

## 6. Researching Spaces of Production and Consumption of Latter-day Saints Media

Various strategies can be deployed in researching the four communication spaces of documentary media – production, representation, consumption, and distribution/circulation – in a semio-pragmatic perspective.<sup>426</sup> Throughout this book, the media's *context* is addressed in order to establish and investigate reading modes. In this chapter the communication spaces of production and consumption are analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods – an audience study<sup>427</sup> on one hand and interviews with Latter-day Saints media and communication professionals on the other.

The first part of the chapter examines how the semio-pragmatic approach can be combined with an audience study to understand its effectiveness in communicating values, opinions, and attitudes about Mormonism. With the audience study conducted in Switzerland (Zürich) and Spain (Barcelona), we can also explore cultural differences in the space of consumption. The second part of the chapter considers how media professionals affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (LDS) frame their own work in light of their religious affiliation. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, the results of both approaches and their methodological implications and limitations are brought together and reflected upon. The overall aim is to illuminate the intentions and experiences of media producers and media consumers in the case of documentary media produced or shaped by religious actors with connections to the LDS Church.

This chapter differs from other chapters in this book not only in its methodological approach but also in the presentation of its results, which

---

426 The theoretical horizons of the communication spaces are introduced in part II, chapter 2.

427 The audience study was conducted in cooperation with Maria Teresa Soto Sanfiel of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. See Marie-Therese Mäder and María T. Soto-Sanfiel, “‘We Are Open-Minded, Tolerant, and Care for Other People’: Comparing Audience Responses to Religion in Documentaries,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 18, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 98–114; María T. Soto-Sanfiel and Marie-Therese Mäder, “Identifying with a Religious Character,” *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 2020, 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-20201471>.

here involves tables, numbers, and quotations from interview sequences. The narrative created from these findings recounts how producers and consumers understand the interface between documentary media and religion and illuminates how it is constructed by the researcher. The approach follows the crystallization concept developed by Laura L. Ellingson, professor of women's and gender studies, which "problematizes the multiples truth it presents. [...] since researchers construct knowledge and representations (narratives, analysis, etc.), all accounts are inherently partial, situated, and contingent. Rather than apologizing for this partiality as a limitation, scholars using crystallization can celebrate multiple points of view of a phenomenon across the methodological continuum."<sup>428</sup> This chapter thus also expands the methodological approach of our project by taking up tools from qualitative and quantitative research in combination with knowledge gained through semio-pragmatics.

### 6.1. A semio-pragmatic analysis combined with an audience study

The current sub-chapter deploys a semio-pragmatic analysis in combination with an audience-study to assess the effectiveness of the communication of religion through documentaries. It also considers how cultural differences impact the documentary reception process. To these ends, a semio-pragmatic analysis was applied to the documentary *Meet the Mormons* (Blair Treu, US 2014, 78') and subsequently a reception study was conducted with undergraduate participants from Spain ( $N=103$ ,  $\text{Mean}_{\text{Age}} = 21.21$ ,  $\text{SD} = 3.40$ ) and Switzerland ( $N=104$ ,  $\text{Mean}_{\text{Age}} = 21.54$ ,  $\text{SD} = 2.34$ ), using questionnaires that had been produced with the results of the semio-pragmatic analysis. The participants watched the documentary and completed the questionnaires, which highlight the perceived values of the documentary and provide opportunity for the expression of opinions about the documentary and attitudes towards it. The results show that the semio-pragmatic tool can enable an understanding of how religion is mediatized in documentaries and that cultural context can significantly influence the perception of values, attitudes, and opinions.

---

<sup>428</sup> Ellingson, *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research*, 22. The concept is discussed in more detail in part I, chapter 2.

## Audience responses to religion in *Meet the Mormons*

The questions of how religious communication employs media and how media change religion are certainly not new and have been extensively researched, as the scale of the literature shows.<sup>429</sup> Such questions address processes that are generally subsumed under the expressions “mediatization of religion”, “mediatized religion” or “religious mediation”, which embrace different aspects of the interface between media and religion.<sup>430</sup> The complexity of religious communication that employs media brings certain methodological challenges for researchers. Steward Hoover, for example, proposes that religious mediation, i.e. the “act of communication via a medium,”<sup>431</sup> must be understood from the audience’s perspective and not in light of the religious authorities and how they want it to be understood.<sup>432</sup> What methodological approach might we then take to the audience’s interaction with mediatized forms of religion? Picking up again on the concept of crystallisation, the audience study undertaken for this project researches how a religious worldview is communicated<sup>433</sup> by a documentary and evaluated by audiences.<sup>434</sup> Two questions guided the research process:

1. To what extent does the audience’s perception endorse the values, opinions, and attitudes that are conveyed by the semio-pragmatic analysis?
2. Are there differences in the responses to the documentary that can be attributed to the audience’s cultural background?

The section is structured as follows: first, the semio-pragmatic analysis, which takes into account the documentary’s spaces of communication,

---

429 Danielle Kirby and Carole M. Cusack, eds., *Religion and Media. Critical Concept in Religious Studies*, Critical Concepts in Religious Studies (London: Routledge, 2017); Mia Lövhelm, *Media, Religion, and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013); Stout, *Media and Religion*; Daniel A. Stout and Judith Mitchell Buddenbaum, *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996).

430 Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Religion,” 11; Hjarvard, “Three Forms of Mediatized Religion. Changing the Public Face of Religion.” For a detailed discussion of the term *mediatization* see part I, chapter 2.1.

431 Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change,” 123.

432 Hoover, “Media and the Imagination of Religion in Contemporary Global Culture,” 611.

433 Fritz et al., *Sichtbare Religion*, 50–74.

434 John L. Sullivan, *Media Audiences: Effects, Users, Institutions, and Power* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2013), 105–186.

and its results are applied to two audience studies; secondly, the audience studies are presented in detail; finally, the results of the studies are compared and discussed.

### Framing the semio-pragmatic audience study

The semio-pragmatic approach is understood as an heuristic tool that deciphers an audio-visual source's reading modes.<sup>435</sup> It places audio-visual media in the tension between film and the communication spaces within which media function.<sup>436</sup> From this it follows that "the meaning of a text changes in accordance with its context."<sup>437</sup> Such an approach emphasizes the institutional context within which the audio-visual sources are produced, distributed, and consumed, for it often provides reliable and accurate information about reading instructions and reading modes.<sup>438</sup>

For this reason, a semio-pragmatic analysis was conducted to establish the documentary and moral reading modes. The results were transposed into questionnaires to be applied as part of two audience studies conducted in 2015 in Spain and in Switzerland. The questionnaires were created in English and translated into both Spanish and German applying the forward translation method.<sup>439</sup> As audio-visual stimulus for the study, we selected one eleven-minute-long sequence (*The Humanitarian*) from *Meet the Mormons*. The principal reason for selecting this particular documentary was that it has been dubbed into German and Spanish, the languages of the study. Its narrative structure allowed for the extraction of a coherent and complete sequence. The extracted audio-visual narrative is representative of the whole film, which consists of six complete chapters. Although we provided a shortened version, in order that the participants' attention be retained throughout the viewing, a comprehensive sense of the aim of the documentary was still guaranteed. We noted also that the documentary depicts Mormonism, a religious grouping that is relatively unknown in Eu-

---

435 Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film*, 77–108.

436 Kessler, "Historische Pragmatik," 106.

437 Roger Odin, *Les espaces de communication*, 15. The French original reads: ... "le sens d'un texte change avec le contexte." Translation mine.

438 A more detailed discussion of the semio-pragmatic approach is included in part I, chapter 2.2.

439 José Muñiz, Paula Elosua, and Ronald K. Hambleton, "Directrices Para La Traducción y Adaptación de Los Tests: Segunda Edición.," *Psicothema* 25, no. 2 (2013): 151–57.

rope, which meant we were more readily able to measure the effect of the film rather than prejudices against Mormons.

Extracting the represented values, opinions, and attitudes towards Mormons

*Meet the Mormons* is produced and distributed by a religious institution, namely The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) and portrays six members of this church.<sup>440</sup> They live or work(ed) in different countries and talk about their successful lives, what they have achieved and how their Mormon belonging has influenced their lives. It can be read as a corporate video, a term that is primarily used in the context of advertising and a form that provides a deliberately positive depiction of a product or an institution – in this case of the LDS Church, which is headquartered in Salt Lake City/UT. The experienced director, Blair Treu, is a Mormon who also worked for Disney, among other production companies, during his professional career. He graduated from Brigham Young University, a Mormon affiliated university, and mainly works now for BYUtv, the Mormon TV channel located in Provo, Utah. *Meet the Mormons* has grossed \$6,047,363 (between October 2014 and February 2015), according to Box Office Mojo,<sup>441</sup> suggesting a successful theatrical release for a documentary. The documentary was originally produced for the LDS Church's visitor center at the Joseph Smith building in Salt Lake City/UT. As a result of its overwhelmingly positive reception in preview, the church's Public Affairs Department decided it should also be presented in theatres.<sup>442</sup> *Meet the Mormons* is today widely distributed and available on diverse streaming platforms, including Netflix, iTunes, and Amazon Instant Video, and it has been dubbed into other languages.

The semio-pragmatic analysis categorizes the representation of religion according to four aspects. First, the social actors depicted are central, as Mormons speak about themselves and their personal experiences. Secondly, places, geographies, and cultures demonstrate that Mormonism is a

---

440 Some of the context information of *Meet the Mormons* is resumed in part II, chapter 7.2 with a detailed discussion of the documentary's ethical dimensions.

441 "Meet the Mormons (2014) – Box Office Mojo," accessed January 22, 2018, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=meetthemormons.htm>.

442 According to the interview conducted with Mormon media professional SA6 in Salt Lake City/UT, June 24, 2015.

global religion. Thirdly, many historical and often religious buildings are prominently depicted. Even though these structures do not have specific ties to the LDS Church, they can connect Mormonism with a larger historical context, as we see in the example of the Hindu temple in Kathmandu, Nepal, that opens the sequence “The Humanitarian” (the segment chosen for the experimental audience study). The fourth aspect concerns how Mormonism is defined in the narrative. All the social actors describe Mormonism in conspicuously similar terms. Thus, for example, in the sequence used for the audience study, the Mormon Bishop Bishnu Adhikari from Nepal speaks of Mormonism changing his life and now influencing his values and priorities, concepts that are found across all the sections of the film. Adhikari also explains how he deals with his conversion to Mormonism, having been raised within the Hindu tradition.

How, then, is religion depicted? The documentary’s moral reading mode promotes Mormonism on the example of outstanding social actors with above average skills in impressive geographic locations that are filmed by an empathic and supportive camera. The narrative is completely controlled by the LDS Church; no critical voices are heard. The social actors represent the church as a global institution, with people from cultures beyond the US included or other geographies referenced. The documentary suggests that Mormonism is Christian, globally dispersed, tolerant, and open to other cultures; the message is that Mormons are outstanding normal people, Christians, family oriented, open minded, and caring of others.

This broadly framed analysis of *Meet the Mormons* determined the content of the first questionnaire in the audience study, which explores how viewers evaluate the depiction of Mormon values and the Mormon character (table 5). The questionnaire used Likert scales (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree).

A close reading of the sequence “The Humanitarian” (00:47:44-00:58:40) explains the content of the second and third questionnaires, on opinions and attitudes promoted by the video’s documentary reading modes.

The sequence opens with a travelling shot from a bird’s eye view of a Hindu temple in Kathmandu, Nepal, the city lights at night, and the Himalayas, with a traditional Hindu dancer in front of a temple and some Buddhist sites filmed similarly. The audio-visual narrative is accompanied by a music score containing modern Indian music. Then Bishnu Adhikari is introduced; he is sitting on a chair in a green outdoor setting. He enthusiastically states (fig. 75): “I love my country Nepal. The beauty that God has given to us by his creation.”

Values questionnaire:

	Completely disagree		Completely agree		
Mormons are outstanding	1	2	3	4	5
Mormons are common people	1	2	3	4	5
Mormons are Christians	1	2	3	4	5
Mormonism is tolerant and adaptive to other cultures and lifestyles	1	2	3	4	5
Mormons are family oriented	1	2	3	4	5
Mormons are open minded	1	2	3	4	5
Mormons care for other people	1	2	3	4	5

*Table 5 The values questionnaire asked participants: Now, tell us to what extent you consider that the following conceptions related to Mormons/Mormonism were emphasized by the video. Please, remember that this question is about the depiction of Mormons/Mormonism in the video.*



*Fig. 75 Mormon Bishnu Ashikari explains why he loves his home country, Nepal (Meet the Mormons, 00:49:12).*

His humanitarian project is then presented in detail. At the end of the sequence Adhikari meets his Hindu father and kisses his feet, as is traditional (fig. 76). The scene is played in slow motion and concludes the sequence about Bishnu Adhikari.





*Fig. 76 The humanitarian kisses his father's feet as a sign of respect (Meet the Mormons, 00:57:38).*

Adhikari's daughter explains that his kissing his father's feet is a sign of the highest respect in Nepalese tradition. Additionally, Adhikari's father comments in a voice-over: "I feel very blessed to be respected like that. I feel really blessed to be respected by my son."<sup>443</sup> The protagonist tells the viewers that he was raised in a religious family which believed in many gods, with a faith based on fear. He decided to attend a Christian school, where he was exposed to religious practices and thinking about Jesus Christ and responded positively. He went to the US for a master's degree, then worked for a year and subsequently returned to Nepal. Feeling a responsibility to invest in his country, he founded the organization "Choice Humanitarian", a US-based organization that helps poor people and builds schools, roads, and water systems. "Education is the key to coming out of poverty," he states. Later he provides an account of his childhood, in a family with ten siblings in rural Nepalese surroundings. The narrative includes humorous and cheerful moments, for example, when his wife and three children are introduced laughing and merrily chatting with each other during dinner or when his daughter describes Adhikari as dancing "goofily".

The sequence focusses on the religious and cultural background of the protagonist. Adhikari lived and was partly educated in the US but now resides with his family, including his three children, in Kathmandu. The nar-

---

<sup>443</sup> The original language is Nepalese; the words are given in translation in the subtitles on the DVD.



ration, both the story and its audio-visual representation, also connects the protagonist to his Hindu and Nepalese heritage. We see the LDS Church's meetinghouse after he has recounted how he experienced the presence of God on the summit of Mount Everest. Then he recalls meeting Mormon missionaries in Russia, where he was baptized, with a picture inserted depicting his baptism, which, he recounts, "made him very happy." Adhikari and his wife explain their relationship to Jesus Christ. Adhikari terms his Hindu background "cultural practices and family tradition", differentiating culture from faith, and states: "Becoming a Christian doesn't mean you abandon your culture." By contrast, his wife refers to a "different religious faith" when talking about her former Hindu affiliation.

The sequence explains how to think about conversion to Mormonism from a different, specifically non-Western, cultural and religious background. The narrative argues that LDS Church members are able to accept and care for family members who are not Mormon. The idea of Mormons as Christians is emphasized, but their religious practices are by and large not depicted, for they take place in the temple, to which non-Mormons do not have access. We do see a picture of Adhikari's baptism, because baptisms take place in the church, where non-members are welcome.<sup>444</sup>

These results from the semio-pragmatic analysis provided the items for two further questionnaires that explore viewer opinions on (table 6), and attitudes toward (table 7) the depiction of Mormonism and Mormons, as steered by the film's documentary and moral reading mode. All the questionnaires used Likert scales (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree).

As a next step, in addition to testing the results of the semio-pragmatic analysis in relation to values, opinions, and attitudes, we also investigated cultural differences across the audiences in their responses to *Meet the Mormons*. To research this question, we designed a cross-cultural quasi-experimental study that was conducted simultaneously in Barcelona and Zürich. The data collected was analyzed in light of variations by country. The cross-cultural and quasi-experimental study assigned at random one hundred undergraduate students from each country, Switzerland (University of Zürich) and Spain (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), to the experimental condition of watching the video about Mormonism. The students'

---

444 The LDS Church uses the term *temple* for the most exclusive of church structures; once dedicated these structures can only be entered by worthy members. The terms *church* and *meetinghouse* are employed for buildings used for regular public worship.

Opinion questionnaire:

	Completely disagree			Completely agree	
The video was credible	1	2	3	4	5
The video was interesting	1	2	3	4	5
The video was entertaining	1	2	3	4	5
The video was educational	1	2	3	4	5
The video was informative	1	2	3	4	5
The video was commercial	1	2	3	4	5

Table 6 The questionnaire about opinions asked: Now, we need your personal opinion about the movie and its content. Please, tell us the extent you agree with the following statements.

involvement was voluntary; as acknowledgement participants received a T-shirt imprinted with the logo of their university.

The descriptive statistical analysis shows that the majority of the answers were located in the positive part of the Likert scale (above the neutral point 3). Participants agreed that during the reception process they had perceived the values (table 5), opinions (table 6) and attitudes (table 7) highlighted by the semio-pragmatic analysis. Even though the study confirmed the results of the analysis, the t-Student test indicated also some significant differences between the two countries.

Differences between the two samples on the values represented by the Mormons’ documentary:

The Swiss and Spanish audiences differed on three out of seven items regarding the values represented in the film (see grey rows in table 8). The Spanish participants considered to a greater extent than the Swiss that Mormons are Christians, family oriented, and open minded. This evidence suggests the influence of the hermeneutic horizons of the audience, which can be understood as a product of the cultural setting in which the presented values are perceived,<sup>445</sup> or, in the words of Ralph Potter, of “the wider context of understanding within which men define and ponder their opin-

445 Religious belonging, education and experiences, values, and moral concepts also shape hermeneutic horizons.

Attitudes questionnaire:

	Completely disagree			Completely agree	
(1) The depiction of Mormonism and Mormons of the video is true reflection of the reality	1	2	3	4	5
(2) The purpose of the video is to present a favourable perspective of Mormonism and Mormons	1	2	3	4	5
(3) The video reflects traditional events, places, people and experiences associated to Mormonism practices	1	2	3	4	5
(4) I learned about Mormonism and Mormons with the video	1	2	3	4	5
(5) The video has changed my mind about Mormonism and Mormons	1	2	3	4	5
(6) The video is a good representation of Mormonism and Mormons	1	2	3	4	5
(7) I would like to know more Mormonism and Mormons thanks to the video	1	2	3	4	5
(8) I will search for more information about Mormonism and Mormons after watching the video	1	2	3	4	5
(9) The video is intended to persuade people about the good aspects of being Mormonism and Mormons	1	2	3	4	5
(10) The video has made me reflect on Mormonism and Mormons	1	2	3	4	5
(11) I will try to get in touch with Mormons to know more about their religion	1	2	3	4	5
(12) The video is a one sided depiction of Mormonism	1	2	3	4	5
(13) The video was produced by Mormon authorities	1	2	3	4	5
(14) The video should be shown at television	1	2	3	4	5

Table 7 The attitudes questionnaire stated: Also, tell us your personal opinion about next statements.

ions.”<sup>446</sup> The major difference in the responses was on the issue of open-mindedness, where the Swiss agreed less than the Spanish that Mormons were portrayed as “open minded.” Additionally, the Spanish participants considered the documentary entertaining, educational and informative to

446 Ralph B. Potter, “The Logic of Moral Argument,” in *Toward a Discipline of Social Ethics: Essays in Honor of Walter George Muelder*, ed. Paul Deats (Boston: Boston University Press, 1972), 108. Ralph Potter developed four elements of a moral argument of which the wider context is one. He considers disputes in this realm to be more difficult. See Potter, 108–110. For a detailed discussion of the term see part III, chapter 7.1.

	n		M (SD)		t
	Spain	Switzer- land	Spain	Switzerland	
Mormons are outstanding <sup>a</sup>	100	101	2.87 (1.12)	2.65 (1.19)	1.33
Mormons are common people <sup>a</sup>	99	101	3.87 (1.04)	3.85 (1.06)	0.11
Mormons are Christians <sup>a</sup>	99	101	3.73 (0.96)	4.21 (1.00)	-3.47**
Mormonism is tolerant and adap- tive to other cultures and lifestyles <sup>a</sup>	99	101	4.10 (0.86)	4.02 (0.95)	0.63
Mormons are family oriented <sup>a</sup>	100	101	3.94 (0.91)	4.27 (0.82)	-2.68**
Mormons are open minded <sup>a</sup>	99	101	3.43 (1.05)	3.96 (0.95)	-3.72*
Mormons care for other people <sup>a</sup>	100	101	4.22 (0.82)	4.32 (0.84)	-0.83

Note. \* $p<0.05$ ; \*\*  $p<0.001$ ; <sup>a</sup> = equal variances; <sup>b</sup>=different variances.

Table 8 Significant differences in items in the values questionnaires are marked \* or \*\*.

a greater extent than the Swiss audience, whereas the two audiences rated “credible”, “interesting”, and “commercial” (table 9) similarly. We can hypothesize that the Spanish perceived the video entertaining, educational and informative to a greater extent because they were less critical of the video and its depiction of Mormonism. The more positive evaluation might be related to their generally more positive responses to the documentary, with the Swiss participants responding more skeptically to *Meet the Mormons*, as table 9 shows.

The differences in the values and opinions questionnaires can be read as consistent with the results of the attitudes questionnaire (table 10, table 7). The Spanish participants hold to a greater extent than the Swiss participants that they learned about Mormonism and Mormons from the video (attitude 4, table 7) and that the video is a good representation of Mormonism and Mormons (attitude 6). The Swiss audience evaluated higher than the Spanish audience the statement that the depiction of Mormonism and Mormons in the video is a true reflection of the reality (attitude 1, table 7). The Swiss also indicated to a greater extent they would try to get in touch with Mormons in order to find out more about their religion (atti-

Opinions about the episode from the documentary:

	n		M (SD)		t
	Spain	Switzerland	Spain	Switzerland	
The video was credible <sup>a</sup>	100	101	3.76 (1.04)	3.50 (1.00)	1.77
The video was interesting <sup>a</sup>	100	101	3.93 (0.93)	3.83 (0.99)	0.72
The video was entertaining <sup>a</sup>	100	101	3.72 (1.02)	3.39 (1.15)	2.18*
The video was educational <sup>a</sup>	99	101	3.53 (0.98)	3.14 (1.16)	2.54*
The video was informative <sup>a</sup>	100	101	3.84 (0.98)	3.43 (1.13)	2.78**
The video was commercial <sup>b</sup>	100	101	3.09 (1.43)	3.14 (1.20)	-0.62

Note. \*p<0.05;\*\* p<0.001; <sup>a</sup> = equal variances; <sup>b</sup> =different variances

*Table 9 The results of the opinions questionnaire show that the Swiss and Spanish samples perceived 3 out of 6 aspects similarly. Significant differences are marked \* or \*\*.*

tude 11, table 7) and they indicated a little less, but still with significant difference, than the Spanish that the video is a one-sided depiction of Mormons (attitude 12, table 7). The differences between the countries in responses on the attitudes questionnaire suggest that the Swiss audience is more critical of the Mormon documentary, although they estimate the video to be a true reflection of reality to a greater extent. The attitude that the video is a “one-sided depiction of Mormons” in combination with the attitude that the video is a “true reflection of reality” shows that the Swiss audience was more aware of the video’s intended effect, namely, to present Mormons as they would like to be perceived by their audience. The Swiss audience is therefore more conscious than the Spanish audience that the video does not provide a neutral perspective on Mormonism. Notably, while the Swiss assess the portrayal of Mormons more critically, they are more likely than the Spanish participants to express an interest in knowing more about Mormons (attitude 7, table 7).

Attitudes about Mormons:

	n		M (SD)		t
	Spain	Switzerland	Spain	Switzer- land	
I learned about Mormonism and Mor- mons with the video <sup>a</sup>	100	100	2.91 (1.18)	2.02 (1.06)	5.60**
I will try to get in touch with Mormons to know more about their religion <sup>a</sup>	100	101	1.71 (0.88)	2.36 (0.95)	-4.99**
The video is a one-sided depiction of Mormonism <sup>a</sup>	99	101	3.07 (1.10)	3.77 (1.05)	-4.62*
The depiction of Mormonism and Mor- mons of the video is true reflection of the reality <sup>a</sup>	100	100	2.60 (0.72)	2.82 (0.81)	-2.02*
The video is a good representation of Mormonism and Mormons <sup>b</sup>	100	100	2.68 (0.89)	2.41 (1.06)	1.94*
The video should be shown at television <sup>b</sup>	100	101	2.58 (1.13)	2.82 (1.14)	-1.50
The video reflects traditional events, places, people and experiences associated to Mormonism practices. <sup>b</sup>	100	100	3.17 (1.02)	2.97 (1.20)	1.27
The purpose of the video is to present a favourable perspective of Mormonism and Mormons <sup>a</sup>	100	101	4.19 (0.83)	4.02 (1.12)	1.22
The video has changed my mind about Mormonism and Mormons <sup>a</sup>	100	100	2.45 (1.05)	2.28 (1.14)	1.10
I would like to know more Mormonism and Mormons thanks to the video <sup>a</sup>	100	100	2.55 (1.19)	2.73 (1.29)	-1.02
I will search for more information about Mormonism and Mormons after watch- ing the video <sup>a</sup>	100	101	2.62 (1.36)	2.44 (1.22)	1.01
The video is intend to persuade people about the good aspects of being Mor- monism and Mormons <sup>a</sup>	100	101	3.75 (1.18)	3.84 (1.05)	-0.58
The video was produced by Mormon au- thorities <sup>a</sup>	100	100	3.39 (0.98)	3.31 (1.04)	0.55
The video has made me reflect on Mor- monism and Mormons <sup>a</sup>	100	100	2.83 (1.07)	2.75 (0.96)	0.14

Note. \* $p<0.05$ ; \*\*  $p<0.001$ ; degrees of freedom =203 <sup>a</sup> = equal variances; <sup>b</sup> =different variances.

Table 10 The results of the attitude questionnaire reveal significant differences in 4 out of 14 instances, marked \* or \*\*.

## Audiences perception of a Mormon world view

The results of the audience study suggest that the semio-pragmatic analysis provides an effective tool for establishing a film's reading modes and for predicting possible responses to a documentary about religion. The semio-pragmatic analysis shows that *Meet the Mormons* focusses on likable actors, the depiction of historical and religious buildings, global geographical settings, and a narrative that promotes the positive aspects of Mormonism by omitting critical reading modes. The documentary and the moral reading modes of *Meet the Mormons* could be observed by establishing the internal and external reading instructions.

Secondly, the results of the analysis were successfully transformed into scales and tested in the audience study. But the study also disclosed significant cultural differences across the reception of the values, opinions, and attitudes presented by the audio-visual message. The differences may have originated in lack of knowledge about Mormonism or in different conceptions of the specific religion or of the documentaries themselves.<sup>447</sup>

The audience study showed that the reception context for documentaries about religion is significant and is related to the audience's perception of values, opinions, and attitudes in the narration of a documentary. The responses measured in the study are indicative of how documentary viewers from different cultural backgrounds, namely Switzerland and Spain, perceive Mormonism. But the study also sheds light on how effectively documentaries can promote religion. *Meet the Mormons* efficiently communicates an overall positive depiction of a religious group, as the results demonstrate.

The research design further points out the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in the field of media and religion that considers sources

---

447 To contextualize the results of the questionnaire on the Mormon documentary and to explore the differences between countries, a second documentary, representing another religion (Islam), has been similarly tested. The same procedure as with *Meet the Mormons* was applied, involving semio-pragmatic analysis that produced questionnaires on values and attitudes. To allow direct comparison, the same opinion scale was adopted in this second instance. The demographic data of the whole study, including both documentaries, is: Zürich (CH): 205 participants, 50.74% female and 45.4% male,  $Mean_{Age} = 20.36$ ,  $SD = 3.24$ ,  $Rg_{Age} = 18-40$ ). Barcelona (ES): 203 participants, 62.6% female and 36% male,  $Mean_{Age} = 22.16$ ,  $SD = 2.76$ ,  $Rg_{Age} = 17-37$ ). The samples' demographics are similar and therefore ideal for comparison. See Mäder and Soto-Sanfiel, "We Are Open-Minded, Tolerant, and Care for Other People"; Soto-Sanfiel and Mäder, "Identifying with a Religious Character".



as well as audiences. Such an approach is achieved here by combining semio-pragmatic analysis with an audience study. Drawn from communications studies, the former pays attention to the stylistic specificities of the sources, in particular of documentaries, their religion-promoting narration, and their intended reading modes. The latter is strictly concerned with quantitative data analysis. This interweaving of theories, concepts, methods, and sources allows discussion of a variety of ways in which audiences interact with the representation of religion in documentaries.<sup>448</sup>

The research also enables consideration of how representation and consumption interact as distinct entities. While the narration's intended meaning, its reading modes, is conspicuously stable, at the same time the reception context in which it is presented and perceived produces difference. The differences in the evaluation of the depicted religion also show the ambivalences and limitations of the semio-pragmatic paradigm. Meaning-making processes that take place between the documentary and the audience are not fully predictable. To achieve such precision, concrete audience responses need to be measured in a qualitative approach that specifies the extent of the determined meanings. A study of reception allows, however, for a comparison of audience responses through the correlation of data.

The multidisciplinary method approach is limited by its broad conception of the audiences, as "Spanish" and "Swiss", with individual or qualitative elements ignored. Future qualitative research should explore precisely such detail. In line with Ellingson's crystallization concept, the current approach is sensitive to how it constructs knowledge and representations. Again, further studies are needed, particularly to confirm or nuance these results in the context of other documentaries and religions. Moreover, future studies should observe the extent to which these representations are persuasive and can induce attitude change.

The second subsection of this chapter does not take on these challenges, which should be addressed in further research. Rather, with its qualitative approach through interviews with media professionals it adds another perspective to the interface of documentary media and religion.

---

448 Bal, "Working with Concepts," 20–22. I am aware that Mieke Bal's approach embraces interdisciplinary, which she contends is "productive", but that she dislikes "multidisciplinary", which she deems "muddled" (20). I do not share her perspective on multidisciplinary, which I believe embraces the interaction between researcher, sources, theories and methods that she is promoting.

## 6.2. Qualitative interviews with LDS Church media professionals

In June and August 2015, six approximately one-hour-long interviews with eight media professionals were conducted in Salt Lake City and its surrounding area and in Frankfurt/M. (GE). The interviews were scheduled for the middle of the research process, with the groundwork on the church, its structure, and its engagement in media communication laid, but space left open for broad-ranging exploration through conversation of themes being identified and addressed by the project. All those interviewed shared two affiliations to which they were deeply committed: employment as media professionals and membership of the LDS Church. As interviewer I was curious to explore the interaction of these affiliations. While the interviews were undertaken early in the project, they were evaluated towards its end, in light of the knowledge and experiences garnered through the research.

The interviewees have been anonymized. They all are affiliated with a single religious institution, some within the hierarchy of the LDS Church and some simply as members; some are also its employees. The anonymization serves to inhibit possible repercussions from their involvement.<sup>449</sup> In two instances, two media professionals participated as interviewees at the same time. One of these “double” conversations was held with independent media professionals who work largely on LDS topics (SA2/SA3), as did one further interviewee who worked for the LDS Church on a contract basis (SA4). The participants in the second double interview (SA7/SA8) and a further two media professionals (SA1, SA6) were, by contrast, permanent employees of the church at the time they were interviewed. One interviewee (SA5) worked for an institution with close ties to the LDS Church. One media professional was interviewed by telephone because he (SA1) was not available for a meeting, and a telephone conversation was preferable to abandoning the interview altogether. The short overview below characterizes the professional occupations of the interviewees and their relations to the LDS Church, and provides demographical data concerning their age, gender, and whether they were born into the LDS Church or converted. The range of information varies because I was not provided with the same information for each participant.

SA1 (male, about 70 years) works for the LDS Missionary Department and is in charge of its diverse communication strategies and responsible for

---

449 Sabina Misoch, “Qualitative Sozialforschung,” in *Qualitative Interviews* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 18–23.

overseeing all aspects of missionary work in the church. He graduated with a degree in Communications – Television Production and was subsequently hired as director of media at the Missionary Department, where he oversaw the production of all church advertising. He was born into the LDS Church.

SA2 (male, about 60 years) has been an independent cinematographer and producer for almost 30 years and works closely with SA3 as a co-producer for film. He was born into the church.

SA3 (male, about 60 years) is an independent writer and film producer. He graduated from Brigham Young University with a degree in Wildlife and Range Science and has a master's degree in Education from Idaho State University. He taught for almost 20 years. He worked as a radio and later film producer, now performs as moderator in these productions, and works closely with SA2 as a co-producer for film. He became a member of the LDS Church at the age of 20.

SA4 (male, about 50 years) is a filmmaker and writer. He started his career with the Walt Disney Company and directed films for the Disney Channel and other commercial companies. He received a BA in theatre from Brigham Young University. He was born into the LDS Church.

SA5 (male, about 70 years) is a film producer and director of IMAX films and other formats. He was director of media for the LDS Church Missionary Department and worked as a creative director at an LDS television channel. He was born into the church.

SA6 (male, about 65) worked for the Public Affairs Department of the LDS Church. Born and educated in England, he worked as a journalist for newspapers in Britain, Australia and Japan before joining the Public Affairs Department. He became a member of the church through conversion at the age of around 20.

SA7 (female, around 60) worked for the Europe part of the Public Affairs Department of the LDS Church.

SA8 (male, around 50) works for Europe part of the Public Affairs Department of the LDS Church. He earned a PhD in politics in Germany and actively engages in regional politics. He was brought up in a Mormon family, his parents having joined the LDS Church when he was five years old.

The first part of the interview followed a narrative-biographical, semi-structured approach and the second part was shaped by guided expert in-

interview style.<sup>450</sup> In light of the narrative-biographical nature of the qualitative interviews, the anonymity of the interviewees has been respected by excluding identifying information from transcribed material cited in this chapter.<sup>451</sup> The theoretical approach was based on sociological hermeneutics of knowledge, which recognizes the singularity of each interview, understands the data as a text, and acknowledges the interpretative dimension of the evaluation process.<sup>452</sup> All but one of the interviews (a double interview conducted in German and not cited here) were conducted in English and transcribed word-for-word. Their consistency and often subtle language can likely be attributed to the fact that the interviewees are trained media professionals with an academic background and are used to discussing complex topics eloquently.<sup>453</sup>

And, finally, the interviews were coded in reference to grounded theory with the software atlas.ti.<sup>454</sup> The coding process considered the interview sequences as closed entities in reference to the method of objective hermeneutics, which we will see in action later in this section.<sup>455</sup> The evaluation narrative examined the main lines of each interview guided by the question, How does the religious background of the interviewees influence their work as media professionals?

---

450 Nina Baur, Jörg Blasius, and Cornelia Helfferich, eds., "Leitfaden- und Experteninterviews," in *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*, Handbuch (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014), 570–573; Uwe Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung: eine Einführung*, Rororo (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2016), 214–218.

451 Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 65/66. Names used in the interviews have been anonymized.

452 Reichertz, "Objektive Hermeneutik und hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie"; Andreas Wernet, *Einführung in die Interpretationstechnik der objektiven Hermeneutik*, *Qualitative Sozialforschung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 11–21; Andreas Franzmann, "Entstehungskontexte und Entwicklungsphasen der Objektiven Hermeneutik als einer Methodenschule," in *Die Methodenschule der Objektiven Hermeneutik: Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, ed. Roland Becker-Lenz et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2016), 1–42.

453 Wernet, *Einführung in die Interpretationstechnik der objektiven Hermeneutik*, 21–27.

454 Strübing, "Grounded Theory und Theoretical Sampling"; Boehm, "Grounded Theory - wie aus Texten Modelle und Theorien gemacht werden"; Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke, eds., "Theoretisches Kodieren: Textanalyse in der Grounded Theory," in *Qualitative Forschung: ein Handbuch*, by Andreas Boehm, Rororo (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2015), 475–485.

455 Reichertz, "Objektive Hermeneutik und hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie," 517.

## Preparation of the interviews

A short overview of the questions was distributed to the participants in advance of the interview so that they were aware of both its structure and the topics it would address. The interviews contained three sections. The first section asked about the LDS institution and how the interviewees were professionally related to the LDS Church, the position they occupied in the church hierarchy or how they and their work were related to the church, their responsibilities within the church, how active they were as church members, and how they were involved in media production for LDS related products. The list of questions below is an example and is in this case the list sent in advance to media professional SA5, who worked for a media institution affiliated with the LDS Church. The words in italics are generic replacements for the specific identifying terms used.

Institution: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

- Which are your responsibilities as a producer within the LDS media production and *media institution x*?
- What is the connection between the Latter-day Saints public affairs department, the missionary department and the LDS media production and *media institution x*?
- How is the LDS presidency involved into the strategies of the LDS media and *media institution x*?
- How are the relation and the processes structured between those departments?
- Who is in charge of the Mormon channel?
- Does the Latter-day Saint Church work with an agency outside the church or is it in house?
- What is the difference between the LDS media in the US and in Europe or other countries?
- In which aspects are the LDS media, BYUtv, the missionary and the public affairs department involved in the *I'm a Mormon* campaign?

Referring to the communication spaces of production, representation, and consumption, the interviewees explained the specifics of the media productions with which they have been involved or for which they were responsible. The sample questions listed below were sent to a media professional who is an employee of the LDS Church. They illustrate the general impetus of this three-part section entitled “Media Production, Texts, Reception and Distribution”:

### Media Production

- In which sense are you involved in media production?
- How is the media production organized? How are the production decisions made? Is there a person or a board in charge of the productions? Who is responsible for strategic decisions according to media production?
- Do all the media professionals working for the Latter-day Saint church belong to the church?
- How many media does the church produce? What kind of? For what purposes?
- Who is in charge of the Mormon channel?

### Media Texts

- *I'm a Mormon* campaign, especially the commercials and The District: What was your role in this production?
- LDS media sources on public Internet platforms like YouTube: How do you deal with the comments on and outside the LDS media platform?
- How is the interaction between those narratives for the different media (in meaning and production)?

### Reception and Distribution

- Do you carry out any effect studies of the Latter-day Saint media?
- Do you dispose of figures about the media material you produce like about the consumption, audience, distribution channels, and budget?
- In which way does media reception provide positive effects and where do you see problematic areas inside and outside the Latter-day Saint community?
- Do you and how do you include other countries and cultures than the US in the media reception.

And, finally, the hermeneutic horizons of the participants, as illustrated by biographical information, were established. In this section the questions were the same for every interviewee:

### Biography

- Are you born in the church or converted?
- You are a Latter-day Saint and [*name of the SA's professional activity in the field of media*]. How do you deal with these two commitments? How

do they intersect? If you do separate between these areas in which situations is this the case?

- How does the involvement in media production processes influence your experiences in the church and your attitude as LDS member in the community?
- What are your favourite television shows/series and movies?

The interview did not work strictly through the prepared questions, but they provided a guide to topics that might be touched upon during the conversation. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed and then coded according to an open coding method.<sup>456</sup> When a code became saturated, it was sorted into inductive categories or split into sub-codes.<sup>457</sup> The final analysis worked with the following ten categories, developed after three interviews had been coded (table 11).<sup>458</sup>

Categories	Description
Biographical	Concerning their private life, education and personal experiences.
Communication	Different means of communication like for example social media, statements about the purpose of their communication and LDS specific strategies to communicate.
Consumption space	Statements about the audience.
Finances	Referred to financial aspects of the LDS Church or media productions.
LDS Church related statements	When the LDS Church is explicitly mentioned.
Media production	Production titles.
Opinions	Views of Mormons formed either within the Mormon community or externally and also political opinions.

456 Helene Starks and Susan Brown Trinidad, “Choose Your Method: A Comparison of Phenomenology, Discourse Analysis, and Grounded Theory,” *Qualitative Health Research* 17, no. 10 (December 1, 2007): 1372.

457 David R. Thomas, “A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data,” *American Journal of Evaluation* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 237–46.

458 Tom Richards and Lyn Richards, “Using Hierarchical Categories in Qualitative Data Analysis,” in *Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis: Theory, Methods and Practice*, ed. Udo Kelle, Gerald Prein, and Katherine Bird (London: Sage, 1998), 80–95.



Categories	Description
Production space	Embraced the whole production process.
Religion	Everything referring to religion.
representation and distribution space	Statements about representation and distribution strategies of the media.

Table 11 The ten categories, developed after three interviews, had been coded.

Also during the coding process did spaces of communication (representation, distribution, production, consumption) emerge as a helpful tool for systematizing parts of the interview sequences. The multiple or partly overlapping coding of a single statement was deliberate and is indicative of possible relations between categories.

The following discussion focuses on the most salient topics and how they relate to other topics. Inclusion in this evaluation is not determined simply by the frequency of a specific code. The selection of topics has also been influenced by the questions that guided the interviews: How do the religious background of the interviewees and their work as media professionals influence each other? Are these roles interrelated or separate; do they even overlap?

### Evaluation of the interviews

The evaluation of the coded interviews largely followed a text interpretation modelled on the method of objective hermeneutics.<sup>459</sup> This method was selected as it takes into account that the study included a relatively small number of interviews – only six, involving eight interviewees in total. In a first step, the interpretation process focused on each interview individually and its sequences that contained an argument or a statement. In a second step, these statements and arguments were analyzed by assigning codes to topic areas, which then, in a third step, were either specified in sub-codes or sorted into categories. The evaluation process applied to the

---

459 Franzmann, “Entstehungskontexte und Entwicklungsphasen der Objektiven Hermeneutik als einer Methodenschule,” 26–33; Wernet, *Einführung in die Interpretationstechnik der objektiven Hermeneutik*, 21–38.

interviews therefore combines objective hermeneutics with elements of grounded theory.<sup>460</sup>

The results of the interview evaluation are organized into seven aspects established during the coding process when the codes were diversified or sorted into categories. Retrospectively it was evident that these aspects had been present implicitly during the interviews:

- (1) Feeling alienated by mainstream media
- (2) Working for the LDS Church requires sacrifices
- (3) Self-definition through professional media work
- (4) The “Mormonese” language
- (5) Telling who we really are and being authentic
- (6) LDS Church control
- (7) Faith and values

The sorting of the statements into seven thematic aspects proved fruitful for the evaluation because it facilitated grouping of the statements and enabled their comparison. Although each statement was considered in its singularity, comparison revealed conspicuous parallels, as the following discussion shows.

(1) Feeling alienated by mainstream media: The interviewees very often mentioned their own experience as media consumers and a feeling of being alienated from the representational style of successful television shows and movies because of the explicit depiction of sexuality, nudity, and violence. A freelance media professional explained:

And that’s not to say I’m opposed to anybody that makes an adult driven, I’m not talking about an adult film, I’m talking about adult driven in terms of its psyche. I’m not opposed to that, I love those kinds of films. But I think because of that mindset, my manager, my agent, kinda pushed me towards the arena that was more safe for the families. And that seemed to be a good fit. Because I wasn’t having to make those hard decisions about oh, I gotta pull out that scene that has nudity in it. I gotta pull, I didn’t have to make those choices because this is for Disney. So you’re just not gonna have those kind of choices, battles to fight. So it has impacted, so my belief system I guess is impacting the kind of stuff that I would do. And I was offered some films that were considered, I don’t put a whole lot of stock in the ratings, per se.

---

460 See Wernet, *Einführung in die Interpretationstechnik der objektiven Hermeneutik*, 21–38; Reichertz, “Objektive Hermeneutik und hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie.”

Because they're different for every country, and they're very, they don't mean a whole lot. But I was offered some films that could have probably been very good for my career but would have gone counter to my belief system, so I passed on this, decided not to do it. It's not like I'm any great saint or anything. I just didn't feel comfortable.<sup>461</sup>

Mormon media professionals are convinced of the harmfulness of such "adult driven" representations but those they work with are also sensitive to what their Mormon colleagues deem appropriate. Production companies therefore often do not offer them projects with potentially explicit content. Interviewees referred to their work's suitability for young people, with one interviewee explicitly referring to being discomforted by the thought of not being able to show their work to their children:

Because I care about what my kids see, so if I have any control I'm gonna use whatever control I have, to the extent that I can. I don't have 100% control, nobody does. I'm only gonna work on things that I would feel okay about my children seeing. [...]. So by and large, when I could exercise some control, I always selected products to work on that were gonna be safe for families, for kids.<sup>462</sup>

All of the interviewed media professionals were parents, to between four and seven children, and some had grandchildren. Their motivation for producing only family-oriented programs was heightened by an identified need for productions that entertain but are in line with their moral principles. One motivation for working in media was to fill a gap in the media market.

They look at the television shows that are on TV right now, and they say, can't watch *Walking Dead* with my kids. I can't watch *Game of Thrones* with my kids, I can't watch *Wallander*, from Sweden, with my kids. My kids can watch either silly children's programming, or nothing. So what's in the middle? What's the sophisticated stuff that a whole family can watch together? And there isn't any. There's none. I mean, you're not going to get your five year old to watch a concert on PBS of a great orchestra, they're just not going to stay there. So, somewhere in the middle, nobody is providing this kind of program. Well,

---

461 SA4, June 22, 2015, Salt Lake City/UT, 2:28.

462 SA4, 2:27.

we believe really strongly that you should avoid things that have gratuitous violence or sexual content. But then we don't really have it.<sup>463</sup>

The media professionals made no mention of pressure from the church to adopt a specific attitude during the production process or to make decisions based on church-defined objectives. They described their work as driven by a desire to tell stories that matched their belief system, a means of serving a greater good.

(2) Working for the LDS Church requires sacrifices: According to the media professionals, the ability to express oneself in accord with one's religious worldview comes at a price. All of the interviewees connected their decision to abide by their moral principles with the sacrifice of a career in mainstream commercial media. They also highlighted that they could have earned much more by working for companies not affiliated with the church. They gained, they explained, in being truthful to their belief and value systems, despite the financial loss. A media professional employed by the church explained:

I'm a journalist by training, my background is in journalism, I spent 11 years in newspaper and I always said I would never go into public relations. Because public relations seems to be all about spin. If I'm working for the Ford Motor Company I might prefer Volkswagen. So there's a certain lack of integrity in that. But when I was invited to come and work for the church in Public Affairs. I was three years in London and twelve years in Australia, and I have been here for 24 years. I realized that my passion, what I really deeply believe in my core was also going to be my job. Which is fantastic, a fantastic opportunity. Connie<sup>464</sup> will tell you that everyone who works here, works here because of their conviction, not because it's a job, and we can also tell you that many of us can earn a lot more working for somebody else. Working somewhere else. But we do it because we love it. So at least we feel no contradiction, at least I feel no contradiction, I think you [to Connie] get the same.<sup>465</sup>

Another interviewee, who was employed by a church-affiliated media institution, was even more outspoken about the consequences of choosing to work for the church. "I think everybody in this building would say, I could

---

463 SA5, June 23, 2015, Provo/UT, 5:87.

464 An alias.

465 SA6, June 24, Salt Lake City/UT, 2015, 3:102.

make three or four times the money working for someone else. I could, I took a huge pay cut to leave the freelance film making world.

So why would I do that? Only because I really believe in what we're trying to accomplish."<sup>466</sup> This media professional also mentioned that the employees of this church-affiliated media institution not only accepted being paid less, but also had to regulate their behavior, even if they were not Mormon: "they have to agree to abide by the Mormon principles. So you can't smoke in the building, you can't drink, you can't have affairs at work, all those things.

But they don't have to be LDS, they just have to be, agree to act like LDS, agree to our standards."<sup>467</sup> According to this interviewee, the nature of the productions and the working atmosphere in which this church-affiliated institution is involved is good enough reason for non-Mormons to work there, even though they have to regulate their behavior and might earn more elsewhere.

(3) Self-definition through professional media work: Their emphasis on the advantages of working for the LDS Church or for a church-affiliated institution could have been an attempt by the interviewees to reassure themselves that they had made the right decision about where to work. They also evidently thrived, however, in being able to define their Mormon-being through their work.

I really believe that there's a dark media landscape and we might be able to make a difference, and so that drives every decision I make. Now is that about being a Mormon?

I don't know. Maybe it's about being a person who cares about the world, but my version of that is being a Latter-day Saint. So being a Latter-day Saint means this matters to me more than almost anything else. I don't think I would be happier.<sup>468</sup>

The emphasis on doing good and making a difference was, as we have seen, a repeated theme. "Being a person who cares about the world" is not exclusive to Mormons, but for this interviewee it was an idea that fed his understanding of what it is to be a Mormon and was expressed by producing media that enlightened the "dark media landscape."

Several interviewees mentioned the experience of belonging to a minority and of often feeling misunderstood. One of the interviewees explained

---

466 SA5, 15:114.

467 SA5, 15:114.

468 SA5, 4:101.

that he was sometimes given negative accounts of who Mormons are and what they do. This misperception was a strong impetus for telling critics who the Mormons really are.

And I thought, if people just knew us for who we really are, they wouldn't say such things. They would, it's like anything. You know, you get to know a person, you get a sense of who they are. And then all of a sudden, all of the things that you've heard about them, you can kinda start to separate fact from fiction a little easier. And so that was really at the heart of the decision of what this film should be.<sup>469</sup>

All the media professionals mentioned that they hoped through their media work to change how Mormons are perceived by non-Mormons. Their goal was to change how they are seen from outside by providing a contemporary perspective on the LDS community. According to an independent media professional, they are additionally interested in portraying their own history in a way that did not ignore the past but could be respected by outsiders:

That's what we've been doing all along, is trying to take a middle of the road between a scholar up here and trying to bring a public to an understanding of what our history is as it's growing and developing and being respected.<sup>470</sup>

The interviewees described their religious convictions being fostered by their work in media production. Media work was seen as a way not only to express their beliefs but also to improve themselves as human beings.<sup>471</sup> "Every time I go out to build a show, I come away a better person because of what I learn from what they [Latter-day Saints] went through and what they did. My work makes me a better person." The media professionals were not interested in telling controversial stories about the church or in relaying criticism of the institution. As faithful people who supported the church with their work, they sought to promote rather than question the church, as was explained during a double interview: "When we started, two things. We were not going to be looking for controversial axes to grind. We're both faithful Latter-day Saints. We believe in the cause. We're trying to help the cause. We're not going to hinder it. You can always tell a controversial story. We're not in the least bit interested. We take criticism.

---

469 SA4, 2:53.

470 SA3, June 22, 2015, Salt Lake City/UT, 5:181.

471 SA3, 5:23.

We just don't care."<sup>472</sup> They also explained that they were willing to expose themselves for the sake of the church: "We become poster boys for ...", the second interviewee added, "Yeah we just become a target." Then the first resumed: "...for the church."<sup>473</sup> They agreed that "they [non-Mormons] mock the church." SA3 then emphasized the outside perception of Mormons: "They just hate Mormons and they just use us to – an avenue to vent."<sup>474</sup>

While they were intrinsically motivated to tell stories about the LDS Church, the media professionals were not interested in spreading explicit religious messages. Reference was often made to a desire to use entertainment as a vehicle for values of which the audience were not directly aware. One media professional described their communication strategy as follows:

Yeah, there isn't a secret agenda to preach Mormon doctrine. There is a secret agenda to entertain people so much that they'll think about the things you're talking about, which were, racism, there was a little Asian girl in the community, there's a black FBI, so.<sup>475</sup>

Here entertainment was the primary aim in producing media, with enlightenment a byproduct.

Three dimensions of the relations between religious background and working in the media distinctly illustrate the media professionals' motivation for media work. First, they sought to overcome their alienation from mainstream media, a step they could take by working for the LDS Church or for LDS affiliated institutions, or by supporting the church's cause. They were, secondly, willing accept the smaller income and more limited career that resulted. The sacrifice was deemed worthwhile because, thirdly, they could use their work to define who the Mormons are and specifically who they are as Mormons. This attitude simultaneously reinforced the boundary between Mormons and non-Mormons that is expressed in different communication strategies, as the next aspects demonstrate.

(4) The "Mormonese" language: In light of their occupational background, it is not surprising that the media professionals were sensitive to communication strategies. For example, they divided their audience between Mormons and non-Mormons. The former also need to be educated

---

472 SA3: 5:57.

473 SA2, June 22, 2015, Salt Lake City/UT, SA3, 5:61.

474 SA3, 5:61.

475 SA5, 4:86.



and provided with materials to share. “To some degree, because we’re still educating our own people as well, you know, so that’s a particularly challenging subject.”<sup>476</sup> Media are also deployed to reach out to the non-Mormon world, as the interviewees made clear. Explaining Mormonism to non-Mormons is not the same as explaining Mormonism to Mormons. One interviewee described the difference in light of language. A message cannot be written in “Mormonese” if it is to be heard by non-Mormons:

Our messages reach everybody but the messages are designed to reach those who are not of our faith and so that helps people that are members to the church who may have a question or be searching or whose faith is struggling. It helps them the same way but if you’re around Mormons very much, you’ll find out that we have our own language. When Mormons talk to Mormons, they talk in Mormonese. They talk in a way that the average non-member doesn’t necessarily understand everything that they say because we have our own way of conversing. It’s not a separate language I’m just inventing. Every group has its own vocabulary. We make sure that all of our material from the missionary department is written in non-Mormonese. It’s written with the target audience in mind of those who are not of our faith and then if you write it that way, members of the church get it. They’re not having any trouble with that but frequently if you write an ad to members of the church, non-members won’t understand it.<sup>477</sup>

The media professional gave no further details, but the point was well made: audience dictates not just content but also expression.

The communication styles of the LDS Church departments also vary. The Missionary Department works closely with the Public Affairs Department (I was asked not use the term “public relation department” “because public relations has this sort of connotation of, you know, sort of spin. And, we don’t like spin,”<sup>478</sup> as the interviewee explained at the beginning of the interview.). How this lateral communication works was illustrated during one of the interviews on the example of *The Book of Mormon* musical.<sup>479</sup> The church initially saw the music as potentially damaging, as parody that mocked their faith. The musical portrays missionaries and was therefore a particular concern for the Missionary Department. The deci-

---

476 SA6, 2:65.

477 SA1, June 22, 2015, Salt Lake City/UT, 3:31.

478 SA6, 2:16.

479 SA6, 2:32–2:38.

sion was made to deploy a strategy that meant not fighting against the musical but using the attention it was attracting amongst critics and the general public for the church's own purposes. Both LDS Church interviewees seemed proud of how the church had dealt with the challenge, which was evidence of how the Public Affairs Department and Missionary Department can complement one another:

In some ways, *The Book of Mormon* musical has been a great advertiser for us because most people can't afford to go to that. Places like London, the whole city was about *The Book of Mormon* musical. The ads are on all the buses, all the subway stations, everything, promoting *The Book of Mormon* musical. A lot of people think it's our musical until they go see it.<sup>480</sup>

The church decided to plaster the public transportation near where the musical took place with its own ads, to build a whole campaign around the musical, and even to buy several pages of ad space in the playbill, where slogans like "I've read the book" or "The book is always better" or "Now read the book" were presented along with depictions of likable Mormons.<sup>481</sup>

This example gives an idea of the extent and nuance of the collaboration by those responsible for church communication.<sup>482</sup> The response to the musical was proactive, not defensive. According to the interviewees, the communication strategy applied in New York and London was to be transferred to any other city where the musical was performed, as an "established pattern"<sup>483</sup> used to "teach what the church is really about."<sup>484</sup>

The Public Affairs Department has also applied "non-Mormonese" language in communicating about the temple garment. This underclothing must be worn when visiting the temple, but some Mormons wear it every day.<sup>485</sup> One interviewee noted, "We actually started calling it sacred under-

480 SA1, 3:52.

481 Playbill, *The Book of Mormon*, Citi Emerson Colonial Theatre, Boston /MA, September 2015.

482 Similar cooperation between the two departments was applied in the case of the webpage [mormonsandgays.com](http://mormonsandgays.com), on the church's attitude towards homosexuality, which was completely revised in 2018.

483 SA6, 2:38.

484 SA6, 2:37.

485 Church Newsroom, "Mormon Underwear" Is the Temple Garment and Is Sacred to Latter-Day Saints, accessed May 10, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkTz\\_NQqKA8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkTz_NQqKA8).

clothing. And then we realized nobody's going to search for that."<sup>486</sup> The adoption of non-Mormon language was thus designed to facilitate communication with the out-group. This practice is not simply accommodating, for it bolsters a Mormon exclusivity – the new term will be received by existing members of the LDS Church as unfamiliar; it is part of an othering process that distances them from the outside world.<sup>487</sup> "Non-Mormonese" communication fortifies belonging for the community who understand "Mormonese".

(5) Telling who we really are and being authentic: The media professional's description "what the church is really about" was a verbalization often connected with a rhetoric of "being authentic" or "showing who we really are". If non-Mormons are shown who Mormons really were, then, it was hoped, that target audience will want to know more, and will perhaps connect with the church through missionaries. But conversion is not always the first aim, as we see in the case of shows broadcast by the television channel BYUtv, which belongs to Brigham Young University and the LDS Church:

we'd like to reach out to people who share our values. Not necessarily our faith, our religion, but who share our values all over the world. And entertain them, and enlighten them, and educate them if you can, but mostly entertain and enlighten. And we all know that we can only stand so much education, then want to be entertained. So, BYU broadcasting's goal is to entertain first and then if we do a good job of entertaining, we've earned the right to tell you something that enlightens you and makes you a better person, right?<sup>488</sup>

Again the connection between entertainment and education is vital to the intent behind the media production. This goal was similarly described by an independent Mormon media professional who produced documentary media about the history of the church. He mentioned that non-Mormon media often constructed their own narratives about Mormon history. He and his co-producer saw it as their duty to correct those that are wrong and claim their own perspective.

People get their story from the media. If nobody is going to speak up and tell what really happened and tell the history as it really happened,

---

486 SA6, 2:37.

487 Sune Qvotrup Jensen, "Othering, Identity Formation and Agency," *Qualitative Studies* 2, no. 2 (October 3, 2011): 63–78.

488 SA5, 4:21.

then we're going to. The church is starting to tell their story in great detail; their history, controversial subjects. Well we're there too. We are trying to partner and help the cause by telling the story of what really happened so that the people will get correct information. The Joseph Smith papers, our existence, is all for one thing. To remove people's excuses for being ignorant of their history. We're going to tell it and we're going to tell it like it really happened so that people are properly informed.<sup>489</sup>

Telling the story of Mormonism as it "really happened" is not about searching out controversial facts and weaknesses. Media narratives are produced to foster church members and to convince non-Mormons of the positive aspects of Mormonism. Almost in all interviews the terms "authentic" and "real" were used to describe the mode of communication for which the professionals strive in their work, prompted by church leaders.

"Authentic" and "real" express quality. They form a guiding principle, deployed, for example, in reference to *Meet the Mormons*. Both the social actors themselves and the audience had to feel the depictions were authentic. One interviewee explained that anyone who spends two weeks with the social actors who appear in the videos should experience them exactly as they are portrayed. The documentary, the interviewee explained, allows Mormons to feel good about themselves and shows non-Mormons "who we really are, what makes us tick."<sup>490</sup> In defining how they are represented in the media, LDS Church members can influence how Mormons are received in "real life". Media representations and general perceptions are understood to be closely tied together.

The intentions behind the *I'm a Mormon* campaign and its follow-up *Meet the Mormons* were described by one interviewee:<sup>491</sup>

Let's tell the story of real members, not the story of the institution. Let's tell the story of the members. You know, typically, documentaries in the past about the Church have been, you start with Joseph Smith, and you need to tell the story. And you talk about the doctrine. And you interview church leaders.<sup>492</sup>

Telling the story of "real members" is a communication strategy deployed by the LDS Church to shape a positive image of the LDS institution.

---

489 SA3, 5:148.

490 SA4, 1:159.

491 See for a detailed discussion of this campaign part II, chapter 4.

492 SA6, 2:45.

The producers of both *Meet the Mormons* and the *I'm a Mormon* campaign sought social actors able to talk about their lives in terms of “striving for a better person”,<sup>493</sup> a description used by an interviewee who was involved in the production of *Meet the Mormons* to define what it means to be a Mormon. Mormons, the interviewee added, fail and succeed just like anyone else.

Both, church leaders and those making the documentaries sought authenticity: “But we really had, honestly we had quite a bit of autonomy in the making of the film. And again their [the church leaders’], their only guidance was, please, just be authentic.”<sup>494</sup> Encouraged to explore how the instruction to be “authentic” was understood, the interviewee continued, “Well it means be honest about who, collectively and individually, does this represent, who we are as a people.”<sup>495</sup> The use of “honest” picked up on the idea of being “authentic” and “real”. This discussion brings us to the issue of the control exerted by church leaders over the work of the media professionals.

(6) LDS Church control: The media professionals involved with *Meet the Mormons* emphasized the lack of direction from church leaders and that they had felt free to tell the story as they wanted. Church leaders had certainly approached filmmakers about making a new documentary for the visitors’ center. But, one interviewee reported,

That was perhaps the thing that was maybe perhaps most surprising to me is that they continued to say, hey just let us see something when it’s done. And so they really didn’t, as I mentioned earlier they didn’t tell us who, where or what, or when. They said just find –, or even how many stories to do. So they were very open, they said keep us posted. And if there’s something that we think you should be concerned about we’ll let you know, but I don’t know I was going to say that by and large they just said go. And really, the reality is that 100% of the time, they just said, okay.<sup>496</sup>

Church leaders were evidently involved, but somewhat to the surprise of the interviewee they did not intervene. Unlike the interviewed independent producers, as we shall see, the producers of this material highlighted their great freedom in their work. They were, however, required to report

---

493 SA5, 4:1.

494 SA4, 1:141.

495 SA3, 1:142/143.

496 SA4, 1:122.

back to the church, for example, to the Public Affairs Department, supervised by Elder D. Todd Christofferson.

So because of the way that's structured, we always have a church leader oversight into what we're doing to make sure we stay on the right track. But they don't get into hands-on, day-to-day management. Generally the context and mostly when we call them, maybe some advice or counsel or something. Or maybe there's a particularly big story that's just blown up and we're looking at maybe a response. Most of the times, I would make the decision. But maybe sometimes when I'd like a second opinion and maybe I'm not quite certain about the direction we are going, I might call and say, listen this is what we're thinking about. What do you think? Most of the time they'll say that's fine.<sup>497</sup>

The media professionals were sensitive about when to reach out to their supervisors within the church as decisions were being made. Although they suggested they had significant creative freedom, one interviewee mentioned "bureaucratic red tape", noting that he liked to "cut red tape, so we'll see what we can."<sup>498</sup> The statement suggests the existence of administrative control, but the interviewee described the hurdles it creates good-humoredly.

Two independent Mormon media producers explained that it is better not to ask for financial support from the church because a production funded by the church must go through a complicated and time-consuming process that affects the production schedule. During "correlations" the church leaders consider whether the media content correlates with the image of the church they wish to see broadcast. The independent media professionals emphasized that it is better to have the church's approval, but they termed the process "painful."<sup>499</sup> The church evidently is experienced at controlling production in two ways, depending on the relevant media professionals' relationship with the church. Those involved in projects created within the institutional church reported no church control or mentioned a great degree of freedom; independent media professionals stated, "we have a little more latitude" in relation to their representation of the church,<sup>500</sup> but they then had neither financial or creative support from the

---

497 SA6, 2:21.

498 SA6, 2:48.

499 SA2, 5:93.

500 SA3, 5:94.

church. As we have seen, however, church control is not exercised only in the space of production, for in the space of consumption the Membership Department systematically tracks online comments and responds to them.<sup>501</sup>

(7) Faith and values: During the interviews the media professionals explained their religious worldview and values in a more general way, without relating them explicitly to their occupation. Their comments suggest a conception of religion that is only implicitly shaped by their work experience. Unsurprisingly, the media professionals in this instance were very largely positive about religion.

Faith, as we have repeatedly noted, is understood in terms of agency. Agency is about the self, about a personal coming to faith that is not externally dictated. One media professional explained:

Because you know one of the main tenants of our faith is not to compel anybody to believe anything. We have this thing called agency, so we want people to – sure we want to help them understand what we believe because it makes us happy, but you can't force something on someone.<sup>502</sup>

All the interviewees said in some way that agency could bring personal challenges, but that they felt rewarded in being able to be active Mormons.

Their statements about their worldviews and religious practices were layered. The interviewees repeated the differences between Mormons and non-Mormons and how difficult it can be for the latter to understand the former. They also talked, however, about strong bonds within the community. Those ties were picked up in the discussion of *Meet the Mormons*, which was well-received amongst members of the LDS Church. In self-identifying as Mormons in the videos, the social actors created a sense of communal togetherness with self-identifying Mormon viewers: “Because we all identify with those members, even though they're different cultures, different countries; we know we all have the same thing in common.”<sup>503</sup> The interviewees also emphasized the Christian character of Mormon tradition, not in terms of a single Christian community but rather in light of Christian beliefs. Communicating to non-Mormons that Mormons believe in Jesus Christ was, according to one interviewee, the essential aim of the *I'm a Mormon* campaign:

---

501 SA5, 4:108.

502 SA4, 1:78.

503 SA6, 2:31.



So all the departments understand that our primary message in the church is that we follow Jesus Christ. Everything centers in that. So when they put their messaging together or when we put our messaging together we've always got this idea of does this help people understand the fundamental Christian nature of the faith? That we're trying to follow him, my following. We're not preaching all the time, but every one of those Mormon, *I'm a Mormon* messages talks about the lifestyle of the person. And we're trying to show the consistency with the way they interpret their faith in their own lives with Christian doctrine, that's the sorta glue that holds us all together.<sup>504</sup>

Adherence to Christian doctrine is presented here as the central reference point for all Mormons and as "the glue that holds us all together." Christian faith is an identity marker for each individual and also for the community, for it bonds an otherwise diverse group.

Interviewees spoke also of the religious community as a strong and supportive network. That network is active when someone involved in a LDS Church campaign leaves the church. The interviewee explained that the leaders of the LDS Church can be informed about "apostates"<sup>505</sup> because members of local congregations are in contact with each other and "Mormons sort of have a network of telling each other what's going on."<sup>506</sup> Within individual congregations members are bonded with each other and in turn congregations are bonded to the church leadership, which provides, the interviewees suggested, strong networks that promote adherence to the church.

The conception of religion expressed by the interviewees was marked by a deep confidence in the religious institution and by "belief in the cause". Media professionals employed directly by the church demonstrated a great commitment to ensuring that their work had value for the LDS Church. The religious dimension was associated with core values that had positive impact on their working life and influenced their decision making.

Financial donors to media productions were deemed by the interviewees to similarly demonstrate their belief in the cause.

So these donors are people who believe that there's a dark, we call it a dark media landscape. There ought to be some light in there. And they believe in that cause. Just like they believe in, I'm sure the same people

---

504 SA6, 2:28/2:29.

505 SA1, 3:157.

506 SA1, 3:96.

who give us money give money to water for Africa and starving children and hurricane relief and refugees in Syria, and then as part of that gift they give money to us saying, we'd like media to be a little lighter as well.<sup>507</sup>

Again we encounter a possible inconsistency: while interviewees defended religious freedom as an important dimension of their religious self-conception, they understood their own religious worldview in exclusive terms. This tension is expressed in relation to Mormon engagement with the LGBTI community.<sup>508</sup> One interviewee noted that although Mormons will acknowledge different understandings of family, they defend their own conception as a moral issue.

So there is a time we say well, it's a moral issue but we also defend. We have this, I don't know if you've heard of this, *Articles of Faith* they're called. And one of those says you know we deemed everyone has a right to worship how, where, or what they may. So we really are huge proponents of religious freedom. We don't want everyone to become a Mormon. That's not logical. We just want everyone who wants to have the right to be one or to be a Catholic or to be humanist or to be an atheist or to be whatever.<sup>509</sup>

The interviewee went as far as to state that non-Mormons too can live good lives pleasing to God.

I think there is plenty of people who go to work and don't think about God at all, and yet they think about being a better person. So that changed my perception. I use to think Mormons might be the only people in heaven, now I am pretty sure that we'll pretty much all be there and we'll all have a role to play.<sup>510</sup>

... all the people that I've met are just wonderful people of all faiths. I can't imagine, I can't believe in a God who doesn't love them as well. I can't believe in a God who doesn't love a great humanist who doesn't even believe in him as long as they're trying to be better people.<sup>511</sup>

---

507 SA4, 4:74.

508 Elizabeth Dias, "Mormon Church to Allow Children of L.G.B.T. Parents to Be Baptized," *The New York Times*, April 5, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/04/us/lds-church-lgbt.html>.

509 SA5,4:4.

510 SA5, 4:104.

511 SA5, 4:11.

This statement parallels a statement by one media professional interviewed that noted that the consumers of LDS Church media productions are not necessarily Latter-day Saints; they need only share LDS Church values. The interviewee used broccoli pizza as a metaphor. Children who do not want to eat healthy broccoli on its own might happily eat broccoli pizza and thus still get the health benefits of the broccoli, even if it comes with less-healthy pizza.<sup>512</sup> A certain “balance” is needed.<sup>513</sup> Such balance is achieved when an audience is entertained, distracted from their own world and brought virtually into another world, and educated about that second world, but without overt reference to religious values that are being inculcated. The interviewees suggested a critical mass of values can be communicated without hindering the production’s ability to entertain.

### Media professionals and their religious worldview

The seven aspects discussed here together suggest this group of media professionals share markedly similar values and worldviews, which we can usefully summarize.

Aspects 1-3 (Feeling alienated by mainstream media; Working for the LDS Church requires sacrifices; Self-definition through professional media work) highlight a sense of alienation from the mainstream media landscape and of misrepresentation by the media. They are strongly motivated by a need to tell non-Mormons who Mormons really are. They want their work to support the cause of the church. Through their media work, they become, they believe, better people, participate in the production of positive images of the church, and lighten the “dark media landscape”.

Aspects 4 and 5 (The “Mormonese” language; Telling who we really are and being authentic) capture how the media productions communicate with their target audience, at the same time drawing boundaries between Mormons and non-Mormons. Cooperation between departments of the church in communicating with non-Mormons is pronounced. All those interviewed appeared to trust that “authentic” and “real” depictions of Mormons would lead to a greater acceptance of the church in the public sphere. The LDS media professionals demonstrated great loyalty to their church and felt responsible for its public image.

---

512 SA5, 4:88.

513 SA5, 4:88; SA4, 1:59, 1:60, 1:81.

Alongside this strong commitment to the church, aspect 6 (LDS Church control) suggests a variety of experience in relation to the control exerted by the religious institution. Interviewees described feeling personal responsibility for their media productions, without restrictions placed by the church leaders; the “authenticity” of the message they convey – a reference to dimension 5 – is, however, adjudicated by church officials.

Dimension 7 (Faith and values) maps Mormon faith as agency, with each individual responsible for their own decisions about the life they should live if they are to become a better person. There is an inherent tension here with the LDS mission goals of finding candidates for baptism and persuading them of the truth of Mormonism. In general, being religious is seen as bringing additional value to media work for the church. Marked commitment to the church institution and to Mormon networks, described as dense and efficient, was evident. For every interviewee religious self-conception and external views of the church focused on claiming an identity as “Christian”.

### 6.3. *Persuasion through documentary media*

The chapter has applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the production and consumption spaces of documentary media produced by or in association with the LDS Church. The first part focuses on the audience in the space of consumption and how it responds to the values, opinions, and attitudes as revealed by a semio-pragmatic analysis of *Meet the Mormons*; to understand how cultural differences shape the space of consumption the study was conducted in Switzerland and Spain. The second part of the chapter examines the space of production in light of interviews conducted with media and communication professionals who are members of the LDS Church.

As argued, the communication spaces of production and consumption are autonomous. The social actors in these spaces communicate through the space of representation. The media producers encode their message through audio-visual means and the audience decodes the message in the space of consumption. These processes are shaped by the cultural context and hermeneutic horizons of the social actors involved.<sup>514</sup> But what, then, is the benefit of researching two spaces that are entirely distinct? What do a semio-pragmatic analysis and quantitative study and a qualitative study

---

514 See part I, chapter 2.3 and part III chapter 2.

add to our knowledge of the interface of documentary media and religion and whether and how they complement or contradict each other?

First, a crucial similarity between the quantitative and qualitative approaches can be located at the level of data: Both studies gathered data, although with different tools. The data presentation takes distinct forms: as statistical tables and as transcribed text. In both cases a hermeneutic process is deployed to draw meaning from the collected material. That meaning is expressed in a coherent narrative communicated to readers to illuminate elements of the interface between religion and documentary.

Second, in both instances the research design focused on participants, on survey-completing spectators of media products and interviewed creators of media products. Their answers are approached with scholarly rigor and evaluated with appropriate methods. We must still be aware that the interviewees' answers provide strictly personal views on a topic, be they from one of 200 college students or one of eight media professionals. According to Ellingson, the partiality of such a research design must be acknowledged:

Thus, participants' voices should be respected and considered valid accounts of participants' experiences, and researchers should incorporate participants' perspectives into analysis, representing them in ways that honor their perspectives. At the same time, researchers should take great care not to romanticize participants' accounts as objective or somehow authentically true in their efforts to respect participants; all perspectives necessarily are partial, even severely marginalized ones. Releasing the burden of having to produce only Truth that, by definition, must compete with all other proposed truth claims may be quite liberating and affirming for researchers schooled in positivism or immediate-postpositivism.<sup>515</sup>

Research with participants is always momentary, for it takes place in a specific time and at a specific place, and interacts with the researcher's personality and hermeneutic horizons.

Third, returning to the concept of crystallization, the applied quantitative and qualitative approaches are by no means contradictory, not do the current studies intersect, it can often occur through triangulation in mixed studies

---

515 Ellingson, *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research*, 13/14.

approaches.<sup>516</sup> The participants in each study, media professionals in one instance and college students in the other, are too different for the data to be consolidated for evaluation. We must be wary of putting the studies in conversation, suggesting potential continuities or parallels. But we can contend that they both contribute to extending our knowledge about the interface between documentary media and religion. They do not overlap but they do have additive impact. Their results illuminate the spaces of production and consumption differently but with methodological parallels.

Fourth, the studies do in fact intersect, not in and of themselves but in the space of representation. In the exploratory audience study the results of the semio-pragmatic analysis of a documentary source were transferred into questionnaires. During the interviews with the media professionals, documentary sources were discussed in detail. Thus, the documentary *Meet the Mormons* was used in the audience study and had been seen by all the interviewed media professionals, four of whom had been involved in its production. On some aspects the media professionals judged the film more positively than did the audience. The mostly US-American LDS media professionals would perhaps still be surprised by the positive attitude of the audiences in Switzerland and Spain towards Mormons and Mormonism in general, a reception that runs counter to the suspicious and negative opinion of Latter-day Saints that they often cited. The audience study suggests that the Latter-day Saints defensive response is less necessary than they might expect.

Finally, the rather positive attitudes towards Mormonism recorded in the audience study could in part reflect an absence of prejudgment. The audience is largely ignorant of the documentary's space of production. Had they known more, they might have been more negative in their assessment. In the US opinions about Mormons and Mormonism are more developed and that public perception is often negatively framed.<sup>517</sup> How are opinions, negative or positive, shaped by knowledge, and specifically by *what* is known and *how much* is known? Which processes nurture or minimize prejudice? Answers to such questions would surely highlight the involvement of media.

---

516 Denzin, "Triangulation 2.0"; Flick, *Triangulation*; John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 213/214.

517 "How Americans Feel About Religious Groups | Pew Research Center," July 16, 2014, <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/>.