



RELIGION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: APPROACHES IN STUDYING RELIGIOUS CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

Religious media content in traditional, digital, and web media space is serving as a powerful tool for studying religion. This article examines methodologies ranging from textual analysis of religious media content to digital trends. Approaches to the analysis of oral and written speech, as well as visual media contents, are revealed. It explores various methodologies used to study religious media content in the digital age. It argues that a multifaceted approach is necessary to understand the complexities of religious media. Textual analysis, visual analysis, ethnography, and digital methods, demonstrating how each approach can contribute to a deeper understanding of religious traditions.

KEY WORDS: *Religion, religious content, textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, visual analysis, ethnography, digital methods, religious websites, Social media.*

INTRODUCTION

Religion in the modern world transcends the dusty pages of ancient scriptures and the imposing walls of cathedrals. It flows through a constant stream of social media posts, online sermons, and meticulously designed religious websites. This ever-expanding realm of religious media content offers a captivating window into the beliefs, practices, and evolution of various religious traditions. In today's world, religion permeates our lives not just through ancient scriptures and towering cathedrals, but also through a constant stream of social media posts, online sermons, and religious websites. This ever-expanding realm of religious media content offers a captivating window into the beliefs, practices, and evolution of religious traditions. However, to truly understand the significance of these diverse materials, a multifaceted approach is required. "Religious media content, encompassing a vast array of formats from ancient scriptures to contemporary social media posts serves as a powerful lens through which to examine the ever-evolving world of religion." [1, 12-p]

Also, as Paroma in his book of "Religion and the Media" (2011) emphasizes that understanding the intricacies of this content is crucial for deciphering the dynamics of religious belief, practice, and adaptation in the digital age. This article embarks on a methodological exploration, illuminating the diverse approaches employed by scholars to unlock the meaning embedded within religious media. It delves into a range of established methodologies, each offering unique insights. Textual analysis forms the cornerstone, meticulously examining the content, language, and symbolism within religious texts, both historical and contemporary. This approach allows researchers to uncover the core themes and messages communicated through these materials.

By examining techniques like textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, visual analysis, ethnography, and digital methods, we can gain a richer understanding of how religious media shapes and reflects the world around us. This exploration will not only illuminate the power of religious media in transmitting core beliefs and narratives, but also reveal the intricate relationship between media and the lived experience of religion.

ANALYSIS

Textual analysis serves as a cornerstone methodology within the study of religious media content. It delves into the intricacies of religious texts, both historical and contemporary, to unlock their deeper meaning and significance. "Imagine a detective meticulously examining a crime scene; in textual analysis, the evidence lies within the words, phrases, and overall structure of the text"[2, 18-p] This approach offers scholars a powerful lens to explore the core beliefs, values, and practices embedded within religious traditions. This involves a close reading of the text, focusing on the central themes, narratives, and arguments presented. Textual analysis examines the specific language used, including word choice, figurative language (metaphors, similes, etc.), and sentence structure. For example, analyzing the poetic imagery in the Quran, such as metaphors comparing God's light to guidance (Qur'an 24:35), reveals the importance of divine illumination. Many religious texts employ rich symbolic language. Textual analysis helps identify these symbols and decipher their deeper meaning within the religious context. Understanding the historical and cultural context in which a religious text was written is crucial. Religious texts come in various forms, such as laws, poetry, prophesies, or narratives.



Analyzing the genre helps researchers understand the text's intended purpose and interpret it accordingly. Textual analysis serves as a powerful tool for unlocking the meaning and significance of religious media. By meticulously examining the content, language, and context of religious texts, researchers gain invaluable insights into the core beliefs, practices, and evolution of religious traditions.

Religious media extends far beyond the written word. Powerful imagery, from ancient cave paintings to contemporary religious films, plays a crucial role in transmitting beliefs, values, and narratives. Visual analysis, a key methodology in studying religious media, delves into the symbolic meaning embedded within these visual elements. It's akin to deciphering a secret language, where colors, compositions, and even lighting choices all hold significance. Visual analysis look for subject matter: this involves identifying the central figures, objects, or scenes depicted in the artwork or film. Symbolism: visual analysis goes beyond surface appearance to identify symbolic elements. Color: colors often hold symbolic meaning in religious contexts. Composition: the arrangement of elements within an image can convey meaning. Light and Shadow: the use of light and shadow can evoke emotions and highlight specific figures or objects.

Visual analysis serves as a valuable tool for unlocking the deeper meaning of religious media. By examining the symbolic elements, compositions, and artistic choices within religious imagery, researchers gain a richer understanding of how religious traditions use visuals to communicate their core messages and evoke emotions in viewers. Visual analysis serves as a valuable tool for understanding the deeper meaning of religious imagery. By examining the symbolic elements, compositions, and artistic choices within religious art, researchers can gain a richer understanding of how religious traditions use visuals to communicate their core messages and evoke emotions in viewers.[3, 112-p] In other words, Krieg emphasizes that analyzing the use of symbols, the way elements are arranged within an image (composition), and the deliberate choices made by the artist (such as color and light) helps us decipher the messages and emotional impact of religious art.

There is another one called digital methods, which is being popular worldwide. This approach leverages data analysis tools and social network analysis to understand online religious content. Researchers can analyze religious websites, forums, social media trends, and online religious communities to gain insights into contemporary religious beliefs, practices, and digital trends.

RESULTS

In accordance with listed methods two prominent websites of Germany and Uzbekistan have been observed. Islamische-Zeitung.de, situated in a diverse, secular society, frequently addresses issues of integration, religious discrimination faced by Muslims in Europe, and the need for mutual understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Islom.uz, operating in a predominantly Muslim nation, grapples more with internal debates on tolerance towards diverse Islamic interpretations and expressions within Uzbek society. Islamische-Zeitung.de caters to a broader audience, including German society at large, aiming to bridge the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Islom.uz primarily targets Uzbek Muslims, focusing on internal religious dialogues and promoting harmonious relations within the Muslim community itself.

Islamische-Zeitung.de frequently utilizes the term "tolerance" explicitly, advocating for its application in diverse spheres like religious practices, cultural expressions, and political discourse. Islom.uz tends to employ broader concepts like "respect," "understanding," and "compassion" while implicitly incorporating them into discussions of interfaith relations and internal religious dialogues. Islamische-Zeitung.de: In an article titled "Tolerance is No Weakness," author Ahmet Toprak condemns Islamophobia and argues for interfaith understanding based on shared values of justice and compassion. He cites Qur'an verses like "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256) as foundational principles for building tolerance [4].

Islom.uz: In a piece titled "The Importance of Mutual Respect among Muslims," Sheikh Muhammad Yusuf emphasizes the need for understanding and respecting diverse interpretations within Islam, drawing upon Prophetic traditions advocating for peaceful discourse and avoiding unnecessary disputes[5]. Islamische-zeitung.de: An article condemning the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France, emphasizing the importance of peaceful dialogue and respect for all faiths.

The differences likely stem from the historical and social contexts of each nation, target audience considerations, and potentially underlying theological or ideological perspectives. Recognizing these nuances is crucial for understanding the diverse ways tolerance is represented within Islamic media and fostering genuine interfaith dialogue and understanding across Muslim communities and wider societies.

This comparative analysis reveals both shared and distinct understandings of tolerance on Islamische-Zeitung.de and Islom.uz. While both emphasize tolerance as a core Islamic value, the specific contexts and target audiences shape how this concept is articulated and applied. Recognizing these nuances is crucial for fostering genuine interfaith dialogue and understanding across diverse Muslim communities and wider societies. Future research could explore a wider range of Islamic websites, delve deeper



into the underlying factors shaping their representations of tolerance, and examine the potential impact of these online discourses on interfaith relations and social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

In today's world, religion permeates our lives not just through ancient scriptures but through a constant stream of social media posts, online sermons, and religious websites. This ever-expanding realm of religious media content offers a captivating window into the beliefs, practices, and evolution of religious traditions. However, to truly understand the significance of these diverse materials, a multifaceted approach is required.

This article has explored some key methodologies employed by scholars to navigate the complex landscape of religious media. Each approach offers unique strengths and contributes to a richer understanding of the sacred messages embedded within these materials.

Text analysis the cornerstone approach, meticulously examining the content, language, and symbolism within religious texts. [6, 18-p] It excels at uncovering core themes, theological arguments, and the evolution of religious thought through comparisons of texts from different periods. Visual Analysis: Focuses on the symbolic meaning conveyed through artistic choices in religious art, films, and photography. It offers insights into how emotions are evoked and narratives are transmitted. [7, 112-p]. However, visual analysis requires careful consideration of historical and cultural context, as an image's meaning might vary depending on the viewer's background. Researchers immerse themselves within religious communities, observing firsthand how media is used and interpreted in everyday life. This approach provides valuable insights into the lived experience of religion and the complex relationship between media and social practices. Studying a religious community's use of online forums can reveal how they foster social connection and share religious teachings. However, ethnographic research can be time-consuming and may not be generalizable to other religious communities.

Ultimately, a multifaceted approach that combines these diverse methodologies is most effective in understanding religious media content. Textual analysis provides a foundation, while visual analysis, ethnography, and digital methods offer additional layers of understanding. By employing this multifaceted approach, we can appreciate the richness and complexity of religious media, fostering a deeper understanding of the sacred messages communicated through an ever-diversifying array of formats. This exploration not only illuminates the power of religious media in transmitting core beliefs and narratives, but also reveals the intricate relationship between media and the lived experience of religion. As religious traditions continue to adapt and evolve in the digital age, these methodologies will undoubtedly continue to play a vital role in helping us understand the ever-changing landscape of faith.

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