

## The Important of the TV on the Religious Understanding of Turkish People

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### Abstract

The aim of the topic is to deal with television programs as an informative medium which gives information and opinions about society and its impact that are supposed to have on the cultural position of individuals and groups. Further, it presents major role of television on life style of adult people and their religious understanding. One of the functions of television is education of the audiences. It will be shows on the change according to life style, administration and educational policy. Nevertheless television has a great importance on educating of the people. Many of them take shape their religious understanding by watching television. We will also deal with the position of media in modern Turkey especially about adult education, we will look into television programs from a socio-cultural and educational perspective, exemplifying this by two Turkish television programs called 'Ekmek Teknesi' (Means of Livelihood) and 'Sır Kapisı' (Door to Secret). In this article we aim to examine both positive and negative effects of these soap operas in context of religious education and theological perspective.

**Keywords:** TV Programmes, Religious Education, Turks, Ekmek Teknesi, Sır Kapisı,

### INTRODUCTION

As a matter of fact in the modern Turkey, media has, progressively more, a great responsibility on shaping the beliefs of society and their behavior pattern with each passing day as a source of the news, interpretation, and information. Today, media becomes one of the most important elements of taking the meaning of the political, socio-economic, religious and strategic stability. Religion has an effective role as one of the most important dynamics of the social life not only as in the traditional life in the previous periods but also in the modern life today. It is a well known fact that media has not only an important contribution on shaping the individual but also developing the society. It should be taken into consideration the fact that mass media has some prejudices on religion (Turan 2005).

International technologies of communication, newspapers, telegraph lines, international trade, as well as high-tech Technologies such as radio, television, telephone, and the Internet are bringing educated people from around the world into ever-closer contact. The technological tools like TV could be conceivable a progression from traditional religious understanding to modern religious understanding with modern education. The modern religious education argues that the former religious teaching did not combined new developments both in educational sciences and in the religious understanding of the Turkish society (Furat 2009).

The traditional cultural structure of the modern Turkish society, which roots back into the Ottoman Empire, is especially manifest in the social and religious life/areas. Certainly Turkish society has been affected by the socio- cultural developments of the modern world as cultural and educational. Therefore religious and cultural values that are imminent in the daily human relationships are greatly affected by the Western culture. In their daily relations, Turkish youth refer to discourses and communicative instruments of Western societies. This, in a sense, is also an impact of the rapidly globalizing world. Whereas television is on the top of the list as the major instrument of influence of the globalizing world among the masses, Internet has a secondary place, mostly common among the younger sections of the Turkish society (Ozdemir 1998, 73-77).

Television programmes have very important places for the religious understands of Turkish people. Because of the people are watching specific TV programmes according to their cognitive structure. These programmes are also their religious and cultural choices.

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According to this point of view, Turkish Muslim society has a religious understanding, which is distinct from the Arabic Islam. The main axis of Turkish Islam revolves around a discourse, which stresses staying away from formalism, not resembling in its dressing codes to Arabs, and more freedom for women. In addition, this understanding of Islam displays more tolerance and more emphasis on universal human values in a globalizing world.

Many of the Turkish people tend toward to television programmes according to the direction of their comprehends. The formal and non formal educations, that they have it from childhood, have very important effect to their comprehends and formation of religious understanding of Turkish people.

The traditional teaching of Islam both inside and outside school religious education in Turkey can be described as the 'Ilmihal-centred approach'. Education of 'Ilmihal centered' have been teaching at the high school (Imam-Hatip) and theology faculties in Turkey for many years. This understanding of teaching Islam, developed during Turkish-Islamic cultural history, has had a great impact on religious education in formal training and common-public education. It has itself recently incorporated some pedagogical improvements (Kaymakcan, 2006, 451).

### ANALYSES AND DISCUSSIONS

In contemporary Turkey, television plays an effective role in shaping forms of relations between human being and outside world. They have also some long- term effects such as developing and changing their understandings, approaches and attitudes on the other hand.

Presentation of religion and methods of religious education are developed together with the scientific and technological developments in modern world. TV has taken the head among these developments. In other word, TV is reference for modern individual to relieve his/her needs concerning information. It seems that TV relieves religious needs in modern Turkish society. But we have two serious problems while dealing with this topic.

1-Does TV have any influence to form to beliefs of people?

2-How does this technological marvel affect on people from the point of view of religion? And in other word, how do both of shape their beliefs?

In this article, we will try to answer these questions for modern Turkish society.

The approach of the scholarship to culture and meaning has become important to both religion and media. Thus perspectives in which culturally religious and media structures have been the primary focus are giving way to an increased interest in the construction of culture. The study of how audiences and spectators understand and use the flow of messages in the mass media becomes, in part, a study of how people establish their general worldviews and ultimate values.

Accordingly the relation between media and religion, we find two programmes that they have very high rating. So we would like to interest in two programmes in the Turkish televisions. We would like to emphasize these questions;

1. Why Turkish people are watching these two programmes more then?
2. What did they find in these programmes?
3. How is an effect between religion structure and TV programmes?
4. Are they having religious content according to their Islamic theology?

#### 1. Television and Influences as an Educational Appliance

Communication mediums in modern world differ rather from these in pre- modern world. These communication mediums are TV, Radio, Press, and Internet. TV among other communication mediums has a

strong influence on mass so that TV can spread out information on any topic in a short time to majority of mass. So children were asked such a question: 'which one do you love much more: father or TV?' in a research work conducted. The reply of children at 44% is TV (Bahadır, 2005; Refik, 1997, 17; Kaya, 1985, 17).

According to a research work conducted in modern Turkish society, 96% of people watch definitely TV (RTUK, 2010; Efe, 1999, 63). Thus many people spend their spare time to watch TV. According to the data in this research, people in many countries including developed West countries, spend at least six hours a day by TV. Similarly, Turkish people also spend huge part of their daily times to watch TV (RTUK, 2009; Cüceloğlu, 1992, 9; Efe, 1999, 9). It is impossible not to use mass communication mediums to reach people for religious representation. Therefore TV is the most important one among mediums used in order to give religious knowledge to people and affect them.

In parallel with the increasing number of TV channels in Turkey, increased in the number and type of TV programs. Due to the development of technological infrastructure and the increase of innovations in this field, television has become more popular. The discussions about the mass media in general and TV in particular has been an object of criticism and which have the topic of 'effect' have been for the scientists for many years. While there are some people like Mc Quail who praise TV claiming that it promotes the opportunities of learning and education, there are some like Jerry Mander who continues criticizing TV taking causing addiction as a starting point (Mutlu, 1999:79-80).

There are a number of difficulties in establishing the causal link between TV watching and cognitive development as cultural and religious. First, inappropriate home and school inputs may induce both more TV watching and lower test scores. This is an omitted variable problem, which can be resolved by detailed data with sufficient 'environmental' control variables. Second, children and parents may share predispositions for certain habits and behaviors that cannot be measured. This is an 'individual-specific effect' problem, which may be overcome with panel data. Third, TV watching can affect cognitive development like religious knowledge, which can in turn affect future TV watching. This is an issue of dynamic treatment effects with feedback, calling for a proper dynamic model and estimation method. With a rich childhood longitudinal sample from children and young adult datum that have not only child characteristics and family background variables but also detailed home and school inputs in the current and earlier periods, we will estimate dynamic models to overcome these problems (Huang-Lee 2010, 393).

## **2. Can it be thought that TV Educated and Gives a Form to Beliefs of People?**

There are those replying 'no' to this question as well as researchers replying 'no'. The communication systems are one of the effective exterior elements, which influence formation of faith. Some researchers say that: these systems are the most effective to 'influence to convince and to motivate people'; others claim that these systems are limited (Topçuoğlu, 1996, 1; Cereci, 1992, 55). According to the first opinion, likes and choices, beliefs and convictions of mass, interest and concerns, thoughts of people are under the control of communication systems (Topçuoğlu, 1992, 219). This results in a considerable influence in the formation of people's faith. As a different result it has been seen that, media besides motivating people towards certain ideas helps strengthening existing ideas of people (Cebeci, 1998, 220; Kaya, 1998, 220).

In this case, it is inevitable that there is a certain effect of mass communication mediums on man and society. But the problem is of power and limits of this effect. First of all, there are a receiver and a transmission, which sends a message; this is the theory of communication. So meanings which spectators infer from words and pictures on TV or any communication mediums are closely related to their cultural levels and worldviews. The same broadcastings, which those who have different worldviews watch, have different meanings for them (Turam, 1994, 81). So the process of being influenced is not completely independent from person. Attitudes by which the individual has, bring near to certain stimulants, and take away from another. Spectators are not completely passive in front of stimulants (Zillioğlu, 1986, 40). For instance, those who have definite views on a subject or a candidate in a political campaign read newspapers and listen to radio programs are suitable for their opinions. At outset, they treat fastidiously not listening to others (Şerif, 1996, 568). It means that individual can control mass communication mediums.

According to some researches, media helps people to consolidate and become sound their own opinions rather than exerting them to accept some opinions. So it is hardly difficult to dissuade people's own opinions and making them accepted to completely opposite opinions to their last ones by means of media. Because of those who have a partisan attitude to media, perceive stimulants transmitting from the media mediums in respect to own world view. Also they have a selective attitude to stimulants, which is not suitable to their own opinions. This is a similar example with the condition of a fanatic football spectacular, so that he always traces his own team's matches and prefers to watch TV channels broadcasting the matches (Turam, 1994, 48). But this psychological and pedagogical process cannot correctly run out because of fast and intensive stimulants. In this case, person is in a dilemma concerning to accepting or rejecting new stimulants. This dilemma can lead to begin a new process, which is able to create some doubts on certain knowledge, values and attitudes (Zilloğlu, 1986, 40).

But if someone does not have any opinion about any topic, then media can have an influence on people to have an opinion. For example, those who do not have a clear decision on political preferences can be affected to accept a political opinion by media. Also, these mediums can affect much more on those who do not have negatively or positively a strong attitude to religion (Furat, 2009).

However, the power of media directing public opinion can introduce a new subject, which people do not know or are not interested in, to their agenda. Naturally, mass communication mediums are actually one of the most important information sources for people, even though it can be objected with the question 'How much correct and true information are obtained by media?'

As a result of that, the place of Radio and TV were researched as regarding with introducing some important reasons such as agriculture, cooperative, and health of child, which are of process of socialization in a research conducted in three villages of Ankara. According to the results obtained, giving information, as a function of radio and TV programs is more important than other functions of them (Yavuzer, 1998, 164; 1996, 88). 'Today, vast and important sources which provide knowledge enough us to make the world meaningful are mass communication mediums' (Kaya, 1998, 62). There are some opinions about media so that it determines both agenda and what about people should think rather than it does not tell about what they should think (Özdemir, 1998, 46; Zilloğlu, 1986, 41).

It is necessary to explain that correctness and usefulness of the information can be discussed so that TV, which can cause disinformation, is criticized. Disinformation is not misinformation, but misleading, indifferent, pieced, and superficial information. Although disinformation takes away people to obtain true information, they can suppose that they have correct information (Postman, 1994, 119). If we think that there is such an effect on topics concerning belief, then it is possible that someone who does not have religious knowledge can assume that this information by media is sufficient for oneself.

If media mediums such as TV and radio broadcast to opposite in a religion with the moral values and basic principles of a religion, one will be misled. Furthermore, media can create some images, which change views of people about religion as it, causes 'disinformation'. We can see the typical example of which in the image of Islam is created by Islam itself. In the West, all Muslims are presented as people, who protest, are bearded, and armed, wearing baggy trousers in media. As a result of that, Western people do not take interest in life styles and thoughts of Muslims; moreover can be biased about Muslims. So we can say that mass communication mediums are primarily effective on cognitive dimensions of faith (Turan, 2005, 137-139; Uyanık, 1996, 292-294).

In company with these datums we have to learn that which programmes are get attentions and which religious programmes are watching by the people? The rate 77.1 % among those who applied to a research conducted in Turkey states to take interest in religious programs. Those who watch religious programs on TV were asked how much useful these programs are. According to the answers, 62.6 % of people states that they improve their common ideas about religion so that this explanations support our argument that media informs. 48.3 % of them state that the programs strengthen their religious beliefs.

However, those who change their attitudes under the effect of from religious and moral programs on TV are 11.95 % in the rate ([www.haberciler.com](http://www.haberciler.com); <http://www.ucankus.com>; <http://www.medyaline.com>).

It is a fact that Turkish People attain their religious requirements from TV broadcast. Especially, the rate of watching religious programs increases at the sacred days and months. Especially there are some soap operas which have religious content. Many of the people have been watched them. Shortly we will study two TV programs in Turkey in the following:

### 3. Religious Programmes in the Turkish TV's

There are some religious programmes in the Turkish channels. But especially for two programmes the people very interested in Turkish channel as soup operas. "Ekmek teknesi" and "Sır Kapısı".

#### a. Example of 'Ekmek Teknesi' (Means of Livelihood)

The soap opera 'Ekmek Teknesi' was being shown on the channel ATV is included in the most watched 10 programs in all channels in Turkey the top 10 most watched. *Ekmek Teknesi* is not a religious soap opera, but contains some religious themes, which are one of the reasons to prompt Turkish people to watch it. There is a character person who has a bakery. He is a wise man on this soap opera. Another character is *Herodotus Cevdet* who is a philosophical person. The everyday lives of people in an old district of Istanbul are subject on this ingenious soap opera. Daily events are dealt with in the framework of family and its social environment. The baker who has a religious personality is performs sometimes practices his religion. However, in the soap opera, there is another character that exploits the religious laws.

So the soap opera completely represents the image of modern Muslim in Turkey, as a secular Muslim state. Those who drink alcohol, which is forbidden in Islam, can perform their religious duties. In interviews, which we have with people who watch the soap opera, they state that they like the soap opera because the soap opera creates an image of modern Muslim Turkish who takes away from all extremist situations and also reflects the religious actuality of Turkey.

Additionally, people who prefer to watch TV programs giving messages on social values, family relations, family-based values and religious rules, watch this soap opera (*Ekmek Teknesi*). Thus, the Turkish soap opera 'Ekmek Teknesi' is important to determine the changing of Islamic mentality of Turkish people. So the watching ratings of religious programs on some TV in Turkey are low especially during sacred days. This means that Turkish people are not very welcome to the strict religious and classical programs. Also the ratings of strict religious programs reflect the change in the understanding of religion in modern Turkey.

The religious educationalists and theologians encounter with a dilemma, which is related to 'How to introduce the religion to people: classical method or modern one?' with regard to the rating of the soap opera 'Ekmek Teknesi'.

#### b. Example of 'Sır Kapısı' (Door to Secret)

Mystic TV programs are popular topic in recent days. Since mystery aimed at soap operas viewed, the effects of the soup operas are discussed by many peoples. We interested in this topic to test the effects of mystic TV programs on people with regard to religious education and understanding and we had chosen the most popular mystery oriented soap operas.

There are many soap operas in Turkish television programs, like, Kalp Gözü (the Eye of the Heart), Sır Kapısı (Door to Secret), Gizli Dünyalar (Mysterious Worlds), Büyük Buluşma (Great Reunion), 6. His (Sixth Sense), Sırlara Yolculuk (a trip down mysteries), Gerçeğin Ötesi (the Beyond of Truth), Yolcu (Passenger) etc. But we would like to emphasize one soap opera that is 'Sır Kapısı'.

The program 'Sır Kapısı' on the Turkish TV channels like STV a fiction that mainly deals with religious life, mystical and supernatural events. The program whose subjects are about unexpected help of God is included in the most watched 10 programs in all channels in Turkey. This program reflects and expresses the mystical deepness of Turkish people. The many people, we have had an interview with tell that they very lived a similar experience in their daily life. Those who watched the program engage the stories due to their belief

in destiny and have an opinion that Allah (God) would help at an unexpected time. In addition all letters sent to the program support this point.

Those who watch the program '*Sir Kapısı*' evaluate super natural events as religious facts. So in this program the religion does not fit into the daily practices of believers.

The programs '*Ekmek Teknesi*' and '*Sir Kapısı*' are the most favorite two TV programs defined as religious ones in Turkish TV channels. '*Ekmek Teknesi*' reflects the modern understanding of the religion. The characters who are good in social life, go to the mosque, and fast during the Ramadan but at the same time they can drink alcohol.

'*Sir Kapısı*' deals with the mystical dimensions of the religion and reflects mystery rather than religious practices. Such an approach to Islam is not well- directed according to Islamic theologians. And it is not suitable for the education of Islamic teaching.

Even though, according to a survey study, many of the people believe that the events in the mysterious serial TV programs are provide good examples to show while giving religious education to children (Koçak, 2006, 350), the keynote address of the "Door to secret" is not proper to majority of the public religious life. Because of the theme is miracle life. It will be experience for rare people, but not at all the people.

### Conclusion

Television is doubtless the most influential instrument of communication in Turkish society. A significant section of the Turkish society watches regularly specific TV programs. Religious programs are also on the agenda of the Turkish people in their everyday life. The most popular TV programs have significant religious and mystical dimensions. Among series, "Door to Secret" called *Sir Kapısı* and "Means of Livelihood" called "*Ekmek Teknesi*", which are intensively outlined around religious themes, have the highest TV ratings. The religious structures of mentioned TV series reflect a modern Muslim Turkish culture and present a secular model of social life rather than a traditional Ottoman one. These serials are popular among more secularized sections of the Turkish society as well as the religious ones, since they have elements which address both secular and rather religious sections of the society. Eroticism and prayer, alcohol, gambling and fasting, all go hand in hand. In these serials, the Muslim character is the one, who has good faith, but does not practise his religion. The message that is given to followers that religion is confined to individual area between man and God. In this context in these series, for an instance, it could be evaluated that dressing codes like headscarf, which are symbols of religion, are not emphasized. Rather, in these series the Muslim Turkish typology is presented as the one, whose faith is more individual and adapted to the modern life. Parallel to this reality, religious life in Muslim Turkish society is offered that it closes to subjective level of religion like the way modern western countries live. Therefore the scenarios do not focuses on religious practises but puts forward ethical values and moral lessons in the social life.

However, high TV ratings of these kinds of serials make Turkish pedagogist and theologians worried. Some of them believe that this phenomenon is a manifestation of a new kind of religious understanding and teaching way. In this context, some mention the rise of a "Turkish Islam."

By the way, all these are processed in an environment of Islamic and ethical values. The question, which television programs play a role in shaping religious believes, gives us some insight in the light of these programs. According to this, masses watch television selectively. The most important criteria of this selection activity is whether one finds something close to himself/herself or not in these programs. It is significant to note that programs, which reflect more universal human tolerance, are mostly watched. In this sense, one can conclude that traditional forms of religion leave its place to more modern understanding ways of religion.

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