

Masculinity Depicted by Pakistani Media Industry: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Masculinity, as represented in the media, is a socially created term with significant implications for cultural norms, gender roles and power systems. This review paper investigates how different types of masculinity, notably hegemonic and toxic masculinities, are portrayed in Pakistani media, such as television dramas, films, internet platforms and commercials.

Methodology: This study synthesizes scholarly work published between 2010 and 2024 and following to this year i.e. 2025, drawing a total of 18 research publications selected using well specified inclusion exclusion criteria and presented a review by using PRISMA approach.

Findings: The data demonstrates that main stream media consistently reinforces hegemonic masculinity, which is defined by emotional repression, violence and masculine domination. Furthermore, toxic characteristics like domination, compulsion and emotional detachment are frequently observed in dramas and advertisements. However, the review analysis also highlights new representations of masculinity in different media platforms and modern era movies that challenge old standards by depicting more emotionally expressive, caring and egalitarian masculine personas.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the study emphasizes the media's significant role in molding popular ideas of masculinity and advocates for more inclusive and progressive depictions. The researcher examines the implications for future research, media literacy, policy interventions as well as limits and setting the framework for more academic study into gender representation in South Asian media.

Keywords: Masculinity, Television Dramas, Cinema, Gender Roles, Media, Hegemonic.

1. INTRODUCTION

In media discourse analysis, masculinity refers to a socially constructed collection of features, behaviors, and roles that have historically been associated with males. Hegemonic virility paradigm is the heart of media related researches, with a particular emphasize on hegemonic mannish places that maintain gender

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scales (Connell, 1995). The virility is represented in Pakistani media describes a background that is interestingly for societal morals artistic values and changing gender directions. Masculinity is often represented by Pakistani media through traditional clichés, where males are portrayed as powerful, dominant and emotionally repressed (Aslam et al., 2022). This depiction in media is particular with society's patriarchal model, that emphasizes male dominance in domestic and civic responsibilities. A diverse spectrum of masculinities from dominant to queer is currently portrayed by media which upholds standards of society that side-by-side questioning about long-held prejudices (Noor, 2024). Dominant masculinity is frequently fostered by TV dramas which is deeply rooted in Pakistani society and influences cultural standards (Aslam et al., 2022). The "4D man" model of masculinity represents that Pakistani men are self-assured, well-groomed and culturally knowledgeable (Zafar et al., 2022).

The media also contributes significantly to the development of gender identities by reinforcing intrinsic norms associated with femininity and masculinity. In Pakistan, television plays and movies reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, with male playing the roles of provider and protector and women playing the roles of meek and caring (Shah & Sahito, 2023). A study of Pakistani television plays between 2019 and 2024 indicated a persistent theme of toxic masculinity, in which male protagonists demonstrated aggressiveness, emotional repression and power over women (Iqbal & Atay, 2024). These depictions not only influence viewers' sentiments, but also legitimate current gender inequities in power dynamics.

Multicultural and transnational media flow models influence the construction of masculinity in the international media. Western media prefers to portray masculinity in a range of ways, from hypermasculine action heroes to more nuanced, emotionally sensitive male protagonists. The Hollywood and European cinema industries have used various images of masculinity to successfully undermine the traditional masculine ideals (Imtiaz & Kamal, 2023). Pakistani media, on the other hand, has adopted a more rigorous definition of masculinity, influenced by religious and cultural ideology. The masculinity in Pakistani media is characterized by traits such as dominance, control and avoidance of emotional vulnerability. Empirical research reveals that Pakistani males are statistically more likely than women to adhere to conventional masculine standards, particularly male privilege and emotional control.

The patriarchal social structure in Pakistan has historically influenced the country's media. TV dramas, which are often regarded as a fascinating kind of entertainment, focus on male heroes' whole qualities exemplify hegemonic masculinity features such as control, dominance and emotional hardness (Iqbal & Atay, 2024). These are consistent with cultural conceptions of social roles that depict males as providers and protectors of honor for their families. Content evaluations of several Pakistani TV serials revealed that the representations actively attempt to perform and reproduce hegemonic masculinity, hence perpetuating gender inequalities in society (Aslam et al., 2022). Researchers also focused on different ways in which media narratives intersect toxic masculinity and submissive femininity. The content analysis of Pakistani TV dramas revealed dominating themes that legitimize male aggression while portraying femininity as adored and submissive. This reinforces negative attitudes that adds to audience knowledge and can be viewed as a legitimizing act of abuse (Iqbal & Atay, 2024).

Pakistani media is portraying masculine as toxic so it is crucial to comprehend gender norms diversity and practices in society. (Aslam et al., 2022). There is a huge impact of media depiction on public image that are reinforcing conventional masculine standards which eventually fostered male supremacy and power aggravating gender inequities as well as other social concerns including domestic abuse and prejudice based on gender (Tariq & Husnain, 2025). Deconstruction of these representations can help uncover and dismantle the underlying assumptions that are supporting patriarchal institutions providing more gender equality in relations and formation of an inclusive society.

1.1 Problem Statement

Media is a significant socio-cultural force that reflects and shapes social norms particularly gender. In Pakistan, where media is extensively utilized and has an immense power, gender representation specially the masculinity in TV dramas, movies and new media is a huge factor in molding perceptions of humans.

However, there hasn't been any thorough research on how masculinity is created in Pakistani media, despite the media's pervasive influence. Recent researches on gender depiction in Pakistani media has mostly focused on traditional gender standards, disregarding the neglected topic of masculinity. This research is concerning the altering gender roles in Pakistan, where traditional notions of masculinity frequently collide with modern world perspective. An empirical understanding of the production of masculinity in Pakistani media is essential as it allows for a more specific investigation of Pakistani media's effect on societal views, gender interaction and individual identity formation. The aim of this research is to fill this significant knowledge gap by surveying literature on prevalent constructions of masculinity in Pakistani media, examining their conformity to or deviation from both modern and traditional conventions, and looking at how they affect society as a whole. To provide an overview of contemporary academic research, a review approach was used.

1.2 Research Questions

RQ₁: - How is hegemonic masculinity portrayed in Pakistani in different media?

RQ₂: -In what ways does Pakistani media showcase toxic masculinity?

RQ_{3(a)}: -What new forms of masculinity are surfacing in Pakistani digital media?

RQ_{3(b)}: - In what ways do these new representations challenge traditional masculine ideals in Pakistan?

RQ₄: - In what ways does different media in Pakistan influence the formation of masculine ideals?

RQ₅: -How have the portrayals of masculinity in Pakistani media changed over the years?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The importance of carrying out a systematic review on masculinity in the Pakistani media industry is that it allows us to critically examine how media portrayals shape societal norms, reinforce gender roles, and affect power dynamics. Hegemonic masculinity is a prevalent theme in Pakistani television dramas, where male characters are often shown as authoritative and aggressive, which perpetuates gender inequalities and restricts the representation of alternative masculinities (Aslam et al., 2022). Likewise, toxic masculinity, marked by emotional suppression, aggression, and dominance, is frequently celebrated in media narratives, contributing to the normalization of gender-based violence and unhealthy power structures in society (Iqbal & Atay, 2024). Digital media has also positive side in this perspective as it created opportunities for alternative masculinities to emerge that allows men to question old conventions and reinvent their identities in previously unattainable ways (Salam, 2021). Pakistani films as they are country's larger socio-political developments, has developed throughout the time as from strict images to more nuanced masculinity and diverse portrayals (Aslam et al., 2022). This review is critical for understanding how these changing representations shape public perspectives and drive debates about gender equality, media accountability and the need for more better depiction of masculinities in Pakistan.

2. METHODOLOGY

The review approach used in this study investigates masculinity's depiction in Pakistani media in a thorough and controlled manner. The study aims to ensure transparency and reliability by following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) criteria. It investigates specifically about how the masculinity is portrayed in Pakistani media and trying to identify reciting themes and trends. The aims are to find out the recurring themes in the literature on masculinity then synthesize them and indicate them as potential research gaps. Since they closely observe the complexities and continuing trends in the field being studied, review-based studies makeup a sizable portion of the body of the existing literature (Ali and Pasha, 2022). Additionally, in order to close the gap and carry out a thorough examination of the other facets of the same issue, the pertinent studies also highlight the key findings. The review concentrated on studies that look at how masculinity is portrayed in Pakistani media, including digital platforms, television, movies and electronic media ads. Articles from 2010 to 2025 were

the only ones taken into account. Opinions, editorials and non-research-based articles are not included but, empirical studies that employed qualitative, quantitative or mixed- method approaches are. Furthermore, studies that did not focus on Pakistani media particular were lacking.

2.1 Assumptions and Justifications

In conducting this systematic review on masculinity in the Pakistani media industry, certain assumptions were made to guide the selection and analysis of studies. First it was considered that essential terms such as “Masculinity”, “Hegemonic Masculinity and “Toxic Masculinity” were universally understood in the selected literature. This assumption is predicted on the expectation that media and gender studies academics will adhere the frequently established terminologies and frameworks like the Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity. Although, there might be minor discrepancies in analysis, The criteria for selection helped to assure the inclusion of studies that used the words with clarity and relevantly.

Secondly, the researcher chose to include studies that were published from 2010 to 2024 as the researcher believe that the recent studies reflect the current trends in this context even better then the past ones. The era was chosen to reflect the evolution of masculinity in both conventional and digital media. The evaluation also considered that there is an unavoidable impact of media portrayals on public perceptions and cultural standards that makes them an important aspect of this study to understand how the gender is identified and constructed.

Furthermore, only peer-reviewed publications that were written in English language and focusing on Pakistani media portrayals were considered for the review. This improved contextual relevance and academic dependability. The process of literature search was carried out by utilizing academic platforms and databases with keywords such as hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, media representation and masculinity and media in Pakistan to only locate the most relevant research papers.

2.2 Evaluation of Assumptions

These assumptions helped to shorten the study process and they have also some significant drawbacks. For example, adopting some uniform terminology across all research may obscure significant variances in how masculinity is understood. Some studies may perceive toxic or alternative masculinities differently depending on the platforms used such as TV, cinema etc. The authors cultural lens also presents such thing thereby influencing how results are contrasting and assimilated. Moreover, just by concentrating on contemporary researches might overlook previous but still valuable insights as how masculinity was depicted in classical media content of Pakistan. Earlier depictions, although older, could provide valuable historical context and show how representations have changed over time.

Furthermore, by limiting the language to English and excluding grey literature (like non-peer-reviewed content or local-language research), some potentially meaningful perspectives may have been missed. Lastly, the assumption that media representations directly shape public attitudes might not account for personal, social, or regional variations in how individuals interpret media content.

Despite these limitations, the structured methodology and the use of the PRISMA approach helped ensure a reliable and systematic review of how masculinity is portrayed across different Pakistani media platforms.

Thus, considering the complexity of the topic and the ongoing academic interest in gender and media representation, the researcher selected three reliable academic databases: Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Taylor & Francis. These platforms were chosen for their extensive collections of peer-reviewed journal articles and access to multidisciplinary research relevant to media and gender studies. The selection criteria were inclusive, with no limitations placed on age, gender, race, ethnicity but foremost Pakistani society is concerned and addressed. The keywords used for the literature search included: “hegemonic masculinity,” “toxic masculinity,” “masculinity in Pakistani media,” “impact of masculinity on Pakistani society,” “emerging masculinities in Pakistan,” “masculinity in Pakistani cinema,” and “evolution of

masculinity in Pakistani media.” The PRISMA method was used to ensure a systematic and transparent review process, in accordance with the guidelines proposed by Page and McKenzie (2021).

Based on the PRISMA method of screening, evaluation and Selection, the researchers gathered a total of 52 records from the selected database. After removing the duplicates, 39 total articles were further screened for full-text availability out of which 29 articles are fully screened. Finally, the researchers selected $n = 18$ articles adhering to the selection criteria (See Fig.1)

Table 1: *Inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study literature*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time Frame	Research papers published between 2010 and 2025	Papers published before 2010
Topic Relevance	Studies focusing on masculinity in Pakistani media	Studies on general gender roles without specific focus on masculinity
Type of Media	Analysis of masculinity in Pakistani television dramas, films, digital advertisements, and social media	Studies on print media, radio, or children's literature
Geographical Focus	Research examining Pakistani content, regardless of local or international publication	Studies focusing on non-Pakistani media
Publication Language	English-language studies only	Papers published in languages other than English
Study Design	Includes qualitative, quantitative, content analysis and discourse analysis	Opinion pieces, blogs, or studies without empirical research

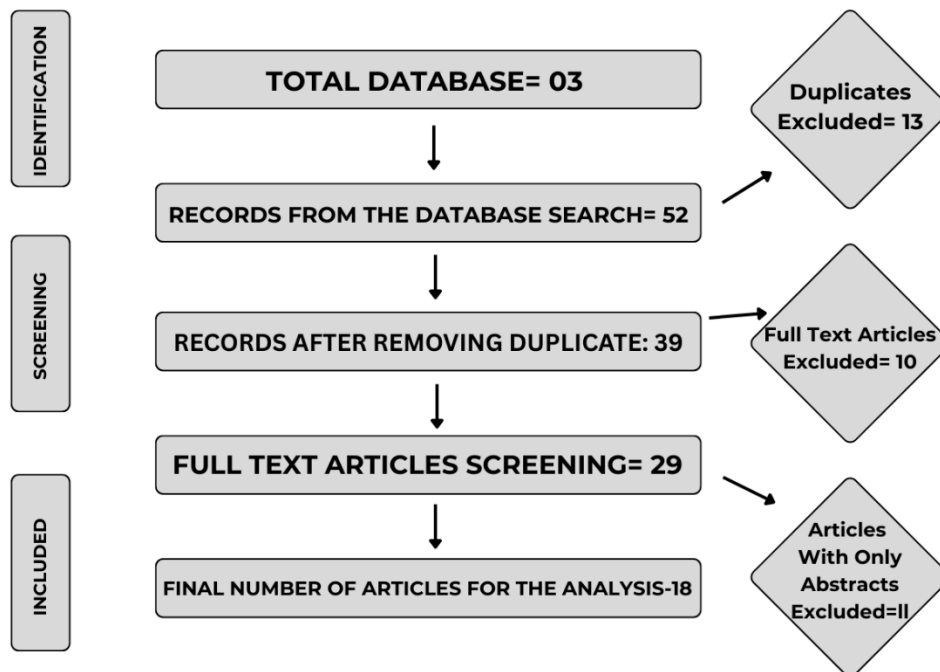


Fig. 1: *PRISMA Flow Chart for the Article's Selection Process*

Table 2 shows the percentage of articles selected from data base. Mostly articles are selected from Google Scholar (n=10) and others from JStor (n=5) and Taylor and Francis (n=3).

Table 3 shows the percentages of selected literature according to their publication years. As it is clearly shown that studies (n= 06) were published from 2010 to 2020, followed by (n=12) published from 2021 until this year 2025.

According to their designs keeping in mind the numbers and percentages of the literature, most studies (13) used content analysis while (2) studies used semiotic analysis, (2) number of studies used mixed method approach and smaller number of studies (1) were based on in depth interviews approach. In terms of research methods (n=13, 72%) studies used qualitative approach, (n=3, 16%) studies used quantitative approach and (n=2, 11%) study used a mixed method approach.

The researchers looked at how the studies collected their data and calculated how many used each method.

Table 2: *Numbers and percentages of literature according to their database.*

Database	Number	%
Google Scholar	10	55%
Jstor	5	27%
Taylor and Francis	3	16%

Table 3: *Number and percentages according to the literature according to publication year.*

Year	Number	%
2010-2015	3	16%
2016-2020	3	16%
2021-2025	12	66%

Table 4: *Numbers and percentages according to their study design and paradigm model*

Study Design	Content Analysis	Semiotic Analysis	In depth interviews	Others
	13(72%)	2(11%)	1 (5%)	2 (11%)
Paradigm model	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed method	
	13(72%)	3(16%)	2 (11%)	

2.3 Validation of Selected Methodology

The methodology adopted for this systematic literature review on the themes of hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, emerging masculinities in Pakistani digital media, and portrayals of masculinity in Pakistani cinema and its evolution underwent a rigorous validation process to ensure methodological integrity, transparency, and replicability. The validation processes that were carried out are highlighted by the following components:

2.3.1 Adherence to PRISMA Guidelines

Page and McKenzie's (2021) PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines were closely adhered to in this review. A transparent, consistent, and reproducible synthesis of the literature is ensured by PRISMA, which offers an organized framework for carrying out and reporting systematic reviews. An article's selection and screening process transparency has been enhanced by using inclusion criteria of PRISMA checklist and flow diagram.

2.3.2 Clearly Defined Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to guarantee the review stayed pertinent and focused. Peer-reviewed English language journal articles that specifically addressed masculinity themes in Pakistani media, such as TV dramas, movies and digital platforms, were given preference under these criteria. Excluded were studies that did not directly address the representation of masculinity in Pakistani media. The review's academic relevance and thematic precision were improved by this deliberate filtering.

2.3.3 Comprehensive Search Strategy and Database Selection

To find a large number of the pertinent studies, a thorough search strategy was applied across several academic databases. A multitude of studies on media, gender studies, and South Asian cultural representation can be found in the databases Google Scholar, JSTOR, Taylor, and Francis. Keywords like "toxic masculinity in Pakistani media," "hegemonic masculinity and Pakistan," "Pakistani digital media and male identity," and "masculinity in Pakistani cinema" were carefully chosen based on Boolean operators and thematic relevance. This strategy reduced prejudice and made sure that a range of academic viewpoints were included.

2.3.4 Use of PRISMA Flow Diagram

A PRISMA flow diagram was used to graphically depict the steps involved in study identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion. This visual tool has improved the transparency of the review process as it displayed the number of studies that were acquired, then assessed, eradicated and finally selected for the final synthesis.

2.3.5 Quality Control and Thematic Verification

To ensure that only research that directly contributed to at least one of the four key points that were included. Each of the selected study was underwent additional scrutiny for methodological quality and thematic relevancy. The themes were validated by content analysis and cross referencing to academic frameworks such as Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and feminist media theory.

In conclusion, the methodological validity of this review study is relied on its organized commitment to globally established standards (PRISMA), stringent selection criteria of articles, transparent reporting and uniform research technique.

3. REVIEW OF THE SELECTED STUDIES

3.1 Defining "Masculinity"

Masculinity is a socially and culturally constructed notion referring to the roles, behaviors and qualities of men. As it is not a stable concept throughout the universe it fluctuates with time and become different in different cultures and societies (Khan et al., 2025). Connell defines masculinity in 1995 as a collection of practices and social norms that have traditionally been designed to sustain male dominance and gender inequality (Noor, 2023). In Pakistani media, masculinity is frequently described by characteristics like emotional control, physical strength, assertiveness and the capacity to provide and protect. These traditional features mirror the larger patriarchal structure of society, in which males are expected to retain power both at home and in public appearances (Aslam et al., 2022; Maqsood& Hashmat, 2024)). Scholars acknowledge diverse masculinities, which can take alternative or non-dominant forms such as emotionally expressive, caring or gender-equal male identities (Ullah et al.,2024.). Pakistani digital media has recently begun to reflect some of these alternative masculinities, providing more diverse and inclusive images of what it means to be a male in today's society (Malik, 2021; Awan et al., 2024).

Table 5: shows the key points on defining “masculinity” presented by literature

Author’s Name	Year	Key Points
Malik	2021	Pakistani digital media starting to depict diverse, inclusive forms of masculinity.
Aslam et al.	2022	Pakistani media portrays masculinity through emotional control, strength, assertiveness, and protection roles.
Maqsood & Hashmat	2024	Reinforces traditional masculine traits reflecting patriarchal social structures in Pakistan.
Awan et al.	2024	Digital platforms offering alternative representations of modern masculinity in Pakistan.

3.2 Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is the prevalent form of masculinity that maintains male supremacy in the society (Aslam et al., 2022). Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity emphasizes the theoretical construct of how social systems legitimate and preserve masculine dominance and authority through a cultural institution such as media (Riaz, 2022). Hegemonic masculinity appears in Pakistani media in a variety of ways, notably in television dramas and ads, where male characters are typically presented as strong, forceful and emotionally controlled (Maqsood& Hashmat, 2024). The media typically depicts males as dominant, aggressive and emotionally disconnected people, promoting gender-based power structures (Aslam et al., 2022).

Analyzing Pakistani television dramas, a study particularly analyzing dramas *Rang Mahal* and *Qayamat*, found that these serials frequently reinforce hegemonic masculinity by portraying male characters as authoritative (49%), aggressive (30%), and consistently subjugating women (21%) (Aslam et al., 2022). Similarly, (Mirza, 2016) found that advertisements perpetuate traditional male stereotypes, portraying men as decisive, logical, and emotionally restrained figures. This consistent depiction across media platforms reinforces societal expectations of male behavior.

Furthermore, when Pakistani men compare themselves to the idealized masculine models in the media platforms, internalizing these images has been linked to poor body images (Mirza, 2016). However, there is a progressive trend toward more varied depictions of masculinity. Contemporary Pakistani film, for example has begun to explore alternative masculinities, such as hybrid and queer identities, which challenge established standards (Fatima, Bhatt, & Nathaniel, 2024). This shift in media depictions reflects a larger cultural discussion about gender roles and the need for more inclusive representations.

Malik, (2021) analyzed 24 popular television dramas spanning five decades and found that authority was the most frequently depicted characteristic of male protagonists, appearing in 68.1% of coded scenes. This explains the portrayal of masculinity in Pakistani dramas has not evolved in a linear manner rather there have been fluctuations, with some periods reinforcing traditional masculinity more strongly than others.

Pakistani media representations of masculinity mirror societal structures that prioritize male dominance in economic, social, and political spheres (Aslam et al., 2022). The perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity in media contributes to the normalization of gender-based inequalities, as media acts as both a reflection of and a mechanism for reinforcing cultural values.

Men are frequently portrayed as the ultimate decision makers and protectors in Pakistani television dramas, controlling women in both personal and professional contexts (Maqsood& Hashmat, 2024). Male protagonists in three well known dramas- *Aye Musht-e-Khaak*, *Kaisi Teri Khudgarzi* and *Tere Bin*-consistently displayed aggressive behaviors, emotional repression and dominance, according to the study. (Zafar et al., 2022) carried out a content analyseis of Pakistani magazines covers and discovered recurrent representation of “4D man”- personification of self- assurance, physical fitness and metro sexual

characteristics. Noor, Bhatti, and Nathaniel (2024) examined movies like *Zindagi Tamasha* and *Joyland* found a range of masculine identities in the film industry, from hegemonic to hybrid and queer. In order to promote a more inclusive understanding of male identities in the cultural narrative, their study focuses on how modern Pakistani films are starting to question traditional masculinity by featuring characters who defy gender norms.

Ads in Pakistani electronic media also contributes to the perpetuation of outdated gender norms (Awan et al., 2024) presented that dominant masculinity is frequently associated with power, control, and authority. The *Servis Tyres* advertisement, for instance, promotes the idea of men as the primary providers and protectors, reinforcing the notion that men must always be strong, resilient, and emotionally detached (Awan et al., 2024). (Imtiaz & Kamal, 2023) explored the socialization processes that shape masculine behaviors in Pakistani culture. Through interviews and focus groups, they found that men often face societal pressures to conform to rigid masculine standards, with deviations leading to social sanctions. This perpetuates the idea that masculinity is synonymous with toughness and authority while discouraging emotional expression.

Table 6: shows the key points presented by literature on hegemonic masculinity

Author(s)	Year	Key Points
Mirza	2016	Investigated male gender stereotypes in Pakistani advertisements; found persistent traditional portrayals emphasizing authority, strength, and emotional restraint.
Malik	2021	Pakistani digital media starting to depict diverse, inclusive forms of masculinity. Analyzed 24 dramas over five decades; authority was the most common male trait (68.1% scenes); masculinity portrayal fluctuates over time.
Zafar et al.	2022	Examined how Pakistani masculinity was portrayed on print media; they emphasize on domination, physical strength and traditional male roles
Aslam et al.	2022	Media portrays men as authoritative, aggressive, emotionally detached; reinforces gender-based power hierarchies; studied dramas <i>Rang Mahal</i> and <i>Qayammat</i> .
Imtiaz & Kamal	2023	Studied masculine socialization in Pakistani culture; found societal pressures enforce traditional male behaviors and discourage expressions of vulnerability.
Awan et al.	2024	Advertisements reinforce dominant masculinity linked to power, control, authority; e.g., <i>Servis Tyres</i> ad showing men as strong, resilient providers.
Noor, Bhatti & Nathaniel	2024	Analyzed films <i>Zindagi Tamasha</i> and <i>Joyland</i> ; explored diverse representations of masculinity, including hegemonic, hybrid, and queer masculinities in Pakistani cinema.
Maqsood & Hashmat	2024	Pakistani TV dramas depict men as dominant, assertive, emotionally restrained; male characters shown as decision-makers and protectors.

3.3 Toxic Masculinity

Television dramas in Pakistan have come under fire for romanticizing toxic masculinity by depicting violent male behaviors as display of affection or possessiveness. In a content analysis of *Kaisi Teri Khudgarzi* and *Hum Kahan Ke Sachay Thay*, (Mughal, 2024) found that 26.8 percent of the male abusive behaviors portrayed were physical abuse and 42.9 percent were emotional abuse.

One particularly troubling finding was that 80.4% of female victims justified the abuse, while 83.9% of other characters rationalized male aggression, often portraying it as an indication of intense affection or masculine possessiveness (Mughal, 2024). In addition to reinforcing negative gender norms, this normalization of violent behaviors deters women from escaping such relationships.

Often male characters in Pakistani television dramas are portrayed as gloomy, emotionally distant creatures asserting power over women. Romantic narrative commonly features a male lead “taming” a female character through dominance and pressure, portraying aggressiveness as an acceptable masculine attribute (Mughal, 2024). Such depictions are consistent with Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory, which states that continuous exposure to certain media representations changes audience views, making them more receptive of toxic masculinity and abusive conduct in real-life relationships (Mughal, 2024).

Aggressiveness and possession of masculine are abundantly presented by Pakistani dramas as legitimate manifestation of affection and love (Maqsood & Hashmat, 2024). (Maqsood & Hashmat, 2024) found that 80.4% of female characters justified abusive behavior, while 83.9% of other characters also rationalized male aggression. This portrays a dangerous message that male dominance and aggression are necessary traits in romantic relationships. Moreover, these dramas frequently portray toxic male protagonists who manipulate, intimidate, and exert control over their partners, yet are ultimately presented as desirable figures (Maqsood & Hashmat, 2024). The toxic traits, including emotional suppression, physical aggression, and disregard for women’s autonomy are highlighted.

Awan et al., (2024) found that advertisements often depict men as powerful and dominant figures, reinforcing the notion that men must be assertive and in control at all times. For example, the *Bold Body Spray* advertisement portrays masculinity through the themes of confidence, authority, and transformation, reinforcing traditional gender norms (Awan et al., 2024).

In Pakistani media, toxic masculinity is portrayed by aggressive, domineering male conduct that is frequently normalized and exalted through dramatic plots. This includes suppression of emotion, entitlement to control, and a propensity for violence, which shapes harmful gender dynamics (Connell, 2020). According to a content analysis by (Iqbal & Atay, 2024) it is presented the recurring patterns of physical, psychological, economic, and spiritual violence in popular dramas such as *Kaisi Teri Khudgarzi* and *Ishq Hai*. These shows often portray reinforcing traditional patriarchal ideologies by men asserting dominance through coercion, abduction, emotional manipulation, and financial control. Moreover, *Kankar* and *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* are also popular dramas depicting masculinity by emotional manipulation and hegemony (Iftikhar et al., 2024). According to feminist media theory, these representations affect viewers ‘view of typical gender behaviors in addition to maintaining the status quo (Iqbal & Atay, 2024). Any alternative or emotionally expressive models of masculinity are marginalized by this portrayal, which fosters a media landscape where masculine identity is built around suppression and power.

Table 7: shows the key points presented by literature on toxic masculinity

Author’s Name	Year	Key Points
Connell	2020	Aggression, emotional repression, dominance and entitlement are examples of toxic masculinity that are exalted and normalized in Pakistani media
Mughal	2024	Content analysis of dramas revealed emotional (42.9%) and physical (26.8%) abuse by male characters; 80.4% of female victims justified the abuse.
Maqsood & Hashmat	2024	Dramas depict male aggression, possessiveness, and coercion as expressions of love; abusive male protagonists are portrayed as desirable figures.
Awan et al.	2024	Men are portrayed in ads as strong and in control personalities as the <i>Bold Body Spray</i> commercial upholds masculinity by emphasizing confidence and authority.
Iqbal & Atay	2024	Analyzed dramas revealing recurring patterns of various types of violence; dramas reinforce patriarchal ideologies and promote coercive, dominant male models.

3.4 Masculinities Emerging in Pakistani Digital Media

Digital platforms are providing alternative representations of masculinity, even though hegemonic masculinity is still ingrained in mainstream Pakistani media. Online streaming services, web series, and social media influencers are introducing more nuanced depictions of male identities that challenge traditional gender norms (Malik, 2021).

Web series such as *Churails* and *Qatil Haseenaon Ke Naam* have featured male characters who are emotionally expressive, vulnerable, and supportive of gender equality. These representations differ significantly in legacy media, which rarely showed men in caring or emotionally demonstrative roles (Malik, 2021).

The emergence of social media influencers, web series and digital content has created a new image of masculinity that portrays emotional expressiveness, gender equality and sensitivity of men (Awan et al., 2024). Some social media platforms like You Tube and Instagram have given the opportunity to Pakistani digital content creators to address the issues like gender inequality and its impact on psychological health. Influencers like Junaid Akram and Shehzad Ghias Shaikh frequently engage in discussions about redefining masculinity, questioning societal expectations that equate masculinity with dominance and emotional suppression (Malik, 2021).

The rise of new media and more exposure to international content in Pakistan have helped to modify and adopt the evolving forms of masculinity like caring and softer roles. Young generation particularly of urban areas, are becoming more adaptive to new depictions of gender roles and leaving behind the traditional roles (Malik, 2021). Globalization and new media platforms have influenced Pakistani society's transition in this context to be more inclusive in this regard. The UBL digital bank advertising also stressing on independence, intellect and flexibility of men above traditional physical strength (Awan et al., 2024). This signals a growing acceptance of masculinity beyond aggression and dominance, reflecting changing societal attitudes.

Electronic media advertising has begun to represent various masculinities going beyond conventional tropes of dominance and authority (Awan et al., 2024). The Lemon Max advertisement on Tv depicting a male figure performing domestic duties is also presenting gender equality countering the traditional mindset that women is the only person to perform duties at home (Awan et al., 2024). Another advertisement of Harpic bathroom cleaner depicts a caregiver guy creating an image of supporting men that shares responsibilities with family. These portrayals promote gender equality and which are challenging for restrictive power systems of the traditional mindsets (Awan et al., 2024).

Emerging studies indicates that new media content creators and web series frequently depict the roles that defy hegemonic masculinities by rejecting violence as a tool of conflict resolution against women and support feminist problems in the society (Ali, 2021; Zubair, 2022). These developing manifestations signify a critical cultural shift in how masculinity is defined and interpreted in modern Pakistani culture, implying a generational reinvention of male identity in the digital age.

Table 8: *showing the key elements presented in literature on emerging masculinities*

Author's Name	Year	Key Points
Malik	2021	Digital platforms and web series (e.g., <i>Churails</i> , <i>Qatil Haseenaon Ke Naam</i>) present emotionally expressive, nurturing male characters; urban youth more receptive to diverse masculinity.
Ali	2021	Digital creators depict male characters supporting feminist causes, expressing emotional vulnerability, and rejecting violence as conflict resolution.
Zubair	2022	Web series and digital content challenge hegemonic masculinity; depict men advocating mental health, gender equality, and non-violent

Awan et al.	2024	masculinity. Advertisements (e.g., UBL Digital Bank, Lemon Max, Harpic) promote inclusive masculinity, highlighting independence, caregiving roles, and gender equity.
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3.5 Portrayals of Masculinity in Pakistani Cinema and Its Evolution

The early decades of Pakistani cinema (1950s–1970s) featured hyper-masculine protagonists based on Bollywood and Hollywood action icons that were frequently shown as guardians and avengers, supporting authoritarian gender stereotypes (Maqsood& Hashmat, 2024). These heroes represented power, dominance, superiority and conventional gender roles (Malik, 2021).

The 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of “Gandasa Culture” a style defined by images exaggerated that were based on violence and revenge driven masculine roles who defend family honor. That period corresponded with socio-political upheavals particularly in Gen Zia ul Haq’s Islamization programs reinforcing the traditional notions of masculinity in media (Malik, 2021; Maqsood& Hashmat, 2024).

Pakistani film industry has witnessed a rebirth since the early 2000s evidenced by films like *Khuda Kay Liye* (2007) and *Bol* (2011) which critically speaks up and questioned the conventional masculinity depictions and recent films like *Laal Kabootar* (2019) and *Joyland* (2022) featured more nuanced male characters depicting them as emotionally expressive and that they are humans they also have emotions as females have (Malik, 2021). These movies have also focused male protagonists who uncover the emotional struggles of men in the society (Maqsood& Hashmat, 2024).

In early decades like in 1960s, the male protagonist was also presented as violent, cruel and emotionally serene (Saeed et al., 2021). The revival of Pakistani cinema after 2000s, films have begun to break these stereotypes, introducing more sophisticated and emotionally varied male characters. Contemporary films like *Cake* (2018) presents men as empathetic, and emotionally sensitive guys that is consistent till now with worldwide deconstruction of traditional gender notions (Khan, 2020). The cinema’s narrative transition represents a slow but significant shift towards more equal gender roles representation for Pakistani society.

Table 9: shows key points on portrayals of evolution of masculinity in Pakistani cinema

Author’s Name	Year	Key Points
Khan	2020	Since the 2000s revival, films like <i>Cake</i> and <i>Laal Kabootar</i> showcase flawed, empathetic, emotionally vulnerable male characters, reflecting global deconstruction of traditional masculinity.
Malik	2021	Cinema from the 1950s–1970s featured protectors/avengers; Zia’s Islamization in the 1980s reinforced patriarchal masculinity; recent films depict emotional vulnerability.
Saeed et al.	2021	Emergence of the male protagonist was often portrayed as hypermasculine assertive, violent, and emotionally stoic mirroring patriarchal ideals in early decades.
Maqsood & Hashmat	2024	Early Pakistani cinema portrayed hyper-masculine heroes reinforcing patriarchal roles; 1980s–1990s “Gandasa Culture” emphasized violent, revenge-driven masculinity.

Table 10: *Summary of the cited articles defining Masculinities portrayed by Pakistani Media*

#	Title of Article	Author(s)	Journal Name	Year
1	Male Gender Stereotypes in Pakistani Advertisements	Mirza, Z.K.	International Journal of Social Sciences	2016
2	Masculinity Reimagined: The New Wave of Pakistani Cinema	Khan, M. A.	Journal of Film and Media Studies	2020
3	Representation of Hegemonic Masculinity in Pakistani TV Dramas	Malik, Q.	Journal of Media Studies	2021
4	Gender-Based Inequality in Workplace: The Case of Media Industry in Pakistan	Saeed, M., Saleem, R., & Khan, M. A.	Journal of Media Studies	2021
5	4DMan: Representation of Pakistani Masculinity on Paparazzi Magazine Covers	Zafar, M., Ahmad, S., & Raza, D.	Global Digital & Print Media Review	2022
6	Hegemonic Masculinity in Pakistan: A Critical Study of Selected Pakistani TV Serials	Aslam, M. H., Mehmood, S. A., & Saeed, M. M.	Journal of Social Sciences Advancement	2022
7	Visual Representation of Gender Roles, Ideologies, and Victimhood in Pakistani Paintings on Honor Killing	Riaz, M.	Journal of Media Studies	2022
8	Gender Through Media: Images of Contemporary Masculinity in Two Pakistani Movies	Noor, S.	Proceedings of the International Conference on Gender Research	2023
9	Masculinity Enactment in a Pakistani Culture: Role of Masculine Socialization	Imtiaz, S., & Kamal, A.	Pakistan Journal of Applied Psychology	2023
10	Portrayal of Male Protagonist and Masculinity in Pakistani Dramas	Maqsood, M., & Hashmat, S.	Journal of Academic Research for Humanities	2024
11	A Comparative Study of Two Dramas Written by Umera Ahmed: “Zindagi Gulzar Hai” and “Kankar”	Iftikhar, A., Aziz, S., Sarwer, S., & Sagheer, I.	Pakistan Islamicus	2024
12	Toxic Masculinity and Passive Femininity: A Content Analysis of Pakistani Television Dramas	Iqbal, I., & Atay, T.	Journal of International Women’s Studies	2024
13	Revealing Masculinity: A Social Semiotic Analysis of Pakistani Print Media Advertisements	Awan, B. N., Rabbani, M., Zafar, K., Khan, A., & Yaqoob, K.	Migration Letters	2024
14	Gender Representation in Pakistani Print Media: A Critical Analysis	Ullah, H., Khan, A. N., Khan, H. N., & Ibrahim, A.	Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies	2024
15	Gender Through Media: Images of Contemporary Masculinity in Two Pakistani Movies	Noor, Sara., Bhatti, Shaheena., S.R.K. Nathaniel	Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Gender Research	2024
16	Media Representations of Male Abusive Behavior and the Normalization of Violence against	Mughal, Aqsa.	Journal of Education & Humanities Research (JEHR)	2024

17	Women Identity Construction and Stereotypical Roles of Women in Pakistani TV Dramas	Khan, M. A., Nazakat, N., & Imran, M.	Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review (PLHR) 2025
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4. CONCLUSION

This study looked at how masculinity is represented in various forms of Pakistani media, such as TV dramas, films, internet, new media and commercials. After evaluating the chosen study, it was obvious that most media still portray males in traditional roles as powerful, domineering, emotionally restrained frequently in charge of women (Aslam et al., 2022; Maqsood& Hashmat, 2024). These images encourage hegemonic masculinity, promoting the notion that males should be dominant and women should be subservient. The study also discovered that toxic masculinity, in which males are aggressive, emotionally detached and even violent, is frequently portrayed as acceptable or even romantic in dramas (Iqbal & Atay, 2024; Mughal, 2024). This can convey detrimental messages to viewers, particularly young ones, about how males should act.

However, not all portrayals are negative. The review found that digital media platforms and some recent films are starting to challenge these old ideas. They show men who are kind, emotionally open, and willing to share responsibilities at home (Malik, 2021; Awan et al., 2024). This shift gives hope for more balanced and respectful gender roles in media. The role of this study was to bring together current research and highlight these trends in one place. It helped show how deeply media can influence how society views masculinity and why it is important to support more diverse and positive representations. These findings encourage media producers, researchers, and educators to rethink how men are shown on screen and to support content that promotes gender equality and healthy relationships.

4.1 Implications

The findings of this review carry several important implications for academia, media practitioners, and policymakers:

- 4.1.1 Academic Contribution:** This research addresses a key gap in gender and media studies that researches always focused on femininity and women's portrayals ignoring evolving masculinities. It focuses on how masculinities are interacting within the evolving digital identities.
- 4.1.2 Media Literacy and Content Creation:** Media literacy trainings are vital for this era as the normalization of hyper masculinities in media are highlighting its need. Content creators must consider the societal implications of gender depictions before making any content and have the responsibility for encouraging healthy masculinities that demonstrate mutual respect for both men and women along with equal emotional depth for both.
- 4.1.3 Policy and Regulation:** Policymakers and media regulatory authorities must consider some rules for content creation that prevent the gender discrimination in any context and that only allows to promote equality and diversity for all genders and they should fight for this equality in every portrayal of media.
- 4.1.4 Societal Transformation:** Challenging dominant masculine narratives can help foster a more equitable society. When media representations broaden to include non-hegemonic masculinities, they enable audiences particularly men to envision and embody a wider range of emotional, relational, and behavioral expressions.

4.2 Limitations

Despite its benefactions, this study has several limitations that must be conceded:

- 4.2.1 Language and Publication Bias:** Because only peer- reviewed papers were included in the review, significant contributions from Urdu- language scholarships and non- academic sources that might provide local grounded insights may have been overlooked.
- 4.2.2 Time Frame Restrictions:** Older foundational studies that might provide insightful historical perspectives on the development of masculinity in Pakistani media were not included because the focus was on literature from 2010 to 2025 (Hussain, 1996).
- 4.2.3 Database Scope:** Although the three academic databases used in the study (Google Scholar, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis) were comprehensive, it's possible that they overlooked pertinent literature that was indexed in regional databases or in publications that were not widely used in academia.
- 4.2.4 Contextual Variability:** In Pakistan, the perception of masculinity can vary according to socioeconomic, cultural and regional factors. The way that masculinity is experienced and understood in various local contexts, particularly in rural and underrepresented communities, may not be adequately taken into account reviewed by the literature.
- 4.2.5 Conceptual Variance Across Studies:** Despite efforts to guarantee thematic coherence, there were still some conceptual variations in the definitions and operationalization of important terms, such as “toxic masculinity” and “emerging masculinities” among the included studies. This affected the comparability of the results.

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