

Internet Exposure and Religious Openness in the Arab Region

Dr. Alaa Elshamy

Assistant Professor of Communication ,
Faculty of Women for Arts, Science and
Education, Ain Shams University

Abstract:

This paper examines the religious implications of Internet exposure in the Arab region, which is deemed a world's hub for both religious devotion and hostility. Utilizing the mediatization of religion theory, this work argues that frequent exposure to the Internet enhances religious openness in the region, attitudinally as well as behaviorally. To empirically investigate this assumption, the study utilizes a unique cross-national survey interviewing more than 25,000 participants from 12 Arab countries, during 2018 and 2019. Findings show that the rise and spread of the Internet cultivates religious openness among Arabs. Specifically, Internet use is positively associated with increasing acceptance of the religious other and with growing support for gender equality. In addition, Internet users are more likely to perceive religion as a private rather than public matter, and more willing to support the separation between religion and politics. Arguably, the results conclude that the growth of online communication in the region helps "democratize" the Arab religious sphere, giving way to new religious agents, beliefs, and practices to flourish. The implications of digital media use for conventional religious authority and secularization processes in the Arab region are further discussed.

Introduction:

Since its inception, the Internet has permeated almost every corner of social life, including religion. When religion meets the Internet, a vibrant and independent scholarship has been generated, addressing the interconnection between the two important domains. Several constructs have been suggested to describe this newly emergent inquiry such as digital religion, cyber-religion, religion online, virtual religion, and online religion (Campbell, 2017, p. 16). Contemporary research addressing the interplay between religion and digital media has focused on how religious beliefs, perceptions, values, and practices are shaped and reshaped due to the advancement of traditional as well as new media (e.g., Freeburg, 2018; Hjarvard, 2008a; Lövheim, 2008; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019). In addition, it has investigated how traditional religious institutions and elites employ old and new media to maintain their religious power (e.g., Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005; Jin, 2015; Knowles, 2013; Midden & Ponzanesi, 2013; Pocé & Ališauskienė, 2017).

Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches, several theorizations have been formulated to understand and explain the intersection between religion and electronic media. Secularization theory has been one of the widely employed approach in this regard (Armfield & Holbert, 2003; Collins & Sturgill, 2013; Hoover & Venturelli, 2006; Lövheim, 2011; Meyer & Moors, 2006). Broadly, the theory asserted that the rise of industrial society has accelerated the modernization, urbanization, individualization, and rationalization processes, resulting in a gradual decline of the importance and presence of religion in modern societies (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). Conceiving the media system as a manifestation of the industrial revolution, Hjarvard (2008a, 2011, 2016) developed the mediatization of religion theory to explore the consequences of media development on religious change and secularization of society. To Hjarvard (2011), the rapid growth of technology transformed the media into an independent and autonomous organization, guided primarily by its own logic (p. 122). The ongoing transformations within the media industry have significantly influenced religion, in that religion has almost become “subsumed under the logic of the media, both in terms of institutional regulation, symbolic content and individual practices,” as Hjarvard (2008a, p. 11) elaborated. As a result, the mediatization of religion

would accelerate the secularization of society on the long term (Hjarvard, 2008a, 2011).

The mediatization-secularization premise has not only been supported with regard to religious issues (e.g., Chaudhry, 2014; Freeburg, 2018; Lövheim, 2008; Lundby, 2016) but also when applied to social (e.g., Hu & Li, 2019; Lee & Hicks, 2011; Lu & Yu, 2020; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006; Seebruck, 2013) as well as political (e.g., Balkin, 2004; Rathnayake & Winter, 2017; Robinson, Neustadtl, & Kestnbaum, 2002) topics. While much knowledge has been advanced on the consequences of mediatized religion argument in the Western context (Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019), little has been known about its implications in the Arab region. Therefore, the current work is devoted to redress this gap in the literature by exploring the interconnection between Internet use and religious openness. The study contends that frequent exposure to digital media would enhance religious openness among the Arab publics, attitudinally as well as behaviorally. To empirically investigate this argument, the article employs the Arab Barometer (AB) wave 5, in which more than 25,000 individuals from 12 Arab countries were interviewed.

This paper contributes to the ongoing theoretical and empirical discussions dominating the scholarship on media and religion in four important ways. First, since “the mediatization of religion is not a universal phenomenon that characterises all cultures and societies” as Hjarvard (2011, p. 124) demonstrated, it is important to expand the scope of the theory by examining it in different sociocultural contexts rather than the Western society where it was originated. From a theoretical perspective, this would enhance existing literature allowing for comparing the religious implications of the Internet across a wide range of societies, with different sociocultural and religious backgrounds.

Second, this work adopts a more solid theoretical approach that explores the mutual influences between the online and offline spheres, examining how the online and offline religious beliefs and practices shape one another. This approach resonates with what Campbell and Lövheim (2011) deemed “the third and current phase of study of religion and the Internet,” where “scholars have increasingly come to focus on analyzing the implications of new media technology for religion in the context of intersections between online and offline

religion” (p. 1087). Adopting such a process-oriented theorization is essential in understanding what Dawson and Cowan (2004) considered “the overall social context of cyber-religion” (p.10).

Empirically, the AB gives an unprecedented opportunity to identify the mechanisms triggering the Internet’s influences on religion across 12 Arab countries. This increases the generalizability of the results throughout the Arab region.

Fourth, identifying the positive and negative religious implications of the Internet could help policy and decision makers develop more innovative strategies in combating religious fundamentalism and dogmatism in the Arab region or beyond. For instance, highlighting those implications could help utilize the electronic platforms in a better and effective way to alleviate the historical religious tensions in the region, where several religious minorities are living among Muslim majority populations.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review:

1. Online Religion and the Decline of Religious Authority:

Over years, religious beliefs and practices had traditionally been transmitted through interpersonal and group communication, under the supervision and control of formal religious institutions. The advancement of the mass media (e.g., audio-and video cassettes, CDs, radio, and television) has helped expand the reaching out of religious content to millions of adherents at the same time, consolidating the power of traditional religious leaders and establishments. However, the coming of the Internet and electronic interactive platforms has significantly changed the distribution of religious content and the balance of religious power relations in society, giving space to new religious agencies, practices, and beliefs to form and spread. Academically, it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that an independent and legitimate scholarship addressing the Internet-religion nexus was established (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2002).

According to Højsgaard and Warburg (2005), the progression of this academic enterprise has gone through three main waves. In the first wave, the potential influences of the Internet on religious change were overestimated due to the rapid growth of religious content and communities experienced shortly after the Internet’s advent. Apart from this utopian perspective, the authors continued, the second

wave tried to reconsider the importance of the broader sociocultural contexts while evaluating the religious impacts of the Internet. In the current third wave, the researchers have become more aware of the complexities and difficulties associated with the study of the Internet-religion interconnection. As a result, they started to employ more diverse methodological and theoretical approaches that can capture the underlying mechanisms prompting the potentialities of the Internet for religion and religious changes within different cultures and societies (pp. 8-9).

Relatedly, media and religion scholars have identified several manifestations showing how existing patterns of religiosity and religious power relations have been influenced due to the rise of online religious communication. First, the Internet has dramatically changed the underlying social conditions which had previously shortened the individuals' ability to freely express and share their personal religious beliefs, as Balkin (2004) explained. Therefore, many various types of religious values, beliefs, and practices have been advanced, either online or offline, reconstructing the ways in which religious content is generated and distributed among individuals.

Second, the rapid growth of online religious communities has led to fundamental changes in the religious power structure. An agreement has almost been reached among digital religion scholars that conventional agents and institutions used to shape processes of religious socialization have gradually been substituted by online religious environment, undermining traditional religious authorities (e.g., Lövheim, 2008; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019; Stolow, 2006). Nonetheless, some scholars have drawn attention to certain cases in which the Internet can enhance rather than undermine traditional religious authorities. Knowles (2013), for instance, content analyzed the forum discussions of the Christian fundamentalist Rapture Ready's website. The author demonstrated that the forum's gatekeepers were dealing strictly and quickly with any perceived threatening elements that could undermine their authority or destabilize the belief system of the forum's members. In doing so, the moderators utilized specific mechanisms such as deleting certain posts, editing specific comments, and preventing specific persons from participating in the forum's discussions in the first place (p. 140). This example supports Jordan's (1999) argument that "offline hierarchies are subverted by cyberspace

but are also reconstructed in cyberspace” (p. 85). That is, “the subversion of hierarchy does not mean that cyberspace is devoid of hierarchy. Rather, new and different hierarchies emerge,” as the author explained (p. 85).

Third, communal religious practices that were mostly performed inside places of worship have been replaced by new “private” modes of religiosity, spirituality, and meditation (Norris & Inglehart, 2011, p. 88). This means that digital technologies have transformed traditional forms of religiosity from being a collective – oriented action to become a more privatized behavior. As a result, online media have accelerated the privatization of religion process distinguishing modern societies in general and secular communities in particular (e.g., Casanova, 1994).

Compared to other media platforms, the Internet has represented a real threat to the current state of affairs in society, including the realm of religion. Houston (2003) indicated that “the Internet’s power as a communication tool comes in part from its capacity to disrupt the status quo by bringing new knowledge at very low cost to the far reaches of the globe” (p.353). From a digital religion perspective, this point was made clear by Hjarvard’s (2016) argument that “changing media structures challenge existing forms of religious authority at the same time as they allow new forms of authority to emerge—forms that have a more individualized and temporary character and rely on popular cultural forms” (p.8).

Guided by the literature reviewed above, the following hypotheses were generated:

H1: Internet exposure undermines levels of trust in religious leaders.

H2: Internet exposure enhances negative attitudes toward the intervention of religion in politics.

2. Mediatization of Religion Theory:

The rise of online religious communities has grabbed the attention of media and religion scholars as well as policy makers. Accordingly, a strand of theorizations has been generated exploring the impacts of online interaction on religious culture and practice. Mediatization of religion has been one of the widely recognized theorizations in this regard. The next section discusses the key premises of the theory and how it was developed. In addition, it elaborates the main strengths as

well as weaknesses of the theory.

To begin with, it should be noted first that previous research investigating the intersection between media and religion was dominated by linear and deterministic understandings, where the underlying complexities and consequences between the two disciplines were not addressed profoundly. Elaborating this point, Hoover (2002) identified three main paradigms characterizing this past scholarship: the essentialism model, which conceived media and religion as distinct domains, where the latter became a site of the former; the effects approach, where the focus was mainly placed on the impacts of specific religious contents on individuals and society; and the institutional paradigm, which emphasized how religious media influenced the broader social structure in general and religious authorities in particular (pp. 26-27).

With the rise of culturalism throughout the 1980s, a culturalist paradigm into the study of religion and media was first introduced (Hoover, 2002). Since then, culturalist researchers have drawn attention to the importance of certain factors such as “lived experiences” and “meaning-making” in explaining the influences of the media on religion (Hoover, 2002; Hoover & Clark, 2002; Lövheim, 2011). Ultimately, this helped develop the “mediation approach” to examine the intersection between media and religion by the end of the 1980s (Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019). Despite its importance, the mediation paradigm has concerned only with the “concrete act of communication by means of a medium in a specific social context,” as elaborated by Hjarvard (2011, p. 124). The author furthered that “mediation in itself may not have any profound impact on social institutions like politics or religion, as long as institutions are in control of the communication” (p.14). By the same token, Lövheim and Hjarvard (2019) added that mediation-based approaches could not deal with the constant transformations featuring both modern media and religion, which can be seen for example in the rapid growth of computer-mediated communication on the one side and diversification of religion and religious cultures on the other side (p. 215). In his attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the mediation approach, Stig Hjarvard (2008a, 2011, 2016; see also Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2015; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019) has developed the mediatization of religion theory.

Highlighting the difference between mediation and mediatization,

Hjarvard (2011) pointed out that “mediatization refers to a more long-term process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media’s influence” (p. 124). To explain why there has been an academic need to develop the mediatization approach, Schulz (2004) introduced four main reasons capturing the fundamental social changes brought forward due to the media industry: (1) modern media have extended people’s ability to communicate with others, allowing them overcome any spatial or temporal limitations that might hinder the flow of communication; (2) they have altered traditional forms of interaction at the individual and institutional level, introducing new and innovative communicative platforms; (3) new media have led to the integration of interpersonal and group communication with other mediated types of communication; and (4) individual agents and several institutions of society have submitted to the logic of the media (p. 98).

Applying Schulz’s reasoning to the media-religion interconnection, Hjarvard (2011) highlighted the following four religious transformations advanced due to modern media: (1) numerous religious sermons and activities are nowadays received by millions of adherents through the mass media, specially television; (2) people are heavily relying on a wide range of popular media genres with religious contents rather than on conventional religious institutions; (3) religious leaders are increasingly utilizing media’s news stories and formats in delivering religious beliefs and practices; and (4) numerous religious establishments are forced to adapt to media’s logic and demands to get their religious content spread among the publics (p.122).

Whereas earlier research on mediatization was primarily concerned with the media-politics interconnection, the mediatization of religion thesis emphasized the media-religion relationship, and hence it is considered as a second wave of mediatization scholarship (Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019, p. 208). The main goal of the theory has been to analyze the positive and negative consequences of the media system on religion and religious change. According to Hjarvard (2008a), “modern media do not only present or report on religious issues; they also change the very ideas and authority of religious institutions and alter the ways in which people interact with each other when dealing with religious issues” (p.11).

To further explain how modern religions are mediatized, Hjarvard

(2008a) utilized an earlier framework developed by Meyrowitz (1993), in which the latter classified the media into three different types: media as conduits, media as languages, and media as environments. As for the media as conduits, Hjarvard pointed out that the media have become the primary distributor of religious texts and representations, which resulted in the decline of institutionalized religions. Regarding the media as languages, the media have influenced the ways in which people perceive religious messages, in that religious narratives and representations have increasingly been molded due to media's formats and genres. Moving to the media as environments, ordinary individuals have become more dependent on the media system for communication and interaction, undermining the roles and positions of traditional socialization agents (Hjarvard, 2008a, pp.12-13). Linking the current transformations in media industry with the mediatization of religion, Hjarvard (2008a) concluded that "the media as conduits, languages and environments are responsible for the *mediatization of religion*" (p. 13).

Reflecting more on this link, Hjarvard (2016) stated that various social institutions, including religion, have substituted to the "media logics." To him, the media have not only become "out-there," shaping the attitudes and actions of individuals, but also "in-here," constructing the ways by which societal institutions can perform their assigned roles (p. 2). The growing importance of the media is clearly observed in the Western society, where the media have transformed into an independent and autonomous establishment (Hjarvard, 2008a; Hjarvard & Lundby, 2018).

The mediatization of religion phenomenon has not only expanded existing religious public sphere to include new religious agents and contents, but has also generated a new type of religion described by Hjarvard as the "banal religion." Contrary to institutionalized religions, Hjarvard (2008a, 2011, 2016) continued, the banal religion is a byproduct of a wide forms of religious experiences, practices, and imaginations produced and shared by ordinary people. Using the word "banal" does not however mean, according to Hjarvard (2011), that the religious representations and practices formulated are less important than formal institutionalized religions or are lacking "coherent and elaborate religious propositions" (p. 130). To further explain this point, Hjarvard (2011) differentiated between "religious media" and other "mediatized forms of religion," following Towler's (1974) distinction

between “official religion” and “common religion.” More specifically, Hjarvard (2011) suggested that religious media are deemed “official religion,” since they are mainly constructed due to the certain rules put forth by formal religious agencies. Whereas mediatized/banal religions are considered “common religion,” since they are primarily shaped by the media logic (p.130).

Since its introduction in 2008, the mediatization of religion theory has generated profound discussions regarding its strengths and weaknesses. As for the former, the theory has reconsidered the transformative influences of media on modern religion; the influences which have often been overlooked by the sociologists of religion (Lövheim, 2011; Lövheim & Lynch, 2011). Second, the explanatory scope of the theory has addressed the interconnection between media and religion at the meso level of analysis, rather than the universal/macro or individual/micro level (Hjarvard, 2008b; Hjarvard, 2011; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019). This has enriched the theory, making it more dynamic and to be perceived by scholars as “an open and exploratory device instead of a closed and strictly defined one,” as indicated by Roos (2015, p. 93). Third, the theory has enhanced the media and religion research by examining the reciprocal influences between the two fields. Therefore, the theory has surpassed the “media effects” versus “selective exposure” dichotomous that had dominated the scholarship on media and religion (Hjarvard, 2011).

Moving to the shortcomings, Lövheim (2011) argued that the theory has adopted a limited conceptualization of religion by relying heavily on the beliefs, imaginations, and explanations of individuals. This means, according to the author, that theory has overlooked other important factors that are also shaping modern religion such as social interaction, lived experiences, and collective religious practices (p.155). In addition, the theory has underestimated the viable roles still played by formal religious agents, who are also utilizing the media for religious causes. Therefore, the premise that religious institutions have entirely substituted to the so called ‘media logic’ needs to be revised as Lövheim (2011, p. 157) indicated.

Based on the main arguments of the theory, the subsequent assumptions were developed:

H3: Internet exposure cultivates positive attitudes toward the

separation of religious practices and social life.

H4: Internet exposure generates negative attitudes toward enforcement of sharia.

H5: Internet exposure cultivates secular tendencies among Arabs.

H5a: Internet exposure is positively correlated with decline of self-reported religiosity.

H5b: Internet exposure is positively associated with decline of praying.

H5c: Internet exposure cultivates negative attitudes toward enforcement of hijab.

H5d: Internet exposure cultivates positive attitudes toward gender equality.

H6: Internet exposure enhances religious tolerance among Arabs.

H6a: Internet exposure increases the likelihood of acceptance of the religious other.

H6b: Internet exposure maintains positive attitudes toward political rights of non-Muslims

Methodology:

Data and Sample:

To empirically explore the religious influences of the Internet in the Arab region, the data of a unique survey interviewed more than 25,000 persons from 12 Arab societies was employed. In detail, the survey was conducted by the AB during 2018 and 2019 in the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen. Depending on nationally representative probability samples of Arab adults (aged 18 and above), the interviews were performed in a face-to-face setting in each country. The sample varied in terms of gender (49.8% females), religion (93.2% Muslims; 6% Christians; 0.1% Atheists), age ($M= 38.6$ year), education (10% illiterate), marital status (60% married; 30% single), and economic status (with 54.5% whose net household income does not cover their monthly expenses, compared to 45.5% whose net household income covers their monthly expenses).

To make sure, the questionnaire was not originally conducted to explore the media-religion nexus. Nonetheless, it included a wide range of topics relevant to the main arguments under investigation such as

the following: patterns of Internet and media use; attitudes toward the religious other and their sociopolitical rights; opinions toward the sociopolitical roles of women; perceptions toward the importance of religion at the individual and collective level; attitudes toward the application of sharia; self-reported religiosity; and a standard battery of demographic-related indicators.

Measurement:

1. Independent Variable:

Internet exposure is the independent variable in this work, and it was measured using the following question: "On average, how often do you use the internet?" The participants were to choose from these responses: 1 (I am online almost all day), 2 (Daily), 3 (Several times a week), 4 (Once a week), 5 (Less than once a week), and 6 (I do not use the Internet).

2. Dependent Variables:

This paper explores the consequences of Internet use on religious culture and practice. More specifically, it investigates whether Internet consumption enhances or undermines religious openness among Arab citizens. Thus, religious openness is deemed the focal dependent variable in this paper. This broad variable was, in turn, measured using three dimensions: positions toward religious authority, attitudes toward the privatization of religion, and opinions toward religious tolerance. The next section illustrates the conceptualization and measurement of each dimension.

a. Positions toward Religious Authority: Two indicators were used to measure this dimension:

- **Trust in Religious Leaders:** The participants were asked how much trust do they have in religious leaders, with responses ranged from 1 (A great deal of trust) to 4 (no trust at all).
- **Attitudes toward the Intervention of Religion in Politics:** The respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following three phrases: (1) religious leaders should not interfere in voters' decisions in elections, (2) your country is better off if religious people hold public positions in the state, and (3) religious clerics should have influence over the decisions of government. The options given

before each phrase ranged from 1 (I strongly agree) to 4 (I strongly disagree). To make sure, scores of phrases 2 and 3 were reversed for statistical reasons. A final additive scale measuring the attitudes toward the intervention of religion in politics was constructed (Cronbach's Alpha=0.514), with lower points referring to negative attitudes.

b. Privatization of Religion: This variable was measured using the following indicators:

- **Attitudes toward the Separation of Religious Practices and Social Life:** On a scale ranged from 1 (I strongly agree) to 4 (I strongly disagree), the participants were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement that "Religious practice is a private matter and should be separated from socio-economic life."

- **Attitudes toward Enforcement of Sharia:** The respondents were asked to provide their opinion on whether the laws of their country should be based on the sharia or the will of the people. The options provided were as follows: (1) entirely be based on the sharia, (2) mostly be based on the sharia, (3) equally be based on sharia and the will of the people, (4) mostly be based on the will of the people, and (5) entirely be based on the will of the people.

- **Self-Reported Religiosity:** This factor was measured by a question item asking the participants to describe their religiosity by choosing one of the following options: (1) religious, (2) somewhat religious, and (3) not religious.

- **Level of Praying:** The respondents were to choose one of the following answers to describe their level of praying: (1) never, (2) at least once a month, (3) once a week, (4) several times a week, (5) once a day, and (6) five times a day.

- **Attitudes toward Imposition of Hijab on Women:** The participants were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following phrase: "A woman should dress modestly, but Islam does not require that she wears a hijab." The answers provided varied from 1 (I strongly agree) to 4 (I strongly disagree).

- **Attitudes toward Gender Equality:** Six phrases were selected to measure this broad variable: (1) a woman can become President or Prime Minister of a Muslim country, (2) in general, men are better at political leadership than women, (3) university education for males is more important than university education for females, (4) it is per-

missible for a woman to travel abroad by herself, (5) women and men should have equal rights in making decision to divorce, and (6) husbands should have final say in all decisions concerning the family. The responses provided before each phrase ranged from 1 (I strongly agree) to 4 (I strongly disagree). To make sure, scores of items 2, 3, and 6 were reversed for statistical purposes. After adding up the points of the six phrases, a final scale measuring the attitudes toward gender equality was established (Cronbach's Alpha=0.725), with lower points signifying positive attitudes.

c. Religious Tolerance: This factor was measured by two dimensions:

- **Attitudes toward Acceptance of the Religious Other:** On a scale ranged from 1 (strongly dislike) to 5 (strongly like), the respondents were asked whether they would like to have people of a different religion as their neighbor or not.
- **Attitudes toward Political Rights of Non-Muslims:** The interviewees were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement that "Islam requires that in a Muslim country the political rights of non-Muslim should be inferior to those of Muslims." The options provided ranged from 1 (I strongly agree) to 4 (I strongly disagree).

3. Covariates:

To capture the interconnection between the independent and dependent variables more accurately, the following factors were statistically controlled: gender, religion, levels of education, self-reported religiosity, and age. Neutralizing these variables were essential to reduce their potential confounding impacts on the Internet-religion nexus. Based on the above-mentioned conceptualizations and measurements, a general description of all variables under study is provided in Table 1.

Table (1)
Descriptive Statistics of Variables with Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD)

| Variables | Min | Max | M | SD |
|---|-----|-----|-------------------|------|
| Level of Internet use | 1 | 6 | 2.8 ^a | 2.10 |
| Self-reported religiosity | 1 | 3 | 1.7 ^a | 0.65 |
| Trust in religious leaders | 1 | 4 | 2.7 ^a | 0.99 |
| Attitudes toward gender equality | 6 | 24 | 14.3 ^b | 3.57 |
| Religious practice is a private matter | 1 | 4 | 2.3 ^b | 0.97 |
| Attitudes toward enforcement of sharia | 1 | 5 | 2.6 ^b | 1.21 |
| Views on the intervention of religion in politics | 3 | 12 | 6.5 ^c | 1.88 |
| Views on acceptance of the religious other | 1 | 5 | 2.9 ^c | 1.05 |
| Attitudes toward non-muslims' political rights | 1 | 4 | 2.8 ^c | 0.91 |
| Level of praying | 1 | 6 | 4.9 ^d | 1.45 |

Note. (a) Lower scores signifying increasing levels in the measured variable; (b) Lower scores referring to positive attitudes; (c) Higher points reflecting positive views; (d) Higher points referring to increasing levels of praying.

Results:

Before discussing the religious implications of the Internet in the Arab region, it is important to first identify patterns of Internet consumption among Arabs, and then elaborate how Arab citizens evaluate their religiosity and religious commitment. Starting with Internet exposure, the findings in Table 2 showed that the vast majority of Arabs (73%) use the Internet with varying degrees, whereas less than one third of them (27%) do not use it at all. Relatedly, the average of Internet use among Arab men (M=2.5, SD=1.99) was statistically higher than among Arab women (M=3, SD= 2.17), $t(26628) = -19.03$, $p=0.000$.

Table (2)
Level of Internet Use among Arab Citizens

| Internet Use | Frequency | % |
|---------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Throughout the day | 11606 | 43.5 |
| At least once daily | 4937 | 18.5 |
| Several times a week | 1855 | 7 |
| Once a week | 633 | 2.4 |
| Less than once a week | 364 | 1.4 |
| I do not use the Internet | 7267 | 27.2 |
| Total | 26662 | 100 |

Turning to religious-related factors, the results in Table 3 indicated that only 36% of Arabs described themselves as religious persons, compared to 51.5% who considered themselves as somewhat religious. Whereas only 12.5% reporting that they are not religious persons at all. Generally, the vast majority of Arabs (87.5%) considered themselves as religious persons. However, self-reported religiosity differed due to religion and gender differences. In detail, the mean averages of self-described religiosity among Christians ($M=1.8$, $SD=0.63$) were significantly lower than among Muslims ($M=1.7$, $SD=0.65$), $t(24693)=-4.39$, $p=0.000$. As for gender, the Arab men considered themselves as less religious persons ($M=1.8$, $SD=0.67$) than the Arab women (1.6 , $SD=0.61$), $t(24907)=20.99$, $p=0.000$.

Table (3)
Self-Reported Religiosity

| Religiosity | Frequency | % |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| Religious | 8953 | 36 |
| Somewhat religious | 12907 | 51.5 |
| Not religious | 3081 | 12.5 |
| Total | 26662 | 100 |

Consistent with these increasing degrees of self-evaluated religiosity, Table 4 indicated that 93% of Arabs (with different religion backgrounds) stated that they pray, and nearly half of the praying persons (48.8%) reported that they pray five times a day, while only 7% stating that they never prayed. Commitment to praying varied due to religion and gender differences, however. More specifically, the mean averages of praying among Christians ($M=3.7$, $SD=1.24$) were significantly lower than among Muslims ($M=5$, $SD=1.39$), $t(24909)= 34.53$, $p= 0.000$. In addition, levels of praying among men ($M=4.7$, $SD=1.62$) were statistically lower than among women ($M=5$, $SD=1.22$), $t(25112)= -23.77$, $p= 0.000$.

Table 4
Self-Reported Level of Praying

| Level of Praying | Frequency | % |
|-----------------------|-----------|------|
| Never | 1766 | 7 |
| At least once a month | 694 | 2.8 |
| Once a week | 1030 | 4.2 |
| Several times a week | 2020 | 8 |
| Once a day | 7354 | 29.2 |
| Five times a day | 12282 | 48.8 |
| Total | 25146 | 100 |

Taken the previous results together, it can be argued that both the Internet and religion representing an integral part of the daily activities carried out by a vast majority of Arabs. This provides an empirical evidence supporting Hoover's (2002) statement that religion and media are nowadays "meeting on a common turf: the everyday world of lived experience" (p. 2).

Religious Implications of Internet Exposure:

According to the framework and literature review elaborated previously, the rise and spread of online religious communities has given way to new "banal" religious beliefs and practices to emerge. In addition, frequent exposure to diverse and competing religious views,

beliefs, and practices on the online domain has threatened conventional religious leaders by eroding their long-established authority. Furthermore, the mediatization of religion processes have promoted more privatized understandings of religion in modern societies. To investigate these arguments within the Arab context, a series of Partial Correlations was conducted among certain factors relevant to the main assumptions under study. The results demonstrated that Internet exposure was significantly correlated with decreasing levels of trust in religious leaders [$r(11910) = -0.069, p = 0.000$]. Similarly, the general results showed that 58.5% of the respondents expressed either little or no trust at all (28% and 30.5%, respectively) in religious leaders, compared to 41.5% who paid religious elites either great or some trust (10.7%, 30.8%, respectively). Furthermore, Internet use was positively associated with growing rejections of any potential interventions of the religious leaders in politics [$r(22162) = 0.103, p = 0.000$]. Given these results, H1 and H2 were accepted, meaning that frequent exposure to the Internet has weakened institutionalized religion across the Arab region as argued by the theory.

As for the privatization of religion phenomenon, Internet exposure was found to be positively correlated with greater support for the separation between religious practices and social life [$r(23744) = 0.044, p = 0.000$], approving H3. In addition, Internet consumption was significantly correlated with holding more negative attitudes toward enforcement of sharia [$r(22328) = -0.043, p = 0.000$], which is consistent with H4. Furthermore, Internet users were more willing to describe themselves as unreligious persons [$r(24695) = -0.053, p = 0.000$]; less likely to pray [$r(24883) = 0.068, p = 0.000$]; and more likely to reject enforcement of hijab on Muslim women [$r(23132) = 0.014, p = 0.03$]. Moreover, Internet consumption cultivated positive views toward gender equality [$r(13668) = 0.135, p = 0.000$], which means that internet users tended to refuse any utilization of religious claims that may undermine the sociopolitical rights of women. According to these findings, H5 (a, b, c, and d) was accepted.

Regarding the consequences of Internet consumption for religious tolerance, the findings showed that Internet use cultivated positive attitudes toward the religious other [$r(24500) = -0.107, p = 0.000$], in that Internet users were more willing to accept people of a different religion as their neighbor than non-Internet users. Relatedly, frequent

exposure to the Internet generated negative positions [$r(21858) = -0.108, p = 0.000$] toward any religious claims that may diminish the sociopolitical rights of non-Muslims. Taken these findings together, H6 (a and b) is supported.

Discussion:

The Arab region has frequently been referred to as a world's spot for both religious devotion and hostility (Hoffman, 2020). Agreeing, the Pew Research Center (2019) ranked the Middle East and North Africa as the world's highest region in terms of government restrictions on religion as well as of social hostilities involving religion. According to the Pew center, this has been constant from 2007 to 2017. The current work adds another empirical evidence supporting these conclusions. For instance, the results in Table 5 show that the majority of Arab citizens (87.5%), with different religious backgrounds, described themselves as either religious or somewhat religious persons. Despite the rising of self-evaluated religiosity, only 15% of the participants accepted to have members of outgroup religions as neighbors, compared to 33.6% who refused to live among neighbors from different religions. The remaining participants (51.4%) showed neutral positions toward this issue.

Table 5
Acceptance of Having Persons of
Different Religion as Neighbors

| Attitudes | Frequency | % |
|---------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Strongly dislike | 3103 | 12.3 |
| Dislike | 5367 | 21.3 |
| Neither dislike, nor like | 12931 | 51.4 |
| Like | 2376 | 9.5 |
| Strongly like | 1371 | 5.5 |
| Total | 25148 | 100 |

In addition, the findings of Table 6 indicate that 25.2% of Arab citizens attributed the ongoing tensions prevalent across the region to

the historical religious divide existing between Shia and Sunni, whereas 21.6% referred to both the Shia-Sunni cleavage and the political divide among politicians as the main causes behind these tensions. That is, religious hostility is deemed by nearly a half of the participants (46.8%) as a major threat in the Arab region, which provides another instance supporting the Pew results.

Bearing in mind the rise of both religiosity and religious hostility in the Arab world, it becomes clear why online religious communities and religious use of the Internet have flourished across the region. Therefore, the Arab context provides an ideal case for exploring the religious implications of the Internet at the institutional as well as individual levels, which is deemed the main aim of this work. As for the institutional level, the study investigated the probable impacts of the Internet on conventional religious authority in the region. At the individual level, it examined whether online communication, with diverse and contradictory religious content, would enhance or undermine religious openness among Arabs.

Table 6
Causes of Tensions in the Arab Region

| Causes | Frequency | % |
|--|------------------|----------|
| Political divide between politicians | 10924 | 48 |
| Religious divide between Shia and Sunni | 5736 | 25.2 |
| Both of these divides | 4894 | 21.6 |
| Neither of these divides | 1189 | 5.2 |
| Total | 25148 | 100 |

Starting with the institutional consequences, the findings indicate that online communication undermines religious authority in the Arab region, in that Internet users adopt increasing degrees of distrust in religious leaders. In addition, they refuse any political roles to be played by religious elites in society. These results are congruent with existing literature. For example, Meyrowitz (1985) argued that the constant advancements of new information technologies lead to a decline of authority in general (p.63). As for religion authority in particular, Meyer and Moors (2006) contended that new media have

significantly altered the ways in which religious values and practices are circulated and conceived by adherents, and hence they “shape the specific modes by which religion go public, modes that are difficult to control by religious establishments” (p. 11). To the authors, information technologies have given way to new religious identities and agents to develop, challenging conventional religious structures (p. 12). Furthermore, Hjarvard (2011, 2016) introduced the concept of “banal religion” to explain how today’s religious imageries and practices of today have increasingly been advanced away from the control of traditional religious authority.

To explain the process through which religious authorities are undermined due to the rise of online communication, Cheong (2013) developed what he called “the logic of disjuncture and displacement.” Explaining this logic, the author pointed out that the Internet empowered ordinary individuals with more viable and vibrant religious platforms by which centralized religious authorities have gradually been supplanted. In addition, exposing to diverse religious knowledge and experience through the Internet helped shape ones’ religious identities away from traditional religious institutions. Moreover, digital communication opened wide doors for new religious mediators to form, undermining the social and religious status of conventional religious elites (Cheong, 2013, pp. 74-76).

Turning to the religious implications of the Internet at the individual level, the findings find a positive correlation between Internet use and increasing secular tendencies among Arab citizens. This can be seen for instance in the growing perceptions of religion as a privatized rather than public matter; increasing rejection of enforcing sharia and hijab; and rising support for gender equality. These findings are in line with the mediatization of religion theory, which suggested that mediatized religion processes accelerate secularization of society on the long term (Hjarvard, 2008a, 2011, 2016; see also Collins & Sturgill, 2013; Lövheim, 2011; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019; Lundby, 2016). Conceiving it as “a part of a gradual secularization,” Hjarvard (2008) described mediatization of religion as “the historical process in which the media have taken over many of the social functions that used to be performed by religious institutions” (p. 10).

Broadly, the mediatization-secularization argument was primarily established upon the classical secularization theory, which argued for

a positive association between the rise of secular orientations and the processes of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization that distinguish our modern era (e.g., Collins & Sturgill, 2013; Habermas, 2006; Hjarvard, 2016). In one of the most comprehensive investigations of the secularization theory, Norris and Inglehart (2011) surveyed 74 countries over 20 years extending from 1981 to 2001. The authors concluded in their seminal volume entitled "Sacred and Secular" that the constant decline of religiosity and religion, observed across the 74 societies examined, was strongly associated with the growth of secularization/modernization. In the same vein, Habermas (2008) confirmed that "the data collected globally still provide surprisingly robust support for the defenders of the secularization thesis" (p. 19).

In addition to implications of the Internet consumption for religious authority and secularization discussed above, the results indicate that online interaction cultivates tolerance toward the religious other and their sociopolitical rights. This conclusion is supported by previous research, where digital media users showed more appreciation of the cultural and political differences compared to non-users (e.g., Balkin, 2004; Houston, 2003; Hu & Li, 2019; Lee & Hicks, 2011; Lu & Yu, 2020; Perry & Snawder, 2016; Rathnayake & Winter, 2017; Robinson, Neustadt, & Kestnbaum, 2002; Seebruck, 2013). Also, existing scholarship shown that exposing to alternative religious beliefs, cultures, and practices on the online sphere increased tolerance toward religious outgroup members (e.g., Amrullah, Ali, & Sukimi, 2019; Freeburg, 2018; Lövheim, 2008; Robinson et al., 2002).

Conclusion:

The introduction of the Internet has revolutionized religion in several ways. To start with, it changed the religious informational structure in society, empowering individuals with a huge and diverse number of religious beliefs, cultures, and practices that they would never expose to otherwise. Moreover, online religion challenged formal religious authorities by giving rise to new religious agents, meanings, and imageries to form. Furthermore, electronic media substituted existing patterns of circulation and reception of religious content, allowing ordinary individuals and religious minorities to engage in the construction and dissemination of religious knowledge. To better understand the religious implications of traditional and new media

outlets, the mediatization of religion theory was advanced. While most of the theory's investigations were conducted in Western secular societies, little has been known about its reliability in the Arab context. The current work seeks to achieve this goal, utilizing a unique cross-national survey interviewed more than 25,000 Arab citizens from 12 Arab countries.

Consistent with the mediatization of religion theory, the results conclude that the rise and spread of online media has undermined formal religious institutions in the Arab world, allowing for new types of "banal" religious representations and practices to flourish. Exposing to these informal and out-of-control religious views has significantly transformed religion to become a more privatized matter as perceived by increasing percentages of Arabs. The growth of privatization of religion is reflected in the decline of both praying and self-reported religiosity among Arabs. It is also recognized in the increasing rejection of both enforcement of sharia and hijab on the one side, and the increasing appreciation and acceptance of the religious other and religious differences on the other side.

Highlighting the Internet's positive religious implications in the Arab region does not, however, negate the potential harmful impacts resulting from the religious use of the Internet. To make sure, several scholars have drawn attention to these negative outcomes (e.g., Alkazemi, 2019; Casanova, 1994; Dasgupta, 2006; Hjarvard 2008; Hjarvard 2001; Lövheim, 2008; Lövheim, 2011; Lövheim & Lynch, 2011). For instance, Hjarvard (2008) demonstrated that mediatized religion could accelerate tendencies of sacralization as well as secularization in modern societies. Other scholars (e.g., Campbell, 2013; Cheong, 2013; Knowles, 2013; Meyer & Moors, 2006; Stolow, 2006) pointed out that conventional religious agents have in turn utilized the Internet in maintaining and maximizing their religious power. More importantly, digital media have frequently been employed by various terrorist groups to cultivate terrorism, fundamentalism, and cyberhate (e.g., Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005; Celik, 2018; Johnson, 2018; Sunden & Paasonen, 2018). Despite these probable destructive outcomes, the results of this work conclude that the growth of Internet has generally helped "democratize" the Arab religious atmosphere.

The importance of the study lies in its attempt to expand the application of the mediatization of religion theory outside the

Western Nordic context, by exploring its viability in the Arab society. In addition, while much of theory's investigations have emphasized the religious implications of mass media use, this work has focused on the Internet's religious consequences.

Before concluding, some limitations to this study are worth mentioning. To begin with, constrained by the questions provided in the original survey, this work had to evaluate the Internet's impacts on religion using a question item addressing the general rather than the religious use of the Internet. Thus, upcoming research is invited to utilize a more specific question items addressing the religious use of the Internet in particular.

Second, the results of this work are limited to the religious implications of the Internet, and hence the potential religious impacts of social media use have not been examined due to the structure of the original survey. Exploring the religious influences of social media use could hence be deemed another important area for upcoming scholarship, especially with the growing dependence on these interactive platforms by Arabs, not only as a diverse source for religious knowledge but also as a relatively free platform for sharing counter religious beliefs and ideas.

Third, the mechanisms driving the implications of the Internet for religion and religious authority may be better captured using a mixed approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, which was not the case in this work. Therefore, upcoming scholarship is encouraged to employ qualitative methods, such as the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions along with other quantitative methods while addressing the positive and negative religious influences of digital media use across the Arab society.

References:

1. Alkazemi, M. (2019). Inner peace or piece of mind? Religiosity, media exposure and tolerance for disagreement about religion. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 18(2), 39-49. <https://doi:10.1080/15348423.2019.1651574>
2. Amrullah, H., Ali, M., & Sukimi, M. (2019). Information-seeking behavior of college students on religion tolerance through social media. *Islamiyyat*, 41(2), 9-15. <https://doi:10.17576/islamiyyat-2019-4001-02>
3. Armfield, G., & Holbert, L. (2003). The relationship between religiosity and Internet use. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 2(3), 129-144. https://doi:10.1207/S15328415JMR0203_01
4. Balkin, J. (2004). Digital speech and democratic culture: A theory of freedom of expression for the information society. *New York University Law Review*, 79(1), 1-55. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=470842
5. Barzilai-Nahon, K., & Barzilai, G. (2005). Cultured technology: The Internet and religious fundamentalism. *The Information Society*, 21(1), 25-40. <https://doi:10.1080/01972240590895892>
6. Campbell, H. (2013). Introduction: The rise of the study of digital religion. In Campbell, H. (Ed.), *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds* (pp. 121-). Routledge.
7. Campbell, H. (2017). Surveying theoretical approaches within digital religion studies. *New Media & Society*, 19(1), 15-24. <https://doi:10.1177/1461444816649912>
8. Campbell, H., & Lövheim, M. (2011). Introduction: Rethinking the online-offline connection in the study of religion online. *Information, Communication and Society*, 14(8), 1083-1096. <https://doi:10.1080/1369118X.2011.597416>
9. Casanova, J. (1994). *Public religions in the modern world*. The University of Chicago Press
10. Celik, S. (2018). Experiences of Internet users regarding cyberhate. *Information Technology & People*, 32(6), 1446-1471. <https://doi:10.1108/ITP-01-2018-0009>
11. Chaudhry, I. (2014). #Hashtags for change: Can Twitter promote social progress in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Communication*, 8 (1), 943-961. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view-File/2362/1111>
12. Cheong, P. (2013). Authority. In Campbell, H. (Ed.), *Digital religion:*

Understanding religious practice in new media worlds (pp. 72- 87). Routledge.

13. Collins, B., & Sturgill, A. (2013). The effects of media use on religious individuals' perceptions of science. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 12(4), 217-230. [https://doi: 10.1080/15348423.2013.845043](https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2013.845043)

14. Dasgupta, S. (2006). Gods in the sacred marketplace: Hindu nationalism and the return of the Aura in the public sphere. In B. Myer & A. Moors (Eds.), *Religion, media, and the public sphere* (pp. 251-268). Indiana University Press.

15. Dawson, L., & Cowan, D. (2004). Introduction. In L. Dawson & D. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.

16. Freeburg, D. (2018). The openness of religious beliefs to the influence of external information. *Journal of Information Science*, 44(3), 363-376. [https://doi: https: 10.1177/0165551516687727](https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551516687727)

17. Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the public sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14(1), 1-25. [https://doi:10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x)

18. Habermas, J. (2008). Notes on post-secular society. <https://archive.kenan.ethics.duke.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/5/files/2017/04/Habermas-Notes-on-Post-Secular-Society.pdf>

19. Hepp, A., Hjarvard, S., & Lundby, K. (2015). Mediatization: Theorization the interplay between media, culture and society. *Media, Culture, & Society*, 37(2), 314-324. [https://doi: 10.1177/0163443715573835](https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715573835)

20. Hjarvard, S. (2008a). The mediatization of religion: A theory of the media and agents of religious change. *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*, 6(1), 9-26. [https://doi: https:// https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1)

21. Hjarvard, S. (2008b). The mediatization of society: A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change. *Nordic Review*, 29(2), 105-134. [https://doi: 10.1515/nor-2017-0181](https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0181)

22. Hjarvard, S. (2011). The mediatization of religion: Theorising religion, media and social change. *Culture and Religion*, 12(2), 119-135. [https://doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579719](https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579719)

23. Hjarvard, S. (2016). Mediatization and the changing authority of religion. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(1), 8-17. [https://doi: 10.1177/0163443715615412](https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715615412)

24. Hjarvard, S., & Lundby, K. (2018). Understanding media dynamics. <https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/62703/Chap>

- ter-3-Understanding-Media-Dynamics.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y
25. Hoffman, M. (2020). Religion and tolerance of minority sects in the Arab world. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64(2-3), 432-458. [https://doi: 10.1177/0022002719864404](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719864404)
26. Højsgaard, M., & Warburg, M. (2005). Introduction: Waves of research. In M. Højsgaard & M. Warburg (Eds.), *Religion and cyberspace* (pp. 1-11). Routledge.
27. Hoover, S. (2002). The culturalist turn in scholarship on media and religion. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 1(1), 25-36. [https://doi: 10.1207/S15328415JMR0101_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15328415JMR0101_4)
28. Hoover, S., & Clark, L. (Eds.). (2002). *Practicing religion in the age of the media: Explorations in media, religion, and culture*. Columbia University Press.
29. Hoover, S., & Venturelli, S. (2006). The category of the religious: The blindspot of contemporary media theory? *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13(3), 251-265. [https://doi: https:// https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039609366978](https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039609366978)
30. Houston, D. (2003). Can the Internet promote open global societies? *The Independent Review*, 7(3), 353-369. https://www.independent.org/pdf/tir/tir_07_3_houston.pdf
31. Hu, K., & Li, X. (2019). The effects of media use and traditional gender role beliefs on tolerance of homosexuality in China. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 51(2), 147-172. [https://doi:10.1080/21620555.2019.1595567](https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2019.1595567)
32. Jin, D. (2015). The mediatization of Buddhism in digital media: The contemporary reflection of Uisang's Hwaom thought. *Journal of media and religion*, 14(5), 196-210. [https://doi: https:// https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2015.1116265](https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2015.1116265)
33. Johnson, B. (2018). Tolerating and managing extreme speech on social media. *Internet Research*, 28(5), 1275-1291. [https://doi: 10.1108/IntR-03-2017-0100/full/html](https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-03-2017-0100/full/html)
34. Jordan, T. (1999). *The culture and politics of cyberspace and the Internet*. Routledge.
35. Knowles, S. (2013). Rapture Ready and the world wide web: Religious authority on the Internet. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 12(3), 128-143. [https://doi: 10.1080/15348423.2013.820527](https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2013.820527)
36. Lee, T., & Hicks, G. (2011). An analysis of factors affecting attitudes toward same-sex marriage: Do the media matter? *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(10), 1391-1408. [https://doi: 10.1080/00918369.2011.614906](https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.614906)

37. Lövheim, M. (2008). Rethinking cyberreligion? Teen, religion and Internet in Sweden. *Nordic Review*, 29(2), 205-217. <https://doi:10.1515/nor-2017-0186>
38. Lövheim, M. (2011). Mediatization of religion: A critical appraisal. *Culture and Religion*, 12(2), 153-166. <https://doi:10.1080/14755610.2011.579738>
39. Lövheim, M., & Hjarvard, S. (2019). The mediatized conditions of contemporary religion: Critical status and future directions. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*. 8(2), 206-225. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00802002>
40. Lövheim, M., & Lynch, G. (2011). The mediatization of religion debate: An introduction. *Culture and Religion*, 12(2), 111-117. <https://doi:10.1080/14755610.2011.579715>
41. Lu, J., & Yu, X. (2020). Does the Internet make us more intolerant? Contextual analysis in 33 countries. *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(2), 252-266. <https://doi:10.1080/1369118X.2018.1499794>
42. Lundby, K. (2016). Mediatization and secularization: Transformations of public service institutions-the case of Norway. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(1), 28-36. <https://doi:10.1177/0163443715615414>
43. Meyer, B., & Moors, A. (2006). Introduction. In B. Myer & A. Moors (Eds.), *Religion, media, and the public sphere* (pp. 1-25). Indiana University Press.
44. Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. Oxford University Press.
45. Meyrowitz, J. (1993). Images of media: Hidden ferment-and harmony-in the field. *Journal of Communication*, 43(3), 55-66. <https://doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01276.x>
46. Midden, E. & Ponzanesi, S. (2013). Digital faith: An analysis of the online practices of Muslim women in the Netherlands. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 41(3), 197-203. <https://doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2013.07.012>
47. Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2011). *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
48. Perry, S., & Snawder, K. (2016). Longitudinal effects of religious media on opposition to same-sex marriage. *Sexuality & Culture*, 20(4), 785-804. <https://doi:10.1007/s12119-016-9357-y>
49. Pew Research Center. *A closer look at how religious restrictions have risen around the world*. <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/07/15/a-closer->

- look-at-how-religious-restrictions-have-risen-around-the-world/
50. Pocé, G., & Ališauskienė, M. (2017). Creating otherness: Minority religions and media in Lithuania. *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, 8(1), 49-71. [https://doi: 10.1558/ijsnr.25989](https://doi.org/10.1558/ijsnr.25989)
51. Rathnayake, C., & Winter, J. (2017). Examining the link between social media uses and gratifications, and political tolerance and dogmatism. *Policy and Internet*, 9(4), 444-466. [https://doi: 10.1002/poi.3.157](https://doi.org/10.1002/poi.3.157)
52. Robinson, J., Neustadt, A., & Kestnbaum, M. (2002). The on-line "Diversity Divide": Public opinion differences among Internet users and nonusers. *IT & Society*, 1(1), 284-302. [https://doi: 10.1.1.80.6457&rep=rep1&type=pdf](https://doi.org/10.1.1.80.6457&rep=rep1&type=pdf)
53. Roos, C. (2015). Mediatization theory: What is in it for the philosophy of communication? On Stig Hjarvard's *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. *European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication*, 6(1), 91-103. [https://doi: 10.1386/ejpc.6.1.91_3](https://doi.org/10.1386/ejpc.6.1.91_3)
54. Schiappa, E., Gregg, P., & Hewes, D. (2006). Can one TV show make a difference? Will & Grace and the parasocial contact hypothesis. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51(4), 15-37. [https://doi: 10.1300/J082v51n04_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v51n04_02)
55. Schulz, W. (2004). Reconstructing mediatization as an analytical concept. *European Journal of Communication*, 19(1), 87-101. [https://doi: 10.1177/0267323104040696](https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323104040696)
56. Seebruck, R. (2013). Technology and tolerance in Japan: Internet use and positive attitudes and behaviors toward foreigners. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 16(2), 279-300. [https://doi: https://doi:10.1093/ssjj/jyt017](https://doi.org/10.1093/ssjj/jyt017)
57. Stolow, J. (2006). Communicating authority, consuming tradition: Jewish orthodox outreach literature and its reading public. In B. Myer & A. Moors (Eds.), *Religion, media, and the public sphere* (pp. 73-90). Indiana University Press.
58. Stout, D. & Buddenbaum, J. (2002). Genealogy of an emerging field: Foundations for the study of media and religion. *Journal of media and religion*, 1(1), 5-12. [https://doi: 10.1207/S15328415JMR0101_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15328415JMR0101_2)
59. Sunden, J. & Paasonen, S. (2018). Shameless hags and tolerance whores: Feminist resistance and the affective circuits of on-line hate. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), 643-656. [https://doi: 10.1080/14680777.2018.1447427](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1447427)
60. Towler, R. (1974). *Homo religious: Sociological problems in the study of religion*. Constable, London.

