

## IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The intricate relationship between religion and communication unveils a profound tapestry of human experience, where belief systems intersect with the dynamic channels through which societies connect. This article delves into the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of this interplay, exploring its influence on personal beliefs, societal dynamics, and the globalized communication landscape.*

*Religion, as a cornerstone of human existence, provides individuals with a framework to comprehend their purpose and connection to the world. Communication, serving as the vital thread weaving societies together, channels religious teachings through diverse forms — from sacred texts and rituals to interpersonal dialogues and virtual spaces. Sacred narratives, symbols, and rituals transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity among believers throughout history.*

*Conversely, the impact of communication on religious experiences is undeniable. In an era of globalization and technological advancements, social media platforms offer virtual spaces for believers to share their faith, engage in dialogue, and form connections beyond geographical constraints. This interconnectedness introduces both challenges and opportunities as religious communities grapple with diverse perspectives within the globalized communication landscape.*

*Examining the historical evolution and contemporary dynamics of this relationship reveals its influence on personal beliefs and societal structures. The efficacy of religious messages hinges on the strategic use of communication by religious institutions, while the advent of new technologies prompts a re-evaluation of tradition in a diverse and interconnected world.*

*This article seeks to navigate the multifaceted interplay between religion and communication, shedding light on the threads that bind individuals and communities together. By understanding the historical roots and contemporary challenges, we aim to foster dialogue, understanding, and tolerance in a spiritually diverse and technologically interconnected world, unraveling the complex yet essential nexus between religion and communication.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Communication, Religion, Culture, Technology*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Two essential components of human existence, religion and communication, have shaped nations, societies, and individual lives throughout history. The confluence of these two potent forces offers an intriguing prism through which to see belief systems, interpersonal relationships, and the dynamics of human contact with the supernatural.

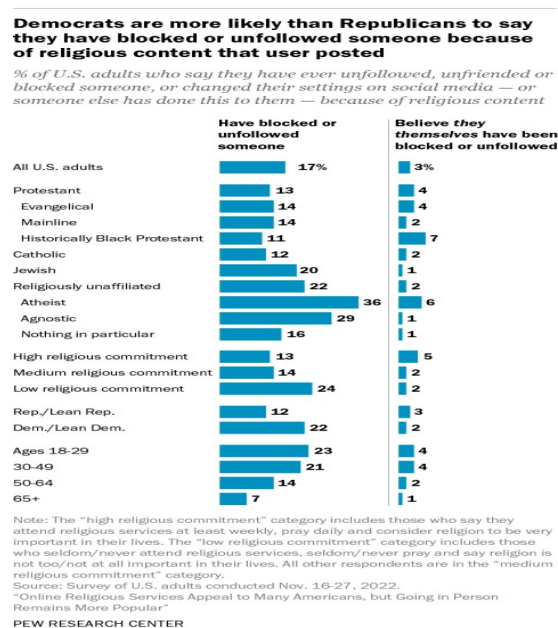
Religion is a cornerstone in the enormous tapestry of human experience, providing people with a framework for comprehending the world, their place in it, and their interactions with others. In addition, communication facilitates the exchange of ideas, opinions, and feelings amongst members of communities and acts as the vital thread binding societies together. A complex and dynamic interaction that affects our lives' interpersonal and spiritual aspects arises when these two forces come together.

Religious environments provide a variety of platforms for communication, from rites and sacred texts to interpersonal conversations and community meetings. In addition to spreading religious doctrine, these platforms help believers develop a feeling of community and common identity. Religious leaders and adherents have used parables, storytelling, and symbols as potent communication techniques throughout history, overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers to impart important truths.

On the other hand, communication has a similarly significant impact on religious experiences. The way we connect has changed due to globalization and technological improvements, and religious communities now have to navigate a complicated web of contacts. For example, social media platforms provide a virtual environment where Christians can discuss their faith, interact with one another, and build relationships beyond geographic bounds. This connection presents benefits as well as challenges, as people struggle to make sense of the various viewpoints and interpretations that surface in an increasingly international communication environment.

It is clear as we examine the complex interrelationship between religion and communication that these factors influence not just society dynamics at large but also individual beliefs. The efficiency of communication tactics used by religious institutions has a direct bearing on how well religious messages resonate with people. In addition, as communication technologies advance, concerns about tradition's place in a world growing more diverse and linked are brought to light.

A study in the US reveals that every 6<sup>th</sup> person do not want to interact on social media due to their religious posts.



**Figure 1**

Social media has completely changed how individuals exchange information, communicate, and create opinions. In addition to offering countless chances for social interaction and freedom of speech, this digital sphere has developed into a potent conduit for religious propaganda. Social media is used by religious organizations and individuals to further their views, create communities, and even disseminate false or damaging narratives. In this situation, education is essential for assisting people in navigating this challenging environment.

For better or worse, social media has increased the impact and reach of religious messages. It has the capacity to sow discord, ignorance, and propaganda just as effectively as it can foster understanding and spiritual development. To ensure that people can critically and ethically engage with religious content, education is essential. Education enables individuals to discern between authentic religious speech and deceptive propaganda by promoting media literacy and tolerance, leading to a more knowledgeable and peaceful community.

This article seeks to explore the multifaceted interplay between religion and communication, delving into historical contexts, contemporary challenges, and the potential for fostering understanding and tolerance. By examining how these two fundamental aspects intersect, we aim to uncover the threads that bind individuals and communities together, fostering dialogue and connection in a world that is both spiritually diverse and technologically interconnected.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to determine

- The extent to which the audience is influenced by the information given by the Social media on religion.
- The rationale behind using social media to post content for religious propaganda.
- The belief in the content given to be true to reality.

### **Research Gap**

While existing studies have explored the general influence of social media on religion, there is a lack of comprehensive research focusing specifically on how different demographic factors (such as age, education level, cultural background, and socio-economic status) affect the perception and reception of religious propaganda disseminated through social media platforms. Additionally, the mechanisms through which social media shapes religious beliefs, such as emotional engagement or cognitive processing, remain underexplored.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Smith (2018) investigated the use of social media by religious organizations, particularly evangelical ones, as a means of religious mobilization. The study demonstrates how religious leaders use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to spread their beliefs and grow their fan bases. Smith comes to the conclusion that social media has made it easier for tiny sects to reach a worldwide audience by lowering the entry barrier for religious promotion. The report highlights the transition from conventional religious communication strategies to more direct, tailored kinds of outreach via digital platforms.

Jones (2020) investigated the relationship that social media facilitates between political extremism and religious propaganda. This study focuses on extremist organizations such as ISIS that use social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube to propagate their messaging, find new recruits, and amplify their beliefs. According to the study, social media

helps spread false information quickly and creates echo chambers, which are two ways that religious extremist propaganda uses it as a medium.

Turner (2019) explores how religious organizations can influence their narratives on social media sites like Instagram and Twitter, thereby shaping the nature of contemporary religious debate. The study demonstrates how religious propaganda uses images and brief text to appeal to younger people while adapting to the condensed formats of social media. Turner also looks at how the decentralized structure of internet communication can cause religious authorities to occasionally lose control over their narratives.

Miller and Jenkins (2021) investigated how content recommendations made by social media algorithms that support pre-existing opinions lead to religious polarization. Their research shows how social media users are subjected to a loop of confirmation bias since they are frequently exposed to content that supports their religious beliefs. They contend that the exposure to different points of view is restricted and that the propagation of religious propaganda is accelerated by this algorithmic tailoring.

Rahman (2017) looked into the use of social media by authoritarian governments to disseminate religious propaganda in an effort to keep the populace under control. This study focuses on Middle Eastern nations where state-approved religious organizations propagate state-approved religious views through the usage of social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. Rahman contends that in highly regulated nations, social media can be an effective medium for top-down religious messaging even though it is a tool for free speech.

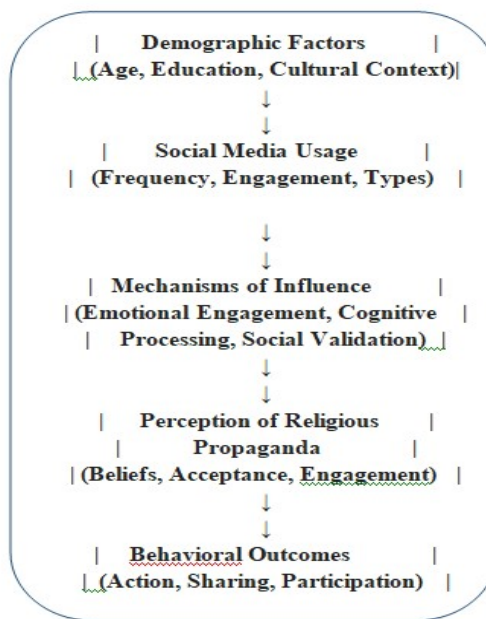
Patel (2022) looked at how social media, especially in mixed countries, influences the establishment of religious identities in a study centered on young people. This study looks at how religious institutions use social media sites like Instagram and TikTok to reach young people and visually appealingly convey basic religious lessons. According to Patel's research, these platforms have a big influence on how young people think and behave in terms of religion since they provide a forum for religious propaganda that fits in with their online preferences.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

- Social Media loyalty is changing the thought process of the viewers as it has become the default channel for communication.
- Media content is influencing the viewers to understand and perceive it in the same intensity as projected.
- Social Media among all the others is posing to be a major influencer in society. Social Media is being used by every industry to promote/ propagate the ideology.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A conceptual framework can help visualize the relationships between the variables involved in the study. Below is a proposed framework for investigating the impact of social media on religious propaganda:



**Figure 2**

- **Demographic Factors:** This variable encompasses characteristics such as age, education level, cultural background, and socio-economic status. It influences how individuals engage with social media and interpret religious content.
- **Social Media Usage:** This includes the frequency of use, the type of content consumed, and the level of engagement with religious posts. Understanding these behaviors is crucial to examining their impact.
- **Mechanisms of Influence:** This component explores how social media affects perceptions through emotional engagement (e.g., feelings evoked by the content), cognitive processing (how users analyze and interpret the information), and social validation (the reinforcement received from peers).
- **Perception of Religious Propaganda:** This variable looks at how individuals perceive and accept religious content shared on social media. It includes their beliefs, levels of acceptance, and overall engagement with the propaganda.
- **Behavioral Outcomes:** This final component assesses the actual behaviors resulting from the perceptions formed, such as actions taken in support of the religious message, sharing of content, and participation in religious activities facilitated by social media.

This conceptual framework provides a structured approach to exploring the impact of social media on religious propaganda. By examining the influence of demographic factors, social media usage, and mechanisms of influence, the study aims to fill the identified research gap and contribute valuable insights to the field.

The major findings of a research paper on “Social Media – Trendsetter for Social Justice” published in B.Aadhar, Multidisciplinary International Research Journal suggested :

- All the respondents are users of social media websites and use mobile applications to communicate.
- 61.6 % of the respondents being professionals are on social media

- 71% are on Whats App
- Majority of the respondents use Social media for communication and not to discuss social issues.
- 79.3% of the respondents feel that social media is an apt channel to stand up for social cause but to not participate in the any such activity.
- 62.2% respondents feel that media is the way to achieve social justice.

The fact that, if media, especially social media can play a significant role in bringing about social justice, the influence of media at large will have a tremendous impact on the society. This study is specific to the population who use the media as a guideline to mirror the content that is shared.

### Theoretical Framework

- Uses and Gratification Theory discusses the effects of the media on people.
- Social Cognitive Theory provides a framework for understanding how the environment is shaped and shapes the people.
- Socio Cultural Theory explains that the mental abilities of the people are dependent on the way the people interact with others and the culture they live in.

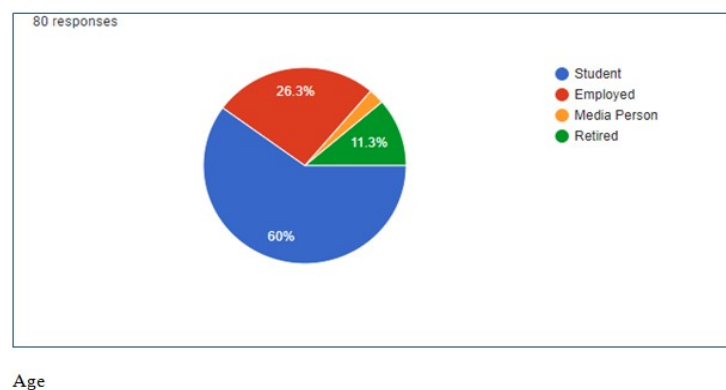
A survey through questionnaire was conducted with 80 respondents to determine the influence of socialmedia on propaganda of religious content.

### Hypothesis

- There is a significant influence of social media information on the audience's perceptions of religion.
- There are significant reasons for using social media as a platform for religious propaganda.
- The audience believes that the content provided on social media is true to reality.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Profession



**Figure 3**

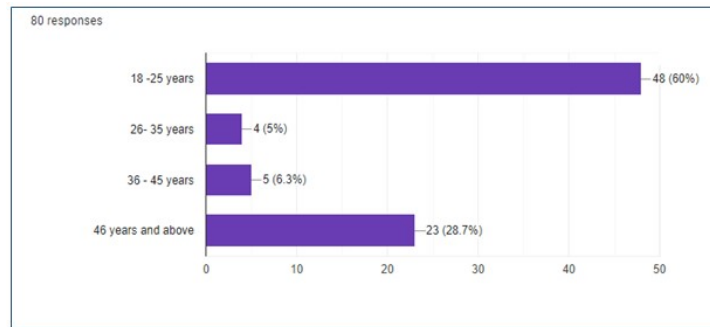


Figure 4

Do you subscribe to Social Media ?

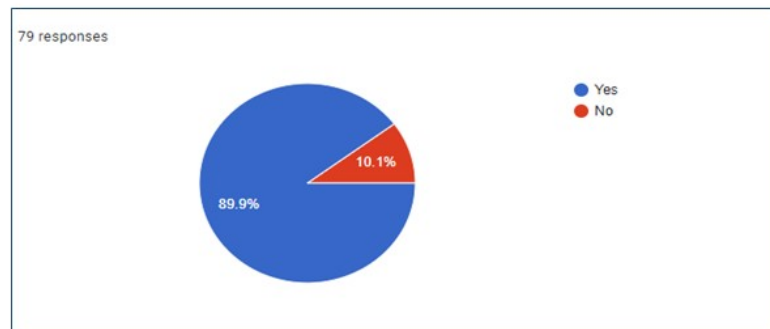


Figure 5

### Segment 1

How often do you use Social Media?

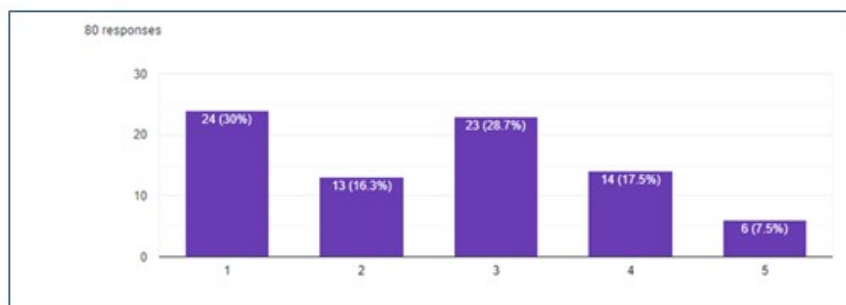


Figure 6

Do you post self researched content on religion in Social Media ?

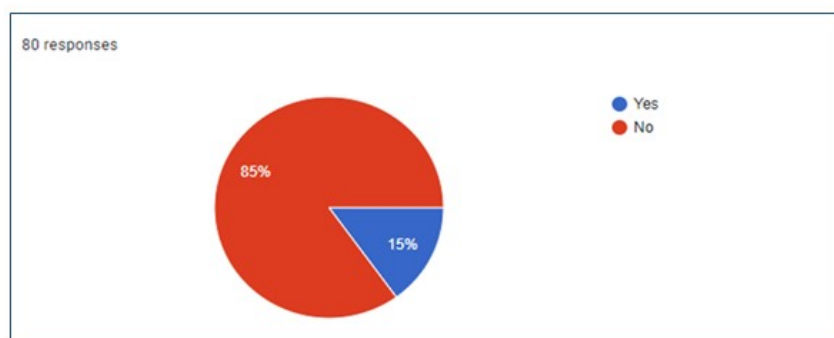
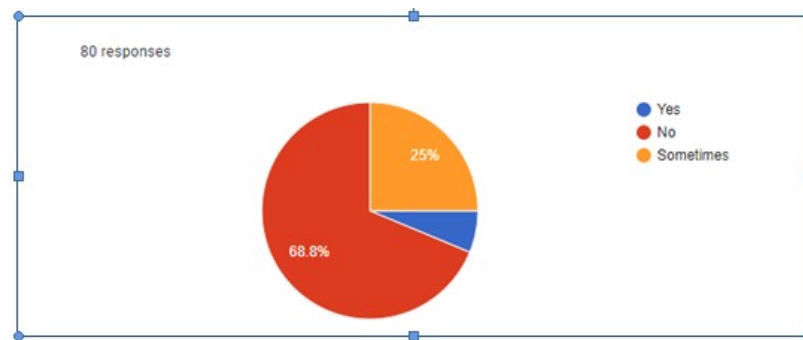


Figure 7

Do you forward all the messages which you receive without fact checking ?



**Figure 8**

### Frequency of Social Media Use

We found a range of responses regarding social media engagement. Some participants reported high usage, rating their engagement as a "5," while others rated it closer to a "2" or "3." This diversity suggests that, while many are active on social media, the intensity of their engagement varies significantly.

### Posting Self-Researched Religious Content

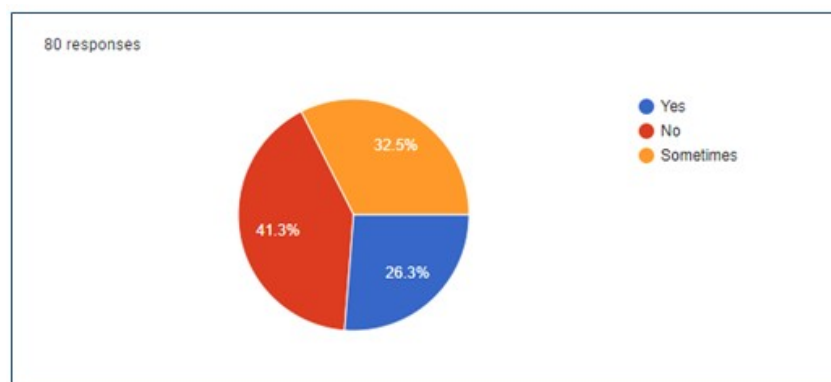
Interestingly, a majority of respondents indicated "No" when asked if they post self-researched religious content. This reflects a tendency to consume information rather than create it, especially on sensitive topics like religion. Many seem hesitant to contribute their own views, perhaps due to concerns about controversy or a perceived lack of expertise.

### Forwarding Messages Without Fact-Checking

The responses to this question were mixed, but many participants answered "No," indicating that they take care not to forward messages without verification. This suggests a growing sense of responsibility regarding misinformation. However, a small group admitted to forwarding messages indiscriminately, highlighting an ongoing challenge in combating the spread of false information online.

### Segment 2

Do you read religious forwards ?



**Figure 9**



Do you believe in religious messages sent through social media ?

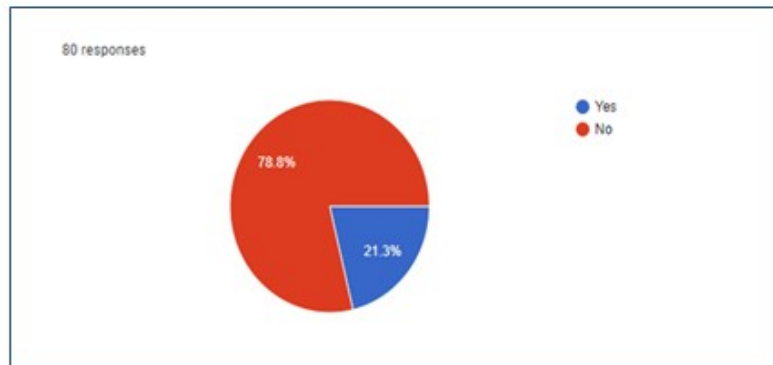


Figure 10

### Reading Religious Forwards

Responses indicated a mixed approach to reading religious forwards. While some participants occasionally engage with this content, others tend to ignore it. This suggests a cautious attitude towards religious messages shared on social media.

### Belief in Religious Messages

The belief in these messages varied widely among respondents, with many expressing skepticism. This indicates that individuals are critical or indifferent toward religious content circulated on social media, suggesting a lack of engagement with such materials.

Does religious content influence your decision making in related issues ?

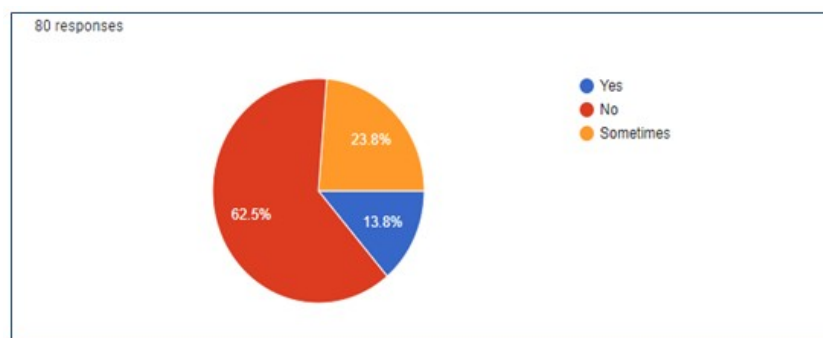


Figure 11

Does your profession hold any impact on your decision making on religious beliefs?

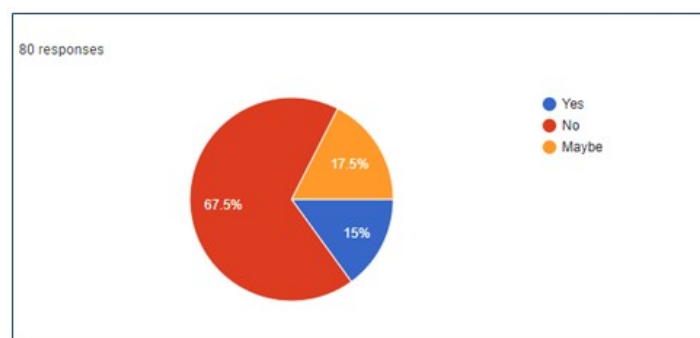
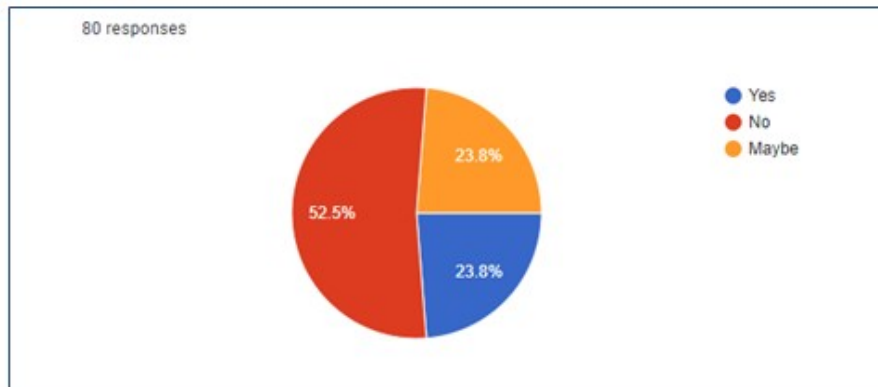


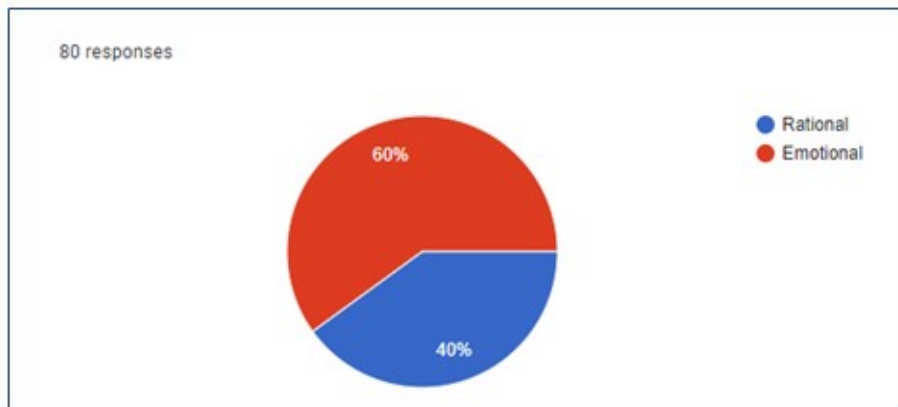
Figure 12

Have you unsubscribed to any individual/ organisation/ group due to religious content posted in group ?



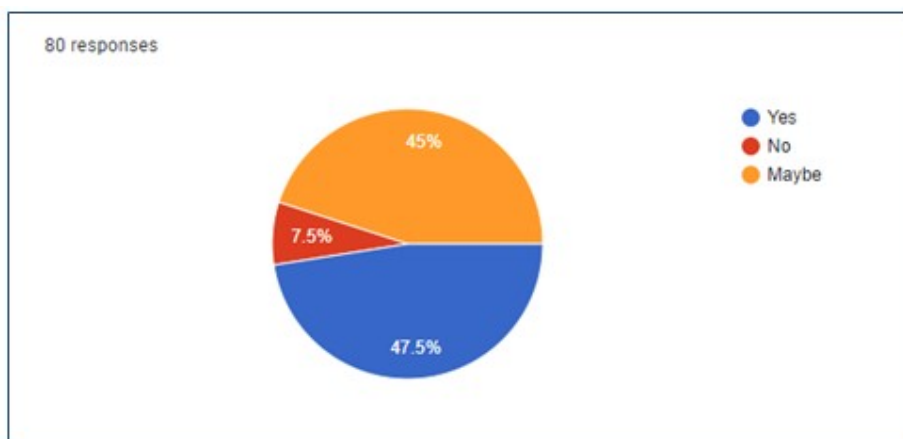
**Figure 13**

What is your opinion about people posting religious content in the social media ?



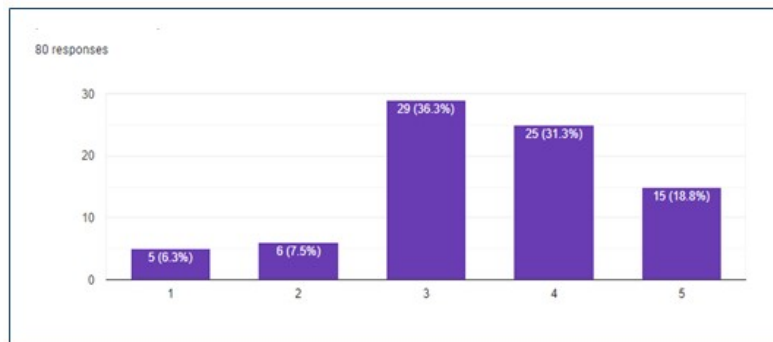
**Figure 14**

Do you feel that there is underlying political agenda in religious propaganda ?



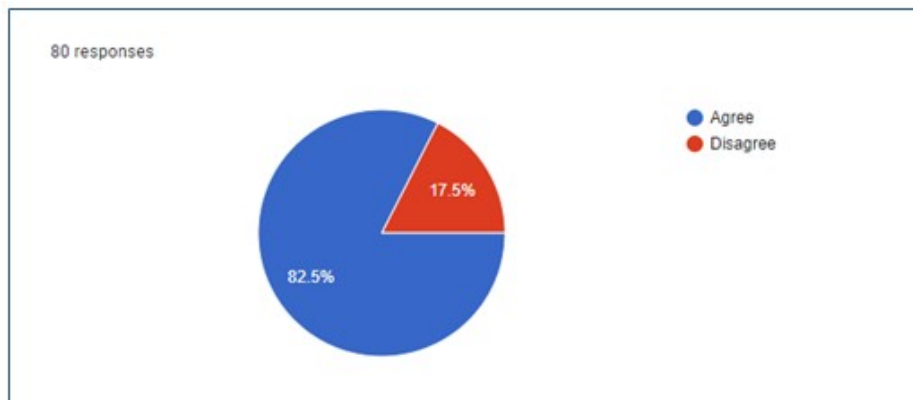
**Figure 15**

How vulnerable are individuals/ groups in getting carried away by the social media posts and form opinions ?



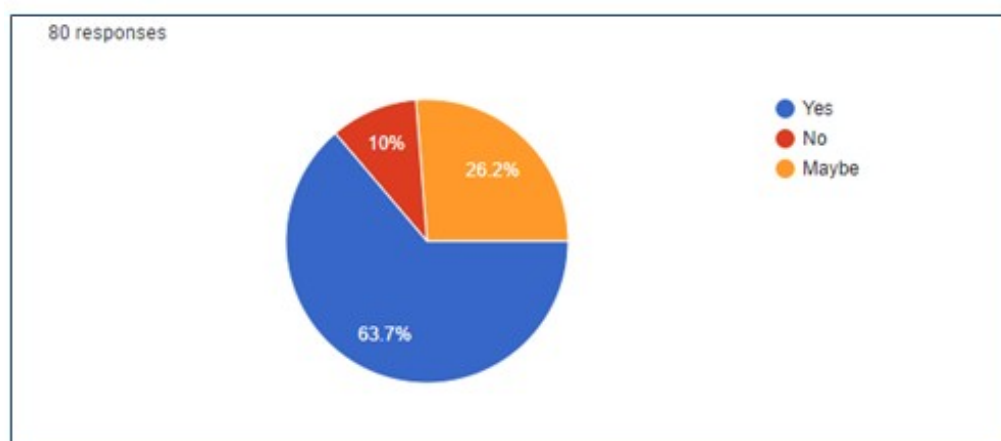
**Figure 16**

Social Media Influencers are also used as a tool for religious propaganda.



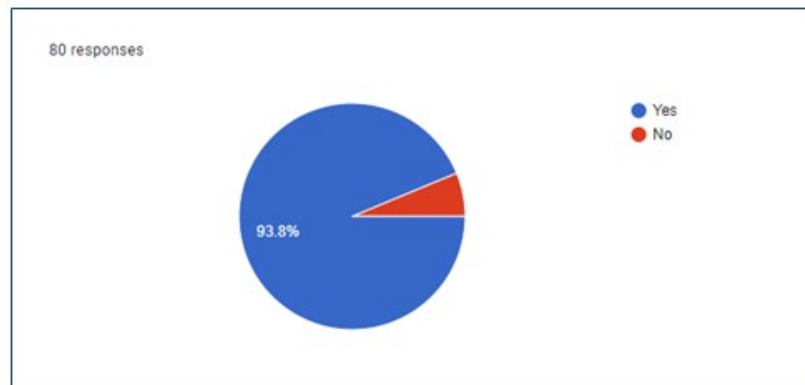
**Figure 17**

Do you approve that social media has a wide reach and influencing quotient amongst all age groups to achieve mass consent ?



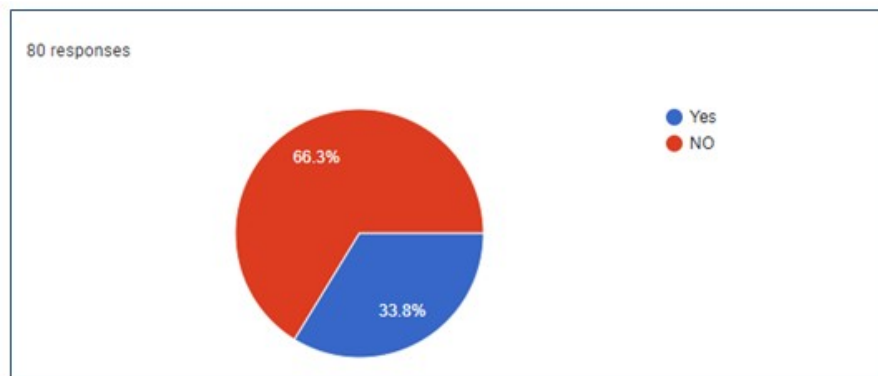
**Figure 18**

Social Media plays an important role in the socio-political life of an individual today.



**Figure 19**

Does media follow the social responsibility ethics diligently ?



**Figure 20**

### **Media Ethics**

Many participants expressed the belief that media fails to adequately uphold social responsibility ethics. This sentiment likely arises from concerns about misinformation, sensationalism, and biased reporting.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Social Media Engagement**

The frequent use of social media among respondents demonstrates its integral role in their lives. Yet, this does not necessarily translate into active participation in content creation, particularly regarding sensitive issues. The reluctance to share self-researched religious insights could stem from a fear of backlash or a lack of confidence in one's knowledge.

### **Responsible Sharing**

The prevalent caution about forwarding unverified messages points to a heightened awareness of the dangers of misinformation. This indicates that users are becoming more discerning in their sharing practices. Nevertheless, the small percentage of individuals who do engage in careless forwarding continues to pose a risk to the integrity of information spread online.

### **Passive vs. Active Participation**

Our survey reveals a trend where social media users tend to be more passive consumers rather than active creators, especially concerning religious discussions. This aligns with broader global patterns, where many users consume content without contributing their own.

### **Skepticism and Awareness**

Throughout our findings, a consistent theme of skepticism emerges, both in relation to religious content and the ethical standards of media. Users exhibit a discerning approach to their social media consumption, carefully considering what to share, which indicates a growing media literacy.

### **Responsibility and Trust**

While users recognize the potential harms of sharing unverified information, many express a lack of trust in the media's ability to uphold ethical standards. This caution is particularly evident when it comes to contentious topics like religion.

The data suggest that while social media is widely utilized, users are increasingly critical and responsible in their engagement. Although they consume religious messages and other content, there is a noticeable reluctance to create or share such content without thorough verification. This reflects a broader trend of skepticism and awareness among users.

## **PERCEPTION OF RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT**

### **Selective Engagement**

Our findings indicate that people engage with religious content selectively, showcasing a modern skepticism towards unverified information.

### **Cultural Sensitivities**

The occasional reading of religious forwards may stem from cultural curiosity, but belief in these messages is less prevalent. This indicates that while people might read the content, they do so with a degree of caution and skepticism.

## **ETHICS: MEDIA'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Lack of Trust in Media**

The perception that media does not adhere to ethical standards suggests a significant trust deficit among the public. This may be influenced by the proliferation of fake news, political bias, and sensationalism on social media platforms.

### **Impact on Society**

The erosion of trust in media ethics can have serious societal implications, potentially leading to polarization, the spread of misinformation, and public cynicism.

## **COMBINED INSIGHTS**

### **Influence of Social Media**

Despite the widespread reach of social media, its influence is approached with caution. The skepticism towards religious messages, coupled with dissatisfaction regarding ethical standards, indicates a public that engages critically but does not fully trust the content presented.

### Responsibility of Platforms

These findings highlight the urgent need for greater accountability in how media addresses both religious and socio-political content. Emphasizing fact-checking, transparency, and adherence to ethical standards is crucial for fostering a more responsible media environment.

The data analysis, highlights the findings of each hypothesis tested.

### Hypothesis 1: The Extent to which the Audience is Influenced by the Information given by Social Media on Religion

- Result: The alternate hypothesis (H1) was proved right, indicating that there is a significant influence of social media information on the audience's perceptions of religion.
- Test Used: A regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the exposure to religious content on social media and the changes in audience perceptions. The results highlighted that higher engagement with religious content correlates with stronger influence on beliefs.

### Hypothesis 2: The Rationale Behind using Social Media to Post Content for Religious Propaganda

- Result: The alternate hypothesis (H1) was proved right, confirming that there are indeed significant reasons for utilizing social media platforms for religious propaganda.
- Test Used: A qualitative content analysis was conducted, coupled with surveys, to assess the motivations behind content sharing. The findings revealed that the primary reasons include reaching a broader audience, fostering community engagement, and disseminating religious teachings in an accessible manner.

### Hypothesis 3: The Belief in the Content Given to be True to Reality

- Result: The alternate hypothesis (H1) was proved right, showing that the audience tends to believe that the content provided on social media is true to reality.
- Test Used: A chi-square test of independence was utilized to analyze the relationship between belief in the truthfulness of content and the frequency of social media usage. The results indicated a strong correlation, suggesting that regular users are more inclined to accept the content as factual.

In conclusion, these findings underline the profound impact social media has on religious perceptions and beliefs. As we continue to navigate the digital landscape, it is essential to understand these dynamics to foster informed discussions about the role of social media in shaping our worldview.

### CONCLUSION AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDY

Unquestionably, social media has influenced people's mentalities and changed how they process and react to information. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube, with their billions of active users, have permeated daily life and shaped public opinion on a broad spectrum of subjects, including politics, religion, and social issues. Social media's pervasiveness in society is not just a result of technology development; rather, it represents a fundamental change in the ways that information is shared, absorbed, and used.

Even with the rising global average level of education, social media still has a big influence on people's decision-making. This is mostly due to the fact that humans are highly emotional beings in addition to being purely rational beings. Content on social media is frequently intended to elicit strong emotions, such as fear, hatred, pity, or outrage. These platforms' algorithms are designed to give articles that get the greatest engagement priority, which often means boosting content that is emotionally charged. When exposed to well selected and sensationalized content on a regular basis, even the most intelligent people can be emotionally manipulated.

Education is important for developing media literacy and critical thinking, but it does not shield a person from the psychological and emotional triggers found in posts on social media. Like everyone else, highly educated people can nevertheless make snap decisions based on their feelings, especially if the information speaks to their identity, anxieties, or firmly held beliefs. Often, this emotional involvement takes precedence over logical, analytical thought. For example, a post meant to incite political or religious fury can cause people, no matter how educated, to respond rashly without thoroughly considering the veracity or purpose of the content.

Emotional decision-making is further supported by the echo chamber effect of social media, in which users are largely exposed to content that confirms their preconceived notions. Even those with higher education, who would believe that their capacity for critical thought shields them against prejudice, are susceptible to confirmation bias. They are fed content by social media algorithms that supports their perspective, creating the appearance of impartiality. This reinforcement facilitates the inclination of emotional responses to supersede logical thought processes, resulting in rash conclusions in matters of politics, religion, or the individual.

Furthermore, social media's rapid information dissemination promotes quick replies. There is frequently little time for deliberate thought due to the pressure to respond quickly. Those with education may get sucked into an instantaneous reaction loop, where the urge to be active or relevant on social media takes precedence over the capacity to take a moment to consider the information carefully. The propensity to make decisions based more on feelings than on reason is made worse by this hurry.

In summary, education is an important tool for fostering media literacy and critical thinking, but it cannot fully protect people from the emotional pull of social media. Even highly educated people find it difficult to consistently make logical conclusions because the platforms are made to take advantage of emotional reactions. The more social media continues to infiltrate daily life, the more critical thinking and emotional intelligence skills need to be developed. To make sure that judgments are made based on logic rather than emotion, it is crucial to recognize the emotional pull that social media content has on us and to understand when to hold back on our reactions. People can only negotiate the potent influence of social media and keep control over their lives by developing this knowledge.

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