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Media, Milieu, and Community

Forms of (Media-based) *Vergemeinschaftung* within and beyond the Association of Vineyard Churches

Fabian Huber

Abstract

This article examines the role of media in the process of religious communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*), drawing on the example of the Evangelical Association of Vineyard Churches. It argues that a direct connection between media production, media use, and integration in the community is too shortsighted. Instead, the empirical study will demonstrate how different media – including those produced by various Vineyard churches – circulate in a specific milieu. It is within this milieu, with its constellation of local celebrations, Bible studies and regional events, that the members of Vineyard churches (re)construct their religious belonging in a complex interplay of face-to-face and media-based communication. In the end, the analysis highlights the multilayered role of media within and beyond the Association of Vineyard Churches and provides a contribution to the conceptual clarification of ‘community’.

Keywords

Communalization; Community; Media; Milieu; Vineyard; Evangelicalism

1 Introduction

In this contribution, I will discuss the role of media in the process of communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*).¹ I assume that media are important to the community in various ways, which

¹ The translation of the German term *Vergemeinschaftung* is extremely difficult, and different possibilities have to be considered. I have chosen the term ‘communalization’ because it is a perfect compromise between the colloquial ‘communitization’ and the usual translation of Weber’s term, ‘communal relationship’ (Swedberg 2005, pp. 43f.).

I will analyze by drawing on the empirical example of the *Association of Vineyard Churches*² in Switzerland. Two recent approaches to religious communities, *congregational studies* and the *posttraditional community* approach, form the theoretical starting point of my argument (2). After a few remarks on my data and methods (3), I will discuss the case of the Vineyard (4). This begins with a short introduction to the history of the Vineyard movement.³ Then I will elaborate on the media profile of the Vineyard from a *crossmedia* perspective. This allows me to generate insights into the status of the Vineyard's media-based communication and mission work in relation to conventional church work (Krüger 2012, pp. 452–453) (4). In particular, I will examine to what extent media use and media production are able to reflect the structures of a religious community. This will lead into a discussion of the evangelical milieu (5). Within this milieu, the members of the Vineyard (re)construct their religious belonging in a complex interplay of different forms of (media-based) communalizations. In order to capture these different forms of communalization adequately, I will conclude by introducing the concept of the *multilayered community* (6). This concept brings together a structural and an individual perspective with special regard to media. In the end, the analysis of media will allow for a more complete understanding of the religious community itself.

2 Theoretical Starting Point: Recent Approaches to the Religious Community

To build my theoretical framework, I will refer to two recent approaches to the study of religious communities: *congregational studies* and the *posttraditional community* approach (*posttraditionale Gemeinschaft*). Combining the two perspectives, I will emphasize the tensions between organizational unity, on the one hand, and individual openness on the other.

2.1. Congregational studies

Due to their focus on forms of organization, congregational studies are particularly well suited for analyzing the structure of religious communities. Douglass and colleagues (e.g., Douglass 1927) initiated the studies of congregations in the 1920s. After a long period without further investigation,

The term 'communalization' takes up both Weber's 'communal' and emphasizes at the same time that this is a process. With this choice of term, I also intend to establish a connection on the level of content. For Weber (1980 [1921]), a communal relationship relies on the involved parties' subjective feeling that they belong together (p. 21). However, he emphasizes that the majority of relationships have some characteristics of a communal relationship and some characteristics of an associative one as well (*Vergesellschaftung*) (p. 22). In order to take this into account, Weber's term should be brought closer to the colloquial term and thus closer to practice.

² In the following, I shall use the shorthand Vineyard.

³ Here the discussion will not be limited to the Vineyard in Switzerland.

Wind and Lewis revived congregational studies in 1994. These authors define a congregation as 1) a group of people who 2) gather regularly 3) to worship 4) at a particular place (Wind & Lewis 1994, pp. 1–3).⁴ A number of research approaches have been formulated on the basis of this definition. Representatives of these approaches see the congregation as the core of religious life (Monnot 2010, p. 21; Warner 1994). By concentrating on the local community, congregational studies deal with questions about its structure and activities concerning, for example, rituals, leadership, finances, or conflicts (see Ammerman 1997; Chaves 1999, 2004; Monnot 2010; Reimer & Wilkinson 2015; Stolz et. al. 2011).⁵ Various authors agree that the primary purpose of a congregation is worship (Ammerman 2005; Holifield 1994; Warner 1994; Wind & Lewis 1994). According to Chaves (2004, p. 8), the production and reproduction of religious meaning takes place within the congregation.⁶ In this context, the inclusion of media is also discussed regarding, for example, the ways in which different kinds of music or visual projections are integrated into the worship (Ammerman 2005; Chaves 2004; Monnot 2010; Stolz et. al. 2011).

However, this concentration on the local community (congregation) excludes various other forms of communalization, including irregular assemblies such as events or seminars and gatherings that are not centered on a particular place, such as certain Bible studies (Monnot 2010, p. 78–81).⁷ Also excluded are, per definition, media-based forms of communalization. Even Chaves (2004), one of the most prominent scholars in this field, admits that it is very difficult to look at congregations as coherent and autonomous organizations. In fact, many of their activities take place in small groups involving only a part of the congregations' members (pp. 203–207), while other may have a larger scope that goes beyond the local community (pp. 207–211). Therefore, Chaves states, “the religious community in which individuals live, work, and worship together seems something more than a congregation” (p. 2). However, Chaves do not indicate what this “more” is, and it is therefore our task to find out. The second theoretical approach mentioned above could be useful in answering this question.

⁴ This definition has been further developed by various scholars. The definition used by Chaves (2004, pp. 1–2) is well known and widespread: “By ‘congregation’ I mean a social institution in which individuals who are not all religious specialists gather in physical proximity to one another, frequently and at regularly scheduled intervals, for activities and events with explicitly religious content and purpose, and in which there is continuity over time in the individuals who gather, the location of the gathering and the nature of the activities and events at each gathering.”

⁵ The studies focus mainly on the American religious landscape. With the publication of the *National Congregations Study Switzerland* (NCSS) data (Monnot 2010; Stolz et. al. 2011), there are now also studies on Switzerland. These are not only important for theory, but also for the empirical data they present.

⁶ The emphasis on ‘worship’ can probably be traced back to the fact that it distinguishes the religious community from other communities.

⁷ Some studies try to consider this by looking at collaboration with other organizations or the environment of a congregation (Ammerman 1997), traditions (Ammerman 2005; Chaves 2004), or the local context (Reimer & Wilkinson 2015). However, the focus remains on the congregation.

2.2. Posttraditional community

The posttraditional community approach⁸ is predicated on the assumption that we live in a postmodern society.⁹ Its proponents consider the process of individualization to be the main characteristic. However, they presuppose an individualization process that does not lead to the isolation of the individual, but to new forms of communities, which they call posttraditional communities (Gebhardt 2000, p. 28; Hitzler 1998, p. 82; Hitzler 2015, p. 252; Hitzler & Pfadenhauer 2009, p. 376). Against this backdrop, the focus of their research lies on forms of communalization that are based on individual decisions that may be temporary and do not include an obligation to belong (Hitzler 1998, p. 82; Hitzler et al. 2008, p. 10). Consequently, some authors include music or youth scenes, markets, and events.

But to what extent can one's belonging to a community be understood as something that is not obligatory and is a purely individual decision? I contend that the concept of community (especially religious ones) implies at least some binding aspects. Norms and values are not generated by individuals alone, but are developed within a group and thus engender a number of mutual expectations among its members.¹⁰ According to Weber, an important part of community action (*Gemeinschaftshandeln*) is, in particular, its meaningful orientation toward expectations (Weber 1988a, p. 441).¹¹ Following this insight, it can be concluded that the subjective feeling of belonging includes a subjective feeling of commitment.

The scholars working within the posttraditional community approach emphasize that these forms of community are also characterized by shared values and boundaries that indicate the 'not-us' (Hitzler et al. 2008, p. 10). However, can these characteristics be found at, for example, an event? Indeed, an evangelical event would meet these criteria (while a rock concert or a carnival would not). Nevertheless, this can probably be traced back to the fact that participants in an evangelical event already belong to an evangelical church, and not to the event itself. This fact is also evident in investigations by representatives of the approach itself. For example, an empirical examination of the Catholic World Youth Days 2005 shows that church members traveled there together, spent their time in the group and traveled back together. Communalization forms beyond one's own group remained limited (Kirchner 2013, p. 221). In this way, such an event appears to be an intensification of an existing sense of belonging or an expansion of the community. A

⁸ This approach is especially common in the German-language scholarship.

⁹ Although the same characteristics are referred to, the nature of 'modernity' shows a certain inconsistency among the various authors. For example, Hitzler (1998) uses the term 'postmodern society', Gebhardt (2000) speaks of a 'late modernity', and Hitzler et al. (2008) of an 'other modernity'.

¹⁰ Here it is also important to ask what role media play in the development and dissemination of such values and norms.

¹¹ In this respect, this also applies to religion, since Weber (1980, p. 245) defines religion as "a certain kind of community action".

posttraditional community is therefore simply a form of communalization, but hardly an independent community.¹² Nevertheless, or even because of this, I consider the inclusion of this approach to be useful. These forms of community, characterized as they are by a lower degree of organization, serve as a complement to the type of community explored in congregational studies.

Highlighting the importance of the individual seems appropriate, particularly in the evangelical field where there is a strong emphasis on a personal relationship with God, which is considered one of the main characteristics of Evangelicalism (Bebbington 1989; Hunter 1987; Willaime 2001). Evangelicals maintain that personal belief is what matters, but that the way in which it is lived out can be diverse, and that individuals should therefore pick whatever works best for them (Stolz & Huber 2016). However, this agreement in the emphasis on the individual implies the same criticism. Here, too, the extent to which responsibility ultimately lies with the individual is questionable.¹³ Furthermore, within the posttraditional communities approach, the connection between media and communalization has already been considered from a theoretical perspective and empirically analyzed. Deterding (2008) examines ‘virtual communities’ as a dynamic field of different forms of communalization. He suspects that the contrast between online and offline is gradually dissolving (p. 129). Regarding ‘mediatization’, the influence of media on religion was also taken into account. In this way, the question of the extent to which media can be a producer of religious events and experiences has been addressed (see Hepp & Krönert 2003, 2007).

In summary: combining the two approaches is particularly useful for the study of the role of media in communalization. Congregational studies offer a strong community concept, but this fails to allow enough scope to include media. The posttraditional communities approach, on the other hand, is open to various forms of media-based communalization, albeit at the expense of the concept of community.

3 Data and Methods

My data stem from the SNSF project “The Dynamics of Media Use and Forms of Religious Communalization”,¹⁴ which was carried out from 2014 to 2018 at the University of Fribourg. The study used a mixed-methods survey. The quantitative data were collected in the summer of 2016.

¹² Even Hitzler (1998, p. 84) is of the opinion that it is uncertain whether such forms of communalization will ever become communities.

¹³ In section 6.4 we will see that social relations are essential here. For the paradox of community and individual relationships to God, see also Walthert 2010.

¹⁴ *Die Dynamik von Mediennutzung und den Formen religiöser Vergemeinschaftung.*

Together with a team of students,¹⁵ my colleagues and I filled out 164 questionnaires¹⁶ with members of the Vineyard¹⁷ through face-to-face PAPIs (Paper-And-Pencil Interviews) before and after the celebrations (the regular Sunday worship) (Diekmann 2014, pp. 439, 512f.). This survey is representative of the members of the Vineyard in Switzerland. The data were analyzed with SPSS 24.

In addition, we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with members of the Vineyard, five of whom held leadership positions. This method has a couple of advantages: first, adherence to a structure ensures a degree of comparability; second, the freedom that is built into semi-structured interviews allowed us to be open and able to react to what our interlocutors said (Mayring 2002, pp. 66f.). Over the course of 60 to 90 minutes, the conversation partners told us how they grew up and came to the community and, in greater detail, which media they use for their religious life and how important these media are in the community. The interviews were transcribed and imported into the *Atlas.ti* program. The evaluation was then carried out according to the coding approach of ‘grounded theory’ (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Furthermore, we asked five Vineyard members to fill out a media diary for one week. Filling out the form on a daily basis meant that participants could more easily and accurately recall their media usage in detail (Möhring & Schlütz 2002, p. 575). As participating observers, we attended various activities of the Vineyard: celebrations, small groups, and events. This enabled us to see which media are used and how. The different methods generated different types of data, and the combination of these different types of data provides us with deep insights into the role of media in communalization.

4 The Case Study: The Vineyard in Switzerland

4.1. History

The Vineyard originated in the 1970s in California as one of the renewal movements of the so-called third wave of the charismatic Christian tradition (Bialecki 2015, p. 179). Following the long-

¹⁵ For the students, the interviews were part of a course (*Forschungsatelier: Mediennutzung von Religionsgemeinschaften*) in which they learned interview techniques and were introduced to the topic of religion, media and communalization.

¹⁶ The development of the questionnaire was essentially based on the information obtained from the qualitative interviews.

¹⁷ In addition, 183 interviews were conducted with the comparison group, Jehovah's Witnesses. Altogether, we have data from 347 persons.

standing leadership of John Wimber (1934–1997), a converted jazz musician, the Vineyard developed a distinct identity. From the beginning, music was the main medium of the group – besides, of course, the Bible. In the year 1990 the Vineyard founded its own music label, Vineyard Music, which, by its own account, at its peak had a market share of 85% of the worship music segment (Watling 2008, p. 88). The Vineyard became internationally known through the charismatic event known as the ‘Toronto blessing’. From 1994 to 1995, in the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (then known as the Toronto Airport Vineyard), phenomena such as speaking in tongues, uncontrolled shaking, and palsies occurred, which the participants interpreted as manifestations of the Holy Spirit (Poloma 1997; Römer 2002). In 1994, a local charismatic church in Switzerland, the Basilea Bern, was the first in the German-speaking area to join the Vineyard movement. From there, the Vineyard expanded to other parts of Switzerland and to the neighboring countries, and in 1999 the umbrella organization for Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, Vineyard D.A.CH., was founded (Watling 2008, pp. 114–132).¹⁸ Today there are some 69 Vineyard churches in the German-speaking area.¹⁹

4.2. The Vineyard’s media profile

4.2.1. Media production

Media production of the Vineyard churches is mainly local. Normally, it is undertaken by small groups or private individuals. It is fair to say that music remains Vineyard’s predominant medium,²⁰ a fact that is also true for the level of production. Most local communities have at least one band that compose new songs and produces CDs.²¹ Almost every local Vineyard community has its own website, where it provides information about its activities and leadership as well as about the history and core values of the Vineyard. The websites also serve as media platforms: one can listen to podcasts, view photos and videos, and order books, magazines, workbooks and CDs. Many Vineyard communities also release their own magazines or newsletters. Some communities even run their own social media sites, generally on Facebook.²²

¹⁸ Freudenberg (2018) provides a good overview of the Vineyard in the German-speaking area.

¹⁹ See <http://www.vineyard-dach.net/vineyards/ueberblick/dach-liste.html> (accessed August 2018).

²⁰ In referring to music as the ‘predominant medium’, I want to emphasize the great importance that music has for the Vineyard in all areas: history, the production of the collective, and individual media use. Below I use the data collected to demonstrate the importance of music in individual media use.

²¹ The CDs are sold on Vineyard websites. Vineyard songs (even from Swiss bands) are also available on popular platforms like iTunes, Spotify and YouTube.

²² For example, the Vineyard Bern, with over 1500 ‘likes’ (<https://de-de.facebook.com/vineyardbern/>).

The Vineyard produces almost no media beyond these local and individual activities.²³ For the German-speaking area, there is currently just one website for the umbrella organization, Vineyard D.A.CH.²⁴ The site gives an overview of the different Vineyard communities in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It also provides information about upcoming events and offers services for the communities. In the media section of the website, podcasts and statements by the leadership are available. Moreover, there is a shop where one can buy books, music and issues of the magazine *Equipped*. This magazine was published by Vineyard D.A.CH. from 2001 to 2014. The decision to discontinue the magazine can be explained by the advent of electronic media – all of the information and content that was formerly included in the magazine is now communicated through the website.²⁵ Another possible explanation is the decline of ‘Vineyard identity’ as a movement and the related decline in importance of the umbrella organization in the domain of media.²⁶ The Vineyard movement in the German-speaking area nevertheless strives to present a unified image, as is evident from the similar designs of the various websites and the use of the Vineyard logo. The umbrella organization even encourages local communities to make use of the corporate design.²⁷ In the end, decisions regarding self-presentation lie with the individual churches.

4.2.2. Collective media use

Within the Vineyard, different forms of collective media use take place and play an important role in celebrations. The opening and closing of events are marked by music: a band plays while participants sing, dance and raise their hands toward the ceiling. In the celebrations that I attended, there was a screen above the stage where song lyrics,²⁸ quoted Bible verses and important points of the preaching were displayed. The screen affects the participants’ individual media use in a number of ways. Most importantly, participants do not have to bring songbooks or even Bibles with them. In addition, in the building there are stands where people can buy books, CDs, and more. In interviews, respondents also mentioned collective forms of media use that take place outside celebrations. People read relevant books together (including, of course, the Bible) and discuss them in small groups. In such small groups, people also use other media, sometimes making short films or recording music.

²³ Although media are produced internationally (for example in the U.S.), they were never mentioned in the interviews and do not seem to affect the members of Vineyard in Switzerland.

²⁴ <http://www.vineyard-dach.net/>

²⁵ The editorial in the final issue explains that it is time to break new ground.

²⁶ In my opinion, this is essentially due to the Evangelical milieu in Switzerland (see section 5) and the importance of social relationships (see section 6.4).

²⁷ To this end, the Vineyard even operates a dedicated website, <http://www.vinboxx.net>, with resources for branding and promoting a corporate identity.

²⁸ For English-language songs the German translation was also displayed.

4.2.3. Individual media use

At the individual level, music appears to be second only to the Bible as the most important and most frequently used form of media. In our sample, 73% of the members surveyed stated that they listen to worship music at least several times a week, not including during the celebrations, with 35% indicating that they listen daily. Only 3% said that they never listen to worship music in their spare time.

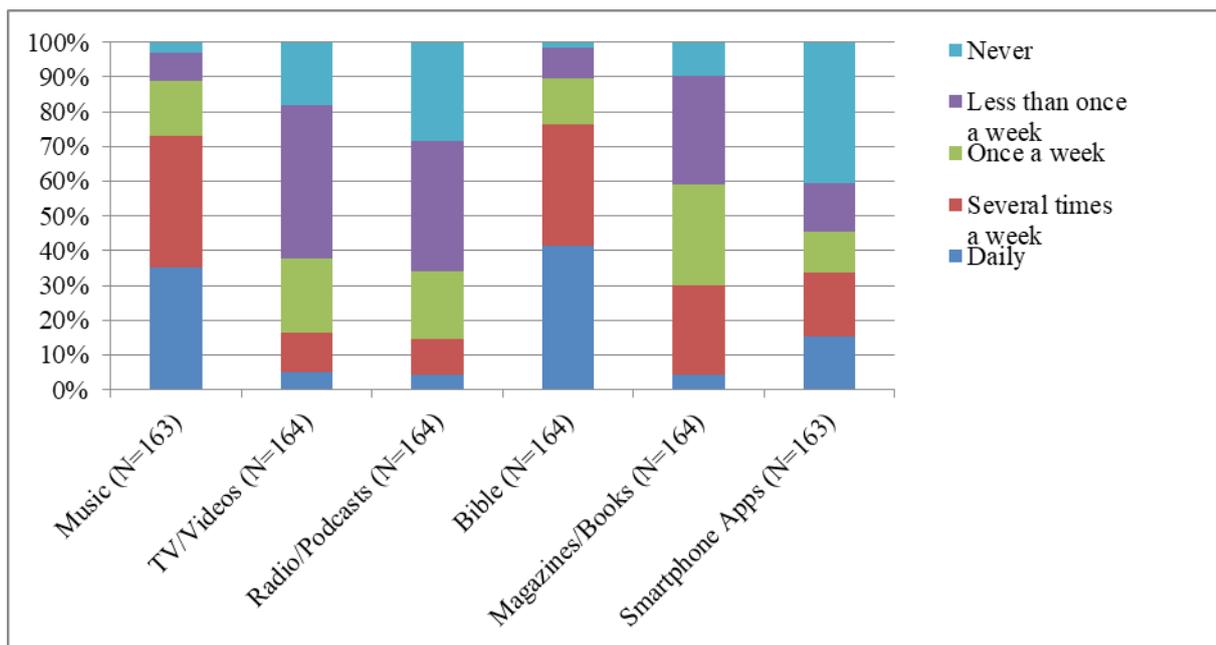


Figure 1: Individual Religious Media Use

When it comes to expressing and practicing their faith through media, Vineyard members read magazines and books, watch TV shows, listen to radio, and use several Smartphone apps. However, in comparison to music, these other forms of media were used far less often for faith-related purposes (see fig. 1).²⁹

Striking, however, is the fact that the Vineyard’s own media are very seldom used. In our data, we find a first indicator of this in answers to the question, “How often do you visit a Vineyard website?” (see fig. 2). Not one person stated that they visit a Vineyard website every day. Just 9.8% of the people surveyed go to such a website several times a week, almost half go less than once a week, and 11% do not go at all.

²⁹ As already mentioned, except the Bible.

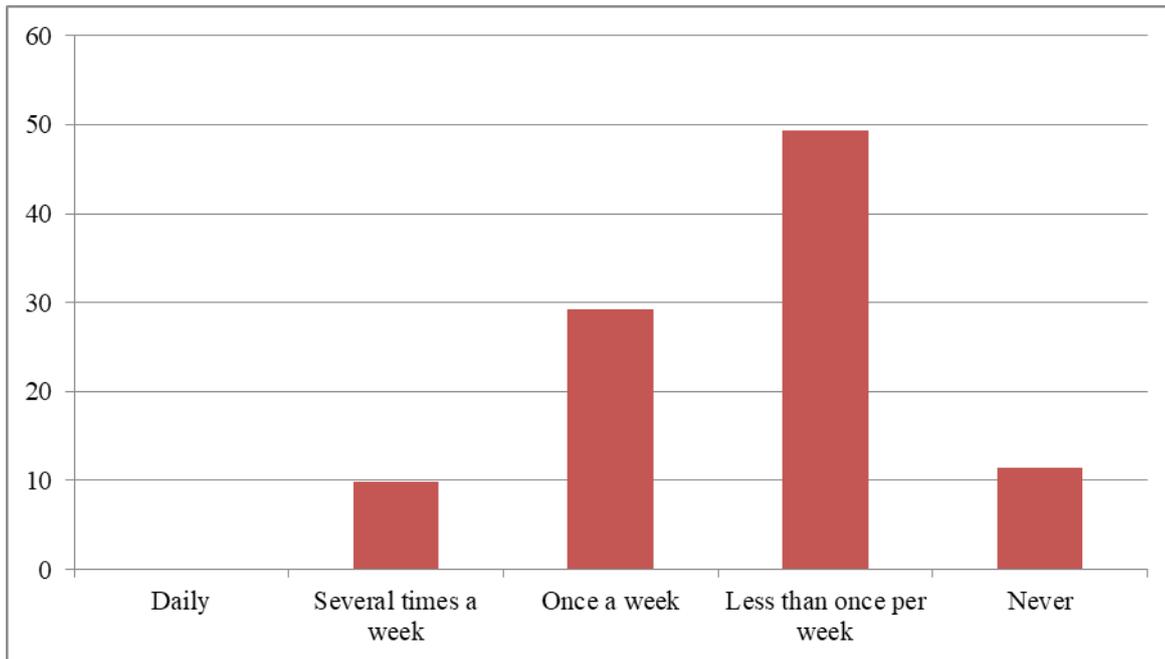


Figure 2: Use of a Vineyard Homepage (N=164)

In the semi-structured interviews it was pointed out that, while the members appreciate the fact that the Vineyard has its own website, they seldom use it.³⁰ Melanie, a 42-year-old member, expressed this sentiment as follows:

[I use] the homepage very rarely. If I need the address of somebody, for example, I go to the homepage. That happens very seldom. We do have a bulletin board [on the site] where you can give away stuff or ask for stuff, if someone needs a room or such stuff. Otherwise, [my use is] mega little. And Vineyard: if I see a book or a CD which seems exciting, then I get it, but not because it is from the Vineyard.

This indicates that even the rare use of the Vineyard's 'own website' does not necessarily serve a religious purpose, but rather an organizational one. More important is the fact that media are used because they appeal to the individual and not because they are from the Vineyard. Other interviewees also stressed this point. It does not really matter if a particular medium says Vineyard on it or not; that is not what the members are looking for.³¹

³⁰ This point is very interesting. Is the offer really appreciated, or does the expression of appreciation reflect an expected commitment that has to be communicated to the outside world (despite a real lack of interest)?

³¹ Only one exception was mentioned: when it comes to the history of the Vineyard or the local community, the fact that the media are produced by the Vineyard itself is considered an important factor guaranteeing the reliability of

As we have seen, the Vineyard's own media production is rather limited. Moreover, it appears to be virtually irrelevant for the members whether the media they consume come from the Vineyard. This combination leads to the fact that individual media use is, to a large extent, not covered by the Vineyard's own production. Therefore, to get an accurate picture of media use among Vineyard members, we have to expand our focus.

5 The Evangelical Milieu

The empirical results regarding media point to a factor that is also constitutive of communalization in general among the members of the Vineyard: the evangelical milieu. While there are a number of conceptions of 'milieu' in the social sciences, the definition put forward by Schulze provides common ground.³² According to Schulze, a milieu is a large group of individuals that exhibits the following components: 1) common structural characteristics; 2) common cultural characteristics; 3) a high volume of internal communication; and 4) explicit boundaries (Schulze 1990, 1992).

For Switzerland, the application of the concept to Evangelicals is well researched, and we have representative empirical data that demonstrates the milieu nature of Swiss Evangelicals, at both an individual and an organizational level (Favre 2006; Favre & Stolz 2009; Gachet 2013; Huber & Stolz 2017; Stolz 1999; Stolz & Favre 2005; Stolz et. al 2014a, 2014b; Stolz & Huber 2016).³³ According to these studies, Evangelicals are a cohesive group who share a common lifestyle and certain values that distinguish them from the rest of the society. The demarcation is strengthened by a high level of internal communication, which in turn results in a pronounced sense of togetherness. In the center of the milieu is an evangelical culture, which is characterized by its identification as Christian. Beyond the confirmation of the milieu character, the studies focus on different aspects of the community.³⁴ Media, to date, have not been one of the focuses. However,

the account.

³² An overview of the different approaches can be found in Matthiesen (1998). Particularly well known in the German-speaking areas are the SINUS milieus (e.g., Barth & Flaig 2013; Vester et. al. 2001). These are often used in market research, even by religious actors (e.g., Milieustudie zh.ref.ch 2011; Ebertz 2018). However, the SINUS milieus have been criticized for representing mentality groups rather than milieus (Rössel 2005, p. 119).

³³ Evangelicals were also examined outside Switzerland with regard to their milieu character. The first study was Riesebrodt (1990, 1995). Similar investigations using the term 'subculture' in place of 'milieu' can be found in Smith (1998) and Reimer (2003).

³⁴ The most comprehensive is Stolz et. al (2014a). It deals with the competitive strength of the milieu, values and norms, communities, and socialization, among other topics. Stolz & Favre (2009) investigate the question of the reproduction of the milieu. Gachet (2013) deals with leaving the milieu, and Stolz and Huber (2016) focus on Church changes within the milieu.

Huber and Stolz (2017, p. 278) raise the question of the possible significance of media for the milieu.

5.1. The Vineyard in the Evangelical milieu

I will argue that the evangelical milieu affects the Vineyard and its members on several levels. Based on the information we gained through the interviews, the embedding of members in the Vineyard and in other forms of communalization within the evangelical milieu can be described as follows.³⁵

At the center is the congregation – the local Vineyard community – where the celebrations take place. Within the local community we find various smaller groups (e.g., for young people, for parents, for women, etc.). The local community is in a loose association with other Vineyard communities and with other churches embedded within the evangelical milieu. The different churches (not only those from the Vineyard) exchange and work together on certain occasions, for instance, when organizing events. Furthermore, there are Bible study groups that extend beyond the borders of the individual churches. Finally, there are other suppliers of products and services within the evangelical milieu. Some of them are media outlets, for example the *SCM-Bundesverlag Schweiz* (a Christian publishing house that publishes magazines for various target groups, for example for families, men, and young people),³⁶ *ERF Medien/lifechannel.ch* (a Christian media company that is primarily engaged in television and radio),³⁷ and *livenet.ch*³⁸ (the largest web portal for and by Swiss Christians).³⁹ This means that the local Vineyard churches (or the umbrella organization) do not need to cover the whole media spectrum, nor is what they produce exclusively for their own members, but rather for the entire evangelical milieu.

The members of the Vineyard participate in different groups within the evangelical milieu. They attend the celebrations of the Vineyard as well as of other churches; go to training schools, healing classes, camps and more. In addition, the individuals have in the evangelical milieu a wide range of media available, which they can use in relation to their own beliefs. The media diaries also showed that the members use a variety of media in connection with their faith (magazines, films, music, etc.), but almost exclusively those from the evangelical milieu (that is, from the aforementioned media producers).

³⁵ Here a brief overview will suffice. Some aspects will be discussed in more detail in section 6.

³⁶ <https://bundes-verlag.net/ch/>

³⁷ [https://lifechannel.ch/de/ERF-Medien/Portrait?="](https://lifechannel.ch/de/ERF-Medien/Portrait?=)

³⁸ <https://www.livenet.ch/>

³⁹ In interviews, respondents indicated that they use media products from these companies. In addition, all three companies are members of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance (see: <http://www.each.ch/unser-miteinander/mitglieder/werke/>).

To sum up, it can be said that, within the evangelical milieu, the different media illustrate the diversity of forms of communalization, and both the various forms of communalization and the media themselves provide members with a sense of identification with being Christians and with their own local communities.

6 The Multilayered Community

Neither the concepts of community mentioned in the second section of this article nor the idea of milieu are capable of adequately capturing these various ways of belonging. They draw boundaries that are too narrow (in the case of congregational studies) or too wide (in the case of the milieu concept), or they assume that people do not commit themselves and only have a temporary sense of belonging as members of a community (as in the posttraditional community). Furthermore, they neglect the role of media. To take into account these various factors, I propose a new concept of community: the *multilayered community*. This concept integrates the approaches already mentioned and has the following characteristics: the multilayered community 1) is based on an individual perspective, 2) has an organized core, 3) includes various other forms of communalization, and 4) manifests itself in social relationships.

6.1. The individual perspective

The individual perspective serves as the methodological instrument that makes it possible to observe the differences and interrelations between the other levels of the community.⁴⁰ First, I follow an approach based on methodological individualism as laid out in Max Weber's action theory. This means that the analysis of macrosocial structures must be 'microfounded' (Schluchter 2003, p. 60). According to Weber's famous definition,⁴¹ sociology deals with understanding social actions and explaining their consequences. It is a matter of determining the subjectively intended reasons underlying the actions of actors. Weber calls such reasons the 'motive'. To recognize the motive requires a grasp of an entire complex of meaning (Weber 1980, pp. 4–5; 1988, pp. 429–431; see also Schluchter 2003, p. 56). Because individual persons are for us the only understandable carriers of meaningful, oriented action, we have to treat the individual and his or her actions as the

⁴⁰ Another reason is the data, especially the quantitative data, which focus on individual actions, as has been shown for the media-based forms of communication. On the content level, the emphasis on the individual person, as we have seen in the posttraditional community and within the evangelical field (see section 2), can be included.

⁴¹ "Sociology [...] is a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences" (Weber 1980, p. 1; cited in Swedberg 2005, p. 2).

most fundamental unit of analysis. A social entity (here, the community) therefore must be treated as solely the result and mode of organization of the particular acts of individual persons (Weber 1980, p. 6; 1988, p. 439).

In order to include media in the analysis, Weber's action theory can be supplemented by newer insights from the sociology of knowledge, which invite us to extend the concept of everyday life to media experiences (Ayaß 2010, pp. 293–297; Keppler 2010, p. 107; Krüger 2012, pp. 136–140).⁴² While Weber's concept of community implies the co-presence of the actors, these approaches emphasize the possibility of creating meaning beyond face-to-face communication (Knoblauch 2008, p. 81; 2017, pp. 306–312).⁴³ With this extension of the theory of action, it is possible to analyze media-based forms of communalization and ask how media can contribute to the construction of meaning and to what extent they contribute to one's identification with the community.

Finally, the focus on the individual highlights the different ways of belonging. Following Simmel's idea of "the intersection of social circles" (*Kreuzung sozialer Kreise*) (Simmel 2013, pp. 456–511), we could develop an agent-based social network model and analyze how a person is embedded in different groups. However, in contrast to Simmel's social circles, it is not the aim here to consider all groups, but just the ones that are important for a person's religious life (the congregation, the Bible study group, events, WhatsApp groups, and so on). They all stand on common ground: being Christian is their central identity, and they encourage this identity.⁴⁴ The multiple group affiliations and various intensities of identification with these can vary from person to person. Therefore, it is important to start from the individual. This in turn leads back to action theory. Weber states that the real actions of individuals can be oriented to different points of reference (Weber 1988, p. 445). Again, questions can then be asked regarding the extent to which media are important for the individual's orientation to a reference point, or can even be a reference point in and of themselves.

⁴² Krüger (2012, p. 159) points also to the resulting problems with regard to the concept of religion.

⁴³ Of course, the relationship between action and communication is at stake here. While Tyrell (1998) sees the two terms as opposites, Knoblauch (1998) connects the two in communicative action. I follow Knoblauch here.

⁴⁴ They therefore should not be in conflict with each other, which would lead to divided loyalties and struggles (Simmel 2013, p. 468).

6.2. Organized core

I concur with congregational studies in understanding the local community as forming the core of a religious community.⁴⁵ For this, we have empirical evidence: almost 90% of the people surveyed attend a Vineyard celebration almost every week, and some even more often (see fig. 3).⁴⁶

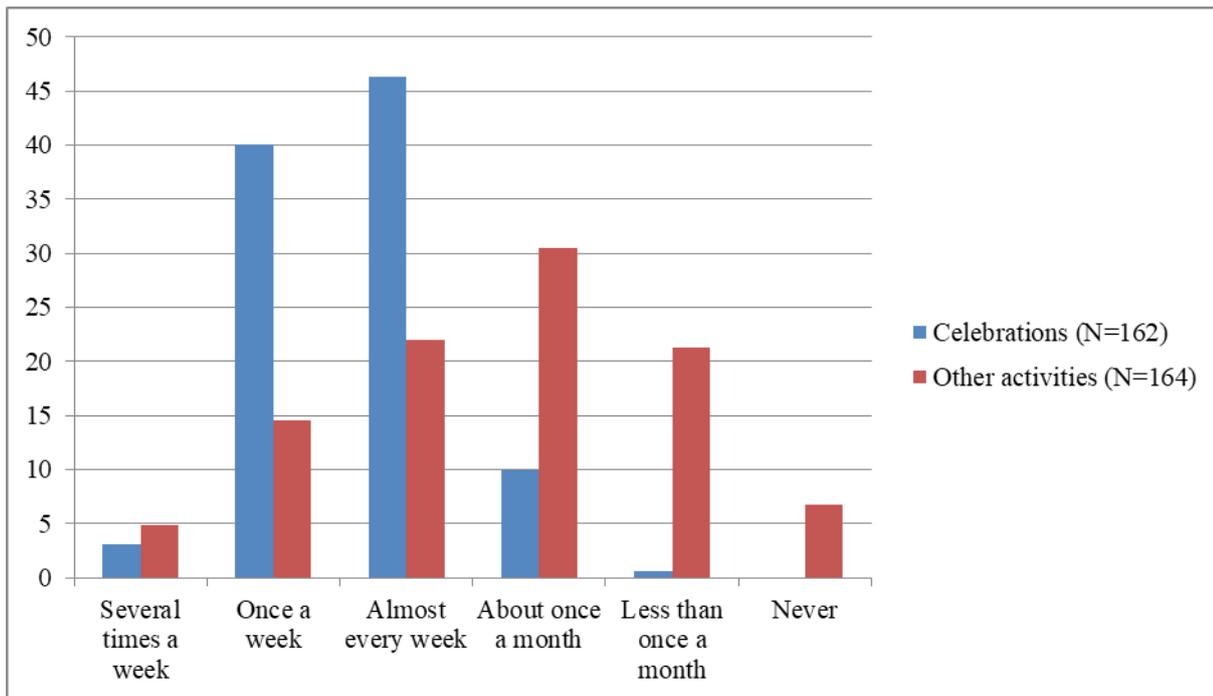


Figure 3: *Activities Within the Vineyard*

Small group meetings and other activities offered by the Vineyard are also regularly attended. The most frequent answer to this question was approximately once a month, which corresponds to the scheduled activities, offered at most of the Vineyard churches. Therefore, we can state that a large part of religious life takes place in one's own local community. Although the media produced here play only a marginal role, media are in general important for the core. They are an essential part of the celebration and the activities in the small groups, as stated above. Furthermore,

⁴⁵ One could argue this is due to the methodological approach. Since we have reached the members through the congregations, it is obvious that they also form the core. Two people, however, mentioned that they only come to the *Vineyard* from time to time and that their core community is a different one. It is also possible to think of an online community forming the core. But so far, findings indicate that online communities must be seen more as complementary to offline activities than as independent from them (Krüger 2012, p. 430). See Neumaier in this special issue.

⁴⁶ It should be noted here that some Vineyard churches do not meet every week to celebrate.

communication media are extremely important in strengthening this core. These maintain social relationships and serve the organization (I will discuss this below in section 6.3.1).

6.3. Other forms of communalization

6.3.1. *Activities outside the core*

Around this core we find various other forms of communalization. One is attendance at activities provided by other churches. Compared to the core community activities, attendance at these activities is sporadic. More than half of the people surveyed said they attended activities at another church less than once a month. However, 13% said they attended one activity almost every week or even more often, while only 11% never attended another church's activity at all. If we examine more closely which other churches serve as alternative places of worship, we find the following results.⁴⁷ Some of the interviewees (26.3%) did not specify and simply responded, "different or multiple churches". Almost 40% attend activities at other evangelical churches (24% at charismatic churches and 16% at moderate evangelical churches).⁴⁸ Almost a fifth of participants said that they attend services at the 'national churches'.⁴⁹ Favre (2006, p. 268) also noted an enduring affiliation to the national church. In his study, a striking 58.3% of the Vineyard members in Switzerland declare such a dual affiliation.⁵⁰ In a way, this is astonishing, as the national churches themselves are not part of the evangelical milieu. However, this distinction appears limited to the organizational level. On an individual level, it is possible for a single person to be both part of the evangelical milieu and part of a national church. In her study of Evangelicals within Reformed parishes, Gachet (2014, p. 297) concludes that this type of belonging contributes to the vitality and spread of the milieu beyond its own borders.

We gained further information on other forms of communalization from the qualitative interviews. Our interviewees talked about a diversity of different communalization forms outside the Vineyard. They attend small group meetings, camps, training schools, and other kinds of events.

⁴⁷ We asked which churches they visit; multiple answers were possible to this question.

⁴⁸ According to Stolz & Favre (2005, p. 171), in Switzerland one may distinguish three main branches in evangelicalism: 1) charismatic and Pentecostal Evangelicals; 2) moderate Evangelicals; and 3) fundamentalist Evangelicals. See also Favre 2006, pp. 105–106.

⁴⁹ It can be assumed that the interviewees are referring primarily to the Reformed Church (the predominant form of Protestantism in Switzerland, in the spirit of the Zwinglian and Calvinist Reformation) when they speak of the national Church. However, it is also possible that a minority attend services of the Catholic Church (see footnote 51). Five people (3%) even explicitly mentioned visiting a Roman Catholic church.

⁵⁰ Favre gives no information on how the members of the Vineyard are distributed among the national churches. For the Evangelicals as a whole, he states that 29.9% have dual affiliation. Of these, 93.8% are in a Reformed church and 6.2% in a Roman Catholic church. Furthermore, it should be noted that Favre's population is the Evangelicals. Of the 1111 respondents, 14 called themselves members of Vineyard (Favre 2006, p. 305). In this respect, eight people in our study claimed to have dual affiliation.

In summary, while some people are very active outside the core community, others take advantage of the activities offered by other communities only as a supplement. Nevertheless, only a minority of those surveyed take no part in activities outside the local community.

6.3.2. Media-based forms of communalization

There are different kinds of media-based forms of communalization that are important to the community because they provide information or offer a platform for discussion and exchange of ideas.⁵¹ These include, for example, online communities, Internet forums, social media and WhatsApp groups. In our data, we have two questions dealing with media-based communalization in terms of communication between members. One involves how often they use social media to contact other members, and the other is about the use of text messaging applications such as WhatsApp (See fig. 4).

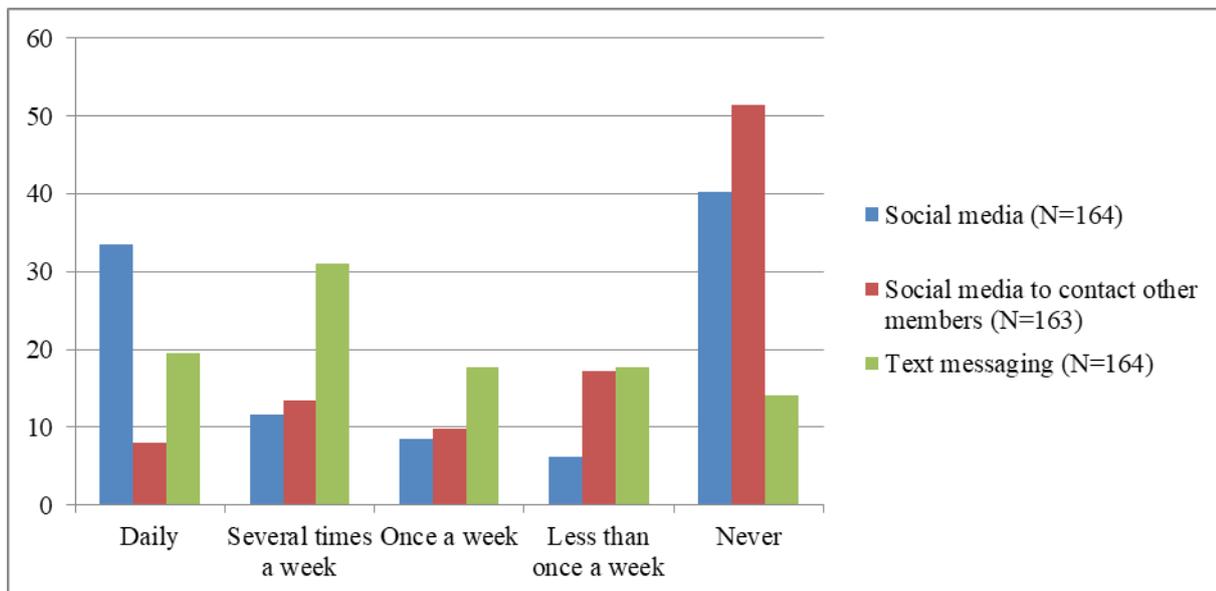


Figure 4: Media-based Communication Between Members

Generally, social media are not very popular among Vineyard members. Of the people surveyed, 40% do not use social media platforms at all, while 51% do not use them to get in contact with other members. Another 45% stated that they use social media several times a week or even daily, 21% to communicate with other members. Text messaging is the most popular way of

⁵¹ One might also wonder to what extent exchanges about media (discussions, recommendations) can be regarded as media-based communalization, but I will not address this here.

communicating within the group:⁵² 19% text daily with other members and 31% text several times a week. Only 14% said they never text with other members of the Vineyard.

Table 1: Regression Models: Influences on Text Messaging with other Members

Independent variables	Age	General media use	Religious media use	Communalization	Complete model
Age	- 0.022**				- 0.013
Playing games		- 0.153*			- 0.176*
Using the Internet to communicate		0.381**			0.225
Using social media		- 0.178*			- 0.116
Using social media to get in contact with other members		0.193***			0.410***
Visiting a Vineyard website			0.517***		0.370**
Listening to religious music			0.284**		0.237*
Using religious apps			0.140*		0.051
Partner in the Vineyard				- 0.104	0.057
Friends in the Vineyard				- 0.164	- 0.178
Participate in other activities of the Vineyard				0.241**	0.236**
Corrected R ²	0.052	0.254	0.163	0.056	0.459
Included variables	1	9	12	5	28
N	163	161	161	162	154

Regression coefficient significant to the *<0.05, **<0.01 and ***<0.001 level

For reasons of clarity, only variables that show a significant value in at least one model or those discussed in the text were included in this table. Not included in the table are the following variables: 1) general media use: watching television, reading newspapers, using the Internet for information, using the Internet for entertainment; 2) specific religious media use: using the Internet for religious information, using the Internet for information about religious activities, using the Internet to comment on religious topics, visiting another religious website, watching religious videos, listening to religious radio programs or podcasts, reading the Bible, reading religious magazines or books, reading or distributing flyers; 3) communalization: participating in a celebration, participating in activities from another church; 4) complete model: in addition to the aforementioned: gender.

⁵² Nowadays, text messages are not only used for communication between two individuals, but are often used in groups (e.g., WhatsApp groups).

A first expectation is that text messages are especially popular among young people, the so-called ‘digital natives’. This assumption was also supported by our qualitative interviews, during which we heard several times statements along the following lines: “Well, I don’t use Facebook or WhatsApp, but the young people do.” This hypothesis was tested with linear regression models (see tab. 1). At first sight, in a univariate model (here model ‘Age’) there is a significant effect of age on the use of text messages for communicating with other members. However, this model only explains 5.2% of the variance.

Moreover, the complete model shows no significant effect of age. Furthermore, it could also be expected that electronic communication within the community would be strongly influenced if a member’s partner or best friends were also in the Vineyard, but the regression models (both the ‘communalization’ model and the complete model) show no significant effect in this regard.

There may be two reasons for this. First, it could simply be assumed that there is not enough electronic communication in these cases to have any influence. More likely, however, is that the question was interpreted to refer to communication with persons as Vineyard members, in which case everyday communication with friends or one’s partner would not have been taken into account. This would mean that respondents assumed that we were only interested in text messages that were directly connected to the Vineyard. Other factors do have a strong impact. In the other models, which analyzed effects of general media use, the specific religious media use, and the participation rate, there were several significant influences on text messaging. In the complete model, the strongest and only highly significant influence on text messaging is the frequency of using “social media to get in contact with other members”. These two items cover the same dimension in the sense of using electronic devices to communicate.⁵³ Here, we can only state that there are people who tend to communicate more in electronic ways than other people. Other items indicate that these persons also seem to be more integrated and active in the local community. The model shows significant effects for the use of a Vineyard website, listening to music, and the participation rate in Vineyard activities besides celebrations. Generally speaking, persons who visit a Vineyard website more often, listen more to worship music and participate more in activities with the group are also more likely to communicate electronically with other members. In the end, it seems that the media use reflects the commitment to the organized core of the community. The qualitative interviews provide further details showing how text messaging is used. Many interviewees reported being in a WhatsApp chat group. Most of them were in the context of a small group to which they belong.⁵⁴ The electronic communication therefore is often for organizational purposes, such as arranging

⁵³ In certain cases (e.g. WhatsApp) the respondents may not have made this distinction between social media and text messaging.

⁵⁴ Several people told us they used to have a Facebook group, but switched to WhatsApp because it is more convenient.

when and where they will meet next time. Other groups are more concerned with the beliefs of the individuals and are about exchange of ideas and prayer requests. An extraordinary example of the different uses of WhatsApp chat groups is offered by Viviane, a 22-year-old member. She is in one chat with the youth group, another with the leadership team, and another with the band of her congregation. These chats mostly concern organizational issues. However, she also said:

I've started an encouragement chat group. There are a few people from the Vineyard. They just get a Bible verse every day. Well, not every day, maybe every other day or every three days. Everybody does a bit when they have something. [...] I think we as Christians have a responsibility for one another, to encourage us in everyday life. Actually, to be nourished with good stuff and nice Bible verses. And often it's just beautiful; somebody writes, "That fits just perfect." Or well, also when God speaks through it, because God speaks that way.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data show a close link between the commitment to (the organized core) of the community and media-based forms of communalization. The more active a person is (for example in a leadership team or in activities for families, children or counseling), the more active he or she is in media. 'Normal members' seem to have less of that need for media.⁵⁵ In conclusion, it can be stated that there is a close interaction between media-based forms of communalization and participation in activities, especially for the organized core.

6.4. Social relationships

Social relationships are an important aspect of a community, and detecting them is essential for understanding and describing a community. Our data show how social relationships matter. We get a first impression of the importance of relationships when we look at how homogeneous the friendships are. Responses to the question, "How many of your three best friends are also in the Vineyard?" show that, on average, 1.27 of members' three best friends are also in the Vineyard. When we asked, "How many of your three best friends are committed Christians?" the average increased to 2.66. We can see that while fewer than half (42%) of the three best friends are in the Vineyard, almost all (89%) of their close friends are committed Christians.⁵⁶ So while only a small proportion of friendships are within the Vineyard, most of them are within the evangelical milieu. The question about partners generated similar results, with 68.9% of respondents saying that they

⁵⁵ It is difficult to speak of 'normal members'. From the very beginning, visitors are encouraged not only to take part in the celebrations, but also to get involved.

⁵⁶ This is particularly astonishing when we consider that the evangelicals in Switzerland account for only about 2.5% of the population (Stolz et.al 2014a, p. 35). This is a strong indicator that friendships are consciously made within the milieu.

have a partner, 61.6% within the Vineyard and 7.3% outside. Of those who have a partner outside, 91.7% said that the partner is also a committed Christian. Only one person has a partner who is not a committed Christian. Regarding partnerships, the connection to the Vineyard is slightly stronger and the boundary of the milieu is even more clearly demarcated. In other words, just looking at the local community is not enough; the border is largely the same as that of the milieu.

Against a backdrop where concrete church belonging is of secondary importance (Stolz & Huber 2016),⁵⁷ social relationships are once again a decisive factor (see fig. 5). In response to the question, ‘Why did you choose to attend this local church?’,⁵⁸ 36.6% of those surveyed stated they came to the Vineyard because of friends. This is the most frequently mentioned reason followed by ‘Family’, with 25%. It can, therefore, be stated that most members joined a particular church because of their social relationships, which can be taken as an indication that the individual person is not so free in the choice.

Social relationships can also influence media use. In the interviews, people told us that they recommend media or borrow media from each other. Moreover, during conversations reference is made to media (see Keppler 2010, p. 119). Through friendships, different media and their interpretations can circulate within the milieu in this way.⁵⁹

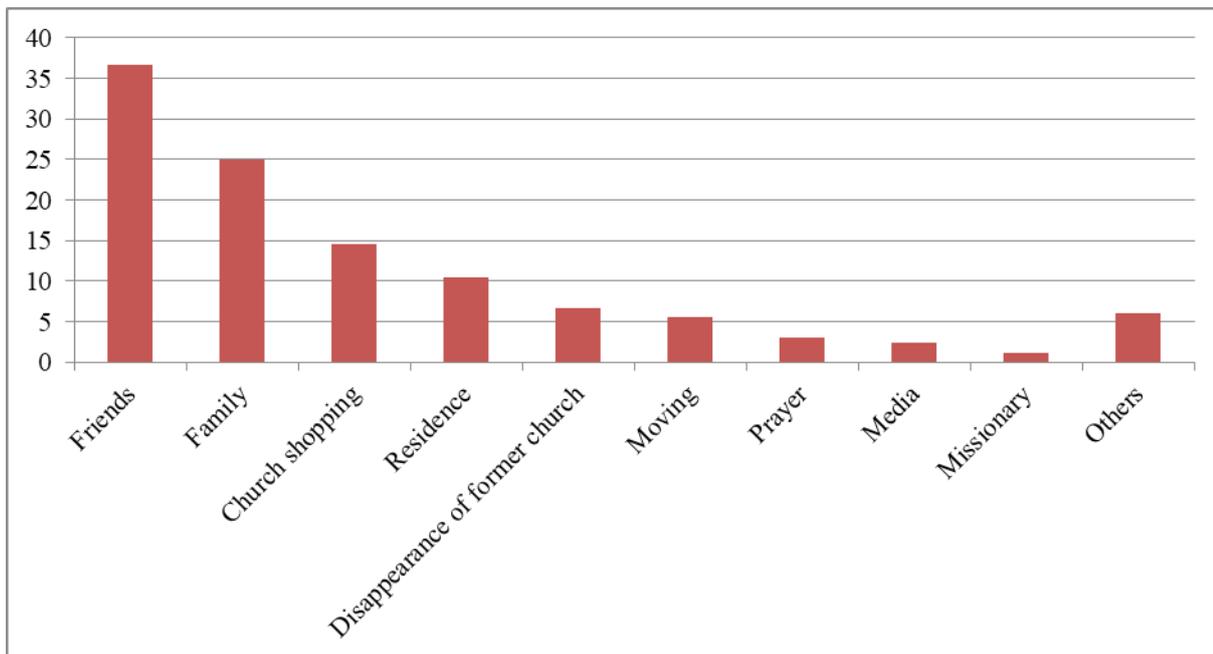


Figure 5: Reasons for Choosing this Church (N=164)

⁵⁷ See also section 2.

⁵⁸ Multiple answers were possible.

⁵⁹ As already mentioned in footnote 50, in the broadest sense, this can be understood as media-based communalization.

Social relationships also have an effect at the institutional level, for example regarding the cooperation between different churches and/or other institutional actors. Usually there is cooperation at the regional level with another church when it comes to organizing, for example, a week of prayer or the distribution of flyers. Social relationships are also important at larger events. The Pentecost Conference 2017 of the Vineyard Bern is a good example of this. Of the 31 partners involved in the conference, only five were other Vineyard churches.⁶⁰ Some partners were other churches. Interestingly, the Freie Christengemeinde Aarau was involved, but the Vineyard Aarau was not. The leader of the Freie Christengemeinde introduced himself as a ‘good friend’ of the leader of the Vineyard Bern. This suggests that social relationships can be even more important than formal associations such as those that exist within the Vineyard. Another interesting fact about this conference is that media institutions were also partners. For example, *livenet.ch*, an online portal from and for Swiss Christians, was involved, as was *fisherman.fm*, a Roman Catholic radio and media platform for young Christians.⁶¹

The consideration of social relationships thus makes it possible to gain various insights into how a community is constituted. It is important not only to look at the homogeneity of a group, but also to examine whether there are institutional or even interactive links between the members (Hradil 1992, p. 43). The analysis of social relationships shows how communities within the evangelical milieu manifest at an individual as well as at the organizational level.

7 Conclusion

In this contribution, I have used the case study of the Vineyard to illustrate the role of media in the process of religious communalization. As an initial outcome, it may be stated that the analysis of media is a suitable methodological instrument for an investigation into the structures of a community. The media reflect various forms of communalization and expand the focus both within and beyond the local community. A question arises regarding the status of media-based forms of communalization in comparison to other forms. I have pointed out how media play a major role in celebrations as well as in the religious lives of individual members. However, the independence of media-based communalizations is still under debate. They are an important part of the community, but their role is apparently rather complementary. In order to capture the various forms of communalization, including the media-based ones, I developed the concept of a *multilayered*

⁶⁰ <http://www.vineyard-konferenz.ch/infos/partner>

⁶¹ Another interesting fact concerning media is that the registration for the conference came with the offer of a free issue of a Christian magazine published by the *Stiftung Christlicher Medien* (Foundation of Christian Media), such as *MOVO*, *DRAN.NEXT* or *Family*.

community. This concept allows both the structural and individual aspects of a community to be connected. On the one hand, different forms of organization can be equally taken into account (the congregation as well as the Bible study groups, the events, and even online communities). On the other hand, this concept is able to take into account the flexibility and diversity of individuals as well as the importance of different types of social relationships – whether they are face-to-face or media-based. This enables us to build a comprehensive understanding of community and has the advantage of not reducing community to just one of these dimensions. Above all, this concept allows us to include media at various levels. The *multilayered community* not only addresses media for communalization, but also as communalization.

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