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5. The Internet, Social Media, and the Critical Interrogation of Traditional Religion among Young Adults in Peru

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on how young adults in Peru use the Internet and social media to critically interrogate traditional and received Catholic beliefs and values. While the YARG survey results revealed only very low levels of internet usage for religion-related purposes among Peruvian respondents, the interview data, by contrast, revealed that the internet and social media was quite commonly used to critically examine and interrogate received traditional beliefs and mores. This finding raises many interesting questions relating to contemporary modes of religious socialization in Peru. While this appears to suggest a gradual weakening of traditional Catholic mechanisms of religious socialization in Peru, it also suggests that the proliferation of the Internet and social media have come to provide young Peruvian adults with new resources for taking an active role in their own religious learning. Based on the survey results and interview data from Peru, this chapter considers our Peruvian respondents' critical engagements with religion in relation to the notion of "self-socialization" (e.g. Newman and Newman 2009; Moberg et al. 2019) which highlights the degree to which people are able to actively participate in and direct their own religious learning, often in ways that are intimately related to their Internet and social media use.

This chapter is structured as follows. We start by providing a discussion of recent changes in the Peruvian and broader Latin American religious landscape, especially as it

relates to contemporary modes of religious socialization. We concentrate, in particular, on the effects of increasing individualization and a gradual transition from “narrow” to “broad” forms of socialization in Peru on the religious outlooks and identifications of younger age groups in Peru. The final section moves to account for the results of select parts of the Peruvian YARG survey data and the religious views and attitudes of Peruvian respondents as expressed in in-depth interviews.

Cultural change, individualization, and the weakening mechanisms of traditional religious socialization in Peru

Socialization has long constituted a central and widely elaborated theme across several disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The term “socialization” is most commonly used to denote the extended process whereby individuals grow into various types of social and cultural roles and gradually acquire the knowledges and capabilities to shape their own behaviors and dispositions in accordance with the expectations of their surrounding cultures and social settings (e.g. Maccoby 2012, 13). However, while most theories of socialization share a common core, they sometimes differ significantly with regard to the importance they attach to the role of individual agency in socialization processes. In the past three to four decades, theoretical perspectives on socialization have generally progressed towards understandings that view socialization as a process that involves an *active* and *dialectical* relationship between both socializing agents and the subjects being socialized (e.g. Maccoby 2007; Klingenberg and Sjö 2019). More recently developed approaches also tend to highlight socialization as a type of social and cultural activity and practice that develops concomitantly with broader changes in society and social and cultural life (e.g. Stausberg 2006, 1754; Vermeer 2010, 106).

Socialization has for long also constituted a key theme in scholarly debates on the changing character of religious life and practice in the late-modern era. Religious socialization is commonly understood as the process whereby individuals acquire the languages, behaviors, values, and dispositions etc. that are associated with particular religious communal settings. Religious socialization (or the lack thereof) therefore plays a central role in how successfully particular religious sensibilities, dispositions, and languages become sustained, reproduced, and transmitted across generations (e.g. Moberg and Sjö 2015, 92). While the early “primary” religious socialization that occurs (or, alternatively, does not occur) within the context of the parental family in childhood and early adolescence has been shown to have a particularly strong effect on individuals’ religiosity in later life, religious socialization needs to be understood as something that continues throughout the lifespan within “secondary” socialization contexts such as education and religious communities in particular (e.g. Mueller and Elder 2003; Bengtson et al. 2009, 327). However, as has been persuasively argued by numerous studies focusing on Western societies (e.g. Voas and Crockett 2005), following a broader social and cultural turn towards increasing individualism and elevation of personal autonomy, successive generations of parents have become less and less likely to socialize their children into any particular religious frameworks. Indeed, as argued by Vermeer (2012, 107), following the perpetuation of individualism as a core social and cultural value, it has become increasingly plausible to regard *individuation* (i.e. “the tension between the development of a unique personality on the one hand and social integration on the other”) as the “core of socialization.” In this view, then, contemporary socialization (including religious socialization) needs to be understood as “an active, simultaneous process of both personality development and the acquisition of core values” (Vermeer 2010, 107).

The effects of increasing individualism on contemporary religiosity and religious life and practice has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and been studied under several different rubrics (e.g. Wilke 2015). However, while past decades have no doubt witnessed a gradual and accelerating transition from traditional to post-traditional societies coupled with the rise of individualism on a worldwide scale, the above observations nevertheless still mainly pertain to Western cultures characterized by what some scholars have referred to as “broad” forms of socialization that generally “encourage independence, individualism, and self-expression” (Arnett and Taber 1993, 519). Cultures characterized by “narrow” forms of socialization, by contrast, “hold obedience and conformity as the highest values, and deviation from cultural expectations for behavior is condemned and punished” (Arnett and Taber 1993, 519). Although it is important to recognize the continued persistence of “narrow” forms of socialization across many contemporary social and cultural contexts, it is equally important to consider the degree to which rapidly modernizing and globalizing societies like Peru have, for some time now, been gradually transitioning from “narrow” to “broad” forms of socialization following significant recent socioeconomic changes, increasing cultural diffusion, the proliferation of new digital media, and the gradual but progressive erosion of traditional values and Catholic hegemony. Indeed, as Maccoby (2014, 13) points out, as the importance of “broad” forms of socialization tend to become accentuated “in times of rapid cultural change,” an adequate understanding of contemporary modes of religious socialization in a context like Peru also needs consider the ways in which “individuals can be socialized to adapt to changing social circumstances.” Moreover, in addition to acknowledging how younger people tend to be particularly receptive to and cognizant about changing social circumstances, it is also important to recognize that young adulthood constitutes a stage in life when individuals increasingly gain the freedom to (and are indeed often increasingly expected to) independently form their own worldviews and

outlooks on life (e.g. Arnett 2007). On this point, some scholars have taken a step further by suggesting that processes of socialization (including religious socialization) in societies and cultures marked by “broad” forms of socialization, increasing individualism, and the erosion of traditional values is increasingly taking on the characteristics of “self-socialization” (e.g. Arnett 1995, 521; Newman and Newman 2009; Moberg et al. 2019).

As explained by Newman and Newman (2009, 524), the notion of “self-socialization suggests that individuals draw on their own sense of agency to select the best social contexts to support their development, and that this process is both a product of and contributor to individual development and individualization.” As we have argued elsewhere (Moberg et al. 2019), rather than suggesting the “disappearance” of “traditional” and/or “narrow” forms of socialization, the notion of “self-socialization” is best understood as a heuristic device that invites us to more seriously consider the role of individual agency “in social and cultural contexts where traditional modes of socialization and socialization agents remain present, but where their influence has been progressively *waning*, and/or where individual autonomy and self-determination has become increasingly widespread or even *encouraged*” (Moberg et al. 2019, 244). As we will discuss in more detail in following sections, the gradual, and currently still ongoing, general transition from “narrow” towards “broad” forms of socialization in Peru is already having an observable impact on the religious identifications of younger age groups. This transition is likely to have significant bearings on the inter-generational transmission of traditional (i.e. Catholic) religious beliefs and values in the near-future and, in the long run, also on the future social and cultural position of the Catholic Church. This is not to say, however, that the individualization of religion in the “age of authenticity” (Taylor 2007) would have developed along the same trajectories or taken the same forms in Latin America and Peru as it has done in the “West.” Although the rapid spread of Protestantism, along with its individualizing tendencies and “disenchanted” influence (Taylor 2007), has served to set

in motion a general diffusion of the Peruvian religious landscape its arrival is still fairly recent. While the dominant Catholic Church in Peru has so far been relatively successful in containing this diffusion, it now finds itself in a new social and cultural environment where wide support for its central tenets, values, and symbols can no longer be taken for granted but are instead becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, not least as a consequence of the gradual erosion and loss of meaning of the *language* of hegemonic Catholicism among younger age groups. Yet another important factor to be taken into account is that the data for the YARG project was gathered among young adult university students. It is crucial to acknowledge, therefore, that the university context constitutes a very particular type of secondary socialization environment that frequently tends to have a notable impact on the religiosities of those who attend, most commonly in the form of an increasing questioning and relativization of received religious beliefs, values, and mores (e.g. Voas and Crockett 2005; Uecker et al. 2007). There are important differences to be observed, therefore, between the social and cultural worlds inhabited by the Peruvian young adults who took part in the YARG project as compared to the Peruvian young adult population in general.

In light of all of the above, it becomes worthwhile to consider the extent and particular main ways in which the religious socialization of our Peruvian respondents has taken on the characteristics of “self-socialization,” and how the more recent proliferation of digital media in Peru relates to these developments. Indeed, the notion of “self-socialization” has been explored in several previous studies of the impact of the present-day media environment on contemporary modes of religious socialization in social and cultural contexts characterized by “broad” forms of socialization. In what further relates directly to the notion of “self-socialization,” previous studies have also highlighted the ways in which the present-day media environment has developed into an increasingly central source and repository of *information* about religion/spirituality-related issues among younger age groups in particular

(e.g. Thompson 1995; Kivikuru 2001; Bromander 2012; Lövheim 2012; for a more detailed discussion see Moberg et al. 2019). As we have pointed out elsewhere (Moberg et al. 2019, 241), any study of media and socialization needs to acknowledge the indeterminate character of media as socialization agents and the relatively high degree of control that individuals tend to be able to exercise over their own media use. Processes of self-socialization through media therefore require a relatively high sense of agency and independent media use on the part of individuals.

3. The present-day religious landscape of Peru and the Peruvian YARG survey results

In this section we proceed to provide a brief general overview of the current religious landscape of Peru and the Peruvian YARG survey results on religious self-identification and self-reported degrees of personal religiosity and frequency of religious practice. In general, it is no exaggeration to say that Peru remains a predominantly Catholic country, both with respect to the large majority of all religious affiliations and the influence that Catholicism continues to exert over core social and cultural institutions. In past decades, however, the Peruvian religious landscape has gradually started to diversify. For example, a Pew Research Center study found that 76% of the Peruvian population continued to self-identify as Catholic in 2014 as compared to 89% in 2007 (followed by 17% who self-identified as some type of Protestant, 4% who reported being unaffiliated, and 3% who reported other religious affiliations) (Pew Research Center 2014; cf. INEI 2018). Many belonging to the country's indigenous population would also classify themselves as Catholics due to the fact that indigenous religious practices tend to be infused with Catholic language.

This gradual, although by no means radical, decline in Catholic affiliation also mirrors the results of other studies on broader regional developments. While Catholic dominance remained virtually unchallenged across most Latin American societies up until the early 1990s (often making up over 90% of all religious affiliations), subsequent decades have witnessed a gradual general weakening of Catholic hegemony coupled with an explosive growth and proliferation of various forms of mainly neo-Evangelical, Charismatic, and Pentecostal Protestantism. For example, according to more recent figures from Latinobarómetro (2017), since 1996, net Catholic affiliation across 18 countries in the broader Latin American region have dropped from 80% to 59%, while the proportion of religious “nones” has risen from 4% to 18%. Notably, the Latinobarómetro (2017) data also reveals particularly significant changes in the religious affiliations and identifications of younger age groups, with only 19% of younger people continuing to self-identify as Catholic as compared to 25% who self-identify as Evangelical, and a further 32% who self-identify as either nonreligious, agnostic, or atheist.

These highly notable and rapid changes in religious affiliation and identification among younger age groups across Latin American societies are due to several complex and closely interrelated factors, including generational and demographic change; a gradual general erosion of traditional values and mores coupled with an increasing openness towards Western individualistic values and consumer culture; the continuing influx of various forms of Protestantism and other non-Catholic religions/spiritualities; a progressive weakening of traditional Catholic mechanisms of religious socialization; and the proliferation of new digital media providing people with previously unforeseen opportunities to seek out and engage with virtually any form of religious, spiritual, or other type of ideological set of beliefs, teachings, and practices. In Peru specifically, these developments have all become increasingly

observable following the politically turbulent Fujimori-era (1990–2001) (Matos Mar, 2004; CVR 2003; Marcus-Delgado and Tanaka, 2001; Durand et al., 2014).

While the 2017 Latinobarómetro data clearly indicates a strong realignment of religious affiliations and identifications among younger generations across Latin American societies on the whole, a large majority of young adults in Peru still continue to self-identify as Catholic. Recent data from the Peruvian Institute of Public Opinion (IOP 2017) reveals that 71% of Peruvian young adults aged 18–29 continue to self-identify as Catholic, followed by 15.3% who self-identify as some kind of Protestant, 7% who cite other religions, and 5.7% who cite no religious affiliation. These particular figures, then, suggest only a slow and gradual weakening of Catholic affiliation and identification among Peruvian young adults in the past couple of decades. While these figures would therefore also imply the enduring efficacy of traditional modes of both primary and secondary Catholic religious socialization in Peru, they might nonetheless be seen as indicative of potential future transformations that may follow due to the current demographics of Peru. Out of an estimated total population of approximately 31.2 million, 24% of Peruvians belong to the age group of 15–29 (INEI 2018, 49). Looked at from a generational perspective, it is thus perfectly plausible to argue, following Voas (2010, 25), that Peruvian society might be slowly “changing religiously not because individuals are changing, but rather because old people are gradually replaced by younger people with different characteristics.”

The Peruvian YARG survey results on religious identification and self-assessed degrees of personal religiosity and frequency of religious practice

While the above-cited available data on the religious affiliations and identifications of young adults in Peru clearly suggest an enduring, albeit slowly decreasing, preference for

Catholicism, this is sharply contrasted by the results of the Peruvian YARG survey data. Notably, only 28.7% of the Peruvian YARG respondents considered themselves “as belonging to one or more religious groups, communities, or traditions” (as compared to the total YARG sample average of 34.5%). Respondents’ replies to the question “Whether or not you belong to any, are there religious, spiritual, or philosophical communities, traditions, or practices you feel close to or that reflect your views?” were somewhat different and largely similar to the total YARG sample results, with 39.2% answering “yes” and 60.8% answering “no.” Overall, the Peruvian respondents thus reported quite low levels of identification with “religious, spiritual, or philosophical communities, traditions, or practices” in general.

As reported on a 10-degree scale (ranging from “0: not at all religious” to “10: very religious”), the Peruvian sample mean for self-assessed degree of personal religiosity was 3.9, followed by a mean of 6.0 for self-assessed degree of religiosity of the parental home (see chapter 3 and appendix A for further details on the items included in the YARG survey). While the former corresponds exactly to the total YARG sample mean, the latter clearly exceeds it. Thus, while Peruvian respondents reported relatively low levels of personal religiosity, they nevertheless considered their parents or “the family they grew up in” as not only considerably more religious than themselves, but also as quite strongly religious in general. Indeed, the strong discrepancy between these two means (personal and parental home) also stand out in comparison to the discrepancy between these same means in other more “traditional” national samples included in the YARG project such as those of Turkey, Ghana, and Muslims and Druze in Israel. While the most recent quantitative data on the younger proportion of the Peruvian population as a whole clearly indicate the persistence of traditional modes of Catholic religious socialization, the Peruvian YARG survey results, by contrast, instead suggest that the transmission of religious beliefs and values between our particular respondents and their parents has been relatively weak.

Regarding religious practice, the B item bloc of the YARG survey also included the questions “Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you take part in religious ceremonies or services these days?” and “Apart from when you are at religious ceremonies or services, how often do you engage in private religious or spiritual practices, such as worship, prayer, or meditation?” Both questions were answered on a 7-point frequency scale (“every day,” “more than once a week,” “once a week,” “at least once a month,” “only on special days or celebrations,” “less often,” “never,” with the addition of the option “I don’t know”). 23.7% of Peruvian respondents reported “never” engaging in public religious practice, followed by 22.4% who reported doing so “less often.” The results for private religious practice were largely similar, with 29% reporting “never” doing so, followed by 20.6% who reported doing so “less often.” Similar to several other national samples included in YARG, while the Peruvian sample results thus reveals quite low overall levels of religious/spiritual participation and practice, they also reveal a somewhat stronger preference for private over public religious/spiritual practice. Overall, however, the Peruvian sample clearly emerges as one of the “less religious” samples included in YARG with regard to both self-assessed degrees of personal religiosity and frequency of religious practice; a result that sits somewhat uneasily with the above-cited available data on the religious identifications of young adults in Peru more generally. Part of the explanation for this surely lies in the peculiarities of the YARG sample and the fact that it was gathered exclusively among university students in the Lima region who are particularly exposed, and most likely also highly receptive, to currently ongoing social and cultural changes.

4. The present-day media landscape of Peru and the Peruvian YARG survey results on media use

The media-landscape of Peru is fairly diverse. Although radio and television remain the most commonly used media (Consumo televisivo y radial 2017: 7), broadband access and internet use have become increasingly widespread in the past couple of decades and greatly increased in prevalence since 2010. Broadband infrastructure now extends throughout most parts of the country, excluding most parts of the rainforest areas. The increasing availability of 4G connections now also significantly supports the use of mobile devices (e.g. Ministry of Transportation and Communications 2018). Prior to these developments, when household Internet access and computer ownership was uncommon, people mainly used cybercafés to access the internet (INEI 2008, 217). At present, approximately 68% of the Peruvian population are estimated to have access to the Internet, and 71% use it every day. These figures also roughly correspond to the total number of estimated mobile digital media users in the country (62 % of the population) (Hootsuite 2018, 118). Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp count among the most popular and widely used social media platforms.

The impact of digital mobile communications media on Peruvian society and culture has also become increasingly recognized at the level of government and national policy making. For example, already in 2002, the Peruvian National Institute of Statistics and Informatics noted that

The emergence of social media is an emerging phenomenon par excellence. In Peru, although there is still some kind of delay with respect to the first world countries, the diffusion they have acquired in the present is equally remarkable. In recent years the rapid growth of Information Technologies especially Internet technology, the network of networks that has changed the way of doing things, communicating, studying, working, having fun and accessing information from

anywhere, anytime. The country is no stranger to this event since the behavior of citizens is based on the exchange of information and communication, the same that can occur in different channels [such as] speech, texts, gestures, movements, expressions, affection (INEI 2002, 3)

As is outlined in more detail in chapter 3 (see also appendix A), the C-section of the YARG survey contained two items on media use, one of which specifically focused on internet use. As reported on a five-point frequency scale (“every day,” “almost daily,” “every week,” “occasionally,” “never”) the internet clearly emerged as the preferred medium among the Peruvian respondents, with 72.6% reporting using it “every day” (as compared to 24.9% for television, 14.6% for radio, and 9.4% for newspapers and magazines). However, in what reflects a continuing uneven distribution of internet access and infrastructures across the “digital divide,” these figures were low in comparison with the figures for most other national samples included in YARG (daily internet use exceeded 90% in all but four national samples). For altogether 10 options provided, Peruvian respondents reported using the internet “every day” for the following purposes: communication (64.8%), developing social networks (39.2%), finding information (55.8%), entertainment (36.1%), buying things or services (1.6%), selling things or services (0.6%), uploading self-created content (2.5%), health or wellbeing related services (2.5%), religious or spiritual services and issues (0.6%), and political issues (7.1%). Furthermore, out of altogether 7 options provided, respondents’ answers to the question “From where do you get information about news or current affairs?” were as follows: newspapers/magazines (66%), radio (50.2%), television (64.5%), social media (89.1%), online news sources (56.7%), friends or other people (60.1%), other sources (2.5%). As these results show, Peruvian respondents primarily use the internet for communication, developing social networks, finding information, and entertainment. Social

media also clearly emerged as the preferred medium for gaining information about news and current affairs.

When it comes to the Peruvian respondents' use of the Internet for "religious or spiritual services and issues," however, only 0.6% reported using it for such purposes "every day," followed by 5.3% reporting using it "almost daily," 5.9% reporting using it on a "weekly basis," 24.9% reporting using it "occasionally," and 62.3% reporting "never" using the Internet for any such purposes. This option thus emerged as the *least* commonly cited of all ten options provided, tying for last spot with the option "selling things or services." Indeed, even if the figures for "every day," "almost daily," and on a "weekly basis," use are combined, the number still stays below just 12%. These figures thus strongly suggest that the Internet and social media does not constitute determinative factors for the religiosities and religious identities and outlooks of the vast majority of all Peruvian respondents.

Peruvian YARG respondents' Internet and digital media use in religion-related matters as expressed in in-depth interviews

In this final sub-section we turn to explore and analyze how a smaller portion of our Peruvian respondents expressed the relationship between their Internet and digital media use and personal religious interests. Even though very few Peruvian respondents reported using the Internet for "religious or spiritual services and issues" on a regular basis (and with 62.3% reporting "never" doing it) as discussed above, when explicitly asked about this issue during their interviews, several respondents nevertheless ended up talking at length about the relation between their Internet and social media use and personal religion/spirituality-related interests. It needs to be noted, though, that the total proportion of Peruvian respondents who directly related their Internet and social media use to their personal religious views or

engagements was very low. Those who did talk about the issue typically used the information they found and engaged with online for one of the following two main purposes: a) to fact-check and critically assess the validity of traditional and received (mostly Christian) religious beliefs and claims, or b) to seek information about non-Christian religions or spiritualities and/or religious/spiritual practices that are quite unfamiliar or unusual to the Peruvian context (examples from the interviews include respondents talking about using the Internet to search for information about the Quakers, the Church of Latter-Day Saints, and the Krishna Movement). In the following, we illustrate these two distinct types of usage through the views expressed by a smaller portion of our Peruvian respondents who all provided more detailed accounts of their Internet and social media use in religion-related issues.

Our first example is of a male Peruvian respondent who talked about the Internet providing him with the information necessary to develop a critical stance towards traditional religion and his own religious upbringing as received through family and religious school. As he recounted:

Long before, when I was {P: eh} a teenager, I got into a lot of arguments with some schoolmates about this being a deeply religious school. At some point my father asked me if it was indeed true what you are telling me. God thanks, either through or by bad luck the opening of the internet allows a lot of information. This is far beyond deceptions and videos about demonic apparitions that one begins to wonder, one begins to seek information precisely on these beliefs and what their validity. Then ((share)) this information, I begin to discuss....I started reading /.../ I began to revise concepts of theology. The internet opens you many doors so check the concepts of theology. I found it nice and a bit complicated. Then I was given Theology of

Liberation when I was 14 years old...But it was hard for me, it was difficult to get away from that religion. I was Catholic. (YPESC048)

While this respondent clearly recognizes three distinct stages in his own religious socialization, he also accounts becoming progressively more open to critiquing religious beliefs and values as received through family and school. By engaging in a conscious self-reflexive revision of received religious beliefs, this respondent therefore displays an attitude towards his own previous religious socialization that is more generally illustrative of a self-socializing attitude. He also clearly highlights the role that the Internet played in him “getting away” from the religion of his childhood and teenage years.

Another female Peruvian respondent talked about how relationship to Catholicism had become increasingly strained and critical following her enrollment at university:

Although the university, well... I wouldn't say is the greatest source of Christianity in the world [talking about her own university], but, eh, yes, partly it is /.../ [I]n fact, more I learnt about it, more details I discovered from it. [Interviewer: And what has been decisive to influence you when changing from one point of view to another?] Questioning; knowing and asking. /.../ one example is the Bible which now I consider should be read in a critical way, I mean like not taking it in a literal way. Ask, know, respond are frequently used instruments in the university and they are becoming an essential tool to take distance or to become more critical in relation to the received faith (YPEMV050).

As is clearly expressed by this respondent, taking part in higher education has involved a more fundamental change in her entire approach to received religious tradition and sacred

texts. Indeed, for this respondent, the principles of critical thinking taught at the university provide an “essential tool” for taking a critical distance to dominant and received religious tradition. The views expressed by this respondent thus also highlight the (usually negative) impact that partaking in higher education often tends to have on previously unquestioned religious beliefs. But at the same time, her views also illustrate what impact partaking in higher education can have in fostering the forming of a self-reflexive stance towards her own previous traditional religious socialization.

Another example of how social media can contribute to further erode received religious beliefs and values for a person already engaged in a self-reflexive re-evaluation of his own religious upbringing can be found in the views expressed by a self-identified atheist male respondent. He explains that his grandfather played a crucial role in his upbringing because of his nonconformist political views. The respondent talked about adopting the political attitudes of his grandfather, applying them instead to religion when the time was ripe to question the “default” worldview of his family. As he recounted:

I was watching the video of an *youtuber atheist, who saw - who had the, the courage might say, of impersonating divine doubts /.../ I remember my, that my preparation was more focused on finding out Muslims, Muslims, Muslims, then - and then I also began to find out literary subjects, I started to find out the Greek religion theme {I: Mm}: Zeus, Aphrodite, Poseidon, I remember There was a documentary that is, right? History Channel: Battle of the Gods /.../ every Tuesday a chapter was released and every Tuesday as a saint I came quickly I sat and watched the chapter. (YPESC119)

This respondent clearly articulates how he found inspiration from a YouTube atheist when formulating his own critical views about traditional, received religious beliefs and truth

claims. As noted, this particular way of using the Internet and social media to fact-check or critically interrogate traditional religious beliefs emerged as the most common way of using the Internet and social media in religion-related matters among Peruvian respondents.

As noted, another way in which some (among the few) Peruvian respondents reported using the Internet and social media was for the purposes of seeking out and acquiring more information about various types of non-Christian religions/spiritualities. For example, one female respondent talked about a powerful experience she had while participating in a traditional indigenous ayahuasca ceremony (a traditional spiritual medicine practice). However, she was also very aware of the fact that ayahuasca practices were becoming increasingly trendy and popular among the mainstream, thereby also losing its traditional meaning in the process. She found out about the ayahuasca ceremonies through invitations that she repeatedly received from a Facebook fanpage and eventually decided to partake in one of the ceremonies herself. As she recounted:

Um, the group of ayahuasca healing ceremonies added me to Facebook, {I:Oh} They contacted me... Yes, and I do not know, they sent me invitations /.../ For some water ceremonies {E: Mm} and, ayahuasca ceremonies also {E: Mm} /.../ The group contacted me and I never knew how they heard about me {E: Sure}. Then, somehow, I was the one that involved, somehow, other people close to me, right? Inviting them to share the page, or (()) sharing, maybe a ceremony, I do not know, and well - I wanted to do the ceremony a long time /.../ for many reasons I could not do it before... Yes, via Facebook. Of course, everything in that you have to ask a lot of things, right? /.../ towards the practice of ayahuasca (E: Mm} these days, right? Because you wonder if this millennial ceremony can become a fashion, right? Many people come from countries, eh, from other countries to do the ceremony, and many

become shamans, right? Here {I: Ah}, in Peru. This is a shame, right? Which, a millenary tradition like this one at the present * is forming, eh, part of a fashion, right? (YPESC069)

This respondent recounts coming into contact with ayahuasca practitioners via Facebook, eventually ending up inviting others to participate as well. These types of ceremonies provide a clear indigenous alternative to dominant Catholic practices although, as the respondent laments, the practice has turned into a popular cultural trend that even attracts foreign tourists.

Another respondent talked about acquiring her information about and familiarizing herself with alternative spiritualities through the Internet:

Eh, well, I, eh, even when I was in the Catholic Church, I really liked these New Age movements***, right? {I: Ujum} on meditation (()) eh, including the Catholic Church /.../ because the idea was that - that is, in the Catholic Church, the idea is that one cares for others, not just for oneself, right? Even worrying and helping others you are happy /.../ the movements of New Age *** is more than anything, individualistic {I: Ujum}, that is, finding peace in oneself, finding harmony in body and soul, etcetera, right? /.../ I have been very interested in these things, eh, of the little that is New Age*** that are mainly meditation movements, there are some places, etcetera. I like to participate /.../ in those - but I, I usually look on the internet, right? /.../ I started to learn a lot of things about that because I had given like to his fanpage (of a professor from her university) /.../ For example, there I learned of this movement -- I do not know if it is called Hare Krishna, actually, where - he belongs to /.../ mostly I find out on the internet, eh, as a result of that or, in fact, I mostly find out on the

internet, on Facebook too, right? /.../ for example, in the Center of Lima there are a lot of places where there are these movements New Age. (YPESC115)

For this respondent, the internet provides a gateway into a wealth of information about different types of religious sentiments and practices (e.g. New Age and the Krishna Movement) that, while at some level resembling the (supposed) practices of the Catholic Church, nevertheless also provide something quite different. The account of this respondents clearly illustrates an active interest in seeking out information about non-Catholic religious practices online that is characterized by a high degree of independence and personal agency.

In their respective ways, the above examples from the interviews illustrate a general erosion of previously more commonly shared, or at least not as openly questioned, Catholic beliefs and values among Peruvians. They illustrate the increasingly central role played by the Internet and social media in the forming of new religious socialization practices among younger generations that are decisively more strongly geared towards personal agency and independent thinking.

Concluding remarks

Based on the YARG survey and interview data from Peru, this chapter has illustrated a particular kind of Internet and social media use for religion-related issues that emerged as quite peculiar for the Peruvian sample: using the Internet and social media either as a means for fact-checking and critically inquiring into received Catholic beliefs, or as a means of acquiring information about other, non-Christian religions and spiritualities. In neither case are the Internet or social media used as a means to support or supplement traditional religious beliefs and values. Indeed, while some respondents did indeed talk about using the Internet

and social media in a “positive” spirit to find out more about alternative religions and spiritualities, most respondents talked about primarily using them as part of a more general self-reflexive and self-socializing (perhaps even “self-de-socializing”) effort to distance themselves from received religious tradition. The type of self-socializing practice exercised by most of the (admittedly few) Peruvian respondents who talked about the relationship between their Internet and social media use and religious views in the first place is thus most adequately described in terms of an independent and self-directed disengagement from received religious beliefs and mores.