"@God please open your fridge!" A content analysis of Twitter messages to @God: Hopes, humor, spirituality, and profanities

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Abstract:
This study investigates religious communication in social media by analyzing messages sent to God on Twitter. More specifically, the goal of this research is to map and analyze the various contexts in which God is addressed on Twitter, and how the tweets may reflect religious beliefs, ritual functions, and life issues. Using content analysis techniques and phenomenography, tweets addressing God were investigated. The results of this descriptive and indicative study show that religion and religiosity are communicated on Twitter in a manner that creates a unique sphere in which praise and profanities coexist. The tweets in the sample vary a great deal in their content and communicative function, ranging from profanities to prayers and from requests to win the lottery to conversations with and comments about God. Some tweets address God as a form of humour or satire, cursing, or otherwise without any deeper religious intention, while other tweets are apparently genuine messages directed to the transcendent, prayers, with which the senders want to show and share their belief with their followers on Twitter.

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1.   Introduction

The web has become a data source for social scientists and other researchers interested not just in studying online phenomena specifically, but also in investigating peoples' opinions, fears, behavior, and lives in general (Rogers 2013). The microblogging site Twitter, for example, has rapidly gained in popularity as a rapid and convenient tool for sending messages and sharing information. The short messages (up to 140 characters) sent on Twitter have proven to be efficient for sharing information about topics such as natural disasters (Earle et al. 2011), commercial products (Jansen et al. 2009), and health information (Scanfeld et al. 2010). In addition, Twitter messages have been analyzed in various contexts, such as scholarly communication (e.g. Ross et al. 2010; Letierce et al. 2010; Shuai, Pepe & Bollen 2012), political elections (Caldarelli et al. 2014), influenza spreading patterns

(Broniatowski, Paul & Dredze 2013; Signorini, Segre & Polgreen 2011; Cunha et al. 2014), and even to predict stock market trends (Bollen, Mao & Zeng 2011).

The present study continues this line of research and investigates the content of religious communication in social media by specifically analyzing messages addressing God on Twitter. We chose to study tweets addressing God as the custom of using @[username] on Twitter to address someone (an existing Twitter account or the idea of a user) create an option to collect data linked with the concept and all the potential communicative expressions and messages addressing a specific user. By collecting the tweets addressing a perceived username, @God, we can specifically focus on the communicative tweets, rather than simply mentions of God. The overall goal of the present research is to map and analyze the various contexts in which God is addressed on Twitter, how the tweets can contain religious content, and how they may reflect religious beliefs, ritual functions, and life issues.

2.   Expressing and Communicating Religiosity on the Web

Although research into religious communication in social media in general and Twitter in particular is relatively young, there are many studies about the wider topic of religion and the internet (e.g., Bertolotti & Cinerari 2013; Campbell 2012; Lundby 2011; Helland 2005). It has often been suggested that online religious activities and practices are representations of offline activities, and hence that investigating online religious activities may give some new knowledge and understanding of our overall religious activities and beliefs (Campbell 2012; Shelton et al. 2012). For example, Campbell suggests that "studying religion on the internet provides insights not only into the common attributes of religious practice online, but helps explain current trends within the practice of religion and even social interactions in networked society" (2012, p.64).

Bertolotti and Cinerari argue that current research into online religiosity is "looking the wrong way" (2013, p.51) and they suggest that "it is much more interesting to investigate new forms of religiosity and spirituality that are being born out of the encounter between our same cognitive endowments and a radically new kind of environment, brought about by the advent of computers and the Internet." Some studies into online religiosity have done just that: looked at new forms of religiosity brought by new technologies, such as social networking sites, and investigated new ways to communicate and share one's beliefs.

Bobkowski and Pearce (2011) studied how youth expressed their religiosity on MySpace and discovered that while a majority of the studied young people expressed a religious affiliation in their MySpace profiles, only about one in three said anything about religion outside their profiles. Smith (2012) took another approach and analyzed the hyperlink networks of the websites of American Buddhists in the United States in order to map how they were connected to each other and what kind of shared interests could be read from their hyperlinking. Ritter et al. used computational text analysis to study the language used by Twitter users assumed to be Christians or atheists and discovered that the Christians in their study used "more positive emotion words and less negative emotion words than atheists" (2014, p.243) and tweeted more words with religious connotations. Their sample of Christian and atheist tweeters was chosen from the people that followed high-profile Twitter

accounts that were publicly either Christian or atheist, such as the Twitter accounts of Pope Benedict XVI and Richard Dawkins. As Ritter et al. (2014) acknowledge, their sampling may be biased towards the extremes at both ends of the spectrum or influenced by the fact that following a religious person may not necessarily be a reflection of the follower's own religious views.

Based on their investigation of blogging as a religious practice, Cheong, Halavais, and Kwon claim that blogging about one's faith can be a "contemplative religious experience" (2008, p.107, p.116). While blogging technically resembles keeping a diary, and thus allows one to contemplate over how religion and faith influences one's everyday life, Twitter is designed for rapid information sharing and short communications. Codone (2014) analyzed how pastors are using Twitter to spread their message and to promote their churches, while Cheong investigated the changing nature of sacred texts by studying how "tweets have been encoded to quote, remix and interpret Scripture" (2014, p.1). Chen, Weber and Okulicz-Kozaryn (2014) mapped and analyzed the Twitter networks of people who had declared their religions in their Twitter profile and discovered a strong preference for people to connect with other people sharing the same religion (i.e., religious homophily).

As we set out to investigate religious communication on Twitter and, more specifically, the content of tweets that address God, we basically think of religion in terms of communication and information. It is our goal to study how people actually use and circulate expressions related to religious ideas in their everyday tweeting. Since our methodological approach is in the end an inductive one, we do not look for definitive and all-encompassing definitions on religion. In this perspective, the definitions by Bowker are meaningful:

"Religions in fact have even more to protect and transmit than all that has so far been described… It is information which has to be organized if it is going to be saved and shared. Religions are systems for the monitoring, coding, protecting, and transmitting of information which has proved to be of the highest possible value." (1997, p.XVIII)

Bowker's definition focuses on communication, but the ongoing, much wider discussion on the concept of religion is reflected for instance in the Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions (BEWR 2006). The entry "Religion, Definition of" argues that there are conceptual and practical problems in defining "religion" from different research angles. The term "religion" therefore refers to concepts that are shaped according to different research interests and pertinent presuppositions:

"… there is little agreement among scholars, whose definitions reflect their particular interests. Thus, a definition of religion that specifies religion as a representation of social relations is obviously rooted in the social sciences. If one were interested in psychology, one might define religion as a symbolic representation of mental, or unconscious, reality. If one were more theologically or metaphysically minded, one might insist on defining religion as the ultimate concern, as a feeling of absolute dependence, or as a representation of the sacred." (BEWR 2006, p.915.)

Bowker's relatively particular perspective seems to be functional and fitting when viewing religion specifically as a communicative praxis in the context of tweets. With that, we set out to investigate how we use Twitter to communicate more intimate and spiritual matters, such as to practice our religions or to show our religiosity.

3. Methods

On Twitter one can send tweets addressing other Twitter users by including the @-sign immediately followed by the username of the addressed person (e.g., @kholmber). Thus, if addressing God on Twitter, the users would include "@God" in their tweet. The username @God (https://twitter.com/god) has existed on Twitter since January 2007 and it is followed by over 180,000 Twitter users, but based on the content of the published tweets, it appears to be intended to be humorous in nature. Although @God exists on Twitter, we can perhaps assume that, at least in some cases, @God is included in the tweets more as a device to show a connection to God or a convention when addressing someone on Twitter and to show that the intended recipient of the tweet is God. If that is the case, then at least some of the tweets sent to @God may not be intentionally directed to the existing username and many senders may be unaware that the account exists.

A total of 4000 tweets containing "@God" were collected through Twitter's API between March 20, 2012, and April 3, 2012. Of these about half were retweets and in the initial data cleaning all retweets and other clearly forwarded tweets were excluded because they were considered not to be personal and original messages sent to @God but simply someone forwarding messages that other Twitter users had sent. Although a retweet could indicate endorsement, they do not express personally-crafted thoughts or beliefs. After this step, a total of 1,910 tweets containing @God were included in the final dataset. To extract a random sample of tweets, a random number was assigned to each tweet. The tweets were then arranged in descending order and the first 320 tweets from the list were selected for classification and content analysis. The sample size of 320 tweets was chosen to give an expected confidence interval width of 5% at a confidence level of 95%, with respect to the whole sample of tweets collected. Any usernames other than @God are anonymized in the following example tweets in order to protect the identity of the tweeters.

The data was analyzed by using two different classifications in two succeeding stages. At the first stage of our analysis one of the authors inductively developed a general classification of the data. The two other authors reviewed this general classification. The classification scheme was built intuitively by creating new categories when tweets that did not fit into existing categories were found. The focus of the classification was the general functions and the apparent forms of communication observable in the tweets. The categories created are listed in Table 1.

Category	Description	Example tweets
Conversations	Conversational tweets between (usually) two or more persons. Often	@[…] He needs to find @God :(

	only fractions of conversations were collected.	
Requests	Requesting or praying for something or for @God to do something.	@god nobody loves me, im upset! plis help me!!!!!!!!
Thanking	Thanking for something.	Wanna say thank you @JesusChrist and @God for waking me up again
Conversations with @God	Conversational tweets directed to @God.	@God hey man, haven't heard from you in a while. Don't be a stranger.
About @God on Twitter	Tweets indicating awareness of the existence of @God as Twitter account.	Lady Gaga has more followers than @God
Group tweets	Tweets sent to multiple recipients. Usually lists, such as #FF (follow Friday) lists, rather than conversations.	#10PeopleIWantToMeet @god @[…] …
Questioning	Tweets asking why.	My fave shoes ruined. Why oh why did I wear them to work @god
Declaring belief	Tweets that indicate the users belief in God.	Another great night of prayer last night with @God
Other	All the other tweets.	

Table 1. General classification scheme of tweets sent to @God

This general classification gave us preliminary information about the various contexts in which God is addressed on Twitter, and some information about the contents of the messages. However, questions about how the tweets actually contain and express religious contents, how they potentially reflect religious beliefs, ritual functions, and life issues, remained still mostly unanswered. Hence, after the general classification of the data, one of the authors performed qualitative content analysis of the same set of 320 tweets by creating more detailed descriptive categories and by focusing attention on the different qualitative features, themes, subjects, contents, and tones of the tweet texts. Creating a mind map of all the 320 tweets was the main research tool for realizing this task. This meant placing one by one all the 320 tweets on a large two-dimensional mind map (number by number) and

grouping them according to their denotative and connotative contents, on the basis of observable similarities and differences between the messages. These differences were notified and marked on each message so that the differences could be easily grasped while simultaneously being able to get a complete visual image of the entire data (more specifically its most prominent features). Already at an early stage, it was obvious that certain groupings of content and tone could be seen as emerging in the data. Together these formed the entire space of expressions in the analysis. Figure 1 presents this space of expressions: a condensed version of the mind map in which only the occurring, dominant themes are presented. The map itself is too large to be presented here in its entirety. These themes in many cases overlap and are joined to one another.
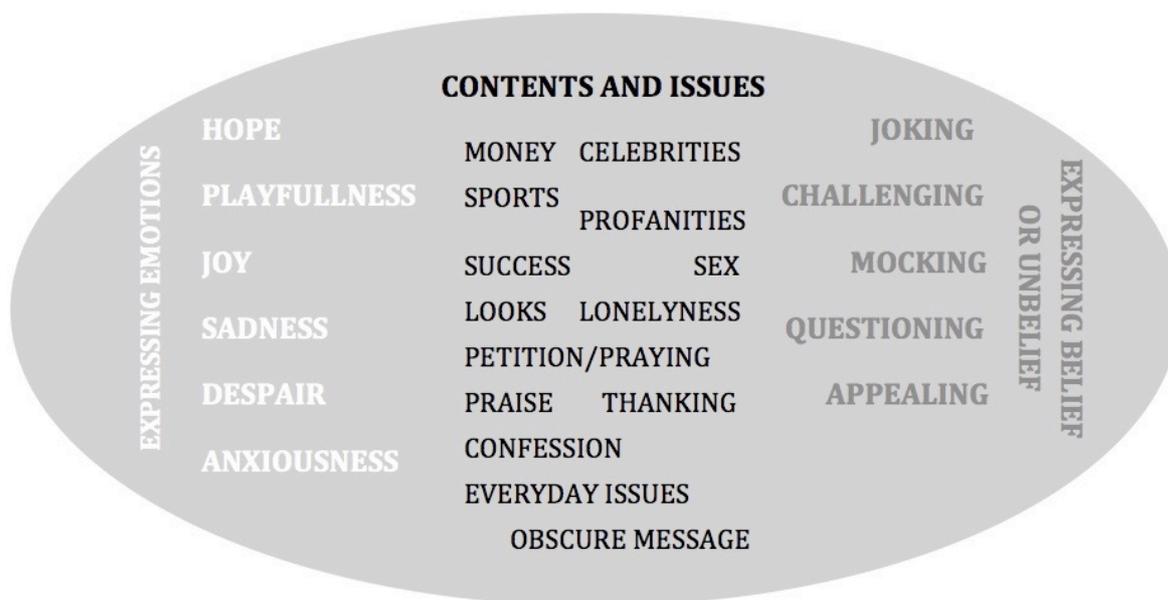

Figure 1. Descriptive categories – themes, contents, and tones in tweets sent to @God. This figure comprises the main, observable features of the mind map by presenting three different aspects of the data in one figure: emotive aspect (white), referential contents (black), and also different tones in expressing belief or unbelief (grey).

Both denotative and connotative textual elements were included in the analysis so that it became feasible to create descriptive categories that were related to one another and could also contain overlapping and joint elements. One tweet could, for example, be placed on the mind map with its number (e.g., 50 of 320) and the following content markers: a) prayer of help / b) feels that causes trouble / c) loneliness. In some cases there was only one marker to be added, sometimes several in a succeeding line, depending on the content of each message. In the mind map all the random 320 tweets and their content markers are presented simultaneously and as interrelated. However, a detailed analysis of these inner connections of the data remains beyond the scope of this study – the focus is here on the descriptive categories and their qualitative features and contents.

This mode of analysis applies elements of classical content analysis but also those of classical phenomenography with its description categories (see e.g. Metsämuuronen 2011, p.240–242). The modes of analysis co-exist and shed light on the rich qualities of the data from their respective angles, supporting the findings from each other and, hence, this research scheme did not call for inter-coder agreement calculations. The second phase of the analysis with its content markers did not contrast the general classification but rather sharpened it in focus and deepened it in detail. The applied methodological stance is illustrated by Brinkmann (2012, p.37–38): "*Rather than being a specific method or even paradigm, the approach can more adequately be characterised as a qualitative stance towards the social and personal worlds in which we live.*" (See also Brinkmann 2012, p.18–22.)

4.   Results and Discussion

1) General classification of the tweets

In only about 9% of the tweets it was clear that the sender was aware that the username @God in fact existed on Twitter (Figure 1), supporting the assumption that "@God" was often included in the tweets as a convention when addressing someone on Twitter. In conversations between Twitter users, which made up for about 31% of the tweets, @God was often mentioned in a similar manner to that in which "God" is often used in spoken English, as in "*@God bless*" or "*Thank @God*". In addition, about 9% of the tweets were conversational and addressing @God specifically. Four percent of the tweets were classified as questioning and these included mostly questions about why something had happened or why God had done something, like for instance "*@God Why was I chosen to be born alone and to die alone*" and "*@god why did you make mosquitoes*". Another four percent of tweets were classified as tweets indicating or confirming the belief of the sender. Perhaps the most interesting tweets were those classified as requests (19%) and those classified as thanking (10%) tweets. Many of the thanking tweets seemed sincere in thanking God, such as "*Dear @god i wanna take a minute, not to ask for anything from to you, but simply to say THANK YOU, for all i have :D #pray*", however, some humorous and obscure tweets were also discovered in this category, such as "*Dear @god, tell your son cheers for dying on that crucifix cause I do enjoy chocolate posing as an egg.*" Some of the requests sent to @God were about winning the lottery or praying that the senders' favorite sports team would win an upcoming game. Some of the tweets dealt with more common requests, like those related to weather: "*I can't take this pollen much longer yo.. Can we get some rain, @God?*" and "*@God please open your fridge!*", but also more serious and perhaps even alarming tweets like "*@god punish me with everything please*".
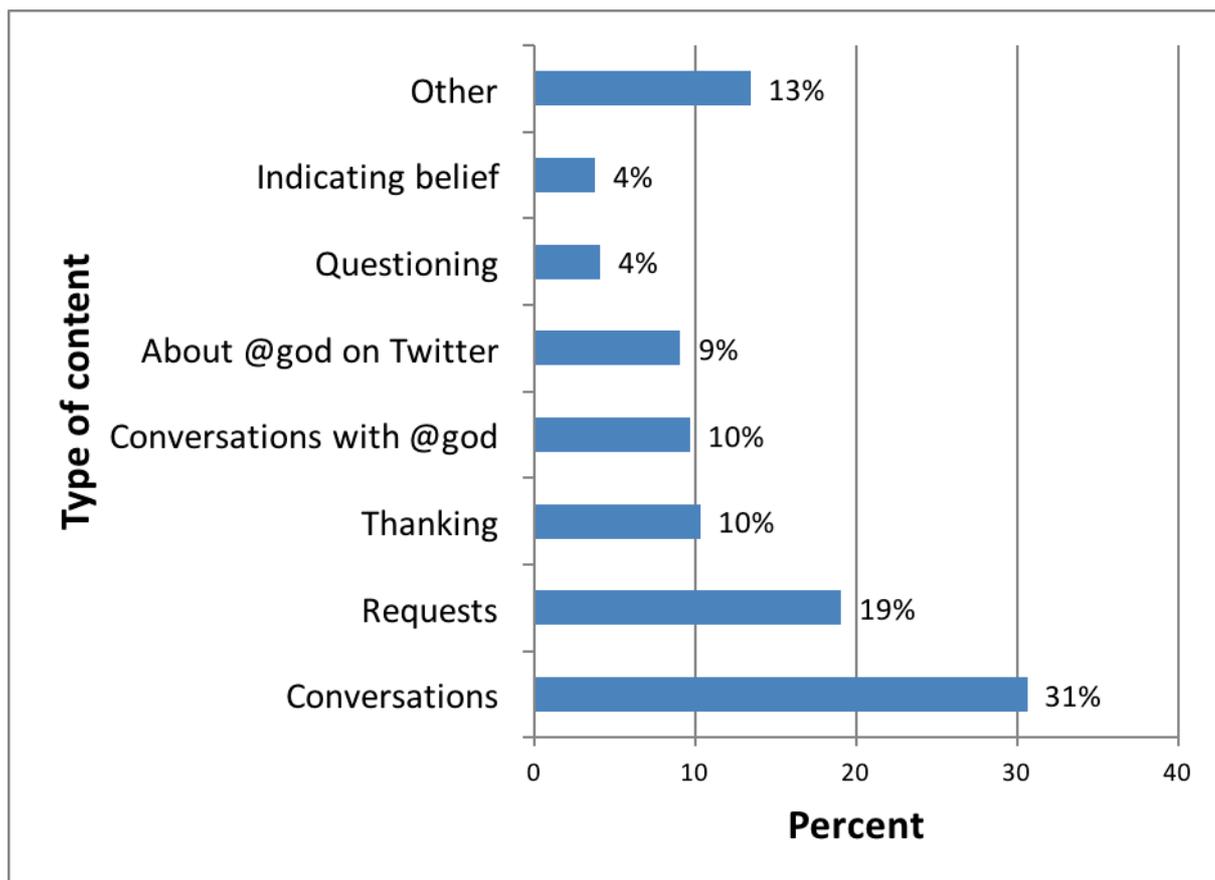
Figure 2. Classification of the content of tweets sent to @God.

2) Qualitative content analysis of the 320 tweet texts – themes, contents, qualities, and tones

In a detailed content analysis of the random 320 tweets, the multi-dimensional richness of these data becomes apparent. Not only do the data contain messages that express prayer, hopes, profanities, and everyday issues but there are also numerous significant and meaningful connotations that feature in these momentary and fragmentary texts. Because of this richness and interrelatedness of the contents of the messages, we present the results of the deeper analysis in the following summarizing themes: i) Expressing emotions, ii) Expressing one's own and influencing other peoples' belief systems, iii) Spiritual and mundane contents and issues: tone in relation to content, iv) contact and togetherness, and v) the idea of God. In the end we ponder the contents of the tweets in relation to the place and shape of religion in their sphere.

   i. Expressing emotions

The concise and transient form of communication on Twitter clearly calls for colorful, emotional, and humorous messaging in order to produce personally interesting messages. Since a majority of the tweets pertain to God, religion, and different concerns and issues of life, it is not surprising that sentiment features in these texts. Emotion may be joy and thankfulness towards God, but also anger, sadness or disappointment resulting of or directed

towards oneself or other people, or anxiousness as a result of personal problems or other people's difficulties. Emotion may be joy and thankfulness towards God, such as "*Dear @god i wanna take a minute, not to ask for anything from to you, but simply to say THANK YOU, for all i have :D #pray*" (Tw205), anger, "*@[...] @God @Jesus Y'all Can Kiss My Ass Tho...Go To Hell.*" (Tw158), sadness "*@God Why was I chosen to be born alone and to die alone*" (Tw15) or disappointment resulting of or directed towards oneself "*plz forgive me @God @Jesus for making fun of that girl's icon*" (Tw160) or other people "*I hate this... I can make someone feel better & then someone goes & makes them sad again. @god why? why do people do that? *sighs**" (TW179), anxiousness as a result of personal problems or other people's difficulties. "*Please @god don't let nae drink tonight*". (Tw175)

ii. Expressing one's own and influencing other peoples' belief systems

There are surprisingly few direct attempts to influence other people's moral behavior or belief systems. This element is present in messages like "*Who are we to #judge others?.. Only @God has that power.*" (Tw120), "*U shall ask and u shall receive @God*" (Tw299), or "*@[...] you are not the boss. @God is.*" (Tw55). However, many poetic and humorous expressions denote God and issues of life (including looks, sex, food, sport, celebrities, and family life). Indirectly, these texts contain certain aspects of attempting to influence i others. A joyously expressed profanity may be aimed at questioning religious belief, like for instance in a tweet in which the writer equates crucifixion and chocolate eggs, or a tweet in which God is addressed in the company of imaginary figures of popular culture. This aspect is, however, not prominent probably as a result of two dominant features of these messages: firstly, the free-spirited, humorous, and personal genre of tweeting to @God clearly resists direct efforts to convince or preach. Preaching in the form of *twermons* has become generally recognized in Twitter but messages to @God in this sample generally represent more intimate and spontaneous messaging (on twermons and like phenomena, see Hernesaho 2016. Regarding the "Twitter of Faith" see also Cheong 2012, p.193–197.) Secondly, the tweets' concise textual form opens up several interpretative possibilities. The texts are simply often ambiguous in their interpretation and clearly also meant to be like that (e.g., "*The Only Things I Ask @GOD*", Tw41, which probably needs the company of other tweets in order to be understood, or "*.@God Three days.*" Tw65.) These characteristics mean that typical revivalist rhetoric with its clear goal to present the way from sin to salvation seems to be absent from the data.

iii. Spiritual and mundane contents and issues – tone in relation to content

Profanities as well as deeply religious expressions may altogether contain humorous expressions and connotations – in such an amount that the data are saturated by the use of humor and humorous expressions (e.g., "*Hailstones as soon as i walk outside? @God please respect me*" Tw131). Profanities come with different tones. The content and tone of the message may be simultaneously humorous, playful, and scornful (e.g., "*Please don't wake these Ugly Bitches up Today I love @God*" Tw85; "*@god I know your scam, I'm taking over the world.*" Tw51; "*@god Y U NO FOLLOW BACK?!*" Tw 256; "*Oi @God your mum*

sucked my dick dry, stop raining" Tw44). They are used in order to lighten up serious issues and to make the tweets more interesting and colorful, but also in order to mock or tease the readers of the messages and to counter-act other users' belief-systems, as mentioned before. The presence and use of humor in this context probably also reflects the typical media-preferences of the largest age group tweeting to the @God-account: young people. Defining the age group of the users is, naturally, a problematic task, but the language, signs used, the contents of the messages, and the tweeters' concerns about for instance studies and final tests at schools and colleges, and mentions of graduation, etc., clearly indicate that a potentially large fraction of these writers are teenagers and young adults (e.g.,*"@God, on the 16th of April will be held the final test in my school. accompanied me please so thst I can graduate...*"; Tw27, "*goin on test 2morrow.... pls @god bless me*"; Tw95, "*Please @god b a college dropout*" Tw122). An accurate quantitative analysis is, however, not reasonable with the current data – only a rough estimation is possible. This is also supported by the findings of Sloan et al. (2015) that Twitter users tend to be more "youthful" than the general public. For young people, in view of these data, humorous expressions, playful and for them familiar use of language seems to be generally in tune with religious expressions and questions. Clearly, tweeting to @God does not require any sophisticated language or specifically religious vocabulary.

A couple of Bible-citations are to be found in the tweets (e.g., this compilation of singular Bible verses from taken from different parts of the scriptures: "*And their brethren, but let all that put their trust in thee rejoice, and Jesus when he was baptized, @God shall hear, and it came to pass*" Tw246) and one allusion to organized worship (the mass, *"@[...] @jesus @god jesus, god, we'd go to mass every second, every hour of the day iyiyi would praise you forever.*" TW191), but in general Bible or holy books, organized worship, religious professionals, and hierarchies are absent from the texts. The Pope is mentioned occasionally, but not in a particularly positive or respectful manner (*"@[...] forget the pope, you have more followers than @god."* Tw93). Attending a sermon in some religious context is also mentioned in some of the tweets. Naturally, these results fittingly connect with the scholarly debate on the changing characteristics of religion, for instance the ideas pondered by Gordon Lynch (e.g., 2007, p.1-7) in the introduction of his book on new spirituality. Lynch writes (2007, 2):

> "This Christianized culture is certainly not uniformly orthodox in terms of traditional Christian beliefs. High levels of belief in God, the importance of prayer, the Devil, angels and both heaven and hell, are mixed in with high levels of belief with in the paranormal and alien visitations to the world. But even given this diversity of beliefs, values and practices, it is the Christian religion that provides the broad framework for most Americans' beliefs and sense on identity."

These ideas by Lynch appear as functional in view of the results of our analysis. Openly expressed traditional Christian beliefs and structures are exceptional in the data, but spirituality, belief, and questioning of the supernatural prevail.

Moreover, as indicators of humorous contents or inclinations, several smileys and LOL-signs are used. These usually point out straightforward funny, scornful, or outrageous

contents. However, the texts themselves often present brief, sometimes obscure, and sometimes clearly discernible hints for humorous interpretation. There are many shades and differing manners of presenting something as humorous or expressing humorous intentions in the messages. The paradox of the connection between crucifixion and chocolate eggs that was mentioned earlier is a relevant example.

iv. Contact and togetherness

There are also messages creating and maintaining contact, realizing the element of togetherness in communication. Naturally, the messages directed to another (human) recipient all realize this function but, interestingly, there are also tweets directed only or also to the believed divine recipient. In these cases tweeting turns out to be actual prayer, praise, thanksgiving, or even confession of one's love towards the Divine. Popular culture and sport are not absent either. Conceptualized as prayer the messages are ritualistic, and together they also form a virtual ritual space. The ritual aspect (see e.g. Bowie 2006, p.140-147) becomes specifically apparent in tweets that act as channels for prayer, praise, and also confession.

Jakobson (1960, p.356) writes about the concept "metalingual" by defining it as clarifying the code – not only in research but also in everyday communicative use. This glossing function that is essentially coupled with the togetherness that communication creates and maintains is, moreover, not very apparent but rather subtly present in all the signs, hints, interpretative clues, and marks that somehow guide or direct the attention, understanding, and interpretation of the reader. Smileys, LOLs and textual signs are meant to guide readers' interpretation. The brief mode of communication works in two ways: on the one hand it makes people to write clear and simple words and expressions – and on the other hand it calls for abbreviations and slang expressions. The language is familiar to the writers and seems to belong to same subculture. Hence, the code(s) and signs used are shared and apparent and, finally, the tweeting culture in this context clearly encourages messages that do not need to be tightly joined to long sequences of conversation. Also our random sample of tweets naturally makes the finding of such conversations less probable. In addition, the metalinguistic function somehow features also in those messages that aim to clarify the use or meaning not of the code but of the @God-account or a certain message.

Who, then, are the addressees of the messages? In many but not all cases only @God. In several instances @God is only one of the recipients, and the tweet may be aimed to receivers such as @God, @Allah, @BabyJesus, @Buddha, @Ganesh, @SantaClaus, @HarryPotter, and @Voldemort, to name a few. The idea of God as recipient is thus partnered in these data with the names of deities of different non-Christian and non-monotheistic religions and belief-systems, or figures of popular culture. Altogether, those messages directed to the believed divine recipient clearly feature a human need to communicate with God or superhuman beings not only in one's thoughts but also by writing – and communicating in and through contemporary communication technology. These data demonstrates that technology can function as a means of creating or striving for closeness or togetherness with the expected transcendent reality. This finding is well in tune with the known fact that through human history the history of religions – like all human culture – has been closely bonded with the development of communication technology. For instance,

Cullen writes: "the stories you'll find here [in *Short History of the Modern Media*] are not solely tales of technological innovation. Indeed, they're intertwined – in some cases inextricably so – with economics, culture, and politics" (2013, p.3). We could also add on religion – both the influence information technologies have had and continuously have on religion as well as the religious shaping of various tools of communication. On the contemporary aspect of these influences, Heidi Campbell has analyzed the entwined reality of religion and modern communication technologies (see Campbell 2010).

A large number of the messages are addressed to close people, family, friends, and acquaintances and, moreover, to the whole of the tweeting community, since the communicative space is open basically to everyone interested. Even if a message may be personally and intimately formulated and directed to God, it altogether takes place in social media, and therefore contains at least a dual function: it may paradoxically be an intimate and personal prayer and, simultaneously, open to all potential spectators and interpreters of the social medium in question. In a group of messages, however, it is apparent that the writers may not have realized that an @God-account actually existed.

v. The idea of God

The recipient @God, moreover, seems to denote for the writers different concepts and aspects. In many messages, God (or @God) is for the writers not a person or being to be discussed about but rather the self-evident object of appeal, prayer, praise and hopes. The mirror image of this "unquestioning dimension" is to be found in those messages expressing questioning and mocking. This duality and especially the lack of any distinction in regard to different religious and theological belief systems may indicate that the God the messages refer to is predominantly the God of the monotheistic Judeo-Christian tradition or rather a reflection of that cultural figure. In this regard, the username "@God" is also used for wishing God's blessing and as a means of cursing or expressing emotive aspects. Another significant way of using the concept "God" is obviously to denote an imaginary figure that is presented together with a number of other figures. In this regard God appears as a being or idea, which is amusing, irritating, or absurd. The writers' mental aspect – emotions in particular – and attitudes towards @God vary from respecting, loving, and praising an absolute and predominantly benevolent power and asking for God's help (e.g., "@*God thanks for this beautiful day||*" Tw217; "@*God....I just need you to know I love you. :)*" Tw270) to questioning God's existence and actions; from humorous joking and questioning to effective attacks towards the idea of a God. Blasphemy is for several writers an obvious means to express their dissatisfaction towards both the idea of a benevolent personal God and a means to oppose religious attitudes and actions online – sometimes in an extremely brutal manner (e.g. "*Hello everyone. I have been busy lately as you know. Was speaking to @god and @thedevil, same person anyway. Told me to get connected.*" Tw155; "*When @God goes to the washroom, they collect his shit and throw it in a jar labeled Nutella. #goodshit*" Tw169).

However, emotive-rational questioning of the notion that the Bible should be regarded as the revelation of the God and the benevolent nature of God is also found in some of the messages. The devil also appears in several tweets together with @God – clearly as some kind of a mental counterpart for the believed goodness. All in all, the concept of "God"

appears as meaningful and powerful, and the use of the term actually indistinctly reflects the theological-philosophical dispute on the use of the concept: whether God may be regarded as the ultimate and real existent, a human projection of neuroses and/or ideals, or a symbol of alienation from the material and political realities (see Bowker 1997, p.378).

5.   Conclusion: The place and shape of religion

Are most of the tweets to @God then ultimately religious? If we consider that religion represents belief systems and practices that take into account some forms of supernatural agency, the distinction of sacred and secular, and perhaps even the sense of numinosity (see e.g., Mellor & Schilling 2014, p.2–3), then especially those tweets with "@God" as their sole and intended addressee and in which "God" appears as an object of appeal, petition, confession, and praise may be regarded as religious. God together with issues of human life is ultimately the referential content of these messages. In this regard, these messages and their contents do not actually differ from traditional folk religious practices as they are defined, for example, by Bowker: "religion which occurs in small, local communities which does not adhere to the norms of large systems… In a wider sense, … appropriation of religious beliefs and practices on a popular level" (Bowker 2005, p.197–198).

As texts that address God, the tweets may be regarded as prayers. As Bowker expresses it, the concept itself may be regarded as more or less wide-ranging in different religious traditions and their practices. Prayer may consist of "trust, penitence, praise, petition, and purpose", articulate meditative and contemplative "ways of being before God" and, importantly, express "the relating of the self to God" (Bowker 1997, p.762). Keeping these definitions in mind, it is obvious that the tweets contain prayers that express praise, thanksgiving, devotion, care for other people, concern for one's own life and actions, questioning, despair and even anger towards God. The contents of these messages appear as crucially meaningful for their writers. As we have seen in some of the examples above, family life, closest relations, children, body image, health, cultural belonging, success, alcohol, food, and intimate matters feature, and sexuality, and romantic expectations are present in the tweets.

However, in a larger view and in not so clearly shaped manner, the religiosity of the tweets is flourishing differently in comparison to traditional, organized religion. The religious sphere of the tweets seems to be simultaneously personal, intimate, free-spirited, questioning, and quite informal. Issues of everyday-life, for instance the concern for success in studies, and interest in food, relationships, and sex feature in the data, much like in more traditional folk religious traditions. Religion features in and through all these issues, positively and negatively. It is apparently a source for power and happiness and also something outdated and disinteresting or irritating. The concept "God" also acts as a representative for religion and religious belief.

It is evident that the emergence of social media as part of the current digital turn in communication and media usage is also intertwined with religious functions. Twitter, too, functions as a medium to communicate religious ideas and questions with other users and, interestingly, also to communicate with the transcendent, God. The results of this descriptive

and indicative study show that some users are sending messages on Twitter to God and that religion and religiosity are communicated on Twitter in a manner that creates a sphere in which praise and profanities coexist. The tweets in the sample vary a great deal in their content and communicative function, ranging from profanities to prayers and from requests to win the lottery to conversations with and comments about God. Some tweets include @God in them in a similar manner to that in which "God" is used in everyday profanities, while other tweets are obviously genuine messages directed to the transcendent, prayers, with which the senders want to show and share their belief with their followers on Twitter. According to Brinkmann, "the social is made of all these things: experience, discourse and objects" (2012, p.35). In these data the mental-communicative religious and cultural elements clearly feature in experience, discourse, and objects of hope, fear, and love.

The descriptive approach taken in this study reveals a rich set of data about the multitude of ways and forms that religion is communicated online and specifically on Twitter. The present study opens the field for more in-depth analysis of how religion is communicated on Twitter and how we can use this rich source of data to better understand religious beliefs and also investigate cultural patterns, subcultures, and differences. It also calls for future research regarding different social media and, in particular, the manners, modes, tones, and communicative functions, different contexts and social formations that pertain to these media.

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God & Spirituality Quotes. 11K likes. If you're like me, you love getting in tune with the spirit of God. This page is for sharing incredible quotes...Â Facebook is showing information to help you better understand the purpose of a Page. See actions taken by the people who manage and post content. Page created â€" 25 October 2014. People. 11,019 likes. Related Pages. Positive inspirational quotes. Education website. Whoever draws near to God will not stumble, but strives ahead: beginning anew, trying again, rebuilding. 533 replies 5,349 retweets 24,617 likes. Reply.Â May the Lord open our hearts to the needs of the poor, the defenseless, those who knock on our door to be recognized as a person. 1,162 replies 8,538 retweets 39,615 likes. Reply.Â Education with horizons open to transcendence helps young people to dream and to build a more beautiful world. #IYD2019. 526 replies 3,970 retweets 19,348 likes. Twitter messages to @God in content analysis: Hopes, humor, spirituality, and profanities | This study investigates religious communication in social media by analyzing messages sent to God on Twitter. More specifically, the goal of this research is to map and analyze the various contexts in which God is addressed on Twitter, and how the tweets may reflect religious...Â We use cookies to make interactions with our website easy and meaningful, to better understand the use of our services, and to tailor advertising. For further information, including about cookie settings, please read our Cookie Policy . By continuing to use this site, you consent to the use of cookies. Got it. We value your privacy.