Mia Lövheim and Knut Lundby

MEDIATED RELIGION ACROSS TIME AND SPACE.
A CASE STUDY OF NORWEGIAN NEWSPAPERS

Abstract

In this article, data on coverage of religion in secular newspaper is seen in relation to the theory of mediatization of religion as presented by Stig Hjarvard (2008b, 2011). He describes mediatization in general as a process through which core elements of a social or cultural activity assume media form. The suitability of Hjarvard’s hypotheses on religion is discussed with the use of indices on mediatization across time as well as across space. Each index is applied to data from a study of Norwegian newspapers in the NOREL programme on religion in the public sphere. The exercise shows that we need to be distinct in both analysis and theoretical claims about changes in the public presence of religion. The article concludes that a dialogue between media studies and sociology of religion can be fruitful in order to further understand the presence of religion in the public sphere.

Keywords: mediatization, religion, newspapers, Norway, NOREL

Media and the changing public role of religion

Until recently the media has largely been left out of the discussion on the changing public role of religion in mainstream religious studies and sociology of religion in the European context. Grace Davie (2000: 104), for example, notices the shortage of studies on media and religion in the European context. Studies of how religious actors use media, as well as representation of certain religious groups and events, have been carried out not least in a Nordic context (Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012; Sumiala-Säppänen et al. 2006). However, there is a need for a more profound analysis of the media as an arena for social interaction and an agent of social and cultural change.

Hoover and Lundby (1997) argue that earlier research on media within studies of religion has by and large suffered from a simplistic understanding of media as a neutral ‘channel’ that transmits the realities of the social world. In order to avoid such simplistic inter-
interpretations it is important to bring in perspectives from media studies. The media have undergone changes that need to be understood, alongside the transformations of religion.

This article presents and discusses findings from a study of media representations of religion in daily newspapers in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The study is part of the NOREL research programme. The overarching research question of the programme concerns changes in the public role and significance of religion in the Nordic countries in the years 1988, 1998 and 2008 (NOREL 2010).

In this article we explore the possibility of analysing this material through the mediatization of religion thesis, as developed by the Danish media scholar Stig Hjarvard. Within media and religion studies the mediatization of religion debate has become a prominent issue, not least in a Nordic context (Lövheim and Lynch 2011; Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012). Furthermore, Hjarvard himself find this thesis particularly relevant for addressing the Nordic ‘paradox’ between the considerable and continued media presence of religion on the one hand and the diminishing commitment to organized religion on the other (Hjarvard 2012).

The mediatization of religion thesis

Hjarvard describes mediatization in general as a ‘process through which core elements of a social or cultural activity (…) assume media form’ (Hjarvard 2008b: 13–14). This process starts out from two interrelated processes of social change in modern society. The first concerns how the media during the 20th century have developed into a more autonomous, independent institution in society. The second process concerns the degree to which the media have become integrated in the workings of other institutions. Thus, mediatization is a theory that focuses on processes of social change, and on the media as agents of social change (Hjarvard 2008a).

While ‘mediation’ captures the regular processes of communication where technical media are applied in social interaction, the concept of mediatization grasps the cultural or social changes or transformations that, over time, may be the outcome of the mediation (Lundby 2009; Hjarvard 2008a). This approach focuses on the implications of mediatization primarily on an institutional level, and on general and long term ‘transformations in society and everyday life that are shaped by the modern media…’ (Lundby 2009: 4, our emphasis). Mediatization should not be seen as independent of other processes of social and cultural change. There is always an interplay with other forces.

Mediatization of religion concerns how the processes described above affect religion, as institution as well as a social and cultural activity. Hjarvard argues that mediatization generally entails the transformation of three aspects of religion. First, the media become the primary source of information about religious issues in society. This challenges the authority of religious institutions to define and frame the meaning and significance of religion in society. Second, the media also produce religious ‘content’ through moulding religious symbols and beliefs according to their own purposes and narratives. Thus, they produce a mix of religious representations that Hjarvard refers to as ‘banal religion’ (Hjarvard 2008b: 14–16). Banal religion contains bits and pieces drawn from institutionalized religion, but
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merges these with elements from folk religion and popular conceptions, emotions, and practices which refer to a supernatural or spiritual dimension of life. In adapting and circulating this form of religion, the media contributes to transforming the content of religion. Third, media become social and cultural environments that take over many of the functions of institutionalized religions, such as providing moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community.

Hjarvard points out that mediatization of religion should not be seen as a universal process, but takes various directions depending on the particular religious and media context. His focus is on highly modernized societies in the Western world, particularly the Nordic countries. Nevertheless, these transformations are proposed as general tendencies. In sum, Hjarvard (2008b: 10) sees them as evidence of a strong connection between mediatization of religion and the secularization of society. He considers the relationship between mediatization and secularization at three levels:

At the level of society, mediatization is an integral part of secularisation. At the level of an organisation and the individual, mediatization may both encourage secular practices and beliefs and invite religious imaginations of a more subjectivised nature (Hjarvard 2011: 119; Dobbelaere 2002).

Starting from the presentation above, we can see that the mediatization of religion thesis as discussed by Hjarvard consists of several related hypotheses:

1. The media transform the arenas for religion in modern society through becoming the primary source of information about religious and spiritual issues.
2. The media transform religious content into the mix of institutional and popular religious elements referred to as ‘banal religion’, moulded primarily according to genres of entertainment and fiction.
3. The media become the main social and cultural environments for providing moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community in modern societies.
4. The media undermine the authority of religious institutions to define and frame the meaning and significance of religion in society thereby weaken the normative relation between the institutions and the individual.
5. The media contribute to individualized forms of religion in society.

As pointed out by Knut Lundby (2009), mediatization can be analysed as various, interconnected aspects of transformation: ‘...the changes incurred by the media may change the direction, the form, or character of the actual social or cultural activities’ (Lundby 2009: 11). Thus, some of these hypotheses concern the ‘direction’, meaning the control of representations of religion in society. Other hypotheses concern changes in the ‘form’ and ‘character’ of religion.
Agency and cultural context

Hjarvard’s theory has been criticized for being too linear in its understanding of the role of the media in social change (Couldry 2008). A key point in this critique is that while the theory’s claims about the increasing significance of media in contemporary society might be valid, its claims about the consequences of these changes are too general and deterministic. A major point in Lövheim’s (2011) critical appraisal of a mediatization of religion is the limitations of the understanding of religion that underpin the thesis.

Hjarvard uses a substantive definition of religion as “…human actions, beliefs and symbols related to supernatural agencies” (Hjarvard 2008c: 166, our translation). He approaches religion in terms of human evolution and applies a cognitive-anthropological approach (Hjarvard 2008b) where Pascal Boyer’s book Religion Explained (2001) is a key reference. Furthermore, the function of religion to provide order, consistency and legitimation for the socially constructed world is emphasized (Hjarvard 2011; Berger 1967: 32, 42). This function is based on a uniform worldview supported by strong social ties and a dominant position in society. Thus, societal differentiation and in particular the pluralization of life worlds in modern society means that this position, and thus the strength of religion, is challenged.

This understanding of religion and modernity as incompatible has been increasingly criticized in recent sociology of religion. Building on empirical evidence as well as critical discussion of the premises of secularization theories (see Casanova 1994) Davie (2007) argues that the presence and transformation of religion in modern society is more complex and multifaceted than depicted in such theories. Building on these theories, Lövheim (2011) argues that ‘for the development of a theory to better grasp the implications of mediatization of religion in the contemporary world; first, an understanding of religion that better acknowledges the complexities of modern religion’ is needed, ‘and second, an understanding of mediatization that also acknowledges the agency of religious actors to take part in the shaping of media as well as modern society’ (Lövheim 2011: 153).

Hjarvard (2012) has responded to such a criticism with his recent development of three forms for mediatized religion with varying degrees of agency. The three forms are: (1) religious media, (2) journalism on religion, and (3) banal religion. The first type is partially in accordance with organized religion and may serve to project religious narratives and messages into the public realm. Journalism on religion and banal religion, on the other hand, primarily construct religion in accordance with the institutional, technological and aesthetic considerations of the media in question. He concludes that, due to the mediatization of religion, religious media play only a marginal role in the construction of public religion. Instead, journalism on religion and banal religion have come to influence the public agenda on religious issues in various ways that may both stimulate criticism towards institutional religion and strengthen individualized and more bricolage-like forms of religion.

Hjarvard underlines that mediatization of religion in the Nordic countries is conditioned by national and regional cultural and social histories and may differ from mediatized religion in other parts of the world. How mediatization of religion, as mediatization in general, can be understood in relation to its context is a second point where the theory needs to be developed further. This insight connects well to the critique raised by sociologists of reli-
gion concerning religious change as a process with various outcomes dependent on social and cultural context described above.

An example of this approach to mediatization is David Herbert’s (2011) theory of the ‘re-publicization of religion’. He argues (2011: 640) for an understanding of mediatization where media changes do not produce changes in isolation but, rather, that the outcome of mediatization is shaped by interaction with changes in media markets and existing cultural practices and discourse of religious mediation. Herbert (2011: 645) suggests that the public presence of religious symbols and discourses is likely to increase when certain conditions are present. These concern, for example, how media practices resonate with existing cultural practices of visuality and aurality; the access of religious agents to media resources which enable them to enter media markets, and the disruption of established forms of secularism through, for example, reflexive deconstruction or mass migration.

This argument connects with the approach to mediatization taken by Andreas Hepp. He argues that it is necessary to understand mediatized activities or institutions as ‘cultures of mediatization’ (Hepp 2012). The importance of context also connects to the thinking in terms of ‘mediatized worlds’ (Krotz and Hepp 2012). Thus, the focus changes from (linear) processes of mediatization to the environments within which extensive media use, mould or transform the actual culture or ‘world’.

There are certain specific characteristics of the Nordic countries that can influence the interplay between media, religion, and culture (Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012). First of all, the Nordic countries share a number of similarities with regard to media systems. They are – in international comparison – characterized by a high degree of public interest and intervention. Furthermore, there is a high degree of access to new, digital media that intermingle with the use of ‘old’ public service broadcast media and newspapers. Finally, the major Nordic media are non-confessional in nature.

With regard to religion, Nordic societies appear highly secular in comparison with other parts of the world. In the Nordic region religion is primarily regarded as a private matter and plays a less prominent social role (Ingelhart 2007). The majority Lutheran churches have until recently dominated organized religion: a situation that is now changing as a consequence of growing immigration, with Islam in particular having gained a stronger presence. Furthermore, globalization has brought the population into closer contact with a variety of religious issues and discussions.

In conclusion, this discussion has presented two approaches to analysing mediatization of religion. One approach, which is represented by Hjarvard’s early work, focuses on mediatization as a process of changes over time in which less attention is paid to differences in cultural and social histories between countries and regions. The other approach starts out from the critique against the thesis and focuses more on mediatization as a process of change across space, with sensitivity to how different religious and cultural contexts and practices might impact the outcome of long-term social changes.
Newspaper material on mediatization of religion

The three dimensions of transformations of religion induced by mediatization, the direction, the form, and the character of the actual social or cultural activities (Lundby 2009: 11) can be applied in an analysis across time as well as space. We look for transformations that call for a refinement of the general thesis on the mediatization of religion.

The empirical data used in the following analysis is drawn from a quantitative content analysis covering four two-week periods in printed versions of four main daily newspapers in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Norway in the years 1988, 1998 and 2008. The four periods are two weeks before Easter, end of Ramadan, before Christmas as well as two regular weeks in the autumn. Representations of religion were studied using a number of search words indicating various forms of religion.

We propose the following connections between the direction, form and character of actual transformations with Hjarvard’s hypotheses of the mediatization of religion:

First of all, it is clear that these kind of data on representations of religion in the daily press enables, primarily, an analysis of what Hjarvard refers to as journalism on religion, and to some extent banal religion; the category of religious media is not covered in our project. Since, as pointed out above, the majority of Nordic media providers do non-confessional journalism on religion, it seems a valid choice to study if and how mediatization transforms the public presence of religion, as expressed in daily newspapers. Thus, journalism on religion can be used to explore the first of Hjarvard’s hypotheses: i.e. that the media transforms arenas for religion through becoming the primary source of information about religion and spirituality. Furthermore, journalism on religion can also be seen as the prime source of media undermining the authority of religious institutions, as proposed in the fourth hypothesis.

These two hypotheses express most clearly a transformation of direction: that the media increasingly control the extent of religious representation in society. This could not be settled fully by newspaper coverage only. However, the relative change in this variable over time or between cultures may give an indication. Change in ‘direction’ can to some extent be analysed through changes in the size of articles and the prominence in the coverage, meaning the space and significance given to religion. These two hypotheses also relate to what religious tradition that is diminishing: the change is expected to be largest among the former dominant religious institutions: the Lutheran majority churches. This is, in our analysis, covered as a change in character of the media coverage.

Hjarvard’s second hypothesis concerns how media transforms religious content into the mix of institutional and popular religious elements described as banal religion. This hypothesis has a strong relation to the aspect of transformation we refer to as form, meaning the extent to which the religious communication becomes dependent on media formats. To study changes in form, a qualitative content analysis would be preferable. However, the available data only offer external information such as type of article and prominence of religion in the articles. Different types of articles might be more or less exposed to changes in form. Religious columns and editorials, for example, may appear in a more traditional style, while debates on religion may be given a more or less prominent place in the paper.
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depending on editorial decisions. News and features on religion are subject to extensive editorial formatting and may thus be given a more mediatized form.

Hjarvard’s third hypothesis about the media becoming the main social and cultural environment for moral and spiritual guidance and community, as well as the fifth hypothesis that the media contribute to individualized forms of religion in society, primarily concerns the character of change. These hypotheses are, rather, to be seen as long-term consequences of how media replaces religion as the prime arena for information about and interaction on religion in society. An analysis of these changes would require complementary data from reception studies. A possible way to identify tendencies toward changes in character over time is to analyse the prominence of religious material in relation to the religious traditions that are covered, as these traditions make the context that the character of the representations connects to.

Concerning mediatization across space, differences and variations in these general patterns would in themselves be indicators of how national and regional cultural and religious differences question the general validity of the hypothesis. Drawing on Herbert (2011: 645) such an analysis can involve aspects such as existing cultural practices of religious mediation: the participation of religious agents in media markets, and the disruption of established forms of secularism through, for example, reflexive deconstruction or mass migration. The data used for this article does not provide indicators to analyse these aspects per se. However, drawing on other studies of the religious situation in each Nordic country, we can expect differences, for example, considering degrees of religious pluralism in various countries and various regions. Furthermore, data from four different newspapers in a country also leave us with an opportunity to compare the cultures each of the papers cultivates in exchange with its readership. Eliseo Veron has shown that all newspapers suggest a ‘reading contract’ between the newspapers and its readers through the way it writes and addresses its constituency. It is because this proposed relation is accepted by the readers that the paper is bought and read (de Cheveigné and Veron 1994; de Cheveigné 1997).

The methodological challenge

The methodological challenge is to be able to draw conclusions about mediatization from material on the representation of religion. This applies to representation in film, television, radio and magazines alike and not just daily newspapers.

Our empirical material comes from quantitative content analysis (Krippendorf 2004) of articles in daily press from the years 1988, 1998, and 2008. Thus, our findings primarily concern tendencies of increase or decline in representations of religion between these selected years, and across the various (sub)cultures or contexts that are studied. As pointed out by Gunter (2002: 222) a purely descriptive application of this technique produces indicators of the manifest content of the media. In order to contribute to a better understanding of what this content describes in terms of change or impact upon society, the patterns or categories of content need to be related to an explicit theoretical framework. The mediatization of religion thesis serves this purpose here.
Our possibility of carrying out this kind of analysis is also dependent upon our coding of the representations of religion. In the present study we have, so far, coded the material primarily through the use of certain search words and categories. They cover only external aspects of the newspaper articles on religion: the location or size of the articles, type of article, prominence of religion in the entry, and the religious tradition that is covered.

In this article only material from Norway is applied to illustrate the challenges in cross-cultural research on mediatization with material on representation of religion. For mediatization across space we look for cultural and regional differences within the country instead of between the Nordic countries, expressed through the four selected newspapers and their readership.

The four main Norwegian newspapers in the analysis are: Dagsavisen (former Arbeiderbladet), VG, Aftenposten and Stavanger Aftenblad (they will be presented, below, for the discussion on changes across space). This material amounts a total of 1740 articles on religion.

Construction of indices

The three transforming aspects of mediatization, direction, form and character (Lundby 2009: 11) are operationalized within the limited set of quantitative variables that are available in this newspaper study. The validity in relation to the three theoretical aspects of change or mediatization may not be optimal but the analysis offers an empirical base to discuss the extent to which the coverage of religion in the newspapers is mediatized.

The three indices all take account of the distinction of ‘prominence’ of religion in each article that is coded. Religion is either a ‘main topic’ or it appears as an ‘additional topic’ alongside another prime focus. Articles with religion as the main topic are given a double score, i.e. they are multiplied by 2, compared to articles with religion as an additional topic.

This gives a more valid measure of the significance, visibility or strength of religion in the newspaper material than just a count of the number of articles where religion appear as a minor or major topic. Recoded this way, the 1740 articles are given 2876 points in each index, as there are 1136 articles in the material where religion is a main topic and 604 articles with religion as an additional topic.

Changes in direction of the representations are measured by an index combining the prominence of religion, as above, with the location or size of the article: A ‘main article’ is on the front page in whatever size, or over three or more columns inside the paper. A ‘medium-sized’ article runs over two columns or in one long column. A ‘notice’ (or ‘paragraph’) is small and without a picture. This combined measure shows a certain direction when comparisons are made between time periods or between countries or cultures.

Transformations in form are measured by an index where the kind of article or genre is combined with the prominence of religion in the entry. The index informs about the visibility of religion following the outer form of the articles.

The character of the changes implies that the content and prominence of religious communication in society is shaped more by the media institutions than by religious institutions.
Change in character is measured by an index composed of the religious tradition that the article refers to combined with the prominence of the religious aspect in the article; i.e. whether religion is the main topic or just an additional topic, as explained above.

Changes across time
The three indices may detect changes over time. It is important to note that we do not have a time series of data, just measurements from 1988, 1998 and 2008. There may be variations between the selected years that we do not capture.

A further note: The percentages on each index refer basically to the actual number of articles on religion each year. The peak among the three selected years was in 1998 with 643 articles on religion in the four newspapers. This level was almost maintained in 2008 with 614 articles, an expansion from 483 articles in 1988. We do not know whether these figures represent growth or decline relative to the total editorial output as we do not have the figures for how many articles of all kinds the newspapers covered during these years.

Direction – significance of religion in the newspapers across the years
The direction index varies through the years, indicating the changes in the significance of religion in the four Norwegian newspapers taken together. In Table 1, the medium-sized articles and notices are counted together, as there was no clear tendency between these two categories. Half of the material relates to main articles, the other half to smaller articles, as measured by this index combining the size or location of the articles with the prominence of religion as a topic. The significance of religion in the papers was, relatively, much higher in 1998 and 2008 than in 1988, showing an upward direction.

Table 1. Direction index (articles with religion as main topic count 2, others 1). Figures from four selected Norwegian newspapers in percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main articles on religion*</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller articles on religion**</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Direction index points (N)</td>
<td>(812)</td>
<td>(1077)</td>
<td>(987)</td>
<td>(2876)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* i.e. these are main articles with religion as a main topic.
** Medium-sized articles or notices where some may have religion as a main topic.

These results indicate a growing interest in religion as a topic in the Norwegian newspapers from 1988 to 1998 that was maintained in 2008.
Form – visibility of religion in the newspapers across the years

The relative change over time may also indicate transformations in form; the visibility of religion in various newspaper genres is shown in Table 2. The religious column written by an approved representative of a religious institution without much editorial interference is on decline as a form. It represented as much as 16 percent of the visibility for religion in the four newspapers in 1988; in 2008 the figure was down to 11 percent. (And, as will be shown below, this figure is due to a daily column in the regional paper).

Table 2. Form index (articles with religion as main topic count 2, others 1). Figures from four selected Norwegian newspapers in percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in religious columns</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in editorials on religion</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in debates on religion</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in news on religion</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in features on religion</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Form index points (N)</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>1077</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>2876</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Editorials on religion have, in all the three years, been a limited exercise (2–4 percent on this index). However, the proportion of debates on religion has been on the rise, covering nine percent on this index in 1988 and up to twice that in 2008. (And please be reminded that minor debate statements have not been included.)

News items is by far the most visible form of coverage on religion in the newspapers, with more than half of the index scores. However, there was a slow decrease in the proportion of news from 1988 through 1998 to 2008. On the other hand, feature stories on religion have been on the rise. Taken together, the two journalistic forms almost keep their share through the three selected years in seven out of ten articles on religion.

Character – strength of religious traditions in the papers across the years

The character index gives an indication of the strength of each religious tradition in newspaper representation for each year. The majority Lutheran tradition shows a strong stance in the columns. However, there was a fairly dramatic drop in newspaper attention for the national church from 1998 to 2008. While the Church of Norway scored 2/3 on this index in 1988 as well as in 1998, the share fell below 50 percent in 2008. Other Christian groups kept their share with about 1/5 of the total ‘strength’ in the representation of religion through the three years.
Coverage of Islam and Muslims, however, was on a steep rise: less than two percent of the output in 1988, up to eight percent in 1998 and, further, up to twelve percent in 2008.

In 2008 one could observe a higher coverage share for other world religions as well, compared to the two preceding year-cuts, but the figures are low with no more than four percent on this index in 2008.

The character of religion in the four Norwegian newspapers, then, slowly changes character: the coverage of the Lutheran majority church decreases while the coverage of Islam as a contentious immigrant tradition rises. A greater openness to other world religions seems also to be the case.

Surprisingly, given the rise of new forms of spirituality and alternative religiosity (Botvar and Henriksen 2010) the newspaper coverage of non-institutional forms were about the same or even slightly on the decrease through the three years, with no more than 4 percent on the index. Religious criticism was even more rare: almost nothing in 1988 and 1998 but an upward direction to nearly four percent of the coverage of religion in 2008, according to this index.

Discussion: Mediatization across time

Changes in direction, form and character in the representations of religion in newspapers may indicate mediatization. This may be the case with each of the indices in their own respect but they should be discussed in triangulation, i.e. taken together. Which indications of mediatization do we see across the three selected years, 1988, 1998 and 2008? Needless to say, the empirical evidence is rather limited. Still, some tendencies may be discerned in this material.

Table 3. Character index (articles with religion as main topic count 2, others 1).
Figures from four selected Norwegian newspapers in percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character of religion</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran majority church character</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian character</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic character</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character of other world religions</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-institutional character</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious critical character</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-classifiable</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Character index points (N) (812) (1077) (987) (2876)
The direction index indicate an upgrade in the coverage of religion in the four newspapers across the three selected years. There seems to have been more of an interest in religion as a topic in 1998 and 2008 than was the case in 1988. This gives editors and journalists a stronger take on religion in society. As they do not just transmit or mediate the material, the more comprehensive coverage also invites more transformation of the ‘reality’ that is treated in the media. This, in fact, is mediatization. To what extent this happens has to be further researched, with qualitative text or discourse analyses of the actual articles.

The index on form, however, may provide a hint. A relative expansion in the forms that journalists, desk editors and layout designers control, compared to given formats where representatives of religious institutions themselves write, may indicate mediatization. Such a tendency was shown in the material. Through the three selected years, one-way communication from Christian representatives gave way to more visible debates on religion. And features take over, to some extent, for regular news coverage of religion.

The character of the material in 2008 still favours the majority Lutheran church. However, the coverage of Islam is on the rise. This indicates a mediatization, as the prominence of representation of Islam is much higher than is the share of this religious tradition within the population. Similarly, the Lutheran majority church tradition is under-represented in the coverage. In 2008, while registered Muslims made up two percent of the population in Norway, Islam had twelve percent of all coverage of religion in our material, according to the character index. Although 80 percent of the population belong to the Church of Norway, no more than 48 percent of the coverage was directed at this tradition. The growing share of unclassified articles may be another indicator of mediatization as it becomes more difficult to allocate articles to one institutional tradition.

Changes across spaces
Each of the four Norwegian newspapers represents a specific editor-reader relationship that makes up a specific ‘culture’ in relation to other newspaper cultures. This depends partly on their geographical location in either the capital or the regional centre on the South-West of the country, and partly on the political culture they cater for.

The former social-democratic Arbeiderbladet changed its name to Dagsavisen in 1997 and, from 1999, turned into an independent but still left-leaning paper. Dagsavisen, from September 2008, has been owned by the holding company Mentor Media (former Mediehuset), but with an independent editor. The three other newspapers are all owned or controlled by the Schibsted Media Group, the big Norwegian media company with newspaper and Internet activities in Sweden and other European countries. The three are, the main tabloid VG, the main daily Aftenposten and the regional paper Stavanger Aftenblad. The three are all independent-liberal, although Stavanger Aftenblad specifies a ‘Christian-humanistic’ basic view. Stavanger Aftenblad is located in the Stavanger region to the South-West of Norway, known as the ‘oil capital’ of the country as well as a stronghold of the Norwegian ‘bible belt’. The other three are published in the capital, Oslo. Dagsavisen’s influence, with a circulation in 2011 of close to 25,000 copies, is more limited when com-
pared with Aftenposten and VG’s approximately ten-times-greater circulation. Stavanger Aftenblad has a dominant position in its region.

Stavanger Aftenblad outnumbers each of the other newspapers with 785 of all 1740 articles on religion through the three years (45 percent of all articles). Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen count for 247 of the articles and VG for 292. Aftenposten takes an intermediate stand with 416 articles. In general, the differences according to the three indices are, in part, greater across the newspaper cultures than across the selected years.

Direction – significance of religious coverage across the newspapers

Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen has the lowest number of articles (and the lowest score on the index) but the highest share of main articles on religion. On the other hand, Stavanger Aftenblad, with by far the most articles on religion, has the lowest index score of main articles.

Table 4. Direction index (articles with religion as main topic count 2, others 1). The sum for each newspaper for all three years in percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A/Dags</th>
<th>VG</th>
<th>Aftenp</th>
<th>Stav.A</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main articles on religion*</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller articles on religion**</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Direction index points (N)</td>
<td>(384)</td>
<td>(432)</td>
<td>(681)</td>
<td>(1379)</td>
<td>(2876)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* i.e. these are main articles with religion as a main topic.
** Medium sized articles or notices where some may have religion as a main topic.

There is a systematic pattern: the direction in coverage of religion shows a smaller share for main articles, the lower total score on this index. For the medium-sized articles and the notices, the picture is not as clear.

Form – visibility of religion in various genres across the newspapers

In form, editorials on religion are rare in all four papers. However, for other genres there are differences. The daily religious column in Stavanger Aftenblad is a conventional representation of religion, where writers from religious (Christian) institutions are given an opportunity to speak without editorial interference. Aftenposten had a weekly column by one and the same minister through the whole period under study. The two other papers did not carry regular religious columns.
The visibility of religion in debates was relatively stronger in Aftenposten and VG, while Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen had the lowest share but the highest share of news on religion, with VG coming close. These two papers, which had fewest articles on religion, had 2/3 of them as news. Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen also had the largest share of feature stories on religion.

Character – strength of religious traditions across the newspapers

The character of the coverage differs between the four papers. Table 6 displays the material for all three years taken together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A/Dags</th>
<th>VG</th>
<th>Aftenp</th>
<th>Stav.A.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in religious columns</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in editorials on religion</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in debates on religion</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in news on religion</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility in features on religion</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No of Form index points (N) (384) (432) (681) (1379) (2876)

The visibility of religion in debates was relatively stronger in Aftenposten and VG, while Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen had the lowest share but the highest share of news on religion, with VG coming close. These two papers, which had fewest articles on religion, had 2/3 of them as news. Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen also had the largest share of feature stories on religion.

Character – strength of religious traditions across the newspapers

The character of the coverage differs between the four papers. Table 6 displays the material for all three years taken together.

Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen and VG were less loyal to the majority Lutheran tradition than Stavanger Aftenblad and Aftenposten. However, Aftenposten demonstrates a remarkable disestablishment in its representation of the Church of Norway. In 2008 no more than 45 percent of their coverage on religion related to the Lutheran majority church, compared to 2/3 in 1998 and 3/4 in 1988. This may partly relate to Aftenposten’s turn from broadsheet to compact format in 2005, when, to a great extent, smaller articles were left out.

For the three years in sum the two papers less loyal to the Church of Norway show a greater interest, relatively, in other Christian churches. In contrast, Aftenposten and Stavanger Aftenblad are more interested in the state church than in the free churches.

Islam is recognized to a very limited extent in Stavanger Aftenblad, while the other papers pick up on the rising coverage for this religion. This may partly be explained by the fact that the three other newspapers are published in Oslo where nearly half of the registered Muslims in Norway were living. The tendency between the regional paper and the three papers published in the capital is the same for other world religions, although with much lower figures than for Islam.

Non-institutional forms of spirituality and religiosity are covered more extensively in Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen and VG compared to the two other papers. Religious criticism did not, as an overall tendency, come through in any of the papers through the years 1988, 1998 and 2008, although there was some in all of them in 2008.
Mia Lövheim and Knut Lundby: Mediated religion across time and space

Discussion: Mediatization across spaces

The direction in coverage of religion shows a co-variance between the newspapers, as those with a smaller share of main articles on this index are the ones with a greater number of articles on religion, and vice versa. This may indicate a stronger, transforming editorial take on religion in Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen and VG than in Aftenposten and especially Stavanger Aftenblad.

The same goes for form, as Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen and VG apply more of the genres that imply editorial formatting of articles on religion than Aftenposten and especially Stavanger Aftenblad.

The same pattern is repeated for the index on character: The two papers Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen and VG were less loyal to the majority Lutheran church than Stavanger Aftenblad and Aftenposten.

The mediatization of religion seems weakest in Stavanger Aftenblad, catering to its strong regional religious culture. The mediatization of religion seems strongest in Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen, in deference to a more radical readership, critical of public religion. VG seems to come next, catering to this tabloid’s more populist readership throughout the country. Aftenposten, with its serious attitude, has more loyalty to established religious institutions and, hence, is less mediatized in its coverage of religion, but not as markedly so as Stavanger Aftenblad. There has also been a clear tendency through the three selected years for Aftenposten to create stronger editorial formatting in their coverage of religion and, at the same time, show less loyalty to the Church of Norway. Hence Aftenposten has become more mediatized in its coverage of religion from 1988, 1998 and 2008.

Table 6. Character index (articles with religion as main topic count 2, others 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Category</th>
<th>A/Dags</th>
<th>VG</th>
<th>Aftenp</th>
<th>Stav.A.</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran majority church character</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian character</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic character</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Char. of other world religions</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-institutional character</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious critical character</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-classifiable</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>(2876)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion: Mediatization of religion in daily press

This article has presented an attempt to apply mediatization theory for analysing patterns in representations of religion in daily newspapers across time and across space. Our starting point has been the mediatization of religion thesis proposed by Hjarvard (2011). As we have seen, the thesis consists of several hypotheses that concern different levels of how media transforms, in this case, the public communication of religion. We have attempted to operationalize the thesis as mediatization across time; a process of religious change focusing on long term and general transformations. In this operationalization, we have used three aspects of this change as transformations in direction, form and character of religious communication (Lundby 2009: 11). In addition we have, informed by recent critique of the thesis, initiated a discussion of how to analyse mediatization as a process where patterns of religious change are shaped by various cultural contexts: mediatization across space. Here we have used the same aspects of transformation in direction, form and character.

This analysis has shown that in applying mediatization theory to a particular empirical case we, first of all, need to take into consideration the kind of data that we have available. In this article the aspects of mediatization were applied to four Norwegian newspapers in the years 1988, 1998 and 2008. Our analysis shows clearly that studies of these kind of representations of religion in media texts can only answer a few of the hypotheses raised in the mediatization of religion theory, and only to a certain extent. This shows that we need to be explicit in our analysis and theoretical claims about the kind of changes in the public presence of religion we are referring to in our studies.

Looking at the dimension of mediatization across time, our analysis gives some support to the hypothesis of a decrease in representations of primarily institutionalized religion as a consequence of how media replace religious authorities in controlling the visibility of religion in society. There is a tendency towards reduced coverage of the dominant religious institution, the Lutheran majority church. However, the coverage of this tradition still dominates the overall representation of religion. We see a change indicated by the decrease of religious (Christian) columns over time and a possible increase in prominent debates on religion. The clearest pattern is an increase in the coverage of Islam. There is a marked tendency toward mediatization, as the proportion of articles with a prominent representation of Islam is much higher than its share of religious tradition within the population. This can be seen as an indication of how media logic more than the social reality of religious life in society shapes how religion is represented.

However, as pointed out above, an analysis of changes in the character of religion due to mediatization requires other kinds of data than is available in this study, such as reception studies data. In conclusion, it is important to underscore that these tendencies do not show a clear-cut and linear transformation over time. Thus, our empirical data does not in any simple way support the claim of an increase or a decrease in representations of religion in the media during the last decades.

Moving on to the dimension of mediatization across space, it is, first of all, important to note that differences across newspaper cultures seemed to be greater than difference across the selected years. This shows that cultural context is an important dimension to consider—
within regions of a particular country, but probably also between Nordic countries. In this analysis, the differences noted – mainly the decline in coverage of the Lutheran majority church, religious editorials, and coverage of Islam – might be explained primarily with reference to how the strength of the Lutheran church in the region of Stavanger shapes the relation between the paper and its readers compared to the more religiously-diverse area of Oslo.

It is interesting to note that the tendency towards an increasing diversity in representations of religion in the daily press over the last decades concerns Islam rather than other world religions or, as might be expected, non-institutional, alternative or banal religion. Thus, our analysis in this article has shown that an inclusion of the dimension of cultural context in analyzing patterns of change in religious communication can qualify how the character of religion transforms through mediatization. An important question for further analysis thus becomes to explore if and how these pattern of regional differences in readership culture can also be discerned in other Nordic countries, and how various degrees of religious pluralism between the Nordic countries shape the tendencies of mediatization outlined here.

The inclusion of daily newspapers within studies on the role of religion in the public sphere, such as the NOREL programme, shows that the media as an arena for religious and social change has now also found a place on the broader agenda of the sociology of religion in Nordic research. Our discussion and analysis in this article shows that the mediatization of religion thesis can provide a useful critical correlate to enthusiastic ideas about a ‘resurgence’ of religion in the public sphere in the first part of the 21st century, as mirrored in the media. The thesis states that the media are becoming the primary arena for religion, and that this means a new public presence for religion. However, the thesis also makes clear that religion, along with other social and cultural phenomena, is transformed in this process.

It is also clear from the discussion above that we cannot in any easy way, from a content analysis of representations of religion in the daily press, confirm the hypotheses of the mediatization of religion thesis. Content analysis can show some indications of how the media mould religion in accordance with its logic, and how, for example, media selections change the direction and form of representations of religion in the daily press over time. However, a content analysis of the kind in this article cannot alone support the thesis that mediatization also changes the character of religion. In order to answer these questions we also need to study the cultural and religious context where media representations are formed, as well as of the reception of media content.

In sum, our discussion of how to analyse patterns of change in representations of religion in the media shows that a dialogue between perspectives from media studies and the sociology of religion can be fruitful in order to further understand the presence of religion in the public sphere. It is our hope that the application and discussion of mediatization as a process across time and space suggested in this article can contribute to a further and refined discussion of these issues.
Notes

1 Some scholars prefer the concept of mediation to capture such changes (Livingstone 2009; Morgan 2011). Mediation and mediatization are rather complementary concepts, for a discussion, see Hepp (2012).

2 As all identified articles on religion are documented with a printout of the article itself, it is possible to apply qualitative, textual methods for deeper analyses to significant parts of the material. However, this has not been possible at this stage of the project. The findings to follow are solely based on the quantitative numbers.

3 Aftenposten and VG were coded by going through all pages in digitally-archived versions of these newspapers. For Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen and Stavanger Aftenblad the coding partially had to be done by searching for ‘religion’ and other specified keywords in the newspaper data bases or in micro film archives.

4 Three of the four papers are published in Oslo where the portion of Muslims are much higher than in the rest of the country, see note 5.

5 In 2011 45 % of the registered Muslims were living in Oslo, according to Statistics Norway.

References


Mia Lövheim and Knut Lundby: Mediated religion across time and space


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