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### The Impact of Televangelists on Contemporary Pakistani Society: A Critical Analysis of Their Preaching and Religious Influence

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#### **Abstract:**

The rise of televangelists in Pakistan has created a discussion over their influence on the religious landscape of the nation. Despite their helpful role in disseminating religious information and ideals, others contend that their preaching may foster intolerance and marginalize particular groups. This article uses a qualitative research approach to tackle the problem, reviewing relevant academic and popular literature as well as conducting survey with audiences of televangelists who could be interested in the topic. The findings of this study demonstrate that while televangelists have significantly influenced Pakistan's religious landscape, such effects have not always been favorable. Numerous televangelists spread a distorted version of Islam that is at odds with the rich religious and cultural traditions of the nation and may encourage the radicalization of particular groups, especially those who feel excluded from the dominant religious discourse. Given that Pakistan emphasizes the variety and depth of its religious traditions, these findings have practical ramifications for fostering inclusive and tolerant religious discourse in that nation. The study's conclusions have important ramifications since they emphasize the need for Pakistan to consider televangelism with greater scepticism. While televangelists can be helpful in spreading religious knowledge and ideals, it is crucial to carefully monitor their messages to make sure they don't incite bigotry or destroy the nation's multireligious heritage. In order to preserve Pakistan's multireligious legacy, this article suggests a more accepting and tolerant approach to religious discourse that encourages communication and understanding among various religious communities.

**Keywords:** Televangelists, Influence, Religious Practices, Ethics, Morality, Intolerance

#### **Introduction:**

The main vehicle for the dissemination of religious ideas nowadays is the media. It offers the community moral and spiritual advice. The rise of Islam, Christianity, and other newly mediatized religions, as well as the digitization of secularism, provide the perception that secularism is under threat due to the continual presence of religious themes in the media. It should be emphasized that the media affects how the public views

religion and the teachings and practices of religious institutions, in addition to reporting on religious issues.<sup>1</sup>

A televangelist is a religious preacher or minister who uses television as a platform to spread their religious teachings,<sup>2</sup> sermons, and pleas for funds to a large audience.<sup>3</sup> A term called "televangelism" was coined to represent a contemporary method of spreading religious teachings that mixes television and evangelism.<sup>4</sup> In order to create a new type of religious broadcasting, television and evangelism were combined, and this phenomenon came to be known as. The term "televangelism" came to be extensively used to describe the act of utilizing television to preach religious teachings, lead worship services, and ask for donations from viewers.<sup>5</sup>

There is a huge impact of televangelists on modern Pakistani society, and they spread their message and affect religious practices and beliefs. In spite of their beneficial function in promoting Islamic principles, televangelist's speeches may have adverse impacts on Pakistani's religious views and behaviours.

### **Background on Televangelism:**

The term "televangelism" was first used in the 1981 Addison-Wesley book "Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism," written by Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann.<sup>6</sup> Although as J. Harold Ellens notes in *Models of Religious Broadcasting from 1974*, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) introduced a media-based outreach initiative in 1958 that is when the name "televangelism" originally appeared.<sup>7</sup>

The introduction of television as a mass communication tool in the 1950s led to its use for evangelism and constituency building alongside other electronic media. There were more than 220 religious television stations and 1,370 religious radio stations by the 1980s. Three Christian networks reach audiences across the country every day, 24 hours a day. Christian broadcasting gained popularity during the Golden Age of televangelism, which roughly ran from 1980 to 1987.<sup>8</sup> In the 1960s, local churches in the US were a major factor in the development of televangelism. It currently combines a variety of religious customs, including those of Islam, Hinduism, and a number of other faiths, on television. In conclusion, televangelism has developed into a widespread phenomenon today.<sup>9</sup>

### **Understanding Televangelism in Pakistan**

Pakistan is a religious country where Muslims make up the vast majority of the population.<sup>10</sup> As a logical result of this, Islam has a huge impact on all dimensions and institutions of society, including the national media. Since the media has gotten more exclusive, a number of religious talk shows have appeared on the news channels. These shows covered a wide range of subjects and had unique formats. As opposed to PTV, the state-owned channel, which has just one expert representing all of Islamic philosophy. The past ten years' talks of religious issues led to a greater involvement of religious intellect in those conversations and even led to a fragmentation of the traditional religious leadership.<sup>11</sup>

To the 20th and 21st centuries, let's jump forward. Newspapers, magazines, television, and the internet have gained popularity around the world. In a short period of time, the world of Muslim preachers and storytellers grew to include well-known books and even the living room where families had access to a wide variety of television channels, not to

mention videos accessible online via YouTube, Facebook, and preachers' individual websites. These preachers are not entirely original, despite the new media developments and media du'ā style. They nevertheless share characteristics with contemporary "ulamā" and links to their Classical forebears 'ulamā'.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, televangelists utilize a conversational and colloquial style of Arabic and wear modern outfits, in contrast to traditionally educated scholars who wear traditional clothing and speak in classical Arabic.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, televangelists' speeches are characterized by the way they promote religion as a means for individual change.<sup>14</sup> Muslim televangelism, which involves promoting religion on television and the internet, has emerged as a significant media phenomena in recent years.<sup>15</sup> Due to its distinctive fusion of entertainment and religion, televangelism is a hybrid genre that captivates audiences. It can be considered as a mirror of the popular "infotainment"<sup>16</sup> tendency in current media culture.<sup>17</sup>

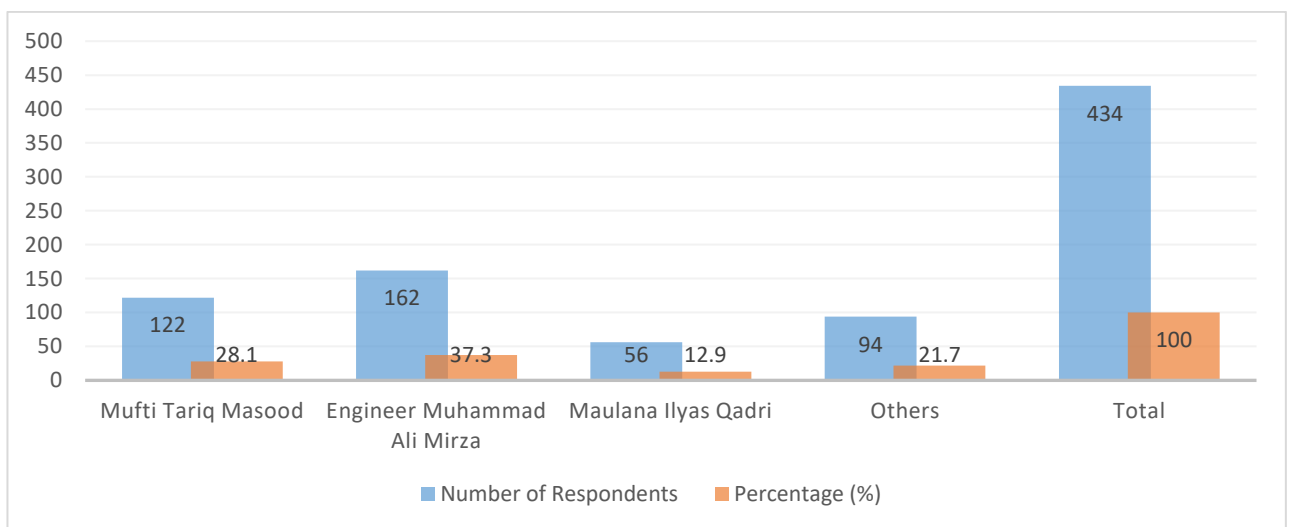
The use of entertainment elements like music, sound effects, and camera tricks is a defining characteristic of televangelism. Furthermore, televangelism has grown significantly in popularity among Muslim young, who view it as a novel and cutting-edge method of delivering religious information.<sup>18</sup> Similar to prominent personalities like well-known musicians and politicians, televangelists have developed a cult following on social media platforms, gaining thousands of admirers and followers.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Popularity of Televangelists in Pakistan**

Islamic preachers in Pakistan have become more well-known as a result of the advent of the Internet and social media. These individuals can be linked to earlier preachers who employed media like cassettes, radio, and newspapers. A lot of these preachers have degrees in fields other than traditional religion, such commerce, accountancy, or engineering. However, some of them have degrees from Al-Azhar or other colleges and have received traditional religious education. Additionally, they employ a range of media channels to convey their message, including meetings and lectures, books, blogs, YouTube videos, and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Social media influencers with a large following include Molana Tariq Jameel, Mufti Taqi Usmani, Ilyas Qadri, Tahir ul-Qadri, Mufti Tariq Masood, Farhat Hashmi, and Eng. Muhammad Ali.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 1: Islamic Scholars or Channels Followed on YouTube**

<i>Scholar/Channel</i>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Mufti Tariq Masood</i>	122	28.1
<i>Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza</i>	162	37.3
<i>Maulana Ilyas Qadri</i>	56	12.9
<i>Others</i>	94	21.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>100</b>



*Figure 1: Islamic Scholars or Channels Followed on YouTube*

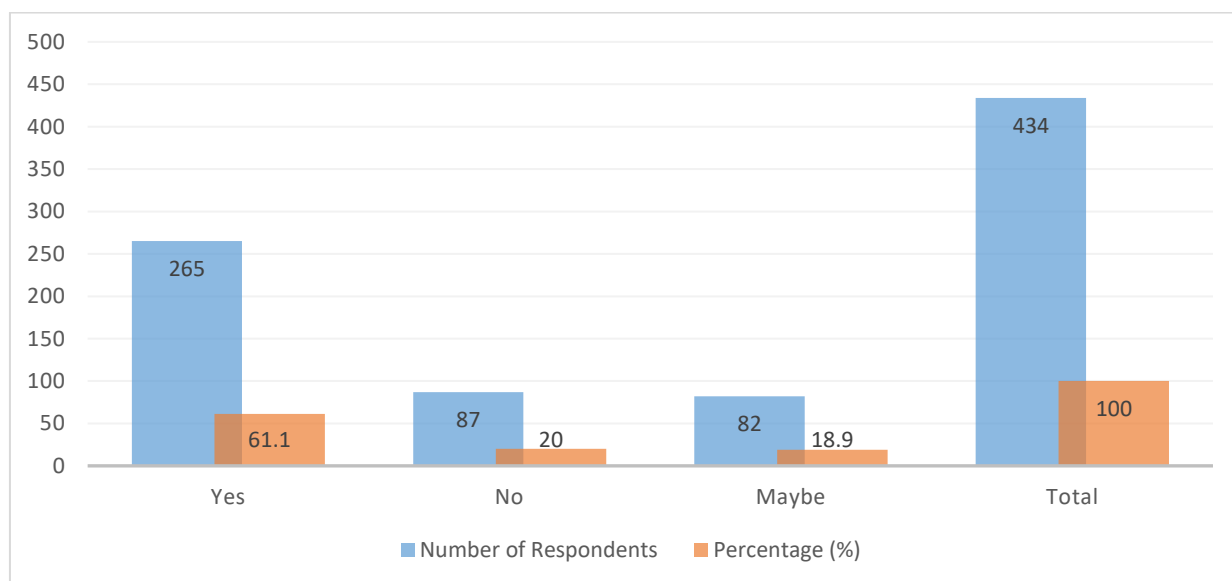
The survey question regarding the Islamic scholars or channels followed on YouTube revealed diverse preferences among respondents, as outlined in Table 1. Mufti Tariq Masood garnered a notable following of 28.1%, while Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza captured the attention of a substantial 37.3% of respondents. Maulana Ilyas Qadri also got attention, with 12.9% of respondents indicating their following. Additionally, the "Others" category accounted for 21.7% of respondents, reflecting the varied array of Islamic scholars or channels followed on YouTube. This data underscores the broad spectrum of Islamic content consumption on the platform, showcasing the diverse preferences and interests of respondents.

**Impact of Televangelist’s Religious Doctrines and Messages**

Although the Islamic television scholars initially started their campaigns to disseminate Islam using traditional strategies like producing books and leaflets and setting up organizations, in recent years, electronic technology has become their main medium of mass communication. In order to spread their views and ideas efficiently, they have embraced media such as cassettes, videos, CDs, DVDs, and television channels. They have been able to communicate with people on a more popular level due to this move to electronic platforms and reach a larger audience.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 2: Change in Religious Beliefs Due to YouTube Content**

<i>Response</i>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Yes</i>	265	61.1
<i>No</i>	87	20.0
<i>Maybe</i>	82	18.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Response</i>	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)



*Figure 2: Change in Religious Beliefs Due to YouTube Content*

Table 2 presents the responses to the question "Have you ever changed your religious beliefs based on content you encountered on YouTube?" Among the respondents, 61.1% answered affirmatively, indicating that they have indeed changed their religious beliefs due to YouTube content. Conversely, 20.0% stated that they have not experienced such changes, while 18.9% expressed uncertainty, suggesting a possibility of change in the future. The table also correlates these responses with the degree of influence experienced: 61.5% of those who affirmed having changed their beliefs reported strong influence, while 34.6% cited moderate influence, and 9.0% mentioned slight influence. Only 3.0% of respondents indicated that YouTube content did not influence their religious beliefs. These findings underscore the significant role that YouTube content plays in shaping religious beliefs, with a considerable portion of respondents acknowledging its impact on their perspectives.

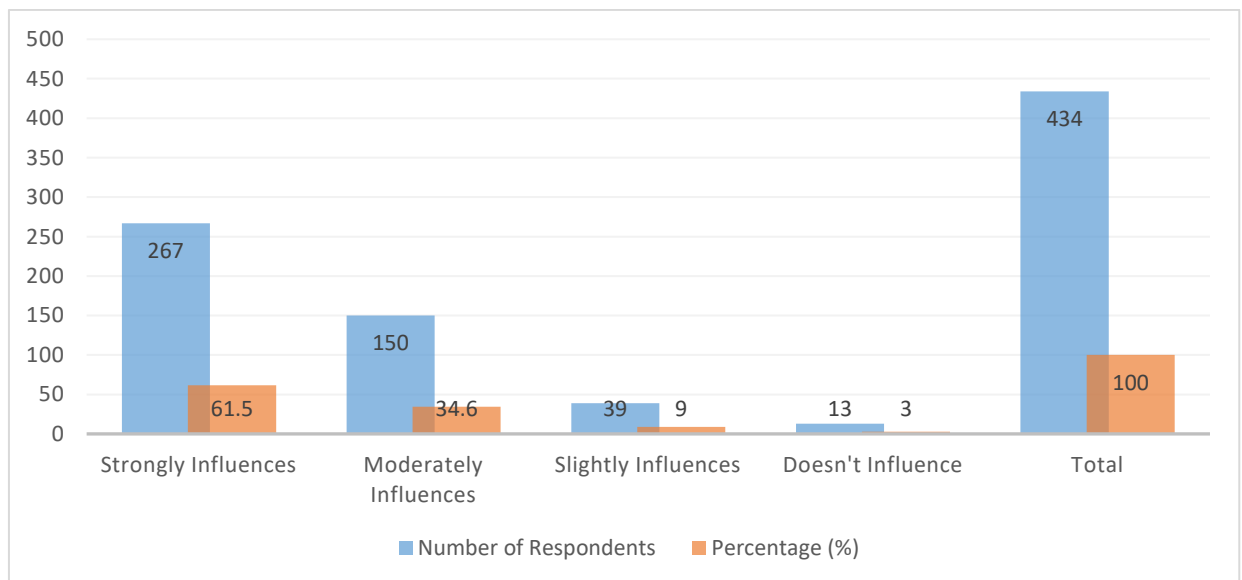
**Religious Influence**

It has been said that as media channels have become more privatized, religion's commercial potential has grown. The lectures offered by specific religious scholars developed a following among the upper middle class. The introduction of religious

programming to television facilitated the spread of religion and boosted channel viewership.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 3: Influence of Islamic Content on YouTube on Religious Opinions**

<i>Influence Level</i>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Strongly Influences</i>	267	61.5
<i>Moderately Influences</i>	150	34.6
<i>Slightly Influences</i>	39	9.0
<i>Doesn't Influence</i>	13	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>100</b>



*Figure 3: Influence of Islamic Content on YouTube on Religious Opinions*

The feedback from respondents regarding the influence of Islamic content on YouTube on their religious opinions is depicted in Table 3. It shows that a significant majority, comprising 61.5% of respondents, feel that Islamic content on the platform strongly influences their religious beliefs. Additionally, 34.6% of respondents reported a moderate level of influence. A smaller proportion, 9.0%, stated that Islamic content slightly influences their religious opinions. Conversely, only 3.0% of respondents indicated that such content doesn't influence their religious viewpoints. These findings illustrate the substantial impact of Islamic content on YouTube in shaping the religious perspectives of viewers, suggesting its significant role in influencing their beliefs and understanding of Islam.

**Taboo Topics in Religious Talk Shows**

Religious talk shows like Alif, Safar e Hidayat, and Aalim Online openly discussed forbidden or contentious topics like homosexuality, the Ahmediya Community's arguments, the Hudood Ordinance, Jihaad, and minorities' rights throughout the

preceding decade. Even in this decade, there are discussion shows that have some portions with religious themes but are not entirely devoted to discussing religious subjects. But for the past ten years (from 2010 to the present), there has been a startling absence of conversations about such contentious and religiously taboo subjects.

They contend that religious taboos and contentious problems are the main and most significant cause of intolerance. After discussing forbidden subjects, their teams and they personally experienced several documented and unreported religiously intolerable situations.<sup>23</sup> On social media, several Muslim scholars, including "MuftMenk," frequently provide information about Islam and its principles.<sup>24</sup>

### **Religious Extremism**

Due to the country's quick digitalization, which sparked a strong increase in the usage of social media platforms, religious extremism has developed in Pakistan's already-polarized society.<sup>25</sup> Regarding the status of women in Islam, Islam's presence in government, and minorities' place in society, the televangelists who broadcast on Pakistani television hold very conservative views.

Some have attributed Pakistani television to or believe it to be a substantial contributor to the increase of Islamic extremism, while others believe it to be a potential remedy. Instead of appreciating religious variety, the majority of televangelists on religiously themed talk shows are thought to be more concerned with presenting Islam as the best religion overall. Because their families compel them to do so, Pakistan's youth attend religious talk shows as a social duty.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Commercialization of Religion through Televangelism**

Contemporary forms of televangelism play a significant role in shaping the religious market, where religion is presented as a discourse and a brand available in various formats such as text, image, and audio. It encompasses inherited knowledge, cultural artifacts, and practices, as well as products that are considered 'anointed' and carry authority or provoke debates over authority. These religious commodities, such as CDs, DVDs, and books, are part of a broader system of religious production, distribution, and consumption that receives validation through preaching and public religious events.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of the fact that the commodification of religion has always been present in material forms of religious practice, televangelism has increased the appeal of theologies of abundance and produced new venues for religious expression in public places like shopping malls, convention centers, sports arenas, and megachurches. But there is still disagreement over how much televangelism contributes to the commercialization of religion.<sup>28</sup>

### **Social Intolerance**

Social and cultural standards are changing in Pakistan. The general public's intolerance is now readily apparent.<sup>29</sup> However, as time went on, it became clear that there was a connection between the spread of religious intolerance and the airing of such shows on television. With the expansion of private media outlets, religion's commercial potential rose. The author used the Talk program "Aalim Online" as an example, where Amir Liaquat seemed to support the murdering of Ahmadis in one of the episodes. A few days later, three Ahmadis were killed in different districts of Sindh, yet Geo and Amir Liaquat did not denounce this act of violence.<sup>30</sup>

### **Youth Intolerance and Societal Challenges**

Modern technology has altered how people express themselves and respond, thus we can now observe young people acting intolerantly against institutions and leaders in the public and private sectors on social media. When the whole situation is considered, it is obvious that society is unable to close the cultural gap that exists between traditional cultures and the current rate of global development, which incites young people to become more intolerant and destructive of themselves. It is obvious that young people are more likely to want revenge than tolerance. The media, religion, literacy, cultural elements, socioeconomic injustice, and society itself are just a few of the many potential factors.<sup>31</sup>

### **Media Influence on Religion**

In order to foster religious diversity and decrease general religious intolerance, many nations adopt a variety of measures. The airing of religious talk programs is one of the methods used to lessen intolerance based on religion. Along with these educational methods, religion itself is occasionally employed to alleviate religious conflict through initiatives like religious peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue.<sup>32</sup> The Pakistani media outlets are degrading religion, which is an essential component of Pakistani ideology. When compared to other channels, the entertainment channel has the biggest viewership, which has a significant impact on viewers' attitudes and way of thinking.<sup>33</sup>

### **Television's Role in Pakistani Paranoia and Violence**

The "Pakistani tendency for paranoia and violence" is mostly caused by the "conspiratorial puffery" that dominates Pakistani television stations.<sup>34</sup> Despite its many difficulties, Pakistan's "energetic free media" is a key factor in the country's perseverance.<sup>35</sup> Tele-religion is responsible for the social expansion of the notion of religion and its departure from the limited definition of religion.<sup>36</sup>

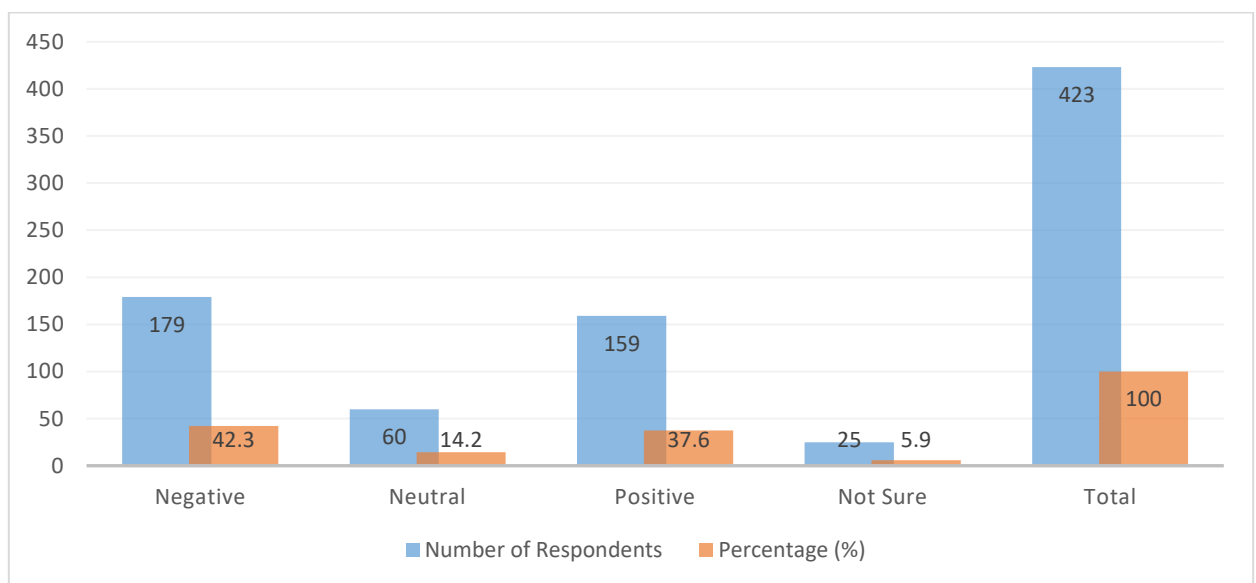
### **Religious Content Conflicts**

The delivery of information to the general public is largely supported by information and communication technology. Conflicting viewpoints are spread through the use of information and communication technology (ICT), which is a technique that encourages religious extremism among the populace. Due to the people's insufficient knowledge, whatever the religious academics have purposefully said on the televisions becomes the final judgment for them.<sup>37</sup> Both liberal and Islamist intellectuals are troubled by the religious content on Pakistani television.<sup>38</sup>



**Table 4: Perceived Impact of Teachings Presented by Islamic Scholars**

<i>Impact</i>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Negative</i>	179	42.3
<i>Neutral</i>	60	14.2
<i>Positive</i>	159	37.6
<i>Not Sure</i>	25	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>100</b>



*Figure 4: Perceived Impact of Teachings Presented by Islamic Scholar.*

Respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of teachings presented by Islamic scholars on YouTube on their religious beliefs and practices are summarized in Table 4. The data reveals varied perspectives among respondents. A notable portion, comprising 42.3%, expressed a belief that these teachings have a negative impact on their religious beliefs and practices. Conversely, 37.6% reported a positive impact, indicating the beneficial influence of such teachings. Additionally, 14.2% of respondents expressed neutrality on the matter, while 5.9% were unsure about the impact. These findings underscore the diverse range of opinions regarding the effect of teachings presented by Islamic scholars on YouTube, reflecting the complexity of their influence on individuals' religious perspectives and practices.

In order for viewers to learn new information and solidify their existing understanding, the authorities should maintain the frequency and content of religious talk shows relevant. Such television programs encourage viewers to adopt a positive outlook on life and make beneficial modifications in their religious beliefs. <sup>39</sup>

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, the modern society in Pakistan has been significantly impacted by televangelism. It has expanded the religious, the industry and provided individuals additional avenues for religious observance. Well-known televangelists have used a variety of media platforms to preach their religious views and draw big audiences. Religious talk programs have been essential in tackling uncomfortable subjects and fostering a more open-minded view of religion. However, these conversations have declined recently, which has made it more difficult to fight discrimination and advance religious harmony.

Televangelism raises a number of issues, including the rise of religious radical ideology, the validation of conservative beliefs, and the commercialization of religion. Conflicts and misunderstandings may result from how religion is portrayed in the media and the dissemination of false information via ICT. Maintaining current and educational religious talk programs that promote optimistic outlooks and enable discourse on delicate subjects is crucial for fostering religious unity. A more inclusive and accepting society can be created by balancing different points of view, encouraging critical thinking, and developing interfaith conversation. In conclusion, televangelism has a multifaceted impact on Pakistani society. Recognizing its effects, addressing issues, and working toward a fair and inclusive strategy can promote religious harmony and understanding in Pakistan.

### **Suggestions**

1. Encourage participation of intellectuals and religious leaders from various sects and backgrounds in religious talk shows and programs to promote diverse religious representation. This will advance religious unity and build a deeper awareness of various religious viewpoints.
2. Promote honest and productive debate on delicate and taboo subjects such interfaith relations, the rights of minorities, and religious fanaticism. This can promote better tolerance and understanding amongst various religious communities while challenging conventional stereotypes.
3. Ensure ethical media reporting: Media organizations should be aware of the material they transmit and its possible social effects. They should make an effort to provide accurate and fair information, steer clear of sensationalism, and support ethical journalism that advances society.
4. Promote the value of critical thinking and education in preparing people to assess religious teachings and messages. Encourage religious literacy and give people the chance to interact and converse in informed ways.
5. Encourage efforts that promote interfaith discussion among various religious communities in order to foster interfaith understanding and dialogue. These initiatives can easily aid in bridging gaps, enhancing understanding between parties, and encouraging peaceful coexistence.

Create clear rules and regulations for religious talk programs and media outlets to make sure they follow moral standards and don't encourage extremism or hate speech. Regular management and monitoring can support the upkeep of responsible and beneficial material.

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