

Religious Minorities and the Media –

Methods, concepts, theories, and
new research avenues

Book of Abstracts



Content

KEYNOTE I	2
KEYNOTE II	2
OPENING ADDRESS AND PROJECT PRESENTATION	3
PANEL I: COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS	4
PANEL II: MAKING THE MEDIA	6
PANEL III: GENDER	8
PANEL IV: PRACTICES	10
PANEL V: RITUAL	12
PANEL VI: MAKING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES	14
PANEL VII: PRINT MEDIA	16
PANEL VIII: MIRACLES AND SUPERNATURALS	18
PANEL IX: LITERACY	20
PANEL X: AUTHORITY	23

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Keynotes

Keynote I

Friday, 16:00-17:30

Mia Lövheim

Uppsala University

Religious identity in digital media: from disembodied surfers to emergent and co-affected performances of self

Abstract:

Mediatization, or the increasing mediation of self-representation and social interaction in contemporary society, challenges previous understandings of the role of religion in the formation of individual and collective identity. Identity as a performance of self across platforms of mediated social interaction, enabled and structured through a matrix of social, technological, economic and political factors, poses new questions to religious individuals, communities and researchers alike. These questions invoke fundamental theoretical issues regarding individual agency and social and discursive structures, public and private spheres, and authenticity and credibility. This lecture will present how approaches to religious identity in digital media have developed since the initiation of this research field in the late 1990s until today, using gender as a lens to reveal changes and continuities in research.

Keynote II

Saturday, 11:00-12:30

Christoph Günther

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

Creating and Challenging Identities through Audiovisuality

Abstract:

Social identities are resources that people can use to make sense of reality. They provide shortcuts to potentially complex systems of beliefs, normative appeals, practices and orientations, as they help people understand who they are, how they are related to others and how they should behave in certain situations. Based on an ongoing research project on Jihadi-Salafi media, my paper uses the concept of audiovisuality to explore the ways in which religious actors seek to create, coordinate and control a shared sense of 'we-ness' through deploying 'fortified' and essentialized categories of social identity as an epistemic and ontological

framework. Taking the destruction of sites of worship by the so-called Islamic State as an example, I will further explore the role of audiovisual media in attempts to shatter social identities of other religious groups. Finally, this paper will show that the power of images and sounds manifesting propositions of social identity is by no means self-evident, but rather contested and thus can be broken by numerous actors.

Thursday, 25.03.2021

Opening address and project presentation

11:30-13:30

***Lukasz Fajfer, Dorota Hall, Marta Kołodziejska and Kerstin Radde-Antweiler**
University of Bremen and Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences*

Religious Media Settlers in Times of Deep Mediatization

Abstract:

Minority Christian Churches have long used religious media to construct the religious identity of their communities and position themselves towards discourses produced by other religious and non-religious actors. Nowadays, the Churches are confronted with trends like datafication and an increasing connectivity of and through digital media; they work in times of deep mediatization (Hepp et al. 2018). As presupposed by many studies that follow Castells (2000; 2012), the differentiation, connectivity, and omnipresence of digital media have tremendous influences on classic organizations such as Churches. Can we assume that religious organizations adjust to these media developments or can we also observe processes of communicative demarcation or creative shaping strategies? We aim to answer this question by discussing findings from our research project which focused on two religious minority groups (the Orthodox Churches and the Seventh-Day Adventist Churches) in Poland – a country with a homogenous religious structure – and in Great Britain with a heterogeneous religious landscape. We will discuss how both Churches, on the level of media structures and productions, as well as media narratives, position themselves with regards to their political and religious environment. We will highlight the typical strategies involved in this process, and argue that instead of being media pioneers, the Churches focus on maintaining the structures, and ensure unity and stability of their organizations - which makes them “media settlers”. In light of the findings, we will discuss the possible limitations of the deep mediatization concept and ways to address them.

Panel I: Community and Social Networks

15:00-16:30

Xenia Zeiler

University of Helsinki

Reinforcing Identity and Community Ties through Social Media Photo and Selfie Sharing in Indian Festival Cultures

Abstract:

Durgāpūjā elaborate celebrations became popular community events with strong identity reinforcing elements already by the 19th century. But another massive transformation occurred in the 20th century, with emerging digital media practices. Today, especially social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and smartphone apps such as WhatsApp are set factors in both, organizing and celebrating practices. This paper highlights the social media practices of Durgāpūjā visitors and their culturally productive potential, on both the individual and collective levels. For this, it studies the WhatsApp and Facebook practices of two geographically distant celebrations' visitors, namely of Mumbai's Sarbojanin Durgapuja in India and Helsinki's Sarbajanin Durgapuja in Finland. Reflecting on the actor-centered deep mediatization as defined by Couldry and Hepp (2016) the paper asks how the visitor's communication practices related to Durgāpūjā in urban centers in both India and Finland look like and how identity forming and reinforcing social networking may change with changing media environments. It particularly considers how social media practices of the festival visitors may contribute to construct, interpret and (re-)define, on the one hand, or consolidate, on the other hand, the festival's community and identity forming, bonding, social aspects. What are the major emerging themes in digital communication practices of the festival visitors, i.e. which topics dominate their social media conversations and smartphone group communication? What are main formats of sharing, and why? What is the role of photos, and more specifically, selfies, in these practices?

Nakhi Mishol-Shauli

University of Haifa

Negotiations and Representations of Religious Identity by Religious Enclave Members on Online Social Networks

Abstract:

Scholars highlight religious enclave leaders' efforts to uphold boundaries in their respective local communities, and maintain a consistent system of traditional, binding, role-identities. In

contrast, Online Social Networks (OSNs) are documented as promoting individual agency and detachment from local congregations. Accordingly, enclave leaders are often wary of followers accessing OSNs' unsupervised information. Nevertheless, some reluctantly allow members to use OSNs for pragmatic reasons such as livelihood. Through a research design that involves thematic and discourse analysis of participant observations and interviews, this study focuses on identity negotiations and representations in OSN groups catering for members of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish (Haredi) sector. Recent surveys indicate that approximately a third of Haredi Israelis use OSNs (WhatsApp groups being the most popular platform). Thus, we studied online Haredi groups as a new arena for ongoing identity discourse among mainstream members of a bounded religious community. Findings unveiled new peer associations emerging from Haredi OSN groups that connect geographically detached members. This empowers grassroots members as they create social capital through these newfound networks within the enclave. Haredi OSN Groups were also found to promote identification with non-Haredi Israeli collectives, namely nationalist groups, despite vehement portrayals of Haredi separatism that are reflected in mass media, especially since the COVID-19 outbreak. This study highlights how technological features converge with participants' culture to create new contexts and sphericules that voice and promote change while maintaining affinity to the bounded religious community and identity.

Radosław Sierocki

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn

Religion, Internet and Social Networks Analysis

Abstract:

Social bonds, relationships, contacts have always been important elements shaping religious identity, community and belonging. Let us recall e.g. Peter Berger's conception of the structure of plausibility. Plausibility, credibility, and persistence of reality are supported by personal beliefs and strong, frequent relationships with others, who share those beliefs. In traditional societies, the strength of the structure of plausibility comes from belonging to the local community (parish) and believing is not negotiable. In post-traditional society believing and belonging are the matters of choice. More and more essential for continuity of structure of plausibility are social interactions and communication mediated in the new media. Internet replaces the local community in looking for the answers and other people. The goal of the paper is to look at the social bonds shaping religion and religious identities in the new media through the social network analysis approach. In SNA social structure is perceived as the network of social relations and the central elements are nodes (e.g. profiles, sites) and the edges (Facebook relations, comments, sharing, likes, following, etc.) that connect nodes. The new media are interesting as factors of changing the way we understand social relations, and as a source of

relational data - data in which qualities of objects (e.g. social media users) are derivatives of the qualities of the whole network.

SNA may be useful in the study of mediatized religion especially in the context of individualization, that is, in the context of choosing what one believes in but also with whom.

Panel II: Making the Media

15:00-16:30

Alireza Taherifard

University of Kassel

Revolutionary Insta-spaces: the online jihad of Iranian clergies

Abstract:

There are a large number of Instagram images representing Iranian religious places and figures. Many of the space-images are produced by formal, state-run religious organizations and advocates. This paper intends to show how the state-run religious space in Iran is visually constructed on Instagram. First, the production of religious content on a western platform will be explained within the ideological signification of 'cyber war'. Next, Instagram images as new functions in regards with the religious space will be investigated. As the main focus, the Instagram page of a pro-state cleric (Ehsan Biazar Tehrani), who administrates one of the prominent shrines in Tehran (Imamzadeh Saleh) will be analyzed. Employing qualitative visual content method based on a performative framework, the types of appearing, positioning, engaging, and transforming acts presented through his images will be investigated. This case covers a number of recent issues, including the tensions relating to the imposed spatial regulations owing to the Corona pandemic, stricken and unprivileged spaces. This analysis demonstrates the desire of the religious space in Iran, introducing itself as revolutionary, for dominating the entirety of social space.

Oren Golan and Michele Martini

University of Haifa and University of Cambridge

Sacred Sites for Fragmented Publics: Legitimizing Catholic Live-streaming and Online Videos for Religious Practice

Abstract:

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an intensification in the use of digital religious platforms. Platforms that engage believers in the face of a coerced retreat from congregational interaction. While videos and live-streaming events are becoming surrogate platforms for

religious movements to connect isolated believers, as well as far-flung publics, it has evoked a strong backlash. Particularly, among conservative and fundamentalist groups that reject the use of these platforms and advocate a full return to face-to-face congregation. Given the intensification of this ongoing struggle, we ask, how do webmasters that operate online devotional platforms legitimize these sites? Research data was gleaned from an investigation of the complete production of a religious channel on Holy Land pilgrimage, ethnographic fieldwork, and interviews conducted with 25 webmasters. Accordingly, we uncovered four interlocking facets of legitimation: scriptural, experiential, journalistic, and ritual. Findings shed light on the workings of institutional religious mediascapes. Religious institutions that forge videos and live-streaming feeds, not only to supplement the religious experience, but also to re-congregate believers around networked centers of worship, particularly in times of crises.

Gladys Ganiel

Queen's University Belfast

Christian Identities and Religion Online during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Ireland: New Opportunities in a Secularising Society?

Abstract:

This paper explores how churches on the island of Ireland moved online in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, analysing the impact of this massive shift in practice on Ireland's Christians. The first part of the paper draws on an island-wide survey of faith leaders conducted in May 2020, which revealed that the percentage of churches offering worship opportunities online increased from 56% to 87% during the pandemic. It also found surprisingly high numbers of viewers of online services, and that 70% of faith leaders anticipated retaining aspects of their online ministries as lockdown restrictions ease. The second part of the paper draws on (ongoing) interviews with 30 faith leaders from a range of Christian denominations, offering in-depth analysis of their perceptions of the strengths and limitations of blended online/in-person approaches in terms of its perceived effectiveness in constructing Christian or congregational identities, evangelisation, and nourishing faith. Preliminary analysis indicates that faith leaders have been surprised and encouraged by the response to 'religion online' during the pandemic, and now see it as an opportunity to expand their reach and influence on a secularising island.

Panel III: Gender

17:00-18:30

Alberta Giorgi and Arianna Mainardi

University of Bergamo and University of Milano-Bicocca

Building a collective intersectional identity: Religion and feminism in the digital environment

Abstract:

Digital media may offer an opportunity to challenge, negotiate and craft specific religious identities. In this contribution, we focus on how religious identity is depicted and reconstructed by an intersectional feminist collective that directly addresses religious difference and how its discourse unfolds in digital environments. The analysis draws on the collective's online activities – more specifically, the blog and the Instagram profile – and interviews with the collective spoke-persons, covering their use of digital tools for activism. The analysis shows the relevance of the generational dimension in the creative appropriation and redefinition of both the digital environment and the feminist and religious discourse. Internet is not a “neutral space” and contemporary feminist studies on the Internet claim for an intersectional online analysis of racialization, gender, sexuality, and class in order to unpack the complexities and the opportunities offered by these new public spaces. In order to contribute to developing this analytical perspective, in this paper we also take a closer look at how the discourse of the collective is framed, articulated, accepted or challenged by its audience and how it is situated in the broader media discourse. By analyzing the mediated discourses and practices opened up by digital tools for intersectional feminist groups and collectives, we argue for a more situated understanding of the resources available to activists for a full formulation of contemporary political subjectivity. Overall, the contribution dialogues with research on religion and gender, feminist movements, digital religions and activism and, social media sphere, by analyzing the complex challenge of including religious difference within an intersectional feminist discourse.

Monise Martinez

University of Coimbra

‘My Body, the Rules of Him’: Media, Female Power and Anti-feminism in the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God

Abstract:

The mediatisation of the Brazilian religious field reached a crucial high point during the 1970s when neo-Pentecostal Churches emerged throughout the country. Considered one of the boosters of this process, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) was also the institution where the rising of women’s groups on leaderships’ positions in its religious media and beyond took place due to this process. The case of Cristiane Cardoso, first-born of UCKG’s founder, illustrates this. At the head of the Godllywood Movement — an initiative conceived as a project towards women aiming to become them ‘exemplary’ —, she achieved visibility in the 2000s, in the aftermath of the increasing relevance of ‘gender issues’ in the Brazilian media field due to a ‘mainstreaming’ process of feminisms. Since those times, which was also marked by the prominence of feminist neoliberal expressions, Cardoso has been promoting a ‘femininity model’ anchored in a self-help aesthetic similar to those ‘postfeminist’ secular ones, towards to support a Christian female ideal. In order to provide a feminist and critical discourse analysis of this ideal, this work will scrutinise the blog posts of the ‘Godllywood Self-help’ last edition — one of the online initiatives bolstered by the movement —, calling attention to the ambiguous relationship of the women ideal endorse by Cardoso with feminisms, and the ambiguities of the mediatisation process to the female power in the analysed context. To this analysis, the strengthening of the Christian conservatism throughout the country the last two decades will be taken into account.

Anna Szwed

Jagiellonian University

A space of their own. Digital media and religious women’s agency

Abstract:

This paper is based on data gathered in the project Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG 2015–2019) that explored the religious subjectivities and values of young adult university students in thirteen different countries around the world, basing on a mixed-method study design. Specifically, the current paper focuses on Muslim students in Turkey and in Israel. On the basis of quantitative survey data, the paper outlines the significant correlations found between internet use for religion-related purposes and the respondents’ degrees of personal religiosity, and frequency of religious practice. On the basis of qualitative data, the paper explores how concerns about the trustworthiness of online content and the

continuing influence of offline religious authorities work to shape and inform the online religious engagements of Turkish and Israeli Muslim respondents. More significantly, the paper discusses the differences between respondents of both groups in their online religious engagements in light of their social positions as minority (Muslims in Israel)/ majority (Muslims in Turkey) groups, and the way these differences relate to their values and affect their religious identities. The presented data can provide a useful reference point for future research into the various manners in which offline forms of religious authority continue to shape and inform the online religious engagements of individuals across different social, cultural, and religious contexts, and the way these engagements affect process of religious identity construction.

Panel IV: Practices

17:00-18:30

Daria Shemetova

MGIMO University

The transformation of religious practices and categories due to the pandemic

Abstract:

The informatization has influenced all the spheres of the society, including religion. The paper discusses the role of the information technologies in the religious processes. The use of information and communication technologies in the matters of religion has increased in 2020 due to the pandemic. Technologies have changed the vision of traditional religious practices. The priests' and the faithful's attitudes towards religious practices online and offline during the pandemic are addressed in the article. The survey, conducted among the Orthodox Christians: priests and the parish, investigates how religious practices online affected the perception of religion and how religious rituals are carried out 'offline' in the post-pandemic period. The author highlights the changes in the mechanism of transferring religious knowledge and in the performing of ceremonies. Based on the results of the survey, the author concludes that the pandemic has contributed to the 'digitalization of religious practices' by modifying religious categories and the forms of interaction in religion matters.

Lisa Kienzl

University of Bremen

Do it yourself!? (Digital) practices in Roman Catholic communities in Austria during Covid-19

Abstract:

During the spread of Covid-19 in 2020, religious communities all over the world were challenged to shift services, gatherings and communication matters in general from an offline to an online environment. In Turkey, the reluctant attitude of Diyanet, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, at the start of the pandemic outbreak in March 2020 evidently revealed the important role of religious authority within this development. However, on a global scale, religious communities responded with high ambivalence. Social distancing and the shift of religious practices to the Internet – in times of resorting to a sense of community in which maintaining personal contacts are essential for many parishioners – often uncovers severe deficiencies. For example, attempts to shift and adapt individual worship services to digital platforms not always work and not all rituals are implemented in ways that are appealing to the needs and values of the respective communities. This paper is exploring different Roman-Catholic communities in Austria focusing on three aspects: First, on the implementation and expansion of (digital) practices, especially on religious holidays. Second, on forms of (online) instructions on how to perform (digital) practices. Third, on the aspect of affordance in this regard. The data set incorporates selected texts and videos from various platforms collected through digital ethnography, ethnographic field notes as well as qualitative interviews.

Velta Skolmeistere

University of Latvia

Church during pandemic: use of social media by different denominations in Latvia

Abstract:

Attending weekly service is a core practice for most of the Christian denominations. Yet, this practice was deeply influenced by restrictions due to the outbreak of Covid-19. This paper aims to understand and compare the approaches of various denominations in Latvia regarding the use of social media in order to maintain a sense of community for parish members, as well as to offer a possibility to take part in a service via broadcast on Facebook or Youtube. The methodology of the paper includes a content analysis of the main social network pages of the denominations, as well as a survey of Church members. The first method serves as a case study and chronological analysis of the adaptation to the new life in the social media ecosystem; whereas the second method gives an insight into how the tools used by the churches were

perceived by their members and how it influences their belonging to a parish, as well as their identity as a believer. The results of the research reveal the various attitudes toward the broadcast of a service in the ways the new situation is communicated and explained to the believers, as well as their reactions to the new order and practices of participation.

Friday, 26.03.2021

Panel V: Ritual

9:00-10:30

Arkaprava Chattopadhyay

Central University of Sikkim

Religious Rituals and Digital Innovations: A Study of the ‘Durga Puja’ 2020, India

Abstract:

Home to a diverse population, India is an unique nation where spiritual catharsis through religious rituals and congregations, is an integral part of the daily life of the people. Thus, in the wake of the global pandemic, there emerged major challenges against implementing the government initiated social distancing norms and upholding the judicial directives against organising such rituals, as the religious sentiments and faith of millions of people had to be negotiated with. But then, post the first phase of the ongoing festive season, it is striking to note that various trends and innovations have emerged through the social shaping of media technology that have somewhat enabled the people to abide by the restrictions and yet achieve their religious goals. To inquire into this, a digital ethnography based methodological approach was adopted focussing on the online innovations of the ‘Durga Puja’ ritual of West Bengal, India, considered to be the largest community-based religious festival in the world, attended by approximately ten million people. It revealed that apart from the prescribed mythological imaginaries of Hinduism being represented through ‘virtual reality’ and ‘augmented reality’ based applications, - online posts in the form of ‘Gifs’ and ‘Memes’ have served as efficient conduits for the mediation of the traditional narratives associated with the five day ritual held between 22nd and 26th October, this year. Furthermore, a sentiment analysis using digital quantification tools indicate that these have ensured that there is religious contentment amongst the people, as is evident from their comments towards the most trending hashtags of relevance such as #DurgaPujo2020, #ShubhoMahalaya, #FBDurgaPujo, #IGDurgaPujo, #DurgaPujoReel, and #PujoReelChallenge, despite being restricted from physically attending the sacred venues adorned by the deities.

Francesco Galofaro

University of Turin

Online ceremonies: a semiotic study on the conflict between liturgical and broadcast grammar

Abstract:

During the Coronavirus lockdown, ordinary and extraordinary religious ceremonies were transmitted by Vatican News YouTube channel. According to Auditel, the Italian Audience measurement society, a million and a half spectators followed the mass celebrated on weekdays by the Pope at 7 o'clock AM; 15 million contacts followed the Palm Sunday Mass; on March 27th, 27 million contacts followed the Urbi et Orbi blessing. This paper will focus on the role of the Italian voice over comment during the live transmission. In particular, we are interested by the commenter's explanations about the different parts of the celebration and their symbolic meaning, considering the differences between the usual liturgy and the variants in relation to the pandemic. The analysis will identify a possible semiotic cause of the internal conflict of the Church between obeying to the restrictions to the ordinary mass and pressing the governments to re-open the churches. This paper is part of the research project NeMoSanctI (New Models of Sanctity in Italy (1960s-2000s) – A Semiotic Analysis of Norms, Causes of Saints, Hagiography, and Narratives), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 757314).

Ann-Katrin Gässlein

University of Lucerne

“Communion without community?” – Lockdown-time as a catalyst for digital mediation of Catholic liturgical co-presence and alternative forms of worship

Abstract:

Supraregional Sunday church services broadcast on public TV and individual approaches to digital officium existed even before the COVID19 pandemic. But with and during the Lockdown-time a lot of new Catholic services emerged: streamed Eucharistic celebrations, house services and other forms like Whats App worship. These forms and their specific ritual difficulties can be regarded as a catalyst for the further development and a reflection of Catholic worship in German-speaking countries (Southern Germany and Switzerland) in general, with regard to digitally mediated co-presence and worship services without ordained ministers. For Catholic ritual performance the corporeality is highly important: Not only the assembly and fully conscious, and active participation of the faithful is essential, but also sacraments are symbolic material acts which require the presence of an ordained minister. In all these aspects

Christ is believed to be truly present, and the individual believer encounters Christ himself in them. Based on video and material analyses from dioceses in Southern Germany and Switzerland and the results of various liturgical conferences this contribution will analyze with which measures worship actors encountered the difficulties connected with these phenomenological and theological determinations during Lockdown-time. Can digital mediation help to make the life of worship happen over long distances in the face of limited assembly possibilities during the pandemic, but in the long term also of decreasing numbers of priests? How must we think about the role of materially celebrated sacraments in the church life, especially after the experience of abstinence? How can the encounter with the present Christ be celebrated in other ways? What kind of shifts in the traditionally hierarchical relationship between ordained ministers and the laity result from the new forms of service?

Panel VI: Making Religious Communities

9:00-10:30

Sawsan Kheir

University of Haifa/Åbo Akademi University

Online Religious Engagement and Religious Identity Construction among Young Adult Muslims in Israel and Turkey: Exploring Issues of Trust and Religious Authority

Abstract:

This paper is based on data gathered in the project Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG 2015–2019) that explored the religious subjectivities and values of young adult university students in thirteen different countries around the world, basing on a mixed-method study design. Specifically, the current paper focuses on Muslim students in Turkey and in Israel. On the basis of quantitative survey data, the paper outlines the significant correlations found between internet use for religion-related purposes and the respondents' degrees of personal religiosity, and frequency of religious practice. On the basis of qualitative data, the paper explores how concerns about the trustworthiness of online content and the continuing influence of offline religious authorities work to shape and inform the online religious engagements of Turkish and Israeli Muslim respondents. More significantly, the paper discusses the differences between respondents of both groups in their online religious engagements in light of their social positions as minority (Muslims in Israel)/ majority (Muslims in Turkey) groups, and the way these differences relate to their values and affect their religious identities. The presented data can provide a useful reference point for future research

into the various manners in which offline forms of religious authority continue to shape and inform the online religious engagements of individuals across different social, cultural, and religious contexts, and the way these engagements affect process of religious identity construction.

Vinit Kumar Jha Utpal

IIMT College of Management

Identity Construction of Tablighi Religious Group in the Time of Corona Pandemic

Abstract:

In India, Tablighi religious group identified as one of the elements, who is responsible to spread Corona in the early days. The local and central governments identified them as anti-social and filled several cases against them. Indian Mainstream media also treated the news related to Tablighi group in different manner. Social Media platform especially Twitter also became the tool to spread hate speeches against Tablighi religious group. This research studies the social identity construction theory of Psychology and wants to examine the identity constructed by Tweets related to Tablighi group. For this research, the pattern of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) has been used and the words ‘Tablighi’. ‘Tablighi jamat’, ‘Tablighi Markez’ and ‘Nizamuddin Markez’ in English and Hindi languages are being used as topic modeling. This research deals with the tweets posted on Twitter from March to June 2020. The finding discloses that social media users think that the Tablighi groups are uneducated, terrorist, anti-Hindu, anti-national, anti-social, uneducated, etc. and spread Corona extremely.

Anna Vancsó

Corvinus University of Budapest

The interpretations of solidarity as part of religious identity on the Hungarian online media during the Covid-19 pandemia

Abstract:

During the times of deep uncertainty, people tend to turn to religious belief. The majority of religious teachings stresses the importance of social solidarity, solidarity is part of religious identity. Religious organizations are one of the main representatives of those thoughts and thus can promote solidarity by set an example in their everyday routine as well as communicate it. During the Covid-19 pandemic the role of solidarity became crucial and religious organizations must react to those challenges without using their well-proven practices and experiences in personal relationships. Besides the online masses, other forms of

communication and online interactions needed to be created, basically through the channels of media. This situation caused difficulties for religious organizations, but also possibilities to communicate outwardly and reach a broader audience. This new, easily accessible form of communication also gives the social scientists a chance to better understand these organizations and their teachings. In our research we tend to describe the way religious organizations discussed the questions of solidarity, as well as showing how the mainstream online media present their activities. One of the main question of the research is to understand how solidarity is interpreted as part of religious identity. What is the difference between the organizational and the mainstream media representations of this question? For the study we used a large corpus which consist COVID related online discourse during the pandemic. With advanced NLP techniques we identify all those texts which related to solidarity actions and identify the different discourse linked to solidarity. With qualitative content and discourse analysis we map the main narratives of solidarity communicated by the religious organizations and the mainstream media to unfold the differences in those interpretations of solidarity.

Panel VII: Print Media

11:00-12:30

Bartholomew Konechni

Sciences Po

“Le professeur martyr”: The Construction of Samuel Paty’s Murder

Abstract:

On the afternoon of Friday 16th October 2020, Samuel Paty, an histoire-géographie teacher at Collège Bois-d’Aulne in the commune of Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, was killed by Abdoullakh Abouyedovich Anzorov. What was remarkable was the speed at which a single frame (Goffman 1974, Scheufele 1999, Zhou & Moy 2007, Van Gorp 2010) was converged upon by French media and the state in order to understand the murder of Samuel Paty. Namely, that this action constituted a form of Islamist terrorism for which the Muslim community in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine was to blame. By Monday 19th October, sixteen individuals had been arrested, including the father of a student in Paty’s class, and more than forty homes of local Muslims had been searched by the police. By Tuesday, the local mosque (La Grande Mosquée de Pantin) had been closed for six months by the Interior Minister, Gérald Darmanin. Through a comparison of local and national newspaper articles (based on forty articles taken from Le Monde, Libération, 78Actu and Le Parisien) covering the murder of Paty between 16th October and 19th October, this paper will seek to explore the social construction of Samuel Paty’s murder and how a single frame became dominant in such a short space of time, leading to the

closure of La Grande Mosquée de Pantin. Using the notion of frame-building (Entman 1993, Boesman et al 2015) this presentation will seek to use the murder of Paty as a case study to examine the collective process by which blame is assigned onto religious minorities.

Gintarė Pocė

Vytautas Magnus University

**Religion and Media in Lithuania: Features of Religious Diversity
Discourse in 1990–2015**

Abstract:

The research aims to analyse the features of the religious diversity discourse in the Lithuanian news media and to understand what social knowledge about religious diversity is presented in the researched media. The theoretical part of the dissertation introduces the concept of religious diversity and presents a discussion about the participation of religion in public life (politics and media) and the impact of this participation on the social situation of religious diversity in society. Also, the functioning of the media in constructing and maintaining social knowledge of religious diversity is analysed based on the social constructivism theoretical approach. Based on the critical discourse analysis approach and by applying the method of quantitative and qualitative content analysis, 2841 articles on religious topics were analysed, which were published in the daily newspaper Lietuvos Rytas in 1990–2015. The research data showed that the discourse of religious diversity expresses the tendencies of religion's activity in the public sphere, aspects of religious hegemony, and the creation of otherness. The dominant religious community is portrayed more positively in the analysed media. Its image is connected with the identity of Lithuanian society, it has opportunities to create religious media and to express its opinion on social and political issues. Meanwhile, religious minorities, especially the new religions, are mainly associated with threats and otherness.

Irena Borowik

Jagiellonian University

Religion and Identity of Catholic communities in debates on abortion, IVF and homosexuality in Poland

Abstract:

The article analyses the construction of Catholic communities' identity in Poland and the role of religion in this process, citing two leading Catholic weeklies' discourse on three biopolitical topics: abortion, IVF and homosexuality. The theoretical basis is Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of identity. The resulting questions included: who is the Other and what is its functionality in characterising the identity of one's own community; how do discursive

communities construct understanding of religion and its role in the myth of an ideal society? The Catholic magazines portray the construction of very different identities and present two contrasting pictures of Catholicism in Poland. In the conservative approach, the Other is an enemy, God has Old Testament characteristics, and the ideal society is embodied by theocracy. In the liberal one, the Other is a respected opponent, God is merciful, and the ideal is a pluralistic society in which religion creates dialogue.

Panel VIII: Miracles and Supernaturals

11:00-12:30

Omoje Akhagba

Polish Academy of Science

e-Religious Programmes and Cyber Miracles during COVID-19 Lockdown in Nigeria

Abstract:

Nigeria is heavily populated with different ethnic and religious groups speaking over 370 languages and estimated to a growing number of 200million people occupying a landmass area of 923,768 km² (Nigerian Bureau of statistics; world bank data, 2019). Religion in Nigeria has metamorphosed into a commercial string of transactional evangelism, rewards for faith and fellowship as most religious organisations offer prayers, salvation, healing, miracles, and prosperity to their congregation. Online church services and special prayers are not new in the Nigerian Christendom as mega-churches started televangelism outside the physical church premises in the early 90s to reach out to their congregation via the paid television timeslot but with the advent of the worldwide web, they have included various online platforms to perform the same spiritual activities to promote their mission. During the beginning of the COVID lockdown, many churches in Nigeria increased their online presence as the government placed restrictions on physical church activities. So, many Church leaders had to develop strategies to keep the followership of their congregation members online with various sermons, false prophecies on COVID cure, and cyber miracles. This paper attempts to provide answer to the following questions: (i) How have Nigerian Churches used the virtual space during the COVID-19 lockdown? (ii) How did social distancing and COVID pandemic shape the pattern of online religious activities in Nigeria? Three mega-churches with global outreach will be selected for this study. This paper is guided by technology determinism theory, social construction of technology, and the religious shaping of technology theory. Online data collected will be analyzed using the computer-mediated discourse analysis both from qualitative and

quantitative approach. Nigeria has been described as the most religious country in the world with plurality of religious organisations and affiliations.

Aurelio D'Amore

University of Palermo

Luna Nera, O Escolhido, Jinn. Netflix and the narratives of supernatural between local seriality and global imaginary

Abstract:

Netflix tv series are probably one of the most iconic symbols of the digital entertainment era. They are not only revolutionizing the cine-television industry but are modifying the very idea of television, generating new modes of consumption and imposing the serial genre as the hegemonic product of popular culture. Moreover, the Californian company not only produces US fictional products, but creates original ones in many regions of the world. The religious is a topics extensively treated in these fictional narratives. This article, within the framework of theory of mediatization, focuses a specific dimension of the religious: the supernatural. More precisely, it addresses three Netflix's "local" productions which display the theme of the supernatural. All of them are embedded on a local and peculiar cultural-religious dimension, but present a very US television tale of the supernatural. It will be attempted to depict the processes of construction of these narrations, in order to understand which perspective they offer in renegotiating local religious imaginaries and in creating a global mediatized one.

Edward Wright

University of Malta/Bournemouth University

Transcendental Reflection as the Foundation of Spiritual Intelligence and Identity: Nurturing the Conative Domain in Religious Education through the Creative Media

Abstract:

This paper explores how, through an anthropological-narrative approach to the pedagogy of religious education, made possible through the creative potential of photography and short multi-modal productions, students could be assisted in nurturing their conative domain of learning, especially in its deep connection to transcendental reflection and spiritual intelligence. In this way students could explore their spiritual and religious identities, as these are mediated through metaphorical images, still and moving, that serve as windows on the transcendental realm of existence. Furthermore, when students show and share their productions in communities of learning, the exploration of their own and each other's spiritual identities is greatly facilitated. The paper argues that this could be the ideal springboard/entry-

point for more effective confessional models of RE, since when "truths" of religion are explored through human narratives/experiences, expressed and shared, meaning-making becomes possible, providing relevance to RE. The theoretical framework for such argumentation is underpinned by the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor, and the work of Howard Gardner on his Multiple Intelligences Theory, later developed to include spiritual intelligence and meaning-making. The paper will also present and reflect upon the results of a qualitative research study conducted over two years in Maltese Church schools. In it, adolescent students were given opportunities to explore their spiritual identities through transcendental reflection, as part of their C(Catholic)RE syllabus. This exploration occurred through multi-modal productions they were guided to create and share. The data generated was analyzed through a combination Ricoeur's method of interpretation, thematic and narrative analysis.

Panel IX: Literacy

13:30-15:30

Zsuzsanna Demeter-Karászi and Gabriella Pusztai

University of Debrecen

The Identity of Religious Higher Education Institutions in the Social Media

Abstract:

The media, as also the various social platforms, are playing an increasing role in the life of communities. Nowadays all aspects of life are represented in the media, considering that through these tools can be available the largest masses. Not only the individual identity building can appear through the media, especially through social media, but also the religious higher education institutions take advantages of this opportunity. In our research we conducted a content analysis of the websites and Facebook profiles of religious higher education institutions to find out what image a religious higher education institution presents by itself and what are the differences between the representations of the world religious higher education institutions. In order to accomplish this, we examined institutions of different denominations in Europe. According to our hypothesis, we assume that the analysis of the websites and social media profiles will shed light on similarities instead of denominational differences. The dynamic appearance that attracts and suggests a cheerful student life will be more general than emphasizing religious, denominational differences, because this is the only way in which these institutions can compete with secular higher education institutions in the competitive situation of higher education. Our results show that the religious identity of the institutions is pushed into the background due to the ranking between the institutions and the

expectations provided by the private sector, but at the same time the different denominations appear in the life of these higher education institutions as supportive suppressors.

Mahmoud Farhadi

IRIB Research Center

Media literacy and the tendency toward secularism among Iranian

Abstract:

Media literacy can be viewed as the power of the audience to analyze various media messages along with a critical look at their content. In fact, it can be said that media literacy gives us a deep understanding of what is going on in the media. The use of cyberspace among Iranians is expanding rapidly, with Iranians using astounding statistics (especially online social networks). According to stereotypes, Iran is a religious society, has a religious government, and religion has a strong role in governing society, but various studies show that parts of Iranian society have been moving towards secularization over the years. Some believe that social media has played an important role in this move. So, the question arises: what effect has Media literacy had on Iranians' tendency toward secularism? To answer this question, we used two methods (content analysis and Survey). In the first step, by using content analysis, the most visited pages and channels in social networks were selected and reviewed. In the second step, a nationwide survey was conducted among 18432 people (over the age of 12) to find out about the literacy situation in Iran, the relationship between media literacy and the tendency to religious / secular thinking. The results of this study show that there is a direct and significant relationship between media literacy and the tendency to secular thinking. In other words, not only did the discourse on social networks contradict the dominant discourse at the level of religious government, but also those who possessed a higher level of literacy were more distant from religious rule and closer to secular thinking. Finally, these findings are explained using multidimensional theories.

Sarit Okun and Galit Nimrod

Ben Gurion University of the Negev

Online religious communities and well-being in later life

Abstract:

Old age in Judaism is the time when life's spiritual peak is reached. In practice, however, many religious older adults have limited ability to leave their homes for religious purposes due to age-related constraints. Such elders experience a conflict between the desire and obligation to continued religious growth and the ability to realize it. Aiming to offer some solution to this spiritual distress the present examines if and how participation in an online religious

community for Orthodox Jewish elders effects members' wellbeing. Twenty-six religious individuals aged 70–96 were trained to use an experimental forum. Their experiences were documented for six months via interviews, media ethnographic, online observations and monthly follow-ups. Analysis led to identification of three principal characteristics: (1) Factors affecting participation included the older adults' motivation to participate, initial perception of digital religion, and attitudes towards the forum's anonymity; (2) online activity patterns indicated a respectful and pleasant discourse on both religious and secular matters; and (3) participation contributed to members' religious identity and improved spiritual and social wellbeing. The findings indicate that continued religious involvement in later life through participation in online religious communities is recommended as an accessible and available means of empowering older people and enhancing their satisfaction in later life. Under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic and the prohibiting on participation in out-of-home religious activities, the results of the study become relevant to all religious individuals regardless of their age.

Funmi Alakija

Moshood Abiola Polytechnic

Religious Identities: The Use of Minority Media as an Alternative Communication Space for First and Second Generation members of Nigerian Diaspora in Peckham, 'Little Lagos', London

Abstract:

This paper presents how first and second generation of Nigerian migrants in Peckham use minority media in negotiating identity (ies) and belonging in the diasporic space known as little Lagos in the South East of London. Literature has shown how the media forms of diasporas affect the dynamic process of “looking in, looking back, and looking around” and religion as a crucial aspect of the Nigerian identity. Based on a seven month ethnography participant observation and semi structure interview in Peckham, this paper shows that, besides the positive role of religion in providing guidance and strength, it is also an avenue through which undocumented migrants explore in meeting everyday migration challenges within the British mainstream. It demonstrates that the establishments of churches, and the popularity of various programmes in the Minority media inviting them to. Services that would address the reality of their status in the host country is a strong part of these migrants' religious identity. This reality is that the legal requirements for residence visas and the problems associated with meeting those requirements affect their integration into the larger society, thereby threatening their personal wellbeing and their feeling of belonging have informed various religious adverts. Although class related, the paper argues that lower class and little education are factors mediating listeners' engagement with the adverts and that the illegal

status of many migrants boosts the multiplicity of Nigerian religious organisations in Peckham. Through the radio medium of NaijaFM, many herbalists not only promote their medicines and drugs to those who cannot go on NHS and 40% of the religious adverts are directed at this group. In the same vein, Nigerian local practices have been transported to diaspora whereby, Pentecostal churches and other religious groups use particularistic media to invite Nigerians to church services that promise to offer relief from their sordid existential realities of living in ‘Little Lagos’ London.

Saturday, 27.03.2021

Panel X: Authority

9:00-10:30

Geetanjali Atri

Jawaharlal Nehru University

Gurus and Media: Creating a New Hierarchy

Abstract:

The turn of the twenty-first century marked a revolutionary shift in the spheres of spirituality and media, alike. While neoliberalism characterised the de-regularisation of the media, the spiritual sphere was swayed by the forces of capitalism. And along side their respective metamorphosis, the two forces now started moving closer to each other; in order to gradually converge into a ‘complementary relationship’. The close nexus between modern spiritual leaders or Gurus and what is now classified as ‘old media’, ensured that benefits flowed both ways. On one hand, the Gurus got the prime-time slot on the leading channels and eye-catching coverage in the newspapers. On the other hand, their followers formed a considerable chunk of receivers, too dear to the media conglomerates. This paper seeks to argue here that such a nexus created a new form of hierarchy amongst the Gurus. On the top, were those who ran their own satellite channels. Then were those who devised their in-house media geniuses. And at the bottom most remained those who still relied on tradition techniques of communication. Here, the paper would construct its arguments with insights from a few case studies of gurus on national and international media along with primary inputs from fieldwork with a Guru-led organisation in Punjab and in Kumbh.

Anna Stanziano, Rita Marchetti, Susanna Pagiotti and Nicola Righetti

University of Perugia

Performing religious identity: the debate on Salvini's use of religious symbols on Facebook

Abstract:

How religion is used by populist leaders to perform their own identities to align with groups whose support they seek? All over the world we are witnessing an instrumental use of religion by populist leaders to reclaim their religious and national identity and thus polarize the political debate. The literature on identity politics affirms that populist leaders perform prototypical group identities around partisan affiliations, such as the religious one, especially during the election campaigns. Assuming the empirical link between Christianity and national identity as strong drivers for populist conservative politicians to address religious issues, this study aims to investigate the political instrumentalization of religion and religious symbols in Italy during the 2018 Italian and 2019 European election campaigns. We investigated how populist leaders used references to religion, and found three main perspectives: religion as (i) a marker of identity, (ii) in conflict with Islam within an anti-Muslim frame, and (iii) in contrast with interpretations and actions of mainline churches. The case of Matteo Salvini, the leader of the Italian populist far-right party “Lega”, and its use of religious symbols for propaganda purposes, will be analyzed. Using a combination of quantitative, computational and qualitative methods, the study analyzes Facebook posts mentioning Salvini and a set of religion-related keywords published in the run-up to the 2018 Italian and 2019 European elections. A frame analysis was conducted on the selected posts which made possible to detect the main frames and sub-frames of the Italian online public debate on religious symbols.

Verónica Israel Turim, Josep-Lluís Micó and Miriam Diez

Blanquerna School of Communications, Ramon Llull University

Are Catholics alone? Analyzing Religious Leadership through social connections on Twitter

Abstract:

How do religious communities engage public audiences? (Hutchings , Asamoah- Gyadu, Evolvi, Han, 2020) highlight different responses dealing with power, globalization, secularity or vulnerability. In this paper we analyze 50 Spanish religious leaders' interactions on Twitter in order to discover who is following whom. Through Machine Learning we realise different connections between them and also omissions. Why one account particularly known is not being followed? The sample covers 3 consecutive years and sheds light on the correlation between sociopolitical trends and focus of interest. We considered 50 to count with significant

data to analyze but considering that analyzing more could lead to a high dispersion. We accessed to the data using an artificial intelligence big data analysis software from where we identified the sample and from where we obtained the most followed accounts by the Church sample as a network. We have also done a classification (type of the account, country, number of followers, gender) in order to establish a categorization in terms of influence.

