

Article

Hilltop Youth and New Media: The Formation of a Young Religious Digital-Resistance Community

Hananel Rosenberg ¹ and Kalia Vogelman-Natan ^{2,*}¹ School of Communication, Ariel University, Ariel 40700, Israel² Media, Technology, and Society Program, Northwestern University, 2240 Campus Drive, Evanston, IL 60208-0001, USA

* Correspondence: kalia@u.northwestern.edu

Abstract: “Hilltop youth” is the name for young religious Jewish people in Israel who, separated from their families, are living in illegal outposts on hilltops throughout Judea and Samaria. The group’s unique religious, sociological, and ideological characteristics differentiate them from other religious communities previously studied in relation to digital culture. In this study, we offer a new angle that provides insight into the hilltop youth’s religious–ideological perception while focusing on their attitude toward new media, smartphones, and social networks, in particular, an attitude that is part of their self-definition as a separatist community. The findings present and discuss the different layers represented within the hilltop youth’s media resistance and how this media-negating ideological position shapes the group’s perception as a religious community that is a counterculture to religious and social sectors in Israel.

Keywords: hilltop youth; media resistance; religious communities; new media; counterculture



Citation: Rosenberg, Hananel, and Kalia Vogelman-Natan. 2023. Hilltop Youth and New Media: The Formation of a Young Religious Digital-Resistance Community. *Religions* 14: 411. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030411>

Academic Editor: Tsurriel Rashi

Received: 13 January 2023

Revised: 2 March 2023

Accepted: 12 March 2023

Published: 17 March 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Religious communities’ engagement with new media vis-à-vis their theological assessment of these technologies offers interesting insights concerning said groups (Blondheim and Rosenberg 2017). Yet, a lot can also be learned about the nature of groups from their practices of rejection and resistance to media, especially in the case of traditionalist religious communities and enclave cultures. While there have been studies that looked at religion-based resistance to media and/or its cultivation according to religious lifestyle, as with the Amish and ultra-Orthodox Jews (Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017; Rosenberg et al. 2019), not many focused on the younger generation. This is indeed the case with hilltop youth, a group of religious youngsters in Israel living in illegal outposts throughout Judea and Samaria, who ascribe to an extremist ideology unsanctioned by the state or their parent communities (Borstein 2004).

Due in part to its relatively short existence, there is a dearth of academic research on the hilltop youth phenomenon (Peleg 2022). The few studies dealing with these hilltop youth have focused on two main angles: (1) the political context arising from their extremist views regarding the Jewish–Arab conflict and from their place of residence in the hostile Palestinian region (e.g., Alshech et al. 2020; Alimi and Demetriou 2018; Eiran and Krause 2018; Pedahzur and Perliger 2011); and (2) the sociological aspects related to their definition as a unique group of at-risk youths (e.g., Lahav et al. 2014; Kaniel 2003). In this study, we offer a new angle that provides insight into their religious–ideological perception while focusing on the hilltop youth’s attitude toward new media, an attitude that is part of their self-definition as a separatist community. We examine in depth the social norms, motives, and exceptions regarding the hilltop youth’s rejection of smartphones and social networks. We discuss the emergent tensions concerning the individual and community, dominant versus counterculture, the transience–permanence, and location–dislocation axes, as well as connection and disconnection.

2. The Literature Review

2.1. Hilltop Youth: Between Politics, Welfare, and Religion

“Hilltop youth” is the name for Jewish teens and young adults, male and female, who are living in illegal outposts on hilltops and farms throughout Judea and Samaria. The number of hilltop youth is estimated at a few hundred, but it is difficult to get an accurate picture since there are no official institutions associated with this group, nor is there an organizing body overseeing their activity. Most of the hilltop youth come from families belonging to the Religious Zionist (*Dati Leumi*, also referred to as National Religious) movement of all its varieties and stay between several months and several years in the outposts, often under difficult and challenging living conditions. Most of the youth first arrive at the hilltops as teenagers (ages 15–18) and live there for a period of six months or more. Another group is young adults who join the hilltop youth after graduating from high school or being discharged from the army, with some getting married and building their homes there, all the while dealing with repeated evictions by the army and the destruction of the houses and buildings built without the authorities’ approval (Friedman 2015; Borstein 2004).

In general, the hilltop youth can be divided into two distinct groups according to their sociological background (Mash et al. 2018): the “settlers,” mostly second and third-generation residents of the settlements in Judea and Samaria, who experienced turbulent periods of terrorist attacks, including at times the injury and death of neighbors, friends, and relatives; and the “urbanites,” youth from a mostly low to medium socioeconomic backgrounds, who move to the hilltops as part of a process of leaving their parents’ home, sometimes after experiencing conflicts with their parents and the educational institutions. Their move to the hilltops stems from feelings of alienation from society and is perceived as part of a self-exploration process that attributes religious and ideological meaning to their stay there (Friedman 2015; for a review of the hilltop youth’s quest for meaning and purpose see Peleg 2022). Borstein (2004) characterizes the transition from the parents’ home to the hilltop as an individual decision and not as a group organization. She claims that the hilltop functions as a space that contains each individual’s unique characteristics and that the blurred borders, both physical and normative, emphasize the sense of freedom and informality that enhance the young person’s space for personal choice, giving them a sense of belonging to an ideological framework whose behavior patterns correspond to the person’s needs. Among the youth, there is a growing sense that they can make an impact and express themselves in a way that is not related to academic achievements but rather to alternative activities, such as agricultural work, construction, and guarding the hilltop, which contributes to their resilience.

On the hilltops, the youth manage their daily life, work, and initiative independently. The youth’s stay at the hilltop is not necessarily connected to older families living there, if there are any, although there are often such collaborations. In terms of the attraction factors and the nature of the people living there, the hilltop youth are mostly deeply motivated by religious and political ideology, adhering to the rules of *halacha* (traditional Jewish law)—especially concerning the complete separation between boys and girls. The daily life on the hilltop is characterized by physical work, such as construction, herding, farming, and guarding, as well as by an informality that offers the youth a daily routine along with a sense of freedom and maintaining of personal space (Borstein 2004).

The hilltops where the youth live were primarily built through the initiative of individuals and are not officially recognized by the state, often also without any official institutional connection to the nearby communities. Nevertheless, these inhabitants view the expansion of the settlements onto the rocky hills as a continuation of the settlement enterprise led by their parents’ generation, but that was abandoned as they settled into a routine bourgeois life. Life on the hilltops is characterized by a constant state of tension, violent conflicts with the neighboring Palestinian residents, and the protection of the lands and the property of the hilltops, including by means of nightly wanderings in the area (Friedman 2015). Over the years, terrorist acts against Palestinian residents in the nearby settlements have been attributed to hilltop youths, including damage to property and several cases where they

were convicted of causing injury and even murder. The violent incidents led to a heated controversy in Israeli society regarding hilltop youth. Some refer to them as “a mixture of eccentrics, hooligans, fringe youth, and passionate fanatics” (Gil 2005), while others see them as “idealistic and dedicated youth, who are original and think outside of the box, ready for any hard work and any struggle, that are reminiscent of the Zionist pioneers from the days before the establishment of the State of Israel” (Netanyahu 2006). However, it seems that most of the Jewish residents throughout Judea and Samaria, who also identify themselves as mainstream Religious Zionists, consider the hilltop youth to be “a group of teen dropouts who have drifted to the outposts where they absorb an extremist ideology” (Mitnick 2015).

Most of the young people living on the hilltops are defined as at-risk youth by welfare services, yet their unique religious, sociological, and ideological characteristics differentiate them from at-risk youth in other regions of Israel (Lindqvist 2020; Friedman and Billig 2018). At-risk youth share the common denominator of feeling that they do not belong to the normative life systems of their peers, as well as other behavioral–social symptoms, such as wandering, delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, vandalism, and more (Arthur et al. 2002). They experience identity crises similar in essence to their teenage peers but with higher intensities, which are accompanied by diverse risk characteristics and a lack of trust in society’s institutions and services (Resnick and Burt 1996), characteristics that appear more radically among hilltop youth (Friedman 2015; Mash et al. 2018). Indeed, some argue that religious education may act as a brake against dropping out of the education system (Lahav et al. 2014), but it seems that some of the characteristics of religious education may be a catalyst for the drop-out process, such as the illegitimacy of undermining the agreed-upon foundations in the group’s religious outlook (Friedman and Billig 2018) and the gaps in religious outlook between the teens and their parents or teachers (Arthur et al. 2002). Indeed, some argue that the more conservative the religious community is, the greater the dropout rate (Lahav et al. 2014).

2.2. Hilltop Youth as a Counterculture

In the few studies on this group, a comparison can be found between the characteristics of the hilltop youth and two avant-garde groups in Israel and the United States (Kaniel 2003; Friedman 2015). The first group that the hilltop youth are compared to are the Sabras (a metaphor for native-born Israelis), that is, those trying to imitate and renew the image of the Zionist pioneering generation. Both the hilltop youth and Sabras share similar characteristics and perceptions: occupying settlements far from the center of the country; loving the land; ideological occupation in agriculture; contentment with little; and a return to nature and biblical spaces. The second group that the hilltop youth are compared to are the hippie countercultures that emerged in the United States and Europe in the 1960s. The similarity between the hilltop youth and hippies stems from their rejection of materialism, aversion to the bourgeoisie and capitalist culture, back-to-nature lifestyle, and a tendency toward anarchism and spirituality.

However, despite all of the above, and despite the social, educational, and political background of the hilltop youth phenomenon, there is no doubt that in the hilltop youth’s own view, their self-identity stems first and foremost from the prism of a revolutionary religious identity (Singer 2016). This group is perceived by itself and others as alien to state institutions and as presenting a challenge to both the degenerate Western secular Israeli culture and their parent group, Religious Zionism, while attempting to refresh its religious outlooks and bring about a religious revival across the entire country (Dann 2004; Mitnick 2015). The alternative ideology is expressed, among other things, in a simple, contented, and biblical lifestyle, a return to nature, and in the working of the land as a messianic act. Another prominent feature among the hilltop youth is the development of a “unit pride” that stems from the avant-garde religious ideology and the sense of pioneering and uniqueness. This mindset is reflected in their external appearance, which creates a unique character and serves as a means of self-definition, belonging, and group cohesion.

The members have long hair with Hassidic-style sidelocks and wear simple clothing with extroverted religious characteristics, such as a large white or colorful knitted yarmulke and large *tzitzis* (knotted ritual fringes) dangling outside their garment—sometimes worn over the shirt—and simple, unfashionable clothing.

2.3. Refusers, Ambivalent Users, and Anti-Technology Movements

Despite the rapid diffusion of new media—internet, social networks, and smartphones—and perhaps, precisely because of it, there is a growing body of research in the literature dealing with the opposite practice: technology resistance (for a review, see [Augustin et al. 2020](#)). In accordance with the assumption that social groups define and are defined according to their relation to technology, it seems that the nature of groups can be learned from practices of rejection and resistance to media no less than from their patterns of adoption and use ([Zimmerman-Umble 1992](#)). Non-users can offer unique insights that the general user public is usually unaware of, as well as create alternatives and offer different lifestyles in the technology-saturated space ([Woodstock 2014](#)).

In an attempt to map the non-users phenomenon, [Wyatt et al. \(2002\)](#) propose four categories based on two axes: (a) non-users who have never used technology versus those who used it in the past and stopped; and (b) voluntary non-users versus involuntary non-users. Wyatt defines these four groups as the resisters, the rejecters, the expelled, and the excluded. Since publishing her article, Wyatt has called for the further refinement of these categories along a dynamic continuum with an additional differentiation: forced user; reluctant user; partial user; and selective user ([Wyatt 2014](#)). Other researchers have also proposed distinct categories of non-users. For example, [Selwyn \(2006\)](#) distinguishes between active users, lapsed users (see also [Birnholtz 2010](#)), rare users, and non-users. Similarly, [Portwood-Stacer \(2013\)](#) claims that there are various nuances in the active refusal of media use, emphasizing refusers whose non-use represents a discursive step. Likewise, [Satchell and Dourish \(2009\)](#) distinguish between late adopters and active resisters, those unable to use (from a socio-economic point of view or lack of infrastructure), “proxy” users, and those with no interest in use. [Neves et al. \(2015\)](#) delve into the type of “surrogate users”, those who occasionally use other people’s accounts for their own needs, for example, to browse and look up other profiles. Another definition is [Ribak and Rosenthal’s \(2015\)](#) “ambivalent users”, who, in response to the communication overflow, perceive as disruptive of the desired balance of everyday life, negotiate selective practices of engagement and minimizing usage.

These studies, and other similar ones, indicate the great diversity within the non-user phenomenon, especially those who consciously choose to do so. Media technology non-use can be done as a personal practice and as an individual decision ([Rosenberg and Vogelmann-Natan 2022](#)) or as part of a group of resisters who share the same values and ideological world ([Rosenberg and Blondheim 2021](#)). In this sense, personal and group media resistance can reflect a variety of perspectives: religious ([Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017](#); [Rosenberg et al. 2019](#)); psychological (e.g., [Pierce 2009](#)); educational ([Buckingham 2000](#)); familial ([Silverstone 2006](#)); and sociological ([Kline 2003](#); [Ribak and Rosenthal 2015](#)). Indeed, the technological resistance may be framed by non-users as an attempt at mental well-being. For example, [Woodstock \(2014\)](#) identifies three main motives of individual media refusers: wanting privacy and boundaries between public and personal spheres; fear of interpersonal relationships being undermined by communication technologies; and wanting to focus on real-time experiences and true presence by eliminating technological distractions. In some cases, the resistance reflects an ideology, such as religious ([Neriya-Ben Shahar 2016](#)) or socialist ([Ribak and Rosenthal 2006](#)), while in other cases, it is seen as an act of anti-consumerism ([Portwood-Stacer 2013](#)), anti-institutionalism ([Ribak and Rosenthal 2015](#); [Syvertsen 2017](#)), or as a type of political protest ([Casemajor et al. 2015](#)). Another important distinction is the duration of non-use: permanent abstinence; temporary disconnection for varying periods depending on a specific time (e.g., during the Sabbath; [Lieber 2020](#)); or on a defined space (e.g., on vacation or backpacking trip; [Rosenberg 2019](#)), or periodic disconnection as part of digital

detox—an increasingly popular practice that advocates for digital balance in a saturated media environment (Hesselberth 2017; Syvertsen and Enli 2020).

2.4. Technological Use, Resistance, and Ambivalence among Subgroups in Israeli Society

Israel provides an attractive framework for examining practices of use and non-use of communication technologies. The country is considered a world leader in the use of mobile phones and social networks (Taylor and Silver 2019) and is considered an ICT powerhouse (Getz and Goldberg 2016). Israel was the first country in the world where the number of mobile phones sold exceeded the size of the population (Kornstein 2015), and approximately 97% of smartphone owners use social media applications daily (Telecom News 2018). Researchers attribute Israelis' affinity for mobile phones to their fascination with technology, their need to be connected, and security concerns arising from the country's geopolitical situation, the concerns that drive the need to be constantly updated (Schejter and Cohen 2002). This is precisely why it is interesting to see the existence of subgroups within society that present a complex attitude toward using new media technologies, such as the ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) and the Religious Zionists.

Unlike the ultra-Orthodox sector, which defines itself as an “enclave culture” (Sivan 1995) and has a negating and suspicious attitude toward new media (Campbell 2007; Campbell and Golan 2011), the Israeli Religious Zionist sector is more open and has a greater affinity toward modernism. The Religious Zionist group is mainly characterized by its continuous dialogue between modern and traditional leanings and between sacred and secular. On the one hand, this combination is the source of its strength and attraction, but on the other hand, it is also the main source of tension within the community and a contributor to the community's high dropout rates (Kaniel 2003). This constant tension is a source of intra-sector discussions among community rabbis and leaders regarding the boundaries of adopting the modern Western world's cultural symbols, practices, and values and the religious prices involved (Engelberg 2015). Indeed, in recent years two identifiable major subgroups have formed within the Religious Zionist community—the mainstream community that tends to accept modernity more openly and the *Hardal* (*Haredi Dati Leumi*, which translates as “ultra-Orthodox Religious Zionists”) faction, which tends to be more conservative and traditional (Golan and Don 2022). These groups are distinguished by a separate education system and the following of rabbis and leaders who reflect their approach.

These tensions between modernity and conservatism, openness and being closed off, are also reflected in Religious Zionism's complex relationship with new media. The more liberal and mainstream Religious Zionist rabbis offer ideological legitimization for using new media, which is based on recognizing the value of internalizing the positive aspects of modernity and on recognizing the communal and educational potential of these technologies. On the other hand, despite emphasizing the positive aspects of these technologies, rabbis from the more conservative sub-groups tend to be more suspicious when it comes to how they are employed, especially among children and teens (Golan and Don 2022).

Compared to these two groups, there is no research focusing on the hilltop youth's attitude toward new media technologies. This group's characteristics—with its original affiliation to the Religious Zionist stream that ideologically supports openness to the modern world and its innovations, on the one hand, and being a counterculture to said original group, to Israeli culture and to Western culture in general, on the other hand—mark hilltop youth as a case study of tensions between technological adoption and resistance, legitimacy and illegitimacy, and conservatism versus modernity. Thus, the research questions are as follows: (1) What are the hilltop youth's attitudes toward new media? (2) To what extent does this attitude correspond to the position of their Religious Zionist parent community? (3) Whether and how does the hilltop youth's adoptive/resistive position toward new media reflect their self-perception as a counterculture?

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative methodological approach in accordance with the nature of the research goals and due to the lack of previous research on the subject. This approach fits our intention to provide rich information to assist with gaining a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon and identifying the approaches, perspectives, and influence factors (Maxwell 1996). As part of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted in an attempt to reveal the point of view and personal experience of each of the interviewees through the presentation of their authentic voice regarding the discussed phenomenon (Moustakas 1994; see also Marwick and Boyd 2014) regarding the use of interviews to reveal insights concerning new media functions in everyday spaces).

3.1. Participants

The study included 16 interviews with young men ($n = 9$) and women who lived on the hilltops of Judea and Samaria for a period of at least two years as teenagers. The interviewees' ages ranged from 18 to 25, the average age being 21 (for details on the interviewees, see Appendix A). All the interviewees came from Religious Zionist homes and lived on the hilltops for several years. Due to the ethical challenges of conducting interviews with at-risk minors, many of whom are estranged from their parents, it was decided to select interviewees aged 18 and older, single and married, who lived in the hilltops during their high school years, the vast majority of whom continue to live there today. On average, the teen habitation period discussed occurred within the past 3–6 years. Interviewing participants on their experiences in retrospect offers both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the distance allows for a more reflective and observant perspective on the hilltop experience in general and the issue of media use in particular. On the other hand, the time lag may affect interviewees' perceptions and create biases. Nevertheless, we had no other choice than to use this retrospective approach due to the related ethical limitations.

To locate the interviewees, we used three students with close familiarity with the research environment as intermediaries: the first lives in a settlement in Judea near some places where the hilltop youths reside; the second works as a counselor promoting youth in the Samaria region as well as in outreach and caring for these youth; and the third previously lived on one of the farms in Samaria. The premise was that advertising on social networks could lead to a bias in which only those who are exposed to these networks would answer the advert. A personal request from the lead researchers may also be declined. On the other hand, having the research assistants reach out to participants, whom they know personally, will help reduce the suspicion toward the "institutional" study and university that may lead to a refusal to cooperate. Indeed, except for one refusal, 16 interviewees accepted our request to be interviewed. The request included a description of the research topic and its goals, as well as a promise to protect the interviewees' privacy, as described below.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted face-to-face over the course of about three months, with each interview lasting between an hour to an hour and a half. The interviewees were asked a variety of questions that dealt with their familial, social, and religious backgrounds; the process of joining life on the hilltops and describing daily life there; the old and new media technologies use practices during their time on the hilltops; their ideological and religious perceptions concerning the role of media in their lives; the surrounding environment's stance on media use; and the like. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the thematic organization method, in which central themes emerging from the data were mapped and identified in accordance with the research questions (Ryan and Bernard 2003). The "bottom-up" categorization process (Strauss and Corbin 1990) included the four stages proposed by Marshall and Rossman (2014): the organization of the

findings; the creation of categories; the examination of early potential assumptions; and the search for alternative explanations for these assumptions.

Acknowledging the fact that in a qualitative study, the researcher's perceptions and experiences are an integral part of their scientific work, and in an effort to improve the analysis reliability, we employed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) proposed strategy and invited three of the interviewees to read a preliminary draft of the analyzed findings and conclusions. We incorporated some of the interviewees' comments into the article to create a dialogue where "the objects of theoretical statements turn into active partners in the incipient process of authentication" (Bauman 1976, p. 106). Throughout the study and in writing this article, the ethical aspects and protection of the interviewees' privacy and anonymity were taken into special consideration. This was also done by taking care not to reveal certain details from examples of the interviewees' work that they shared with us during the interview. All the interviewees were given pseudonyms, and their genders and jobs remained unchanged, though in some cases, the technical and biographical details were modified from the interview transcripts (Allmark et al. 2009).

4. Findings

4.1. Technological Resistance as a Social Norm on the Hilltops

Practically all the interviewees can be defined as smartphone and social network rejecters. Despite owning smartphones beforehand, once the interviewees arrived at the hilltops, they would switch over to a dumbphone (i.e., a basic mobile phone that does not include advanced software features typical of a smartphone). The interviewees emphasize the fact that on the hilltops, the accepted norm is not to use smartphones and social networks. "As a bachelor on the hilltops, a smartphone is something that is not acceptable. The attitude toward it is very negative, and you can also see how that attitude has an effect because all the youth living there permanently do not have smartphones" (Eyal, M.). Smartphone resistance is a social norm that developed from the bottom up, out of a decision made by the youth living there:

"On the hilltops where I lived, it was simply a social environment that you don't bring a smartphone with you. There were people who had a smartphone, but they didn't live permanently on the hilltop. There wasn't coercion or a law forbidding it, but in general, as a society, they didn't like this thing and didn't accept it; it was simply a matter of social environment" (Amiel, M.).

A similar social norm was depicted among the girls living on the hilltops, "The rule was very clear, we decided that whoever wants to live with us on the hilltop should have a dumbphone, there was no other option" (Shira, F.). Guests staying for short periods or residents who do own a smartphone are seen as exceptions, and they do not use the smartphones out in the open, "Youth that come irregularly to our hilltop will often have smartphones, but usually they leave it in their pocket" (Eyal, M.).

4.2. Resistance Motives

4.2.1. Non-Use as a Religious Practice

Religious ideology is a central motive behind the hilltop youth's smartphone and social network rejection, one that also plays a role across the other motives. The hilltop youth are, first and foremost, religious communities. This is evident in their self-identity, their socio-demographic background, and their daily life on the hilltops as designed in accordance with Jewish law, for example, a strict separation between boys and girls, with them sometimes living on entirely separate hilltops. Smartphone non-use is "part of our Torah-focused religious view" (Eyal, M.). This is also evident from the terminology interviewees used to describe the device and its risks, such as "impurity", "prohibited", "harms God worship", and the like, "It's a waste of time and defiles the soul ... Do you know how all those movies with murder, gore, and immodesty impact the soul? They destroy it ..." (Tzachi, M.).

As evident, the religious reasoning for non-use refers first and foremost to the issue of modesty, “The objection to smartphones was because a smart device can contain indecent content that could affect the person and it is within reach. We on the hilltop tried to use the smart device as little as possible because of this reason” (Eyal, M.). However, in the words of one of the interviewees, the negating view toward the new technology stems from a more comprehensive religious outlook of distancing and abstaining from content related to Western culture, “On our hilltop, there were some rules related to the environment we wanted to have there. We didn’t wear shirts with prints in English, we didn’t listen to foreign songs, and we didn’t own smartphones” (Tzachi, M.). Amiel (M.) articulates this perspective more directly, “There is the problem of entering the life of Western culture, of all the Internet, television, and media, which in general are not positive things; their goal is to bring in ratings and not be good for people. We came here to do something different.”

It turns out that the youth’s religious, familial background had something to do with their decision to establish a smartphone-free space. Some of the interviewees perceive technological abstinence as one step further beyond the education they received at home and the ambivalent, and sometimes suspicious, attitude toward technology they received there. “It is clear to me that this is related to the community I am part of that tries to filter content coming from the outside. It has to do with my parents, my home, the town where I grew up, and the Religious Zionist community that aims for clean content that does not destroy the soul, but we took it one step further” (Ofra, F.). However, it turns out that this step was not always accepted by the youth’s families. The difficulty in contacting the youth while in their dangerous environment caused friction in the matter, even if the pressures applied by the families did not bear fruit. “My family was less interested in my desire to be with a simple Nokia. They mostly worried about me all the time and wanted to know what was going on with me. They actually felt more comfortable with me having a smartphone because that way, they could communicate with me more easily and make video calls. But that is what I decided, and that was it” (Jacob, M.).

4.2.2. Non-Use as Integrating with the Quiet, Slow-Paced Life on the Hilltop

The daily conduct on the hilltop is completely different from the daily life of youth who are in a home and school setting. Theoretically, the distance from home, from regulated settlements, and the precarious security situation could be a motive for smartphone use, but the interviewees indicate that the opposite is true. The non-use is seen as a practice that helps to integrate into the daily conduct on the hilltop and the special environment associated with it, which is different from the conduct in the world outside the hilltops. Some of the interviewees defined the calm and quiet pace away from the digital overload as compatible with the pace of life and the quietness that characterizes life on the hilltop, “The fun thing on the hilltop is that you just have your peace. It’s the same with the phone, you don’t always need to know what’s going on” (Sharon, F.).

In a similar vein, Ofra (F) describes how girls who came to visit the hilltop and were not used to the media-disconnected lifestyle only felt connected to the work taking place there, thanks to being disconnected from their smartphones. “When girls who have a smartphone at home visit the hilltop for a few days, they suddenly arrive at a place where there is much activity, and suddenly, on the hilltop, they look up from the media for a moment and discover a different world than what they knew. And there is a kind of disconnection from the real disconnection that exists in the outside world.”

4.2.3. Non-Use as Connecting to Nature

One of the most prominent features of life on the hilltops, which is also a major attraction for the youth who choose to live there, is the connection to nature. The contrast to the urban youth culture is mainly expressed in the daily chores that include planting trees, building houses, and herding sheep. The new technology is perceived as an antithesis of the new lifestyle:

“In the seventh grade, I left school . . . I needed time off for myself, and school was difficult; so I would leave the city to a place with a lot of nature . . . The first farm I lived on was a boarding school in the Binyamin Region with agricultural work, and from there, I realized that what I wanted was to live in nature. On the hilltop where I live now, I have endless nature, and the last thing I need in nature is this smartphone” (Ayelet, F.)

Nati (M.), who lives on a hilltop with large herds of sheep, describes a similar experience, “In my view, the mobile phone is a misplaced curiosity. I can know what is happening now in China, all over the world, all the time. But that is not presence. We are not interested in China. What interested us was our goats and animals. And there we were. And for that, we didn’t have to consult Google.” For him, it is not only a contrasting symbol to natural life but also a functional issue: focusing on hilltop chores makes one of the main advantages of new media unnecessary. Interestingly, the extended work in herding sheep, which by nature includes a lot of free time, might have been an attractive factor for using the phone. Eyal (M.), who worked as a shepherd for several years, said that it was, indeed, a great temptation, but precisely because of this, not using the mobile phone was a conscious and important step for him:

Eyal: “I would go out to the pasture, a 15-year-old boy, for 6 hours every day, alone with the goats. It’s easiest to take a phone, but I decided not to do it because I knew it wasn’t good for me. When you are in a place like this, society does not spur you on. On the contrary, live in nature; see the beauty. And as a 15-year-old boy whose personality is not yet formed, you are interested in nature. At first, it’s hard because you’re used to the phone. Suddenly you become interested. I am out in the rain in the pasture for six hours, enjoying my life. For someone else it’s a nightmare, for me it was the most fun. Because people and teens are not exposed to nature, they live at home and are afraid of cockroaches.

Interviewer: “Didn’t you feel an imbalance living like this as a 15-year-old boy all day in nature, disconnected, without a phone?”

Eyal: Balance? What is balance? Does the country have a “normality committee”? I would love to meet it. I’m the normal one here.”

For Eyal, the non-use symbolizes the normality expressed by life in nature. He does not hide the difficulty of disconnection but sees it as a necessary step to adopt an alternative, happier, and healthier way of life than the one he knew in his previous life.

4.2.4. Non-Use as Social Disconnection/Formation

Another dominant theme links the non-use of smartphones and social networks to the social dimension of hilltop life in a double sense: the conscious and planned disconnection from the old social ties and the social formation of the hilltop youth as a group that forms while maintaining an alternative relationship to the digital societies that characterized their previous world. This is how Esther (F.), for example, who as a girl moved to a hilltop where a group of young girls lived alone, describes it:

“Before I got to the hilltop, I had a smartphone. Immediately after I arrived, I threw it away. From what I see that a society looks like, where all communication is around WhatsApp group messages, and what communication looks like, where people have trouble talking to each other, and the differences between a society that is media-based and a society where this phenomenon does not exist. As someone who was deep in both worlds, [. . .] my opinion changed a lot. I used to think that a lot of good things could be derived from this, and slowly, slowly, the less I am in a media-based society, the more I understand the damages of these connections, the losses, and how much the profit is not worth the price we pay.”

Esther describes the new social relationships, devoid of technology, as a personal revelation and the desire to build a society different from the one she was used to in her

previous life. In Nati's (M.) experience, the social environment created on the hilltop eliminates the need for technological devices:

“Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, it didn't interest me anymore. I had a great life on the hilltop, I didn't need more than a little news update which I like. We loved sitting together, playing music and games, talking. Those who are on Instagram are the types of people who didn't interest us that much.”

Nati refers not only to the internal formation of the community members but also to those outside. In this sense, the social aspect of the media disconnection process has another side since smartphone and social networks non-use means disconnecting from the friends of the past and the previous affiliation group. Another interviewee refers to this explicitly:

Every vacation, all my friends were at Dugit beach (a popular unofficial vacation spot for teenagers in the Sea of Galilee), doing drugs, and I was on the hilltop. It changed me. My friends said, “What happened to you? You totally lost your mind!” But I didn't feel like hanging out with idiot guys like that anymore. After arriving at the hilltop, I saw high-quality guys. So why should I keep in touch? It's all a bluff. So, I'll see a story on Instagram and know what's going on with them and what flavor of ice cream they're eating; it's not really keeping in touch. It's nothing. No one cares what you upload and what you do and where you are, and what you are” (Benny, M.)

4.2.5. Non-Use as Reflecting Work Ethics versus Leisure Culture

The utilization of time, the hard physical work, and seeing them as a value is a very significant theme associated with the non-use of media technologies. The new media are seen as attractive and, therefore, a danger, especially since there is a lot of free time on the hilltops. In Amiel's (M.) words, “All in all, what bothers me the most is wasting time; if I have a mobile phone in my pocket, I can waste hours for nothing. And when you're on the hilltop sitting around bored all day, it's much more extreme because you can sit for entire days using a mobile phone without doing anything.” The main value is work, “There is a purpose to advance in the world; it's a pity for us to waste any free moment, no, we didn't come into the world and to the hilltop to waste time” (Amiel). Yet, even beyond working hours, an alternative leisure culture is developing on the hilltops, which almost exclusively includes sitting together with friends while the rest of the time is devoted to work. Consuming media content as a leisure experience is seen as a negative thing, “Idleness leads to boredom, and boredom leads to sin; it always leads to bad things. And even if someone is just bored reading a book, then it's a shame you wasted your time and didn't do something effective, but at least it's not harmful that way. And if someone is bored and is on the phone, then he is harming himself and his friends” (Esther, F.).

4.3. Legitimization of Use

Despite the ideological position of new media non-use in hilltop life presented above, another important theme emerges from the interviews that give a certain legitimization for the possible use of these technologies. The interviewees describe three components of legitimization that allow limited and defined use of new media technologies: marital status; a practical need related to work; and as a tool for ideological and political promotion in the public discourse.

4.3.1. Marital Status

The first legitimization element differentiates between use and non-use according to the marital status of those living on the hilltop. While there is a rigid position of non-use concerning singles, married couples are presented with much more flexibility. “When I got married, I bought a smartphone. Before then, I didn't have any at all, but after the wedding, it's a completely different story” (Yoav, M.). The reasons offered for this distinction are

both practical (i.e., the practical need for abundant communication, using WhatsApp, the camera, etc.) and more principled, such as a lessened concern of stumbling blocks relating to modesty and the reduced risk of wasting time due to the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

4.3.2. Work Practices

Another legitimization for using smartphones concerns work purposes. The interviewees refer to instances where the hilltop residents, primarily those who are married and have families (but singles as well), need a smartphone for conducting business, such as the distribution of agricultural produce. For example, this is how Benny (M.) explains the reason for using the smartphone and how he goes about it:

“Today, I have no choice. For me, a smartphone is a work tool. If you ask me, “Would I want to give it up?” Without a doubt, but for real. I’m obligated [to have a smartphone] because of work. But I limit myself; for example, I proactively deleted the Facebook app because we can all get addicted, and I choose not to risk it.”

Here too, it is evident how media use is seen as a forced act, as post-factum use. Benny, similar to other interviewees, describes efforts to “domesticate” the mobile phone so that it serves its practical purpose but nothing beyond that.

4.3.3. New Media Use as a Means for Political and Ideological Action

Another, more fundamental, legitimization for using media is as a means for distributing ideological and political content that serve the mission for which they were enlisted: settling the land and promoting the ideological hilltop youth gospel. The media is described as a tool that enables the distribution and publication of the activities carried out in the field. The main emphasis made by the interviewees is that these channels are particularly important considering the mainstream media news coverage that is hostile toward the hilltop youth:

Nirit (F): “It is clear to me that there is something about social networks that make them a very important tool. My husband, for example, has a smartphone, and his activity on the networks is really a mission, and I wish there were more people from the hilltops who would get involved with what he does. We would be slandered in the media a lot more without the public relations he does for the hilltops, and his activity has an impact on the attitude toward the hilltops and, as a result, on our security situation.”

Interviewer: “On which networks is he active?”

Nirit: “All of them. WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter. He goes on to Tiktok a lot because the Palestinians upload a lot of things there. He is also a lot on Telegram in the politics and news updates groups.”

The pioneering aspect of using the smartphone and social networks as a tool for ideological dissemination is compared to the pioneers living on the hilltop itself:

“I consider those who chose to have a smartphone as the pioneers of the hilltop youth who are trying to do things correctly, and it keeps them from stumbling. The media discriminates against the hilltop youth and show how extremist we are, but in the end, when we have media, we can show that we are only here to protect the Land of Israel.” (Jacob, M.)

Jacob describes the need to create a counter view to the media which, according to him, presents false things about the hilltop youth and the importance of spreading humane and authentic content of what is happening on the hilltops. This is also how Sharon (F.) describes her personal experience of the importance of spreading her own experiences on social networks:

“After one of the evictions of the hilltop, I uploaded a lot of personal things to Facebook about my life on the hilltop, and I got a lot of positive feedback about it. I uploaded it to raise awareness that the hilltops are not just evictions; it’s a whole world of experiences.”

It is important to note that all the interviewees who described using media for the purpose of ideological dissemination have families. However, in the ideological context, the legitimization of using technology to promote their ideology is described as more significant compared to the “post factum” use for practical, familial, and occupational purposes. Yet, even here, there were those who saw the use of networks as only a strategic-practical act, while their personal attitude toward the technology remained negative (Amitzur, M, “On a personal level, I don’t connect with all the engagement with the outside, on social media. It’s purely for the mission, for fighting for the Land of Israel to change people’s minds, to show them what’s happening on the ground, but my personal tendency is to sit at home under my grape vines and fig trees without revealing personal things.”) However, there were others for whom the exposure to what the inherently positive forces of technology could do for the hilltop youth led them to rethink and ideologically change their relationship attitude toward media:

“In the past, I was much more critical of the media, I considered it a waste of time, but in the last two years, I have changed my mind. Although again, I still think that there are things in the media that need to be corrected and that our media is not perfect, on the other hand, I definitely understand that many people want to consume their information and form their opinion through the people themselves and not necessarily through reporters or institutional media, which is often biased toward such and such agendas. I bought a smartphone two years ago; we had a military checkpoint here near the hilltop, and we suffered from abuse and assaults at the hands of the border patrol police and things like that. After that, I came to understand that, in fact, our voice is not heard in the media, and those who observe from the outside only know that the residents of the hilltops throw stones at the soldiers and all kinds of things like that. They don’t know the injustices done to us and the positive things that happen here, so I decided to buy a smartphone, and after that, I opened a profile on Twitter. I actually started sharing our side of the events, what is happening here on the hilltop, and also the police harassment and things like that. And also, in terms of the positive and good things that are happening here in the settlement of the country.” (Yoav)

5. Discussion

To date, studies on Jewish religious communities’ engagement with media technologies have tended to focus on Orthodox communities (traditional and modern, with a greater emphasis on the former) and how the various groups negotiate the adoption of digital practices in parallel to the resulting challenges to their religious institutional authority (Sabag-Ben Porat et al. 2022; Campbell and Golan 2011; for a comprehensive overview of Jewish engagement with digital media, see Campbell 2015). Yet, in this unique case study, we witness a reversed, hybrid scenario. The hilltop youth rebel against their parent religious community’s media “leniency”, undermining religious authority and communal belonging through their own media resistance. This study explores the hilltop youth’s religious–ideological outlook and attitude toward new media, how it corresponds to their parent community, and the role it plays in their self-definition as a counterculture. Three main findings were presented. First, technological resistance is the accepted social norm on the hilltops. Second, the hilltop youth’s motives for media resistance are based on religious practice, a slower-paced lifestyle, a connection to nature, social reformation, and the value of productivity. Third, despite their media rejection, there was legitimization for (limited) media use citing marital status, work purposes, and promoting their ideology and narrative. The study demonstrates how the hilltop youth’s rejection of smartphones and

social networks differs from other forms of religious–ideological media resistance, partly due to the group’s unique characteristics as a religious community.

The current study expands the non-use literature and knowledge base in that those existing studies of technology resistance among individuals (Portwood-Stacer 2013; Rosenberg and Vogelmann-Natan 2022), social activists (Syvertsen 2022), and religious communities (Rosenberg and Blondheim 2021) have focused exclusively on older users. This research presents an interesting case study of a teenage religious community, a community whose main self-identifying characteristic is the non-use of new media. This fact is especially surprising when it comes to young people from generation Z, the “mobile natives”, whose digital space is woven into their daily lives from a very young age (Zhitomirsky-Geffet and Blau 2016; Ophir et al. 2020).

The findings show a basic negative attitude toward the use of new media, a rejection that is essentially a part of the definition of their identity as a religious community. Life on the hilltop is seen as the culmination of a process of the youth’s conscious disconnection from their previous institutions and frameworks, the home, school, and friends. At the same time, it is also seen as a disconnection from the Israeli–Western culture in terms of its content, lifestyle, symbolism, urbanism, and the pace of life it dictates. Admittedly, on another level, there is a dual component in the hilltop youth’s attitude toward new media. However, it is not only the duality that we know from other religious communities of fear of external influence versus practical needs (Neriya-Ben Shahar and Lev-On 2011). There are additional layers here on both sides of the duality and paradoxical tensions regarding the hilltop youth’s media resistance. These tensions are discussed under the following three emergent categories: non-use as a community status symbol; the convergence of resistance as an alternative religious outlook; and a time- and space-based community.

5.1. Non-Use as a Community Status Symbol

It is well known that the mobile phone, as an object, functions as a social status symbol, especially among teenagers. In some rare cases, it is the absence of the device that serves as a status symbol. This is, for example, the case of young backpackers who brand themselves as “authentic backpackers” that travel without smartphones, compared to the new breed of digital backpackers, the “flashpackers” (Rosenberg 2019). In the case of hilltop youth, here, too, the digital absence and non-use function as a status symbol, but in a broader sense. There are two unique aspects at play here. First, unlike the backpackers, where the non-use is a status symbol that functions in a specified time and place, for hilltop youth, it is not about a temporary disconnection. Second, for hilltop youth, non-use is not a measure that grants status to an individual person but rather a measure that reflects belonging to a community that defines itself as such. That is, the status symbol is a mark identifying them as part of the hilltop youth.

The non-use plays an important role in the hilltop youth’s transition from individuals to a defined community. At first, joining the hilltop is an individual act. (Friedman 2015), that emphasizes that the youth’s arrival on the hilltops and farms in Judea and Samaria stems from feelings of alienation and not belonging to society and as part of a process of self-searching. Borstein (2004) adds that the youth’s ascent to the hilltop is characterized by individual participation that does not usually involve group organization and that the youth’s lives change on the hilltop. The hilltop is a space that contains the unique and different characteristics of each individual. In addition, the blurred borders emphasize its informality and strengthen the capacity for personal choice as well as the feeling of belonging to an ideological framework, a framework in which the behavior patterns and methods of operation correspond to the needs of the youth.

However, it seems that the individual step is accompanied by group norms that indicate a joining of the community. As evident from the interviews, apart from outerwear, not owning a smartphone expresses an informal but acceptable status symbol and an act toward community affiliation. This stands in contrast to studies where the smartphone constitutes a status symbol (Abeele et al. 2014), and it is unlike the case of mobile phone

refusers where non-use is an individual action or the case of an ultra-Orthodox society with its rigid norms and sanctions (Rosenberg and Blondheim 2021). Here, the non-use is a declarative move that synthesizes the individual with the group. The non-use expresses a part of the process of leaving their parent religious community and forming a new community.

This tension between an individual and community concerning non-use is also reflected in the hilltop youth's legitimization of use. The partial adoption stems precisely from defining the disconnection as an element of the community characterization. When it comes to media resistance, hilltop youth are faced with an important dilemma. On the one hand, they are a major subject of debate within the Israeli social-political discourse, and on the other hand, their non-use excludes them completely from this discourse. This is somewhat similar to the case of Chabad, a unique ultra-Orthodox Hassidic sect that, despite wanting to be an enclave culture and emphasizing the dangers of new media to users' religious world, is utilizing technology as a means for ideological dissemination and recruiting new followers (Blondheim and Katz 2016; Golan 2021). In negotiating their media use practices, certain attempts are made by both groups to gain the benefits of media use without paying the prices. Therefore, the hilltop youth view certain (sanctioned) individuals' media use as a sacrifice made for the sake of the community.

5.2. *The Convergence of Resistance as an Alternative Religious Outlook*

Some levels of similarities can be drawn between the hilltop youth and notable youth subcultures from the 1950s through the 1970s (e.g., the Beat Generation, mods, hippies, rockers, punks, etc.), whose activities often led to self-alienation, marginality, and being labeled as "deviants" by adults. These subcultures' struggles to distinguish themselves from their parents and the dominant hegemonic institutions, as well as their focus on recrafting concepts of identity and authenticity, are interpreted as acts of symbolic political and cultural resistance (Williams 2007b; Muggleton 2005; Clarke et al. 2006). However, these youth subcultures were not completely divorced from materialism and mass media, which played a role in the dissemination of their image and enabled the consumption of their commodified identities (Williams 2007b; see also Stratton 1985). The hilltop youth, on the other hand, are a religious community that present a "digital counterculture." The non-use of new media, and especially smartphones, functions both as a tool for these layers of detachment and as their symbol. The hilltop youth are described as "having rejected the affluence, self-indulgence, and perverse hatred of things Jewish that has infected Israeli society; they are idealists who represent a renewed Religious Zionism" (Dann 2004). Indeed, the hilltop youth's new media resistance is self-presented as a contrast to some other aspects of identity which they are "rebellious" against.

In a sense, the hilltop youth's resistance can be seen as the convergence of all the resistances, or one that "converges" multiple layers of resistance reminiscent of former youth subcultures and other familiar forms of activist/ideological media rejection. These resistance layers include non-use as an anti-Western ideology (Ribak and Rosenthal 2006; Syvertsen 2017), where the hilltop youth view media resistance as "disconnecting from the disconnection" of Western culture. There is also non-use as an anti-bourgeois ideology (Portwood-Stacer 2013), in which the smartphone represents the fast-paced urban life that is disconnected from the back-to-nature lifestyle and the simplicity that the hilltop youth adhere to. Another resistance layer is that of non-use as a digital counterculture that strives for authenticity (Rosenberg 2019). The hilltop youth are designing an everyday space that strives for authenticity and sees technology as its nemesis. Yet, unlike other cases of media resistance as activism, for the hilltop youth, these layers are embedded in and motivated by a religious ideology, religious activism, so to speak. Furthermore, unlike other youth subcultures, the hilltop youth channel their "deviance" as a form of piety and toward pro-communal behavior. This overarching theme is repeatedly reflected in the interviewees' choice of terminology when discussing these various alters of resistance.

What is more, for the hilltop youth, the non-use is part of an alternative religious outlook. As aforementioned, the hilltop youth grew up within and have broken away from the Religious Zionist society. The Religious Zionist community's attitude toward media technology stems from an attempt to blend religious–traditional foundations with a view of modernity as a positive value and as part of its identity, therefore offering legitimacy in principle for media use (Golan and Don 2022). In practice, however, there is an ambivalent position regarding the proper integration practices, especially regarding teenagers, due to the challenges of exposure (Rosenthal and Ribak 2015). In the case of hilltop youth, the religious outlook is completely different and presents a reversed trend. This group of religious teens rebels against their parent community and institutional leniency by creating a community that opposes the religious legitimization of media use. In their media resistance, the hilltop youth adopt a more extreme religious rebellious outlook than their original community.

Despite adopting a more extreme media resistance approach, the hilltop youth's non-use differs from that of the ultra-Orthodox and Amish communities. The ultra-Orthodox resistance stems from the fear that the penetration of a foreign culture via media content will threaten their religious values and worldview. The Amish resistance stems from wanting to preserve the authenticity and simplicity of the past. In both these communities, the resistance is directed by the religious institutional leadership; it comes from the top-down (Neriya-Ben Shahar 2020). The hilltop youth combine the ultra-Orthodox and Amish approaches, creating a culturally disconnected space as well as returning to natural authenticity, but it comes from the bottom-up, initiated by a community of teenagers as a religious alternative.

In fact, it is this key element of youth leadership and control that further distinguishes the hilltop youth from other youth subcultures and back-to-nature youth organizations, such as the hippies and the *Wandervogel* youth hiking movement from early 20th century Germany (Williams 2007a). A common theme across these groups is the rejection of their parent culture and the dominant hegemonic value system, such as industrialization, urbanization, totalitarianism, capitalism, and others. However, despite their declared intent, these movements were not entirely detached from the adult-controlled spaces and adult influence (Williams 2007b). Adult leadership and resources played a role in most youth subcultures (O'Connor 2004), including the *Wandervogel*, whose groups were also dependent on the approval of parents and the ministries of education (Williams 2001). At the end of the day or weekend, many of the young members in each of these movements returned to their parents' homes and partook in their bourgeois lives (Clarke et al. 2006). Yet, in the case of the hilltop youth, there is complete autonomy from adult influence and institutions. The hilltop youth do not engage with institutions of media, consumerism, or government; they do not receive state and civic support; and they do not live with their families or among mainstream society. This puts to question the level of authenticity other youth movements can claim to be when compared with the hilltop youth who are truly a "youth" movement.

5.3. A Time- and Space-Based Community

The hilltop youth's ages, them being members of generation Z, leads to the next tension of non-use as the construction of a time- and space-based community. In their review of digital detox, Syvertsen and Enli (2020) illustrate how the practice of temporary disconnection represents a form of commodification of authenticity and nostalgia, a desire to reconnect with "real life" out of a sense of losing contact with it. However, being mobile natives, the hilltop youth are not familiar with a world without digital media technologies; they have no experience to look back on with nostalgia. Instead, in this case study, a community that views itself as a counterculture adopts these positions not as a temporary initiative or as a nostalgic restoration of lost authenticity but rather as a look ahead toward creating an ideal, permanent daily experience of authentic connection to reality.

Within this context of the community lies another layer related to the definition of hilltop youth as a place-based religious community. It is recognized in the media studies literature that digital media technologies “accelerate a radical dislocation of our experience of space” (Barney 2004, p. 33). In this sense, the hilltop youth’s technological disconnection constitutes a unique practice of trying to assimilate into a specific space without interruptions. This is mainly because hilltop youth as a community are distinct for being anchored in a specific location. The community’s whole essence and definition rests in its belonging to a place, an identity that stems from a location. It is not a ‘place’ in the sense of presence, such as turning off your mobile phone to be present at a specific time and location where the device could create disconnection, such as at a social or family event (Syvertsen and Enli 2020; Rosenberg et al. 2022), but rather in the sense of a perpetual connection to geographic location. The hilltop youth’s purpose in settling these isolated outposts, specifically Judea and Samaria, is an attempt to create a “reality on the ground” and to establish a continuous presence in a place with immense religious, political, and ideological significance for the community.

The hilltop youth’s media resistance represents the community’s attempt to find balance across these two axes of time and space. On the one hand, the hilltop youth disconnect from media technologies in order to build a lasting connection to a place and community. On the other hand, there is a struggle to remain permanently connected to a geographical location under the constant threat of evictions at the hands of the state. The hilltop youth must grapple with the reality that they are inevitably building something that is temporary despite their hope and goals. When it comes to time and space, despite the community’s efforts, the unique hilltop youth experience is filled with tensions between transience and permanence, between location and dislocation, and between connection and disconnection.

6. Conclusions

This study examined the attitude toward new media technologies of a particularly unique religious community—the hilltop youth. Despite being “mobile natives” and growing up in religious communities with more liberal views on media use, this group of rebellious teens practices smartphone and social network rejection. The hilltop youth’s non-use incorporates many different layers relating to religion, class, culture, and ideology, all of which shape the group’s reimagined outlook and identity. Although it is not free of paradoxical tensions, the media resistance plays a crucial role in the formation of the hilltop youth as a religious counterculture and community. Most studies of religious communities’ resistance or adoption of media technologies focused on the institutional level or the adult members of these groups. Yet, it seems that the media, particularly resistance, practices of these religious communities’ younger counterparts reveal unconventional, diverging experiences and dynamics. Therefore, future research on other Gen-Z religious communities, both peripheral and central, could provide insight and nuance to the understanding of religion and digital culture.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, H.R. and K.V.-N.; methodology, H.R. and K.V.-N.; formal analysis, H.R. and K.V.-N.; investigation, H.R. and K.V.-N.; resources, H.R.; data curation, H.R.; writing—original draft preparation, H.R. and K.V.-N.; writing—review and editing, K.V.-N.; supervision, H.R. and K.V.-N.; project administration, K.V.-N. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of Ariel University (protocol code AU-SOC-HR-20200812, 12 August 2020).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Interviewee details.

Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status
Eyal	M	22	Married+1
Ofra	F	18	Single
Nirit	F	21	Married+1
Amiel	M	21	Married
Shira	F	20	Single
Sharon	F	22	Married
Jacob	M	25	Married+2
Yoav	M	22	Married+1
Esther	F	21	Single
Amitzur	M	24	Single
Noga	F	18	Single
Tzachi	M	19	Single
Ayelet	F	18	Married
Benny	M	23	Single
Nati	M	21	Single
Motti	M	19	Single

References

- Abeebe, Marieke Vanden, Marjolijn L. Antheunis, and Alexander P. Schouten. 2014. Me, myself and my mobile: A segmentation of youths based on their attitudes towards the mobile phone as a status instrument. *Telematics and Informatics* 31: 194–208. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Alimi, Eitan Y., and Chares Demetriou. 2018. Making sense of 'Price Tag' violence: Changing contexts, shifting strategies, and expanding targets. *Social Movement Studies* 17: 478–84. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Allmark, Peter, Jonathan Boote, Eleni Chambers, Amanda Clarke, Ann McDonnell, Andrew Thompson, and Angela Mary Tod. 2009. Ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews: Literature review and discussion. *Research Ethics* 5: 48–54. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Alshech, Eliyahu, Badi Hasasi, and Simon Perry. 2020. Self-Radicalized Western Salafi-Jihadis and Hilltop Youth in the West Bank: Similar Radical Thought, Completely Different Practice. *Journal of Religion and Violence* 8: 153–95. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Arthur, Michael W., J. David Hawkins, John A. Pollard, Richard F. Catalano, and A. J. Baglioni Jr. 2002. Measuring risk and protective factors for use, delinquency, and other adolescent problem behaviors: The Communities That Care Youth Survey. *Evaluation review* 26: 575–601. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Augustin, Laura, B. Kokoschko, Martin Wiesner, and M. Schabacker. 2020. Toward a comprehensive definition of the non-user. *Proceedings of the Design Society: DESIGN Conference* 1: 1853–62. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Barney, Darin. 2004. The vanishing table, or community in a world that is no world. *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 11: 49–66. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 1976. *Towards a Critical Sociology: An Essay on Common Sense and Emancipation*. London: Routledge.
- Birnholtz, Jeremy. 2010. Adopt, adapt, abandon: Understanding why some young adults start, and then stop, using instant messaging. *Computers in Human Behavior* 26: 1427–33. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Blondheim, Menahem, and Elihu Katz. 2016. Religion, communications, and Judaism: The case of digital Chabad. *Media, Culture & Society* 38: 89–95.
- Blondheim, Menahem, and Hananel Rosenberg. 2017. Media theology: New communication technologies as religious constructs, metaphors, and experiences. *New Media & Society* 19: 43–51.
- Borstein, Eti. 2004. Noar HaGevaot, Bein Hemshekhiut LeMerod: Zehut ideologit datit leumit ve'emdot bnei noar be'gevaot YOSH [The Hilltop Youth, Between Continuity and Rebellion: Ideological National Zionist Identity and the Views of Judea and Samaria's Hilltop Youth]. Doctoral dissertation, Newport University, Newport Beach, CA, USA.
- Buckingham, David. 2000. *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Campbell, Heidi A. 2007. Who's got the power? Religious authority and the Internet. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12: 1043–62. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Campbell, Heidi A. 2015. *Digital Judaism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, Heidi A., and Oren Golan. 2011. Creating digital enclaves: Negotiation of the internet among bounded religious communities. *Media, Culture & Society* 33: 709–24.

- Casemajor, Nathalie, Stéphane Couture, Mauricio Delfin, Matthew Goerzen, and Alessandro Delfanti. 2015. Non-participation in digital media: Toward a framework of mediated political action. *Media, Culture & Society* 37: 850–66. [CrossRef]
- Clarke, John, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts. 2006. Subcultures, cultures and class. In *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. Edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson. New York: Routledge, pp. 3–59.
- Dann, Moshe. 2004. In defense of hilltop youth. *The Jerusalem Post*. July 13. Available online: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/319451108> (accessed on 2 January 2023).
- Eiran, Ehud, and Peter Krause. 2018. Old (molotov) cocktails in new bottles? “Price-tag” and settler violence in Israel and the west bank. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30: 637–57. [CrossRef]
- Engelberg, Ari. 2015. Modern Orthodoxy in Post-Secular Times: Jewish identities on the boundaries of religious Zionism. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 14: 126–39. [CrossRef]
- Friedman, Shimi. 2015. Hilltop youth: Political-anthropological research in the hills of Judea and Samaria. *Israel Affairs* 21: 391–407. [CrossRef]
- Friedman, Shimi, and Miriam Billig. 2018. Education, socialization and community: Coping with marginal youth in rural frontier communities in Israel. *Children and Youth Services Review* 84: 103–9. [CrossRef]
- Getz, Daphne, and Itzhak Goldberg. 2016. Best Practices and Lessons Learned in ICT Sector Innovation: A Case Study of Israel, World Development Report, Digital Dividends. Available online: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/ru/526981530526619514/pdf/Best-Practices-and-Lessons-Learned-in-ICT-Sector-Innovation-A-Case-Study-of-Israel.pdf> (accessed on 2 January 2023).
- Gil, Zvi. 2005. Heichan Noar HaMishorim [Where Are the Youth of the Plains]. *Zarkor (blog)*, January 6. Available online: <https://zvigill.wordpress.com/2005/01/06/%D7%94%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%9F-%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%A2%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D/> (accessed on 2 January 2023).
- Golan, Oren. 2021. Community: Dual production for dual publics: Chabad’s inward and outward online presence. In *Digital Judaism*. Edited by Heidi A. Campbell. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 176–85.
- Golan, Oren, and Yaakov Don. 2022. Legitimation of New Media for Religious Youth: Orthodox Elites’ Approach to Adolescent Youngsters’ Engagement with Digital Worlds. *Religions* 13: 484. [CrossRef]
- Hesselberth, Pepita. 2017. Discourses on disconnectivity and the right to disconnect. *New Media & Society* 20: 1994–2010.
- Kaniel, Shlomo. 2003. Heibetim Psikholoigim shel Mityashvei HeGevaot beYehuda veShomron [The Psychological Aspects of Settlers in Judea and Samaria]. In *HaZiyonot HaDatit: Idan HaTemurot, Asufat Mechkarim leZecher Zeoulun Hamer [Religious Zionism: The Era of Transformations, Studies in Memory of Zebulun Hamer]*. Edited by A. Kohen and I. Harel. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute.
- Kline, Ronald. 2003. Resisting consumer technology in rural America: The telephone and electrification. In *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technology*. Edited by Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 51–66.
- Kornstein, S. 2015. The Rise of Mobile Phones: 20 Years of Global Adoption. *Cartesian (blog)*. Available online: <https://blog.cartesian.com/the-rise-of-mobile-phones-20-years-of-global-adoption> (accessed on 3 January 2023).
- Lahav, Haim, Vered Ne’eman-Haviv, and Yael Aviad-Wilchek. 2014. HaGitzim shel Medurat HaShevet: Meafyeneihem HaYichudiim she Bnei HaNoar HaDati-Leumi beSikun veEtagareihem [The Sparks of the Tribal Bonfire: The Unique Characteristics of the National-Religious At-Risk Youth and Their Challenges]. *Social Issues in Israel* 26: 91–119.
- Lieber, Andrea. 2020. Networked Individuals: The virtual reality of the sabbath in twenty-first century American Judaism. In *Religion in the Age of Digitalization*. Edited by Giulia Isetti, Elisa Innerhofer, Harald Pechlaner and Michael de Rachewiltz. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 72–85.
- Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Egon G. Guba. 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lindqvist, Felicia. 2020. *Who Are the Hilltop Youth? Perception of self vs. Perception of Researchers*. Växjö: Linnéuniversitetet, Institutionen för Samhällsstudier (SS).
- Marshall, Catherine, and Gretchen B. Rossman. 2014. *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Marwick, Alice E., and Danah Boyd. 2014. Networked privacy: How teenagers negotiate context in social media. *New Media & Society* 16: 1051–67.
- Mash, Roni, Sarah Ben-David, and Pninit Bruckental. 2018. “HaGevaot” b’Yehuda veShomron: Chamama Letahalich Itzuv Zehutam shel Mitbagrim [The hills in Judea and Samaria: A hothouse for adolescents’ identity design]. *Social Issues in Israel* 26: 120–51.
- Maxwell, Joseph A. 1996. *Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage publications.
- Mitnick, Joshua. 2015. On barren hilltop, Israeli settler vigilantism blurs into Jewish theocracy. *The Christian Science Monitor*. September 2. Available online: <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2015/0902/On-barren-hilltop-Israeli-settler-vigilantism-blurs-into-Jewish-theocracy> (accessed on 1 January 2023).
- Moustakas, Clark. 1994. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Muggleton, David. 2005. From classlessness to clubculture: A genealogy of post-war British youth cultural analysis. *YOUNG* 13: 205–19. [CrossRef]
- Neriya-Ben Shahar, Rivka, and Azi Lev-On. 2011. Gender, religion and new media: Attitudes and behaviors related to the internet among Ultra-Orthodox women employed in computerized environments. *International Journal of Communication* 5: 875–95.
- Neriya-Ben Shahar, Rivka. 2016. Negotiating agency: Amish and ultra-Orthodox women’s responses to the Internet. *New Media & Society* 19: 81–95.
- Neriya-Ben Shahar, Rivka. 2017. The medium is the danger: Discourse about television among Amish and ultra-orthodox (Haredi) women. *Journal of Media and Religion* 16: 27–38. [CrossRef]

- Neriya-Ben Shahar, Rivka. 2020. "Mobile internet is worse than the internet; it can destroy our community": Old Order Amish and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women's responses to cellphone and smartphone use. *The Information Society* 36: 1–18. [CrossRef]
- Netanyahu, Yiram. 2006. Shlifot im Noam Arnon [Retrievals with Noam Arnon]. *NRG*. June 6. Available online: <https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART1/431/330.html> (accessed on 2 January 2023).
- Neves, Barbara Barbosa, João Monteiro de Matos, Rita Rente, and Sara Lopes Martins. 2015. The "non-aligned": Young people's narratives of rejection of social networking sites. *Young* 23: 116–35. [CrossRef]
- O'Connor, Alan. 2004. The Sociology of Youth Subcultures. *Peace Review* 16: 409–14. [CrossRef]
- Ophir, Yaakov, Hananel Rosenberg, Yuliya Lipshits-Brazilier, and Yair Amichai-Hamburger. 2020. "Digital adolescence": The effects of smartphones and social networking technologies on adolescents' well-being. In *Online Peer Engagement in Adolescence: Positive and Negative Aspects of Online Social Interaction*. Edited by Nejra Van Zalk and Claire P. Monks. London: Routledge, pp. 122–39.
- Pedahzur, Ami, and Arie Perlinger. 2011. *Jewish terrorism in Israel*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Peleg, Samuel M. 2022. In Search of Meaning and Holy Redemption: The Case of the Hilltop Youth in the Occupied West Bank. In *Finding Meaning: An Existential Quest in Post-Modern Israel*. Edited by Ofra Maysel and Pninit Russo-Netzer. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 97–123.
- Pierce, Tamyra. 2009. Social anxiety and technology: Face-to-face communication versus technological communication among teens. *Computers in Human Behavior* 25: 1367–72. [CrossRef]
- Portwood-Stacer, Laura. 2013. Media refusal and conspicuous non-consumption: The performative and political dimensions of Facebook abstention. *New Media & Society* 15: 1041–57.
- Resnick, Gary, and Martha R. Burt. 1996. Youth at risk: Definitions and implications for service delivery. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 66: 172–188. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Ribak, Rivka, and Michele Rosenthal. 2006. From the field phone to the mobile phone: A cultural biography of the telephone in Kibbutz Y. *New Media & Society* 8: 551–72.
- Ribak, Rivka, and Michele Rosenthal. 2015. Smartphone resistance as media ambivalence. *First Monday* 20. [CrossRef]
- Rosenberg, Hananel. 2019. The "flashpacker" and the "unplugged": Cell phone (dis) connection and the backpacking experience. *Mobile Media & Communication* 7: 111–30.
- Rosenberg, Hananel, and Kalia Vogelmann-Natan. 2022. The (other) two percent also matter: The construction of mobile phone refusers. *Mobile Media & Communication* 10: 216–34.
- Rosenberg, Hananel, and Menahem Blondheim. 2021. The smartphone and its punishment: Social distancing of cellular transgressors in ultra-Orthodox Jewish society, from 2G to the Corona pandemic. *Technology in Society* 66: 101619. [CrossRef]
- Rosenberg, Hananel, Menahem Blondheim, and Chen Sabag-Ben Porat. 2022. Mobile phones and the experience of time: New perspectives from a deprivation study of teenagers. *Time & Society* 31: 366–391.
- Rosenberg, Hananel, Menahem Blondheim, and Elihu Katz. 2019. It's the text, stupid!: Mobile phones, religious communities, and the silent threat of text messages. *New Media & Society* 21: 2325–46. [CrossRef]
- Rosenthal, Michele, and Rivka Ribak. 2015. On pomegranates and etrogs: Internet filters as practices of media ambivalence among National Religious Jews in Israel. In *Digital Judaism*. Edited by Heidi A. Campbell. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 153–68.
- Ryan, Gery W., and H. Russell Bernard. 2003. Techniques to identify themes. *Field methods* 15: 85–109. [CrossRef]
- Sabag-Ben Porat, Chen, Hananel Rosenberg, and Menahem Blondheim. 2022. Challenges in Jewish Communities Online. In *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion*. Edited by Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Cheong. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Satchell, Christine, and Paul Dourish. 2009. Beyond the user: Use and non-use in HCI. Paper presented at 21st Annual Conference of the Australian Computer-Human Interaction Special Interest Group on Design: Open 24/7, OzCHI 2009, Melbourne, Australia, November 23–27; pp. 9–16. [CrossRef]
- Schejter, Amit, and Akiba Cohen. 2002. Israel: Chutzpah and Chatter in the Holy Land. In *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk and Public Performance*. Edited by James E. Katz and Mark A. Aakhus. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 30–41.
- Selwyn, Neil. 2006. Digital division or digital decision? A study of non-users and low-users of computers. *Poetics* 34: 273–92. [CrossRef]
- Silverstone, Roger. 2006. Domesticating domestication: Reflection on the life of a concept. In *Domestication of Media and Technology*. Edited by Thomas Berker, Maren Hartmann, Yves Punie and Katie J. Ward. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 229–48.
- Singer, Laura. 2016. *The Israeli Vagabond: An Analysis of Israel's Hilltop Youth Movement*. Honors Program Capstone Project. Syracuse: Syracuse University. Available online: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/932 (accessed on 1 January 2023).
- Sivan, Emmanuel. 1995. The enclave culture. In *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*. Edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 11–69.
- Stratton, Jon. 1985. Youth subcultures and their cultural contexts. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 21: 194–218. [CrossRef]
- Strauss, Anselm, and Juliet M. Corbin. 1990. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. London: Sage Publications, vol. 15.
- Syvertsen, Trine. 2017. *Media Resistance: Protest, Dislike, Abstention*. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Syvertsen, Trine. 2022. Framing digital disconnection: Problem definitions, values, and actions among digital detox organisers. *Convergence*. [CrossRef]

- Syvertsen, Trine, and Gunn Enli. 2020. Digital detox: Media resistance and the promise of authenticity. *Convergence* 26: 1269–83. [CrossRef]
- Taylor, Kyle, and Laura Silver. 2019. Smartphone Ownership Is Growing Rapidly Around the World, but Not Always Equally. Pew Research Center. Available online: http://www.pewglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/02/Pew-Research-Center_Global-Technology-Use-2018_2019-02-05.pdf (accessed on 3 January 2023).
- Telecom News. 2018. Study: Usage Habits of Israelis on Cellphones and Installed Application. *Telecom News*, March 6. Available online: <https://www.telecomnews.co.il/D7%AA-%D7%A2%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%94%D7%9D.html> (accessed on 29 December 2022).
- Williams, John Alexander. 2001. Ecstasies of the Young: Sexuality, the Youth Movement, and Moral Panic in Germany on the Eve of the First World War. *Central European History* 34: 163–89. [CrossRef]
- Williams, John Alexander. 2007a. *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900–1940*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Williams, J. Patrick. 2007b. Youth-subcultural studies: Sociological traditions and core concepts. *Sociology Compass* 1: 572–93. [CrossRef]
- Woodstock, Louise. 2014. Media resistance: Opportunities for practice theory and new media research. *International Journal of Communication* 8: 1983–2001.
- Wyatt, Sally. 2014. Bringing users and non-users into being across methods and disciplines. Paper presented at Refusing, Limiting, Departing (CHI '14 Workshop), Toronto, ON, Canada, April 26–May 1.
- Wyatt, Sally, Graham Thomas, and Tiziana Terranova. 2002. They came, they surfed, they went back to the beach: Conceptualizing use and non-use of the Internet. In *Virtual Society? Technology, Cyberbole, Reality*. Edited by Steve Woolgar. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 23–40.
- Zhitomirsky-Geffet, Maayan, and Maya Blau. 2016. Cross-generational analysis of predictive factors of addictive behavior in smartphone usage. *Computers in Human Behavior* 64: 682–93. [CrossRef]
- Zimmerman-Umble, Diane. 1992. The Amish and the telephone: Resistance and reconstruction. In *Consuming Technologies*. Edited by Eric Hirsch and Roger Silverstone. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 183–207.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.