

Framing or being framed?

A qualitative study of the use of feature films in confirmation teaching
within the Church of Norway

In an increasingly media-saturated world, understanding how popular media influence (young) people's engagement with religion and religious faith, including within formal religious education such as formal faith education, is a worthwhile endeavour. By examining the use of feature films in confirmation teaching within the Church of Norway, this dissertation explores this influence and thus addresses a gap in empirical research, especially within the Nordic context. Drawing upon sociological perspectives on religion and media, the study explores how feature films are embedded into confirmation teaching and how this shapes the dissemination, interpretation and understanding of religious content among confirmands.

This dissertation consists of three articles. In the first, I explore confirmation leaders' intentions and experiences using film through interviews. In the second, I analyze the practical use of film based on observations of confirmation teaching sessions. In the third, I examine confirmands' experiences and reflections of the usage of film using group interviews. This approach allows me to explore how films are used and experienced in confirmation teaching, focusing on the complex interplay between media and religious education from various perspectives.

Relevant theoretical frameworks have informed the data analysis. Erving Goffman's framing theory is central to understanding how films are presented (or 'keyed') in the teaching sessions and how these frameworks influence the confirmands' interpretations. The analysis not only identifies various framing strategies, such as pre-film keying, post-film keying, and sectional film keying, but also explores these strategies' response to the confirmands' reception within the teaching situation.

The concept of religious media literacy is employed to explore the confirmand's experience and reception of participation and how they engage with and interpret religious content in relation to the films. This theory contributes to exploring how the confirmands discern the relation between film and religion and relate to them.

The mediatization of religion theory, as presented by Hjarvard and Lövheim (among others), provides a broader context for exploring how the integration of film influences religious teaching. This theory explores how media influence religious belief and practice, particularly in modern media-saturated societies. With the help of this theory, the study examines how the use of film as a teaching tool mediatizes the confirmation teaching, influencing how religious content is communicated and understood.

The study reveals a significant dissonance between confirmation leaders' intentions behind using films and the confirmands' reception and interpretation of them. The leaders view the films as valuable resources for illustrating Christian teachings, bridging the space to the confirmand's lifeworld by making religious content more relatable. The confirmands, however, struggle to make this connection, finding it hard to relate the film's content with the intended religious messages. In practice, this leads to the films becoming the focal point rather than the bridge, with the confirmands engaging primarily with the film's narrative rather than the theological content.

Further, the power of framing is significant. The leaders select, key and frame the films to align with the Christian themes of confirmation teaching, influencing how the confirmands interpret and engage with both the films and the theme in question. This framing situation, where the leaders often aim at a preferred or 'correct' reading, reveals a dialogical but risky space. Both the leaders and the confirmands rely on the frames to interpret the content and theme, resulting in a multi-levelled and multi-faceted framing situation.

Despite being highly familiar with popular media, the confirmands find the link between media and religion new and challenging in this context. While films create an inclusive and captivating learning environment, they also demand a certain level of interpretative skill, especially in relation to Christian themes. Transferring a film to a Christian frame is not always understood, accepted, or fitting for the confirmands, underscoring the need for leaders to facilitate this process, as confirmands may not inherently be able to interpret the media content within a Christian context.

This study argues that using films in confirmation teaching exemplifies a form of mediatization of religion, where media not only represent but actively shape religious practice. By integrating films into confirmation teaching, the approach to faith

education moves away from traditional methods. The result is that the films become both source and arena for religious engagement, acting both as conduit, language and environment for exploring religious messages, resembling what could be called a 'filmatization' of religion.