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Religious Communication and Epistemic Authority of Leaders in Wired Faith Organizations

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Abstract

The mediation of communication has raised questions of authority shifts in key social institutions. This article examines how traditional sources of epistemic power that govern social relations in religious authority are being amplified or delegitimized by Internet use, drawing from in-depth interviews with protestant pastors in Singapore. Competition from Internet access is found to delocalize epistemic authority to some extent; however, it also reembeds authority by allowing pastors to acquire new competencies as strategic arbiters of religious expertise and knowledge. Our study indicates that although religious leaders are confronted with proletarianization, deprofessionalization, and potential delegitimization as epistemic threats, there is also an enhancement of epistemic warrant as they adopt mediated communication practices that include the social networks of their congregation.

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