

RESHAPING THE “GOD BEAT”:  
HOW THREE COMMUNITY NEWS WEBSITES FRAME RELIGION

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**ABSTRACT**

With a downsizing of newspaper staff and an upswing in Internet use, the religion beat has had to adapt, much like the rest of journalism. In some cases, the religion beat has been cut. But some publications maintain the beat in new ways. This qualitative study explores how three community news websites — the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Faith in Memphis* from the *Commercial Appeal* — frame religion.

Using textual analysis and interviews, the researcher sought to determine the relevance of previous frames, identify new frames and describe models for religion coverage. Mark Silk’s 1995 *Unsecular Media* acted as a guide; Silk identified seven frames for journalism stories, each one informed by values that underlie American life. This study found that though some of Silk’s frames are still present, new frames have, indeed, emerged. This study found a large dependence on community content — a community-driven reporting model within the religion beat.

Ultimately, this study fills a gap in research by documenting the way religion is framed online at the community level. It also expands knowledge of the way religion news is framed in the community context. Prior to this, no study has been conducted of online religion coverage at the community level.