

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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In an era where digital technologies permeate every facet of human experience, the intersection of religion and media emerges as a profoundly dynamic field of inquiry. The *Jel-Kép* journal's 2025/2 thematic issue delves into this nexus, exploring how religious practices, identities, and institutions are mediated, represented, and transformed through various media platforms. This special issue brings together five original research articles that illuminate diverse dimensions of this relationship, ranging from digital discourse in Catholic communities to the integration of artificial intelligence in ecclesiastical journalism. Complementing these contributions are two book reviews that engage with contemporary scholarship on religion in society and media, and the evolving role of AI in journalistic practices.

The issue opens with Rita Glózer and Miklós Hornyák's article, "Mediating Synodality: Stakeholders and Social Media Engagement in the Hungarian-speaking Catholic Sphere." Employing text mining and manual content analysis, the authors examine 491 Facebook posts from 44 public accounts to map the digital communication of Pope Francis's synodal process within Hungarian-speaking Catholic communities. Their findings underscore the pivotal roles of ecclesiastical media outlets, transnational actors, and Greek Catholic representatives in shaping online narratives, while highlighting disparities in diocesan engagement and the prevalence of reposted institutional content over original, community-oriented posts.

Building on themes of digital identity formation, Márta Korpics and István Béres's "Exploring Offline and Online Religious Identity in Tradition-Oriented Religious Communities" investigates the interplay between virtual and physical realms in two tradition-oriented religious groups. Drawing from communication studies and the sociology of religion, the study reveals that online presence not only reinforces offline community cohesion but also enhances participation and the sharing of spiritual experiences. The authors conclude that social media serves as a vital complement to traditional religious functioning, facilitating adaptation and survival in a digital society.

Shifting focus to educational institutions, Bálint Duráczky, Szilvia Nyüsti, and Fruzsina Mikó's "From Mission to Marketing: How Reformed Primary Schools Communicate Their Value Proposition" analyzes the online branding strategies of 181 Reformed primary schools in Hungary. Through text analysis of school websites, the article categorizes institutions based on structural attributes and student demographics, demonstrating how religious identity is articulated to differentiate from state education systems. This work traces the evolution of communication practices amid post-2010 expansions, revealing a transition from missionary emphases to market-oriented value propositions.

Réka Szilárdi's "Brand Up! – Marketing Strategies for Religious Experiences" extends the discussion to religious lifestyle festivals, using a decade-long study of Hungary's Everness Festival. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods—including participant surveys, organizer interviews, and content analysis—the article traces shifts in religious trends, communication channels, and brand-building efforts. It highlights how these events foster

spiritual, community-based identities through merchandise, social media, and transformative experiences, offering insights into the broader religious market and pluralism.

Finally, Zoltán Rajki, Mónika Andok, András Radetzky, and Dóra Szilczl's "Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools and Applications among Ecclesiastical Journalists" addresses the transformative impact of AI on media production within religious contexts. Based on qualitative interviews with 40 journalists in fall 2023 and a subsequent quantitative survey in spring 2024, the study compares attitudes and practices between religious and non-religious content creators. It explores automation processes, ethical concerns, role transformations, and institutional regulations, while noting gender and generational differences in AI adoption.

This issue also features two insightful book reviews. Rita Glózer reviews Ákos Lázár Kovács's recent volume, *Vallás a társadalomban és a médiában* (Religion in Society and Media), published in Gondolat Kiadó's *Conditio Humana* series, offering a critical engagement with its contributions to understanding media's role in religious representation. Additionally, Szilvia Berekméry reviews Tony Silvia's *Artificial Intelligence in Journalism: Changing the News* (McFarland & Company, Inc., 2025), evaluating its implications for the evolving landscape of news production.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Szilvia Berekméry for her meticulous English-language editing of this special issue, which has ensured the clarity and academic rigor of the contributions.

Collectively, these articles and reviews advance scholarly discourse on religion and media, demonstrating how digital tools both challenge and enrich religious expression in contemporary societies. We invite readers to engage with these works as catalysts for further interdisciplinary exploration.