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Abstract

THE USE OF THE INTERNET FOR
MISSION AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE
IN THE UK BETWEEN THE AGE
OF 11 - 16

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The purpose of this thesis is to explore the use of the Internet for mission amongst young people in the UK between the ages of 11-16. We will discuss the World Wide Web (WWW) and its variants, as a new cultural context. The work will reflect on existing literature in the field and contextual theology in order to assess how appropriate it is to see the web as a new cultural context and seek to understand the insights that this approach can bear on our subject. The work will then explore, using repertory grip interview techniques, the personal constructs young people have as they come to look at the gospel. A case study, the talk2us project, will be examined and compared against as well as contrasted with other similar examples within the UK. Conclusions will be drawn as to the best way to proceed with mission amongst the defined age group as well as an understanding of realistic expectations for this form of ministry. These conclusions regarding the use of the Internet and its associated technologies will be based on the research amongst the young people sampled, the constructs we have been able to develop and the experience gained from the case studies.

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GLOSSARY

Browser. A program that allows users to view web pages. Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer are examples of popular browsers.

Chat. A service that allows users to communicate by typing messages that are displayed almost instantly on the screens of others who are using the chat room. Generally the participants remain anonymous, using nicknames or pseudonyms to identify themselves online.

Construct. A word that is loaded with two meanings. Firstly, a retrospective account of how a person has classified or constructed past experiences. Secondly, a forward looking element seeking to determine a person's predisposition to perceive (or construe) in the future.

Cyberspace. Refers to all the computer networks on the Internet. The term distinguishes the physical world from the virtual or computer-based world.

E-mail (Electronic Mail). A mail system that allows computer users on a network to send text, graphics, sounds, and images to other users.

FAQ. Frequently Asked Questions document which answers FAQs about various subjects.

Flaming. Sending a deliberately confrontational message to others on the Internet.

Home Page. The web page that your browser is set to use when it starts up or to the main welcoming page of any web site.

Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML). The coded format language used for creating documents on the World Wide Web. It controls how web pages appear.

Instant Messaging (IM). Real-time chat. A service that allows users to send and receive messages almost instantly.

Internet. The name given to the collective electronic network of computers and computer networks, which are inter-connected throughout the world - started with the ARPAnet at the US Dept. of Defence.

Internet Evangelism. Any use of Internet technology to spread the Christian Gospel; through websites, chat rooms, newsgroups or via e-mail.

Surf. To search for information on the web in a random, non-linear way.

Web Site - A collection of "pages" or files linked together and available on the World Wide Web.

WorldWideWeb (WWW) The name given to the collection of computers which serve information in hypertext format to the INTERNET - invented by Dr. Tim Berners-Lee, at the European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN), who wrote the first hyper text transfer protocol daemon (HTTPD) and the first hyper text mark-up language (HTML) browser, as a way to allow nuclear physicists to exchange working papers over the computer networks.

1   Introduction

The rise of the Internet, the collective electronic network of computers and computer networks which are inter-connected throughout the world, and its entrance into the home via personal computers is changing the way we communicate, play, and gather information. The screen becomes a normal method of interaction and point of access for a whole manner of activities. In the light of the increased use of the Internet by young people and the growing number of households that have access to it, there is a growing desire to engage in ministry relevantly using the Internet.[1] We are aware that young peoples interest in spirituality in this country is growing.[2] The same research also points out that young people are not looking to the institutional church to answer their questions.[3]

The challenge for Christian communicators is to effectively communicate, relevantly, the Christian story using mediums that are familiar to the young people themselves, thus, "putting them (*the young people in our instance*) in tune with the mystery that is God".[4] Hence, this is why interest in the use of the Internet for ministry purposes has grown. A secondary influence will have been the huge presence of every cult, sect and faith on the Internet, not to mention Christian sites, which are bigoted, judgemental and oppressive. With this profusion of information, a need is seen for clarity of presentation of the Christian gospel.

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[1] Oasis, YFC, Crusader, Christian Enquiry Agency, Campaigners are all looking at using the Internet for mission.

[2] The extensive research of Professor Leslie J. Francis has indicated a growing openness to the possibility of a religious dimension to life. Quoted in Brierley P, Reaching and Keeping Teenagers (Monarch: 1993), p. 20.

[3] Ibid and also the later work by Brierley P, *The Tide is Running Out* (Christian Research, 2000), p. 163 showing that 270 15-19 year olds leave the church each week.

[4] Drane J, *Evangelism for a New Age* (Marshall Pickering, 1994), p. 140.

The word Internet can commonly be a 'catch all' name given to a host of new technologies that allow for communication and inter-connectedness such as:

- ❖ E-mail
- ❖ The World Wide Web
- ❖ Chat rooms

- ❖ Discussion boards
- ❖ Messaging services
- ❖ News Group

The above services of the Internet have created for Christians the opportunity to established forms of outreach as revolutionary as the use of TV and radio were a generation before. Many of the attempts are extremely 'Christian', stylised within the Christian sub culture by the use of images, language and metaphors that are not common currency. They are regularly confrontational in their style. Money is being invested, however, and ministries are starting to emerge that look at using this new media to reach out to people with the Christian gospel.

This work assumes that the people on the Internet cannot be dealt with as a homogeneous group but rather; even in cyber-space the following issues are important.

- ❖ Race
- ❖ Gender
- ❖ Age

- ❖ Ethnicity
- ❖ Geographical Location

The disciplines of contextual theology will be discussed in relation to this issue, seeking to understand how to approach the people we are seeking to minister to.

The choice of the word 'mission', as opposed to 'evangelism', the "proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ with a view to bringing about the reconciliation of the sinner to God the Father through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit",[5] is an intentional one. This work will

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[5] Elwell WA, Ed, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Book House, 1987), p. 382.

show that the narrow definition of evangelism on the Internet will not work. Rather, if the Internet is to have a useful role to play, in the ministry of the Church to young people, then it will have to exist within the wider context of mission, engaging in work with young people both before and after they find faith in Christ.

While agreeing with Bosch that any attempt to list some dimensions of mission is fraught with the danger of "incarcerating the *missio Dei* in the narrow confines of our own predilections, thereby of necessity reverting to one-sidedness and reductionism",[6] nevertheless, a helpful working definition of mission is of value since it defines the intent that we bring to the Internet and its use with young people. The definition used by Engel and Dyrness is helpful in our context. "Mission then is the extension of the mighty work that Christ embodied as he restored God's reign on the earth—atoning for human sin on the cross and conquering sin and death in the resurrection. And it is an anticipation of what God one day will do when Christ returns in glory to renew the earth".[7] This, therefore, will operate as our working definition.

There are two reasons for the choice of the UK for this work. First, while there are a number of outreach projects in the USA there are very few projects in the UK for young people although this is fast becoming a growth area as smaller organisations, individuals and Churches get involved. Secondly, the author's own expectations were that he would be able to meet with those young people who have found faith on the Internet and seek to understand the process that they went through and the values and assumptions they came to the subject with. In reality, anecdotal evidence is high but the author has not been able to find one person who has found faith through the Internet, other than the one mentioned in the case study, within the age range under discussion in the UK.

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[6] Bosch JD, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991), p.512

[7] Engel JF, & Dyrness WA, *Changing the Mind of Mission* (IVP, 2000), p. 37.

Having been unable to interview and build up a profile of the young person who has found faith through the Internet, as they do not exist, in this country at least, we chose to interview young people who were coming to faith or who were believers. We wanted to find out what were the values and assumptions that they look for in their faith journey. This research allowed us to extrapolate the information and apply it to the Internet as a context where it could be safely assumed that the same values would operate.

While some research was undertaken to look at other sites engaged in ministry on the Internet, it became clear that there were really only three that would fall under the concerns of this work, of which two are still emerging.

The third example is the talk2us Internet outreach project hosted by Youth for Christ (YFC). This will be the subject of our case study, however it has to be noted that talk2us has evolved over the period of 18 months, during which time it has developed and there has been a dynamic synergy between that project and the research and investigation undertaken for this dissertation. It would be fair to say that both have significantly affected the other.[8]

Our aim, on the basis of literature relevant to the area under discussion, is to research and experience, assess the nature, value and impact of mission on the Internet. We will then ask key questions with regard to its appropriateness and how best it should be constructed to be effective within the UK context for 11-16 year olds. This will be done by comparing and contrasting the research; with the case study in the light of the other information presented here.

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[8] It is true to say that YFC have benefited from the results of the research for this dissertation, as much of what has been developed with the YFC Internet strategy has been a direct result to research amongst young people and also desk research on the use of the Internet within the UK.

2   Literature review

The literature dealing with the subject in hand is very sparse and reflects the newness of the area as a field of research. Some works exist at a popular level looking at Internet church, however, most of these are practical in their orientation and American in their context.[9] The first source is the published books specifically on Internet evangelism. While these do not deal with young people, they are specific to our field of research. The second source is academic papers, which impact our subject. Most of these are unpublished, i.e. on the Internet or in online journals. Some papers we have obtained direct from the author. The final area under consideration is that of contextual theology. If we are able to see the Internet as a new cultural context, one that is unique and significant in its impact on a large number of people, then contextual theology can help us ascertain the correctness or otherwise of this statement and also give us the tools to better operate within it.

2.1   Internet Evangelism

The three books written directly on the subject are popular in nature and not intended as academic works. Mark Kellner's book[10] provides a critical examination of how the evangelical movement could expect to use the Internet to its advantage. It is now five years old and out of print. Vernon Blackmore's God on the Net (1999) is a listing of websites and online resources available for Christians.

The more recent work by Andrew Careaga[11] is a practical "how to" book presenting the Christian message utilising the Internet. This work is very

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[9] The Internet Church by Walter P. Wilson. Internet for Christians: Everything You Need to Start Cruising the Net Today by Quentin J. Schultze. The Wired Church: Making Media Ministry by Len Wilson. Out on the Edge: A Wake-Up Call for Church Leaders on the Edge of the Media Reformation by Michael Slaughter (Editor). The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World: Electronic Culture and the Gathered People of God by Tex Sample. Real Followers: Beyond Virtual Christianity by Michael Slaughter, Warren Bird(Contributor).

[10] Kellner M, *God on the Internet* (IDG Books, 1996)

[11] Careaga A. E-vangelism – *Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace* (Vital Issues Press, 1999)

positive about the Internet and perceives it as "a blessing for Christians who want to actively minister to the lost and hurting of the world".[12] Laced with stories of conversion and advice on effective web outreach, it is a helpful book. For our purposes the interesting discussion raised in this book is the need to see the web as a new cultural context.

The call for an understanding of the Internet to be viewed as a new cultural context is shared by others.[13] Careaga believes that "if we are to be missionaries on the Internet, we need to understand this new Internet culture."[14] Here he is drawing on missiological and contextual theology insights, he goes on to write that to be "effective emissaries for Christ, *missionaries* must learn the culture and customs of the groups to whom they minister".[15]

The new Internet culture is marked according to Careaga by a new language; the informal keyboard language of the net, with all of it's associated abbreviations, and short cuts ignoring normal rules of grammar and capitalisation. For example, 'rolf' being short for 'rolls on the floor laughing'!

There is also a new freedom of expression, where people are liberated from their normal polite conventions due to the distance provided by the new environment. Thus flame wars; heated debates can blow up on discussion boards and in chat rooms, especially if someone has strong views on a subject. Christians looking to evangelise in chat rooms, by nature of the strong views held, can be found in these flame wars with people of equally strong opposing views.

Another characteristic of Internet culture is that of personal anonymity. The user chooses how much to reveal about themselves. They may be using their

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[12] Careaga A. E-vangelism – *Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace* (Vital Issues Press, 1999), p. 20.

[13] In correspondence with Mike Riddell we discussed the same idea.

[14] Careaga A. E-vangelism – *Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace* (Vital Issues Press, 1999), p. 38.

[15] Careaga A. E-vangelism – *Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace* (Vital Issues Press, 1999), p. 38.

real name or a "handle", a nickname. They become a disembodied presence, simply text on a computer screen. This can benefit freedom of expression and the ability to explore taboo subjects. This same anonymity allows the user to not have to take responsibility for their conduct, they can be aggressive or offensive and pop up in the conversation later as a different person.[16]

Lastly, the Internet is ever changing. Technology moves on, that which was certain is dissolved, for instance the recent removal of Microsoft's list provider, ListBot. Something that many had grown to rely upon and now removed for fiscal reasons. Web links that were published in books only a year ago are now no longer there. The only constant is change. This creates an atmosphere of, to quote Careaga, "wired today, gone tomorrow".[17] Relationships can be easy to make. Maintaining them, however, can be more difficult. Messages are transmitted "quickly over vast spaces, allowing little time for either absorption or reflection".[18]

Tom Beaudoin would want to add to this list that "Cyberspace is radically pluralistic",[19] something that communication and information technologies (CIT's) have been accused of before.[20]

Lyon would add a further three points. First that it is an open medium, where anything goes, a point related to that of Beaudoin's. Secondly, that reality slips out of focus, as one moves into virtual reality (Sweet calls this the "fluidity of cyberspace",[21] which bends and melts). Thirdly, that it is a place

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[16] This has been happening recently on the YFC talk2us outreach site, with young people disrupting the chat rooms, getting banned and then re-entering as a different person.

[17] Careaga A. E-vangelism – *Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace* (Vital Issues Press, 1999), p. 46.

[18] Schultze QJ, et al. Dancing in the Dark; Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 58.

[19] Beaudoin T, *Virtual Faith* (Jossey-Bass Publications, 1998), p. 57.

[20] See Lyon D, *Jesus in Disneyland* (Polity Press, 2000), p. 14.

[21] Sweet L, *Aquachurch* (Group, 1999), p. 27.

where the virtual self that is both central and fragmented can be constructed and presented to the world. This is a point mentioned by Careaga and applied more specifically in Lyon's work is the context of the postmodern construction of self.[22]

2.2 Academic literature dealing with the Internet

The number of works published on the Internet is increasing as the culture of free sharing of information develops. Maura McCarthy's Social Anthropology thesis[23] for her MPhil is helpful. Her precision, in clarifying between an evangelistic website and evangelical websites[24] and her observations that most evangelism, certainly within the American context, is proclamation and confrontational help to describe where these fledgling ministries are. This is an aspect something, which grates against the culture of the Internet as described by Careaga. McCarthy sees the Internet in many ways. Depending on your perspective it can be a research tool, an information transfer tool, or "from a global perspective it is the virtual home of trans-national social groups and communities".[25]

In her work she discusses whether there can be such a thing as a "virtual ethnography", i.e. in light of the existence of real social groups on the Internet, do they constitute a real community? Her conclusion is that "it can therefore be said that the Internet exists as a social context in which people can enact a sense of community".[26] Taking as her evidence for this, the shared norms for linguistics, emotional expression and behavioural expectations McCarthy describes the Internet as an ideal medium for electronic communication as it is able to combine the disciplines of print, radio, and television. In this way it can implement the lessons learnt from

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[22] Lyon D, *Jesus in Disneyland* (Polity Press, 2000), p. 69.

[23] McCarthy M, *E-vangelism: redefining evangelical identity in online global culture* (Unpublished M.Phil Social Anthropology thesis, May 2000)

[24] Ibid., p. 2.

[25] Ibid., p. 3.

[26] Ibid., p. 5.

other evangelistic media, thus offering the "simultaneous anonymity and intimacy of telephone evangelism as well as the mass appeal of television evangelism".[27]

The paper given by Bernard Leach, head of Sociology at Manchester University and Dave Unsworth, his research fellow presented us with some useful information. The work explored ways in which New Religious Movements (NRM) use the World-Wide-Web (WWW) to support their activities. They looked at the WWW as a marketing and recruiting tool and sought to analyse its effectiveness as such. Their conclusion was that at the moment the Internet is not a significant factor in NRM recruitment, however they felt it was likely to increase. The contribution they make to our discussion lies in four areas.

Quoting Howard Rheingold, a leading proponent of the view that virtual communities are emerging on the net they wrote, "the greatest impact of virtual communities will come from new forms of culture that will emerge from virtual communities".[28] This goes someway to identify the web as a new cultural context, with its own creative element. Secondly, Leach and Unsworth rightly point out that there is a big difference between those websites seeking to create virtual communities and those seeking to attract real communities of interest. The latter being what Christian Internet evangelism is attempting to achieve. Thirdly, they outline seven factors that are held to play a part in recruitment to NRM's.

❖ The pre-existence of social networks and interpersonal bonds

❖ Affirmative ties with members of the NRM

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[27] Ibid., p.12.

[28] Leach B, Unsworth D, *Recruitment on the Web – Reading Between the Dots* (Unpublished paper presented at the INFORM seminar, 2000), p. 8. Quoting *Community development in the cyber-society of the future*. Howard Rheingold

- ❖ Intensive interaction of the new recruit with other members of the NRM

- ❖ Less interaction with non NRM social ties

- ❖ Less attachment to non NRM ideological alignments

- ❖ The status of the individual as a spiritual seeker

- ❖ The provision of direct rewards by the NRM for potential members[29]

Leech and Unsworth's conclusion highlights that there is little evidence to suggest that the Internet is a major recruitment force for existing real groups, whether these groups be NRM's or non religious community and voluntary groups. However, they do leave the door open for a new breed of NRM that appeals more effectively to "techno-pagans".

A work less central to our subject but referred to by McCarthy is that of Paul Basu.[30] Basu who works at the Department of Anthropology, University College, London was studying Scottish diasporic identity utilising homepages and homecomings, his work was presented at Hull University. His research points him to the conclusion that the Internet is only a substitute as ultimately each conversation refers "to a context outside the Internet, to something somehow more real, substantial and unequivocal".[31]

He brings a helpful corrective to Internet enthusiasm when he says "Thus I believe we should guard against the temptation to fetishize the Internet as a self contained context of study, and rather, seek to understand the complex inter-relationship between these 'virtual' domains and 'the real', or, perhaps

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[29] Leach B, Unsworth D, *Recruitment on the Web – Reading Between the Dots* (Unpublished paper presented at the INFORM seminar, 2000), p. 13.

[30] Basu P, *HOMEpages/HOMElands* (London: Unpublished paper presented at the University of Hull, 2000. To be published in, Digital Societies: The Internet and Ethnographic Imaginations, London: Berg)

[31] Ibid., p.6.

more correctly, between these two kinds of reality: the *insubstantial* and the *substantial*".[32]

Finally an article published in the September 1998 volume of American Psychologist looking at the Internet paradox.[33] Considering how this social technology reduces social involvement. This work came out of research on 167 people in 73 households. The conclusion being that greater Internet use was associated with a decline in a participant's communication with family members in the household, a decline in the size of their social circle, and an increase in their depression and loneliness. The latter is felt partly due to the ability to join communities of common interest on the Internet, rather than of convenience.

The authors develop an argument stating that the Internet can be harmful if it breaks pre-existing strong relationship ties, which are generally supported by physical proximity. However, as a provider of weak relational ties the Internet is a useful tool to link people to resources and information including social relationships not available in their closest, local groups. While their research is inconclusive, it is clear that the Internet is more effective when it seeks to support weak ties, something it is able to achieve. The authors conclude that their "analysis is consistent with the hypothesis that using the Internet adversely affects social involvement and psychological well being".[34] To this end they would discourage the building of church web sites, rather asking for the energy to be better used in encouraging communication locally.

As seen the works cited are illuminating to our subject but no one work connects directly with our topic. This reflects the newness of the subject and the lack of study taken place within it.

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[32] Ibid., p.6.

[33] Kraut R, Lundmark V, Patterson M, Keisler S, Mukopadhyay T, Scherlis W, *Internet Paradox; A Social Technology That Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-Being?* (American Psychologist: Volume 53, no 9, 1017 – 1031)

[34] Ibid., p16

2.3   Contextual theology

In the light of the number of times the Internet is referred to as a new cultural context it is appropriate to take an overview of contextual theology, to understand it's precepts and to seek to analyse how this approach to mission can illuminate our work in the present discussion. Three authors contributed to the backbone of our study in this area supplemented by others. Those three were, Robert Schreiter,[35] Stephen Bevans[36] and Max Stackhouse.[37]

Contextual theology is the term given to a number of approaches to cross cultural mission that seek to take into account in the communication of the gospel, the communicator's and the recipient's culture, history and power structures. Bevans describes it as "a way of doing theology in which one takes into account; the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologising; and social change in that culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass roots struggle for equality, justice and liberation".[38]

Schreiter prefers the term 'Local Theology'[39] which he sees as a theology that is sensitive to three areas, namely, context, procedure and history and seeks to synthesise the traditions brought by the gospel, the culture and the existing Church.

Stackhouse is not concerned to define contextual theology, rather he is looking generally at the models put forward by Schreiter. He comes close to a definition, however, as he develops his arguments with respect to his work on 'Affirmations and Translation', which looks at text and context. He writes, "to convey it's message every mission must learn the language, the idioms, the

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[35] Schreiter RJ, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 1985)

[36] Bevans SS, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Orbis Books, 1992)

[37] Stackhouse ML, *Apologia: Contextualization, Golbalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Eerdmands, 1988)

[38] Bevans SS, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Orbis Books, 1992), p. 1.

[39] See Schreiter RJ, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 1985), p. 6.

values, and the meaning system of the culture into which it moves, so that the message it brings can be clearly understood in the vernacular of the people".[40]

The definitions of Stackhouse and Bevans are tied to their own disciplines within theological education. We choose to place contextual theology in the context of mission and not just theological education from where the term was first coined.[41] This follows in the footsteps of Bosch in his work on 'Mission as Contextualisation'[42] in Transforming Mission where he writes, "from the very beginning the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life of the world of those whom had embraced it".[43] The view that the gospel has been defined once and for all and simply has to be 'indigenised' in other cultures is no longer tenable.

Schreiter develops three models of contextual theology, namely, translation, adaptation and contextual approaches.[44] Bevans further breaks down the models into five categories, anthropological, transcendental, praxis, synthetic and translation.[45] The various models emerge from the different ways of viewing scripture, culture, the role of the people being evangelised and the work of the missionary. We shall look at each of Bevans' more detailed models in turn.

The most conservative model is that of translation. This does not mean a word for word transliteration, but rather a translation of meaning. It certainly takes culture into account, but lays much more importance on fidelity to scripture and tradition. Roman Catholic liturgical texts have been guided by a translation method, "keeping only what is essential to the rites while adapting

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[40] Stackhouse ML, *Apologia: Contextualization, Golbalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Eerdmands, 1988), p. 54.

[41] See Bosch JD, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991), p. 420.

[42] Bosch JD, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991), p. 420 – 432.

[43] Bosch JD, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991), p. 421.

[44] See Schreiter RJ, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 1985), p. 6.

[45] See Bevans SS, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Orbis Books, 1992), p. 26.

customs deemed inessential to local culture and practice".[46] Bevans sees this model as the most commonly employed. While the translation model might make doctrines appear quite different from their original documents, "nevertheless, the translation model insists that there is something from the outside that must be put into other terms".[47] This process of inculturation (the interaction or dialogue between gospel and cultures) is seen as "the dynamic relation between Christian message and culture or cultures; an insertion of the Christian life into a culture; an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them".[48]

The anthropological model is at the opposite end of the scale to the translation model. The primary concern being the "establishment and preservation of the cultural identity by a person of Christian faith".[49] The model centres on the value and goodness of the person and his or her fulfilment. The manifestations of God's divine presence in the culture through relationship patterns, concerns of a culture and values before the gospel arrived are sought and affirmed. The gospel can still challenge a culture but this challenge needs to come from within and not some foreign (Western) power.

The praxis model focuses on the identity of Christians within a socially changing culture as agents of social change and requires a commitment to Christian action not only Christian faith. Bosch says, "it is no longer possible to juxtapose theory and praxis, orthodoxy and orthopraxis: 'Orthodoxy and orthopraxis need one another, and each is adversely affected when sight is lost of the other'".[50] This model seeking to be faithful to the gospel assumes that right thinking follows right action, which the church learns in the midst of

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[46] Ibid., p. 30.

[47] Ibid., p. 33.

[48] Arbuckle GA, *Earthing the Gospel* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), p. 17.

[49] Bevans SS, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Orbis Books, 1992), p. 41.

[50] Gutierrez G, A Theology of Liberation (Orbis Books, 1988). Quoted in Bosch JD, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991), p. 425.

doing. It finds expression in Liberation theology and some black and feminist theologies.

The fourth model, the synthetic model seeks to draw together the insights of the previous three models and to hold them in tension with the vital role that culture has to play. The model is open to shaping by reaching out to other resources found in other cultures in "both the method and content of its own articulation of faith".[51] This develops a synthesis between its own culture and others. This model is looking for a dialectical creativity in bringing together differing experiences and assumptions, not for a compromise but for conversation, creating a dynamic relationship between the faith community and the culture within which it exists.

The last model presented by Bevans is that of the transcendental model. Here the emphasis moves from the content of the message to be articulated to the person who is the receptor of the message. "The hope here is that if one is personally authentic in one's faith and in one's being in the world, one will be able to express one's faith in an authentically contextual manner".[52] The starting point is one's own experience of selfhood and religious experience. There is a recognition that, who a person is, is determined in some part by the context and the social networks formed around that person. From this starting point there is a 'bringing to speech' who I am as a person of faith within a defined history, social network, geography and culture. This starting point is deemed significant and in fact normative for many, as the most personal turns out to be the most general. This personal experience speaks to other individuals who are able to resonate with the first person's experience and reflections. This model, Bevans suggests is best employed in situations of multicultural diversity, which could fairly be applied to the Internet.

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[51] Bevans SS, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Orbis Books, 1992), p. 83.

[52] Ibid., p. 27.

2.4   Discussion and conclusions of review

The review of the material available highlights the scarcity of material specific to our subject.   However, there is a generous amount of material that is peripheral to our subject that can shed light on it, as well as better equip us for our research.   Specifically the debate over whether the Internet is a new cultural context or not is helpful.   If it is then it is the contention of the author that we must learn to proclaim the gospel within it, using all the tools contextual theology can teach us.   However, if not, then how do we best deal with the Internet and the potential opportunities it presents mission?

This presupposes an assumption of this discussion that we should want to engage in evangelistic outreach on the Internet.   There may be philosophical disagreements, questioning the morality, integrity and suitability of the Internet for such outreach.   The more persuasive arguments tend to be those based on the work of Leach and Unsworth, who actually challenge the validity of such endeavours, suggesting that they are not productive at this time for evangelism.   Secondly the research that points out the negative effects of excessive Internet use.   Sweet argues strongly on the issue of whether we should be present within the electronic media suggesting that, "the church's inability to speak biblical truth to this new electronic culture is a symptom of a limp, lazy mission, and lack of historical perspective on mission".[53]

Within the context of mission to young people, the author believes relevance with integrity is a key precondition to effective communication and evangelism.   Hence mission on the Internet is not a question of should we, but rather how?

2.4.1   Is the Internet a new cultural context?
Throughout the review of the literature surrounding the Internet the discussion as to whether it is a new cultural context has been highlighted.

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[53] Sweet L, *Aquachurch* (Group, 1999), p. 61.

Some would strongly suggest that it is,[54] others strongly that it is not,[55] both arguing from a sociological standpoint. Lyon suggests, "while great debates about the creation of new communities in cyberspace, the reality is rather mundane. One is tempted to wonder if cyberspace is more than merely a handy distraction from the real world".[56] Bill Gates is recorded as saying "The information highway is going to break down boundaries and may promote a world culture, or at least a sharing of activities and values. The highway will also make it easy for patriots, even expatriates, deeply involved in their own ethnic communities to reach out to others with similar interests no matter where they may be located. This may strengthen cultural diversity and counter the tendency toward a single world culture".[57] To the author this seems to be a long-winded way of saying, "I'm not sure".

This author's own preconception was that the Internet is a new cultural context that can be studied and the gospel incarnated within it. Therefore the proper subject for study for this work is the study of the Internet itself. This position is difficult for a number of reasons. One of the key problems, as pointed out in another context by Stackhouse, is that "it is very difficult to know what people mean by context. How big is it? How long does one last? What are its main marks? How does one know when one sees one?".[58] If a context is simply where there are connections and a number of shared norms, then we are able to talk of the Internet as a new global context; however, the work of the contextual theologians presupposes a much tighter definition of context.

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[54] Careaga and McCarthy

[55] Basu P, *HOMEpages/HOMElands* (London: Unpublished paper presented at the University of Hull, 2000. To be published in, Digital Societies: The Internet and Ethnographic Imaginations, London: Berg)

[56] Lyon D, *Jesus in Disneyland* (Polity Press, 2000), p. 70.

[57] Quoted in Sweet L, *Aquachurch* (Group, 1999), p. 169.

[58] Stackhouse ML, *Apologia: Contextualization, Golbalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Eerdmands, 1988), p. 10.

Schreiter is clear that the context he is referring to is the 'local' culture of the people with whom he is attempting to communicate. "Culture is the concrete context in which this *(the coming of the gospel)* happens. It represents a way of life for a given time and place, replete with values, symbols and meanings, reaching out with hopes and dreams, often struggling for a better world".[59] This is more akin to what happens to people when they turn the computer off.

This is not to say that what happens on line is not a context; it is simply at a very different level. Lyon calls these "novel contexts of social interaction a communicative context",[60] which hints at "exuberant anarchy and at the instantaneous, individualised, fragmentary, and inconsequential".[61] The experience on the computer may be communication, work or leisure, however it is our contention that in the understanding of contextual theology it cannot be perceived of as a cultural context within which the gospel can be articulated and interpreted in such a way that it becomes universally appropriate and understandable to that context, which is an aim of contextual theology.

In a very wide understanding of the Internet there are some shared norms and it is a shared experience. Within tight web circles and discussion groups there may be something approaching a cultural context. For the most ardent user they may perhaps be moving into a place where we could talk about a cultural context. These are the extremes, however, as we have not been brought up in the Internet, it is not part of us, our first language is not MS Word. It is a learned activity of the affluent few with the resources to gain access to a computer. It seems more accurate to talk about some of the values that the Internet fosters, the list mentioned in the review of the work

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[59] Schreiter RJ, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 1985), p. 21.

[60] Lyon D, *Jesus in Disneyland* (Polity Press, 2000), p. 59.

[61] Lyon D, *Jesus in Disneyland* (Polity Press, 2000), p. 59.

by Careaga[62] earlier is pertinent here. To talk of contexts in the terms of the contextual theologian requires proximity, joint history, shared life and values. It is 24/7 in its intensity. We may be able to chat with a young person from Vietnam, however we share a very different cultural context. Our only shared context is at the level of agreeing to play by the same rules, to use the same language, transfer protocols and codes of behaviour. Even this is risky as e-mails to Egyptian friends can often be misunderstood as they hold different values to those held by oneself. Talking about new media generally Schultze et al says, "By themselves, this media cannot sustain a stable culture; that requires oral, face to face communication".[63]

Perhaps the most helpful way to understand this is with a metaphor. If the web is seen as a ship, for the period the passengers are aboard, they are controlled by the rules of the ship, its customs, eating times and modes of behaviour. For those who spend long periods aboard it may even start to define them. They are still people, however, and in all but the most extreme examples, land one day and move back into the culture defined on dry land.

This point has been argued at length as the conclusion of this point determines the subject for our further study. To this we now turn.

2.4.2 *The young people become the subject not the Internet.*

With the Internet unable to be studied as a new cultural context in the terms of contextual theology, where does that leave us? If we look past the method of communication to the perceived recipients of the communication, then we are able to focus on the young people themselves. They are living in specific cultural contexts. There is the context of being young, at school, marketed to and enjoying the similar experience of the media living in Britain at the beginning of the 21st century. There is also the micro-culture within which

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[62] See Page 6

[63] Schultze QJ, et al. *Dancing in the Dark; Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 64.

they live which is determined by geography, family structure, socio-economics and lifestyle choices.

The move from the Internet being the subject of examination to the young person is one that would be welcomed by Engel and Dyrness who see technology as a tool and not a strategic means, something the author firmly endorses. Commenting in 'Changing the mind of Mission' they write mockingly, "As soon as radio came into common use, evangelists took advantage of this means to reach out to people with the gospel. Later, television and now even the Internet have become privileged means of spreading the gospel".[64]

Donovan in his preface to his romantic description of his work as a contextual theologian notes the words of a young person to him, "In working with young people… do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor them have ever been before".[65] The purpose of this next section is to look at ways of understanding where young people are and how we can meet them using the Internet as a tool to facilitate this meeting.

Having asserted that the Internet is not a cultural context in the terms defined within contextual theology, there are some very clear lessons that can be learnt from contextual theology for our purpose. Schreiter has developed a system of analysis, which enables him to listen to a culture. He looks specifically at the social realities that cluster around three subject, creation, redemption and community. His preferred tool is the Semiotic study of culture, which concerns itself with the study of signs within a culture. While much of what he refers to is not relevant to our subject there are some useful insights as we come to research young people.

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[64] Engel JF, & Dyrness WA, *Changing the Mind of Mission* (IVP, 2000), p. 67.

[65] Donovan V J, *Christianity Rediscovered* (SCM, 1982), p. vii.

Key to doing research of a qualitative type necessary for the task in hand was the sorting out of the structures,[66] or constructs of significance. Unlike Schreiter we do not have a starting point of three points to work from. Secondly we are in danger of what Schreiter calls "being led astray, but a continuing flow of the right kind of questions can allow patterns to emerge".[67] Both these points are addressed in the next section.

3 Research Into the Internet and Young People

In light of the new nature of the subject under discussion the research we have done is our primary source documentation. This takes two forms, desk research looking at the various indicators that give us an impression of how many young people are online and what they are doing there.

The second aspect will be the research work amongst young people. For this purpose the chosen tool will be Repertory Grid interviews, described below. It provides us with a tool that is passive in its approach and allows the values and constructs of the young people to emerge, rather than those of the interviewer or researcher. Thus allowing the young people to speak for themselves and influence our discussion on our topic.

3.1 Desk Research

The use by young people of the Internet in the UK has increased dramatically over the period of this research. While the activity of young people online is analysed in the USA, in the UK we are still somewhat rudimentary in the way we gather information about their activities.

A comprehensive study from the Pew Internet & American Life Project[68] has found that 73% of US teenagers aged between 12 and 17, or 17 million people, use the Internet. A survey of American teenagers found that 4% use

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[66] See Schreiter RJ, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 1985), p. 56.

[67] Schreiter RJ, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 1985), p. 56.

[68] See full report at www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=36

the Internet for religious or spiritual experiences. This compared with 12% of the adult population using the Internet for religious purposes.[69]

Figure 1 shows an American study the reasons why teenagers go online. This information was confirmed in our anecdotal experience with the young people we interviewed.

Figure 1 - Reasons Teens go online. Source PriceWaterhouseCoopers
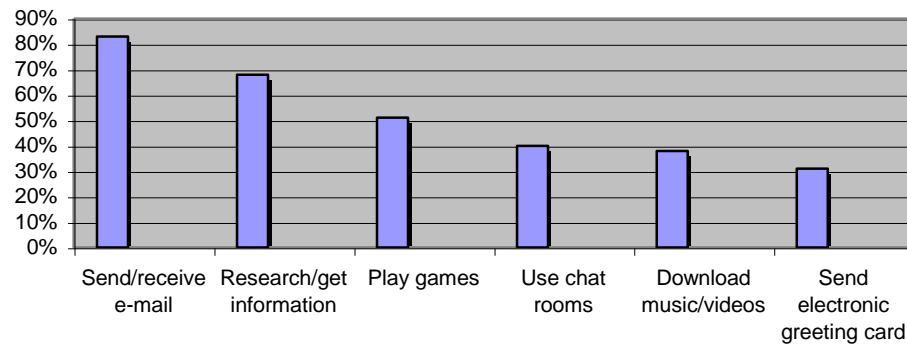
Looking specifically at the UK we find that 9 million households, or 37.2% of the total number of households, now have Internet access, according to NetValue.[70] This figure is confirmed by research published in June 2001 by "Which Online",[71] that 36% of the general population, or over 16 million people, use the Internet in the UK, up from 27% for 2000. 45% of current

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[69] "The Cyberchurch is coming" Press release by the Barna Research group, 1988

[70] An online worldwide New Media research company. NetValue has set up a worldwide market research system. This system of measurement is based on panels strictly representative of the Internet user population, and analyses all Internet use, over and beyond the simple measurement of web site audiences. http://www.netvalue.com. For a full explanation of their methodology see http://uk.netvalue.com/methode/index.htm

[71] http://www.which.net/whatsnew/pr/jun01/general/internet.html

users are women.   A Mori survey published in July 2001 puts the figure at over 10 million households.[72]

Exhaustive research gathered by the National Statistics Office offers us a percentage breakdown of adult users by age (see figure 2). Not surprisingly, most of the users are in the 16-24 bracket. The provision of Internet access at college and university would account for a large proportion of this.

Figure 2 – Adults who have access to the Internet. Source National Statistics Office
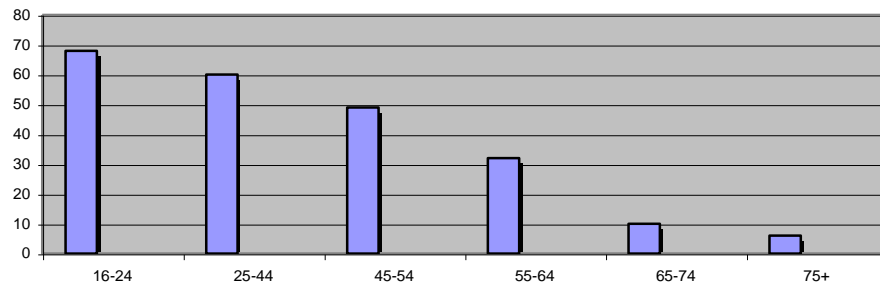
NetValues research into young people in the UK, published in May 2001 has shown that the number of Internet users under the age of 17 has grown by 44% in the six months before March 2001 to almost 1.5 million. About 250,000 of these users are under the age of 11, while 1.24 million are aged between 11 and 16. Over a quarter of all UK users under 17 visited gambling sites in March, while one in five visited pornography sites. Half visited music and literature sites and 40% logged onto games sites. Downloading music and video clips, and using instant messaging services are also popular among this age group. A study by Virginstudent[73] published in July 2001, reported that only 1% of UK college and university students have never used the Internet.

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[72] http://webserv.vnunet.com/News/1123755

[73] http://www.virginstudent.com

With the revolution in access occurring due to digital TV, online gaming via a console and access through mobile phones, it is projected that 80%[74] of the population will have access by some means in the next 10 years.[75]

Figure 3 – Proportion of Households with Internet Access Either Through PC or Digital TV.
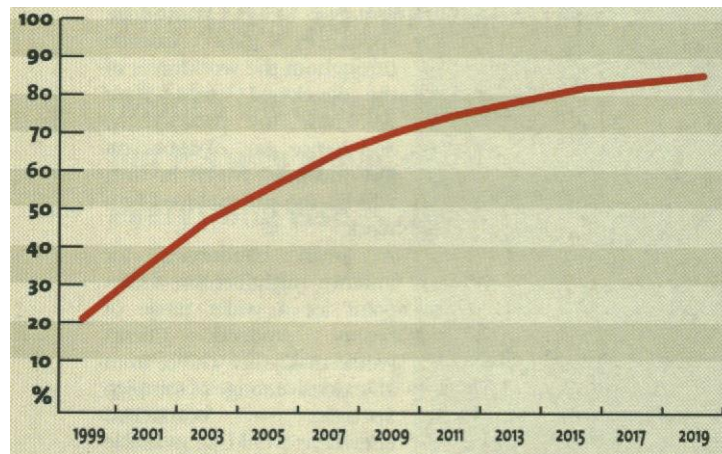
3.2 Research amongst young people

We undertook a process of field research to gain an understanding of what the young people are looking for as they come to use the Internet as "seekers", (A term popularised by Willow Creek Community Church outside Chicago to refer to those who are showing an interest in spiritual things and specifically the Christian gospel). There were three constructs we wanted to understand. First, what are the constructs that young people operate within as they interact with other people when they are exploring the Christian faith? Second, what are the constructs that a young person operates within as they come along to places or activities in their exploration of the Christian faith? Third, what are the constructs that a young person operates within as they use

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[74] Source: ONS/Future Foundation and Swiss Reinsurance Life and Heath, The insurance Report 1999

[75] See Moynagh M, & Worsley R, *Tomorrow; Using the Future to Understand the Present* (London: Lexicon Editorial Services, 2000), p. 16.

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the Internet? What does it have to be like to make them spend time there, what are they looking for in a web page or chat room?

There are very few young people who have found faith directly through the Internet, to date we have only been able to verify one UK web convert,[76] though we are assured more exist.[77] With a growing number of young people using the Internet this work seeks to research the young people and to understand what they are looking for as they approach the medium of the Internet. The real subject of this work, therefore is to discover how we can best use the tool or medium, the Internet, to effectively communicate the Christian gospel to young people.

3.2.1   Research Philosophy

The approach relies heavily on Personnel Construct Psychology. An approach developed by George Kelly an American clinical psychologist. Kelly was suspicious of approaches that made the subjects fit theories rather than the other way around. His three main concerns were, observer bias, where the interviewer contributed more to the process than the interviewee. Secondly, precision and prediction, that "if you study enough people you can prove small but statistically significant links between (say) cigarette smoking and extraversion, birth order and language skills, etc.".[78] This is echoed in our modern day distrust of statistics, believing they can say whatever the researcher wants them to say. Lastly, the over reliance on experts is a patronising approach that makes assumptions about what the subject needed. He is quoted as being "the first person-centred psychotherapists".[79]

Kelly sought to identify people's constructs, a word that is loaded with two meanings. First, a retrospective account of how a person has classified or

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[76] A young girl (15) claims to have come back to faith through the ministry of talk2us, the YFC Internet outreach project.

[77] My colleague claims to have led a 19-year-old girl to faith4 years ago.

[78] http://www.enquirewithin.co.nz/concern.htm#1

[79] http://www.enquirewithin.co.nz/concern.htm#1

constructed past experiences and secondly, a forward looking element seeking to determine a "person's predisposition to perceive (or construe) in the future".[80]

The approach is neatly summarised on the Enquire Within™[81] website "According to Kelly, the degree to which we understand other people - or ourselves - is measured by the extent to which we understand how they make sense of their experience. The term personal constructs in Kelly's theory refers to the set of models, or hypotheses, or representations, which each person has made about their world. Kelly invented Repertory Grid interviewing as a way of getting people to reveal their own personal models".[82]

3.2.2 The Young People

The young people were all predominately between the ages of 11 and 16. We did however experiment with some older young people to see if the profiles changed. We used the network of YFC Centres[83] to gain access to a variety of young people. Three issues influenced the process by which people were excluded or included in this sample. First, the location of the YFC centre since practical restrictions of travel time and accessibility meant that the sample was restricted to the locations mentioned later. Secondly, the type of young people the YFC centre worked with varies enormously and thus gave us a broad representation. They were mixed in both their economic background, whether they came from a rural, urban or suburban situation and in their experience of the Christian faith. Some would clearly identify themselves as Christian, some had only that week come along to a group.

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[80] http://www.enquirewithin.co.nz/backgrou.htm

[81] Enquire Within is the name given to this technique, software and the industry that has grown around it in the form of a tool for business, educators, researchers etc.

[82] http://www.enquirewithin.co.nz/backgrou.htm

[83] Youth For Christ is an evangelistic youth agency specialising in communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ to young people in the UK. Started in the US it is now international working in 200 countries. It is a cross denominational group. Youth for Christ Centres are local independent outreach projects run by trained full time staff.

This gave us a helpful insight into the mind of an enquirer. Lastly, the young peoples own willingness to give up an hour and a half to be interviewed. We had two young people from Tower Hamlets booked to interview, who cancelled at the last minute, it seems they were intimidated by the prospect of the interviews. The inherent weakness of this process is its randomness, the most obvious flaw being that with the withdrawal of the Tower Hamlets girls only one of the ten young people interviewed was black.

3.2.3   The Research Method

Our intention was to do a qualitative investigation into the preconceptions and constructs that young people operate within. The intentions being to find out more than how many agree or disagree with a statement. It was, therefore, important to use a tool that would enable young people to express their own understandings and constructs without (as far as possible) the interviewer imposing statements or qualitative judgements upon them. The tool used was Repertory Grid interviewing. In industry the major users of Repertory Grid are marketing, consultancy, human resources and the education community.

In marketing and consultancy the technique is used to support management decision-making, to gain insight into how the organisation manages change and crises, to understand the perceptions of an expert, and to support a management change programme amongst other applications. Human Resources professionals use it to evaluate the effectiveness of training, resolve conflict, measure organisation culture, facilitating change, and developing management competences. In education it is valued for being rich in feedback and in learner involvement.

Repertory Grid brought an interactive process to our investigation, which began by asking young people to describe how they have learned to understand the Christian faith and what elements have been helpful or unhelpful in that journey.

3.2.4 Research Process

We had three phases to our research. There was the initial stage, where we were seeking to determine some preliminary constructs. This was done by personal interviews. Then, the secondary stage, seeking to test our assumption from the preliminary constructs. This was carried out in a number of group work situations. Finally, the third stage, being confident that we have some sound constructs, two types of questionnaires were produced to allow us to widen our sample by asking others in contact with young people to facilitate the forms being filled in. In practice the second and third stages crossed over, as there were opportunities in some clubs to get young people to fill in the questionnaires. A fourth phase was intended, this being where we outline the constructs discovered and run a workshop with them looking at how these constructs may be met within the confines of the Internet. This was attempted but only met with limited success. This was due to the concentration needed on the part of the young people and their own limited knowledge of what could be achieved using the Internet. Most of them being end-users rather than designers.

3.2.5 The Personal interviews - Phase 1

The process was predicted to take the following form. We interview each young person seeking to use the repertory grid technique continuing with personal interviews until the results started to repeat and we could be confident that we were starting to uncover the constructs that were common for the young people under investigation. The interviews were set up after school in a venue which was familiar to the young person, for instance, the YFC worker's home or office, with the local worker present to provide a known face and child protection accountability.

The repertory grip interview took the young people through a compare-and-contrast process using three areas, i.e. people, things and external influences that may affect a young person in their journey of faith. For people, we looked at the significant individuals that they have encountered. These could

be positive or negative. For things, we looked how they relate to the Church and Christian youth work. For external influences, we looked at the bible, Christian music, the Internet and TV.

The young person would be asked to write down on pieces of cards five subjects within the element we were looking at. For instance, they were asked to write on each card one of the following. Someone who I feel is a Christian, someone who has a positive influence on me in a Christian way, someone else who has a positive influence on me, a teacher I like, someone else I admire, someone I don't admire, a teacher I don't like and someone I would not see as helping me. These people are easily recalled by an 11 – 16 year old. Some of the older people questioned were not so subjective and thus had problems thinking of a teacher who they don't like. Once they had these subjects written on the cards they were asked a number of questions to draw out their own personal constructs about their relationship and predisposition towards them.

The questions followed the following pattern. The Initial questions looking to draw out behaviours and features that are important to the young person such as, "put two cards together that are similar". Once that is done the question is asked "what makes them similar?" These answers are often in youth jargon, i.e. she is "cool" which is not of any value to us unless we are able to define the statement, so the question is asked, "what would I be seeing if they are being cool?" This will take us further into the understanding of the young person, however greater clarification is necessary so the following questions may be asked repeatedly, "what else would I be seeing?" This would go on until the young person has exhausted their ability to answer or define their own understanding. Questions like "how would I tell if someone was cool? Or what would I expect to see if someone was cool? Also helped clarify the statement in the mind of the young person.

For example, when talking to Melissa, a 15 year old girl who would not describe herself as a Christian, about places, she chose to equate the youth club and youth alpha together. When asked what makes them similar she simply said they were where she was learning about Christianity. When pressed to say what else makes them similar she said, "being apart of what everyone is doing", thus expressing something of the features of what makes these clubs successful. When asked again, what else makes them similar, she said it was "a place where you have your own space, your own space to chill".

Finally to test and clarify the answers the interviewer asks "what makes the ones you have chosen different to the ones you have on the table?" Thus we have a compare and contrast method of eliciting the behaviour and features important to a young person in their exploration of the gospel. When Melissa was asked to explain the opposite of "a place where you have your own space, your own space to chill", she referred to places where "they expect it to be as it has to be, set up for you, with rules and organised already". Mel clearly wanted space to be creative within a secure environment. What she did not want is a highly structured club. This leads us to ask the question - how can this be achieved on the Internet.

Other questions were used to keep the process moving, all of which kept the interviewee as the subject of the research, not the interviewer. For example:-

What do you mean by?

Tell me something else that makes them similar?

What is the opposite to … ?

Which way are any like the others?

What is that person doing to … ?

Look at the cards and pick up the two that are most different.

Tell me about the difference between them?

Once the subjects of the two cards are exhausted, the young person is asked to repeat the process or look at the cards and pick up the two that are most different. Then they are encouraged to tell us about the difference between them and some of the other cards they have chosen.

At key moments in the interview it was important to ask "why?" The other questions tell us about behaviours or features that are important to the young person, the "why" questions tells us about the values the young person holds. For example, when a young girl is being interviewed about people, it becomes obvious that it is important to her that keeping confidences is a very important feature of a relationship. On asking the "why" question it is clear that trust and loyalty are key constructs to her. The question we have then to answer is how does an outreach ministry using the Internet model trust and loyalty, if this value is found to be common amongst young people?

The interview process took an hour and was hard work for the young person, though rewarding in results for the purposes of this investigation. Throughout the interview the responses are recorded on the proprietary forms needed to keep the data in a format that is compatible with software to be used in the analysis. See appendix 1 and 2 for samples of the forms used. Appendix 3 gives the transcript of the first two interviews.

A total of ten young people were interviewed in this way. This was the most creative and productive part of the process with a large amount of interesting and useful information being gleaned from them. Below is the information with respect to where and when the interviews took place and with whom.

3.2.5.1 *Haverhill (dormer town)*

The interviews in Haverhill took place on the 3rd of May 2001. Haverhill was originally a small, Suffolk market town. In the 1960's there was a significant London overspill. Since the late 1990's it has also become a popular place to live with people who work in Cambridge but can't afford to live there. The

present population is around 20,000. Haverhill is a curious mix. There are still the remnants of the "old Suffolk folk". There are also some sprawling council estates with significant deprivation, and now, in what is being termed "new Haverhill", there is a growing Middle Class population. Details of the two girls interviewed are listed in the table below. Both were interviewed at the YFC office building.

Table 1 – Details of Young People Interviewed in Haverhill

Name	Age	Sex	X'ian	X'ian home	Computer user
Melissa	15	Female	No	No	No
Sabrina	13	Female	Possibly	No	Yes

3.2.5.2   Isleham and Fordham (rural)

Interviews here took place on the 4th May 2001. Isleham and Fordham are both small rural villages with similar size populations of around 1000 to 1500 people. They both have small Co-op shops, Post Offices and Primary Schools. There is very little youth provision for young people other than some local youth clubs catering for up to age 16yrs. Any other activities require travelling to a larger town or city, these being Newmarket, Mildenhall, Ely, Bury-St-Edmunds or Cambridge. Both girls interviewed travelled to school by bus. They were close friends and were interviewed together. The interviews took place in the home of the YFC worker who was also the father of Natasha.

Table 2 - Details of Young People Interviewed
in Isleham

Name	Age	Sex	X'ian	X'ian home	Computer user
Sophie	15	Female	Moving towards faith	Sympathetic	Yes
Natasha	13	Female	Yes	Yes	No

3.2.5.3   Loughton (suburban)

Loughton is a commuter belt for London being near the end of the central line. The area is affluent and prosperous. This hides areas of social need and deprivation.   The YFC worker selected for us two young people whose lifestyle reflected the more successful elements in the area.   There is good youth provision in Loughton and easy access to amenities.   The interviews took place on the 4th June 2001 in a church youth facility. The young people were friends and therefore were interviewed together.

Table 3 - Details of Young People Interviewed
in Loughton

Name	Age	Sex	X'ian	X'ian home	Computer user
Alex	14	Male	Yes	Mother X'n	Yes
Katie	14	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes

3.2.5.4   Coventry (urban)

The interviews took place in Coventry on the 5th June 2001 in an area called Binley, which is on the North East of the city. The parish within which the young people were drawn is mixed economically and this was reflected in the

young people interviewed. There is a lot of youth provision both within and outside the Church. Access to the city and the facilities available there is good. The interviews took place at the Vicarage of the parish church, St Bartholomew's.

Table 4 - Details of Young People Interviewed in Coventry

Name	Age	Sex	X'ian	X'ian home	Computer user
Matt	18	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sean	13	Male	Yes	Mother X'n	Yes
Ashley	14	Male	Moving towards faith	Sympathetic	No
Martin	14	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes

3.2.6   Group work sessions – Phase 2

During our interviews in Loughton it became apparent that the results were repeating themselves. The interviews in Coventry supported this conclusion therefore we moved from this initial stage to the second stage. A question sheet was produced for two of the issues we had been researching. Personal values, those relating to their constructs surrounding interaction with people. Secondly, places and activities, detailing constructs developed from the interviews outlining the young persons interaction with various locations. See appendix 4 for a sample of these questionnaires. These sheets were used to test our preliminary constructs by asking young people to score the sheets. They placed a 1 in a box if they strongly agreed with the statement to the left and a 5 if they strongly agreed with the statement to the right and a number in between depending upon their assent or otherwise to the statement. This was

repeated for each of the elements under discussion for instance, "someone who I feel is a Christian."

The second type of sheet that was created for the young people to fill in was the relative importance questionnaire. There were two sheets to fill in of this type as with the first form. For an example see Appendix 5. These forms listed all the constructs that had been drawn out in the previous interviews and asked the young people to complete them in such a way, that we were able, using software, to ascertain from the results the relative importance of the constructs under discussion. We were aware that the construct system was not just a jumble of assorted perceptions; it was a hierarchy, with some constructs closer to the centre, to the essence of the person, and others more peripheral. These forms sought to assist us in the ranking of these constructs.

The plan was to gather a group of young people, talk to them about their constructs and then by placing sheets of flip chart paper around the room with the constructs on them, encouraging the young people to write down web sites or Internet activities that may achieve the need of the construct. In addition they were asked to write down ideas as to how the need of the construct may be satisfied. For example, one of the constructs was 'the ability to have a laugh and a joke', when talking about people who have helped young people discover more about Christianity. So, it can be assumed that fun is an important element for an 11–16 year old. This ties in with other research, such as the work done with respect to Rock Solid, an 11-14 year resource for outreach youth ministry. One of the core values of this is fun. The question was then asked of the young people, how can a website deliver this?

The results of this method, which was used first at Bilton Evangelical Church in Rugby on 19th June 2001, were questionable. The young people were in an open youth work context and they had not come to the evening to work. They had very little to say above the superficial as to how the Internet could

be used within the context discussed. The real value of the time was the opportunity to get groups of young people to sit down and fill in the questionnaires within a supervised framework. This allowed us to test how easily the young people filled in the forms and to do some spot checks to test their understanding.

The second group session took place on 25th June 2001 in Potters Bar at an after school "War hammer club" in Mt Grace School. War Hammer being a role playing game enthusiastically followed by a group of non-Christian boys in a club facilitated by YFC. The smaller size of this group made it more possible to take them away in pairs and repeat the above process. Again the real benefit was in supervising a number of people filling in the forms. The flip chart exercise worked better in this context, however, it was not particularly perceptive in its results.

The last group we visited was in Greenwich on the 2nd July 2001, at the offices of Greenwich YFC. This group was slightly older and far more Christian than the first two. The group were keen Internet users and able to think more abstractedly, an ability that comes with age. They were able to fill in the scoring sheets and discuss the possible ways of satisfying the constructs using the Internet.

Table 5 - Details of Young People seen During Stage 2 of Research

Venue	Number	Age	Activity
Rugby	25 (approx)	11 – 14	Flip chart exercise Relative importance forms
Potters Bar	7	14	Flip chart exercise Relative importance forms
Greenwich	8	16 – 18	Flip chart exercise Constructs forms

3.2.7   Remote Research – Stage 3

Having found the preliminary constructs and tested the questionnaires we were then in a position to circulate the constructs forms (appendix 3) as widely as possible to elicit a broader picture of the constructs that young people operate within. This part of the research, while being monitored and supported left the process of completion and return in the hands of various youth workers.

The choice of where forms were sent out to was based on where we had a good relationship with a youth worker and could reasonably expect them to co-operate with us. Secondly, the need for the forms to be filled in by both Christians and seekers meant we selected people who worked with the type of young person necessary. The issue of geographic location was important; therefore forms were sent to the West Country, Scotland, the North East and the North Midlands. In total 60 forms were returned. The majority of which were filled in correctly.

Table 6 – Locations from where questionnaires were returned

Area	Number
Weald (Kent)	13
Scunthorpe	6
Birmingham	7
Congleton	4
Burton upon Trent	6
Taunton	6
Coventry	12
Stoke on Trent	6
Total Forms returned from stage 3 =	**60**

3.3   Data Analysis

Once the forms were filled in, the data from them was added to the forms we had managed to get completed during stage 2 of the research. The combined

data was then entered into a computer based profiling tool.[84] The software was a "content free analytical engine" intended to process information and to ensure that the most relevant constructs were obtained. Using nothing but the information we gleaned from the young people, the software applied a statistical analysis, providing the results in the graphical representation below. Visually illustrating the structure of our constructs.

The data collected from the flip charts, looking at the results when we prompted the groups of young people with the constructs, asking them to discuss and detail the type of Internet outreach that would satisfy the needs presented by the constructs for the target group, were collated and are presented as appendix 6. They are of anecdotal value and some have been utilised in the case study.

3.4   Summary of Youth Research Using Repertory Grip

To summarise, the initial interviews allowed us to elicit from the young people a number of constructs with relation to people, places and more limitedly, the web. Once we had these constructs we were able to take the most common ones and put them in the form of a questionnaire, (appendix 4). This led us on to phase two, where we were able to test our constructs with a wider audience as well as do a relative importance questionnaire with some of the young people. We were also able to do the exercise looking at how the Internet could facilitate meeting the needs of some of the constructs mentioned. Finally, the third phase, the scoring sheet being sent to a more diverse group, enables us to widen our sample and further test our constructs. While the sample size was not key to the analysis as it was a qualitative research tool that we were using, it helps to confirm the accuracy of our conclusions.

Due to the nature of young people, their attention span and interest level, not every young person filled in all the sheets.

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[84] Adapt 4.7

This process lead us to develop a matrix which shows how young people describe their constructs in their own terms. Then, using the information they gave we were able to develop a complete graphical representation of the structure of their perceptions.

3.5 Results

The unique point of this research was that the YFC network gave us unparalleled access to young people who were not yet Christian but were certainly investigating the faith. We were able to analyse the constructs young people have with respect to people and places. Within both these subjects we were able to see what it is about the Christian youth worker or friend, or the youth event or club, that elicits a positive response from the young people. This analysis was broadened out in the analysis of web usage, the third area of the research, as other factors were pertinent in our discussion there, with direct respect to web pages and the Internet. We also did a relative importance study on this section, to establish the most important aspects of a web page to young people.

The results of our research are presented graphically below. With the sample size being 100 we were able to get a cross section of:

(a) Age
(b) Socio-economics
(c) Geographic location
(d) Christian commitment
(e) Gender

Having recorded this information either during the interview or on the questionnaires, the software enabled us to undertake very detailed comparisons. We shall limit ourselves in our reporting to:-

(a)   The total results for each area under investigation

(b)   A comparison of these results between believers and seekers.

The reason for limiting our reporting to these two areas are:

The use of the Internet for evangelism cannot specify who comes to a site, although its content may predetermine that to some degree. Looking at the resources that organisations have available, and the research showing an almost 65/45 split amongst boys and girls using the web, it is appropriate, like most seeker events, that it be open to both sexes. This is not to deny that in the future specific sites for each gender may become more appropriate, as has been the case with the increase in cell groups for single sexes in the UK and USA.

If the research is broken down into too many sub sets and analysed i.e. by gender over 17 then the number of respondents becomes so low as to not be representative for our purposes. Only 10% of the respondents were over 17.

The score itself in all of the graphs in this section relates to the total score given to a construct divided by the number of times that construct has been scored. This information is taken from the questionnaires. Where questionnaires were wrongly filled in, the information was grouped in the miscellaneous section.

3.5.1   Values and Constructs of Young People with Respect to People
This section of the research allowed us to seek to understand what it is about a young person's interaction with another, generally older, individual that makes them warm to that person and more likely to trust them. What is it about the inter-personal relationship that goes on that it is significant through the eyes of the young person?

The questionnaires (Appendix 4) required the young people to score a construct against eight difference characters on the scoring sheet. They were:

1. Someone who I feel is a Christian
2. Someone who has a positive influence on me in a Christian way

3. Someone else who has a positive influence on me

4. Teacher I like

5. Someone I admire

6. Someone I don't admire

7. Teacher I don't like/respect

8. Someone I would not see as helping me

In total 35 young people are represented in the graph below. 15 young people had indicated themselves as believers.

Figure 4 – Values & Constructs of Young People with regard to People
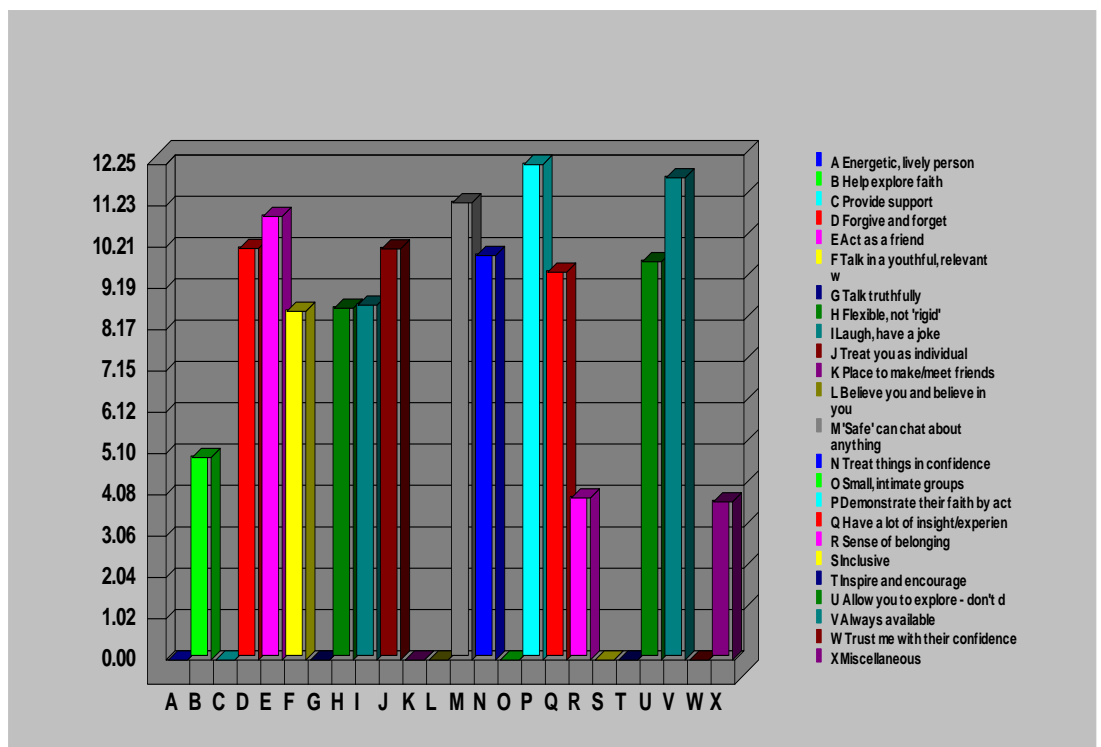
As can be seen from the graph the level of important for the constructs was:-

1. Demonstrate their faith by what they do and how they have got through their lives

2. Always available for me when I need them

3. It's safe to talk to them about anything

4. Act as a friend, there for me

5. Forgive and forget when I've done wrong

6. Treat you as an individual

7. Treat things in confidence

8. Allow you to explore things – don't dictate your views

9. Have a lot of insight/experience to share

10. Have a laugh and joke

11. Flexible, allow you space, opportunity to do your thing

12. Talk in a way that is relevant to me[85]

These 12 constructs were the top 12 overall after which there was a large gap between them and any other on the scoring sheet. Others may have had a high score of one or two individuals, but due to the low number of young people that scored them they have not rated or the reverse can be true where a number of individuals have rated something very low. While the graph represents 24 constructs, only twelve were used on the questionnaire. This was due to some constructs which were clearly the same thing just expressed differently being merged for the questionnaire. Whilst others were observed to be of little importance as the interviews developed and thus not included when choices had to be made about the final twelve to be included on the questionnaire.

It was interesting that the issue of character was clearly the most important. Writing at the turn of the century the American, W. G. E. Cunningham wrote a book called Sunday school.[86] His main point was to champion the fact that if one does not believe a person, one will not believe what the person says.

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[85] The descriptions given above are from the data collection sheets while the descriptions on the right of the graph are truncated due to software parameters.

[86] Cited in Westerhoff J H, *Will our Children Have Faith?* (Morehouse Publishing, 2000), p. 84.

He felt that children were close observers of character. Dealing with the concrete, not the abstract. It was also surprising how low having a laugh and a joke came. While important, it was not the most important. There can be a view that to be a youth worker, you have to have a charismatic personality. This is clearly not the case.

Next the data was separated out between those who indicated themselves as believers and those who marked themselves as seekers.

Figure 5 – Initial Comparison Between Believers and Seekers on Places Construct Data.
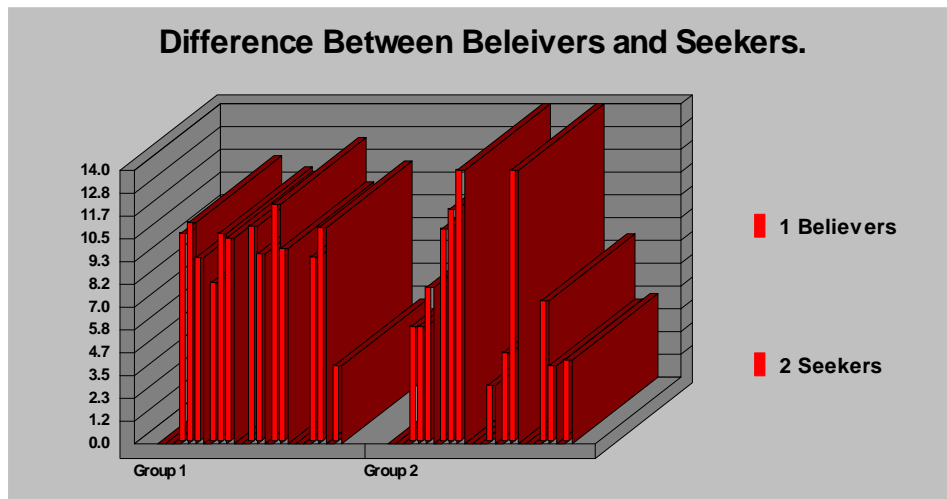
The comparison between the believers and seekers in this section is erratic. This is due to the small number of young people that ticked the not yet a Christian box. This means that the results are not statistically robust as believers were more likely to tick the box, whereas the seekers were more likely to be unsure and thus leave the box empty. Therefore the number of responses for seekers in this section is very low, thus making the comparison difficult. No further comment will be made on Figure 5 as they would not be conclusive. It is shown here to illustrate the difficulty at this point.

What can be compared with some confidence is the difference between the total statistics and those who indicated themselves as believers. This makes two assumptions, that those who said they were not yet Christians understood the terms and those who did not fill in the section were not Christians.

Figure 6 - Difference Between Global Figures & Believers Figures, with respect to Values & Constructs of Young People with regard to People
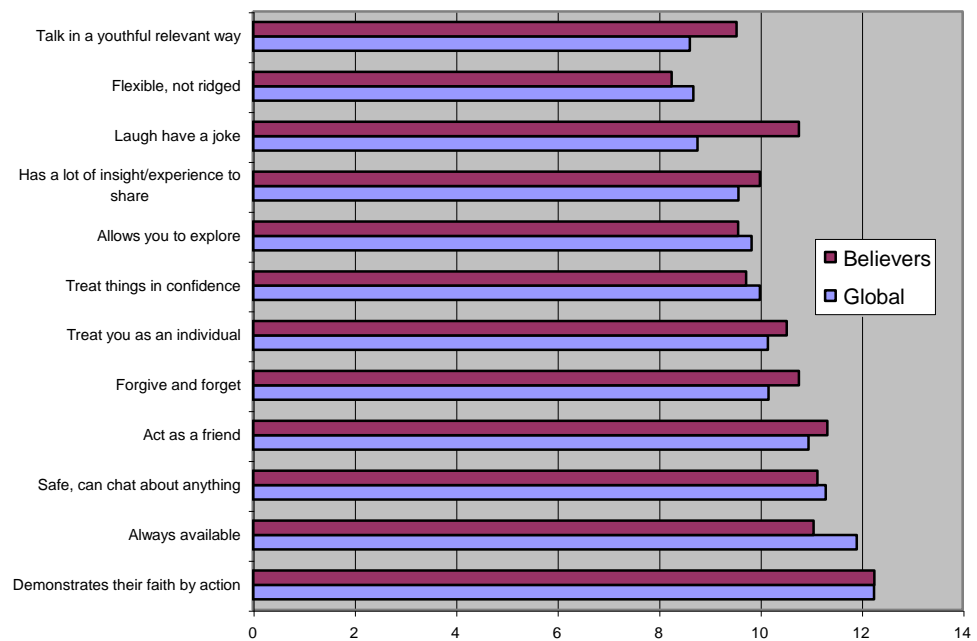
Looking at the comparisons in Figure 6, certain conclusions can be drawn.

For believers it is more important than for the general respondents for a person to talk in a youthful relevant way. They may have had more experience of the opposite in a church setting; thus, having been socialised into sitting through boring talks, they may be more sensitive to this. Similarly for a believer, it is very important for the person they are with to be able to laugh and have a joke, as compared to the general survey.

No other differences between the believers and the total results are significant and therefore worth noting.

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3.5.1.1   Conclusions on Values and Constructs of Young People with Respect to People
Overall the 12 constructs that were scored highly are constructs that can all be delivered through the Internet; such as availability, freedom to chat about anything and the forming of friendships.

It is not surprising to the author that these 12 constructs scored so highly. The stages one and two of the research, the repertory grip interviews and the group went to great lengths to identify what were the core responses/constructs. Therefore the high scores validate the work put into eliciting the original constructs.   Secondly, looking at the age of the respondents, all between 11 and 18 generally, with the weighting at the younger age, many young people would be at the faith development stage of what Westerhoff calls "Affiliative faith".[87] A stage of faith where one is seeking to understand faith as it is acted out with others, within community. Belonging and exploration together is crucial and therefore relational issues scored high. This, and it must be stated, is the normal need in the teenage years for acceptance and support from peers.

3.5.2   Values and Constructs of Young People with Respect to Places
This analysis of the research looked at the constructs that young people bring to bear upon places and events. The questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 4.   12 Constructs identified from the first phase of the research were represented on the questionnaires and these constructs were scored against:

1.   Church

2.   School

3.   Christian youth club

4.   Home/Place I live

5.   Christian gathering e.g. Spring Harvest

6.   Another place I meet friends

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[87] Westerhoff J H, *Will our Children Have Faith?* (Morehouse Publishing, 2000), p. 91.

7. Chat room

8. Other place I go to which I like

In this section the maximum number of respondents was 42 young people, of which 29 classified themselves as believers.

Figure 7 – Values and Constructs of Young People with Respect to Places
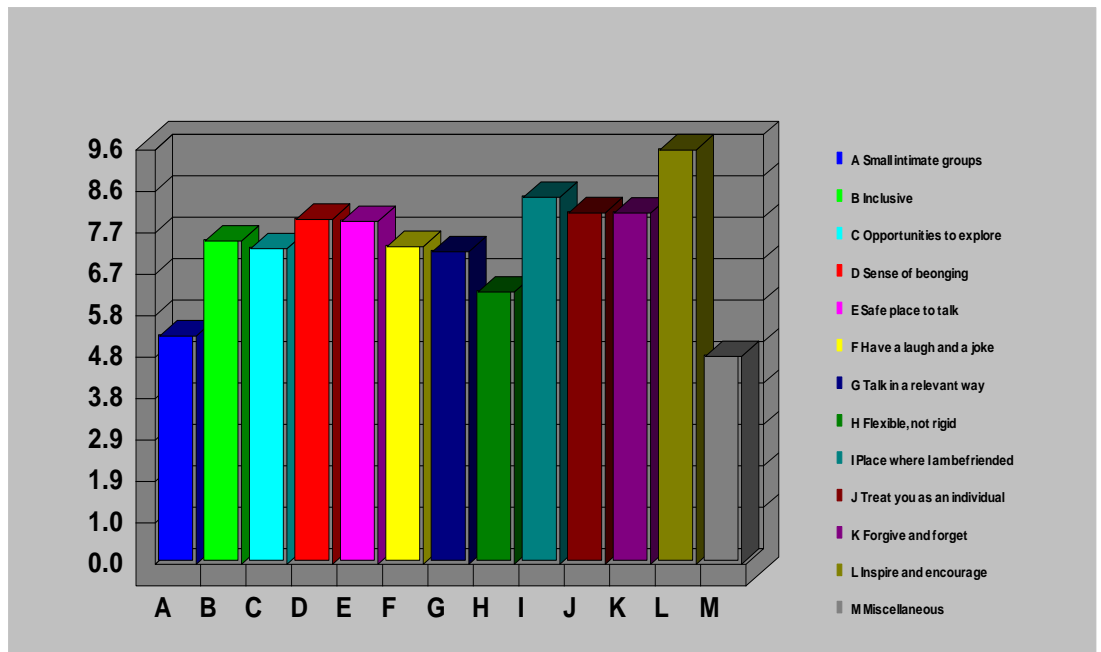
Looking at the overall analysis the constructs were scored in the following order:

1. Inspire and encourage (by far the highest construct)

2. Place where I am befriended

3. Treat you as an individual

4. Safe place to talk

5. Sense of belonging

6. Forgive and forget

7. Opportunities to explore

8. Inclusive

9. Have a laugh and a joke

10. Talk in a relevant way

11. Flexible not rigid

12. Small intimate groups

As mentioned before, miscellaneous is a catch all box used to put in forms that were not filled in correctly. For the purposes of this research it can be ignored.

3.5.2.1   Comparison between Total and believers figures with respect to places.

Figure 8 - Difference Between Total & Believers Figures, with respect to Places
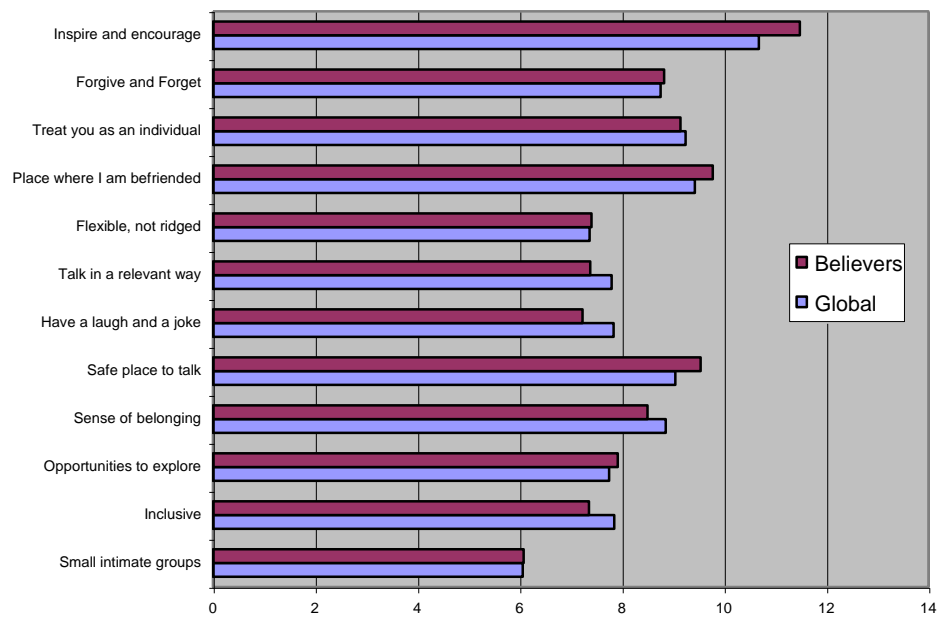
As 69% of the respondents in this section classified themselves as believers, it is not unsurprising that the difference in the scoring on the graph is small between believers and global.

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Where there are differences is that believers were generally looking for more inspiration and encouragement from the groups they went to than the total figures, a difference of 0.8 on the scoring. To have a laugh and a joke, to be inclusive and to be a safe place to talk were within 0.5 and 0.6 in difference with the believers' expectations being lower than those of the seekers expect in the need for a safe place to talk. The believers wanted a place where they were befriended more than the total figures indicated. This would be consistent with Westerhoff's theory for faith development and the need for peer reinforcement.

The total figures were higher for the need to talk in a relevant way. A construct that the believers scored a little lower on, perhaps illustrating their willingness to forgive the occasional irrelevance of church people doing talks. The total figures were higher with regard to a desire for a laugh and joke; perhaps the point above is salient here as well.

3.5.3   Conclusions on Values and Constructs of Young People with Respect to Places
Overall the young people want to be encouraged and inspired in a place where they are befriended, which is safe, forgiving and deals with them as individuals. This place has to create a sense of belonging where they can explore in this context the Christian faith at their own pace. Youth clubs and projects up and down the United Kingdom would hold to many of these constructs and leaders would suggest that they are key to the club or project that they run, both within the church and the youth service more generally.

It is of interest that the desire for small intimate groups is low. Bearing in mind that the sample was drawn from YFC sources, most would be seekers or relatively new converts. This may account for this low score for the small groups. There is a greater anonymity within a larger group. Small groups are more threatening and involving. The opportunity to sit back and observe is limited in this context. It is interesting that at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago the same point was made, that for the seeker, the larger

event is more comfortable as they have the ability to stand back and control the pace of their involvement. Something that exploring the Christian faith using the Internet is inclined to allow.

3.5.4   *Values and Constructs of Young People with Respect to Web pages*

The third area that was researched in the interviews, group work and with questionnaires was that of web constructs. This was seeking to determine the constructs that young people bring to bear upon their interaction with the Internet and web pages. The main data gleaned for this part of the research was from the original interviews and the group work in stage two. Constructs sheets were not sent out as part of stage three of the research, as it was felt it was one too many sheets to give to the young people to fill in.

Figure 9 – Web Constructs From Stages 1 & 2
of Research Process
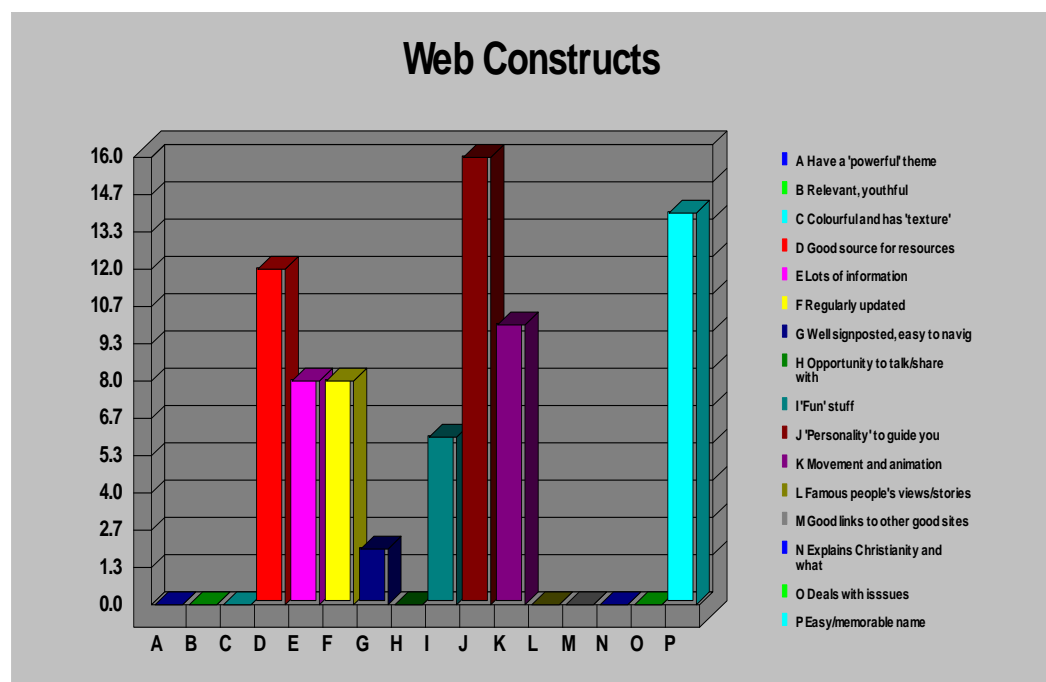
A number of points were raised during the interviews, which were clearly constructs that were brought to bear in relation to the Internet. Since we were not scoring at the time they do not rate on the graph (figure 9). This

graph, therefore, presents some of the constructs that were discovered and have been scored by a couple of young people. While it is of interest it does not carry the weight of the previous pieces of research.

Specifically it is of interest that they felt very strongly that there needed to be a personality to guide you around a web site, this would be consistent with the search engines like "Ask Jeeves",[88] which create a very human feel for the site.

The need for an easy memorable name was important to the young people; again the reference to "Ask Jeeves" is a good example.

3.5.4.1 *The need for it to be a good source of resources*

If it is offering to do something then it needs to deliver. We would suggest that this is becoming important in the light of the huge amount of information available through the Internet and therefore the difficulty of identifying exactly what one is looking for.

3.5.4.2 *Moving and Animation*

Young people are socialised by televisions and are use to this style of presentation. The web pages especially, to be engaging, need to interact in this way.

The other issues that were scored:

1. Lots of information

2. Regularly up-dated

3. Fun stuff

4. Well sign posted and easy to navigate

These are self-explanatory and do not warrant comment.

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[88] askjeeves.com

While these constructs were not scored it needs to be repeated that they did occur repeatedly in conversations and are important constructs to the young people.

3.5.5   *Relative Importance Analysis*

The second area that we researched amongst the young people with regard to web was designed to find out the relative importance of various constructs as it related to their use of the Internet. They were asked, "If they were looking at a Christian web site what would be the most important features for them?"

A number of constructs were listed; see Appendix 5 for a sample sheet, the constructs were the same as those used in the previous graph.

The young people were asked to compare each construct against the other, marking on the grid which one was more important to them, thus with this completed we were able to, using the propriety software, determine the relative importance of each construct as it related to the use of the Internet. 16 young people took part in this exercise.
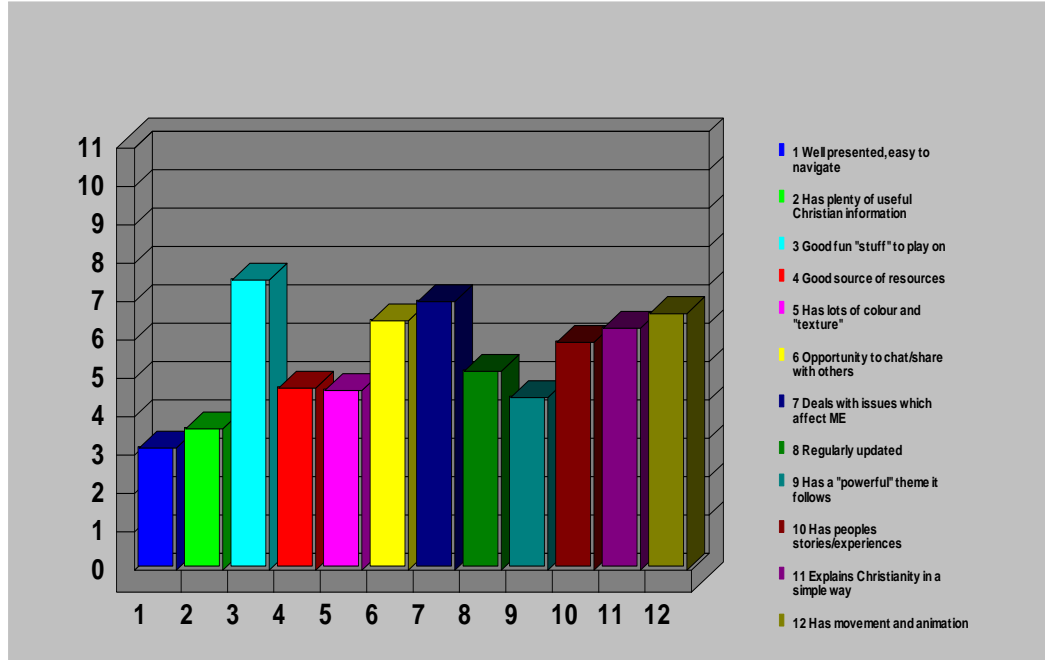
What is significant is that by far the highest score was for, a site that had good fun stuff to play on, followed by its need to deal with issues that affected the young person and to have movement and animation.

Therefore out of the top three constructs two out of three had to do with style over content. This is obviously key in the production of Internet outreach and our approach to designing materials for young people. Content heavy pages without movement and creative design, will not catch their attention in the first instance. What the video wall was to events in the 1980's in the UK, creative front pages to web pages used for outreach will have to be in Internet ministry to these young people.

The next triad from the research was the need for opportunities to chat and share with others, something that explains Christianity in a simple way and something that has people's stories and experiences. All of these are more content based. The Internet, as a mission tool to 11–16's is an ideal medium

to deliver these constructs in a relevant manner. The ability to chat and share is of particular importance, as this is one thing that can be missing if you live in Haverhill or another more remote location where the opportunity to interact with others who are asking the same questions as oneself can be very rare.
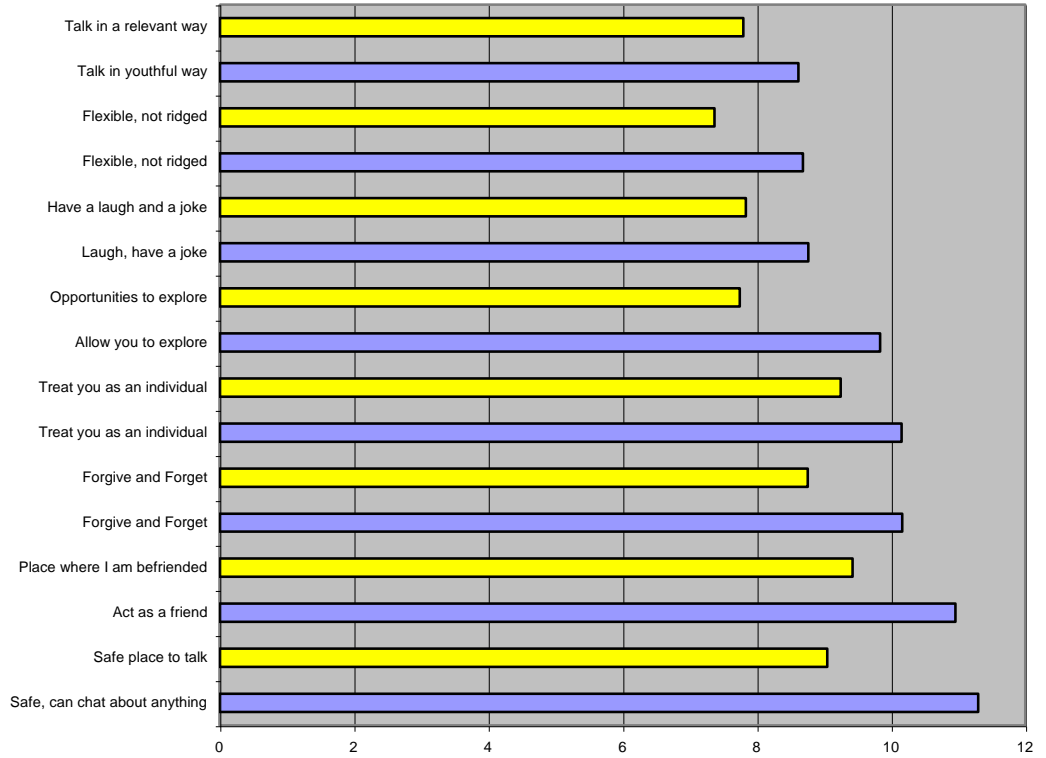
Comparing the differences between this research and the previous graph on web constructs against the relative importance graph shows some anomalies. The earlier graph (figure9) with its small sample size needs to be given far less weight to that of the relative importance grid (figure 10).

3.5.6   *Comparisons between constructs around people and places*

Direct comparisons can be drawn between the research as it related to people and places. There are a number of constructs that are common to both and can be safely assumed to be core to the young people interviewed and those who completed the questionnaires. The similarity of these constructs and their emergence within both subjects would suggest that these are constructs or values, which were common to young people. It is therefore appropriate as we look at the use of the Internet for outreach with this age group that we take into account the factors mentioned above.

Figure 11 compares, using the total figures, those constructs, which are common to both people, and places. This is done because in both of these areas we had strong sample sizes and some very clear constructs emerged. Those that are common to both subjects can be seen below.

Figure 11 – Comparison of Global Constructs
common to both People and Places

Construct	Value
Talk in a relevant way	
Talk in youthful way	
Flexible, not ridged	
Flexible, not ridged	
Have a laugh and a joke	
Laugh, have a joke	
Opportunities to explore	
Allow you to explore	
Treat you as an individual	
Treat you as an individual	
Forgive and Forget	
Forgive and Forget	
Place where I am befriended	
Act as a friend	
Safe place to talk	
Safe, can chat about anything	

In all cases the people constructs (represented in dark grey) scored more highly than the place construct (represented in light grey). This can simply be due to the difference of the sample or the intensity of people relationships as opposed to that of places and events.

 The highest score was the "safe, can chat about anything", with respect to people. This was also the one with the largest difference between the place construct and the construct for the person, two points on the score. See the bottom line of figure 11.

3.5.7   Results from Group Work in Stage 2 of youth research process
The groups of young people we met were mixed in their success. The most benefit being drawn from our ability to monitor the filling in of the various forms and glean a bit of anecdotal information. Once the constructs were

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formed in the first stage, the groups failed to yield anything new to our research, simply reinforcing the data we already had. While attempts were made to test our own conclusions they always came back positive, thus reinforcing the view that we had the right constructs.

What was helpful in the groups was to discuss how the web might fulfil some of the criteria demanded by the constructs. The results from Potters Bar and Greenwich can be seen in Appendix 6 and were not that startling. The young people operated within what they knew and produced nothing that was of any real value by way of creativity or innovation. What was interesting was their interaction with the constructs, which was positive and reinforcing of their value. The results from Rugby are not included as the group was too large and they failed to engage with the exercise. The questionnaires were more successful in that context.

3.5.8   Overall Conclusions to Results.

Therefore, in light of the thoroughness of the repertory grid and the rigid determination to operate a research method that did not impose conclusions on the young people ensuring that we dealt with the "socially constructed subjective judgements of pupils"[89] - our aim, being to reduce observer bias to a minimum, we would conclude was achieved.

The constructs highlighted in discussing people, places and web all came from the young people. The process of scoring and then plotting has allowed us to see which ones are the most important. The comparison between the people and places constructs in figure 11 enables us to see which constructs are common and therefore of more general importance to the young people questioned. This information was used to compare and contrast against the case studies later.

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[89] Quoted from the unpublished work by Marilyn Tew describing her use of Repertory Grid as part of her PhD into Emotional Intelligence of young people.

4 UK Youth outreach sites overview

To see what others were doing in this area and to be able to compare and contrast them against the case study later, we undertook a process of phone research. The purpose of this phone research was to analyse the other types of Internet mission aimed at young people in the UK.

4.1 Materials and Methods

Prior to this phone research, several months were spent asking youth organisations and interested parties if they knew of any youth outreach on the Internet in the UK. The only examples people were able to give were the ones researched in the phone interviews; all other suggestions were works still at the idea stage. In discussions with the trustees of some large UK Trusts, it transpired that there were a number of applications in to build such sites. The only models then, similar in the UK were, Life2themax, a site hosted by Crusaders and ACTUALReality hosted by Gavin Matthews. Both were website ministries.

The following nine questions were asked in the telephone interview, which lasted approximately ten minutes.

1. What is the aim of the website?
2. Who is the intended audience?
3. How many hits or page requests do you get a month?
4. How many people contact you directly as a result of the website?
5. How many people hitting your site would be Christians?
6. Do you know of anyone finding faith via your site?
7. Where is the site marketed?
8. What functionality does the site have?
9. How successful do you feel the site is?

The answers to these questions are included as part of the analysis below.

4.2   Crusaders life2themax.net[90]

This site has been live for under a year and is a web site with other features built into it. The first version had an 11+ age feel to it. The site was updated on the 24th July 2001 and now has an older feel to it with far more functionality (the target age being 13-18). Matt Summerfield the National Director of Crusaders was interviewed in July 2001

In answer to the questions Summerfield said:

1. The aim of the site is to present a credible Christian message to Christian and non-Christian young people and to explore issues from a Biblical perspective.

2. The intended audience is non Christian 13-18 year olds, to present a place where they can explore issues of faith.

3. Summerfield did not have access to this information and his Webmaster forwarded it at a later date. The web site activity is outlined in the table below.

4. The initial site had an opportunity for people to e-mail Summerfield directly, this has not happened in any great number, the most popular part of the site had been the guest book which had a high number of people going there and leaving messages.

5. Most of the people visiting the site are Christian. By the comments on the guest book there is a strong "Crusader" presence though from some of the comments it can be assumed that some of the kids are not yet Christians.

6. To date there is no evidence of anyone finding faith through the life2themax web site.

7. The life2themax web site is publicised through Crusaders internal contacts and as of September will be going out on mouse mats into

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[90] www.life2themax.net

secondary schools. This year has been seen as the year of preparation rather than the time when there would be high expectations of success.

8. The old site has a guest book and the opportunity to send in questions. The new site is far more interactive with opportunities for:-

    ❖ Text messaging

    ❖ An agony aunt

    ❖ An opportunities to vote on various issues

    ❖ A message board

    ❖ Online chat

    ❖ An opportunity to join a mailing list

    ❖ To read reviews

    ❖ Get information about the life2themax project, events and what's new

    The site is comprehensive and interactive.

9. The site has been successful in as much as it has been an online web tract. It's been well received by young people, albeit Christian. The success of the initial trial period means they are now preparing to develop it into a full life style magazine with marketing in the main stream youth magazines.

4.2.1   Website Activity Report.

The system of recording web site activity used by life2themax counts page requests. A request is different to a "hit". A request is made every time an image or html[91] file is downloaded from the site. For example, lets assume that an index file[92] has 10 images on it, when a user visits the index page 11

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[91] The format in which the code for web pages is stored on the web. Hyper text mark-up language.

[92] The first page one goes to on most web pages

requests occur (10 images + the index page = 11 requests). The life2themax site had 20 graphics and components to its index page as well as a "shockwave"[93] introduction, therefore the number can be divided by 20 to give a rough indication of the number of people visiting the index page of the site. Without the detailed analysis tools employed in other sites it is difficult to see whether these hits are for 2 seconds or for a sustained period of time. The moment a person goes further into the site, more page requests take place and the ability to assess how many people are visiting the site is further complicated.

Table 7 – Web Site Activity for Life2themax

Month	Overall # of reqs	Requests for pages		
Jun 01	17815	1377		
Jul 01	23650	1679		

Looking more closely at the statistics for the site we would conclude that less than 10 people per day have visited the site over the last 54 days from when this analysis was done, the 25th July 2001.

4.2.2   Comment

Life2themax is a work in progress. Its main feature being to reassure Christians and create a place for Crusader young people to interact and find out about events etc. Now in its second format it is far more comprehensive and interactive. At present all that can be said is that it is positioning itself in the right place, especially if it is able to become an online magazine, which is marketed in the secular youth press. Clearly the issues of how relevant it would be to those outside of Christian circles will be key and the question as to why I would go there if I weren't a Crusader member is also crucial.

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[93] Macromedia's animation language.

4.3   ACTUALReality

ACTUALReality is the follow up site for a CD-ROM. The CD-ROM, developed in the United States contains movies, information and data and is intended as a discipleship tool for Christians. It is aimed at young people and is built in partnership with Crusaders. It is intended that the CD-ROM leads people to the web site, where 18 lesson plans can be downloaded which can be used in bible classes (their term).

The marketing for ACTUALReality says "it is a dynamic means of bringing the reality of the Christian faith to the youth of Britain. It is an interactive CD-ROM featuring over 25 Christian bands who use cutting edge technology to share their faith." It is called a "music driven search for truth taking users on a technologically dazzling journey into God's message".[94] While this may be the stated aim, the tool clearly is one for discipleship and not outreach as made clear by Matthews.

Gavin Matthews is the ACTUALReality Project Co-ordinator; he was interviewed by phone in July. The work is run out of an office in Perth.

4.3.1   *Answer to questions*

1. ACTUALReality is a follow up site for the CD-ROM, having got a taster of the 18 issues raised on the CD-ROM. Young people can come to the site to explore at a deeper level.

2. The intended audience is young people who've been using the CD-ROM, Christian or non-Christian.

3. The number of people who have accessed the front page of the actual reality site are indicated in figure 12. This is an accurate measure for our purposes but it says nothing about the duration of their visit to the site.

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[94] See www.actualreality.org.uk

Figure 12 – ACTUALReality Web Site Activity
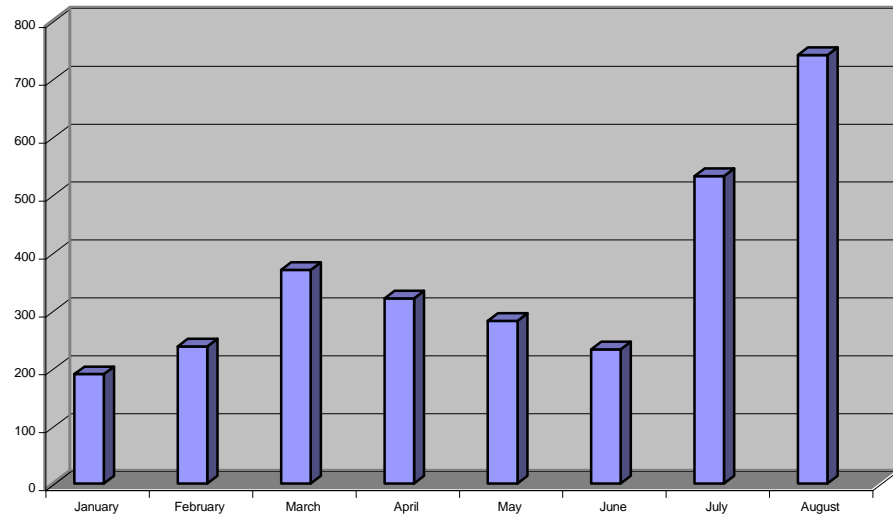
4. Very few people contact Matthews directly in his words "it's a small trickle."

5. Matthews has no way of knowing if the visitors are Christian or not, they do not seek to find out.

6. No one has found faith due to the site. This is not a surprise as they see it as a discipleship tool rather than an evangelistic device, although they do have a graphical gospel presentation on the site taken from the Billy Graham web site.

7. The site is marketed primarily through the CD-ROM sales. The three elements must be seen as one, that of a CD-ROM, web site and bible class synergy. The site is also marketed by Matthews travelling around and speaking about the project. Crusaders are supporting the project and their magazine is marketing it.

8. The site has an opportunity on it to find out more about the project, to buy the CD-ROM, to go through a gospel outline, a guest book with 27 messages on it (mainly from the UK but some as far away as Saudi Arabia), and some resources for parents and

teachers. The other interactive functionality on the site is a mailing list which young people can sign up to receive Internet mailings.

9. The site is not seen as being complete as all the lessons plans are not yet published there. The expected completion date is November 2001, although it has been live for 6 months.

4.3.2   Comment

In discussion with Matthews, it became clear that there is a shortage of purely evangelistic web sites within which this site would not place itself. The original similarities, especially in the light of the wording of the introduction to the site with talk2us discussed later, are proven to be false under further examination. ACTUALReality is a site for Christians, and more specifically it is linked to a product, the ACTUALReality CD-ROM.

5   Talk2Us – A Case Study

5.1   Introduction to Talk2us.org.uk

The talk2us youth outreach web site was conceived in the spring of 2000 by YFC, a Christian Evangelistic Youth Agency committed to take the Good News relevantly to every young person in Great Britain. The rational behind the site was to effectively communicate the gospel with the increasing number of young people using the Internet; specifically chat rooms and web browsing.

Secondly the YFC main web site had a section on it for the theatre company and bands, it became apparently that these pages were getting increased traffic at 3.30 pm on weekdays. Clearly young people were coming home from school and logging on to the bands web site having seen them in school.

For the site to be effective it needed to have further mechanisms to attract young people to visit it. The approach of buying advertising in secular magazines was dismissed as too costly. An option was formulated in partnership with Scripture Gift Mission (SGM). SGM were looking at how to increase their relevance into the youth market following the success of their

Little Book of Life, parts of scripture presented in a similar way to the Little Book of Wisdom. It was decided to produce three postcards raising issues pertinent to young people. Self-image was entitled, "I look in the Mirror" (see figure 13). The second one discussing issues of Success and failure, called "The wrong Letter", (see figure 14). Thirdly Relationships issues were raised under the title, "Was it me", (see figure 15). The first postcard was never used due to concerns that links to sadomasochist activities could be construed. Secondly, some did not appreciate the male nude.

The postcards would raise issues that could then be discussed on the web site. The only ways of following up the issues presented for the young person was to send back a tear off strip or log on to the talk2us website.

Figure 13 – I look in the Mirror   Figure 14 – The Wrong Letter   Figure 15 – Was it Me?
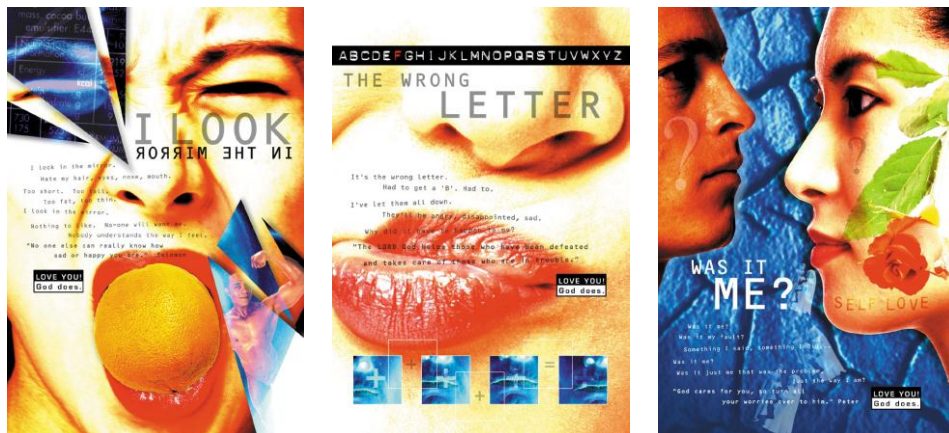
These postcards were all under the banner of "Love you? God Does!" The postcards were intended to be distributed by Boomerang, a secular marketing agency to all the schools in the UK, cinemas and theatres. The arrangement with Boomerang stalled due to their uncertainty about distributing Christian literature, the decision being blocked by their censors. The go ahead was given in April 2001, and then only for a pilot project to gauge negative reaction.

What this presented was a number of ways in which young people may find the talk2us website, namely:-

- ❖ Through the activity of the YFC creative arts teams, Activate and TVB

- ❖ Through the activity of the YFC sports teams, Fly and Kick

- ❖ Through the activity of the YFC Local Centres[95] using the web site as part of their lessons in schools

- ❖ Through the distribution of these postcards via Church youth pastors and other youth projects

- ❖ Through the Boomerang arrangement (when it started)

- ❖ Through the YFC summer camps, Fort Rocky, where this web site is used as a follow up tool

- ❖ Through word of mouth

YFC having got the structure in place to feed young people towards a web site employed a full-time web worker, a youth worker with IT skills to manage the site and become the public face of the work to young people as they visit the website. This appointment was made in June 2000. The first version of the site was up and running by July 2000 in time for Message 2000.[96]

The initial response was poor, the postcards were handed out, but the tear off slip with the web address on was required as a ticket for entrance to WorldWide Message Tribe concerts. Thus, the follow up mechanism was inadvertently taken out of the hands of the young people.

The site operated from August through to Christmas with limited success, the major opportunity this period presented was for the site to be developed in

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[95] YFC have 51 local Centres with full and part time staff. 70% of their work is in school and this presented the opportunity to distribute the postcards.

[96] An evangelistic outreach to young people in and around Manchester sponsored by the WorldWide Message Tribe, Youth for Christ, Soul Survivor and Oasis.

such a way as to make sure that it was highly interactive for those young people who visited.

The traffic to the site at this period was provided wholly by the creative arts teams and sports teams; the willingness of team members to be online at certain times of the evening to chat with young people created a sense of community and a buzz. The conversation ranged from the deeply personal through to the extremely superficial, something that the research highlighted as a trait of this age range.

The project got fully underway in January 2001 when 22,525 of the postcards were distributed to young people amongst 8 trial areas:

- ❖ North Staffs
- ❖ South Staffs
- ❖ Harrogate
- ❖ Greenwich

- ❖ Norwich
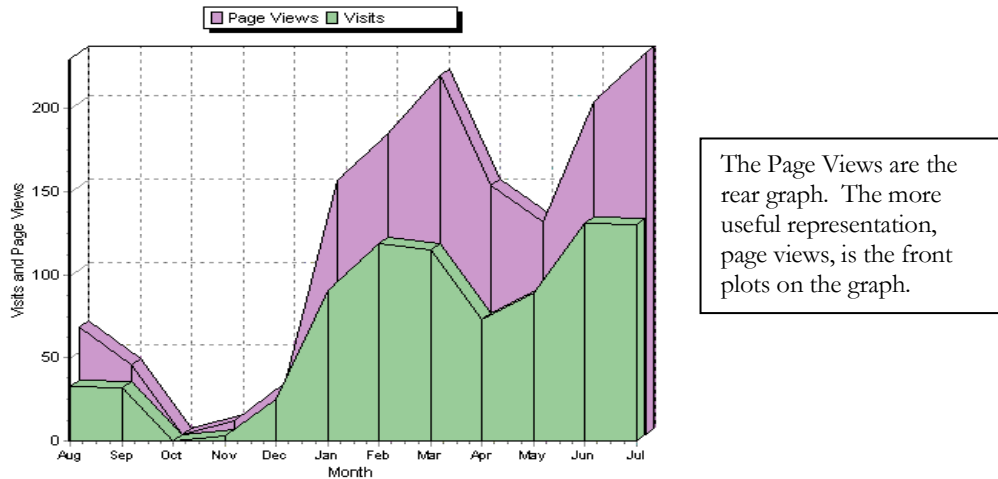- ❖ The Wirral
- ❖ West Leicestershire
- ❖ Burton on Trent

This caused an increase in activity on the web site with people visiting the chat room in the numbers of 150 per month by February as seen in the graph (figure 16) below.[97]

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[97] Note that all charts and graphs in this section were calculated on 25th July 2001.

Figure 16 – Visit and Page views to talk2us chat room

The Page Views are the rear graph. The more useful representation, page views, is the front plots on the graph.

The difference between visit and page view is crucial.[98] Because no one standard is used for measuring web traffic careful definition of what is being recorded is important to allow for comparisons to be made.

In April the "Was it Me?" postcard, the card looking at interpersonal relationships was distributed by Boomerang with a subsequent increase in activity on the web site. This activity peaked and then drifted down when the second postcard, looking at success and failure tying in with exam time was released, after which the web page got its highest level of hits since its conception, 450 visits in a month. The web site provider and hence the counter for the whole web page, was transferred to the same system as used

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[98] When someone comes to a site, they generate a "hit" for every piece of content that is sent to their computer. Viewing a single web site page would generate one hit for the page and one hit for every individual graphics file that was on the page. A single page could easily generate a dozen or more hits. When you are browsing a site, every time you follow a link, it is treated as a single "page view". The software used to calculate web traffic by talk2us defines a "visit" as a series of page views by one person with no more than 30 minutes in between page views. When browsing a site, every time a link is followed a link to a new web page, it is treated as a single page view. Talk2us defines a visit as a series of page views by one person with no more than 30 minutes in between page views. If a link to another site is clicked, and then the person comes back to the site within 30 minutes, they are still on the same visit and the counter won't increment. However, the meter will increment the number of page views recorded for the current visit.

for the chat room analysis at the end of April to improve comparison, hence the abrupt start in May in figure 17.

Figure 17 – Year Analysis for Talk2us website main page.
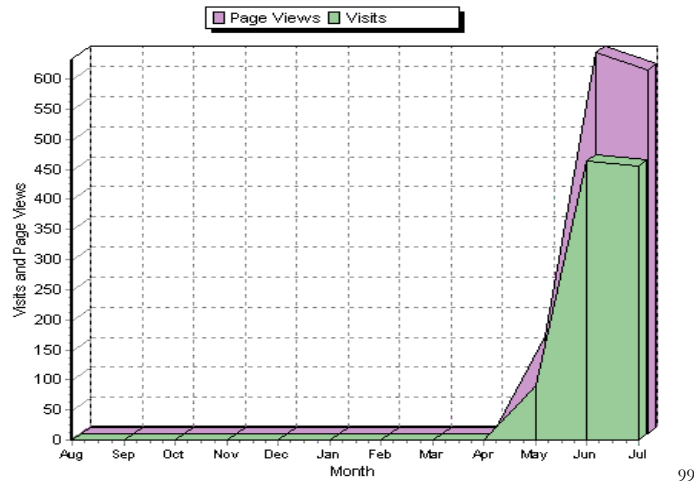
5.2   Target Audience

The target audience for talk2us is non-Christian seekers, young people between the ages of 11-15. The site while not actively discouraging Christians from being there provides nothing for Christians intentionally, such as prayer opportunities or discussions around Christian issues or themes. The site focuses very clearly on the seeker. This said by the nature of the discussions that go on it is clear that there are a number of Christian young people that frequent the site. This may be that they need to continue to find their Christian identity and the site helps them achieve this. The research of Finney contends, on the basis of his research, that people discover God in a gradual way, a process that takes around 4 years.[100] He secondly asserts that on the basis of the same research, young people, who are expected to have a sudden

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[99] The Page Views are the rear graph. The more useful representation, page views, is the front plots on the graph.

[100] See Finney J, *Finding Faith Today* (British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992), p. 25.

experience of God, tend towards a more gradual process.[101] If this is true then it is not surprising that "Christian" young people explore their own faith journey using this tool. Quoting Finney again, "People look for help in discovering a relationship with God, maintaining it in good repair, and thinking through the differences it should make in their relationship with others".[102]

All of the methods of making the site known to young people are targeted clearly at those who are outside the realms of the church with the exception of the residential weekends, which are mixed, and word of mouth, which is uncontrollable.

5.3 Site Content and Provision

The website was designed by YFC and the text was written by SGM copywriters. See Appendix 7. It contains a number of static features to answer questions and give an overview of Christianity, such as a "basics" page outlining the essentials of Christian faith and frequently asked questions section responding to issues raised by young people.
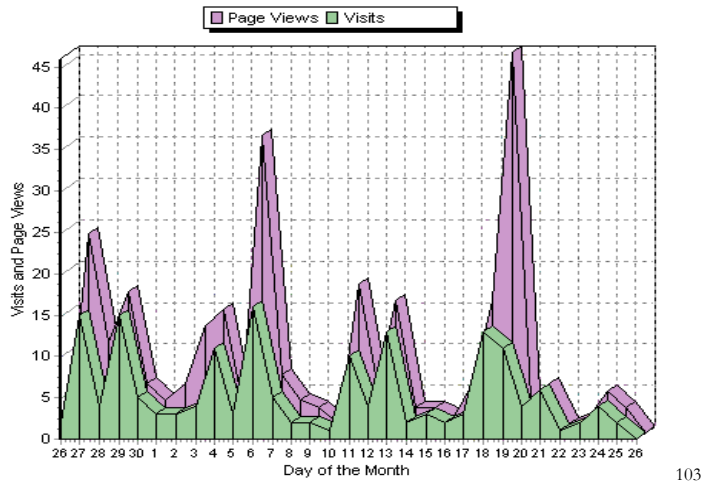
5.3.1 Chat Room

A "chat room", an opportunity to talk real time using the keyboard, provided the interactive content. This could be with up to 50 other people at any one time. The reality of this is it has been a lot slower with around 5 young people visiting the site most days it is active. This has allowed an intimate environment to be created and some interesting conversations have taken place. The chat room is only open a certain times and is hosted by the Internet worker. The graphs, figures 18 & 19 show the activity on this chat room for the week preceding the 15th July 2001.

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[101] See Finney J, *Finding Faith Today* (British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992), p. 25.
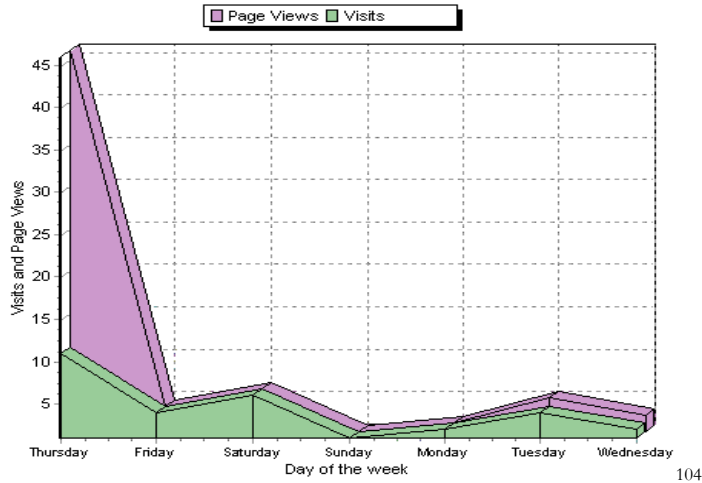
[102] Finney J, *Finding Faith Today* (British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992), p. 21.

Figure 18 – One Month Analysis of Chat
room activity on Talk2us

Figure 19 - Daily Analysis of Chat room
activity on Talk2us

The daily figures shown in figure 19 show that this is a more popular activity
later in the week. This can be misleading as the chat room is not always open,
hence this may simply reflect when the site is open. The site seeks to respond

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[103] The Page Views are the rear graph. The more useful representation, page views, is the front plots on
the graph.

[104] The Page Views are the rear graph. The more useful representation, page views, is the front plots on
the graph.

to the desires of young people and has systems in place to see if young people are trying to access the site more often and then respond accordingly.

5.3.2 Discussion Board

A discussion (bulletin) board was created, covering a number of issues where young people post issues and other young people, the Internet worker or members of the various teams interact with them. The board has 72 discussions running with multiple messages posted on them. These relate to those of deep personal interest to those that are flippant and superficial. A selection can be seen in appendix 8.

5.3.3 Fun Stuff

The site contains a number of areas to create interactivity and to be fun. For example, online polls, links, blogging (on line dairying), WAP[105] access, SMS[106] interactivity allowing the web page to interact with young people's mobile phones, E-cards[107] and tell a friend[108] features. The SMS feature allows the young people to be contacted when not online. At the time of writing 50 young people had signed up to receive SMS messages from talk2us.

While the rest of these features do not contribute to the evangelistic thrust or nature of the site, they do create an ambience of fun and interactivity, allowing the young person to change the appearance of the site with their own contributions.

The chart below, figure 20, shows where the young people are going in relation to other areas on the website over the previous three months from the time of analysis on 25th July 2001. Clearly, most young people are just

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[105] Wireless Application Protocol, a system for viewing web pages over mobile phones

[106] Short Message Service. A method of sending text messages between mobile phones and from computers to mobile phones.

[107] Internet greeting cards that can be sent to a person's e-mail address.

[108] An online referral system.

looking. A number "lurk", a term used for someone who watches a discussion rather than takes part.

Figure 20 – Comparison of activity on talk2us
by month and area.
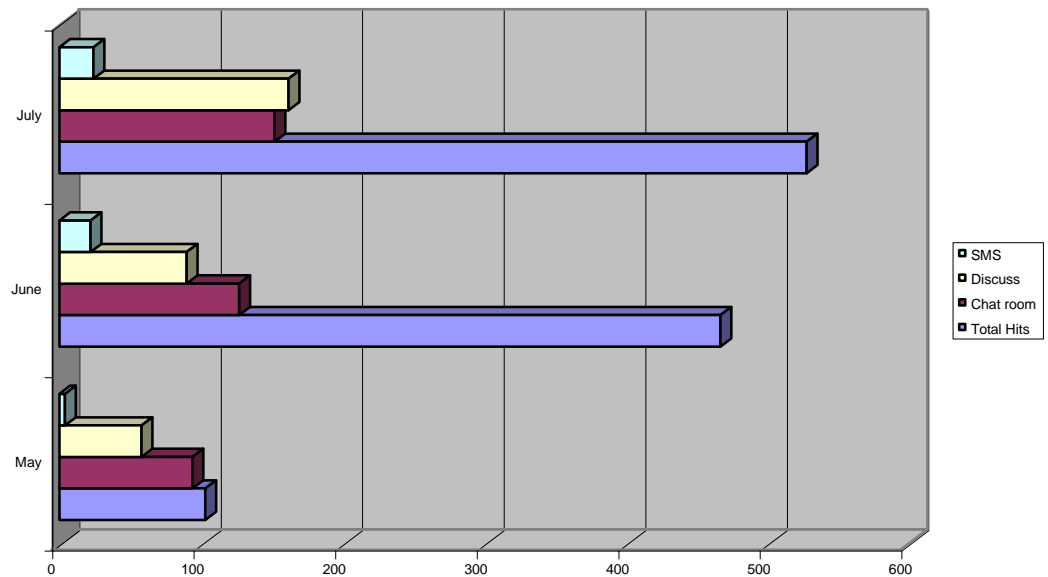
The key areas where outreach activity takes place are around the chat room, the discussion board and the ability to contact YFC requesting further information or to correspond more personally. SGM have a number of resources, which YFC are able to forward to young people upon request.

5.4   Analysis of Success of Site in the Light of YFC's aims

The site has taken longer than expected to become busy and problems with censors and others in blocking the distribution of postcards means that YFC and SGM are behind schedule. However, for the period that it has been running, it has achieved its aim of providing an evangelistic web site for a clearly defined age group of young people that interact with other parts of the wider YFC ministry. 196 young people contacted SGM for more literature.

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Figure 21 – Analysis of talk2us general hits by week
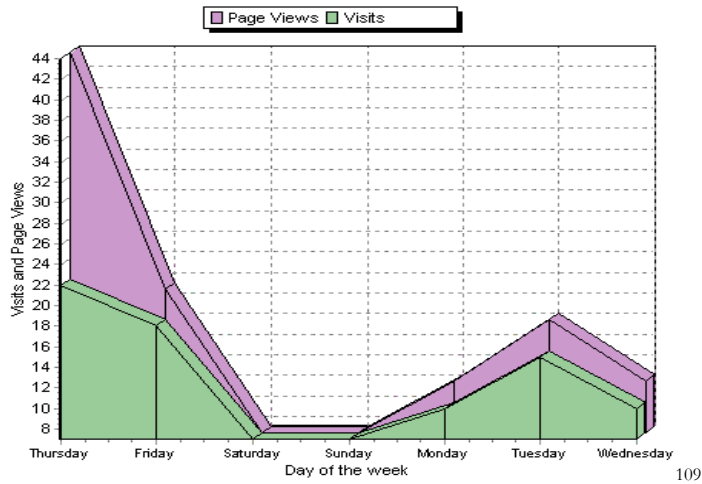
YFC are therefore generally satisfied with the progress to date. One young person has professed to coming to faith through the ministry, Anna. She had been interacting with the web worker for some time when she wrote

"Thanks for giving me some hints on how to start reading the Bible. To me it seems like a pretty daunting task! I've already read John's gospel as we've studied for AS Religious Studies. I've always been a Christian – but not a strong believer. Two of my close friends are devote Christians and they were the first people to introduce it to me, but when Activate visited us at our school, about a month ago, they helped me realise what I've truly missed. Ever since then I've been going to church and CU in school to help develop my faith. Cass was the one who gave me the web site address and I talked to her at the end of the road show. The site is really important and it's helped me get back on my feet again, but not without my own person difficulties!! Thanks. God bless, Anna.

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[109] The Page Views are the rear graph. The more useful representation, page views, is the front plots on the graph.

Figure 22 – Analysis of talk2us general hits by month
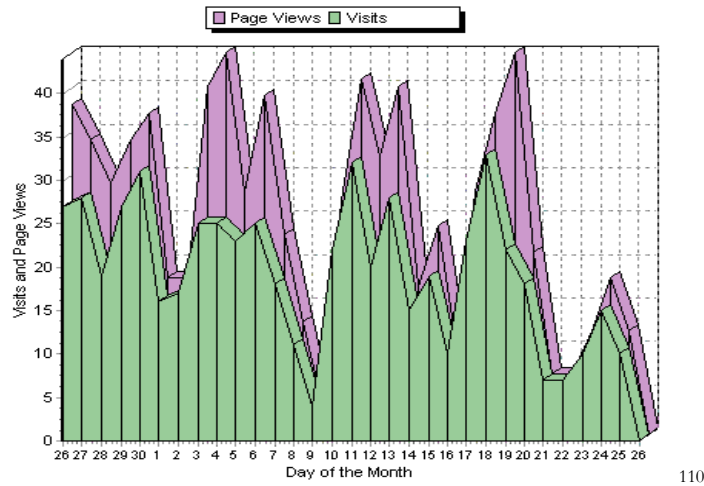
It is clear to YFC that they will not be seeing a large number of web converts; they are rare and normally found within a North American context. The web is seen as a tool in the process of conversion, extending the length and depth of contact from the one off event, be it the concert or schools lesson giving the young person the opportunity to follow at their own pace issued raised and talk further.

6   Conclusions

The literature with regard to Internet ministries gave us an overview of what is happening and what are the issues being discussed with type of work. Specifically, the issue of whether the Internet is a new cultural context. Objectively this is to be dismissed as argued above, however, we accept that virtual communities do exist. It could be argued that some are keen to define the Internet in terms of a new cultural context out of their own enthusiasm for it and to validate their ministry. Our research indicated that the Internet is

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110 The Page Views are the rear graph. The more useful representation, page views, is the front plots on the graph.

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having a growing impact as more homes go online. Secondly, it is a medium that young people are very familiar with.

The repertory grid research amongst the young people provided a large number of constructs that were important to young people in a number of situations. By identifying those that scored highest and then extracting those that were common to both major areas studied, i.e. people and places.[111] We were able to look at the most general, and important constructs. These were:

- ❖ Safe place to talk

- ❖ Place where I am befriended

- ❖ Forgive and Forget

- ❖ Treat you as an individual

- ❖ Allow you opportunities to explore

- ❖ Have a laugh and a joke

- ❖ Flexible, not ridged

- ❖ Talk in youthful relevant way

What it needs to be is EPIC in the acronym used by Sweet.[112] Internet ministry is able, when carefully constructed and evaluated, to create environments where these constructs are recognised and reinforced as can be seen from the case study of talk2us. In the light of the fact that very few young people have any contact with those from the Christian faith[113] it is potentially a very useful tool in mission to them if we are able to engage them in some way.

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[111] See section 3.5.6

[112] Experiential, Participatory, Interactive and Communal. See Sweet L, *SoulTsunami* (Zondervan, 1999), p. 215-222.

[113] 91% of teenagers have no contact with organised Christianity. Brierley P, *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers* (Monarch: 1993), p. 15.

The two ministries studied, Actual Reality and Life2themax were both attempting to connect using different methods to engage with some of the constructs above. Talk2us actively seeks to connect with seven of the eight of the constructs, having not yet looked at ways of demonstrating forgiveness on the Internet. Though some excellent examples do exist.[114]

People don't usually come to faith solely as a result of a single (mass) medium. Somewhere along the path, there has to be contact with real flesh and blood people as well.[115] It is the conclusion of the author that this type of ministry is only part of the process by which young people come to faith in the UK and therefore needs to be placed within the wider context of youth mission.

For Internet outreach to be effective it needs:

- ❖ Human contact before

- ❖ Some sort of reminder to draw the young person to the site

- ❖ For the site to reflect all the constructs mentioned in above

- ❖ To build bridges between the Internet into offline contact

- ❖ The ability to connect the young person, safely and appropriately with real people. The community of faith

What the Internet provides is the place for young people to explore, at their own rate and to an extent that they control. Key to its effectiveness in evangelism will be the sensitive skill of the people running the site to move the conversation on to the Christian story. "His stories like all stories in principle, invited the hearers into a new world, making the implicit suggestion that the new worldview be tried on".[116] This must be the aim of this type of ministry. The transcendental model of contextual theology presented by

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[114] See www.embody.co.uk

[115] I am indebted to David A Couchman MA, M.Sc. Director of Focus Radio who helped clarify my thinking here.

[116] Wright N T, *The New Testament and the People of God* (SPCK, 1992), p. 77.

Bevans on page 15 may be the most appropriate way to operate on the Internet. Especially in the light of the high score 'has peoples stories experiences' registered in the relative importance grid on page 52.

The Internet creates an opportunity for the one off contact, schools lesson or event, which may have first contact the young person has had with Christianity to be extended in time and depth. By making young people aware of the site in these contexts and creating various web pages that are relevant to different situations. The moment is turned into a conversation that can ultimately bring the person to the point when they want to discuss faith issues.

In this way the Internet is not anything different to the other broadcast media that we have had with us over the years. Treated in the same way as television or radio it can be seen as an important link in the chain of events that leads someone to find faith and a place where ideas can be tested in the anonymity of this new technology.

In conclusion, mission to 11-16 year olds using the Internet in the UK will not be accomplished by setting up of an attractive web site no matter how much is invested, the sheer number of other competing sites means that it will soon be swamped and fail to register on search engines. What is far more important is that this mission is seen in the context of the wider mission to this age group and takes as its starting point, as the repertory gird analysis did, the thoughts and understandings of the young person. Having done this the site will then resonate with the culture of the young person who is an honest seeker. This person may be not yet be a Christian, or may be connected with a Church and be identified as a Christian, however, they use the site as a place to question and 'construct and find their identity' as believers as they move from affiliative faith to searching faith.[117] This is still mission and valid

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[117] See Bridger F, *Children Finding Faith* (Scripture Union, 1988), p. 67-73. Bridger connects these changes to the need for the young person to have freedom to question and explore in the adolescent years.

ministry. For the site targeted at non-Christians, for evangelistic outreach this may be disappointing, to find young people who by their language are clearly churched, using the site.

It is the author's contention that there is a good potential for web ministries seen in this light. They need to accept the issues discussed above and be able to interact with young people who are spiritually inquisitive and at a stage in their faith development where they are looking for some answers to metaphysical questions. To this end, the Internet as a mission tool can make a useful contribution.

While it is necessary to conclude this work, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the Internet as an evangelistic tool with 11-16 year olds, as there are too few examples to reasonably give us a picture of how it is working. Viewing the projects in the bigger picture of mission, both in the impact the ministries will have on young people at different stages of faith and where the Internet ministries fit in, with respect to other youth mission work, both online and off-line places the effort in a more holistic environment. The Internet will be used increasingly as a tool for mission, and rightly so. Only when some of the questions discussed above are addressed will it be effective.

19,189 words

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