

## A MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTING MARKETING IN RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract:

Due to the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), many real-world processes have been replicated in the virtual world. However, religious organisations are conservative and traditional in this way. At any case, it is also a fact that religious organisations accept novelties with a delay, then gradually and systematically incorporating them. So it can be expected that marketing and ICTs will be formally accepted.

This research aims to explore the potentials, and build a general optimum model of e-marketing in religious organisations. The main research methods envisaged for this purpose are the in-depth interview, the analogy method, causal reasoning, and descriptive modelling. A structural technological model to the function of e-marketing in religious organisations is intended, allowing to face challenges arising from the ICTs and the virtual world in the next ten years.

**Keywords:** *religious organisations; nonprofit marketing; e-marketing; virtual society*

## UN MODELO PARA IMPLEMENTAR EL MARKETING EN ORGANIZACIONES RELIGIOSAS EN UN ENTORNO VIRTUAL

### Resumen:

Debido al impacto de las Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones (TICs), muchos procesos del mundo real han sido replicados en el mundo virtual. Con todo, las organizaciones religiosas son conservadoras y tradicionales en este sentido. En cualquier caso, también es un hecho que las organizaciones religiosas aceptan las novedades tras un tiempo, y entonces las incorporan gradual y sistemáticamente. Así cabe esperar que el marketing y las TICs serán formalmente aceptadas.

Esta investigación trata de explorar lo potenciales y construir un modelo de e-marketing de óptimo general en organizaciones religiosas. Los principales métodos de investigación previstos para este fin son la entrevista en profundidad, el método analógico, el razonamiento causal, y el modelado descriptivo. Se pretende un modelo tecnológico estructural para la función de e-marketing en organizaciones religiosas, que permita afrontar los retos que surjan de las TICs y del mundo virtual en los próximos diez años.

**Palabras clave:** *organizaciones religiosas; marketing no lucrativo; e-marketing; sociedad virtual*

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## 1. Introduction

New evangelisation is a term that has often been used by mass media. It is associated with the changes encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church. Although the first impression evoked by the term “new evangelisation” is some renewed bringing the Good News, this is actually about the re-evangelisation focused on the new ways of bringing the Good News, particularly through modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

The reasons for this new approach are primarily pragmatic. Fast-paced changes and the advent of media culture have caused alienation of the modern man from God, both directly and indirectly, whereas modern ICTs has formed a new, virtual space. This space should include activities of religious organisations, so that it would not become completely separate from the religion and its influence, as religion remains an important moral and humanistic factor of modern communities.

Over time, most religious organisations have grown distant from believers and become rather self-oriented. Pope Francis also points to this, being the key motivator in the Christian community for the return of the church to the original principles of faith. The original principles of faith directly correspond to the marketing concept whose primary task is to meet consumers’ needs. Bringing the Good News, as well as encouraging love and care of the believers, who are actually consumers for religious organisations, is the basic mission of any Christian religious community.

Religious organisations are sort of mediators (agencies), bringing the Good News from God to every believer. In the origins of Christianity, it was passed down by word of mouth, whereas Evangelists (the Gospel writers) started the written tradition. New means of communication provide new ways of bringing the Good News, but also new ways of applying marketing to the work of religious organisations. If modern ICTs are used, it is known as electronic marketing or e-marketing. Marketing of religious organisations should be created systematically and by creating models. To ensure this, it is necessary to explore and define the model of optimum implementation of marketing of religious organisations in a virtual environment.

## 2. Research methodology

Religious organisations could be considered as agencies whose activities are based on marketing. First, bringing the Good News is based on promotion principles. Next, wittingly or unwittingly, the marketing process in religious organisations involves the definition of a religious group, i.e. believers (consumers), thus defining the market segment, optimising the marketing-mix and providing marketing implementation and control.

In addition to the classic, physical marketing, religious organisations are also increasingly engaged in electronic marketing (e-marketing), influenced by fast development of ICTs and the virtual electronic environment. The Web environment presents the central and the most significant segment of the modern virtual environment. Therefore, it is understandable that there are hardly any religious organisations without an online presence, including those in the Republic of Croatia. As in any important field, the construction of the Web environment for e-marketing of religious organisations should be approached systematically. This implies practical research and building of the model of optimum Web environment for e-marketing of religious organisations in Croatia.

Based on the above, we posed the following research question: What is the optimum model of e-marketing in religious organisations?

In accordance with the initial hypothesis that it is possible to design a model for implementing marketing of religious organisations in a virtual environment, the research aims: i) to provide a brief analysis of religious organisations in the Republic of Croatia; ii) to examine e-marketing in religious organisations, as well as the impact of ICTs on e-marketing in religious organisations; and iii) to explore the potential of ICTs and build a general optimum model of e-marketing of religious organisations.

The research was generally conducted deductively, starting from the initial hypothesis. The in-depth interview was also used in the research, and research results were summarised by applying the method of descriptive modelling, the application of which required the methods of abstraction, classification, analysis and synthesis, and analogy. In addition to the primary data, secondary sources were used, i.e. scientific and professional literature.

### 3. Religious organisations in the Republic of Croatia

Religious organisations belong to the category of non-economic, i.e. non-profit organisations. The basic scope of work of religious organisations is to satisfy the needs of the population for spirituality. Namely, when it comes to religious organisations, the focus is on organisations whose activities are based on religion. It is common that religion implies believing. For most people religion is an organised system of belief and worship, with the focus on God. For others, religion means believing in a greater number of gods, and there are also people without traditional belief or religion, but who practice a sort of faith in their own personal way, unrelated to organised religions. However, most of the Earth's population believes that some supernatural force influenced the creation of the world and that this force exerts some influence on the life of an individual. Every religion includes a more or less simple teaching referring to the purpose and origin of everything that exists. Religions are nowadays divided in two groups: primitive religions, such as animism and supernaturalism, and world religions, such as theisms and systems of abstract beliefs (Taoism, Buddhism). There are several organisational forms occurring within a religion, including: i) a church; ii) a sect; iii) a denomination; and iv) a cult.

The difference between a church and a sect, the two most important forms of religious organising, is the following: "Churches are well-developed religious organisations with a hierarchical official structure and strictly determined place where religious services are held. They can act in a national, but also in an international area; they insist on having the monopole on the religious truth; the membership starts with the act of birth and it is not brought into relation with emotional attachment, as the case is with sects. The sects are small groups of followers of some particular opinion or direction that separated from a church or some other religious spiritual direction. Sects are characterised by a shorter duration time. In relation to a church, a sect is a free association of committed, wilful and strict believers who approach the spirituality in their own way, whereas a church is a strong authoritative organisation. One becomes a member of a church by birth, whereas one becomes a member of a sect voluntarily and by his or her own choice. The work of a church is based on organised work of educated priests who are the only ones entitled to perform religious ceremonies, whereas in sects there are no appointed priests, because all believers are mutually equal in performing religious ceremonies, and all of them are both believers and preachers at the same time" (Vrste Religijskih Organizacija 2014).

Another source claims that the word "sect" can be interpreted in two ways: as a group of people who separated themselves from something, or as a group of people who follow someone or something. Sects can be roughly divided in three groups: Christian, quasi-Christian and non-Christian. In this paper we will primarily focus on properties of Christian and quasi-Christian sects, although many of these properties can be used to describe non-Christian sects as well. The Catholic Church often accuses Protestantism of being a sect. Indeed, many Christian sects arose from the so-called free churches (also known as reformed heritage churches). However, they actually rest on ideas of radical Anabaptist reformation, which was rejected and condemned by magisterial reformation a long time ago. Numerous heretical sects have followed Christianity from its very beginning. However, the sect spirit of narrow-mindedness and intolerance can also be present in large and even majority Churches. Quasi-Christian sects are those sects that persevere in referring to the Bible and call themselves original Christians, which they are not, however, according to their teaching (Reformirani Kršćani Zagreb 2014).

According to Balog (2012, p. 155), "in the modern multicultural and multi-religious society, which has been immersed in advanced processes of secularisation, the Church is present and efficient only to the extent to which it witnesses its mission by its authentic and actual message, proving it, in the process, by its deeds. If individual testimony of believers living out faith or collective testimony of the entire Church deteriorates or disappears, the Church will no longer be able to fill the spiritual space for people. This space will be inhabited and possessed by other, often undesirable content. In this sense the Church is invited to confront the darkness – spiritual, cultural and intellectual; poverty, sickness, social injustice and any other evil of the modern world, permanently and everywhere, along with any of its believers".

Furthermore, the usual classification of religious organisations relies on the criterion of teaching or entirety of norms and principles of a religious community. Therefore, in Croatia there are Christian religious communities, Islamic and Jewish religious communities.

The Republic of Croatia is among the countries that have very liberal religious laws. According to art. 40 of the Constitution of the country, freedom of conscience and religion and the freedom to manifest religion or other convictions are all guaranteed. Moreover, according to art. 41, all religious communities, i.e. organisations, are equal before the law and separate from the state. A separate law allows religious

organisations to perform religious ceremonies in public, found schools, colleges and other institutions, social and charity institutions and to manage these institutions. In accordance with affirmative covenants, religious organisations in the Republic of Croatia are under protection of the state and entitled to receive assistance. The Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities (Official Gazette 83/2002) defines important determinants of functioning of religious communities and organisations in the Republic of Croatia.

In accordance with the legal provisions, in the Republic of Croatia there are 42 churches, i.e. religious communities registered (Reformirana Kršćanska crkva u Hrvatskov 2014), including eleven historical religious communities of the European cultural circle, seven reformed heritage churches, and twenty-four other churches and religious organisations (see Table 1). The rights and obligations of religious communities in the country are regulated not only by the national laws, but also by national and international agreements that Croatia has signed with various religious communities. As, according to the 2001 Census, 87.83% of believers belong to the Roman Catholic Confession (Danas 2014), the most important among these are the four international agreements entered into with the Holy See<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 1.** Registered churches in the Republic of Croatia

Historical religious communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Catholic Church</li> <li>• The Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Evangelical Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Reformed Christian (Calvin) Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Islamic Community of Croatia</li> <li>• The Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Montenegrin Orthodox Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Macedonian Orthodox Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Croatian Old Catholic Church</li> <li>• The Coordination of Jewish Municipalities in Croatia</li> <li>• The Jewish community Bet Israel in Croatia</li> </ul>
Reformed heritage churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Christian Adventist Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Baptist Union of Croatia</li> <li>• The Christ Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Church of God in Croatia</li> <li>• The Alliance of Pentecostal Churches in Croatia</li> <li>• The Croatian Seventh-day Adventist Church</li> </ul>
Other churches and religious organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Christian Neo-Pentecostal Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Christ Spiritual Church of the Baptised</li> <li>• The New Apostolic Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Church of the Full Gospel</li> <li>• The Reformed Christian Church of Hungarian people in Croatia</li> <li>• The Protestant Reformed Christian Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Jehovah' Witnesses – Christian Religious Community</li> <li>• The Waldensian Evangelical Church</li> <li>• The Evangelical Methodist Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)</li> <li>• The Independent Baptist Church</li> <li>• The Union of Churches "The Word of Life"</li> <li>• The International United Pentecostal Church in Croatia</li> <li>• The Christian Prophetic Church</li> <li>• The Liberal Catholic Church</li> <li>• The Good News Church</li> <li>• The Evangelical Christians</li> <li>• The Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days</li> <li>• The B'ahai community in Croatia</li> <li>• The Croatian Hindu community</li> <li>• The Vaisnava Society in Croatia</li> <li>• The Dharmaloka Buddhist community</li> <li>• The Church of Scientology in Croatia</li> <li>• The Universal Life Church</li> </ul>

Source: Reformirana Kršćanska crkva u Hrvatskov (2014)

<sup>1</sup> International Agreements (*Official Gazette* 2/1997, 3/1997, 18/1998).

#### **4. Religious organisations in the function of meeting the spiritual needs of the population and the key factor in shaping moral, cultural, social and other elements of the social structure**

The mission of all religious communities is to maintain and spread their faith. This is done by meeting one of the key human needs, and that is the need for spirituality. From the very beginning of the human existence, people were probably aware that existence of the body does not imply the life in that body. In this regard, a belief is developed in the existence of a spirit as a non-material category that gives life to the body. Medieval beliefs that there is the spirit that can be separated from the body were so strong that in the process of burying dignitaries they used two coffins: a big coffin for the body and a small coffin for the late person's spirit.

The fact is that even today modern science has not provided a specific and correct answer to the question about what life is and about the difference between the living body and the dead body, i.e. the difference between life and death. Religions find the answer exactly in the existence of a soul, which is defined as related to "non-material part of a human being" or "the entirety of human emotions, consciousness and character traits". The term "soul" has its origin in the word spirit, which was again used to create the word spirituality, i.e. the state of mind in which one surrenders to the development of one's own spirit, through religious commitment to God. The word itself originates from the Latin word *spiritus*, which means breath, breathing, spirit.

Searching for answers to the questions related to their current existence, existence before and after the life they have, and existence in general, most people find answers in spirituality, but roads leading to this spirituality are different. Depending on their own built metaphysical world and own life philosophy and environment, people choose their attitude toward spirituality. Formalisation of this relationship implies being a part of a religion, i.e. religious movement, whereas informal relationship is typical for agnostic attitudes of a part of the population. In essence, atheism is not typical for human beings. It is more often the case of denying spirituality, which is what certain dogmatic movements do in their attempt to settle scores with religion. One of such movements was communism. The strength of the human need for spirituality is so great that even at times when such movements have fought against religion, people have been hiding and keeping their beliefs to themselves, thus satisfying their need for spirituality and proximity to God.

The basic religion in the European tradition is Christianity, and the Roman Catholic Church, together with the Protestant and Orthodox Church communities, is a backbone of the spirituality of the European population. Like other religions, the mission of Christian churches is also to maintain and spread spirituality, i.e. to maintain and spread faith. This process as well as believing in God (Greek *theós* = God) in Christian religious communities is known as evangelisation. Accordingly, for Christians, "Evangelisation is sharing the message of Jesus Christ, which is called Gospel or the Good News, through words and deed to non-Christians, and constant repetition of the Christ's message of salvation in sermons, testimonies of faith, catechesis and liturgy to those who are already Christians. The key Christian mission is also the mission of all Christians".

Balog (2012) claims that the mission of the church has considerably more tasks than the evangelisation itself, and lists the following mission tasks accordingly:

- a) the Church has to be involved in responsible and ethical management of material resources of everything that was created;
- b) the Church has to compassionately serve and help with alms to human beings in all their common and uncommon needs, regardless of their mutual differences;
- c) the Church shall continuously spread evangelism and be a credible witness of the truth to Jesus (Ef. 4:21);
- d) the Church shall stand up for achieving God's justice and righteousness, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness in all aspects of the society; and
- e) the responsibility of the Church is to use its own model of functioning to show a reconciled and liberated society in the middle of the fallen, anxious and desperate world. The church should be both a law and a model of God's creation of a new social and natural order where His peace and justice will rule.

Related to the mission which is focused on satisfying the spiritual needs of the population, Christian churches as well as other religious organisations are actually organisations acting on the principles of marketing philosophy which they apply wittingly and in an organised manner or unwittingly (in a less formal way). For religious organisations –as well as for other organisations– the mission is the starting point for definition of strategic goals, whether formally or informally.

Formalisation of strategic goals and their formation through time and space dimension results in the marketing-strategy. Marketing-strategy is used to define target markets and consumer segments, and to adapt marketing mix accordingly. As evangelisation, i.e. spreading of faith, is at the core of any mission activities of religious organisations, these organisations, in addition to their operation in the market of their own consumers-believers, also operate in the market of potential consumers. In line with the principles of ecumenical work, “kidnapping” believers from other religious organisations would be considered immoral. Therefore, evangelical work is partially directed at attracting those people who do not belong to any of the religious communities.

To put it simply, Christian marketing organisations behave like marketing agencies that “promote” a product that will be “consumed” at the end of the earthly Life. This product is resurrection and/or eternal life. From the moral aspect it is questionable whether it is appropriate to compare Christian churches or any other religious organisations with marketing-agencies, particularly in the light of the fact that in broader population, due to lack of understanding of the marketing concept, marketing agencies are seen as something negative, exhausting, and therefore immoral.

However, the fact is that there are no significant differences in the principles of operation of religious organisations and marketing agencies. An additional reason to avoid putting religious organisations, particularly Christian ones, in a negative context, lies within the fact that the basic teaching of these organisations is the foundation on which moral, cultural, social and other pillars of the modern western society are built. For example, the foundation of the European morale and culture is defined through Biblical texts, i.e. through Old Testament (e.g. Canon law and moral principles of today’s behaviour are defined through the Ten Commandments) and through teaching of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Although the Christian Church has been departing from its principles throughout the history, particularly during the periods of forced evangelisation and in the periods of confronting persons with different views, its mission and operation have always been aimed at the basic evangelisation mission.

Considering the above, and with regard to the temporal and historical dimension, questions can be asked whether religious communities act based on the marketing-philosophy, whether the church discovered and applied marketing-philosophy long before marketing came to existence, or whether marketing was inspired in its origin by the operating principles of religious organisations. There might be a generic connection between marketing and the original church operation, or it might be an accidental correspondence of two separate models of operation. Whichever seems more likely, the fact is that the church, i.e. religious organisations, operate on principles of marketing-philosophy, i.e. on the principles of satisfying the consumer needs (existing and potential believers), and they work in line with the strategy with clearly defined basic elements of the marketing mix.

In line with this, and related to the “market” of religious organisations (Hercegovina.info 2014), it is safe to say that today’s man is religious, because 88.6% of people in the world consider themselves to be believers. Christianity is the largest religion in the world, with 33.2% of the population, and a growth rate amounting to 1.26%. Islam is the second religion by size and it has 22.3% of the population, with a growth rate of 1.79%. The third religion is Hinduism, with 13.7% of people and a growth rate of 1.39%. The fourth religion is Buddhism, with 6.8% of followers at the world level and a growth rate amounting to 1.05%. These four religions account for 76% of the global population, but there are also many smaller religions, the largest one among them being the Chinese Popular Religion with as many as 454,579,000 followers, which is 6.7% at the global level.

Balog (2012) presents the following global market segmentation that primarily refers to the Christian religious organisation, particularly churches, but it can be also applied to other religious organisations:

- *Market A*: toward persons categorised as potential believers, which have not become believers yet.
- *Market B*: toward believers who actively practice Christian religion and belong to the Christian community by their birth.

- *Market C*: toward potentials donors and sponsors of the Christian religious communities.
- *Market D*: toward various subjects from narrow or broad social environment of the Christian religious community in order to achieve various political, social, economic and other goals.

The main “products” of the Christian community are resurrection and “eternal life”, along with various services that are used on the path to resurrection and “eternal life”. Balog (2012) defines different production mixes of the Christian religious communities:

1. Worship, i.e. Gospel messages as the main product (from the standpoint of the Church and the believers):
  - Gospel message about the Good News, i.e. Gospel sermon.
  - Ceremonies or sacraments.
  - Large religious gatherings.
  - Pilgrimages to holy places.
2. Pastoral care of believers and families:
  - Individual, family, parish, diocesan, church.
  - Religious education/catechism.
3. Human resources as products of the Christian religious communities (from the standpoint of the society):
  - Believers and believer groups in general.
  - Priest services: priests, missionaries, spiritual guides, clergymen.
  - Cooperating services: catechists, Christian instructors in catechism, theology teachers and professors, scientists and researchers in the field of Christian theology.
  - Other services: managers of Church institutions and other church organisations.
4. Church, i.e. ecclesial communities and institutions and general church communities as such:
  - Parish and diocesan communities and general church community as such.
  - Educational institutions in the field of theology (secondary schools/seminaries, theological seminaries, i.e. Faculty of Theology, scientific institutes).
  - Museum and archive institutions.
  - Press and publishing institutions.
  - Church institutions in the field of social services.
5. Results of the scientific and professional work in the scientific field of theology as products of the Church faculties (results from the standpoint of academic community and scientific public):
  - Scientific and professional (individual and/or group) projects.
  - Scientific and professional books.
  - Scientific and professional magazines.
  - Scientific and professional seminars and congresses.
  - Internet publications, interest groups, information exchange.
6. Material, financial and non-material resources of the Christian religious communities as products (from the standpoint of the user of internal or external environment):
  - Material resources of the Christian religious community: Church (sacral) buildings and other facilities, land (agricultural land, forests), church equipment and installations, libraries, museums and archives with existing funds, works of art.
  - Financial resources of the religious community: money, shares, bonds, fund shares, receivables.
  - Non-material resources of the religious community: rights (author rights and other rights), organisational culture, image of religious communities and their general reputation in the society.

#### 7. Serving the public good (from the standpoint of the user of internal or external environment):

- Permanent influence of its own point of view and system of values on a broader environment (other religious communities, educational and scientific institutions, non-profit sector, public and private means of mass communication, political and state system, non-formal groups, public opinion, family).
- Participation in public discussions about laws pertaining to the field of morale, human rights, freedom, tolerance, civil society, etc.
- Social services of the Christian religious community.

The same author also defines the typology of prices of products in the marketing of the Christian religious communities:

1. *Transparent price*: it refers to a good or a service that is clearly marked by price. For example, the magazine *Glas Koncila* costs HRK 7.00<sup>2</sup>. Scholarship for one academic year at the Faculty of Theology amounts to HRK 2,000.00. These prices are given in the same way as prices of products and services of profit-oriented entities and the same rules apply.

2. *Transparent price with a self-regulating discount*: it refers to a good or a service with a price attached, but a potential buyer can pay less than the stated amount or pay nothing, if he/she fits within any of the proposed or suggested categories. For example, organisation of a retreat costs HRK 100.00, with a note that those who cannot afford it can pay less or nothing at all.

3. *Transparent price with a self-regulating amount*: it refers to a good or a service of a religious community where buyer pays the amount determined by him/herself. For example, some Christian religious communities expect their members to make a regular monthly contribution amounting to one tenth of their monthly income, and if they do not earn money, such contribution can be made in kind (agricultural products, etc.).

4. *Non-transparent price*: it refers to a good or a service of a religious community where there is no price attached, but a certain proportion of money is expected. For example, families pay HRK 50.00 to 200.00 for blessing their homes during Christmas holidays. The price is usually not verbalized between the service provider (the priest) and the client (the family), but the expected amount is spread among interested clients by word of mouth.

5. *Imaginary price*: a good or a service of a religious community where no price is attached or expected, but a voluntary contribution is expected from each individual, according to their financial ability. As a rule, this kind of contribution is discreet, i.e. known only to the contributor. The contributions are collected during liturgy or left in boxes intended for this purpose. With larger amounts, the name of the contributor can be revealed, according to his/her preferences. Therefore, it can be said that imaginary price is a mental image projected by the believer on goods and services received from the Christian religious community.

6. *Transcendental price*: it has no amount or currency, as it cannot be measured or known and it refers to only one theological category: the value of Christ's sacrifice, which can provide eternal life to anyone who wishes so. Therefore, transcendental price is a *modus operandi* of all previously described price forms in the Christian religious communities.

Starting with inbound distribution where believers move toward Christian religious communities, and outbound distribution where Christian religious communities bring their products and services nearer to believers through their distribution channels, Balog (2012) differentiates among four basic types of distribution channels and their mutual combinations:

1. *Direct distribution channels*: there is one distribution place where religious gathering occurs for the purpose of worship. This is the most frequent model among the Christian religious organisations, not only due to general efficiency, but also because of the theological imperative of regular gathering of all believers belonging to a group or a parish. This is the zero level of distribution channel, because the service is held at the same place where consumers are.

<sup>2</sup> Croatian Kuna (HRK) is the currency of the Republic of Croatia. At the time of publishing this paper (December 2014) the exchange rate with Euro was around 0.13 (1 HRK = 0.13 €) and 0.15 with US\$ (1 HRK = 0.15 US\$).

2. *Network distribution channels*: in addition to the main distribution site, there is also a network of regional centres in own or rented spaces. For example, if the goal is to promote some religious teaching programmes, then networks of primary and secondary schools can be used as channels of distribution. Some Christian religious organisations organise religious teaching of adults in the way that they organise a network of small home-based prayer groups with up to ten members. Such a network is evenly distributed among particular parts of a town or villages within a region.

3. *Diffused distribution channels*: conveying Christian messages without the presence of the recipient in sacral spaces. For example, publications (books, magazines, course books, scripts, manuscripts, audio and video recordings) are targeted at believers, i.e. the target market. For example, the Christian message can be distributed through electronic means of public communication (as radio or television).

4. *Internet distribution channels*: in the near future, this channel of distribution for messages of Christian religious organisations is going to decrease the significance of simple and network distribution. The possibility of watching the liturgy via Internet, participation in on-line gatherings and use of religious texts as well as access to watching religious meetings that have already been held on demand will significantly improve the availability for anyone interested in such content. This level of distribution initiated the thorough change of the current paradigm of the Christian religious organisations in general.

Finally, this author also defines the elements of the promotion mix:

1. *Personal sale.*
2. *Public relations.*
3. *Publicity.*
4. *Sales promotion.*
5. *Advertising.*

Although many religious communities are actually conservative organisations, the evolution of the virtual world forces them to change the way of functioning too as well as demands them to step into the virtual environment. Moreover, the origins of such new forms of activities of religious organisations can be already noticed in the virtual environment. Taking into account the traditions, conservatism, as well as moral and ethical norms of religious communities, it becomes obvious what a sensitive and demanding research assignment it is to “transfer” them to a virtual environment, and to develop a model of e-marketing in religious organisations.

## **5. Predictable developments in Information and Communication Technologies as the foundation for building a marketing model for religious organisations in a virtual environment**

We assume that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) will continue their accelerated development and that this development will be focused on three main prerequisites: i) a further and increasingly intensive technology convergence (especially in case of ICTs devices as smartphones, ultra light laptops or tablets); ii) a significant growth of communication channel performances will be experienced, as well as a continuous online growth; and iii) centralised data processing and processing systems with decentralisation and improved mobility of the presentation systems as well as growth of importance of service models on central data processing systems in the form of providing software, equipment and storage resources as a service (contained in the Cloud Computing and Distributed Processing concepts).

Regarding expected development trends in the ICTs field, we should also take into account the development of quantum computers, as well as the advances in terms of nano-computing, with special application in the medical field.

The application of these technological concepts is expected to result in further evolution of new service concepts such as:

1. Further development of social networks (Web 2.0), and micro segmentation of the society through social networks, development of social applications on the Web, as well as creation and evolution of the semantic (Web 3.0) and intelligent Web (Web 4.0).

2. Further development of geolocation systems and contextual geolocation as well as development of ambient intelligence<sup>3</sup>.
3. Significant development of biometric systems (connected to geolocation systems)<sup>4</sup> as well as development of supervisory systems based on both biometric methods and social data mining (analysing data from social networks).
4. Development of increasingly complex, smart, interactive and interoperable<sup>5</sup> Web software applications adapted to all technological requirements (computers, advanced phones, tablets).
5. Processing spoken languages and development of applications that can use them, implying the changed importance of input subsystem (from writing to speaking to a machine).
6. Universal data platforms (the ability to read everything on everything), development of universal development tools, broad interconnectivity and freedom of virtual moving and acting.
7. Creation of virtual “avatar” communities within the concept of virtual reality.

## **6. Attitudes and opinions of decision-makers in important religious organisations in the Republic of Croatia regarding marketing in religious organisations in a virtual environment**

At a first sight, religious organisations seem to be the strongholds of traditional behaviour. However, is that completely true? To determine whether the decision-makers in religious organisations in Croatia fully understand the potential offered by modern ICTs, and whether they understand the causal relation between survival and e-marketing in their business, in-depth interviews were conducted among decision-makers in religious organisations. The respondent sample was intentionally selected (convenience sample) and so the following persons were interviewed:

- Rebić Ivica, a priest and the manager of Caritas organisation of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Đakovo-Osijek (as expert on charity issues and activities of religious organisations).
- Krasicki Arkadiusz (Arek), a student curate at the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, the parish priest of the parish Martyrdom of John the Baptist in Brijest (near Osijek), as well as the founder and manager of the charity organisation Duhos (as expert on charity and religious issues).
- Jendričko Josip, a retired pastor, the bishop of the Church of God in Croatia, Vinkovci (as expert on religious issues).
- Jovanović Mladen, the chairman of the Council of the Christ Churches in Croatia and the pastor of the Church of Christ in Zagreb (an expert on religious issues).
- Fischer Darko, an honorary president of the Osijek Jewish Municipality, but also a retired information and communication expert (as ICTs expert).
- Balog Antal, director of Agape, an humanitarian organisation of the Evangelical Church in Croatia, secretary of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek (as expert on charity, religious and marketing issues).

During the in-depth interviews all the above experts were asked the same set of questions (see Table 2). Based on the answers, relevant information was obtained (namely in qualitative terms).

Additionally to the scarce specialized literature on the topic, such information was used as the main basis when designing and developing the conceptual descriptive model of marketing of religious organisations in a virtual environment, which is shown in the next section of the paper.

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<sup>3</sup> Ambient (environmental) intelligence is a new intelligent information and communication concept resulting from geolocation systems, and it implies the implementation of those activities considered as proper of “intelligent” cities (as, for example, intelligent traffic light management, turning on and off according to urgency criteria of people coming toward the crossroad and queuing), “intelligent” houses (for example, houses managing energy consumption according to the habits of their users), “intelligent” home appliances (for example, refrigerator ordering the food that has been eaten) and similar.

<sup>4</sup> Following the consumers’ movement based on biometric characteristics (facial and iris recognition, and similar).

<sup>5</sup> Which implies work on all device and software platforms.

**Table 2.** Questions asked during the in-depth interviews to experts

1. *Could you please say something about yourself, your professional qualifications, education and the work you have professionally done so far as well as about your current position related to making decisions in a religious organisation?*
2. *Do you use ICTs in your daily work (personal computer, network system / Internet, notebook PC, mobile phone, tablet, etc.)? Which of these do you use most often and how would you evaluate its importance in your everyday work?*
3. *Do you use ICTs for maintaining and/or managing business processes in your organisation? Is computer only the tool for doing administrative work (writing texts, business correspondence, and communication) or do you use it to order goods and services, distribute your goods and services through computer networks, and similar?*
4. *What is the first association that comes to your mind when you hear the word marketing and how would you define this term from your perspective?*
5. *Considering the previously defined term of marketing, how would you define the term of electronic marketing? Do you come across this term in your everyday life?*
6. *Does your organisation use e-marketing? What features of electronic marketing (e-marketing) does it use?*
7. *Considering fast evolution of ICTs as a relevant factor, what are your predictions about the world in 5, 10 and 15 years? How will this evolution reflect on changes in the work of your organisation?*
8. *Which of the modern Internet services are used by your organisation (web site, e-mail, a profile on a social network, own cloud, geolocation service or integrated information system that combines all of this or most of this)?*
9. *How useful are information that you gather through interaction with your users? Are they important for making decisions in your work? How would you estimate the relation between the information collected through your physical interaction with users of your services and the information collected digitally (in percentages)? According to your opinion, what information is nowadays important for successful running of your organisation?*
10. *What is your view on ethical dimension of the information society in which any information is globally available to everyone? Do you see a problem in violating the privacy, or do you appreciate the potential of the modern information system that makes it possible for you to create virtual partner relationships with users of your goods and services?*
11. *Would you say for your organisation that it is market-oriented, i.e. that it is oriented toward satisfying the needs of users of your goods and services (transfer)? Has your organisation got a defined marketing strategy, developed marketing programmes for the current period, and formally determined elements of the marketing-mix? If it has, can you briefly define your marketing-strategic goals as well as the defined elements of the marketing-mix?*
12. *Does your organisation have a strategy for information and communication development and a defined model for implementation of e-marketing in the current and future business operations of the organisation? If it has not, what are your personal preferences in terms of the development of information and communication infrastructure in your organisation, and how do you see electronic marketing of your organisation?*
13. *After all these questions, do you think that I have forgotten to ask you something important related to electronic marketing of your organisation?*

Source: own elaboration

## **7. A proposal on a conceptual descriptive model of e-marketing in religious organisations in the information society**

In order to design a model contributing to the presence of religious organisations in the Web environment (i.e. to use the potential of mobile technologies for the needs of such organisations in terms of e-marketing), the potential of all available services occurring in the virtual internet structure should be used. According to Kearney (2011), the domain of online services can be divided in five categories:

a) *Communication services*: including all ways of communication among Internet users such as *VoIP*, social networks, email and instant messaging. The main service providers in this area are *Skype* (a part of eBay), *Facebook* and *Hotmail* (a part of Microsoft). Except *VoIP*, these services are mostly free for users and they are funded through advertising.

b) *Common content services*: including portals with general content such as *Yahoo!*, but also specialised services such as web sites for meeting potential partners and news portals as well as various web sites focused in a concrete topic, ranging from wine to politics. Revenues are mostly generated through advertising, although some sites charge access to their services.

c) *Search engine services*: mostly referred to search engines such as *Google*, or *Baidu*, but also to local directories such as *Yell* in the UK or *Pages Jaunes* in France. Revenues in this segment are mostly generated by publicity and promotion, with addition of sophisticated models such as the sale of key words and pay-per-click model, which have become more prominent in the past few years.

d) *Entertainment services*: web sites mainly focused on audio-visual entertainment such as those intended for download of digital content (*iTunes*), music and video-streaming sites and online radio (*YouTube*, *Last.fm*), IPTV, online games (*Xbox live*), betting and gaming services (*Party Poker*) and services providing services for adults. Revenues are almost equally generated by advertising and by payments made by end users.

e) *E-shops*: many online services which sell non-digital goods and services. The biggest categories of e-shop services include *e-Retail Trade* (Amazon), *e-Travelling* (Expedia) and online brokerage services. Both real-world shops and those existing only in virtual space are active in this segment. E-shop facilities will charge the end user with the product and it will retain charged margin, while the rest will be forwarded to the producer or some of the mediaries between the producer and the shop. Margins and costs in online shops are usually lower than the ones existing in real-world shops, so prices are often –although not always– lower. This has encouraged a significant rise in the number of e-shops and a transfer of the volume from traditional ways of selling to e-shops, primarily in case of specific goods such as books. Revenues generated by online services originate from a combination of advertising, paid access to particular content and transaction fees in e-shops.

The classical marketing and e-marketing share similar principles. However, they differ in the scope and forms of operation, i.e. regarding planning, implementation and control. E-marketing actually follows the e-business models, among which the following should be mentioned: i) brokerage model; ii) advertising model; iii) infomediary model (which is based on information on consumers and profiling); iv) merchant model; v) manufacturing model (a direct model, without mediators, as the one used by Dell); vi) affiliate model; vii) community model; viii) subscription model; and ix) utility model (an “on-demand” model where users pay for the actual use).

Based on the available models of e-business, e-marketing developed its own techniques for application of marketing in a virtual environment. The differences between the classical marketing and e-marketing primarily lie within the target market. So, the target market in case of e-marketing activities is a virtual/global (electronic) market that has global transparency and enables mass customisation and personalisation. It is available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, operating on the principle of self-service and tracking, making one-stop transactions possible, etc. The target market, as well as the models and techniques used by e-marketing resulted in the need for an adjusted (e-)marketing-mix.

However, current e-marketing models have been developed in a general way and mostly focused to meet the needs of profit-oriented business entities. In order to apply an e-marketing model to religious organisations, additional adaptations should be made, taking the peculiarities of e-marketing of religious organisations into account. Important differences between e-marketing of profit-oriented organisations and e-marketing of (non-profit) religious organisations are primarily found in terms of: i) definition of e-marketing goals; ii) definition of e-marketing mix; and iii) definition of e-marketing control (defined quantity and quality criteria).

Specifically, in case of religious organisations, their e-marketing offer will include:

- Liturgy/religious messages.
- Pastoral care for believers and families.
- Human resources.
- Church institutions and church communities.
- Results of scientific and professional work as products of church colleges.
- Material, financial and non-material resources of religious communities.
- Service to the common good.

Additionally, the pricing policy may involve transparent, non-transparent, imaginary and/or transcendental prices (i.e. without amount and currency unit).

Based on all above considerations, a structural model for e-marketing in religious organisations can be defined, which is symbolically represented by the following expression:

$$eM_{Vo} = eIT_{Vo} + eMmix_{Vo} + eMp_{Vo} + eMk_{Vo} \quad [1]$$

where:

- $eM_{Vo}$  refers to e-marketing ( $eM$ ) in religious organisations ( $Vo$ );
- $eIT_{Vo}$  refers to marketing research in a virtual environment ( $eIT$ ) in religious organisations ( $Vo$ );
- $eMmix_{Vo}$  refers to e-marketing mix ( $eMmix$ ) in religious organisations ( $Vo$ );
- $eMp_{Vo}$  refers to implementation (application) of e-marketing ( $eMp$ ) in religious organisations ( $Vo$ ); and
- $eMk_{Vo}$  refers to e-marketing control ( $eMk$ ) in religious organisations ( $Vo$ ).

The implementation (application) of e-marketing in religious organisations can be defined through:

- a) structuring the technology by means of modelling the optimum ICT platform (as a challenge imposed on modern organisations is to be ahead of their time, i.e. “to be the first”); and
- b) selection of optimum techniques of e-marketing for such religious organisations.

Regarding the technological aspect of the model, key factors for successful application of the technology in next 5-10 years include:

- a) two-way communication, accepting the fact that in modern conditions each individual wants to create some content in a virtual environment;
- b) content development (blogs, chats, video chats, social networks, location intelligence services, ambient intelligence...);
- c) constant generation of new multimedia contents, in order to maintain interest;
- d) influence of individuals on groups (social character), i.e. engagement of highly motivated people with high index of social influence (so-called opinion makers);
- e) exclusivity, both in terms of the content and the content creator (creating one’s own content and fighting with opinion makers if required); and
- f) existence of information on the processes in the social environment (constantly measuring indices of social presence and social influence).

As opposed to these key tasks, it is also possible to foretell on some potential key problems, including, e.g. i) broad scope; ii) loss of exclusivity; iii) everyone sees everything, everyone has information on everyone; iv) everyone can reach everyone, everyone can comment on everything; v) constant presence (24/7) / negative trigger must not be allowed; vi) growth of communication speed; vii) maintaining the interest of users; and viii) requirement of constant adjustments.

On this basis, the technological structural model to implement e-marketing in religious organisations that will be used in the next 5-10 years can be symbolically re presented as follows:

$$eMp(thl) = mobile(transf(min(Web1.0) \rightarrow Web 3.0) + max(Web2.0) + HRvi + Wmetrix + BIsu + CRM2.0 + SEO + GEO) \quad [2]$$

where:

- $mobile$  refers to everything needs to have mobile functionality;
- $transf(min(Web1.0) \rightarrow Web 3.0)$  refers to the transformation of Web 1.0 into Web 3.0, with minimising the content created by the religious organisation;
- $max(Web2.0)$  refers to the increase in terms of presence on social networks;
- $HRvi$  refers to using persons with high social index (e.g. a community manager);
- $Wmetrix$  refers to using the services (such as Cloud) that measure the users’ influence on the community (i.e. the social index or the index of social influence of a person, showing how much a particular person publishes, how much he/she follows, and how much this person is followed in all services);

*BIsu* refers to using own business intelligence tools to measure social index of both individuals on the web and the entire organisation;  
*SEO* refers to Search Engine Optimisation, i.e. managing search engine positioning (also available in Web 3.0); and  
*GEO* refers to using ambient intelligence (e.g. *FourSquare*).

Finally, after defining the structural technological model of e-marketing in religious organisations, a selection of optimum techniques of e-marketing should be made. Following the applicability analysis for any of these techniques, we are in the right position to define a set of them which best suits the available resources of the modern e-marketing. This set of techniques consists of:

- *Viral marketing*: the potential of opinion leaders should be used (i.e. the potential of opinions by those people with high social index to encourage chain reaction).
- *Affiliate marketing*: assistance of significant popular Web sites that allow putting banners of religious organisations as well as links to their sites.
- *Referral marketing*: combination of the first two techniques, with significant success through social networks (i.e. Web 1.0 links to social networks in the way of “tell a friend”).
- *One-to-one marketing*: an integral part of the Web 2.0 concept (but also of Customer Relationship Management, CRM), which allows the adaptation of a product to consumer, and monitoring consumers’ behaviour in pre-sale, sale and post-sale activities.
- *Real-time marketing*: in order to be “in the right place at the right time”, i.e., just-in-time.
- *Content marketing*: a technique to design and distribute relevant content to attract, gain and involve the most important users of the transfer of religious organisations (accordingly to the *Pareto’s Principle* or *80/20 Rule*<sup>6</sup>).

However, one should bear in mind that the suggested structural model of e-marketing in religious organisations is a time-limited model. Its duration is determined primarily by the speed of the development of ICTs and the volume of use of a virtual environment by all elements making the chain of religious organisations.

## 8. Conclusions

Our research explored religious organisations and the way in which they are organised in the Republic of Croatia, and attempted to define an optimum model to implement marketing in religious organisations in a virtual environment.

In this sense, although religious organisations are generally conservative and traditional, they are also susceptible to changes brought about by the new era. For example, the Roman Catholic Church encourages such great adaptation to the new era through “new evangelisation”. Inevitably, any changes today are intertwined with ICTs, which has formed a new virtual space that needs to include activities of religious organisations. New evangelisation is not the only way used to gain new, virtual space; it has also embraced the principles of modern electronic marketing. However, even today many theologians doubt if marketing of religious organisations exists at all. As religious organisations strive to bring the message of eternal life, they can be viewed as intermediaries between people and God. Therefore, marketing is incorporated in their work, as they satisfy certain needs of the population, i.e. their religious needs.

Religious organisations are known for being conservative. Still, it is also a fact that they accept novelties with a delay, incorporating them into their activities gradually and systematically. In line with reforms taking place in most of religious communities, it is reasonable to expect that new ICTs, as well as marketing, will become formally accepted with time. However, large organisations, including religious organisations, use conservatism and tradition to protect themselves against potentially wrong “business” moves and loss of their own credibility and dignity among believers. The process of accepting the new era and modern marketing techniques can probably be accelerated through a systematic application of

<sup>6</sup> The *Pareto’s Principle* or *80/20 Rule* states that in any activity a few individuals/actions (some 20%) are vital while many of them (some 80%) are trivial. Based on the original mathematical formula by the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto to describe the unequal distribution of wealth in his country by 1900s, it was universalized by Joseph Juran in 1940s as a “vital few and trivial many” rule, meaning that, e.g., 80% of a problem (effect) is in fact caused by 20% of the causes (see Juran 2004).

marketing in religious organisations in a virtual environment. To achieve this, an adequate model should be defined.

At this purpose, one structural model has been suggested in this paper as a result of the research conducted by the authors, aiming an optimum framework of the Web environment for e-marketing in religious organisations in the Republic of Croatia. As such, it represents an important step toward building a comprehensive optimum model of e-marketing of religious organisations in general. Based on this research, further efforts should be made to consider technological, human and organisational prerequisites for the optimum Web environment for e-marketing in religious organisations. These issues will be in the research focus of the authors in next future.

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