

Uses and Gratifications of a Spanish Digital Prayer Project: Rezandovoy

Usos i gratificacions d'un projecte espanyol de pregària digital: Rezandovoy

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This article aims to make a contribution, from a sociological and communication sciences perspective, to our understanding of religion in digital media. The results of a case study on Rezandovoy, a Jesuit digital prayer service, are set out here. The service was created in Valladolid (Spain) in 2011 and it is used by 40,000 Spanish-speakers from around the world daily. The theoretical framework used in the study is the paradigm of uses and gratifications, a consolidated framework in mass media research that is also applied to new digital media. This theoretical framework helps to explain the reasons why believers from all over the world use digital media in relation to their faith. In the current case study, through a methodology consisting of focus groups, interviews and virtual ethnography, we conclude that there are a variety of gratifications that encourage users to utilise Rezandovoy. By taking into account what the users themselves say about the satisfactions they obtain from the service, six

Aquest article pretén fer una contribució des de la sociologia i les ciències de la comunicació al coneixement de la religió en els mitjans digitals. S'hi exposen els resultats d'un estudi de cas sobre Rezandovoy, un servei de pregària digital de la Companyia de Jesús creat a Valladolid (Espanya) el 2011, que l'utilitzen diàriament 40.000 hispanoparlants de tot el món. El marc teòric emprat és el paradigma dels usos i gratificacions, un marc consolidat en la investigació dels mitjans de comunicació de masses, que s'està aplicant també als nous mitjans digitals. Aquest marc teòric pot ajudar a explicar els motius pels quals creients de tot el món utilitzen els mitjans digitals en relació amb la seva fe. En aquest estudi de cas, a través d'una metodologia consistent en grups de discussió, entrevistes i etnografia virtual, es conclou que hi ha una diversitat de gratificacions que porten els usuaris a utilitzar Rezandovoy. Partint del contingut de les gratificacions formulades pels propis usuaris, es defineixen sis categories de

categories of gratifications are defined: "Spiritual", "Prayer School", "Guidance", "Social Utility", "Diversion" and "Emotional".

Key words: *Rezandovoy, Jesuits, uses and gratifications theory, audio prayer, digital prayer.*

gratificacions: "Espirituals", "Escola de pregària", "Orientació", "Utilitat social", "Diversió" i "Emocionals".

Paraules clau: *Rezandovoy, jesuïtes, teoria dels usos i gratificacions, pregària àudio, pregària digital.*

RESEARCH INTO THE RELIGIOUS USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

In recent years a growing number of researchers from diverse disciplines have studied the phenomenon of religion in digital media (Campbell, 2013; Cheong, Fischer-Nielsen and Gelfgren, 2012; Dawson and Cowan, 2004; Hadden and Cowan, 2000; Højsgaard and Warburg, 2005; Spadaro, 2014). This study approaches the question from a sociological perspective, in particular from the tradition of communication sciences, applying the theoretical and methodological framework of uses and gratifications. The case study for this research has two notable characteristics: its scope is limited to Spanish-speaking users, who have been almost completely ignored by academic literature to date; and it is within the Catholic tradition, whose weight in the academic literature is clearly less than expected considering its influence in the world.

According to Lorne L. Dawson (2000: 26) the first challenge for research about digital media and religion is the "identification and measurement" of the reality, that is, "what, with regard to religion, is on the Internet, and who is using it, how and why?" It is therefore necessary to study the profile of users who are using digital media in a religious context and studying the way they are doing so. This is a case study on Rezandovoy.¹ Inspired by the British Jesuits' website Pray-As-You-Go,² Rezandovoy came into existence in March 2011 and offers a daily audio recording composed of a reading from Biblical texts (mainly the Gospel), as well as music and comments. The recording can be streamed straight from the website, downloaded for any compatible devices or accessed via Android or iOS operative systems via applications on mobiles. The service is addressed to Spanish speakers of all ages from around the world, and in a short time it has achieved notable success, receiving 40,000 downloads daily in September 2013, from across 145 countries. The site's promoters define it as "a meeting place with the Gospel for men and women of the 21st century" (Rezandovoy 2011: 1). The Episcopal Commission for Social

Communication of the Spanish Episcopal Conference granted it the Bravo Award for New Technologies in 2011.

THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

This study employs a theoretical perspective with an established tradition in sociology when analysing communication media: the uses and gratifications theory. In opposition to the traditional theory of the effects of communication media, the starting idea of the uses and gratifications theory is that users relate to the communication media in an active and creative way (Katz and Rice, 2002; McQuail, 1985; Rubin, 1996). That is the theory's main strength as its perspective considers users of communication media as active agents. The uses and gratifications theory maintains that users utilise the media in order to satisfy certain necessities; that different groups obtain different gratifications; and that is possible to study these gratifications, as users are able to provide information about them.

Although the development of this theoretical framework was initially linked to the mass media of the 20th century, the study of uses and gratifications is also being applied in the context of the new technologies of communication. This makes sense, as it is a theory that has traditionally been fruitful in the initial stages of each communication medium: press, radio, television and now the Internet (Ruggiero, 2000). The truth is that it seems to be a particularly useful framework for studies of the Internet due to the fact that people use the Internet in a more instrumental way and less as sheer habit, in comparison to the use of other mass media. Interactivity, as a fundamental feature of digital media, reinforces the idea of active users, which forms the basis of the uses and gratifications theory. Thus, we can find uses and gratifications studies about computers at home (Perse and Dunn, 1998), about videogames (Sherry *et al.*, 2006), electronic mail (Dimmick, Kline and Stafford, 2000), social networks (Martínez, 2010), blogs (Kaye, 2010), the Internet in general (LaRose, Mastro and Eastin, 2001) and about some particular types of websites (Kaye and Johnson, 2002).

The theoretical framework of uses and gratifications has not paid as much attention to the relationship between communication media and religion as it has paid to other types of media production, but there are some significant studies. In particular, this paradigm has been fruitful when explaining, in an American context, the motivations of the users of religious channels and programs (Abelman, 1988; Abelman, 1987; Hamilton and Rubin, 1992), but we know of only a few precedents that deal specifically with religion in digital media. As previously pointed out, a notable bibliography about digital media uses and gratifications already exists, but not specifically about religious media or contents. Barbara K. Kaye (2010: 207) reminds us that it is usual in the tradition of uses and gratifications theory that the motivations of a media in general are investigated first, and later studies are made about specific content for those media. Next we take a look at three precedents: Michael J. Laney (2005) has studied the gratifications provided by Christian websites; Pauline Hope Cheong, Alexander Halavais and Kyounghee Kwon (2008) have studied the gratifications obtained by bloggers

writing about religion; Greg G. Armfield and R. Lance Holbert (2003) intend to integrate the theories of secularisation and of uses and gratifications to determine the extent to which religiosity can work as a predictor of the use of the Internet. In conclusion, more empirical research is needed to bring out the potentials of this paradigm of uses and gratifications in order to reveal important aspects of the religious usage of digital media.

It is advisable here to offer a warning. In a context of believers, talking about “gratifications” when referring to a religious website project can generate a wary response. This is usual when social sciences approach the subject of religion using their own categories. The term *gratification* denotes a utilitarian exploitation of the media that is alien to the way the vast majority of users of a website of this type understand their own experiences.

Without relinquishing the academic perspective on which this study is based, it is necessary to note that the needs and gratifications that are alluded to in the theory of uses and gratifications, are the same variety of reasons why people use communication media. There are no preconceived ideas about the type of gratifications that guide the use of a medium, which of course can be in opposition to a hedonistic or excessively narrow conception of human needs.

THE GRATIFICATIONS OF REZANDOVOY

Rezandovoy is a digital prayer service, but it provides users with a range of gratifications. James E. Katz and his colleagues (1973: 517), observed at the beginning of the 1970s that “gratifications studies based on specific media contents have demonstrated that one and the same set of media materials is capable of serving a multiplicity of needs and audience functions”. The classic categories of the paradigm of uses and gratifications to explain the types of gratifications are: “Knowledge”, “Social Utility”, “Personal Identity”, and “Diversion” or “Entertainment” (Dominick, 2006; McQuail, 1985). Each product, because of its characteristics, seems to be orientated toward offering a specific type of gratification, but that doesn’t mean that these gratifications are the only ones that it offers. A television news broadcast allows its public to satisfy their need of “surveillance of the environment”, informing its public of what is happening around them and in the world, but it can also fulfil social utility or entertainment roles. Michael J. Laney (2005), in his study about Christian websites, concludes that the reasons why people use religious websites are many: because the web is entertaining, because of the inspiring music and graphics, in the search for positive and edifying messages, to search for spiritual and religious training, as an alternative to traditional religious services, to reinforce and consolidate their own beliefs, to search for others, etc. Hope Cheong and her colleagues (2008) for their part, conclude that the bloggers writing about religion also do so for different reasons: to transmit certain values, for entertainment, escapism, to look for integration, to interact with others, etc. This also applies to Rezandovoy. The gratifications that we call “Spiritual” seem to be the most natural, given its characteristics, but Rezandovoy allows users to satisfy other, different necessities as well.

A qualitative methodology, consisting fundamentally of focus groups and virtual ethnography of Rezandovoy users, has been applied to configure the list of gratifications. On the one hand, the comments that users left on the Rezandovoy Facebook page, covering a time period from March 2011 to November 2013, were analysed. In total, 3,333 comments were analysed searching for testimonials that would formulate motivations for using Rezandovoy. The 460 emails that users sent to Rezandovoy from the beginning of the project in March of 2011 to June 2012, were also analysed. And finally, three focus group sessions with users were held: one in Gijón (Asturias) in June 2013 in which six people took part, and another two in Madrid in February 2014, in which seven and four people respectively, participated.

Information about a variety of Rezandovoy's gratifications was obtained using these research techniques. The gratifications were grouped into six broad categories. This classification is based on the classic typologies of uses and gratifications, but, as is usual with these kinds of studies, necessary adaptations to the characteristics of the medium or media product being analysed were made (Atkin and Jeffres, 1998; Kaye, 2010; Ko, 2000; Laney, 2005). Finally, six types or categories of gratifications were identified in Rezandovoy: "Spiritual", "Prayer School", "Guidance", "Social Utility", "Diversion" and "Emotional".

In the following table the results of the analysis of the content of the recorded testimonials are shown. In particular, a number of texts outlining reasons to use Rezandovoy that have been recorded are detailed, classified by the type of gratification they belong to. Subsequently, in the sections dedicated to each of these categories, some of these words will be referred to as examples. The names of the authors of these comments have been changed in all cases.³

	Spiritual	Prayer School	Guidance	Social Utility	Diversion	Emotional
Facebook	45	25	36	21	13	23
E-mail	46	13	22	10	9	19
Focus Group	1	12	21	11	9	7
TOTAL	92	50	79	42	31	49

In addition, different personal interviews with members of the Rezandovoy team provided internal knowledge of the project, which was useful when drawing up the categorization presented here. Specifically, the Jesuit priest that directs the project was interviewed as well as a lay professional who works on the project, along with two volunteer collaborators: a lay collaborator who writes the scripts for the prayers and a Jesuit who, besides writing scripts, also lends his voice to the recordings.

SPIRITUAL

Both Robert Abelman, (1987), when studying the uses and gratifications of religious television programs, and Michael J. Laney, (2005), when studying religious

websites, include a category called “Faith”. Rezandovoy is a tool for prayer, and therefore, a significant element of the gratification that followers receive when using this digital media is related to the spiritual dimension of the person. Any gratification alluding to a relationship with the sacred via Rezandovoy is included under the umbrella of “Spiritual”.

For many users, the moments spent listening to Rezandovoy is time shared with God. They refer to it as a space or time shared with Jesus, of meeting with Jesus, in which God gets close to them, where there is a dialogue with God made possible via Rezandovoy: “It helps me meet Jesus from the depths of my heart” (Mari Carmen, email); “Thank you for helping us get closer to God everyday” (Carmen, email); “To me, praying means more than talking to God. It is being with God” (Miguel, email); “For me talking to Jesus is easy, but listening to him wasn’t; so now I know I am listening to him” (Lorena, comment on a Facebook post on 22/01/2013).

There are also people for whom Rezandovoy offers consolation or a feeling of plenitude that can’t be expressed in other ways: Rezandovoy can help one to be “in peace with God” or to allow the “spirit to flood my heart” (Carmen, email); “There was something in my life that I was missing, I couldn’t find it - I lacked references, silence, listening... the Gospel” (Elena, email).

PRAYER SCHOOL

This is not a usual category within the studies of uses and gratifications. Gratifications of a cognitive character are usually classified in a category called “Knowledge” or “Information” (McQuail, 1985: 105), or in the case of religious media in the category we have called “Spiritual” and other authors call “Faith” (Abelman, 1987; Laney, 2005). However, in the case of Rezandovoy this set of gratifications is mentioned with enough emphasis and autonomy to be considered as a specific type of gratification. Rezandovoy means, for many, a tool to learn to pray or to acquire praying techniques. José María Rodríguez Olaizola, the Jesuit who is responsible for the project, also highlights the function that Rezandovoy plays in teaching people to pray, stating that praying is something that “has to be learnt” (Rodríguez Olaizola, 2013). Another Jesuit who collaborates on the project, defined Rezandovoy as “the teacher who helps, who is there when you need him” (Cipriano Días Marcos, personal interview). Many catechists, teachers and those heading youth groups, also highlight the gratification of “Prayer School” in their use of Rezandovoy.

The recordings of Rezandovoy, through the suggestions for reflections that accompany the Biblical texts are, for many users, a great guide for praying: “It makes you question yourself. It forces you to take a position. It is not about answering your question. It restrains you, it holds you” (Salvador, focus group); “They make it so easy, the music, the environment, the questions they ask, it is of infinite help” (Luisa, focus group). This is an especially useful gratification for young people or for people without experience in praying. A nineteen-year-old youngster expressed it using these words: “I start to pray, and think ok, how do I do it? Do I look at the ceiling? At the sky? It gives you some guidelines, it guides

you little by little, and helps you get into the mood to pray, to feel the prayer and to live it" (María, focus group).

Many people state that Rezandovoy has enabled them to acquire a praying discipline they didn't have before. Because of laziness, lack of order, or inability to generate a daily praying routine, in the end they didn't pray. Rezandovoy has helped them acquire a routine and to maintain a daily practice of praying: "It is the formula, a mechanism they provide and if you follow it, it establishes a habit" (Salvador, focus group); "It helps me focus, I am very busy and without this I think I wouldn't do it, there would be days when I had the time, but also others when I didn't" (Carla, focus group); "I confess I am lazy about praying, to turn on the computer and listen helps me a lot" (Orlando, email); "It was very hard for me to enter into the dynamic, I tried to do it, things happened around me, I couldn't; I happened to see Rezandovoy and I really liked it, I thought it felt really right..." (Miriam, focus group).

Finally Rezandovoy is also a facilitator of prayer. There are users who highlight that Rezandovoy creates moments for praying that wouldn't happen without this tool, or it would be more difficult for these moments to happen. The specific characteristics of this digital media facilitate their introduction into the daily routines people have: "The thing is that because they are audio, it enables you to pray in circumstances where normally you wouldn't. Driving or in the street, you save that moment" (Maribel, focus group); "The day I don't have space or time to stop for longer, this helps me pray" (Valeria, focus group); "You go for a walk and it is now more enjoyable, the medium is more comfortable, you don't need to take a book" (Sandra, focus group); "It is not the same as on paper, but the truth is that we no longer handle so much paper" (Miriam, focus group).

GUIDANCE

Barbara K. Kaye and Thomas Johnson (2002), in their research on political websites, have detected a factor called "Guidance". However, other authors choose to group these gratifications together into other categories such as "Personal Identity" or under the umbrellas of "Knowledge" or "Information" (McQuail, 1985; Ruggiero, 2000: 26). In the "Guidance" category are all gratifications related to the way in which Rezandovoy can help users to have a better understanding of the message of the Biblical texts that are used in the prayers, and to apply them to their day to day in different ways, transforming their practice, attitudes and values.

There are people who use Rezandovoy as a way of deepening their faith, as a catechetical space or one of religious learning. For many, the comments make understanding the gospel easier: "The way to approach the text is simple and deep at the same time" (Diana, focus group); "For those of us who only have a basic understanding of religious matters without any special religious education, it helps us to understand things" (Julia, focus group); "It helps me learn the word of God, especially the explanations it provides as a guide after the Gospel" (Miriam, focus group); "It makes you think and understand, and afterwards when you come back to the gospel you understand it better. I discover aspects that I wouldn't have

thought of" (Elena, focus group). This can be particularly useful for young listeners without any experience of reading the Bible: "It is cool that they explain the prayer, you say - Oh! It did have a meaning!" (María, focus group).

In some comments, what is most appreciated are the adaptations of Biblical texts placed in a contemporary context: "It is an application, a translation-interpretation that puts the Gospel into today's words" (Sandra, focus group); "It helps me understand the words of the Gospel that are talking to me, here, in my life of today, because the Bible was written in another time, the comments contribute to my understanding of it" (Daniela, focus group); "I do believe it can help many people see that... wow! It's not talking about things of the past, it is talking to me" (Valeria, focus group).

There are users who state that Rezandovoy changes the way they approach their daily lives, it helps them know themselves better, transform their lives, it helps them to cope with the vicissitudes of daily life, gives them optimism, it gives them hope, helps them to become better people, etc.: "This little time of praying with you gives me strength and encourages me in daily mission" (Franklin, comment on a Facebook post from 09/11/2013); "God gives me the opportunity to give a new meaning to each day thanks to Rezandovoy" (Ernesto, comment on a Facebook post from 02/04/2011); "It gives me hints and orientation for my daily life" (Gloria, focus group); "It helps you to become a better person, to be focused on your life, on your daily life" (Dora, focus group); "If you listen to this in the morning then the pieces of the day's puzzle fall into place, it helps you look at life from a certain perspective, you are focused on what is important, not on the urgent. It sets my agenda." (Asun, focus group); "As it is on first thing in the morning, it gives me energy for the whole day, because then I am aware of this" (Carla, focus group).

SOCIAL UTILITY

The gratifications called "social" are usually related to the function that media consumption plays on people's social lives. There is a set of social needs for inclusion that are related to the human need to forge closer ties with family, friends and society as a whole. Most studies about uses and gratifications point to these types of gratifications (McQuail, 1985: 105). Media provides people with a conversational subject and provides common ground for social conversations, as many people use these as aides to talk to others about what they watch, listen to or read in the media. In addition to this, the media is also a way to avoid loneliness or it gives users a feeling of belonging. In the case of this research about Rezandovoy, these rewards reflect the utility that Rezandovoy has for some users as a resource for socialising, as well as gratifications related to the community dimension that Rezandovoy can provide.

There are gratifications in Rezandovoy that reflect the influence that social context exerts in listening to Rezandovoy. In some contexts, Rezandovoy can be useful to facilitate the integration of the individual, as a subject for conversations or as an element that many users share with other people and groups: "From the first day it worked so well for me that I spoke about it everywhere" (Alicia,

comment on a Facebook post from 09/09/2012); “When there has been a prayer that has especially moved me or that I thought was especially intense, I sent an email saying ‘Hey! Don’t miss this’, or if I think it speaks to particular people because of their current circumstances I say ‘Hey! This is that we were talking about’. I do this a lot” (Borja, focus group). The behaviour of some users reflects a social context favourable for these type of gratifications: “The subject appears in the meetings and it speaks to you, almost everybody related to this world knows what it is”; “It is normal practice to ask people close to you: ‘Did you hear today’s broadcast?’ ‘What a nice song!’ ‘Did you hear that poem?’ It is usual, we normally talk about it, I know there are more people listening” (Daniela, focus group).

Secondly, there is a community dimension that Rezandovoy can imply, in a range of ways. In the simplest one, Rezandovoy is a way of praying that can be experienced as prayer in a group. At least if we compare it to the prayers made using a book. Listening to the voices that read the prayer to you transforms it into an shared experience: “When you read it, there is a feeling of solitude, but listening to Rezandovoy gives you the sensation of being in company as everyday there are at least two voices broadcasted” (Dora, focus group). The consciousness that several people have taken part in the preparation and in the recording of the prayers means an added value for some users: “You know that somebody else has thought and prayed that text, has taken care of it. You feel you are in good hands. You let yourself go with the flow” (Valeria, focus group).

But this community dimension may be a reflection of deeper yearnings. Rezandovoy means a stimulus or a particular support for people living in secularised contexts or where faith doesn’t enjoy such prestige: “Solitude in faith is hard, but with you less so” (Elena, email); “Sometimes I think about it as praying in a group. You are there and there are many other people with you and you think, ‘so I am not a freak’. There really are other people that have the same need for God that I do” (Julia, focus group); “When I pray I think it is fantastic to be connected to so many people. You are all there, I feel you are there, people that need Church but, because of their life circumstances, are isolated. You are praying, I feel that I am in company because you are praying the same prayers as I am” (Maribel, focus group); “When I am in Rezandovoy it is the closest I get to being part of something that can be called Church. I am completely on the margin, I don’t belong to any group, etc. And I appreciate it very much, I love being there” (Salvador, focus group).

DIVERSION

This is a classic category of gratifications in the studies of uses and gratifications, although some authors prefer to call it “Entertainment” (Dominick, 2006: 46; McQuail, 1985: 105). Under this category is a diverse group of gratifications that highlight the utility of Rezandovoy in interrupting daily routines, setting aside the activities or worries of daily life, providing serenity and calm, or just simply providing an aesthetic pleasure.

Significantly, in the focus groups it became evident that there was a clear rejection of the idea of Rezandovoy as a tool for mere relaxation.⁴ But even if

this is the case, it is normal to find testimonies of people who appreciate the utility of Rezandovoy in finding a moment of peace, as a tool to disconnect or to find some peace in their daily lives: “Thank you! For the minutes of peace you give me” (Eduardo, comment on a Facebook post on 24/12/2012); “Thank you for this space, for helping us stop our fast-paced lives for a few minutes and to get connected with the Gospel and with God” (Elena, email); “These prayers are an oasis in my daily life” (Concepción, comment on a Facebook post on 29/11/2012); “When I have come back to praying, something happens in me, my spirit finds peace” (Daniel, comment on a Facebook post on 29/10/2012); “Personally it helps me stop my daily work. Know that your efforts help many people like me, whose daily life is eating us up” (Natxo, email); “To me it means winding down, it is tranquillity when I go to sleep. Sometimes peace invades me, and I cannot get past half the prayer. There are occasions when I wake up with the light on and my mobile next to me” (Miriam, focus group).

It is also usual that users stress the aesthetic pleasure that they get from Rezandovoy, the assembly of the recording and especially the music used: “I think that the music is a hit, because it is innovative, we have sung ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’⁵ since time began, there was nothing new!” (Asun, focus group); “The music is one of the great successes, it gets you out of the day-to-day, it takes you to another state, relaxes you, releases you from your problems” (Salvador, focus group). For many users music is a resource that helps facilitate the prayers: “I love the music. I think ‘let it go inside’... It helps me a lot” (Julia, focus group); “I have a weakness – music. It touches me deeply and it always makes me concentrate on the prayer” (Diana, focus group).⁶

EMOTIONAL

This gratification is related to the catharsis and emotional release that Joseph R. Dominick (2006: 45) includes within the gratifications called “Diversion” or that Denis McQuail (1985) includes in the section “Entertainment”. But the emotional release that can be achieved by crying whilst watching a soap opera and the comfort of a prayer from Rezandovoy after the death of a loved one don’t seem to be comparable. Robert Abelman (1987), for his part, includes these gratifications in the section “Faith” that we call “Spiritual”. In this section the gratifications of Rezandovoy that are linked to the emotional and sentimental aspects of users are included. Rezandovoy stimulates feelings or influences them, especially in providing support and company in times of difficulties.

There are people who manifest deep emotional feelings when listening to Rezandovoy. People feel touched, moved; Rezandovoy touches or reaches their soul: “Sometimes it lifts me up, fills me with a feeling of joy that appears inside” (Luisa, focus group); “There are times when I have to stop listening, because it moves me so much, and you say - Ok then. I am going to leave it” (María, focus group); “The truth is that it touches me deeply when I listen to it on my iPod. Just telling you it touches my heart” (Antonio, email); “It seems it reinforces the prayer, it sometimes moves me so much that I need to turn off the device and just take it in” (Daniela, focus group).

Rezandovoy offers many users the emotional support that they need for specific moments in their lives. These users highlight how much it has helped them to overcome difficulties, giving them comfort or encouragement when facing particular situations, or accompanying them when they were going through bad times: “When I am feeling the blues I look for one of your prayers and it helps me to continue on my way” (Sandra, comment on a Facebook post on 22/01/2013); “Rezandovoy is of great help and even more if you are feeling down” (Julia, focus group); “When you need support or when you need to feel a little bit more loved by God, it helps you enormously. When you need to abandon yourself to God. I put myself in his hands totally” (Luisa, focus group); “I was able to come through big problems thanks to it, I have listened to it, it leaves you calm and you start again” (Marta, focus group); “During moments when I was feeling bad or in a low mood, it has helped me. First to recognise your truth and face it, ‘Well, I feel like this and God sees me like that and wants me to be like this’. I know that this prayer has supported me” (Valeria, focus group).

There are many testimonies from people whom Rezandovoy has helped in situations like illness or death, offering company and encouragement, and giving a deeper meaning to what is happening to them: “I am 48 years old and have lung cancer, I have discovered new prayers and ways of praying that have brought joy to my life and have put order in my heart” (José Luis, email); “It is very hard to lose a loved one... it creates a gnawing gap, but from faith and with your invaluable help, everything is a little better” (Rubén, comment on a Facebook post on 21/03/2012); “After the massacres that my family have suffered through over these last days you have helped me not to blacken my heart” (María del Carmen, email); “In these moments of sadness it helps to me to get through the day-to-day a little bit better. I know my husband would like it” (Marta, email).

CONCLUSION

It is fascinating to encounter a field of study with so much to still be done. An excellent way to enter into the intersection between digital media and religion is by performing empirical studies and providing knowledge about specific cases. In this, social sciences can make an important contribution through qualitative and quantitative techniques proven throughout the history of these disciplines.

In this study, the results of a qualitative research about the gratifications of Rezandovoy have been set out. An analysis of user testimonials has been made, and a categorisation of the gratifications that this tool offers has been made. In particular, six categories have been defined, that aim to cover the semantic field of Rezandovoy users. These, when explaining their decision to use Rezandovoy, allude to motivations that can be classified into six types: Rezandovoy is essentially a prayer tool designed to offer, based on the framework of a specific tradition, an experience of meeting or having contact with the sacred (Spiritual); at the same time, Rezandovoy acts as the prayer master or as a guide for prayer (Prayer School); it helps users to orientate their lives according to evangelical values (Guidance); in some contexts, it makes social life easier, because it works as

a subject for conversations or establishes bonds among people, and also satisfies the need for a community dimension of faith (Social Utility); Rezandovoy offers aesthetic pleasure or allows for users to temporarily disconnect from daily tasks and worries (Diversion); and finally, it works to channel emotional release and comfort users when facing life's difficulties (Emotional).

Our next step is to undertake a quantitative study about the users of Rezandovoy using an online questionnaire that will be distributed via the Rezandovoy website with the intention of reaching the thousands of users of this digital media for prayer spread out throughout the Spanish-speaking world. The gratifications set out in this work will be operationalised through a battery of items that will be evaluated by users on a Likert-type scale. The questionnaire will also work to offer a description of the socio-demographical characteristics, of the values and beliefs, and of the usage patterns of the users of Rezandovoy. The analysis of the results will allow the search for statistical associations between variables describing the users' profile and the gratifications that Rezandovoy offers.

Antonio Spadaro (2011: 30) states that reflection on religion and digital media cannot be limited to a purely sociological approach that entails the danger of "crushing and standardizing specific identities and theologies". Certainly the sociology of religion cannot pretend to have the last word about the phenomenon of religion, and this research does not provide the last word about Rezandovoy either. Social sciences cannot explain the fundamental substance of a project of digital praying like this. However, they can serve to generate knowledge about some aspects of the case and bring to light relevant dimensions of the information society in which we are immersed.

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Notes

¹ <<http://www.rezandovoy.org>>

² <<http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/home>>

³ With regard to the electronic mails, only testimonials that were previously published in a dossier by Rezandovoy are reproduced (Rezandovoy 2011).

⁴ "This is not a Zen instrument, nor yoga, nor new age, nor nonsense like that. It gives you peace as it provides focus in your life, as it enlightens it, because of the closeness to God. Not because the music relaxes you, nor because you close the door and say 'I'm finally alone'. I don't do this to go and lie down on a sofa and to be relaxed and away from the outside. I play an active role in the praying" (Asun, focus group); "What gives you peace is to place your life in the light of God and that helps you. You put your life into the light

of God and it gives you peace but that is not tranquility" (Dora, focus group).

⁵ Original: "Qué alegría cuando me dijeron..."

⁶ The theme music of Rezandovoy at the beginning of all prayers has become indicative of the site, and for many users it works as a preparation for the prayer. Most of the testimonies indicate that the theme music puts them in the mood for praying: "The theme music is the call" (Miriam, focus group); "I associate it with when I was a child, your mum puts you to bed and tucks you in, I associate it with that moment" (Luisa, focus group); "It's like Pavlov's dog, you hear it and immediately you enter. It creates the reflex of thinking that I am in God's presence" (Asun, focus group).

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