P3: Digital Religious & Spiritual Media Use

Digitalization has changed communication fundamentally. Therefore, we investigate the influence of digitalization on religious and spiritual communication. This includes both, religious communities and the society at large.

Main Research Questions

RQ1: How do members of practicing religious communities use digital media to fulfill functions of meaning-making and social connection?

RQ2: How is spirituality experienced on online social networking platforms?

Methodological approaches

To investigate RQ1 we conducted
- 9 qualitative interviews with young Christians (age 14 – 20)
- Based on these interviews, we conducted a quantitative survey among young Christians (N=576)

Regarding RQ2 we conducted
- a two-wave representative survey on spiritual experiences on social media (N=2156, Wave 1)
- and a quantitative content analysis of spiritual social media posts from account the survey participants follow (N=1.600 Instagram Post)

Hereby we distinguish between for types of connectedness. Connectedness with
- Higher power
- Nature
- Others
- Self

Findings

Theoretical contribution

We developed a dynamic model of digital media use in religious communities explaining the co-orientation of social relationships, individual media use, and individual religious meaning system.

Empirical contributions

1. Young Christians use a distinct set of digital media to experience their religiosity
2. Users can be categorized in five media repertoires
3. Most media fulfill the function of religious meaning-making while only messengers directly support social connection
4. Most creators of religious content are traditional authorities (57%) but 23% are (lay) Christfluencers

Contribution to URPP

Communicative practices

We describe and analyze the religious and spiritual communicative practices in today’s digital society. Herein, we take a multiphase approach to get a holistic understanding of communication.

Communities

We describe and analyze the formation of religious and technology-shaped identities and communities, specifically highlighting the digital interaction between believers.

Authorities

We describe and analyze the concept of shifting authority by investigating claims of authority and authenticity by social media creators and religious influencers.

Religious practices

We describe and analyze the contributions of digital religious practice for individuals, communities, and society, in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria.

Publications


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