

Media Strategies of Orthodox Church Television Networks: A Comparative Analysis of Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia

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Article information	Abstract
DOI : 10.25077/jds.2.2.58-69.2025 Correspondence : zaza.tsotniashvili@ciu.edu.ge	This article discusses the media strategies of Orthodox Church television networks from five predominantly Orthodox countries, Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia. Through mixed methods of content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and comparative analysis, this study explores how these networks arbitrate faith, culture, and media as they engage with their own sociopolitical environments. Through case studies of two networks from each country and an analysis of over 100 hours of programming, in addition to interviews with relevant stakeholders, the article probes the kind of programming these networks produce, their audience engagement and leveraging of technological advances. Theoretical implications of this paper suggest interaction in a digitalized world, diversity in selling points and the combination of traditional frameworks with new-age media. The study therefore identifies universal challenges of secularisation, political influence and digital transformation, and offers successful strategies that will aid religious broadcasters staying relevant to the digital epoch. These findings spur broader debates about religion in the media and the media in religion and provide insight for practitioners and scholars in the field.
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INTRODUCTION

Orthodox Christianity plays a central role in shaping the cultural identity and sociopolitical discourse of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. In recent decades, the evolution of media technologies has presented Orthodox Churches across the region with a complex dual task: maintaining liturgical and doctrinal traditions while simultaneously embracing contemporary communication platforms to engage broader, often younger, audiences. Television remains a particularly influential medium in this context. Unlike digital-first channels, it offers a powerful blend of liturgical content, spiritual education, and culturally resonant programming capable of reaching viewers in both urban and rural communities.

This study traces, via case studies, the development of Orthodox Church television networks in Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia, and how these media regimes evolve and adapt as they respond to changing sociocultural expectations and digital disruption. These networks operate in various national contexts, shaped by different church-state histories, varying rates of religious observance, and disparate levels of digital infrastructure development. Although earlier scholarship has had much to say about specific countries, comparative academic work that systematically investigates the media ecosystem around Orthodox television networks is thin. This study seeks to fill that gap by introducing a multi-country comparative proposition of how content analysis, stakeholder interviews, and digital analytics can collectively deepen our understanding of the intersections of tradition, innovation, and audience engagement.

The relation between media and religion has been of great interest to scholars, with studies highlighting that media shape not only how beliefs are communicated but also how belief itself is experienced. The

mediatization of religion, where media are setting much of our spiritual practice (e.g., Hoover, 2006), is something Hoover emphasizes in her discussion, and it is also a focus of Campbell's, who calls attention to the reflections between religious communities and the tensions around negotiating digital culture dynamics (Campbell). These perspectives are theoretically grounded in this study. Although work on Orthodox media is still relatively scarce, there has been increasing interest in the strategies of these institutions. Mitrofanova (2005), for example, addresses the Russian Orthodox Church's post-Soviet attempts toward identity reassertion and Roudometof (2014) investigates the interaction of Orthodox media with globalized audiences beyond national borders (Roudometof, 2014). While numerous studies explore the shift of Orthodox institutions to digitalization through platforms such as YouTube and social media (Volkova, 2021; Golan & Don, 2022; Shevchuk et al, 2024), the study of television as a religious medium remains limited.

An important dimension of this study is the political entanglements of the Orthodox Church media. In other contexts, such as Russia and Greece, religious broadcasting tends to fit into nationalistic and conservative ideologies. Knox has noted the vehicles of Russian Orthodox channels for bringing state narratives (Knox, 2005), and Makrides has addressed a similar family of issues in Greek religious broadcasting (Makrides, 2012). These dynamics pose challenges for editorial independence and the wielding of religious media as soft power instruments. The dynamic nature of the media ecosystem also becomes either a threat or a chance for the Orthodox shooting houses. As Campbell details, digital modalities redefine religious authority and engagement (Campbell, 2013), while Hutchings investigates the development of online rituals and virtual church congregations (Hutchings, 2017). However, the response of legacy television networks towards digital disruption remains poorly understood. This research adds to that discussion by exploring how Orthodox church networks incorporate digital extensions of themselves — from social media outreach and mobile apps to livestreamed liturgies — into their analog broadcast models to stay relevant.

Orthodox Church television networks have become spiritual institutions and cultural pillars, providing religious education, promoting national identity, and addressing societal issues. However, although they play a significant role within health systems, systematic research appraising their strategic operations across national contexts is lacking. Much previous work has typically been limited to individual case studies or has prioritized newer digital media over broadcast television [1]–[6]. This study aspires to contribute to a comparative understanding of Orthodoxy on the little screen by offering an assessment of how Orthodox television channels in Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia develop and articulate their media strategies, how they address the challenges generated by the processes of digitalization and secularization, and how they manage to keep in touch with their viewership in fluid contexts.

To guide this inquiry, the research addresses several key questions: What are the dominant media strategies employed by Orthodox television networks in each country? How do these networks navigate sociopolitical pressures, including their relationships with the state and involvement in national identity discourse? To what extent have these organizations adopted digital technologies to broaden their reach and deepen viewer engagement? And what common challenges and best practices emerge across these distinct national experiences? By addressing these questions through a comparative and mixed-methods research design, the study generates academic insights and offers practical recommendations.

This study guides media practitioners, especially those engaged in faith-based, nonprofit, or culturally specific broadcasting settings. It shows that traditional media institutions can successfully refashion themselves around digital forms to remain relevant, provides models for balancing theological messaging with development and technological innovation, and outlines best practices for fostering audience participation across generations and geographies. It also provides advice for how to traverse political constraints while maintaining editorial independence. The study is a framework that systematically compares national approaches that other religious or values-driven broadcasters may adopt when seeking

sustainability in the digital age.

This research relies on four key hypotheses. First, the strategies for Orthodox Church television media are utterly different in many countries, depending on their sociopolitical context, cultural background, and technology dissemination. The project explores this question using comparative data around content, audience, and technology platforms. Second, Orthodox Church broadcasters are expected to stress religious identity and cultural continuity, particularly in societies with histories of religious oppression or secular rule. This will be empirically tested via qualitative content analysis and interviews with media producers and church representatives. Third, the article claims that digitalization has brought about a hybridization of media systems, but that the hybridization process differs in depth according to national conditions. The hypothesis will be tested through digital platform analysis, which will include data from social media platforms and Blue Stream statistics. Next, the role of political influence is examined through an analysis of relations between the government and the church, as it determines how editorial decisions are made, particularly when it comes to content aligned with the narratives of the state.

The validation of these research hypotheses and answering this central question should result in an overall, contextual understanding of the changing media role of Orthodox Church television in modern media systems. By virtue of its comparative design and its combination of qualitative and quantitative data, the research not only addresses a gap in the scholarly literature but also provides concrete tools for media practitioners and religious institutions facing the challenges of the digital age.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative comparative case study design with supplementary quantitative aspects to examine Orthodox Church television networks in Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia. The research is broken down into three phases, data collection, analysis, and comparative synthesis. A multi-method approach was employed, with purposive content analysis of TV programming supplemented by semi-structured key expert interviews, to achieve methodological triangulation and increase validity.

In this study, a purposeful sample of Orthodox-affiliated networks was included—Trinitas TV (Romania), TV Hram (Serbia), 4E TV (Greece), Spas TV (Russia), and Ertsulovneba (Georgia). A composite week method over six months (January–June 2024) was used to capture a random sample of programming, covering both routine and religious festival periods. About 20 hours of programming per country were studied, including liturgical broadcasts, religious education, talk shows, cultural documentaries and newsbeat segments. Each program is a unit of analysis; we coded for type, theme, tone, audience, media techniques, and underlying values using NVivo software. High intercoder reliability (average $\kappa = 0.82$) confirmed coding consistency.

In addition to the content analysis, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with church leaders, media producers, and key scholars (4 per country). Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select participants. They focused on programming goals, target audiences, digital adaptations, and editorial practices. Interviews were conducted in local languages or English, lasted 45–60 minutes, audio recorded with permission, and transcribed for analysis using a thematic approach.

Analysis of the data was performed in 2 stages. First, within-case analysis integrated content and interview data to build a media strategy profile by country. Second, we used cross-case comparative synthesis to identify commonalities and country-level differences in network strategies, content focus, digital integration, and youth outreach. Lately, we also scanned a range of relevant social media metrics and digital content to contextualize.

Protocols for ethical trials were regimens. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, and anonymity was maintained via coded identifiers. Data storage was secure, sensitive information was handled accordingly, and cultural respect was kept throughout the investigation. Iterative analysis was

conducted to validate findings, and they were shared with participants who were willing to represent transparency.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents a comparative overview of Orthodox Church television networks in five countries—Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia—highlighting their funding sources, content focus, youth engagement levels, online presence, and social media reach.

Table 1. Orthodox Church Television Networks

Country	Funding	Content Focus	Youth Engagement	Online Presence	Number of TV Programs Analyzed	Facebook Followers (k)	YouTube Subscribers (k)
Romania	State + Church	Religious + Cultural	High	Strong	30	120	90
Serbia	Church + Private	Religious + National Identity	Low	Moderate	30	45	30
Greece	Moderate State Support	Religious + Social Issues	Medium	Strong	30	75	50
Russia	Strong State Support	Religious + National Identity	High	Very Strong	30	200	180
Georgia	Church + Volunteer	Religious + Community	Low	Weak	30	25	20

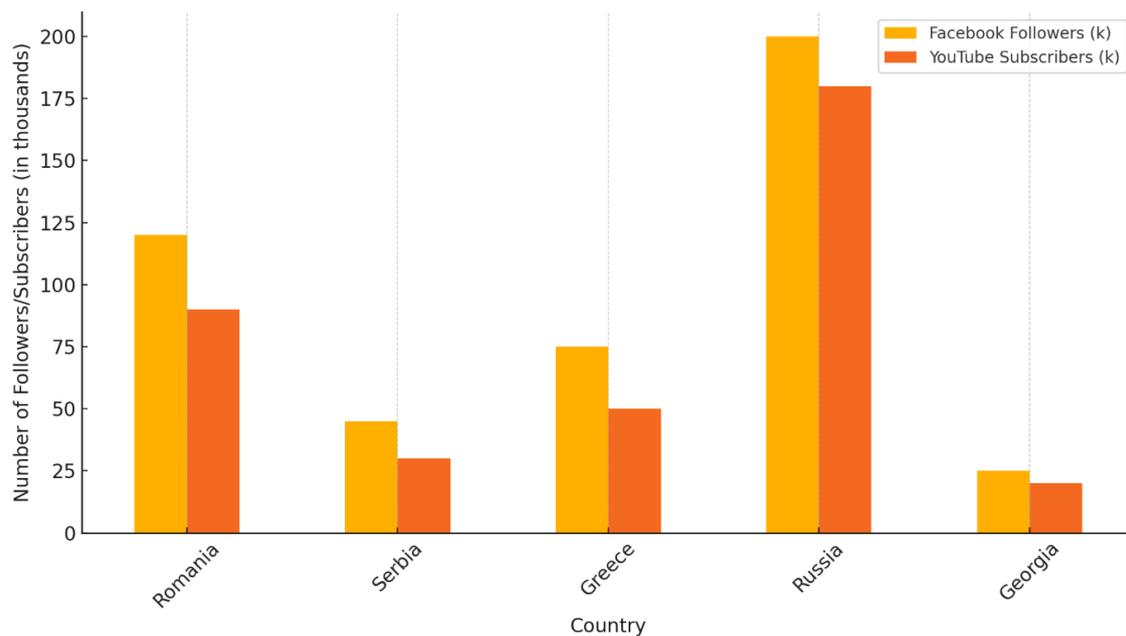


Figure 1. Online Engagement of the Orthodox Church Television Network

Romania's Orthodox Church television network receives both state and church funding and features religious and cultural programming. An analysis of 30 TV programs shows it engages youth at a high level and has a major online presence, with 120,000 Facebook followers and 90,000 YouTube subscribers. The networks in Serbia, financed by both the Church and private donors, underscore religious topics intertwined with national identity. However, they have weak youth engagement and only moderate online presence, as evidenced by comparatively modest social media numbers — 45,000 Facebook followers and 30,000 YouTube subscribers.

In Greece, where the state funds networks moderately, the content ranges from religious to contemporary social issues. Youth engagement is rated medium, supported by a strong digital presence, with 75,000 followers on Facebook and 50,000 YouTube subscribers. With strong state support, Russia stands out among the 40 in terms of the most robust institutional backing. Its networks specialize in

mixing religious content with national identity storylines, posting constantly and achieving high youth engagement and very strong overall online performance, with 200,000 Facebook followers and 180,000 YouTube subscribers, making it the most digitally influential of the five.

Lastly, Georgia's networks often rely on Church and volunteer assistance and emphasize religious and community-oriented programming. Although their very roots are in grass-roots networks, they are struggling with digital engagement (young followers aren't too interested in their platforms, as demonstrated by the low number of Facebook followers: 25,000, and YouTube: 20,000).

Comparative Strategies of Orthodox Church Television

The comparative analysis of Orthodox Church television networks in Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia reveals a diverse landscape of media strategies shaped by varying degrees of institutional support, cultural context, and audience engagement priorities. The common thread among TV channels there is that religious content is always the backbone of programming. Most of the broadcast content would consist of liturgical services, theological talks, saints, religious history documentaries, and educational shows for children. But differences do emerge, both in production quality and thematic breadth. There are higher production values and a wider spectrum of content to be found on these networks, including cultural programming and news fairs from a religious standpoint. In contrast, the Serbian and Georgian networks assigned a greater share of their budget to traditional religious content, with some lower-end television content and little room for diversification or high-budget productions. Greek networks occupy a middle ground between these two poles, mixing core religious programming with conversations about relevant contemporary social issues, thus appealing to a wider swath of the population.

The countries also differ sharply in their distribution strategies. Online platforms, alongside satellite and terrestrial broadcasting, are now a core means of content dissemination (even more so in programming directed at young people and diaspora groups). Russian and Romanian networks have emerged as notable in this context, strategically deploying websites, YouTube, and social media to amplify their reach. Digital tools have started to be utilized also in Greek networks, albeit through a slow process and to a far lesser extent. In contrast, the Serbian and Georgian networks lag in their digital outreach, showing less online visibility and audience engagement. Such a digital divide illustrates disparities in the realms of investment in technology, infrastructure, and the formation of digital strategies.

A difference in target audience segmentation also underscores differences in strategic approach. Russian and Romanian television networks propose an inclusive approach to programming that targets both practicing believers and the culturally Orthodox public with little experience in religion, but all networks cater primarily to the devout Orthodox Christian viewer. At the same time, an accessible language and a rather high-interest format further enable this inclusive strategy! By contrast, the Serbian and Georgian networks primarily target engaged churchgoers, maintaining traditional programming styles and emphasizing doctrinal materials. Greek networks hope to bridge the gap between faith and modern life, frequently casting social and moral debates in an Orthodox light to attract viewers worried about contemporary society's ethical issues.

The nature of these countries' funding models significantly impacts the coverage and quality of religious broadcasting. State support is extensive, including in Russian and Romanian networks, and these networks can maintain high production standards and a variety of programming. Greek networks are less publicly funded, with some space for innovation but not much for a big-scale expansion. In Serbia and Georgia, Orthodox networks rely heavily on grants from the Church, private funding, and, in some instances, backing from international religious bodies. These economic restraints often result in limited work on content and investments in digital platforms, in turn leading to more conservative broadcasting approaches.

National identity has become an important aspect of religious programming on all networks, but the extent and the style of it vary. Narratives blending Orthodoxy with national unity and heritage in Russian and Serbian networks are especially aggressive. Colonial-era Romanian programming, by contrast, promotes national culture through the lens of Orthodox faith, encouraging patriotic feelings. In Georgia, the broadcasts highlight the history of the Church as a conservative defender of national identity, particularly when foreigners have ruled. Greek channels have taken a more contemplative approach, often looking at the tension between contemporary Greek changing identities and the Orthodox Christian narrative, without discernible nationalist overtones.

Engagement among youth is a key ingredient for long-term sustainability and outreach. Russian and Romanian networks are most effective in investing actively in content aimed at younger audiences and leveraging interactive formats and social media channels to stay relevant. Serbian, Georgian, and Greek network stakeholders mainly stick to traditional formats and do not promote youth involvement, so they accept less innovation in content creation.

Media Strategies of Orthodox Television Networks

Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia reproduce different media strategies of Orthodox Christian television networks, conditioned by the respective sociocultural contexts and institutional objectives. The Romanian Orthodox Church has a deep-seated place in Romania's history and culture, allowing it to retain a loyal audience. Programming remains solidly in the comfort zone of traditional broadcast, both in live liturgical formats and instruction, and while digital platforms are slowly being integrated, there is still a hesitation and an awareness that only resists change at a slow pace despite the obvious need to engage younger audiences. In Serbia, Orthodox networks operate in a fragmented and competitive media environment full of secular offerings. Here, strategic focus channels onto cultural nationalism, the programming tailored to reaffirm Serbian identity and Orthodox values. Although this method works quite well for older generations, they are trying to improve digital engagement and reach younger audiences via the internet.

On the other hand, Greece offers a different model, as Orthodox television networks continue to play a widespread role by promoting historical and cultural narratives that underscore the country's rich religious roots. They have adeptly exploited features of digital media that enable them to attain an audience with the Greek diaspora, given the fact that streaming and social media have enabled content to reach beyond the national borders. The centralized structure of the media in Russia, along with state support, enables the Orthodox Church to have a far-reaching and coordinated media strategy. Religious content is often infused with ideas of national identity, and considerable resources focused on digital infrastructure have allowed the Church to build out strong presences both on and offline, reaching a wide cross-section of the population.

The Orthodox media landscape of Georgia is more reaching and community-oriented. Television networks strongly emphasize the religious practices and traditions of their region with programming reflective of everyday religious life. Much of this work is supported through volunteer contributions and regional participation, creating a high level of viewer loyalty and ownership of the community. In that sense, these diverse national approaches highlight the flexibility of Orthodox Church television networks in adapting to societal changes while attempting to maintain religious and cultural continuity.

Comparative Landscape of Orthodox Television Networks

In all these countries, there is a common challenge: adapting to the digital transformation of media consumption. As traditional broadcasting remains an indispensable part of the media landscape, the networks are mining digital territory in a bid to ensure their long-term viability and relevance. However, at the same time, these initiatives are diverse, reflecting the peculiarities of each country's socio-political context and the significant impact of the Orthodox Church. So, despite the challenges, such initiatives

show that there is room for experimenting with religious media. The study, which was funded by the AI and Society Program of the Institute for Global Communication at UC San Francisco, highlights the need for increased media literacy as people contend with the complexities of AI-generated material. But as audiences continue to rely on personalized, algorithmically curated information, educating them on critically assessing and engaging with this content is critical to promote an informed society. (Tsotniashvili, 2025)

Even in this historical background, the Orthodox television networks in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus remain, both promoting religious teachings, maintaining cultural identity, and educating spiritual believers. In Romania, the launch in 2007 of Trinitas TV — under the auspices of the Romanian Orthodox Church — made it the country's leading broadcaster. It has a full liturgical program and broadcasts sermons, documentaries, and educational programs to strengthen Orthodox values and moral guidelines. It has a national reach, and its online programming, available to the diaspora, has expanded its influence beyond Romania's borders. Alfa Omega TV, another major Romanian network, supplements this mission with a focus on both historical and current events examined from an Orthodox perspective. It identifies Romanians through religious narratives and serves up theology, saints' lives, and hot-button social issues.

Hram TV (in English: Temple TV), the official channel of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia, provides religious programming, including liturgies, teaching, and events of the Church. It is a major proponent of Orthodox spirituality, with strong national and regional coverage in the Balkans. Another network, Svetigora TV — while physically based in Montenegro — has a primarily Serbian audience and is well-known for high-quality documentaries and historical features. It provides religious programming, cultural exploration, and Orthodox Christian heritage, creating ties to tradition and faith.

Two of the most powerful Orthodox channels are based in Greece. The Church of Greece's official broadcaster is Ekklesia TV, delivering rich liturgical coverage, theological discussions, and faith-oriented educational programming. It is widely watched throughout the country and provides access through the internet to important broadcasts, especially during major liturgical seasons like Easter. Similarly, 4E TV engages diverse demographics, especially youth, through interactive shows and documentaries. By creating meaningful content that speaks to the everyday lives of Orthodox individuals while remaining entertaining and informative, it has successfully reached and continued to grow the audience online.

In Russia, it became one of the most powerful voices in Orthodox religious broadcasting. It is famous for combining cultural and historical programming with Orthodox topics and is broadcast to a wide range of Russians and Russian-speaking people worldwide. The channel airs religious dramas, broadcasts of church services, and thoughtful documentaries about Russian history and Orthodox spirituality. Another heavyweight player, Tsargrad TV, melds Orthodox teachings and conservative political commentary. Founded by a businessman, Konstantin Malofeev, it promotes traditional Russian and Orthodox values and produces content that combines theological discussion and contemporary political events, serving audiences both in Russia and Russian speakers abroad.

Georgia's Orthodox television landscape is equally fluid. Ertsulovneba TV, the Georgian Orthodox Church's channel, features liturgical broadcasts, educational shows, and programming related to Georgia's Orthodox history and cultural traditions. It has a national reach and online distribution that allows it to reach a wide audience within and beyond Georgia. Iveria TV, by contrast, augments this focus with cultural and spiritual content, particularly its coverage of Georgian heritage and the veneration of Orthodox saints. Holding a growing online audience, it brings an important church contribution toward national religious identity preservation and transfer.

In all 5 countries, several common findings can be drawn. Orthodox TV channels are often deeply integrated into national media ecosystems, and many operate not merely as spiritual platforms but

as tools for bolstering cultural identity. Their reach transcends terrestrial broadcasting, as numerous channels have embraced online streaming and digital outreach as a means to engage with global diaspora communities and younger audiences. And while all networks pursue religious content, their programming contains ample histories, cultural background, and social commentary, emphasizing how whole this relationship between faith and national identity is in these places. Through this programming diversity and the dynamic intersection of tradition and modern media technologies, there is a reflection of adaptive strategies employed by Orthodox television networks to maintain relevance and impact in an ever more digital and secular society.

DISCUSSION

This paper demonstrates the complex and context-dependent strategies developed by Orthodox Church TV networks in Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia, and Georgia. Through their theological similarities grounded in Orthodox Christianity, these networks show remarkably different styles of engaging with their audience, creating content, and adapting to the changing media and political environments. The resulting sub-case studies suggest that while all Orthodox broadcasters share a general aim to help preserve shared religious values and bolster the respective cultural identity, the way(s) in which they achieve this are profoundly affected by national context, institutional resources, and visions.

One of the central dynamics that emerges is the ongoing battle between religious orthodoxy and the demands of modern media. The sacred traditions, liturgical practices, and contemplative spirituality of Orthodox Christianity must negotiate a contemporary media environment dominated by rapid information consumption and visual interactivity, which poses unique challenges for this ancient Faith. This challenge becomes especially salient when issues of the day, such as youth culture, modernity ethics, and technology, are woven into theological discourses. Studies indicate that Orthodox mainstream media, in areas such as Romania and Russia, are increasingly utilizing modern production techniques and interactive formats, including animated children's content and youth-focused talk shows, to connect with their audiences while remaining theologically sound (Chaplin, 2015; Mitrofanova et al., 2021).

Similar can be said of the Romanian and Russian Orthodox Churches, which came up with new media techniques merging the old theological frame of reference with the contemporary media aesthetics. Such adaptations, when made with careful consideration of and adherence to the core tenets of Orthodox theology, have also proven vital to the appeal of faith communities to younger demographics, potentially leading them into promising territory for communities of faith in an increasingly digital age (Bondarenko & Tutorskiy, 2020; Negrov & Malov, 2021). However, sound implementation requires significant investment in digital literacy and agile editorial practices to enable the outreach to remain within the bounds of Orthodox doctrine yet relevant to the ever-evolving, fast-paced environment of digital media consumption (Simion, 2017; Sokolovskyi et al., 2020).

By contrast, though, Orthodox media in Georgia and Serbia are considerably more conservative, often returning to traditional programmatic forms. This hesitancy arises from a need to maintain doctrinal accuracy and to warn against media practices that could undermine the integrity of religious messaging (Makrides, 2016; Rodopaios et al., 2024). This divergence among Orthodox networks highlights a key tension: religious media are forced to straddle the line between theological fidelity and an imperative of relevancy in an ever-evolving digital landscape. It is important to ensure that religious institutions can convey a coherent message in this environment to gain the interest of digital-native audiences and keep them engaged, a challenge that continually gains importance with the evolution of technology (Neacșu, 2023; Aydingün et al., 2019). The existential and cultural challenges enumerated in the category of Orthodox Christianity reflect a wider struggle that permeates religious organizations across spatial and social poles. Finding a middle ground between a dedication to sacred tradition and the pull of modernity is an ongoing task and one that will shape the destiny of Orthodox media and its relationship to modern society (Coman, 2023; Dorroll, 2025).

The study further sheds light on the instrumental role of Orthodox Church television in aiding the reception of national identity, an aspect of great importance. In all five countries, religious broadcasting is used as a spiritual tool and cultural medium. In cases like Russia and Serbia, Orthodox programming is especially steeped in nationalist sentiments: religious identity is seen as a major thread in the weave of both historical continuity and national identity. Such networks extensively use commemorative content, heroic imagery, and portray the Church as the bastion of national values, thus intertwining spirituality and nationalist sentiments (Agadjanian, 2001; Storm, 2011). Such outcomes also reflect the findings of other studies, including Brubaker (2011) and Annavarapu (2015), that national identity in many Eastern European contexts is frequently developed and understood through religious frameworks, which present religious affiliations as a cultural aspect of public life.

By contrast, Romanian and Greek Orthodox broadcasts take a more nuanced cultural approach. These networks emphasize the international association between Orthodoxy, language, tradition, and moral heritage rather than overt nationalism. Thus, it creates a form of identity that is not directly political in competition with specific historical narratives, but which still hangs in a unity of common past (Agadjanian, 2001; Dragotă et al., 2018). The aforementioned is equally prevalent in Georgian Orthodox media, which operates on a much smaller scale and with less resources but still highlights the Church's engagement in maintaining national particularism via local folklore and unique historical accounts, further supporting the contention that religious television plays a central role in the landscape of forming national identity (Mukhibat, 2023; Peek, 2005).

These observable trends point in the direction of mediatized nationalism, a concept introduced to describe how religious media serve as a vehicle for the generation of ideological uniformity and national unity across post-Soviet and post-imperial societies. This dual role of religion under a framework of nationalism may provide the context of a unified national community; however, at the same time, it risks complete marginalization within the social settings and structures to counter narratives (Mana et al., 2021; Bolzendahl et al., 2019). This highlights the difficulty of walking the line between a self-identifying nation and the nature of Orthodoxy built on inclusion in this age of globalization and conflicting cultures (Campbel & Gorgodze, 2016; Annavarapu, 2015).

Overall, Orthodoxy stands out both for the fact that each country's religious and national contexts remain interspersed in programming and for how each country seems to be basing specificity on the larger European experience. Others, while some embrace a strong nationalist narrative, want to create a cultural heritage highlighting inclusivity and a shared moral framework. These dynamics not only inform public perceptions of national identity but also govern the operational strategies of religious broadcasters within a rapidly changing media ecology with increased audience expectations (Tranby & Zulkowski, 2012; Schnabel, 2015).

However, the study has multiple limitations that restrict its extrapolative potential. Limited access to internal operational data from the networks, including financial reports, programming strategies, or editorial policies, was one of the major challenges. This limited a deeper institutional analysis of the decision-making process within the organizational structures. In a further limitation, although the engagement of young people with the material was identified as a prominent theme, the study did not seek the perspectives of young viewers directly through interviews or audience surveys – it relied on content analysis and expert commentary instead. That stifles the level of insight we have into how well these networks are resonating with the younger audiences. Furthermore, interviews may have introduced some bias, since many informants worked for Church-affiliated institutions, potentially coloring the analysis of strategies and challenges, and underrepresenting dissenting or critical perspectives.

Although the study has its limitations, it nevertheless proposes multiple practical implications for Orthodox Church media organizations to surmount the current media landscape. First, the need for strengthening digital integration cannot be overstated. Romania and Russia networks, for example,

rely heavily on online content (YouTube, social networks, mobile applications) and effectively leverage international diaspora and younger audiences. Second, targeted youth programming is a continuing need. Ensuring that content encompasses contemporary aesthetics, relatable themes, and interactive features makes it possible to connect different generations, especially when the young ones have a say in generating content and media production. Three, diaspora outreach is a promising avenue for strategic expansion. And indeed, culturally relevant programs featuring multilingual options and streaming religious services of significance to remote communities' help reinforce ties with co-ethnic distant communities, as evidenced by Greek and Romanian examples.

Another recommendation that arises is diversifying blame. In addition to the necessary coverage of liturgical and doctrinal matters, embracing Orthodox points of view on contemporary social issues — mental health, family life, environmental ethics, digital life — expands relevance and engenders a greater and more meaningful kind of public discourse. Finally, this study offers wider lessons for international religious broadcasters beyond the Orthodox tradition. Digital transformation, media fragmentation, and audience diversification are placing similar pressures on religious institutions across confessional lines, and several strategic priorities emerge. Such approaches include investments in media literacy training for clergy and content producers, protections for editorial independence from political interference, and interfaith partnerships to promote common purposes and address shared societal issues. Data-driven approaches through audience analytics and performance metrics can enable religious networks to assess their impact and improve programming decisions.

Thus, television networks operated by the Orthodox Church represent an active negotiation of theology, media, and national identity. The details differ, but the driving necessity is the same in all cases: to reassert spiritual authority, cultural relevance, and public trust in a dramatically reshaped media environment. This research contributes to recent scholarship on the communications of faith by providing a comparative lens that highlights both the adaptive potential and the persistent difficulties of faith-broadcasters this century.

CONCLUSION

The current study provides an overview and comparative analysis of the media strategies of the Orthodox Church TV networks in Romania, Serbia, Greece, Russia and Georgia. Using a mixed-methods research strategy that combined content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and comparative synthesis, the study provides insights into how these networks negotiate the tension between religious orthodoxy and the realities of media modernity, the challenge of political capture, and the need to connect with various audiences. Theoretically, this study contributes to the burgeoning field of religion and media by showing how Orthodox broadcasting is not just a delivery vehicle for the transmission of theology but also provides a means of recognition that serves cultural nation-building and identity enforcement in different social and political contexts. The findings practically serve to inform religious media practitioners, especially in the Orthodox environment, of the areas that require modernization; how to diversify content, attract the millennial generation, and gain access to the diaspora through digital media and new programming formats. The study also has important policy implications in emphasizing the need for both editorial independence for religious media and the promotion of pluralism, as well as ensuring that regulatory frameworks support ethical and inclusive communication practices. What is learned here can aid Orthodox media practitioners in refining their strategic planning, provide context on the cultural significance and social impact of religious broadcasting that can inform state leaders, and be used to help scholars expand theoretical conversation in religious communication. The lack of audience reception data and limited youth representation are among the limitations that future research can address by conducting empirical studies on how viewers experience and interact with Orthodox television. Comparative studies with other religious traditions and an exploration of digital-native Orthodox influencers and creators would also deepen our knowledge of how faith communities are

being reshaped in a global digital media ecology. Providing an overview of both the challenges and opportunities, this study aims to provide a constructive framework for understanding religious media in the twenty-first century and practical pathways for making Orthodox broadcasting more inclusive, responsive, and impactful.

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