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MEDIA MANAGEMENT: WHY TV CONTENT RATING SYSTEM MATTERS?

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Abstract

Effective regulatory systems are essential for the smooth and sustainable operation of any organization. A few decades back, Pakistani dramas were considered a mirror of society and the industry produced quality content that always kept the ethics and norms of the society as its prior responsibility. However, with the advent of globalization and commercialization, major changes have been witnessed in Pakistani dramas as the content has started emphasizing controversial issues without any precautions or parental guidelines. This study aims to investigate whether the content is inappropriate or unsuitable for teenagers. By applying systematic random sampling, the Pakistani TV dramas have been selected from the leading TV channels. The study analyzed the content quantitatively and the results revealed that around 264 scenes from Pakistani TV dramas frequently showed inappropriate content including violence, extramarital affairs and offensive language, drug abuse, and physical intimacy. The outcomes also indicated that a media self-regulatory system called “TV Content Rating System” has become the need of the hour to help parents and guardians know the nature of drama content. The research suggested that the system with parental guidelines will further generate precautions for parents to save their children from undesirable content.

Keywords: Commercialization, Teenagers, Globalization, Intimacy, Affairs, drugs.

Introduction

What kind of drama content is on air nowadays on Pakistani TV channels during prime time? It is one of the most debated questions among intellectuals of society. Pakistani parents are very conscious of the harmful effects of media, especially after the popularity of Cable TV networks started in this new millennium. The Pakistani dramas portray obscene dialogues and luxurious lifestyles which is a true reflection of the glorification of elite culture in society (Farooqui, 2022). This includes gaslighting as well as verbal, psychological, emotional, and narcissistic abuse (Seher, 2021, para. 2). Young viewers are exposed to a variety of content with unrestricted access to television without parental guidance which could lead to irresponsible and inappropriate behavior, and thought patterns (Zulfiqar et al. 2019). The dramas highlight extramarital affairs with sister-in-law, violent behavior with family members, romantic talks and actions, hugging, and physical intimacy which could affect the minds of children (Seher, 2021; Asghar 2010). A couple of decades ago Pakistani dramas were supposed to be the best source of family entertainment due to their impressive themes based on social issues, domestic problems, crime, the feudal system, and other contemporary issues (Noreen et al., 2021). However with the passage of time, globalization and commercialization of the Pakistani media industry transformed the scene dramatically (Noreen et al., 2021). Unfortunately, it is no longer a routine to watch Pakistani dramas with family due to their inappropriate content and language (Nazir et al., 2019; Rojková et al., 2014). In Pakistan, the “Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority” (PEMRA) acts on complaints of the viewers and bans dramas on abusive content but social, political, and legal challenges restrict them from performing their duties effectively (Kay, 2016). This study aims to analyze the current

Pakistani dramas on international content rating systems to suggest a workable solution.

Problem Statement

Nowadays, Pakistani TV dramas have become controversial due to unethical and immoral content. For instance, love affairs between a sister-in-law and her brother-in-law, verbal and non-verbal romantic scenes, harassment, and violence in different shapes are visible without any parental guidelines. The content is not made for every viewer. There is a particular audience of any genre, but these TV dramas are being watched by the family jointly and young viewers fall into the vulnerable stage as they are not mature enough to digest the content, they start to believe as true and adopt it which they see on screen. Unfortunately, Pakistani dramas portray violence, abusive language, physical intimacy, and extra-marital affairs without any content rating and precautions. This research investigated the frequency of inappropriate content used as the name of entertainment without any parental guidelines and precautions.

Research Questions

1. What types of objectionable content have been portrayed in recent Pakistani dramas?
2. To what extent the prevalence of inappropriate content is found in Pakistani dramas?
3. Do Pakistani TV dramas adhere to parental guidance strategies?

Literature Review

The development of new digital technologies and the Internet has undoubtedly introduced several platforms for entertainment. However, TV still leads as a favorite medium for dramas due to cheap sources. Stories of these dramas cover different themes and taboos of society in which few are not suitable for children and teenagers. Parents and critics have raised concerns about the negative effects of these dramas on children containing abusive and

offensive language, extramarital affairs, and feudal masculinity. In this digital age, when access to TV dramas through unrestricted internet is very easy, it has become more challenging for parents and caretakers to protect their children from exposure to inappropriate content (Kublenz et al., 2016). It is believed that such terrifying and explicit content that includes abusive language and violence contributes to physical and psychological reactions and produces negative effects like anxiety and fear among children (Rideout, 2004; Cantor, 2003b). To control such effects and their consequences, governments and institutions around the globe have developed several content rating systems. The goals of these systems were not to censor the content, but they must provide desired information to the parents and guardians to protect the children.

Convention on the Rights of the Child introduced by the General Assembly of the United Nations back in 1989 stipulates in Article 18: *“States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. ...To guarantee and promote the rights outlined in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities...”* (Brník et al., 2021, p. 2). Television Content ratings or guidelines follow the Telecommunication Act of the United States 1996, which gives parental choice in Television Programming. Accordingly, two types of parental guidelines V-Chip and TV content rating systems. V-chip was a device that was installed on TV and gave parents control to block unwanted content that is not suitable for kids and adults. On the other hand, The TV content rating system was borrowed from the

criteria of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) movie rating, and it was imposed on TV broadcasters after long discussions with relevant people and organizations. This TV rating system was initiated to control the media's effects on children and teenagers (Fucci, 1998; Kafu, 2017). The system was developed for parents to inform them about the content and whether the content is appropriate for their children or not (Kublenz et al., 2016). MPAA, the National Cable Television Association, and the National Association of Broadcasters worked jointly to design the strategy to overcome this problem keeping in mind the consequences of the violent, sexual, and offensive content, and business of the broadcasters (Gentile, 2008). This system didn't meet the satisfaction level of the parents and received strong criticism from society. In addition, five content-based categories, V (violence), FV (fantasy violence), L (offensive language), S (sexual situations), and D (suggestive dialogue), were added to describe the content (Kunkel, 2003).

Firstly, the TV content rating icon flashed on January 01, 1997, in the United States. It was the combination of age-based rating and content-based rating systems, as both of those systems have their standard of rating the TV content (Fucci, 1998; Kunkel et al., 2001; Walsh & Gentile, 2001). Not only in the United States, but several other countries also implemented the TV content rating system as per pre-caution measures for the viewers and most importantly for parents. For instance, Italy, Germany, India, Colombia, Finland, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, and New Zealand are some of the countries where the content-based rating system is working for the betterment of the viewers and helps to control the negative effects of media (Federman, 2015). Several countries have modified the rating system according to their moral and administrative approaches. Slovak

Republic introduced a unified content rating system”, referred to as TV-CRS in 2001. They used green and red signs along with stars to warn parents about the on-aired content. They further took several steps to protect children against malicious TV content; they introduced *safe space*, 6 am to 10 pm for teenagers, adjusted the level of physical, psychic, or verbal violence, depiction of parent-child relationship menace or menace in terms of family relationships, nudity, depression, use of drugs, depiction of unnatural, sudden, or extra sensational happenings. Similarly, the Dutch government established an authority, the Netherlands Institute for the Classification of Audiovisual Media (NICAM), for the motion picture rating system. The authorities worked with the collaboration of Education, Cultural, and Health ministries, and developed a rating system with the help of media professionals and academicians which is now adopted by European countries (Brník et al., 2021). Parents found content rating very useful to know about the kind of content their children watch and no need to do research or previews before allowing children to watch (Bushman & Cantor, 2003). A study on Spanish TV revealed that the implementation of content labeling and self-regulation code has created awareness among the public. Many private TV channels and their representatives feel that the situation has been improved as compared to the first five years of content labeling and now “Protected TV hours” and children’s rights are intact (Ortiz-Sobrino et al., 2015). Moreover, it could be better with sincere and affirmative efforts to raise awareness and understanding of this system on a larger scale, and the rating system should also provide easy-to-understand guidance and accurate information to accelerate the pace (Bushman & Cantor, 2003).

Methodology

The study used the relational quantitative content analysis method to measure the

frequency of objectionable and inappropriate scenes having violence, offensive language, issues of extramarital affairs, physical intimacy, and drug usage. The population of the study is the broadcasted popular dramas from 2019 to 2020 on Pakistani TV channels. We used systematic random sampling techniques for the selection of channels, dramas, and episodes. Four popular leading entertainment channels, Geo TV, ARY Digital, A-Plus, and Hum TV were selected during the sampling process. Then we chose one drama from each channel, *Jalan* from ARY Digital, *Main Agar Chup Hoon* from Geo TV, *Zebaish* from Hum TV, and *G.T. Road* from A-Plus, aired at prime time, from 8 pm-9 pm from January 2019 to December 2020. Moreover, 26 out of 203 episodes were selected from four dramas using different *nth* numbers keeping in mind the number of episodes of selected dramas. Every single scene of an episode was taken as a unit of analysis. The coding sheet was developed to count the scenes.

Finding:

Drama Name	Violence	Language	Dressing	Extramarital Affairs	Physical Intimacy	Smoking	Suicide	Total Scenes
Jalan	24	56	13	7	2	10	2	114
G.T Road	3	27	15	3	2	0	0	50
Main Agar Chup Hoon	6	22	20	4	0	3	0	55
Zebaish	3	20	15	5	1	0	1	45
Total	36	125	63	19	5	13	3	264

Results and discussion

It has been observed that limited data analysis of the sample contains 264 objectionable scenes. The categories include seven categories i.e., violence, language, dressing, extramarital affairs, physical intimacy, smoking, and suicide. Moreover, it dictates that Pakistani dramas mainly show these scenes in huge numbers, particularly for language and dressing with the largest number of scenes. Other scenes occupy violence and extramarital affairs, physical

intimacy, and suicide with a slight difference in numbers from dress and language. The data shows the sample of drama *Jalan* which indicates 24 scenes of violence, 56 of abusive or inappropriate language 13 scenes of objectionable dressing as per norms of the society, 7 scenes of extramarital affairs and 2 physical intimacies, and 10 smoking scenes were also recorded. It indicates that objectionable content is very frequent which not only hurts the drama's reputation but also damages the audience sentiment. Another drama *GT Road* with 6 randomly taken episodes, shows 55 objectionable scenes which include 27 scenes of abusive language, 15 scenes of objectionable dressing, and 3 of extramarital affairs. These reported scenes eventually identify that drama could become an embarrassment as a family entertainment. The data analyses another drama telecasted by the title of; *Main Ager Chup Hoon* dictates that 64 scenes can be considered objectionable as per the norms of the Pakistani society. The scenes include 20 reported obscene dressing, and 22 scenes of abusive language. In another drama *Zaibaish*, there were a total of 48 objectionable scenes where 20 language and 15 dressing objections were sighted. Bad behavior and violence-related dramas affect the audience. According to media effects theory, children try to develop their attitudes and behavior on what they watch on television and apply it in their daily lives. Human behaviors are governed by many social factors including affiliations, norms, practices, beliefs, and actions to construct our relationships and television viewing can bring about a shared way of viewing the world (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Jensen et al., 2011; Shrum et al., 2011). Bad behavior including violence is measured as a significant type of media effect as studies indicate the great effects of violence on viewers, especially on young ones. TV violence creates more fear of crime which

leads to mean-world syndrome (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

According to the report of "The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry" on "Violence and Children" TV programs shape the value system and behavior of the viewer. The report also identified that immense viewing of television violence by children may cause greater aggressiveness and even watching a single violent program can increase aggressiveness. Children who watch such programs, in which violence is very realistic, frequently repeated, or unpunished, are more likely to adopt what they see. Moreover, Huesmann (2007) in his research said that violence has both short-run and long-run impacts on younger viewers, as they adopt it through powerful observational learning. The television drama industry in the world has developed its norms and rules as per the needs of the audience in the last 20 to 25 years. In comparison with the world, the Pakistani drama industry is avoiding such rules; in the early days, Pakistani state television was the only broadcaster, and it was easy to control the content as per state policy. Nowadays, it is looking difficult as private channels and private media houses are in the race to produce dramas, and this competition of so-called new ideas has come up with many issues. After having a deep analysis of the sample content, the research indicates that the drama content of the Pakistani drama industry has changed, and it needs a parental guideline about age as previous study expressed that countries of European origin have come up with some of the solutions regarding the content guideline as who should watch the content. Some of the countries have developed safe broadcasting time slots in late hours and some have come up with early content warning systems so that the viewer and the target audience may watch the content as per need. The study also enhances the responsibility of this medium, the broadcaster must know about

the need and vulnerability of the audience. Media content should be designed as per the requirements of the audience as it could be harmful for some audiences and a source of entertainment for others.

Conclusion

The findings of the study show that Pakistani private TV channels are frequently broadcasting objectionable content in their TV dramas. The results also indicate that a content rating system needs to be followed as it could damage the moral values of society. The content that obtains violence, physical intimacy, abusive language, extramarital affairs, and drug usage is truly inappropriate and possibly harmful to children. The content which carries scenes of sexual intimacy, violence, abusive language, bold scenes, and Western dressing is completely unethical for the culture of Pakistan. This indicates that the Pakistani drama industry needs a content rating system. The literature review reflects that Western societies are following parental guidelines for their content. Therefore, it is mandatory for a society like Pakistan which particularly follows Islamic ideology and values, to ensure the availability of parental guidelines on their content for a better and optimistic environment for future family systems. The study suggests undergoing a system of TV Content Rating as it would facilitate the family structures to avoid embarrassment while watching dramas, and it will also provide a broad horizon for TV producers to discuss social issues with more liberty, specifically for their target audience. In previous years, the state-controlled the TV content that was not only used for commercial purposes but for entertainment and education as well. In the new media era, private channels are being more persuaded by their commercial interests as compared to the public good. No doubt, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is monitoring and regulating TV

content, but this is not as systematic as we need.

Recommendations

Based on the findings following recommendations were drawn:

- It is recommended that the government should consider a Content Rating System as part of national media policy.
- It is recommended that this research should be applied to other genres of the media industry to develop a proper Content Rating System.
- The government of Pakistan, Pakistani entertainment broadcasters, advertising agencies, regulatory authorities, and drama production houses should gather on one page to develop a content rating system.
- PEMRA should introduce a TV Content Rating System to keep the stakeholders on board to manage the mechanism of the drama industry.

Limitations of Study

- The existing body knowledge restricted the current research study to analyze the application of content rating systems in developing societies.
- There was a lack of existing data on complaints in PEMRA.

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