

The Modern Religious Programs on Television and their Impact on Islam Advocacy

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Abstract

The study aims to identify the impact of modern religious programs broadcasted in our present time on the path of Islamic advocacy and their success in disseminating religious knowledge and culture using the latest technological and artistic techniques.

Where the study used qualitative descriptive research, exploring the concept of modern religious programs, their origins, development, classifications, and the essential features necessary for contemporary preachers. The study concluded several key findings, principally, the significance of religious programs lies in being vital sources for acquiring religious information and Islamic advocacy. These programs are defined as those televised via satellite channels, addressing Islamic religious topics. These programs vary in their topics, functions, and targeted audiences. They have evolved significantly on television, becoming an integral part of channels and programming worldwide. Religious programs are classified based on their format, including traditional programs, dialogue-based religious programs, special programs, drama programs, and cartoons. Among these, dialogue-based religious programs are considered the most important and widely recognized. The preacher calling to Allah should embody personal attributes such as knowledge, sincerity, dedication, strength, gentleness, and eloquence. Additionally, they should understand their limitations, remain calm under pressure, and uphold personal hygiene while taking care of their appearance.

Keywords: Modern Religious Programs, The Emergence of Religious Programs, Dialogue-Based Programs, A Distinguished Preacher.

Introduction

The religious programs broadcasted on television are considered one of the most important sources for acquiring religious information. Therefore, it has become crucial to polish and organize these programs to have a presence that elevates the standards of their specialized field. Undoubtedly, there are new religious channels that have made a tangible impact on the audience, occupying a media space that has remained vacant for many decades. They have diligently worked within their varying capacities to educate Muslims about their religion and present its brighter aspects. The impact of these programs have been an influential source for

enhancing religious knowledge, cultural awareness, promoting religious awareness, and disseminating diverse religious knowledge (Al-Otaibi, 2009, p. 21).

Abu Rustum believes that the most important modern technologies used in the field of television, aimed at attracting and increasing followers, involve the usage of specialized software and equipment employed by satellite channel management. Their objective is to produce media content at the highest levels of quality, thereby disseminating the latest developments through these technologies. The most important of these technologies are manifested in visual effects and auditory effects. Devices such as high-resolution image display equipment, video recording and playback devices, editing devices, image mixing devices, digital effects, graphics, and design tools are vital for delivering images in the best possible condition to viewers. Additionally, auditory effects, such as microphones, speakers, sound mixers, magnetic audio recording devices, sound measuring devices, and others, have the capability to reach the viewers' ears and influence them as much as possible (Abu Rustum, 2012).

Therefore, the use of modern television technologies in covering religious programs is a fundamental task in the production of television religious content. This has significantly increased their importance, as seen in the process of selecting and differentiating between religious programs for broadcasting. The aim is to attract the attention of viewers and those interested in this field, to study and uncover these programs, and to elucidate their significance for the audience (Al-Azzah, 2021, 6).

The Concept of Religious Programs on Arab Satellite Channels and Their Development

Shalabi defined religious programs in the Glossary of Media Terms as "planned programs that address Islamic religious topics and vary in their topics, functions, and target audience, within specialized programs that enhance the commitment of the listener or viewer to their Islamic beliefs and obligations" (Shalabi, 1989, 471).

Meanwhile, researcher El Tigani described them as "a collection of programs presented by Arab satellite channels within their various programs that have gained good popularity among the public in the Islamic world. These programs include talk shows hosting religious scholars, answering callers' questions via telephone, recorded programs, live broadcasting, and these programs contribute to public awareness and education. They also carry a message defending Islam as a religion of tolerance and moderation, rejecting injustice, aggression, and terrorism" (El Tigani, 2020, 88).

On the other hand, researcher Barakat defined a religious program as "a program through which communication professionals on television channels and preachers aim to influence the future audience of the media message, educate them religiously, and crystallize their mature religious awareness within the social framework. They utilize various and multiple persuasive methods to achieve this goal, considering it the highest objective pursued by those engaged in communication" (Barakat, 2016, 268).

Religious programs are considered specialized program formats offered by satellite channels or social media platforms, whether on general satellite screens or on dedicated religious channels. Since around 1970, Islamic media outlets, in general, have witnessed continuous development. Some Islamic media have swiftly embraced each new technological advancement. The general motivation for utilizing new and available media in the Islamic project for education and persuasion has deep roots. Technological changes have played a significant role in shaping and highlighting religious channels and preachers. Through these

developments, Islamic figures have gained prominent status in Arab and Islamic countries (Al-Omari, 2017, p. 54).

Although religious programs have made a clear mark on television, their impact has been relatively modest compared to other types of programming. They did not receive as much attention as entertainment or even news programs. Typically, these religious programs consisted of discussions, religious readings, and recitations of Quranic verses. Over time, the content and styles of religious media discourse diversified, adopting various formats such as radio symposiums, religious drama, religious series, calls to prayer (Adhan), Friday sermons, and others.

Subsequently, there was a shift towards establishing specialized religious radio stations, which became a cornerstone of religious media. The Quran Radio was established in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and the Islam Calling Radio in Mecca. Algeria followed suit by launching its Quran Radio in the 1990s. Today, almost all Islamic countries have radio stations and channels dedicated to the Quran. Moreover, specialized religious satellite channels have proliferated in Islamic countries, such as the Al Majd satellite channels series, Iqraa Channel, and Al Resalah Channel (Bayou, 2021, p. 189).

After the spread of Arab and global satellite television, facilitated by satellites, there was a noticeable diversification in religious programs. Programs focused on preaching, guidance, dialogues, Fatwa (religious edicts), and biographical shows became prevalent. This significant step marked a positive advancement for religious programs in the present time.

The Classifications of Religious Programs on Satellite Channels and Their Forms

Religious programs specialize in matters related to religion to enhance religious culture and awareness. Often, specialized religious programs encompass various aspects of religion, whether the program's focus is on creed, or jurisprudence, recounting religious stories from the Quran, the tales of prophets, the lives of companions, or the followers of the Prophet Muhammad. These programs aim to draw lessons, convey ideas, and instill desired values in understanding the correct religious teachings and adhering to the righteous path.

To reach a larger audience and call them to religion with our best efforts, it is essential to diversify programs, their ideas, content, and formats to cater to all ages and intellectual differences. Religious programs are classified into two main axes:

The First Axis: Types of religious programs according to their format and presentation style

Religious programs are categorized based on their presentation format into several sections:

- **First:** Traditional religious program: Direct talk format: This is one of the simplest types of programs, focusing on a single speaker, either a preacher or a distinguished scholar, addressing the audience directly. It heavily relies on the speaker's persona, requiring them to be engaging in appearance, voice, tone, and their ability to present the subject matter with simplicity and clarity to captivate viewers' attention and prevent boredom (Nawwara & Ilham, 2017, p. 22).
- **Second:** Dialogue-based religious program: This is considered one of the most important and widely recognized programs. It could involve a host with one distinguished guest scholar or preacher, or the host might engage multiple guests. Dialogue is a common element in most program formats, as it serves as the primary means of obtaining information from the guests. One of the key features of dialogue-based programs is the diversity of opinions and perspectives, drawing knowledge from

multiple scholars according to their ideologies and thoughts, aiming to demonstrate the beauty and excellence of ethical religious discourse characterized by politeness and constructive criticism (Mouwad, 2002, p. 14).

- **Third:** Specialized program: This program focuses on a single topic and aims to present it using various artistic formats such as songs, investigations, visuals from newspapers, and snapshots. It includes elements of movement, diversity, transition between scenes, situations, sections, and contrasting opinions, all to create suspense, anticipation, deepen details, and explanations. Furthermore, it involves comparisons to provide comprehensive information about a single topic. The program is closely related to the producer's style, delivering the idea effectively to the audience (Al-Shamemri, 2010, p. 221).
- **Fourth:** Drama or cartoon programs: These programs present religious stories in a dramatic or cartoon format. They can include stories mentioned in the Quran, during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, in the era of the Imams and followers, or imaginative stories with a religious aim to influence people, guide them towards God, and encourage them to follow His teachings. These programs have a strong impact on children, educating them about their religion, past civilizations, and important figures to emulate. They also influence and soften the hearts of all generations towards their faith.

The Second Axis: Types of religious programs based on content and substance.

First: Jurisprudential programs (Fatwa); these are specialized programs that deal with various and diverse jurisprudential matters. These programs are managed by scholars well-versed in the fundamentals of jurisprudence, capable of providing answers to any fatwa based on Quranic evidence, the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith), or scholarly consensus (Ijma). They are proficient and mentally prepared to analyze contemporary issues in religion by drawing analogies with similar matters that arose during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to issue fatwa to the public accordingly.

Second: Narrative programs about biographies and historical events; these programs are dedicated to storytelling, whether it's a complete program with each episode presenting a different story or a serialized program focusing on a single story, where each episode is a part of that narrative. The biography of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the lives of his noble companions are rich sources for developing valuable and insightful religious programs. They guide individuals, assess the practical aspects of Islamic pillars, and reinforce the fundamental principles and values of Islam (Al-Saffar, 1982, p. 100).

Third: Religious educational programs: These programs are specialized in educating viewers about any religious topic, such as programs on Quranic exegesis, Hadith, scholars, or teaching people the rules of Quranic recitation (Tajweed) and other similar programs. Such programs can either be traditional, where the presenter is an esteemed scholar leading the session, or dialogic with one or more guests. The primary goal of these programs is to educate and inform the audience.

Fourth: Religious social programs: These programs shed light on societal issues, aiming to address and solve them. For instance, volunteer programs that focus on showcasing the living conditions of the impoverished, their households, incomes, and assisting them in initiating small-scale projects for sustenance. These initiatives are sometimes publicized in the media

to attract the attention of affluent individuals and charitable organizations, encouraging them to offer their donations and alms to support these families. Moreover, social programs might involve religious questions posed to the local community to gauge the level of religious knowledge among individuals. This helps scholars and preachers assess the community's religious literacy, intensify their advocacy, courses, and educational programs, serving as an incentive for them to spread religion and religious culture.

Fifth: Religious documentary programs: This type heavily relies on historical facts, constants, and variables, along with the analytical abilities of the content creator, which express their cultural depth and vision. When presenting documentary material, the producer should consider the availability of sufficient information regarding historical religious topics or geographic subjects. For instance, the story of the people of the cave could be detailed in a fascinating manner using a specialized documentary style that includes visuals of the locations and timelines, captivating viewers' curiosity and interest until the end of the program. The program producer must determine the importance of the documentary subject and delve into it, using a professional approach to present the material across time. A good documentary text is cohesive, carries objective unity, presents diverse presentation tools, uses simple yet sophisticated language, and embodies somewhat new facts for the audience (Mahdi, 2020).

Qualities of an outstanding preacher on modern television

When asked about his opinion regarding a successful preacher and the qualifications that should be present to enhance the effectiveness of the call and influence the callers, Sheikh Ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) responded: 'A successful preacher is one who cares about evidence, endures hardships, and exerts his utmost effort in calling to Allah, no matter the temptations or the exhaustion faced. They do not weaken due to harm or because of the words they hear. Instead, they must remain patient and make every effort to call people to Allah through all means, with attention to evidence and proper methods. The call should be based on a compelling foundation that pleases Allah, His Messenger, and the believers. One must beware of being lenient, to avoid speaking about Allah without knowledge. Therefore, they should have complete concern for the religious evidence and endure the hardship in calling to Allah, whether through media or education. This is the successful preacher deserving of praise and high status with Allah, provided that it is done sincerity to Allah'" (Saad, 2006, p. 488).

Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya - may Allah have mercy on him - mentioned two fundamental conditions for conveying the message of Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him). He said: "Since conveying the message of Allah depends on knowing what is conveyed and being truthful in it, the rank of conveying through narration and fatwa is not appropriate except for those characterized by knowledge and truthfulness. Such a person is knowledgeable about what they convey and truthful in it. Moreover, they maintain good manners, possess agreeable conduct, are just in their words and actions, combine the aspects of secrecy and public appearance, and have consistent behavior in their conduct, entrance, and exit. If the position of signing on behalf of kings in a location where their virtues are undeniable and their rank is not unknown, is among the highest earthly positions, then what about the position of representing the Lord of the heavens and the earth? The mufti should be aware of the one who represents him in issuing fatwa and be certain that he will be held accountable in front of Allah" (Al-Jawziyya, 1991, p. 10).

Given the significance of the role of Islam Advocacy (da'wah) and its excellence compared to other roles, it is essential to mention the most important qualities of the media Islamic

preacher (Da'i) that should be embodied. These qualities include those inherent to the personal characteristics of the preachers themselves, as well as those related to their media work in calling people to Allah.

Personal Qualities of the Preacher

1. **Knowledge:** The call to Allah will not yield its fruits nor achieve its desired results unless the preacher has a close connection with the sciences and knowledge from which they must acquire. Through the acquisition of such knowledge, a broad culture is developed, and a familiarity with the issues of their nation and the problems of their time is gained. They should have the ability to appeal to emotions and stir ambitions through compelling arguments, clear evidence, and strong proof. Since the knowledge of calling is connected with other sciences, it becomes the source for introducing Islam, explaining its rulings, and calling people to it. It is a means to the noblest goal. Therefore, the preacher to Allah should be knowledgeable, well-informed, and well-versed in other sciences that benefit them in the field of calling to Islam.
2. **Truthful and Sincerity:** Those who are resolute in calling to Allah, sincere and truthful, are not deterred from their path by trials, nor do they waver in their mission due to hardships. No tribulation diverts them from their call; instead, they remain steadfast in their position, unaffected by any word or incident that may obstruct their path. (Al Saqabi, 2007, p.16). Truthfulness in the path of calling to Allah and sincerity in the work grant the preacher strength because they seek no reward or thanks from anyone; their intention is solely connected to seeking the pleasure of Allah and attaining His paradise. Al-Shafi'i expressed this sentiment when he said, "I wished that people benefited from this knowledge, and nothing of it was attributed to me." (Al-Ghazali, 1900, p.45).
3. **Strength:** Narrated: Abu Huraira From Sahih Muslim. One day the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, " A strong believer is better and is more lovable to Allah than a weak believer." (Sahih Muslim, 338). A strong believer is preferable because their strength allows them to support the weak and defend truth and justice. In the context of calling to Allah, strength is sought after and valued in Islamic teachings. It is part of the character of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) that he preferred and gave precedence to a strong leader over a weak one in positions of authority. He used to say, " Oh Allah, I seek refuge in You from the disgrace of the sinner and the inability of the feeble" (Al-Mahmoud, 2006, 62).

When the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned at the outset of his mission that Abdullah bin Omar (may Allah be pleased with him) prayed, " O Allah, strengthen Islam with one of two Umar," (al-Tirmidhī, 60), referring to either Amr ibn Hisham (Abu Jahl) or Umar ibn al-Khattab, it was due to their influential positions. Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) was known for his strength and power even before Islam, as was Abu Jahl, whose real name was Amr ibn Hisham. The Prophet (peace be upon him) hoped for their acceptance of Islam because of the honor, strength, and support they could provide to Islam in its initial stages. Therefore, a strong preacher's message holds greater hope of reaching hearts. (Al-Saqqaf, 2001).

4. **To be gentle, kind, and easy-going:** The ideal preacher should aspire to emulate the noble character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He wasn't domineering, commanding or forbidding with severity on Earth. Instead, he was a humble, gentle, and

approachable Messenger, treating his family and companions with a cheerful countenance and without affectation. An old woman stopped him and asked about religious matters, and he patiently stood and engaged with her for as long as necessary. This was the noble character of our Prophet (peace be upon him). (Al-Qadiri, 2000).

Qualities of a Professional Preacher in Media

1. **Skill in persuasion:** Barakat defines the skill of persuasion as an "organized and deliberate effort that utilizes various means to influence the opinions and thoughts of others, aiming to make them accept and agree with a specific viewpoint on a particular subject, employing psychological and social knowledge of the targeted audience" (Barakat, 2016, p. 32). For an Islamic preacher in the media, the ability to persuade is one of the most important skills to promote or enhance religious content, creating a strategy that generates convincing public opinion, i.e., the audience of the preacher. Therefore, the matter of persuasion is not an easy task faced by preachers in religious programs. It requires training, practice, effort, tactics, and effectiveness in performance, suitable for Islamic media advocacy. They need to understand the interests, opinions, and thoughts of the targeted audience and strive to persuade them using diverse skills aligned with their objectives and goals (Youssef & Al-Samad Ali, 2014, p. 319).
2. **Understand the limits of the body's capacity:** is advisable for the media preacher, especially when conducting live religious programs where specific questions are posed by the audience, either through phones or from guests, to carefully consider before responding. If they are not thoroughly knowledgeable about the topic, it's important not to hasten in answering or to admit when unsure to avoid making mistakes. There are numerous individuals eager to find faults in Islamic scholars and preachers, waiting for any error to exploit and misrepresent Islamic beliefs. Therefore, media preachers should be well-versed in the subject matter they discuss on-screen, comprehend its various aspects, and read extensively on related topics to present their arguments effectively. They should be prepared for any unexpected external interventions.
3. **Not to get angry for themselves:** With the widespread use of social media, criticism towards Islamic scholars and attempts to seize upon mistakes made by preachers have increased significantly. Therefore, it's essential for preachers not to become angry for personal reasons, but rather to reserve their anger for anyone who infringes upon the rights of Allah, ridicules religion, or violates Islamic sanctities. In such instances, it becomes imperative for them to defend Islam through various means and respond to critics of Islam, not those personally criticizing them. Since adversaries of preachers and scholars are many, it's certain they will face criticism. Responding directly to critics might diminish the preacher's stature or compromise their composure in front of their audience. It could even weaken their faith if they get angrier for personal reasons than for the sake of defending their religion. Therefore, it's important to exhibit the manners of the Prophet and emulate his behavior as much as possible in their path of calling others to Allah. As narrated by Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her): "Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) never took revenge for his own self in any matter presented to him till Allah's limits were exceeded, in which case he would take revenge for Allah's sake." (Bukhari, 6126).
4. **Maintain cleanliness and care for appearance and attire:** Those with the highest sense of refinement are the preachers who convey the image of Islam and how a Muslim should ideally be. It's crucial for them to capture people's attention, hearts, and emotions.

Therefore, the cleanliness, elegance, coordination, and appropriateness of clothing are crucial factors for the success of a preacher in their call (Abu Zethar, 2014).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can summarize the key findings of this research, which are:

1. The significance of religious programs lies in being essential sources of Islamic knowledge and advocacy of Islamic teachings.
2. Religious programs are defined as television broadcasts that cover Islamic religious topics, varying in subjects, functions, and targeted audience.
3. Over time, religious programs on television have witnessed significant evolution, becoming a prevalent feature on channels worldwide, present in virtually every country.
4. These religious programs are categorized based on their presentation format, including traditional programs, dialogical religious programs, specialized programs, drama series, and cartoons.
5. The dialogical religious programs are considered among the most significant and popular religious programs ever.
6. Religious programs can be categorized based on content into jurisprudential (fiqh) programs, narrative programs, educational programs, religious social programs, and religious documentary programs.
7. A preacher calling to Allah should possess distinct personal qualities such as knowledge, honesty, sincerity, strength, humility, and professional skills. It's essential to be skilled in persuasion, aware of one's limitations, not getting angry for himself, and to maintain personal hygiene and appearance.

Recommendations

- Increasing the production of modern religious programs that cater to the significant advancements in our present time.
- Conducting surveys to understand the nature of religious programs that attract audiences, assisting in planning successful religious program productions.
- Leveraging social media platforms to advertise religious programs in an engaging manner, prompting viewers to gravitate toward them.
- Encouraging researchers to write more field and analytical studies related to contemporary program viewership, aiming to provide valuable insights to experts and scholars for the advancement of Islamic advocacy to a level that befits it.

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