REFRAMING BELIEFS: THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

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Abstract:
Religion and media are both the important themes of the study especially in the modern world and they are linked to each other as well. In the recent year's religion is linked to media to express its message to a great number of audience and viewers. In this regard with the rapid advancement in media especially in the twentieth century[7], the religion is expressed through various forms of media. The scope of the study of their relation does not seem possible to cover all of its aspects in a single research study because both of them are the vast fields which encompass different aspects of human lives. In this paper we will discuss the study of the relation of both religion and media through four approaches which implicitly indicates towards the role of religion and media to answer the question that how both of them are studied in relation to each other around the globe. These approaches[8] are categorized by Dr Liesbet van Zoonen[9] provide a precise way to the classification of the study of various aspects of relation of religion and media. Furthermore, the paradigm of study for every approach will be elaborated.
Key words: religion, media, sociological approach, interplay, research methodology

INTRODUCTION:

Religion and media, as powerful and pervasive forces in contemporary society, have a profound impact on shaping our beliefs, values, and cultural landscape. In the digital age, where information flows at an unprecedented speed and media platforms are ubiquitous, the relationship between religion and media has undergone significant transformations. This evolving nexus presents a

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[7] See "A Short History of Media" Rupert Taylor, retrieved on 27-05-2018 from https://owlcation.com/humanities/A-Short-History-of-Media

[8] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" retrieved on 17-05-2018 from *https://www.kent.ac.uk/religionmethods/.../FOUR%20APPROACHES%20TO%20THE*...

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fascinating area of study that seeks to understand how religion is mediated, communicated, and influenced by various forms of media. Throughout history, religion has played a central role in providing individuals with spiritual guidance, moral frameworks, and a sense of belonging to a transcendent reality. Traditionally, religious institutions, rituals, and scriptures have served as the primary means of connecting individuals with their faith and fostering religious communities. However, the advent of mass media has introduced new avenues through which religion is practiced, interpreted, and disseminated.

In the contemporary context, media encompasses a vast array of platforms, including television, radio, print publications, websites, social media, and streaming services. These platforms have not only become sources of information and entertainment but have also become integral to religious experiences, interactions, and expressions. The interplay between religion and media in contemporary times raises several intriguing questions and avenues for exploration. One crucial aspect of this relationship is the role of media in shaping public perceptions and representations of religion. News media, for instance, plays a significant role in shaping public opinion about religious events, figures, and controversies. Moreover, the portrayal of religious minorities, religious conflicts, and religious diversity in media can significantly impact social attitudes and understanding. Another aspect to consider is the influence of media on religious practices and beliefs. With the rise of digital technologies and online communities, individuals now have unprecedented access to religious content, teachings, and discussions. The Internet has become a virtual space where religious communities can interact, share their experiences, and engage in religious practices, thereby transforming the traditional notions of religious authority and religious community. Furthermore, the relationship between religion and media encompasses issues of religious freedom, pluralism, and secularism. Media platforms often become sites of contestation and negotiation, where different religious perspectives vie for visibility and legitimacy. Additionally, media can serve as catalysts for religious mobilization, advocacy, and social change, allowing religious groups to disseminate their messages and mobilize followers around particular causes. In different time periods the relation of media and religion is explained through various aspects and angles according to different motives behind. Sometimes this relation is studied to examine the impact of media on religion, sometimes it seems to be a sociological research and sometimes it seems to be mere a goal of the study of media's link to multiple phenomenon of which religion is the one. Sometimes their relation is examined in religious point of view and sometimes it is analyzed through the modern or contemporary age's perspective. However, the dimensions to study the relation of religion and media are plenty.

The study of the relation of religion and media has vast dimensions. Sometimes both; religion and media play a vital role in the lives of people without possessing any connection with each other. But to some extents their role is similar in this regard because they try to build a relationship between God and the human beings in spiritual way. They become a source to connect the lives of human beings with the transcendent or the ultimate reality. Sometimes they develop great kind of values in societies and at the same time show a positive relation with each other. Sometimes the negative impact of media on the religion is observed. It happens in some situations that the religion becomes mediatised or greatly influenced by media that it cannot convey its message without the help or impact of media. In the present scenario media have become an important if not primary source of information about religious issues.

In different time periods the relation of media and religion is explained through various aspects and angles according to different motives behind. Sometimes this relation is studied to examine the impact of media on religion, sometimes it seems to be a sociological research and sometimes it seems to be mere a goal of the study of media's link to multiple phenomenon of which religion is the one. Sometimes their relation is examined in religious point of view and sometimes it is analyzed through the modern or contemporary age's perspective. However, the dimensions to study the relation of religion and media are plenty. In this work the vast paradigm of the relation of religion and media is brought under the classification of four approaches.

Four Approaches to Study Religion and Media:
Under the following approaches it is tried to have a general view of the role of media and religion in a society by working either separately or together to have a strong link with the human beings.

1. SIMILARITY:

Media and religion play a similar role of mediation between the self and the sacred.[10]Religion is sometimes considered to make a channel between soul and God through institutions, authorities and practices (for example the places of worship, holy texts and prophets/preachers). Like media the religion uses symbols, icons and stories to make sense of the world. In this regard the work of Hent de Vries[11] emphasizes that without the mediatory practices, religion cannot manifest itself.[12] Media have often been framed as 'religion' or 'religious'. Popular music has often been compared to religion, not only through its manifest lyrics but also through the way it constructs and maintains communities around specific subcultures of music.[13] The Irish rock band U2[14] has often been framed in religious and spiritual terms.[15] Although it has the catholic background of its members, but the band's political and social agenda, its iconography and relation to its fans base also becomes a reason for its religious fame.[16]

METHODOLOGY:

The studies under this approach are relatively empirical researches. They are neither in a deductive (theory testing) nor in an inductive (theory building) manner.[17]

2. DISTINCTION:

Media and religion are two distinct fields. They can affect each other.[18] The relation of media and religion has its foundation in the history of development of media. During the centuries from seventeen to twenty first this relationship or the impact of both on each other increased continuously. The relation became very strong especially in the twentieth century by the invention

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[10] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" Ibid

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[12] See Religion and Media, Hent de Vries and Samual Weber (eds.)(Stanford University Press,California, 2001).   Book description is retrieved on 20-0502018 from http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=1316
See "Book Profile: Religion and Media", Melissa Conroy, Syraclace University retrieved on 23-05-2018 from http://www.jcrt.org/archives/05.2/conroy.pdf
Reviews about the book also published in the Journel of Media and Religion,Vol.01,2012, issue:02 retrived on 22-05-2018 from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S15328415JMR0102_4

[13] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" Ibid

[14] See "U2's HISTORY" Matt McGee retrieved on 20-05-2018 from www.u2.com/band

[15] See "U2 at 40:How Bono's band became icons of rock by singing about God " retrieved on 19-05-18   from   *https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2016/October-2016/U2-at-40-How-Bono-s-band-became-icons-by-singing-about-God*

[16]   See "The Theology of U2" Doughlas Taylor retrieved on 19-05-2018 from http://uubinghamton.org/2014/03/the-theology-of-u2/

[17] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" Ibid

[18] Ibid

of new devices and technology improvements.[19] Sometimes the media's interaction with religion is considered very harmful. Especially when after suffering from the neglect for a long period in modern age the religion's importance felt in the end of twentieth century, the western modernity tried to represent a negative picture of religion through media.[20]Religious institutions and individuals have been and still are highly bothered by the rise of the modern mass media. For instance, the dime novels of the 19th century[21] were considered as instruments of Satan in USA.[22] Later on, when the media became more powerful, warnings and guidelines were common instruments for religious authorities against media dangers. In the Netherlands, in 1954, the Catholic bishops prohibited Dutch Catholics to listen to non-catholic radio or watch non-catholic television. In current times, orthodox Christians have called for the Harry Potter books[23] to be banned from school libraries because of their alleged occult and paranormal content.[24]

Another example in this regard can be the instructions issued by the Islamabad High Court to PEMRA to give the thorough respect to the holy month of Ramadan.[25]

Religious institutions, individuals, administrating and ruling authorities would not be so opposed to media if they did not believe the media to be very powerful and undermining force for religious institutions and authorities. Social theory and research have indeed pointed to the increased presence and role of media in everyday life as one of the factors in modernity that has changed religious experience. It is thought that some forms of media such as television has contributed to the disappearance of religion in modern societies. The current wave of television series with paranormal and supernatural themes has been found to transform the religious imagination of young audience.[26]
For example the young generation can deny or misinterpret the concept of angels after watching the animated cartoon series like superman.

The list of such conflicts between religion and particular media is very long and suggests an inherent opposition between the two. However the scholars from media and religion also tried to create a positive image of these fields to work in collaboration.[27] Religious institutions have been among the

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[19] See "The Media, Culture and Religion", Robert A. White published in the journal; Communication Research Trends: Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, (St. Augustine University, Tanzania,Vol. 26, No. 01, 2007)

[20] See "Religion and Media – Reflections on their position and relationship in Southern Africa" Muhammad Haron, published in Global Media Journal African Edition, Vol. 4, 2010, pg. 30*

[21] See "Themes: Dime-Novel SF" retrieved on 22-05-2018 from http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/dime-novel_sf

see "Dime Novels" retrieved on 22-05-2018 from https://www.newberry.org/dime-novels

[22] See "Domestic or Sentimental Fiction" retrieved on 22-05-2018 from https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/domestic.htm

[23] It is a series of books related to the stories of an orphan boy who met some wizards and he also knew some megical tricks and spells. These fiction stories first published in 1970 in UK ang gained much popularity. It is estimated that after Bible these books were sold in largest number. See "Harry Potter" retrieved on 26-05-2018 from https://www.hypable.com/harry-potter/book-history /

[24] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" Ibid

[25] See "IHC orders halting transmission of 'circus shows' during Ramazan" retrieved on 21-05-2018 from https://www.dawn.com>news

See also "Islamabad High Court Ban on Reward Shows in Ramzan-propakistani" retrieved on 22-05-2018 from https://propakistan.pk>islamabad

See "IHC warns TV hosts to maintain decorum during Ramzan…" retrived on 22-05-2018 from https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk>

[26] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" Ibid

[27] See "Research of Media, Religion and Culture in Africa: Current Trends and Debates", Walter c. Ihejirika publishied in the journal African Communication Research,Faculty of Social Sciences and Communications, (St. Augustine University, Tanzania,Vol.2, No.01, 2009), p.7

first to adapt media to spread their message. In Nigeria the message of the Church is spread due to the availability of internet on a large scale. Many groups living even in diaspora now become able to know the current religious issues and they are kept informed about their religious trends on a large scale.[28] The televangelical movement[29] in the US is the prime example in this regard.[30]

Another example in this regard is the religious teaching programs on TV like the recitation of Quran with Urdu translation for one hour from 6 AM to 7 AM and in the evening a program AL-Quran to teach the kids the recitation of Quran with proper rules of recitation are broadcasted on PTV at daily bases.

Methodologies:

There are two types of arguments under this approach that assume that media affect religion in either negative or positive way. These arguments belong to an active media paradigm which gives media enough power over the agency of individuals or groups to create their own meaning. In this paradigm the psychological, experimental or survey research is popular, but qualitative methods are also used. However there are many authors who use descriptive procedures combining theory and secondary sources.[31]

3. **MEDIATIZATION (also taken as convergence):**

Religion has become a thoroughly mediatized experience. The increasing presence of media of some kind in our daily lives, but also in various social, cultural, political and economic spheres has led to the introduction of a new concept in the social sciences and humanities; *mediatisation*. The concept was introduced to studies of media and religion by Stig Hjarvard[32] in his article "*A theory of the media as agents of religious change*."[33] In it, he claims that religion can no longer be studied separately from the media for four reasons:

1. For most people in western societies the media have become the primary source of their religious ideas, whether they concern their own religion or those of others. For example the sharing of views and comments about religious leaders and religious terms are very common through face book or twitter.[34]

2. Media also have become the primary source of religious imagination.

3. Many social functions of religion, especially where it concerns community building and rituals, have been taken over by the media. That is why the difference between ritual and media no longer seems to be prominent as sacred and secular.[35]

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[28] See "Online Religion in Nigeria: the Internet Church and Cyber Miracles", Innocent Chiluwa in the journal Communication and Citizenship, iAMCR Conference, 2010), p. 2

[29] "*Televangelism*" refers to evangelical religious television programming that depends upon viewers for direct financial support. See "Televangelism- Content Pages of the Encyclopedia of Religion and Society" retrieved on 26-05-2018 from http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/Televangelism.htm See "The Unknown History of Televangelism" William F. Fore retrieved on 26-05-2018 from https://www.religion-online.org/article/the-unknown-history-of-televangelism/ *see also "A History of Christian Televangelism: How does it survive?" Emmalin Buajitti, retrieved on 26-05-2018 from* https://medium.com/@rlg233g6/a-history-of-christian-televangelism-how-does-it-survive-4fdea9d6ebd6

[30] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" Ibid

[31] Ibid

[32] He is a professor in the department of Media, Cognition and Communication at University of Copenhagen, Denmark. See "Stig Hjavard – Staff" retrieved on 29-05-2019 from https://mcc.ku.dk/staff/?pure=en/persons/87296

[33] See The mediatisation of religion: "*A theory of the media as agents of religious change*." (published in Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook , vol. 6, Intellect ,2008), p.9-26

[34] See "Religion, Popular Culture and the Social Media: the construction of a religious leader image on Facebook" Professor Mihai COMAN, College of Journalism and Communications, University of Bucharest, ROMANIA, pg. 12

[35] See "Ritual is Becoming Digitilised: Introduction to the special Issue on Rituals on the Internet" Kerstin Radde-Antweiler (published in Online Journal of Religions on the Internet, 2006), p. 1-5

4. Religious institutions themselves have subsumed to 'media logic', i.e. framing their actions and activities in forms appealing to the media, and to audiences that live with media. For example the use of different components of media in the Christian religious institutions is common to convey the message of Bible to the people on a large scale.[36] In the contemporary world many people through their research work are trying to convince the religious authorities as well as the common people to understand the importance of the use of media to spread the religious message effectively because it is the media driven age.[37]

There are various examples which illustrate that how the religious meaning is sent to the people through the use of media at a vital scale. In this regard some researches of the twenty first century clearly explain the matter.[38]Through the rapid advance of media and its highly linked association to the religious terms, many scholars convey their religious messages, views and teaching to a huge number of listeners. In this regard the need of religious institutions seems secondary.[39]

 Sometimes the influence of media on religion increases so much that the religion seems deviating from its separate identity. It appears as a product of media or it becomes mere a market place to exchange different ideas. The religious views seem no longer as religious. In the contemporary media age secular appears to be sacred and sacred appears to be secular. The authority of religious institutions also appears to be fading away by the so much interaction of religion and media.[40]

 'Branding' of religion is one dominant pattern of mediatisation. There are a lot of TV channels specified with scholars of certain type of religious sects. The scholars on these platforms represent their religious views as their special religious brands for gaining acceptance and popularity from the audience. For example, in Pakistan there are many channels associated with the Islamic school of thoughtslike deobandi, brelvi and ahl al-Hadith etc. while on a large scale there are Sunni and Shia scholrs who represent their views through different websites.

Mediatization is probably most visible in the presence and practices of religion on the internet. Christopher Helland[41] has argued that the mediatisation of religion in this regard took the form of 'religion online'.[42]

Methodologies:

The mediatization thesis is in itself is deterministic, assuming that the media act as agents of changes towards religion. Studies in this field often take an active media perspective, and less from a psychological than from a cultural/sociological perspective. Quantitative and qualitative content, text and image analyses are often used here to collect evidence for mediatization.[43]

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[36] See "The use of Media in Ministry: communicating the message" Mike Mazzalongo. Retrieved on 29-05-2018 from https://bibletalk.tv/media-in-ministry

[37] See "Media & Technology in the Church: Why We Need it and Why We Don't" Tamara Panza retrieved on 29-05-2018 from https://northpoint.edu/media-technology-church-need-dont/

[38] See Religious Media Theory: Understanding Mediated Faith and Christian Application of ModernMedia, Raimo Salokangas (ed.) (Jyvaskyla University Printing house, 2003), p. 20

[39] See Digital Religion, Tore Ahlback(ed.) (Donner Institute of Research in Religion and Cultural History, Finland, 2013), p. 190-198

[40] Religion in the Media Age, Project Public Lectures, Stewart Hoover, (London: Rutledge, 2006), p.4-6

[41] He is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Dalhousie University. His major research area is Sociology of Religion. See "Christopher Helland" retrieved on 29-05-2018 from https://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/sociology-social-anthropology/faculty-staff/our-faculty/christopher-helland.html

[42] See *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises"* Helland, C. in Online Religion, Jeffery K. Hadden and Douglas E. Cowan (Eds.), (JAI Press: New York, 2000), p. 205-224

[43] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" Ibid

4. ARTICULATION:

The way to relate media and religion is neither stable, nor predictable and depends on audience. 'Articulation' is a general term that refers to the shape or manner in which things come together and a connection is made.[44] Articulation of a structure of system is the way in which its different parts or elements are connected.[45] With reference to the relation of media and religion, articulation refers to the way people appropriate different forms of media with reference to religion for their own purpose and understanding. In the context of religion and media, it refers to the approach Stewart Hoover[46] defines in his book *"Religion in the Media Age"*[47] which locates the analysis of religion and media radically in the experience of people as they encounter their social and cultural lives, of which the media play an ever more important part'. Yet, which media these are, whether they are always the same, under which circumstances, in which environment and in which times they change is a question that has hardly been addressed nor answered yet. The notion of 'articulation', however, implies that the starting point for any investigation should be with the people themselves and how they experience particular media as integrated in or separate from their religious experience. This is different from the previous approaches; it acknowledges the empirical possibility of similarity between media and religious experience, separation between media and religion, or completely mediatized religion. Different talk shows, public participation programs and the onlone interview conducted at social areas or at public gatherings indicate toward the articulation of media and religion. The practice of non-religious customs at the religious occasions and the adaptation or dealing of many cultural values as religious ones depict the glimpses of articulation between religion and culture alongside the views of people regarding this.

Methodologies:

Research in this area assumes that audiences are active producers of meaning, in interaction with each other and the text of interest. As a result of the situated nature of 'articulation', studies that would fall under this approach are quite diverse. One important area of research puts everyday experiences at the centre of the research; another important one looks at different interactions between media, religion and the public sphere. The methodology of preference is inductive and often based in grounded theory, using methods like in-depth interviews, focus groups and observations.[48]

CONCLUSION:

The following are some examples that show the results obtained from the research:

1. If the study of the relation between religion and the media is specified under the aforementioned techniques (whether it is confined to a single approach or all four ways as a whole are accepted), a very simple and clear picture emerges for a solid comprehension of the topic. Although the wide paradigm of the interaction between religion and the media cannot be covered by simply these approaches, they can nonetheless give a basic and precise image of the study of religion and media, even if they do not describe the whole or complete one.

2. Carrying out research using these methodologies may be beneficial in establishing the relationship between religion and the media in a manner that is clear and concise.

3. The interplay between different forms of media and different religions in today's world appears to be inevitable and unavoidable. Therefore, there must to be the prudent planning and management

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[44] See "Articulation" retrieved on 29-05-2018 from https://www.vocabulary.com>dictionary

[45] See "Articulation: definition and meaning" retrieved on 29-05-2018 from https://www.collinsdictionary.com

[46] He is a Professor in the Department of Media Studies and Director of Center for Media, Religion and Culture at College of Media, Communication and Information at University of Colorado, Boulder. See "Stewart M. Hoover" retrieved on 29-05-2018 from https://www.colorado.edu/cmci/people/media-studies/stewart-m-hoover

[47] See Religion in the Media Age, Ibid

[48] See "Four approaches to the study of media and religion - University of Kent" Ibid

behind this contact in order for both of them to be able to effectively play the job that society has assigned them.

4. The message of religion can be effectively communicated to a wide variety of people of different ages through the use of the media. The optimistic mindset that is necessary for this is one that will enable the media to present the world with an accurate depiction of a religion. It is clear that the media portray religion in a negative light by attaching some form of evil concept with it. This is evident in today's society due to various unfavorable trends. For instance, sometimes an extreme or terrorist group is shown to be affiliated with a certain religion in order to establish a negative image of a religion or to propagate hatred for it in the minds of general people. This can be done both intentionally and unintentionally. In a similar vein, religion is frequently used to see the media as being secular, atheist, and bad, among other things. It is imperative that efforts be made to eradicate such a way of thinking.

5. The media can be a source that not only creates an accurate impression of a particular religion, but it can also create an environment in which all of the world's religions can coexist in harmony.

6. The media is occasionally used to portray a very dull and unpleasant picture of religion; this kind of negative aspect should be erased from the thoughts of the audience through the positive and neutral usage of media for a religion. 6.

7. The positive and impartial use of media to expound the message of religion can also become a plus point for media because doing so helps people establish a positive and good view of the media as well. This is a win-win situation for everyone involved.

8. A study of the relationship between religion and the media can be very interesting and enlightening if it takes a particular approach. This is because the study illustrates the roles that religion and the media play in society, as well as the roles that one plays for the other.

9. Due to the fact that the link between the media and religion is always evolving, the field of study surrounding this topic is wide open and can be approached from any angle or perspective. The opportunity to work in this sector is vast and encompasses many different dimensions as a result of the advancements in science and technology as well as the emergence of new religious perspectives. In conclusion, the research outcomes highlight the significance of understanding the influence of media on religious discourse. By recognizing the potential challenges and opportunities, scholars, media practitioners, and religious leaders can collaboratively foster a positive and constructive portrayal of religion, promoting harmonious interactions and mutual understanding in our diverse and interconnected world.

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[13] The mediatisation of religion: theorizing religion, media and social change published in Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook , vol. 6, Intellect ,2008 retrieved on 15-05-18 from www.ingentaconnect.com

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