

**Religion and Innovation Series**

# **Religion and New Media**

**Trento  
17-18 May, 2018**



# PROGRAMME

17 May 2018

- 09:30**      **Welcome and Introduction**  
*Boris Rähme, FBK-ISR*
- 10:00**      **Religious Authority in a Digital Age: Negotiating  
Influence in Jewish and Christian Communities**  
*Heidi Campbell, Texas A&M University*
- 11:30      Coffee break
- 12:00**      **“To Reach This Generation”: Christian Innovation  
in a Digital Age**  
*Timothy Hutchings, Durham University*
- 13:30      Lunch
- 15:00**      **Religious Change and Digital Media:  
Exploring Hypermediated Religious Spaces**  
*Giulia Evolvi, Ruhr-Universität Bochum*
- 16:30      Conclusions
- 19:30      Dinner

18 May 2018

- 10:00**      **The Ritualized Use of Media and the Constitution  
of Religious Community**  
*Andrea Rota, University of Bern*
- 11:30**      **Conclusions**
- 12:30      Lunch

# ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

## Religious Authority in a Digital Age: Negotiating Influence in Jewish and Christian Communities

**Heidi Campbell, Texas A&M University**

This presentation will explore how understandings and performances of religious authority are changing due to the unique technological accordance offered by digital media. Digital media platforms allow religious individuals and entrepreneurs to elevate their voices within their communities in ways that challenge the positions of traditional religious leaders. At the same time digital media creates opportunities for religious institutions to shore-up or re-establish their positions of influence within their communities and beyond. By highlighting select case studies of Jewish and Christian communities' negotiations with new media, attention is drawn to the tensions emerging between established religious hierarchies and new religious spokespersons. Here we see religious digital creatives use distinctive "technological apologetics" to mitigate such tensions created through their new social positions.

### Biography

Heidi Campbell teaches media studies on themes related to media theory, global and popular culture and media & religion. Her research focuses on how religion is translated and transformed by digital cultures and the influence of digital and mobile technologies on Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities. She directs the Network for New Media, Religion and Digital Culture Studies, is co-editor of the Routledge's Studies in Religion and Digital Culture book series and on the editorial board of the *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication*, *New Media & Society*, the *Journal of Media, Religion & Digital Culture* and *Ecclesiology & Ethnography*. She has authored over 70 articles and books including *Exploring Religious Community Online* (Peter Lang 2005) and *When Religion Meets New Media* (Routledge 2010). She has also edited four works including *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media World* (Routledge 2013) and *Playing with Religion in Video Games* (University of Indiana Press, 2014). She has held research fellowships with the Institute for Advanced Studies-Durham University (UK), Caesarea Rothschild Institute for Interdisciplinary Applications of Computer Science-University of Haifa (Israel), Institute for the Advanced Studies-University of Edinburgh (UK) and the Glasscock Center for Humanities Research-TAMU.

## Religious Change and Digital Media: Exploring Hypermediated Religious Spaces

**Giulia Evolvi, Ruhr-Universität Bochum**

In contemporary Europe, many actions and discourses negotiate the role of religion in society, discussing for example the symbolic power of the Vatican. I would argue that these actions and discourses often depend on religious groups' adoption of digital technology, and lead to a type of religious change that is connected to media practices. In defining digital religion, I consider religious change as the process transforming religious spaces into secular, and post-secular, venues; and I consider digital media as embedding materiality, connecting to institutions, and negotiating technology. The theory of hypermediation can help to understand this type of digital religion, and to emphasize the increased speed and emotional character of contemporary digital communications. With the concept of "hypermediated religious spaces" I describe digital venues of religious change that are connected with physical spaces and are characterized by three dialectical pairings: the tension between alternative and mainstream discourses; the negotiation of private and public religion; the creation of narratives in between imaginary and real venues. I illustrate the concept of hypermediated religious spaces through examples of blogs in French and Italian, written by young European Muslims that challenge stereotypes about Islam, atheists that try to limit the influence of religion in society, and Catholics that organize anti-gender protests.

### Biography

Giulia Evolvi is a Research Associate at the Ruhr University Bochum, Germany, where she works for the Centre for Religious Studies (CERES). Giulia coordinates the Focus Group Materiality for the KHK project and does research on religion and media. She obtained her PhD in Media Studies from the University of Colorado Boulder, United States, where she was affiliated with the Center for Media, Religion and Culture, and also holds a Master's degree in Religious Studies from the University of Padua, Italy. Giulia's most recent article, titled "#Islamexit: inter-group Anatgonism on Twitter" (Information, Communication, and Society) explores Islamophobia in relation to social media. Previously, she worked on Muslim blogs, publishing the article "Hybrid Muslim Identities in Digital Spaces: the Italian Blog Yalla" (Social Compass). She is also interested in Catholicism, which she explored through newsreels in the article "The Myth of Catholic Italy in Post-Fascist Newsreels" (Media History). Giulia is currently writing a book on religious change in Europe and digital media, which will be published by Routledge with the title "Blogging my Religion."

## **“To Reach This Generation”: Christian Innovation in a Digital Age Timothy Hutchings, Durham University**

Christian entrepreneurs, companies, communities and organizations have a long history of digital innovation, reaching back to the 1940s. This paper draws on examples from the mid-00s to the present day, including online Christian churches, digital Bibles and educational videogames. As we shall see, the digital products and networks envisaged by Christian designers have changed considerably over time, but their ultimate goals have remained remarkably stable. Building on the work of Heidi Campbell in conversation with the concept of mediatization, we will propose a broad understanding of the work of innovation in Christian contexts. The designers we will discuss are motivated not just by their religious values and the intrinsic qualities or logics of their media but also by a specific set of shared ideas about the society around them. We will conclude by asking if this approach has wider applicability beyond Christian contexts.

### **Biography**

Timothy Hutchings is a sociologist of digital religion and a Research Fellow at the CODEC Research Centre for Digital Theology, part of Durham University (UK). His PhD (Durham 2010) was an ethnographic study of five online Christian churches, exploring themes of authority, ritual, community and the relationship between online religion and everyday life. His subsequent postdoctoral work in the UK and Sweden has included studies of online Christian evangelism, digital Bibles, digital pilgrimage, death online and digital pedagogy. He is the author of *Creating Church Online* (Routledge 2017) and lead editor of *Materiality and the Study of Religion* (Routledge 2016) and *Christianity and the Digital Humanities* (De Gruyter forthcoming). He is also the editor of the journal *Religion, Media and Digital Culture* (Brill).

## **The Ritualized Use of Media and the Constitution of Religious Community**

***Andrea Rota, University of Bern***

In the past years, Heidi Campbell convincingly demonstrated how new media, when they are introduced into religious contexts, must go through a process of “domestication.” This process includes a phase in which their “appropriate” use is negotiated within a community. My intervention aims at amending and expanding Campbell’s original insight. Drawing on the example of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the contribution puts forward a performative approach to the domestication of media and calls attention to different authority systems and to the role of ritual settings in defining the relationship between individual and collective forms of media use and media interpretation (Mediendeutung).

### **Biography**

Andrea Rota studied science of religion, contemporary history, and social anthropology at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). He held postdoctoral positions at the Universities of Bayreuth, Fribourg and Bern, where he is currently Assistant Professor at the Institute for the science of religion. His work focuses on the public presence of religion, with a particular attention to public schools, on the use of media technologies in religious contexts and on philosophical theories of collective action.

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