Chapter 8: Discussion

8. Introduction

This research set out to investigate what, how and why information was being published on English Christian church websites. Research questions were concerned with the extent use was made of social media, email and websites and whether the predicted challenges to authority had been experienced by English church leaders.

The research has been largely exploratory in nature, since little equivalent work focusing on the English experience has been published upon which to build. It has included the reworking of some US studies in the English context, and has tested US ideas about authority with English leaders.

Combining a longitudinal survey of web presence, content analysis and interviews, the results portray the situation across England with a spotlight on the area broadly equivalent to the Diocese of Chelmsford. This chapter focuses on key points from the results, highlighting implications and opportunities for application or recommendations to church hierarchies. The ways in which findings relate to and extend the current body of knowledge are also discussed. Exploratory research does not involve testing specific theories or comparing experiences against academic models. Instead, a narrative describing the situation and suggesting further research is developed. Where there are deficiencies in the research design or implementation these are considered in chapter 10.

The research has identified a number of factors which offer a possible explanation for the way that churches' media involvement operates. Leader engagement influences the whole process. If the church leader is interested in, and sees value in the use of online communication, then the wider church membership has the

necessary guidance and permissions. Within the interview sample, some leaders were taking the initiative and others were more reluctant adopters. Related to this is the leaders' own online information seeking behaviour. The attitude of the leader regarding their role in governance or control of the process is a factor which influences the ethos of the web presence. A leader who is not enthusiastic about web media but who demands a high level of control can stifle the creativity of their volunteers. Conversely, a leader who has no interest in the control might see a website created which did not match the church's stated ethos or theology at all. In terms of website creation and maintenance the majority of sites are run by volunteers. In many cases these volunteers have key responsibility for the content creation – in others, content is determined by the leader, again, showing the influence of the level of control the leader influences over the site. The content choice is determined by how the church sees its role as information provider – who forms the key audience for the information they are publishing? The evidence suggests that this question and the assessment of website content that its effective answering would imply is not often investigated. These choices influence the sense that the church has of being part of a wider community – the ways in which the organisation links to others online, or signposts to its physical neighbours, or engages with social media to allow interactivity. There may be concerns about how online information challenges the authority of leaders, influencing the choice of ways in which the church is outward-facing.

Three factors influence the relationships between these themes of creation, information provision and engagement with the wider community. The first is expertise – what level of skill or willingness to learn is available to the church from within either its volunteer community or its paid leadership? A lack of current skill will hinder the volunteers' ability to develop new, or maintain current, websites. The age of the congregation is also a factor. Research suggests that there may be an

influence on the willingness to use online tools dependent on the age profile, with older congregations seen as non-users. The final factor is the time available to volunteers and leaders. If they feel under time pressure, as most do, there will be less willingness to invest time in an activity deemed non-core.

The evidence from the current research project for this summary, the relationship with the wider research literature and how that reinforces – or contradicts – the findings is discussed below.

8.1 Clergy engagement and information skills

8.1.1 Leader engagement

Interview results suggest the level of engagement each leader feels with the idea of online communication influences the quality and purpose of the website for their church. It is an oversimplification to assume that there is a direct causal relationship, but it is one strand of the possible overall explanatory narrative. Without a leadership that encourages a good standard of content creation and presentation, even if they are not expert themselves, church sites may be ineffective and church webmasters will not have encouragement or vision to improve the site or their own skills. In this sample, although all leaders used the internet as a source of information (as discussed in 8.1.2 below) not all were mindful of any need for church sites to be well presented in terms of currency, content or layout. The evidence from the content analysis suggests that sites are falling behind generally accepted standards.

8.1.2 Clergy information seeking

All leaders interviewed used the internet to meet information needs in both their personal and vocational roles, with some noticeable differences. The two Catholic

priests would not use web resources for researching preaching whereas the Baptist ministers would be prepared to turn to Google as well as God for inspiration. Whether this is a personality difference independent of denominational allegiance was not explored, and the direction of influence could run either way. Those who were not minded to use online resources could have other personality traits that led them towards Catholicism as an expression of their faith, whereas those who might be more open to innovation may prefer a less formal denomination. No firm conclusion can be drawn on this matter, given the small samples involved. However, the key point to note is that all leaders understood the value of online resources, even if they only reluctantly or sceptically adopted their use. This extends the findings of Park and Taylor (2007) who say ministers are more likely than the general US population to turn to the internet for information, in that there is acceptance of online information as a useful source, and builds on the PICTURE findings (Cantoni *et al* 2012) of Catholic priests' use of internet resources. Leaders were also aware of the potential negative aspects of working online.

Previous literature is based on either small *n* case studies or larger purely quantitative survey work, so direct comparisons cannot easily be made. Lambert and Michels have published work on the information seeking of US ministers. (Michels 2009, Michels 2012) reported case studies with a small number of ministers, concluding that their information seeking was enriched by online resources, and also that they judged resources based on whether they fitted with the understanding of orthodoxy. The ministers in Michels' (2012) later interviews were prepared to use resources from outside their denominational boundaries. The English leaders in this project did not have a uniform approach to selection of resources. One preferred a non-denominational portal run by an amateur as a starting point, but this was the only strong preference noted across the interviews. A number of English leaders mentioned the importance of their personal print

collections as a resource. Carr (2004) found that in his London sample, only 32% of respondents had used the web for sermon preparation, compared to 65% researching liturgy and 69% looking for educational or theological information. In Singapore, leaders find a benefit in using websites as:

> *...web resources provide a relatively cheaper and faster way of conducting research and gathering sermon illustrations than referring to books.*
> (Cheong, Huang & Poon 2011, p944)

Amongst Catholic priests, only 8.7% had never searched online (NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC) 2010). Lambert (2010) analysed information-seeking behaviour across different work roles that church leaders fulfil. The current research reinforces the idea that the general trend is towards further acceptability of online resources as valid sources of information for ministers. In addition, the distinction between different processes and sources for different roles noted by Lambert (2010) is reflected by the findings from the English leaders.

As leaders begin to use online information sources more frequently, there is a need to ensure that they are well equipped to judge the resources available. The pastors in Michel's sample used their understanding of orthodoxy as a judgement tool. As new sites and sources spring up, is it reasonable to consider how conflicting voices and sources may be heard and accommodated? Or will leaders stick to a small number of reliable, safe sites for their content use, limiting the potential for enrichment or inspiration?

What is also interesting is the conflict between national and local sources of information. Michael, national communications officer, outlined the difficulty of having a national body providing information that covered the practices of many local, and independent churches. It was important for that organisation not to be

seen to contradict the local church, and therefore found that publishing less detail was the solution (see 4.7.3.6).This position is echoed in the Dutch and Danish experiences (Lomborg and Ess 2012, Noomen, Aupers & Houtman 2011). Both authors suggest that national church websites or social media strategies risk blandness for broadly similar reasons. Noomen suggests it is hard to 'present substantial religious content' because it 'is almost inevitably contested.' (p1109). Lomborg and Ess (2012) question why the Danish National Church does not have a social media strategy, and express concern that this leads to a fragmented and ad hoc approach from local churches.

This may be one explanation why a national parachurch organisation like The Alpha Course has a high profile in the links chosen by local churches. It gives the local churches a way of aligning themselves with a known source of evangelistic material. Alpha is an independent organisation, and does not have to follow any national church line on teaching. So it is able to publish without fear of contradiction. With only one focus (provision of commercial courses) their communication can be well-targeted and produced to a high standard.

If leaders only refer to a small range of online resources, then their understanding of the benefits of a well-designed site may also be limited. This could offer a partial explanation for the apparent tolerance of the problems with many individual churches' sites – leaders are just not aware of better possibilities, so their standard of expectation may be lower. The evidence from the use of email suggests that leaders are not averse to online tools per se, as will be shown in the next section.

8.1.3 Email

One theme which emerged from the interviews was how leaders felt under pressure from the volume of email they received. 'Email overload[24]' is not a concern unique to church leaders, but it was not a concern that was specifically targeted in the interviews. What is perhaps different from other professions is the emphasis on personal contact and individuals' issues that the church leaders need to maintain. The nature of the pastoral role means that church leaders interviewed had developed strategies for deciding whether email was a suitable method of communication and had clear rationale for using other channels so to not diminish necessary face-to-face conversations.

Fischer-Nelson (2012) found high levels of email use amongst Danish pastors – 99% used it for work-related purposes. Mills (2011) examined pastoral care by email and concluded that it is a medium that can be used to deliver counselling instead of the traditional face-to-face meetings. This study looked at the role of email in a limited situation – a workplace chaplaincy – which is different from that faced by the majority of parish priests who are dealing with email requests on a daily basis. Mills (2011) does not look at the effect on the church leader of adopting email as a legitimate route for counselling provision and how this might lead to a greater sense of email overload, indeed, in the current research leaders were in some cases very deliberately limiting the ways in which email was used. Singaporean pastors reported that email communication has changed the context and content of the priestly encounter as some congregation members now perceive them to be "more accessible, not so much on a pedestal." (Cheong 2011, p946). There are also reports of feeling overburdened by demands placed on them and that there is a risk

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[24]http://blogs.hbr.org/hbr/hbreditors/2012/06/the_responsiveness_trap.html?awid=84027 11796186695328-3271 retrieved 7 June 2012

their role is being de-professionalised because so much time is spent dealing with computer-mediated communication (Cheong 2011).

Apart from Carr (2004), this current research project is the first recent work to examine the use of email communication by ministry professionals in England for day-to-day work. This is an area that could well benefit from further research – how does a move to online communication affect either the quality or essence of care a leader is able to offer, and what effect does email overload have on church leaders' ability to perform their role? Standard workplace email management tools do not translate to a church-based leadership environment where the demands on the leaders' time really can be matters of life and death. Advice and guidance on effective management of email could be offered to leaders to help them work with the information overload many seem to suffer.

8.2   Website creation and maintenance

8.2.1 Content creation

Objectives 3 to 6 addressed how websites were created, by whom, and with what level of expertise and oversight. Answers were sought by a mixture of content analysis and interview.

Content analysis results showed that most were created by volunteers, with a minority (22%) employing professional designers. A noticeable minority (13%) of sites did not follow established design rules or guidance, for example, unorthodox placement of menu bars. Many sites were out-of-date; some omitted faith- or service-based information. Too few churches had enough content to allow for denominational differences to be compared. A small minority of sites had specifically signposted information for visitors, and of those many still used church jargon terms, as shown in 7.1   above. The lack of currency of website information

shows that the sites are not being well maintained, even if their basic construction meets technical and accessibility standards.

One further question is raised. If webmasters have insufficient time to understand basic design guidance, will they have sufficient time and expertise to adhere to legal requirements? Will sites be accessible to all? Will volunteers be equipped to understand and, if necessary, comply with policies regarding cookies[25] and privacy, the latter highlighted in the US context by Hoy, Phelps (2003).

The content analysis and interview results help to define the barriers organisations perceive preventing them from working effectively online – even supposing that this was a goal the organisation wanted to work towards. The scale of challenge is laid out. It points to each church making its own decisions and own mistakes, wasting time and resources because there is an apparent lack of guidance or collaboration. The research has quantified the problem, if indeed lack of online presence is viewed as a problem – not only in the number of churches for whom a website is not available, as identified in 5.1 , but also in the difficulties of ensuring good basic design and construction of content of websites that do exist.

8.2.2 Images

Webmasters interviewed by Noomen (2011) suggested that it was easier to use graphic elements for a Catholic site because there is a greater emphasis on the visual – Catholic icons, representations of Mary, and so on. This was not borne out in this study. That may be because there are fundamental differences between

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[25]

http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/privacy_and_electronic_communications/the_guide/cookies.aspx, accessed 4 August 2012

Dutch and English church traditions, or because the content analysis was not sufficiently subtle to pick up a difference. The findings could provide an avenue for further research, as web design becomes routinely visual, mobile and app-driven, does the idea that a text-based faith tradition will have difficulty still hold? Do these non-text uses of digital media present a specific problem?

A finding of note was that for three of the four denominations (section 5.6.1 above) the images presented were more likely to be of buildings rather than people. For many, particularly older Anglican churches, the building will be of architectural significance. However, the building is not the community that meets within it. Guidance –for example, David (2007), Blackmore (2001) suggest less focus on the church building and more on the people. If the architectural features of the building are those deemed to be of most interest to visitors to the website, this suggests the church may need to reconsider for whom it is publishing the site. There is a tension here for volunteer webmasters operating on limited budgets and with limited skills. It is easier to capture the physical aspects of an organisation and far harder to convey an atmosphere of welcome or conversation or relationship via static pictures. Multi-media can help, but may need resources or skills that are simply not available to the individual congregations. The findings in 5.8.3 above show that leaders are aware of this tension and the difficulties of introducing improvements.

8.3   Webmasters

The majority of websites were created and maintained by volunteers (see 5.7.1). This is no different from many other local church activities. Most parishes have only one or two paid staff. Some larger churches may employ more people and in other areas parishes share a full-time minister. The relationships between the webmaster and the church leadership are sometimes difficult or strained, due to circumstances or personalities. In a number of parishes, the work of the website team is not given

ongoing consideration. The pattern seems to be that once the website is established, whoever has taken on that responsibility is more or less left to their own devices:

> *…it's something I volunteered for, I have a very strong interest in computing, computers, the web all self taught over the years and the church tend to see me as one of their experts now.* (Oscar, webmaster)

In the existing body of research, a number of studies suggest volunteer-led web presence is the normal experience (Smith 2007, Sturgill 2004). The current research project confirms this is the experience for the English churches and extends the understanding of the dynamics of relationships between church leaders and the volunteers with whom they work. The level of evaluation of, and control over, content is discussed in the next section.

8.4   Governance and evaluation

Farrell (2011) claims that:

> *The congregation website is an accurate reflection of the values, purpose and identity of the individual congregation* (Farrell 2001, p87)

Carr (2004) reported that in 2002, only 3% of churches commonly considered their website at Parochial Church Council (PCC) meetings. Smith (2007) found that non-profit parachurch groups did not regularly evaluate their websites' reach. Farrell's sample of US sites may be different, but what has become clear from the findings of this research is that the website's content is often not connected directly to the values and identity of the congregation since there is little oversight, evaluation or ongoing governance.

Interview findings suggest that it is unusual for a website to be discussed at leadership meetings on a regular basis. The pattern appears to be that there is much discussion on the point and purpose of the site when its launch is being planned, with little follow-up once the site is live and established (see section 5.8.3 above). Even though the webmasters in the sample were only from Baptist churches, they echoed back the sentiment from the leaders from all denominations regarding the minimal level of governance of the website. If websites are to be useful tools for organisations then their content, currency and maintenance should surely be reviewed in the same way other operational parts of a church might be, such as children's work or tea rotas. The number of sites publishing out of date information in section5.8.1   above provides evidence that there is insufficient routine updating and maintenance of the websites.

There are two ways in which support could be given to churches to help overcome these issues. Firstly, support could be offered which would encourage churches to see their websites objectively and to discuss their purpose more frequently. This could either be from the national or local hierarchies. It could take the form of workshops, written guidance or specific sessions of advice at other meetings. Peer support could be encouraged, with groups of local churches working together to share best practice. Secondly, a level of theoretical support may be helpful – this could lie in formal communications training, but also as a way of embedding the idea of governance and evaluation as necessary aspects of follow-up at the point the site is being discussed for the first time.

The national church organisation has no direct influence on the day-to-day operations of the local churches within the four main denominations studied, shown for one of the denominations in the interview with Michael (see, for example, 7.3). The level of hierarchy and the relationship between 'head office' and the branches

varies between the four denominations. Methodists emphasise the 'connexional' nature of their organisation, and the Baptist Union suggests a looser affiliation. The Catholic and Anglican churches operate a more rigid hierarchy. The implications for the church communications are as follows. Although there are some initiatives and resources that are promoted on a national basis and adopted locally, for most decisions the local church finds its own way, and therefore makes its own mistakes. Carr (2004) describes the Diocese of Southwark's approach, which at the time, was to offer advice informally, but not official support. This is likely to have changed and the possible training sessions mentioned by Carr (p56) may well have been implemented by now. Certainly the Diocese of Chelmsford offers advice and guidance via their website at

http://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/adminarea/websites.html (accessed 8 September 2012).

Interview findings suggest a patchy approach to planning and implementation at a local level. There is little church-wide consideration of the website or of the church's methods of communication or marketing so the purpose and effectiveness of the website is rarely tested. Feedback is obtained, if at all, informally. It seems therefore that although collectively much work is being put into these local websites, there is no real measurement of their effectiveness.

It is possible that formal evaluation of an endeavour is not viewed as compatible with the voluntary nature of the contributions that are made to the running of a church or organisation. Whilst there are obvious measures for some activities - the number of children in a Sunday School, for example – and consequences that are noticeable for some activities being performed badly (no coffee after services, no sermon being preached) – the site's existence can be taken for granted. Effectiveness can be hard to evaluate if the wrong measures are being noted, and

there were unclear targets or objectives set at the outset. How do churches define the effectiveness of their site? The hit counts (section 5.9.1 above) only capture one aspect of the site's use; and the informal feedback from those who found the church via the website (for example, Howard, Gate Ecumenical, also in 5.9.1) only captures positive experiences of site visitors. The invisibility of effort may be a further reason why evaluation is rare – the sites are left to 'tick over' by themselves, apparently needing little intervention. There may be other reasons – perhaps there is fear of real or implied criticism of a volunteer, or as seems to be the case in this sample, relationships, although strained, are too valuable to be abandoned:

> *…we do have someone in the church who helps to look after it but if I am honest he is not the most co-operative of people and this is his domain and he resents intrusion into it, he will not always do what you ask him to do.*
> (Lee, Shelley Baptist)

8.4.1 Arbiters of content

Whilst there may be a lack of concern towards evaluation, the actual content does have some scrutiny. A sense of needing control without web expertise was seen in some interviews. Several church leaders took the view that they had responsibility for the content, and either created or judged the text before publication. It was likened to being the final arbiter for the parish magazine. Conversely, webmasters expressed a sense of being left to their own devices, meaning there was expertise on the medium but not the content. Across all the interviews, then, there was a mix of high interest/ low control from the leaders in question. In some cases leaders with no interest beyond web shopping were writing all the content and deciding what was important for it to publish. In other cases the opposite was true.

Interviewees who said their website should be an online noticeboard may well have articulated one of the main barriers to having a contemporary and welcoming site. They are attempting to translate a paper form into a digital presence. This is under-using the capacity of a website to be a rich environment; and those that attempt a more multimedia approach do so without much assistance, guidance or funding. The communication strategy falls between a gap from the 'head office' not being in a position to dictate implementation, and the 'branch office' working independently.

The research highlights the results of this approach. Church websites are variable in quality, as measured by their currency and the depth of information they provide. Leaders are struggling to find volunteers with current skills to exploit the tools available on the internet such as blogging platforms. On a practical note, the results suggest a number of ways in which the churches could be assisted with their conversations on their websites (see the recommendations and questions at 9.4). The research also highlights the problems inherent in this distributed approach to website building which would be of relevance for all voluntary organisations or others run on similar lines. It shows how simply not having enough time, or expertise, in apparently well-resourced organisations, is a barrier to providing effective information online.

There may be a complementary explanation for the apparent lack of involvement in online communication, explaining where cautiousness and potential lack of interest originates. The next section considers the role of moral panic and fear of apparent online danger in decisions to move content online.

8.5   Moral Panic

There is a long history of moral panics about the alleged harmful effects of exposure to popular media and cultural forms... in these media panics the spirals of reaction to any new medium are utterly repetitive and predictable. (Cohen 2002, p xix)

Comments from the interviews point to moral panic as a reason for a lack of engagement. Phrases such as 'you hear things about chat rooms' and 'this Facebook stuff's really dangerous' from Gayle or 'it can cause an awful lot of pain' from Wendy suggest that the idea of the internet as a dangerous place is pervasive and affects the decision making of the churches when considering what level of online engagement to adopt. Anonymisation, and a general sense of decreased wellbeing, was a theme touched on by Robert in the interviews.

Moral panic is a term that has been widely used, defined by Cohen in 1972 following a study of the media scares based on the 1960s Mods and Rockers conflicts. A moral panic has five key elements (Cohen 2002, pxxvi):

- **Concern** about a real or imagined threat
- **Hostility** and moral outrage towards the folk devils, 'them' pitted against 'us'
- Widespread, if not universal **consensus** that 'something must be done'
- Public concern is **disproportionate** to the actual risk posed
- **Volatility** meaning the panics disappear quickly as the news agenda moves on.

Commentators such as (Marwick 2008) have identified furore over stranger danger on the internet as being a moral panic – now modified too into a media panic, or in Marwick's case, 'technopanic.' It is interesting to note that as each new media form evolves and arrives, there are criticisms levelled at its immoral and undermining nature. Campbell (2010) sums this up as follows:

> *Technology is framed as posing a threat to religion and so it is perceived that it must be resisted.* Campbell (2010, p4)

The same kind of accusations were levelled at comic books, the cinema and television as are now being made about Facebook and other peer-to-peer methods of communicating (Drotner 1999). Media stories about changes to brain function[26] (Swain 2011, Greenfield 2010) as well as violence and abuse all point to the demonisation of the internet. Hoover (2012) suggests there is a 'kind of moral panic' (p.vii) about discussions of new media and their ability to unsettle the status quo. In 2012 politicians are discussing regulation to force internet service providers to block pornography unless customers have agreed to opt-in[27]. Little wonder then, that as a starting point a bystander may assume that going online is a moral danger; let alone the problems with viruses, bogus websites or spam emails to be faced. The women in the study from (Stewart 2011) were wary of 'aberrant' content (discussed on page 52 above) and took their direction from church leaders. In the same volume as Hoover (2012), Hogan and Wellman (2012) also suggests that the popularity of social networks and always-on connectivity has led to:

> *...reigniting moral panics about stranger danger, anonymous crowds, and alienation in modern life.* (Hogan, Wellman 2012, p49)

Understanding the actual risks posed is a first step to using a technology safely, and to its best and most meaningful extent. Marwick suggests that one issue in the

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[26] For links to rebuttals of these claims, see http://mindhacks.com/2012/02/29/at-least-its-not-twitter/, accessed 4 April 2012

[27] http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/may/04/pornography-online-cameron-opt-in-plan, accessed 7 May 2012

US at least is the absence of positive encouragement of young people's engagement with digital culture. This may also be the case in the UK, and is discussed here alongside the way that age is a factor influencing churches' use of online tools.

8.6 Age

Age has an influence on the production of websites and the use of online media in two ways. Firstly, there is an assumption that older congregations are not interested in going online, so there is no need to build a website that is more than a digital notice sheet. It is worth noting, however, that recent research puts the average age of an US Facebook user at 38 (Hampton et al. 2011), so perhaps that particular site is not as youth-oriented as some might have thought. Secondly, there is a correspondingly general assumption that younger members of the church will find it second nature to be online – but that it is fraught with dangers, as the quotations above highlight. These two generalisations have implications for an ageing church and for organisations that need to balance safeguarding with outreach and contacting their young members via online tools.

8.6.1 Working with older people

An older congregation was seen as the key reason why there was limited use of social media and online communication within many leaders' churches. This is despite the age breakdowns given in section 4.4 which suggest the church membership is not universally elderly. Five of the leaders interviewed said their congregation was 'mainly older' people, only one used the descriptor 'elderly.' The consensus appears to be that older people have little or no interest in the internet. Evidence from the US suggests this is not universal, with Hoover, Clark and Rainie (2004) concluding that 50–64 is the age group most likely to look for religious information online.

Farrell (2011) links the age of a congregation to the level of functionality available on websites. It is claimed that more traditional congregations, who use no technology in their worship and whose average age is older, will have fewer instances of interactivity on their websites, preferring to use the site for basic information provision. It is possible that this translates to the English experience, and could afford one explanation of why the church websites under consideration did not permit much interactivity. There is no evidence for denominational differences from the work undertaken, because there were so few incidences of interactivity recorded (as given in section 7.8 above).

Population trends in the UK (Office for National Statistics 2012b) suggest that by 2051, 24% of the population will be aged 65 or over. In 2010 the proportion was 17%. For those over 85, the percentage will rise from 2 to 7%. By 2035 there will be 15.6 million people of pensionable age. Given that the Church of England, at least, is marked by the older nature of its members, the average age of congregations will rise in future. Indeed, the Diocese of Chelmsford is undertaking a broad review of needs for the future based partly on changing demographics. (Diocese of Chelmsford 2012)

It is outside of the scope of this project to fully explore research that considers implications of the age-based assumptions that are being made within church congregations, but it is worth noting that there is ongoing work examining how older people might be supported in their use of online communication. In a society where so many routine transactions are moving away from personal contact and towards web-based interaction, there is a real risk that the older members of a community will be disadvantaged, either socially, financially or practically. Also, given the increasing complexity of everyday technology, a basic level of technological understanding would be of assistance to many (Malinowsky et al.

2012). Social media does not have to be age-dependent and can provide many opportunities for older people to create and maintain networks (Ongeri 2012). Far from ignoring the older congregations, the church could have a role to play in supporting older people in getting online. There are three ways in which this could happen. First, a church website could be promoted as a safe place where people can start to engage with the internet and understand its uses and limitations without the risk of accidentally seeing illegal or disturbing content. Second, peer learning is known to be effective in enabling older people to learn new skills (Sayago, Blat 2011). Community connections within the congregation could facilitate this. Thirdly, few websites are designed with older users in mind – or users with any sensory or cognitive impairment, not just those which are age-related. There could be a self-fulfilling prophecy in action here. Sites which are difficult to negotiate will put older users off, so there will be no momentum from an older congregation who find websites confusing. In turn there will be no impetus to address the problems caused by confusing websites because few people are engaged with the process. These three areas all point to possibilities for further research.

8.6.2 Working with younger people

During interviews, mention was made of the need to follow safeguarding procedures when working with young people. This involves careful schemes of engagement with social media and young people. Both the Methodist and Anglican church have model policies which specifically forbid the establishment of relationships via social media – in practice this means that leaders cannot be friends with young people on Facebook. At least one leader in the sample studied felt this was an unworkable policy. In the US in 2011, the state of Missouri created a statute which prohibited teachers from friending pupils or former pupils on social

networking sites[28] although this was later amended after protests, further suggesting that merely prohibiting contact is not seen as a helpful solution to the problem.

Safeguarding polices will be implemented at a local church level with information coming from local Dioceses or national organisations. Comments in the interviews suggest that safeguarding training may be the only point at which the use of social media is discussed – and in the context of the Methodist and Anglican churches, with its use being banned. Whilst there is no doubt that there have been incidences of abuse from church leaders, it is also possible that the reaction to use of Facebook or other online tools is exaggerated partly because it is framed within the context of a moral panic around internet use. Small wonder then that churches are not making use of this media, or are leaving it to groups within the church to establish their own Facebook pages. One Baptist church's safeguarding policy seen as part of the research includes the option for parental consent for young people to be contacted via email, text message or Facebook which seems to be a more pragmatic solution.

Safeguarding policies are designed to ensure behaviour is transparent and can be monitored and are vitally important given the past scandals of abuse and ill-treatment. Online bullying does take place, and was acknowledged by at least one interviewee (Wendy, St Timothy, p126) and the nature of online communication means that it would be easy to send private messages of an unwanted nature. The concern for the church therefore is how to use social media safely, transparently

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[28] http://www.senate.mo.gov/11info/pdf-bill/intro/SB54.pdf, s162.069 (accessed 31 July 2012).

and effectively – to be present in the online places where the churches' own young people already are.

By categorising the internet as a dangerous place, and only discussing its use within the context of safeguarding, leaders' perceptions of the possibilities of websites may be clouded. A sense of negativity might pervade the discussions if the dangers and not the benefits are highlighted. Studies of young people's use of the internet have shown that the incidences of unwanted contact may be over-reported and taken out of context (Marwick 2008, Holmes 2009).

In contrast to Marwick, whose focus has been on the US, (Holmes 2009) has investigated the situation in the UK. His suggestion is broadly similar:

> *Therefore, although data suggest it should not, online stranger danger remains a central discourse of youth internet use.* (Holmes 2009, p1176)

Holmes notes that there is little evidence from the US regarding young people's use of social media and what is available is outdated – assumptions based on studies conducted before broadband and mobile internet are rapidly dating. One finding reported of note is that from Ofcom, which suggests most online communication is within established offline peer groups, and thus an extension of everyday interactions at school or college (Ofcom 2008). Holmes concludes that those at risk from exploitation online are those at risk in many offline situations too. News stories covering discovery of paedophile use of the children's site Habbo Hotel in June 2012 had a sensationalist tone, with 'moral panic' being invoked as a suitable

response[29]. At the time of writing there have been no formal inquiries into this scandal.

These findings do not suggest that the problems can be solved by removing online tools as a source of communication, and indeed restrictions on use would be disproportionate to the risk incurred by removing young people's access to their social spaces. Educating those young people to negotiate dangers safely might be a more appropriate course of action. (Thornburgh, Lin 2002) use the analogy of a swimming pool to recommend education as a strategy. Children do drown in water. The cure for this is not to fence off pools but to teach children how to swim.

If English churches' fear of harm from abuse outweighs the understanding of the positive benefit of using Facebook or other social networking tools with their young people, a major channel of communication may be missed. Although it is worth noting that Bobkoswski's (2011) work suggests that it is wrong to assume younger people are happy to discuss their faith in the same online spaces their secular peers inhabit. It could be that churches' efforts to use these spaces are unsuccessful because young people do not want to mix their church and secular life online.

One final point is to note an apparent discrepancy between the age ranges of the churches quoted by the leaders and the involvement of young people. Few said their churches were definitely made up of older people, a number said there was a spread of ages in the congregation. So if the church meetings are rejecting, or not considering, using online tools, is this because the younger members of the church

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[29] http://www.channel4.com/news/striptease-and-cyber-sex-my-stay-at-habbo-hotel, accessed 31 July 2012

are not being represented in these forums? If governing bodies are dominated by the older members of churches, perhaps the decision making is skewed.

The current research appears to be the first academic investigation of reasons why social media, successfully employed in many parts of society, is not being widely adopted by churches. The contribution made by this study is to begin to highlight some of the assumptions and prejudices against online communication in general, such as the presence of a moral panic.

8.7 Church as information provider

8.7.1 Content choice

Content analysis showed that many websites carried far less information than had been anticipated. The coding scheme had been originated based on prior studies of church websites e.g. Carr (2004), Baab (2007) as listed in section 3.8 so the list of possible website content was grounded in reality. The most popular categories of information related to the operational, organisational aspects of the church, rather than the community life or attempts at evangelisation (reflecting Sturgill 2004). If the expectation is that the website needs only to replicate the weekly notice sheet[30] then this limited information will meet that need. However, there is evidence to suggest that this paucity of information downplays the role that the church plays in the local community. Statistics from the Church of England show that 48% of churches host some kind of community activity: after-school clubs, farmers' markets, advice surgeries are just some of those given (Archbishops' Council 2012). Yet only 8% of the Anglican churches in the study sample made mention of this kind of activity (Table 7-2). The proportion was far higher for other denominations at 33% for Baptist, 20% for Catholic, but lower at 6% for Methodist churches.

Interviews suggested that leaders, and the church governing bodies which they lead, did not have clearly articulated aims for their websites. Deciding who the audience is, and what their needs might be, acts as a framework for the choice of content. As well as defining what should be published, it also helps define what is not relevant and what a realistic updating schedule might be. Leaders were not specifically asked about their perception of their role as information provider, so

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[30] Please refer to Appendix 11.10   for an example of an Church of England notice sheet

this is potentially an avenue for further investigation – indeed, local church communication strategies and information management, combining the pastoral, theological and administrative roles and how information is handled accordingly would be of interest (see also the comments regarding email use in section 8.1.3 above).

8.8   Denominational differences

One aim of the project was to establish whether there were any differences in the choice of information topics on websites across different denominations – the four main variants being the Church of England (Anglican), Catholic Church in England & Wales, the Baptist Union and the Methodist Connexion. These four account for 75% of the churches in the UK.

The results show that there are some apparent notable differences for some of the information categories, for example photographs at section 5.6 ,rites of passage (6.3.2) and statements of faith (6.2.1). These have not been tested for statistical significance: so few churches carried information that statistical comparisons would be unreliable.

With hindsight, perhaps a wider approach may have yielded more interesting information. Looking at the mission statement and the theology of a church and comparing that with the information it published may have shown whether the websites were reflecting the way the church described itself. This would have partly replicated the work of Sturgill (2004). This reported a study of evangelical churches that were part of the US Southern Baptist Convention[31] which was intended to evaluate the scope and purpose of their websites – focused either on the church as

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[31] http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/default.asp, accessed 4 April 2012

an organisation, as a tool for evangelism, locating the church in the wider community or providing interactivity. Sturgill's research suggests that the organisational role was prevalent in the churches sampled. The English results replicate this. However, differences found between denominations were less marked than the differences between types of information provided. Given the explicit evangelical nature of the Southern Baptist churches (their main aim is to increase their membership) this is of interest. In 2004, the churches were perhaps not exploiting the internet to its full potential – it is quite possible given the rise in social networking and ubiquity of the internet that a follow-up study with the same US churches would give a different result. Of note though is that the English sample drawn in 2010, six years later, mirrors that earlier position of the US churches. It could be expected that the predominantly local, Anglican parish churches would focus on the organisational topics on their websites because that reflects their role within parish life, and the same is true to a certain extent of all the denominations considered within the study. The results show that with one exception (the higher mean number of items for evangelism on Baptist sites) all denominations followed the same pattern, i.e. more organisational items than evangelistic information, and fewer items relating to community or interactivity. (A broader discussion of interactivity found on websites is at 8.11.2). There is no evidence to suggest significant denominational differences in what Sturgill would designate the purpose of the church website. Interview evidence suggests that this focus on the organisational, replicating online the weekly news sheet, is deliberate, since no interview respondents suggested evangelism as the primary purpose for their site. Rather than seeking converts, churches saw their website as a way of advertising their presence to people of faith who were looking for a church to join.

The current research shows that the categories of information used by Sturgill for a specific denomination in the US are applicable to any of the four main

denominations in England, and that patterns of information content are broadly similar. This extends the relevance of Sturgill's research, and further formalises understanding of the purpose of English church websites.

8.8.1 Differences in the number of websites

One area where denomination differences were established was in the longitudinal survey which ran from January 2009 to December 2011, establishing the number of English churches with a website. This was in order to answer objective 1, against which context further investigation could proceed. The number of churches with a site increased for all four denominations. The survey shows that of the sample, there are more Baptist churches with findable websites. This could be an artefact of the way that the data was collected (see 3.6   in the methodology). It could also reflect the different organisational aspects of the four denominations – the Anglican churches are more likely to be smaller than the other three, because there are more of them.

The survey did not account for a number of factors that may have influenced the results. There was no account taken of the church size, nor its location other than having an English postcode. With more than half of English churches having a congregation of fewer than 50 people (see 3.13.1.1   3.13.1.1   above), it could be that the remaining churches either feel they have no need of a web presence or have insufficient talent within their community to implement one. The sample was also separate from that used for the content analysis. In addition, the sample drawn was not proportional to the number of churches in each denomination but of 100 each, so the Baptist and Methodist churches are possibly over-represented. The Methodist church organisation means that individual churches might not have a site, but do have a web presence elsewhere but this was not taken into consideration. Finally, the numbers are an aggregate count, in that they do not note

changes for individual churches – one church removing its site and another publishing a site would not affect the overall total. One major limitation of this piece of work is that the interviews did not address what the reasons for the changes and variants in number of sites might be. There is no existing literature to draw comparisons with or to suggest reasons for the variation.

These limitations aside, the results do pose some useful questions. The tailing off of the rate of increase between December 2010 and December 2011 suggests that a point has been reached whereby no more churches will invest in a web presence. The decrease in the Anglican churches may be down to parishes merging, so only needing one website. Were the churches in this section of the study those that have no interest in publishing a website, or were they just not listed or visible via a Google search? Was the Findachurch.co.uk website used current and its data reliable?

If churches feel they do not need a website, the results from this project suggest that the leading reason will be the age of their congregation. Without knowing more about the demographics of the churches in the study it is impossible to make that connection with conviction. Other reasons for withdrawing or not publishing a website may be because the leader and governing body do not feel it is necessary, or they do not have the relevant enthusiasm and expertise in amongst the community to lead such a project. The effects of varying levels of skill on the websites that are published are discussed in the next section.

8.9   Expertise

The reliance on keen, but possibly unskilled volunteers and the lack of training take-up means that webmasters may not be expert in web design and maintenance

even if their approach was cutting-edge when they took on the responsibility, and they have not lost the reputation of being the computer expert in the organisation.

Training is available at national and diocesan level as discussed by Michael and Murray. Michael described their offering:

> *We have a separate section of our department which is just communications training, that is aimed at both lay and ordained members of the church, but also members of [churches]...I've been doing [courses] for the last two years. We have a website... we also have a paper programme that's sent out to all [local areas] who then put it up on their websites or sent it out to their clergy in their normal mailings.* (Michael, communications professional).

Evidence for lack of current expertise in website creation and maintenance was found in the content analysis. The continued use of frames, out-of-date information, disregarding of conventions of menu bar placement and other guidance all suggest the webmasters lack current skills. In a community like a church with a limited pool of volunteers upon which to call, the leader is often left with whomever is willing to work on the project, and they may not be the most appropriate person. Without outside help or new volunteers to oversee the website, it is likely to be ignored or stagnate. In addition, if there are compulsory, legal requirements to be attended to first (like safeguarding) then parishes with limited time or money may not prioritise training in online communication.

One further point to note is that the prevailing assumption may be that a good website can only be achieved if it is paid for, which is a suggestion made by Benjamin (Valley Methodist): "if you want a very whizz bang website you've got to pay for it and churches are not flush with money." However, this view may be dated. There are sufficient free tools now to ensure an accessible and clear web presence

without the need for professional design input. It is possible therefore that aiming for a smaller website, presented clearly, rather than a site which aims to cover many communication targets would be a more successful option for many organisations.

8.10 Time

Time influenced willingness to adopt online tools in two ways. First, several interviewees felt that online applications were timewasters. Second, that their time as church leaders was already full, and adding another layer of communication would be too much extra commitment. The experience of those who have embraced online tools suggests that these extra avenues of communication do provide benefits in connecting with people outside of the normal face-to-face relationships in a congregation. Fischer-Nelson (2012) reported that Danish pastors found the internet beneficial for creating and maintaining contacts. 75% of those aged 26-39 and 58% of older pastors said they were in contact with more parishioners via the internet. Finding time to build an online network and train oneself in a new tool is clearly a barrier to adopting social media. It is entirely reasonable for a church leader not to devote significant amounts of time to an activity deemed non-core. A third, implied, barrier caused by time is the time volunteers need to create or update a site or their own skills, as mentioned above. This is a problem faced by many voluntary organisations – the experience of English churches helps enrich the picture of difficulties of finding time and expertise for effective communication within all volunteer-based enterprises.

A further avenue of research could be to investigate how those who combine online and offline busy lives feel they have succeeded: is it at the cost of other activities, or a changed notion of work and personal time? How has 24/7 connectivity via smartphones and mobile devices affected personal boundaries? What support is available for churches' IT infrastructure?

8.11 Church as part of wider community

8.11.1   Welcome pages

It is possible that the number of welcome pages encountered was low because the content was elsewhere on the websites. The decision was to scrutinise a smaller subset of website pages which had been specifically flagged as there for newcomers. In itself, the signposting of this kind of information shows a sensitivity towards those who may not want to read an entire site to find the 'way in.'

The results showed that technical language is still prevalent. The writers of these pages could perhaps be encouraged to put themselves in the shoes of complete newcomers. Once more, the need is to consider their audience. What might be relevant to a wedding guest might be very different from someone approaching the church as a potential congregation member.

8.11.2   Interactivity and social media

8.11.2.1   Interactivity

One aim of the research was to replicate the research McMillan (2008) undertook to evaluate websites offering interactivity in a way that was platform-neutral. This would allow for comparisons between sites which were not dependent on the expertise or design or specific use of tools. The original research defined three concepts which were also followed in this replication:

- Human to computer
- Human to human
- Human to content.

The framework that this work provided was deemed suitable for this research because it was anticipated only a minority of the sites under consideration would be

built with sophisticated technologies. The results showed that so few of the sites carried interactive elements that a full evaluation of the applicability of the model could not be made. In addition, the rest of the content analysis study coded for presence of a contact email, link to a blog or comments section and whether any third party content was available. 9% of all sites made mention of a blog, 89% had a contact email published and 16% had third party content. These results taken together show that church websites do not include interactivity in their construction. The interviews confirmed that this was a purposeful omission, as many leaders felt that face-to-face communication was more important than opening up websites. It should be noted that McMillan's work was formulated in 2005, before social media sites became widespread and popular. It is likely that the online focus has shifted, and that those who do want to connect online are doing so via a third party platform like Facebook rather than at the level of an individual organisation's own site. There would be little value now in creating separate church-site based forums when a Facebook page can perform that function and is where people already read content and interact with each other.

8.11.2.2   Social media

Linked to this last point on interactivity, the discussion now turns to social media. Objective 11 was to explore the use of social media by churches and their leaders as a tool for sharing information.

Interviewees mentioned the difficulty of keeping personal and vocational life separate when using social media websites. The fact that comments from a vicar deemed inappropriate make it into national press (Britten 2012) would suggest that this is a well-founded concern, although perhaps on a slightly smaller scale than an apparent national scandal. Alongside the issues of separate identities, reasons why the interviewees were not involved with social media were more practical – feeling that there is insufficient time available, to find time to spend it online. Even those

who were enthusiastic about online work were aware of the potential for distraction and time wasting. Content analysis showed that few churches had a link to Facebook or a blog.

So is the contemporary church ignoring social media? It could just be that the websites did not link to blogs, or Facebook accounts because they are under the control of separate people and seen as having distinct purposes. Interviews suggest this could be one explanation. It is also possible that leaders and church members are using social media individually rather than collectively; that their churchgoing is only one part of their identity and so their social media use is not directly tied to the church. The points raised in the interviews about maintaining separation between vocational and personal life online may also have an influence on the willingness of leaders to run official social media accounts. However, the most likely reasons are firstly, that leaders feel they have insufficient time, as discussed in section 8.10 above. Secondly, that social media might be a useful secondary source of online communication but that email remains the primary method by which information is exchanged online.

Cheong (2012) shows how Twitter has been used at a corporate level in the US to build church participation and to share statements of faith with fellow users of the service. She calls for further research, particularly into the negotiation of roles and:

> *How leaders can balance social chatter (alongside potential narcissistic self promotion) with the need for quiet reflection and rest that spirituality entails* (Cheong 2012, p203)

The interview findings from this project show that there is an awareness of this balance – both from the non-participants, who see the site as a complete waste of time, and from those who have potentially wasted some time but have found more

relational benefits. Mark, for instance, had found a spiritual director (similar to a personal counsellor) via a Twitter conversation, which had provided him with a clear benefit, and he and Lee were keen to meet offline those with whom they chatted online.

Lomborg & Ess (2012) addressed concerns about identity in their case study of a Danish pastor and his interaction on Facebook. The same kind of experience as Helen reported was noted. Although the pastor:

> *considers it professionally helpful to give the congregation members who are part of his Facebook audience glimpses into his private life…he is careful not to post status updates that could compromise his status* (Lomborg & Stine 2012, p177)

He is, therefore, making deliberate choices about where the boundary between public and professional life lies with each status update. The negotiation of public and private roles via a shared space like Facebook is a process that each church leader has to tackle individually. It is clear that no one set of denominational guidelines would suit all circumstances, churches and personalities.

8.12 Authority

Many authors have considered whether religious use of the internet would lead to changed nature of authority for church leaders, for example (Cheong, Huang & Poon 2011, Campbell 2007, Campbell 2010a). It has been suggested that new religious movements would usurp the traditional rituals (Dawson 2000); that freely available information that explained unorthodox positions would lead to the erosion of traditional leadership. The preceding discussion too on the boundaries between public and private identity has a bearing on this. Objective 9 of the research project

was to ascertain whether there was evidence of any challenges to authority on a local, individual level.

No strong evidence was found of the church leaders in the interview sample having noticed negative effects of easier access to theological or ideological information.

The leaders interviewed by (Cheong, Huang & Poon 2011) expressed concern that new media allow for the 'amplification of heresy' (p948), in other words, about wrong information or theology going viral. These Singaporean pastors reported similar experiences to those in the English interview sample – congregants will question what is said in sermons and will query teaching based on having Googled for answers. The English church leaders did not view this as a negative effect – but as a positive encounter, giving them opportunities to reach out and teach and get feedback on their work. Campbell (2007, 2011) also found little evidence to corroborate earlier claims that online communication may undermine leaders' authority. So perhaps the challenge to authority lies not at the level of the individual church leader but at a more macro, organisational level. Perhaps also the threat is lessened with an established church as in England and Wales, which may derive some authority from its status within society. There may also be other cultural or demographic differences between the populations studied in the US and in England. If English congregations are made up from older people, they may well still adhere to a custom whereby criticism of a minister of religion would be unthinkable. Younger US churchgoers, used to questioning, and part of a larger church with a larger leadership team, may think differently. Perhaps, too, the English leaders are more personally psychologically secure in their status as trained theologians than their US counterparts, welcoming the opportunity to engage in theological debate rather than seeing it as a threat. Returning to the Facebook study mentioned above, Lomborg & Stein (2012) claim that the Danish church is an 'environment marked by

greater equality and democratic processes' (p172). They found no evidence of challenge to authority related to social media.

Finally, there are different kinds of authority, as Campbell (2007) makes clear. The interview questions were broad, and did not facilitate a more in-depth discussion of the definition of authority that may or may not have been under consideration. The interviewer's concept of authority may have been different from that of the interviewees – these differences were not explored. A fuller exploration of this is outside of the scope of the project.

8.13 Hyperlinks

Objective 8 investigated whether churches used hyperlinks to locate themselves in local, national or global online communities. Analysis of the outgoing links from the content analysis sample raised some interesting points. The number of links varied across churches, and not all websites had outbound links.

Scheitle (2005) suggests that there is a relationship between the links a website carries and the ecclesial identity of the church. It was not possible to replicate this investigation exactly because there was no way to assess the politics of each church, but it is interesting to note that of the four denominations studied, the Catholic churches had the highest mean number of links. If, as Scheitle claims, more links indicate a more conservative church, then this would suggest that of the churches in content analysis the most conservative were the Catholics.

This research indicates there is no link between the size of the church and the number of links, but there has been no significance testing to establish relationships. This relationship was explored again to test Scheitle's work with an English data set. The size of the church might have an influence on this factor – a

larger church might have a broader range of interests or related organisations. Results showed that this was not the case, as reported in section 7.6.3 above.

The categories of links that were popular provide interesting information. Of the links that were used five or more times from any site, the most popular were local schools, the main denomination site or another local church. These target organisations could suggest the churches are keen to identify themselves as part of a wider national network, and of having local relevance. The Catholic churches linked to schools most frequently, because they often have close relationships between schools and their churches. Across the board, these are conservative choices in that no radically Christian sites are linked. The most popular non-denominational links were to the Alpha course and Rejesus.co.uk. Although the Alpha Course began at an Anglican church, the course itself is now seen as being ecumenical and has a very high brand awareness. Churches may choose to link to it because it is a simple way to point visitors to a way of exploring Christianity - a well-respected site which allows visitors to find a local Alpha course. Rejesus.co.uk is a site designed for people enquiring about Christianity, run as an agency of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. It provides more information than the Alpha course site, as it is designed to be a resource in itself rather than provide information on an offline course in the way the Alpha site does.

Only one of the top 30 most-linked sites was based overseas, and that was Biblegateway.net - this is an international site hosting numerous translations of the Bible. Although linking to it makes the individual church part of a network of users, the use of this resource is more to do with the resource itself than linking to something outside the UK. It is also the fourth most popular site in the sample of 49 non-denominational sites in the US, as identified by Smith, Scheitle & Bader (2012).

Smith, Scheitle & Bader (2012) investigated the ties shown by hyperlink networks between non-denominational churches in the US. The study found a degree of overlap between churches, which did not directly link to each other, and third party sources creating a strong sense of coherence among apparently independent organisations. The research shows how investigating these links can provide a richer picture of the online landscape than that found by looking at each website as an individual data point, as it uncovers hidden relationships. The hyperlink analysis in the current research project is not at a similar level of sophistication, but as one of the first link analysis of English churches, it begins to build a sense of the networks.

Smith, Scheitle & Bader (2012) claim that 'the link itself represents a statement about the identity and interests of the congregation' (p269). However, interviews suggest that the choice of links is not systematic so the use of links for identification within the wider Christian online landscape may not be deliberate. Two leaders picked them for the site themselves. One said they had been suggested jointly between themselves and the webmaster. So there is unlikely to be guidance from the leader as to which might be appropriate – or inappropriate – links to include. A situation whereby a site that was controversial but popular was included could well arise. It is difficult to make robust claims about the characteristics of the collection of outgoing links when the interviews suggest there is no coherence to their choice.

Nonetheless the lists of links and categories is interesting as it offers a perspective on the most popular websites and organisations, showing which have a high brand awareness within church circles. This could possibly be a starting point for wider research into marketing and branding of religious organisations and media as well as the inter-denominational networks.

The preceding discussion has highlighted findings and posed questions for further research into the information use, communications and digital culture of English churches. The next chapter outlines the final conclusions and answers to the research questions, and suggests practical implications for the research findings.