

A Community of Sinners: An Analysis of Confessional Web Sites

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Drawing from Web content analysis techniques (Herring, in press), a feature analysis of 32 confessional websites and a thematic analysis of 320 confessional posts found on these sites were conducted. Based on an overall decline in U.S. religious confessional numbers, popular media has speculated that online confessions are taking the place of traditional religious confessional practices and that online confessions generally contain “unthinkable deeds, abhorrent acts or secret longings” (Jason, 2007, Nov. 28) and are intimate in nature. The present study tested the statements of popular media regarding confessional websites by performing a feature analysis and thematic analysis. The feature analysis revealed seven common features that occurred on 63% or more of 32 websites. A thematic analysis using variables based on a preliminary review of the data and previous research found that posts were frequently personal in nature, described a negative experience, displayed no personal data, were written by a person of unknown gender, referenced a general time frame, were socially acceptable, and had a high chance of being of lustful or of an untruthful nature. Based on these results and in response to speculation made by popular media, the emergence of a confessional web genre and possible implications are discussed.

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