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Does the 'old' media's coverage of religion matter in times of 'digital religion'?

When I was in Britain, working on a project which involved studying the coverage of religion in the media, one of the most common questions people asked was not related to the content of media coverage.[1] It was about the 'new' media. No matter whether I was conversing with a scholar, media producer, journalist, friend or ordinary man in the local pub, the question was almost invariably: are you going to focus on the 'new' media?

After getting used to answering this question I started to expect it, and at academic conferences I usually answered before anyone had a chance to ask. I began to wonder why people think that the 'old' media is no longer important. Media professionals were fascinated by the 'new' media, but perhaps not as much as the constantly tweeting members of various think tanks I was fortunate enough to encounter at several conferences.

My reflections turned into a provocation: if someone is studying religion in the 'new' media, practically no-one is asking them to take the 'old' media into account; but if someone is studying the 'old' media, a typical first reaction is to question the rationale of study unless a major part of it is re-focused on the 'new' media. This article is not, however, a critique of the study of 'new' media. The study of digital religion and religion in the 'new' media, especially in tracing the transformation of communities, ideas, practices and forms of interaction which people tend to classify as religious, has already proved fruitful. What is not well-justified is the assumption that the 'old' media does not really matter anymore. This is something to be examined, although the structures and business models of the mainstream media are changing because of the 'new', digital media. Furthermore, we need to explore the interac-

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1   'Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred: A Longitudinal Study of British Newspaper and Television Representations and Their Reception' was funded by the Religion and Society Research Programme between 2008 and 2010 and the rest of the team consisted of Professor Kim Knott and Senior Lecturer Elizabeth Poole. See Knott *et al.* 2013, Taira *et al.* 2012.

tions between 'old' and 'new' media, what emerges from their convergence, and start theorising about its implications in the context of religion.

Some of the things that will be dealt with apply to the media in general. Only some are religion-specific. However, the intention is not to repeat what media scholars have already said about intermediality, media convergence and the relationship between 'old' and 'new' media. The reflections shared here are rather based on my empirical research of religion in the media, especially in the 'old' mainstream mass media in Britain and Finland. Much of what will be said may well be trivial, but if the 'common sense' of scholars and media professionals has followed the 'new' media hype, then the following reflections may well be acute.

Conceptually it is not the most elegant choice to talk about 'old' and 'new' media. The terms are even more problematic if 'old' is understood to be referring to a thing of the past, or to something bygone and if 'new' is understood to be implying relevance. However, the terms are used here 'under erasure', meaning that they are inadequate yet necessary terms for clarifying the roles of the different media in relation to religion. 'Old' refers primarily to mainstream media, such as newspapers, television and radio, while 'new' refers primarily to websites, blogs, mobile phones (including applications) and social media. The distinction gets even more complicated when thinking about the online presence of newspapers: the technology is 'new', but the content is produced by 'old' media. Furthermore, to use the term 'digital' instead of 'new' is not without its problems either. It is easy to understand what the term 'digital religion' refers to, but in the context of thinking about the convergence of 'old' and 'new' media, talk about 'digital' can be confusing, as practically all media are digital nowadays.

What follows is an exploration of how and why the 'old' media still matters, if it does at all, based on my experiences in researching religion in the media. Three observations will be examined – that people do use the 'old' media, that sources of popular 'new' media stories are often mediated by 'old' media houses and news agencies, and that people still care about 'old' media's coverage of religion – in order to finish by suggesting that it might be useful to go beyond the binary opposition of 'old' and 'new'.

People's use of the 'old' media

The most obvious observation suggesting the continuing significance of the 'old' media is that people still read newspapers, listen to the radio and watch

television (see Poole and Taira 2013; McNair 2005: 21; Pietilä 2007: 130–1; Temple 2008: 93; Vehkoo 2011). However, newspaper circulation and consumption figures have decreased significantly in the past two decades, even in Finland, where the level of newspaper readership is exceptionally high.[2] Especially young people are less attached to newspapers: in 1991, 90 per cent of Finnish youth aged between 15 and 24 followed newspapers, but in 2011 this had decreased to 70 per cent – which is still a relatively high proportion (Vehkoo 2011: 29–30; see also Pietilä 2007: 134–5, 165–6, 185).

Certainly there are changes going on. To take my students of religion in the media class as an example, four out of twelve had a television at home; no-one mentioned the radio as an aspect of their media use and only three were currently subscribers of a printed daily newspaper. University students are a far from representative selection of young adults in Finland, but most adults have been surprised when I have told them about the media usage of these students. This indicates that something is changing. However, the changes have not killed off the 'old' media. For instance, printed letters in opinion pages in newspapers still have much more prestige than opinions shared on discussion forums or newspaper websites. As the Finnish media professional and analyst A-P. Pietilä (2007: 120) suggests, with only a little hyperbole, to publish a letter in *Helsingin Sanomat* – the most influential newspaper in Finland – is almost equivalent in terms of prestige and merit to publishing an article in a scholarly journal. Indeed, 2010 was record year for letters to the editor in *Helsingin Sanomat*, and the most popular topic was a religion-related controversy – Gay Night, which will be discussed later in this article (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 31.12.2010).

However, despite the massive changes in the media sphere and the opportunities which this transformation has opened up, recent studies on religion and media tend to overemphasise the 'new' media, and in some cases limit their scope to the 'new' media. This becomes fairly obvious when looking at the book market in the area of religion and media scholarship, as there are plenty of excellent textbooks on religion and 'new' media.[3] By contrast, there

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2   This is not only because of the internet and 'new' media, as the decrease started before the internet became popular among the masses.

3   A selection of English language publications from last 15 years demonstrates the extensive interest in religion and 'new' media: Erica Baffelli et al. (eds), *Japanese Religions on the Internet* (2010); Gary Bunt, *Virtually Islamic* (2002), *Islam in the Digital Age* (2003) and *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (2009); Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online* (2005) and *When Religion Meets New Media* (2010); Douglas Cowan, *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet*

have never been as many widely distributed, up-to-date studies on religion and/in the 'old' media – at least not in the European context. Furthermore, many studies that deal with religion in the 'new' media do not seriously take the 'old' media into account. This is partly because scholars tend to chart relatively unexplored territories, but the overall outcome is still the same – a shortage of recent studies focusing on mainstream mass media.

To say that people still use the 'old' media is not to predict that hard copies of newspapers will stay in the pole position in religion-related issues or any other topic. On the contrary, some media outlets, such as *The Guardian* in Britain, are actively developing business models which situate their website as the most important point of access to the information (Vehkoo 2011). Furthermore, as far as I am aware, there are no media analysts who would argue for an increasingly significant role for newspaper hard copies in the media sphere. This, however, does not mean the end of the daily press, though it does have implications for reading habits and journalistic production. For instance, reading a web page and following various links is quite different from the experience of reading or browsing an actual newspaper, which is more 'closed' in its form (Pietilä 2007: 96). In addition, in the world of the web it is easier to switch to the next source if the current one does not provide enough information. Moreover, people are not reading or browsing the whole newspaper in the digital world. Perhaps people never read the whole hard copy either, but at least many readers will have browsed through every page. This has been taken into account so that people could use hard copy and internet side by side. One recent trend is so-called 'layer reporting' which means that the most general information is printed in the newspaper with reference to more detailed information and explication in the newspaper's blogs, with links to yet more specific material. From the perspective of religion in the media, it is interesting that the chief editor of *The Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger (2010), pointed to the work of the religious affairs correspond-

(2004); Douglas E. Cowan and Lorne L. Dawson (eds), *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (2004); Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (eds), *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (1999); Jeffrey Hadden and Douglas Cowan (eds), *Religion on the Internet* (2000); Robert Howard, *Digital Jesus: the Making of a New Christian Fundamentalist Community on the Internet* (2011); Anastasia Karaflogka, *E-Religion* (2006); Göran Larsson, *Muslims in the New Media* (2011); Göran Larsson (ed.), *Religious Communities on the Internet* (2006); Rachel Wagner, *Godwired: Religion, Ritual and Virtual Reality* (2011); Margit Warburg and Morten T. Højsgaard (eds), *Religion and Cyberspace* (2007).

ent of *The Times*, Ruth Gledhill, as an inspired example of layer reporting.[4] In other words, there are massive changes going on in the world of the 'old' mainstream media, but the rumours about its death are premature. Daily printed papers may have passed their moment, but television is still almost ubiquitous, despite the fact that watching television is commonly combined with the use of the internet and mobile phones (texting, for example). If the information about religion is received from 'the media', it still often means the 'old' media, because people are using it.

The sources of popular stories about religion in the 'new' media are often based on the 'old' media

My second observation concerns the sources of religious affairs stories which become popular in the 'new' media. By looking at the origins of news stories which circulate on Facebook and are commented upon in various blogs, Twitter and discussion forums, it is obvious that they are often based on news originating from mainstream media houses and news agencies. Even when the origin is located somewhere else, popular stories are typically mediated by the mainstream media.

To take another example from my students, they were not active users of 'old' media technologies, but when asked about their media use, they all said that in addition to television programmes which are available online, they follow major Finnish newspapers online, typically the biggest one and a local one. This habit is further evidenced by statistics on the most popular websites. The Finnish websites which gather most hits are the two main tabloids, the news service of a major commercial television channel, the biggest daily newspaper and the public broadcasting company. The most popular discussion forum follows after these.[5]

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4   'The paper will carry a paragraph on a controversial sermon by the Bishop of Chichester. Gledhill will explain its significance on her blog, and link to the full sermon for those who want the source. Readers can then debate the text on the blog and follow other links' (Rusbridger 2010). Furthermore, newspapers will monitor the digital debate at least on their own website and give reports about it. For instance, in Finland the enactment of a Finnish atheist bus advertising campaign was covered in no more than 33 newspaper articles (including 11 opinion letters) in the three biggest morning papers, but the papers referred to a lively debate that was going on on their websites (Panttila 2012).

5   The websites, starting from the most popular are *Iltalehti*, *Ilta-Sanomat*, MTV3, *Helsingin Sanomat* and YLE. Statistics are based on week 15, 2012. TNS Gallup 2012.

Some students mentioned major international news services. One mentioned blogs which were related to her hobbies, but nobody suggested that they get their information about religion from sources outside the major media houses. Some students mentioned Facebook links, but majority of these led to newspaper websites.[6]

There are exceptional cases when the 'new' media plays a major, autonomous role; these include instances of censorship (Poole and Taira 2013). When the mainstream media is being politically controlled, news spreads via Twitter. Or, when 'Everybody Draw Mohammed Day' (20.10.2010) was launched on the social media as a protest against and provocation of what were considered to be attempts to limit freedom of expression, Pakistan blocked Facebook temporarily, but the damage had already been done: many people in Pakistan were already aware of the campaign.

In some cases the news items have their origin in the 'new' media; for example YouTube, but usually they become debated issues only after going through the 'old' media. It is true that 'old' media houses do not have the monopoly in selecting topics for the public agenda. This is partly because of the existence of the internet, but the freesheets have also played a role in this development. However, some commentators go too far in suggesting that the 'old' media finds its stories on internet discussion forums (Pietilä 2007: 376). According to my observations, it is not a constant pattern and when it does happen, it is rarely so direct. For example, when the Finnish mainstream media started to focus a critical eye on the Laestadian revival movement's ways of dealing with cases of paedophilia within its communities, the topic had already been discussed on forums by those who were concerned. However, the media did not pick them up from there. It was rather that the anonymous discussants were empowered enough by the support of like-minded others, and then were able to give stories to the mainstream media in order to start a wider and more visible debate.

The point here is not to suggest that the 'old' media have remained the same. On the contrary: the publishing houses that used to be organised around one newspaper are only able to maintain their position by trans-

When compared with September 2007, five most popular are the same, but in a slightly different order: MTV3, *Ilta-Sanomat*, *Iltalehti*, YLE and *Helsingin Sanomat* (see Pietilä 2007: 50).

6   A notable exception to this is the tendency to link the most ridiculous and absurd opinion blogs to Facebook. Some bloggers acquire 'cult' status and the ridiculing of them strengthens the normative boundaries of the imagined community of those who disagree.

forming themselves into multimedia organisations in which a printed daily newspaper plays only a small part. Nonetheless, even in the course of this transformation they are maintaining a strong position, along with news agencies, in generating and sharing information about religious affairs.

Traditional newspapers – whether printed or on websites – can be strong as long as they maintain quality, an aura of trustworthiness and provide astute analysis and good filtering in the arena of a chaotic abundance of information about religion. Digital space offers plenty of opinions, talking points, ideas and expertise on specific issues, but, due to its anonymity and lack of an aura of trustworthiness, people are more likely to rely on information when they know its source and are able to evaluate it on the basis of their previous experiences.[7] The 'old' media loses out to the 'new' in terms of the quantity of stories about religious affairs, but quantity is not enough to create topics for public discussion. Therefore, the mainstream media matters even when the origin of the religion-related story is in the 'new' media, because the 'old' media are more powerful when it comes to selecting the stories, functioning as a nodal point in distributing them, and working within the aura of trustworthiness and responsibility that they have in the minds of many media users.[8]

People care about the 'old' media's coverage

My third observation is simple: the 'old' media's coverage matters to people and communities. If the 'old' media does not matter anymore, why are representatives of religious communities so worried about the representations of their beliefs and practices in the 'old', mainstream media?

In the United States people ranked religious affairs news as second in terms of importance, but in terms of satisfaction it ranked last. Religious leaders suggested that the media were 'too sensational and focus on fringe elements in ways that denigrate religion'. Conservative Protestants said that journalists

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7   Even though the anonymity of the web has often been pointed out by critics who see it as part of the 'cult of the amateur' (Keen 2007) and 'an officially endorsed licence for irresponsibility' (Bauman 2012: 118), it is obvious that 'new' media enthusiasts also agree that the web allows greater anonymity than the 'old' media – they just happen to value it differently.

8   Insiders of various communities and subcultures do not always trust mainstream media accounts, but for general readers the mainstream media are usually more trustworthy than insiders' accounts, especially if there are any reasons to think that insiders want to present themselves by sharing only positive aspects.

tend to promote secular values; they found it hard to believe that there were any Christian journalists (Buddenbaum 1998: 105, 110). This can be applied to other groups as well. As Paul Moses writes, 'journalists assigned to the religion beat find out very quickly that many of the people they cover suspect the news media are biased against them. Evangelical Christians, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims all complain that they are victims of unfair coverage' (Moses 2005: 67).

In Britain I had the opportunity to participate in a conference where spokespersons of many religious associations were sharing their thoughts with journalists and academics about religion in the media.[9] Most religious people complained about the media coverage and treatment of their group. Therefore, it seems to be the case that however religion is covered in the mainstream media, religious people are not satisfied – and people invest their time and energy in pointing this out.

A good example from the conference was a complaint by Sikhs who thought that their treatment in the media was negative and that they were not covered as extensively as were Muslims in the British media. Furthermore, in some cases they are even being confused with Muslims. It is questionable whether a greater amount of coverage is necessarily a good thing, if the media often focuses on conflict and controversies. Confusing Sikhs with Muslims is unfortunate indeed, but, as far as I know, there is only anecdotal evidence of that happening in the media. Whatever the case, all communities are entitled to expect fair and balanced media coverage. However, according to my researches the image of Sikhs in the British media is far from negative. Sikhs have been involved in one major media controversy in Britain during the past couple of decades. This was in 2004 when the theatrical drama *Behzti* (Dishonour), written by a British-born woman with a Sikh background, Gurpreet Khaur Bhatti, was protested against by Sikhs in Birmingham (Weller 2009: 155–6). This extended into a media debate which was still in the minds of Sikh representatives at the 2009 conference (see Singh 2012), although most of the daily coverage of Sikhs is fairly positive. Sikhs are seen as an example of a community which has integrated successfully and because of this, the coverage is sometimes verging on treating Sikhs as the 'teacher's pet' of all non-Christian religious and ethnic minorities in Britain.[10] The example

9   Religion and the News, 11–13 October 2009, Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, England. See also Mitchell and Gower (2012) and a short summary of the conference (Gower 2009).
10   My understanding of the media coverage of British Sikhs is closer to the data received from statistics. According to British Census 2001 Sikhs in general have higher

of Sikhs in Britain shows that organisations and communities pay a lot of attention to the media coverage that is related to them, up to a point of being oversensitive and selective at times.[11]

One important question asks why do religious groups want to be covered in the mainstream media, if they consider their treatment unfair? Generally religious groups want to be covered because they want to disseminate their message, find allies, attract new members and generally further their interests. Furthermore, the voices as they are heard in the mainstream media coverage give an indication of the state of the internal hierarchy for those on the inside and also communicates this to outsiders, as communities carefully monitor who gets to be the spokesperson for a particular tradition. Moreover, media 'coverage, especially favorable or neutral coverage by an outside entity such as the press, creates an illusion of legitimacy. Being ignored or receiving unfavorable coverage' by the mainstream media has the opposite effect (Buddenbaum 1998: 21). Staying outside the mainstream media is not a real option for most groups.

This situation is not in the control of religious communities. If there is any battle between religion and media, the media are winning (Hoover 2006: 3). And even though the mainstream media are not anti-religious or 'secularist' in their content and approach, nor are they voices speaking on behalf of religious communities. An autonomous media institution was constituted in the institutional differentiation process of modernising societies, and it has been suggested that this process has had three main consequences for the relationship between religious groups and the media. First of all, the media have become an important, if not primary, source of information about religious issues. Secondly, information about religious issues comes to be formed according to the demands of popular media genres. Thirdly, the predominantly secular media 'have taken over many of the cultural and social functions of the institutionalised religions and provide spiritual guidance, moral orientation, ritual passages and a sense of community and belonging' (Hjarvard 2011: 124).

rates of private home ownership than the national average and otherwise they increasingly resemble the national profile. They are not necessarily the 'ethnic high flyers' in Britain, but neither are they 'underachievers' (Bluck *et al.* 2012: 101–2).

11   One reason why the reception of even fairly positive coverage might result in complaints lies in the gap between media logics and the hopes of religious communities: religious groups would like the media to tell people about their ethical message, whereas the media focus on controversies, celebrities, out-of-the-ordinary events and what they consider to be socially, politically and economically significant topics.

Most relevant of these for the purpose of this article is the fact that the mass media have the ability to set the public agenda: details given in the coverage of a particular issue prompt people as to what is considered important and what is not. Furthermore, the mass media provides a language to speak about religion, to describe and classify people and groups as liberals and conservatives, for example. Moreover, the power to decide over what parts of religion are worth talking about has been passed over from the church to the media (Buddenbaum 1998: 113; see also Hjarvard 2011: 125). This is why people continue caring about coverage of religion in the 'old' media despite all the changes and opportunities brought about by the 'new' media.

The 'new' media offer plenty of opportunities for marginalized groups to disseminate their message and reach potentially interested people without the mediation of a sometimes unfavourable mainstream media. This is the appeal of the 'new' media for many communities. More than this, the 'new' media provide favourable circumstances in order 1) to find like-minded others, 2) to hear more heterogeneous voices than the mainstream media have traditionally wanted to listen to and 3) for finding information that is not featured in the mainstream media. These three aspects are highlighted in interviews and correspondence documented in Heidi Campbell's study on religion and the 'new' media (see Campbell 2010: 82, 155, 180), and other scholars have argued for the internet's role in facilitating more active and visible identities for atheist and secular groups (Smith and Cimino 2012).

While there is evidence of digital communities that are organised so that they allow a multiplicity of voices and opinions (Hoover and Echchaibi 2012), searching for like-minded people and sharing information that is closely related to people's existing interests are typical features of 'new' media networks and communities (Pietilä 2007: 46–7). Therefore, there are new kinds of digital spaces where links are shared and topics evaluated. These spaces – astutely re-named the '@gora' (Bauman 2012: 32) – are significant in locating individuals in hyper-interactive interpretive communities. These are very different contexts for receiving and processing information than the situation in which an individual is reading a newspaper in solitude while having breakfast. However, none of this changes the fact that people worry about how their community is covered in the mainstream media.

It has been suggested in this section that the appeal of the 'new' media does not cancel out the power of the mainstream, 'old' media, or people's interest in how they are portrayed in the media. This can be further illustrated by selected examples. The Druid Network has established a strong digital basis for sharing information, organising activities and maintaining Druid identity in

Britain. When they acquired charitable status on the basis of the advancement of religion in England and Wales in 2010, the *Daily Mail*, the second biggest British newspaper and known for its politically conservative and pro-Christian standpoint, published an article by Melanie Phillips (2010), who wrote 'will someone please tell me this is all a joke?' and continued that 'elevating them to the same status as Christianity is but the latest example of how the bedrock creed of this country is being undermined. More than that, it is an attack upon the very concept of religion itself.' She concluded that 'Druidry is surely not a religion but a cult' (Phillips 2010).

Phillips's report caused outrage among Druids, leading some outside of the Druid Network to draw up a petition demanding an apology, acquiring 4,187 signatures.[12] The case of the *Daily Mail* article was an example of the attention marginal groups pay to the media coverage that concerns them. Although the Druid Network had already been granted charitable status on the basis of the advancement of religion, negative coverage in the 'old' media prompted a swift response.

Similarly, when a book about Finnish Wiccans received a fairly negative review, in which the seriousness of Wicca was questioned, in one of the main daily newspapers (Wilhelmsson 2005), Wicca adherents sent a response to the newspaper. The letter was never published in the newspaper, but was available on the website of the Finnish Pagan Network (www.pakanaverkko.fi).[13] Even Finnish Pagans who have been pioneers in creating their network by using 'new' media (at least if compared to organisations, groups and communities classified as religious) were eager to respond immediately to the 'old' media's coverage, which amounted to nothing more than a book review.

The most important thing to keep in mind in thinking about the persisting significance of the 'old' media in relation to religion is this: the 'old' media remains a powerful arena of discourse on religion, especially for those who are not actively seeking information on the subject (see Fischer-Nielsen 2012: 48–9; Hjarvard 2012: 30; Poole and Taira 2013). It is obvious that the social

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12   For the petition for a public apology from Melanie Phillips for her article 'Druids as a religion? Stones of praise here we come', see Petitiononline.com 2011. There is a YouTube clip of Arthur Pendragon and others handing in the petition to the *Daily Mail* offices in London, posted online on 13th November 2010, see Pendragon 2011. About the Druid Network's Charity Law case, including the analysis of media coverage, see Owen and Taira, forthcoming.

13   The letter has not been available after the launch of a new website. The latest check is from 2008 (22 May), but the link is not in operation anymore. I do not have a copy of the letter, but I have referred to it in one of my earlier articles (Taira 2008: 137–8).

media, as well as many websites and discussion forums dedicated solely to religion-related issues, are hugely significant for people who are interested in religion and who actively seek information about it, but they are ordinary people who do not mind too much about what goes on in religious communities, or about debates concerning religion get their information from the mainstream newspapers and television. Furthermore, people who are in powerful positions in society are not likely to follow religious media or 'digital religion', but they are playing key roles in making decisions that have impact on religious organisations and communities, whether digital or not. This does not mean that everything significant happens in the realm of the 'old' media, because there is no such thing as an 'old' media in the same way there used to be. However, newspapers, television and radio are not powerless or irrelevant. The 'old' media interacts with the 'new' and the point is to find out how this interaction works.

The convergence and intertwining of the 'old' and 'new'

News material circulates from one area of the media to another and there is no consistant starting point or source of origin for news. If previously it was the media houses who decided what gets covered in the media, now there is more interaction, because media technologies have made it possible for ordinary people to produce material and distribute it. This chapter has emphasised that in religion-related issues the mainstream media play a significant role, but cannot do so without being in connection with 'new' media. Furthermore, the 'old' media adapt to the logic of the 'new', for example in incorporating video material into news stories (thus contributing to increasing visualization) and in stressing the importance of clicks, comments and 'likes' in evaluating the success of news and in integrating consumers to the production process (thus emphasizing co-creation and contributing to the 'prosumerisation'[14] of the media). However, the adaptation does not simply mean a decrease in influence, as in some cases it has increased the 'reachability' of the 'old' media.[15]

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14 Prosumer is a portmanteau word combining producer and consumer. The term was popularised by Tapscott and Williams (2008), who referred to the value of openness, peering and sharing in increasing participation in the media.

15 *The Guardian* provides a good example: its circulation of hard copies is relatively low in comparison to other British newspapers, but it is one of the most popular and influential newspaper websites. Daily newspapers seem to isolate themselves and decrease their online influence if they are available only for those who pay. So far an

The concept of media convergence, coined by Henry Jenkins, is particularly relevant here; understood as 'the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences' (Jenkins 2006: 2). Here I emphasise the first aspect, the flow of content, by introducing and analysing one religion-related media controversy, thus suggesting that studying how different media are intertwined and mingled is one way to go beyond a strict distinction between 'old' and 'new' media.

On 12 October 2010 the Finnish public broadcasting company YLE broadcast a live studio debate entitled Gay Night (*Homoilta*) on one of its main television channels. Even though on the surface level the topic was about the rights of gay people in general, soon the debate started to revolve around religion, mainly the attitude of the Evangelical Lutheran Church towards homosexuals and homosexuality. While there were pro-gay religious commentators in the studio, religious, anti-gay voices were louder. During the programme many people resigned from the Church via the internet website. Partly because this resignation boom continued, the programme received plenty of coverage in the newspapers. I explored the media reception of and debate about Gay Night with my students, looking at national newspapers, religious papers and 'new' media extensively, but here I shall focus only on the convergence between 'old' and 'new' media (about the Gay Night, see also Moberg and Sjö 2012: 86–9; Hokka 2013).

The first aspect of this entire media event which is worth highlighting is that it was initiated by television. It was possible to send text messages and emails to the programme, and some of them were read aloud or shown in the screen. The programme itself was an example of interaction between 'old' and 'new' media, but it also showed the power of television to prompt a reaction.

The second aspect is the increase in resignations from the Church. It happened on a website; it started during the programme and continued while the media debate was active. The fact that it is easy to terminate church membership without delay on a web platform made it possible to keep the news value and intensity of the debate so strong. Without the 'new' media, the debate would presumably have been slower-paced, less intense, and there would have been more time for reflection, but as things went, people responded

online paywall has worked for special papers, such as the *Financial Times*, but less well for those whose target is to reach general readership (given that there are other relevant and free online media available). See Brown 2012: 121.

quickly by resigning from the Church online. Again, this aspect highlights the convergence of 'old' and 'new' media.

The third aspect is related to the reception and media discussion. The 'old' media covered 'new' media outputs by referring to the blog of a celebrity who criticised the Church and also telling the readers that a less famous blogger's rant against homosexuals had received 37,000 Facebook 'likes'.[16] According to this case, the mainstream media monitors digital debate and picks up parts of it. Three criteria were present: celebrities were likely to be referred to; unusually popular pieces were mentioned (but not always taken seriously), especially if they circulated in social media; opposite standpoints were juxtaposed in the 'old' media, but more radical articulations of these positions were taken from the 'new' media.

The fourth aspect deals with inclusion. As the mainstream media is selective and cannot compete at the level of quantity, it is useful to ask, what was being left out by the 'old' media? In this case, direct responses to blogs were not mentioned in the mainstream media, although some blogs were monitored. Furthermore, even though radical articulations of opposite positions were picked up, poorly articulated rants – given that they were not social media hits – were not covered.

The fifth aspect notes a long-term convergence and intertwining of the old and new media. Approximately five months after Gay Night the youth section of Christian revival group launched a video on YouTube (and on a religious television channel, TV7) in which former bisexual had recovered from her orientation and become heterosexual.[17] This prompted a media debate and a minor peak in Church membership resignations. Here I will skip the details, but point out the connection to convergence: it started from 'new' media; it was seen as a continuation of the Gay Night debate which was located in the 'old' media; and it was debated in both the 'old' and 'new' media.

In spite of having its origins in television, Gay Night was not specifically an 'old' media event. Likewise, despite its origins in YouTube, the Christian anti-gay campaign was not 'new' media event. The former would not have

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16   I am referring to Jari Tervo's and Jouko Piho's blogs respectively. Both blogs are located on the online newspaper *Uusi Suomi*'s website, which increases the likelihood of them being monitored by the mainstream media.

17   The campaign was organised by youth section of The Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland, which can be classified – for lack of better terms – as Evangelical and conservative. The name of the campaign 'Älä alistu!' was taken from the Bible (Gal. 5:1). In English it says 'be not entangled', but better translation of Finnish version in this context would be 'Do not yield'.

been such a huge media event without 'new' media and the latter would not have caused such a stir without the former. Taken together, both cases (and their connection) function as an example of media convergence.

Conclusion

This exploration has been motivated by the experiences I have had in researching religion in the mainstream media. The starting point was to examine how and why the 'old' media matters in the era of digital religion, if at all. Three observations were made: 1) people still use the 'old' media, 2) widely distributed news about religion in the 'new' media is often based on stories published in the 'old' media, and 3) the coverage of religious affairs in the 'old' media matters to (religious) people. The first one is fairly obvious and it can be countered by pointing out that there is a decrease in the number of users of 'old' media; but it is still useful to remember that a slightly shrinking audience has not meant the end of its significance. The second one is useful in understanding that media houses have a significant presence in the 'new' media. The third observation is particularly important, because representatives of religious groups are very sensitive to their coverage in the mainstream media. A key point that binds these together is that especially those who are not keen on following religious issues in detail with the help of specific 'new' media outlets get their information about religion from the mainstream media.

These observations do not lead to the conclusion that nothing has changed in the media sphere. However, the current situation makes it unnecessary to maintain the strict distinction between 'old' and 'new' media, especially when the classification has a normative flavour, suggesting that 'old' does not matter much and is not worth studying anymore. This convergence and intertwining of old and new in the media has been demonstrated by the analysis of one religion-related media event. The general argument has arisen out of my interest in studying influential public discourse on religion, and from that perspective the study of 'new' media does not appear as revolutionary as, perhaps, it might from other perspectives. This, of course, does not mean that 'new' media are not relevant in public discourse, or that the study of them would not be truly revolutionary from selected perspectives, but that is just another way of saying that the significance of 'new' media for the study of religion depends on the questions, approaches and perspectives adopted.

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