

Digital Mediation of Spiritual Experiences: Sense-Making Through Story Completion

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Abstract. *The ubiquity of digital technologies has reconfigured the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, fostering the emergence of techno-spirituality. In Brazil, this phenomenon is particularly evident among the Evangelical population, which adopts digital artifacts amidst the tensions of the “attention economy”. This paper investigates how believers in the state of Sergipe construct meanings regarding this digital mediation. Methodologically, we advance Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) by leveraging Story Completion complemented by Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Story Mapping. Results reveal that technological adoption is not a binary event but a hermeneutic-pragmatic process that evolves from moral hesitation to conditioned acceptance through user discernment. We suggest that apps function as material substrates that expand interpretative capabilities while reconfiguring spatial and temporal barriers of faith. This work contributes to the field by empirically modeling faith-based sense-making in the Brazil and validating story completion as a robust methodological lens for investigating moral negotiations and subjective meaning-making beyond the limitations of direct self-report.*

1. Introduction

The ubiquity of digital technologies has reconfigured the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, inserting computational artifacts into the heart of contemporary spiritual practices. In this scenario, the concept of techno-spirituality emerges, referring to the field of study and practice where technology is used to facilitate, mediate, or enhance spiritual experiences [Bell 2006]. More than the mere use of tools, techno-spirituality demands a paradigm shift in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI): from an analysis focused solely on interfaces and usability to a deep investigation of the mediations and meanings that these artifacts acquire in the everyday life of faith. In this sense, it is necessary to consider that technology is not external to spirituality but a constituent part of how individuals perceive and relate to the sacred [Bell 2006].

In Brazil, this phenomenon is particularly visible in the exponential growth of the Evangelical population, which has adopted smartphones and Bible apps as facilitators of a routine of spiritual constancy [Rosa and Damian 2024, Rosa et al. 2026]. However, this adoption occurs within an “attention economy” [Hiniker and Wobbrock 2022] where persuasive design can directly conflict with the imperative of deep and relational attention to the divine. Existing studies often oscillate between celebratory narratives of access and efficiency and moral critiques of distraction, without empirically examining how believers themselves negotiate these tensions over time.

Despite the relevance of this field, HCI literature has historically neglected aspects related to faith, focusing predominantly on functional efficiency or quantitative surveys [Wyche 2010, Rosa and Damian 2024, Wolf et al. 2026]. There is a critical need to investigate how believers, as active agents, construct meaning regarding this mediation, especially in specific regional contexts of the Brazil. This investigation aligns with the Grand Challenges for HCI research in Brazil (GranDIHC-BR) for the 2025-2035 decade, specifically GC1 (New Theoretical and Methodological Approaches in HCI) [da Silva Junior et al. 2024] and GC4 (Sociocultural Aspects in HCI) [Neris et al. 2024]. Given this, this study is guided by the following research question: *how do Brazilian Evangelicals from the state of Sergipe construct senses and meanings regarding digital mediation in their spiritual experiences?*

The objective of this research is to investigate the digital mediation of spiritual experiences among Brazilian Evangelicals from the state of Sergipe, employing the story completion method to access subjective and reflexive constructions of sense-making. To this end, we utilized the Story Completion method [Clarke et al. 2019], a projective technique that allows participants to express values and tensions indirectly, mitigating social desirability bias. The results reveal that technological adoption is not a binary event but a hermeneutic process that evolves from an initial moral hesitation to a conditioned acceptance regulated by the user’s discernment. As a contribution, this paper provides an empirical model of spiritual mediation in the Brazil, provides evidence about the use of narrative methods for investigating values in HCI, and proposes design guidelines that prioritize human agency and distraction mitigation.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, including Verbeek’s post-phenomenology, techno-spirituality, HCI, and the sociocultural context of Brazilian Evangelicalism; Section 3 describes the research methodology: story completion as a data collection method, and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) and story mapping as data analysis methods; results and discussions are presented in Sections 4 and 5, respectively; finally, Section 6 presents the final considerations.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section establishes the theoretical foundations supporting the investigation, articulating the Philosophy of Technology with the state of the art in Techno-spirituality, HCI, and the Brazilian sociocultural context.

The study of techno-spirituality requires a paradigm shift: from the analysis of interfaces and usability to the analysis of mediations and meanings. Mediation Theory of [Verbeek 2015, Verbeek 2016] proposes that technologies are not merely neutral intermediary objects or passive tools, but mediators that actively shape the relationship between

human beings and the world-and, by extension, the transcendental.

Unlike the traditional concept of interaction, which presupposes the existence of pre-given human subjects and technological objects between which an action occurs, the mediation approach suggests that subjects and objects are co-constituted within this relationship. [Verbeek 2015] argues that technology design is, inherently, the design of human existence, as artifacts help define how we perceive and act in the world. Technological objects functioning as media through which humans relate to the world [Verbeek 2015, Frauenberger 2019, Ihde 1990]. This view is echoed by entanglement theories [Frauenberger 2019, Frauenberger 2020], which argue that focusing on the design of interaction is insufficient and that the more appropriate question for HCI to ask is “*Who do we want to become through the tools we bring into this world?*” [Frauenberger 2020, p. 74]

Specifically, technological mediation transforms experience in two main dimensions [Verbeek 2011]:

- **Hermeneutic Dimension:** Technology alters perception, shaping how reality is read and interpreted. In a hermeneutic relationship, technology provides a representation of the world that requires interpretation.
- **Pragmatic Dimension:** Technology alters action, inviting or inhibiting specific behaviors and shaping practices.

In the context of techno-spirituality, for example, this can mean that an app does not merely “contain” the Bible as a data repository, but constitutes a new way of experiencing the sacred, altering the hermeneutics of faith and associated ritual practices. Technology is not external to the spiritual experience but becomes an integral part of how faith is lived and understood.

HCI research has historically neglected aspects related to faith, religion, and spirituality¹, focusing predominantly on work efficiency and productivity [Wyche 2010, Wolf et al. 2024, Rosa and Damian 2024]. However, the “third wave” of HCI expanded focus toward cultural, emotional, and experiential aspects, opening space for the investigation of techno-spirituality [Bødker 2006, Rosa and Damian 2024, Neris et al. 2024]. [Buie and Blythe 2013], in a seminal review, identified that despite the abundance of religious apps, academic research on the topic was scarce.

Ten years later, [Wolf et al. 2024] observed an evolution in the field, noting an increase in interest regarding the community and social aspects of digitally mediated faith, partially driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. Current HCI literature suggests that design for spirituality should not focus solely on problem-solving but on “extraordinary computing”, which supports and honors significant and sacred aspects of domestic life, distinguishing them from the ordinary and routine [Wyche and Grinter 2009]. Furthermore, there is growing recognition that spiritual practices involve tangible and embodied dimensions that are often challenged or reconfigured by digital mediation [Markum et al. 2024].

In Brazil, technological appropriation by Evangelicals is marked by a diversity of practices that require a situated analysis [Rosa and Damian 2024, Rosa et al. 2026].

¹[Wyche 2010, p. 5] presents some hypotheses for this occurrence, including that “*religion are mistakenly assumed to fall outside the scope of scientific study*”.

The country is experiencing exponential growth in the Evangelical population, which rose from 15.4% in 2000 to 22.2% in 2010, and to 26.9% in 2022 [IBGE 2026]. The evangelical context is not incidental, but analytically relevant, as it emphasizes personal devotional practices, making it particularly suitable for investigating techno-spirituality.

[Rosa and Damian 2024] indicates that Brazilian Evangelicals utilize computational artifacts intensely to facilitate devotional routines and participation in services. Based on a recent survey with Brazilian Evangelicals, [Rosa and Damian 2024] revealed that digital technologies, such as smartphones and Bible apps, are used for practices like Bible reading, prayer, and consuming religious content (podcasts, videos). During the pandemic, the adoption of hybrid and online services accelerated, transforming church infrastructure and the worship experience [Rosa et al. 2026].

However, this adoption is not without tensions. There is a duality in user experience: while technology offers practicality and access, it also introduces distractions (such as social media notifications) that can compromise the reverence and spiritual focus required during worship [Rosa et al. 2026].

From this perspective, this research directly responds to two GranDIHC-BR, aligning with the strategic guidelines of the national scientific community.

- **GC1: New Theoretical and Methodological Approaches in HCI** [da Silva Junior et al. 2024]. This challenge calls for overcoming the traditional cognitivist paradigm in favor of approaches that consider embodied, situated, and phenomenological experience. By adopting Story Completion [Clarke et al. 2019] and Technological Mediation Theory [Verbeek 2015, Verbeek 2016], this study addresses the need to explore new methods that capture the richness of human experience and subjective values, investigating not only usability but how technology shapes existence and spiritual well-being.
- **GC4: Sociocultural Aspects in Human-Computer Interaction** [Neris et al. 2024]. This challenge highlights the need to consider sociocultural diversity in the design and use of computational artifacts. Spirituality is explicitly recognized as an area where technology transforms the interaction between physical and virtual worlds. This research addresses this challenge by investigating how Brazilian Evangelical culture, as a system of signs and meanings, negotiates the appropriation of digital technologies, avoiding the imposition of solutions that disrespect local values.

3. Methodology

To access these meanings indirectly and reflexively, we employed the story completion method [Clarke et al. 2019] as a narrative elicitation technique. The goal is not to capture interaction, but meaning-making. Data analysis was conducted through RTA [Braun and Clarke 2006], supplemented by a story mapping strategy [Braun and Clarke 2013] to preserve and analyze the structural progression of the produced narratives. The story completion method was chosen because it [Clarke et al. 2019, Braun and Clarke 2013]: (i) facilitates the investigation of sensitive or normative topics; (ii) reduces the pressure for direct self-disclosure; and (iii) enables the expression of socially and culturally shared meanings through fictional narratives. We followed the

principles of RTA as proposed by [Braun and Clarke 2006], adopting an inductive and interpretative approach.

Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling via social media platforms (e.g. WhatsApp, Instagram, X, and Facebook). An invitation containing a link to an online survey was initially shared with the researcher's primary contacts and subsequently forwarded to others who met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were: (i) being 18 years of age or older; (ii) identifying as an Evangelical Christian; and (iii) reporting some level of involvement in spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, Bible reading, or attending religious services). In total, 15 participants completed the activity. Nevertheless, it should be noted that all participants are from the Brazilian state of Sergipe. While most participants reside in the state's metropolitan area, the study also included individuals from inland regions.

All data were collected² anonymously. While participants could voluntarily provide an email or phone number for future research phases, this information was removed prior to analysis to ensure full de-identification. Data collection was conducted through an online survey hosted on Google Forms³, divided into two main sections. The first section gathered contextual information, including age, gender, location, duration of involvement in a spiritual community, frequency of spiritual practices, and religious denomination. These data served exclusively as interpretive support for the qualitative analysis rather than for statistical or comparative purposes.

The second section consisted of the story completion task. Participants were presented with the beginning of a fictional story (a "story stem") featuring a character (José or Maria), identified as Evangelical, who begins using a mobile app designed to support spiritual practices. The scenario was as follows (using the character Maria):

Maria is an Evangelical who is actively involved in her church. She deeply values her spiritual life and strives to maintain daily practices such as prayer, Bible reading, and moments of reflection. Recently, a fellow church member mentioned a smartphone app designed to support the spiritual lives of believers, and Maria became interested. She decided to download the app, which was developed to assist people like her in their daily spiritual routines. Maria is curious yet slightly apprehensive about how this technology might influence her relationship with God and her spiritual life. During the first week of using the app, Maria began to notice some changes...

The scenario was originally developed in Portuguese (the participants' native language) and was deliberately designed to be open-ended and non-evaluative, allowing participants to project their own perceptions, values, and expectations onto the narrative. Participants were instructed to complete the story freely, describing the character's experience over the first week, including their feelings, reflections, and the potential impacts on their spiritual practices. To encourage rich narratives, we requested that re-

²The data collected (in Portuguese) is openly available on the OSF platform via the link: https://osf.io/jurcs/files/c7u2j?view_only=e811a589f81141ed8924537195a336a8.

³Available openly on the OSF platform: https://osf.io/jurcs/files/qxfvh?view_only=e811a589f81141ed8924537195a336a8

sponses ideally consist of at least two paragraphs. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Centro Universitário Maurício de Nassau (CAAE. no.: #89644424.6.0000.0415) before to data collection. All participants provided digital informed consent. The produced stories are fictional and contain no identifiable information, ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality.

The analysis was primarily conducted by the first author, explicitly acknowledging the constructive and reflexive nature of the analytical process. The analysis followed six iterative, non-linear phases [Braun and Clarke 2006]: (i) familiarization with the data, (ii) initial coding, (iii) generating themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and (iv) producing the report. The analysis prioritized semantic meanings while remaining attentive to implicit assumptions regarding authenticity, spiritual depth, and the legitimacy of technology use.

As a complement to the horizontal RTA, we employed the story mapping technique [Braun and Clarke 2013] to analyze how the stories organized themselves over time. Narratives were examined across three key moments: (i) the beginning (e.g., curiosity, caution, initial enthusiasm); (ii) the development (integration into routine, perceived benefits, tensions, or ambivalence); and (iii) the conclusion or resolution (balanced integration, complementary use, or rejection of the technology). Story mapping allowed us to identify recurring narrative trajectories, preserving the “told” nature of the stories and complementing theme identification with a structural analysis of meaning.

This study adopted a reflexive stance, acknowledging that theme construction is influenced by the researcher’s theoretical positioning and experience within HCI and the study of technology mediated by cultural values. Research rigor was maintained through: (i) prolonged engagement with the data; (ii) transparency in the analytical process; and (iii) coherence between objectives, methods, and interpretations. Data sufficiency guided our process; collection was concluded when new stories no longer added substantively new meanings or narrative trajectories. The final dataset is consistent with the requirements for a small-scale qualitative study [Braun and Clarke 2013].

4. Results

To facilitate understanding of our findings, we will first present the results of the Story Mapping, as it helps in understanding the acceptance, rejection, and critical aspects related to the use of digital technologies in spiritual practices and experiences. Subsequently, the RTA is presented. The analysis of the 15 narratives produced through the story completion technique revealed a set of recurring sense-making patterns regarding how evangelicals construct meanings around the use of digital technologies in their spiritual practices and experiences. Through RTA, we identified seven main themes addressing perceptions of practicality, spiritual deepening, moral legitimacy, tensions and ambivalences, community life, religious commitment, and the regulation of technology use. In addition, story mapping highlighted a dominant narrative structure, organized into beginning, development, and ending, which cuts across most of the stories.

4.1. Story Mapping

Analysis of narrative sequencing revealed a dominant narrative pattern across the stories. Most narratives begin with distrust or hesitation toward technology, develop through prac-

tical experimentation and the discovery of spiritual benefits, and conclude with a conditional acceptance, grounded in balance and alignment with religious values. This pattern is evident in transitions such as: “*what had always been an obstacle*” (P15) followed by “*could now become an ally for a healthy spiritual life*” (P15). This narrative movement indicates that meanings attributed to digital technologies are constructed through experience over time, rather than predefined. Although this trajectory was dominant, it should not be interpreted as linear or inevitable, but as a recurring narrative pattern shaped by shared cultural meanings.

Figure 1 illustrates how participants’ narratives commonly begin with hesitation or moral doubt regarding digital technologies, develop through experiential engagement and discovery of spiritual affordances, and conclude with different outcomes: balanced acceptance, critical ambivalence, or rejection in favor of traditional practices.

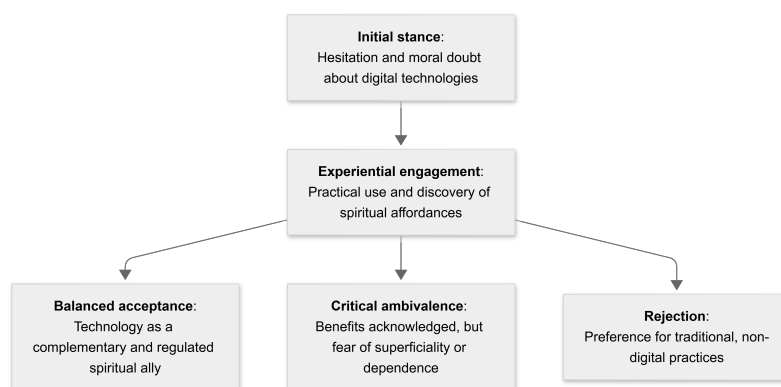


Figure 1. Story map representing dominant narrative trajectories identified through story completion.

4.2. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

4.2.1. Practicality and integration of spirituality into everyday life

One of the most recurrent themes concerns the practicality afforded by digital technologies, enabling spiritual practices to be integrated into daily routines characterized by fragmented time, mobility, and competing demands. Participants constructed the app as a mediator that reduces material and temporal barriers to spiritual engagement.

This integration is evident in narratives⁴ where spiritual practices occur in contexts previously perceived as unsuitable, such as commuting or short daily intervals: “*while returning home on the bus, he could quickly take out his device and enter a moment of communion*” (P10). Other stories emphasize immediacy and constant access: “*in any place, without needing to carry a physical Bible*” (P10), and “*in just a few seconds, he could open the app and use it briefly*” (P11). These excerpts suggest that spirituality is not displaced into the digital realm but rather reinserted into the flow of everyday life through technological mediation.

⁴All the story excerpts included in this paper have been translated from Portuguese to English using ChatGPT.

4.2.2. Cognitive deepening and didactic mediation of faith

Another central finding concerns the perception of digital technologies as mediators of cognitive deepening of faith. The stories describe apps as tools that expand biblical understanding by offering historical, cultural, geographical, and linguistic contextualization. This deepening is evident in accounts highlighting access to explanatory and contextual materials: *“Maria realized that the app helped her deepen her biblical study”* (P3), and *“dense bibliographic materials from which she could seek more information”* (P3).

Some narratives attribute a more advanced hermeneutic role to the app, enabling access to layers of meaning previously unavailable: *“explanations of society, history, culture, geography, and economy at the time the texts were written”* (P14), *“checking words in the original language (Koine Greek)”* (P14), and *“a light was shed where there had been none”* (P14). These accounts indicate that technology reconfigures access to religious knowledge, acting as a mediator of interpretation and understanding.

4.2.3. Technological mediation as a legitimate spiritual ally

The narratives also construct digital technology as a legitimate spiritual ally, provided that its use is perceived as complementary to traditional faith practices. Acceptance of technology is closely tied to the idea that it does not replace the relationship with God but strengthens it. This legitimacy is explicitly articulated in statements such as: *“the app did not replace her faith, but complemented it”* (P4) and *“technology as an ally of faith”* (P4). In some stories, there is a clear shift in the moral evaluation of technology: *“what had always been an obstacle could now become an ally for a healthy spiritual life”* (P15) and *“there is undeniable spiritual enrichment”* (P14). These excerpts indicate that acceptance of technology is not automatic, but constructed through perceived spiritual experience.

4.2.4. Tensions between spiritual depth and superficiality

Despite positive evaluations, the narratives also reveal tensions and ambivalences regarding digital technology use. Some stories express concerns that speed, convenience, and dependence on apps may lead to superficial spiritual practices. This tension appears when characters perceive a loss of depth: *“her spiritual practices would become superficial if she constantly depended on the app [...] the speed that this new format brings to spiritual practices [...] she prefers to grow up in a traditional way, with less technology”* (P2). In other cases, technology is associated with problematic reorganization of time: *“there was no longer time for her morning devotional [...] she rushed through her daily tasks”* (P1). These excerpts highlight that digital mediation is perceived as potentially beneficial but also risky, requiring critical reflection by the user.

4.2.5. Reconfiguration of community practices

The analysis also revealed impacts of digital technologies on the communal dimension of religious life. Some narratives point to strengthened sharing and support among com-

munity members: “*she recommended the tool to her friends*” (P3) and “*this helped her assist other people as well*” (P6).

Conversely, other stories indicate a reduction in participation in in-person church activities: “*she stopped attending some doctrinal services*” (P7) and “*she no longer practiced communion and mutual learning as much*” (P7). These findings suggest that technology reorganizes the boundaries between individual and collective religious practices, redistributing them across digital and physical spaces.

4.2.6. Constancy, commitment, and spiritual faithfulness

A cross-cutting theme across the narratives is the valuation of technology when it contributes to spiritual constancy and commitment. The frequency and regularity of religious practices emerge as central criteria for positive evaluation of app use. This aspect is clearly reflected in excerpts such as: “*he developed a more constant routine of relationship with God*” (P9) and “*it helped maintain his daily spiritual commitment*” (P9). In some cases, this assessment is condensed into normative expressions: “*committed and faithful*” (P13). These accounts suggest that technology is evaluated primarily based on its ability to reinforce core spiritual values, rather than on technical features alone.

4.2.7. Regulation, discernment, and balanced use of technology

Finally, the narratives emphasize the need for conscious regulation of technology use. The spiritual value of digital tools is conditioned on balance and discernment exercised by the user. This perspective is evident in statements such as: “*when used with balance*” (P4) and “*knowing how to use it wisely*” (P6). Some stories acknowledge initial resistance or prejudice toward technology, which is later overcome through lived experience: “*although there is much prejudice against technologies*” (P14). These excerpts reinforce that participants position themselves as active agents in technological mediation, responsible for regulating its effects on their spiritual lives.

5. Discussion

This research distinguishes itself from previous works, predominantly focused on quantitative surveys regarding the frequency of use and types of digital tools adopted by Brazilian Evangelicals [Rosa and Damian 2024, Rosa et al. 2026] or on participatory design methods and sketching for value elicitation [Wyche and Grinter 2012], by introducing the Story Completion method as a methodological lens to investigate the social construction of sense-making. While prior studies identified which technologies are used and the existence of tensions between the sacred and the digital [Rosa and Damian 2024, Rosa et al. 2026], our results advance HCI by mapping the narrative structure and the trajectory of this mediation-revealing that adoption is not a binary event but a hermeneutic process that evolves from moral hesitation to a regulated and conditioned integration.

The empirical findings from the story completion task suggest that digital mediation is not a static state of use, but a dynamic cycle of co-constitution between the subject and the artifact. This process is synthesized in the Hermeneutic-Pragmatic Cycle of Dig-

ital Faith Adoption (Figure 2), which maps the transition from an initial moral threshold to a state of spiritual discernment.

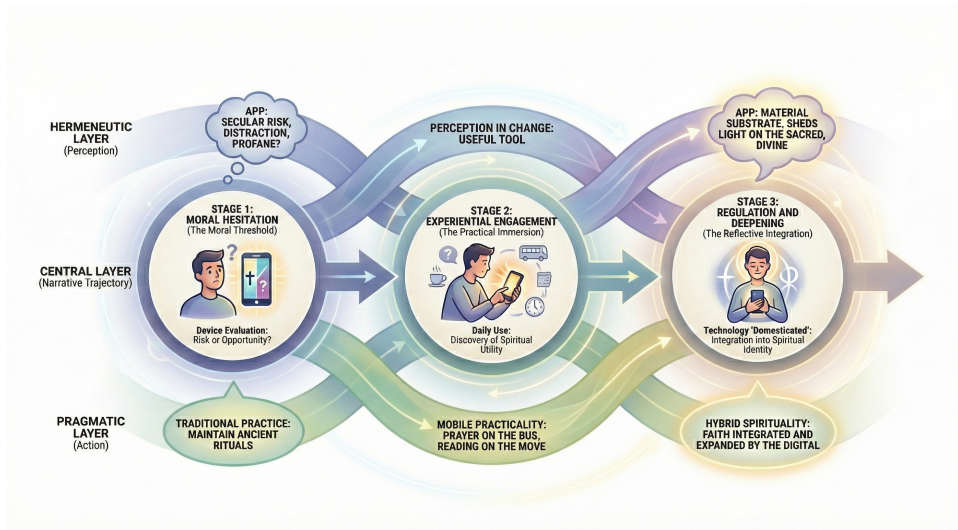


Figure 2. The Hermeneutic-Pragmatic Cycle of Digital Faith Adoption. This model illustrates how the participants’ narrative trajectory – moving from moral hesitation to reflexive integration – is mediated by shifts in the hermeneutic perception of the sacred (upper layer) and the pragmatic reconfiguration of devotional routines (lower layer), ultimately enabling spiritual discernment. This figure was generated using the Google Gemini.

- **The Hermeneutic Layer:** At the onset of the trajectory, the smartphone and app are often perceived through a lens of “secular risk” or “distraction”, embodying the tensions of the attention economy. However, as the user engages with the tool, a hermeneutic shift occurs: the device is reconfigured as a “material substrate” that “sheds light” on sacred texts through cognitive deepening (e.g., access to Koine Greek and historical contexts).
- **The Pragmatic Layer:** Simultaneously, technology reconfigures the “action” of faith. The pragmatic mediation allows spiritual practices to bypass traditional physical and temporal barriers, facilitating a mobile and ubiquitous spirituality (e.g., praying on the bus or during work breaks).
- **Spiritual Discernment as Agency:** The culmination of this cycle is not a passive acceptance of technology, but the exercise of “Spiritual Discernment”. In this stage, the user acts as an active agent who regulates the mediation, ensuring that digital efficiency does not compromise the relational depth required by their faith.

By demonstrating that technology acts as a mediator that indicates potential reconfiguration of the believer’s intentionality and attention, this study fills a critical gap noted in the literature regarding the scarcity of research deepening the qualitative understanding of spiritual experiences beyond functional or institutional efficiency [Wolf et al. 2024]. Thus, it contributes to HCI with an empirical model of how faith shapes technological appropriation in the Brazil, challenging the view of tool neutrality and highlighting user agency in managing the spiritual “attention economy” [Hiniker and Wobbrock 2022].

The results of this study reveal that the incorporation of digital technologies into the spiritual practices of Evangelical Christians does not occur passively or immediately,

but through a complex process of negotiating meanings. The narrative structure identified in the Story Mapping – moving from hesitation to a conditioned and regulated acceptance – suggests that technology is not perceived merely as a neutral tool, but as an active agent that reconfigures the experience of faith.

One of the central findings of this study was the perception of apps as tools for cognitive and didactic deepening, allowing access to historical and linguistic contexts that “shed light” on the sacred text. From the perspective of technological mediation theory by [Verbeek 2015, Verbeek 2016], this characterizes a hermeneutic relationship, where technology shapes how the user reads and interprets the world-in this case, the Bible. The app does not just deliver the text but transforms the understanding of it, acting as a material substrate that expands the believer’s hermeneutic capacities [Verbeek 2015, Neris et al. 2024].

Beyond interpretation, the “practicality” reported by participants (allowing prayer on the bus or reading during work breaks) indicates a reconfiguration of the temporal and spatial barriers of spiritual practice. This corroborates the findings of [Rosa and Damian 2024], who identified that digital technologies are crucial for engaging believers in a routine of spiritual constancy, allowing for practices such as Bible reading and devotionals in mobile contexts. Technology, therefore, does not displace spirituality into a separate “virtual world” but reinserts it into the flow of everyday life, promoting an ubiquity of faith that challenges the traditional distinction between the sacred and the profane.

Despite functional benefits, the narratives produced evidence a critical tension between spiritual depth and technological superficiality or distraction. This fear reflects a fundamental concern pointed out by [Hiniker and Wobbrock 2022]: in an “attention economy”, technologies are often designed to maximize superficial engagement, which directly collides with the Christian imperative to cultivate attentive and deep relationships with God. When participants narrate the fear of practice becoming “automatic” or “rushed”, they are expressing a resistance to the commoditization of their attention, recognizing that spiritual sense-making requires an intentionality that the persuasive design of apps may undermine [Hiniker and Wobbrock 2022].

This resistance also dialogues with the studies of [Wyche and Grinter 2012] with Pentecostals in São Paulo, who observed that believers reject the excessive automation of spiritual practices (such as spiritual warfare), preferring to maintain human judgment and agency. In the present study, this manifests in the category of “regulation and discernment”, where the acceptance of technology is conditioned on its balanced use. The Evangelical user is not a passive consumer but an agent who morally evaluates whether technological mediation is serving as an ally or an obstacle to their faith.

The RTA revealed that technology indicates potential reconfiguration of community practices, at times strengthening sharing and at others reducing physical presence in services. This can be understood through the Socioenactive approach used by [Rosa et al. 2026], which analyzes interaction across physical, social, and digital dimensions. Technology alters the social dimension by allowing asynchronous and long-distance connections but risks weakening in-person community cohesion, a vital component of Evangelical services.

Literature indicates a growing trend in HCI research focused on “Community”, driven by the need for connection during and after the COVID-19 pandemic [Wolf et al. 2024]. However, as observed by [Wolf et al. 2024], digital mediation can alter sensory and emotional experiences, potentially weakening the collective energy perceived in in-person practices [Wolf et al. 2024, Rosa et al. 2026]. The results of this study reinforce this ambivalence: while some characters in the stories used the app to help friends, others isolated themselves from church activities. This suggests that the design of spiritual technologies must consider not only the user’s individual experience with the divine (vertical) but also the impact on the social fabric of the faith community (horizontal) [Hiniker and Wobbrock 2022, Rosa et al. 2026].

Even though apps are software, the narratives indicate that they compete with or complement traditional material artifacts, such as the printed Bible. The initial hesitation of some characters reflects an attachment to the materiality of sacred objects, a central theme in material religion studies [Markum et al. 2024]. The transition to digital is not just a change of medium but a renegotiation of cultural values and religious identity [Neris et al. 2024]. As highlighted in the GranDIHC-BR-GC4 [Neris et al. 2024], consideration of sociocultural aspects is critical to prevent technological solutions from violating values or segregating groups.

The preference for a “hybrid” or complementary integration suggests that design for this audience should not seek to replace traditional practices but to augment or extend them, respecting the “extraordinariness” of the spiritual experience [Wyche and Grinter 2009, Rosa et al. 2026]. The concept of design that respects local culture and values is essential [Neris et al. 2024]; technologies that ignore the importance of the physical Bible or pastoral authority may face resistance or rejection [Rosa and Damian 2024, Wyche and Grinter 2012].

The application of Story Completion responds to the GranDIHC-BR-GC1 [da Silva Junior et al. 2024] by proposing new approaches to investigate complex subjective phenomena. In sociocultural dense Latin American contexts, this method can reduce social desirability bias by allowing participants to project values and tensions onto fictional characters. Thus, the technique consolidates research practices situated in the Brazil, offering the necessary rigor to explore moral negotiations and technological mediations in faith communities.

This study contributes to the field of HCI by demonstrating that technology adoption by Evangelicals is a reflexive process of sense-making. For designers and researchers, this implies that:

- **Design should favor Agency:** systems should avoid excessive ritual automation, allowing the user to maintain control and intentionality of the practice. Agency-oriented design could include explicit user control over automation, recommendations, and content pacing.
- **Distraction Mitigation:** It is necessary to develop interfaces that minimize attention fragmentation, supporting the state of contemplation and “pause” required for spiritual connection. This may involve features such as intentional pauses, notification suppression during devotional moments, or interaction rhythms that resist rapid consumption.
- **Sociocultural Sensitivity:** Design must be informed by community values, rec-

ognizing technology not as neutral but as a carrier of values that may conflict or align with Christian faith.

An open question that remains is whether the emphasis on discernment places an excessive moral burden on users, potentially obscuring the responsibility of designers in shaping attention and behavior.

6. Final Considerations

This study investigated the digital mediation of spiritual experiences among Brazilian Evangelicals from the state of Sergipe, employing the story completion method to access subjective and reflexive constructions of sense-making. Contrary to a purely utilitarian view of technology, the results suggest that the adoption of digital artifacts in this regional context is a hermeneutic and morally regulated process, in which technology acts as a mediator that indicates potential reconfiguration of both the perception and the practice of faith.

The main contributions of this work to the HCI are threefold. First, at a **theoretical level**, the study applies Mediation Theory [Verbeek 2015, Verbeek 2016] to explain how techno-spiritual apps transcend the function of data repositories, becoming material substrates that shape biblical interpretation and devotional routines. Second, at a **methodological level**, the research provides evidence for Story Completion effectiveness [Clarke et al. 2019] as a technique capable of mitigating social desirability bias and accessing deep cultural values, responding to GrandIHC-BR-GC1 [da Silva Junior et al. 2024]. Finally, the **design implications** offer concrete guidelines for developing spirituality-sensitive technologies, prioritizing human agency, distraction mitigation, and the preservation of community cohesion.

Despite the contributions, this study has limitations. The sample of 15 participants, recruited through convenience and snowball sampling, although achieving data sufficiency for an in-depth qualitative analysis, reflects a specific niche of Brazilian Evangelical diversity. Due to the researcher's profile and dissemination channels, participants tend to be users already technologically engaged and interested in theological deepening, which may have accentuated the theme of "cognitive deepening" over other less intellectualized forms of spirituality. Furthermore, the fictional nature of the stories, while useful for projection, may not capture the full extent of actual usage practices in high-pressure or crisis contexts. Furthermore, another obvious limitation is that participants only shared stories related to one smartphone app, which does not represent the full range of existing digital technologies.

For future work, it is recommended to apply the method to groups with different socioeconomic and denominational profiles (e.g. classical Pentecostals vs. Reformed) to investigate how doctrinal variations influence the narrative structure of technological mediation. The study of tangible artifacts and systems using artificial intelligence is also suggested, exploring how spiritual discernment is exercised in the face of algorithms that automate the curation of sacred content. In summary, techno-spirituality remains a fertile and urgent field for HCI in the Brazil, demanding designs that not only optimize tasks but also honor the extraordinariness of the human experience. More broadly, this study reinforces the importance of researching spirituality not as an edge case in HCI, but as a privileged site for understanding how technology, values, and meaning are co-constructed.

Ethical concerns

This research involved human participants and was therefore submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Centro Universitário Maurício de Nassau, under the Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appraisal (CAAE) no.: #89644424.6.0000.0415. The study only started following the committee's approval. All data that could potentially contain references compromising the required anonymization were de-identified. Participants signed an informed consent form (ICF) detailing the research's risks and benefits. They were further informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, that they could withdraw their consent and discontinue their participation at any time without any negative consequences, and that all collected data would remain anonymous.

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