

CULTIVATING MINDFUL MEDIA USE IN FORMATION

I. Introduction

Media is no longer merely an external tool in human life; it has become an environment in which people think, relate, learn, pray, react, and imagine themselves. For missionaries in formation, this means that media use is not a marginal issue but a deeply formative one. The digital world shapes attention, desire, relationships, self-image, emotional regulation, moral judgment, and even one's capacity for silence and prayer. Therefore, media formation is not simply about controlling devices, but about forming the person who uses them.

Within the Claretian formation journey, mindful media use belongs especially to the human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and community dimensions. It touches self-mastery, discernment, study habits, missionary witness, fraternal life, and apostolic creativity. If used without awareness, media can fragment attention, weaken interiority, create dependency, foster comparison, normalize superficiality, and distort missionary priorities. But when used wisely, it can become a powerful means of evangelization, learning, communion, social awareness, and missionary presence.

Mindful media use is therefore not a call to reject technology, nor to romanticize a pre-digital life. Rather, it is a call to freedom, simplicity, and discernment. It invites the missionary to engage media in a way that protects interior depth, strengthens truthfulness, supports community, and serves the mission of Christ. In the logic of the Forge, media must not become a hidden fire that consumes attention and desire; it must be placed within the true fire of the Spirit so that it becomes an instrument of formation and mission rather than a source of inner fragmentation.

II. Why Mindful Media Use Matters in Formation

Media use is never neutral. What one repeatedly watches, reads, scrolls through, reacts to, and shares gradually shapes inner life. Digital habits influence not only what a person knows, but how he perceives reality, what he desires, what he fears, how he compares himself with others, and how he responds to boredom, loneliness, stress, or silence. For this reason, formation must ask not only *what content is morally acceptable*, but also *what kind of person is being formed through repeated digital behaviour*.

For a missionary, this becomes even more significant. The one who is called to be a listener and servant of the Word must develop the capacity for attention, interiority, and discernment. But digital culture often trains the opposite: speed over depth, reaction over reflection, stimulation over silence, performance over authenticity, and visibility over truth. Without conscious formation, a candidate may gradually lose the capacity for contemplative presence, disciplined study, fraternal availability, and deep prayer, even while remaining externally "active" or "informed."

Mindful media use therefore belongs to the work of purification. It helps uncover hidden dependencies, emotional escapes, restless consumption, image-management, and unconscious digital compulsions. It also belongs to configuration, because the missionary must learn to use media in a Christ-like way: truthfully, responsibly, compassionately, and missionally. It belongs to tempering, because digital maturity requires discipline, restraint, consistency, and accountability. And it belongs to mission, because today's apostolic world includes digital spaces where the Gospel must also be witnessed with intelligence, charity, and evangelical freedom.

III. Formative Goal

To form missionaries who use media with freedom, discernment, discipline, truthfulness, and missionary intentionality, so that digital engagement supports prayer, study, community, human maturity, and evangelizing mission.

IV. Core Formative Objectives

This module seeks to help the Formandus:

- develop **discernment** in relation to media content and digital habits
- cultivate **self-mastery and moderation** in screen use
- strengthen **attention, silence, and interior freedom**
- recognize the emotional and psychological effects of digital consumption
- use media **ethically, truthfully, and responsibly**
- integrate media into **study, prayer, formation, and apostolic mission**
- live **digital accountability** within community
- become capable of **missionary presence in digital spaces**

V. Theological and Formative Foundations

1. The Human Person Is Formed by Attention

What a person repeatedly gives attention to gradually shapes his inner world. Attention is not merely a mental function; it is a spiritual and formative act. In this sense, media use is not simply about entertainment or information. It becomes a question of stewardship: *To whom and to what am I giving my mind, heart, time, imagination, and emotional energy?* A missionary cannot give himself fully to God and mission if his interior life is constantly dispersed by unexamined digital consumption.

2. Freedom Requires Discernment

The missionary is called to freedom, not impulse. Freedom does not mean unlimited access; it means the capacity to choose what truly serves growth, communion, truth, and mission. Mindful media use therefore belongs to ascetical and spiritual formation. It is one of the contemporary forms of self-discipline through which a person learns to say both **yes** and **no** wisely.

3. Silence Is Necessary for Spiritual Depth

Without silence, the inner life becomes shallow. Media saturation can weaken one's capacity to remain with oneself before God, to read one's interior movements, or to pray from depth. Digital silence is therefore not optional in formation. It is part of protecting the inner sanctuary where vocation matures.

4. Mission Today Includes the Digital Environment

The missionary cannot ignore the digital continent. Many people today seek meaning, identity, belonging, truth, and even prayer in digital spaces. Formation must therefore prepare missionaries not only to avoid digital harm, but also to inhabit digital culture with evangelical wisdom, credibility, and pastoral creativity.

VI. Key Areas of Formation in Mindful Media Use

A. Media Discernment

Mindful media use begins with discernment. The Formandus must learn to ask not only, "Is this allowed?" but also deeper questions:

- Is this content true?

- Does it nourish or deplete me?
- Does it help me become more free or more compulsive?
- Does it deepen my humanity and vocation, or scatter me?
- Does it align with the Gospel and my missionary identity?

Media discernment requires intellectual honesty and spiritual awareness. Not all content that is entertaining is harmless; not all content that is religious is healthy; not all content that is informative is wise. The candidate must be trained to evaluate messages, sources, ideologies, emotional manipulation, consumerism, polarization, and digital seduction. He must also learn to identify fake news, clickbait, algorithmic bias, moral confusion, superficial activism, and the subtle shaping power of repeated exposure.

This discernment can be taught through the **see–judge–act** approach:

- **See:** What exactly am I consuming or sharing?
- **Judge:** What values, emotions, assumptions, and consequences are present here?
- **Act:** What is the responsible and evangelical response?

In formation, this habit is crucial because it trains the missionary not to consume media passively, but to relate to it consciously and critically.

B. Healthy Media Habits and Digital Self-Mastery

Many digital problems are not primarily moral failures but failures of rhythm, moderation, and awareness. The candidate may not intend harm, but still live with constant distraction, fragmented study, late-night scrolling, compulsive checking, shallow attention, or emotional dependence on devices.

Healthy media use therefore requires **practical discipline**. This includes:

- fixed times for checking messages and social media
- clear limits during prayer, study, meals, recreation, and community life
- avoiding screens as a default response to boredom, loneliness, stress, or fatigue
- maintaining sleep hygiene by limiting night-time device use
- reducing multitasking and reclaiming sustained attention

Digital self-mastery is part of human formation. It is closely linked with emotional regulation, delayed gratification, focus, and freedom from compulsive behaviour. In this sense, digital discipline is not a secondary external rule; it is an expression of inner formation.

The missionary in formation should gradually become capable of saying:

- “I can stop.”
- “I do not need to check this now.”
- “I can be present without constant stimulation.”
- “I can tolerate silence and inner emptiness without escaping into screens.”

That is already a significant sign of maturity.

C. Media and the Interior Life

One of the greatest risks of excessive media use is the erosion of interiority. Constant exposure to stimulation weakens recollection. The person becomes accustomed to noise, novelty, speed, and emotional spikes. Over time, silence begins to feel uncomfortable, prayer becomes difficult, study becomes tiring, and relationships become thinner.

For this reason, formation must explicitly connect media use with prayer and inner life. The candidate must learn to notice:

- how media affects his capacity for silence
- what kinds of content leave him agitated or inwardly scattered
- whether digital use before prayer makes prayer shallow or distracted
- whether screen dependence is replacing solitude, self-reflection, or contact with God

Mindful media use involves not only reducing harmful content, but also reclaiming spaces of inner freedom. This may include:

- screen-free mornings before prayer
- no-phone periods before the Eucharist or meditation
- silent walks without headphones
- digital-free retreats or recollections
- ending the day without media overload

These are not merely “rules.” They are practices that help the person recover his capacity to dwell with God, self, and reality.

D. Media, Relationships, and Community Life

Media affects not only the individual but also community. Devices can silently erode fraternity by reducing presence, fragmenting attention, replacing conversation, and normalizing emotional distance. A community may live under the same roof yet remain inwardly isolated if everyone retreats into private screens.

Mindful media formation must therefore include a communal dimension. The Formandus should be helped to reflect on questions such as:

- Do I remain available to others, or am I often digitally absent?
- Do I use media to avoid difficult conversations or tensions?
- Does my screen use weaken common life, meals, prayer, or recreation?
- Am I more attentive to online interactions than to the persons physically around me?

Formation houses need a culture in which presence is valued. This does not mean suspicion toward technology, but rather the prioritization of real encounter. Shared life must remain stronger than digital drift. Mindful media use in community also includes:

- fraternal correction when digital habits become visibly harmful
- common reflection on digital culture and its effects
- community agreements about use during common times
- shared viewing or engagement with enriching content rather than isolated overconsumption

When done well, community becomes a place of mutual digital maturity rather than either surveillance or permissiveness.

E. Media Ethics and Moral Responsibility

Digital life requires moral formation. The missionary must learn that online behaviour is not exempt from evangelical responsibility. What one posts, forwards, comments on, endorses, laughs at, or ignores can either build communion or spread harm. Formation in media ethics should therefore address:

- truthfulness and fact-checking
- charity in online interactions
- avoidance of gossip, defamation, mockery, and verbal aggression
- responsible sharing of images and information

- respect for privacy and confidentiality
- avoidance of voyeurism, sensationalism, and exploitative curiosity
- awareness of pornography, sexualized content, and digital boundary violations
- responsible use of AI-generated, edited, or misleading content

The missionary must understand that digital conduct is a form of witness. Even hidden online behaviour shapes conscience and identity. What is repeatedly normalized in private digital space often eventually influences public ministry and relationships. A mature missionary learns to ask:

- Would I be comfortable if this were known in community?
- Does this reflect who I am called to become?
- Does this strengthen integrity or divide me inwardly?

Such questions belong to conscience formation.

F. Media as a Tool for Study, Formation, and Mission

Media is not only a risk; it is also a gift when used intentionally. Formation should not remain defensive. It must also teach positive and creative digital use.

A missionary today should learn to use media for:

Formation and Study

- accessing quality theological, biblical, pastoral, and ecclesial resources
- participating in online courses or lectures
- organizing learning through digital tools without becoming distracted
- using technology to support study discipline rather than undermine it

Prayer and Spiritual Growth

- Scripture apps
- liturgical and prayer resources
- digital retreats and guided meditations
- sacred music or spiritual audio used intentionally, not compulsively

Evangelization and Mission

- sharing faith-based reflections responsibly
- creating digital content rooted in truth and pastoral sensitivity
- engaging people online with respect and charity
- using media to amplify voices of the poor, the excluded, and mission concerns
- contributing to educational, catechetical, and missionary initiatives

Formation should gradually prepare missionaries to inhabit digital spaces not as self-promoters, but as servants of the Word. The digital apostolate must remain grounded in prayer, truth, and pastoral maturity—not in vanity, ideological reaction, or the need for online validation.

Content Creators' Boom: A Call for Missionary Discernment

The digital world has given rise to a new phenomenon: the rapid growth of "content creators" and "social media influencers." While these expressions have become common in contemporary culture, missionaries in formation need to approach them with careful discernment.

The vocation of a Claretian missionary is fundamentally different from the pursuit of digital popularity. The primary mission of the Church is not to generate online visibility but to proclaim the Gospel and bear witness to Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). Before ascending to the Father, Christ entrusted His disciples with the mission: "Go therefore and make

disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19–20). This missionary mandate remains the foundation of every form of Christian communication, including communication in digital spaces.

For this reason, formation should help candidates understand that digital media are never an end in themselves. The goal is not to accumulate followers, increase views, or cultivate a personal online brand. These may sometimes accompany effective evangelization, but they must never become its primary motivation.

Many people today identify themselves as content creators, yet much of what circulates online is designed simply to attract attention, entertain, provoke emotional reactions, or increase engagement. Such a culture can subtly tempt even consecrated persons to measure success by visibility rather than by fidelity to the Gospel. The missionary must therefore continually ask:

- Does this communication make Christ more visible, or myself?
- Am I seeking to proclaim the Gospel or to promote my own image?
- Does this post lead others toward truth, hope, and communion?
- Is my digital presence an authentic expression of my missionary vocation?

Formation should educate candidates to see themselves first and foremost as **digital evangelisers** rather than merely as content creators or influencers. Their identity flows from baptism, consecration, and missionary vocation, not from algorithms or online popularity.

This also means helping formandi recognise that one of the Church's contemporary missions is not only **to evangelise through digital media but also to evangelise the digital culture itself**. The digital continent needs witnesses who can purify communication by promoting truth instead of misinformation, dialogue instead of hostility, charity instead of aggression, and authentic human encounter instead of superficial visibility.

A Claretian missionary therefore enters the digital world as a servant of the Word. Every post, video, article, podcast, image, or online interaction should reflect the values of the Gospel and the missionary charism. The ultimate measure of digital success is not the number of followers gained but whether Christ becomes better known, loved, and followed through one's witness.

Practical Guidelines for Formators

Formators can encourage this missionary outlook by helping formandi:

- examine the motivations behind their online activity;
- distinguish evangelisation from self-promotion;
- evaluate whether digital engagement reflects Claretian missionary values;
- prioritise truthful, educational, catechetical, and pastoral communication over popularity;
- remember that credibility in digital ministry comes from integrity of life more than technical skill.

In this way, digital media become an authentic missionary field where the formandus learns to proclaim Christ with humility, wisdom, and evangelical freedom.

VII. Signs of Unhealthy Media Use in Formation

The following signs may indicate the need for attention and accompaniment:

Personal Signs

- compulsive checking of phone or notifications
- difficulty remaining in silence or prayer without restlessness
- reduced concentration in study
- sleep disruption due to late-night media use
- irritability when disconnected
- emotional dependence on stimulation or online validation

- using media to escape loneliness, anxiety, boredom, or inner discomfort

Relational Signs

- withdrawal from community interaction
- distraction during meals, meetings, or common times
- preference for online contact over real conversation
- avoidance of tension through digital retreat
- weakened capacity for listening and presence

Spiritual Signs

- fragmented prayer
- inability to sustain recollection
- superficial engagement with Scripture or spiritual reading
- reduced sensitivity to conscience
- digital overexposure replacing contemplative space

Apostolic Signs

An unhealthy digital apostolate may become evident when the formandus:

- seeks visibility more than witness;
- pursues popularity rather than fidelity to the Gospel;
- communicates impulsively without adequate discernment;
- neglects pastoral charity and truth in online interactions;
- becomes more concerned with producing digital content than cultivating real missionary presence.

When these patterns appear, they should not immediately be interpreted as moral failures. Often, they point to deeper needs for accompaniment in areas such as identity, emotional maturity, vocational motivation, or missionary discernment.

VIII. Formation Practices to Cultivate Mindful Media Use

A. Practices for Formandi

1. Daily Digital Examen

At the end of the day, the Formandus reflects briefly:

- How did I use media today?
- What helped me grow?
- What left me scattered, restless, or inwardly divided?
- Did I use media as a tool, or did it use me?
- What needs adjustment tomorrow?

2. Designated Media Windows

Choose specific times for checking messages, email, and social media rather than constant intermittent use.

3. Screen-Free Sacred Spaces

Keep certain spaces or moments free from devices:

- chapel
- meals
- community sharing
- spiritual direction
- personal prayer time

4. Digital Sabbath

Set aside a regular period—half-day, one evening, or one full day—without non-essential digital engagement to reclaim silence, real presence, and embodied life.

5. Intentional Content Audit

Review regularly:

- Who am I following?
- What am I repeatedly exposing myself to?
- What content subtly shapes my mind and desire?

Unfollow, limit, or remove what undermines freedom, truth, simplicity, or vocation.

6. One-Task Practice

During study, prayer, or community interaction, train yourself to do one thing at a time without divided attention.

7. Replace Scroll with Substance

Consciously replace some digital habits with:

- reading
- journaling
- walking
- conversation
- manual work
- silent prayer
- creative hobbies

This helps rebuild depth and attention.

B. Practices for Formation Communities

Formation houses may establish practical norms such as:

- no devices during common prayer and meals
- agreed silent hours without non-essential media
- common reflection sessions on digital culture
- periodic digital fasting days
- communal viewing of enriching documentaries or faith-based media
- shared guidelines for responsible online conduct and public posting

These norms should not be imposed merely as discipline but explained as part of a shared formative ecology that protects prayer, study, fraternity, and freedom.

IX. Role of the Formator

The formator accompanies the candidate in developing digital maturity through observation, dialogue, discernment, and personal witness. Beyond establishing community norms, the formator helps the formandus understand how digital habits influence freedom, prayer, study, relationships,

and missionary identity. The aim is not merely responsible technology use but the formation of missionaries who communicate the Gospel with truth, charity, and evangelical integrity.

The formator helps by:

- helping the Formandus interpret the emotional and spiritual function of his media use
- distinguishing between ordinary use, unhealthy dependence, and deeper compulsive patterns
- fostering self-awareness rather than merely external compliance
- ensuring that community norms are realistic, consistent, and formative

The formator must be attentive to whether media use is serving as:

- escape from inner conflict
- compensation for loneliness or lack of intimacy
- avoidance of vocation-related anxiety
- self-image management
- hidden fragmentation beneath outward functionality

When necessary, the formator should address concerns directly but respectfully. The goal is not digital perfection, but increasing freedom, truth, and integration.

X. Accompaniment Questions for Formandi

These questions may be used in personal accompaniment or recollection:

Self-Awareness

- What role does media currently play in my daily life?
- What emotional needs do I tend to bring to my phone or digital space?
- When do I most often use media unconsciously?

Spiritual Discernment

- Does my media use deepen or weaken my prayer life?
- What kinds of digital habits make me less available to God?
- Where do I sense a need for purification?

Human and Relational Growth

- How does media affect my attention, sleep, emotions, and focus?
- Does it help or hinder my presence to others?
- Am I becoming more free or more dependent?

Missionary Identity

- Does my online behaviour reflect my vocation?
- Am I using digital space in a way that serves truth, charity, and mission?
- What kind of missionary presence am I cultivating online?

XI. Self-Assessment Tool: Mindful Media Use

Instructions

Rate each statement from **1 to 5**:

- **1 = Rarely true**
- **2 = Sometimes true**
- **3 = Moderately true**
- **4 = Often true**
- **5 = Consistently true**

Statement	Rating (1–5)
I am aware of how much time I spend on media each day.	
I can stop using my phone or device when necessary.	
I do not allow media to interfere regularly with prayer or silence.	
I use media in a way that supports my study and formation.	
I am careful about the truthfulness of what I read or share online.	
I avoid content that weakens my dignity, integrity, or vocation.	
I remain present to others during community times without digital distraction.	
I do not use media primarily as an escape from loneliness, stress, or inner discomfort.	
I am capable of spending time in silence without needing digital stimulation.	
I practice some form of digital discipline or media fasting.	
My online interactions are respectful, charitable, and responsible.	
I use media intentionally for prayer, learning, or mission.	
I am honest with myself about unhealthy digital habits.	
I can tolerate boredom without immediately turning to a screen.	
My media use reflects the kind of missionary I want to become.	

Scoring Guide

- **60–75** → Strong digital awareness and healthy integration
- **45–59** → Generally healthy, but some habits need strengthening
- **30–44** → Several patterns need conscious review and accompaniment
- **15–29** → Significant concern; deeper intervention and structured guidance may be needed

Reflection Questions

- Which three statements received my lowest score?
- What do these scores reveal about my inner habits?
- What one concrete change is God inviting me to make now?

XII. Formator Observation Rubric

Mindful Media Use in Formation

Area	Emerging	Developing	Stable	Mature
Self-Mastery	Uses media impulsively and without awareness	Shows some effort to regulate use	Usually uses media with discipline	Demonstrates consistent freedom and moderation
Attention and Focus	Easily distracted; poor sustained focus	Tries to focus but struggles with fragmentation	Maintains reasonable attention in study/prayer	Shows strong capacity for recollection and focused presence
Spiritual Integration	Media clearly disrupts prayer and silence	Recognizes tension but inconsistently manages it	Protects prayer and silence with growing intentionality	Integrates media within a clearly ordered spiritual life
Community Presence	Frequently withdrawn into devices	Sometimes distracted during common life	Usually present and respectful in community	Consistently available, attentive, and relationally present

Discernment of Content	Consumes/shares content uncritically	Shows some awareness of quality and values	Generally evaluates content responsibly	Demonstrates mature evangelical and intellectual discernment
Ethical Responsibility	Weak awareness of online responsibility	Inconsistent but improving digital ethics	Generally respectful and responsible online	Shows strong integrity, prudence, and missionary witness
Missionary Use of Media	Uses media mainly for entertainment or escape	Occasionally uses it constructively	Uses media meaningfully for learning or apostolate	Employs media creatively and responsibly for mission

Formative Use of the Rubric

This rubric should not be used merely to police behaviour. It is meant to help formators identify:

- patterns of growth
- hidden dependencies
- emotional or spiritual functions of media use
- areas requiring accompaniment, structure, or correction

XIII. Suggested Formation Activities

1. Community Media Audit

As a formation house, reflect together:

- What is media doing to our prayer, study, fraternity, and mission?
- Where are we healthy?
- Where are we losing depth or freedom?

2. 7-Day Mindful Media Challenge

For one week, candidates practice:

- no phone before morning prayer
- no device at meals
- 30-minute evening screen limit
- daily digital examen

Follow with group reflection.

3. Content Discernment Workshop

Take examples of:

- news articles
- social media posts
- short videos
- religious content

Evaluate them using:

- truth
- emotional impact

- hidden values
- missionary implications

4. Digital Silence Retreat Element

During retreat or recollection:

- collect phones for part of the day
- include reflection on silence, withdrawal, craving, and interior restlessness
- process the experience afterward

5. Missionary Media Project

Invite candidates to create one digital missionary resource:

- a short faith reflection
- a podcast episode
- a prayer video
- a catechetical post
- a social awareness campaign rooted in Gospel values

This helps shift media use from passive consumption to responsible mission.

XIV. Integration Across Stages of Formation

Pre-Novitiate

Focus on:

- basic digital discipline
- awareness of overuse and distraction
- introduction to media discernment
- online boundaries and identity

Novitiate

Focus on:

- silence, detachment, and inner freedom
- purification of compulsive habits
- digital fasting and recollection
- deeper awareness of emotional and spiritual effects

Post-Novitiate

Focus on:

- disciplined integration with study and apostolate
- missionary and ethical use of media
- pastoral communication and digital witness
- online boundaries in ministry

Ongoing Formation

Focus on:

- digital maturity in leadership and mission
- media ethics and credibility
- sustainable digital habits

- creative apostolic presence without burnout or vanity

XV. Conclusion

Mindful media use is now an essential part of missionary formation because digital life has become one of the principal environments in which freedom, desire, attention, relationships, and identity are shaped. The question is no longer whether media affects formation, but whether formation will consciously address that influence with wisdom and courage.

A well-formed missionary does not merely avoid harmful content. He becomes a person who is inwardly free, attentive, truthful, disciplined, relationally present, spiritually rooted, and missionally intentional in the digital world. He knows when to disconnect, when to engage, when to speak, when to remain silent, and how to use media without being used by it.

When cultivated within the Claretian formative journey, mindful media use helps form missionaries who are:

- inwardly recollected
- intellectually discerning
- ethically responsible
- fraternally present
- pastorally credible
- apostolically creative

In this way, media becomes not a force of dispersion, but a tool placed in the hands of a missionary whose heart is being forged by the Spirit—free enough to remain rooted in Christ, available to others, and ready to proclaim the Gospel even within the digital continent.