



Religion and the media



How is religion portrayed in the media?

Newspapers

A local newspaper may help promote a local religious establishment by publicising events, or may inform its readership about various aspects of a religion. A national newspaper may feature articles on national or international events, eg Hajj, or the appointment of a new Pope.

However, newspapers can report stories in a biased way. 9/11 and representations of Islam)

Magazines

There are many religious publications which educate and promote the message of religion to support and strengthen people's faith. Some say that religious publications may give a one-sided image of their religion, which might lead to prejudice against other religions or non-believers.

Television

Soap operas, dramas and documentaries give different representations of religion. Documentaries are factual and should give a balanced presentation. For example, the documentary *Strictly Kosher* showed the reality of everyday life for some Jewish people.

The internet

Religious groups can use the internet to their advantage by promoting their religion to the world & bringing together the faithful by sharing news and views online. Many religious charities, eg CAFOD, use their websites to make people aware of disasters around the world and to ask for help and donations online. However, the internet can also be used to spread a message of bigotry & hate about particular religions or groups of people.

Radio

Some radio stations target a religious audience, broadcasting the latest religious news and providing sermons, music, stories and advice.

More secular radio stations may explore issues where there are clear religious perspectives to be considered. For example, topics such as abortion might be discussed and opinions contributed by the presenters, guests and the public.

Film

Often, films which have a religious storyline have characters facing moral choices. For example, the film *Bend it like Beckham* highlights the typical struggles that some religious Sikh women may experience as a result of living in the West.

Films can help to educate the public about different religious principles. Viewers can also sympathise with religious characters in the films and the difficulties they may go through.

Films may also promote discussion on sensitive issues experienced by faith community members such as sexism, homosexuality or arranged marriage. However, they can also reinforce stereotypes by offering a biased portrayal of the religion.

There are various types of media, including:

Newspapers these may have a particular political bias or social perspective. Religion-specific newspapers, eg the *Jewish Chronicle*

Magazines Religion-specific magazines cover news from a particular religion's point of view

TV TV programmes are mostly secular, although some digital channels, eg the GOD channel, focus specifically on religious programming.

Radio stations, local and national, target different audiences. Most are secular, although some may contain aspects of religion, eg BBC Radio 4's *Beyond Belief*.

The internet can be used for entertainment, research, education and information. Religion-specific websites,

Films cover different stories, topics, themes and genres. They are often first released at the cinema and then become available for personal viewing at home.

For

Critical comment helps people to understand and think about different views on an issue.

Members of the public have the freedom to make their own decisions on beliefs and practices of religions, regardless of what the media says.

Without opinion, the media would be simply informative. Opinions give 'flavour' to what the media presents.

Against

Most people gain the majority of their knowledge of religion from the media, therefore it needs to avoid being biased.

Belief and practice are a personal choice which should not be criticised.

If the criticism is too general, all members of a particular faith community may be thought of in the same negative way



The law

Individuals who feel that the media has offended them or invaded their privacy can complain to various agencies and associations, including:

Press Complaints Commission – handles complaints about the editorial content of newspapers and magazines and provides advice to journalists and the public.

British National Union of Journalists (NUJ) - has a code of conduct that should be met by all journalists.

Broadcasting Standards Commission - handles complaints within the broadcast media about taste, decency, violence and sexual conduct.

Telecommunications Act, 1984 – individuals who have received a message that is offensive or obscene can refer to this act for their own protection.

Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) - makes sure that advertisements are legal, decent, honest and truthful.

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) classifies all films shown in the UK. The BBFC can request changes to a film so that it is considered more suitable for viewing. A film cannot be shown unless it has been passed by the BBFC.

Keywords

BLASPHEMY- Speaking or acting sacrilegiously about God or sacred things

CENSORSHIP- To suppress speech or communication that is considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, politically incorrect or inconvenient

ECUMENICAL- Representing a number of different Christian Churches

FREEDOM OF SPEECH- The right to express any opinion without censorship or restraint

MEDIA- The main means of mass communication grouped together

PHILOSOPHICAL MESSAGE- A communication that explains something important about life

PORNOGRAPHY- Printed or visual material of sexual organs or activity in order to stimulate sexual excitement

PORTRAYAL- A depiction of someone or something in the media

PROMISCUOUS- Having many short sexual relationships

RELIGIOUS FIGURE- Leader of a religious group

RELIGIOUS MESSAGE- A communication that explains something important about religion

REPRESENT- To depict something in a work of art, literature, film etc.

VIOLENCE- Behaviour involving physical force intended to harm someone or something