Breaking the Silence or Normalising the Taboo? A Content Analysis of Social Taboos in Pakistani Prime-Time Television Dramas

Tazeen Fatima, Department of Mass Communication, University of Karachi

Abstract

Since the advent of private broadcasting, Pakistani TV soap operas have incorporated issues once considered taboo for public discussion-sexual abuse, adultery, abortion and violence. The debate continues whether TV has provided a platform for the voiceless or whether it has normalized behavior against social and religious sensibilities. Objective This study identifies the social taboos presented in prime-time serials on Geo TV, Hum TV and ARY Digital that aired from 2016 to 2020, which taboos were most frequent, which serial carried the most, and the narration of the taboos. Nine serials were purposively selected, three from each channel, and coded for eight types of taboo, supplemented by a thematic interpretation of storylines. The theoretical framework for media effects used was libertarian, with the addition of social responsibility, cultivation, and social learning theories. All nine serials contained taboo content (39 instances). Disrespectful attitude was represented in eight serials (89%), killing and relations without marriage in six (67%), rape or harassment and extramarital affairs in five (56%), divorce in four, live-in relationships in three, and abortion in two. Man Mayal contained the most types of taboo (seven). The three channels varied little in presentation. Narration ranged from voicing victim agency to ignoring the behaviour altogether. Content analysis quantifies representations and related to popular channels. Audience research can map interpretations. The importance of narrative narration that takes accountability for content that remains unchallenged or unexplored is noted.

Keywords: social taboo; Pakistani television drama; content analysis; representation; libertarian theory; narrative design

Introduction

Television drama is one of the most visible and widely consumed of all popular culture in Pakistan. Urdu serials attract millions of viewers each evening, and they have historically been a forum for the performance and negotiation of family life, gender relations, and social norms. Kothari (2005) characterized the serial as a distinctly feminine genre that is clearly "zanana", that is, culturally linked to women's experience and to nationhood. As the serial takes over the home in a time slot that is ultimately both prime and child friendly, it takes up a highly charged space as well.

All societies have in their lives certain acts, words and topics which are taboo. Freud (1950) defined taboo as a prohibition sanctioned by fear and restriction; Douglas (1966) said that what a society considers to be dangerous or unclean reveals the way in which it construes the limits of the social order. The notion of taboo is relative to culture. An act which is permitted in one society may be taboo in another especially in the context of behaviour which is contrary to the norms of the society. In Pakistan there are many taboos, which are based on religious dictates and family honor and modesty. Topics like sexual violence, extramarital relations and abortion are known to exist, but not discussed.

Media reform in the early 2000s, including the establishment of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) put an end to the government monopoly of television and the proliferation of private TV channels now made with the expectation of profitability. In the mid-2010s, serials have tackled topics which were previously omitted.

Udaari (2016), which was based on the sexual abuse of a girl by a family member, was perceived as a turning point which prompted other channels to do the same (Rizvi & Imran, 2022). Public opinion has been split between audiences happy to see the victims given a platform and those who consider this unsuitable for family viewing. The regulator has at times barred the transmission; in 2020 PEMRA banned a number of serials which it deemed offensive to social and religious values (Journalism Pakistan, 2020a, 2020b).

Current research on Pakistani drama is mostly focused on one subject at a time – for example, sexual harassment (Rizvi & Imran, 2022), transgender people (Abbas, 2019), violence, language, and dress (Faiz et al., 2020). There has been less effort to map a broad range of taboos across multiple channels and to identify which taboos are more prevalent. This is what this study does by analyzing nine prime-time serials from three Pakistani channels – GEO TV, ARY Digital, and HUM TV. It seeks to answer five questions:

RQ1. Are there elements of social taboos in prime-time drama serials on these channels?

RQ2. If yes, what types of taboos are depicted?

RQ3. What is the most common element of taboo in the sample?

RQ4. Which serials have the highest number of elements of taboo?

RQ5. How are elements of taboo reported?

Because drama is a designed message. Formulations of the story's plot, its characters, its camera treatments, music and dialogue, and the time of its placement in the network schedule determine whether the program presents a taboo topic as judgment on wrongdoing, as anecdotal testimony, or as entertainment. The article summarizes the literature and theory, describes the

method of content analysis, presents the results, and discusses the ramifications for theory and for message design practice.

Literature Review

Representation is not a mirror held to reality. For Hall (1997), representation is about the processes through which meaning is produced by the selection, processing and repetition of images and texts, and those processes contribute to the construction of what is normal and what is deviant. When a piece of drama presents an act that is forbidden, it enters into that process of construction. In terms of plot, a drama may prop up a taboo by showing the offender punished, or it may threaten the taboo by humanizing the motives of the offender or the victim. There are reasons why mode of presentation is important, and they have their roots partly in social cognitive theory. According to Bandura (2001) people learn attitudes and behaviors by observing models in the media, and the consequences given to follow a model's behaviour affect the likelihood of imitation.

Similarly, Gerbner and Gross (1976) suggested that watching a lot of television develops a perception of social reality that is consistent with the most frequent messages conveyed by the medium. If TV regularly conveys infidelity, violence and disrespect during the evening line-up, they become more 'real' to viewers, more the norm.

Pakistani television, social issues have been a part of the purview. During the era of the state broadcaster, serials navigated within family life and social problems, and women comprised its central audience (Kothari, 2005). With the advent of private channels, drive for higher ratings compelled producers to reflect more sensational contents. Rizvi and Imran (2022) analyzed a dozen of serials on Hum TV and ARY digital serials and traced the liberalism around sexual harassment to the telecast of Udaari. They noted how its controversy and ratings made channels to produce more serials on harassment and women's emancipation, and analyzed audience's fear, restraint, and liberalism around the topic. They conclude that voicing a taboo on television is both a creative and social act with social aftermaths.

Other research explored specific content domains. Faiz et al. (2020) did a content analysis of four Hum TV and ARY Digital serials and coded violence, language and dressing. They concluded that both channels' serials were relatively high in violent behaviour and abusive language while showing the aforementioned other elements they considered as indication of foreign culture promotion.

The authors' conclusion that concerns over content that breach social mores and norms extend not only to sexual content areas but also to other content domains. Abbas (2019) conducted research on 24 transgender characters found in five Pakistani Urdu television serials aired

between 2010 and 2018. He found that the transgender visibility has increased over time and the serials adopted a position against discrimination but more often than not the TV serials depicted the transgender in discriminated and low social status jobs and the stories depicted lesser than nothing of all sorts of other LGBTQ identities, to have been reminder that a taboo can be shown in even a way to promote against discrimination.

These gender representations can be compared with the research on gender representation. Kharroub and Weaver (2014) argued that the under-representation and stereotypical representations of women in television drama is significant because it influences people's attitudes about gender, something which is relevant to serials where marriage, divorce, and relationships are strongly associated with the notion of female roles.

Theoretical framework

The theory behind the study is a libertarian theory of the press which originated in the European tradition of free speech thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was then theorized in the context of the normative tradition outlined by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956). Its proponents argue that people are rational and can therefore have the capacity to evaluate knowledge and decide for themselves what to believe; that the press should be free from prior restraint and that the answer to bad speech is more speech (as Mill (1859) articulated in his defense of open debate).

Libertarian theory isn't taken at face value; Siebert et al. (1956) also proposed the social responsibility theory, which recognized the media's right to be free but hoped this might be balanced by duties to the community and accountability. Cultivation and social learning approaches identified above, raise the empirical concern that simply viewing a gruesome truth over and over again can "train" audiences to see it as normal. Between these two ideas lies a healthy tension: the right to show a subject we might call taboo, balanced by the obligation to show it in a way that doesn't glamourize harm.

Research gap

There are three shortcomings in the literature of taboos on Pakistani television. The content analysis focus on a single taboo or on a handful of serials on one or two channels. Some content analyses do not report frequencies of various sorts of taboos over the channels and so cannot be compared, and the way one taboo is presented in the plot is discussed impressionistically

rather than in relation to counts in the content analysis. This research deals with these issues by mixing a frequency analysis of eight taboo types with a thematic analysis of each serial.

Methodology

The research employed a content analysis, a method of data collection used to draw out systematic, objective, and often replicable inferences about texts by coding units into predetermined categories (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 2018). Content analysis is appropriate for examining the contents of media, noting what items are present, what is absent, and their frequency of occurrence. Moreover, with its open-ended nature, it can contribute a thematic reading of how content is framed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The study therefore adopted a convergent design, presenting the overall "presence" and frequency of items in a quantitative approach coupled with thematic summaries of the serial storyline. The subjective nature of themes is recognized; in the analysis of screenplays, total neutrality is an unachievable ideal, and the thematic exposition relies on the researcher's judgment.

Table 1.

Sample of prime-time serials analyzed

Code	Serial	Channel	Broadcast year(s)	Taboo theme of initial selection
D1	Udaari	Hum TV	2016	Sexual abuse / harassment
D2	Man Mayal	Hum TV	2016	Extramarital affair
D3	Woh Aik Pal	Hum TV	2017	Abortion
D4	Cheech	ARY Digital	2019	Killing
D5	Mugabi	ARY Digital	2016–17	Obscene language
D6	Mere Paas Tum Ho	ARY Digital	2019–20	Live-in relationship
D7	Laut Ke Chalay Aana	Geo TV	2017	Disrespectful attitude
D8	Khali Haath	Geo TV	2014–17	Relations without marriage
D9	Ghar Titli Ka Par	Geo TV	2017–18	Relations without marriage

The unit of analysis was the individual drama serial, viewed as a complete narrative. A serial was coded as containing a taboo if the taboo was depicted, enacted, or made a significant part of the plot at any point in its run. Eight taboo categories were defined for coding. They are listed with their operational definitions in Table 2. The categories combine themes identified in the researcher’s initial selection of serials with those that emerged during viewing.

Table 2.

Taboo categories and operational definitions

Category	**Coded as present when the serial depicts or centers on…**
Rape / harassment	Sexual assault, sexual abuse, or persistent sexual harassment of a character
Extramarital affairs	A married character's romantic or sexual relationship outside the marriage
Abortion	Deliberate termination of a pregnancy, or a character's decision to consider it
Killing	Murder, shooting, or suicide shown or enacted in the storyline
Divorce	Dissolution of a marriage as an event in the plot
Live-in relationship	Unmarried partners cohabiting as a couple
Disrespectful attitude	Demeaning, insulting, or defiant conduct towards spouses, elders, or other family members
Relations without marriage	Romantic or intimate relationships between unmarried characters

Note. Definitions are operational and were applied at the level of the whole serial.

Each serial was coded for the presence or absence of each of the eight categories, producing a matrix of nine serials by eight categories. Where a category could not be confirmed in a serial, it was recorded as absent. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each category, for each serial, and for each channel. The thematic reading followed the plot of each serial and noted how the storyline positioned perpetrators, victims, and bystanders and what consequences followed.

A single coder carried out the coding, and intercoder reliability was therefore not computed. This limitation is discussed in later section, and future replications are encouraged to use at least two independent coders and to report an agreement statistic such as Cohen's (1960) kappa. The study analyzed publicly broadcast material and involved no human participants.

Findings and Results

All nine serials contained social taboo content, which answers RQ1. Across the sample, 39 taboo instances were coded across the eight categories (an average of 4.3 per serial). Table 3 shows the presence of each category in each serial, grouped by channel. Every category was present in at least two serials, and no serial was free of taboo elements.

Table 3.

Presence of taboo categories in each serial (● = present; – = absent)

Category	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	Σ
Rape / harassment	●	●	–	●	●	–	–	●	–	5
Extramarital affairs	–	●	–	●	–	●	●	–	●	5
Abortion	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	●	–	2
Killing	●	●	●	●	●	–	–	●	–	6
Divorce	–	●	–	–	–	●	–	●	●	4
Live-in relationship	–	●	–	–	–	●	–	–	●	3
Disrespectful attitude	●	●	●	●	–	●	●	●	●	8
Relations without marriage	–	●	●	–	–	●	●	●	●	6
Total per serial	3	7	4	4	2	5	3	6	5	39

Frequency of taboos (RQ3)

The most frequent taboo was disrespectful attitude, which appeared in eight of the nine serials (89%). Killing and relations without marriage each appeared in six serials (67%). Rape or harassment and extramarital affairs each appeared in five (56%), followed by divorce in four (44%) and live-in relationships in three (33%). Abortion was the least frequent, appearing in two serials (22%). Table 4 presents the frequencies by category and channel, and Figure 1 shows the overall distribution.

Table 4.

Frequency of taboo categories overall and by channel

Taboo category	Serials (of 9)	% of serials	Hum TV (of 3)	ARY (of 3)	Geo TV (of 3)
Disrespectful attitude	8	89%	3	2	3
Killing	6	67%	3	2	1
Relations without marriage	6	67%	2	1	3
Rape / harassment	5	56%	2	2	1
Extramarital affairs	5	56%	1	2	2
Divorce	4	44%	1	1	2
Live-in relationship	3	33%	1	1	1
Abortion	2	22%	1	0	1
All categories	39	–	14	11	14

Note. Categories are ranked by overall frequency. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

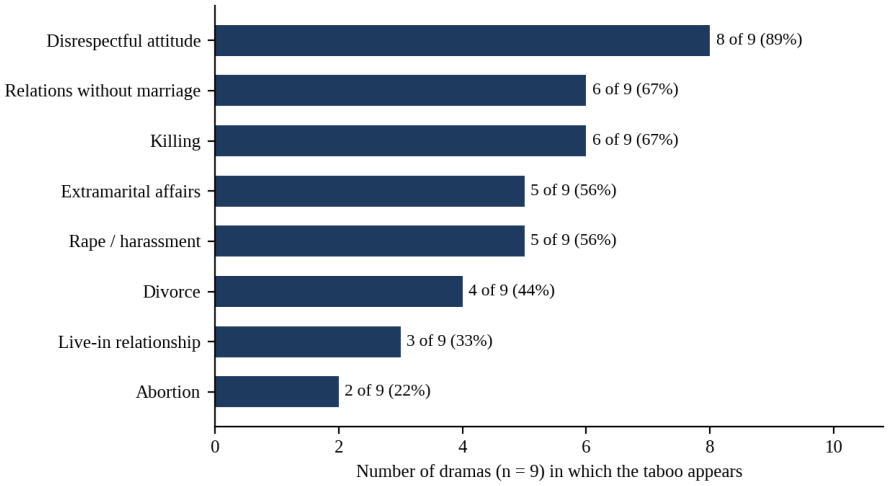


Figure 1. Frequency of social taboo categories across the nine serials (n = 9).

Taken together, the three categories that concern relationships outside marriage (extramarital affairs, live-in relationships, and relations without marriage) accounted for 14 of the 39 instances (36%). Adding divorce, which is closely tied to marital breakdown, brings the figure for marriage-related categories to 18 of 39 (46%). Violence-related categories (rape or harassment and killing) accounted for 11 instances (28%). The pattern shows that the serials are concerned most heavily with the conduct of family and intimate relationships, and that violence and sexual abuse form a second major cluster.

Taboos per serial (RQ4)

The serials differed considerably in the number of taboo categories they contained (Figure 2). *Man Mayal* (D2) contained seven of the eight categories and lacked only abortion, making it the most taboo-dense serial. *Khaali Haath* (D8) followed with six, *Mere Paas Tum Ho* (D6) and *Ghar Titli Ka Par* (D9) had five each, *Woh Aik Pal* (D3) and *Cheekh* (D4) four each, *Udaari* (D1) and *Laut Ke Chalay Aana* (D7) three each, and *Muqabil* (D5) two. Serials with fewer categories were not necessarily less intense: *Udaari* and *Muqabil* concentrated on a small number of grave subjects and treated them at length, which a presence-or-absence measure cannot capture.

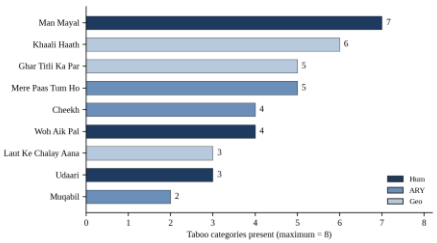


Figure 2. Number of taboo categories present in each serial, by channel.

Comparison across channels

In sum, the three channels were quite similar in total number of instances of taboo. Hum TV serials featured 14 of the 39 (4.7 per serial), Geo TV serials also 14 (4.7 per serial), and ARY Digital serials 11 (3.7 per serial). Hum TV had the most utterances of killing and of rape or harassment combined (reflecting Udaari and Man Mayal). Geo TV was most frequently concerned with relations without marriage and with disrespectful attitude and both were in all three and divorce was in two. ARY Digital was the only one where no abortion occurred. Because these are so small, these are descriptive differences and not definitive ones. Sexual abuse and harassment and agency. Udaari, Cheekh, Muqabil and Khaali Haath all depict sexual harassment and/or abuse. In Udaari, the sex abuse is by a family member of a child in the house, and there appears to be an expectation that the earlier victimization will be followed up with empowerment-one of the scholar's notes summarizes a scene in which a friend of the victim tells her she is not a victim. The serial was one of the more controversial in the sample; the researcher notes objections from some parents and, in one case, regulator attention to specific scenes. In Cheekh, a wealthy and conceited young man tries to rape a girl and kills her when she resists; the researcher notes that the serial makes his lack of remorse one of his defining traits. In Muqabil, a woman who was abused in childhood told her own husband; the husband's response to this disclosure is an attempted suicide; in the researcher notes, the serial draws out the problems with this element of the plot. In Khaali Haath, the prototypical misogynist's obsession with his sister-in-law and insistence on harassing her throughout the course of the story contributes to his suicide.

Infidelity and sexuality outside of marriage. Man Mayal, Mere Paas Tum Ho, Laut Ke Chalay Aana, and Ghar Titli Ka Par all center the story around relationships outside of marriage. In Man Mayal, a jilted suitor disrupts the marriage of the woman who refused him, and the story shows her encouraged by her family to live with him after she divorces her husband despite their not being married. The researcher interprets this as reproducing a stereotype that a woman in a failed marriage can be saved by another man. Mere Paas Tum Ho shows a married woman abandoning her husband and child for a wealthier man and subsequently abandoned when his first wife returns from abroad; this trajectory can be read as a warning. Laut Ke Chalay Aana traces the build-up of a long-term marriage ending in extramarital relationship. Ghar Titli Ka Par shows a woman who abuses various men for money and prestige and then moves in with a man without getting married.

Life and death. In Woh Aik Pal, a widow finds out her second husband murdered her first, and in Khaali Haath she contemplates an abortion while pregnant. The researcher's view is that the characters' use of abortion is shown as something that can be taken lightly and for any reason, whether revenge or otherwise. Death and killing. Killing and murder appear in six serials as murder, shooting and suicide, making it among the most common taboos. Disrespect for women. Almost every serial had the disrespect for wife, elders or women, which was most frequently incorporated into the characters building, for example, the egotistical and controlling male protagonist or characters who abuse other characters. Since is integrated into everyday speech, it is the most easily ignored among taboos, so this might be the reason why it was ranked first.

Discussion

Most notably, the serials cluster around the nature of intimate and family relationships, with violence and sexual abuse forming a second factor. That resonates with Kothari (2005)'s description of these Pakistani serials as a domestic genre, and with Rizvi and Imran's (2022) conclusion that the commercial success of a serial about sexual abuse led others to begin to portray and probe such matters on TV. Competition may also be at play. If sexual abuse is too taboo for one serial, that serial might have limited power; others will pick up the subject matter. Repetition as observed here across channels (relationships without marriage in 6 of 9 serials, for example) would be the sort of imitation you would expect; from a cultivation perspective, repeatedly experiencing betrayal, deception, and strife between couples on several channels may lead viewers to believe this to be an inevitable aspect of married life.

That disrespectful behaviour, which ranks at the top of the categories, ahead of the sensational genres, is the most interesting finding, diverging from the researcher's initial hypothesis that the genres that would dominate are rape, extramarital love and cohabitation. Low-level disrespect like shame-based insults and refusal to obey or listen to elders and spouses seem almost inherent in dramatic conflict as a basic storytelling resource, consistent with the previous finding of high levels of verbal aggression in Pakistani serials (Faiz et al., 2020). The category is very general and the criterion somewhat vague, and we can take some solace in the fact that these scenarios are typical of any dramatic conflict anyway; still, repeated daily and televised on high-rating serials featuring the very same major characters, repetition and modelling theory (Bandura, 2001) tell us that this normalizes the behaviour.

The thematic reading illustrates that the same taboo can have very different functions in communication as determined by the writer or designer of the story. Supporting the victim and opposing the culture of silence, Udaari's thematic reading- in which the victim is not blamed and is helped-is likely to utilize the taboo for support and to oppose culture of silence. On the other hand, suggesting that engaging in attempted suicide as a response to trauma is a dangerous script and that a woman rescued only by a former lover may mean reify gender stereotyping, the thematic reading of Muqabil and Man Mayal respectively demonstrate the opposite use of the taboo. These reversals of meaning lend support to Hall's (1997) point that "meaning is generated by the way a subject is represented" and reaffirm Abbas's (2019) point that "a representation can both defy and reaffirm prejudices at the same time". For writers and designers, choosing to stage a taboo is only the first decision. The next, of course, is the perspective from which the story is narrated, the consequences that viewers see follow, and whether pathways to support and/or accountability are present.

The study used libertarian theory to account for why a program should be free to tackle controversial issues. It corroborates the core argument of libertarian theory in one regard. The serials that highlighted abuse, like Udaari and Cheekh, made aspects that society would normally have kept concealed, a part of public consciousness, and actors representing victims and survivors present on TV. Libertarian theory would claim that TV consumers are rational and can process and critically evaluate what they see, and that the best response to harmful speech is more speech.

The conclusions also reveal the shortcomings of an unqualified libertarian stance. The importance of extra-marital relationships, the spectacle of suicide and abortion as the end of a story, and the recurrence of disrespectful behaviour problematize social responsibility theory's central concern about media freedom: is its use mindful of effects? (Siebert et al., 1956). The response to regulation reveals this dilemma. In 2020 PEMRA blocked several serials under Section 27 of the PEMRA Ordinance, on content that was considered offensive to social and religious values (Journalism Pakistan, 2020a, 2020b). Libertarian theorists would have been wary of this ban, while social responsibility theorists would have understood this as an imperfect exercise in public morals. A compromise position would argue for professional self-regulation, with more overt directions and schedules, and being watchful for extreme representations of extreme situations. Because this study cannot assume that what is seen on the screen has effects, its recommended 'regulation' relates to the design of content, not its restriction.

These subjects fall under the category of tabu from the perspective of public morality originating from religious instruction and family honor, and reading on the part of the researcher sits with that perspective: extramarital sex, murder, and abortion are all considered forbidden by Islamic teaching and are not accepted by Muslim society. This helps explain why many viewers found what they watched morally challenging rather than neutral entertainment. It also helps explain why speaking out about abuse remains taboo; norms that condemn sexual violence also act to silence speaking about sexual violence, which Rizvi and Imran (2022) terms a spiral of silence.

Implications for practice and research

A few obvious implications: Writers/producers could construct taboo subject storylines in a manner where wrongdoers are punished, victims not stigmatized, and traumatic issues do not resolve themselves in acts of suicide and or vengeance. Channels could utilize scheduling and advisories to address the fact that evening serials are generally watched by entire families. Researchers have three directions: (a) audience reception studies of how viewers (including children) interpret taboo subject storylines, (b) methodology (e.g., measurement of screen time or intensity rather than presence alone), and (c) comparative research on serials treating the same subject matter differently.

Limitations This is a very small sample of only nine serials, selected purposively. It cannot be generalized to the total Pakistani drama schedule. The sampling was limited to serials which were already linked to taboo themes, which exaggerates how common it appears there to be taboo content in relation to the entire prime-time schedule. The coding system was limited to noting the existence of a category, not how often, how long or how intensely it appeared. For example, a quick show of disrespect is counted the same as a sustained disrespect. Underlying categories such as disrespectful attitude are interpretive, and there was no validity testing of the coding system. Coding was also undertaken by only one researcher. Audience reading and interaction of the content was not investigated, so how the audience perceived the content and the potential effect on audience perceptions cannot be inferred. The serial Khaali Haath was actually broadcast from 2001-2004, but is included in the study, being different serials used at the time, and should be checked.

Conclusion

This study analyzed representations of social taboos in nine top-rated serials on Geo TV, Hum TV, and ARY Digital. Taboos appeared in all nine serials with 39 codes in eight categories. The most common taboo was disrespectful attitude (appeared in 89 per cent of the serials) followed by killing and relations without marriage (67 per cent each), rape or harassment and extramarital affairs (56 per cent each), divorce, live-in relationships, and abortion. Man Mayal had the highest variety of categories of taboos and the three channels were fairly similar in the amount of specific taboo subjects they broadcast. The thematic analysis demonstrated that the same subject can either be used as a tool to empower the victim or to perpetuate stereotypes depending on narrative design. Viewed through libertarian perspective, the movement of taboo topics into the mainstream signals progress in freedom of expression. Viewed through social responsibility perspective, it is an indication that freedom has a responsibility. The challenge for the writers, producers, regulators, and educators is to keep drama series generate discussions on issues of society and not to ignore the responsibility towards the taboo subjects.

References

Abbas, S. (2019). Through the lens of television: Progression in portrayal of Pakistani trans *community (A study of TV shows from 2010 to 2018).* Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 9(4), Article e201919. https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcmt/5864

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Media Psychology, 3*(3), 265–299. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303_03

Berelson, B. (1952). *Content analysis in communication research*. Free Press.

Cohen, J. (1960). A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 20*(1), 37–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/001316446002000104

Collins, R. L. (2011). Content analysis of gender roles in media: Where are we now and where should we go? *Sex Roles, 64*(3), 290–298. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9929-5

Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Faiz, R., Khalid, S., & Mahmood, T. (2020). Promotion of anti-social and anti-cultural behavior by private television dramas in Pakistan. *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies, 6*(2), 761–780. https://doi.org/10.26710/jbsee.v6i2.1220

Freud, S. (1950). *Totem and taboo* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1913)

Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication, 26*(2), 172–199. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01397.x

Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. SAGE.

Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Journalism Pakistan. (2020a, September 4). *PEMRA bans telecast of two plays*. https://www.journalismpakistan.com/pemra-bans-telecast-of-two-plays

Journalism Pakistan. (2020b, September 12). *PEMRA bans ARY Digital play Jalan over indecent content*. https://www.journalismpakistan.com/pemra-bans-ary-digital-play-jalan-ove-indecent-content

Kharroub, T., & Weaver, A. J. (2014). Portrayals of women in transnational Arab television drama series. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 58*(2), 179–195. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2014.906434

Kothari, S. (2005). From genre to zanaana: Urdu television drama serials and women's culture in Pakistan. *Contemporary South Asia, 14*(3), 289–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584930500463719

Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Mill, J. S. (1859). *On liberty*. John W. Parker and Son.

Rizvi, W. R., & Imran, M. (2022). *Voicing the taboo: Sexual harassment in HUM and ARY Digital TV dramas in Pakistan*. SSRN. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4073853

Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four theories of the press*. University of Illinois Press.