings to

Buddhist Sims, who for the majority, tended to be myopically loyal to only one tradition of Buddhism.

Many acclaimed Buddhist teachers are endorsing the virtual space of SL. Western teachers Jundo Cohen, Josh Bartok, Grace Schireson, Ken McLeod and Nate DeMontigny have all entered the realm of “SL” with acclamation. DeMontigny not only praises the alternative world for its variety of temples, meditation gatherings and discussion groups, but also credits the site and its community for providing structure for his strict meditation routine. DeMontigny explains: “Being a ‘lone practitioner’ it’s sometimes difficult to keep a constant practice going. I need that extra nudge from time to time. By logging in to SL and attending a meditation session or a dharma talk, I get a virtual nudge that I can transfer to my real life” (DeMontigny 2010). Zen teacher Jiun Foster sees SL as an open digital outlet for those interested in the dharma but unable to access it for geographical reasons (Foster 2010). Foster also praises the virtual reality for providing the necessary audio and video for large groups, creating a community where “[p]eople really identify not only with their own avatars, but with the other people around them” (Foster 2010).

This encouragement by Western Buddhist authorities, to include the digital world in users’ religious practice, shows hints of Buddhist modernism’s deinstitutionalization. Virtual worlds highlight the individual, going so far as to require users to reinterpret themselves online through the use of an avatar. Much of Buddhism’s mythological elements are also removed in virtual worlds, and are replaced with the mysticism of a new alternative universe, where a user’s avatar could be a striking image of one’s actual physical self, or a giant frog wearing a tuxedo.

VIRTUAL RETREATS

Both online and online/offline meditation retreats give offline practitioners some virtual support and guidance. There is no digitalized world in these experiences; no virtual avatars. After

signing up online, followers meditate offline and reconvene digitally to discuss their experiences. The first example is of a purely online meditation experience, with no façade of offline support, and the other two examples are online/offline meditation retreats, which encourage community in their mission statement.

Virtual Meditation (virtual-meditation.com) offers a free “Gateway to Enlightenment” virtual meditation course, which includes access to the “Virtual Meditation Room,” and “Spiritual Healing Center.” In the “Virtual Meditation Room,” users will “literally be connecting on a spiritual level with all members who are currently Present in this Meditation Room.” The room is a black web page with the image of a flickering candle, a music playlist, and a “Collective Consciousness” world map that shows who other digital subscribers who are using the “room.” The “Spiritual Healing Center” allows user to type out “spiritual healing request,” in a blank text box, with the fine print:

The contents of your request will not be visible to others and will be held in a Sacred Secure location for 30 days. Be assured that your request has been 'Heard' on a spiritual level the moment you submit it. After clicking 'Submit' you can click the 'Print' button to save a copy of your request for your personal use.

This practice traces back to Wagner’s (2012) analysis of the smartphone app, *Prayer*, in which users type out prayers, hit send, and receive no confirmation that anyone, let alone anything divine, has received your thoughts. Wagner notes that users still feel satisfaction in the notion that someone or something has digitally accepted their thoughts or prayers. However, with the growth of religion on the Internet, O’Leary (1996) noted that digital religious practitioners would still crave some sort of offline experience. The following online/offline retreats grant part of this.

Buddhist Geeks creator Vincent Horn hosts “Life Retreat” (liferetreat.me/), an eight-week long retreat with ten fellow digital meditators that promises personalized instruction from indi-

vidually-selected meditation instructors and facilitated group exploration. Hour-long individual with instructors and group meetings occur once a week and there is no common practice or text associated with the retreat. Because of this, there is more of an emphasis on community and spiritual dialogue than on practice. Like “Life Retreat,” “BASIC Mindfulness” (basicmindfulness.org/) is a virtual meditation that involves completely online discourse. “Basic Mindfulness” offers two-day retreats, with retreat themes changing monthly. The retreat provides audio-guided meditations to its user and emphasizes individual practice.

One site that combines all the above categories – save the virtual world aspect – while still maintaining distinct boundaries between them, is the site *BuddhaNet* (buddhanet.net/). The site has an online magazine, appropriately called “Buddhazine,” with articles on the psychology of meditation and “ecocrisis”; an online resources library and database, filled with songs, mantras, sacred texts, and Buddhist imagery from Mahāyāna, Theravāda and Vajrayana traditions; a subsection of comic strips, crossword puzzles and photo documentaries bring out the site’s “buddhism without the ‘b’ word” aspects; and “buddhanet audio” features audio clips of lectures, songs, chanting and guided meditation.

The above examples are only a sampling of Buddhist websites. Hundreds more exist and the list is growing. There is a larger growth in digital religion, however, within the newest medium of communication and information: the smartphone.

IMPORTANCE OF THE TRANSITION ONTO SMARTPHONE

Although smartphones, mobile phones with an internal computer operating system, have been available since 1994, their usage exploded with the iPhone's introduction a decade later. As of February 2012, nearly half (46%) of American adults owned a smartphone (Smith 2012). And

with almost one million smartphone apps, over one million podcasts, 10 million songs, 1.5 million books, and thousands of television shows, movies and music videos in the iTunes App Store for purchase and download, smartphone users are easily able to find an excuse to stay glued to their iPhone, BlackBerry or Android device (iTunes 2012). In 2010, Campbell and Antonio C. La Pastina investigated the cultural phenomena surrounding the release of the Apple iPhone. The authors noted that media coverage and blog postings sensationally treated the smartphone's pending release as a sort of "Second Coming." Several online publications – including *The Examiner* and *MSNBC* – picked up and used the nickname the blogosphere had bestowed upon the iPhone: the "Jesusphone." Gizmodo's "Analyst: The iPhone Really Is the Jesusphone," begins with this unabashed quote from tech-geek Tomi T Ahonen:

Much like the Western calendar marks time from before and after Jesus Christ, and how the computer world changed totally by the Macintosh—remembering that Windows is Microsoft's copy of the Mac operating system—I am certain that the mobile telecoms world will count its time in two Eras. The Era BI: time Before the iPhone, and the ERA AI: time After the iPhone.

Campbell & Pastina reference William Stahl's (1999) research that much of our language about technology is implicitly religious. Indeed, there has always been a strong correlation between technology and religion. Erik Davis' "techgnosis," (1998) or the mystical impulses that spark Western culture's obsession with technology, defines the "soul-searching" aspect and the mutual unfolding of technology and ourselves in the world. Religion has been "critiqued as a false premise, deceiving humanity into thinking technology will provide lost powers that it never actually possessed" and on the flip side, technology has been "anthropomorphized, so it is seen as a spiritual force guiding humanity. Techgnosis presents technology itself as a god to be worshipped" (2010: 1193, 1194). In *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*, David F. Noble presents the idea of the "religion of technology," or our constant

engagement with technology to attempt to regain some lost sense of spiritual meaning or control in the world (1999). The pick-and-choose aspect of the American spiritual marketplace is enhanced with smartphone technology, given the device's enhanced attributes of individualization and mobility.

Simply addressing the hardware of the iPod and iPad, we note a large emphasis on the individual, as we have seen in one of our "mobile mindfulness" implications: these new mediums do not easily allow you to physically share information, although a user can opt to share some virtually. This element of individualization also emerges with the user's choice in apps. Apps, in many ways, are the mobile version of a user's browser bookmarks: they not only represent the most-visited content, but they also represent a user's actual and aspirational personality. For example, one might bookmark a fitness website on his or her computer, and download the site's corresponding app, with the future aim of becoming more physically fit. Smartphones and their apps are devices to record and plan ideal versions of oneself.

With close to a million apps in the iTunes App Store, smartphone users have the ability to digitally patch themselves together on their phones; the online world provides an experimental and open arena for unlimited facets of self-identification (Wagner 2012). Contemporary spiritual seekers piece together their online religiosity in the form of digital imagery, symbols, ethics and sacred text. Users no longer have to separate their multiple identities – although they can choose to do so if they want – creating a sort of "pluralist response" to religious diversity and interreligious dialogue (Eck 2012). Smartphones, and a user's unique choice in apps, allow users to be a *National Public Radio* listener, an *Angry Birds* player, a fan of "The Lumineers," and an aspiring *Food Network* chef. Or, more applicably to this topic: a *YOGAmazing* yoga practitioner, an *iMantra* subscriber, a *Journey of Jesus: The Calling* player, and a *buddhify* meditator. Incorporo-

rating one's religious beliefs into one's patchwork of identification is a normal practice. Just as those that identify as puzzle fanatics can simply download a crossword app, those that identify as Roman Catholic can simply download a Catholicism app. But with the smartphone platform often comes the removal of religious institution, something that caused a media-stir with one religious app.

When the *Confession: A Roman Catholic App* debuted in February 2011, both the media and religious world hurried to predict the app's implications. Journalistic leads like "Confession? There's an app for that," playing off of one of Apple Inc.'s catchy slogans, brought religious practice on the smartphone platform to the attention of the masses (Praetorius 2011). Little iApps, the company behind *Confession*, designed the app to be a supplement to actual, offline confession, with "a personalized examination of conscience for each user" (Confession 2011). An aid to "prayerfully prepare for and participate in the Rite of Penance, the app flaunts password-protected profiles, a step-by-step guide to the sacrament (Confession 2011). Little iApps explains that their desire is to "invite Catholics to engage in their faith through digital technology," following the digital-friendly proclamation made by Pope Benedict XVI at the 2010 World Communications Address (Praetorius 2011). *Confession* leads users through an "Examination of Conscience," to determine which of the colorful and age-appropriate sins available on the app the user has committed. Once the proper – or improper – transgressions have been checked, the app jumpstarts the confession process by displaying the textual liturgical opening, "In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Father, it has been [blank] since my last confession," automatically filling in the blank by backtracking to the user's last login. Practitioners can then select from a list of prayers to complete their supplementary confession.

American media outlets covered the app's release relentlessly. Not only does *Confession*'s presence sit squarely in the above "religion of technology" discourse, but issues of authenticity pulsed through the app as its story unfolded. Several Roman Catholic bishops and senior church officials promoted digital confession as a supplement to "offline" confession, while the Vatican banned use of the app altogether (Hadhazy, 2011; AFP 2011). This hesitance reveals that there is still cultural skepticism of digital religion, which, given the Roman Catholic Church's out-of-touch reputation, should not come as too much of a surprise. That said, some publications predicted *Confession*'s fresh twist would encourage a boom in offline sacrament attendance, and even Catholicism overall. Most importantly, the *Confession* app was the first large-scale religious app to eliminate the need for offline authority and institution. It encouraged online religious practice without any mandatory offline interaction. Users could undergo the religious ritual of sacrament in their homes, at the office, or waiting in line at the supermarket. *Confession*'s individualizing and antiestablishment motifs have influenced and resonate in other religious apps, including Buddhist apps.

As we have seen, the cultural implications of the release and habitual use of the smartphone have been monumental in our current society. And with the example of the *Confession* app, we are given a sneak peak of how smartphones and smartphone apps alter digital religion. Although the *Confession* app stems from the Roman Catholic faith, the app suggests some parallels with what I will argue on Buddhist meditation apps.

With the *Confession* app, smartphone users are encouraged to treat their immediate surroundings as a pseudo-confessional, making their living room, minivan, or subway train a transient, spiritual place of practice. In this temporary space, through the utilization of the app, users receive digital cues and instructions, and essentially experience some sort of psychological

atonement. They leave the exploratory place and the confessional experience with a (temporary) psychological transformation; namely, that they have confessed and are forgiven for their sins. Additionally, although the *Confession* app includes many tradition elements of Catholicism – such as the suggested recitation of certain prayers or hymns after confession to atone for sins – the app removes much of the religion’s interaction with religious authorities and ritualized elements such as the formal steps involved in the Sacrament of the Penance. The app also removes much of the institutional structure of Catholic confession, the largest being the negation of priestly involvement. With this, community and doctrine is also negated, putting the focus on personal experience of the practitioner.

Meditation apps follow this same strand of thought. The apps emphasize further these lines of “liminoid” place by requiring users to ignore the outside stimuli and focus on the internal working of the app. Users leave this space of practice with the placebo promise of psychological and physical health improvements, whether short-term – stress relieved, anxiety ceased – or long-term – attentiveness increased, blood pressure lowered. With this, I connect a heightened version of McMahan’s psychologization with the “mobile mindfulness” implication of the creation of “limoid” spaces of experiment and play. Essentially, to foster the mental and physical benefits of mobile meditation, users must create an experimental place for psychological practice. Additionally, meditation apps demythologize the practice of meditation, turning the tranquil practice into a game. With this, I connect a heightened version of McMahan’s demythologization with the “mobile mindfulness” implication of the smartphone’s gamification. In these meditation apps, mythology – and really sense of Buddhism at all – has been removed. In its place is a meditation “game,” with minimal accredited “Buddhist inspiration,” according to some app creators. Smartphone meditation app users earn points, instead of merit, based on the dura-

tion, consistency and “accuracy” of their meditative practice. Meditation apps also remove institution, refocusing on the individual. With this, I connect a heightened version of McMahan’s de-institutionalization with the “mobile mindfulness” element of the smartphone’s individualization. Removing the institution, hierarchy and community leaves one thing: the individual. Smartphone meditation apps feed into this idea of individualization: with little exception, meditation apps contain only a single-player option; player profiles resemble video games, with tracking that display personal statistics and improvement; meditation practice on the smartphone encourages an isolating field, as discussed in our other theoretical implications, emphasizing the individual experience.

With these parallels in mind, we move on to Buddhist smartphone apps. In the section that follows, I outline Buddhist apps available on the market, categorizing and explaining these categories as the list goes on. When we reach Buddhist meditation apps, I begin to explain how each of the “mobile mindfulness” elements applies to each subcategory.

BUDDHIST SMARTPHONE APPS ON THE MARKET

Religious apps are available for any faith imaginable framed for every demographic and age group. A quick search of the term “religion” in the iTunes App Store, the largest ecommerce hub for purchasing and downloading smartphone apps, produces over two thousand results.³ Christianity has the largest number of apps, with options like *Letters to God*, *Bible Quiz*, and the paired-apps *Doodle God* and *Doodle Devil*. But other religions are included as well; smartphone users can download *Pocket iSuddur*, *alQuran*, *iPuja*, *Gurbani World* and *Spell Book Lite*. Indeed, app representations include not only from the well-known “world religions” of Christianity, Ju-

³ All data collected January 2013.

daim, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, but also from many new religions, including Creationalism, Kabbalah, Wicca, and the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. And like digital religion, what I call “mobile religion,” or a mobile take of digital religion, takes on different uses. Virtual prayer books, religious imagery and cartoons, digital confessionals, collections of inspiration quotes from spiritual leaders, timer prayer reminders, religious trivia and meditation apps are just some of the categories these religious apps fall. Rachel Wagner taxonomizes the market into six categories: prayer, ritual, sacred text, social media, self-expression and focusing/meditation apps (Wagner 2012). These are helpful categories and I use them loosely in my analysis.

In what follows, I summarize popular Buddhist or Buddhist-inspired apps. This list is by no means all-inclusive. However, it is a broad representation of the Buddhist apps market, paying close attention to the most well-received and downloaded apps, as organized logistically by the iTunes App Store. This collection was amassed through iTunes App Store’s search inquiries “religion” and “Buddhism,” but it is important to note the apps discussed below are not always categorized under “Religion & Spirituality.” In fact, the majority of the apps are listed under “Lifestyle” or “Reference.” For example, *oo Heart Sūtra oo*, *Buddha Wisdom* and *WonDiary* are classified as “Lifestyle,” and *ListenBuddha* and *Buddhism Dictionary* are listed under “Reference.” The categorization of these apps subscribes to McMahan’s demythologization and much of the meditation app’s content, as we will see, plays into the “mobile mindfulness” emphasis of gamification. Overall, apps with Buddhist content or Buddhist inspiration fall into four categories: quotations, sacred texts (or sūtras), instructional lifestyle how-tos, and meditation apps.

QUOTATION APPS

While meditation apps took up the majority of Buddhist apps available, quotations apps, either quoted from religious figureheads, texts, or uncited, took second place. These are apps that generate daily or on-demand Buddhist quotes, vaguely attributed either to Buddha or to various sūtras. *Buddha Quotes 500* is a collection of various quotes attributed to Gautama Buddha. The app is clearly for beginner Buddhists: the description mentions that “‘Buddha’ means ‘Enlightened One’,” and none of the quotes are ascribed to any sūtra. The app’s imagery is anonymous and minimalist, and plays into Western stereotypes of meditation, showing a silhouette of a sole meditator, complete with *uma* and elongated ears. *Daily Dalai* delivers daily quotes from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. *Buddha Wisdom* features Theravādan Buddhist imagery and has a Facebook plug-in to post quotes to user’s or friend’s Facebook wall. *Wisdom of Buddha* credits its one- to two-line quotes, like “The mind is everything. What you think is what you become,” to Gautama Buddha and Lao Tzu, lumping two Asian religions under the “Buddhism” banner. *Zen Wisdom* has similar quotes, although it allows users to share Zen-tradition-specific quotes on social media sites.

Quotation apps attempt to uphold institution by spotlighting authority, but many fail to successfully cite or authenticate the quotes they use. Further, these apps play into Buddhist modernism’s aspect of psychologization. Daily quotes may be viewed as educational opportunities, but given the spiritual-but-not-religious content of the quotes, which avoid heavily-Buddhist or mythological language, it is more realistic to view them as psychologically uplifting inspiration tidbits that users can read, reflect upon, and then go about their day.

SŪTRA APPS

Sūtra apps strive to fit Buddhist sacred text into a smartphone screen. And while some achieve this goal, with digital pages that seem to endlessly scroll on, many reduce lengthy texts

by sticking to highlighting only key passages. The app *Zen Collection* features a large collection of Zen literature, including popular press books composed for English-speaking audiences, such as Soyen Shaku's *Zen for Americans*, and translated classical texts, such as *Mumonkan* (The Gateless Gate) and *Shoyoroku* (The Book of Equanimity). *iDharma* contains Theravādan and Mahāyāna sūtras, and a space for readers to take personal notes. The multifaceted *ListenBuddha* has numerous sūtras uploaded in its internal playlist, including the Diamond Sūtra and the Heart Sūtra. Listeners can choose between traditional "Temple Versions" or alternative readings by Buddhist masters. Although the audio sūtras are in English, the virtual bookshelf of "Local Sūtras" shows the selections with Japanese titles. The app also offers audio loops – one of the options is "infinity," and has reminders for "Vegetarian Day," which lands on the Buddha's birthday. In the app, *oo Heart Sūtra oo*, users can listen to and read a Japanese version of the Heart Sūtra, illustrated with neon-colored techno Japanese Buddhist images. The app includes a video clip of an animated cartoon of a bizarre "Ashura jellyfish Buddhist priest." *Buddhism Dictionary* contains several Buddhist sūtras along with historical blurbs on the major Buddhist schools, how the religion spread into the West, and Buddhism's stance on contemporary issues like euthanasia and women's rights. The logos of the sūtras apps draw from traditional Asian art, as opposed to some of the more modern imagery seen in many Buddhist apps.

Like the Quotation Apps, these apps attempt to include aspects of institution and mythology in their content, but with the smartphone's physical limitations, the apps sometimes end up portraying the religion in a reductionalist manner. With its small screen, the smartphone cannot visually hold much textual content at once. Users must either endlessly scroll to read an entire sūtra or, more realistically, adhere to a certain app's edited version of a sūtra. Just as news re-

porting has trimmed many headlines and summaries down to a 140-character tweet, so have religious apps shrunk entire sūtras down to a couple paragraphs.

INSTRUCTIONAL HOW-TO APPS

The instructional, how-to apps provide a digital framework of how to live one's life, based on Buddhist theology. Rick Hanson, author of *Buddha's Brain*, created an app of the same name that promises to “rewire your brain over time.” This app fuses Buddhism and neuroscience, and offers life coaching on how to absorb new experiences, neutralize negative feelings and elevate compassion, in order to feel “more at one with the world, and less separate and vulnerable.” And at \$4.99, it is also one of the pricier Buddhist apps available. The app *WonDiary* encourages breaking bad habits through the Buddhist-inspired philosophies of meditation, mindful conversation, and mindful eating. Users self-evaluated the mindfulness of these practices, and results show up on a categorized chart. The 365-day app includes inspirational quotes and daily assignments. Meditation is hinted at with its “awareness practice” or “living in conscious compassionate awareness rather than identifying the antics of conditioned mind as yourself,” but does not strictly encourage meditative practice. *Noble Paths* touts itself as “Buddha meets Benjamin Franklin,” incorporating the Eightfold Path with Franklin’s method of daily tracking to enhance awareness and personal growth. The app emphasizes a “practical, methodical approach” that slowly incorporates the “Right” Path [quotes are the app’s own] into user’s life through daily practice. Practitioners establish target scores for each of the eight paths and self-evaluate with half-Buddha points, seeing your “Right” Path grow on an app chart.

These instructional how-to apps are examples of the psychological self-improvement trope placed on many religiously-inspired apps. They present Buddhism in a day-by-day regimen, breaking the religion down into small, digestible and slightly secular bite-size portions. There is

also an element of “life coaching” here. Apps take on a “teacher” role, instructing their user “students” each day.

MEDITATION APPS

By far, the largest subcategory of Buddhism apps is meditation apps. In a 2011 *Buddhist Geeks* interview, Rohan Gunatillake, the creator of one the meditation apps we will explore further on, spoke on improving the aesthetics of modern meditation. Gunatillake believes that a movement away from the “hippie” and “woo woo language” of an aesthetic of past meditation generations, towards a cleaner contemporary framing, is more appealing those curious about meditation. Gunatillake notes that our culture has changed – those who wish to practice meditation are more spread out and adhere to different lifestyles – so our view and practice of meditation should change as well. Gunatillake pushes to make meditation mobile and more fluid. This may have been the thought behind *Buddha Machine*, a predecessor to smartphone meditation apps. Quite literally, the *Buddha Machine* framed itself as a “small plastic box that plays meditative music composed by Christiaan Virant and Zhang Jian” (Buddha Machine 2013). The twenty-three dollar device, which debuted in 2005, contained nine tracks and came in seven colors, which played off the popularity of the 2004 iPods minis with its aesthetics and marketing. *The New York Times* dubbed the *Buddha Machine* “beautifully useless” and Fast Company called it the “anti-iPod” (Sanneh 2005, Wilson 2012). It is now an app, with a user interface that mirrors the physical model – as in, users select a color and the only imagery on the screen is a giant speaker.

Although the device stubbornly sticks to a somewhat technologically archaic design, portable meditation apps have come a long way since *Buddha Machine*. In fact, the pantheon of smartphones meditation apps is so large that the category can and should be broken down even

more. Buddhist meditation apps vary in their interactivity and technological sophistication, community networking, and use of Buddhist aesthetics. Using this first factor of interactivity and technological sophistication as a guide, I create a spectrum of meditation apps, ranging from *simple timers*, *self-reflection timers*, and *interactive guided meditations*. As we move down this spectrum, community networking increases and use of Buddhist aesthetic decreases. For example, *simple timers* tend to have minimal app interactivity and technological sophistication, minimal community, but may incorporate some Buddhist aesthetics; *interactive guided meditations*, however, have high levels of interactivity, technological sophistication and community networking, while opting for secular imagery over Buddhist aesthetics. Below is an analysis of several of these apps, as an introduction to the contextual analysis of two especially multifaceted apps, *buddhify* and *ReWire*.

Simple Timers | As an example of an unadorned timer, *Luna Stone* is one of the simpler meditation apps on the market. The app plays up the Western stereotype of Buddhism as a nature-oriented religion, connected mystically to the cosmos. The only interactive element of the app is a pale white stone that glows when the timed meditation ceases. The app's simplicity can also be seen as an oversimplification of Buddhism itself, boiled down to a singular practice. *iSatori* follows these stereotypes as well; the app simply shows a flower during a timed meditation. For such a strong title – “satori” is a Japanese word that translates to seeing into the true nature of one's self – the app's singular visual element fails to deliver even a fraction of this heavily religious term. Although the app, *undo*, does not differ from many other meditation apps – it is a simple timer – the aesthetics and intention should be noted. In its online description, the app not only implies that meditators must atone for daily or lifelong actions, but its also implies that meditation is the best atonement. *Undo* makes the unlikely boast that is “a place where monks do

their practice.” The app’s logo is a thought-cloud, drifting away; the user interface’s cosmetics are neutral and minimal, and feature simple Japanese characters. *Mind* intentionally fights against many of the technological details of the meditation apps that follow, writing in its description that the timer contains “no messy UI [user interface] elements.” The modern, minimalist, black-and-neon aesthetics make it one of more stylish, simple timer apps.

Self-Reflection Timers | Moving down the spectrum of meditation apps, we start to into timers that are slightly more sophisticated in technology and aesthetics. These apps are timers at their core, but they also dedicate some of their digital space to user instruction or area for reflection. *iMindful* stretches a bit farther than a timer, allowing practitioners to create meditation playlists that incorporate bell sounds at different intervals. Created by a self-described “Buddhist minister,” the app features a timer for yogic poses, a slider for screen brightening, vibration & sound switches, and a text feature to self-reflect on practices. *Walking Meditation* offers “easy and informal” meditation, allowing users to toggle between three pre-recorded meditations. The sixteen-minute meditation exercises flash spiritual feel-good idioms like “being fully present,” “enlivening the body,” and “enhancing the senses.” The app has extensive instructions for meditation and a space to record self-reflections. *The New York Times* and *Self Magazine* have endorsed the app *Simply Being*, a supplemental meditation app to the podcast “Meditation Oasis.” Users choose between 5-, 10-, 15- and 20-minute audio guided meditations. Although guided meditations are pre-recorded, practitioners can separately control the volume of vocals, music, and “nature sounds.” *Complete Relaxation* promises to “reduce stress” and help users “find peace” through the use of “hypnotic” meditative music from composer Christopher Lloyd Clarke. The lighthearted logo shows a phone with face, eyes closed, headphones attached, meditating. The app *Sati*, which is the feminine form of the word “truth” in Sanskrit, uses bright, playful colors

but its meditation routine is quite strict: the default meditation time is set at 60 minutes. The app records meditation history and allows practitioners to add a personal “memo” next to their meditations.

With no trace of organized religion, mythology or really Buddhism itself, *simple timers* and *self-reflection timers* are open for personal interpretation and use. Since there is no instructional element, users practice on their own accord and with their own methodology. Further, these apps are “Buddhist” in the most banal sense; as previously mentioned, many of these apps are in the “Health & Fitness” category, something especially relevant to this *simple timer* category. Meditation here does not involve Buddhism, a notion encouraged by sites such as the aforementioned *The Interdependence Project* and an idea that Hindu monastic Swami B.V. Tripurari recently addressed in an online article. Tripurari writes, “meditation properly understood tends to already be light on religion” and that meditation is at the same time an objective methodology, “a science so to speak.” Published on the popular website *The Huffington Post*, this sort of secular discourse has set the tone for how contemporary Americans view meditation.

In these two classifications of meditation apps, we start to see an adherence to the “mobile mindfulness” category of individualization. Meditation app’s gamification comes with a higher level of technological sophistication, which we will see in the next classification, and the creation of an experimental space requires a stronger user-smartphone relationship, which we will unpack as we explore our two case studies, *buddhify* and *ReWire*. These apps disregard institution, barely mentioning Buddhism or any need for religious authority, in favor of the individual. Given, many apps have varying levels of Buddhist-inspiration behind them; but even the ones that do, like *iMindful*, internally eliminate institution and elevate the importance of the individual

experience. For example, select *self-reflection timers* provide space for user self-reflection, making the timers a sort of personal digital diary.

Interactive Guided Meditation | This final section of meditation apps is the most technologically advanced, cosmetically appealing, and allows for a high level of individual customization. The app *Meditation Timer Pro* allows user edits to meditation preparation time, sitting time, and the sound bites to signal the beginning and end of practice. In addition, users can save and name these customizable meditations. The app logs your practice schedule and collects statistics, like “Average Duration” and “Longest Duration,” with the ability to send this data to Facebook and Twitter. *Equanimity*, defined as “mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper,” does not provide much calm to those who are seeking a qualitative, rather than quantitative, meditation experience. The app has the rigor of a drill sergeant, timing meditational practice, scheduling all recorded sessions, and charting weekly and monthly practice. *Headspace* focuses on fitting meditation into users’ lives, instead of the other way around. The app’s flexible approach includes 365 daily “individual” meditation sessions, and “motivational support,” or gentle vibrating reminders to meditate and progress reports. Users also have the option to post meditative progress to Facebook. The app is by far the most cosmetically appealing of the group, with a clean, straightforward user interface and bright, trendy colors. The app’s logo appeals to a multitasking audience, for those whose mind is constantly fighting between various responsibilities, errands and events in daily life. *Insight Timer* promises a “fun, modern way to support your meditation practice,” which includes Tibetan singing bowls. Practitioners select timer duration, one of eight singing bowl sounds, and number of interval bells. The app records and charts progress, rewarding “Insight Connect” milestones when significant achievements are reached; the app also

features a journal, a global map to show who else is meditating (using the app), and an internal-app community, that automatically posts your updates to others in a Facebook-news-feed manner.

Like the previous two classifications of meditation apps, these *interactive guided meditations* elevate the individual. Individualization is emphasized even further with meditator profiles, personal statistics and the ability to post personal progress to other online profiles, such as *Head-space*'s Facebook connection. Also in this classification, we see elements of gamification. Meditative sessions are played and scored in a similar fashion to that of computer or video games. Meditation app users have player profiles and can access past meditation sessions, also mirroring online games. Further, whether internally and externally – through social media sites – displaying quantitated scores, apps encourage users to “beat” or maintain their meditative skills, like that of a video game.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Looking broadly at Buddhist smartphone apps and meditation apps on the market, we were able to apply our initial implications of “mobile mindfulness,” or the thematic changes that occur with digital religion’s transfer onto the smartphone and with it, the increased use of apps to identify with or enact religious practice. We will see the missing piece of “mobile mindfulness,” or the experimental space created by using inclusive meditation apps in this next section, as we closely analyze two meditation apps: *buddhify* and *ReWire*. The third leg comes out in this analysis because we dive deeper into user experience and environment, as well as the developers’ intentions and implications for the app. Additionally, *buddhify* and *ReWire* heighten our other two elements of “mobile mindfulness,” individualization and gamification, even more.

IV. MEDITATION TO-GO

In this section, I focus on two meditation apps that have been particularly popular on the smartphone app market: *buddhify* and *ReWire*. Both case study apps have done well on the market and are the pinnacle of the three elements of “mobile mindfulness.” In each case study, I will review the meditation app overall, the reasoning behind making the apps, as described through each of the apps’ creators, and the user experience. I will end each case study with a theoretical application of the “mobile mindfulness” trio of medium changes.

BREAKING DOWN *BUDDHIFY*

The first app under analysis is *buddhify*, a bright and breezy audio-guided meditation app providing “meditation on the go.” Before separately addressing how the app plays into each of the three theoretical implications of “mobile mindfulness,” I discuss the app’s user experience and origination, including an in-depth look at *buddhify*’s developer.

Since its November 2011 release, the meditation app *buddhify* has received international acclaim. As of March 2012, the app has sold 10,000 units; *The Times* named it the “App of the Week;” media monster *Reuters*, the technology blog *lifelacker*, and the magazine *Wired* all featured raving reviews. *Buddhify*’s success can be partly attributed to the social media genius of its creator: Rohan Gunatillake is a freelance technology consultant and works on various creative and social communications projects all over Europe. Gunatillake, a Sri Lankan raised in Britain, runs a personal blog that resembles an endless press release for *buddhify*. Gunatillake is a self-described Buddhist, has practiced meditation for a decade, and has trained under some of the world’s leading meditation teachers, including Rob Burbea, Sayadaw U Tejaniya and Ajahn

Sumedho. Gunatillake combined his extensive mediation knowledge with his professional digital innovation experience to create *buddhify*.

Gunatillake designed *buddhify* for cosmopolitan professionals that are too busy to find time to meditate at home, describing the app as "the urban meditation app for modern life." Gunatillake considered that those curious about meditation indeed had downtime, but it occurred in transit: during private or public transportation commutes, walking to and from events on their busy schedules, or while working out. The app encourages mindful-training within the hustle and bustle of everyday life, an aspect that is so ironic that it actually benefits the user: if one is to generate mindfulness, why not generate it in the most abrasive of surroundings? In this way, *buddhify* is a "focusing mechanism" of sorts, especially since the app instructs users to take in certain aspects of their surroundings while negating others, as we will see momentarily in the user experience.

Gunatillake explains he did not design the app to present Buddhist teachings, whether informally or formally. Instead, *buddhify* does "instruct in techniques which have been developed through the Buddhist tradition" (2013a). In this personal email exchange, Gunatillake goes on to criticize "Buddhist-inspired" apps for not crediting Buddhism: "For me, calling it Buddhist-inspired is just like citing your references on a paper - to not do so would be a bit rude." By not incorporating *buddhify*'s religious inspiration throughout the app – although the app's name is a special case – Gunatillake opens up this Buddhist-inspired app to a non-Buddhist crowd.

In fact, in my experience using and exploring the app, the only mention of Buddhism comes medially: *buddhify* flashes entertaining Buddhist facts while meditation audio files download. Most of this trivia is unrelated to Buddhism, but one reads: "Famous meditators include Tiger Woods, Goldie Hawn, the Dalai Lama and the Buddha." Either Gunatillake is having a

laugh by including the Dalai Lama and the Buddha or he truly believes that *buddhify*'s intended audience is unaware of the role these men have played in Buddhism. Regardless, it shows purposeful distancing from Buddhism, replaced with an assimilation to pop culture, where celebrities receive top billing.

Buddhify is marketed well, and Gunatillake paid attention to the app's aesthetics and design. *buddhify*'s logo and user interface read as bright, simple and playful [Appendix 1.A]. Like many meditation apps, the internal set-up mirrors a video game. Practitioners select location, with options limited to *gym*, *traveling*, *walking* and *home*, and choose one of four meditation "flavors," shown as neon-colored ice cream cones: "clarity," "connection," "stability," and "embodiment" [Appendix 1.B]. Each flavor promises to strengthen a specific trait, seven in total: *mindfulness*, *curiosity*, *energy*, *joy*, *concentration*, *calm* and *balance*. Straying from Gunatillake's assurance that the app does not present Buddhist teachings, these personal strengths align with the Buddhist seven factors of Enlightenment in Buddhism: mindfulness (*sati*), investigation (*dhamma vicaya*), energy (*vīriya*), joy (*pīti*), concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Here, *buddhify* is sticking close to its Buddhist-inspired meditation roots, but reframing them in a way that makes practice – and its goals – more accessible and understandable to an audience that may not necessarily self-describe as Buddhist.

These personal strengths rest along the bottom of the app's dashboard, each with its own colorful arrow. The direction of the arrow changes with each "check-in," or when users voluntarily report their meditative practices [Appendix 1.C]. The dashboard also tabulates the percentage of completed meditations, an obscurely calculated "buddhifymode" percentage and quantifies and categorizes the regularity and continuity of meditative practice [Appendix 1.D]. This quanti-

tated scoring, along with the app's videogame like framing, is another example of *buddhify's* gamification, a furthering of McMahan's demythologicalization.

Once *buddhify* users select a location and flavor, the guided meditation begins. Introductory bite-size meditations last around three minutes. Upon completing these preparatory practices, longer eight-minute meditation audio files are "unlocked," similar to video or computer game levels. Ten-minute two-player meditations, only available under the *home* location, are the only internal group aspect of the meditation app. Although each meditation is individually themed depending on the selected personal strength, broad motifs of focused breathing, mental positivity, lifestyle simplification, awareness of surroundings, compassion for others and yourself, and constant self-reflection flow throughout each session. The tone of dialogue is casual and trendy. Gunatillake uses contemporary slang in the guided meditation, using words like "whatever" and "totally," and ending some meditations with: "Thanks for using *buddhify*. See you around."

In the guided meditations, Gunatillake uses the space not just to instruct but to tell a story. Descriptive introductions frame the meditation audio that will follow. For example, a "connection" meditation that encourages users to "connect" with their surroundings via observation begins with: "In the end, it's all about the drama of the day's events. Exhausting, really... we're going to take a break from our own personal soap opera, and have a look around." A "stability" meditation that focuses on breathing starts with, "You've probably already noticed, but there are a lot of distractions out there...we're so used to having our attention pulled all over the place." One "embodiment" meditation notes that, "There are so many great things about living in times with so much access to great information, but one of the downsides is because we can spend so much of our day online, we often get stuck in our heads."

With statements like this, Gunatillake convinces *buddhify*'s busy users that they can continue to pursue their current multifaceted lifestyle, and use *buddhify* as a masking later of sorts, not as a solution, to minimize the day's stress and pressure. Another example of a "clarity" meditation goes like this [noted pauses are lengthy, lasting at least five seconds each]:

One way of defining meditation is learning to look at the world differently and in a way that leads to more happiness. [Pause] So that's what we're going to do. [Pause] Oh, and in case you didn't realize this already, you should be walking around as you're listening to this. [Pause] Common sense tells us that when we're walking, we're moving along. And that's almost certainly true. But another way of looking at it, is that our sense of awareness stays in the same place, and it's the world that is moving around us. [Pause] Have you ever seen that optical illusion, that if you look at it one way, it's a vase; but if you change your perspective, it looks like two faces. [Pause] This meditation also involves a subtle change in perspective like that. [Pause] And it can take a little bit of getting used to, so let's give it a try in the simplest of ways.

The meditation then instructs users to walk about, while taking in the importance of the "whole sense of our vision," and keeping the mind "as open as possible, while "letting the walking just happen." The guided meditation notes that its purpose is not to create a "special state" but to let the mind relax and be open. This thought flows nicely into our first aspect of "mobile mindfulness," creating experimental spaces for psychological reflection and recuperation.

CREATING EXPERIMENTAL SPACES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENT

Buddhify's psychologization is primarily seen in the apps' grouping under the "Health & Fitness" category of the iTunes App Store. The media also credits the app's health benefits over its religious implications: *The Sun* heralded the app as the "#1 Health App for Busy Workers"; *The Daily Telegraph* cited it as an app that will help you stick to your New Year's resolutions; *The Examiner* reports that using meditation apps like *buddhify* will decrease colds. Marketing *buddhify* as a physical and mental wellness app opens up its reception, to those who are not necessarily concerned with Buddhism or meditation, but who want to pursue a healthy and stress-

free lifestyle.

As seen in the quoted passage above, *buddhify*'s guided meditations invite users to create experimental spaces of personal practice to improve psychological wellness. When using the meditation app, users are no longer clumped in with the masses, herded along with everyone else. Rather, earphones securely in place, calming audio dictating orders, eyes, body and mind compliantly following, they are different than those they observe, simply because they are observing them. When Gunatillake encourages users to observe their surroundings in the audio recordings, he is asking them to create a temporary barrier between user and environment. Fellow commuters, passing buildings or cars, and senses become visual objects of note, or things to be observed, instead sites of interaction. In this way, the app encourages practitioners to use and segment off their surroundings to create an exploratory space for psychological self-improvement, as meditations encourage users to note surroundings in detail, in order to increase self-reflection.

For example, in the guided meditation above, users are instructed to walk around their physical surroundings, but then mentally remove themselves from those surroundings in order to reflect on them: "Common sense tells us that when we're walking, we're moving along. And that's almost certainly true. But another way of looking at it is, is that our sense of awareness stays in the same place, and it's the world that is moving around us." Users create segmented places of psychological practice, encouraged by what the guided meditation says immediately afterward: "Have you ever seen that optical illusion, that if you look at it one way, it's a vase; but if you change your perspective, it looks like two faces. [Pause] This meditation also involves a subtle change in perspective like that." *Buddhify* helps practitioners create places to improve overall mentality, playing into our theoretical argument that meditation apps focus on psychological self-help.

GENERATING GAMIFICATION

Reflecting on modern interpretations of Buddhism, Buddhist scholar Robert Sharf notes that key technical terms relating to Buddhist practice, such as samatha (concentration) and kenshō (seeing one’s nature) are being interpreted phenomenologically: “they are assumed to designate discrete ‘states of consciousness’ experienced by Buddhist practitioners during meditative practice” (1995: 231). *Buddhify* heightens this philosophical demythologization, by avoiding Buddhist language, ethics and visuals, and injecting elements of gaming. For example, the app reduces “state of consciousness” down to mental areas of self-improvement paired with neon ice cream cones.

Gunatillake has always been clear that *Buddhify*'s name is the only Buddhist aspect of the app. He explains that the title and lowercase "b" is to credit the app's religious inspiration while indicating that it is not actually a Buddhist product or service (Gunatillake 2012b). Even *buddhify*'s name has a somewhat active approach to it. Substituting the suffix "-ism" for "-ify" makes the Buddhism in *buddhify* something you can actively do or accomplish, instead of a solitary and monotonous practice, a common view of meditation among Western audiences. This activeness is attractive to our multi-tasking culture that is constantly doing something while doing something else.

One of *buddhify*'s guided meditations, Gunatillake says: “You may have thought, ‘Meditation sounds like hard work.’ But the truth is, when it’s at its best, I can feel more like play.” This feeds into meditation’s gamification in smartphone apps. To begin meditation practice in *buddhify*, practitioners must press an oversized orange “play” button. Users are called “players,” as in “one-“ or “two-player” meditations. The app’s dashboard has similarities to video or computer game dashboards, with neat little summaries of player progress. Meditations are quantitated

in an obscure “buddhifymode,” which is equivocally calculated to this researcher. Players also self-evaluate their meditation performances, which reveals the app’s partiality for self-improvement, self-help and an emphasis on the individual.

INCREASING INDIVIDUALIZATION

Along with most meditation apps on the market, *buddhify* emphasizes the individual experience: it is all about your personal practice, your personal achievements and your personal reflections, all experienced and recorded on your personal smartphone. Community – whether an offline community surrounding the meditator or an online group within the app – comes second-tier to a focus on self. We can see the individualizing factors first in *buddhify*’s lack of authoritative meditation teacher. Not only is meditation practice not specific to a tradition, but it also does not involve the typical teacher-student relationship. Gunatillake addresses this: *buddhify* “breaks a rule of mediation teaching. Meditation teaching normally tells you that to learn meditation, you go to a course or class and learn it through that” (2011). In some ways, Gunatillake takes on the role of authority, while simultaneously appealing to a rebellious, deinstitutionalized youth culture.

Individualization is also seen in *buddhify*’s meditation “flavors,” which allow practitioners to pick-and-choose which meditational elementals on which to concentrate. App users create a “meditation identity” through their personalized and selection of meditation flavors: a sort of choose-your-own-adventure psychological experience. This, along with the users’ continuous self-evaluation performance of the meditational elements during practice, creates a unique meditation “bricoleur” for the user.

TAPPING INTO *REWIRE*

While *buddhify* takes full advantage of what's outside the smartphone medium – by using practitioners' physical location as part of meditation – *ReWire* takes advantage of what's inside the medium – by incorporating users' personal music and media as part of meditation practice. *ReWire* taps into the different characteristics of “mobile mindfulness” in different ways than *buddhify*, resulting in a different meditation experience for the user. Like the previous section, I will first look at the background and user experience of *ReWire*, along with a developer biography, before addressing each of the three implications of “mobile mindfulness.”

Meditation practitioner and computer developer Michael Redmer created *ReWire* for those with a “peripheral interest” in meditation, or for those Tweed called “nightstand Buddhists.” Indeed, similar to many meditation apps reviewed in the previous section, the word “meditation” is the only hint that the app involves the Buddhist practice. In a personal interview with me, from which the majority of this introductory description is based on, Redmer explained that although Buddhism inspired *ReWire*, it is not in any way a Buddhist app (Redmer 2012). Redmer contests that *ReWire* utilizes Buddhist techniques, and deals with the Buddhist qualities of impermanence and cessation, but the association with Buddhist practices ends there. Buddhism was merely an inspiration.

ReWire's tagline reads: “Simple, geeky, and effective,” a mantra that the app adheres to closely. The app's logo and aesthetics are minimalist and simple [Appendix 2.A]; the app's tech-geek nature comes through in users' meticulously quantitated and graphed meditation sessions; and the app looks to effectively increase attentiveness, through the resolution of cultural “inefficiencies.” Redmer created *ReWire* to solve two “inefficiencies” (Redmer's terminology) that he saw in his own meditation practice and in the practice of his demographically similar colleagues.

The first “inefficiency” is the scant amount of time meditators could hold attention on any object. To help solve this, Redmer began viewing “attention” as a muscle that could and should be exercised and strengthened. With *ReWire*, practitioners work out their attention muscle by noting moments of “vanishing.” This is the heart of *ReWire*: the app plays music and videos from the user’s internal smartphone library and randomly cuts the audio throughout the meditation session. When the music stops, or when there is a moment of “vanish,” users must tap the smartphone screen to alert the app that they are paying attention. If users are too early, late, or absent in their attention-taps, the entire phone vibrates as a warning. Through repetition then, *ReWire* hopes to train the mind against the temptation of becoming lost in media or other distracting content and to essentially be more mindful of one thing at a time.

The second “inefficiency” is the inability to objectively measure progress in meditation practice. In traditional or formal Buddhist meditation, an authority figure usually fills in this role: teaching technique, giving pointers, and pointing out blind spots in practice. Since this authority did not exist on the smartphone, *ReWire* took on the role, calculating meditation metrics, accuracy percentages, and response and duration times (Redmer 2012). Although I could not extract the exact specifications of analytical measurement, Redmer claims that *ReWire* uses the “first accurate, mechanical system” to measure one’s intellectual power (Redmer 2012). Cumulative results are displayed on the app’s start-up page, showing the number of total sessions, consecutive days practiced, percentage of accuracy and average reaction time. Practitioners can also view past session data and post these results to social media outlets, a topic I will turn to shortly.

Redmer adds that our inability to focus is a sort of societal epidemic, something which has only heightened by our constant use of and dependence on smartphones. Redmer says that the cure for this “cultural ADD” (Redmer’s terminology) may be on the very platform that causes

it: mindfulness and concentration apps like *ReWire*. The app's slogan should be noted as well: "Don't just time your meditation. Optimize it" (ReWire 2012a). *ReWire* adds layers of competition to a usually simple activity. Instead of simply timing our meditations, now we must "optimize" them, "mak[ing] every moment of your meditation count" (ReWire 2012a).

The app's name itself is a reference to "rewiring the brain" to increase focus and ability to concentrate (Redmer 2012). With this, *ReWire* seems to be a mobile continuation of Donald Lopez's Buddhism-and-science connection. Redmer describes the app quite scientifically, as a "highly efficient training practice for your mind: the more you use it, the stronger your concentration 'muscles' become, making you more focused and present" (ReWire 2012a).

That said, Redmer explains that the concept behind *ReWire* is very religious. Redmer actually began his religious journey in seminary to become a pastor. Here, Redmer studied the "Dark Night" meditative theory, based on Saint John of the Cross' poem of the same name. The poem encourages a personal spiritual journey, and that through overcoming negative, or dark, periods in life, comes a purification of the senses and of the spirit, and with it, a closer relationship with God. It is this latter portion that *ReWire* taps into: Redmer wants *ReWire* users to become more attentive to the cessation of their personal smartphone music and video.

ReWire's landing screen is dark with bright, neon notes [Appendix 2.B]. When logging into the app, users immediately see personal previous meditation practice statistics and have the option to "Listen" or "Watch" for their next session. Action takes priority here, both past and future action: previous statistics from past action take up the first half of the screen, and two calls-for-action take up the bottom half. *ReWire* is straightforward in this way. The app encourages users to reflect momentarily on previous meditation and then move on to the next, no dilly-dallying. Once the decision between audio or audio-visual is made, users choose session duration,

difficulty (easy, medium, hard) and the media to use during meditation. *ReWire* maintains that any amount of dedicated mental training is beneficial, but suggests 15-20 minutes in the “Listen” mode or five-10 minutes in the “Watch” mode for beginners (ReWire 2012a). The app’s *Frequently Asked Questions* page has grouped meditative sessions under the titles “Quick Focus Boost” of 10-15 minutes of “Watch”; “ReWire Classic” of 15 minutes of “Listen” and 15 minutes of “Watch”; and “Mind Bender” of 30 minutes of “Listen,” 30 minutes of “Watch,” and 30 minutes of “Do Nothing,” or meditation involving no stimuli, among other grouped sessions. For media, *ReWire* pulls music and videos directly from the smartphone’s internal library, creating “a customized, compelling experience, from Bach to the Beastie Boys” (ReWire 2012a). In case users are looking for new music and video inspiration, *ReWire*’s app site features a “Media” page with recommended music, videos, podcasts, and a link to the *ReWire* Vimeo page (ReWire 2012a).

Meditation sessions are as described above: *ReWire* plays the media, pauses it a random intervals, and users must tap the screen to alert the program of their continuing attention. Set against a mountain silhouette at either dawn or dusk, two large neon-outlined circles take up most of the app’s screen in the “Listen” mode. The circles disappear and appear at random; users tap the inside of these circles when the media stops. In the “Watch” mode, when a video is chosen for the app’s media, the video itself takes up the background and users must tap the left side of the screen when the visual elements pause and the right side of the screen when the audio pauses [Appendix 2.C]. After meditation practice, users have the option of sharing session results with their social media world [Appendix 2.D]. Practitioners can internally track their progress with personal charts, which detail time, accuracy and reaction time for each session.

CREATING EXPERIMENTAL SPACES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENT

Differing from *buddhify*, *ReWire* requires user-smartphone interaction during the meditation practice; namely, tapping the smartphone screen. Teusner & Torma (2011) note that for smartphone religious text to have significance for the user, the contents must respond to touch. Applying this thought to *ReWire*, meditation users gain meaning in their practice as they interact with the app. Teusner & Torma continue: “Though the feedback given from the phone is hardly tactile (that is all that users feel on a screen is glass), rapid feedback is afforded from the phone aurally and visually” (2011: 153). The same can be said for *ReWire*. Meditators are not receiving anything incredibly spiritual through tapping their smartphone, but they do receive instant feedback from the smartphone medium: sensory vibrations for missed cues and visualized scoring at the end of each session. With this interaction and these cues, *ReWire* practitioners gain control over their meditative practice through touch.

ReWire creates a different sort of experimental space, one that creates a stricter barrier between user and environment. While *buddhify* encourages users to focus on their immediate surroundings, *ReWire* requires participant full-attention within the app itself. Users must ignore all outside simulation to for peak personal performance, which intensifies the spatial border. This sort of deep concentration, along with the app’s new “brain entertainment tracks,”⁴ will help users train mental focus, clarity, and equanimity, and “achieve deep mind states” (ReWire 2013). Essentially, “play” promises to improve psychological well-being.

These three new “brain entertainment tracks,” titled “Joy,” “Focus,” and “Calm,” are available as an in-app purchase for \$1.99 each. “Calm,” for example, lists the following psychological attributes and benefits: “Brainwaves: Law Alpha,” “Biofield Frequencies: Deep relaxation and peacefulness” and “Sinewave Proportions: uplifting calm and nervous system revitaliza-

⁴ *ReWire* updated its website and app in March 2013, after I had conducted my initial research.

tion” [Appendix 2.E]. The validity of these neuroscience elements aside, this sort of scientific framing shows that *ReWire* elevates the psychological practicality in its meditation. *ReWire* assures users that they will benefit psychologically with the creation, entrance and habitual use of these experimental spaces. Overall, the app promises a solution to the mental inability to concentrate on one thing.

GENERATING GAMIFICATION

Like *buddhify*’s active “-ify” suffix, *ReWire* encourages activeness over passivity: “With *ReWire* you don't just sit passively, you actively participate with your experience allowing quick training of your attentional muscle while gaining greater control over your mind and syncing up with each moment” (Redmer 2013a). *ReWire*, stripped of the background information you as readers just gained, could easily be seen as a simple smartphone game of accuracy, tapping the screen when an object appears or disappears, gaining points along the way. In fact, popular game apps like *Angry Birds* and *Cut the Rope* boil down to the same play method: simple gaming through tapping, touching or swiping the smartphone screen.

ReWire’s gamification also comes through in its meticulous quantification. Although my initial research focuses on *ReWire* version 1.0, I also address the qualities of the recently released version 2.2.⁵ The app credits the tracking features as an opportunity to keep *ReWire* users “motivated and aware,” as opposed to any sort of competitive gain, either with oneself or with others (Redmer 2013a). In version 1.0, upon session completion, the app records and displays the user’s session duration, “accuracy,” and “reaction” in bright neon boxes [Appendix 2.D]. “Accuracy” is calculated as a percentage, and “reaction” is displayed as a time interval. Users have the option

⁵ Released on March 18, 2013.

to “cancel,” or erase, that session, or “save” it into their personal quantified profile of meditation. Users can also view their personal profile, which breaks down one’s meditations by session and day, graphing out each session’s accuracy and reaction for comparison. Quantification differs slightly in version 2.2: meditation sessions measure “Length,” “Consistency,” “Difficulty,” and “Performance.” From these measurements, “Practice Points” are generated. For example, depending on performance, a *ReWire* user could earn 188 “Practice Points” from a 15-minute medium-level difficulty meditation.

This line of thought traces back to Wagner’s “hunger for the real” (2012:14). *ReWire*’s quantification makes indistinct meditative practice “real,” by measuring meditation and recording practice sessions statistically. These quantifying elements, along with *ReWire*’s game-like tapping, frame meditation as a digital game, performed offline and recorded online. *ReWire*, however, goes a step further in its quantification by allowing users to share scores with their online communities. This feature is seen in many other smartphone apps, particularly those that involve the online recording of an offline activity. For example, the *Nike+ Running* app, which, through GPS tracking, records the length and time of user runs and posts the results on their online profiles. Upon session completion, both versions of *ReWire* feature a “share” option, to post meditation scores to Facebook or Twitter. The default message, using example statistics: “I just enjoyed a 15 minute @ReWireApp interactive meditation session and earned 188 practice points. #ReWireApp” [Appendix 2.F]. This social media aspect loops back to our cultural necessity to digitally record experiences; that practices that occur offline seem unverifiable, due to their absence from our online profiles.

This sort of self-promotion is controversial with *ReWire* because of the Buddhist ideology of nondisclosure concerning meditation achievements: Buddhist meditators should keep their

spiritual accomplishments to themselves. In our personal interview, Redmer admitted his knowledge of this precept but was solid in his belief that it strengthens *ReWire* as a practice tool. By negating a key Buddhist principle, however, this app is pushed more strongly into the secular, individualized notion of modern religion.

INCREASING INDIVIDUALIZATION

ReWire's individualizing elements come out in ways similar to *buddhify*: app users have their own personal profile, sessions revolve around the individual experience, and meditations are so interactive that they physically and mentally isolate the individual on their smartphone. There is also, however, the added individualizing elements of looping in users' personal music library for meditation, and the digital sharing of users' meditation accomplishments with personal social media networks. There is even a slight individualizing edge in *ReWire*'s quantification and recording nature, which puts users in direct competition with themselves to improve accuracy, duration and uphold "streaks." Even *ReWire*'s logo is also very individualizing; an empty white silhouette of a stick figure sitting cross-legged, headphones on, supposedly meditating against a black background.

Reflecting on these two case studies, we see certain attributes that modern meditators seek in their "mobile mindfulness" experience. Smartphone meditation app users are looking for an individualized and personal app that increases inner "mindfulness," with the additional possibility of habitual practice solving psychological and physical health concerns. But more importantly, the way that these apps are framed shows a level of concealment. Modern meditators, to some extent, want to be ignorant that they are going through this mindfulness procedure, or, to put it another way, users do not want to be consciously aware that they are using time in their busy schedules to solely solve the anxiety, stress, or emotional issues that many of these media-

tion apps promise to alleviate. Hence, the game-like façade of meditation apps, and their placement on the smartphone: a device that is with us relentlessly, whether we wish to perform “mobile mindfulness” or not.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In this thesis, I have argued that religious presence and practice on the platform of the smartphone creates experimental places of spiritual “play,” to be performed transiently amidst the hurry of everyday life; that the platform of the smartphone and the framing within an app gives religious practice elements of gamification; and that the personalizing – and at times isolating - elements of the smartphone and the apps’ internal user interface facilitates and heightens a modernist individualized “pick and choose” approach to religion. To conclude, I want to touch on a few compelling points that the presence and use of these apps generate. Namely, how these apps both fit in and further how Americans view and practice religion in contemporary times. I will then bring in two other voices, both from outside the academic community, to analyze how offline Buddhist meditators are addressing the practice’s transfer into the digital world.

In *Media, Place and Mobility*, a book cited earlier in this thesis, Shaun Moores notes that our consistent use of mobile technology – namely of apps on the mobile platforms of smartphones, tablets and laptops – has changed how contemporary culture define spaces of “dwelling.” Moores argues that user action taken on mobile mediums was not designed to create forms of “dwelling,” or “place-making.” Moores notes that digital action on these mediums was supposed to be as transient as the user’s physical location. But what we see with select meditation apps, as unpacked in the “mobile mindfulness” section, “Mobile Medium: Creating Experimental Places of “Play,” is a reinterpretation of the term “place” and how one might dwell in that place. The meditation apps encourage pop-up, temporary places of mindfulness, which are discarded and left behind as the user physically moves on. This sort of “place-making” is important because smartphone users could be supplementing more permanent, institutionalized forms of

meditation – or even Buddhism – in favor of these non-committal moments of personal spiritual and psychological improvement.

This brings up issues of religious authenticity, an issue I tried to keep out of the main analysis of my thesis. However, it would be negligent to overlook the fact that these Buddhist or Buddhist-inspired meditation apps are changing the way the contemporary West views and practices meditation. One aspect of authenticity involves a practitioner's physical space. These apps relocate users' space for meditation; they encourage users to leave the domestic or institutional space for traditional meditative practice, and instead practicing in unorthodox spaces. Mobile apps are encouraging users to replace their living room with a subway train; to replace quiet surroundings with chaotic ones; and to replace permanency with transiency.

Does this physical – and, in many cases, mental – relocation create any reductionalism in Buddhism as a religion? If so, does the generation of new practitioners, through the enormous reach of digital media, make up for any sort of reductionalist tendencies that this medium transfer may cause? Or is this new group of media-recruited practitioners watering down meditation's traditional roots? These questions are not new – they have been asked with the introduction of each new medium to a religious practice – and the answers will vary from serious practitioner to those with a more casual interest in meditation.

Differing from previous mediums, however, these meditation apps encourage a drop-in and drop-out mentality on religious beliefs and institutions, a mentality that aligns with offline religious identification as well. Because many religious apps, including meditation apps, leave out doctrine, institution and community, there is a lower level of faith-commitment that can go along with religious app users. Thus, religious app users can choose to “belong” to multiple religious institutions, via their smartphone device, based on their own definition of the term “belong.”

Users can adhere to whichever faith-based tenets of the institution they deem fitting to their own personal spiritual identification. This begs the question, do contemporary Americans want to belong to only one religious denomination?

This ideology matches shifts in American's contemporary religious identification, both online and offline. A 2012 Pew study shows a jump in American who adults self-identify as "atheist" or "agnostic," but reveals an even larger largest increase in those who identify with "nothing in particular" (Pew 2012). This phrasing is important, especially when contrasted with the other "unaffiliated" choices of atheism and agnosticism. The "nothing in particular" category suggests that many Americans are not turning away from religious institutions all together, like their atheist and agnostic peers, but instead they are taking on a pick-and-choose attitude when it comes to their personal religious identification. Americans are dabbling in multiple faiths, grouping together Buddhist practices with Christian scripture, adding a twist of Daoist philosophies.

The two case study meditation apps encourage this pick-and-choose mentality. Our personal choice of which apps we download and use are a reflection of what we want to identify with. With millions of apps on the market, smartphone users have an endless list of choices to help them patch together their digital identity. And with no restrictions on which apps users can download, users may download dozens of religious or religiously-inspired apps and still self-identify with "nothing in particular."

Let me now bring in two more voices to our conversation, both of which are from outside the academic community. Buddhist practitioners themselves are reflecting on these transformations – and they are reflecting in online forums. The first is Tibetan Buddhist author and teacher Ken McLeod, who addresses how the conversation of Buddhism in Western societies is changing with new technology. The second is Buddhist blogger and self-described "Buddhist

minister,” Miles Neale, who has coined the Buddhist pop culture phrase “Frozen Yoga and McMindfulness.”

At the 2012 *Buddhist Geeks Conference*, Ken McLeod noted that we tend to think of technology as things – computer or electronics – but that really technology in a broader sense is a systematic way of doing things. In this keynote address, McLeod tapped into Marshall McLuhan’s theoretical observations on what occurs when a new technology or medium is introduced to a society: something is enhanced, something is made obsolete (or changes positional rank in importance), something is retrieved from the past, and the new technology or medium creates its own negation.

With the introduction of “online information technology” in regards to Buddhism, McLeod attests that personal accessibility is enhanced. Because of this, offline necessities, such as international travel for meditation retreats and trips to public libraries for information gathering, are rendered obsolete. This new technology encourages “the sense of the individual path,” or that individuals are free to pursue whatever path seems the most interesting. Its negation, and perhaps the downside as well, McLeod notes, is that digital Buddhism becomes its own “tower of Babel” – users don’t know what information is “good” and which is “bad.” McLeod notes that because of this, religious “crafts are being turned into technologies.”

As an example, McLeod cites Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) as an example of Buddhist meditation going through McLuhan’s system. The mindfulness system is more personalized, quantifiable, or “scalable,” to use McLeod’s terminology, and brings meditation practice into the domain of health and hospital care. McLeod notes that overall, in these new interpretations, Buddhist doctrine and traditional institution are largely neglected.

McLeod continues that modern interpretations of Buddhism on new mediums are attracting new interest, and a different *kind* of interest. This is because many aspects of Buddhism, especially meditation are “free from the Asian structures – which have been extremely importance and part of the transition – but is something that *has* to evolve and change as Buddhism comes into the West.” This insistence that the religion must progress to adapt to a new culture or onto new mediums is not new – Thomas Tweed (2008) famously argues that religions have always ebbed and flowed into each society – but so much change, especially if seen as reductionalist change, is troublesome to some essentialist practitioners.

One of these concerned practitioners is Miles Neale, whose *Shambhala SunSpace* article “Frozen Yoga and McM mindfulness: Miles Neale on the mainstreaming of contemplative religious practices,” addresses this reductional concern. Neale argues that modern meditation practices have removed so much of the Buddhist “meat,” or essence, from the practice, that practitioners are left with a superfluous practice. Neale uses American yoga classes as an example, noting that classes focus on breathing, stretching, and “mindfulness” training, all with no philosophical basis. Neale calls this “Frozen Yoga” – a play on “frozen yogurt” – as frothy and substance-less as its food moniker. Neale argues that likewise now we see a kind of “compartmentalized, secularized, watered-down version of mindfulness being offered” in meditative practices, which he called “McMindfulness.” In essence, it is meditation “for the masses, drive-through style, stripped of its essential ingredients, prepackaged and neatly stocked on the shelves of the commercial self-help supermarkets” (2010).

From Neale’s perspective, modern meditation, especially practice that Neal calls “technology based,” lacks the integrity of Buddhist traditions because it negates religious lineage and philosophical substance (2010). “Mobile meditation,” in many ways, epitomizes Neale’s

“McMindfulness” concept. Referring to forms of digital meditation, Neale praises the health benefits, but asks the question, what happens when the yoga class ends and the calm of the meditation session ceases?

Let me end on this tension expressed by McLeod and Neale, that many Western Buddhist teachers argue that Buddhism must evolve to fit into modern cultures, and that much of this cultural appropriation of Buddhism in America can be viewed as religious reductionism. This observed tension applies to our conversation on “mobile mindfulness.” And it is something that both Gunatillake and Redmer were aware of as they created their mediation apps. It may also be something that mobile meditators are aware of as well, as noted in the conclusion of part four. Both Gunatillake and Redmer refrain from calling their apps Buddhist, despite their clear Buddhist inspiration and their own personal religious backgrounds.

On the one hand, one might suppose that because of the current trend away from self-identifying with any religious organization, many Buddhist practitioners had acquiesced to a more secular, scientific way of pursuing meditation practices. On the other hand, the following quote from Gunatillake on the *Buddhist Geeks* website suggests something different:

Buddhify is one way in which I’m trying to help that conversation happening, of making more and more accessible, but authentic ways of getting involved in meditation, so that in time people who really want to go down the rabbit hole further can then explore and stop pulling that thread.” (2011)

From this, I gather that Gunatillake created *buddhify* not to yield to more secular meditation techniques, but rather as a meditation teaser to draw curious users into more traditional forms of meditation practice they might encounter in offline Buddhist communities. In this sense, mindful meditation apps are an outreach tool, to expose ambivalent spiritual seculars to the benefits of meditation, attempting to entice them into seeking out “real” meditation practices offline.

This thesis was a review and analysis of current and popular representations of digital Buddhism. Throughout the paper, my voice, both as a researcher and as an academic, led readers to certain theoretical conclusions. For future research, I would like to step aside and let the voice of digital Buddhism users shine through. I believe research in audience reception would help answer some of the questions I proposed earlier in this conclusion. Additionally, bringing in the voices of users would help answer questions of consistency of digital media usage, location of this usage, audience experience, and audience religious affiliation.

Another area of future research could be more in-depth interviews with digital Buddhism creators. The interviews I conducted with Gunatillake and Redmer created depth and added an element of authenticity that I could not have achieved as a sole contributor. This thesis greatly benefited from the inclusion of the creators' fascinating personal backgrounds and thought process behind creating the two case study apps. I would be interested in conducting additional interviews with other principal and creative voices in the digital Buddhism, to reveal how they are addressing the transfer of mediums from the backend.

Overall, these “mobile mindfulness” apps aptly illustrate how modern practitioners are finding, consuming, and practicing “religion,” based on an individualized “pick and choose” approach. The mobile and customizable aspects of the smartphone may well discourage engagement with offline Buddhism, by encouraging the validity of individualized practice devoid of institutional or even doctrinal roots. Contemporary use of the smartphone, both as a source of limitless information and as a platform to express ourselves spiritually, will only proliferate, as we continuously search for ways to personalize religion with the touch of a button.

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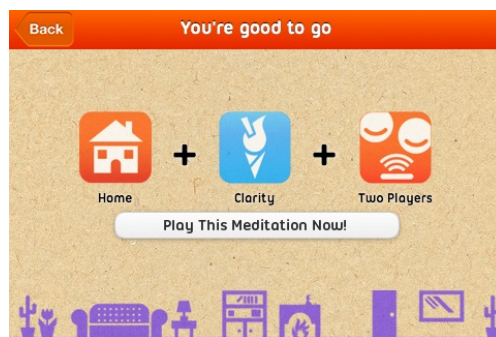
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APPENDIX



(1.A)



(1.B)



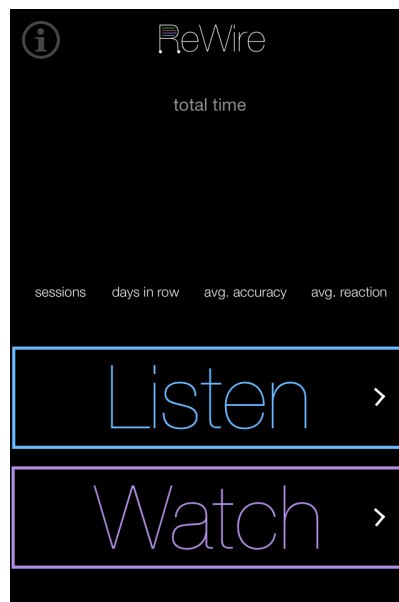
(1.C)



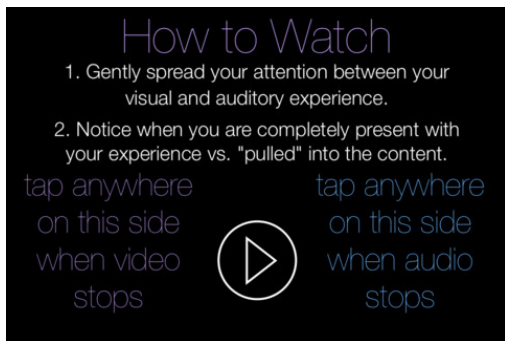
(1.D)



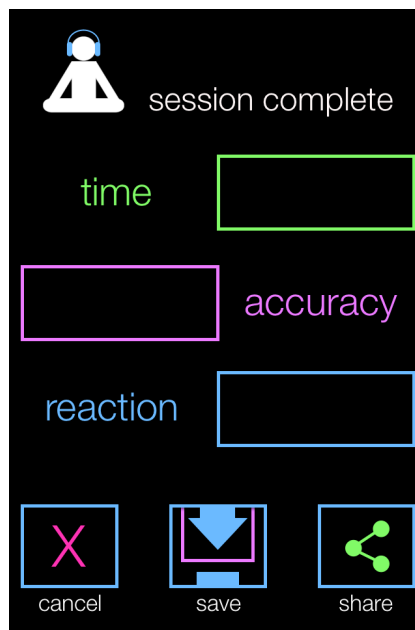
(2.A)



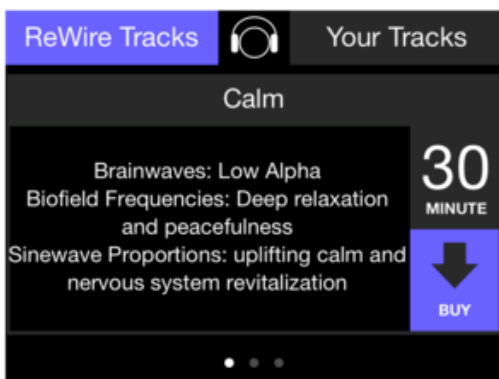
(2.B)



(2.C)



(2.D)



(2.E)



(2.F)