

Online Workshop

# Social Media & Religion

October 22-23, 2020



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## **International Online Workshop on ‘Social Media and Religion’**

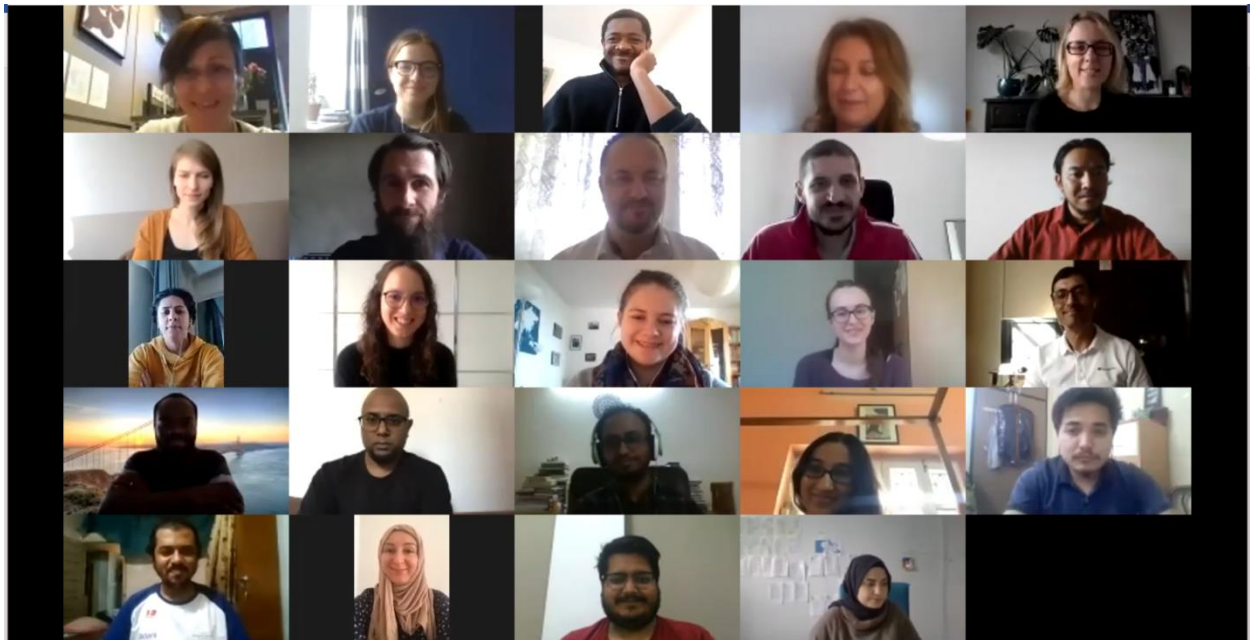
An international online workshop on ‘Social Media and Religion’ took place on the 22-23 October, 2020, which hosted 48 scholars from diverse disciplines such as: Religious Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, History, Political Science, Regional Studies, Media Studies, Computer Sciences, and Digital Humanities. The main purpose of this interactive workshop was to discuss online research and its methodological and ethical challenges, especially during the pandemic. Our aim was to create a stable platform on which researchers could extend their academic networks and stay updated with the latest methodological approaches to online research. The event was open to master and doctoral students and postdocs.

This workshop was of interest to a diverse group of people particularly because it offered practical methodological sessions. We invited two key experts, one of them specialized in Digital Humanities (Dr. Wajdi Zaghouani) and the other in Digital Religion (Dr. Anna Neumaier), with a request to share their experiences on the methodological aspects of online data collection. We acknowledge an increasing importance and necessity in online research. On the one hand, we witness a growing role of social media which is affecting many aspects of people's social life, including their religious practices. On the other hand, due to restrictions related to COVID-19, many researchers have been forced to shift their research into an online format and they need to master techniques to conduct online research.

The restrictions of not being able to have a real face-to-face experience did not prevent us from doing intensive socializing even at this online event. We used different strategies for creating a networking platform. First, we circulated an extended program with short bio-notes of each participant so that they could get to know each other in advance. Second, we organized many break-out sessions, “virtual networking rooms” and optional “virtual coffee breaks” which gave the participants an opportunity to meet in a more relaxed atmosphere and share their experiences in small groups. Online workshop provided even some advantages that one cannot experience in a face-to-face event. For example, the chat feature of the Zoom allowed participants to actively interact with each other, ask questions, and receive answers or suggestions for further useful links or references. All participants were asked to share in the chat their experiences with online data collection techniques and what challenges they faced. This allowed us to quickly get a long list of personal cases of collecting online data that was available to all participants. We also recorded the presentations of our keynote speakers, which were later circulated among the participants and other interested scholars who were unable to join our workshop.

Despite diverse time differences, the number of attendance on both workshop days was high and participants were very active. For example, we had a participant from the New York University who attended the workshop in the middle of the night and had to go to work right after our full-day workshop. We perceive it as a good sign that the workshop was interesting and useful. We received positive feedback from the workshop participants and most importantly, the participants wholeheartedly supported our initiative to create a platform for further networking. Inspired by the ideas of participants, we created a Google group and a Facebook group where we also welcome other scholars working on social media and religion. We want to preserve the interdisciplinary aspect of this networking group, as we are convinced that in the context of online research, scholars from different disciplines have much to learn from each other. Given the growing role and demand for online research, we are confident that this workshop will initiate important scholarly exchanges and collaborations.

We express our gratitude to the GRADE (Goethe Research Academic of Early Career Researchers) and want to say a big “Thank you” to the Vereinigung von Freunden und Förderern of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, the Gesellschaft der Freunde und Förderer of the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena and the GRADE Center GPE of the Faculty 08 of Philosophy and History of the Goethe University for the financial support. This workshop would not have been possible without their generous support.



Thank you!!!

