

More Clicks, Less Context: Why Religion Is Often Misunderstood Online

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ARTICLE INFO

Published on 12th of June 2026.

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54878/ysbwq177>

KEYWORDS:

Social cohesion, Media literacy, Critical thinking.

HOW TO CITE:

SEJDINI, Z. (2026). More Clicks, Less Context: Why Religion Is Often Misunderstood Online. Proceedings of the 3rd International Dialogue of Civilizations & Tolerance Conference (IDCT 2026). Emirates Scholar Center for Research & Studies, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
<https://doi.org/10.54878/ysbwq177>



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ABSTRACT

Religions are often encountered today through digital media—especially by young people. In German-speaking contexts, public debates and online stories sometimes portray religions through simplified frames, stereotypes, or isolated quotations. This keynote takes a practice-oriented approach and discusses how such misrepresentations can shape perceptions, emotions, and everyday interactions—at school, in peer groups, and in broader society.

Using selected examples from German-language media and social media, the talk highlights typical patterns of misinterpretation (e.g., generalizations, selective attention to conflict, or presenting individual voices as representative of an entire tradition). A central focus lies on youth: Where do they get their “religious knowledge” online? Which sources do they trust? How do they deal with contradictory narratives, sensational content, and peer pressure in digital spaces?

The contribution also outlines accessible educational responses—simple ways to strengthen critical thinking, respectful communication, and constructive engagement with difference—without requiring specialized technical knowledge. Depending on the conference needs, the keynote can be shaped more strongly toward schools, community settings, or public discourse.