EASR 2019: Religion – Continuations and Disruptions

Call for Papers:

Methodological Challenges in Studying Digital Religion (Open Session)

(Chairs: Frederik Elwert and Maren Freudenberg, Ruhr University Bochum)

Changes and disruptions in the religious field challenge the methodological approaches of scholars studying the field, as new phenomena might require modification to traditional methods or require new methods altogether. This holds particularly true for the rapid changes due to the digitization of society and the emergence of digital religious forms. Scholars face difficulties applying traditional qualitative and quantitative methods to the Internet and other digital spaces, which only partly mirror offline phenomena.

For example, when it comes to webpages, traditional methods of visual and textual analysis are of limited help, given the multi-modality and non-linearity of visual, textual, and audio components and the discrepancies between the user paths intended by the web design and the actual paths taken by users. There are, indeed, many aspects of digital spaces that can inform the study of digital religion, including networks of actions and platforms, interconnections between users, and non-traditional forms of expression. Therefore, there are some questions that need to be explored: In which ways can we, as scholars, approach digital venues? What is the impact of the chosen methodology on the object of study?

Thus we invite scholars to discuss the methodological challenges they face when studying digital religion.

These might include but are not limited to

* multi-mediality of websites, e.g. text and image and video,

* interactivity and usage studies,

* non-linearity and network structures of web pages,

* availability of large-scale data, e.g. web forums, YouTube comments,

* multi-method studies (ex. textual analysis combined with interviews),

* social network analysis of social media data, e.g. Twitter.

While some of the challenges can be discussed from an abstract methodological perspective, many of them become apparent through concrete experiences in studying digital religion. The panel puts emphasis on the reflection of methodological approaches and challenges rooted in empirical studies that deal with specific cases of digital religion. However, more theoretical contributions are also invited.

Case studies can include (but are by no means limited to)

* the online self-representation of minority religions,

* the appropriation of digital media by majority religions,

* digital media beyond the web, e.g. mobile apps,

* networks of religious media,

* examples of religious contact and material forms of religion on the Internet,

* hashtags as a frame for religious communication in the web (for example to foster critical discourses of religion).

We welcome innovative and interdisciplinary contributions that bring together new empirical and methodological perspectives, especially if they focus on under-researched phenomena. A possible outcome of the session is a special journal issue on methods for the study of digital religion.

If you are interested in submitting an abstract to this open session, please do so by **December 15, 2018** on the conference website: https://easr2019.org/call-for-individual-papers/

We look forward to receiving your proposals!