

## TRANSGENDER VOICES: ANALYZING DISCOURSE AND REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA IN PAKISTANI SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

This research article delves into the intricate landscape of media representation and discourse surrounding transgender individuals in Pakistani society, employing Stuart Hall's theory of representation as the analytical framework. Hall's theory, which emphasizes the crucial role of media in shaping cultural identities and meanings, provides a robust foundation for exploring how transgender identities are constructed, negotiated, and often contested within the Pakistani media sphere. The study systematically examines a range of media outputs, including print, digital, and broadcast formats, to identify prevailing narratives and portrayals of the transgender community. It seeks to uncover whether these portrayals reinforce stereotypical and marginalizing perceptions or contribute to a more nuanced and respectful understanding. Special attention is given to the intersectionality of gender, culture, and religion in shaping these media narratives. Through qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis, the research highlights the disparities between the lived experiences of transgender individuals and their representation in the media. It investigates the extent to which Pakistani media has been an instrument of empowerment or marginalization for the transgender community, considering the socio-cultural context of Pakistan. The findings of this study are significant in understanding the role of media as a double-edged sword, potentially perpetuating stigma and discrimination while also possessing the power to challenge societal norms and foster inclusiveness. This research contributes to the broader discourse on gender diversity and media representation, offering insights that are pertinent not only to academic and media practitioners but also to policymakers and social activities working towards a more inclusive society. **Keywords:** Transgender representation, Pakistani media, Stuart Hall's theory, Discourse analysis, Media portrayal.

### INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of media studies, the representation of marginalized communities, particularly transgender individuals, has garnered significant attention. "Transgender Voices: Analyzing Discourse and Representation in Media in Pakistan" delves into this pertinent subject within the unique socio-cultural context of Pakistan. This research is a pertinent subject within the unique socio-cultural context of Pakistan. This research is grounded in Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which posits that media and cultural representations

play a crucial role in the way societies understand and construct reality.

Hall's theory, which emphasizes the power of media in shaping cultural identities and societal norms, serves as the foundational framework for this study. According to Hall, representations are not merely reflections of reality but are actively involved in its construction. This concept becomes especially pertinent when examining the portrayal of transgender individuals in Pakistan. In Pakistan, media when these representations contribute

significantly to public perceptions and attitudes towards the transgender community.

Pakistani society, with its complex socio-religious dynamics, presents a unique case for studying the representation of transgender individuals. Historically, the transgender community in Pakistan, often referred to as 'hijras,' has occupied a paradoxical position, facing both social marginalization and certain cultural acceptances. In recent times, there has been a gradual shift in both legal recognition and social attitudes, which are increasingly, reflected in media portrayals.

The study aims to critically analyse the discourse and representation of transgender individuals in various Pakistani media forms, including television, print media, and digital platforms. By applying Hall's theory, the research seeks to unravel the layers of meaning encoded in these representations, exploring how they reinforce, challenge, or reshape social understandings of transgender identities. The analysis not only provided insights into the current state of transgender representation in Pakistani media but also contributed to the broader discourse on the media's role in shaping social realities in the context of marginalized communities.

### **1.1 Background on Transgender Issues in Society**

The representation of transgender individuals in media has become increasingly prevalent, prompting a need for critical analysis. Transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals face severe discrimination, stigma and systematic inequality, including a lack of legal protection, high rates of poverty, and discrimination in various aspects of life (Human Rights Campaign). The struggle of trans. and gender-diverse persons is further exacerbated by the lack of legal recognition of their gender identity, which fosters stigma and prejudice (United Nations, 2018).

Transgender individuals also face enormous health disparities, including high rates of HIV infection, and difficulties accessing a range of services due to a lack of awareness and competency in mainstream service providers and systems (James et. Al., 2016). Despite the dramatic progress of the transgender movement, trans people continue to face blatant discrimination, high levels of violence, and poor health outcomes (ibid.). The experiences of transgender and nonbinary individuals are often marked by

discrimination, bias, and violence, affecting their employment, housing, and healthcare access (Pew Research Centre). Transgender people have always existed throughout human history, and their stories are being shared with a much wider audience, helping to humanize their experiences (Marten, 2016).

The representation of transgender voices in media is a critical aspect of their lived experiences. Straut Hall's theory of cultural representation provides a framework for understanding how media texts construct and negotiate meaning related to transgender identities. This theory can help analyses how media representations provide culturally available knowledge that structures our understanding of transgender identities and experiences, and the impact of these representations on transgender individuals and public perceptions (Divan et. Al., 2016). By critically examining the discourse and representation of transgender voices in media, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between media representation and transgender identities and provide valuable insights into how media representation shapes and reinforces transgender identities and experiences (Pew Research Centre).

### **1.2 The Role of Media in Shaping Public Perception**

Public attitudes towards transgender people and the transgender community are significantly influenced by how transgender people are portrayed in the media. Stuart Hall's media representation Theory offers a framework for understanding how media texts generate and negotiate meaning related to transgender identities. The theory emphasizes that media representation provides culturally available knowledge that structures our understanding of transgender identities and experiences. The theory also highlights the potential impact of media representations on both public perceptions of transgenderism and transgender self-perceptions (McLaren, 2018).

Historically, the representation of transgender people in media has been overwhelmingly negative, often perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions. Media representations of diversities and differences, including those related to transgender individuals, are invariably cared for, gendered, Eurocentric, and

classed (Billard, 2016). Vivid representations in media have been found to have a much higher impact on audience perceptions than more accurate but pallid base-rate information, influencing not only public perceptions of transgenderism but also the perception of transgender people (Ibid.). Vivid representations in media have been found to have a much higher impact on audience perceptions than more accurate but pallid base-rate information, influencing not only public perceptions of transgenderism but also insight and self-awareness (Richard, 2019). While media representations of transgender individuals are on the rise, these representations are often problematic and can reinforce negative stereotypes, leading to misunderstanding and prejudice of the transgender community (Jobe, 2013).

Understanding how media portrayals of transgender people might affect public attitudes and the experiences of the transgender community is made possible by Stuart Hall's theory of media representation. By critically analyzing the impact of media representations on public perceptions of transgenderism, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between media representation and transgender identities and to inform future media practices to ensure fair and accurate representations of the transgender community.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to critically analyse the discourse and representation of transgender voices in Pakistani media, with a specific focus on the participation and social inclusion of the transgender community. The study intends to investigate how media representations create and negotiate meanings associated with transgender identities, as well as the effects of these representations on public attitudes and the transgender community. It draws on Stuart Hall's Representation theory (Memoona, et. al., 2021). The goal of the study is to comprehend how transgender identities and experiences are shaped by culturally accessible knowledge obtained from media representations, as well as the possible impact of these representations on public attitudes towards the perception of self among transgender people and the concept of transgender identity (Arsalan, 2023).

Additionally, the research aims to shed light on the challenges and issues faced by the transgender community in Pakistan, and the potential role and contribution of transgender individuals towards an inclusive society (Pirzada, et. al., 2022). This study aims to provide valuable insights into how media representation shapes and reinforces transgender identities and experiences, as well as the impact of these representations on public perceptions and the transgender community. It accomplishes this by critically examining how the transgender population is portrayed in Pakistani media with regard to their social inclusion and engagement.

### **1.4 Research Question**

How does the representation of transgender voices in Pakistani media shape public perceptions and influence the experience of the transgender community, drawing on Stuart Hall's Representation Theory?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The portrayal of the transgender community in Pakistani media has been a subject of scholarly inquiry, with several studies shedding light on the portrayal of transgender individuals in mainstream media. With an emphasis on the social engagement and inclusion of the transgender community, this literature review critically analyses the previous studies on the portrayal of transgender voices in Pakistani media. The review is informed by Stuart Hall's Representation Theory which provides a valuable framework for analyzing the discourse and representation of transgender voices in Pakistani media.

A relative analysis of Pakistani English newspapers, including Daily Dawn and Express Tribune, revealed that the representation of transgender individuals was often characterized by misgendering and marginalization, reflecting a lack of accurate and respectful portrayals of the transgender community (Hadia et al., 2020). This misrepresentation and marginalization in media portrayals contribute to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and the marginalization of the transgender community in Pakistani society. Furthermore, a study of Pakistani television shows from 2010 to 2018 highlighted a progression in the portrayal of the Pakistani transgender community, following a legal

breakthrough of transgender laws in 2009 (Arsalan et al., 2023).

While this progression is promising, the study also emphasized the need for further improvement in the representation of transgender individuals in media. The findings of these studies underscore the significance of critically examining the media portrayals of the transgender community in Pakistani society, particularly in the context of analyzing the discourse and representation of transgender voices in media. In addition, research on the participation of the transgender community in Pakistani media has highlighted the need for greater equality.

Furthermore, studies on the transgender community's social participation in Pakistani media have brought attention to the need for greater equality and inclusivity. By shedding light on the social standing of transgender people in Pakistani media, a study on how the transgender population is portrayed in the country's media addressed a vacuum in the body of knowledge (Memoona et al., 2021).

In addition, studies on the transgender community's participation in Pakistani media have brought attention to the need for greater equality and inclusivity. By providing insights into the social position of transgender people in Pakistani media, a study on how the transgender community is portrayed in the media regarding their social participation closed a gap in the research literature (Ibid.). This study emphasized the importance of accurate and respectful media representations in shaping public perceptions and influencing the experiences of the transgender community.

Finally, a critical discourse analysis of the linguistic experiences of the transgender community in District Mansehra, Pakistani, offered an insightful commentary on the discourses around the establishment of self-identity and the societal image of the transgender community (Hafsa & Zainab, 2023). This study highlighted the need for more inclusive and respectful media representations to challenge existing biases and stereotypes.

The historical media portrayals of transgender individuals in Pakistani society have been characterized by stereotyping, misgendering, and marginalization. A review of Pakistani media archives reveals that the representation of transgender people in media has often perpetuated negative stereotypes and misconceptions,

contributing to the marginalization of the transgender community (Shahzad, 2018).

Furthermore, a study of Pakistani English newspapers found that the representation of transgender individuals in mainstream media was often characterized by misgendering and marginalization, reflecting a lack of accurate and respectful portrayal of the transgender community (Hadia et. al., 2020). The representation of transgendered individuals in Pakistani media has undergone a shift in the post-2000s era. There has been a shift in the way the Pakistani transgender community has been portrayed in the media in recent years, even though stereotypes, misgendering, and marginalization have historically defined media representations of transgender people in Pakistani culture (Ibid.).

A study of Pakistani television shows from 2013 to 2018 revealed a progression in the portrayal of the Pakistani transgender community, with more nuanced and respectful representations (Khalil et. al., 2020). However, the study also highlighted the need for further improvement in the representation of transgender individuals in media. Additionally, a comparative analysis of two leading Pakistani English newspapers found that the representation of transgender individuals in mainstream media was often characterized by misgendering and marginalization, reflecting a lack of accurate and respectful portrayal of the transgender community (Khalil, 2020).

These results imply that although there has been a change in the way transgender people are portrayed in Pakistani media, more truthful and considerate depictions of the transgender community are still required. This study attempts to provide a thorough understanding of how media representations construct and negotiate meanings related to transgender identities, as well as the effects of these representations on public perceptions and the transgender community in Pakistan in the post-2000s era. It does this by drawing on Stuart Hall's Representation Theory.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

Understanding how media representations create and negotiate meaning connected to cultural identities, including gender identities, is made easier with the help of Stuart Hall's theory of representation. In the

context of Pakistani society, this theory can be applied to the analysis of media portrayals of the transgender community, shedding light on how these representations shape public perceptions and influence the experiences of the transgender community. The study by Asghar and Shahzad (2018) investigated the media portrayals of transgender people in Pakistan, revealing the prevalence of stereotyping and misrepresentation in Pakistani media (ibid.).

This study aligns with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, as it demonstrates how media representation can perpetuate negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the transgender community, ultimately influencing public perception. Furthermore, the study by The Nation (2018) examined how transgender individuals are portrayed in Pakistani media, exposing the pervasiveness of misgendering and marginalization in the media, particularly in learning English newspapers such as The Nation (Jami, 2018)

This research aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of Stuart Hall's representation theory, highlighting how media portrays can play a pivotal role in the marginalization and skewed depiction of transgender individuals. This, in turn, significantly influences societal perceptions. Conclusively, Hall's theory offers an insights lens through which we can comprehend the mechanisms by which media narratives construct and navigate the meaning associated with transgender identities. The investigation into how transgender people are depicted in Pakistani media resonates with this theoretical perspective, illuminating the ways, in which this portrayal may reinforce harmful stereotypes, exacerbate the societal marginalization of transgender persons, and shape collective societal views.

### **2.3 Media Representation Theory**

Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, as outlined in his book "Representation: Culture Representations and Signifying Practices," provides a valuable framework for analyzing the discourse and representation of transgender voices in Pakistani media. Hall's theory emphasizes the importance of understanding how media. Hall's theoretical framework underscores the criticality of discerning the role of media in shaping and negotiating the

connotations tied to cultural and gender identities. Within the milieu of Pakistani society, this conceptual approach becomes instrumental in examining how the transgender community is depicted in media narratives. Such An examination shows the significant influence of these portrayals on public perception is depicted in media narratives. Such an analysis reveals the profound impact of these portrayals on public perception and the lived realities of transgender individuals.

Hall's theory highlights the need to critically examine how media representations construct and negotiate meanings related to cultural identities. In the context of Pakistani society, this means analyzing how ethnic media represents identities. By drawing on Hall's theory, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media representations shape public perceptions and influence the experiences of the transgender community in Pakistani society. Previous studies on the media representation of the transgender and contemporary portrayals of transgender individuals in mainstream media. Comparative representations of transgender people in the media. After transgender regulations were passed. After transgender regulations were passed in 2009, there has been a shift in how the transgender community in Pakistan is portrayed in television programs from 2010 to 2018 (Abbas, 2010).

Utilizing Stuart Hall's Representation Theory as a foundational lens, this study endeavors to elucidate the intricate process by which media representations shape and define the essence of transgender identities community with Pakistan. The literature review, informed by a thorough examination of prior research on media portrayal of transgender individuals in Pakistan, aims to offer a nuanced understanding of both historical and current depictions in mainstream media. This approach promised to yield a rich, multi-dimensional perspective on the topic.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study aims to analyze the discourse and representation of transgender voices in Pakistani media using a qualitative method approach. Data is collected from mainstream Pakistani English newspapers, television programs, critical discourse analysis, and media presentation of social

participation. This analysis is focused on frequency, tone, language, and impact on public perceptions and the transgender community. The study also examined the language and discursive strategies used in media representations to uncover power dynamics and ideological biases. The data is analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to understand how media representations construct and negotiate meanings related to transgender identities. The research is adhering to ethical guidelines, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media representations shape public perceptions and influence the experiences of the transgender community in Pakistani society.

#### **4. FINDINGS**

##### **• Themes identified in media Content**

The media content analysis identified several themes about how transgender people are portrayed in Pakistani media. Stereotyping, marginalization, and misgendering are among the motifs that have been found. The media frequently presented transgender people as comical and targets of mockery, which contributed to the spread of unfavourable stereotypes and false beliefs about the transgender population. The media content analysis identified several themes about how transgender and misgendering are among the motifs that have been found. The media frequently presented transgender people as comical and targets of mockery, which contributed to the spread of unfavourable stereotypes and false beliefs about the transgender population. The media content also highlights the challenges and issues faced by the transgender community, including discrimination, violence, and lack of legal protection. The themes identified in media content underscore the need for a more accurate and respectful portrayal of the transgender community in Pakistani media.

##### **• Discursive Strategies in Media Portrayals**

The analysis of media portrayals revealed several discursive strategies used in the representation of transgender individuals in Pakistani media. These strategies include sensationalism, objectification, and marginalization. The media often sensationalized the experiences of transgender individuals portraying them as object of curiosity and spectacle. The media also objectified transgender individuals, reducing them to their physical

appearance and reinforcing negative stereotypes. Additionally, the media often marginalized transgender individuals, portraying them as outsiders and perpetuating the idea that they do not belong in mainstream society (Ibid.). These discursive strategies highlight the need for more respectful and accurate portrayals of the transgender community in Pakistani media.

##### **• Perceptions and Reactions from the Transgender Community**

The analysis of media portrayals also revealed the perceptions and reactions of the transgender community to media representations. The transgender community expressed frustration and disappointment with the misrepresentation and marginalization of their experiences in Pakistani media, the community are also highlighted the need for more accurate and respectful portrayals of their experiences, emphasizing the importance of media representation in shaping public perceptions and influencing the experiences of the transgender community

##### **• Comparison with Historical Media Representations**

The analysis of media portrayals also revealed a comparison with historical media representations of gender individuals in Pakistani media. The historical media portrayals of transgender individuals were characterized by stereotyping, misgendering and marginalization, perpetuating negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the transgender community. The way the transgender population in Pakistan is portrayed in the media has improved recently, but there is still much work to be done until the transgender community is fairly and accurately portrayed.

#### **5. DISCUSSION**

##### **• Discursive Strategy in Media Content**

In the proposed discussion for a scholarly article, the analysis of media content and portrayal of transgender individuals in Pakistani media can be expanded into a more in-depth and nuanced examination. This discussion delved into the identified themes, discursive strategies, community reactions, and historical comparisons, providing a comprehensive understanding of the representation of transgender individuals in Pakistani media.

The media content analysis revealed recurrent themes of stereotyping, marginalization, and misgendering of transgender individuals. Often depicted as figures of ridicule and humor, these portrayals contribute to the perpetuation of adverse stereotypes and misconceptions about the transgender community in Pakistan. Furthermore, the media's focus on the challenges faced by this community, including discrimination and lack of legal protections, underscores the necessity for a transformation in media representation towards more accurate and respectful depictions. This aspect resonates with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which emphasizes the significant role of media in shaping cultural and societal perceptions (Hall, 1997).

In this article, the study critically examines the discursive tactics employed by Pakistani media in depicting transgender individuals. Predominant strategies identified include sensationalism, objectification, and marginalization. These approaches often reduce transgender individuals to simplistic spectacles or focus predominantly on their physical attributes, thereby perpetuating and reinforcing detrimental stereotypes. This phenomenon aligns with the arguments presented in Judith Butler's work "Gender Trouble" (1990), which critically addressed the societal construction of gender and identity as discussed by Hall.

The participation of Khawaja saras (transgender individuals) in Pakistan's traditional media, such as local festivals and street theatre is predominantly confined to dance performances set to recorded music. Within television and film, transgender individuals are often relegated to music and dance roles, typically behind the camera. There are instances where cisgender actors have portrayed transgender characters, but the on-screen representation of actual transgender actors remains exceedingly rare. A notable exception was the debut of Marvia Malik as Pakistan's first transgender news anchor on March 23, 2018, an event that garnered significant attention both nationally and internationally; CNN.

Additionally, Kim Sid has made strides as a transgender model and actor in the entertainment industry. The Pakistani drama industry, known for its traditional and archetypical television shows, has historically steered clear of unconventional

narratives that challenge stereotypical and conservative ideologies. Despite television dramas being considered a closer reflection of reality, the portrayal of societal issues remains a formidable challenge, particularly within socially sensitive contexts, as Kothari (2005) notes, Pakistani dramas are often influenced by public regimes, and the medium is primarily utilized for entertainment purposes, avoiding controversial subjects.

Consequently, advocacy for Khawaja sara rights within this domain was virtually non-existent before the 21st century. This lack of representation and advocacy highlights the need for a more inclusive and representative media landscape that addresses and portrays the real issues and experiences of marginalized communicative Pakistani society.

Historically, Khawaja saras were conspicuously absent from mainstream Pakistani TV and film industries, especially in terms of on-screen roles. When represented, their characters were typically framed within the context of the blue comedy and enacted by cisgender artists. Their portrayals often bordered on the absurd and undignified, with an apparent aim to elicit laughter through exaggerated, stereotypical depictions. Such roles, as Gauhar (2018) notes, heavily relied on raucous laughter and vivid makeup, with scripts frequently resorting to crude and vulgar language to generate humour.

This aligns with Davies and Iltott's (2018) observation of comedic representation, drawing upon Richard Dyer's (1993) assertion: "How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation". This underscores the significant role media representation and observational learning play in shaping societal perceptions and the consequent valuation of different genders. Before 1992, Pakistan Television (PTV), the sole channel in the country, occasionally featured trans\* characters in Urdu TV shows, albeit without explicit acknowledgement of their gender identities. An example of this can be seen in the character Akbar in the 1984 Urdu drama serial 'Angan Terrha' (Crooked Courtyard), penned by the renowned satirist Anwar Maqsood while Akbar's gender is never explicitly stated, his feminine mannerisms and speech subtly classify him within the third gender category, as he discloses his past as a singer and dancer.

During the 1990s, there was an emergence of more pronounced portrayals of khawaja Sara, as exemplified by the popular comedy-drama 'Janjaal Pura' (Messy City), which featured three stereotypical khawaja sara characters. These characters, donning flamboyant makeup and feminine attire, were depicted within the traditional confines of street dancing and singing, reinforcing prevalent stereotypes rather than offering nuanced or respectful representations

The onset of the 21st century heralded a gradual shift in the representation of transgender individuals in Pakistani media, moving towards a more nuanced portrayal. The 2004-2005 drama serial 'Moorat' (Eunuch's Wedding), while still adhering to certain stereotypes, notably addresses the societal struggles and adversities faced by the Khawaja Sara community. Broadcasted by ARY Digital, this 33-episode drama brought to light the marginalization and hardships endured by this often-neglected group. The narrative, focusing on the lives and emotional journeys of transgender individuals, aimed to convey a critical message. As noted by the writer Seema Ghazal (Ghazal, 2015), the script sought to contribute positively to society, countering the prevailing views of them as pitiable or menacing entities.

A significant breakthrough in transgender representation was the character portrayed by Ali Saleem, a transsexual, in the TV show 'Late Night with Begum Nawazish Ali (2007-08)'. This show, which aired on Aaj TV, gained popularity in both Pakistan and India, departing from traditional portrayals. Despite this progress, mainstream media in Pakistan generally shies away from exploring narratives of LGBTQ+ identities. Discussions surrounding lesbian, gay, and transgender lives remain largely taboo within Pakistani society. Historically, Urdu TV shows have predominantly focused on social interactions involving transgender individuals, often neglecting to delve into narratives surrounding identity and embodiment.

When exploring the linguistic experiences of transgender individuals, it is evident that terms such as 'Khusra', 'hijra', 'Khawaja sira', and 'she-male' are commonly used, yet these terminologies are perceived as offensive by the transgender community. Such language obscures their self-identified identities, revealing the influence of

societal constructs on gender perception. This phenomenon aligns with the 'social structural theory of gender', illustrating how societal norms dictate acceptable labels, often at odds with the preferences of transgender individuals themselves. The desire among many transgender persons in Lahore, Pakistan, to be recognized as female and referred to with familial terms like 'daughter' or 'sister' further underscores this disconnect. The prevailing social structure in Pakistani society perpetuates gender stereotypes and the erasure of third-gender identities, leading to a significant gap between the self-identified of transgender individuals and the identities imposed upon them by societal norms. This linguistic marginalization not only deprives them of their desired identification but also overshadows their true identity with a socially constructed one.

In Pakistan, transgender individuals encounter severe discrimination, deeply rooted in and perpetuated by language. Notably, the negative linguistic attitude extends beyond the individuals to their families often compelling parents to disown their transgender children due to the societal pressure (Ghumro & Mahesar, 2021). This phenomenon can be theoretically contextualized within the framework of the 'Speech Act Theory', specifically through its components: Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary acts. In this context, the 'saying' or utterance (locutionary act) reflects the meaningful linguistic expression. The 'fear' and resultant 'afraid' reaction of the parents represents the illocutionary act, the intended implication of the speech. Finally, the act of banishment (The perlocutionary act) serves as the consequential reaction, illustrating the overarching impact of language on the lives of transgender individuals.

The narratives underscore that language-induced discrimination begins early, often manifestation as familial rejection. This injustice, however, does not end with expulsion from the home. Many transgender individuals reported the inability to endure the derogatory language and sexist remarks directed at them, leading to their premature departure from educational institutions. This lack of educational attainment further compounds their challenges, limiting their access to respectable employment opportunities and resulting in widespread discrimination in various societal



sectors, including workplaces and public transportation.

The role of language in perpetuating gender discrimination within Pakistani society is substantial. The usage of derogatory and sexist vocabulary against transgender individuals not only shapes their personal experiences of marginalization but also significantly influences their socioeconomic positioning and access to opportunities. The significance of mental health in contemporary society is increasingly recognized, particularly among marginalized groups such as the transgender community. This research indicates that negative linguistic connotations profoundly affect the mental well-being of transgender individuals (Khalil, 2016). Furthermore, when asked if positive linguistics recognition and the elimination of offensive terms would enhance their mental well-being, the respondents unanimously affirmed this notion. They expressed that linguistic abuse and negativity contribute to the disrespect and marginalization of their gender identity (Ibid.). This perspective aligns with the societal representative theory of gender, suggesting that recognition and acceptance of their gender identity are crucial steps towards achieving equality and justice. However, despite their aversion to derogatory terms like 'khusra' or 'hijra', many transgender individuals feel powerless to challenge these labels due to their economic dependence on the very society that oppresses them. This dynamic illustrates the pervasive influence of hegemonic structures, where the dominant male and female gender norms overshadow the rights and identities of transgender individuals.

Additionally, the research revealed a poignant aspect of gender identity among the transgender community. Contrary to being labelled as male, many transgender individuals identify more closely with female emotions and feelings. Mislabeling their gender is not only inaccurate but also deeply offensive, akin to misgendering a cisgender female as a male. This highlights a critical gap in societal understanding and acceptance of the complex nature of gender identity, particularly in the Pakistani context.

#### • **Perceptions and Reactions of the Transgender Community**

The transgender community's reaction to their portrayal in the media is characterized by a profound

sense of frustration and disappointment, stemming from continuous misrepresentation and societal marginalization. There exists a fervent demand within the community for media representations that are both perceptions and experiences concerning the transgender community. This perspective is in line with Gross's (2001) observations in "Up from Invisibility: Lesbian, Gay Men, and the Media in America," which underscores the significant impact of media portrayals on marginalized groups.

In the analyzed media content, transwoman characters are the most visible, accounting for 39.13% of portrayals, while genderqueer and transmen are each represented in 30.43% of cases. Notably, all characters share the same Pakistani Asian ethnicity, with no representation of other ethnic groups. Regarding age demographics, there is a predominant focus on young adults and middle-aged individuals, with limited depiction of infants, toddlers, and tweens in two, and a single instance of a teenage character. The term "Hijra" often utilized to identify the majority of these characters, is regarded as pejorative in the Urdu language, typically referring to the transgender, eunuch, bisexual, and hermaphrodite communities in Pakistan. Conversely, the term "Khaja sira" is also employed, albeit interchangeably, to denote the same gender group.

Regarding religious identity, 91% of the transgender characters in this sample are depicted as Muslim, with the remaining characters not displaying any specific religious affiliation. The use of various verbal and nonverbal ideological codes is also evident. The frequent mention of terms such as "khuda", "Allah", 'MashaAllah,' and 'Allah ka shukar hai', alongside visual elements like mosques, prayer mats, Quranic verses, dhamal, and the portrayals of hijras in full-sleeves loose outfits accomplished by mystic background music, collectively suggest a connection between the Khwaja sira community and the broader Pakistani religious society.

Additionally, the narrative often delves into common beliefs, superstitions, and myths surrounding the perceived curse and blessings of eunuchs, as indicated by the use of verbal cues related to blessing, prayers, good luck, bad luck, curse, God's will, and divine power. These religious aspects of the characters are highlighted in twenty-nine mini-

episodes. The analyzed dramas subtly explore the themes of sexuality, albeit not focusing primarily on the sexual relationships of characters. For instance, in the drama "Khuda Mera Bhi Hai," a character named Noor develops romantic feelings for Sania. However, this relationship is short-lived as Sania withdraws upon discovering Noor's bisexuality. A similar unreciprocated affection is portrayed in "Alif Allah aur Insan" where Shammo, a transgender individual, harbours feelings for Rani, a nomadic heterosexual girl who does not reciprocate due to Shammo's gender identity. In the telefilm "Bhaid Bhao," the lead character Tasneem, who exhibits tomboyish traits, resists his mother's pressure to marry a suitor, asserting that a man cannot marry another man.

The transgender identity in these five TV shows is primarily articulated through the conversations of cisgender characters. Transmen in these narratives consistently use masculine pronouns for self-identification. Notably, there is an absence of lesbian and gay characters in the coded sample. The language used by cisgender characters to describe hijras in forty-nine mini-episodes is often derogatory, mirroring societal attitudes towards the khawaja sira community in Pakistan. Hijras are frequently depicted in a negative light, described as unclean, abnormal, incomplete, ugly, and associated with begging or prostitution. This portrayal reflects the deep-rooted societal subjectivity and stigma faced by the Khawaja sara community.

Beyond the issues of identity, the dramas also address a range of challenges faced by the transgender community, including respect, education, employment, harassment, healthcare, and the abandonment and infanticide of intersex infants. These narratives serve to highlight the multifaceted struggles and societal issues confronting the Khawaja sara community in Pakistan.

#### • **Historical Comparison of Media Representation**

A comparative analysis of historical and contemporary media portrayals reveals persistent trends of stereotyping, misgendering, and marginalization of transgender individuals. Despite some advancement in recent years, there is still a considerable disparity in achieving respectful and accurate representation. This historical context is pivotal for understanding the evolution of media

representation of marginalized groups as discussed in Gamson's "Freak Talk Back" (1998).

The challenge in assessing the extent of delegitimizing language in news media coverage of transgender issues is notable. This study quantifies the percentage of paragraphs in transgender-related stories that contain delegitimizing language, yet it is impossible to define a "correct" level of delegitimization. What is apparent, however, is that the criticisms levied by transgender activities and scholars against news media representations are justified, even though the incidence of delegitimizing language appears to be diminishing.

In Pakistan, members of the Khawaja Sara community face significant vilification, harassment, and discrimination, as noted in studies by Cooke & Kim (2017). Despite this, they are often constrained to marginalized roles within society, such as sex workers, street dancers, or beggars, driven by socio-economic and religious barriers (Abdullah et al., 2012). These societal paradox conflicts with the fundamental Islamic teaching of human dignity respect, and brotherhood as found in the Quran (Al-Hujurat, 10; Al-Tin, 4; al-Isra, 70). The oppression of the Khawaja Sara community in Pakistan is compounded by the lack of educational resources and limited employment opportunities, as highlighted by Collumbien et al. (2008).

The media's underrepresentation and stereotypical depictions of gender are crucial, as they shape public perceptions and beliefs about gender (Kharroub & Weaver, 2014). Media often perpetuate cultural ideals and expectations about gender, reflecting and reinforcing societal norms. Studies indicate that the media frequently present a distorted and stereotypical view of gender, with women, transgender individuals, and minorities being significantly underrepresented (Collins, 2011). In the context of Pakistani media, the male-dominated society predominantly showcases men, failing to proportionately represent women and minorities, including the Khawaja Sara community (Holtzman, 2000). The minimal media presence of the khawaja sara community thus reflects their marginalized and oppressed status in Pakistani society.

Despite the notable decrease over time in the delegitimizing use of terms, it is intriguing to observe that these changes occurred significantly after the Associated Press's 2006 amendments to its stylebook

guidelines on reporting about the transgender community. Although the Associated Press provided explicit directives for reporting on transgender containing delegitimizing terms fell below 20% and consistently remained low. This suggests that the reduction in delegitimizing language was more likely a result of broader cultural shifts in the understanding and acceptance of transgenderism rather than direct adherence to formal reporting standards.

• **Media Roles in the Social Construction of Transgender Identities**

The historical trajectory of the transgender community in the South Asian subcontinent can be delineated across four distinct epochs: ancient, medieval, colonial, and contemporary. In ancient texts, transgender individuals were recognized and often referred to as “kliba,” “pandaka,” and more broadly as “napumska.” The medieval era, particularly under the influence of the Mughal Empire, saw a shift in the social roles of transgender individuals, predominantly described as eunuchs. The term “Khawaja sira” emerged from this period, typically designating the leader of the Mughal court eunuchs. Reddy (2006) notes that transgender individuals were often brought into these roles as slaves and fulfilled various functions, including serving army generals, advisors, educators, and guards (Manucci, 1908).

The colonial period marked a significant transformation, primarily due to the British intervention and their efforts to impose new societal structures. The British viewed transgender practices as disruptive to social order, leading to their marginalization. The enactment of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871, which labelled transgender individuals as a criminal tribe, exacerbated their social stigma and economic challenges (Reddy, 2006)

Following the formation of Pakistan, the repeal of the colonial criminal tribes act ostensibly offered a reprieve. However, as Naqvi and Mujtaba (1997) observed, this period of relative tolerance was short-lived in the 1960s, when the Pakistani government once again imposed restrictions on the transgender community, impacting their social status and identity. The history of transgender individuals in Pakistan reached pivotal moments in 2012 and 2018 when the Supreme Court of Pakistan acknowledged the gender identity of transgender people as a 'third

sex'. This was further augmented by the legislative milestone in 2018 with the passage of the 'transgender persons (Protection of Rights) Act.' This act comprehensively defines transgender individuals, prohibits discrimination in various life spheres, and formally recognizes their identities, marking significant progress in the recognition and protection of transgender rights in Pakistan.

Effective mitigation of prejudice stemming from media representations necessitates comprehensive education. Adults, for instance, can discern the fictional elements in cartoons depicting a green sky. However, when media delves into complex cultural or technical realms beyond general knowledge, misrepresentations can lead to misconceptions. The portrayal of forensic science in popular shows like "CSI: Miami" often misleads viewers, particularly those without a background in the field, about the realities of forensic procedures. Such portrayals have influenced courtroom expectations, where jurors anticipate irrefutable, definitive forensic evidence, a stranded that is often unattainable in reality.

The issue becomes more problematic when media misrepresents diverse communities such as the transgender population. This group contends with discrimination in various facets of life, a struggle exacerbated by media portrayals that often resort to stereotypes and oversimplifications. Depictions reducing the complex and personal process of transitioning to a singular event or using incorrect pronouns not only trivialize the experience but also perpetuate ignorance and misconceptions.

Such misrepresentations have real-world implications. Many transgender individuals, fearing rejection, conceal their identities even from their families. They often face employment insecurity and challenges in accessing healthcare. Accurate media representation could play a pivotal role in alleviating these fears by fostering understanding and humanizing transgender individuals, highlighting their aspirations, challenges, and the full spectrum of their human experience. The research paper is critically analyses media portrayals of transgender characters, figures, representation and impact in Pakistani society.

• **The Impact of Media Representation on Public Perception and Policy**

In the evolving social landscape of Pakistan, transgender activists are increasingly making their

presence felt, drawing inspiration from influential figures like Nayab Ali and Shahzad Rai. Their engagement is gradually transforming the social domain into a more inclusive space for diverse backgrounds and perspectives. A notable instance of this shift occurred in 2015, when transgender rights activist Mazhar Anjum, challenging the norm of minority-only representation, vied for a conventional seat in Pakistan's national assembly (Shekh, 2013). Despite encountering resistance, Anjum preserved her efforts to elevate the economic status of transgender individuals, notably collaborating with the Benazir income support program to establish a training organization (Shaikh, 2013)

Another prominent figure, Lubna Umar, also stood for the National Assembly in the same electoral cycle, advocating for health care reform, transgender shelters, and citizen representation (Kollman, 2009). Her campaign was a pioneering step in dismantling barriers for women in public office. Since 2015, several other transgender candidates, including Zarish Khanum, Nadeem Kashish, and Qamar Naseem have secured influential roles in government advisory positions (Kollman, 2009).

The increasing public acceptance and leadership roles assumed by transgender individuals signify their growing influence in Pakistani society. Although the progression towards transgender equality has been gradual, it has significantly impacted public perception and policy. Nevertheless, for transgender citizens, achieving systematic societal protection and substantial transformation of existing communal frameworks remains crucial for safeguarding their rights.

Additionally, a shift in the broader cultural narrative of American society towards recognizing transgender individuals as equal, deserving of respect and proper treatment, is imperative. While entertainment media have a substantial impact on shaping cultural attitudes and fostering acceptance of the LGBT community (Calzo & Ward, 2009), it is the news media that predominantly influence the potential sphere and serve as a primary mechanism for legitimizing communities and their concerns. It is the news media that predominantly influence the communal sphere and serve as primary mechanism for legitimizing communities and their concerns.

While extensive research exists on media portrayals of the LGBT community. It predominantly centres

on lesbian and gay representations, with the transgender aspect receiving comparatively less attention (Spencer, 2015), recent years, however, have seen a growth in studies focusing on transgender media representations (Chávez & Griffin, 2012). Capuzza (2015) observes that much of this research adopts critical-cultural methodologies over empirical social science approaches; a trend common in minority media representation studies (Dixon & Williams, 2015).

Specifically, scholarly literature on new media's portrayals of transgender issues is largely composed of case studies examining the coverage of public figures and hate crime victims (Capuzza, 2015). As highlighted by Spencer (2015) and Capuzza (2015), this body of work illustrates how news media narratives often discipline and stereotype transgender identities, as also noted by scholars like Barker Plummer (2013).

In Pakistan, the increasing public presence of transgender individuals is playing a crucial role in fostering greater acceptance and equitable treatment. Their active participation and highlighted visibility in governance and public forums are enhancing public awareness and belief in the importance of equal rights (Mir, 2020). These developments mark significant strides towards creating an egalitarian society that upholds human dignity, by expanding opportunities and protections for all individuals (S., 2020)

## 6. CONCLUSION

The analysis of media portrayals of the transgender community in Pakistan, drawing on Stuart Halls's Representation Theory, reveals the pervasive misgendering marginalization, and stereotyping of transgender individuals in Pakistani media. The historical and contemporary media representation perpetuates negative stereotypes and misconceptions, contributing to the marginalization of the transgender community. The themes identified in media content, such as misgendering and marginalization, underscore the need for more accurate and respectful portrayals of the transgender community in Pakistani media.

The discursive analysis used in media portrayals, including sensationalism, objectification, and marginalization, highlighted the urgency of challenging existing biases and stereotypes. This

comparison with historical media representations demonstrates a progression in the portrayal of the Pakistani transgender community but also emphasizes the need for further improvement in media representations. The perceptions and reactions from the transgender community underscore the importance of media representation in shaping public perceptions and influencing the experiences of the transgender community. Overall, the analysis reveals the significance of media representations on the social construction of transgender identities in Pakistan, emphasizing the need for more accurate, respectful, and inclusive portrayals of the transgender community in media to challenge existing biases and stereotypes and promote social inclusion and equality.

### 6.1 Recommendations

Based on the analysis of media portrayals of the transgender community in Pakistan, the following recommendations are made:

- Improving accuracy and inclusively in transgender representations through training for journalists and media professionals.
- Countering negative stereotypes and misconception about the transgender community through positive representations and avoiding sensationalism.
- Increasing representation of transgender individuals in content reflecting their diversity and complexity.
- Promoting transgender rights and inclusion through stories and campaigns that raise awareness and understanding of transgender issues.
- Engaging with the transgender community for input and feedback on media portrayals and representation.

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