

Beyond deliberation and cyber-balkanization

Contextual responses to religious encounters through social media

Master Thesis – Research Master Sociology of Culture, Media & the Arts
Erasmus School of History, Culture & Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Anneke Pons- de Wit [321023]
annekepons@solcon.nl
Word count: 9978 (excl. appendix)
Date: 27-06-2013

Supervisor

Dr. Willem de Koster
Assistant Professor – Cultural Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Second Reader

Prof. Dr. Susanne Janssen
Professor – Sociology of Media and Culture
Erasmus School of History, Culture & Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Abstract

Although much research has been done on the social consequences of religious communication in a plural society, religious encounters through social media are understudied. Despite several calls for contextualization of the social implications of internet communication, the general debate on internet communication and intergroup understanding remains divided between the theories of religious deliberation and cyber-balkanization. This research aims to overcome this dichotomy by studying how the exposure to and the evaluation of religious messages can be understood from the value patterns of religious users. In-depth interviews with members of orthodox and ecumenical religious groups in the Netherlands reveal two value dimensions which matter. The first dimension covers how religious users perceive the place of religion in society (moral individualists versus collectivists) and the second dimension the perceived appropriateness of social media to communicate on religion. These two dimensions create four types of religious users who evaluate religious communication through social media differently: the indifferent, the self-enhancer, the guardian and the connector. These types cannot be understood from the theories of cyber-balkanization and religious deliberation. This has to do with the distinctions between the in- and the out-group and between the private and the public sphere assumed in both theories. These distinctions appeared to be differently relevant for different users.

Keywords

Interreligious dialogue, Social Media, Cyber-balkanization, Religious Deliberation, Private-public distinction

Proposed journals to publish

Information, Communication & Society; New Media & Society; Journal of Contemporary Religion

Introduction

An important topic of research is the consequences of religious encounters in the plural environment of the internet. During the last decades, the physical barriers between people have decreased rapidly, which is partly caused by the dissemination of access to the internet (Castells, 2007, Casanova, 2007). The internet in general and the highly interactive internet facility of social media in particular generated more possibilities of religious encounters. Research in the field of intercultural and interreligious studies, makes clear that the reaction of religious groups and individuals to both intra- and interreligious encounters could cause major changes in society, religious groups and individual religious identities. The expected changes vary between religious relativism (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1973; Dobbelaere, 1981; Wallis & Bruce, 1992) and intergroup struggle and purification of the own religious tradition (Huntington, 1992; Blumer, 1958; Echchaibi, 2008; Roeland et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, in the fields of internet studies and interreligious dialogue the role of social media in the everyday intra- and interreligious encounters is understudied. As Ess & Dutton (2013) summarize, in the field of internet studies the intersection between religion and internet mainly cover online religious identity formation (Clark, 2002; 2007; Wagner, 2012), religious communities online (Campbell, 2010; De Koster, 2010) and the empowerment of socially marginalized groups (DiMaggio et al., 2001; De Koster & Houtman, 2008; De Koster, 2010). Religious encounters are covered extensively in the field of interreligious dialogue (Hick, 1995; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Moyaert, 2011), but encounters through the internet are not investigated in both fields.

However, the two very influential opposite theories of cyber-balkanization (Sunstein, 2007; Pariser, 2011; Edwards, 2013) and religious deliberation (Castells, 2007; Campbell, 2012; Wagner, 2012) focus on the consequences of internet communication on intra- and intergroup understanding in general. Nevertheless, increasingly scholars call for a contextualized approach (Sassenberg, 2002; Kennedy, 2006; Postill, 2006; De Koster, 2010; Campbell, 2012), in which the consequences of online communication are investigated in relationship to the context of the interaction. Until now, research which overcomes the theoretical dichotomy by focusing on differences between groups and individuals is still almost lacking.

Taking these considerations into account, the goal of this research is to understand the experiences and the evaluation of interreligious encounters from the contextual

perspective of value patterns. For this reason, I have conducted in-depth interviews with members of ecumenical and orthodox Christian groups who live in the surrounding of Rotterdam (the Netherlands) . During the interviews, they talked about the experiences regarding religious communication through social media. The analysis showed that the theories of cyber-balkanization and religious deliberation do not cover the four types of religious users of social media found in the data. However, before these findings and its theoretical consequences will be discussed, the theoretical background, the necessity to contextualize and the research plan will be explained further.

The call for contextualization of a theoretical dichotomy

Antagonistic expectations: Religious deliberation or cyber-balkanization

The theory of *religious deliberation* focuses on the way in which religion in general changes from an interrelationship between offline religion and online religious communication (Campbell, 2012). The starting point of this theory is the offline existence of religious organizations and the all-embracing feature of online communication (Papacharissi, 2002; Castells, 2007). Being involved in religious communication online means being involved in a social environment in which one is not only able to receive but also to produce religious meaning. Therefore, a process of democratization of the production of religious meaning and a decentralization of religious authority is expected (Campbell, 2012; Wagner, 2012; Hoover, 2008; Castells, 2007). Furthermore, meaning making on the internet takes place in a religiously diverse environment rather than in the homogeneous environment of the church. Consequently, it is assumed that the religious internet users converge the religious beliefs and practices of the own group and other groups (Campbell, 2012; Wagner, 2012). From this, an important change in religion is expected. The distinction between the in-group (own religious group) and out-groups (other religious groups) which is assumed to be typical for religious organizations since the differentiation of society in modernity, is expected to blur (Ibid; cf. Marwick & Boyd, 2010). The boundaries between religious groups start to blur, religious meanings will interchange and mutual intergroup understanding will increase. Furthermore, internet communication is expected to activate a process of blurring boundaries between private and public social life (Verstraeten, 1996; Persson, 2010). Based on

Goffman's theory Verstraeten (1996) and Persson (2010) assume that individuals will reveal private information to the public, because of the all-embracing nature of internet communication. In conclusion, the theory of religious deliberation through online religious communication expects that individuals will increasingly define their own meaning based on increasingly diverse opinions. Therefore boundaries between religious groups start to blur and privatized topics become public. This would lead to increased intergroup understanding.

In contrast to the theory of religious deliberation, a strengthening of the rigidness of group boundaries can be expected on the basis of Sunstein's (2007; cf. Edwards, 2013) seminal theory of *cyber-balkanization*. Sunstein's starting point is also the existence of offline groups, but he emphasizes the personalizing nature of internet communication (Papacharissi, 2002; Persson, 2010). Based on the assumption that individuals prefer to be exposed to the topics *and* the opinions they like, Sunstein expects that the possibility to be exposed to personalized information online will foster selective information exposure (cf. Tremayne, Zheng, Lee & Jeong, 2009). Consequently, in this internet era individuals are thought to live increasingly in a 'filter bubble' (Pariser, 2011). Such a decreased exposure to diverse opinions reduces the intergroup understanding and fosters the homogeneity of the in-group. Compared to the theory of religious deliberation, in the theory of cyber-balkanization a strengthening of the distinction between the in-group and the out-group is expected, because the group identity becomes increasingly separated from other identities. With regard to religious communication, this theory predicts that religious individuals prefer to be exposed to religious meanings of the in-group and exclude other opinions. Furthermore, the possibility the internet offers to live in a filter bubble also fosters selective exposure to and biased positive evaluation of topics one is interested in. Thereby internet communication allows someone to distinguish between topics, including the distinction between public and private topics. If religion is regarded as a private topic, one can choose not to be or selectively be exposed to information on religion. In contrast to the expectations of the theory of religious deliberation, the theory of cyber-balkanization therefore holds that people will increasingly distinguish between the in- and the out-group and between private and public topics. As a consequence, increased intergroup polarization is expected.

Need for contextualization

When the internet became increasingly used as a way of communication, many theoretical ideas on the social implication of the internet were developed. However, citing Agre, DiMaggio et al. conclude that ‘discussions on the internet are often informed less by positive knowledge than by the cultural system of myths and ideas that our society puts onto technology’ (2001: 329). He therefore calls for the conduction of contextualized empirical research instead of the expression of general theoretical expectations (cf. Sassenberg, 2002; Kennedy, 2006; Postill, 2006; Campbell, 2010; De Koster, 2010). Decidedly, it can be expected that different groups will react differently to different situations on the internet. Taking these differences into account helps to understand the different mechanism at work with regard to the social implications of internet communication.

Although in the theories of religious deliberation and cyber-balkanization an interrelationship between the context and online communication is assumed, both fail to contextualize. Especially Campbell (2012) claims to respond to the call of contextualization. According to her, the offline context interrelates with the online communication features, which results in a networked type of religion. The theory of cyber-balkanization also assumes an interrelationship between the preference of being exposed to messages of the in-group and the features of internet communication. However, both theories assume a *general* change in the direction of respectively increased intergroup understanding and intergroup polarization based on a *general* value pattern. In that sense both approaches still show traces of techno-determinism and neglect the call for investigating the *differences* between groups or individuals with regard to dealing with internet communication (Sassenberg, 2002; Bakardjieva, 2005; Kennedy, 2006; De Koster, 2010).

Therefore, in our research the call for contextualization of the question on the social implications of the internet is met. Central to this approach is the assumption that purposive action is the core motivation to evaluate intergroup encounters (De Koster, 2010). Purposive action is mostly driven by value patterns, whether rationally or irrationally defined (Weber, 1964 [1947]). A consequence of this approach both the value patterns behind the evaluation of online religious encounters and the definition of religious encounters become an empirical question (cf. Bakardjieva, 2005). This definition differs a lot from the dominant definition in the field of offline interreligious dialogue. There, interreligious encounters are defined as intended dialogues between different religious groups meant to foster optimal interreligious

understanding (Hick, 1995; Keaten & Soukup, 2009). However, this definition is rooted in a pluralistic approach of religion and has a blind spot for unintended encounters not meant to strengthen interreligious understanding (D'Costa, 1996; Moyaert, 2011). Conclusively, asking religious individuals to define their own religious encounters makes one more sensitive to the creative ways in which the *experienced* encounters are evaluated either positively or negatively.

In the academic literature, the group doctrine on the interrelationship between the in- and the out-group is regarded as an important value dimension to understand individual differences concerning the evaluation of religious encounters (Moyaert, 2011; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Merino, 2010; Trinitapoli, 2007). Group doctrines differ mainly between exclusivism on the one hand and pluralism on the other hand. Exclusivist groups regard the religious beliefs of other religions as false (Moyaert, 2011; Keaten & Soukup, 2009), while pluralist groups assume that every religious idea constitutes one way of approaching the Real (ibid; Hick, 1995). Consequently, the pluralistic doctrine is regarded to be open to learn from the religious other to get a better idea of the Real, while openness to the religious other is discouraged by exclusivist doctrines because the doctrine of the other is regarded as wrong (Trinitapoli, 2007; Merino, 2010). From this, it can be expected that members of exclusive groups evaluate interreligious encounters more negatively than pluralist groups do.

Of course, the evaluation of online communication on religion does most likely not only depend on a one-dimensional framework of religious doctrines. For instance, the involvement in the academic world or experiences of being a marginalized individual in the religious group can foster the incorporation of frameworks of reference other than the religious doctrine (Lee, 2002; De Koster, 2010). Evaluation of religious encounters could be influenced by these frameworks as well. Consequently, it is important to remain open to value patterns which differ from the religious doctrine to understand an individual's exposure to and evaluation of online religious messages.

Research plan

Ecumenical and orthodox Christians

This research is based on in-depth interviews with members of the orthodox protestant *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* and members of an ecumenical Christian group living in the Netherlands in the urban area of Rotterdam. The choice for the Netherlands does not only have practical, but also theoretical advantages, because the Netherlands is one of the most culturally and religiously pluralist countries (Lechner, 2008). Therefore, the possibility of exposure to other religious opinions is more common and mechanisms of closeness and openness will appear most clearly. Both groups are chosen on the basis of the existing assumption that differences regarding the exposure to and evaluation of religious encounters can be understood from the group doctrine on the interrelation between in- and out-groups.

The main objective of the Christian Ecumenical movement of the 20th century is to overcome the differences among religious groups. This is rooted in a general idea of religious relativism and pluralism (Irvin, 1994; Heim, 1998), in which the God of all religions is regarded as the same (Kuipers, 2012). On the other hand, the central doctrine of orthodox protestant groups in the Netherlands is exclusive to other religious beliefs (Stoffels, 1995) which is typical for the orthodox strand of Christianity in general (ibid; Myers, 2003). Thus, the doctrine of the ecumenical Christian group in Rotterdam is pluralistic and the doctrine of the orthodox Protestants exclusivist.

Qualitative in-depth interviews

To answer the research question, the qualitative method of in-depth interviews was chosen, which has several advantages over other methods. Firstly, it is best to ask individuals themselves about the considerations that go beyond the exposure to and evaluation of online religious messages (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). Therefore, interviews fit our research goal better than participatory research methods. Secondly, face-to-face interviewing is preferred over online interviews, as it opens up the possibility to talk also with religious users of social media who are less convenient with the medium. Kazmer & Xie (2008) mention that inconvenience with the location can be disadvantage of face-to-face interviews. However, this disadvantage is taken into account by asking the respondents to choose the location of

the interview. This worked out well. The evaluation of the interviewees varied between ‘nice interview’ and ‘relaxed interview’.

Seven interviews were held with members of the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* and six with members of an ecumenical religious group in the surrounding of Rotterdam. Their names are replaced with pseudonyms in this article. More information concerning the gender, age and religious group can be found in appendix 1. The interviews took place at the home or in a public space and lasted between one and an half hour and three hours each. The first respondents are approached either before the start of a sermon or through personal networks. Next, snowball sampling was used, which was mainly guided by the principle of theoretical relevance (Flick, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The theoretical relevance in this research was based on the principle of interviewing people who use social media differently with regard to religious communication. The advantage of this approach was that it was easier to create trust, as a positive reference of a friend from social media could be used. This was especially relevant in the case of the members of the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten*, since the topic was somewhat controversial for them.

I did not use a fixed list of questions. The conversation covered several aspects of religious encounters through social media, such as intended and unintended exposures to online religious messages, initiating and evaluation of such encounters, and the considerations on which these decisions are based. Furthermore, the religious diversity of the individual network on social media, and the opinion on the religious other and on social media as a way of communication were discussed during the interview. This semi-structured way of interviewing appeared to be an excellent way to remain open to unexpected insights and opinions of the respondents.

Two underlying value dimensions

Among the respondents, big differences exist with regard to the definition of a religious message. For instance, for Pieter ‘the central goal is your connection with God’, while Fleur states:

‘helping each other, caring for each other, doing things together: Religion is such a social aspect for me’.

Typically, the religious other is defined as the contradiction of ones most important religious values. Accordingly, Pieter defines individuals who ‘miss the connection with God’ as the religious other, while for Fleur the religious other is personalized by the ‘anti-social’ rightist tweets of Geert Wilders. Therefore, it is important to take into account that individuals will label different messages as intra-religious and interreligious.

The respondents also differ with regard to the frequency of experiencing religious messages. Tom for instance states: ‘in general, my experience is that people do not share many philosophical things’. Sophie does even never read religious messages on Facebook. However, on the other hand, Anna is often involved in discussions which ‘particularly cover religious topics’. The same goes for Arjan, who wonders how many Christians he became connected to online. Concerning interreligious encounters, Luuk explains that he is ‘connected to very different people (...) and therefore is exposed to all types of opinions’, while Pieter only experiences intra-religious encounters. Conclusively, these religious users differ extensively with regard to involvement in religious interactions.

Interestingly, these differences cannot be understood from the expected difference regarding doctrinal openness between exclusivists and pluralists. Two other value dimensions make the difference: whether it is appropriate to communicate on sacred topics online and which place religion should have in society. In the next part four types of evaluation of and exposure to religious messages will be discussed, which logically follow from the two value dimensions discussed firstly.

Communicating the sacred online

‘I still think that it is best to discuss religious topics face-to-face’. That was the reason Ria gave me when I asked her why she did not react to religious messages online. This really contradicts to the opinion of Bjorn who told me that social media ‘absolutely’ are appropriate to communicate on religious topics. Apparently, respondents differ in their opinion on the appropriateness of social media to communicate on sacred things.

The question of whether social media are defined as appropriate or inappropriate does not depend on fixed features of social media or the sacred. This is the outcome of a negotiation between the features of the object of social media and the existing ideas on the nature of the sacred (Becker, 2011; Alexander, as described in Lynch & Sheldon, 2013). Becker (2011: 1185-1186) defines this negotiation between technology and moral opinions

on it as the affordance of technology. Accordingly, it depends much on the definition of the sacred and of the affordances of social media whether it is allowed to use social media for religious communication.

An important moral consideration regarding religious communication on social media is authenticity (Andriotis, 2009). Among the respondents, authenticity is translated in two requirements. On the one hand, the *realness* of religious communication is mentioned. For Tom, apparently social media do not meet this requirement::

‘Actually, the Biblical message is one.. if you truly want to proclaim, than you’ll proclaim it with your heart (...) So, if you post a message on it through Facebook, there is less ‘heart’ in it.’

However, according to Laura, social media meet the requirement of realness. In her opinion ‘actually, you are going to experience that [religion online, AP] like you experience your friends and the way they communicate’. Secondly, respondents thought *profoundness* to be required to communicate on religion. According to Anna, social media are valuable, because:

‘actually, I think that it [social media, AP] is almost the same as writing a letter. That has a certain value which can be very intense, because you can express things deliberately’.

However, others like Ria and Thea disagree. Thea told me how she was somewhat upset that a colleague wrote a message about the Lord’s Supper on Facebook. She thought:

‘I would not share such things on Facebook, you know.. I don’t think Facebook is the appropriate way to share that. For me... yeah... that’s very delicate you know... something of your personal beliefs you don’t share on your account.’

They define social media as ‘superficial’, for what reason it is not appropriate for religious communication. Conclusively, among the respondents a difference in the opinion on the appropriateness of social media exists, which has to do with the experienced realness and profoundness of social media. However, only from the interrelationship with a second value dimension the exposure to and evaluation of religious communication can be properly understood.

The place of religion in society: Moral individualism and collectivism

During one of the interviews, Tom, a young man who is brought up in an orthodox family, told me about the struggles he has had with these orthodox beliefs during the last years and how he recently became more seriously involved in another orthodox church. A little bit astonished, I asked him why he did not talk at all about this on social media. His answer was as follows:

‘religiously believing is something very personal for me, you know.’

This answer discloses a very privatized idea of religion, which appears to be different from the collectivist idea of religion found among other respondents.

A privatized idea of religion is part of a morally individualized personality (Bellah et al., 2008 [1985]; Berger et al., 1973; Houtman & Aupers, 2010). The core belief of moral individualism is that the development of religious convictions is located at the level of the individual (Bellah et al., 2008 [1985]; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Houtman & Aupers, 2010). As Berger et al. (1973; cf. Besecke, 2005) explain, a morally individualized personality emphasizes individual freedom and autonomy to define the own religious beliefs. From this, an aversion to the paternalistic influences of religious institutions in individual life follows. Typically, the relationship of moral individualists to the own religious group is reflexive (Berger et al. 1973; Giddens, 1991: 75; Bellah et al., 2008 [1985]: 21) and to other religious groups tolerant (Heyd, 1996; Keith, 2004; De Koster et al., 2011). Both attitudes stem from the same logic of keeping a distance from group dominance and making room for themselves and others to define their opinion individually.

Not all respondents are moral individualists. When Ria talks about experienced problems of some churches today, she mentioned the ‘lack of religious structures’, because that is ‘the best method’ to fulfill the general need of giving meaning to one’s life. Apparently, for Ria the religious group is important to define religious beliefs. Although this moral collectivistic attitude is not so much treated explicitly in academic literature, the development of the moral individualistic personality is sometimes explained in comparison to the collectivist personality (e.g. Berger et al., 1973). The starting point of religious collectivism is at the level of the community. Consequently, religious meaning is thought to be defined on the level of the group and not on the individual level (Gudykunst, Yoon & Nishida, 1987; Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988). For this reason, Anna does not matter to talk about religion in public.

Since moral collectivists derive their religious meaning from the own religious group, this group is very important for them (Gudykunst et al., 1987, Bochner, 1994). Therefore, several efforts are made to protect that group. For example, Anna experiences the prominent appearance of orthodox church leaders in the media as ‘irritating’ and has the idea she ‘has to do something’. Also, for Marco it is difficult to disagree with his own group overtly, while he wants to void disagreement with other religions ‘to express my Christian identity’. The focus on the own religious group goes along with disinterest for other beliefs, which ‘does not add something to me’ (Thea). Nevertheless, Thea also expresses how the wish to protect the in-group or expand can lead to an exposure to the beliefs of others. She reads for instance a popular Dutch magazine for young women, called ‘Girlz’ online

‘[...] to see what’s on it and how those girls think. The questions they ask, yeah, that’s confronting to me. But, however, then I’m thinking: O yes, but that’s about the girls I meet at Friday evening. So, then I know when I meet them: That’s what you read. For I think it is good to empathize with your target group.’

Obviously, Thea reads these other opinions to know the group she wants to convince to become involved in the own group.

Conclusively, moral collectivists derive religious meaning from the religious group they are dedicated to. For that reason, protection and enhancement of this group is very important for them. In that sense, they disagree with moral individualists, who derive religious meaning from individual considerations.

Moral individualism in relationship to religious pluralism and exclusivism

Although in academic literature moral individualism is attributed to a religious pluralist doctrine and regarded as contradictive to an exclusivist doctrine (Berger et al. 1973; Wallis & Bruce, 1992; Bellah et al., 2008 [1985]; Keith, 2004), our data do not confirm this theory. Actually, it appears to be the case that some orthodox Christians are morally and some ecumenical Christians morally collectivistic as well. The connection between moral individualism and religious pluralism is based on the assumption that religious beliefs are put in a relative perspective when one distances oneself from in-group defined religious meanings. However, it becomes clear from research on religious fundamentalism that moral individualism can foster religious exclusivism as well (Echchaibi, 2008; Geelhoed, 2012;

Roeland et al., 2010). Sometimes, the central goal of fundamentalists is the strengthening of the individual spirituality, which is a hyper individualistic. Nevertheless, this goal is realized through incorporating traditional religion in one's own identity. On the other hand, religious pluralists appear to be less open to different religious messages than often assumed (D'Costa, 1996; Burggraeve, 2007; Moyaert, 2011). Even Anna, who emphasizes several times that she is 'not so strict: much is open for discussion', appears to value the orthodox 'black-white' thinkers in Christianity negatively.

In short, differences in the evaluation of online religious communication cannot be understood from the doctrinal difference regarding openness between pluralists and exclusivists, but from an interrelationship of moral individualism versus collectivism with the opinion on appropriateness of social media to communicate on religion. Both value patterns of both dimensions occur among the regarded pluralists from the ecumenical church and the regarded exclusivists from the orthodox church. In the next part we will look at the way in which an interrelationship between both value dimensions result in four different ways of exposure to and evaluation of online religious encounters.

Different evaluation among different users

When the two value patterns of the opinion on religious communication through social media and the opinion on the place of religion in society are combined, four types of religious users emerge (see figure 1). Based on its specific value pattern, each type evaluates online religious encounters differently and wants to be exposed to different religious messages.

The indifferent: 'I'm fed up with all those opinions'

Some of the religious users of social media combine moral individualism with a negative opinion on the appropriateness of social media to communicate on religion. For instance, Tom regards social media as 'superficial' which is why he thinks it is inappropriate to talk

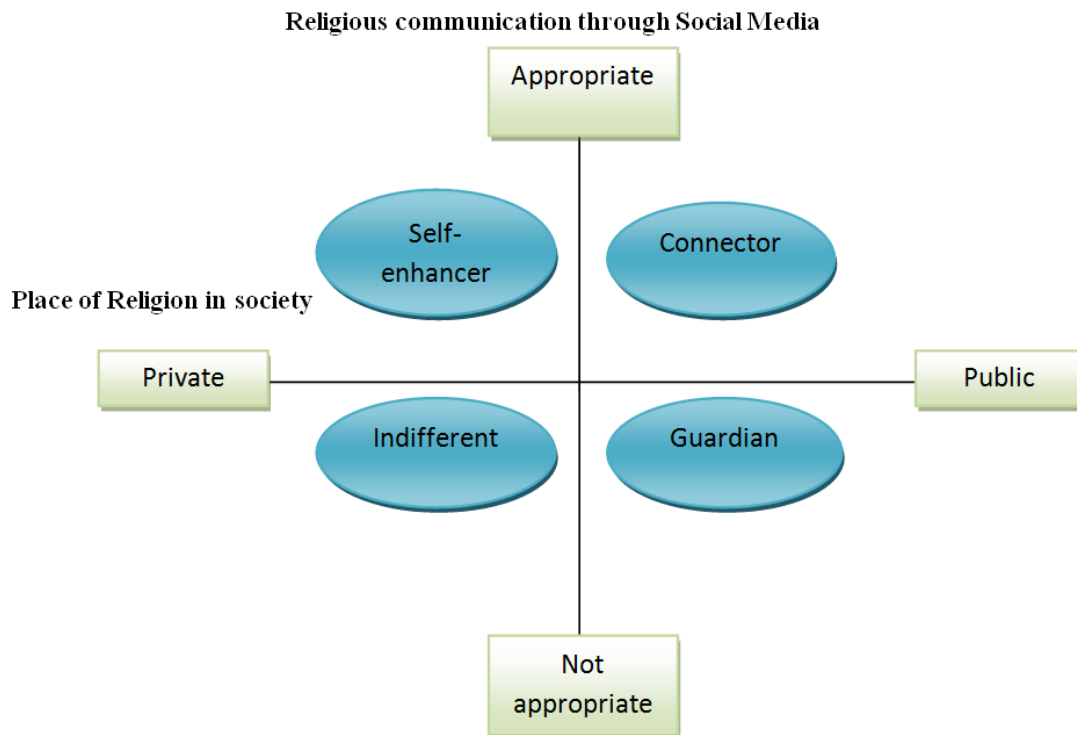


Figure 1: Types of religious users social media

about religion on social media. However, ‘everybody has to decide him- or herself’ (Sophie), since ‘actually, moral convictions about how to life must not be dictated externally’ (Tom), from which citations the moral individualism becomes clear.

Regarding online religious communication this type of users avoids exposure to intra- and interreligious encounters, but do not matter about the religious background of their connections. For example, Sophie defines her online network on the basis of personal connection and blocked even a member of her own church because:

‘Then I’m thinking: I know who you are, but I almost never see you, I don’t have a connection with you. So, then I don’t connect’

Furthermore, Sophie could not mention any online religious encounter that have affected her. She only mentions several offline intra- and interreligious encounters. Tom does mention some he values negatively because they are ‘disingenuous’ or ‘not nuanced’ according to him.

It becomes clear that these users of social media do not like to be exposed to both intra- and interreligious messages online and evaluate all these messages negatively. At most, they feel a certain disillusion to the religious in- and out-group, because ‘I’m fed up with all those

opinions' (Tom). Such an *indifferent* attitude to religious messages can easily be understood from the private idea this type of users has on religion and the regarded inappropriateness of social media to discuss this topic. However, the indifferent user cannot be understood from either the theory of religious deliberation or cyber-balkanization, because this type does not make a distinction between the in- and the out-group. This type only distinguishes between a public online realm and a private offline realm. Therefore, their negation of online intra-religious messages does not implicate an openness to interreligious messages and vice versa. The indifferent represents a position beyond the existing theoretical dichotomy.

The self-enhancer: 'Just when it interests me'

A second type found in the data combines a negative evaluation of the appropriateness of social media for religious communication with a morally individualistic opinion on the place of religion in society. Like the indifferent users, this type does not like to communicate on religion through social media. However, the difference with the indifferent type is that this type regards social media as a way of communication that 'can be used for almost everything, whether it is for daily life or whether it is for your beliefs' (Laura). Because of this positive valuing of social media, two features of moral individualism become more manifest among this type compared to the indifferent user.

Firstly, these users do not want to be exposed to intra- and interreligious messages too overtly either. Nevertheless, they are open to religious messages on *topics* they prefer, because these messages can help them in developing their opinion. The ambivalence emerging from this value pattern is clearly expressed by Bjorn:

'For me that [sharing his belief, AP] is too private. But, at the mean time, I'm rather ambivalent about it. In some way I would experience it as exciting if others would react to it. Probably it opens up new possibilities... which provides new insights.'

Apparently, while the indifferent type only gathers the necessary input to develop their individual opinion offline, this second type is open to derive religious meaning from messages on social media. To protect their individual freedom and autonomy this type creates an *online* distinction between a private and a public sphere. For instance, Luuk kicked off a friend from Facebook who sent him 'a bead letter [for a Christian charity

organization] all the time' because 'I can decide myself and don't need to be pointed to it constantly'. At the meantime he searches for diverse opinions on the interactive national Dutch news site nu.nl, because

'you can be much more exposed to many opinions, for what reason you can define your own opinion on the basis of many perspectives. That's what I like.'

Luuk defines the space of Facebook as a public space and creates his own private space in the more anonymous environment of an interactive news site. Although others do not make this distinction equally clear, Laura also evaluates religious messages she perceived as 'differently' more positively. Conclusively, from the conviction that religion has to be defined individually a tension regarding the evaluation of religious messages emerges. This tension is solved by the development of an online distinction between a public and private sphere, motivated by the goal of self-enhancement. These *self-enhancers* want to be exposed to messages on topics on which they still have to develop their opinion, but do not like to be exposed to religious messages they already know much about.

Secondly, self-enhancers do evaluate heavily on the basis of the topic, but do not matter on the distinction between the in- and the out-group. For instance, Laura is not able to make clear how personal relationships are related to her evaluation of religious messages. Also, Luuk answers to this question:

'Yeah.. then probably it is the case that the person does matter less compared to what that person says'.

Obviously, the distinction between the in- and the out-group is not relevant for self-enhancers. This can easily be understood from their moral individualistic opinion which forces them not to be involved in one group to overly.

Conclusively, based on their general attitude not to be influenced by others and the positive evaluation of social media as a way to communicate religion, the self-enhancers are open to topics they want to develop an opinion about, whether it is from the in- or the out-group. Nevertheless, neither their openness can be understood from the theory of religious deliberation, nor their closeness from the theory of cyber-balkanization, since the distinction between an in- and an out-group is irrelevant for them regarding the evaluation of online religious messages. Therefore, the boundary between the in- and the out-group can neither blur nor be strengthened. However, the self-enhancers do create a distinction between public

and private spaces. This distinction helps them to solve the contradictory moral needs to protect their autonomy and to fulfill their individual choices simultaneously.

The guardian: 'To know what others are doing'

Another type of religious users combines a morally collectivistic value pattern with a negative evaluation of religious communication through social media. Thea explains this as follows:

‘When I tell something [about her religious experiences, AP], then I prefer a [offline, AP] dialogue (...) In my opinion, on Facebook it’ll get a life on its own.’

Although a negative evaluation of religious communication through social media is shared with the indifferent type, this is not because of a private idea of religion.

This type evaluates both intra- and interreligious messages through social media negatively, but values to be exposed to interreligious messages *if* it helps to protect or expand the religious in-group. Despite a strong connectedness to the religious in-group, for instance Ria and Thea do not get inspiration from online religious messages. This can be logically understood from the perceived inappropriateness of social media to communicate on religion. However, interestingly, both want to be exposed to interreligious messages. This seems to be a strange paradox. Thea explains this paradox by stating that she wants ‘to know what happens among particular target groups I meet’. She ‘memorizes’ this information to ‘refer to it when the [offline, AP] opportunity occurs.’ This obviously collectivist goal of saving or expanding the in-group is realized by making a clear distinction between the in- and the out-group. Thea describes such a distinction when she explains why she permits one of her colleagues to be a friend despite of her lifestyle, while refusing another for the same reason:

‘Of course, the advantage [of being connected, AP] regarding the first colleague is that I talk regularly to her. And when I read her messages, then I’m able to discuss it with her. But with the other colleague, that guy, I never talk about these topics. And then it does not add something for me [to be connected, AP]’

Apparently, if knowledge of the life world of the religious other is regarded as an opportunity to expand the in-group, exposure to this life world is regarded as desirable. If

that is not the case, the religious other is excluded.

In line with the emphasis on the distinction between the in- and the out-group, for this type of religious users 'it is not the topic, but the person' (Thea) which matters to evaluate religious encounters through social media. For instance, Ria evaluates the 'superficial' messages of her brother (who left the in-group) more negatively than the 'superficial' messages of her friend 'who does not know better'. Obviously, among this type of users evaluation of religious messages mainly occurs on the basis of the messenger and his or her (possible) relationship to the in-group, which is completely contradictive to emphasis on the topic among self-enhancers.

Conclusively, this third type evaluates religious messages through social media negatively, but still wants to be exposed to interreligious messages to achieve their *guardian* task of bringing others (back) to the in-group. Because a guardian want to be exposed to interreligious messages, it is impossible to define their closeness as cyber-balkanization. However, the guardian can neither be understood from the theory of religious deliberation, because the guardians do not want to be influenced at all. The value pattern of the guardians cannot be understood from both theories, because the guardians do not matter about the distinction between public and private religion. In contrast to the indifferent and the self-enhancer, the guardian thinks that every religious topic can be discussed with individuals, as long as it strengthens the in-group. Also, social media are not rejected because it brings religion in public, but because they harm the in-group.

The connector: 'Hopefully it is as important for you'

The fourth type combines the morally collectivist value pattern of the guardians with a positive evaluation of the appropriateness of social media to communicate on religion. Like the self-enhancers, this type believes that 'everything can be used and misused (...) but nothing is wrong with the medium itself' (Marco). Obviously, the difference between the self-enhancers and this type is that this type wants 'to bring something [religious, AP]) to the attention' (Anna). No restriction is felt to communicate on religion online. Therefore, two features of moral collectivism become more clear from this type in comparison to the guardians.

Firstly, these users want to defend the in-group and employs strict boundaries between

the in- and the out-group to meet that goal. For instance Pieter states that social media are *particularly* valuable for the in-group:

‘For me it is especially important to keep each other faithful (...) I think, on Facebook people have the possibility to be open to reach many people from our own religious community (...) I think, it surely adds to how you place yourself in the religious community. Because, now you know other people from the religious community.’

Obviously, intrareligious communication helps to foster the in-group binding. However, for the same reason these users feel the need to be actively involved in interreligious communication:

‘I want to show people: you can also talk about life in that way [religious, AP] way and maybe it inspires you.’ (Anna)

However, contrary to the self-enhancers and in line with the guardians, the connectors avoid to be exposed to messages they are unsure about. As Anna explains:

‘But I notice regarding for instance the death.. I’m somewhat more careful about it, because that is a rather sensitive topic. And sometimes, the message of those people is a little bit confusing. So, than I open up myself less.’

This carefulness clearly shows that the connector uses interreligious encounters for the sake of the strengthening of the in-group. If the connector is unsure about a message, he or she cannot use it to strengthen the in-group or inspire others. For that reason, the message is useless for the connector. Furthermore, the emphasis on the in-group requires a clearly defined boundary between the in- and the out-group. Especially among *connectors* with an extensive online network this boundary becomes clear. For instance, Anna explains:

‘after a while, it becomes clear to you that that person is connected to Ecumenists and others belong to another group (...).’

She appears to categorize the messages along the lines of existing religious groups. Fleur developed a different system of distinction on the basis of different social media. She uses Facebook for communication with the in-group and Twitter for communication with the out-group. However, both ways are an effective means to preserve the distinction between the in-

and the out-group.

Secondly, the attention for the boundary between the in- and the out-group among connectors is combined with little attention for the boundary between public and private topics. Like the guardians, connectors evaluate religious messages mainly on the basis of the person (and the religious group behind that person). However, the distinction between private and public religion does not make any sense for the connectors as Anna expresses clearly:

‘That topic [religion, AP] was really a taboo-topic. Which I found annoying. Especially because you actually experience a schizophrenia yourself: You talk about it in the church, but outside the church not at all.’

This lack of understanding for a privatized idea of religion can be logically understood from moral collectivism, since religious experience is both private and public when it is regarded as a collective responsibility.

In short, the connectors want to be (intentionally) exposed to online religious encounters, but they only value the intrareligious encounters positively. Exposure to interreligious encounters is meant to defend or expand the in-group and is refused when this goal is not met by for instance uncertainty on the topic of encounter. More frequently than from the guardians, it appears from the connectors that the distinction made between the in- and the out- group does not underlay a wish to be completely restrained from interreligious communication. The main reason is the irrelevance of the public-private distinction among collectivists and the related wish to connect people to the in-group. Since the theory of religious deliberation and cyber-balkanization assume both distinctions, it is impossible to understand the exposure to and evaluation of religious messages among the connectors from these theories.

Transitions

During the analysis the described typology emerged from the data as a pattern which is tightly connected to the different opinions on the appropriateness of social media to communicate religion and on the place of religion in society. If these opinions change, the corresponding value patterns concerning the evaluation of religious communication through social media will change as well. The example of Arjan will clarify how such a transition

works.

Arjan is very ambivalent regarding the appropriateness of social media to communicate on religion. On the one hand, he holds the opinion that social media cause an increased misunderstanding and are inappropriate to communicate on religion. However, Arjan also plays an active role to get his religious community online. This ambivalence is visible in the way he deals with religious messages online as well. At one moment he tells that he shares a religious speech through social media to inspire other people. Nevertheless, he appears to be also critical, even on intrareligious communication and explains:

‘All those religious discussions, I don’t want to be involved in it anymore’.

This ambivalence is easily understood from his experiences in the past. He started as a connector and he shared his religious beliefs online to discuss it with others. As a moral collectivist, he aimed to inspire others and be inspired by in-group Christians. However, he became exposed to many messages of out-group Christians. Since he attributed this experiences to the features of the medium, he became skeptical on the medium and started to show features of the guardian. The guardian becomes particularly clear in the extensive talks about the objectionable online behavior of others. Accordingly, this example of Arjan shows how people sometimes change their opinion and consequently display different types of attitude regarding religious messages online.

Conclusion and discussion

The central question of the presented research concerns the exposure to and evaluation of religious encounters on social media. Contrary to existing ideas on *general* developments of either religious deliberation or cyber-balkanization, this research focused on the way in which religious encounters can be understood from different *contextual* value patterns. Differences in the wish for exposure to and the evaluation of these encounters can be understood from two value dimensions: the regarded appropriateness of social media to communicate religious messages and the regarded place of religion in society (morally individualistic or collectivistic). Based on an interrelationship between these dimensions, four different patterns of dealing with online intra- and interreligious encounters appeared from the data. Being morally individualistic and averse to religious communication through the internet, the *indifferent* type neglects all religious messages or evaluates them negatively.

The *self-enhancer* is moral individualistic as well, but evaluates religious communication through social media positively. This type does not like to be influenced by religious messages either, but distinguishes between online private and the public spaces to receive information from topics he or she wants to develop his or her opinion on. The third type is the *guardian*, who does not want to communicate on religion through social media because it is inappropriate for religious communication. Nevertheless, guardians gather information on other persons to defend the in-group, which is important because of their moral collectivism. Finally, the *connector* is morally collectivistic as well. For them, social media is appropriate for communicating religion. The connectors want to be inspired by online in-group communication, but they are actively involved in interreligious encounters as well to express and defend the in-group. Importantly, the value pattern of these four types of users do not fit to the theories of religious deliberation and cyber-balkanization, because the distinction assumed between the in- and the out-group and between public and private space is not relevant for all types. Also, an aversion to religious communication through social media blocks make the theories inappropriate. More in detail, the problem with both theories is threefold.

Firstly, in both theories an existing distinction between the in- and the out-group is presumed. Within the theory of cyber-balkanization the boundary between the in- and the out-group defines the exposure to information (Sunstein, 2007). The idea of deliberation of religion is based on the idea that the internet blurs the (existing) boundaries between the in- and the out-group (Castells, 2007; Campbell, 2012). However, for the indifferent and the self-enhanced type this boundary is irrelevant, because of their moral individualism. Although in the theory of religious deliberation the individualizing effect of new media is emphasized (Warner 2012, Campbell, 2012), exactly the existing moral individualism subverts the whole idea of blurring boundaries through media. Indeed, moral individualism prevents the indifferent and self-enhancer from sharing religious information and activates them to be only open when it interests them.

Secondly, both theories assume a general distinction between public and private religiosity. In the theory of cyber-balkanization this distinction appears by assuming that individuals just want to share certain topics within the personally defined group (Sunstein, 2007). In the theory of religious deliberation for instance Persson (2010; cf. Papacharissi, 2002) assumes a blurring of the public-private distinction. However, it appears that guardians and the connectors do not care about his distinction. This distinction only meets

the goals of moral individualists. Because the guardians and the connectors do not locate religion in a distinctive social sphere, their distinguishing between the in- and the out-group does not evolve in avoidance of religious topics in certain groups.

Thirdly, in the theories of religious deliberation and cyber-balkanization, the influence of the value-dimension on the appropriateness of social media to communicate on religion is also neglected. However, when social media are regarded to be inappropriate to talk about religion, the theorized mechanisms of cyber-balkanization and religious deliberation do not even have any opportunity to emerge. Obviously, the indifferent type shows best how both theories do make no sense because of a negative evaluation of social media to communicate on religion.

Conclusively, regarding religious encounters through social media the effort of contextualization done in this research requires a rejection of the two important general theories of religious deliberation and cyber-balkanization. This underscores the importance of a contextualized approach to investigate the social implications of the internet.

Additionally, my findings have implications for other academic fields. As mentioned earlier, the explanation of doctrinal religious exclusivism was initially borrowed from the field of interreligious dialogue (Hick, 1995; Trinitapoli, 2007; Merino, 2010) to understand differences with regard to openness to online religious messages. However, this research shows that openness to the religious other is not automatically connected to doctrinal pluralism and closeness to doctrinal exclusivism (Echchaibi, 2008; Geelhoed, 2012). This has major implications for the debate within the field of interreligious dialogue. Firstly, this research discloses that both pluralism and exclusivism inspire the creation of boundaries between an in- and an out-group or between public or private religion (Moyaert, 2011). Secondly, this research shows that an understanding differences regarding the reaction to interreligious encounters must be understood from a multi-dimensional perspective. Especially moral individualists do not only derive their value patterns from the religious doctrine of the group.

Furthermore, our findings have implications for the ongoing debate on the privatization of religion (Berger et al., 1973) versus the deprivatization of religion (Casanova, 1994). Both theories assume a general distinction between public and private religiosity, while it appears from this study that this distinction is not relevant for moral collectivists. By conducting more research to the understudied opinions of moral collectivists, theory can be developed in which the mechanism of distinguishing between private and public religion is contextually

defined.

The present study is based on limited data from two religious communities in an urban area. Nevertheless, by selecting strategic cases, powerful mechanisms underlying the evaluation of intra- and interreligious messages through social media are revealed. Therefore, it would be worth to expand the scope of this study by conducting research among members of other religious groups in a less plural environment like a rural area or another country. Comparative research will validate the discovered theoretical mechanisms further and offer valuable possibilities to refine the theoretical findings. Furthermore, a closer look to the mechanisms underlying transitional types of religious users of social media will detect the development of these value patterns.

Acknowledgement

The author thanks Willem de Koster for his fine supervision of this thesis research and Johan Roeland and Sandra Wagemakers for their constructive comments on earlier versions of this article.

References

- Andriotis, K. (2009). Sacred Site Experience: A Phenomenological Study. *Annals of Tourism Research, 36* (1), p. 64-84.
- Bakardjieva, M. (2005). *Internet Society: The Internet in Everyday Life*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Becker, C. (2011). Muslims on the Path of the Salaf Al-Salih: Ritual Dynamics in Chat Rooms and Discussion Forums. *Information, Community & Society, 14* (8), p. 1181-1203.
- Bellah, R.N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W.M., Swidler, A. & Tipton, S.M. (2008 [1985]). *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Berger, P.L., Berger, B. & Kellner, H. (1973). Pluralization of Social Life-Worlds. In P.L. Berger, B. Berger & H. Kellner (eds.), *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (p. 64-82). New York: Random House.
- Besecke, K. (2005). Seeing Invisible Religion: Religion as a societal conversation about transcendent meaning. *Sociological Theory, 23* (2), p. 179-196.
- Blumer, H (1958). Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position. *Pacific Sociological Review, 1* (1), p. 3-7.

- Bochner, S. (1994). Cross-Cultural Differences in the Self Concept: A Test of Hofstede's Individualism/Collectivism Distinction. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 25 (2), p. 273-283.
- Burggraeve, R. (2007). Alterity makes the Difference: Ethical and Metaphysical Conditions for an Authentic Interreligious Dialogue and Learning. In D. Pollefeyt (ed.), *Interreligious Learning* (p. 231-256). Leuven: Leuven University Press/ Uitgeverij Peeters.
- Campbell, H.A. (2010). *When Religion meets New Media*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Campbell, H.A. (2012). Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society. *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 80 (1), p. 64-93.
- Casanova, J. (1994). Public Religion in the Modern World. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Casanova, J. (2007). Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A European Union/ United States Comparison. In T. Banchoff (ed.), *Democracy, and the New Religious Pluralism* (p. 59-84). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, M. (2007). Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society. *International Journal of Communication*, 1 (1), p. 238- 266.
- Clark, L.S. (2002). U.S. Adolescent Religious Identity, the Media, and the Funky Side of Religion. *Journal of Communication*, 52 (1), p. 794-811.
- Clark, L.S. (2007). Introduction: Identity, Belonging and Religious Lifestyle Branding. In J.C. Lyden (ed). *Religion, Media and the Marketplace* (p. 1-33). New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press.
- D'Costa, G. (1996). The Impossibility of a Pluralistic View of Religions. *Religious Studies*, 32 (2), p. 223-232.
- De Koster, W. (2010). Contesting Community Online: Virtual Imagery among Dutch Orthodox Protestant Homosexuals. *Symbol Interaction*, 33 (4), p. 552-577.
- De Koster, W. & Houtman, D. (2008). 'Stormfront Is Like a Second Home to Me': On Virtual Community Formation by Right-Wing Extremists. *Information, Communication & Society*, 11 (8): p. 1153-1175.
- De Koster, W., Achterberg, P., Houtman, D. & Van der Waal, J. (2011). One Nation without God? Post-Christian Cultural Conflict in the Netherlands. In D. Houtman, S. Aupers & J. van der Waal (eds.), *Paradoxes of Individualization: Social Control and Social Conflict in Contemporary Modernity* (p. 123-140). Farnham: Ashgate.
- DiMaggio, P., Hargittai, E., Russel Neuman, W. & Robinson, J.P. (2001). Social Implications of the Internet. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27 (1), p. 307-336.
- Dobbelaere, K. (1981). Trend Report : Secularization: A Multi-Dimensional Concept. *Current Sociology*, 29 (1), p. 3-153.

- Echchaibi, N. (2008). Hyper-Islamism? Mediating Islam from the Halal Website to the Islamic Talk Show. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 1 (3), p. 199-214.
- Edwards, A. (2013). (How) do Participants in Online Discussion Forums create 'Echo Chambers'? The Inclusion and Exclusion of Dissenting Voices in an Online Forum about Climate Change. *Journal of Argumentation in Context*, 2 (1), p. 127-150.
- Ess, C.M. & Dutton, W.H. (2013). Internet Studies: Perspectives on a Rapidly Developing Field. *New Media & Society* (published online), p. 1-11.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Geelhoed, F. (2012). *Purification and Resistance: Glocal Meanings of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Netherlands*. Rotterdam: Erasmus University of Rotterdam.
- Gergen, K. (1991). *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). Chapter 3: Theoretical Sampling. In B. G. Glaser & A.L. Strauss (Eds.), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, (p. 118) Edison: Aldine Transaction.
- Gudykunst, W.B., Yoon, I.C. & Nishida, T. (1987). The Influence of Individualism-Collectivism on Perceptions of Communication in In-group and Out-group Relationships. *Communication Monographs*, 54 (3), p. 510-543.
- Heim, S.M. (1998). *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Heyd, D. (1996). Introduction. In D. Heyd (ed.), *Toleration: an Elusive Virtue?* (p. 3-17). New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Hick, J. (1995). *The Rainbow of Faiths: A Christian Theology of Religions*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F. (1999). Active Interviewing. In A. Bryman & R.G. Burgess (eds.), *Qualitative Research. Volume II* (p. 103-121). London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Hoover, S.M. (2008). Audiences. In D. Morgan (ed.), *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture* (p. 31-43). New York: Routledge.
- Houtman, D. & Aupers, S. (2010). Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital. In: S. Aupers and D. Houtman (eds.), *Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital* (p. 1-29). Leiden: Brill.
- Huntington, S.P. (1992). The Clash of Civilizations? *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (3), p. 22-49.

- Irvin, D.T. (1994). *Hearing Many Voices: Dialogue and Diversity in the Ecumenical Movement*. Lanham: University Press of America
- Kazmer, M. M. & Xie, B. (2008). Qualitative Interviewing in Internet Studies: Playing with the Media, playing with the Method. *Information, Communication & Society*, 11 (2), p. 257-278.
- Keaten, J.A. and Soukup, C. (2009). Dialogue and Religious Otherness: Toward a Model of Pluralistic Interfaith Dialogue. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 2 (2), p. 168-187.
- Keith, T. (2004). Pragmatism, Race, and Inclusiveness. *Contemporary Pragmatism*, 1 (1), p. 103-118.
- Kennedy, H. (2006). Beyond Anonymity, or Future Directions for Internet Identity Research. *New Media & Society*, 8 (6), p. 859-876.
- Kuipers, B. (2012). *Tien motieven om te geloven*. Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum.
- Lechner, F. (2008). *The Netherlands. Globalization and National Identity*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Lynch, G. & Sheldon, R. (2013). The Sociology of the Sacred: A Conversation with Jeffrey Alexander. *Culture and Religion, an Interdisciplinary Journal*, 2013 (1), p. 1-15.
- Marwick, A.E. and Boyd, D. (2010). I tweet Honestly, I tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience. *New Media & Society*, 13 (1), p. 114-133.
- Merino, S. (2010). Religious Diversity in a "Christian Nation": The Effects of Theological Exclusivity and Interreligious Contact on the Acceptance of Religious Diversity. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49 (2), p. 231-246.
- Moyaert, M. (2011). *Fragile Identities. Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.
- Myers, D.B. (2003). Exclusivism, Eternal Damnation, and the Problem of Evil: a Critique of Craig's Molinist Soteriological Theodicy. *Religious Studies*, 39 (4), p. 407-419.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere. *New Media & Society*, 4 (1), p. 9-27.
- Pariser, E. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Persson, A. (2010). *Front- and Backstage in "Social Media"*. Paper presented at the XVII World Congress of Sociology, Gothenburg.
- Polderman, C.P. (1996). *Kerk en Wereld: Een studie over gereformeerden en hun uiteenlopende relaties met televisie in het licht van politiek, cultuur en theologie*. Leiden: Uitgeverij J.J. Groen & Zoon.
- Postill, J. (2006). Localizing the Internet beyond Communities and Networks. *New Media & Society*, 10 (3), p. 413- 431.

- Roeland, J., Aupers, S., Houtman, D., De Koning, M. & Noomen, I. (2010). The Quest for Religious Purity in New Age, Evangelicalism and Islam: Religious Renditions of Dutch Youth and the Luckmann Legacy. *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion, Volume 1: Youth and Religion*, p. 289-306.
- Sassenberg, K. (2002). Common Bond and Common Identity Groups on the Internet: Attachment and Normative Behavior in On-Topic and Off-Topic Chats. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 6 (1), p. 27-37.
- Stoffels, H. (1995). *Als een briesende leeuw: Orthodox-protestanten in de slag met de tijdgeest*. Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok.
- Sunstein, C.R. (2007). *Republic.com 2.0*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tremayne, M., Zheng, N., Lee, J. K. & Jeong, J. (2009). Issue Publics on the Web: Applying Network Theory to the War Blogosphere. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12 (1), p. 290- 310.
- Triandis, H.C., Bontempo, R. & Villareal, M.J. (1988). Individualism and Collectivism: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Self-ingroup Relationships. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 54 (2), p. 323-338.
- Trinitapoli, J. (2007). "I KNOW THIS ISN'T PC, BUT . . .": Religious Exclusivism among U.S. Adolescents. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 48 (3), p. 451-483.
- Verstraeten, H. (1996). The Media and the Transformation of the Public Sphere: A Contribution for a Critical Political Economy of the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Communication*, 11 (3), p. 347-370.
- Wagner, R. (2012). *Godwired: Religion, ritual and virtual reality*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Wallis, R. & Bruce, S. (1992). Secularization: The Orthodox Model. In S. Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization. Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, p. 8-30. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Weber, M. (1964 [1947]). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Edited by T. Parsons. New York: The Free Press.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Respondents

Name	Religious Denomination	Gender	Age
Tom	Orthodox	Male	23
Pieter	Orthodox	Male	24
Marco	Orthodox	Male	24
Frans	Orthodox	Male	35
Thea	Orthodox	Female	33
Sophie	Orthodox	Female	23
Laura	Orthodox	Female	16
Luuk	Ecumenical	Male	45
Bjorn	Ecumenical	Male	62
Arjan	Ecumenical	Male	37
Fleur	Ecumenical	Female	17
Anna	Ecumenical	Female	47
Ria	Ecumenical	Female	32