

**Entertainment Industry as a Public Sphere: Interactional Sociolinguistic Analysis of Pakistani Drama and a YouTube Podcast Comment Sections**

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**Abstract**

*This study is a comparative analysis of two entertainment avenue/ genres: TV drama and YouTube podcast shows, as an adequate public sphere. The proposed hypothesis that there is a stark contrast between the audience of these two genres, is rationalized through the theory of mass communication by McQuail (2010), the analytical framework of exchange structure (Sinclair and Coulthard, 2013), Habermas' theory of public sphere and Stenstrom's (1996) taxonomy of primary acts. The detailed study based on interactional sociolinguistic analysis reveals that TV drama audiences are numbed towards social and cultural malice because the said platform itself does not problematize or generate a critical discourse about them. Hence, its audience's comment analysis supports their reciprocal behavior. On the contrary, the podcast audience seem to be astute, attentive, and intelligent which is again concluded based on their comments. Its audience responds to the essential discussion of societal problems that the host addresses. This study therefore suggests that internet podcasts are a better public sphere and a platform for the betterment of a community, rather than TV dramas that serve no educational purpose but only further the internalized stigmas.*

**Keywords:** *Entertainment, Interactional Sociolinguistics, Public Sphere, Discourse Analysis*

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**1. Introduction**

This research delves into the dichotomy between mainstream Pakistani media and the burgeoning realm of social media influencers, specifically focusing on the contrast in content representation and public engagement. The mainstream media, predominantly driven by sponsor-oriented content, has often been criticized for its monotonous and limited portrayal of societal issues, primarily revolving around themes of marriage, romance, and religion, with a tendency towards simplistic resolutions. This approach starkly contrasts with the efforts of social media influencers who offer a more nuanced, diversified, and self-aware perspective on social problems and potential solutions. Through an analysis of comment sections across these two mediums, this study aims to uncover the key differences in audience engagement and the extent to which each platform contributes to or hinders the development of a true public sphere as defined by Habermas. By examining the impact of these mediums on social change, creative expression, and the fostering of informed thinking and decision-making, the study seeks to illuminate the role of media in shaping public discourse and understanding in Pakistan. The overarching goal is to guide a disoriented population towards a more informed and critical engagement with media content, thereby aiding in the aim of creating social awareness.

What is true of mainstream global media, that the popular sponsor-oriented content is “dangerous nonsense” (Postman, 2010, p. 16), is reflected in the context of Pakistani media. Unlike the older Pakistani media content and the contemporaries, the current media landscape fails to do a satisfactory job of inclusive representation of social problems, professional struggles, mental health, and many other issues prevalent today. A case in point is its entertainment industry such as the primetime dramas, that target a large audience, and repeatedly focus on marital, romantic, religious, and conspiratorial themes that have now grown monotonous and brain-dead. Not to compartmentalize the whole lot in a designated category, there are few exceptions of some remarkable content producers that highlight injustices and oppression against marginalized groups with strong opposition from the victims (mostly women). However, the majority frustrates the intellectual mind with a sweep under-the-rug denouement that provides zero conviction to the perpetrator on the accounts of an epiphanic realization of their wrongdoings and a classic *deus ex machina* salvation of the protagonist. They do not satisfy the premises of Habermas’ (1947) public sphere. On the contrary, social media influencers like Junaid Akram, also known by his social media handle name, GanjiSwag, play their part in changing the narrative both in terms of the nature of common citizen problems and potentially educated solutions to them. The latter is much more nuanced, diversified, and self-aware with an evolving nature of constant improvement and correction. The input from the podcast’s audience forms the content in the shape of questions about troubles in daily life. Junaid Akram approaches the brass tacks of personal issues to avoid unnecessary complications. The show’s format allows for meaningful community interaction where each member is at liberty to express their opinions open to discussion that are about social and personal issues. Thus, in this study, I will draw a parallel between the two mediums by studying their respective comment sections, identifying the key differences, observing the worthwhile benefits for social change, describing the obstruction posed on freedom of creative expression, and deciding which one is a true public sphere. The purpose of my study is to propose for the disoriented population, a steppingstone toward the journey of informed thinking and calculated decision-making.

### **1.1 Research Objectives:**

1. To conduct interactional sociolinguistic analysis of Pakistani Dramas and a YouTube podcast’s comment section to understand their respective audiences.
2. To determine the value of the entertainment industry as a public sphere.
3. To evaluate YouTube comments as a public sphere for the possible suggestion of informed media consumption.

### **1.2 Research Questions:**

The present study, thus, formulates the following research questions:

1. What do the comment sections of two different genres of entertainment media reveal about their audiences.?
2. What value does the entertainment industry provide as a potential public sphere?
3. How do dramas and YouTube podcasts serve as different forms of public sphere?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 From Television to Social Media**

Social media platforms, particularly YouTube, have proved To inform and educate oneself of societal trends and challenges, humans have made use of mass media and social media in all its forms. Earlier studies have found media effectiveness on a large scale, as reported (McQuail, 2010) insufficient, or inadequate. Meanwhile, individual evaluation and experiences are held responsible, and this unbiased observation that the media holds a monopoly over “homogeneity of

content”, redresses the concerns of collective behavioral change. (Curran & Gurevitch, 1977, Chapter 1, pp. 7-21). This conclusion stands true for the current landscape of Pakistani media that is restrained through regulations by institutions such as PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) and civil society that is actively vocal at opposition to innovation and experiments. While today the earlier mediums are archaic, state-of-the-art communication sources with continuous upkeep have replaced them. Individual content creators on social media are at more liberty to discuss forbidden subjects than giant corporations/ production companies. Nonetheless, the usual tedious content resurfaces to maintain the monopoly. It appears that change in the medium is not a solution, but to revolutionize the critical thinking faculty on both ends of the consumers and producers, and to address real-life issues that are faced by many. It is important that consumers readily choose their topics of interest and equip themselves with subjective thinking.

To continue, Fursich (2010) discusses the impact of media representation and quotes theories that argue for either opinion. Social Cognitive and Cultivation Theory respectively confirm its impact in the form of learned behavior and long-term psychological assumptions of the constructed reality, while the limited effects paradigm puts the responsibility on the audiences’ existing ideologies and presents the media as a mere reinforcer of the status quo. Her study advocates for inclusion and sensitized representation of minorities in US travel shows who are otherwise suggested as somewhat exotic, special, or even abnormal. She also briefly mentions the constraints that prevent diverse representation and suggests remedies such as hiring a diverse workforce. The thematic nature of her research resonates with what I am propagating in mine, however, the subject differs substantially, as she focuses on pure journalistic reporting that discounts the impact of fictionally established worldviews that have far more deep-seated imprints on human psychology. For a larger population today, it would not be an exaggeration to call television obsolete, considering the common use of social media today where there are an estimated 6.4 billion smartphone users (Liu & Ellis, 2021). One of its commonly used platforms, since its creation in 2005, YouTube has become a household name with 2.68 billion monthly active users that consume a billion hours of content every day (Ruby, 2023). To normalize the platform as a safe space for every user, YouTube advertises to believe “that everyone deserves to have a voice, and that the world is a better place when we listen, share and build community through our stories.” (About YouTube - YouTube, n.d.). One cannot deny its potential to inform, educate, and generate discourse that could either interest a vast audience or create a niche for unconventional subjects. Of course, the platform has its own constraints, but considering the interactive model that allows comments and feedback from the consumers, it is an effective tool to emanate voices of concern. Accordingly, Edgerly et al. (2010, p. 5) writes of the “low barrier of entry” on YouTube according to Habermas’ (1974) public sphere theory that suggests a relatively open and highly accessible means of free expression for every individual. This liberty may be taken advantage of, if the content is sensationalized and not creatively repurposed, parallel with White’s (1997) concern that it may merely generate a buzz among the reactionary audience and cause an unhinged debate of accusations (as cited in Yoo, 2010).

Social media platforms, particularly YouTube, have proved a handy launchpad for its users to garner audiences. TV production houses similarly have shifted to the medium rather conveniently. It has also served well for common people to emerge as influencers, content creators, or micro-celebrities, “the state of being well known to a niche group of people, and view followers as fans.” (Marwick, 2017, p.1). These microcelebrities produce content in various formats namely: vlogs, comic skits, video essays, celebrity gossip, animation, product/ movie reviews, tutorials, crash

courses, pranks, podcasts, and many more. To stay relevant, they may use “false fights, copy-pasting material, obscenity, harsh language, and Clickbait as core practices.” (Ayub & Ali, 2023, p. 12) This points to the heavy question of moral responsibility and accountability on the grounds of which many have been susceptible to the reactionary “cancel culture”. To localize, e-celebrities in the Pakistani milieu are no different, although with much fewer opportunities. Farrukh et al. (2021) bring Pakistan and its identity not necessarily in a positive light, but different from that of the mainstream Western idea of Muslims, particularly Pakistanis. I write not positive, because they refrain from subjective commentary or writing a critique of the YouTuber’s attitudes. I find their study positively contributive to identity studies in regard to cherry-picking and dissolving misplaced stereotypes formed about the oriental Pakistani; to name a few that Pakistani (Muslim) women are “meek dependent and shy” (Farrukh et al., 2021, p. 10). It is lacking that they do not make it a point to categorize the progressive portrayals from the ones that conform to Western ideas of modernity, hence the lack of commentary.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Media, Communication, and Culture**

McQuail (2010) and Postman (2010) study the intricacies of mass communication as a medium and provide a critique of the over-saturation of television content. The two agree on the cultural influence of the medium on society, where for the former it is not only confined to a tool but rather a metaphor that is involved in culture formation and experience, and for the latter it is a memory reservoir for a cultural group. Postman (2010), in fact, proposes media content as a lens to understand a culture. (pp. 25–28), which he then identifies as one that is overwhelmed by irrelevance, incoherence, and impotence (p. 95). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that what is represented in the media is an appropriated version of reality, which may differ in degrees of dependability and significance (Postman, 2010; McQuail, 2010). It would be fooling oneself to judge media messages void of any agendas or explicit motives, be it the news reports or fictional dramas. They are rather "a broader system of social and cultural meaning, with many possible interpretations of origin and function." (McQuail, 1985). Here arises the question of whether the target rating point (TRP)-granting audience is to be held responsible for the deteriorating content or otherwise, which is crucial.

#### **3.2 The Audience:**

To answer the above question, let us first consider the role of the receiver in this scenario. To do that, a few more queries emerge which are: who is the audience and how are they formed? Smythe (1977) as cited by McQuail (1985) identifies the audience as the primary product of the media; it analyses their psychological interests mainly to pitch to potential advertisers. Oftentimes, the weight of informed decision making is put on the audience, and rightfully so. The media audience has a conscious social identity (McQuail, 1985) and to this end, they have a certain degree of autonomy over what medium and content they opt for. The audience establishes the dominant social order and cultural norms which the elite media and media elites as identified by McQuail (2010) pursue to uphold rather than subvert, albeit for purely monetary ends.

There are different theories proposed as to how the audience is formed. A group of people may have gratification and usage means that they achieve through watching media. McQuail et al. (1972) introduce a typology of media-person interactions that is fourfold; namely for diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance. On the flip side, they might not be conscious of their choices of media content and just engage with it for no actual purpose. The approach may also be structural, wherein, on the audience, there is an intersectional set of

influences that considers factors of social background, spatial context, and availability of content. Both approaches will be incorporated to eliminate the shortcomings of either one.

### **3.3 Habermas and the Public Sphere:**

Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere is a seminal concept in sociology and communication studies, proposing a domain in society where individuals gather to freely engage in rational-critical debate about public matters. This sphere, distinct from government and economic spheres, is crucial for the formation of public opinion, a process central to the functioning of democracy. Historically rooted in the 18th-century European coffee houses, salons, and literary societies, it provided a platform for the bourgeoisie to discuss and critique societal issues. However, Habermas also acknowledges the transformation of the public sphere, especially with the rise of mass media and its commercial and political influences. Despite its significance, the theory has been critiqued for its idealized notion of rational discourse and oversight of power dynamics and inequalities that can pervade public discussions. Nevertheless, Habermas's public sphere remains a foundational concept in understanding the dynamics of public opinion formation in democratic societies. I am using this theory as my overarching framework to understand the merits of entertainment content as avenues of opinion making and their usefulness in promoting a well-informed society.

Audiences are defined in terms of public opinion which is an act of criticism performed by members of the public gathering. (Habermas et al., 1974). It is among receptive and reasonable audiences that objective judgment can originate. Public opinion is part of a bigger phenomenon called the *public sphere*. A medium cannot be classified as a public sphere unless it initiates the formation of public opinion. "Today newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere" (p. 49); their credibility and accuracy are debatable though.

While Habermas' public sphere of communicative rationality primarily studies political discourses, this study applies its tenets to media and literature, hence the "aesthetic-affective" aspect of discourse. (Dahlberg, 2005). There are three modes of aesthetic-effective expression: greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling. (Young, 2002, as cited in Dahlberg, 2005). Effective storytelling as a tool may lead to ideational liberation and narrative building. To correctly identify a medium as a public sphere, the fine difference between rhetorical coercion and persuasion in discourse must be undertaken. Discourse enables revision of the "...conceptions of what is valuable or worthy of pursuit, [and] to assess various courses of action with respect to those ends" (Baynes, 1994, as cited in Dahlberg, 2005, p.125). In summation, Habermas' public sphere will be a driving force to understand and discern the variables of this study.

### **3.4 Research Method**

#### **3.4.1 Interactional Sociolinguistics/ Ethnography of Communication:**

Discourse analysis understands the investment of language use in creating meaning beyond the level of mere exchange of words and treats every instance of language use as a communicative event (Griffin, 2013). It is an all-encompassing analytical method, however most relevant to this study is that of interactional sociolinguistics defined by Gumperz (2015). Incorporating the principles of Grice's cooperative maxims (1975), its primary goal is to reveal the pragmatic elements of meta-discourse, chiefly concerning culture; hence the name ethnography (Bailey, 2015). Interactional sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field that delves into the intricate relationship between language and social interaction. It blends insights from both sociology and linguistics to explore how language usage varies across different social contexts, influenced by factors like social status, gender, ethnicity, and age. Central to this field is the analysis of conversations, where the focus is on understanding the dynamics of turn-taking, meaning

negotiation, and the repair of misunderstandings. Interactional sociolinguistics also investigates phenomena like code-switching, where individuals toggle between languages or dialects for specific communicative purposes, and diglossia, the use of different languages in distinct social settings. It pays close attention to speech acts and politeness theory, examining how actions are performed through language and how politeness conventions vary across cultures. Non-verbal cues like gestures and facial expressions are also considered crucial in the study of communication. Moreover, this field scrutinizes how language both reflects and reinforces power dynamics in society, offering insights into the ways linguistic practices are intertwined with cultural and social structures, including the potential for language to challenge these dynamics. Through its comprehensive approach, interactional sociolinguistics provides a deep understanding of the complex role language plays in human social interactions. In this study, IS is employed to analyze the difference of language use across the comment sections of two entertainment mediums, in order to assess the audience characteristics. Interactional Sociolinguistics has essentially been used as a method to study spoken discourses, however, as a platform, social media allows for participant interaction which creates room for its application.

Benson (2015) integrates Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model of discourse with Stenström's (1994) taxonomy of interactional acts to understand language acquisition through the analysis of YouTube comments. Thus, the proposed framework is most appropriate to analyze linguistic use as a form of social practice. Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model involve the following hierarchy: transaction, exchange, turn, move, and act. Transaction is the highest unit in this framework that consists of exchanges which in turn are composed of two or three moves. Exchanges help understand the organization of discourse, (Initiation, Response, follow up) while moves are the functional unit and serve a communicative purpose. Lastly, an act is the smallest interactional unit, signaling what the speaker intends, what s/he wants to communicate. A move may consist of one, two, or several acts.

### **3.5 Data Sources**

The chosen data includes episodes from the internet podcast show 'Ask GanjiSwag' on the YouTube Channel with the same name i.e., Ask GanjiSwag. Furthermore, the comparison of content is made with a primetime Pakistani drama called 'Tere Bin'. The researcher will conduct an interactional analysis of the two episodes of each data source which discusses the chosen social issue.

#### **3.5.1 Ask GanjiSwag**

Ask GanjiSwag is a steadily growing YouTube channel, which is a pioneer in its genre of YouTube content in Pakistan. The channel is run by Mr. Junaid Akram who is a highly influential Pakistani YouTuber. He eventually started as a standup comedian, and then ventured into making YouTube content that varies in nature; they are educational, entertaining, and informational. In this show, he discusses audience questions sent in through emails and proposes solutions based on his experience and understanding. This is a controlling data source in this synopsis, as it is the standard against which other Pakistani media content is evaluated and analyzed in terms of quality, popularity, and audience response. The reason for choosing this show is because of its potential positive impact on audience perception formation about society and the world at large. Hence, its analysis and understanding are crucial for not only the researcher but also for future studies.

#### **3.5.2 Tere Bin**

Tere Bin has remained one of the most highly viewed Pakistani TV dramas. Most of its episodes have had overwhelming responses not only from the audiences but also sparked debates due to its controversial and insensitive treatment of social issues. Its screenplay is written by Nooran

Makhdoom and falls under the genres of drama, romance, and action. The rationale behind selecting this drama for this synopsis is that it provides a rich data bank of audience interaction, based on which understanding public response is highly convenient. This data source is in stark contrast with the former, which is why the analytical comparison brings about thought-provoking results.

#### **4. Analysis & Findings**

##### **4.1 Interlocutors and Exchange Structure:**

###### **4.1.1 Mailer/Author vs. Host/ Actors**

An exchange structure consists of the moves: Initiation, Response, and Followup (Sinclair & Coulthard, 2013). In the drama and the podcast show's exchange structure, the Initiation move (I) is always originated in the words of the author and the people who have written the play and the emails respectively. A case can be made that since these two do not speak the written words themselves, one can put their role of interlocutors as passive and part of meta discourse. Because the show host and the drama actors speak the written words, they can be the main interlocutors. Their relationship with the mailer/ author is a direct one where the former's performance depends on the input of the latter and vice versa. Their spoken words are examples of the Initiation move (I).

###### **4.1.2 Commenters vs. Replies to the comments**

The audience in any comment section can be categorized into primary and secondary commenters. Primary commenters put forward the original statement, in the response or acknowledgment of which, the secondary commenters write their own statements. The original comment is the Response move (R) to the Initiation move (I) of the content host/ actor. The replies can either be a second tier of Response (R) or a follow-up (F). In this study, since I am only analyzing the primary informational acts, I will not include the comment replies.

##### **4.2 Subjects:**

Out of the many issues discussed in the selected drama, and the episodes of AG, I have chosen the theme of forced marriages. For the limited scope of the pilot study, I am only able to analyze one episode of each genre. As for the TV drama, I have excerpted the 3<sup>rd</sup> episode of 'Tere Bin' (2022) which garnered 69M and 57M views on its first and last episode respectively. Among other themes of infidelity, patriarchy, and marital rape, the drama's main running trope is of forced marriage that breeds a host of disputes. On the other hand, in the 35<sup>th</sup> episode, Junaid (2021) reviews questions that are oriented toward mental disability, domestic issues, career, diasporic life, sex education, and particularly, forced marriage.

##### **Extract 1. Tere Bin**

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How triggered is Murtasim to hear that his mother had taken a decision on his marriage but was totally okay getting Meerab married without her Permission, Typical

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##### **Extract 2. Ask GanjiSwag**

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There's ample medical evidence to suggest that the chances of developing genetic disorders are 7 to 8 times higher for inbred children compared to others. We just don't see it because genetic disorders in general are rare. Just because we don't personally experience a phenomenon, doesn't mean it's not rooted in science, because by that logic germs don't exist and the sun revolves around earth.

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### 4.3 Forced Marriage Related Comments:

For the objective of examining audience interaction and reception through the lens of Habermas' public sphere theory, I identified comments that discussed forced marriages in one capacity or another. To achieve this, I designated words like 'Meerab', 'Murtasim' (the protagonists), 'parents', 'cousin', 'forced marriage', 'Pakistan', 'society', 'women', and 'shaadi' (marriage in Urdu). Out of the 10,074 comments under the drama episode, I detected only 38, which makes up 0.37% of the total. The rest of the comments either praised the acting, quoted dialogues, anticipated subsequent episodes, expressed their admiration, ensured their support for the drama, or urged the other commenters to pledge their loyalty to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Islam, which is entirely irrelevant. This suggests that TV drama audiences are desensitized to prevalent issues of culture and tradition due to repeated portrayal and normalization.

Contrarily, in the AG episode, because of lower viewership, the number of comments was significantly less. The episode amassed 144k views and 765 comments. However, still, the percentage of attention the issue gathered was higher than the drama i.e., 1.5% which was composed of 12 comments. Similarly, I used the words 'cousin marriages', 'genetic disorders', 'watta satta' (exchange marriage), and 'Islam'. The comments were also dissimilarly more detailed, with fewer grammatical errors, and articulate. Other commenters addressed *the* remaining issues of the episode. The data implies a telling contrast between the audiences of both genres, the former are mostly passive and unopinionated and the latter are rational. Hence, the podcast show is a much better "public sphere" (Habermas et al., 1974) as, despite its limited audience, it manages to form an echo chamber for public debate that may lead to opinion-making.

Below is one example from each comment section.

#### Extract 3. Tere Bin

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If these kinds of forced marriages are still happening in this world today, then these things are cruel and unfair and need to change.

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#### Extract 4. Ask GanjiSwag

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"I don't understand cousin marriage. It's not even encouraged in Islam, but some people defend it like it's the law!"

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### 4.4 Interactional Analysis: Acts

In each move, one or more acts can be detected. According to Stenstrom (1996) which signal (s) "what the speaker intends, what s/he wants to communicate" (Stenström, 1994, p. 30). Her taxonomy of informational acts categorizes speaker responses into primary, secondary, and complementary acts. Primary acts can realize moves on their own. Secondary and complementary acts are dependent on the utterance of the primary. Some functions of the primary acts are to alert, challenge, object, or evaluate. I have sorted the comments according to the frequency of appearance in the corresponding comment sections. To understand the meaning of each act, refer to Appendix-A.

*Table 1: Tere Bin Comment Section*

<i>Primary Acts</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Primary Acts</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
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<i>Opine</i>	11	<i>Alert</i>	3
<i>Query</i>	10	<i>Praise</i>	3
<i>Evaluate</i>	10	<i>Acknowledge</i>	2
<i>Inform</i>	9	<i>Agree</i>	2
<i>Challenge</i>	6	<i>Disagree</i>	2
		<i>Suggest</i>	2

#### **Extract 4. Tere Bin**

I am happy that she's fighting for her rights. Even our religion gives us the right to not accept the marriage. Hats off to the girl, and shame on these parents who are forcing these people to get married, forcing their children that is not acceptable.

#### **Microanalysis:**

The comment above is one of the few that indicates a problem with the issue of forced marriages. Upon further breakdown, it reveals instances of three different primary acts:

1. I am happy that she's fighting for her rights.... Hats off to the girl... (Praises the addressee)

The choice of words like 'happy', and 'hats off', and the indicators, 'she', and 'girl', (Meerab) define the sentence as praise.

2. Even our religion gives us the right to not accept the marriage. (Informs- provides information)

Here the commenter shares the knowledge of 'religion' with their fellow audience.

3. ...shame on these parents who are forcing these people to get married, forcing their children that is not acceptable. (Disagrees and challenges the addressee) The final part of the comment signals the commenter's disagreement, chiefly with the writer, whose script has made the actors engage in actions that they are challenging.

**Table 2: Ask GanjiSwag Comment Section**

<b>Primary Acts</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Primary Acts</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Opine	4	Evaluate	2
Inform	4	Challenge	1
Object	3	Alert	1
Suggest	3	Praise	1
Query	2	Correct	1
Disagree	2	Check (Clarify)	1
		Confirm	1

***Extract 5. Ask GanjiSwag***

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With all due respect Mrs. Junaid Akram, that's terrible advice. I've seen that Watta Satta marriages are always uncomfortable to be in, they destroy lives. Also, the man does not like the woman so why should he marry her just like that? Even if he wants to opt to marry through an arranged marriage arrangement, he can find someone he actually likes through the system. Cousin marriages are already a curse in this society. Also once he does get married to someone else and his sister still gets married to her cousin whose sister he does not want to marry, the guy will most probably torture his sister and so will his family and there will always be that bitter taste of oh her brother didn't marry my sister or daughter and people can stoop so low that they sometimes divorce women just to seek "revenge". Watta satta arrangements and cousin marriages are always super risky and should be avoided.

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***Microanalysis:***

Comparatively, this comment is far more detailed and with proper paragraphing and makes use of different primary acts, as stated below:

1. With all due respect Mrs. Junaid Akram, that's terrible advice. (Disagree-Challenge)

The above section is rich with primary acts because it not only expresses strong agreement but also the use of the word 'terrible' points at a challenge to the addressee.

2. I've seen that watta satta marriages are always uncomfortable to be in, they destroy lives. (Correct)

After expressing disagreement, the comment attempts to correct the addressee and states their point of view.

3. Also, the man does not like the woman so why should he marry her just like that? (Query)

A query can either mean an expression of strong surprise or doubt. In this case, it is the former.

4. Even if he wants to opt to marry through an arranged marriage arrangement, he can find someone he actually likes through the system. (Suggest)

Now that the commenter has corrected the addressee's statement, they are proposing an alternate future for the emailer.

5. Cousin marriages are already a curse in this society. (Inform)

To reiterate their disagreement with the addressee's solution, they are providing further information for emphasis.

6. Also, once he does get married to someone else and his sister still gets married to her cousin whose sister he does not want to marry, the guy will most probably torture his sister and so will his family there will.

always be that bitter taste because her brother didn't marry my sister or daughter and people can stoop so low that they sometimes divorce women. just to seek "revenge" (Object)

Since the commenter strongly opposes the idea of the emailer getting married in an exchange setting, they are postulating a possible situation to communicate their objection.

7. Watta satta arrangements and cousin marriages are always super risky and should be avoided. (Inform- Opine)

Lastly, they inform of the dangers of cousin marriages and assert their opinion one more time.

It is found that despite the podcast having significantly lesser number of audience and views, its comment section offers a much more profound variety of critical insights and ideas. Its audience engages with the content much more effectively, tends to derive lessons, empathize with individual experiences, and propose meaningful solutions. On the other hand, one would argue that the primary goal or responsibility of dramas is not to reform society; it is chiefly an entertainment avenue. Nonetheless, it is still imperative that the drama industry takes the initiative to address social awareness and raise concerns. However, the insensitive attitude and treatment of complex social issues is apparent both on the part of the creators of such dramas and its audiences. Through the intense analysis of the mentioned drama's comment sections, it is found that audiences rarely engage in critical thinking and their comments mostly do not reflect the subject matter at all. The comments that do so are rare and do not concur with the huge number of views on each individual episode. One is left with comments that either completely derail from the main topic or do not offer food for thought.

### **5. Discussion**

The two modes of entertainment, i.e., dramas and podcasts, selected for this paper have different aims and objectives to achieve from its audiences, however they are similar in that they both serve as a public sphere. The objective of this paper is to determine to what extent they are fulfilling their roles as a meaningful public sphere. To achieve this purpose, interactional sociolinguistics and public sphere theory are employed as the analytical and theoretical framework respectively. After sifting through the comment section of one episode of each of the mentioned shows, comments related to a particular social problem are identified for evaluation. To be specific, they are grouped into the framework of primary acts proposed by Stenstrom (1996).

Upon rigorous analysis, huge disparities in audience interests and engagement are reported in the analysis and findings section. It reveals that drama audiences are almost purely concerned with entertainment both as a means and an end. The portrayal of forced marriage as a social evil is perceived as a normality and the comments finding this concept as an anomaly to be addressed are only a few among over ten thousand comments; they constitute of only 0.37%. Table 1 sorts those comments in primary acts where 'Opine' takes the precedence. Contrarily, podcast audiences tune in mainly to be cognizant of prevailing social subjects and mindfully participate in the public sphere. As mentioned before, the views on this podcast are significantly lower than mainstream dramas, however the audience comments are much more conscious and observant. 1.5% of comments address the issue under study and offer suggestions that reflect critical thinking. Therefore, the intellectual difference between the audience of the two mediums is significant. The findings recommend that dramas are consumed primarily (not necessarily) as an entertainment medium, losing their potential to reform society constructively. Whereas podcasts are a space that provide its audiences with both entertainment and an opportunity to gather and ponder about society.

In summary, this research study concludes that the entertainment industry has the means, the platform, and the voice to identify civil issues, treat them with sensitivity, and create a responsible public sphere for cross breeding of ideas and intellect. It can create value and bring about a long overdue change in Pakistan. While one genre, i.e., TV dramas, fails to achieve this objective and has a crude attitude towards artistic expression, YouTube podcasts such as Ask GanjiSwag offer both entertainment and social reform. Ultimately, the respective approaches are furthered by their audiences. Hence, this study suggests that podcasts are a better public sphere and a conscious choice of media content consumption. Whereas Pakistani dramas create thoughtless content for passive reception and do not fulfill their role as a public sphere.

## 6. Conclusion

One of the objectives of this paper was to investigate the chief differences between the audiences of two entertainment genres i.e., TV dramas and podcast shows through the analysis of their respective comment sections. Secondly and thirdly, its purpose was to evaluate the said genres as a meaningful public sphere that engages the audience in critical thinking and intellectual exchange of ideas. To achieve these objectives, one episode of each media content is selected for a focused study.

Moving away from the tradition of past studies that targeted one entertainment genre and criticized its shortcomings, I have compared distinct modes of content that discuss similar themes but have a contrasting approach to their severity and treatment. Hence, the pool of audience also varies. Postman's (2010) analysis suggests a distinct form of conditioning of the TV audience whose content-watching habits vary from that of the social media users. Content selection and wide audience reception affect social norms and cultural values as McQuail (2010) points out that it is the audience that forms the dominant social order. To examine it linguistically, Stenstrom's (1996) taxonomy of primary acts and Sinclair and Coulthard's (2013) hierarchy of interaction is incorporated.

Upon further evaluation, it is revealed that TV drama audiences are desensitized to social issues, because they are repeatedly illustrated ordinarily and rationalized with the narrative denouement. As a result, despite high viewership, there is a low percentage of comments signaling these issues. Contrarily, in the podcast show the basic premise is to problematize the social stigmas and culturally binding traditions. Consequently, the audience is more perceptive, observant, and vigilant. Therefore, to objectively evaluate the eminence and usefulness of a medium as a legitimate 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1974) my comparative study of the corresponding comment sections affirms the podcast show to be more valuable. Podcasts are a better public sphere whereas dramas rarely add value to society. Nevertheless, the drawn conclusion is a testimony that it is a viable study to further carry on. For future research, more entertainment genres can be included for comparative studies.

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