

Televised Femininity and Digital Afterlife: Rereading Pakistani Drama Heroines through Online Audience Reception

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This paper is an attempt to critically evaluate the roles of female protagonists in five Pakistani dramas that aired between 2019 and 2024 and their impact on social media reactions and the perception of society about gender roles.

Methodology: The study adopted a qualitative design, which relied on the Reception Theory and the Social Cognitive Theory by Stuart Hall and Bandura, respectively, using netnography and thematic analysis of YouTube commentaries discussing Cheekh, Sinf-e-Aahan, Zard Patton Ka Bun, Kuch Ankahi, and Khaie. This enabled capturing the audience interpretations and behavioral influences which were dominating, negotiating, and oppositional.

Findings: The involvement of the audience showed it in a complex reaction: oppositional readings emphasized the observance of traditional gender standards, negotiated readings showed a reluctant acceptance, and dominant readings advocated female empowerment. Although Khaie provided a societal issue regarding the female agency displayed through retribution, dramas such as Sinf-e-Aahan and Zard Patton Ka Bun have a profound impact on the real world where education and employment of women is supported by their family.

Conclusion: Study concluded that digital involvement of viewers transform consumption into an interactive dialogue, the paper identifies the importance of Pakistani media as a vibrant place of gender role negotiation. These tragedies trigger gradual, controversial social change. To promote the idea of progressive change of society, the media narratives of the future must maintain the aggravation of complex social changes, romanticization of healthy masculinity, and the diversification of gender roles.

Keywords: Female Protagonists, Pakistani Dramas, Gender Roles, Audience Reception, Social Media, Social Change.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As modernity sets in, there has been a significant change in the story focus of Pakistani television such that there is a visible shift in the focus of the TV towards female-based stories. Women empowerment, their struggle, and the multifaceted role in the contemporary social norms are highly evident in these stories (Tariq and Husnain, 2025; Shabir et al., 2013; Safdar et al., 2015). This historical exodus of representation of habitual underpinning of patriarchal rules habitually introduces women as subordinate or subsidiary figures not a mere fad, but a more thorough appreciation of women rights and their changing role within Pakistani society. To understand the contribution of the media to the social attention, understanding its significant influence on the opinion of the population in relation to changing gender equality is essential nowadays.

Studies have indicated that the Pakistani dramas are becoming more bold and there is an increase in the liberal roles played by women in the dramas raising awareness about their rights. Unlike the often formulaic Indian everyday soaps, which constitute a common reference point, the Pakistani dramas are slowly starting to shine through the help of the depiction of women with their individual personalities and struggles, much further than the staple banality of those which are played by them in the role of being the followers of the male characters. This development transforms TV drama into a powerful cultural instrument that is capable of reflecting and forming the values of society. According to Dutoya (2018), dramas introduce an impression of modernity, which is a large space to explore the discursive construction of the Pakistani new woman (p. 72).

1.1 Female-Centric Narratives in Cultural Discourse

As the powerful culture, TV dramas also represent the values of the society, but at the same time, they can influence ongoing problems and provide an important opportunity to express cultural ideas and shape the attitude of people towards the rights of women and their abilities (Akram, 2018; Ahmed and Wahab, 2019). Plots of females can also break down stereotypical beliefs by spreading different perceptions of gender in the form of the so-called female portrayal the active leaders and decision-makers. Those stories provide a necessary space to talk about brutal social and economic ills, which involve sensitive issues, such as child marriage and honor killings, not to mention the praise of the power and resistance of women. These depictions can have a significant influence that makes women strive to achieve greater economic and emotional self-reliance and make them universally empowered. The ability of the dramas to transcend roles and abilities as a potential of the viewers to re-evaluate their assumptions regarding the role of women in society. Furthermore, through the methods of handling the issues of women rights and social norms, these stories can lead to the bringing up of the social perception of gender equality.

It is critical to examine the overlap of ladies and media, in this case TV, in Pakistan whereby there has been an increased number of lady-facing testimonies in television drama within the past five years (an era of post-pandemic). The researchers have decided to examine the impact of this fashion on the perception and social norms of the target audience. Television drama is an enormous cultural form in a bid to reconcile literature and the visual art. After capturing the attention of audiences, it will be less complex to maintain the attention. Some have claimed that any of the artistic advent that has a drama and a text can be called a singular when the creators have the liberty in literature (Jenkins, 2012), and because the readers have a role to play in bringing about the technological know-how fiction of participatory subculture (Xu et al., 2023). The recent television drama industry is transforming its production and narrative adaptation of literature by increasingly becoming aware of inclusivity, specifically, women and minority ethnicities (Hogg, 2022). A new commissioning panorama has been developed in British television, which suggests independent production firms headed by female executives who incorporate over fifty percent of the group of workers in the diversification of both staff and narrative approach (Stemmers, 2016; Milner and Gregory, 2022).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

TV genres have long been identified as cultural sites wherein speech, storytelling, and ordinary social practices intersect to form targeted audience pleasures and identities (Gillespie, 2002, p. 144). Classic audience studies describe that one-of-a-kind TV genres mobilize special discursive modes, popular amusement programs favoring colloquial and vernacular talk, even as news or documentary codecs adhere to extra formal registers (Hobson, 1989; Geraghty, 1991; Morley, 2005:2006). Amongst these genres, soap operas hold particular significance for women audiences, not due to the fact that they mirror women's conversational patterns but also due to the fact that they invent new material for "small talk" and "gossip". Reinforcing women's friendships and social bonding (Rakow, 1987). Hobson (1982) famously tested that the soap serial viewing amplifies past the private act of watching to the communal act of speaking, sharing narrative recaps, commenting on realism, and linking on-display drama to real-life activities in offices, houses, and enjoyment spaces (Levine, 2020; Tapal, 2023).

This foundational perception remains rather applicable within the cutting-edge Pakistani context, wherein prime-time TV dramas proposing robust woman protagonists have migrated into digital spaces of interplay. simply as in advance audiences demonstrated their own conversational worlds through soap communicate, Pakistani viewers now extend this validation to social media systems, wherein Twitter threads, Instagram reels, and Facebook discussions emerge as modern-day arenas for narrative trade and opinion-building. in this way, the social media reception of Pakistani dramas echoes the dialogic practices diagnosed by using Hobson (1982) and Seiter et al. (2013), however with the accumulated dynamics of algorithmic visibility, on-line fandoms, and transnational participation (Backhouse et al., 2023).

Pakistan's TV enterprise started in the 1960s, with the nation-owned Pakistan Television business enterprise (PTV) providing teleplays and drama serials as a form of countrywide leisure (Saleem & Shafiq, 2025). By the early 2020s, Pakistan's TV enterprise had increased some distance past a handful of private channels, with the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) issuing dozens of satellite television licenses and more than a hundred satellite channels working nationally, along with a kind of thirty to forty entertainment channels (Din, 2025; PEMRA, n.d.).

Drama serials remain the flagship of this region, with estimates of producing 80 to 120 serials yearly and using hundreds across the drama production environment (Associated Press, 2025). Recent studies reveal that these dramas exert a huge impact on Pakistani females' viewing conduct, lifestyle choices, and gender perceptions. Abbas (2018) and Kothari (2005) have further indicated a weaker and submissive depiction of women's roles.

Besides this, Iqbal et al. (2024) discovered that although the representation of females in the popular dramas still remains controversial, most people who watch the determined on serials translate them as empowerment selling messages. Combined, these dynamics of the enterprise and target audience help to realize that Pakistani drama serials are not only entertainment but also strong cultural places where social norms are reproduced, negotiated, and, in some cases, even disputed (Fatima, 2019). This contemporary image of women is better than the older traditional images of women as docile players to more complex images of women that are more empowered and have strong female resistance. Iqbal et al. (2021) claim that many recent plays have featured strong female protagonists and social challenging circumstances to occupy their niche.

This is a sign that, somehow, positive societal changes are taking place in Pakistan, which denote the slow but progressive acceptance of women's rights. Although some narratives attempt to break the stereotypes, as Umer et al. (2024) argue, the perpetuated stereotypes of women are dependent on or subordinate to men. Critical feminist frameworks state that Pakistani dramas usually reflect women in such a way that strips femininity of breadth and reduces it to a thin version of grounded 'womanhood' in patriarchal systems (Pinedo, 2021). Women's work, particularly caregiving and domestic tasks, remains obscured or discounted because of gendered norms that restrict women's engagement in public or professional life. These images serve to reinforce dominant gender systems by presenting women as

primarily mothers, wives, or caregivers instead of independent actors, as the content of the dramas has the potential to shape female viewers' perceptions and attitudes in their real-life actions (Bader, 2025; Roggers, 2025).

According to Hall (1973: 1980), the media have been shaping expectations of gender, encoding certain influential ideologies through which audiences interpret reality. In the case of Pakistani dramas, female characters are either supportive or oppose dominant gender ideologies, as over time (Gerbner, 1976), an audience, through extensive exposure to a specific type of content, becomes conditioned to accept certain beliefs and attitudes. This study focuses on examining how stories about women are portrayed within the discourse of the target audience to understand the impact these messages have on thinking toward women.

Media representations do not function as a reflection but as a 'construct social identity and hierarchy' (Butler, 1990), which provides a lens to understand why, in Pakistani dramas, women more often than not reflect the society's cultural values and norms, but in fact through the use of technology, they are subjected to oversimplified and stereotypical portrayals, rendering them incapable of expressing open victimization under male gaze in society (Mulvey, 1975). Kothari (2005) points out that the narratives in some dramas do energize women, whereas most still confine them domestically, which warrants the need to study media texts to assess how they frame gender issues.

Undoubtedly, past studies have explored that the relationship between the audience and the media is entangled and evolving, and the audience is expected to behave in a particular manner of selecting media, gratifying specific, pre-defined needs (Katz et al., 1973; Altuwairiqi et al., 2019; Ngigi & Busolo, 2018). This is especially true for female-centered dramas, where they tend to watch look alike stories of everyday lives or defying the set traditions (Mulla, 2021). Moreover, the depiction of social issues that spark debates can also impact people's views and attitudes, facilitating them to express (Qaiser et al., 2024) their approval or disapproval of the image of women represented in dramas, concerning femininity and masculinity (Taj & Ameen, 2025).

The platform-communication channels like YouTube, online and offline, are now digital tools, aiding individuals in building both personalization and expressiveness on regional and global scales (Nicole & Boyd, 2013). Social media tools' simplification to interconnect our lives through instantaneous messaging, making the global village possible, has enabled incredible benefits (Arthurs et al., 2018). YouTube is a space of interaction for millions of people, granting them a diversified range of opportunities and coping mechanisms as well to deal with the challenges of privacy issues, social withdrawal, and advertisers' targeting (Mowafy, 2018; Budzinski et al., 2021). Globally, Pakistan ranks 8th in terms of internet consumption in 2025 (Kemp, 2025), among more than 116 million internet users, whereas YouTube has set new records of media consumption patterns (MCPs), being one of the most influential digital platforms among the citizens. Technology-driven accessibility decorum is the main reason for its becoming a 'central medium' of entertainment, infomercial, and infotainment in public discourse. Moreover, its spatiality is significant to satisfy the Pakistani audience's attachment with uploaded and archived TV content, especially dramas (Chaudhary, 2021).

Undoubtedly, YouTube offers ease of revisiting episodes and collaborating through remarks, likes, and shares, as an energetic method of meaning-generating, critiquing, and reinterpreting narratives (Burgess & Green, 2018). Importantly, the reach of YouTube isn't confined to Pakistan's borders; diasporic groups throughout the globe access Pakistani dramas via this platform to create a transnational target market through the negotiation of cutting-edge troubles of womanhood, identity, and cultural values in virtual spaces (Aksar et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2024; McElroy & Noonan, 2019). Accordingly, YouTube serves as an entertainment archive and a community interaction platform where traditional perceptions of society are not only supported but also challenged at the same time. Women-centered stories impact more than just the amusement area as they contribute to the spread of gender equality and women's empowerment. The characteristics of powerful female characters in the dramas sometimes change the audience's views due to the different perceptions and claims they have about them. In addition, the

increase of attachment to gender awareness can result in the emergence of more revolutionary attitudes towards gender equality (Berg & Sansalone, 2024; Aslam et al., 2025).

2.1 Problem Statement

In spite of the increased incidence of female-driven memories in Pakistani TV dramas and earlier and current research activities, the exact impact they have on creating new possibilities of how women can be viewed and the opportunities that females have is a huge gap that is yet to be filled in order to substantially find out whether or not the female-centric narratives have indeed created new avenues to their enterprise or are they unwittingly contributing to the perpetuation of old stereotypes on gender roles and possibilities of women. Such confusion as to the real effect of the female-centric representations on the factors of societal attitudes reveals itself in the information on the role of the media in the process of social transformation to a general vacuum. It demonstrates that the shallow changes in the depiction of the person are not always associated with the subsequent change in the ideals of the society (Zaheer, 2020).

This looks at the attempts to examine how female characters are framed, constructed, and placed within these stories and critically evaluates the presence and or absence of female characters as actual agents of change or as passive agents in stereotypical roles despite being categorized as woman-led storytelling. The research is important because of the fact that the media is critical in influencing cultural values and therefore, in-depth analysis of the representation of women in the Pakistani dramas is crucial. It can be expected that the target market reception analysis which is composed of the views of the diaspora will demonstrate whether these media narratives tend to boost gender stereotypes or contribute directly to the establishment of gender equality in Pakistan. The perceived ambiguity concerning the extent of the media progressiveness impacts upon those shows where media depictions, even so-called progressive ones, may work within a couple of degrees. It may be that they may placate these norms outwardly and maintain others, or their reception will be biased against in terms of already held prejudices in society. That is why the analysis of the interpretation of target market (dominant, negotiated, oppositional) is necessary in a deep way in order to find out the actual effect that goes beyond the original cause of the creators. This means that merely placing a female in the central position is not a sufficient step; the subtlety of her persona or her initiative, her associates, and the social response to her actions should be attentively considered by the policymakers or the content makers to achieve an actually new result. This underscores the complexity that is inherent in media as a social engineering tool.

2.2 Research Questions

1. What themes and character tendencies are related to females in selected Pakistani dramas?
2. How do distinct online audience groups interpret those portrayals of females (dominant, negotiated, oppositional)?
3. In what approaches do those portrayals influence target audience attitudes and behaviors regarding gender roles and empowerment?

2.3 Theoretical Framework

In Pakistan, TV dramas serve as arenas of contention as cultural norms, gender roles, and social aspirations are acted and discussed. Research has discovered that Pakistani serials are both enabling and opposing to the traditions of patriarchy, which provide female heroes who waver between obedience and defiance (Khan et al., 2023; Hashmi, 2022). This duality has drawn immense attention to media and cultural studies, especially as viewers have more and more exposures to those texts in virtual spaces, which also encompass YouTube, where the audience has their reactions, negotiations, and opinions recorded publicly (Benson, 2016; Burgess and Green, 2018). To be aware of those interactions, there must be a framework that describes the production of the said meanings in the texts of drama, as well as the interpretive corporation of audiences (Carrelo, 2023). In this paper to provide this analysis, the encoding/interpreting model by Stuart Hall provides the background of this question in which he asserts

that the meaning which is intended to be enveloped in the media text is encoded; nevertheless, it is the audience that decodes it through approaches that may be either dominant, negotiated, or oppositional (1980/1993). This approach goes beyond the passive target audience assumption and emphasizes the role of socio-cultural historical past, lived enjoy, and ideological positioning in interpretation. The South Asian TV studies have already proven the effectiveness of the use of the Hall framework to shoot the target audience ambivalence to current gender messages (Kazi, 2021).

Meanwhile, critics warn that the model may underemphasize the structural limitations of media production and will not fully represent the affective or emotional aspects of reception (Morley, 2006). Nonetheless, its focus on polysemy and negotiated readings is vital to the research of how Pakistani visitors express in favor of or against changing images of women. The ideologies of Albert Bandura on social cognitive techniques build on this interpretive identification by virtue of elucidating how constant exposure on media characters can influence ideals and behaviors. Social cognitive theory (SCT) states that individuals learn through observation, modelling and reinforcement (Bandura, 2001).

In the framework of gender representation, research shows that the television viewers tend to internalize or repudiate the televised behaviors depending on the perceived realism, praise systems, and character identification (Signorielli, 2009; Gerding and Signorielli, 2014). Although the concept is sometimes critiqued by critics who claim it runs the risk of overemphasizing the role of purpose and effect mechanisms between media and action (Brooks, 2023), its focus on observational studying and vicarious reinforcement is critical to understanding how drama stories could stimulate, explore, or even re-calibrate the attitudes of the audience towards the empowerment of women.

The cultural interpreting (Hall) meets the social learning of knowledge (Bandura), provides a rather fruitful framework, in which the audience openly argues about the morality, company, and dreams of girl characters in the commentary section of Youtube (Crosby, 2022). Furthermore, it would be useful to clarify how those talks can further lead to behavioral intentions or attitudinal changes about gender roles, which captures both the discursive making of meaning and the modeling outcomes that happen when audiences are repeatedly exposed to the serial female-focused stories. This framework is significant to the Pakistani media studies in 3 aspects. First, it conforms to the evidence that Pakistani dramas are not only viewed as an entertaining but also as a moral and social course, which is why it is possible to conduct observational studies (Umer et al., 2024).

Second, it admits the discontinuous, dialogical quality of digital reception, in which viewers are co-creators of meaning by watching together (Hill, 2018), a position that admits the anxiety between structural media power and target audience agency; a stability that is essential to information how dramas can both reinforce and challenge patriarchal norms. By combining the interpretive malleability of the principle of reception and the behavioral acumen of SCT, the prevailing gaze can readily explain how the representations of women in Pakistani dramas are examined, discussed and certainly performed by their different on line viewers.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research takes a qualitative approach to evaluate critically the female-centered stories in five Pakistani dramas and discuss their impact on the audience. The approach is significantly based on the assessment of theoretical framework (around 80%), which leads to the discussion of gender representation and narrative form, supported by the empirical evaluation of audience engagement (about 20%) from YouTube comments. This mixed qualitative technique allows for an in-depth understanding of both the text (the dramas) and the public reactions (the online audience), fusing theory-based insights with empirical data. Netnography serves because the number one studies technique, supported through thematic evaluation to interpret online viewer reactions. Netnography, derived from ethnography, is

utilized to study on-line groups and digital interactions, focusing on audience-generated content material in boards and social media systems (Kozinets, 2015; Addeo et al., 2019).

This approach permits researchers to observe how online groups articulate identities, construct that means, and reply to media content material in natural settings. In this study, netnography helps an in-depth exploration of target audience sentiment closer to female characters in Pakistani dramas. Thematic evaluation is employed to perceive and explain the primary issues inside the qualitative data, involving familiarization with the data, coding, and subject matter formation. This analytical technique supports both record-guided and principle-guided research techniques, deciphering discussion subject matters such as empowerment, resistance, victimization, and societal expectations.

3.2 Data Selection

Data collection focuses on YouTube comments due to the platform's active viewer response and diversified targeted audience content. Five popular, woman-centric dramas: *Cheekh*, *Sinf-e-Aahan*, *Zard Patton ka Bun*, *Kuch Ankahi*, and *Khaie* are selected based on their viewership, reputation, and their potential to challenge or represent critical social paradigms. A systematic sampling technique is implemented, choosing the first 100 comments (primarily based on likes and replies) from the highest-viewed episodes across the 3-act narrative structure (introduction, war, decision) for every drama, ensuing in a complete pattern of about 500 comments.

3.3 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis entails conducting thematic analysis with the aid of a coding sheet that helps in the classification of the feedbacks into various categories according to the themes that have been generated from the reception principle and social cognitive theory. By choosing YouTube feedback as the primary source of data, it indicates that social media platforms are not just the places where the content is consumed but they might also be the locations where the societal norms, particularly the gender roles, are being loudly discussed, fought over, and even possibly redefined. Compared with traditional media consumption where the audience's reception was largely non-public or inferred, social media allows such interpretations to be public and interactive. Audiences are not just passive receivers of messages, but they are actively involved in the whole process of message encoding, decoding, and re-encoding by means of their comments and debates. This turns passive watching into active participation in cultural argument. Such active online involvement indicates that the influence of the media is not always unilateral. Content material creators can observe actual-time reactions, recognize the nuances of target market interpretation (dominant, negotiated, oppositional), and potentially adjust destiny narratives. It also means that social change, catalyzed by media, is a public, often contentious, negotiation process, rather than a silent, linear progression.

As regular viewers of Pakistani television dramas and active observers of their digital reception, we were drawn to the ways audiences respond to female-centric narratives on YouTube. Beginning in early 2024, we undertook a systematic netnographic exploration of five popular dramas: *Cheekh*, *Sinf-e-Aahan*, *Zard Patton Ka Bun*, *Kuch Ankahi*, and *Khaie*, all of which foreground complex female protagonists and have generated substantial online engagement. Similar to prior cultural studies of television reception and online fandom (Kozinets, 2015; Shifman, 2013), we aimed to trace how viewers collectively negotiate questions of gender, morality, and social change in the comment sections of freely accessible YouTube episodes.

YouTube was selected as the primary field site because it remains Pakistan's most active video platform, drawing both local and diasporic audiences who post spontaneous reactions to full episodes and teasers. We used a purposive theoretical sampling strategy (Strauss, 1987; Mason, 2017) to gather the top 100 most-liked or most-replied comments from each drama's highest-viewed episodes across the three-act narrative arc: introduction, conflict, and resolution. This strategy prioritized comments with visible

audience engagement rather than aiming for numerical representativeness, allowing us to capture the most discursively influential reactions.

This analytical approach combined netnography and interactional cues. In accordance with Kozinets (2015) we recorded interactional cues like likes, responses, and emoji usage in addition to the comment content, treating the comment threads as genuinely occurring online communities. Thematic analysis proceeded in three stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006): familiarization with the data, inductive coding of recurring patterns, and the development of overarching themes. Particular attention was paid to audience negotiations of empowerment, victimization, resistance, and conformity, drawing on the encoding/decoding model of reception (Hall, 1980) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) to interpret dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings of female representation.

4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.1 Analysis of Female Protagonists in Pakistani Dramas and Audience Engagement

4.1.1 *Cheek* (ARY Digital, January 2019-August 2019)

At the beginning, the female protagonist, Saba Qamar as Mannat, is portrayed as an energetic and happy person, but everything changes after Nayab is brutally attacked, which drives her to become a strong advocate for justice. Mannat repeatedly encounters various social issues and makes many sacrifices, such as losing her family and loved ones, as she pursues the truth. Robust and determined Mannat goes in opposition to the standard gender expectancies of Pakistani society, as compared to other female characters in drama. Her choice to withstand injustice and her characterization have worked as a seeding thought for a lot of people to consider how they have to react in such social troubles.

Her role shows a discontinuous transition of female depiction with passive to active forces of resistance with the repetitive phrase of Mannat, "most important Main Chup Nahi Bethungi" (I will not stay silent), as an extra, but a discursive project which exerts social pressure on the audience to resist injustice rather than being inactive. The audience has received a positive interpellation through this repetition that has encouraged them to understand their very own complicity (Cook, 2011). In systems of oppression, to take into account active resistance and social vitality through residing reenactments (Knittel, 2019). The theme of 'sufferer blaming', addressed through Mannat's consistent assignment to societal silence, is reinforced with the aid of her dialogues and court confrontations, demonstrating that female voices in drama can encourage discourse on resisting patriarchal violence.

Cheekh has worked as a bridge to reduce the gap between victimhood and empowerment via Mannat's phrases and moves, which shift the belief of females from passive sufferers to lively seekers of justice. The drama's dialogues are mostly referred to active viewers in YouTube feedback as an inspiration, showing that the language used by female protagonists can immediately influence target audience perceptions.

Table 1. *Top 3 Most Engaged Episodes*

Episode 6	The fact that Nayab (Ushna Shah) falls from the roof during Haya's engagement ceremony makes this episode noteworthy. The audience is captivated and intrigued by the circumstances behind the woman's death and how she got there.
Episode 16	Saba Qamar's character Mannat defies her family's wishes and begins pursuing justice. This episode receives a lot of acclaim for its strong emotions since Mannat develops into a courageous and strong character.
Final Episode 30	In the drama's conclusion, Mannat prevails in her legal battle against Wajih (Bilal Abbas Khan). This episode was the most watched because of the court scenes and the story's resolution, which captured viewers' interest.

Cheekh is known to be a show that raises some controversial issues such as rape and legal system problems. The right conversations about empowering women and ensuring their rights in Pakistan are initiated when the viewer sees one of the female characters fight these evils. The manner in which Mannat is described has especially resonated with the women audience. Many people noted, as described in Table 2, that her strong will and courage were different from the way women are usually shown in other dramas. Because she suffered the loss of her husband and child, readers feel more for her and are encouraged to discuss the sacrifices others make for justice. Its powerful leading role helps to challenge old beliefs about women (Taj & Ameen, 2025) and encourages important talks on feminism in Pakistan, which experiences injustice.

Table 2. *Netnographic Thematic Analysis of Drama Serial Cheekh*

Code Category	Theme/Sub-theme	Frequency	Indicative YouTube Comments
Victim Blaming	Dominant Reading	27	“Stop victim blaming... Aurten marzi ke begair bhi kahin akele reh jate hain...” “Don't take sides, whether it's your husband or anyone... If you can help someone, please help them.”
	Oppositional Reading	11	"If the victim girl did not go to discuss with the man... She also would not die if she agreed to sin."
	Negotiated Reading	8	"I am not victim-blaming... Just step up for the sake of your own safety."
Religious and Moral Interpretations	Dominant Reading	5	"How beautiful and full of wisdom is Islam... never be alone with a non-mehram."
	Oppositional Reading	15	"Pure Islam me bs aurato ko hi bola gaya h adami ko tameez ya aakal nhi di gayi." Jo larki deen se baher jati hai... but why only larki? It should apply to both women or men."
	Negotiated Reading	3	"In an Islamic country, when women wear the hijab... There are no cases of raping."
Women's Empowerment and Self Defense	Positive Behavioral Influence	5	"Nayab shouldn't stand there like a helpless weakling... Women need to learn how to fight back."
	Modeling Behavior	10	"Dramas have always shown women as weak objects... You have to save yourself... maybe accept and apologize just to escape."
Gender Roles and Societal Expectations	Negative Behavioral Influence	7	"Modern women don't understand... best place for girls is home."
	Modeling Behavior	9	"Strong message for girls to never trust any stranger except father or brother."

The most prominent theme, with a total of 46 comments (27 dominant, 11 oppositional, 8 negotiated), is victim blaming. A significant portion of the audience actively rejects the notion that women are to blame for the violence they experience, as seen by the high frequency of dominant readings (27). There are viewers who request others to stand by women instead of blaming victims, as it is demonstrated by remarks such as C1. However, eleven conflicting readings prove that rather a large percentage still adheres to traditional beliefs and blame women as the cause of their predicament. The eight negotiated readings show that female responsibility to be safe is expected rather gently but persistently through indicating a group that despite the absence of explicit blame, women are still expected to go the extra mile. Twenty three comments (five dominating, fifteen oppositional, and three negotiated) refer to religion and morals. The much greater number of opposing readings (15) points to the strong sub-text of discontent over the gendered adherence to religious practices, and the overwhelming readings (5) praise Islamic instructions as guarding women. With C5, a large number of the audience are unsure as to why only women have to ensure safety and modesty. It means that there is an influence of religious principles, though the resistance to their biased application is growing. There are 15 comments (10 modeling behavior, 5 positive behavioral influence) enabling the empowerment themes. These remarks are important because they support active resistance and self-defense, even if they are less common than victim-blaming. The drama does cause some viewers to reevaluate customary passivity, as seen by their calls for women to fight back and reject helplessness (C7).

The second theme appears in 16 comments (9 modeling behavior, 7 negative behavioral effects). Comments that perpetuate traditional norms and imply that women are safest at home are examples of negative influence. Comments about modeling behavior, on the other hand, advise women to trust only close male relatives, reflecting a protective but constrictive worldview. The greatest single group of comments clearly rejects the idea that women are to blame for the violence they experience, with 27 majority readings opposing victim blaming. This implies that *Cheekh* has been successful in getting a sizable segment of its audience to sympathize with female victims and challenge damaging social norms. However, a sizable portion of the audience still holds conservative and patriarchal beliefs, as seen by the 11 oppositional readings on victim blaming and the 15 oppositional readings on religious/moral interpretations (a total of 26). These viewers frequently demand rigorous adherence to traditional gender roles or blame women for their own misfortunes.

Other viewers are in an intermediate position and this is indicated by the eight negotiated readings on victim blame and three on religious/moral interpretations. They might not embrace empowerment in totality and instead they might deny themselves the direct responsibility but still request women to help in taking extra care. It is a practical reaction to the social conditions. Some of the viewers have been influenced by the drama to accept female empowerment as shown by the fifteen comments that center on the third theme, Women Empowerment and Self-Defense (5 affirmative, 10 modeling). The subtext of empowerment remains not the hegemonic story in society, however, when judged by the less frequency when compared to the victim-blaming tendencies. It seems that a large part of the audience is too concerned with the conservative patriarchal formations and the drama is more of a warning than a tool of social change as can be seen in the seven negative behavioral influence comments and nine modeling behavioral comment that warn against carelessness and reliance on the male blood relatives.

The response of the viewers to *Cheekh* presents contradictions between the celebration and subversion of gender norms. The very frequency of dominating interpretations of counter-victim-blaming remarks (27) and a rather high count of empowerment remarks (15) proves that quite a large part of viewers believe that the drama does attempt to subvert certain gender conventions in some way. The image of a female protagonist who fights against unjust institutions and fights to obtain where she belongs in society appeals strongly to those who watch the movie and often question the social conventions and defend the rights of women. This implies that *Cheekh* could develop understanding and liberal attitudes towards gender roles among viewers.

Besides remarks in the adverse behavioral consequences, opposition interpretations of victim blaming and moral or religious aspects were also 26 comments (7). It means that a large minority believes that Cheekh is another supporter of social norms and traditional gender roles (the fourth theme). A significant number of viewers seem to think that women must be docile, submissive or voluntarily move into their personal lives as exhibited by the 19 comments which demonstrate modeling behavior (including empowerment and gender roles). This mix reveals how the conservative ideas still have an impact on the audience.

Also, the fact that the negotiated readings (11 comments) exist suggests that a large portion of the audience has found Cheekh to be a battleground between liberal and conservative ideologies. Such viewers uphold empowerment stories and sympathize with female characters, yet they still follow the traditional norm of femininity regarding how women should behave (Zaheer, 2020). This negotiation is a clash of cultures to re-define the shifting gender relations against well-established patriarchal structures. The fact that the number and kind of comments created by viewers in reaction to this drama are in the middle of challenging and supporting gender norms indicate that plays that focus on women are neither challenging nor supporting gender norms. The main part of the shift is, specifically, the rejection of the social tradition of blaming women along with the advocacy and compassion toward women (Mulla, 2021). Nevertheless, the solution remains buried within standard paradigms, and this is the way in which difficult the social change can be. Although such dramas may stimulate discussion and reflection, their long-term effects are predetermined by the major changes in society and the continuation of the discourse on the issues of gender and representation.

4.1.2 Sinf-e-Ahan (ARY Digital, November 2021-May 2022)

This Pakistani television serial narrates the incredible story of six women of different backgrounds that break the social norms and their own restrictions to join the army. The program that was broadcasted on ARY depicts how they evolved slowly into being obedient characters and then turned out to be combative figures of strength. The main character, a girl Arzoo Daniel (Syrá Yousaf), is a Catholic girl born in Lahore, in many ways, her vision of the world is colloquial. With a lot of struggles, she protects herself against bullies in the area and is ready to love until it comes to her in the form of employment instead of the marriage traditions playing up as expected. Her narrative is a good example of responsibility. Mahjabeen Mastaan Mastaan was the daughter of an aristocrat Mahjabeen Sinf-e-Aahan longs to become a military general. She is inspired by most renowned commanders, including Lt Gen Nigar Johar. Her family exerts a significant amount of stereotypical feminine demands to be at home and obedient to her husband, which she strongly opposes.

Pariwesh Jamal (Ramsha Khan) belongs to the lower class of the country in the rural environment. Her personality takes the toll of the institutionalized social norms and portrays the ills of women in villages. Specifically, Pariwesh wants to attain some equity in a male-dominated environment and takes a risk in her family of gender-based aspirations. Shaista (Yumna Zaidi), is one of the more prolific characters in the play because of her cleverness and her vocal nature. Shaista opposes children in the family by asserting her right to ambition which stands in contrast to most of the members of her family who do not even desire children, especially male children. Her search explains the need to advocate herself to overcome gender discrimination founded on self-identity. An example of the unsolved dilemma between the ambition of a woman to serve the military and the social norm of her need to marry can be traced through Rabia (Sajal Aly). She is a living example of the dichotomy that the majority of women have. Along with that, Kiran (Sonia Mishal) respects her past and also shows the emotional challenges of a widow in her new life. She is the complete opposite of morally upright women, Rukhsana and Musarat and her personality is more somber in its themes of loss and resiliency which provide the story with extra flavor.

Some of the female protagonists in this play represent a diversity of socioeconomic status and breaking the gender roles through the joining of the military. An example of a dialogue that denies gender norms and encourages independence is *mujhe apni zindagi ka faisla khud karna hai* (I want to decide my own

life). These lines are the main motivation to the idea of women empowerment and resistance against the society. The dialogue between each character, be it in the ISSB training or the family conflict, break the stereotypes and creates a multi-layered story which enriches a bigger cultural discussion of women who can do more beyond the home. The dialogues in *Sinf-e-Aahan* contribute to the humanization of the challenges faced by women who desire to do non-traditional jobs by shedding light on their personal sufferings and showing strength. The purpose of drama is to make women normal subjects of male spaces and to give alternative female subjects (Iqbal et al., 2024). Since they have the highest number of viewers and engagement, the comments were applied to the following three episodes:

Table 3. *Selected Episodes' sample from Sinf-e-Aahan*

Episode 1	We learn about the seven primary personalities in the Pakistan Army and what unites them in the first episode. The film's unique concept and outstanding actors attracted a lot of attention.
Episode 5	The girls encounter the significant obstacles of the ISSB testing facility for the first time in this episode. These leaders' diverse origins and goals are emphasized to highlight their strengths and areas for improvement.
Final Episode 23	As the narrative comes to a close, the women are transformed into "Women of Steel." It was one of the most-watched programs due to its uplifting and inspirational tale of women in the military.

Such episodes make it deeper than usual as they bring up such issues as patriarchy, gender inequity, and social pressure. According to Table 3, this drama is intended to inspire both young and old people by depicting women as people who have different aspirations in life. It has received acclaim over its high-quality production and alteration of the Pakistani media portrayal of women.

Table 4. *Netnographic Thematic Analysis of Drama Serial Sinf-e-Ahan*

Code Category	Theme/Sub-theme	Frequency	Indicative YouTube Comments
Women's Empowerment and Strength	Dominant Reading	38	"SinfAahan is depicting Women from all backgrounds... Their unwavering bravery and determination to succeed are truly admirable. "Power of women shown in this drama is amazing... so empowering for the girls of this generation."
Breaking Social Norms and Stereotypes	Dominant Reading	23	"We see many dramas with ill-mannered, shamelessly dressed girls... but this drama is different." "By depicting reality, drama encourages Pathan families to send their daughters to the army."

	Oppositional Reading	10	"Bhai power ka dosra nam mard hai... Aurato ka "koi kam ni fooj ma." "Girls can't join the army like boys... worst drama."
Diversity, Inclusivity, and Representation	Preferred Reading	8	"Diversity of female leads makes it enjoyable." "Beautifully portrays women from different social, financial, and cultural backgrounds."
Family and Societal Support	Positive Behavioural Influence	9	"No negativity in drama promoting women empowerment and support of brothers and fathers."
	Modeling Behaviour	12	"Parents permitted scouting after watching this serial." "Motivates conservative families to support daughters."

As it can be seen in Table 1, the most common theme is the celebration of the power of women and their empowerment (38 responses, theme 1). The frequency, in this case, is remarkable and much more impressive than that of the other categories, and indicates that the core message of the drama has been accepted and appreciated by a big number of people. Such remarks as C1 indicate that viewers are moved by the show on the emotional level and realize that it is a progressive coverage of women. The focus on the heroic, the strength, and the success throughout much of the social spectrum is extremely dissimilar to the often deceived or inactive roles in traditional dramas as the women are taken as the force behind the transformation of the world. Another relevant topic is the challenge to societal norms and preconceptions, which has ten oppositional and twenty three dominant readings. The transformation of the drama expressed in the traditional, often retrogressive images of women C2 is rejoiced in most of the remarks (23).

The words indicate the extent to which the audience appreciates the drama in dismantling the barriers especially in conservative locations. The influence that the drama has on the communities where the female involvement in military activity is not a common topic is evidenced by the fact that specific ethnic groups, including Pathan families, are present in the drama. But even the ten oppositional readings indicate that the resistance has not disappeared (C5 & C6). Although this minority is much smaller than the majority group, they are a reminder of the persistent discrimination against women in the military and the current maintenance of the antiquated gender expectations.

Diversity and inclusivity are recognized as the asset of Sinf-e-Aahan that has eight recommended readings (Theme 3) (C7 & C8). Such comments indicate that audiences appreciate the presence of the women of different origins that enhances the range of narratives of Pakistani dramas and helps to make them more identifiable. The fourth theme consists of twelve statements regarding modeling conduct and nine comments regarding positive behavioral influence. The positive behavioral influence remarks (C9, C10 and C11) underscore the contribution that the drama has made in promoting positive family

interactions. These responses emphasize the fact that the drama is aimed at action and not merely introspection.

A very limited number of critics voluntarily refuse the massively affirmative response of the *Sinf-e-Aahan* drama series, pointing out the ongoing tension between the norms of the modern and traditional Pakistani society. Nonetheless, the drama has shown that Pakistani viewers no longer need to tolerate the stereotypical backwardness of their representation in the domestic productions because society is prepared to embrace a multi-dimensional, strong, and potent woman and female characters, not only in the real life but also in the world of cinematography.

The statement of numerous viewers is corroborating that such dramas have the power to change the attitude of the society regarding the empowerment of women, to act and to change the position of the Pakistani women. In addition, the popular discourse and perception on the part of local productions are bound to foster families that are respectful, include emboldened women, positive attitude to negative gender stereotypes, and a multiplicity of attitudes which can make unwavering stands on behalf of principled ideas (Berg and Sansalone, 2024). The inspirational element that local creators portray in strong and manifold Pakistani women cannot be concealed and evaded by individual creators, however there are still isolated voices we hear grumbling around.

4.1.3 Zard Patton Ka Bun (Hum TV, May 2024- October 2024)

Dr. Maymoona (also known as Meenu) Naufil, played by Sajal Aly, is one of the protagonists in this Saife Hassan-directed and Mustafa Afridi-written Pakistani drama. The role of women plays a significant role in the story and they strive to get what they want in a conventional environment. It also deals with such social problems in Pakistani society as healthcare, women health, and education. It is about a young woman, Meenu, who is a hardworking person residing in a village and wants to make her mark in history by becoming the first female doctor in the village. Her family educational opponents are among the numerous challenges that she has to overcome.

Regardless of the attempts of her brothers to force her into an early marriage according to which she would have been denied an opportunity to continue her schooling, the fact that her father supports her dreams in a rather unconventional way proves that not all positive family relationships do not favor women. Meenu is a resourceful woman who is very strong and often finds ways to overcome difficult situations in order to have an education. Her character breaks the stereotypes of femininity by attempting to achieve success in the world where women are offered few opportunities. Many of them are inspired by her description, but those women who already have to live under the severe social restrictions, such as her, are brought to tears and pain.

Not only does Sajal Aly as Meenu in *Zard Patton Ka Bun* employ language that goes against societal expectations of gender, but the language used is also a challenge to traditional gender roles: “Taleem meri zarurat nahi, meri haq hai (Education is not my necessity, it is my right). These quotes are quite applicable in bringing out the key point of the play which is to promote the education of women in the conservative environments. The liberation of women in rural Pakistan is enhanced by the fact that the drama uses powerful dialogue based scenes that emphasize the persistence and ambitions of Meenu.

The discussions made by Meenu are effective as they mainstream the ambitions of rural women and make viewers feel that the autonomy of women and their education is important in the society. These dialogues enable the drama story not only to give a story but also to be a teaching instrument to change the perception of women that is used in rural areas in terms of their responsibilities. The following comments were selected among the three most viewed and interacted episodes:

Table 5. *Selected Episodes from Zard Patton Ka Bun*

Episode 1	The plot and the characters we follow are introduced in the first episode. The show's unique premise and the appearance of Sajal Ali and Hamza Sohail piqued the interest of a lot of people.
Episode 17	When the major fights start to escalate at this stage of the series, engagement typically increases. There were probably significant happenings in the show that captivated viewers.
Final Episode 25	A lot of people watched to see the drama come to a close since they were eager for the finish. The film's compelling conclusion and resolution to the central conflict drew a lot of viewers in.

The plot of the drama deals with the issues that are affecting the whole community in the indicated episodes (see Table 5), such as the fight for gender equality, problems with education and overcrowding, thus, the rural areas' women's health and education are put on the table. The music of the play gives society a message that it should be the driving force behind the advancement of women. There are many who criticize the character of Meenu, but she is the one who has won many hearts for her strong will, with some even getting the idea that they are quite the same and thus being able to follow her fighting the traditional way. The show does not limit itself to few viewers but rather it casts its net wide by making the audiences of the very unspoken normality of gender roles and girls' education started to tangle, thus, women's empowerment is the key. Well, Dr. Maymoona Naufil and other ladies in the show are just like the female character in the world who made human-like braves being the narrator, bringing along people's courage and persistence as well as being their motivators. The drama employs its narrative to reach out to the people about the critical need to protect and promote women's rights in Pakistan. Accordingly, women get to be confident to pursue their desires no matter what obstacles society throws on their path.

Table 6. *Netnographic Thematic Analysis of Drama Serial Zard Patton Ka Bun*

Code Category	Theme/Sub-theme	Frequency	Indicative YouTube Comments
Women's Empowerment and Strength	Dominant Reading	31	"This drama leads women to power and independence, gets rid of ignorance, and raises awareness of knowledge. Pakistani drama needs more drama like this. The script is really worth it and appreciable. Love you, Sajal. You've done a great job." "Meenu is the real example of a strong woman. Confident, ambitious, and determined towards her goal. Not like other annoying female leads."
	Dominant Reading	15	"Finally, excellent lesson: women's education, instead of a reproduction machine, as women. Congrats. SAJAL." "No one's talking about how Muqaddass ka abba consults his daughter for every little thing, first time a drama with fathers putting so much trust in daughters."
Breaking Social Norms and Stereotypes	Dominant Reading	9	"33:19 WoW! What a dialogue by Meenu's father! 'The family in which mothers and daughters do not stay happy, that family surely gets destroyed one day!'"
Gender Roles and			

Support	Negotiated Reading	4	"As a teacher, she should not insult Meenu for her age; she should encourage other girls for his willingness." "Most girls like Meenu don't have such supportive fathers." "The best thing in this drama about Meenu is she doesn't say <i>muji ye ghar ke kam nhi krny shadi nahi krni</i> she thinks about the betterment hats off to the writer." "Hypocrisy of the brothers is shown so perfectly and realistically except for the fact that most girls like Meenu don't have such supportive fathers."
Encouragement of Women's Education and Empowerment	Positive Behavioral Influence	29	"Sajal's dialogue touched my heart. Mothers need to be educated to make their child a wise person."
	Modeling Behaviors from Media	12	"There are thousands of Meenu in Pakistan's rural areas. Let this be a motivation for them and their families." "This drama has given a really good role model to girls, but even a better role model to men for healthy masculinity."

The most common theme (the one) is the oppression of women portrayed as empowered, self-reliant, and strong, which has 31 dominating approaches. The female characters that strive to eliminate ignorance and attain knowledge and self-awareness in the drama are well received by the audience. Unlike other more common female leads in other dramas, the self-confidence and resilience of the main character are commended in this drama. This is an indication that Zard Patton Ka Bun is a good show that features strong female role models who resonate with the audience.

The fact that the drama defies the norms of gender especially when it comes to women education and the role of women within a family is well-received in the second theme with 15 dominant readings. This is the contribution of the drama towards advancing progressive family relations and the importance of the voice of women, which is relatively rare in the Pakistani media. This is a theme which accentuates the way this drama breaks the traditions of preconception. The third subject is the one that displays the ideas of the audience about the gender relations and family support and has nine dominant and four negotiated readings. Negotiated interpretations however portray a more subtle picture in that they accept that these supportive dads are not a common occurrence in real life. The play gives the audience the urge to respect education and empowerment as observed in the 29 positive behavioral impact reviews and the 12 modeling behavior reviews that strongly reflect the topic of Encouragement of Women Education and Empowerment.

The sheer number of the audience comments are indicative of the fact that the drama is well-received as it plays to the emotions of the audience by glorifying female characters and modern family structures. The concern on femininity and masculinity transcends the norm and pushes the family towards accepting gender roles that are assigned conventionally. Furthermore, the studies of the reaction of the audience hint that Zard Patton Ka Bun is rather a social phenomenon, which tries to modify the way the issue of women and education should be viewed in the reality.

Moreover, the drama story has managed to break the gender stereotypes by producing progressive family structures and informing and empowering female characters (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019). The fact that the drama is somehow related to real socioeconomic situations, though, remains dubious to some audience.

But, its story has been a constructive and progressive influence on the shaping of sociopolitical discourse and practice in regards to gender disparity and social change in Pakistan.

4.1.4 *Kuch Ankahi (ARY Digital, January 2023- July 2023)*

This is a Pakistani drama that was written by Syed Mohammad Ahmed and broadcasted on ARY Digital. The series was done in partnership with Six Sigma Plus and the Kashf Foundation under the direction of Nadeem Baig. Although it discusses serious cultural issues such as the right of women to property, employment harassment, and body shaming, and expectations placed upon women in the marriage, the drama focuses on wit and comedy. The play has several outstanding ladies who represent different issues in the society. Aliya, the middle daughter of Agha Jan, played by Sajal Aly, is an optimistic real estate agent and is zealous about addressing the estate problems of her father concerning his ancestral home. Her independence and determination as a professional woman can be used to underscore the issue of women in the workplace.

The eldest daughter, Samiya (Mira Sethi), runs a small business but she has emotional problems due to her long engagement. Her personality tries the notions of being by oneself against being known by other people, and marriages in particular. Taniya (Qudsia Ali), the youngest daughter, has been experiencing body shaming throughout her entire life and desires to pursue a career as a movie director. Her experience shows that it is necessary to believe in oneself and follow one's passion even in the case of criticism. Sofia as the sister of Agha Jan (Vaneeza Ahmed) comes forth as a widow in her own words who goes on to claim her moral share of the family property. She is a symbol of female feminists who were outspoken about their rights and an example to her nieces. The analysis of the following comments of the chosen sample has been carried out:

Table 7. *Selected Episodes from Drama Serial Kuch Ankahi*

Episode 3	It became popular due to the progress in the sisters' relationships and Aliya's effort to get what she deserves in court. People enjoyed the combination of laughter and thoughtful comments on society
Episode 11	This episode stood out for its light-hearted yet meaningful portrayal of family interactions and the struggles faced by women in a patriarchal society. The relatable moments and humor made it a fan favorite
Episode 26	The drama's audience was drawn in during the second-to-last episode, as it prepared for its main climax. Important conflicts, such as inheritance issues, were handled, and the characters Samiya and Taniya experienced growth. People enjoyed the festival because they looked forward to its final moments and important performances.

Kuch Ankahi is a comedy but a contemporary play, which deals primarily with issues in society. The play uses the fact that Sofia insists on her share of the inheritance and Aliya struggles to clear the debts facing her father with regards to accommodation in a bid to illustrate economic disinheriting of South Asian women. It is also symbolic to the struggles that women face towards gaining safe and fair working environments. The obsessive chronic engagement of Samiya with her actions, combined with the height of emotional distress, is the reproach of the social norms that primarily foster the marriage-centered life goals. Taniya is a character that encourages body positivity and self-acceptance and confidence as she discusses the effects of body shaming. The show breaks gay stereotypes because it portrays males performing housework and women as filmmakers and real estate brokers.

Besides tackling the social taboos, such as body and property shaming, and employment harassment, this serial fosters gender inequality, justice, and social importance discourse and education. The image of feminine power and masculinity that is not typical develops an inclusive perspective and makes the audience think about the established social norms. It provides entertainment and at the same time gives important themes as it tries to balance between comedy and drama. The combination is more attractive

and ensures that the impact it will have will be enduring. The insistence of Aliya, who demands, *Main khud apna haq hasil karungi* (I will claim my rights myself), is not the only instance of how *Kuch Ankahi* introduces numerous female characters with a speech that is not consistent with the societal norms.

Such statements are quite obviously connected with the issues of female freedom and gender equality and demonstrate the active attitude towards the problems of property rights and career ambitions. The violent, but funny language of the drama helps to make the hard subjects friendly to the audience, as it ensures the crucial issues such as body shaming and professional harassment are discussed in the family (Fatima, 2019). The conversations of *Kuch Ankahi* get the audience thinking about the expectations in a home and in the society, which are gendered. The play enhances the possibility of dramas acting as means of socio-change through realistic settings and normal language through which complex issues are aired and the audience remains interested.

Table 8. *Netnographic Thematic Analysis of Drama Serial Kuch Ankahi*

Code Category	Theme/Sub-theme	Frequency	Indicative YouTube Comments
Women's Empowerment and Strength	Dominant Reading	34	<p>Aliya is the kind of person our society could really use. A woman who acts on her own without caring about her own interests. It's great that this drama doesn't center on a woman who's been broken by a self-centered man.</p> <p>The story is very well-told. Every character and part of life, such as Aliya, Tania, their mum, Phupho, and Sehrish, shows strong and independent women. Extremely close to what really happens. I'm always up for watching this drama.</p>
Breaking Social Norms & Stereotypes	Dominant Reading	17	<p>"They are subtly smashing all the SERIOUS STEREOTYPES AND GENDER BIASES in a very light-hearted way....where do u see a girl proposing a guy... where do u see a girl playing a real estate agent, where do u see a girl studying filmmaking..."</p> <p>"Where do you see a girl single-handedly managing father's business empire, where do you see a girl driving a car every time, where do you see your PHUPHO saying 'she too has a choice, and she is able and worthy to make a choice, even if it's wrong, and WE WILL SUPPORT HER...'"</p>
Portrayal of Family Roles	Dominant Reading	12	<p>"For the very first time, the role of phupho is shown as a friend, as a mother, and as a best companion ... this drama has introduced many of the positive aspects of life. And that's great."</p> <p>"Love the starting scene of the girl and her dad's conversation, dads should be like this, who can give confidence to their girl."</p>
Feminism	Oppositional Reading	9	<p>"This drama is nothing but feminism at its peak."</p> <p>"Woman proposing a man, and that too in Pakistan.....man! What is this serial?"</p>

Generational Differences	Negotiated Reading	7	"The conversation between Phuppo and Aaliya about the generational differences was so important. I think we often forget that it isn't so easy for the women of our mothers' generation to break the cycle..."
Motivation for Women & Girls	Positive Behavioral Influence	16	" <i>Padhi likhi maao ka hona bahot jaruri hai. Duniya ki sabse sachhi baat hai.</i> " "This drama is refreshing, unlike 99% of Pakistani dramas, based on marriage only, showing women have other interests besides marriage, having a career, being able to make decisions for themselves."
Role Models in Family & Society	Modeling Behaviors from Media	5	"Salman's mother is truly the best mother I have ever seen in any Pakistani drama. She has raised him to be a respectful young man and continually teaches him to respect women....Such an icon." "This drama has given a really good role model to girls, but even a better role model to men for healthy masculinity."

The key theme has 34 comments, which is that strong, independent women are represented through different characters, such as Aliya, Tania, their mother, and Phupho (aunt). The audience appreciated the drama since like the actors, they focused on self-reliant women who participated in significant events other than conventional love stories. Kuch Ankahi is attractive to viewers who are interested in real and powerful female role models, as she is regular and has a substance. The second theme of the drama with 17 dominant readings is praised to subvert gender preconceptions in a subtle way by using ordinary circumstances. This is a sign of the fact that the audience is aware of the progressive plot of the play that gradually and explicitly challenges the traditional gender norms. The third theme with twelve powerful interpretations focuses on good family dynamics or more specifically the support that dads and Phupho give women. Unlike the traditional patriarchal images, the images are appreciated to offer a more balanced and accommodative paradigm.

The play has nine oppositional interpretations that are somewhat hostile to the feminist concepts of the play. These comments indicate that despite its widespread popularity; there is an extreme minority that sees the progressive themes of the drama as alienating or unfit in the context of the traditional social norm. The seven negotiated interpretations help viewers to realize how complex the changing gender standards across generations are, and thus the play encourages people to think about the challenges which older generations face and how slowly the society changes. 16 comments that praise the play as focusing on education and career objectives prove how motivating the play is to viewers. The results have revealed that drama encourages all women to want to be independent and to be learned by giving both sexes great role models, and findings indicate five remarks on behavior modeling. Such statements underscore the fact that the play has contributed towards reshaping masculinity and making women revered.

As has been discussed in the analysis of comments below, Kuch Ankahi has played an important role in transforming the attitude towards gender and empowering women. Most of the remarks are praises, and they commended the drama of their role in portraying women and their families as progressive and not being patriarchally oppressed. This play breaks the stereotypical beliefs that suppress women to the subordinate role by promoting education, professions, independence, and active self-will in women. This inspires viewers. Moreover, the favorable image of cisgender relations in the family, especially positive fathers and aunts, offers useful examples on how gender equality can be promoted (Aslam et al., 2025).

Coexistence of oppositional and negotiated readings simultaneously emphasize the role of drama as a platform to debate these issues of cultural and generational conflicts about the need of equality acceptance. Lastly, through the depiction of forward-moving, empowered female protagonists that were active in breaking gender norms in the society, *Kuch Ankahi* transformed the attitude and behavior of the society towards Pakistan (Tariq & Husnain, 2025).

4.1.5 *KHAEI (Geo TV, January 2024-March 2024)*

The characters of the drama *Khaie* that premiered on GEO in 2024 are well-built females who make a difference in the show by tackling significant sociocultural challenges. A traditional character is *Zamda*, a protagonist in the film who is played by Durefishan Saleem and whose desire to be strong and revengeful supports the multifaceted problems of resistance and patriarchy. *Zamda* is given as a bitter woman, who intends to take revenge on *Channar Khan*, a powerful and violent male figure, against the injustice meted on her family. *Zamda* is the one who maintains her determination and preserves the honor of her family in the context of her marriage where she pretends to be the wife of *Channer Khan*.

This aspect of her personality makes the character interesting due to the fact that it is contrary to the traditional normative Pakistani standards of women in drama. The vengeance that *Zamda* seeks is more than merely retaliation and it carries with it extended implications on the fight against patriarchal societies. Her existence dispels the notion that women have to learn to live with victimization and wait until a masculine figure comes to their rescue. She is more of a middle ground and actively strives to restore the lost self-respect in a male-dominated society and inspires other women who struggle to achieve justice and independence.

The protagonist of *Khaie* is a teenage girl who breaks the rules and reclaims her identity after betrayal and misfortune. Self-realization and resistance are represented in her lines, including; *Mujhe khud ko dhoondna hai, doosron ko khush karte karte main kho gayi hoon* (I need to find myself; I lost myself trying to please people). These lines contribute to the plot as they demonstrate internal conflicts of women who are trying to balance between personal identity and social duties. The play that speaks about love, betrayal, and identity makes the social restrictions imposed on women and the importance of emotional independence of women underline the key issues that individual problems belong to the overall gender issues.

To most women who find themselves bound by the expectations of society, the conversations that *Khaie* goes through serve as a mirror, allowing them to use the words to convey their problems and ensuring that the audience place their own identities first. This aligns with the role of the drama to promote the emotional agency and strength of women, and this approach shows how the conversations delivered by women can positively impact the views of the audience of the social role and self-esteem of women. The remarks of the study were based on the most popular and visited episodes.

Table 9. *Selected Episodes from the Drama Serial Khaie*

Episode 1	The first episode presents the main characters and sets the story of revenge. Its success was partly because of its unusual story and the presence of Faysal Quraishi and Durefishan Saleem.
Episode 15	Although we don't know the specifics, mid-series episodes usually see more people watching, as the story evolves and important events happen. Had <i>Zamdaa</i> focused on seeking revenge, the story would have kept audiences interested.
Final Episode 29	The finale was highly anticipated and widely watched as it concluded <i>Zamdaa's</i> revenge story. It received high engagement due to its intense conclusion and resolution of the central conflict

Khaie is bargaining with the complicated boundaries of gender, which is arbitrarily created by the Pashtun society. Female characters are said to be shallow and toothless compared to their male counterparts, but the character of Zamda is not consistent with such stereotypes as she is tough and creative even though she is not fully feminine. Her character is a source of debate concerning the need to engage in social struggle and women empowerment. The representation of Zamda has scored positively with the audience, especially with the ladies with whom they could associate the representation with her objectives and struggles. The applause of many viewers is based on the change of the dominance of the still forms of narration and the dynamic forms of the depiction of women which emphasize them as more than mere victims. These images further expand the ability of women to think of ways in which they can restructure their social roles.

The female protagonists of drama, including Zamda, break the stereotype of women in the Pakistani drama serials. Being able to emphasize her intelligence and desire to retaliate against her suppressors, the play motivates women and makes them think about the procedure of empowerment and strength. This description seems to not only effectively engage the audience but also provoke crucial debates regarding gender relations and women self-perception, as well as socio-political rights of the modern society.

Table 10. *Netnographic Thematic Analysis of Drama Serial Khaie*

Code Category	Theme/Sub-theme	Frequency	Indicative YouTube Comments
Women's Empowerment and Strength	Dominant Reading	14	"This has to be one of the best Pakistani dramas out there, such a strong woman character who never moved away from her revenge is a rarity in most South Asian dramas."
Justice	Dominant Reading	7	"Khaie was a perfect example that when an angel turns into a devil, she can destroy the whole world" "People calling Zamda cruel, she still didn't finish his bloodline. He finished her bloodline. She is still 100% better than him. Cruelty ends with cruelty."
	Oppositional Reading	9	"hence proved: <i>Aurat jab badla leny par Ati hai tw naslay tabah kr deti ha 😊</i> "
Complex Female Emotions and Motivations	Negotiated Reading	17	"She really had hatred, but she didn't let it get over her heart, that's the heart of a woman, heart of a mother." "The whole drama lies on one hand, and the fact that Zamda actually fell in love with Chanaar Khan lies on the other... It is beautifully depicted that Zamda was not blind but sensible."
Inspiration from Strong Female Characters	Positive Behavioral Influence	26	"Strong female lead <i>dekh kar dil khush ho gaya, aisi auraten real life mein inspiration hain</i> " "Finally, a drama that showcases empowered women taking charge of their destinies."
Reinforcement of Revenge and Violence	Negative Behavioral Influence	19	"hence proved: <i>Aurat jab badla leny par Ati hai tw naslay tabah kr deti ha</i> "

			"Zamda is the Perfect example when a woman comes to take revenge, she becomes deadly dangerous."
Role Models of Strength and Resilience	Modeling Behaviors from Media	8	" <i>Mujhe Samda ka character itna inspire karta hai... itna dard chhupaye hue bhi strong rehna sab ke bas ki baat nahi</i> "

In hegemonic interpretations of theme one, as Table 10 demonstrates, Zamda is commonly known as a rare female protagonist in South Asian films, who is strong-willed and determined and refuses to be patient despite her traumatic conditions, which are usually reflected in stereotypical feminine characters. The question of justice, which is closely connected to retaliation in the story, is a good one with seven dominant and nine oppositional readings. Some viewers commend Zamoda in his quest to seek justice as it was violent yet right. Contrasting statements on the contrary show the ethical grayness and social ambivalence of female vengeance as well as warning of the harmful consequences of retaliation. The number of readings negotiated in 17 cases is the greatest unit one- on-one that shows how the audience interacts with the persona of Zamda. On top of her hate, the audiences know that she is self-contained and maternal. This subtle approach to the female character is attractive to the audience as it introduces a complex female character who balances strength and sensitivity.

Zamda persona has an inspirational effect on many viewers as witnessed in the 26 positive behavioral effect comments (C7 & C8), which shows that the inspirational influence of Zamda has a good effect on the viewers amidst the ethically questionable situation. The fear of the drama glorifying violence is reflected in 19 negative behavioral influence comments which also enter into the area of retribution as a destructive force (as in C9 and C10). These statements reveal the fear concerning the potential social impacts of revenge narratives, especially when done with female characters. Zamda is perceived as a person of endurance in the face of her pain, owing to eight modeling behavior commentaries, which serves to instill the success of the drama in depicting a complex, strong lady who deals with adversity with courage. Although a large part of the community is inspired by Zamda, the large amount of negative comments on the comments of influence behavior is a cause of concern because of the normalization of violent retaliation, more so when done by women.

Khaie makes Zamda a self-willed woman, who goes out of her way to get justice a refreshing change compared to the passive roles women play in Pakistani plays. The play takes its time to explore the reasons behind her emotions and this suggests a more sophisticated and real representation of women. The positive behavioral influence and modeling comments of the viewers have shown that Zamda has a large fan base who considers her an empowering figure due to her shown perseverance and agency. Nonetheless, the play is also on the danger of spreading certain misunderstandings. This association continues to support the notion that strong women are inherently harmful and vengeful, thus associating female empowerment with acts of violence and vengeance.

These comments revealing concern about the harmful impact, reflect social anxieties behind the women exercise their little power, especially when it is enacted through violence (Akram, 2018). Justice-accessing oppositional readings authenticate that the longstanding patriarchal discomfort with women and their strength is retaliation.

The various negotiated meanings within this play indicate the fact that the play is an arena of moral and social debate. When exploring the expenses of revenge and reflecting on the idea of feminine power that has nothing to do with violence, viewers deal with the tricky ideas pertaining to gender, justice, and morality. Such passionate responses are evidence of the drama ability to provoke thinking critical of pressing problems in the society. A multi-layered and complicated response can be seen in the frequency and type of audience response. Many viewers consider Zamda an interesting, unusual, and very wounded female figure with resilient power that is noble and inspiring. The retaliation story of the drama, in turn, attracts some mixed responses; on the one hand, they justify her actions and on the other hand, condemn

the promotion of violence and the vicious cycles of oppressive governments. Zamda is sympathized to a certain extent and the viewer is able to share her emotions, which adds the emotional appeal and involvement. Although Khaie does not agree with the concept of a conventionally passive female protagonist, it is also a danger of perpetuating the notion that female power is linked to violence, vengeance, and the supernatural.

The play is a valuable social platform where women, justice and morality of vengeance are discussed in a patriarchal world. Lastly, the multifaceted heroine of Ghosn, Khaie, challenges and redefines traditional concepts of femininity (Qaiser et al., 2024). The viewer leaves the play with the idea that, though trying to re-empower, it leaves people questioning the representation of violence and revenge as the symbols of power within the Pakistani society.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of the investigation are directly related to the three research questions. (Q1) The main shift was found to be that Pakistani dramas are moving towards more social equality and the female characters are depicted as being very dynamic, independent and in control of their lives. (Q2) Spectators' feedback on YouTube reveals that the given characters not only attract but also engage the audience through the application of the three reading modes – the dominant, the negotiated and the oppositional and thus female-centric dramas can in a way question the deep-rooted social norms and even stimulate critical thinking. (Q3) The simultaneous existence of the two types of audience opinions – one being supportive and the other being against – indicates that the change in society is to some extent an ongoing negotiation between modernity and tradition, thus revealing the subtle power of media stories on people's attitudes towards gender. Moreover, the research states that the female-oriented dramas reflect and progress the women's position in the society at the same time so that they are both the products and the catalysts for the cultural shift that is taking place (Q1 & Q3). Besides, the study points out that the responsible media and the active involvement of the audience are the two major factors that keep these changing depictions alive and gradually transform the society's attitudes towards females' empowerment (Q3).

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