Authority

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The concept of authority is profound and has been marked throughout history as having a contentious relationship with budding developments in new communication technologies. Marvin (1988) illustrated for instance, how the then new medium of the electric bulb was accompanied by debates on the nature of authority and changing interactions between the elites and masses. Regarding television's influence, Meyrowitz (1985) argued that "authority is weakened when information systems are merged" (p. 63), allowing different people to gain access and greater control over knowledge and social information. With the emergence of web-based technologies, attention to authority and interrelated issues in participatory democracy and grassroots activism has grown alongside changes in larger culture and society. In light of intensifying datafication within the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence technologies, renewed buzz around changing authority linked to new divides in knowledge asymmetries, privacy and surveillance has surfaced in technologically dense societies, including in the religious domain (Cheong, in press).

While the role of authority had received relatively less attention in the earlier phrase of digital religion research as discussed in a prior review (Cheong, 2012), this topic has in recent years seen a welcome uptick in academic activity, with publications in fields beyond religion and communication, including anthropology, theology, sociology, journalism, area studies, marketing, and public policy. Accordingly, this chapter provides a thematic analysis of the corpus of studies

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examining implications of the internet on religious authority, particularly in the recent two decades. By discussing how religious authority has been framed in relation to digital life, this article probes a set of questions: What is "religious authority"? How do interdisciplinary scholars researching new media regard religious authority? What general propositions about authority and communication technologies lie behind these published works?

This review observes much of the literature operates on at least three different logics. The first is more rooted in the earlier emphasis on the internet as a decentralized and free space. A popular conceptualization is that forms of religious authority are altered by digital technologies perceived to disrupt traditional faith doctrines and domains often embedded in hierarchical communication. An alternative perspective is stimulated by situating religious authority among older media and faith infrastructures. The internet may have, to some extent, facilitated changes in the personal and organizational structures by which religious leaders operate. But active accommodative practices by some clergy related to their digital media engagement with digital media, may enable them to regain the legitimacy to operate in the religious sphere. A third approach synthesizes neoteric work and empirical research to highlight emergent paradoxes in authority in light of tensions to harness the affordances of mediated social networks. Emerging practices of religious authorities facilitated by the latest networked and human-machine communication prompt updating our understanding of authority in increasingly mediated environments.

Considering Religious Authority and Mediated Communication

Given its rich and multiplex nature, authority itself is ever-contested and challenging to define. Though a variety of titles are commonly used to connote religious authority, treatments of religious authority vis-à-vis developments in digital media have taken on varying forms and scales. For instance, religious authority has been conceptualized on a spectrum from stability to fluidity. As reflected in Weber's classic categorization (1947), traditional and legal action is said to arise from more static or inherited forms that precede human action, justified by sacred beliefs, legitimized from a fixed appointment to a superior office or assignment in a rule-based system. Following this, in expressions of digital religion, distinct layers of religious authority including hierarchy, structure, ideology, and texts have been identified from a study of online Christianity, Judaism, and Islam communities (Campbell, 2007). Other studies have since discussed multiple layers of religious authority but have also observed how components like hierarchy and structure are intertwined within Hindu temple management (Scheifinger, 2010) and how these four layers of authority are negotiated and variably expressed in German Christian and Polish Catholic internet forums (Kokdziejska & Neumaier, 2017).

Authority can also be understood in more transient terms, for instance, given to charismatic figures by those who recognize their dramatic powers to stimulate action and change. Lacking external validation, charismatic authority often fades after its initial stimulation or becomes routinized into traditional or legal structures (Weber, 1947). In such a view, authority is fluidly contested in mediated religious culture as performance-based legitimacy (Kertcher & Margalit, as cited in Horsfield, 2016) in the eyes of spiritual beneficiaries. As Bunt (2018) observed about the ephemerality of Islamic religious authority, "in an avalanche of opinion and information

overload, audiences are gained or lost with a single tweet or are diminished by social media trends" (pg. 65).

Related to this, authority can be understood as emergent, maintained in interactions between two realities that manifest and acknowledge the authority; the "effect of a posited, perceived or institutionally ascribed asymmetry between speaker and audience that permits certain speakers to command not just the attention but the confidence, respect, and trust of their audience,-or an important proviso-to make audiences act *as if* this were so" (Lincoln, 1994, pg. 4). In this sense, authority is dialogic and performative, accomplished through everyday discourse and continuous acts of authoring claims to elicit the attention and trust of a religious collectivity (Cheong, Brummans & Huang, 2014; Slama, 2017). In a digital age, religious authority can be approached as dynamic communication practices constituted across face-to-face and mediated platforms (Cheong, 2017; Cheong, Huang & Poon, 2011). Given the rise of social media algorithms, performances of authority on religious issues are fickle and consensus-based in popular culture (Clark, 2011). With the datafication of religious practices, pastors are continually challenged with managing evolving impressions from data analytics and real-time data integration in their church operating systems (Cheong, in press b).

Furthermore, authority can assume a number of singular or plural forms, on a range of levels. For example, religious authority in Muslim societies can be embodied by a sole representative having the avowed capacity to define orthodoxy and orthopraxy or on the other hand, formed upon ascriptions of legitimacy to groups or institutions sanctioned by the Islamic State as observed in Malaysia (Yusof, 2016), Syria, and Iraq (Bunt, 2018). Forms of authority may also

overlap or be clustered, "as though they ride together in many circumstances" when people or groups are thought of as holding one or more forms of authority simultaneously (Herbst, 2003). In this regard, Horsfield (2016) proposed that "there are likely to be not just several discreet forms of religious authority at work, but multiple loci, layers or claims to religious authority," understood on specific territories. The complexity of interrelated changes in religious authority is also stressed in mediatization theory, which focuses on transformations observed in institutionalized media dominance accompanied by structural conditions and resources that support new authority claims in predominantly secular Nordic countries (Hjarvard, 2016).

In light of its multidimensional nature, research methodologies to examine religious authority have spanned qualitative, quantitative, web-based, and mixed methods including ethnography, interviews, surveys, visual analysis, case studies, narrative analysis, and natural language processing to analyze big data, as well as methodological triangulation. This variability enables us to observe its wide-ranging manifestations and seasonal applications in multimodal worlds.

Mapping Digital Religious Authority Research

This section discusses overarching conceptual shifts that parallel the chronological developments of digital media, while acknowledging that these unifying themes are necessarily limited in scope and detail here. As relationships between religious authority and digital life have been popularly characterized as conflictual or complementary, this is mapped below under two general organizing logics; the logic of disjuncture and displacement, and the logic of continuity and complementarity. The former perspective refers to dominant approaches in which digital media

is framed to be disruptive to traditional religious authority, stressing an erosion of power for traditional institutions and leaders, to define and determine the meaning of religious symbols. The latter refers to more recent thinking of digital media connections as being supportive of religious authority, whose practices are restructuring the legitimacy of their symbols and work contexts, amidst innovative (re)presentations. Beyond these two themes, a third metatheoretical perspective which highlights salient tensions and paradoxes is discussed.

The Logic of Disjuncture and Displacement

A popular logic is that religious authority is eroded by the development of new media, linked to the initial wave of internet research. Here, the logic of disjuncture involves arguments which propose the relationship between religious authority and online media is characterized by upheaval and/or disconnectedness. Displacement refers to the acts of apparent change or movement, including supplanting power and furnishing an equivalent authority in place of another. The mainstream conception linking religious authority and the internet is normative, taking hold in the shadow of utopian and dystopian thinking in the context of virtual communities. In tandem with the celebratory rhetoric accompanying pioneering web-based developments, earlier research on online religion made extreme claims about religious authority in mainstream and new religious contexts. Studies have proposed that the internet is a distinct space for spiritual interaction and new flows of religious information posed corrosive effects on the influence and jurisdiction of traditional authorities. The dominant logic associates offline religious authority with more static models of legitimation, seeing the internet as promoting

informational diversity and social fractures that are disruptive to the status quo. In alignment with the logic of displacement, new web-based authorities have also been proposed.

One common view frames online religion as a vibrant alternative, emphasizing its potential for altering how religious faith is conceived and practiced. At the outset, virtual communities were often regarded as alternative spiritual sanctuaries. Early reports on new religious movements focused on interpretative textual communities, which functioned without a central leader or institution (O' Leary, 1996) and implied circumvention of existing connections with established religious authorities. By expanding access to religious information that can undermine the plausibility structure of a religious system, commentators have noted how online religion has grown significantly with online scriptures, expositions, and e-devotionals and as search engines prompt the use of the internet as a library. A shift from the church as "a locus of theology" unfolds as viewers assemble religious guides of their own volition deferring to the authority of the webpage, which appears "completely self-contained" and "free of external certification and gatekeeping" (Soukup, 2003).

Numerous commentators have also highlighted how obscure, self-proclaimed religious guides have posted their teachings online, offering lay perspectives to expand religious discourse. For example, commentaries are one of the primary ways that ulama have disseminated their authoritative views, but lay Islamist thinkers have co-opted mediated platforms. Anderson noted the rise of new communities of discourse that reflect "creolization" and argued that "what emerges with the Internet is thus a sphere of intermediate people, new interpreters, drawn from these realms and linking them in a new social, public space of alternative voices and authorities"

(pg. 56). By allowing schismatic leaders to emerge, the internet helps challenge the ability of traditional authorities to define legitimate teachings and symbols. Turner (2007) stated that "global information technologies and their associated cultures undermine traditional forms of religious authority because they expand conventional modes of communication, open up new opportunities for debate and create alternative visions of the global community." He went so far as to propose that "in the modern global media, the ability to claim religious authority has been democratized in the sense that anybody can assume the role of an imam" (pg. 120).

A related facet of displacement logic points out how the status of authorities and ecclesiastical structure is undermined when followers gain access to unorthodox teachings and inflammatory information. Fukamizu (2007) argued that the authority of Japanese Buddhists priests has eroded with electronic forum use, as followers develop "critical attitudes" and doubts about traditional doctrines. The decline of a religious movement ensues when leaders appear unwilling or inadequately equipped to deal with misinformation online. Introvigne (2005) observed religious leaders of a new Japanese religious movement were largely ineffectual in the face of online "information terrorism" and as a result of "the partially voluntary lack of legal and other reaction against attacks", this religious movement lost almost half of its membership in certain western countries (pg. 112-113). Along the same lines, Cowan (2004) argued that the replication of propaganda in anticult and counter-cult movement sites, confer "the semblance of authority" on self-styled "experts" or originators of online materials. Because religious organizations may face limited energies to respond to misrepresentations, the web "favors the countermovement" and helps further the cause of critics if propagation of (mis)information is their primary agenda (pg. 266-268).

Furthering the logic of displacement where digital media is perceived to be disruptive to traditional religious authority, online forum leaders and webmasters have been portrayed as new authority figures. For example, Herring (2005) noted that notwithstanding criticisms and contested decisions, interactants in an online Christian newsgroup generally accepted the moderator as a "governing authority" and spiritual advisor. The authority of Buddhist leaders is also displaced by non-monastic authorities like webmasters who are "conceived as the religious specialists or "virtuosi" (in Weber's terms) for giving definitions and taking the place of monks as disseminators of knowledge" (Taylor, 2003, pg. 294). Busch (2011) concluded that as the global moderators discursively and structurally shaped a Buddhist forum, it "inherently allows those in control of the site the authority to set the boundaries of religious orthodoxy and identity and hence, who can take part in the community" (pg. 1).

Moreover, it has been anticipated that the internet helps create new mediators associated with new online services, altering the past hierarchical order of established religions. Scheifinger (2010) argued that puja service professionals challenge the authority of the temple administration and priests in a "subtle" manner by restricting the participation of non-ethnic Indians, curtailing animal sacrifices and selling the photographs of deities (where temple photography is disallowed). Activities of puja service providers also undermined the financial position of priests by reducing the opportunities for them to receive monies from devotees, leading to the conclusion that "that those who have traditionally exercised authority are now being bypassed and that when it comes to the ordering of pujas online, it is the independent providers who are the ones exercising authority" (pg. 652).

Collectively, these and other studies highlight how the logic of disjuncture and displacement that undergirds religious authority operates across a spectrum of religious beliefs and backgrounds. Religious interpretation, texts, ecclesiastical structures, and positions like webmasters and online moderators (all framed as components of religious authority) are changed by online communication and the capabilities of the internet to expand resource access, facilitate new ritual practices, and support new positions of power. As the internet becomes more popular among the religiously oriented, it is perceived to be a largely, though not universally positive resource for promoting social capital in online religious communication, which is seen by some offline religious leaders as disruptive or destructive.

The Logic of Continuity and Complementarity

There are alternative perspectives challenging the conceptualization that the internet leads to a crisis of religious authority, mirroring the trajectory of internet studies that has moved away from a focus on online phenomena and disembodied customs. The logic of continuity involves arguments which propose or reason that the relationship between religious authority and new media is characterized instead by connectedness and succession. Complementarity refers to the acts of interrelation of socio-technical developments that co-constitute and augment authority. The past two decades have witnessed a more integrated perspective that grounds the significance of the internet in peoples' everyday lives, particularly the harmonization of online practices with community building activities. As scholarship has gathered toward investigating the synergetic

relationships between online and offline faith beliefs and infrastructures, offline religious authority is reframed as sustaining and being sustained by digital practices.

So rather than be threatened by the internet, scholarship has recognized how religious organizations have addressed the presence of new online texts and controversial interpretations. For instance, the use of court orders against internet opponents on the basis of copyright infringement and defamation illustrates forceful reactions undertaken by the Church of Scientology leadership to address disparaging and hostile online rhetoric (Introvigne, 2005). Another case of a Baha'i oriented discussion group is interesting to note regarding its temporal sequencing of events. Piff & Warburg (2005) proposed that although the group was initially allowed to function without the interference or supervision decentralized of Baha'i institutions, the eventual closure of the email list demonstrated how "American Baha'i authorities" could have "put pressure on individual posters to exercise restraint or self-censorship in expression of their views", thus "the much-heralded bypass opportunity of the Internet may be more of an ideal construction than a reality in many cases" (pg. 98).

In congruence with the logic of continuity and complementarity, Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai (2005) highlighted how ultra-Orthodox Jewish elites in Israel controlled online information via censorship and supervision of websites that provided a platform for them to provide counter-narratives to criticisms. Internet usage, other than for those for professional and economic purposes, was banned for laity as leaders issued proclamations that only allowed time for information technology training. It was argued that the process of "culturally shaping" the internet led to the preservation of the hierarchical order of their fundamentalist community and

social stratification of their membership. Evidence of online "informational gatekeeping" practices was also uncovered by Knowles (2013) in an examination of web content and forum discussion boards of a popular fundamentalist and evangelical Christian group. Moreover, it was observed how the Catholic Church which has historically shaped the internet in line with its hierarchy and clerical caste, generated automated email responses on the Pope's behalf and dismantled the ranking function and comment mode on the Vatican YouTube channel (Campbell, 2012). An analysis of Pope Francis's tweets evinced how top-down Papal authority was "very pragmatic" as messages primarily took the form of short sermons or reflections, while comments "especially questions, do not receive answers" (Guzek, 2015).

Instead of incongruence and criticism of new technology, Kluver & Cheong's (2007) study in addressing questions of religion and modernization found cultural compatibilities expressed between the development of new media and established faith traditions (i.e. Buddhism, Christian, Muslim, Taoist, and Hindu) in Singapore. Religious leaders largely framed the internet as positive and some stressed its tool-like capabilities to impute neutrality and reclaim digital technologies for religious use. In keeping with burgeoning mobile phone use among congregants in Indian Christian churches, Rajan (2019) discussed how leaders have intentionally adopted smartphone applications to facilitate deeper social connections and generate "affective loops" back to the church.

Furthermore, as an extension of the logic of complementarity, scholars have proposed redefinitions of the constitutions and practices of religious authority to account for its perceived flourishing in social media platforms (Cheong & Ess, 2012). How religious authorities are

constructed and recognized are closely bound with media factors, including their perceived charisma, accessibility and cultural competence to navigate new communication platforms (Cheong, 2016; Horsfield, 2016). Indeed, there appears to be changes in the modes of authority production as some religious leaders have expanded their scope of influence by restructuring their communicative practices to spur administrative and operational effectiveness.

A growing and now fairly sizable corpus of studies highlights how religious leaders are weaving social media into their vocation. Lee (2009) illustrated how Won Buddhist monks and nuns have created blogs on Cyworld to demystify the life of a priest, depict their accommodation and loyalty amid gendered organizational norms, and "indirectly deliver" sermons. Fisher-Nielsen (2012) also stressed that Google, Facebook, and YouTube are integrated into the working lives of the 1,040 pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church surveyed in Denmark, where 95% of them reported to be online daily and 94% of pastors between 25 and 39 years regarded the internet as having positive influence on their work. Two-thirds reported that the Internet had "caused more frequent contact with parishioners" and most endorsed "flesh and blood," "real church practice" in lieu of cyber rituals and web-based services. More recently, using natural language processing to analyse over 85,000 tweets by 88 leaders of American evangelicalism, Burge & Williams (2019) found that leaders mostly used their social media "as a natural extension of their current modes of communication," to encourage their followers and provide information on upcoming projects.

In this way, some commentators claim that the latest media is an avenue of renewal, rejuvenating the life of religious organizations. Lomborg & Ess (2012) noted how the presence of a Danish

church on Facebook was praised in terms of its "progressive," "brand value." In an analysis of Muslim-oriented podcasts, it was asserted that leaders may expand their authority as podcasts generate "a set of acoustic and visual features signaling 'Islamic' authenticity to the listener and by the bias of steady references to the high educational level (in terms of a traditional Islamic education) of the podcasts' key speakers" (Scholz, Selge, Stille & Zimmerman, 2008, pg. 508).

Hence, to adapt pragmatically to an increasingly pluralistic spiritual sphere or "religious marketplace," leaders and laity are encouraged to enter into agreements characterized not merely by offline dogmatic pronouncements, but also by clergy's new competencies to connect across media to persuasively reach congregational members (Cheong, 2017). Clergy are proposed to be adjusting their social identity from that of commanders, to guides and mediators of knowledge and encounters both online and offline, an approach that Cheong, Huang, & Poon (2011) have termed "strategic arbitration." Such strategic arbitration facilitates the co-creation of information and expertise under conditions where laity cooperation is elicited by retaining discretionary power among the leadership to determine informational and interpersonal outcomes such that they do not destabilize the organization.

For example, findings from a study of Christian pastors showed how leaders monitored their online communication (e.g. selectively curbing email response) and justified the validity of their authority (e.g. drawing upon scripture and stressing their own interpretations via new "online ministries" and branding activities) to reinforce normative regulation (Cheong, Huang & Poon, 2011). Another study illustrated how Buddhist leaders principally rechanneled online resources and messages back to priest and laity relationships by a) stressing the benefits of Dharma classes

and personalized mentoring or "karmic links," b) promoting sensorial ritual practices and festivals enacted in the presence of monks and nuns within sacred temple grounds, and c) enacting multi-modal outreach across digital platforms (Cheong, Huang, & Poon, 2011b).

In contemporary times, therefore, an added dimension of the logic of complementarity includes transmediation, a process whereby religious authority practices are appropriated and remediated across different communication platforms (Cheong, 2017). Given new media's affordances to amplify the religious leaders' ability to reach faith seekers, Lee & Sinitiere (2009) highlighted how media-savvy "holy mavericks" have attracted attention to their high-growth organizations in part by their vigorous adoption of corporate branding in a mediated convergence culture. Strategies to create epistemic coherence across multimedia also help co-produce global religious organizations transnationally as it was found that discursive practices across multi-lingual media contributed to making the dharma master of a Buddhist humanitarian organization present in her physical absence (Cheong, Brummans, & Huang, 2014). Another analysis of two United Kingdom megachurches' social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube found that both organizations use all four platforms for "branding and promotion," to provide information and promote projects that align with their core mission (Sircar & Rowley, 2020).

In sum, a growing body of research points to the recurrent logic of continuity and complementarity of religious authority, situated in the modern zeitgeist surrounding internet use as incorporated within individual, collective, and institutional norms and orderings. As the literature demonstrates, while religious leaders are recognized to be increasingly dependent on online resources to a certain extent, overall, they are increasingly portrayed to be adaptive and

exercising significant control. Furthermore, religious leaders have also been portrayed as assuming expanded competencies as strategic arbitrators of online-offline religious information to restore relational bonds and credibility, important to the development of convergent multimedia and branding strategies.

The Logic of Dialectics and Paradox and other Future Research Directions

As discussed in the section above, it is clear that digital life facilitates both the weakening and strengthening of religious authority, offering possibilities for conflict, yet also understanding and accommodation. This insight of the dual logics prompts further examination of a dialectical perspective in mediated culture. The dialectical perspective to new media and culture recognizes the simultaneous presence of two relational forces of interaction of their seeming opposite, interdependence and complementary aspects, akin to eastern philosophies (like yin and yang) on the completion of relative polarities (Cheong, Martin, & Macfadyen, 2012). Here, the logic of dialectics on religious authority would entail an overriding sense of co-occurring tensions and imply understanding the negotiation and management of conflicts, uneven gains, and ambivalences that media interactants face within their online and offline experiences (Cheong & Ess, 2012). As Schement & Stephenson (1996) noted, religion has to be understood in terms of "endemic tensions"; localized and prevalent aspects of continuity and change, consumption and worship that constitute "unavoidable frictions" in the private and public spheres of religious practice within an information society. As such, thinking dialectically about mediated faith communities helps identify unexpected and ineluctable paradoxes in contemporary social and spiritual realities (Cheong & Arasa, 2015).

A growing number of studies have observed the countervailing tendencies and double meanings of mediated religious authority in light of new digital resources and spaces of interaction. For example, Cheong, Huang & Poon (2012) recognized how new online competing resources can also serve as a source of education to enhance a priest's authority. In other words, "a paradox of epistemic authority is that it may be more effective when followers possess some level of knowledge that enables them to evaluate the legitimacy of clergy's knowledge," for example, in instances when congregants converse while referring to new texts, which allows clergy to display their proficiency by addressing their specific concerns. In another study, observations of German and Polish Christian discussion forums "confirm that religious authority may be both challenged and reaffirmed online" (Kolodzlejska & Neumaier, 2017), as forum informal experts did not advance subversive agendas but mostly shared information to support and supplement the work of existing authorities. At the same time, forum debates introduced a diversity of worldviews but helped users reaffirm their beliefs. The "complex balance between challenging and reaffirming traditional religious authority" was similarly proposed in Giorgi's (2019) study of mediatized Catholicism in Italy which illustrated opportunities for marginalized voices to gather online while at the same time, members "referred to the authority of charisma and the church as a community, to which they all belong" (pg. 16).

Recent studies on religious memes have also acknowledged the dialectics in religious authority practices as digital platforms provide a crucible to reinforce official beliefs and norms, while the multiplicity of meanings generated via meme dissemination can possibly segregate the church. Applying a visual rhetorical analysis of two Indian churches' Facebook pages, Rajan (2015)

illustrated how traditional religious institutions can exercise control through social media by imbuing faith memes with orthodox religious knowledge and avoiding controversial topics even as participatory capacities on Facebook permitted dispute and opposition. In a similar vein, Bellar and colleagues (2015) recognized how the purposeful appropriation of faith memes can uphold and provoke religious authority as priests incorporate memetic images into their blogs to generate reflexive discourse and online exchanges. In addition, according to Burroughs and Feller's (2015) study, though the "reflexive and metonymic function of religious memes ruptures" everyday Mormon practices, online participants furthered proselytization by linking to official websites and producing content which mirrored aesthetic imprints associated with the church. Explication of the "doubt your doubts" meme derived from a message by a key Mormon leader, also raised the paradox of strategic ambiguity, whereby an institutionally produced meme appeared organic in frenzied circulation (pg. 369).

Furthermore, various studies have highlighted how clerics now face simultaneous challenges to connect and balance self-promotion on social media yet all the while maintaining a credible demeanor and workload. Lomberg & Ess (2012) noted that Facebook friendships may be relationally rewarding but it is "a delicate balance to strike as this strategic presentation of the pastor as an ordinary person also possibly entails a risk of jeopardizing the professional respect and authority so important for a pastor in his work and leadership within the community." Rinallo, Mcclaran, and Stevens (2016) in their study of "market-mediated religious authority" argued that while marketplace success enabled Wiccan leaders in Italy to build their legitimacy and a strong community, excessive dependencies can also delegitimize their leadership. Thus, "risky market engagement" entailed meticulous boundary work by leaders to constantly monitor

their practices and stay in the "safe zone of critique-free market practice." In addition, drawing upon a study of Indonesia's Islamic preachers, Slama (2017) highlighted multiple tensions faced by imams who are empowered yet "in a more vulnerable position" with social media exchanges with their female Indonesian middle-class followers. She noted the ambivalences faced by clergy who need to "master the subtle economy of time" so that they can "develop a sense of how much time can pass until they reply to particular messages without disappointing their followers" (pg. 100). In so far as these challenges are managed reasonably, preachers can convert their social and cultural capital to economic capital, and accrue "gains in Islamic authority."

Conclusion and Future Recommendations

This chapter performed an updated mapping of the broad contours of research developments to illuminate key relationships undergirding authority in an increasingly mediated era. Recent studies illustrate an emerging logic of dialectics and paradox as leaders struggle and manage tensions related to processes of digital mediation in their work to (re)enact religious authority. This complex and somewhat counter-intuitive relationship warrants conceptual expansion and future-focused attention. In particular, a related recommendation here is to deepen understandings of religious authority by employing a dialectical perspective and an intersectional lens that attends to the endemic tensions, aligning with what has been identified as the fourth wave of embedded and everyday digital religion research recently (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019). By critically unpacking issues such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity among religious leadership, attention to intersectionality in routine devotion can further illuminate power dynamics that construct the contested negotiations and reception of authority.

For example, it is worth pointing out here how the dialectics of cultural differences-similarities can work in mediated spaces as religious leaders labor to construct branded identities and personal bios on Twitter that are both striking and memorable, yet remain relatable to larger audiences (Cheong, 2016). Specifically, while marketing discourse advocates the creation of a unique brand, it was noted that the top twittering clergy in the U.S. tended to be "male, white, educated, and middle class. The intersection of their privileged identities allows them, in turn, to compose brands that are aligned with elite or aspirational lifestyles including globetrotting adventures and hobbies that include golfing, live football game attendance, and family vacations" (pg. 104). Attention to intersectionality and gender was also highlighted by Lovheim & Hjarvard's (2019) reference to young Nordic Muslim women who have coopted social media to perform predominantly male authoritative roles like scripture-based advice giving. Their performances have been simultaneously boosted by new media affordances and yet riddled with critical censure, which may mar their construction of authority overtime.

On the topic of longitudinal observation, future research on religious authority should also consider broadening the data repertoire to more accurately archive and monitor overtime developments in the conditions that facilitate the avowal and ascription of religious authority. In effect, further research needs to investigate the ways religious leaders manage and resolve ambiguities in their long term and projected negotiations in human-machine communication, for example, the privacy-connectivity concerns with new mobile and geo-locational applications, big data and artificial intelligent agents. In parallel, more studies can employ triangulation of research methods to capture larger, diverse and global data sets to verify propositions of the

corrosion, maintenance, and reconstruction of religious authority.

Recommended Readings

Lincoln, B. (1994). *Authority: Construction and Corrosion*, Chicago: University of Chicago

Press.

In this book, Bruce Lincoln, professor of the history of religions, provides an engaging

treatise on authority, its construction, maintenance and corrosion. Vis-à-vis television,

the then new media at the time of the book's publication, he conceptualizes the

importance of observing how the exercise of authority implicates and is dependent on the

use of electronic media.

Cheong, P.H., Fischer-Nielsen, P., Gelfgren, S., and Ess, C. (eds) (2012). *Digital Religion,*

Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, Futures, New York: Peter Lang.

This book offers an overview of the study of digital religion and social media practices.

The introduction chapter addresses the question of authority in light of prevailing digital

and social media developments. Multiple chapters in this anthology by prominent

researchers in interdisciplinary fields highlight the implications of new media for

authority, identity and community constructions in religious networks and connections.

Hoover, S.M. (ed.) (2016). *The Media and Religious Authority*. University Park, PA:

Penn State Press.

This edited volume comprises of two main parts of material related to developments in

religious authority; introductory chapters providing theoretical viewpoints, and case

studies on specific processes of media construction, representation and response.

Together, this insightful work with contributors from across the globe explicates evolving

processes of mediation and its relation to religious authority.

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