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## Department of Media and Communications

# Taming Technology:

# Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Families and their Domestication of the Internet

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**ABSTRACT**

Inspired by the lack of attention given to issues of religion in the domestication tradition of media and technology studies, this research examines ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jewish households and their domestication of the Internet. Although many ultra-Orthodox rabbis discourage domestic Internet use, an increasing number of Haredi Jews choose to go online from the privacy of their own homes. Given their desire to limit contact with the secular world, these ultra-Orthodox users struggle to make use of the Internet while avoiding its many temptations. In order to examine how Haredi families integrate the Internet into their everyday religious lives, this study relies on in-depth qualitative interviews with six ultra-Orthodox families. The results indicate that the location of the networked computer plays a key role in regulating domestic Internet use. The research also identifies a unique form of impression management aimed at presenting the Haredi home as free of secular distractions. The study concludes that religious domestication of the Internet depends not only on family beliefs and practices but also on the influence of friends and neighbors in the ultra-Orthodox community.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At first glance, the ultra-Orthodox seem to be relics of another era. Dressed in the garb of their eighteenth-century Eastern-European ancestors, these devout Jews (also known as Haredi Jews) appear backward and old-fashioned. The men with their traditional black kaftans, broad-brimmed hats and untrimmed beards, the women with their long skirts, armsleeves, and modest wigs—they give the impression of an insular people eager to distance themselves from the modern world and all its trappings. And to a certain extent, they are insular. Nearly all Haredi Jews insist on avoiding mass media such as films, television, and even secular newspapers. Yet those expecting the lives of the ultra-Orthodox to be free of modern-day conveniences will be thoroughly disappointed. Although they reject much of popular culture, Haredi Jews are not necessarily opposed to the technologies of that culture. Tensions arise, however, when modern media technologies threaten to expose ultra-Orthodox households to the unholy distractions of the secular world.

Recent years have seen an escalating debate among the ultra-Orthodox concerning the hazards of home computers and the Internet. In January 2000, a group of Israel's foremost Haredi rabbis issued a decree banning the Internet from all Jewish homes. The ruling by the Council of Torah Sages called the Internet the "world's leading cause of temptation" and a danger one thousand times greater than that of television, which the group successfully banned 30 years earlier. The Council called upon everyone in the Haredi community to avoid the Internet at all costs. According to the rabbis behind the decree, nothing less than the future of the Jewish people was at stake. Home computers were acceptable, as long as they were not used for any form of entertainment. For those whose livelihoods depended on cyberspace, work-related Internet use was also permitted, but only with authorization from a special rabbinical court.

Whereas the vast majority of Haredi Jews abide by the prohibition against owning a television, few have greeted the Internet decree with the same level of obedience. Despite the ban, a growing number of ultra-Orthodox Jews are accessing the Internet from the comfort and privacy of their own homes (Portnoy, 2004). Some use web filters, including several programs designed specifically for ultra-Orthodox users. Others limit their online activity to e-mail and little else. Regardless of the strategy, the challenge seems to be the same: harnessing the benefits of the Internet while avoiding its temptations. It should come

as no surprise that many Haredi families go to great lengths in order to exercise some form of control over these new technologies.

This dissertation is about such families and the place of the Internet in their daily religious lives. Through in-depth interviews with Haredi families living in London and Los Angeles, this research explores the role of traditionalist religion in the domestication of the Internet. Religion at its most conservative practice is often perceived as being incompatible with the diffusion of new technologies. This study aims to challenge such a perception while filling an empirical gap in both domestication research and the sociology of religion. Literature on contemporary ultra-Orthodox Judaism and its adherents is in short supply, and that which does exist rarely broaches the issue of information and media technology in any real depth. Likewise, domestication studies rarely consider the influence of religion on the adoption and use of media technologies. This exploration of Haredi families ultimately seeks to shed light on how religion shapes, and is shaped by, the appropriation of the Internet.

**A Short History of ultra-Orthodox Jews**

Although they are often perceived as remnants of ancient Judaism, the ultra-Orthodox are a relatively recent addition to the Jewish world. Until about 200 years ago, all Jews could best be described as premodern (Kertzer and Hoffman, 1993). Things began to change in the nineteenth-century when a group of German Jews set out to reform their religion, updating its traditions for the modern era. They were known as Reform Jews and those who opposed them were labeled Orthodox Jews. The Orthodox movement resisted change on the grounds that it would corrupt religious laws handed down directly from God at Mount Sinai (Gartner, 2001). Not all Orthodox Jews were alike, however, and opinions differed regarding the degree to which Jews should adapt to their non-Jewish surroundings. Those who were the most uncompromising became the first ultra-Orthodox Jews.

From the outset, ultra-Orthodox Jews demonstrated a hostile attitude toward non-Jewish culture. They went to great lengths to isolate themselves from *chukos ha goyim*, the ways of the Gentiles, "they discouraged their children from becoming literate in the local vernacular, dressing in the fashion of the times, moving out of the ghetto, going to the university, or in any way openly acculturating" (Heilman, 1992: 19). To be led astray by secular society was to endanger the holy covenant between God and the Jewish people. Indeed, the term *haredi* (which has come to refer to the ultra-Orthodox) derives from biblical Hebrew and denotes "one who trembles at the word of God" (Isaiah 66:5). Haredi Jews are

seen as the reverential minority who continue to keep the divine law amidst the many distractions of the modern world. Ironically, these Jews refer to themselves as neither Haredi nor ultra-Orthodox. They simply call themselves *Yidn* (the Yiddish word for Jews), as if to declare their own way of life to be the Jewish norm.

Today, the ultra-Orthodox are a small yet growing segment of world Jewry. Israel is home to the largest population, with approximately 630,000 Haredi Jews (Macintyre, 2007). The United States is not far behind, with an estimated Haredi population of 468,000. Some of the ultra-Orthodox live in autonomous communities in places such as Meah Shearim in Jerusalem and the Williamsburg neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Many more, however, live mixed in with larger Jewish communities. Due to high birthrates, the number of Haredi Jews is growing rapidly around the world. In Britain, for example, nearly three out of every four Jewish births are ultra-Orthodox (Paul, 2007). The British Haredi population now amounts to 45,000, comprising 17% of the total UK Jewish population. With the high rates of intermarriage and assimilation in other factions of Judaism, many sociologists have predicted that within a few generations, most of the world's Jews will be ultra-Orthodox (Eisenberg, 1996).

**CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

**Literature Review**

This literature review is divided into four parts. Part 1 provides an overview of the domestication concept (the framework for this study) as well as a review of the literature relating to the domestication of the Internet. Part 2 examines what sociologists of religion have to say about the impact of new technologies (especially the Internet) on traditional systems of belief. Part 3 reviews the media studies research on religious families and how they consume media. Part 4 evaluates the existing literature on ultra-Orthodox Jews and their use of new technologies.

*Part 1: Domestication*

*The transition of media into private spaces does not go by without significant interruption and transformation, as families and households seek to control what they might see as unwelcome intrusions into their private spaces…* (Silverstone 2005: 15)

The domestication concept emerged in the early 1990s as a way to describe the adoption and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). It was in an essay for the collection *Consuming Technologies* (1992) that Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch, and David Morley first sketched out the process by which ICTs are brought into the home and integrated into daily domestic life. Whereas earlier models typically depict this process as rational and linear, [1] domestication describes a dynamic and somewhat unpredictable experience. The term itself calls to mind the taming of wild animals, suggesting that technologies must be housebroken if they are to become part of the home and family (Berker et al., 2006). This is a confrontation that does not always end well. Sometimes technologies are successfully domesticated into the routines of everyday life while other times they are not. But the process is never quite complete. Even those technologies that appear domesticated might one day face rejection from the household.

The original framework (Silverstone et al., 1992) outlines four distinct phases of domestication: *appropriation* (the purchase and ownership of a technology), *objectification*

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[1] The foremost example is diffusion of innovations theory, which uses a set of statistical curves to describe the adoption and diffusion of new technologies. See Rogers (1995) for a full account.

(where that technology is positioned in the household), *incorporation* (how and when the technology is actually used), and *conversion* (how the technology is displayed and discussed with those outside the home). Another important concept is the *moral economy of the household*, described as a kind of shared value system unique to each home and family. Many domestication studies have criticized these concepts, arguing that empirical reality does not reflect such rigid categorizations (i.e. Bakardjieva, 2006). Although some of the original terminology has fallen out of favor in recent years, the focus remains on studying ICT use in a particular social context.

The domestication approach has been used to study ICTs in a variety of households and social settings. The earliest research looked at nuclear families (i.e. Hirsch, 1992) and the homes of single parents, teleworkers, and the young elderly (Haddon, 2004). These first studies helped shed light on the relationship between socioeconomic constraints and the use (or non-use) of new technologies. Subsequent research has examined domestication outside of the home, in places such as university campuses (Habib, 2003) and small businesses (Pierson, 2006). Other studies have focused on the adoption of particular technologies, such as the telephone, cable TV, and the home computer (Haddon, 2006a). Regardless of the technology being studied, the findings generally encourage skepticism in the face of technological utopianism (Silverstone, 2005). Contrary to claims that new technology radically transforms everyday life, domestication research suggests that change is more evolutionary than revolutionary.

Domestication research focusing on the Internet, for example, has challenged claims that cyberspace is a place of absolute freedom and autonomy. In her study of Internet use in Ireland, Katie Ward argues: "[T]he introduction of new media forms such as the Internet – rather than emerging and functioning in isolation – are constructed within an existing media and domestic context" (2005: 107). Ward finds that Internet use is shaped almost entirely by the existing habits and interests of a household. Moreover, the Internet use she observes is largely utilitarian. The majority of participants do not "surf" the Internet but instead visit websites for specific reasons, such as to read the news or check the weather forecast.

Maria Bakardjieva's book *Internet Society* (2005) provides an in-depth look at the domestication of cyberspace by nonprofessional Canadian users. Of particular note is a chapter titled "Making Room for the Internet," which explores how networked computers are

integrated into the physical space of the household. Bakardjieva finds that the location of the home computer reveals a lot about the family and how its members relate to this technology, "By placing the device in a particular way, the families I studied were defining its properties" (160). Bakardjieva also introduces the idea of "little behavior genres" which she describes as innovative online practices invented by everyday users of the Internet. In contrast to Ward's study (2005), Bakardjieva observes Internet use not grounded in everyday household practices. She discusses several "disenfranchised" users who have found comfort and support in online communities. Contrary to the assumption that virtual interaction is somehow inferior to face-to-face communication, her findings suggest that both online and offline realities are capable of providing genuine communal experiences.

*Part 2: Religion and New Technologies*

> *Once the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm.* (Mills 1959: 32-33)

There is little agreement among sociologists of religion regarding the relationship between technological innovation and religious activity. Those who support the secularization thesis (nicely summed up in the above quotation), generally attribute the demise of religion to the triumph of science and rationalism. According to Max Weber, scientific progress leads to an increasing "disenchantment of the world," as faith in modern science steadily replaces faith in the supernatural. Inspired by the works of Weber (1915; 1919), Durkheim (1915), and Marx (1957), many social scientists of the 20th century predicted that as the world became more modernized, it would also become less religious. Rational thought would ultimately win out over religiosity and superstition.

Stephen Hunt (2005) observes that secularization was so ubiquitous a theory that, until quite recently, a discussion of religion in a textbook on contemporary everyday life would have been difficult to find. Although several sociologists still argue for some form of secularization,[2] many more now acknowledge the enduring (and perhaps increasing) power

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[2] See, for example, Norris and Inglehart (2004).

of religion. Two competing paradigms have emerged to explain the presence of religion in the world today: rational choice theory and the postmodern perspective. Each theory has its own argument as to the impact of new technologies.

The rational choice model emerged in the 1980s as sociologists Rodney Stark, William Bainbridge, and Roger Finke applied the logic of economics to the study of religion. According to rational choice theory, people make decisions about religion by assessing the costs and benefits and then choosing what brings them the greatest advantage. Rational choice theorists agree with the initial premise of secularization—that modernization has produced a rational world—but they insist that rationalism does not undermine the need for religion. On the contrary, rational individuals recognize the unique benefits offered by religiosity, namely the promise of supernatural rewards (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985).

Postmodernist writers challenge the idea that contemporary society encourages rational thinking. Jean-François Lyotard argues that modern science and technology have transformed the nature of human knowledge, giving rise to a condition of "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984: xxiv). He claims that people have lost faith in the all-encompassing myths of the modern world, including those of traditional religion. Faced with the collapse of conventional systems of belief, people look for meaning in new forms of individualized religion. Lyotard goes on to observe that "the new technologies can only increase the urgency of such a reexamination, since they make the information used in decision-making (and therefore the means of control) even more mobile and subject to piracy" (6). This argument is especially prevalent in postmodernist accounts of the Internet.

Many sociologists of religion depict the Internet as the epitome of the "spiritual marketplace" (Roof, 1999). Cyberspace is seen as the ideal arena for people to seek out and construct new forms of religiosity. Some believe that this kind of online interaction has the potential to undermine the more traditional belief systems. In his book *The Soul of Cyberspace*, Jeffrey Zaleski suggests that the Internet is best suited for sustaining non-conventional brands of religion, "Any religion that relies on ecclesial authority and hierarchy, as well as on sacraments, is going to have a hard go on the Net" (1997: 100). Other research indicates that cyberspace can offer new opportunities for strengthening traditional beliefs. In her study of a Swedish web community for young people, Mia Lövheim (2007) finds that those who browse the "spiritual marketplace" are heavily influenced by the conventions of traditional religion.

Much of the research on religion and new technologies calls for a new approach to studying religious life. Wade Clark Roof (1999) draws on the idea of "lived religion," which conceives of religiosity as an ongoing personal narrative. Along similar lines, Nancy Ammerman (2007) offers the concept of "everyday religion" as a way to study religious life in a social context, outside of churches, synagogues, and other institutions. Rather than focusing on what a religion dictates or demands of its followers, the "everyday" and "lived" approaches look at how those followers incorporate religion into their daily routines. The "official" ideas of a religion are not irrelevant, but simply "most interesting to us once they get used by someone other than a professional" (Ammerman, 5). With an emphasis on the individual, both concepts are useful for studying the influence of religion in areas of everyday experience (such as the use of technology) that may not traditionally be associated with religious life.

*Part 3: Media Consumption and Religious Families*

*Media have been claimed to structure the flow of daily life, determining when we eat, sleep, socialize, even procreate. These are clear and taken-for-granted roles and functions "traditional" religion is interested in, at least, and are surely profound functions for the media to assume, creating at least a condition or context within which religion must find its place.* (Hoover 2006: 9-10)

Aside from a few recent studies to be discussed shortly, researchers have rarely examined the media consumption of religious families. The topic of religion in general has been a "blind spot" of media studies and those few exceptions[3] have focused on religious institutions and not audiences (Hoover, 1997). This began to change with the research conducted by Stewart Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark, and Diane Alters for their book *Media, Home, and Family* (2004). The result of extensive ethnographic audience research on a wide cross-section of American families, this study identifies "accounts of the media" that reflect the values and preferences of each household (Alters and Clark, 12). The book offers several examples of media accounts influenced by religious frameworks.

For one evangelical Christian family (referred to in the book as the Hartmans), specific beliefs and practices create a "net of constraints" with regard to media consumption

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[3] For example, research on televangelism in the United States. See: Horsfield (1984), Hoover (1988) and Peck (1993).

(Alters: 128). The Hartman parents see it as their duty to encourage their children to make "good" decisions in all areas of everyday life. As a consequence, there are no "official" house rules regarding television use. However, the parents do monitor their children closely and frequently turn off the television when they notice something inappropriate. Further limiting media choice, the sole television set in the Hartman household is located in the living room and receives only five channels.

Another case study worth mentioning features the Ahmeds, a Muslim-American family seeking to maintain a distinct identity based on religion and culture. The Ahmed parents give an account of the media consistent with their desire to live as Muslims outside of mainstream culture. Their household rules are very restrictive and include a chart to keep track of each child's media use. The researchers find, however, that the viewing practices of the Ahmed family do not always match the account and framework given by the parents (Clark: 87). The findings underscore the difficulties that many parents face in consistently applying household rules concerning media use.

Whereas *Media, Home, and Family* deals with a wide range of domestic issues, Stewart Hoover's subsequent book *Religion in the Media Age* (2006) focuses exclusively on the relationship between media consumption and contemporary religious life. In order to describe the full spectrum of modern-day religiosity, Hoover appropriates the taxonomy of religion developed by Wade Clark Roof (1999).[4] This taxonomy describes five religious subcultures, but only one is relevant to this dissertation: dogmatists.[5] Roof describes dogmatists as "rigidly religious, some might say Pharisaic, concerned more with the external forms of religion than with its spirit" (1999: 212).

Extrapolating from Roof's description, Hoover makes the following predictions as to the media consumption of dogmatists:

*It seems rather straightforward to suggest that the relationship of this group to media culture would be rather strict and judgmental. It is hard to imagine them going anywhere outside their traditions and institutions for insights, inspiration, or resources linked to religion or spirituality (a term they are unlikely to use). They'd be*

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[4] Although Roof's taxonomy of religions emerged from research on the Baby Boom generation, Hoover (like Roof) argues that subsequent generations have exhibited similar religious sensibilities.

[5] The five categories are: Born-Again Christians, Mainstream Believers, Metaphysical Believers and Seekers, Secularists, and Dogmatists. Although Roof discusses only Catholic and conservative Protestant dogmatists in his book, it is more than likely he would also place ultra-Orthodox Jews in this category.

> unlikely to connect their media lives to their religious lives, and unlikely to attend to media related to "secular" or "mainstream" culture. (Hoover, 2006: 81-82)

Hoover's own research, however, tells a somewhat different story. In their attitudes about media, dogmatists do indeed see themselves as distinct from mainstream culture. At the same time, they often engage in media practices that are not that distinct (Hoover: 203). Hoover argues that media constitutes a "common culture" to which all families (regardless of religiosity) are attracted, at least to some degree. He observes that even the most dogmatic couple in his study (Evangelical Protestant parents with very negative views of the media) watch late-night talk shows in the privacy of their own bedroom.

*Part 4: Ultra-Orthodox Jews and New Technologies*

> [T]hese people were still around because they only appeared to belong to yesterday. Where others are absorbed by and celebrate the present, haredim may have found a way to absorb the present while celebrating the past. (Heilman 1992: 359)

In the small amount of literature that actually raises the issue, the ultra-Orthodox are generally depicted as eager to embrace new technologies. In his famed ethnographic study of an ultra-Orthodox community in Israel, Samuel Heilman (1992) describes a high-tech bar mitzvah celebration for the son of the *rebbe*.[6] The band performing traditional Jewish songs boasts all the latest electronic instruments and synthesizers. Moreover, the music is recorded and then sold a week later on cassette tapes decorated with a picture of the *rebbe*. It is not long before the same cassettes are available to Haredi Jews living in Jerusalem and Brooklyn.

In his book *The Soul of Cyberspace* (1997), Jeffrey Zaleski discusses the online outreach efforts of Chabad-Lubavitch, one of the largest ultra-Orthodox movements in the world. Chabad prides itself on having been the first Jewish group to take advantage of the Internet. The mission statement on Chabad.org reads: "Utilize internet technology to unite Jews worldwide, empower them with knowledge of their 3,300 year-old tradition, and foster within them a deeper connection to Judaism's rituals and faith."

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[6] The spiritual leader of an ultra-Orthodox community.

As the previous two examples suggest, literature on the use of technology by ultra-Orthodox Jews usually relates to ultra-Orthodox institutions. Little has been written about the experiences of individual Haredi Jews and their families. Even a landmark study on ultra-Orthodox Internet use in Israel (Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai, 2005) reveals surprisingly little about what the technology means to those who use it. Relying on quantitative data, the study examines the ultra-Orthodox solely as a "virtual community" (31). The authors estimate that nearly one-third of Haredi Israelis surf the Web, but there is little discussion of what role the Internet plays in their everyday lives. The results of the study are surprising, especially in light of the Internet ban, but the data ultimately offers little more than a snapshot of the community as a whole.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study adopts the domestication model as its primary conceptual framework. With a focus on the family dynamic and its relationship to ICT use, domestication is uniquely suited for studying the place of the Internet in the ultra-Orthodox home. The domestication approach represents a break from much of the recent media research on religious families (Hoover et al, 2004; Hoover, 2006). While Stewart Hoover and his colleagues concentrate on media consumption (particularly entertainment content such as television programs), this study puts an emphasis on media and technology practices. Although the domestication framework has been criticized in the past for neglecting to consider media texts (Hartmann, 2006), David Morley has argued convincingly that de-centering the media in domestication analysis brings greater insight into the relationship between media processes and everyday life (Morley, 2006). This means that household "accounts of the media" are important to this study, but only as elements within the larger domestication framework.

In order to most accurately observe the domestication of the Internet by Haredi families, this research makes a few revisions to the original domestication framework. To begin with, the four phases of domestication have become a bit outmoded and thus will not be included in the updated model for this study. It has sometimes been said that domestication suggests a linear and sequential process by which technologies are adopted (Ling, 2001). This misconception stems in part from the four phases, which give the impression of a progression of events culminating in a domesticated technology. In reality, the processes of domestication are overlapping and ongoing, and there is seldom any guarantee that an ICT will be domesticated (or stay domesticated). Following the example of

Leslie Haddon (2006b), this study preserves the themes of each phase while abandoning the original terminology.

Given that domestication research has long neglected the issue of religion (perhaps due to the near-orthodoxy of secularization), this study emphasizes religiosity and its daily implications by drawing on Nancy Ammerman's concept of "everyday religion" (2007). This idea allows us to observe the effects of religious life without buying into the assumptions of rational choice theory or the postmodernist perspective. The concept is also highly relevant to the religious subjects of this research. After all, this is not a study of ultra-Orthodox Judaism but rather a study of ultra-Orthodox Jews. The "official" Jewish opinion regarding the use of home computers and the Internet is ultimately of little consequence to this research. More important than the decrees of the Council of Torah Sages are the ways in which ordinary Haredi Jews respond (or do not respond) to those decrees in their everyday lives.

The moral economy of the household (one of the key concepts of the domestication framework) has been criticized and abandoned by more than a few domestication researchers (i.e. Bakardjieva, 2006). They argue that no such stable household dynamic exists in the modern world. Inspired by Roger Silverstone's defense of the concept (2006), this study retains the moral economy. The concept draws attention to the economic and social dimensions of a family, emphasizing daily practices and values in much the same way as everyday religion. Taken altogether, this conceptual framework brings together various related threads and seeks to uncover the many ways in which religion, media, and technology are interwoven in the everyday family experience.

**Research Objectives**

This research was inspired by a surprising gap I noticed in the domestication tradition of media and technology studies. Domestication research has examined a variety of households and families, looking at how everyday routines and practices influence the appropriation of new technologies. One issue that rarely arises, however, is the role of religion. This is all the more surprising considering the emphasis domestication theory places on the household as a *moral* economy. I began to wonder what domestication would look like in the context of a religious home. What role do religious beliefs and practices play in the adoption (and non-adoption) of new technologies? Can such a thing as "religious

domestication" be observed and studied? As fate would have it, it was around this time that I discovered a vibrant community of ultra-Orthodox Jews living in North London. And thus the topic of this dissertation was born.

I began by formulating the following research question: **How do ultra-Orthodox Jewish families relate to the Internet and domesticate the technology to fit into the values and practices of their everyday lives?**

Due to the lack of domestication research on religious families, this study should contribute to a far greater understanding of the relationship between everyday religious life and ICT adoption. From the sociology of religion perspective, the findings may shed light on the extent to which cyberspace impacts traditional religious beliefs and practices. This research also pushes the study of religion and media in a new direction, with its focus on technology use rather than media consumption. Finally, this study should expand our understanding of Haredi Jews and how they approach new technologies. The minimal research that does exist on ultra-Orthodox Internet use is largely quantitative in nature. A domestication study promises to deepen our understanding of this phenomenon while exploring new dynamics of family, religion, and technology.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Strategy

The domestication approach lends itself to mostly qualitative research methods. This is understandable given that qualitative research is concerned with the meanings that underlie social phenomena while quantitative research usually explains phenomena using statistical models (Bauer et al., 2000). One of the core assumptions of domestication is that the processes of technological adoption are too complex to be measured and predicted. Indeed, the original framework emerged in opposition to the statistical determinisms of earlier models (i.e., Rogers, 1995). According to Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, the domestication perspective provides "an understanding of the complex interrelationships of cultures and technologies" (1992: 26). Qualitative research clearly is best suited to capture such a dynamic process.

The earliest domestication studies relied heavily on ethnographic research. In theory, ethnography seems to be the ideal method for capturing the full range and complexity of domestication. Only extensive observation of a family or household can uncover the true extent to which ICTs are intertwined with everyday life. This is the approach Eric Hirsch (1992) employs in his case study of a British family. His detailed ethnographic observations paint a vivid picture of the "Simon" household. Hirsch is able to highlight relationships and tensions within the family, many of which have some bearing on ICT use in the home. Unfortunately, the ethnographic approach proved rather costly and time-consuming and was abandoned (Haddon, 2006b). Subsequent studies have largely relied on qualitative interviews, as well as some participant observation.

Some of the more recent domestication studies have supplemented in-depth interviews with additional research techniques. In her investigation of domestic Internet users, for example, Maria Barkardjieva (2005) asks participants to take her on a "virtual tour" of their computer desktops. Bakardjieva uses this opportunity to examine email inboxes, address books, and bookmarked websites. To enhance another case study, Elaine Lally (2002) includes photographs showing participants' computers situated in the home environment. Some studies have even experimented with a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Jo Pierson (2006), for example, explores "professional domestication" in small businesses using both survey data and in-depth interviews. All of

these research strategies are motivated by essentially the same goal: to construct and compile the most complete picture possible of domestication in action.

For this study, I have chosen depth interviews as my research methodology. This approach is well suited to the conceptual framework of my research as well as the nature of the families I have chosen to examine. As mentioned earlier, depth interviews are quite popular in domestication research. Although ethnographically oriented approaches are perhaps more revealing, time and money constraints make qualitative interviews an attractive alternative. Depth interviews may not generate as much data as ethnography, but they are still enormously useful in examining the processes of domestication. The qualitative interview can probe what the Internet means to members of the household. It can reveal aspects of the family dynamic that may affect how the technology is perceived and used. Moreover, if the interview takes place in the home, it may offer the opportunity to observe the domestic environment.

Depth interviews are also useful when dealing with respondents who may be self-conscious or somewhat defensive (Gaskell, 2000). As members of a relatively self-contained religious group, ultra-Orthodox Jews may be hesitant about volunteering information to someone from outside the community. Indeed, the researchers who conducted the Israeli study on Haredi Internet use (Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai, 2005) acknowledge that ultra-Orthodox Jews generally do not respond to surveys. Their study thus solely relies on quantitative data extracted from a social-networking website. Depth interviews have the potential to overcome the initial reticence of respondents by establishing "a relationship of trust and confidence" (Gaskell, 2000: 45). This is important in any interview but especially important when dealing with Haredi Jews and the issue of the Internet. As discussed in the Introduction, the Internet is a sensitive subject within the ultra-Orthodox community. The rapport developed in a successful depth interview should help elicit honest and accurate responses from Haredi participants.

The depth interview is also effective at exploring the everyday routines and practices that are so central to domestication. Silverstone (2005) observes that the most valuable methodologies are those "which seek to get beneath the surface of everyday life and practice, to explore the dynamics, the ambiguities and the contradictions as well as the certainties, of the relationships we create and sustain with our information and communication technologies" (5). The depth interview allows the researcher the time and

latitude to explore such dynamics and relationships. In the case of ultra-Orthodox families, religious beliefs and practices may be interwoven with everyday life in rather unexpected ways. Given that so little is known about the role of the Internet in daily Haredi life, this approach helps to generate a large amount of data—including information the researcher may not anticipate. At the same time, the interviewer can follow up issues and take the interview in unforeseen directions.

**Recruiting Respondents**

In an effort to recruit ultra-Orthodox families for this study, I began visiting an ultra-Orthodox learning institute in North London. For a period of five months, from February 2007 to June 2007, I attended weekly lectures and discussions while looking for families who might be willing to participate in my research. This proved more difficult than I originally imagined. The institute attracted a wide spectrum of Jewish visitors, only a fraction of whom were ultra-Orthodox. Moreover, the ultra-Orthodox who did attend were mostly unmarried men in their early twenties. I eventually befriended a rabbi from the institute who offered to help me locate willing participants. I had only two conditions for the families I would interview: (1) that they be ultra-Orthodox and (2) that they have Internet access in their home. The rabbi put me in contact with three families living in North London and eventually three others living in Los Angeles.

It is important to emphasize that the families I have chosen in London and Los Angeles were selected solely based on availability and convenience. The focus of this study is not a transnational comparison and the sample is not meant to be statistically representative of the ultra-Orthodox community as a whole. Indeed, there are several factors that distinguish these six families from the Haredi Jews examined in the Israeli Internet study (Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai, 2005). Whereas the majority of ultra-Orthodox Israelis live in autonomous, self-contained communities, the ultra-Orthodox of London and Los Angeles live in neighborhoods alongside non-Orthodox Jews as well as non-Jews. Furthermore, the ultra-Orthodox of America and Britain support themselves by working, whereas in Israel most Haredi Jews receive government subsidies that allow them to study on a full-time basis (Efron, 2003). For both of these reasons, some have argued that the ultra-Orthodox in Israel are far more able than their non-Israeli counterparts to isolate themselves from mainstream society.

**Design of Research Tools**

The topic guide used for the interviews (attached as Appendix A) was inspired by the original domestication framework. The guide is divided into four main sections relating to the Internet and home computer: Purchase, Placement, Usage, and Talk. The questions listed beneath each topic are prompts relating to a wide range of domestication issues. Two pilot interviews were conducted in April 2007 and the topic guide was slightly revised. The respondents both discussed the decision not to purchase a television and thus a background section was added concerning previous household experiences with media technologies. The topic guide was designed to provide a general structure for the interviews, but was used with a great amount of flexibility. Mindful that each household has its own unique dynamic, I encouraged respondents to elaborate on their family routines and daily practices. As intended, each interview evolved well beyond the general outline of the topic guide.

**A Note about Access**

It is important to note that I am Jewish (although not ultra-Orthodox) and this was an undeniable advantage when it came to conducting this research. The ultra-Orthodox may reject non-Orthodox forms of Judaism, but they do not reject individual Jews (Diamond, 2000). On the contrary, they are inclined to reach out to non-Orthodox Jews in the hopes of bringing them into the fold. I was questioned (informally) about my Jewish background by most of the participants in my study. Who was my rabbi? What synagogue did I belong to? And so on. Before several interviews, I was invited to put on *tefillin*[7] and say the requisite prayers. Out of respect, I also wore a *kippah*[8] during each of the interviews and home visits. Although I was certainly still viewed as an outsider, I believe that being Jewish helped the respondents feel more comfortable, and increased the likelihood of them "opening up" during the interviews.

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[7] Also known as phylacteries, *tefillin* consist of two small leather boxes with black straps attached. The boxes contain Biblical passages and are strapped to a man's arm and forehead during morning prayers.

[8] Also called a *yarmulke*, a *kippah* is the skullcap worn by observant Jewish males.

**Conducting the Interviews**

Each of the six families recruited for this study was interviewed twice. The first interviews generally involved only the father of the household and were conducted in his place of work. These interviews were semi-structured (relying on the topic guide) and lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. The second interviews generally involved both parents and were conducted in the family's home. These interviews were more open-ended in nature and lasted between one and two hours. Some of this time was spent observing the domestic environment.

**Table of Respondents**[9]

| Household 1 | Avrom and Deena Leider | 1 child (2 years old) |
|---|---|---|
| Household 2 | Gavriel and Rachel Herzog | 4 children (ranging in age from 4 to 12) |
| Household 3 | Menachem and Sara Posner | 3 children (age 4, 5, and 7) |
| Household 4 | Yankel and Rivka Boer | 1 child (3 years old) |
| Household 5 | Noson and Chana Chardes | 5 adult children, 1 child at home (age 12) |
| Household 6 | Simcha and Shaina Zelnik | 2 children (age 4 and 6) |

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[9] All families spoke on condition of anonymity and thus all names have been changed.

**CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION**

**Welcome to the Internet**

The earliest phase of domestication, whether described as "appropriation" or "imagination," has always revolved around the decision to bring (or not to bring) a new ICT into the home. When asked about their reasons for purchasing a computer and choosing to obtain Internet service, most of the families in this study gave work-related explanations. For example:

Gavriel: *I needed a computer to do emailing at home.*

Noson: *My wife needs the Internet for her work.*

Rivka: *We knew for work reasons we had to get Internet.*

Sara: *Here [in the household] I have Internet because it's my home and my work.*

Yankel: *If my office would be somewhere else, I wouldn't have a computer at home.*

As the quotes above suggest, many of the respondents work from home (generally on a part-time basis). Most of them claimed that work and work-related responsibilities were their only motivation for acquiring Internet access. Although this is by no means a unique rationale for acquiring ICTs, the reasoning here is also consistent with some of the official ultra-Orthodox rulings regarding the Internet. As discussed earlier, domestic Internet use is permitted in some Haredi communities for those whose livelihoods depend on cyberspace. By referring to the Internet as a work-related necessity, respondents in a way were aligning themselves with the "party line"[10] of ultra-Orthodox Judaism.

For nearly all the couples interviewed, the decision to obtain Internet access was a mutual one. There was little negotiation or debate on the issue, as both husband and wife agreed that job-related obligations justified having Internet in the home. There was one exception: the Chardes household. Noson explained that he was initially opposed to the idea when his wife, Chana, suggested they subscribe to the Internet:

Noson: *I really did not want Internet in the home. I really did not want it. But the type of work my wife is doing. She's the secretary for an organization called [deleted]. It provides food packages for poor families for Shabbes [the Sabbath]. It's*

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[10] Strictly speaking, there is no "party line" since no single institution speaks for all ultra-Orthodox Jews.

*an important type of job. In other words, it's not like, "Well get a different job" because it's a community job and it's doing good work.*

For Noson, the rationale for acquiring Internet is not just work-related but also community related. The charitable nature of Chana's job—and the fact that her work benefits the local Jewish community—is what convinced Noson that having Internet in the home would be justified. Although none of the other respondents discussed this dual justification, much of the work happening in other households was also community related. For example, many of the respondents were involved in Jewish education and Jewish outreach organizations. Is it likely, then, that the nature of their work played at least some part in other families' decisions to obtain Internet access.

**Respecting Religious Authority**

The decision of whether or not to bring an ICT into the home is often influenced by people outside the home. Within ultra-Orthodox communities, the convention has been to seek counsel from the local rabbi or rabbinical court. However, the data collected in Israel (Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai, 2005) suggests that Haredi Jews are not deferring to religious authority when it comes to the issue of household Internet use. This trend was also observed in the six families interviewed for this study. When asked if they consulted anyone before acquiring the Internet, many of the respondents became noticeably uncomfortable. Most emphasized the importance of consulting a rabbi in situations such as these, yet all admitted they had not done so. Here are two telling responses:

Gavriel: *Most people consult rabbis. Normally, you consult the rabbi. Or, if it's a spiritual decision, you normally consult the rabbi. But for me it was always very clear-cut. As long as it's controlled.*

Yankel: *Like with everything I do, I speak with a rabbi that's an authority. But in this specific area, it's already… I do speak to this rabbi. He knows that I do have… I don't remember if I spoke to him about it. It was understood that for the things that I'm doing, we need to have Internet.*

During the second interview at the Boer household, Yankel was even more forthright about the role of religious authority: "The answer is not the same for each family. The answer is not the same for each home. Everybody is different."

At first glance, the absence of rabbinical guidance seems to coincide with the postmodernist account of contemporary religious life. Some sociologists of religion might argue that these families have turned away from traditional ultra-Orthodox Judaism in favor of more individualized forms of religion. This is a persuasive account, however the information revealed in the interviews tells a somewhat different story. Many of the respondents justified their decision to have Internet by mentioning others in the community who had made the same decision. For example, when asked if he ever considered not obtaining Internet access, Avrom responded:

Avrom: *There wasn't a serious consideration. The thought crossed my mind, but it was never really something that I seriously considered. I have friends that either considered it or decided against it but I don't know anybody within my circle that actually ended up not having it. I know those who certainly decided not to, and ended up having it.*

Time and again, respondents brought up others in the Haredi community who were also online. They mentioned parents, neighbors, friends, and even rabbis who all accessed the Internet from home. The implication was that rather than constituting a defiance of religious authority, domestic Internet use was actually the norm. The decision to bring Internet into the home, therefore, was not an expression of individual religiosity but instead an acceptance of the local community consensus.

**Making Room for the Internet**

A crucial aspect of domestication concerns where an ICT is placed within the household. Its position in the domestic environment reveals "the pattern of spatial differentiation (private, shared, contested; adult, child; male, female, etc.) that provides the basis for the geography of the home" (Silverstone et al., 1992: 23). Most of the families interviewed for this study claimed that their networked computer was placed where it could be used most effectively for work purposes. For three of the families, this was the bedroom; for two, it was the home office; and for one it was a locked cupboard. It soon became clear,

however, that these locations enable much more than just a quiet work environment. None of the families allow their children access to the Internet and the location of the networked computer "behind-closed-doors" allowed parents to enforce this restriction with little difficulty.

In the Chardes household, for example, Noson and Chana keep the networked computer in their bedroom, which also serves as Chana's office. They have not told their 12-year-old son about the Internet connection, although they do allow him to use a non-Internet-enabled computer in his bedroom. Noson was adamant that none of his children access the Internet. At one point, he emphasized: "We have a lock on the computer. Even my kids who know we have Internet do not know the code to get in." Clearly, the lock is a deterrent but so too is the location of the computer in the parents' bedroom.

For the Herzog family, the Internet likewise is locked away from the children. Gavriel and Rachel store the family laptop in a locked cupboard in the dining room. They use the computer rarely, but when they do, it is placed on the dining room table. The children are barred from accessing the Internet, however they occasionally watch DVDs on the laptop, always with at least one parent present. In each of these examples, the placement of the networked computer facilitates parental control over the Internet. This control ultimately helps parents enforce a particular set of rules for the household.

**Making a Good Impression**

Besides regulating household Internet use, the placement of the networked computer serves another purpose in the Haredi home. It contributes to a unique form of impression management I observed in many of the households. Originally distinguished in the homes of teleworkers, impression management is the struggle to present oneself and one's home in a "positive" light. For teleworkers, the fear was that employers, friends, and neighbors might see them as unprofessional:

> *Teleworkers were often conscious of the need to present themselves as competent, 'professional' and working in convivial conditions in order to convince employers and clients that home life was not a distraction. Indeed, some even concealed the fact that they were teleworkers, fearing that potential clients would doubt their ability to shut out domestic life and manage the work.* (Haddon and Silverstone, 1994: 8-9).

The impression management of ultra-Orthodox homes is linked directly to the celebration of the Jewish Sabbath. From sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday, observant Jews abstain from any secular activities. This is a sacred time when no "work" is permitted, including the use of electricity. On this occasion, many families open their homes to visitors who need a place to "observe" the day of rest. Many also follow the custom of hosting guests for Friday night dinner and the Saturday afternoon meal.

What all of this means is that at least once a week the ultra-Orthodox home is "open" to the Jewish community at large. Since there are some Haredi Jews who object to domestic Internet use, part of the impression management is aimed at downplaying or perhaps concealing the presence of a networked computer. This may explain why none of the computers were located in "public" spaces, such as the living room or kitchen—where much of the Sabbath is spent relaxing with friends and family. This might also explain why two of the families (the Leiders and the Posners) each had an old computer stored in the living room, hidden from plain sight. On a more spiritual level, the impression management aims at blocking out secular distractions. A computer is a reminder not only of work but also of the secular world in general. Keeping the computer out of sight perhaps helps the family to focus on what is supposed to be a very holy day.

**Accounting for Internet Use**

When asked about their use of the Internet, most respondents gave accounts largely consistent with their work-related rationales for originally acquiring Internet access. Yankel's response, "It's all for work purposes" is indicative of these accounts. Even the one household that did not obtain Internet specifically for work, the Leider family, described their Internet use as predominantly utilitarian. Other than work, the respondents claimed to go online primarily to communicate with friends and family, using email and Internet telephony services such as *Skype*. On occasion, this communication overlapped with work, as some co-workers were also friends.

These accounts of Internet use reflect the ultra-Orthodox desire to live outside of mainstream culture. The respondents acknowledged the nearly limitless nature of cyberspace yet presented their own use as intentionally limited. For them, the Internet was meant for engaging with work, friends, and family. It was an extension of everyday life rather than an

opportunity to seek out new worlds and new experiences. By their accounts, they were *users* rather than *consumers*. The question arises: How do these accounts measure up to everyday reality?

Not unlike the findings in *Media, Home, and Family* (2004), there were some gaps between household accounts of the Internet and actual online practices. These gaps, however, were not a result of inconsistencies between parental rules and daily practices. All of the families claimed that their children were not allowed to use the Internet. Although there was limited time for observation, it did not appear that this rule was broken. In fact, the children in several households seemed unaware that Internet access was even available. The inconsistencies emerged in the respondents' descriptions of their own Internet use. Many of them described Internet habits that were contrary to the utilitarian accounts originally given. For example, Gavriel admitted that he sometimes watches online clips of football matches and Avrom admitted to reading the *Drudge Report* website, although he claimed to avoid secular news media. The contradictions were not major but they may suggest larger inconsistencies that did not emerge in the interviews.

It is important, though, to put these inconsistencies in the larger context of household media consumption. None of the families interviewed for this study owned a television, as is typical practice for the ultra-Orthodox. This decision coincides with the belief that Haredi Jews should steer clear of mainstream (secular) culture. However, many of the respondents described media practices that were contrary to this belief. Noson and Chana, for example, mentioned that when the family goes on vacation and stays in a hotel, the children are allowed to watch some television such as the *Animal Planet* channel. Gavriel and Rachel, on the other hand, admit that even within the home they occasionally let their children watch family-oriented films such as *Mary Poppins* (using the DVD player on the laptop computer). Avrom confessed that he allows himself to watch movies during long airline flights.[11] Based on these admissions, it is clear that the Internet was not the catalyst for contradictory media accounts. There were inconsistencies with other media technologies long before the Internet ever entered the home.

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[11] He had most recently viewed *Borat*.

**Teaching Values**

Apart from restricting the Internet use of their children, many of the respondents talked about combating secular influences with Jewish values. For these parents, it was not enough simply to prohibit their children from accessing the Internet. As Noson explained, Jewish education was also needed to prepare children to face the realities of the modern world:

Noson: *The cat's out of the bag. With cell phones that now have access to the Internet, the cat is really out of the bag. On one hand, we have to try to set up as many systems as we can to try to keep the insulation there. But on the other hand, we also have to give our children a set of values and joy in Judaism and a sense of what is holy, so that these things don't have as powerful a pull. They have a pull, because there's always some curiosity. But hopefully, we're going to give them enough love and spirituality that they'll feel comfortable within the system, and they're not going to be looking for other things.*

Many of the other respondents were also quite pragmatic about the implications of new media and technologies. Like Noson, they recognized that it was impossible to shield their children completely from the influences of mainstream culture. It was better to acknowledge the inevitable influence and give children the education to deal with secular temptations. For Yankel, a significant part of this education was teaching his children to fear God:

Yankel: *Number one, keep them away from negative things, which is not easy. Number two, I think that's more important, especially in today's day and age, is to add positive fear of God. In other words, to really teach the children that God is looking upon us every moment of the day. There's no place that you could go and you're running away from God. God is always with you.*

Yankel later admitted that it was this fear of God that helped him to avoid misuse of the Internet, "The fact that I'm a Jew and I know that Hashem[12] is watching above every moment what I do…this makes sure that I only use the Internet for the right things." This is the kind of "everyday" religious belief that plays a key role in how the Internet is integrated

into daily life. These beliefs and values form a framework that guides everyday actions and shapes the domestication of the Internet and other ICTs.

## Domestication: A Summary

The ultra-Orthodox families involved in this study were largely successful at integrating the Internet into the moral economies of their households. Part of this success comes from their utilitarian approach to cyberspace. The Internet is seen as a work-related necessity, not a source of entertainment. Another significant factor is where these families choose to keep their networked computers. The locations chosen are part of a larger strategy for regulating Internet use while also downplaying its presence in the home. The local Haredi community also plays a crucial role in this process of integration. Many families take comfort in the knowledge that others in the community are also online. Another source of comfort are the Jewish values and education these parents pass along to their children. Even as they seek to restrict access to the Internet, these families recognize that technology is constantly evolving and that absolute isolation from secular culture is no longer possible, if it ever was. This pragmatism helps them to accept the presence of the Internet in their homes while at the same time reminding them to be vigilant for the sake of their children, and themselves.

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[12] One of the Hebrew names for God, *Hashem* literally means "The Name."

**CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

We return now to the two questions that inspired this research: *What role do religious beliefs and practices play in the adoption (and non-adoption) of new technologies? Can such a thing as "religious domestication" be observed and studied?* The results of this study clearly demonstrate the role of religion in the adoption and use of new technologies. The belief that Haredi Jews should live outside of mainstream culture provides the basis by which ultra-Orthodox families domesticate the Internet. As the research findings illustrate, the influence of religion can be seen in nearly every phase and dimension of domestication. The phenomenon of religious domestication, however, is not limited to the beliefs and practices of the Haredi household. The findings also point to the influence of family and friends in the Haredi community. This underscores the importance of examining domestication strategies acquired outside of the home, especially for those families who belong to close-knit communities.

We have identified the influence of religion on domestic Internet use, but what about the influence of domestic Internet use on religion? Although the Haredi families in this study did not look online for religious inspiration, they did use the Internet to correspond with fellow Jews and to carry out community-related work. The fact that none of the families consulted a rabbi about the Internet suggests a conflict with religious authority, but does not signify a breakdown of traditional religion. The findings revealed that there have always been some inconsistencies in these families when it comes to following the "rules" for media consumption. The presence of the Internet also reminded parents that they needed to emphasize certain Jewish values for their children, to better prepare them for the increasingly unavoidable distractions of the secular world.

Although this study has focused on households with access to the Internet, subsequent research might examine those ultra-Orthodox families who have chosen not to adopt the seemingly ubiquitous ICT. The Haredi community as a whole merits more in-depth investigation, especially in light of its rapidly growing population. Further studies might also look at the domestication of the Internet by families from other conservative religious backgrounds, such as Evangelical Christians or Fundamentalist Muslims. The domestication approach in general, with its focus on what ICTs mean to those who use them, can offer tremendous insight into the followers of traditionalist religions. Studying the domestication of

media technologies such as television and the Internet can reveal how religious families see the world, and themselves.

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**APPENDIX A: Interview Topic Guide**

**Background**

Talk a little about the media and technology (TV, comp, etc) you have in your home. How did you make the decision what to buy and what not to buy?

*For this interview, we're going to focus mainly on the home computer and Internet.*

**1.   Purchase**

When did you decide to purchase a computer?
When did you decide to get Internet?
How did you make this decision?
Did you have any concerns?
Did you consult anyone?
Did you use a computer much before?

**2.   Placement**

Where do you keep the computer in your house?
How did you decide where to put it?
Did you discuss where to place it before the purchase?

**3.   Usage**

What is the role of the computer/Internet in your life?
What do you use the Internet for?
When do you use it?
Who do you email? Other members of the community?
How does your Judaism influence your Internet use?
How does your Internet use influence your Judaism?
Has your use changed at all over time?
Does your computer/Internet use differ between home and outside?
Who else in the family uses the computer?
Do you use monitor your children on the computer?
Are there rules for computer/Internet use?

**4.   Talk**

Do all of your friends and family know you have a computer/Internet access?
Do you recommend computer/Internet to other people?
What do you tell people who are looking for advice about computer/Internet use?
Who do you go to if you have a computer-related question?
How do you think computers/Internet are viewed within the Orthodox community?

**5.   Concluding**

Is there anything else you would like to say on this topic?

## APPENDIX B: Interview Transcript

Respondent: Avrom Leider
Location: Leider Household, North London
Date: June 26, 2007

Q: Can you talk a little about what media and technologies you have in your home?

A: We have Internet and… that's pretty much it. What other ones are there?

Q: Television?

A: No, we don't have a TV.

Q: Most ultra-Orthodox families don't have a television, right?

A: No, no.

Q: What about radio?

A: I listen to the radio although very rarely at home. I just do it when I have the chance in the car. Sometimes. But I do listen to the radio.

Q: Let's talk about television. Was it ever a consideration?

A: No. It was never a consideration. It was something which was always taboo. It was always something that we wouldn't have… pretty much since we were children. It's not that we've never seen any television, but it's not something that we would have.

Q: What's different about the computer and the Internet?

A: That's a good question. It's something, which, as you're aware of, there are many Haredi rabbis that forbid the Internet as well. I think that the Internet is more like walking down a street. When you walk down a street, there are many, many influences. Positive and negative. I think the Internet is very much like that. I would acknowledge that it's more dangerous, because you're walking down a street, which, you know, you could be walking in a red-light district type of thing. Basically the potential of the Internet is much greater. It's much more positive and much more negative than the television. And the positive sides of it are quite attractive. It's like you walk down the street and you have these little shops. What you go into… it's also very easily accessible. The difference is that you're doing it within the privacy of your own home. But if you went somewhere where nobody knew you as well. It's very similar to, whereas the television has preset programs, the Internet… that's the world. That said, again, the Internet has a much greater potential for evil, negative influences. And not just from a religious perspective, either. But the advantages of the Internet are very great. I use it to tremendous advantage.

Q: Like what?

A: Besides for email, obviously keeping in touch with people and much is keeping in touch but also addressing different issues. Community news, family news, and that type of thing.

Q: When did you decide to get a computer?

A: I can't remember the exact date. It must have been shortly after we discovered computers. Growing up, we had a computer quite early. We didn't always have one. Are you referring to the Internet or the computer?

Q: Both. I find it interesting because some ultra-Orthodox will have a computer in their home but not connected to the Internet, right?

A: Right. Because there's nothing wrong with a computer, per say. It's the Internet part that's… I mean, obviously you have things like computer games but… you can just not play them. Well, pretty much since the Internet, since the world-wide-web was invented or shortly after that, when we discovered it.

Q: Was there ever a consideration not to get the Internet?

A: There wasn't a serious consideration. The thought crossed my mind, but it was never really something that I seriously considered. I have friends that either considered it or decided against it but I don't know anybody within my circle that actually ended up not having it. I know those who certainly decided not to, and ended up having it.

Q: What was so attractive for you about the Internet?

A: Extreme accessibility, really. There's just so much you can do on the Internet.
About television, the Rebbe spoke about it, and was obviously heavily opposed to it. One of the things he said was in olden days, back in the day in Europe and even today, parents used to walk their children, they didn't walk them by a church so that they shouldn't have that influence. And nowadays you bring the church into the home. That was one of the things he said… That's an example he was giving of something that happens. He spoke about the very negative influences of it. So the Internet, one could argue, is that and worse. But I think another thing about the Internet is you actually have to go somewhere. That's why I say it's like walking down the street. Whereas in the television you turn it on, there's a program there. You switch channels, but when you turn it on, there's something there already.

Q: It's a more passive experience?

A: It's more passive but therefore automatically negative. There are very few things in television which would be called "neutral" religiously. The weather, nature channels, maybe.

Q: Do you ever watch television on the computer?

A: Sometimes. I sometimes watch news clips.

Q: What about films? I noticed earlier you seemed to know a lot about films.

A: Certain films. I watch them on the plane, usually [chuckles]. When I travel, if I know if anything interesting has come out… Recently, I haven't really bothered, or I'm just too tired.

Q: So you don't usually watch films in the home?

A: No. I have watched films in the past, but I don't usually watch films.

Q: When you do, is it then on the computer?

A: If we would watch films now, it would have to be on the computer. We don't have any other… We don't have a television screen.

Q: But that doesn't happen too often?

A: No, it doesn't really happen.

Q: Do you feel on a daily basis your Judaism influences how you use the computer? Or is it more unconscious?

A: It is a very big influence on how we use it. Then again, lots of things do become subconscious, or just part of what we do. So, do I feel the influence of Judaism, do I think about it every time I go shopping for food? Or every time I eat, am I thinking: Is this kosher? Or is it something that I know automatically that certain thing are kosher? You do it for so many years.

Q: Like *kashrut*, then, are there certain rules you set for yourself in term of Internet use?

A: There are obvious things that one does or does not use. Just like outside in the real world. Some of them are common sense. You don't have to be religious. And some of them are religious things.

Q: What are some examples of the religious things?

A: Well, some of those things that are common sense I do because of religion. Some of the things that are. The thing is, I do certain things for, let's say… I wouldn't read certain things because of religion. I wouldn't watch movies online. (Long pause) I'm not going to get into pornography and things like that because those are the things that are obvious… that are not religious. Well, they do have religious aspects for me. But they're things which I think that for someone who is not religious as well, it's a stupid thing to do. But that's the thing. So many things, I think, make sense. It's mainly what I would read and what I wouldn't. On the other hand, sometimes you do for research. You have to read certain things. I'm not entirely ignorant about other religions.

Q: You mentioned research, but are there other ways the Internet aids you in your Judaism?

A: It's tremend—It's not unlimited, but it's just hugely vast, the Internet. There is so much that one can access on the Internet. You name it. Studies, research into different projects, different topics. It's huge.

Q: Though, a lot of the content on the Internet is not the most accurate.

A: You have to take it with a grain of salt. If one comes across it on Wikipedia, one knows that it's a… suggestion. When I say research, it's also sites that have texts. You can buy these CDs which have texts, and you can get a lot of it online. They're also not entirely accurate. Apparently, there was a recent story. I don't know how accurate the story is, but about one of these programs. Somebody asked one of these rabbis in Israel how many times it says the word "Moshe" [Moses] in the Torah. And he gave a number which was two less than what one of these CDs had. This person had searched on the CD and the search had… he [the rabbi] said there are two times where it has the same letters but different vowels. I don't know how accurate the story is. I'm sure some of these programs read it with vowels not just with letters. I just saw this story. I don't know if it's true. It sounds like one of these apocryphal stories.

Q: Then again, that sounds like the type of thing that does happen a lot online.

A: That's right. So one has to take it with a grain of salt. Especially Wikipedia, which I do enjoy. But there's always the fact that it's not necessarily… But then again, you read books and there's lots of nonsense in books. And I'm talking about books that are reputable books.

Q: How much do you use the Internet to communicate with people in your community?

A: A lot. A tremendous amount. Be it Facebook, regular email, websites.

Q: Is it mainly to communicate with people you see on a semi-regular basis? Or is there a lot of long-distance communication?

A: A lot of long distance communication but not all of it is long term, sustained. People email me from lots of different places.

Q: Is it safe to say that a lot of people in your community use the Internet?

A: Most rabbis that I know of use the Internet. Even older people that I know… My father is older and he uses the Internet.

Q: Wow.

A: You said you were looking for someone else. I was going to see if he could do it. He's online. And he has been since the early days. That's how – I was at home then and we had a computer. I'm sure he didn't really know how to use it that well, back then but we had it.

Q: You mentioned the Rebbe speaking out against television. What about the Internet?

A: See that's the thing. He was no longer talking and then passed away before the Internet really made it big. He did generally. There's a book about the use of technology and the lessons we take out of everyday life. The Rebbe spoke about things like football, soccer. He spoke about many things. One of the things the Rebbe strongly emphasized… a very strong theme is that everything in the world was created to be used for godly purposes. It says in the Talmud that the only reason gold was created was so it could be used in the Temple, used for G-d. And as a byproduct, as an aside, there's gold in the world. Everything from the world was created to serve G-d. So technology is no exemption from that. It was also created for the purpose of serving G-d. And not only that; there's a reason why things were discovered at this point in history and not 200 years ago, 500 years ago. The Rebbe was very encouraging, even TV. Even while saying people shouldn't have a television, the Rebbe encouraged the use of it. There were [inaudible] talks of the Rebbe that were on television regularly. The Rebbe was always very much into technology. In fact, the Rebbe's offices were always quite advanced. They had car-phones before most people, really before most anyone. Fax machines, these things are very necessary for that type of office. He had hundreds and hundreds of messages coming in every day. They had a fax machine at a time when if someone wanted to send a fax one would have to go to the three fax machines one knew of in London. Technology was something which the Rebbe encouraged. He embraced it within certain boundaries. Obviously it's not… so Internet… Now the only question is what the Rebbe would say about *us* using the Internet as opposed to embracing the technology. I mean embracing the technology and using it for goods things. There's no question that would be encouraged. The only question is to what extent having it in one's own home. If there are people that don't use it… nobody denies that the Rebbe would encourage the use of it to reach others. Even TV.

Q: I assume there's still some tension. For example, some families choose to have a computer but not have Internet.

A: Even within other Haredi circles, there are people who have a computer and have email but no Internet. There are many degrees. I know because I have lots of relatives that belong to other communities. We have a family email list as well. And some of them can't click on the links and can't download files. They can just read an email. There are programs for that.

Q: I've read of one program that sends a list of the websites you visit to other people. It's based on the principle that if somebody if watching over you—

A: You'd be embarrassed. Lately there's been in Manchester and Gateshead, strong bans on the Internet.

Q: In the home or in general?

A: In the home. In the office, one has to get a dispensation. This is in other Haredi communities such as in the Lithuanian community.

Q: As long as you keep your own boundaries, is there not too much of a downside to having the Internet in your home?

A: There is a downside, because those boundaries are self-imposed. And therefore easy to move or to breech. There are programs as well which limit the use… Another downside is children. Because then it's no longer about you trusting yourself, which again, even if you trust yourself, there's always slip-ups. But children, it's a much bigger problem. So there are various filtering programs which prevent children from going to lots of sites. But the problem with those programs is that they also tend to… they analyze a site. For instance, in school they have them and there are sites, which aren't bad at all, but they are banned because the site sees them as being bad. But I'm sure that there's a certain element of autonomy or setting the controls yourself.

Q: Have you thought about what you'll do when [your son] is old enough to use the computer?

A: I haven't extensively. But I… we have thought about the fact that it will almost certainly entail one of these Internet blocking programs. The worry is that children are usually very technology savvy and they can figure how to bypass these programs. I know that one of my brothers; his children don't use the computer at all. It's there. It's in the house. But they don't use it. The oldest is 14 so maybe now he uses it a little bit. But they don't use a computer for anything.

Q: And your brother is able to maintain that?

A: Yeah. Pretty much. He has a laptop. He doesn't really have a computer in his house. He used to. He gave it away.

Q: What about you? Is it a laptop? A PC?

A: Both. We have a laptop and when we moved here, we bought a PC, a desktop. The laptop still exists, so we use both. The PC is more for heavier work. That's why we bought it.

Q: Where is the PC?

A: Downstairs. Generally, Deena uses the laptop. We actually have another computer right there [gestures to the corner of the room], but we never use it. Somebody gave it to us. It's under that orange cloth. We don't really need it at the moment.

Q: With the PC for example, did you discuss beforehand buying it with your wife? Or was it a given?

A: It was a given.

Q: What about where to put it in the home? Was there much discussion?

A: There wasn't really a major choice. It was either the bedroom or the second bedroom, which was the office. We discussed it, obviously, but having it up here, which is where, we had the laptop up here for a few weeks, before we set up the main computer. In this particular house, there wasn't really much of a choice. We did think about it. I didn't like the thought of having it in the bedroom. In Australia as well, we had it in the second bedroom/office.

Q: Has anyone from the community ever asked your advice about whether or not to have a computer in their home?

A: Most people that I know take it for granted that they will have a computer. I have a friend, two friends, who didn't want Internet. He had a TV but he wouldn't get Internet. And he does now. He said when he gets married, he doesn't know if he wants… One of my brothers-in-law, he didn't want Internet. My sister said, "No way." For many reasons. For better or for worse, it's how we keep in touch with most people who aren't living within three blocks of our house, and even those who are. It's difficult. We've become so attached to it. I say for better or for worse because there are some disadvantages to that of course. There are some advantages. Many people want to keep in touch with

others that live across the world. For somebody like my wife whose family lives in Australia; you can talk to them, email, and use Skype. It's definitely useful.

Q: Is the computer more welcomed in the home than the television because it's a more active experience? In contrast, television is a fairly passive experience where you sit there—

A: Like a couch potato. No, it's more passive… Again, you turn on a TV and it's an automatic negative. Almost certainly. Unless you happen to turn it on to the weather channel or something. Whereas with the Internet, one has to search it out. It's easy and it's usually accessible and there are huge amounts of it on there. Walking down the street, there are limitations. You're not just walking anywhere… I do think it often as walking down the street. Just going out into the world. Some people try not to go out too much. But then you're not living within the world. The point is to live within the world. That's why we're living our physical lives. People walk down the street and you have a row of shops or possible venues, and where do you go? It may sound somewhat simplistic because… That's one of the biggest things about the Internet: the privacy of it.

Q: So continuing with the street metaphor, one of the benefits to the Internet is the element of choice?

A: It's preprogrammed. It's choice but it's also the fact that it just reflects your life.

Q: What do you mean?

A: The range of what's available on the Internet is what's available walking down the street. Among Haredi communities, the street is not something they want to bring into the home. The street is a dangerous place to be. So that's why a lot of them don't have the Internet. The home is like that expression, "The Englishman's home is his castle." Not anymore, but now it's always being infringed upon. The point is that within a person's four walls, they control what happens. With the Internet, that could be a problem.

Q: Is the media culture of television substantially different than the culture online? Is there a greater diversity online?

A: Massively so. Pretty much everything that's available on television is available online, just plus. We can download TV programs.

Q: Is that then something you would do, if you didn't have to wade through the 'bad' programs to find the good stuff?

A: In England, if one watches streaming television in real time, one has to have a license… I don't have a TV license. I don't watch TV. But they say if you watch any real time TV even if it's over the Internet, you need a license.

Q: So in terms of watching programs online, it's OK if it's entertainment as long as its self-selected and of some level of quality?

A: No, well lots of people don't do it at all. There are certain things, like certain documentaries and things, that I would watch. Others wouldn't, at all. Then again, others wouldn't watch movies on a plane.

Q: Is it then a very individual decision?

A: Watching movies is something that, within our belief system, we shouldn't do. So whilst I will watch sometimes on a plane, I don't think people who aren't are fanatic
They're just adhering more strictly. I don't know. I'm just trying to think if I feel guilty, if I think it's wrong. I don't usually just watch something on the plane. It's something which, for instance, different films I want to see, and I wouldn't otherwise. I watched *Borat* on the plane. Also, I often read about

movies, so if you hear me discussing it, it doesn't necessarily mean that I've seen it. It's something that I've done for a long time. Some of these movies I'm not really interested in seeing but I am interested in knowing about them. Some I'm interested in seeing. Some I actually get to see. Generally, we don't see movies.

[The telephone rings and Avrom answers, speaking for several minutes]

A: I remember when I was a child, when the Internet first came out. There was a computer at home that my mother used. It was restricted with a password. We knew how to use it better than she did. The password we cracked very, very quickly. Whenever something went wrong, she'd accuse us of breaking it. We'd say, "We know how to use that thing better than you do." My parents actually run a vocational training course in computers and other things for the Haredi community. They teach computers, IT. They also teach other things within that framework. They have different Haredi people coming in and learning how to use computers. Not just to turn them on, but also to use different programs… whatever it is.

Q: So there's little concern if the computer is only be used for a vocational purpose?

A: Even with the recent bans in different communities, within the work environment, they have to get some sort of permission but within the office, then, it's usually allowed. There are people who need to use it for work.

Q: What about in your community? Do you need permission to have a home computer or Internet access?

A: It's not our community. In those communities, it's banned within the homes. It's banned outright.

Q: So in your community, is it up to each individual household to decide?

A: [long pause] Pretty much. Again, most people that I know… most people either have or don't have for other reasons. There are some who don't have for those reasons.

Q: What occupies most of your time online?

A: Email. News. That's how I spend most of my time.

Q: What kinds of news sites do you go to?

A: Drudge Report. I find it boring at times. A lot of what he puts up there I have no interest in. First of all, in the race for president, I look at the headlines. And then the immigration debate, I used to… but I can't be bothered to read it all the time. He has some British news…

Q: I've noticed his links to British newspapers online have been increasing lately.

A: Yes, yes. He does have to things like *The Daily Mail*, *Times Online.* It's not necessarily related to Britain. It's British news. It's just on a British website. The good about it is you don't actually have to read the articles. You just get a picture of what they're about. You get a general picture of what the news is.

Q: What about *The Jewish Chronicle* [gesturing to a copy on the living room table]. Do you read that online too?

A: No, because I have it here. I've been into their archives a few times to check up a few things.

Q: Do you get any other newspapers delivered?

A: *The Chronicle*, *The Jewish News*, pretty much. Sometimes I buy other papers but usually I don't read them… it's a waste of money. I don't get around to reading them often.

Q: Yeah, it seems that nowadays you can get the news faster and cheaper online.

A: The thing is there are things in the newspaper which you can get alone, but you just don't. It's not necessarily the main news page or something. There are different things which... Then again, is that worth buying and reading through a whole paper just to get those things? Would I live without them?

Q: Any final thoughts?

A: Everything that's created is created to serve G-d. There's something called a religious evil inclination, or even a Hasidic evil inclination, the *yitza hara*, can dress itself up in various garbs. So it can come across as…

[The telephone rings again, and Avrom answers the call quickly]

A: How does one determine whether it's an evil inclination or it's really a positive influence? Even an evil inclination can come dressed in the garb of a religious belief. How does one determine that it's the evil inclination? The general principle is that if it leads to something good happening, then it's good. And if it stops something good happening, even for the best reasons, it's not good. Everything has to be used for the good. The question is whether we should have it in our homes. Like TV, the answer is no, even though it also has to be harnessed for good.

Q: Is it then easier to harness the Internet and the computer for good than the television?

A: It's easier… there's more potential. But with the television it's also possible to harness it, but we don't have it in our homes.

Q: There doesn't seem to be a consensus about what is allowed in the home—

A: Among the religious communities?

Q: Yes.

A: There isn't a consensus. There are many communities which ban it. There are others which allow it. Others which allow it with restriction.

Q: Do you see the banning as an over-reaction?

A: I understand where they're coming from. I just don't know that that's the way forward. It's a very big problem and a very big threat. A lot of the problem isn't only religious. It really affects others in the same way. Pornography is a much-spoken-about problem on the Internet. There are addictions, actual pornography addictions. One could argue that they would happen anyway. But they wouldn't. They wouldn't. Most wouldn't.

Q: Last question. Do you ever go to any Yiddish language websites?

A: Rarely. Sometimes. Hebrew, more. And English, even more.

Q: That about covers it. Thank you.

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