The story of the hashtag(#): A practical theological tracing of the hashtag(#) symbol on Twitter

Author:
Jan Albert van den Berg[1]

Affiliation:
Department of Practical Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State, South Africa

Correspondence to:
Jan Albert van den Berg

Email:
vdbergja@ufs.ac.za

Postal address:
PO Box 100985, Brandhof 9324, South Africa

The phenomenon relating to the popularity and impact of social media as an important expression of the new digital world, is already widely known and well-documented. In this research, the main focus will fall on a specific manner of expression associated with social media and, in particular, with the Twitter platform, namely the hashtag (#) symbol. This symbol has come to comprise an important expression in popular culture, and is generally associated with various dimensions of activities in the social media environment. Through the use of several examples from the recent past, the development and meaning of the hashtag will be explored and described. As part of this description, a motivation will be put forward as to why it is important, for the purposes of a practical theological involvement as expressed in the dimensions of a lived spirituality, to take cognisance of the hashtag and the world that is associated with it. Arising from this motivation, and in congruence with the strategic character of practical theology, perspectives will be mapped out with a view to the further use and meaning of a dynamic reading of the hashtag.
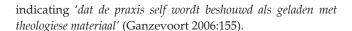
#Introduction

At the beginning of 2014, the destructive effect of the so-called #NekNominate challenge on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter caused a sensation (Finn 2014). By way of background information, the following explanation pertaining to this craze can be cited:

> Known as 'NekNomination', the game involves filming someone finishing a whole bottle of hard liquor in one sitting, and sharing the feat on social media with the hashtag #NekNominate challenging others to do the same. (Mintz 2014)

Initially, the #NekNominate challenge was merely aimed at daring people to consume as much alcohol as possible and to film the event, and then place it on the social media along with a challenge to others to do the same. However, after this challenge led to the tragic death of two persons in Ireland (*Daily Mail* 03 February 2014), a South African captured the world's imagination with his reformulation of the dare with a view to a positive outcome. Through the use of social media Bret Lindeque, after having received a similar dare from a friend via Facebook, transformed this destructive challenge by reformulating it in a positive manner.

Lindeque responded to the challenge by giving food to a poor man, filming this event, and posting the video clip on the social media platform, YouTube (News.Com.au 2014). In his introduction to the video clip on YouTube, viewed early March 2014 by approximately 192 000 people, Lindeque wrote: 'Downing a can of Castle Light is easy ... Imagine if we all harnessed the power of social media to make a real difference in people's lives' (Mintz 2014; *The Telegraph* 03 February 2014). After the placement of this video on YouTube and through the creation of the hashtag #ChangeOneThing (2014) on Twitter, the number of Lindeque's followers on the Twit*t*er platform not only increased dramatically, but an initially destructive challenge was imbued with new content through the use of the hashtag #ChangeOneThing. The important contribution of the hashtag as indicated in the previous example is facilitated through the functions of labelling a specific theme and aligning it with other posts seeking parallel voices (Zappavigna 2012:1).

The continually growing popularity and use of social media, along with its influence on numerous aspects of life, is illustrated in the previous example. These events illustrate how an apparently small act of an individual in a local context can acquire international significance through the use of social media. The act of taking cognisance of these events should, in itself, serve to emphasise the topicality and relevance thereof for a practical theological investigation. This orientation is embedded in the assumption that theology is part of everyday life (Vanhoozer 2007:7). Underlying this, Campbell-Reed and Scharen (2013:236) refer to this sensitivity and orientation in remembering Browning's initial claim for 'framing research within a "theological horizon" and acknowledging the normative claims present within situations to be described'. This orientation is even more explicitly described by the well-known Dutch practical theologian, Ganzevoort,

indicating '*dat de praxis self wordt beshouwd als geladen met theologiese materiaal*' (Ganzevoort 2006:155).

Engaging with expressions of popular culture – for example on the Twitter platform and even more specifically within domains created by the hashtag – is therefore in the expectation that it will reveal 'signals of the transcendent, the presence of grace, rumors of angels' (Vanhoozer 2007:33). It is in the actions and contours of the search for the story of the hashtag and its meaning, that some of the coordinates of a lived spirituality can be traced and mapped out as an expression of life in a digital world. With this envisaged description a contribution is made to the orientation and understanding that 'practice itself enacts and names theology' (Campbell-Reed & Scharen 2013:241), leading to the formulation of an ordinary theology articulating a 'faith and a spirituality, and incorporates beliefs and ways of believing' (Astley 2013 n.p.). In this mapping of expressions of faith in the digital world cognizance is given to the understanding that:

> [*F*]aith is something to be practised and not just believed; and [*that*] one of the tasks of practical theological research is to investigate and interpret the lived experience of people of faith. (Graham 2013:159)

Therefore, in the following paragraphs, by taking into account the documented example provided in the Introduction, illustrating the dynamics associated with the digital world, an exploratory investigation will be launched into the development and growth of social media, but with particular reference to the hashtag, as used on the Twitter platform. The article not only portrays my own search for the story of the hashtag and its meaning. In the documentation of the research, and as an expression of the creative character associated with the investigation, I will also make use of the hashtag as a structuring device in order to indicate the respective rubrics of the article. This indicative use of the hashtag in the development of the various rubrics will comprise an expression of the creation of new domains of knowledge. The domains of meaning will be filled in with the contents derived from the ongoing practical theological movement between practice and theory. These will be embodied as a so-called 'thick description of social situation' (Campbell-Reed & Scharen 2013:236) in various examples of the use of the hashtag on Twitter, accompanied by a theoretical reflection in order to arrive at the formulation of further theory with pragmatic and strategic implications for practice.

#Social media

The tracing of the hashtag is embedded against the background of the broader development of the Internet, which had officially been in use for 25 years by 2014 (Social Times 2013). The development of the Internet, or the so-called 'World Wide Web', arose from the initial proposal in 1989 of the British software programmer, Tim Berners-Lee, for a comprehensive technological information management system (Carr 2010:9), as expressed in his development of a

so-called 'hypertext transfer protocol' (Athique 2013:13). Hinton and Hjorth (2013) point out that:

> For Tim Berners-Lee – the inventor of the World Wide Web – hypertext was crucial in the designing of the web as part of a networked environment. Berners-Lee's contribution was to use hypertext to link texts that could be located on any computer on the internet. This meant that texts could be connected to other texts, forming a complex series of relationships that Berners-Lee visualised as a web-like structure, hence the name 'web'. (p. 10)

On 06 August 1991 Berners-Lee placed, for the first time, a publicly accessible link of the Internet project on the World Wide Web (Athique 2013:14; Crystal 2011:12; Dewdney & Ride 2006:208).

From the original development of the Internet within academic and research environments, it went on to obtain initial public exposure through static but connected web pages, as well as via the use of the email facility. However, for many people, the Internet only became a 'searchable reality after the arrival of Google in 1999' (Crystal 2011:12). In this regard, the development of the character and presence of the Internet facilitated a confluence of the use and benefits of different forms of information communication technology, such as the telephone, fax and television,[1] in which connections 'across a vast network made up of anything from physical copper wires to wireless satellite connections' (Hinton & Hjorth 2013:9) were made. As a further expression of the influence of the advent of the Internet, reference has been made to the dawn of the so-called age of the new media, in which globalisation, the availability of information and new forms of social expressions are embodied (Athique 2013:14). Defining the concept and characteristics of new media, Flew (2008) indicated:

> [*T*]hat it involved the combination of the three C's – computing and information technology (IT), communications networks, and digitised media and information content – arising out of another process beginning with a "C", that of convergence. (p. 2)

Early in the 21st century the Internet, however, entered into a further development from the initial so-called static Web 1.0 usage mode to the so-called Web 2.0 technology. In their description of the new dimensions of the Internet, Koch and Lockwood (2010:94) point out that these dimensions consist of *inter alia*, '[*s*]torage technology (memory), display technology (xml, HTML), search technology (Google), publishing technology (wikis, blogging and Twitter) and organizing technology (social networks such as Facebook)'. Arising from this development, the accent falls on the opportunity that is available to 'Internet users to directly engage with and construct by easily pulling together the sorts of people and information that they are interested in' (Lesame, Sindane & Potgieter 2012:6). The development and popularity of Web 2.0 technology, with particular reference to computer software and user experience (Hinton & Hjorth

1. 'The advent of the digital revolution in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century media culture apparently confirms both Jean-Luc Godard's belief in the "end of cinema" and other media critics' claims that we have even entered a post-television age' (Everett & Caldwell 2003:xi).

2013:16), has led to the creation and establishment of so-called social media. Flew (2008) summarised and indicated a twofold rationale for the growing popularity of Web 2.0:

> … the concept of Web 2.0 has caught on for two particular reasons. First, it has embedded within it a range of the features that have long been seen as central to the Web as a communications infrastructure, such as the scope for participation, interactivity, collaborative learning, and social networking (social networking media is a commonly used alternative term to Web 2.0), as well as positive networking effects from harnessing collective intelligence; in other words, the quality of participation increases as the numbers participating increase, and this in turn attracts more new users to the sites. Second, some of the fastest growing websites of the 2000s have been based on Web 2.0 principles. These include sites such as the photography site *Flickr*, the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, the online user-generated video site *YouTube*, aggregated Web log (blog) sites such as *Blogger, Livejournal* and *technorati,* and the various personalized Web space sites such as *MySpace, Facebook, Friendster* and *Bebo.* (p. 17)

Currently, the further reinforcement of the popularity and ongoing development of social media is facilitated by the availability of increased mobile Internet accessibility, as effectuated by cellphones and tablet computers. In their book, *Understanding social media* (2013), Sam Hinton and Larissa Hjorth write that social media, as a collective term, influences all levels of society; that it comprise an integral part of the lives of a significant number of people worldwide; and that dynamic and constant meaning is created through the use of different forms of social media (Hinton & Hjorth 2013:2). In this regard Zappavigna (2012:193) is correct in her assumption that '[*m*]ost forms of social media, such as *Facebook* and other general social networking services, incorporate significant multimedia content, with images and video playing a significant role in meaning making.'

One of the most striking expressions and examples of the development of social media is undoubtedly the social media platform, Facebook, which was developed in 2004 from a college hostel room at Harvard University in the United States of America (Koch & Lockwood 2010:102). Since the initial development of Facebook and its subsequent growth – which, in metaphorical terms, would make it the third largest country in the world, after China and India, as far as user numbers are concerned (The Economist 2010) – various other social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Pininterest, Instagram, Google+, MySpace and various personal blogging services have developed (Hinton & Hjorth 2013:35). O'Reilly, a renowned technological software entrepreneur and specialist, has, with regard to the popularity of social media platforms associated with Web 2.0, pointed out that 'Web 2.0 is not a technology, it is an attitude' (O'Reilly 2005). Some of the characteristics of this attitude can be seen in the dynamics of the Twitter platform.

#Twitter

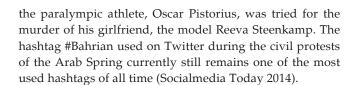Since 2006, the social media platform, Twitter, known as a so-called micro-blogging site (Zappavigna 2012:1), has displayed dramatic growth (White 2012:121). Through the use of only 140 characters, users have the opportunity to send short 'tweets' out into the world (Van Dijk 2011:333). In the use of Twitter, an important communication medium had been discovered, which, especially as far as the distribution of news is concerned, changed the world on a variety of levels. For example, this platform played an influential role in political events, such as the Arab Spring (Emiroglu 2013), as well as the two most recent American presidential elections (The European Business Review 2013). Social media is also increasingly changing the dynamics of the existing work environment. A good example of this can be found in journalism as a career with news being conveyed much faster by means of so-called public journalism. As an illustration of this, the tweet that was sent 10 hours before the first news reports appeared by Sohaib Athar (@ReallyVirtual) regarding the secret operation during which Osama bin Laden was killed by American special forces, can be mentioned (Mashable 2013).

However, social media platforms, and specifically Twitter, are dynamic in character, and display continual evolutionary developments. In 2009 Twitter, for example, changed the phrase by means of which users were encouraged to tweet news, from the original 'What are you doing?' to 'What's happening?' (Crystal 2011:11). Through the use of this altered question format, users are now encouraged to formulate tweets that are focused more in an outward direction, on events in the environment, rather than on more personal aspects. Another significant development that would permanently change the social media landscape was the evolution and use of the hashtag. The documented research in this article will now focus in more detail on tracing the origin, use and meaning of the hashtag in the social media environment, with particular reference to the Twitter platform.

#The story of the hashtag(#) symbol

Currently, the use of the hashtag is a common phenomenon, and the symbol is used for a variety of purposes. Zappavigna (2012:1) describes the hashtag as 'an emergent convention for labeling the topic of a micropost and a form of metadata incorporated into posts.' She further explains that the hashtag 'is a convention for marking an annotation of the topic of a tweet' and appended to the tweet 'when more than one word, is assigned, it will usually be represented without spaces' (Zappavigna 2012:36).

In various advertising campaigns, the core of the commercial message is linked to the hashtag. Thus, for example, the South African cellphone company, Cell C, launched a striking advertising campaign under the keyword, #CellCBelieve (Cell C 2013). Even the Dutch Reformed Church adopted the use of the hashtag by linking it to a youth rally that was being launched on a countrywide basis, namely #Imagine (2014). A further example of the sheer scope that is facilitated by the use of the hashtag, is the prominence enjoyed by #OscarPistorius as a search phrase worldwide on Google (2014) during the court case in which

the paralympic athlete, Oscar Pistorius, was tried for the murder of his girlfriend, the model Reeva Steenkamp. The hashtag #Bahrian used on Twitter during the civil protests of the Arab Spring currently still remains one of the most used hashtags of all time (Socialmedia Today 2014).

In tracing the history of the hashtag, the following interesting facts come to light in connection with the development of the symbol as currently used. Initially, the hashtag was used within Internet chat rooms. The first person to use the hashtag within a different context, Chris Messina, suggested on 23 August 2007 that the symbol should also be used on Twitter in particular. Murthy relates the history of this event as follows:

> The first hashtag on Twitter, which he used as an example of the concept, was #barcamp – a loosely organized series of technology conferences that he helped to create. Messina later elaborated on the idea in a blog post, even drawing up designs of what the feature could look like on Twitter. He called them 'channels.' Writer Stowe Boyd proposed the name 'hash tags'. (Murthy 2013 n.p.)

Not everybody, including the executive officers of Twitter, initially thought that this idea was feasible. However, the use and popularity of the hashtag was manifested for the first time in tweets that used the keyword, #sandiegofire, in order to distribute news regarding forest fires that occurred during October 2007 (Zak 2013). Currently, the hashtag is commonly used to refer to a variety of matters, ranging from news events to jokes. The use of the hashtag was officially put into effect in July 2009 by the Twitter platform, to be followed in 2011 by Google+ and Instagram, whilst Facebook began to make use of this idea in June 2013 (Socialmedia Today 2014).

The general popularity enjoyed by the hashtag obviously lies in its functional usage. The functionality of this symbol is found in the common practice of sorting and selecting thematically related information from a torrent of messages within the context of social media platforms. Seward (2013) sums up the use of the hashtag as follows:

> Any word(s) preceded by a hash sign '#' are used in *Twitter* to note a subject, event, or association. Hashtags are an integral part of *Twitter*'s ability to link the conversations of strangers together. (n.p.)

A good example of the selection of information occurs when a well-known news event is taking place, and everyone is making use of the hashtag in order to contribute their own comments to the general commentary. With a view to the further development of perspectives entertained in this research, the remark of Zappavigna (2012:36) is therefore important to take note of: 'Hashtags are a form of conversational tagging ... a form of metadata that emerged through community use on Twitter.' Thus, in a unique way, the use of the hashtag serves to illustrate Marshall McCluhan's observation that 'media aren't just channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought' (Carr 2010:6).

#A practical theology of *hashtags*

The influence and significance of the digital age has already been investigated by various theorists on a variety of interdisciplinary levels. Initially, the work of Marshall McLuhan, coining the famous 'the medium is the message'-expression (McLuhan 1964:11), followed, at a later stage, by the contribution of Neil Postman in his work *Technopoly, the surrender of culture to technology* (1993), set the standard for the interpretation of the dawn of the digital era. In addition to prominent intellectual figures, such as Lanier, Jenkins, Miller and Slater in the interpretation of the digital age and coming from a broad interdisciplinary background, the most influential voice in this regard is currently that of the macro-philosopher, Manuel Castells (Flew 2008:60). In a variety of works, he offers perspectives on the impact of the digital world indicating, amongst others, that the 'information age' represents 'a culture of virtuality in the global flows that transcend time and space' (Castells 2006:381). Sherry Turkle, a world-famous Internet psychologist and philosopher focusing on the the interaction between computer and human beings, pointed out in her book, *Alone together* (2011), that what is becoming visible in a growing digital world is nothing other than vistas on 'the future unfolding' (Turkle 2011 n.p.).

For the purpose of this research, it is also important, in view of the accent of the broad research problem on the influence of the digital world on the religious and spiritual dimensions of being human, to seek possible methods of enquiry. Except for addressing and embarking on this research endeavour, due cognisance is given to a relevant challenge for a relevant and topical practical theology as indicated by Garner (2013):

> [*T*]heologizing about the Internet needs to engage with all aspects of it, from 'older technologies' such as email and the World Wide Web, through to contemporary social media developments, while also keeping an eye firmly on any emerging trends. (p. 262)

Heidi A. Campbell of the United States of America has won renown as the world's leading researcher in this regard. In her two latest books, *When religion meets new media* (2010) and *Digital religion* (2013), she joins her colleagues in pointing out the comprehensive manner in which the digital age has influenced all religions.

All the indicated theoretical points of departure attest to an earnest quest to discern the meaning of the media in general, and the social media in particular, for the day-to-day existence of the individual, and of communities. Currently, the hashtag has become an important expression of a multi-dimensional existence in digital reality. Taking account of the impact of social media, as embodied, *inter alia*, in the use of the hashtag, it is self-evident that practical theology, which is interested in the praxis of every day, would not only take account of this reality, but would also be involved in it in a particular way.

In the tracing of the story of the hashtag, as it is dynamically created and used every second on Twitter and other social

media platforms, important markers are offered for the development of a practical theology of hashtags. On the basis of the documented research, the following perspectives, to name a few, would appear to be important in the creation and further development of a practical theology of hashtags:

- Firstly, the character of the hashtag carries strong nuances of relevance and topicality. In this regard research on the use of the hashtag by newspapers provides good examples on the relevant and strategic use of these symbols. In research carried out by the PewResearch Journalism Project (2014) it was found that within the news context the hashtag was used in the following ways: the hashtag signals that a tweet (and by extension the linked story) is related to a particular ongoing news story or topic; and the hashtag also serves the function of linking content into a larger conversation about a specific topic on Twitter. Except for these functions it was also found that the hashtag is used in promotional ways. In this regard the challenge would indeed be, for practical theology, taking cognizance of not only the broader impact of social media, but also the dynamics associated with the hashtag, to make 'public and thus available for wider reflection, the coherence and wisdom of complex practices' (Campbell-Reed & Scharen 2013:241). A practical theology of the hashtag would therefore not only see an opportunity in engaging with the hashtag-world, but would also see in it a guarantee of relevance and topicality.

- Secondly, this relevance and topicality is confirmed by the fact that any individual can avail him- or herself of the opportunity to create a hashtag and, in this way, render a contribution to the establishment of a specific domain and accent of meaning-making. The documented story of Brett Lindeque illustrated how the creation of the hashtag #ChangeOneThing (2014), has led to the establishment of a new movement influencing people in a positive way. As such a practical theology of hashtags needs to ask itself constantly in what way an own contribution is offered in the creation of (new) hashtags, possibly contributing to an existing conversation or alternatively articulate avenues for a new conversation and meaning-making?

- Thirdly, the hashtag's function of adding the opinion of an individual to the confluence of opinions contributed by others, confirms the possibility of not only grouping information thematically, but also of opening up movements in this regard, with exponential dynamics. Zappavigna points to possibilities in this regard by referring to so-called 'social tagging' by which users 'searching for the tag via the search interface that *Twitter* provides … may elect to subscribe to a feed of tweets containing this tag: a process known as following the tag' (Zappavigna 2012:36). This social aspect associated with the use of the hashtag has implications for practical theology emphasising the movement from only a 'living human document'-orientation towards acknowledging being part of the 'living human web', underscoring 'a matrix which is not only relational, but which highlights the very interconnectivity of selfhood' (Campbell-Reed & Scharen 2013:242). In this regard a practical theology

of hashtags would be sensitive for 'the need to extract relevant information from the continuous stream of data originating from such online sources' (Aiello *et al.* 2013:1268). Taking notice of the creation and use of so-called 'trends' through the use of hashtags as an expression of what themes are to be relevant and topical in a digital, living, human web is necessary. Murthy (2013) described the importance and meaning of trending topics on Twitter as an expression of the so-called society of experience which is event-based. For a practical theological agenda interested in describing a lived spirituality, taking note of these accents, would indeed be of importance.

- In the fourth place, a practical theology of hashtags therefore also requires a many-faceted multidisciplinary exploration and investigation of the empirical reality that is created and facilitated through the use of the hashtag. Entering and describing this reality poses the challenge of 'theological knowing in a lived research practice' (Campbell-Reed & Scharen 2013:241–2), contributing to the 'gathering [of] stories that are empirical and descriptive' (2013:258). Addressing these challenges, a practical theology of hashtags need to be aware of factors 'such as the fragmentation and noise of the user generated content, the *real*-time requirement, the burstiness of events and their time resolution' (Aiello *et al.* 2013:1268). Discerning the technical requirements for such a research endeavour, it is taken as a given that any inquiry associated with the development of a so-called practical theology of hashtags needs to be informed through a strong interdisciplinary accentuated mode of research.

Against the background of these four possible future research avenues, and in a subsequent description in the tracing of the story of the hashtag, a formulation of a possible practical theology of hashtags can be articulated. A practical theology of hashtags does not imply a formal structured volume of theology, rather a sensitive orientation and articulation of dynamic movements in the digital world and its implications for a lived spirituality.

#Keep the conversation going

Through the use of several examples from the recent past, the development and meaning of the hashtag was explored and described. In the introduction to this article, an indication was given of possibilities in which the hashtag renders a contribution in the facilitation of specific new dynamics in a digital environment. By making use of #ChangeOneThing (2014) an initially destructive challenge was imbued with new content through the use and the dynamics associated with the hashtag.

As part of this description, a motivation was put forward as to why it is important, for the purposes of a practical theological involvement, as expressed in the dimensions of a lived spirituality, to take cognisance of the hashtag and the world that is associated with it. Arising from this motivation, and in congruence with the strategic character of practical theology (Heitink 1993:174; Osmer 2008:175–176), perspectives regarding a dynamic reading of the hashtag

were provided with the aim of developing future practices. The popular theologian, Leonard Sweet has for example already encapsulated some of the aspects of this challenge in his article, 'Twitter theology: 5 Ways Twitter has changed my life and helped me be a better disciple of Jesus', indicating that 'Twitter makes me a better Jesus disciple, partly because Twitter is my laboratory for future ministry' (Sweet 2014).

In the marketing of the interactive use of the Twitter platform amongst viewers a prominent sports channel in South Africa uses the phrase: 'Keep the conversation going!'(@SupersportTV 2014). In the continuation of the quest to articulate and trace the meaning of a possible practical theology of the hashtag, the character of the research is also reflected in the exhortation, 'Keep the conversation going!' For practical theology becoming part of and even by keeping the hashtag conversation going, a strategic contribution is rendered to an era in which popular and digital culture have become important channels for religion and spirituality (Ganzevoort 2013:29). The challenge would be for practical theology not only to take notice of this described environment, but also to engage with the hashtag in a way that would contribute to new accentuations of a lived spirituality.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

References

Aiello, L.M., Petkos, G., Martin, C., Corney, D., Papadopoulus, S., Skraba, R. *et al.*, 2013, 'Sensing trending topics in Twitter', *IEE Transactions on multimedia* 15(6), 1268–1282.

Astley, J., 2013, 'The analysis, investigation and application of ordinary theology', in J. Astley & L.J. Francis (eds.), *Exploring ordinary theology, everyday Christian believing and the church,* Ashgate Publishing Company, Surrey. (Kindle edn.).

Athique, A., 2013, *Digital media and society, an introduction*, Polity, Cambridge.

Campbell-Reed, E.R. & Scharen, C., 2013, 'Etnography on Holy Ground: How qualitative interviewing is practical theological work', *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17(2), 232–259. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2013-0015

Carr, N., 2010, *The shallows, how the internet is changing the way we think, read and remember,* Atlantic Books, London.

Castells, M., 2006, *End of millennium. The information age: Economy, society and culture,* vol. iii, 2nd edn., Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Cell C, 2013, *Have you seen our new #CellCBelieve ad?*, viewed 22 April 2014, from http://www.facebook.com/CellC.SouthAfrica/posts/10152008821782265?stream_ref=5

#ChangeOneThing, 2014, viewed 06 March 2014, from http://razzlemonster.wordpress.com/2014/02/08/changeonething/

Crystal, D., 2011, *Internet linguistics, a student guide*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London.

Dewdney, A. & Ride, P., 2006, *The new media handbook,* Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New York.

Emiroglu, S., 2013, *The role of social media in Arab spring*, viewed 16 July 2013, from http://www.academia.edu/2578601/The_Role_of_Social_Media_in_Arab_Spring

Everett, A. & Caldwell, J.T., 2003, *New media, theories of practices of digitextuality*, Routledge, New York.

Finn, C., 2014, 'Neknomination is the new social media craze', in *thejournal.ie*, viewed 06 March 2014, from http://www.thejournal.ie/neknominations-ireland-alcohol-1262043-Jan2014/

Flew, T., 2008, *New media, an introduction*, 3rd edn., Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Ganzevoort, R., 2006, *De hand van God en andere verhalen. Over veelkleurige vroomheid en botsende beelden,* Zoetermeer, Meinema.

Ganzevoort, R.R., 2013, *Spelen met heilig vuur, Waarom de theologie haar claim op de waarheid moet opgeven*, Uitgeverij Ten Have, Utrecht.

Garner, S., 2013, 'Theology and the new media', in Heidi A Campbell, (ed.), *Digital religion, understanding religious practice in new media worlds,* pp. 251–265, Routledge, London.

Google, 2014, *#OscarPistorius*, viewed 24 April 2014, from https://www.google.co.za/#q=%23oscarpistorius

Graham, E.L., 2013, 'Is practical theology a form of 'action research'?', *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17(2), 148–178.

Heitink, G., 1993, *Praktische Theologie. Geschiedenis-Teorie-Handelingsvelden,* Uitgeverij Kok, Kampen.

'Highly dangerous neknomination drinking game craze claims its first two lives in Ireland as one man drowns and another found dead in Dublin house', *Daily Mail*, 03 February, 2014, viewed 06 March 2014, from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2550823/Two-young-Irish-men-die-weekend-taking-highly-dangerous-NekNominate-drinking-dares.html#ixzz2vAUnJ9Eg

Hinton, S. & Hjorth, L., 2013, *Understanding social media*, Sage, London.

#Imagine, 2014, *Imagine-Dream. Believe. Do*, viewed 23 April 2014, from http://imaginemovement.co.za/en/

Koch, R. & Lockwood, G., 2010, *Superconnect, the power of networks and the strength of weak links,* Little Brown, London.

Lesame, Z., Sindane, S. & Potgieter, P., 2012, 'New media: theories and applications', in Z. Lesame; B. Mbatha & S. Sindane (eds.), *New media in the information society*, pp. 1–21, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.

Lundby, K., 2013, Theoretical frameworks for approaching religion and new media, in Heidi A Campbell, (ed.), *Digital religion, understanding religious practice in new media worlds,* pp. 225–237 Routledge, London .

Mashable, 2013, *One Twitter user reports live from Osama Bin Laden raid*, viewed 15 June 2013, from http://mashable.com/2011/05/01/live-tweet-bin-laden-raid/

McLuhan, M., 1964, *Understanding media: The extensions of man,* MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Mintz, Z., 2014, 'What is NekNomination? Social media drinking game fueled by huge amount of peer pressure', *International Business Times,* 03 February, viewed 06 March 2014, from http://www.ibtimes.com/what-neknomination-social-media-drinking-game-fueled-huge-amount-peer-pressure-photo-1552978

Murthy, D., 2013, *Twitter, social communication in the Twitter age*, Polity Press, Cambridge. (Kindle edn.).

News.Com.au., 2014, *South African man Bret Lindeque turns Neknominate on its head*, viewed 06 March 2014, from http://www.news.com.au/technology/online/south-african-man-brent-lindeque-turns-neknominate-on-its-head/story-fnjwmwrh-1226818264791

'NekNominate: South Africans turn drinking craze into force for good', *The Telegraph*, 03 February, 2014, viewed 06 March 2014, from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/10615052/NekNominate-South-Africans-turn-drinking-craze-into-force-for-good.html

O'Reilly, T, 2005, *What is the Web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software*, viewed 08 March 2014, from http://www.im.ethz.ch/education/HS08/OReilly_What_is_Web2_0.pdf

Osmer, R., 2008, *Practical theology, an introduction,* Wm B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

PewResearch Journalism Project, 2014, *Use of hashtags-how mainstream media outlets use Twitter*, viewed 10 April 2014, from http://www.journalism.org/2011/11/14/use-hashtags/

Postman, N., 1993, *Technopoly, the surrender of culture to technology,* Vintage Books, New York.

Seward, Z.M., 2013, 'The first-ever hashtag, @-reply and retweet, as Twitter users invented them', *Quartz*, 15 October, 2013, viewed 28 April 2014, from http://qz.com/135149/the-first-ever-hashtag-reply-and-retweet-as-twitter-users-invented-them/

Socialmedia Today, 2014, *History of hashtags*, viewed 24 April 2014, from http://socialmediatoday.com/irfan-ahmad/1897096/history-hashtags-infographic

Social Times, 2014, *Your social media source, how old is the internet*, viewed 06 March 2014, from https://socialtimes.com/how-old-is-the-internet_b114946

@SuperSportTV, 2014, *Join your world of champions for all the latest sports news & updates,* viewed 22 April 2014, from https://twitter.com/SuperSportTV

Sweet, L., 2014, *Twitter theology: 5 Ways Twitter has changed my life and helped me be a better disciple of Jesus*, viewed 28 April 2014, from http://www.leonardsweet.com/article_details.php?id=55

The Economist, 2010, *Facebook has become the third-largest nation*, viewed 13 March 2014, from http://www.economist.com/node/16660401

The European Business Review, 2103, *Obama and the power of social media and technology*, viewed 16 July 2013, from http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/?p=1627

Turkle, S., 2011, *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, Basic Books New York. (Kindle edn.).

Vanhoozer, K.J., 2007, 'What is everyday theology?, how and why Christians should read culture', in K.J. Vanhoozer, C.A. Anderson & M.J. Sleasman (eds.), *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Cultural Trends,* pp. 15–60, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic.

Van Dijk, J., 2011, 'Tracing Twitter: The rise of a micro blogging platform', *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 7(3), 333–348. http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/macp.7.3.333_1

White, C.M., 2012, *Social media, crisis communication, and emergency management. Leveraging Web 2.0 technologies,* CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, New York.

Zak, E., 2013, *How Twitter's hashtag came to be*, viewed 28 April 2014, from http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2013/10/03/how-twitters-hashtag-came-to-be/

Zappavigna, M., 2012, *Discourse of Twitter and social media-how we use language to create affiliation on the web*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London.