

# 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=2.156, 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



Fig.1: Example spiritual Instagram Post

## 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.

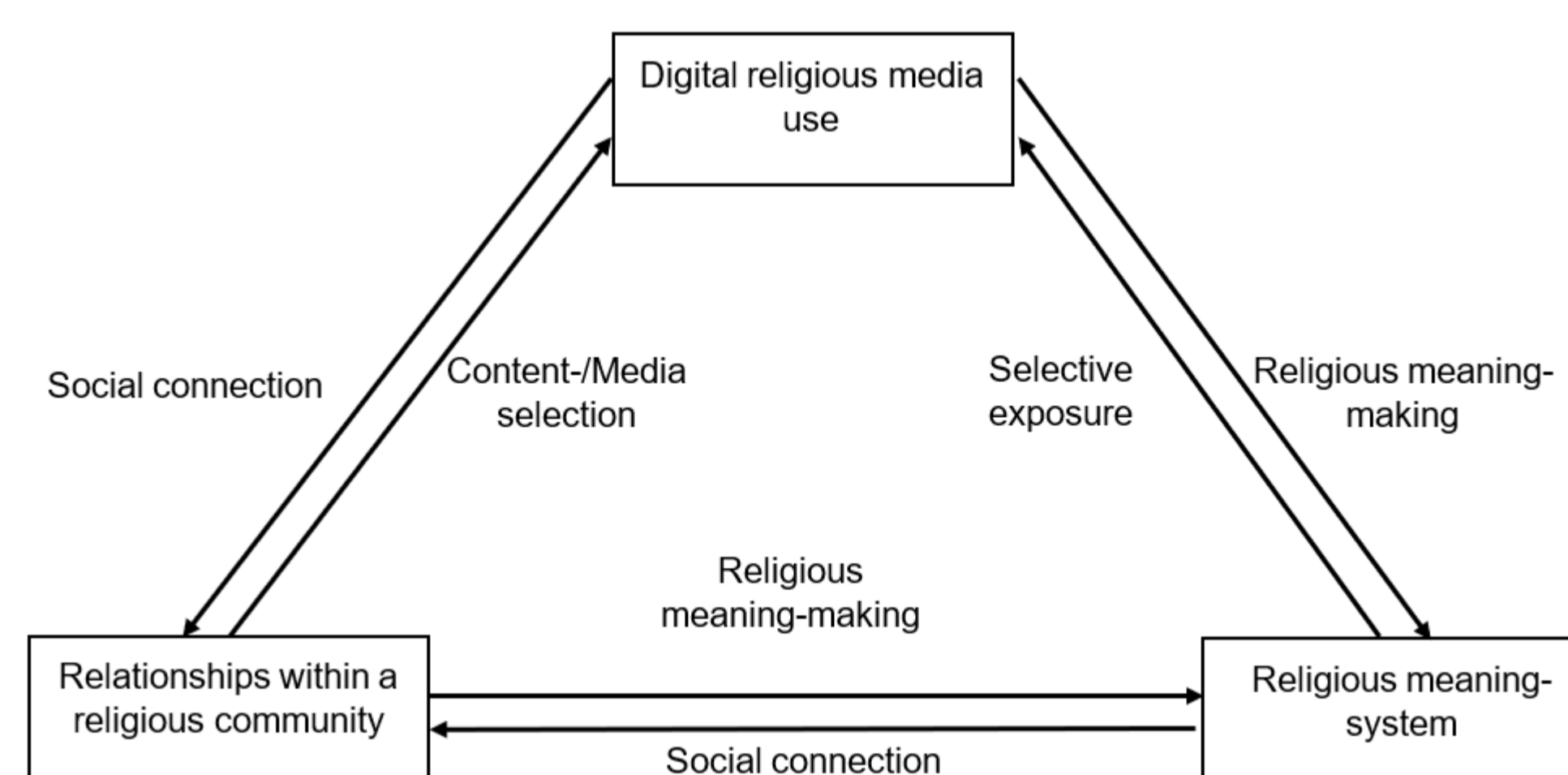


Fig.2: Dynamic model of digital media use in religious communities

### 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

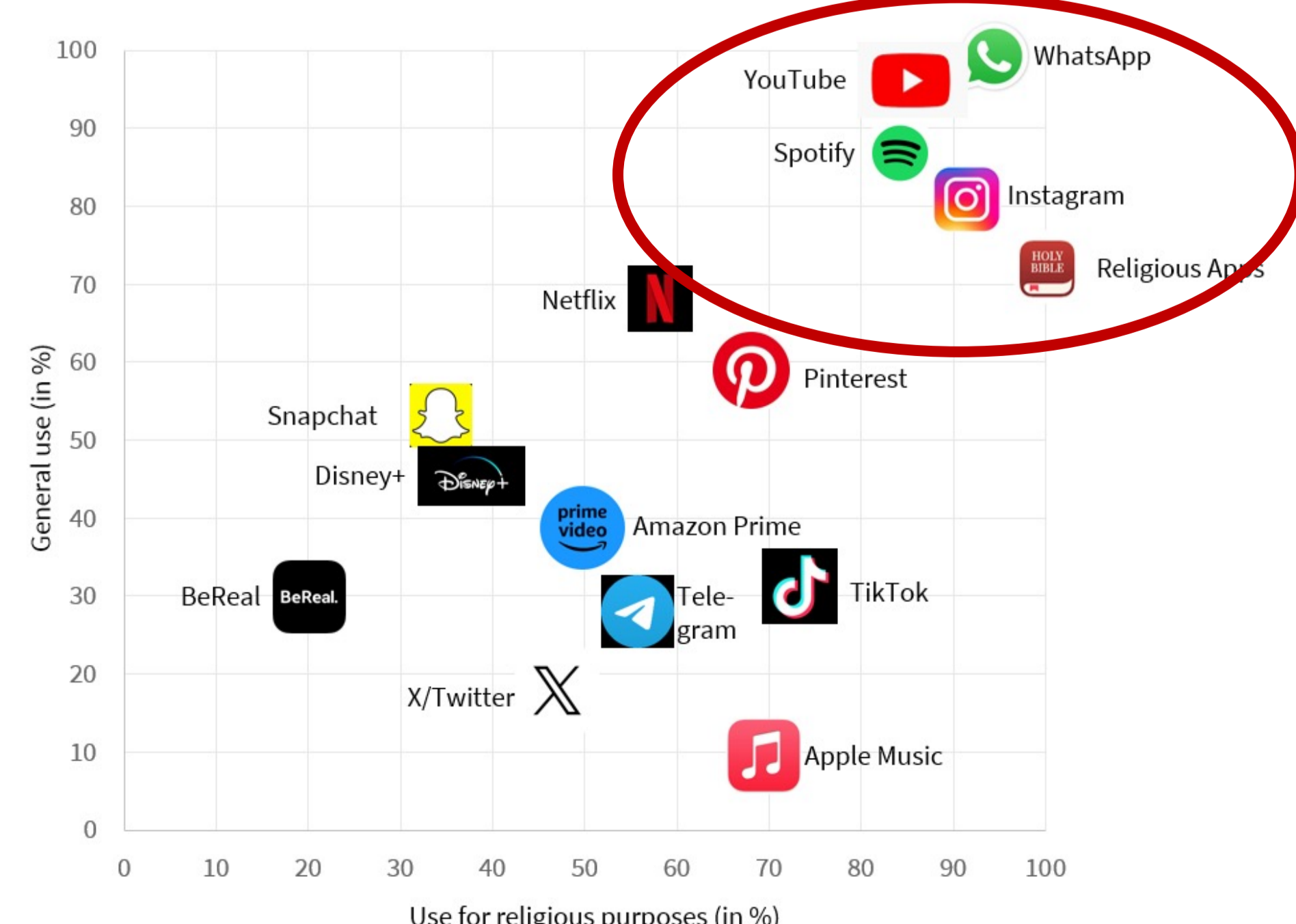


Fig.3: Digital religious media use in young Christians

## Contribution to URPP

### Communicative practices

We describe and analyze the religious and spiritual communicative practices in today's digital society. Herein, we take a multiplatform 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

Müller, J. & Friemel, T.N. (2024). *Finding God in Today's Digital World—Digital Religious Media Use of Christian Adolescents and Young Adults*. [under review in *New Media and Society*].

Müller, J. & Friemel, T.N. (2024). *Dynamics of digital religious media use – A model of digital media use in mediatized religious communities*. [submitted for review].

Müller, J. & Friemel, T.N. (2024). *#believe – The Perception of Christfluencers on Social Media* [in preparation].

Müller, J. & Friemel, T.N. (2025). *Spiritual media experiences*. [in preparation].



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QR-Code to the project website