

Exploring Cross-Cultural Influences in the Pakistani Drama Industry: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to highlight the impact of Indian, Turkish, and now Korean content on Pakistani society through television dramas from the last three decades. The study provides a comparative analysis of different global customs, cultural traditions, and lifestyles in our particular local drama, perceiving how our drama industry has evolved with foreign influences over time. While keeping in mind our glorious era of the 1970s, 80s, even 90s, and millennium, Pakistani modern-day drama has been overshadowed by foreign supremacy. The overlapping similarities among these cultures are one of the reasons the audiences can relate to these drama genres and conclusively are fascinated with their influence. Although it is a matter of consideration that our local viewer has a wide variety of drama content on other platforms, the growing popularity and impact of the abovementioned cultures can be relatable to modern-day collective issues. Moreover, the present study proves that the influence of Indian, Turkish, and Korean content in our local drama industry is gradually changing the lifestyles and mindsets of youth. Undoubtedly, international content shares some relevance rather than fascination and may promote cultural diversity, but the fastest-changing trends among Pakistani youth require attention and an immediate approach to redefining cultural identity. Moreover, the study reveals that our local drama become more commercialized

while addressing serious social issues due to foreign influences, which are not alienated but irrelevant to Indigenous Pakistani society. This comparative analysis has been done on the basis of the viewer's perception and exploratory research method towards foreign influences in our local drama industry using the technique of innate expressionism.

Keywords: Drama, Cultural Identity, Foreign influences, youth

Introduction

The Pakistani drama industry has a rich history that dates back to the 1960s, with several dramas focusing on social and domestic issues as exemplified by PTV's popular serials, including *Dhoop Kinare*, *Khuda ki Basti*, *Tanhaian*, and *Alpha Bravo Charlie*. At their times, these dramas boasted social and familial values, with strong female characters. However, the Pakistani drama industry has significantly transformed over the past three decades due to the cross-cultural content. The post-2000 landscape witnessed a significant shift with the emergence of private channels. This shift prioritized TRPs more than the content itself, leading to a predominance of content featuring romance, love triangles, and even extramarital affairs. This trend, emerging from the influence of Indian and Western culture, has sparked discussions regarding the cultural impact, specifically the potential loss of Pakistani cultural distinctiveness and the adoption of modern trends in clothing, language, and social norms within the dramas. While the phenomenon could also be viewed as a form of cultural exchange, the rise of Indian dramas in Pakistan has sparked debate regarding cultural imperialism. Similarly, Turkish dramas have become popular among the Pakistani audience, both male and female. Consequently, these popularized, Urdu-dubbed TV dramas have ignited discussions about their influence on social norms.

In addition, the impact of Korean dramas, popularly known as K-dramas, on Pakistani youth has emerged as a particularly significant force. These dramas have garnered global popularity with their storylines and characters. Their content resonates with viewers through relatable themes that explore family dynamics, respect for elders, the pursuit of love, and the challenges of

navigating social change—themes that transcend cultural boundaries. This research contributes to studies highlighting cross-cultural influences on the Pakistani drama industry and its social impact. The study utilizes an exploratory method with secondary sources to analyse the significant influence of foreign content, mainly Indian, Turkish, and Korean, on the Pakistani drama industry and viewer perception. The study investigates how exposure to diverse global customs, cultural traditions, and lifestyles, particularly through foreign content from India, Turkey, and Korea, has impacted the Pakistani drama industry and society.

This study, through a comprehensive analysis, focuses on the implications of these cross-cultural themes on Pakistani society and the drama industry itself, exploring particular examples of local and foreign dramas that have resonated deeply with Pakistani audiences.

Background

The year 1964 became the golden era for Pakistani television. Pakistan Television (PTV) broadcasted several dramas, which weren't just entertainment but mirrors reflecting society's issues. From family struggles to crime and misuse of power, PTV explored everything. Initially, dramas focused on family unity. In 1969, Pakistan Television (PTV) launched the groundbreaking serial *Khuda Ki Basti*. The serial depicted a common Pakistani man's everyday social life and traditions. The serial gained global acclaim, especially among Pakistanis abroad (Noman & Baloch, 2020). Pakistan is a culturally rich nation with diverse languages, traditions, and ethnicities. However, as an Islamic republic, certain shared principles of faith, religious ideology, and social norms bind its citizens. From the beginning, PTV has always strived to uphold these socio-religious values. However, after 2000, with the proliferation of private television channels, the Pakistani drama industry shifted towards modernism. Modern dramas delve into more intricate relational challenges, as Rehman et al. (2019) noted.

Significance of the Study

This research sheds light on the proliferation of foreign television dramas on Pakistani culture and society. Over three decades, the Pakistani drama industry has witnessed a significant change, driven by the popularity of Indian, Turkish, and Korean shows. This research examines their influences in molding the themes, storylines, and content of Pakistani dramas, which were traditionally grounded in the country's social and religious context. This research examines this cultural shift and provides valuable insights into Pakistani society's evolving identity. It also sheds light on the ongoing negotiation between upholding indigenous cultural values and integrating global influences. It also emphasizes the need for media literacy and safeguards to prevent cultural erosion and safeguard national identity.

Objectives

This study aims to:

1. to examine the influence of Indian, Turkish, and Korean dramas on the Pakistani drama industry.
2. to investigate the impact of these dramas on viewers' attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyle choices.
3. to recommend strategies for promoting local content that reflects Pakistani cultural and religious values.

Literature Review

Media plays a critical role in our lives as a powerful source of entertainment, education, and information. It can alter our world perspective, often subconsciously molding our opinions and behaviors. Once revered as a luxury, television has become a commodity in households - especially Pakistani households - as a lens through which we are offered a glimpse into the ever-changing world around us. The advent of television started an era of dramas, a dominant form of entertainment that informed, engaged, and persuaded viewers towards emerging trends. However, these dramas also nudged the views towards the adaptation of new and unfamiliar ideas.

Karim (2016) argues that dramas have gradually transformed into a source of transmission and reinforcement of various social norms. Likewise, Aazhar (2007) claims that television's core function was once to educate individuals through different types of programs, such as dramas. These ideas align with Narula's (2006) views that the audience can be significantly impacted by the behaviors and interactions in dramas, profoundly impacting their conduct in daily social lives. But dramatization has extended to new heights with the beginning of a digital age. Now, the word *mass media* encompasses television, phones, movies and entertainment to distribute information at a massive level. Electronic media, such as television sets, cinema screens, and computers, have become pioneers in promoting cross-cultural trends across the globe. This influence originates from their audience's size, diversity, and geographic reach, shaping the existing culture compared to the traditional venues (Vineet, 2011). The rise of media has effectively broken the territorial barriers, establishing a more interconnected world (Jang et al., 2021). This accessibility enables individuals to choose from diverse entertainment options, leading to the birth of globalization (Eijaz & Ahmad, 2011). Some scholars use the term *cultural imperialism* as an extreme proliferation of different cultures in a native culture. Schiller (1993) defines cultural imperialism as integrating societies into a global system where dominant cultures pressure or entice local elites to adopt their norms and structures. Kheeshadeh (2012) states that the worldwide exchange of resources - information, goods, money, or people - can change the concept of human connection. But this interconnectedness can also lead to; cultural imperialism and homogenization. Several nations worry that globalisation, driven by media and powerful corporations, can infiltrate their culture and lead to cultural imperialism (Kheeshadeh, 2012; Kim, 2007).

Contrarily, Carey (2002) highlights how researchers have studied these remarkable changes, introducing the term *globalisation*, which, despite cultural homogenization concerns, can also promote intercultural understanding through information flow. The globalisation of media means a better understanding of cultures through the flow of information in

international society. Lee et al. (2020) discusses how globalization can connect different nations through extensive culture, strengthening the local culture through hybridization. Eventually, globalization has blurred the lines between the local and foreign cultures, leading to cultural imperialism and hegemony.

Methodology

This study primarily employs content analysis through secondary sources to examine the cross-cultural themes prevalent in the Pakistani television industry. For this purpose, the analysis focuses on several popular dramas aired on Pakistani television, including *Ertugul*, *Ishq Mamnoo*, *Mera Sultan*, *Mere Paas Tum Ho*, and *Nageen*. These dramas, with the exception of *Mere Paas Tum Ho*, were foreign content dubbed in Urdu for the Pakistani audience. The analysis draws a systematic approach to examine the rise of the cross-cultural, dubbed shows in Pakistan, their viewership and their influence on the perspective of Pakistani viewers. The research dives into the themes and content of *Mere Pass Tum Ho*, and its cultural impact based on the portrayal of relationships and sensitive cultural issues. It analyses how viewers in Pakistan react to such content and examines the potential infiltration of cross-cultural norms and values (Noman & Baloch, 2020).

Analysis and Discussion

Influence of Indian, Turkish, and Korean Media on Pakistani Media

With television availability in their houses and affordable cable connections, Indian dramas became extremely popular in Pakistani households. This popularity can be attributed to several Indian channels such as Star Plus, Zee TV, and Colors. However, these dramas have left a jarring impact while no longer broadcasting on the channels. For example, some viewers have adopted several superstitions commonly seen in Indian dramas, such as the (mistaken) belief that breaking glass brings terrible luck (Ahmad, 2014). Razu et al. (2018) also highlighted that a significant portion of the population, particularly women (around 1 in 10), have reported being highly influenced by Indian dramas. Similarly, children exposed to the Indian language through Hindi-dubbed cartoons are also part of the influence (Ishaq et al., 2021).

This form of cultural imperialism has ignited concerns about the erosion of Pakistani cultural identity. While Pakistani dramas have become popular among the audience, both Indian and Pakistani, we can observe a touch of Indian culture in our drama nonetheless. Anwar et al. (2023) conducted a study that specifically focused on women in Kalat and found that Indian dramas significantly impacted their views on marriage, relationships, and family values. Similarly, Noman & Baloch (2020) examined the content of the popular drama series *Mere Pas Tum Ho* to see how it portrayed elements of Indian culture. The study found that the show normalized certain aspects of Indian life that are not typical in Pakistan, such as wearing sarees, degradation of women, having live-in relationships, and extramarital affairs - all of which don't align with Pakistani culture and Islamic religion. Dawn News also points out the prevalence of such themes in the current Pakistani dramas, *"Producers have completely ignored complaints about the overwhelming use of two themes in dramas this year; two sisters competing for the same man and infidelity leading to a second wife."* According to the esteemed publication, at least 13 dramas have used either storyline (Haider, 2020). Mirroring the popularity of Indian dramas, Turkish dramas have captivated the Pakistani audience. This appeal can be attributed to shared religious beliefs and a sense of Muslim identity and unity. Despite the difference in language, Turkish dramas have become a mainstream phenomenon in Pakistan. This cultural influence is so strong that some perceive it as a "cultural invasion" through soap operas, as reported in (Dawn News, 2013). This trend extends beyond Pakistan, with other countries experiencing a similar fascination with Turkish media, a phenomenon referred to as "neo-Ottoman cool" by Kraidy & Al-Ghazzi (2013).

Furthermore, the rise of private channels in Pakistan sparked a demand for fresh content, leading to the hugely popular trend of Turkish soap operas. The first major success story was *Ishq-e-Mamnoo*, which garnered a staggering viewership of over 55 million for its final episode, as reported by (Dawn News, 2013), citing Media Logic data. Several other shows, such as *Fatima Gul* (30 million) and *Fariha* (28 million), garnered interest among

Pakistani audiences. Similarly, the *Mera Sultan* became a staple in households, providing a glimpse into the Ottoman royalty.

Dirilis Ertugul, which aired on Pakistan's national TV channel, PTV, also became a massive hit, garnering a viewership of over 133 million people. The viewership can be attributed to the values of Islam and the portrayal of women depicted in the series, which resonated with the Pakistani audience (Sajid, 2020). But Indian and Turkish dramas weren't the only ones impacting Pakistani viewers. The term "Korean Wave" (Hallyu) was coined by Chinese media to describe the global craze for South Korean entertainment (Kim, 2007; Song, 2020). But, Hallyu wasn't simply a passing trend; it has slowly taken over the media industries worldwide, representing a thriving and ever-evolving segment of the entertainment industry (Parc & HwyChang, 2013).

The immersive Korean dramas have invested the viewers—primarily the female audience—in the stories and characters. Many find themselves neglecting sleep, health, and other commitments in their eagerness to see what happens next, triggering a binge-watching culture.

In 2016, Like Ertugul, PTV Home also broadcasted a dubbed version of the South Korean drama *Jewel of the Palace* called *Nageen* in Pakistan. The drama series aimed to further the ties between Pakistan and South Korea (Hasnain, 2021). Unlike Indian dramas, where Pakistanis share cultural similarities, and Turkish dramas, where Pakistanis share a religious identity, Pakistani youth are drawn towards K-dramas because they often explore relatable themes such as family, respect for elders, pursuing true love, and navigating changing societal values. This aligns with Klapper's (1960) suggestion that people are drawn to media that confirms existing beliefs and experiences. Therefore, k-dramas, unlike Western content, truly resonate with Pakistani viewers. Pha & Lhe (2022) also highlight that many viewers prefer K-dramas over Western shows due to the portrayal of more modest storylines and characters in Korean dramas. Similarly, a study by Zehra (2018) suggests that Pakistani viewers feel a sense of cultural closeness to the portrayals of Korean culture in K-dramas. This may have led to the extreme popularity of

various Korean dramas such as *Squid Game*, *Crash Landing on You*, *Descendants of the Sun*, and *All of Us are Dead* in Pakistan. This has created a somewhat cultural hybridization as dramas, makeup, fashion, and lifestyle are slowly mirroring the ones portrayed in South Korean content.

Conclusion

This research explores the impact of foreign content, especially Indian, Turkish, and Korean dramas, on Pakistani viewers' mindsets, cultures, and the drama industry. The findings reveal a significant shift towards a narrative structure that has diverged from the traditional, socio-religious values once depicted in Pakistani dramas. The proliferation of foreign content has led to cultural hybridization, molding Pakistan's language, dress, and culture. This transformation has sparked concerns regarding the ongoing dilemma of preserving local cultural values or adapting global emerging trends. While foreign dramas have offered fresh air, they also pose challenges to maintaining a robust cultural identity and preservation. The research highlights the vitality of media literacy initiatives to engage with the content critically. Additionally, well-calibrated regulatory measures should be explored to ensure that the complex cultural interplay is navigated smoothly while safeguarding the core cultural values.

Recommendations

The above study suggests that:

1. The government should integrate media literacy into school and university curricula to teach students critical media content analysis.
2. Set quotas for foreign content on Pakistani TV channels, ensuring a balance with local productions.
3. Facilitate co-productions between Pakistani and international media houses to blend local and global elements.
4. Develop captivating storylines and characters resonating with local audiences to attract the viewership in Pakistan.

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