Religious Preaching on Social Media; Perception of University Students in Lahore

Shahnam Ali Baig*[1], Abul Hassan[2], Ali Abul Hassan[3]

[1]*M Phil Scholar, School of Creative Arts, The University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

[2]Assistant Professor, School of Creative Arts, The University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.
[3]Lecturer, School of Creative Arts, The University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

This study aims to analyze the impact of religious narratives presented by Islamic scholars belonging to different sects on social media platforms. A large number of youngsters using social media platforms follow their favorite Islamic scholars on social media. Youth's dependency for seeking religious knowledge through social media platforms has transformed from traditional religious learning to digital learning of religious knowledge. Different Islamic scholars' opinions on religious orders are being debated on social media, making it difficult for young people to decide which scholars to trust. Survey of 100 students, ages 18 to 30, from 6 leading universities will be given questionnaire. This study will incorporate cultivation theory to study respondents' interpretation of religious messages by scholars using social media platforms. Participants were questioned about their knowledge of Islam, the impact of following an Islamic preacher had on their lives, their experience and perception about the digital preaching phenomenon, and whether or not those scholars helped them learn more about their respective religions believes and ideologies.

Introduction

The media landscape has changed as a result of the development of the internet. It signaled the start of technological change and socialization with an increased thirst for knowledge. Social media, which is primarily information about individuals, slowly evolved from this. The newest form of media, social media, has a variety of features and traits. It is a computer-mediated tool that enables users to create, share, or exchange data, concepts, and images/videos in online networks and communities.

From generation to generation, religion has changed. The X Generation's and the Y Generation's perspectives on religion are different from one another. 92 percent of teenagers say they use the internet every day, according to a recent Pew Research Center research. Because young people (aged 16 to 30) utilize modern media so frequently, their methods of information gathering and their modes of thought may differ from those of the elder generation. (McClure, 2018). Despite of what their religious traditions teaches, young people who are using social media are more likely to use a "pick-and-choose" strategy to tailor their faith than those who do not. Adolescents who use social networks are exposed to a variety of manifestations of faith and beliefs from friends and people they follow. Teenagers seem more inclined to adopt a syncretic attitude to their own beliefs in a society that places a high emphasis on acceptance and tolerance as well as classmates who frequently have non-traditional ideas and values. (Liebelt, 2022).

Teenagers use Facebook, Line, Whatsapp, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter, and other popular media the most frequently. But only one social media, notably Instagram, is the topic of the writer's research. Every social media platform also has the unique benefit of drawing in the largest number of people. Instagram is the platform that is still widely used today. Among the most widely used social networking sites worldwide is Instagram. Instagram's user base is growing, and the platform is becoming more and more popular (Sazali et al., 2020).

With the growth of the Internet and social media, Islamic preachers in Pakistan gained popularity. However, these people may be traced back to earlier preachers who made use of media like cassettes, radio, and newspapers. Many of these preachers lack traditional religious education and instead hold degrees in fields like commerce, accountancy, or engineering. However, some of them do have traditional religious education and hold degrees from Al-Azhar or other institutions. They also use various channels to promote their message, including conferences and lectures, books published, websites, YouTube videos, and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. With millions of followers across various social media platforms, Molana Tariq Jameel, Mufti Taqi Usmani, Ilyaas Qadri, Tahir –ul-Qadri, Mufti Tariq Masood, Farhat Hashmi, and Eng. Muhammad Ali Mirza are prominent examples of Muslim preachers in Pakistan with a millions on followers.

Some Islamic preachers in Pakistan initiated the "Digital Munazara" trend on social media in recent year. They make a video in which they compete with the other scholars, use his image as the thumbnail, and post it to social media sites like Facebook or Youtube.The other scholar then feels pressure from the followers to reply, so he records a video performing everything the first preacher does and uploads it. This cycle then repeats again after a day or two.

Literature Review

Small communication devices have enabled the users to access social networking websites anytime and anywhere. Examples of these devices include pocket PCs, laptops, iPads, and even basic mobile (which support internet), among others (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). Self-esteem as a potential mediator between social media addiction and undergraduates' mental health and academic performance, and further assessed the efficacy of an intervention to reduce cyber addiction and its potential negative effects (Houetal, 2019).

Religious Preaching and Social Media

Social media's development has an impact on how Muslims practice their religion and learn about it, as well as how ethically mature these users are in social media and mass media. Religious functionaries use learning tools and resources from mass media and social media, including Islamic religious education teachers in schools, madrasa instructors, religious lecturers, religious instructors, headmasters, and religious teachers in the religious education setting. For learning about religion and Islam, social media is preferable to traditional media. In the process of studying religion and Islamic religion, the role of the old media (mass media) has been replaced by the new media (social media). Even specialized TV that only broadcasts Islamic religious content has not yet won over the hearts of study participants. The respondents' top three picks for learning about Islam are the WA media, Facebook, and YouTube (Basri et al., 2020).

Al Izzami et al., (2022) described in the process of studying Islam and religion, the role of the old media (mass media) has been replaced by the new media (social media). Even specialized TV that only broadcasts Islamic religious content has not yet won over the hearts of study participants. The respondents' top three picks for learning about Islam are the WA media, Facebook, and YouTube. The findings show that students tend to have a straightforward context in which TikTok social media has an impact on their knowledge of Islam. Students are willing to spend more than three hours browsing on TikTok social media due to the lack of action and busyness. Due to this, TikTok social media and Islamic knowledge have a moderate influence value, although adding moderate Islamic knowledge may still be possible.

Recent studies on social media and religion have focused in particular on how social media can help people grow their religious beliefs, advance their social ideals, and enjoy content that is religious in nature utilizing a variety of approaches. Many people, mostly young people, utilize social media intensively. The evolution of the cognitive process is heavily influenced by what the

mind receives from social media. Social media is full with unfiltered information and disinformation that comes from people of various religious backgrounds and affiliations. When these things are mixed together, they confuse young and impressionable minds. it is claimed that social media significantly affects society, particularly in the growth of a secular society (Usmani et al., 2018).

Zaid et al., (2022) stated that Islamic preachers on social media these days are well-educated in the West, talented storytellers, and skilled in the creation of digital media. In light of modern problems like the accessibility of technology and the frequently perceived rigidity of religious and cultural structures in Muslim cultures, this creates new concerns about the future of Islam. The emphasis on social media influencers indicates that social media use for religious reasons has advanced to a new level, one that is distinguished by permanence and sophistication. Social media influencers are persons who, although being "ordinary" people everywhere, have become celebrities with their followers. Social media influencers have become well-known by amassing a sizable following on social media platforms, as opposed to traditional celebrities, who were well-known due to their professional talent.

Religious extremism and social media

Jazib, (2021) stated that religious extremism has grown in Pakistan's already-polarized society as a result of the country's rapid digitalization, which fueled a sharp growth in the use of social media platforms. The use of social media sites has grown throughout time and is currently expanding, especially on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The disturbing truth is that religious intolerance has been spreading tremendously along with the rise in the use of digital platforms. To stop the spread of violent internet information, the government must work in tandem with social media companies. Furthermore, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Google have already made noise about promising initiatives like the "Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism," which was established to support scholars in this area. The use of best practices would lessen abusive language while ensuring that Pakistanis have easy access to social media. Another course of action that the government should take is to actively combat religious extremism by promoting more moderate religious instruction.

Ibahirne (2014) stated that social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube and Face book have recently had a rapid diffusion and adoption in nations with a majority of Muslims. With 45,194,452 users, Facebook is the most popular social networking website in the Arab world. Following with 2,099,706 users is Twitter. In terms of daily YouTube views, the Arab world is second only to the United States. Saudi Arabia has the most YouTube view per internet user, with 90 million views each day (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016). On digital media, Muslims are portrayed as a homogenous out group that is prone to conflict, violence, and extremism—qualities that are said to stem from the faith of Islam. These overall trends are startlingly comparable to those observed in conventional media by earlier study, despite the fact that language usage in the forum

tends to be confrontational and conflict-oriented. These findings add to the ongoing academic debate over how digital media relate to one another. The debate centers on whether social media primarily serves as a "safe haven" for the creation and maintenance of alternative discourses or if it serves instead as a "online amplifier" that reflects and supports pre-existing ideology discourses, which may have even more polarizing effects on public discourse.

Contemporary religious trends on social media

Social media are more centered on fashion than faith, Pakistani users readily embrace religiously inspired content. It is important to note that while just 133900 Pakistanis utilized the internet in 2000, this number increased to 44,608,065 in Dec 2017. In Pakistan, Facebook is the most used and well-liked social networking site. Pakistan had 35 million active Facebook users in 2018. Thanks to social media, women can now join more regularly in religious settings. However, both in Christian and Muslim groups, the proportion of female members is still modest. Some analysts predict that social media's influence on religious life will grow as a result of the Arab world's adoption of these platforms. One of the main topics of worry for communication experts around the world has been religious fanaticism. On the religious occasion of Muharram, sectarian strife has always been present in Pakistan (Abid et al, 2021). As a result, Shia and Sunni group supporters frequently utilize hate speech on social media (Khan et al, 2016).

Religion, without a doubt, requires instruction in order to be properly practiced. Few individuals bother visiting locations like libraries or finding information through antiquated media tools in our digital age. The majority of people choose to utilize the internet as their primary information source, thus when it comes to choosing a religion, individuals typically use social networking sites to learn about the many facets of religion. As a result, a lot of Islamic scholars have realized how important it is to create a digital platform for spreading Islam. Popular websites like "Islami City" have created social media accounts on a variety of social networking platforms to aid in spreading the message of Islam to a wider audience. Some religious scholars choose to post their work on the internet and on media sites because, in view of previous studies, social media has made it simpler to spread religious messages around the globe. This project draws readers from all over the world to study these professors' work and to challenge it.

Social media has also contributed to the propagation of Islam; many recent converts post about their conversion experiences on Instagram and describe their complete spiritual journeys (Perreault, 2015). This has helped Islam since social media, particularly among young people, is the most popular source of information in the twenty-first century. When young people read such tales, they get motivated and are more likely to study Religion and its teachings. In addition, previous research indicates that young people's decisions about their religious affiliation have become confused in the digital age. Because of the widespread Islamism that has been used to paint a negative picture of Muslims, numerous young Muslims have had second thoughts. Social media has been crucial in clearing up misconceptions about Islam in the minds of both Muslims

and non-Muslims worldwide. Active debates about Islam and misconceptions about it on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook. (Widiyanartietal,2018). Almost everyone today gets their news and updates about their nation or religion primarily from social media. The influence of social media on religion has grown dramatically as more people use digital media to stay informed about events across the globe. Many Muslim scholars, like "MuftMenk," often disseminate information about Islam and its teachings on social media platforms. Islamic Da'wah, which literally translates to "To Invite," is the practice of Muslim academics inviting people from all over the world on adopt Islam, according to prior research. By taking such measures, Muslim preachers are made it simpler for individuals to learn new things about Islamic doctrine and to understand their "True faith." Many Muslim preachers are publishing hadiths and Qur'anic verses and converting them into various languages so that people of many nations can understand them. Social media has therefore made it simpler for people to learn new things and to get reliable data about their religion.

Saleh and Astiana (2021) stated the role of social media in discouraging religious extremism in Indonesia. The study shows group exclusion, politics in religion, threats and hates speech by the religious extremists on social media. The main purpose of the study also is to investigate how Islamic preachers in Yogyakarta (A city in Indonesia) convert as safeguard of religion and the function of social media in this process. For that they applied the qualitative method and conduct interviews of different Islamic preachers via Zoom app. In the result of that they found some key points which was that how can they aware their community towards Islam, how they can tackle the hate speech by some of the intransigents Islamic preachers on social media, how they can show the real image of Islam and what type of role should social media play. The researchers want their government, religious preachers, educational organizations and terrorism agency to play their part and give awareness to their community.

Research Objectives

The main objective is to find out whether or not Islamic preachers on social media has an impact on the beliefs that individuals keep regarding their religion. The objective of the study is to provide an extensive view of the existing literature in relation to the impact of social media on youth. The researcher intended to analyze respondents' knowledge of Islam, the impact that following an Islamic preacher had on their lives, how they felt about other scholars on social media and whether or not those scholars helped them learn more about their respective religions.

Methodology

The researcher conducted a survey of 100 educated students ages 18 to 30, according to (brooke & monika 2021). 84 percent adults use social media platforms ages 18 to 29 in USA and (Ittefaq et al, 2022) 80 percent of social media used by 18 to 35 age group in Pakistan. The data was collected from five big different universities on the basis of their higher enrolments in Lahore. Among these five universities one of them is public sector institution and the others are private

sector institutions and the reasons of selecting 100 educated students from these particular five universities was that these universities represent most of the young populations of Lahore.

From five universities one of them is UCP (University of Central Punjab) which is a private university located in Lahore, 2nd one is UMT (University of Management and Technology) is a private research university which is located in Lahore, 3rd one is LUMS (Lahore university of management sciences) is a private research university, located in Lahore, 4th one is PU (Punjab University) which is a public, research, coeducational higher education institution located in Lahore , the last one SU,(Superior University) is a private university in Lahore. The aim was to went there and asked them about the impact of social media, religion and religious preachers on their life. The respondents were questioned about their religious sects and their favorite Islamic scholars and the impact on their life's.

All participants reported that they are currently study in six mentioned educational institutes in Lahore Pakistan. Responses were female-dominated: 61.4% identified as female, 38.6% identified as male. The quantitative survey collected 100 responses.81.5% of participants were aged 20-25, 15.3% were aged between 25-30, 2.4% aged 30-35 and 1% aged above 35. When asked about their most followed religious scholar on social media, 60.5% of the respondents selected Molana Tariq Jameel, 11.3% Ilyas Qadri, 10.5% choose Mufti Tariq Masood, 7.3% Eng. Muhammad Ali Mirza, 4.8% Farhat Hashmi, 4% Allama Shehensha Hussain Naqvi and 1.6% selected that they follow some other preachers. Questionnaire pertained questions related to their knowledge of Islam, their priorities of following religious preachers on social media platforms, possibility of the impact and usefulness of the content on their lives.

Figure 1: Knowledge of Islam

Participants asked about their knowledge of Islam.
132 responses
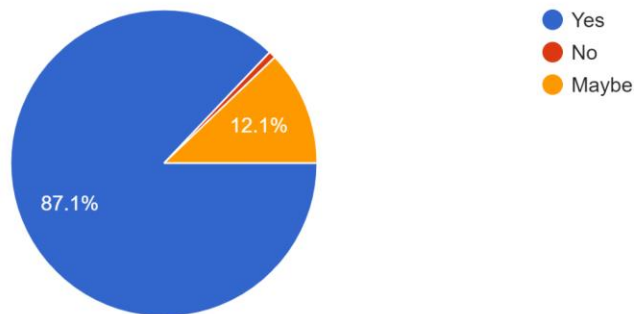
Participants were asked about the knowledge of Islam which they got from different sources.87.1% says that they know the basic knowledge of Islam,12.1% were still confused whether they know or doesn't know the basic principles of Islam and lastly 1% on them doesn't know the basic knowledge about Islam.

Figure 2: follow any Islamic preacher on social media

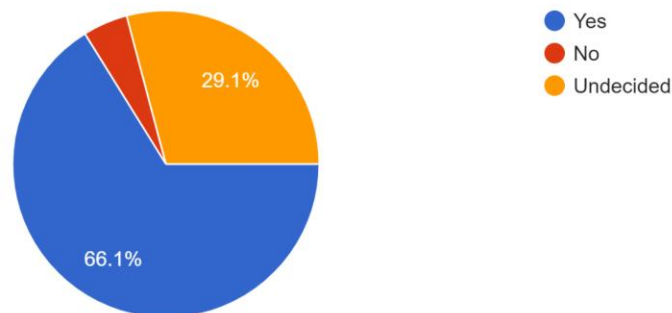Do you follow any Islamic preacher on social media?
131 responses
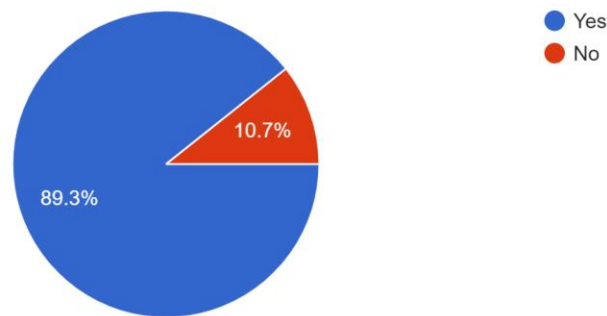
Participants were asked that do they follow any Islamic preacher on social media,89.3% says Yes they do follow and 10.7% denied.

Figure 3: impact of Islamic preacher on their personalities and lives

Do you think that your Islamic preacher has a huge impact on your life?
127 responses

The most important question that I asked participants which I actually wants to know for the sake of my research was that do they have an impact of Islamic preacher on their personalities and

lives. So I got my required answer as 66.1% majority said Yes they have an impact of preachers, while 29% were still undecided and 4.7% denied that they don't have any impact of Islamic preachers.

Figure 4: follow any other Islamic preacher on social media

Participants asked that do they follow any other Islamic preacher on social media?
129 responses
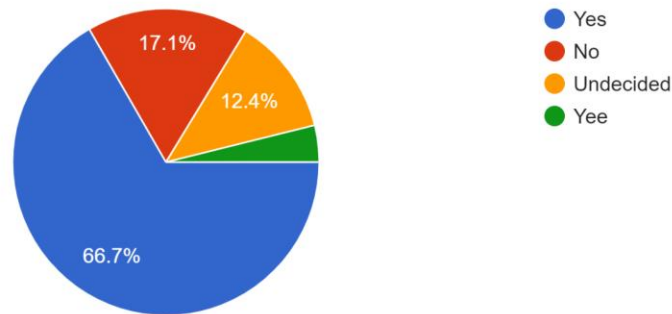
Participants asked that do they follow any other Islamic preacher on social media for sake on knowledge of Islamic quires.70.7% said Yes they do follow other preacher on social media,17.1% said No they don't follow and 12.4% remain undecided.

Figure 5" other Islamic preacher helpful on social media

Participants asked that do they found other Islamic preacher helpful on social media?
128 responses
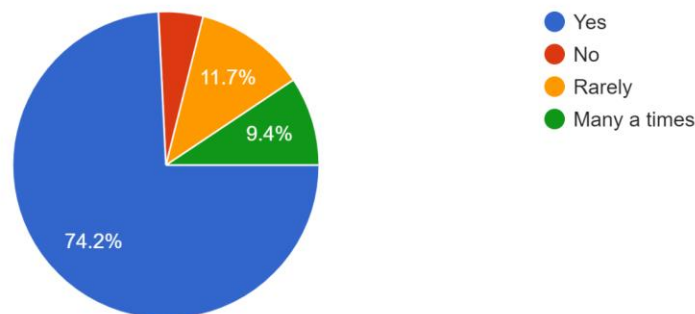
Respondents were asked do they found other Islamic preacher helpful on social media.74.2% choose Yes,11.7% rarely found other preachers helpful,9.4% said many a times they found other social media preachers helpful and 4.7% denied.

Figure 6: Comparison of preachers

Do you compare the sayings of both preachers?
128 responses

- ● Yes
- ● No
- ● Rarely
- ● Many a times

35.9%   17.2%

43.8%
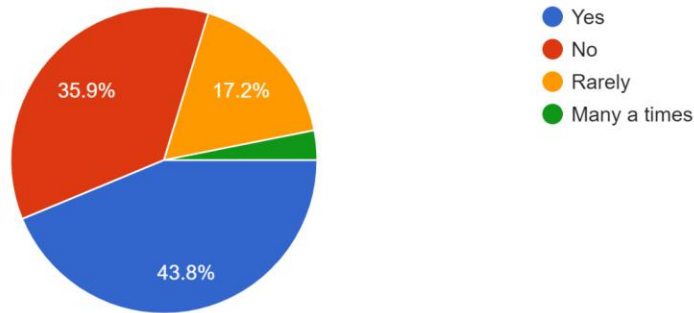
Respondents were asked do they ever compare they sayings of both preachers,43.8% said Yes they do compare,35.9% choose No,17.2% argue that Yes we do compare but on a rare occasions and 3.1% admits they compare many a times.

Correlation among Variables through SPSS

Table 1: Correlation

			B1 Participants asked that do they follow/practice religious principles?
A1 Do you know the basic knowledge of Islam?			
Do you know the basic knowledge of Islam?	Pearson Correlation		.215
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.032
	N		100

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In table 1 A1 is Independent variable as it can have been seen above, when we correlate A1 to B2(dependent variable) variables that summed up as r = **(.215)** which shows a very weak relationship between these two variables.

Table 2: Correlation

		B2 Do you feel offensive on negative comments on your Islamic preacher ?
A2 Do you follow any Islamic preacher on social media?		
Do Follow any Islamic preacher on social media?	Pearson Correlation	.051
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.613
	N	100

In table 2 A2 is Independent variable B2 is dependent variable, so when we correlate these variables the value of **r = (.051)** that show that there is no relationship between these two veriables. Result of correlation tells us that participants do follow Islamic preachers on social media but they never get offensive or angry on the negative comments regarding their preacher.

Table 3:Correlation

		B3 Do you follow the sayings of your preachers religiously in your daily life?	**C3** Do you trust the sayings of your preacher blindly?	**D3** Do you think that your Islamic preacher has a huge impact on your life?
A3 Would you ever be a part of any protest if called by your Islamic preacher ?				
Would you ever be a part of any protest if called by your Islamic preacher ?	Pearson Correlation	.178	-.170	-.013
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.080	.095	.897
	N	100	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In table 3 A3 is independent variable and when we correlate A3 to B3, the value was
r = (.178), the result of correlating A3 with C3 gave us the value **r = (-.170)** and lastly correlating A3 to D3 shows **r = (-.013)**.
Correlating A3 to B3 value indicates there is no relationship among these, value A3 to C3 and A3 to D3 indicates that there is perfect negative relationship among these values.

Table 4: Correlation

A4 Participants asked that do they follow any other Islamic preacher on social media?		B4 Participants asked that do they found other Islamic preacher helpful on social media?	C4 Do you compare the sayings of both preachers?
Participants asked that do they follow any other Islamic preacher on social media?	Pearson Correlation	.408**	.190
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.060
	N	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In table 4 we correlate A4 to B4 with gave us the value **r = (.408)** that indicates there is a moderate association among these, correlating A4 to C4 showed us the **r = (.190)** means there is no relation among these two values.

Discussion

In first research question researcher asked participants about their knowledge of Islam.87.1% says that they know the basic knowledge 12.1% were still confused whether they know or doesn't know the basic principles of Islam and lastly 1% on them doesn't know the basic knowledge about Islam. Parents have a significant influence on their kids' religious behaviors. A little more than half of the parents polled claim that their adolescent has "all the same" religious beliefs that they do, and a further four out of ten claim that their adolescent shares "some" of their religious beliefs (Petts, R. J. 2009). Youngsters in Pakistan starts knowing the basic principles of Islam from their home, parents usually teach their kids at the beginning of their childhood. So their first base of knowledge is home.

Second research question was the impact of Islamic preachers in their life and upon which 61% of youth agreed, while 29% were still undecided and 4.7% denied that they don't have any impact of Islamic preachers. In the era of social media where religious preachers have their own space, remembering the instructions of his parents he started following Islamic preacher according to his sect which is told by his or her parents. Here is the time where he connects towards his preacher, so anything that youngster wants to know about religious quires and straight away will check his own religious preacher social site page and get his required information, that show the impact of that preacher in his life.

In third question participants were asked if they follow any other Islamic preachers on social media for the sake of knowledge, 70.7% said Yes they do follow other preacher on social media ,17.1% said No they don't follow and 12.4% remain undecided. Even I asked them do they found other Islamic preacher helpful on social media.74.2% choose Yes,11.7% rarely found other preachers helpful,9.4% said many a times they found other social media preachers helpful and 4.7% denied. There are some quires in Islam where preacher have inconsistencies among sects, so that youngster wants to know what is the stance of other preachers on this matter, then where they started searching for other preacher and got his perspective on that particular matter.

In fourth and last research question where participants were asked that if they gain new information regarding their religious sect through their preacher, 76.9% were satisfied as they select Yes option. 9.2% participants denied,7.7% thinks that rarely they gain new information and 6.2% says they gain new information many a times. (Amir,2010) The Pakistani Taliban, in the opinion of 79.4% of respondents to a recent Pips survey of nation, do not advance Islam. The majority of responders (85.6%) thought that suicide bombs were against Islamic law. 92.4% said that religion is a significant part of their lives. Before that Pakistani youngster used to think Taliban's as Islamic hero's as they are holding the Islamic flag in the world, youngster though that they are against those who are against their religion but now with the advancement of social media many Islamic preachers had in a joint "fatwa," declared that the Taliban's understanding of Islam was false and inconsistent with the true meaning of the Shariah. The Taliban were ignorant and had a wrong mentality. The experts argued that Islam forbids killing women in response to the Taliban's understanding that doing so serves the greater interests of the faith. "Even heretical women are not permitted to be slain in Islam," they said. (Dawn,2012) These were the things that youngsters are actually unaware but with the exposure of social media and the youngsters are getting the new information from their sect and from the other sects as well.

Conclusion

The social media's impact on youngster's religious beliefs has been noted particularly globally; the millennial generation (born in the twenty-first century) is considerably different from earlier generations in every way. These people are explorers and questioners, and social media has given them a forum where they can freely express their ideas and religious convictions. This study showed us the great effect of online preaching through social media by Islamic scholars. Various studies indicate that social media is utilized to teach Islam since it can direct young people who are confused and seeking guidance. The impact of social media on Islam has significantly altered how many Muslims previously practiced their faith, but it has also inspired many people to study about Islam and adhere to its teachings. Islam is a religion of peace that teach us to respect all the other religions on the basis of humanity and all the other aspects of life. But in Pakistan some religious preachers have developed their social media accounts solely to deceive and mislead the younger population of today. These preachers with hidden motives tend to use this as an

opportunity and spread false information and misguide people from the path of religion. TLP is one of the biggest examples in Pakistan.

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