



The Role of Showbiz Towards Erupting Extremism and Liberalism A Sociological Analysis of Pakistani Culture and Showbiz

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Abstract

This study mainly focused on the role of media behind the ongoing ideological conflict between the evolving cultural values of liberals and the conventional culture of conservatives. The way Pakistani media depicts the content having LGBTQ+ representation makes their intentions obvious to normalize this phenomenon in Pakistani society where the majority of people follow the conventional religious values in their lives. The people of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are showing their serious concerns about this type of depiction. In this study, researchers chose two movies (Zindagi Tamasha and Joyland) and one drama (Barzakh). Researchers drew the arguments based on analysis and comments of the public that were taken as very emotive by the society. According to the Pakistani audience, the themes of these movies and serials created controversies among the viewers. That's why researchers selected these particular movies and dramas. The majority of Pakistani people were against this kind of content, and they were not in favor of considering themselves as part of this culture that claims to be modern liberal. They were seen disowning these kinds of values propagated through such movies and dramas. The need of the hour is, that showbiz and the media must take into account the major social problems to be discussed and highlighted, such as honor killing, mob lynching, and other social and ethical dilemmas as compared to the issues that are not concerned and disliked by the majority of people.

Keywords: Extremism, Showbiz, Liberalism, Conservatives, Conflict

Introduction

The term Showbiz is an informal term that is used publicly which includes Movies, Television, Popular Music, and theater (Dee, 2018). Another major part of the Showbiz industry is actors and influencers that play a major role in it. Showbiz plays a major role in any culture as it depicts overall cultural values and shows the image of any community and society (Dee, 2018). Showbiz specifically and media in general, can be considered as a major element of any society. They show the overall social structure, norms, values, morals, and rituals (Milhaj et al., 2021). In addition, showbiz can also transform some elements of society by promoting and depicting new ideas and

values. But it can also be destructive if it depicts something negatively (Taillon et al., 2020). There are many instances when showbiz negatively depicted any phenomenon while the idea itself was somehow reformative and can be used as a positive tool for society. Two seminal examples in this regard are conservatism and liberalism (Kubrak, 2020).

As Solanas (1969) said:

“We realized that the important thing was not the film itself but that which the film provoked.”

Liberalism is a widely used academic and general public concept that mainly consists of the idea of personal freedom, individual rights, political equality, and a free economy. It has been praised worldwide and has many supporters who openly defend it as a basic human right for anyone (Freedon, 2024). On the contrary, conservatism can be defined as the support of an ideology in such a way that we don't consider our opponents acceptable for basic rights (Kruglanski et al., 2021). Extremism can be mostly seen in the religious conservatives and some other antagonist groups. The worst form of conservatism is extremism which is mostly seen in the groups that consider them Islamic Fundamentalists (Makhamatjanovich, 2023).

Due to the diverse aspects of showbiz, the most influential factor is the social integration of society. Social integration is a sociological term that can be simply defined as the unity and cohesion among the diverse and ideologically different groups and subgroups in any society. It is also related to migration and some scholars also define it in the context of majority and minority (Gidron & Hall, 2020). Every society consists of many groups and communities that have different and sometimes opposing ideas. Social integration is the idea that focuses on the steps and ideas that can make them tolerant and positive towards each other (Gidron & Hall, 2020). The perspective shift of any society must be smooth so that there should be no disruption in the social framework overall. It will be beneficial for all elements of society (Loaiza, 2024). As in case of abrupt change even if one aspect will be evolved, the others will be resisting that change. This opposition can lead to backlash instead of the expected positive transformation. That is why the perspective shift of any society must be smooth to be effective and palpable (Ormerod, 2020).

Research Questions

- What is the role of Showbiz behind the worsened conflict between conservatives and liberals?
- What are the reasons behind cultural opposition towards the showbiz industry in Pakistan?
- What are the possible solutions to mitigate this erupting discord?

Significance of the Study

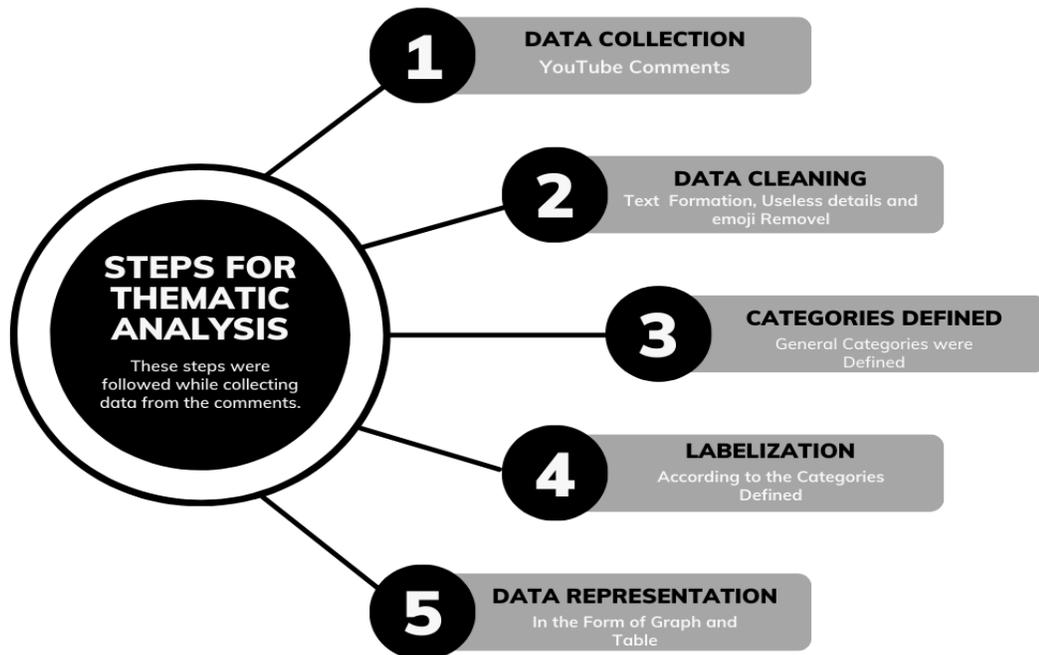
The study has been done because Pakistani society is facing a surge in daily violence and social disruption. Mob lynching, unethical disaccord, opinion intolerance, and extremism in ideology are common practices in Pakistani society nowadays. There is an urgent need for social integration and harmony among the groups having different opinions and perspectives. In the current era, the showbiz industry is a vital part of any society. It can influence trends and social changes, either increasing or decreasing them. Since many people directly or indirectly interact with social media, which ultimately connects to the showbiz industry, researchers have focused They focused on the role of showbiz in this regard whether they are providing positive results or have a negative influence. The researchers are trying to find out the root causes of the erupting wave of ideological conflicts that are somehow related to showbiz. In this regard, they have worked to understand the role of Showbiz in the depiction of the cultural aspects that are sensitive. They have articulated the role of showbiz, especially the film and drama industry, and how they are intentionally or unintentionally escalating the vibe of extremism.

Methodology

The researchers used a mixed-methods design; movies and drama are observed and watched critically while noticing each detail through the qualitative research method. Public opinion is evaluated through YouTube comments by using the quantitative research method. For these researchers analyzed the following films and dramas:

1. Joyland
2. Zindagi Tamasha
3. Barzakh

Thematic Analysis of Public Opinion through YouTube Comments



Comments were half collected from the trailers of these movies and dramas, while the other half were collected from the videos of scholars criticizing these movies and dramas directly, which were the major sources for viewers to show their responses to these movies and dramas. Roundabout 4355 relevant comments were gathered, cleaned, and then categorized. Purposive sampling was used to focus on the comments that reflect opinions, reactions, or criticisms related to the representation of transgender individuals and liberal themes.

Qualitative Analysis of Movies/Dramas

Case Study 1 (Zindagi Tamasha)

The film was directed by Sarmad Khoosat and was initially planned to be released in 2020. This movie was also a winner at the 24th Busan International Film Festival. This movie was based on the story of Rahat Khawaja, who was a famous Naat Khawan and had a noble position in their surroundings. He faced intense social aggression when his dancing video leaked on social media. The story mainly focused on how he was facing social exclusion and backlash in the society. His daughter even started to hate him and he was considered shame for his own family members. The story mainly portrayed hard realities of society like hypocrisy related to religion, social judgment and stigmatization. Another important aspect highlighted in the movie was the depiction of socio-cultural elements of transgender community, which was the main point for critique in public. When Rahat Khawaja was facing hatred and backlash by society and even from his own family, a group of

trans ganders approached him and proposed that he can join their group and community if he wants. This event was basically portrayed as the turning point of the story as it showed that how isolated he was after the incident. But the concerning point here was that the depiction of transgender community was very negative and based on stereotypical assumptions of the society. The transgender individuals were shown as negative and useless persons with dancing skills and vulgarity. This kind of representation led to extreme hatred towards them by reducing their social value and any kind of positive expectations from them. By portraying their culture as just a sinful and filthy group that only rely on deviance and prostitution for their living, the film promoted harmful and negative narrative about them and stigmatized their existence and made it further hard to achieve some dignity in society for them. The movie not only received criticism from the religious groups but it even received criticism from transgender right activists' groups. In the case of public opinion, the movie received a big backlash due to the unconventional and unique storyline that was somehow challenging traditional and religious assumptions and values. In Pakistan, a religious representative person who can have various categories like Moulana, Molvi, Imam Masjid, Naat Khawan, Khateeb, etc. is assumed to be an angel with not a single sin in him. So, the public criticized the movie vigorously because it depicted a religious person in such a bad role. On the other hand, the way the movie portrayed the role of the transgender community as just dancers and prostitutes, encouraged already existing hatred towards these communities that was already based on the assumption that they are of no use in society despite disruption and vices. The main argument of the public was why they support this kind of community and provide basic rights that are already spreading sins and immoral traits in society. They argued that the movie is promoting them as a normal part of society while they should be denounced for their negative role. Some commenters believe that the producer created the work primarily to appeal to modern Western countries. The motivation behind this, according to these opinions, is to gain recognition or win awards from Western institutions or audiences, implying that the content was tailored to align with Western tastes, values, or ideologies. Other critics allege that the ideas presented in the work are part of a Western agenda. They see it as a deliberate effort to undermine Pakistan's social, cultural, and Islamic values, portraying the work as a tool for Western "propaganda." This reflects a concern about cultural imperialism, where local traditions and values are seen as being eroded by foreign influences. These opinions reveal the polarizing reception of the producer's work, showing how art and media are often viewed through the lenses of cultural, ideological, and geopolitical biases.

Case Study 2 (Joyland)

"Joyland" is a Pakistani drama film directed by Saim Sadiq, which premiered in 2022. The film explores the complexities of gender and sexuality within a patriarchal society, focusing on a Lahore-based family and the youngest son's involvement with a transgender dancer. This movie showed the inner side of Lahore. It focused on the story of a family who were not very well settled. The leading character was named Haider, who was a married person. He started working as a background dancer in a stage theater. The story shifted when he fell in love with a transgender named Biba. The whole movie revolves around the extramarital affair of the lead role of Haider with that transgender while depicting the transgender community as some moral-less individuals with no values. It normalized an extramarital affair for a male and transgender without any considerable regret and shame. The movie depicted several sensitive and intimate visuals, including scenes of physical affection such as kissing, which conveyed underlying themes of romantic and sexual relationships. These portrayals, while artistically significant, also introduced an implicit representation of sexual intimacy. The film faced a significant backlash in conservative contexts, particularly in Pakistan, where it was ultimately banned. This decision came in response to numerous public complaints and official reports citing concerns over its content. The main problem people felt with the film was the depiction of LGBTQ+ as a normal part of society while it is considered a cultural, moral and religious sin in Pakistan. The movie received negative reviews and opposition by most of the

viewers. Most of the religious leaders also raised their voices to ban it and stop the producers and actors from making of any further film like that otherwise strict actions should be applied. The main aspect considered negative was its depiction of romance and adultery as a part of culture. Almost all of its elements like storyline, visuals, and roles were criticized and received backlash. Another common assumption held about the movie was that this kind of movies are mostly made to attract the attention of western people so that they will appraise the open-minded approach of these people and they will receive more value from western film industry. The way transgender character neglected social values and norms in the movie and was depicted as a morally ambiguous individual raised further negative perception about transgender community and people further considered the stereotype that most of the transgender are evil and they always play a negative role in society. The movie promoted the idea that transgenders never try to understand social structure and values and always cause harm and vulgarity in the society. Many people showed their disappointment and aggression towards the move through various social media platform and declared it as a shame for Pakistani culture and society.

Case Study 3 (Barzakh)

The story of Barzakh drama is very unique and diverse. It was released recently and mainly focused on the life of an old man who is trying to get married to the love of his life who was died many years ago. Most of his family members considered his announcement as a result of mental illness due to old age. The main controversial character in the series was basically one of his sons who was portrayed as gay and there was an intimate scene of him also in which he was doing romance with another gay. The idea of Barzakh was also manipulated in a controversial way. Mostly Islamic scholars considered it a disrespect to Islamic School of thought and asked viewers to boycott the drama and raise their voice to ban it. The drama received backlash and hatred across the country. Many scholars even asked for protests and violent actions for the makers and actors of the drama. It resulted in the removal of the episodes from Youtube. But scholars did not satisfy and stop, they made many videos and recorded speeches about the assumed west agenda of spreading vulgarity in Pakistani society and they further demanded by Pakistani government that strict actions should be taken to stop any further intention for making this kind of dramas and movies. Another aspect in this regard is that many secular and open-minded people also criticized this drama and called it an urge to raise the outrage for homosexual persons because they were shown in negative characters which will not cause any positive consequences in the society for them.

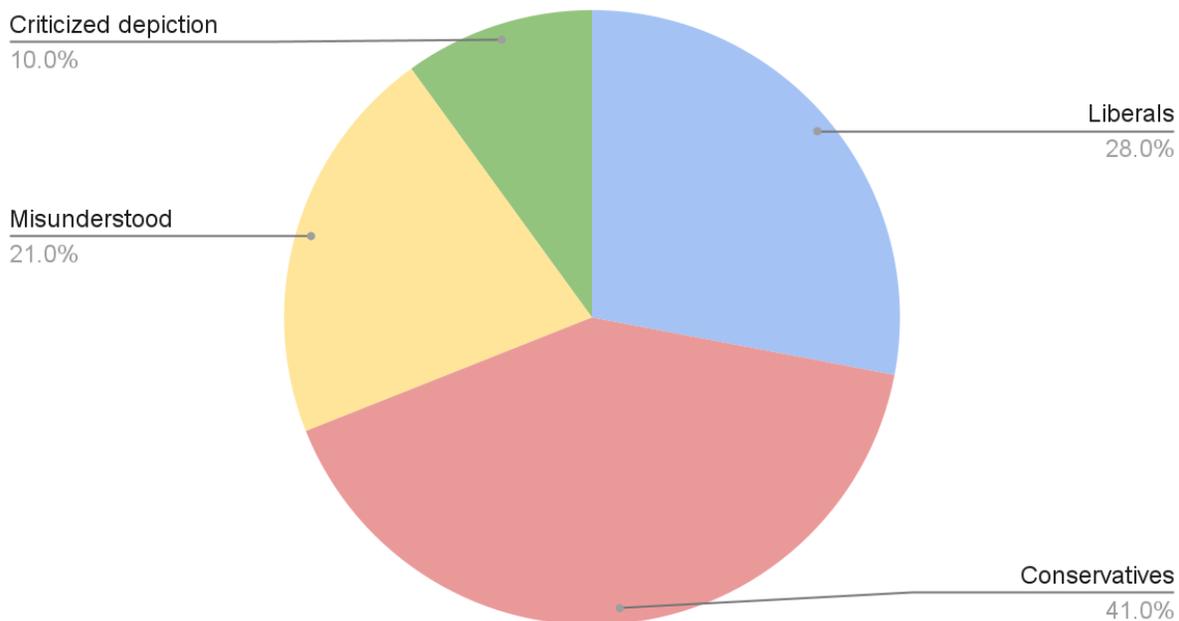
A big part of viewers gave their views against the film *Barzakh*, they mostly stated that it was promoting homosexuality, especially due to a scene in its third episode where a near-kissing moment was almost occurred. This scene was a main point of criticism, as mostly viewers considered it as an intentional attempt to normalize same-sex relationships. It is important to consider that the idea of same-sex intimacy is considered a hideous crime in both cultural and religious concept of Pakistani people. The backlash even extended to the lead actor, Fawad Khan, who played a major role in the story of the drama. No matter how famous he was before in the public and praised for his previous works, Khan faced a lot of criticism for his involvement in a projected that was trying to challenge conservative norms. Religious scholars and public condemned his role in the drama and gave him a hard time for future role selection; they even started to questioning his alignment with social and Islamic values. Many expressed disappointments in his participation, arguing that such portrayals contribute to the erosion of cultural and moral frameworks. The actor's association with the controversial themes of *Barzakh* sparked a broader debate on the responsibilities of public figures in media, particularly in representing contentious subjects in conservative societies.

Quantitative Analysis of YouTube Comments

Quantitative analysis is applied to the YouTube comments. Patterns in public opinion, focusing on attitudes toward liberal and conservative portrayals in showbiz were analyzed. Comments were filtered by removing the spam, unrelated, or promotional content. Then they were labeled as “liberal,” “conservative,” “misunderstood the meaning,” “criticized the negative depiction of concepts,”

Type	Numbers	Percentage
Liberals	1219	28%
Conservative	1785	41%
Misunderstood the meaning	916	21%
Criticized the negative depiction	435	10%
Total	4355	100%

Pie Chart



In the given dataset, the category labeled "Liberals" primarily represents individuals who have expressed positive feedback regarding the reviewed movies and dramas. These individuals generally appreciate the content and endorse its themes, considering it as a progressive or artistic expression. On the other hand, the "Conservatives" category comprises the majority of respondents who have outrightly criticized the movie, perceiving it as a direct threat to social values and Islamic ideology. Most of the members of this group also considered it harmful and derogatory content that should be not allowed in any way.

The "Misunderstood the Meaning" category includes individuals who have strongly criticized liberal and feminist ideologies, often expressing concerns about their growing influence. Although they did not criticize the actual theme of the drama and its depiction of the roles and their story, their reviews suggested that this kind of ideas should be considered negative and they should be not promoted as they will cause further deviance in society.

At the end, the "Criticized the Negative Depiction" group consists on the individuals who were mature enough to understand the core concepts but they argued that this kind of portrayal will make it further hard for general people to accept these kinds of communities. They also stated that this kind of depiction will be leading to the reinforcement of already existing stereotypes. Their point was that it will make it further hard for our society to accept these ideas and cultural shocks, it will lead to further misunderstanding and conflict.

Conclusion

The current research identifies that the role of showbiz is not very positive in the cultural context. According to the Pakistani audience, Pakistani media is playing a negative role in the eruption of a long-lasting conflict between the conservatives and liberalists. The way they are portraying the image of a liberal person or group by showing drugs, unacceptable dressing, family affairs, and transgenders in negative roles like prostitutes and dancers are making the fundamentalists and conservatives more repulsive to these kinds of people. In addition, the way Pakistani actors dress and act as supporters of liberal ideology is also radical and not acceptable in the Pakistani society. The most important thing for any society to move towards prosperity is cohesion among various groups. In this regard, the negative role that Pakistani media is playing in erupting a long-lasting conflict between extremism and liberalism should be denounced. There is an urgent need to provide a true and realistic image of various groups like liberals and feminists in front of the general public, especially conservative people. The way the media has shown the liberalist perspective and feminism in a very extreme and derogatory condition for the Islamic Society is concerning. The Pakistani Censor Board should not solely consider the visuals as a problem only, but they must also consider the meaning and message of the story if it is related to reality or not. Another common issue in Pakistan is that most showbiz stars are very bold and open-minded. They wear Western dress and openly support Western ideas like feminism and liberalism. But Pakistani society does not consider it acceptable. As a result, most showbiz stars are criticized by the majority of Pakistani people.

Recommendations

Considering the current social and cultural dynamics of Pakistani society, it is important for showbiz industry to be aware of the general mindset and basic values of common man. In order to provide a deeper connection between Pakistani audience and cinematic productions, films and content should be created in such a way that they can make some positive impacts in the society, and they should be providing a desired one and positive image of marginalized communities.

If filmmakers and content creators will align their stories with the cultural values and traditions, they can create the content which will be more praised and positive for the overall society. A balanced approach which will be considering social structure and sensibilities can be very useful for artists as it can produce content that will mitigate the gap between cultural shocks and societal acceptance. It will enhance audience engagement and interest in the content but will provide an inclusive approach towards filmmaking for a responsible entertainment.

Movies and dramas that are based on sensitive subjects for example cultural stereotypes, transgender identities, and religion should be in their best form of acceptance by society and especially religious groups. These sensitive topics should be presented in a positive and decent way so that people can relate and improvise their existing understanding rather than getting offended with negative and disturbing depiction. A positive and creative message should be conveyed but it should be kept in mind that the story should be adhering to sociated values and structure without any cultural shock.

Additionally, there is a crucial need of showing transgender characters into positive roles so that people can understand their value and accept them as a free individual in society. Movies and

dramas can play a seminal role in this regard by showing positive sides of these communities which will not only mitigate stigmatization of these communities but they will be also getting more rights. Film makers and story writers can make common man feel their pain by showing the struggle these communities are facing and how many transgenders has played very positive roles in society despite of being unacceptable by others.

Showbiz industry should gradually show the dark side of these communities but point to ponder here is that general people are not able to understand the facts that all of the evil these communities has grown is because of their exclusion from society. So, movies and dramas should be showing the causes which are leading these individuals to become a social evil. But this transition should be time taking and should be applies very carefully because future dramas and movies can also raise hatred again which will be making it more difficult for these communities to get equal rights. By just understanding the outcomes of the message given by story or visuals, Pakistani showbiz industry can play a crucial role in social integration and overall betterment of society.

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