Attendance Rising: Foucauldian Theory and the American Megachurch

“Six Flags over Jesus,” “eChurch,” “iChurch,” “Church-Mart,” and “Baptidome” are just a few of the labels provided by researchers and onlookers to signify the recent phenomenon of the modern day megachurch. The plethoric presence of megachurches is a product of their ability to disseminate their message and make it available in ways that “televangelists” and television programming are unable to provide the pastor desiring to increase membership. Dennis J. Bekkering’s research on the new “Video Streaming Preacher” claims, “Videos [online video streaming]...are integrated with opportunities for online personal interactions, as well as other information intended to encourage attendance” (103). His point is that online videos offer preachers additional benefits in communicating with an audience. The new technology of online video streaming and podcasting afford moments to promote, connect, and persuade additional actions of the viewer/listener that television lacks. Bekkering terms this new environment “intervangelism” and the new online broadcasting preacher “intervangelists” (101). He also argues, “Most intervangelists...appear to be preachers from local American congregations [protestant], specifically churches connected to the growing megachurch movement...these intervangelists also use their online video broadcasts to attract viewers to attend their churches” (103). In other words, technology has provided the fuel for the recent paradigm shift in the meteoric rise of the modern day American megachurch.
In a recent survey released from the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Scott Thumma and Warren Bird estimate that fully 56 million Americans worship at a Protestant church, and that “over 10%—or nearly six million—of these worshippers were part of congregations that each drew more than 2,000 or more in total attendance” (“A New Decade of Megachurches” 3). Bird and Thumma here endorse the magic attendance number of 2,000 as the currently held benchmark at which church attendance is measured to attain “megachurch” status. Accordingly, the remaining 50 million Americans worship at churches with fewer than 100 in attendance. Churches that lie outside of the boundaries of “megachurch” status have been referred to by Ram A. Cnaan and Daniel W. Curtis as “storefront churches [which] usually accommodate up to 100 members” (13). Curtis and Cnaan further identify storefront churches as not only accommodating fewer members but also serving a less affluent congregation with a much lower overhead (13). Megachurches, on the other hand, accommodate a more affluent, educated membership (13). These attendance and demographic differences also indicate, as well as have been studied and researched, specific cultural, discursive, and epistemological practices of the megachurch that deserve further analysis. A rhetorical analysis of these phenomena will reveal overlaps with the theories of Michel Foucault as indicated in his works The Archeology of Knowledge and The Order of Discourse. His theories not only shed further light upon the megachurch attendance phenomenon but also provide a framework with which to further analyze and develop a greater understanding of growing trends within the modern day megachurch. Of primary focus will be Foucault’s theories on culture, subject position, author function, discourse, and epistemology. The results of this analysis will serve to explain the recent paradigm shift in attendance to the new modern marvel: the emerging megachurch.
Although their recent popularity is undeniable, it is the practices of churches that are now classified as “mega” that have caused them to rise so quickly and become so ubiquitous. As we will see, the numbers are staggering, the marketing is compelling, and their systems appealing. Further evidence of this emerging phenomenon comes in the startling attendance statistics of the megachurch. Thumma and Bird’s “Not Who You Think They Are: The Real Story of People Who Attend America’s Megachurches” finds, “nearly two thirds of attenders have been at these churches 5 years or less” (1). This statistic further supports the recent increase in attendance. In 2011, Thumma and Scott released further evidentiary support of this phenomena:

Contrary to a number of recent news reports and blog posts, very large churches continue to show an overall pattern of dramatic growth. The surveyed megachurches reported a median growth rate of 47% between 2005 and 2011 or an average of 8% a year. This expansion is not shared uniformly across all respondent congregations. In fact, 15% did not grow at all or were in decline over the past half-decade, while 28% grew by 100% or more. (“A New Decade of Megachurches” 7)

These findings clearly suggest that there has not only been a marked growth in attendance at megachurches within the past five years but also that there has been an increase in attendance at a very select “type” of megachurch. It should also be noted that Thumma and Bird’s study, “A New Decade of Megachurches,” contacted 1,611 megachurches with 336 responding, or 21% (14). The fact that there has been phenomenal growth is fairly certain, whether the distributions are accurate and apply to all megachurches is another matter and the focus of another study.

Culture
By researching the culture within the megachurch, an analysis can then be performed to uncover the various power structures at work that give the institution both its reach and control. The research reveals the demographic who attends the modern day megachurch, but the research does not reveal specific reasons why attendance at these churches has blossomed and continues to expand. Granted, research indicates that the pastor, worship services, and programs are factors that help them remain viable with our society, but those “surface” terms only provide terse reasons and insight on a large scale and do not satisfy our present inquiry. Our present inquiry is concerned with the “practices” that are employed to promote the megachurch’s own power structures, primarily through the culture of technology.

To become a megachurch, the church must attract new members and reach the weekly attendance threshold of 2,000. Members become congregants and assume roles and responsibilities to the church itself as well as to other congregants. Further fleshing out the role and responsibilities of the congregations of both megachurches and “storefront” churches, Cnaan and Curtis observe the following assessment of congregational functionality:

[Congregations] are the societal mechanism by which people of faith come together to form a collective that sets organized and accepted means to jointly express religiosity. Although each person can pray and worship on his or her own, congregations transform individuals into a coherent and organized group. They do so by setting the rules and rituals accepted by a group, allowing people to express their faith in a manner that is understood, consistent, and unifying. (12)

Cnaan and Curtis corroborate that the cultural machine of the congregation establishes acceptable, selected, ways in which members can join in together in worship, but it is not just in any way the member desires. Potential and existing members are “enticed” through the perceived
“low cost” of membership. Future members’ initial contact is mostly casual and is packaged as an attractive offer when compared with other more “traditional” offers. Megachurches “advertise” a “low commitment/low cost” obligation to attract members via the Internet, streaming online videos and interactive promotions of programs of services. According to Marc von der Ruhr and Joseph P. Daniels, “Once new attendees deepen their connection with the church, significant expectations are placed upon their behavior in terms of tithing, volunteering, etc” (360). Von der Ruhr and Daniels capture the essence of the Foucauldian notion of culture as it applies to the megachurch. There are systems of both selection and exclusion in place. The modern day megachurch uses technology to attract new members by “selecting” them (361). Further commitment and the methods of exclusion are then realized and enforced. However, systems of selection and exclusion are not handed down dictatorially, rather they are a result of the discourse practices of the congregation and pastors.

Culture, according to Foucault, is a system of selection and exclusion that “rests on institutional support; it is both reinforced and renewed by whole strata of practices, such as pedagogy, of course; and the system of books, publishing, libraries; learned societies in the past and laboratories now” (“From The Order of Discourse” 1463). In other words, for a culture to remain a viable organism, there are several ways in which the members of the society, in order to be selected, and, thus, remain, within the society, must act. As shall be revealed, the modern day megachurch’s success relies heavily on the distribution of its message—its “strata of practices”—to further its cause. These practices come not only in the form of the distribution of specific messages or sermons but also as members “learn” the acceptable ways to act and are informed by and through exposure to the discourse. Foucault’s systems of exclusions share much in common with this recent rise of the megachurch. There are procedures of exclusion, which, as
Foucault demonstrates, “are well known” (1461). Every society, group, culture, and relationship shares these exclusions. Most “learn” what to do and not to do.

The megachurch is not immune to these principles of exclusion; perhaps this is what is so alarmingly ironic about them. (The widely held notion that the church is an accepting place of inclusion rather than exclusion may sound counterintuitive.) Foucault announces the first procedure of exclusion: “The most obvious and familiar is the prohibition. We know quite well that we do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot just speak of anything in any circumstances whatever, and that not everyone has the right to speak of anything whatever” (“From The Order of Discourse” 1461). In other words, every participating member of a society or culture knows, or should know, that there are limitations on that which he or she can speak. Not only are there limitations about that which can be spoken—not each and every subject, even within the discourse, is open to discussion by all—but also who can and cannot speak about certain topics, subjects, or circumstances. The universality of this prohibition may seem obvious to most, but when applied to the megachurch, or religion in general, it seems counterintuitive to those basic tenets of belief of most Christian affiliated organizations.

Congregants cannot do or say anything whatsoever. There are rules. Consider the recent downfall of Robert H. Schuller’s Crystal Cathedral. Between 2009 and 2011, Schuller’s Crystal Cathedral went from megachurch status to bankruptcy court. Douglass J. Swanson performed an analysis of the media coverage and statements made surrounding the fall and found that “Although a church membership of 10,000 was claimed, only a handful of members are quoted throughout the news stories. The ministry’s successful effort to shut down the website of dissenting members suggests that the Schuller social order does not condone dissent” (490). This
means that even in the midst of wrongdoing, megachurch parishioners knew the basic procedures of exclusion. Those that did say “anything whatever” were quickly quieted.

Megachurch members share the same cultural, social etiquette. There are unwritten and unspoken ways of behaving, and the knowledge of knowing who can and cannot speak, as well as what one can or cannot say, are a result of a cultural phenomenon that takes place as members are exposed to the discourse over time. As new members join the congregation, they witness the ways of speaking from observing their fellow members and leaders speak. It is through this process of absorbing the rhythm, rhyme, and conventions of the discourse that the Foucauldian exclusive system of prohibition is transmitted. Megachurch attendees learn what not to say by the learning of what it is that they can, or should, say.

Second in Foucault’s triad of exclusion is what he refers to as the “discourse of the madman” (“From The Order of Discourse” 1461). Foucault notes that this second principle is not “another prohibition but a division and a rejection” (1461). He asserts, “I refer to the opposition between reason and madness” (1461). The message of madmen is immediately discarded and unworthy of consideration (1461). Foucault’s characterization of the discourse of the madman reveals a division between truth and falsity, between reason and madness. The ability of a culture to discern between the two is of utmost importance to maintaining the discourse.

In 2005, one of the patriarchs to the televangelist and megachurch movement delivered a prophecy. Oral Robert’s claims to have had a vision and a conversation with God. The resulting vision was dubbed “The Wake-Up Call” vision (Copeland et al.). Many, even those within “the church,” may consider much of what many modern day prophets speak to be mad. In Foucauldian fashion, Kenneth Copeland (a pastor of a megachurch himself), Gloria Copeland (Kenneth Copeland’s wife), Richard Roberts (Oral Robert’s son), and Billye Brim (a modern day
intervangelist) joined together to provide “insightful and informative commentary and interpretation of Brother Robert’s sobering vision” (Copeland et al.). Authoritative members of the church gathered together to “decipher that speech” of the perceived prophetic message (Foucault, “From The Order of Discourse” 1462). In Foucault’s cultural system of exclusion lies a boundary through which discourses arising from those considered “mad,” by reason of their perception or of previous events, are either discarded completely or are taken as gospel and truth that even “wisdom cannot perceive” (1461). This ordering of a discursive analysis of the speech of the madman serves to reconcile the division between reason and madness. The prophecy called for the church to “wake-up” and prepare itself for the second coming. Not only was this prophecy disseminated on the web and voraciously spread, but also the vision itself was well deciphered by Copeland’s gathering.

The ability to spread messages so quickly and with such force, allows the megachurch to latch onto and promote messages like Roberts’ vision, and its acceptance as truth, to their membership around the world instantly. Foucault would call this the “will to truth,” and that it is “also renewed, no doubt more profoundly, by the way in which knowledge is put to work, valorized, distributed, and in a sense attributed, in a society” (“From The Order of Discourse” 1463). In other words, there is a function in the dissemination of the message that “renews” its power. Through the medium of the message it is validated and authenticated.

Foucault’s concern is that this type of culture is centered on a will to truth rather than a culture that is centered on the “will to know” (“From The Order of Discourse” 1462-3). In the “will to know” culture, members of society are imposed upon “a certain position, a certain gaze and a certain function (to see rather then to read, to verify rather than to make comment on)” (1463). Foucault likely had no idea how “prophetic” these words would become. The current
climate of the read and comment culture pervades a will to truth, where the majority of
comments on megachurch streaming videos and other social networking sites provide the society
to advance the truthful message rather than to question and verify. When Copeland et al.
assembled to “authenticate” the vision and prophecy of Oral Roberts, there was no questioning
or verifying. The will to know was replaced by the will to truth, and the message was merely
furthered as truth: read and commented on. The subject position, as will be evidenced later that
Foucault would advocate, is one in which the subject is not merely one who receives a message
of truth, as dictated by authoring authority, but a subject who wills to know. The will to know
then takes on a new subject position of questioning and discovery, unlike the subject positions of
the congregations of the megachurch.

Now that we have a thorough analysis of the systems of exclusion, it is necessary to
embark on observing the systems of pedagogy that, as Foucault proposed, are the practices by
which these systems are disseminated to congregants. Pedagogical practices of the megachurch
are witnessed in the ways in which the messages are delivered, the expression of the message
delivered, and the function of the author. These pedagogies culminate in providing
epistemological moments, opportunities for the congregant to become educated on the acceptable
practices of the institution. The prominent pedagogies endorsed by megachurch ministers involve
a multi-layered, technological approach when it comes to congregational learning and loyalty.

The worship service has not only changed in its appearance and delivery, but it has also
risen as a major component in congregant loyalty. Thumma and Bird’s research reveals, “One of
the hallmarks of megachurches is their willingness to experiment and innovate with worship and
style of presentation” (9). Their point is that although the megachurch continues to employ the
practice of the worship service, they have responded to changes within their presentation of the
traditional worship service by appealing to a larger, more contemporary audience (9). The contemporary worship service is not just for worship anymore—theatrics, modern instruments, and videos serve to entertain. This pedagogical shift from a lack of emphasis on worship to a greater focus on the worship service may serve to “prime” congregants to hear and be more receptive to the messages within the songs themselves. Therefore, worship services can serve as epistemological moments, or mini-sermons. Due to the increase in physical size of the building and increase in the numbers of congregants at these facilities, huge screens are employed to let the whole church “see” the worship service. Not only do the screens bring the worship experience to the congregant but they also display the words to each worship song. Broadcasting the lyrics also helps to further promote the discourse.

Additionally, much like we might watch a YouTube video in a classroom for a lesson, technology serves the megachurch with educational opportunities that have made their way onto the platform. Scott Thumma’s “Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations” asserts, “Technology can bring a media-rich everyday world into the worship service, whether it is simply using tech examples in sermons or more robustly, watching clips of the latest movies to illustrate a verbal point” (9). In other words, the megachurch has taken on a more interactive and educational role in the practice of teaching their congregants and are using technology to remain relevant. In addition to the practice of using technology to illustrate verbal points, megachurch pastors use the concept of repetition and repeating to instill particular objects of the discourse to their congregants. By having the congregation repeat the phrases of the discourse, the congregation has a greater chance of remembering it. This form of repetition is also employed through the technological structure of social media, mobile apps, and “tweets” that send those short, memorable, repeatable phrases from recent sermons.
As indicated in Foucault’s definition of a culture, its “system of books, publishing, libraries” all serve to reveal the type of society it is (“From The Order of Discourse” 1463). In the society of the megachurch, pastors and congregations are able to “stay connected.” Within this new system of distribution is the ability to remain a part of each member’s life. Through the use of social media, church pastors are able to strategically place themselves in closer contact with their parishioners. Technology allows for the message to be available to congregants where they are and provide additional resources that they may need when not “at church.” However, the goal still remains to utilize the reach of this newfound technology to entice listeners and viewers to join the church and become active, attending members. Megachurches take full advantage of the subject positions that technology affords.

Subject Position

The whole strata of practices of the megachurch have made it possible for congregants to put themselves into the perfect subject position for spreading their cultural messages: Foucault’s listening position. Foucault argues that “the positions of the subject are also defined by the situation that it is possible for him to occupy in relation to the various domains or groups of objects...according to certain programs of information, he is the listening subject” (“From The Archeology of Knowledge” 1443). In his theory, the subject places him or herself within a position in relation to and within the context of the situation. The listening position is both voluntary and has been incentivized by the megachurch culture. The listener is able to voluntarily approach the online environment or plug into social media to receive the discourse of the megachurch anywhere they have access. This incentive to receive the discourse is a product of the discourse itself. Members are not told they have to be connected, but the incentive is to not miss out on any of the discourse and be “excluded.” Megachurches today are “plugged in” to
each and every modern day technological product on the market and provide access to whichever product their parishioners may possess. Whether a congregant is an Apple or Andriod user, he or she will be able to access the discourse of the megachurch at anytime. Whether the message is on a cell phone, tablet, laptop, or desktop computer, congregants eagerly participate in the discourse by taking on the position of listener/viewer.

**The Author Function**

As the research shows, congregations of the megachurch hold an affinity for a leader, usually the senior pastor (Thumma and Bird, “Changes in American Megachurches” 14). This research is not surprising considering that it is a commonly held belief that God (in the case of Protestant churches, God, here, refers to the Old Testament God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or the tripartite “omni” God: omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent) is the one true author, but the preacher is a conduit for the delivery of the message. Foucault’s author function suggests that the person, the individual is ineffectual, and all that matters is the message (“From The Order of Discourse” 1465). The person from whom the message originates is not as important as the message. Nothing could be more true from the standpoint of a “believer,” or congregant of the megachurch.

Megachurches participate in the theory of the author function is several ways. Primarily they stream services live through their websites. Since it is the message and not the messenger that is of importance, the message is preserved through its distribution on the Internet. The “author,” or preacher of the message simply becomes the mouthpiece for the messages delivered via a link on the website and a title of the message to identify its contents. It is through the subject position of the listener who hears the message that the epistemological moments are
realized. Knowledge can be attained via the author function. The power of the message is in the message itself, not in the author. She or he is the vehicle by which the message is conveyed.

Additionally, megachurches, due to their sheer size, square footage, and number of services, utilize video screens to stream the service to congregants in the back of massive auditoriums, for a replay of the message delivered earlier to later services, and for distribution to satellite locations, or “multi-site” megachurches. As Anne C. Loveland and Otis B. Wheeler write in their book *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History*, “Megachurch builders, unwilling to sacrifice large seating capacity, sought other means of achieving intimacy. Along with the thrust stage, they adapted the huge video screens” (229). In accordance with the author function, megachurches were able to realize that intimacy could still be achieved through the use of video screens. While some churches use video screens during live services, many churches use them to record the pastor’s message during the first service and replay the message for later services. The recorded message and the intimacy on which the author function theory relies are witnessed multiple times at megachurches across America every Sunday. Congregants are also able to experience the intimacy via the interactivity of their websites live video streaming and video on demand options on their websites. Intimacy is ultimately achieved when the congregant’s subject position fully reaches that of listener. The author is not responsible solely for this positioning; it is the institution that must provide that connection.

A cursory search of the top Megachurches (Lakewood Church, Houston, TX; North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, GA; Willow Creek Community Church, Barrington, IL; Fellowship Church, Grapevine, TX; West Angeles Cathedral; Los Angeles, CA; and The Potter House, Dallas, TX) in North America reveals a ubiquitous offering of live video streaming, even
providing a “countdown” to the next live service, as well as menu-driven options for retrieving recent messages by topic and date. Having the capability to spread their message while maintaining the intimacy of the message helps to ensure the continuation of the discourse. Along with the function of the author, there are sets of rules within the discourse of the megachurch that have also led to its success.

**Discourse**

Foucault insists, “In analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice” (“From *The Archeology of Knowledge*” 1441). By making this distinction, Foucault is employing the principle of irreducibility. There is a tendency to reduce discourse to one-to-one correlations between signifier and signified. As we have witnessed, culture, subject position, and the author function influence and determine contextual moments in which objects of the discourse are transmitted and contain meaning. It is within these specific epistemological moments that the “more” takes place. When analyzing a discourse, it is necessary to analyze complex relations within a very specific context in a given time and place. This theory of discourse is extremely useful because it sheds light on the “Foucauldian” problem of “words and things.” The solution here is to analyze discursive practices to reveal “more.”

What is it, then, that is the “more” that is designated in a discourse? Central to the discourse of the megachurch, as in most churches, is what is considered their one, main canonical text: the Holy Bible. Attendees can reasonably expect to see Bibles in each and every service. They can also expect to hear scripture quoted. The degree to which scripture is quoted varies, as do the interpretations. To witness the emergence of this discourse, and to avoid becoming a theological conversation, I will solely analyze the “rules” and rhetorical devices of
megachurch discourse. The varying interpretations of specific denominations or independent, “non-denominational” churches are evidenced in the rhetorical characteristics, or rules and devices, of the megachurch discourse.

A thorough analysis of commonalities among megachurch pastors reveals a set of rules that seem to have been adopted unilaterally. If these are not rules, then they are a highly recurring set of features that are prevalent among the majority of pastors. In a recent article, “Rise of Megachurches: Are They Straying Too Far from Their Religious Mission?,” authors Alan Greenblatt and Tracie Powell discovered that “many networks and consultants share spiritual and management strategies, offering instructional ‘podcasts for pastors’ and even offering advice about what color ties to wear during services” (781). Greenblatt and Powell also noted a prominent source for the distribution of such advice from Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose-Driven Life*. The authors find that Warren developed an “‘evangelism strategy’ that includes a casual dress code, convenient parking, bright lights, live bands, short prayers, and simple sermons that accentuate the positive” (781). The highlight of the previous sentence, of course, is the “simple sermons that accentuate the positive.” These “rules” might be more appropriately termed the “rules of the discourse on how to grow a church,” but it is the application of these rules in practice that may have resulted in such a shift in audience response to this style of discourse. This rhetorical approach can be seen in the tropes and devices employed by some, not all, megachurch pastors. It is important to note here that this subject could also take on the form of its own research and analysis. This is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the content of megachurch sermons, nor to define or argue the definition of what constitutes “simple.”
An analysis of several messages (sermons) of top megachurch pastors reveals that the majority of their sermons appear to follow the simple, accentuate the positive, style. This style is accented by short six- to ten-word sentences that are usually not condemning or accusatory in any way. The discourse is almost always delivered with an attitude of encouragement. If the message does happen to be a “touchy” subject, the megachurch pastor’s awareness of the sensitivity of the subject is evident in his or her delivery. In addition to short sentences and an attitude of encouragement, aphorisms and anecdotes are commonly used devices. These, too, are short, simple, and easy to remember stories and sayings that aid the pastor in getting the message across to his or her congregation. These types of sermons are well received and also provide ways of creating intimacy between the congregation and the viewer/listener. In Foucauldian terms, these types of sermons, then, “define not the dumb existence of a reality, not the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects” (“From The Archeology of Knowledge” 1441).

In other words, the focus is not on a specific vocabulary but rather on the way the minister contextualizes and orders the objects within the discourse, simple or not. By ordering the objects in a particular manner, particular epistemologies arise. Therefore, differing discourse practices (denominations) surface as a result of the way in which the objects are ordered. The ordered objects then come together to form the epistemological moments.

**Epistéme**

As a result of the analysis of discourse and discursive practices, Foucault positions the ordering and relations of objects at the forefront of knowledge creation: “By episteme, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations, that unite at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possible formalized systems” (“The Archeology of Knowledge” 191). In other words, Foucault holds that discourse, and the corresponding
discursive practices, the set of rules and the formation of objects, through language, is what “gives rise” to knowledge. In the case of the megachurch, the live sermon, rebroadcast over the Internet, and the incorporation of social media, have made it possible for pastors of the modern day megachurch to disperse his or her discourse, thus directing countless moments of knowledge to congregants.

Foucault also emphasizes, “It [the object] exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations” (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 45). His emphasis is on conditions and relations of existence in which the object can exist. If the object of knowledge were to lose its foundation, the positive conditions, then the object of knowledge would cease to exist in that context, at that time, and in that place. The environment necessary for objects to arise requires that a set of relations between objects emerge. The culture of the megachurch has created a set of positive conditions that make it possible for discursive practices to order objects. Objects, when so ordered, create epistemological moments, knowledge. Technology has enabled its rapid proliferation that has resulted in an increase in attendance and the emergence of churches with large attendance.

Sonja K. Foss and Ann Gill suggest Foucault’s position on episteme as “the code of a culture...a characteristic order that defines the discourse for a period” (386). The essence of Foss and Gill’s analysis is two-fold: the establishment of a code (through discourse) and the imposed order upon that discourse for a given period. These are important distinctions for Foucault. They are also important distinctions for the purpose of the current analysis, for megachurches have not always been; they have emerged as a result of the conditions that have allowed for their existence. Capitalizing on technology, megachurches have helped to define a code and provided the necessary conditions for a discursive practice to surface. The Internet, cell phones, tablets,
and the more portable laptop computers have helped usher in the connectivity to create these necessary moments of epistemology for potential congregants that did not exist previously. Live video streaming, podcasts, YouTube, websites, social media, and their affordability to connect and be connected to, reached a critical mass, spawning a cultural surge that has attracted congregants to megachurches in large numbers.

**Conclusion**

Foucault’s theories of culture, subject position, author function, discourse, and epistemology overlap with the phenomena of the megachurch and its expansive growth and presence. The megachurch culture provides a base upon which the discourse is upheld and taught for an audience that wills to truth. Subject positions establish clearly defined avenues for parishioners to participate in receiving messages and information necessary to the agreed upon cultural norms. The expected norm is to be “fed” the word, and congregants must put themselves into the listening position for this to occur. The author function gives preference to the message. Sermons, too, carry this similar authenticity and are recognized by congregations. This is also why megachurches are able to accommodate such large numbers, multiple services, and multi-site expansion. Without the ability to direct and foster subject positions, tailored sermons, and establish authority, the megachurch movement would be unable to survive. Discourse analysis reveals several insights into the rhetorical devices practiced by pastors to promote their message and foster epistemological moments. The resulting knowledge is supported by the positive conditions that allow for this knowledge to exist during this period. This overlap of Foucauldian theory and recent megachurch practices explains their recent rise and proliferation in the United States. As a result of this eMergence, the Megachurch has become a modern marvel on the modern landscape.
Works Cited


Thumma, Scott. “Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations.” 


