



**IAMCR  
Lyon 23**



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## **Religion and Communication Working Group**

Abstracts of papers presented at one or both of the 2023 conferences of the  
**International Association for Media and Communication Research**  
IAMCR Lyon23 – Lyon, France 9 to 13 July  
IAMCR OCP23 – Online 26 June to 12 September

**lyon2023.iamcr.org**  
**July 2023**

This abstract book includes original abstracts of papers accepted for IAMCR 2023 and included online at OCP23 and/or presented at Lyon23 in France

Version: 27/07/23

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# Journalists & Synagogue-State relations in Israel

## Authors

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## Abstract

As both a democratic state but also the Jewish homeland, there is continuous tensions between how the Jewishness gets expression in a democratic order. The tension in synagogue-state religious relations is a constant theme in the Israeli media, which has an important role in agendas setting on the subject. To shed further light, the author carried out a survey of Israeli journalists on the question. 250 filled responses were received. Among issues of contention are: `1) civil marriage, and religious conversions . Ppersonal status including marriage and religious conversions are controlled by the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. Israelis desiring a civil marriage require to travel overseas. 2) Religious conversions are limited to the orthodox stream; conversions by non-orthodox streams like the reform and conservative Jewish streams are not recognised by the state; 3) , recreation in public places on the Sabbath and holydays is limited. There is no public transportation on these days. It limits say the non-religiously observant public from some public events. 4) Haredim are mostly exempt from 3 years national service.

The survey of journalists carried out by the author found that 50%, 47%, 41%, 45%, and 39% of journalists said that the issues of forbidden marriages, army exemptions, Sabbath recreation on public places, and conversions, and government budgeting for *yeshivot* (Talmudical colleges) respectively were of `high' or `very high' news value . A further 39%, 29%, 33%,33%, 35%, respectively said these were of `average' news interest.

The question of synagogue-state issues may also be examined in terms of whether the journalists favour the separation of religion and state. For example, 23% of those who `much favour' separation of synagogue and state gave a `very high' news value to civil marriage in contrast to 16% who disagreed with the separation of synagogue and state.

These questions may be broken down according to whether journalists define themselves as secular, traditional, and religious journalists. For example, on army exemptions for *yeshiva* students, there was a great difference between the three groupings, secular, traditional, and religious journalists. 54% of secular journalists, and 44% of Traditional journalists gave the subject `high' or `very high' interest in contrast to 33% of religious journalists.

There was an inclination for journalists who do not believe in God to give a `very high' news value to issues on the public agenda in contrast to `high news value' a clue to how they saw the gravity that the matter posed to their values. For example, on the question of civil marriage 23% of journalists who did not believe in God gave the issue a very high news value in contrast to 12% and 15% of journalists who `believed' or `very much believed' in God respectively.

The paper will also compare journalists' evaluations of the news value with those of rabbis and the Israeli public.

**Key Words**

Journalists

Israel

State-Religions relations

# **Online communication and public relations strategies within the Romanian Orthodox Church. An analysis of online media presence during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The research aims to analyze how the Orthodox Church adapted to the socio-cultural change, a change that took place both from the perspective of the digitalization of the means of communication and the health crisis situation (COVID-19). Many Orthodox believers have resisted for religious reasons to state-imposed measures that have affected the lives of religious communities.

In recent decades, many studies have appeared on religious communication (Campbell, 2016; Gelfgren, 2021) and some of these studies analyze religious communication in Romania with focus on mass media, religion and public space (Coman, 2020). However, there are very few studies that analyze online PR strategies within religious institutions in Romania.

The objective of the research is to analyze the Church's communication about the COVID-19 crisis, how the Orthodox Church has dealt with public communication. This problem of communication in times of crisis will be analysed on two methodological levels. The first is related to how to report to the government / public order. I will analyze how the Orthodox Church sees the relationship between the state and the church, to what extent the regulations imposed by the state, which affect religious life, should be followed / challenged or not. The second perspective will analyze the vision of the Orthodox Church regarding what it means to live and its relationship with members in the online space (especially when physical meetings cannot take place, for example: during the pandemic).

My research is based on an in-depth study of online space in Romania over the period 2020-2022. During this period, defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 30,000 articles were identified in the virtual world.

I will investigate from a formal and technical point of view: what were the PR strategies, how exactly it was communicated, what tools were used, how often, what was the tone and how the Orthodox Church responded to the negative or derogatory articles.

This research is relevant because it allows us to understand better the messages sent by the Orthodox Church, through various communication tools, during the COVID-19 crisis period. Which was the most used communication tools? What did the churches, who did not have the tools they needed to communicate, do during the pandemic?

## **Key Words**

Orthodox Church, COVID-19, communication, PR strategies, Romania, virtual world,

# Construction of Religious Identity on Instagram: Hinduism as a Case Study

## Authors

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## Abstract

The mission of any religion has always been to promote its principles, beliefs, and practices. Through architecture, sculpture, and painting, religious authority has communicated its ideas across the ages (Clark 2000). Since the 20th century, public broadcasting and privately owned media outlets have provided religious organizations with representation in the mass media. As social media platforms evolve, they become interactive channels for communication. As Manuel Castells put it more than a decade ago, these technologies enable “mass self-communication,” which empowers people by allowing them to not only receive messages but also send them to multiple receivers at the same time (Castells 2009). By facilitating social interaction and fostering the exchange of ideas, information, and knowledge between people, organisations, and institutions and their audiences, social media platforms are becoming a tool for cultural and social transformation as they generate collective or individual opinions (Valentini, 2015, Gershon, 2016). As a result of communication technology, religion has become more accessible to the general public. Campbell and Vitullo (2016) coined the phrase "digital religion" to describe the changes that create and strengthen the practice of religion in the digital world. This study will examine how online religious occurrences are expressed and formed, incorporating an investigation into new relationships between religious processes and digital platforms, especially Instagram. Much research has been conducted on social media platforms and religions associated with Christianity and Islam, but only a few have focused on Hinduism. Hinduism, in contrast to Islam and Christianity, has been historically restricted to the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism’s adherents have, according to Lal (2029), demonstrated in recent years a marked tendency to turn on various forms of digital media in order to forge new forms of Hindu identity and create a global Hindu consciousness. India has the highest Instagram user base in the world as of January 2023, with 230.25 million users overall. Brazil and the United States each had 119.45 million subscribers (Statista, 2022). Instagram's combination of visual appeal, ease of use, high engagement, and a strong community make it a popular choice for many users. When compared to other social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter, Instagram makes it easy for users to discover and follow accounts that align with their interests. Examining accounts such as @hinduism, @hinduism\_and\_science, @sanatni.hinduism, etc., with 5-10 million followers, this research seeks to examine the intersections between religion and technology in Hinduism, as well as the ways in which diverse forms of tech-religious intersections transform and create new religious practices, communities and discourses. It uses descriptive qualitative research, where critical discourse analysis will be used to explain the underlying themes in the discourse on Instagram accounts based on Van Dijk’s

theory, and content analysis aims to explain the content of the discourse. In this study, Instagram accounts will be used as a source of data.

### **Key Words**

Religion

Hinduism

social media

Instagram

digital religion

platforms



# **Religious communication strategy in Chinese popular songs: A metaphorical criticism of Christianity in Gloria Tang Tsz Kei's(G.E.M.) music**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

This study employs the method of metaphorical criticism to analyse the strategy of religious communication in the lyrics of the songs created by a popular Hong Kong pop music singer Gloria Tang Tsz Kei (G.E.M.). Since G.E.M. was the only Asian musician who got Forbes 30 Under 30 in 2016, and the first Chinese singer obtained over 2 hundred million view ratings on YouTube, it is a good chance to explore how religious communication is launched through the dissemination of mass cultural products.

Just as McDill (2013) [1] indicated, Jesus, delivered God's messages to people through understandable language, evangelism should also be communicated with strategies close to people's daily life without being too intentional, but rather resonating with the general public. Tremlett (2021) also proposed the term 'sticky religion' to describe 'vernacular religion,' which makes a stronger connection with popular culture and people's experiences.[2] Since an explicit phrase such as 'God is Love' could be withdrawn by non-believers, using metaphors might be a better entrance for non-believers to get access to Christianity easily (Rogers, 2017)[3]. Another study illustrated that rap music could reflect God's faith in street life; its format and text fragments could present piecemeal or fragmentary life experiences (Walsh, 2013, p.232)[4]. Moreover, Rubino (2019)[5] maintained that Reli Singer's religious appeal is usually presented in the lyrics, which just like the singer's confession brimming the truthfulness of people's daily life, audiences are obsessed with the singer's story and these songs would be successful.[6] Hence, metaphor is practical to imply religious messages in the lyrics as a strategy to be accepted by more people.

Ivor Armstrong Richards proposed the 'tenor-vehicle' as a set of the essential concept of metaphor in 1929. 'Tenor' refers to an abstract concept; usually, its meaning cannot be recognized easily. 'Vehicle' refers to a figurative tool to present the tenor concretely (Bilsky, 1952, p.130)[7]. A metaphor connects different materials to make them meaningful, but the meaning is not always fixed. The metaphorical criticism of G.E.M.'s works namely 'Revelation' finds that she did use metaphors in her songs as a major rhetorical strategy to preach the gospel. This study will fully analyse the tenors and vehicles of the metaphors in G.E.M.'s songs.

- [1] <http://www.truthtofreedom.org/blog/2010/02/25/jesus-communication-strategy>
- [2] <https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=1200>
- [3] <https://stanforddaily.com/2017/11/09/religion-as-a-metaphor-for-non-believers/>
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### **Key Words**

Keywords: religious communication, metaphorical criticism, Gloria Tang Tsz Kei(G.E.M.)

# **Covid-19 and the decline in church attendance: Is it the death of Religion in America?**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

Covid-19 led to a closure of many churches in United States of America. At the height of the pandemic most churches decided to temporarily shut down their places of worship until the pandemic had subsided. Post pandemic, several churches returned to their church buildings. However, some churches continue to offer hybrid services (both in-person and online) to date. Nonetheless, there is still a notable decline in both membership and church attendance. The number of returnees and new members/visitors has hit a record low in the USA. This has triggered a great shift towards the provision of virtual church services and the emergence of a new form of inter-sacred space. The church community interactions have been altered drastically challenging the meaning and continuity of in-person and brick and mortar (in-building) worship. Virtual church seems to be the future of the church, dealing with issues of human geographies and media technology. This article, therefore, aims to explore the impact of the coronavirus on the mission and theology of the church as well as probing ways to maintain and strengthen the remaining church community.

## **Key Words**

Covid-19, Virtual, Church, Pandemic, Technology, Media

# **Minority Radio in the United Kingdom: The case of Muslim radio Stations in West Yorkshire**

## **Authors**

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Dr. Nour Halabi - University of Leeds

## **Abstract**

Media represent crucial spaces for ethnic and religious minorities to express their culture, celebrate their linguistic diversity and practice their religious rituals and practices. Scholars have noted the importance of radio as a medium to communities of color and minorities (Cottle, 1998; Hilgert et al., 2020). This study focuses on Muslim minority radio stations in West Yorkshire to understand how minorities use media to connect each other and perform religious and cultural practices. It examines Fever FM that serves South Asian Muslim communities with the express mission of combating under-representation and exclusion of minorities from mainstream media.

The research seeks to understand the importance of radio as a medium to racial, ethnic and religious minorities and how UK Muslims use radio to express their culture and identity. It asks the question: how do local Muslim media producers, creators, professionals try to cater to the needs of their community and to combat their lack of visibility in mainstream media? and what role does minority local media play in fostering a sense of community belonging?

We propose a media ethnography as the best approach to this study, encompassing both media production and consumption sides of this case study. We intend to conduct semi-structured interviews with media professionals and audience members, site visits of the station, recording studios, and other relevant locations central to the production side of this project.

## **Key Words**

Radio, Minority, Identity

# Exploring spiritual practices on Chinese social media: A case study on RED (Xiaohongshu)

## Authors

Ms. Haoyang Zhai - University of Melbourne

## Abstract

The paper aims to explore spiritual practices on Chinese social media, with a focus on the topic of 'wish me a baby boy' on RED (Xiaohongshu), a popular user-generated content platform with e-commerce features. The topic refers to female users engaging in ritualised online activities, such as commenting specific mantras, in hopes of having a baby boy as an exchange. These ritualised activities might be influenced by traditional Chinese spiritual practices of 'making a wish' and 'returning the favour' (also known as 'xuyuan' (许愿) and 'huanyuan' (还愿) in Mandarin). This digital spiritual practice is rooted in the long-standing son preference in Chinese culture (Gupta, Jiang, Li, Xie, Chung, & Bae, 2010), closely associated with a wide range of folk belief practices and religious rituals, and possibly related to the Chinese government's recently adopted three-child policy in response to declining fertility rate (Wee, 2021).

The study adopts a non-participatory observation method and employs the Fabrication method (Markham, 2012) as an ethical measure because of the methods' effectiveness in accurately representing relevant posts on RED and preserving the complexities and nuances of online ritual places. The analysis will cover aspects such as cover images, content, comments, and engagement metrics of relevant posts. The discussion will explore how traditional spiritual practices are being shaped and mediated in their migration to digital platforms, and how spiritual topics become a way to attract traffic or express an ironic viewpoint about traditional gender values on the Internet.

This paper contributes to the broader understanding of spiritual practices in the digital age (Campbell, 2013). By examining the topic of 'wish me a baby boy', the study seeks to shed light on the dynamic interplay between traditional spirituality and the digital realm in contemporary China. It highlights the significance of considering the cultural context and historical background in analysing spiritual practices on digital media. The study will provide a novel perspective on the ongoing discussions of the relationship between spirituality, media, and the Internet in the context of China, and reflect on implications for future research in the field.

## Key Words

digital spirituality, folk belief, digital platform, son preference, China

# **The sacred mobile devices : the impact of digital technology on the religion of Yi people**

## **Authors**

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Ms. LIU ZIWEI - School of Journalism and Communication, Renmin University of China

## **Abstract**

Based on in-depth interviews with three Members of the Yi ethnic group in the underdeveloped areas of southwest China, this paper studies the online religious rituals that have recently emerged among the Yi ethnic group within the framework of digital religion research. we can see the influence of digital technology on minority religions in southwest China, including but not limited to the following aspects: amplified auditory sense, mobile devices endowed with sacredness, limited ritual effect. This is not only a manifestation of the modernization process in China's underdeveloped areas in the context of digital technology, but also a cross-cultural practice in the context of digital technology.

## **Key Words**

digital religion ; voice ; sacrality

# **Filming God, filming Religion and the nationalistic sentiments: A study of the religious narratives and religious representations in Indian movies**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

Religion is one of the most effective propagandist tool in the history of communicative technologies. Indian polity had experienced the gripping edges of religion in media from the time of early 1987 with the broadcasting of Ramayan on Doordarshan, one of the largest mediated event in India after the freedom struggle, and that led to the mobilization of Hindu nationalism and a 'split society' (Rajagopal). Several studies have pointed towards the predominance of 'bhakthi' was gradually converted into reinforcement of religious consolidation, nationalism and consequently to the surge of right-wing political domination (Mankekar). Indian films from the initial years were greatly indebted to religion for storytelling and narratives while religious symbols and patterns appeared in movies as a normal practice. Stars played roles of gods in movies received quasi-divine status and many of them were rewarded with political thrones with their own regional political parties. Filming gods, religion and religious symbols are to be assessed from the point of view of propagandist intentions today as several movies extol beliefs and religious practices out of proportion. On the other hand, movies with allegedly objectionable elements concerning certain religious beliefs face staunch attack which gradually get banned by the state machinery. Recent years witnessed a sudden upwelling of Indian movies in its reach and success. Boundaries are broken in its reach and box office collections with the corresponding confidence to invest big with budget and production process. Regional films are made and accepted as pan Indian films and well sold internationally along with fetching laurels at global stages like Oscar. Religious representations in recent movies and their implied and explicit messages call for a critical exploration of the intent and its ramifications. Indian polity, deeply religious in nature, is potentially vulnerable to the political persuasions carried out in the form popular films augmented with religious flavour (Dwyer). And religion sounds vocal, explicit and loud in many of the recent Indian films. This paper intends to research the portrayal of Hindu religion, religious symbols, faith practices, beliefs, traditions and belief-bound social practices in Indian movies. The study will further explore their socio-political implications in the Indian polity like popularising religion, re-enforcement of Hindu Nationalism and accrediting 'a brand of Official Indian Cinema'. The researchers have identified four pan Indian movies released in 2022 for content analysis which represent regional and Bollywood film industries: RRR (Telugu), Brahmastra (Hindi), Kantara (Kannada) and Malikappuram (Malayalam).

## **Key Words**

Indian Movies, Religion and cinema, propagandist movies

# **The New Conflict between Ecological environment and Religious Beliefs in Chinese Mass Media: A Case Study of the ritual Fangsheng (life release to nature) Series**

## **Authors**

Ms. ZHANG YUANJIE - École Pratique des Hautes Études

## **Abstract**

Based on the official context of atheism and media policy, the number of religious news in the Chinese mass media is relatively low, although one case that has received a lot of attention in recent years is the *Fangsheng* rituals in various places and the ecological damage and religious consumption fraud they have caused. The ritual of *Fangsheng* is a religious practice that is still highly recognized by the contemporary Chinese population and has its origins in Buddhist rituals. Its basic practice is to release animals back into nature that would otherwise be killed and kept in captivity. In the last decade, the ritual of release and its participants have received widespread media coverage, which has been mainly negative. This paper focuses on news of the release ritual in both traditional and new media on the internet. On the one hand, this paper uses textual analysis and statistical methods to obtain data on emotional tendencies, reporting styles, audience responses, etc. On the other hand, it compares contemporary coverage of "ritual release" with that of the twentieth century, in order to see the historical changes in the coverage of religion in China from a longitudinal perspective.

Finally, the article will analyze the new issues of religious communication reflected in this case from three aspects: First, the parallel religious consumption and communication between online e-commerce and the local temple economy; Secondly, the new opportunities and challenges of remote participation in religious rituals; And finally, the theory of the spiral of silence in Chinese religious news reporting in the Internet era. The mass media has not acted as an active narrator, and temples and ritual participants are usually low-profile and voiceless in the mass media. And there is a considerable degree of closure and specialization in Chinese religious academia. The study and practice of religious communication for the public is not the mainstream direction. These in turn add to the misalignment of the public's perception of faith and ritual.

## **Key Words**

Mass media, animals, religious rituals, eco-environment, religious consumption, e-commerce



# **INTERACTIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND GETTING BACK TO ONE'S SELF IN THE GLOBAL WORLD WE DWELL IN TODAY**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

Our interactions in present times, are widely being shaped and governed by two-way flow of information through an interface between the user and the technology. The global village we dwell in today is expounded by interactive technologies which are not only intriguing but bewildering too. The term global village was coined in the early 1960s by Canadian communications theorist Marshall McLuhan, who wrote about the influence of newer technologies of his day, the television, computers, and other electronic disseminators of information. The interactive technologies we are using today, have ushered us in a fast-paced world where our styles of thinking and thought are getting reoriented each day like never before. These technologies have embraced a gigantic body of study and knowledge and offered us a wide array of tools for increasingly complex interconnections and interactions. How we transcend the real world boundaries and traverse the virtual world, is very captivating as this shift has changed the social dynamics to a great extent. The availability of diverse platforms and means for social interactions, needless to add, is a boon to us. People are getting close and connected. The world is busy capitalizing on the information age and turning technology to advantage. Top ranked social networks like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Snapchat, Tiktok etc. have engaged and absorbed the generations entirely. There is much to choose from and all in a very easy and speedy manner. In 2021, over 4.26 billion people (statista.com) were using social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to almost six billion in 2027.

While advantages of social media outweigh the disadvantages, yet its impact on many important aspects of life is a poignant reminder that we have lost on several counts. Going overboard with social media has resulted in a sense of detachment, disenchantment, disillusionment, incoherence, social alienation, severance and so on. There are many difficult questions which call for resolutions today in the age defined by social media technologies. Returning to one's own self is an overarching idea when we find ourselves stuck in the maddening voices all around. This theoretical research paper shed light on the need for adherence to conscience and getting back to one's self. With sociological, psychological and religious perspectives to draw on, this paper attempts to focus on the humanistic approach whereby we strive for human values and dignity.

## **Key Words**

Key words: Interactive technologies, conscience, one's self, individual consciousness.

# "Russian world" concept in religious context: professional media vs social networks

## Authors

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## Abstract

The evolution of the idea of the "Russian world" offers a full range of ways to reconceptualise it in the twenty-first century. The concept with its religious connotations is being used to justify the right to have an exclusive "sphere of influence" in the near abroad (Trenin 2009) and consequently - the expansive military action in Ukraine. So the concept presumes "inhabiting the planet" in certain way and by the people of 'right' faith and 'right' values.

In this context, it is important to take into account the polysemantic nature of the word "мир"(mir) in Russian that has two basic meanings in English: 'world' and 'peace'. Therefore, the famous novel of Leo Tolstoy "Война и мир" (Voina i mir) has been translated into English as "War and Peace". During the war in Ukraine, both connotations sound negative: "Russian peace" sounds cynical and "Russian world" sounds aggressive and invasive.

"Russian world" has evident religious context which differs in professional and social media. In professional media, journalists and experts refer to the historical concept of "Moscow is the third Rome [after Constantinople], and there shall never be the fourth". Being articulated in religious discourse from mediaeval time, this approach was reanimated and conceptualized in 90th of the twentieth century by some intellectuals seeking for 'passionate' and religion based idea.

Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill since his enthronization (2009) started to use "Russian world" rhetoric in his homilies and TV programs in order to keep the influence of Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in ex-USSR countries, especially Ukraine - statistically the biggest part of ROC. The Church media actively imposed "Russian world" worldview on the Ukrainian faithful following the slogan: "Eastern Orthodoxy keeps and preserves high moral values in oppose the soulless West".

Patriarch Kirill's version of the "Russian world" could be considered as an important contribution to this interpretation. He used the term "Russian world" for the external, secular audiences, whereas talking to the internal Church circles he uses another term, "Holy Russia" [Sviataya Rus'], but they mean essentially the same. The unity of "Holy Russia" was sealed in the baptismal font of St Vladimir who converted the pagan country into Christianity in 988. According this religious argument, the countries of "Holy Russia" – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and with some stretch – Moldova and Kazakhstan – should stand together united by Orthodox Christianity against other civilizational entities (Kirill 2009, 2010, 2014).

While professional (official, institutional) media in Russia uncritically follow this religious rhetoric and 'blessing' the military invasion in Ukraine, Russian social networks and platforms face this challenge of "Russian world" concept with questioning it in theological and inter-religious

frameworks, take it critically and provide the audience with strong arguments against it. The results of the quantitative and qualitative comparative research will be presented during the conference - if the paper is accepted.

**Key Words**

Religion, media, social networks, Russia, Orthodox Church, 'Russian world' concept

# **Analysis of Journalistic Role Performance for News Coverage of Religio-political Discourses in Pakistan's Politics**

## **Authors**

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Ms. Saman Choudary - Universitat Pompeu Fabra

## **Abstract**

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf – PTI is one of the major political parties in Pakistan and the first-ever political party of the country whose government was overthrown by the opposition with the help of a constitutional “No-trust motion” on April 10, 2022. PTI's ousted Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan announced nationwide protests and launched his political movement in the form of a long march called “Long March 2.0”, against his removal from power by the opposition on account of various allegations including “Imported Government”, “Foreign Conspiracy” and many other dogmas sacralized with religious indoctrinations. This political movement has challenged and hampered the efforts of incumbent government adversely, both financially and politically, causing a serious economic crisis for a nuclear capable state in South Asia. In this regard, DAWN, the leading print and online English newspaper of Pakistan, provided live coverage of this political movement of PTI starting from April 09, 2022, to November 27, 2022. To understand the journalistic role of ‘DAWN’, this study analyses the reporting of the newspaper while covering the political movement of PTI, using the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse as it carries a strong significance for the framing and dissemination of a sacralized political narrative to the Pakistani audience from the lens of journalistic role performance. This study is aimed to explain the discursive formation of political rhetoric by the DAWN newspaper, instrumental to the construction of social realities with the help of religious interpretations and disseminated by the political party in its political speech acts. In this backdrop, it is assumed that the use of text in political speeches (in the form of ‘speech acts’) is for the discursive formation of religio-political narratives. This study attempts to answer the research question that how a distinct knowledge genre (layer) is constructed (disseminated) in society by journalists while covering a political movement that may be detrimental or jeopardizing the political and financial stability of a state. Speech act theory and sociology of knowledge approach to discourse provide the theoretical-methodological understanding of the phenomenon, selected themes from the political speech acts of “Long March 2.0” are analyzed for their role in the construction of social reality. News items of the live blog for PTI's Long March by DAWN are analyzed. This study will help to explain the significance of journalistic role performance in shaping and creating knowledge in society through their coverage of a religio-political movement, highlighting the need to revisit the role performance of journalists in the challenging task of reporting a political movement that may cause uncertainty and chaos for the foreign direct investments, credit ratings and macro-micro economic challenges. It is suspected that the journalistic role is critical in nature, beyond merely reporting news, and discursive construction of social realities.

## **Key Words**

Journalistic role performance, news coverage, Pakistan, and politics.

# Islamic Feminism Through Zines: Subverting Nationalistic Symbols for Gender Justice

## Authors

Ms. Yamila Frej - Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania

## Abstract

Though Western mainstream media has historically been keen to both preserve and deconstruct their mystique, Muslim women are now rewriting the popular narrative on their own terms. Most recently, the murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iran's morality police has moved thousands of women to protest across the Middle East and around the world (Specter, 2022). Their voices may now seem louder than ever, but contrary to popular belief, Muslim women are no strangers to radical activism at the crossroads of their gender, politics, and religion. Within a growing body of feminist literature from the Middle East, Islamic feminists are those who choose to place religion at the center of their activism. In recent years, their activism medium has shifted to independent zine-making – a creative and alternative way for feminists to share critiques of the world around them. With very little research conducted on this new practice in the Middle Eastern context, this paper seeks to answer the following question: How do Islamic feminist zines produce radical ideology from the symbols, scriptures, and customs contained within Islam? To answer this question, this study implements a latent thematic analysis to study three zines produced by Islamic feminists: *Not For Your Orientalist Gaze*, *In Our Arms*, and *Feminist Dialogues*. Thematic findings suggest that through their zines, and in two critical practices, Islamic feminists both a) subvert traditional Islamic symbols to create new radical meanings and b) reinterpret religious scripture to uncover preexisting themes of gender equality. These themes offer lessons to scholars interested in how activists can curate medleys of new and traditional media to address social justice issues.

## Key Words

Islamic feminism, religious media, digital activism, gender justice, zine production

# **Malka Leifer in secular and religious news and community talk: reportage, power and scandal**

## **Authors**

Ms. Mona Chatskin - University of Canberra

## **Abstract**

This paper reports on media analysis and focus group findings examining mediatised public crises around child sexual abuse in the Australian Jewish community, and the impact of this on religious communities. The research project took as the backbone for analysis the Malka Leifer case that has spanned for over a decade and is linked to the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse's report of Case Study 22, which examined responses in Orthodox Jewish schools to child sexual abuse. Quantitative and qualitative media analyses were conducted of Australian mainstream legacy and Jewish religious news publications that reported on the Leifer case: *Australian Jewish News*, *The Age*, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)* and *Herald Sun*. Four key 'moments' and time periods of this highly mediated event were selected for the media analysis. The research found a significant difference in the way each news publication reported on the case and shaped the narrative, with different frames being enacted by each media outlet.

The media analysis served as the foundation for a 'peer conversation' (Gamson, 1992) style of focus groups with Melbourne Jewish community members to investigate local impacts of the case's media reportage. As Melbourne's Jewish community is one of the largest and most diverse Jewish communities in the diaspora world, the focus group methodology sought to represent the community as wholly as possible. The main methodology, consisted of 8 focus groups with Jewish community members from a variety of different sects. Findings reveal that although the Leifer case and its reportage centres around the Ultra-Orthodox Adass community, all Jewish community members – regardless of sect – feel a personal sense of accountability for the scandal and an embarrassment on behalf of Israel's delayed judicial processes. These findings highlight the Jewish community's strong interiority and how deeply embedded the fear of Antisemitism is within Jewish people's common stock of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The media reportage was dominated by the 'otherness' frame, which subsequently exacerbates fear of Anti-Semitism and creates further disparity in the community in times of crisis. The focus groups also reveal how the Jewish community engages with secular, religious and social media, and which news sources the community select and trust in times of mediatised public crises.

Drawing on the theorising of Couldry (2012) and Cottle (2006), the paper considers the capacity and limitations of survivor-advocates to leverage media power in the contemporary media system. The campaign efforts of survivor-advocates through traditional and social media, and Australian and Israeli politicians lobbying in mainstream press, triggered enormous support from the wider Australian and Israeli communities. Findings reveal the significant power of media representations,

and how Jewish institutional child sexual abuse is framed by media outlets within the Australian media landscape, and the consequential impacts on the Australian Jewish community.

**Key Words**

Religious media, child sexual abuse, community, Judaism, mediatised public crisis

# **An increasingly (in)visible religion? A longitudinal analysis of the Italian news coverage of the Catholic Church from 2005 to 2021**

## **Authors**

Prof. Rita Marchetti - University of Perugia

Dr. Susanna Pagiotti - University of Perugia

## **Abstract**

The issue of the visibility of religion in the public sphere seems to be more topical than ever. The historical moment we are experiencing - characterized by populist pressures, the Covid-19 crisis, as well as the Russia-Ukraine war – with the increasing of the sense of uncertainty give further oxygen to the debate, reinvigorating the public role of religion in our societies.

In this regard, the academic community has for some years hypothesized a "new visibility" of religion (Hjelm 2015), so that a relevant role in the "publicization of religion" is played by the media (Herbert 2011, 2020). A key concept is in fact that of the mediatization of religion (Hjarvard 2008, 2012), according to which religion is increasingly subsumed into a media logic (Altheide, Snow 1979). However, while the public visibility of religion in the media has recently become a topic of great interest at international level (Knott et al. 2013; Lövheim, Lindermann 2015), in Italy the literature on this topic is quite scarce. Only a few studies consider the Italian case comparing it with other national contexts, but mostly on specific issues at the center of the debate (Lövheim 2019). Italy may be of particular interest due to the central role played by the Catholic Church, which, despite the changed socio-political context and the transformations of the media system, does not seem to have lost its capacity to intervene publicly.

The present study therefore intends to fill this gap through a longitudinal analysis of the coverage of the Catholic Church on the main Italian print newspapers in the last 17 years (2005 – 2021). To this aim, we have analyzed all the articles published by four of the main Italian newspapers, selected by diffusion and different political orientation (*Il Corriere della Sera, la Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Giornale*) which contained at least one of a list of keywords related to the Catholic Church. In total, 202,788 articles were collected and analyzed through a content analysis (by QDA Miner and Wordstat tools). The findings will be read and interpreted in light of the more general political, social, and media changes that have occurred over the considered period and the transformations in the Catholic Church communication strategy.

Results show that in Italy we cannot speak of a greater visibility of religion, in particular of the Catholic Church today in print press than in the past, nor of a uniformity with respect to the way in which is spoken about it. The Catholic Church continues to have a stand in the public debate but in a different way both in terms of issues on which it intervenes (1) and on religious actors who are called to participate in the debate (2).



The study made possible to establish how print newspapers cover the Catholic Church, and how it has changed in Italy over the years.

**Key Words**

Religion; Catholic Church; News coverage; Italy

# The linear path to marginalization of Christianity in media coverage

## Authors

Prof. Arne H. Krumsvik - Kristiania University College

## Abstract

In this analysis of news media's presentation of Christianity, I will, with mediation as a theoretical perspective, first present literature contributions on the relationship between the media and religion, and show how this development provides a basis for a hypothesis that Christianity as a religion is becoming less visible. Empirical findings from Norwegian online media over the past ten years strengthen this hypothesis

In analyzes of editorial prioritization, the extent of media coverage has traditionally been used to find answers to which topics the media regard as more or less important, usually measured as column meters in the newspapers. In the digital age, this makes less sense, and it has become common to measure frequency in the form of the number of articles with a specific content. It will therefore be the unit of analysis in this paper, in order to answer the question of how media coverage develops over time.

To test the hypothesis, I have used the term *church* as a proxy for the Christian religion. This is of course not an overview that covers all forms of media coverage, but the relative development over time will be able to give us an indication of whether Christianity is becoming more or less visible in the media.

I obtained data for the last 10 years (2012-2021) from Retriever's database for Norwegian editorial sources (983 sources, online publications, only editorial content), by using a search string with the term *church* in bound and unbound form in the two official versions of Norwegian, Bokmål and Nynorsk: "(kirken OR kirke OR kyrkje OR kyrkja)".

In the 10-year period from 2012 to 2021, there were 199,224 mentions of the church in Norwegian editorial online media. The three largest categories accounted for 53 per cent of this (105,745 articles). The distribution between these shows that religion and outlook on life (48 per cent) is the largest category, followed by culture and entertainment (30 per cent) and politics (22 per cent).

The total mention has declined by 57 per cent in the 10-year period, from 27,990 articles in 2012 to 11,921 in 2021.

The year-on-year decline has an almost linear development.

Of the three largest categories, it is politics that declines the most (-68 per cent) from 2012 to 2021, while religion and outlook on life (-53 per cent) and culture and entertainment (-43 per cent) have a slightly lower decline.

2008 is the peak year for the church search string in the Retriever database, with 36,368 hits in Norwegian online editorial sources. 13 years later, it has thus been reduced to one third.

Based on both literature and empirical evidence, it is possible to argue that we have now reached a phase where the dissemination of religion in a post-Constantine era contributes to Christianity as an institutionalized religion is in the process of developing into a more marginal phenomenon.

**Key Words**

Christianity, Church, Mediation, News Media, Norway.

# **Divine Sanctions, Avowals, Faith and Lived Experiences: An exploration into the Religious Communication Practices of a Tribal Community in Karnataka, Southern India**

## **Authors**

Dr. shamala R - Central University of Tamil Nadu

Dr. Vasupradha Srikrishna - Madras Christian College

## **Abstract**

Traditions and cultures within a religious community are often perpetuated through everyday practices and rituals. One of the key dimensions of religious communication in India is mostly on account of what binds the believers with the gods and religion that they believe in. Deity's sanctions, sometimes acclamations are often a norm in decision-making in this tribal community of Beda Nayakas, mediated through religious practices and rituals. Besides divine sanctions in critical decision making, there is a layer of faith and lived experience built into this research through ethnographic and autoethnographic insights.

There is also media mediation of religious communication, which has occupied the attention of scholars (Cohen 2012, Das 2022 & Diez Bosch, M.2021). However Beda Nayakas are non-existent in this framework, invisible to the masses yet thriving within their own micro-spaces. The culture of deity and religious worshipping in different ways and means in different religions is passed on from generation to generation as a part of an inherited culture by the Indian communities (Rowkith.S and Bhagwan R, 2020). While such narratives form a rich part of religious communication, indigenous tribal practices, especially stemming from academicians who come from a tribal lineage, has been a rarity. This work aspires to document the undocumented.

There is also a bonding between the believers in tribal communities and their deities that have built unique communication practices, often not known in academic zones nor in religious communication literature. The interpersonal relationship with the Deity, is worth acknowledging, especially the practice of finding answers to the future constitutes the rituals and their communication contests, particularly non-verbal communication through rituals. The ritual practices are communicative in nature which binds the members ready for the ritualized inter relationship (Chistyakov, Denis & Chistyakova, Olga. 2020). The tribal rituals are in particular unique and have to be studied from a communication perspective as rituals are in more than a way, means of communication and its ethnicity can enable communities towards social integration.

This study particularly focuses on the communication practices while performing rituals among the tribal community members of the Beda Nayaka (Valmiki) community in Karnataka in Southern India, South Asia. They worship Lord Kasthurai Ranganath, an incarnation of Lord Maha Vishnu. The members of this tribal community depend on their deity to seek answers about major life

decisions like marriage, harvest, careers etc., besides everyday routines such as consultations with doctors and business decisions which are informed through the non verbal forms of communication. The first author, being a member of the Beda Nayaka tribal community, is living her experiences and interpreting them whenever she has to be a part of the rituals in her community temple. This research uses an ethnographic approach, embedding an auto-ethnographic approach within, to examine and map the communication practices of the Beda Nayak tribal community

**Key Words**

Key terms: Beda Nayak tribe, religious rituals, Communication practices.

# **Continuity and Change in the Attitudes of American Jews and Evangelicals toward Israel**

## **Authors**

Prof. Eytan Gilboa - Bar Ilan University

Dr. Yael Bloch-Elkon - Bar Ilan University

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the religious factor in American public opinion towards a foreign country. As a case study, it uses the attitudes of Jews and Evangelicals in the US towards Israel. Traditionally, these religious groups have held favorable views of Israel. Yet, this paper found that in recent years the basic trends have changed and support for Israel has been eroded, especially among Democrats, liberals, the less orthodox and young adults.

Historically, American Jews have developed a strong attachment to Israel. Recently however, researchers have developed the "distancing hypothesis" to describe deteriorating relations between the two largest Jewish communities in the world. It says that Jews are increasingly distancing themselves from Israel socially, culturally, ethnically, and emotionally, and they do not consider Israel any longer as a significant part of their Jewish identity.

The attitudes of Evangelicals toward Israel were shaped by a theological approach known as "premillennial dispensationalism," an interpretation of biblical prophecies that views the restoration of a Jewish state in the ancient land of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital as a required condition for the resurrection of Jesus. In the last decades, Evangelicals have become strong supporters of Israel. Yet, scholars have found erosion also in their attitudes, especially among the less faithful and young adults.

This study presents long-term trends based on the collection, integration, and analysis of data from public opinion surveys conducted in the US from 2000 to 2022 by polling agencies including the Gallup Poll and the Pew Research Centre, Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and the Ruderman Family Foundation, university research centers such as The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandies University, and Evangelical organizations such as the LifeWay Research and the Springtide Research Institute.

The study assumes that opinions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may have influenced the distribution of attitudes toward Israel. Therefore, we examined both views of Israel including feelings, attachment, and care; as well as opinions on various issues of the conflict including feelings toward the Palestinians, sympathies for the two sides and support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. We also examined the distribution of opinions across various socio-demographic variables including age, political orientation, gender, religious affiliation, education, and income.

Both Jews and Evangelicals are still strongly supporting Israel, and the figures for the two religious groups are higher than those of the general public. Compared to the beginning of the century, however, the trends reveal erosion among certain groups, mostly young adults, and in certain issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, primarily in sympathies and support for a Palestinian state. The two religious groups suffer from decline in affiliation and religious practices. Relations between religion and state in Israel, Netanyahu's support for Republicans and his policies toward the Palestinians alienated many American Jews, the majority of whom are liberals and democrats, but at same time they increased his popularity among Evangelicals who are conservative and mostly Republicans.

**Key Words**

Public Opinion, Surveys, Jews, Evangelicals, Distancing Hypothesis, Denominations, Israel

# Religious Storytelling in the Service of the Deity and the Devotee: An Exploration of Śrīmad Bhāgavata Kathā and its Socio-Cultural Significance for Indian Society

## Authors

Ms. Ujjaini Chakrabarty - Tezpur University

## Abstract

Oral performance of religious narratives has been a characteristic feature of Indic religions. The belief in the salvific power of the oral sacred word gave rise to *Kathā*, that is, the oral performance of religious narratives, that gradually gained ritual significance and became a conspicuous feature of devotional Hinduism. The oral performance of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Kathā*, based on the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, one of the most influential texts in Hinduism, is one such event, which is integral to the understanding of the inter-relationship between religion, faith, culture, art and society in India, and the changes that have continually occurred in the socio-cultural milieu of our country. The Bhāgavata Kathā 'travelled' with itinerant storytellers and over the course of time, penetrated into the socio-cultural fabric of India, turning this oral event into a discursive space which served multiple purposes. For more than a millennium, the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Kathā* has enjoyed unparalleled popularity due to its content and the simplicity of the spiritual practices it preaches. Since the stories of the Bhāgavata were primarily meant as an instruction manual of spiritual, philosophical, moral as well as social significance, the *Bhāgavata Kathā* was also used as a medium to engage with the masses. At least from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the medieval saint-reformers modeled their religious practices on the lessons derived from the Bhāgavata; the marginalised sections of the society were the primary beneficiaries of the Bhāgavata Kathā which was aimed at relieving people of the observance of arduous rituals, instruct people on Dharma and appropriate modes of social behaviour and make Vedic knowledge accessible to all. Bhāgavata Kathā has itself also undergone many changes since its inception to incorporate the more popular folk and regional performative traditions, without, however, compromising on its essence. In the present times, Bhāgavata Kathā has become a connecting link between the diaspora communities and their culture. With the advent of new media, exponents of the Bhāgavata Kathā have also adopted digital technologies to merge the 'online' features of connectivity with 'offline' features of traditional religion, including belief, rituals, discourses, etc., to contextualise ancient wisdom of the rishis to suit modern needs. However, while folk narratives and its performances have been the subject of much research, the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Kathā*, though more widespread in reach and frequency, has not received much scholarly attention vis-à-vis its textual version. This is a research gap that needs to be filled.

The present paper, based on the findings of field study, thus aims to study the significance of Śrīmad Bhāgavata Kathā in the socio-cultural sphere of Indian society, and its role in shaping the landscape of belief which is a hallmark of Indian culture. The adoption of technology by the exponents of the Bhāgavata Kathā alongside its oral performance provides further scope for the



exploration of mass media's role in re-inventing, sustaining and reinforcing the belief of faith communities in their religious traditions, in spite of being separated by spatio-temporal boundaries.

### **Key Words**

Oral tradition, Bhāgavata Kathā, Religious Media, Faith, Discursive

## **What would Mary Magdalene's Tik Tok account look like? The analysis of Catholic women profiles**

### **Authors**

Dr. Veronica Israel Turim - Ramon Llull University

Ms. Valentina Laferrara - Ramon Llull University

### **Abstract**

Social Media Influencers (SMIs) are new figures that are emerging in the online sphere (Fernández Gómez et al., 2018; Pérez-Curiel and Limón Naharro, 2019), whose leadership does not come from traditional institutions, but from algorithmic authority (Campbell, 2020). They are characterized by having a relevant role in a network (social media platform), being the creators of engaging content, and impersonating a set of values, competencies, skills, and beliefs (Tanase et al., 2018). They are considered more accessible among their followers and enjoy more credibility than celebrities (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). They influence the opinions and even the behavior of their followers (Freberg et. al., 2011).

Several scholars have conceptualized how new online media enables users to enact and express their religious identities, and acquire these new kinds of authority (Campbell, 2012, 2020; Hutchings, 2014; Lövheim and Lundmark, 2019). Among these new voices, we can find those of religious women. Historically, women have been excluded from leadership positions in the most diverse fields (Connell, 1987; Carli and Eagly, 2002; Painter-Morland, 2011; Kubu, 2017; Madsen and Andrade, 2018), and the religious sphere is not presented as the exception (Cuceu, 2011).

COVID-19 accelerated the digitization of religion in many religious groups and organizations (Kühle and Larsen, 2021), putting the shift from offline to online religion at the center of academic research (Foley, 2021; Larsen et al. 2021a, 2021b; Tudor et al., 2021). With the advent of SMIs, online religion (Helland, 2018) can open an opportunity for a new more feminine religious leadership. Studies on the role of women in religious leadership online are scarce, the reason why this research focuses on the use of these platforms by Catholic women and the consequent changes perceived in their religious community.

This study conducts four in-depth qualitative interviews with female influencers from four different Spanish-speaking countries: Argentina, Colombia, Spain, and Mexico. The interviews were conducted between January and March 2021. After their transcription, we identified the topics discussed and analyzed the material for conceptual similarities in the dynamics of social network use. The off-the-record information provided by the interviewees has not been transcribed, but it

did contribute to the analysis of this research. The results show that Catholic women use this platform mainly to transmit the message of Jesus and to break stereotypes about the Catholic religious community. They also perceive that their relevance on these platforms has contributed to increasing the visibility of women within their religious community.

**Key Words**

Online religion, women in religion, religious influencers, social media influencers.

# **Mediating Religion through Mobile Phone: A Study of worshipping through mobile phone in Hindu religion in India**

## **Authors**

Dr. Krishna Sankar Kusuma - Jamia Millia Islamia

## **Abstract**

Internet technologies have reduced the distance between people and places. The internet and mobile phones gainfully rose to a must have device for every day communication. The use of mobile phones for the purpose to religious worship and archive gaining momentum over the years. Due to covid-19 it has made the religious institutions to innovate and offer similar experiential worship to the devotees. The practice of keeping the images of gods in digital places have clues from the physical places like calendars, framed photographs and idols made with variety of metal, rock and earth. But the digital has given an opportunity to keep the most beloved god or goddesses as screen saver, live viewing of *Aarti* (worship prayers), offering donations etc.

The study aimed to explore how the internet and mobile phone infrastructures have reshaped the idea of worship, which includes every prayers, sacred offerings, and keeping the memoir's of god and goddesses in Hindu religion in India. The study identified the most popular sects of Hindu temples includes Tirupati Balaji, Vaishnav devi temple, Shree Jagannath Temple. The three temples has grand history and situated in three different part of India.

The study also incorporated the survey of devotees and three focus group discussions (FDG)s for understanding the mediating the devotion through mobile phones. The mobile phone practices of sacred and devotional activities will also be studied. Not the least the study also focus on the political economy of the digital mode of emerging virtual god market in India. The emergence of mobile phones have brought god to your more nearer than anything else. Unlike television where it has to be fixed in the drawing room, mobile phones can be with you right in your palm for ready access any where and any time. During Covid it has great relief that mobile could act as a catalyst to make everyone part of continuing the Astha (devotion) both individually as well as for family. The latest experiments to add to the existing are augmented and virtual reality experiences offered by various temples for those who may not be able to travel. The study will also finally address the issues of digital divide.

## **Key Words**

mobile religion, digital religion, mediated worship, Hindu religion, god online

# Interactive video and anonymous divination: religious culture in streaming media

## Authors

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## Abstract

Interactive videos are becoming increasingly attractive as part of popular content on many streaming media sites, such as YouTube. However, the use of interactive videos in religious culture and the social shifts it has caused have yet to be thoroughly examined. As Han and Li's (2022) research has shown, the use of streaming media in specific areas, such as divination and tarot, has also greatly expanded pre-existing patterns of religious culture consumption and attracted behavioral change for them. People ask a specific question, use interaction to choose the results of the divination, use algorithms to make divination draws, and try to use the answers given by video to advise them on their lives, especially in the field of tarot. This paper presents a descriptive analysis of video divination and its users' behavior, including individual subjectivity, social relationships in interactions, and meaning interpretation, by examining the intersections between the streaming media site "YouTube" and users in the field of divination. Through in-depth interviews with audiences of video, 20 texts were returned and analyzed in terms of their textural and interactive orientations to examine the processes underlying how interactive videos are influencing the consumption of specialty divination in pop culture. Findings suggest the importance of individual interpretation in this process, from routine creation of ritual sense in the divination to the construction of affective spaces online, and the establishment of behavior cycles from online to offline, which all underpin personal feelings and interactive experiences.

For further explanation, we also conducted 15 semi-structured interviews for around 20 hours in total, based on the standard of theoretical sampling considering usage frequency, degree of participation, and self-reported affection. The interviewees were born between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, most of whom have been engaging with interactive video divination for 3 months or more. The interviews have been conducted through instant messaging, face-to-face talking, and telephone.

This study found that the majority of participants did not have long-standing religious beliefs or regularly participate in religious rituals; instead, some of them had only learned part of the divination process from social media. However, participants were still willing to use the results of mass-interpreted divination as advice for their personal lives, and they felt that videos were more objective than traditional consumer models. Because interactive video does not favor one result over another because of the user's personal feelings but rather gives more direct answers to each question, this study found that interactive video divination reflects to some extent participants' distrust of offline social relationships, with privacy, scandal, and personal experiences being the main reasons why participants did not want to meet face-to-face with diviners. That distrust of real

social and personal relationships was the reason for choosing anonymous divination or even interactive video divination in the first place.

**Key Words**

Streaming Media, Anonymous Divination, Interactive video

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

## Authors

Dr. Hananel Rosenberg - Ariel University

Mrs. Kalia Vogelmann-Natan - Northwestern University

## Abstract

Religious communities' engagement with new media vis-à-vis their theological assessment of these technologies offer interesting insights concerning said groups (Blondheim & Rosenberg, 2017). Yet, a lot can also be learned about the nature of groups from their practices of rejection and resistance to media (Syvertsen, 2017; Augustin et al., 2020). While some studies looked at religion-based media resistance and/or cultivation, as with the Amish and ultra-Orthodox Jews (Neriya-Ben Shahr, 2017; Campbell & Golan, 2011;), not many focused on the younger generation. This is indeed the case with 'Hilltop Youth', a group of at-risk Jewish religious youngsters in Israel living in illegal outposts throughout Judea and Samaria, who ascribe to an extremist ideology unsanctioned by the state or their Religious Zionist parent-communities (Friedman & Billig, 2018; Borstein, 2004). Despite being "mobile natives" and growing up in religious communities with more liberal views on media use (Zhitomirsky-Geffet & Blau, 2016; Ophir et al., 2020), this group of rebellious teens practice smartphone and social network rejection. The hilltop youth's unique religious, sociological, and ideological characteristics differentiate them from other religious communities previously studied in relation to digital culture, marking them as an interesting case study regarding the tension between technological adoption and resistance, legitimacy and illegitimacy, and conservatism versus modernity.

Based on 16 in-depth semi-structured interviews with young men and women (ages 18-25), who as teens lived on the hilltops for several years, the 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 are presented. First, technological resistance is the accepted social norm on the hilltops. Despite owning smartphones beforehand, once the interviewees arrived at the hilltops they would switch over to a dumbphone. Second, the hilltop youth's motives for media resistance are based on religious practice (e.g., modesty, dissociation from Western culture and content), wanting a slower-paced lifestyle, connection to nature (without media distraction or interference), social reformation (severing old social ties in favor of forming the hilltop community), and valuing productivity (viewing leisurely media consumption as negative). 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 findings show a basic negative attitude towards the use of new media, a rejection that is essentially part of the definition of the hilltop youth's reimagined identity as a religious community that is a counterculture to religious and social sectors in Israel. The hilltop youth's media resistance is not free of paradoxical tensions, which include the individual and community, dominant- versus counterculture, the transience-permanence and location-dislocation axes, and connection-disconnection. Yet, it seems that the media practices of religious communities' younger counterparts reveal unconventional, diverging experiences and dynamics than those of adult members or institutional levels. 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.

**Key Words**

hilltop youth, media resistance, religious communities, new media, counterculture

# Countering The Bengali traditional Rituals in Facebook through Islam in Bangladesh

## Authors

Mr. Md Mahbubul Haque Bhuiyan - University of Houston

Ms. Nishat Parvez - University of Oregon

## Abstract

This research examined how traditional Bengali rituals were attacked with religious arguments on Facebook in Bangladesh. To investigate that phenomenon, a combination of textual and visual analysis was used along with Framing theory as the theoretical framework. The primary findings from this study suggest that traditional Bengali rituals were mainly attacked in the name of Hindutva and western culture. Furthermore, people celebrating the customs and festivals are tagged as atheists, enemies of Islam, and confronted with other hate speeches.

Though the fourth-largest Islamic country by population (World Population Review, 2022), Bangladesh is historically considered a moderate county where people from different identities can observe their religion as well as the traditional rituals that do not have any religious identity. Religious identity did not hamper rituals or freedom in daily life.

However, liberty in individual and collective life has been scrutinized for the last decade. Writers were killed, blaming atheists, worship places of religions were attacked, and people were criticized for not rigorously observing Islam. Traditional Bengali rituals were also criticized in social media, especially on Facebook, as Hinduism and western culture by Islamic extremism in recent times.

Social media has an impactful role in this shift. Traditionally, public spheres like tea shops and occasional waz mahfil (gathering for religious speeches) were the places to criticize the other religion and traditional rituals. However, the easy access to social media made this criticizing phenomenon a daily culture, and it can be assumed the amount of criticism is multiplied now. It is generating more fear in the progressive portion of people. It is significant to reference that according to the global data firm, Statista Bangladesh is the 10th largest country in terms of Facebook audience size. By December 31, 2022, it was among the top three contributors in monthly active users.

This study is an ongoing investigation and applies textual and visual analysis that involves collecting information about texts and images from Facebook and recognizing repeating words, categories, topics, themes, and explanations. Using these two methods, we interpret texts, films, graffiti, and documents to recognize the reality contained in the texts. In the current study, both methods are applied to identify how religious discourses are used on Facebook against Bengali rituals and liberal people, and the following case was taken purposively to investigate.

Pahela Baisakh (Bengali new year) is one of the largest and oldest festivals in Bangladesh, which was used to observe by the people of Bangladesh regardless of caste and religion. But in recent



years, it seems the ultra-conservative portion of Muslims has attacked it, and it is mainly seen on Facebook. This study sampled the Pahela Baisakh celebration from 2018-2022. A total of 500 Facebook statuses and comments were taken from three influential Facebook groups. Moreover, 30 images were collected for visual analysis. These data were collected purposively, which countered rituals using Islam.

Using Framing theory as a framework. The primary result found two major themes in the collected data. These are,

1. Pahela Baisakh is Hindutva and western culture and against the Islam
2. People who celebrate Pahela Baisakh are atheists, and it shouldn't be tolerable

These two main themes suggest that religious framing was used against recognized rituals on Facebook in Bangladesh. They were mainly defined into two broad categories; one is labelling them as Hinduism and western culture. Another is, devaluated for not following the Islamic and Bengali cultures. Alongside religion, patriarchy, dominant hegemony, and stereotypes were applied to devaluate progressive people's societal positions.

After the country's independence in 1971, Bangladesh was considered moderate in culture and tradition until the last decade. However, the recent phenomenon has shown that religious extremism and the pressure to observe pure Islam is increasing in the country. This is more rigorous in the digital sphere. It seems social media, especially Facebook, multiplies the discourse against the progressive activities in Bangladesh. People were labelled atheist, Indian, and Western identities damagingly.

To conclude, othering progressive people and traditional customs and tagging with western and Indian culture are familiar in Bangladeshi culture; nonetheless, it wasn't in large numbers in the past. However, the augmented space in social media multiplies the attacks on culture and liberal people in recent times.

### **Key Words**

Bengali, rituals, Islam, extremism, attack, digital, sphere, redoubled.

# **SPIRITUAL COMPETENCE AND DIALOGUE Analysis grid for learning to be in a digital world and climate change**

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## **Abstract**

The future of humanity in relation to the development of digital technology and climate change in the field of communication is surely a priority issue for reflection in contemporary societies.

Research in this field is still much needed. Combining efforts for a digital future that generates a human balance with benefits for the environment, in many contexts, is still an illusion. To face these challenges, the main challenge for communicators and other professionals is not only to continue advancing in the digitization of communication processes, but also to work in parallel on proposals that facilitate *learning to be* in a digital world.

For this reason, our research proposes an Analysis Grid that facilitates the understanding and subsequent application of strategies that strengthen spiritual competence in the actors of the communication process, whether religious or not. It is about the theoretical and practical development of said competence that has its starting point in the communicative competence (dialogue).

From this perspective, our initial questions can be formulated as follows: Among the competencies that producers and receivers of a communication process should have, what role does spiritual competence play? How should it be understood and applied from the perspective of strengthening *learning to be* in a digital world and climate change?

To address these questions, we start from the main results of our doctoral and postdoctoral research on the communicative dimension (dialogue and cognitive decentering) in order to now delve into the anthropological-philosophical dimension where aspects related to spirituality can be addressed.

Theoretically, we start from the contributions of research from different geographical contexts and currents of communication. Likewise, the Analysis Grid is the result of our experimental research with inductive/qualitative support, carried out both in Bolivia and in Belgium.

As a general conclusion, it has been observed that an Analysis Grid – which can be adapted and completed according to the context and specific needs – would facilitate the understanding and subsequent application of spiritual competence in religious or non-religious communication processes. Thus, it could contribute to *learning to be* in a digital world affected by the environmental crisis.

## **Key Words**

spiritual competence, dialogue, analysis grid, learning to be, digital world.

# Life and dead experiences through digital simulations narratives

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## Abstract

If your actions had no consequences, what would you like to do in your life?

Think about it. All options are valid and possible. Would you swim with sharks, to have that colossus a few meters away from you, knowing that if it opens its mouth wide enough it could swallow you? Would you revive a deceased relative to really say goodbye? If there was nothing to stop you, what would you like to do?

With Virtual Reality you can achieve from simple recreations such as falling from a parachute, already with more than 500 thousand videos on Youtube, or more extreme, science-fictional possibilities such as what happened in early 2021 when the firm Vive Studios recreated Kang Na-Yeon, a seven-year-old girl who had died four years earlier, so that she could interact with her mother.

As seen in the documentary "Meeting You," the mother gave them all the audiovisual material that can be collected in the Instagram era so they could reconstruct celebrations such as the girl's birthday to the places they normally went to, such as a park in South Korea. With this, they tracked the shape of physical expressions, voice modulations and movements so that when using the reality headsets the mother could interact with her virtualized daughter.

Between tears and talks directed to the daughter's avatar, the mother demonstrates that, beyond what I consider an unethical voyeurism, it is impressive the break in reality that can be generated with this new medium and how technology allows us to go through our fears in safe spaces in such an immersive way that the brain does not notice the emotional difference between a virtual environment and a real one, as it happens in a dream.

The recreation of the girl cost only \$42,000 and less than a year of work, so digital immortality is now an accessible possibility, which makes us confront that with VR ethical implications arise that it is essential to address in another installment.

Let's visualize all that this support allows for an author who creates immersive fiction stories or the new possibilities of a commercial brand to link with the customer because, as Ivan Sutherland -the creator of virtual reality glasses- clarified more than half a century ago in *The Ultimate Display* (1962): "A screen connected to a digital computer gives us the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with concepts not possible in the physical world. It is a viewfinder for looking into a world of wonders." And the advances in recent years have been dizzying.

The possibilities of this theme, the idea that we inhabit a simulated reality (Bostrom "Are you living in a computer simulation", 2002) and the opportunities to create simulated experiences that

enhance or modify our reality expand the capabilities of virtual realities and the way we perceive the idea of reality and how to understand or construct a supra-reality.

J. G. Ballard in the foreword to his novel Crash stated: "I feel that the balance between fiction and reality has shifted significantly in the last decade. Increasingly their roles are reversed. [...] It is now less and less necessary for the writer to invent the fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality."

How to invent reality? Or more precisely, how to generate elements that allow us to manipulate the user so that they replace their experience of liveliness with simulated experiences?

Today, with the metaverse and extended realities, people are linking the two worlds, the real and the virtual, in a univocal reality. But it is still not enough, the goal is to go beyond social collaboration or virtual reality, those visual discourses that seek interactivity and immersion but do not achieve suspension of disbelief. The current mechanisms have not nor aim to deform the philosophical principle that reality is a construct, in addition to the fact that the current human is in search of new digital experiences.

In In this presentation I will address the idea of experience that is formed in the human mind, the characteristics of virtual simulations and the narrative possibilities to recreate death experiences so we can understand the elements that lead to this replacement, its implications and needs in an increasingly near future. As well as the importance of shaping simulations, from the new digital narratives, in order to achieve the immersion that allows people to replace realities and supra realities.

### **Key Words**

Simulations

Virtual Realities

Beyond dead experiences

Narratives

Supra realities

Reality