

Love, Marriage, and the Media: Exploring the Influence of Pakistani Dramas on Pakhtun Youth's Perceptions of Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

This study explores the portrayal of romantic relationships in Pakistani television dramas and examines its influence on the perceptions of Pashtun youth regarding love and marriage within their cultural setting. The research is based on the Cultivation Theory, which explains that continuous exposure to media content can shape common beliefs and viewpoints among audiences. The study investigates the relationship between repeated exposure to romantic content in dramas and the development of shared attitudes among Pashtun youth towards love and marriage. A detailed research methodology was followed, utilizing a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first phase, major universities in Peshawar were randomly selected as clusters. Later, convenience sampling was used to select at least 15% of students from each cluster, ensuring broad representation. The findings highlight the significant impact of media, supported by statistical tools including a high R-squared value, significant ANOVA results, and relevant coefficient values. These indicators confirm a strong association between media exposure and the shaping of public perception. The study emphasizes the need for media producers and policymakers to consider the cultural and emotional realities of Pashtun youth when presenting narratives related to love and marriage.

Key Words: Pakistani Dramas, Pashtun Youth, Cultivation Theory, Media Influence, Love & Marriage Perceptions, Multi-stage Sampling

Introduction:

Romantic relationships are a universal human phenomenon, deeply rooted in the emotional, psychological, and social fabric of societies. Across cultures and civilizations, the concept of love and the institution of marriage have held central importance. With the evolution of communication and the rapid expansion of media channels, particularly television, the portrayal of romantic relationships has become a common narrative theme in visual storytelling. In the context of Pakistani society, this is a trend that has grown significantly over the last few decades, especially with popular and technically close-up television dramas. Pakistani dramas are famous for the excellent design of their storylines and the emotional depth, as well as their almost journalistic approach to contemporary life in Pakistan. They are widely watched not only within Pakistan but by the overseas Pakistani community across the world. These dramas delve into the intricacies of human relationships, from romantic love to arranged marriage and family conflict, spanning generation divides and changing gender roles. Although they are a dramatic way of providing entertainment content, they definitely reflect what their audience wants to hear and how it feels about itself in reality.

The messages contained in these narratives can shape views and the story shapes attitudes; with

impressionable youth especially prone to change their beliefs over time depending on how subtly the material is presented as one thing or another (not) true. If surveillance cameras in every room produce disorientation then it's surely possible for educative television programs to implant new values into vulnerable minds—making them last forever. In Pakistani society, love and marriage are traditionally controlled by strong cultural and religious traditions. Arranged marriages are common in Pashtun culture, with the senior members of the family making the arrangements.

In such a social climate, love marriages—those based on mutual regard and personal select—are often viewed with disbelief or even discontentment. Furthermore, gender dynamics remain defined by conventional roles, where men are supposed as providers and women as caretakers. Though recent years have observed some shifts in these views due to urbanization, globalization, and exposure to digital content, the process of change is gradual and often met with resistance.

Media, especially TV dramas, has become an important part of social learning in this case. When young people watch romantic stories again and again they start thinking differently about love and marriage. These dramas show ideas like personal choice and emotional happiness. Sometimes they also show going against old traditions.

Cultivation Theory says watching media for long time can change how people see the world. This is true for youth. Because people accept these media messages easily. Many young people do not have other sources to learn about relationships and life. So, they believe what media shows.

In Pashtun culture tradition is still very strong. People follow cultural rules closely. But when youth start thinking differently about love it shows that change is coming. It means society is slowly changing. Pakistani dramas may be helping in this change. They either support old ways or challenge them in a quiet way. That is why it is important to see how these dramas show romantic relationships. What they show can affect what young Pashtuns believe about love and marriage. It is also about how they see roles of men and women. This study wants to look at this issue.

The research will check how often love stories come in dramas. It will also study how they are told and what message they give. Then it will see how this affects young people and what they start believing in their daily life.

Problem Statement

Pakistani dramas now show more and more romantic stories. These stories are very common now in media. Young people watch them a lot. But still not many researchers have studied how these love stories in dramas change the youth thinking about love and marriage. This is more true in Pashtun society where culture is very strong.

This study wants to fill that gap. It will look at how romantic stories in Pakistani dramas affect the thinking of Pashtun youth. The focus is on how old cultural values and social rules work together with media. It will see how all these things shape what young people think about love and marriage.

The research will help to understand how media changes social thinking. It will give a clear picture of how media and culture fight or mix in Pashtun area.

Significance of Research

This research is very important. It looks at how love stories in Pakistani dramas change the thinking of youth about love and marriage. The focus is on Pashtun society where culture and traditions are very strong.

First, this study fills a big gap. Not many studies talk about how media affects young people in conservative places like Pashtun areas. This research shows how media helps build new ideas about love and relationships among the youth.

Second, it helps us understand how media and society connect. It shows how watching dramas again and again can make people follow old values or start thinking in new ways. It also looks at how media affects ideas about gender roles in marriage.

Third, this research can help media workers and policy people. If dramas are showing wrong or confusing love stories that don't fit culture, this study can help fix that. It can guide them to make better programs that people understand and respect.

Lastly, this study is useful for improving how youth think about love and marriage. It can help in making programs that teach people to think deeply about what they watch. It can also help schools and groups to talk with youth about what is real and what is not in dramas.

Overall, this research adds strong value. It shows how TV dramas are not just for fun. They also shape how people think and live in a culture like Pashtun society.

Hypotheses

H1: Love stories shown in Pakistani dramas affect how Pashtun youth think about love and marriage in their culture.

H2: Watching romantic stories in dramas again and again helps Pashtun youth build similar thoughts and beliefs about love and marriage.

Literature Review

Pakistani TV dramas show love stories in many ways. This topic is getting more attention from researchers now. Many want to know how these dramas affect how young people think about love and marriage. Over time TV in Pakistan has changed a lot. In the past it was run by the government. It showed stories with morals. The goal was to teach and guide people. But now media works for profit. Now TV channels care more about ratings.

In old times dramas showed family problems and social issues. They talked about real life problems. Things like feudal systems injustice gender issues and problems in marriage. People used to learn something from those dramas. Pakistan Television or PTV started in 1964. Its dramas helped people think. They were not just for fun. They were like school on screen. These stories made people understand what is wrong and what is right in society.

But everything changed in late 1990s. New private TV channels came. They brought a new style. Now they want to earn more money. So they show stories that get more attention. They use romance betrayal and family fights to keep viewers hooked. Researchers like Rehman and others say this change happened because of business. Now media wants young urban people to watch more. So the content is now fast emotional and dramatic.

Still TV dramas are very popular. Most people watch them in the evening. These shows are part of daily life. According to Joshi dramas stay very important in Pakistan's media. They build ideas. They change what people think slowly.

Media is powerful. It changes how people see the world. Baran and others say media is like a teacher. It sends messages from one generation to another. It tells people how to think about gender religion and relationships. In Pakistan TV still plays a big role. It builds people's thoughts about love marriage and family. This is more true for youth who spend a lot of time watching TV.

In many countries studies show how TV changes ideas about love. For example Segrin and Nabi in 2002 found that people who watch love dramas a lot start believing in perfect love. They think marriage should always be happy. They expect no problems. Osborn in 2012 also found same. Watching love stories again and again makes people think love is like a dream. Ferris and his team in 2007 studied dating shows. They said these shows teach wrong things. They show women as objects and men as hunters. This gives wrong message about relationships.

In Pakistan same pattern is seen. Arafat Sial and Zafar in 2020 said that today's dramas show broken marriages and extra love affairs. Many stories start with happy family. Then someone comes and ruins it. Then divorce happens. Then people marry again. Specially women who are divorced are shown happy after second marriage. These shows match real life changes but also they may tell youth that breaking marriage is okay.

Abbas and Mahmood in 2021 said many Urdu dramas now support liberal ideas. Divorce is shown as freedom. But in places like Pashtun society marriage is still a serious matter. Honor respect and family name are big things. Divorce is not easy there. So these stories clash with local culture.

Pashtun society is known for strong traditions. Barfield in 2010 explained some words like "ghairat" and "namos." These are about honor and modesty. They control how people behave. In such places romantic love is a private thing. It is not always accepted. Dramas that show free love and personal choice can confuse youth. Shinwari and Zeb said many young Pashtuns start thinking new ideas after watching dramas. They want freedom in love. But sometimes they expect too much. Their dreams do not match real life.

Other researchers looked at how dramas show gender roles. Ahmed and Khattak in 2014 said that sometimes dramas show strong women. But later they still reward those who obey. Khan and Saleem in 2018 said that stories of female empowerment often end with the woman choosing family over career. These stories affect girls deeply. They learn what is expected from them. It shapes what they want in marriage.

Cultivation Theory by Gerbner in 1976 helps us understand this. It says that if people watch same kind of message again and again they start believing it. In Pakistan where people watch a lot of dramas this theory fits very well. Many youth do not have real life experience in love or marriage. So they trust what TV shows them. Latif Malik and Nadeem in 2021 found that students who watch Hum TV get ideas about what kind of partner they want. They copy fashion style and even way of talking from dramas.

Naseem in 2016 said that liberal values are now shown more on TV. This shows change in society. But it also makes some people worried. Hussain in 2023 said that new dramas show things that go against culture. He said they show cheating lying and disrespect to parents as normal. They also stop showing traditional dress like dupatta. These things create confusion.

Still many experts say dramas are not bad. Shahbaz and Muzaffar said that dramas are now more than fun. They show problems of real life. They help people talk about things that were hidden. They show women suffering or poor people fighting for justice. These stories can teach and help.

Today Pakistani dramas try to do two things. One is to show old values. Second is to show new ideas. Some dramas support arranged marriage and show it successful. Others show love marriage and freedom of choice. Ali in 2020 said that both kinds are there. Bandura in 2001 said that people learn by watching. If they see someone behave in certain way they learn to do the same. So media must be careful. It teaches silently.

For Pashtun youth this is very important. They live between two worlds. One is tradition. The other is media. They respect elders but they also want freedom. What they watch on TV affects what they want in life. Some get inspired. Some get confused. That is why we must study this more.

We need to understand how media messages and culture fight or mix. Youth are learning from both. Sometimes they agree with TV. Sometimes they feel guilty. This stress needs to be studied. Media should not show false dreams. It must show real love with respect and care.

In the end we see that Pakistani dramas are powerful. They change society and reflect it too. From PTV times to now things changed a lot. Media still holds a mirror to the public. But now it also tells them what to believe. In places like Pashtun society this impact is strong. Youth are watching learning and changing.

This review shows that more study is needed. Media is not just fun. It is part of life now. If we want healthy love and marriage ideas in our youth we must understand what dramas are telling them. And what messages they are taking as truth.

Research Method

This study used a quantitative method. A proper survey design was used to collect the data. The research was done in Peshawar, the main city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Most people living here are Pashtun. The main goal of this study was to see how love stories shown in Pakistani dramas affect what Pashtun youth think about love and marriage.

Population and Sample Size

The target group for this study was university students in Peshawar. In total, 430 students took part in the research. The response rate was very good, around 93.02%. This shows that students were

interested in the topic and took it seriously.

Sampling Method

A multi-step sampling method was used. First, five well-known universities were selected randomly. These included:

- University of Peshawar
- IMSciences
- Qurtuba University
- Agriculture University
- Islamia College University

From each of these universities, at least 15% of students were selected. This was done using convenience sampling. It helped to reach Pashtun students easily and collect honest responses from them.

Data Collection Tool

Data was gathered using a self-made questionnaire. It had three parts.

- **Section A** asked about basic info like age, gender, and education.
- **Section B** asked about how much students watch dramas and what kind of romantic stories they see.
- **Section C** focused on what they think about love and marriage in their culture.

The questions were rated using a five-point Likert scale. This helped to see how strongly they agreed or disagreed. The tool was tested before with a small group to make sure it was clear and suitable.

Research Variables

This study looks at how media content affects **social attitudes**. It uses two main variables:

- **Independent Variable (IV):** How love and romance are shown in Pakistani TV dramas
- **Dependent Variable (DV):** What Pashtun youth think about love and marriage

Concept of Variables

The independent variable means how love is shown in dramas. This includes love stories, feelings, dating, and couple life. These stories are built on culture and society. They show how ideas about romance are changing with time. Many dramas show people choosing love over family rules. Some show fights between old and new thinking.

The dependent variable is about what Pashtun youth feel and believe. It means how they think about love, marriage, divorce, and gender roles. Do they like arranged marriage or love marriage? Do they accept divorce or second marriage? These are some things this variable looks at.

Measuring the Variables

To study this, a **questionnaire** was used. It had **three parts**:

- **Section A** asked about personal info like age and gender
- **Section B** asked about how often they watch dramas and what they see
- **Section C** asked about their views on love and marriage in Pashtun culture

A five-point Likert scale was used to rate answers. This helped collect clear and useful data.

Results and Discussion:

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS (version 21), offering statistical insights into the relationship between romantic portrayals in Pakistani dramas and Pashtun youth's attitudes toward love and marriage. Key findings are presented through Model Summary, ANOVA, and Coefficients to assess the model's significance and explanatory power.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.914 ^a	.835	.834	.43977

a. Predictors: (Constant), Portrayal of romantic relationships

Table 01

Table 01 demonstrates that the portrayal of romantic relationships significantly accounts for 83.5% of the variance in youth's attitudes towards love and marriage within the specified context. The model's goodness of fit is supported by a high R-squared value of 0.835, indicating a strong relationship between the predictor variable and the outcome variable. The standard error of the estimate is 0.43977, further underscoring the reliability of the model's predictions.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	96.235	1	96.235	497.603	.000 ^b
	Residual	18.953	98	.193		
	Total	115.188	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Attitudes towards Love and marriage
b. Predictors: (Constant), Portrayal of romantic relationships

Table 02

The ANOVA table indicates that the regression model is highly significant in explaining the variance in attitudes towards love and marriage. The low p-value suggests that the predictor variable "Portrayal of romantic relationships" significantly contributes to the model's ability to explain the variation in the dependent variable. The F-statistic of 497.603 further supports the overall significance of the regression model.

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-.748	.173		-4.335	.000
	Portrayal of romantic relationships	1.420	.064	.914	22.307	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Attitudes towards Love and marriage

Table 03

Table 03 presents a significant positive relationship between the portrayal of romantic relationships in Pakistani dramas and Pashtun youth's attitudes toward love and marriage. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 1.420) indicates that for every one-unit increase in the portrayal of romantic relationships, there is a 1.420-unit increase in favorable attitudes toward love and marriage, assuming other variables remain constant. This reflects a strong positive effect of media content on youth perceptions.

The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.914$) further emphasizes this influence, suggesting that a one-standard-deviation increase in media portrayal leads to a 0.914-standard-deviation increase in youth

attitudes. Such a high standardized value underscores the substantial impact of romantic media narratives in shaping social beliefs.

The R-squared value of 0.835 reveals that 83.5% of the variation in attitudes toward love and marriage can be explained by the portrayal of romantic relationships in dramas. This high explanatory power validates the strength of the regression model and confirms the relevance of the independent variable in predicting the dependent outcome.

These findings are well aligned with Cultivation Theory, which posits that prolonged and repeated exposure to media gradually cultivates shared beliefs, values, and attitudes among viewers. In this context, Pakistani dramas serve as a powerful agent of socialization for Pashtun youth, transmitting messages that influence how love, relationships, and marriage are perceived. The results clearly demonstrate that media portrayals are not passive narratives but active contributors to the evolving social fabric of Pashtun society.

Thus, statistical evidence not only confirms the research hypothesis but also provides empirical support for the theoretical framework guiding this study.

The high R-squared value of 0.835 reinforces the applicability of Cultivation Theory, indicating that repeated exposure to romantic portrayals in media strongly explains the variation in youth attitudes toward love and marriage. This high coefficient signifies that a significant proportion (83.5%) of the variation in attitudes towards love and marriage can be attributed to the portrayal of romantic relationships in media. This resonates with Cultivation Theory's core premise that repeated exposure to media messages creates a shared understanding of reality. In this case, continuous exposure to media representations of romantic relationships in Pakistani dramas contributes to cultivating certain attitudes about love and marriage among the youth.

Cultivation Theory's concept of mainstreaming is also reflected in the ANOVA results. The low p-value and the substantial F-statistic (497.603) indicate that the predictor variable "Portrayal of romantic relationships" significantly contributes to explaining the variance in attitudes towards love and marriage. This aligns with the theory's idea that media messages, when consistently portrayed, influence a broad audience, fostering a consensus in beliefs.

Applying Cultivation Theory to the coefficient analysis reinforces the concepts of symbolic annihilation and resonance. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 1.420$) reflects a measurable change in youth attitudes toward love and marriage with each unit increase in the portrayal of romantic relationships. This supports the theory's premise that repeated media representations shape audience perceptions by consistently emphasizing specific values, behaviors, and relational outcomes.

The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.914$) further reflects the strength of this influence. In the context of Cultivation Theory, such a high value indicates a strong resonance point where media messages and real-life experiences of the viewers closely align. This alignment enhances the media's impact, as Pashtun youth may find televised portrayals of love and relationships relatable to their own emotional aspirations, even when such portrayals diverge from traditional social norms.

This resonance amplifies the cultivation effect, suggesting that the closer the media narratives mirror the perceived or desired realities of the audience, the stronger their influence becomes. The findings of this study support the main idea of Cultivation Theory. Watching romantic stories again and again can change how people think. It can make new ideas look normal. It can challenge old traditions. It can also change what young people expect from love and marriage. This is true in societies where culture is still strong.

Both the coefficient values in this study support the hypotheses. They also match what Cultivation Theory says. When media shows the same kind of message many times it starts to shape how people see life. These numbers show that media really plays a role in changing how youth think in Pashtun society.

Conclusion

This study gives strong proof that romantic stories in Pakistani dramas affect how Pashtun youth think about love and marriage. The results support Cultivation Theory. The high R-squared value, ANOVA and other numbers from the analysis show that the media is not just entertainment. It is a strong force that shapes shared thinking in society.

These results are important for understanding how media and culture are connected. Media can make youth think in new ways. Even in a culture like Pashtun society where traditions are strong media can bring change. This research shows how media influences youth identity and values. It proves that media is a powerful tool of learning and change.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies should look at how cultural values like honor, family name, and group identity affect the way media messages are received. These values may stop or slow down the effect of romantic stories. Or maybe they work side by side with media.

Other studies can explore what types of media youth use most. What platforms do they like. What genres do they follow. This can help to know what kind of love stories is influencing them more.

Also, research should compare different areas of Pashtun society like rural with urban youth and tribal areas with settled cities. This will show how media impact changes across different lifestyles. It will give a deeper understanding of how diverse Pashtun society is becoming.

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