

USING THE STYLISTIC LENS TO COMPARE PAKISTANI MAINSTREAM DRAMAS AND OTT WEB SERIES

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Abstract

The Pakistani audiences show a remarkable shift towards streaming platforms in the past decade. Different studies discussed the difference in narrative of Over-the-top (OTT) web series and mainstream television dramas but none discussed the difference in their production techniques. The study uses a stylistic analysis to compare Pakistani mainstream dramas and OTT web series analyzing how production techniques construct visual meanings and gender representation. Visual Culture Theory and Gender representation theory are utilized to study the visual representation of gender roles through production strategies across both platforms. A comparative qualitative stylistic analysis is implemented by careful coding of production elements to identify stylistic similarities and differences across both platforms. One sample from both platforms has been selected which highlights key similarities and differences in the representation of both male and female characters through both platforms.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the Pakistani Media landscape has been through a remarkable shift from mainstream dramas to over-the-top (OTT) platforms in the form of web series (Toor et al., 2024). The rise of this platform introduced web series highlighting a range of global media trends that is continuously challenging the mainstream media through versatility in its narratives, themes and experimental production esthetics (Lobato, 2020). The mainstream Pakistani television dramas mostly follow a consistent style portraying linear storytelling, domestic settings and conservative cultural norms whereas OTT web series narrate greater thematic and visual diversity (Shehzad et al., 2020).

By discussing family dynamics, gender roles and social taboos and stereotypes the mainstream television dramas are playing a vital role in creating public perceptions regarding these issues (Qayyum & Khan, 2021). On the contrary, the rise of web series highlights the controversial topics of sexuality, women's agency and oppression which are frequently censored by the mainstream platforms (Malik, 2020). Gender representation remains a major area of study in both mediums. Earlier studies have focused mainly on thematic content in both the mediums, limited research has analyzed these platforms through a visual lens specifically in the Pakistani context. Stylistic analysis offers a significant

methodological entry point to explore how production techniques; such as mise-en-scène, cinematography, lighting, costume, and color palettes, communicate meaning (Toolan, 2023). Analyzing these production elements can offer better understanding of the socio-cultural functions of entertainment content, as visual media operates both as a narrative and symbolic system (Mirzoeff, 2021).

Therefore, this study, aims to conduct a stylistic analysis to compare Pakistani mainstream television dramas with web series on OTT platform. The main focus of the research is to identify similarities and differences in the

1.1. OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To identify similarities and differences in the use of production techniques by both Pakistani mainstream television dramas and OTT web series.
2. To analyze the representation of gender roles by both platforms by utilizing different production techniques.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ₁ What are the major stylistic similarities and differences between Pakistani mainstream television dramas and OTT web series in context of the production techniques?
- RQ₂ How gender roles are portrayed through both platforms through their use of production elements?

1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As digital platforms are remodeling the traditional storytelling styles, the comparison of the two platforms using the stylistic lens, overcomes the research gap specifically in Pakistani context. The study also explores how visual strategies, like cinematography, costume and styling, mise-en-scène, body language, and Audio-Visual interactions, differ across these platforms, contributing to distinguished representations of gender role. The findings will be particularly valuable for visual storytellers, media scholars and cultural critics looking for understanding the

representation of gender through specific production strategies by both platforms. The descriptive framework by Sherif, Anany and Ewis's (2023) of stylistic analysis is used to examine the aesthetics and philosophy hidden in the visual narratives through production techniques. The comparison of visual language used by both Mainstream television and OTT in Pakistan, will contribute to the growing field of media and cultural studies, especially in context of Pakistan. It will discover new perspectives on the impact of changing production patterns on narrative strategies and visual story telling.

implementation of visual production choices in shaping contemporary identities for Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

Pakistani dramas have a deep-rooted impact on its audiences' beliefs and lifestyles (Iftikhar, A., Aziz, S., Sarwer, S., & Sagheer, I., 2024). The rise of web series have however is satisfying the needs of the younger audience more efficiently (Lobato, 2020). According to a study, the growth of web series in Pakistan reflects a broader trend towards digital storytelling, providing opportunities for innovative content creation and reaching wider audiences (Malik, 2020) .

2.1. Representations of gender roles in Mainstream Pakistani Dramas

Pakistani mainstream dramas mirror our cultural and traditional values rarely advocating for social change. Mostly they portray conventional socio-cultural themes, including complex family dynamics, issues of honor and social status, and patriarchy and violence against women (Aftab, A., Shahid, S. E., & Amir, D., 2025). Female characters are commonly defined by their relationships with men, while narratives are structured around marriage, betrayal, and familial conflict proved by research analyzing stereotypes in Pakistani dramas (Iqbal, 2024). Additionally, research on the objectification of women in media analyzed Pakistani dramas for their portrayal of social issues, including domestic conflicts and gender-based violence, highlighting the need for

more responsible storytelling (Quratulain., Safdar, A., & Tahir, 2023).

Even when mainstream dramas attempt to address progressive themes, cultural limitations can be observed. For instance, dramas such as *Kuch Ankahi* (2023) and *Dobara* (2021) portray women's professional struggles and age-gap relationships, but within socially acceptable boundaries, ensuring they remain aligned with patriarchal values (Pervaiz, 2023). Evidently Pakistani Drama industry is not shielded from the global impact, its content is influenced by global media consumption trends, particularly Turkish, Indian, and now Korean content which impacts narrative structures and thematic preoccupations, by adopting foreign themes, lifestyles, language, dress, and culture (Khan, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of Western cultural elements into Pakistani dramas has been critically examined through a feminist lens. Research explores how the portrayal of gender roles and power dynamics in Pakistani television dramas reflects the infiltration of Western cultural values, contributing to shifting societal attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment (Badar et al., 2023). A study focusing on the drama serial "Mere Paas Tum Ho" explored that it is promoting extra-marital affairs, materialistic mindsets and introducing live-in relations, thus tormenting our cultural and Islamic values (Shakir, 2020).

2.2. Representation of gender roles in Pakistani OTT Web Series

The easy accessibility of internet in Pakistan has led to the growth of web series as a prominent storytelling format, steadily deviating from traditional television in content, production, and artistic freedom, due to fewer monitoring constraints and more diverse audience expectations (Malik, 2020). A study on Pakistani web series highlights that digital content is increasingly challenging mainstream censorship norms, particularly regarding gender roles, class struggles, and political critique, portraying female-led resistance against societal oppression which is beyond the limitations of mainstream television (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, 2023). A review on Pakistanicinema.net discussed that "Mrs. & Mr.

Shameem" is acclaimed for its bold exploration of gender roles, societal judgment, and emotional depth (Tooba M, 2024). The relative artistic freedom of web series permits for the exploration of themes generally avoided or censored in mainstream media, such as contemporary portrayals of gender and sexuality, also permitting more diverse and on-demand content (Srivastav & Rai, 2022). Web series in Pakistan represent the empowered women through more radical and controversial portrayals compared to television dramas, which represents similar themes with greater limitations and adherence to traditional norms (Ashfaq, 2023).

2.3. Stylistic analysis in media studies.

Stylistic analysis includes analyzing the production art piece in terms of production techniques used. On one hand, the cinematic set of tools involves camera movement, framing, angle, sound and editing while the includes the costumes, props, setting, and performance choices (Shqairat, 2021). Most of the Pakistani mainstream dramas tend to use familiar visual tropes, such as domestic settings, conservative costume design, and restrained cinematography, which collectively established gender roles and reinforce societal expectations (Tabassum & Amin, 2021). A study on Pakistani OTT web series analyzed that the visual language of OTT content is often more contemporary, with greater emphasis on realism, urban aesthetics, and thematic complexity (Bajwa et al., 2022). All aspects of production played a role in narrating the essence of the story as a study explored the role of mise-en-scène in depicting interiority of those living in it (Radinger Field, L. 2024). A study suggests that the use of "colour aspects and colour schemes not only enhance a visual narrative but stimulate psychological responses and emotional reaction" (Abdullah & Rosli, 2025).

As the existing literature does not clearly compare visual styles across Pakistani mainstream and online dramas, it provides a groundwork for the study. This research might involve selecting a comparable set of dramas in terms of genre or theme from each platform and applying a consistent descriptive visual stylistic analysis

framework. In addition to this, the representation of gender roles through differences in production choices will also be examined. This type of analysis will be helpful in giving a detailed understanding of the evolving dynamics of Pakistani media and a range of cinematic strategies used across different platforms.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study will adopt a dual-theoretical lens using both *Visual Culture theory* and *Gender representation theory* to analyze narrative construction along gender roles through cinematic techniques.

3.1. Visual Culture Theory:

Visual Culture Theory (Mirzoeff, 2023) provides an initial lens for understanding the role of visuals in constructing meaning. It helps to interrogate *how seeing is structured* by power and cultural codes and *how visuals participate in shaping viewer understanding*. In this study, the theory enables understanding of the visual production techniques, like cinematography, color tones, costume design, lighting, and spatial framing, used in Pakistani dramas and web series to construct gender roles.

3.2. Gender Representation Theory:

Gender Representation Theory provides a critical feminist framework for analyzing how gender identities are constructed in media. From the works of Sarah Sachar (Sachar, 2024), Rosalind Gill (Gill, 2007) and Laura Mulvey, this theory highlights how women are visually coded, whether empowered, passive, or culturally contested, and how such representations reflect larger gender philosophies. The theory helps to examine how visual production techniques shape the portrayal of femininity and masculinity across both mediums.

Sampling Procedure

Systematic interval sampling was used with a fixed interval of 4 to ensure even space coverage (Wu et al., 2020). To avoid systematic bias a random start from 3rd episode was implemented (Makwana et al., 2023).

Sample Composition

The following episodes from each platform were selected:

3.3. Bringing the Frameworks Together

Both the theoretical understandings provide a framework to guide visual stylistic analysis. Visual Culture theory guides how meaning is created through visuals while Gender representation theory counters what those visuals communicate about gender identities across both platforms.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study implements qualitative content analysis. Within the notion of content analysis, the study follows descriptive approach to explain the concepts of stylistic analysis using both audio and visual elements, built on Sherif, Anany, and Ewis's (2023) framework. In their terms, stylistic analysis is "the method of execution that deals with how the formation or construction of the form of this film" (Sherif, K. A., Anany, W. M., & Ewis, 2023) unfolds not only through "technology of equipment, imaging and lighting," but also via "the design and composition of the picture and internal motion and external configurations". Accordingly, we systematically code key production techniques as "formal elements" This descriptive stylistic analysis allows us to map how mainstream Pakistani dramas and OTT web series each deploy these elements to craft distinctive visual styles and gendered narratives.

4.1. Sample Selection

Purposive sampling technique is used to compare visual styles across Pakistani mainstream television dramas and OTT web series. The selected sample includes **Mrs. & Mr. Shameem** (2022) from ZEE5 and mainstream drama **Kuch Ankahi** (2023), for their common focus on feminist themes like gender roles, female empowerment, and societal critique. The timeframe (2020-2025) ensures contemporary relevance

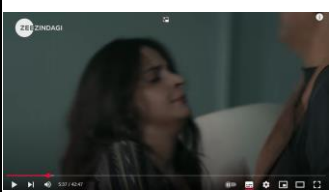

| Series | Total Episodes | Random Start | Sampled Episodes | Sample Size |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Kuch Ankahi | 27 | 3 | 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27 | 7 |
| Mrs. & Mr. Shamim | 19 | 3 | 3, 7, 11, 15, 19 | 5 |

4.2. Proposed Coding Scheme for Visual Stylistic Analysis


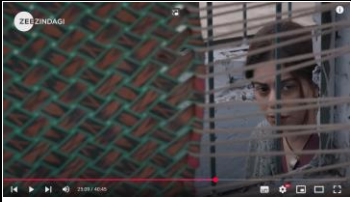
The study develops a coding scheme for analyzing production techniques for stylistic analysis guided by the visual culture theory.

| Code Category | Visual Focus | Example Interpretation |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Camera Framing | Camera angles and movements shots types | Low-angle shots of men = dominance; women framed with in windows or borders = suppression |
| Lighting & Color tone | Use of shadow, soft vs. harsh lighting, symbolic colors | Warm lighting for domesticity; dim lighting in scenes of resistance |
| Costume & Styling | Dress code, makeup, symbolic accessories | Dupatta as modesty signifier; jeans = modernity vs. rebellion |
| Spatial Hierarchy | Character placement in physical space | Men in foreground/public space; women in domestic/interior space |
| Body Language & Movement | Posture, gestures, physical distance | Assertive female body language = empowerment or deviance |
| Symbolic Motifs | Objects, settings with cultural symbolism | e.g Mirror = dual identity |
| Sound-Visual Interaction | Background score, silence, sound cues with visual emphasis, foleys | Dramatic music during moral conflict; silence = inner tension |


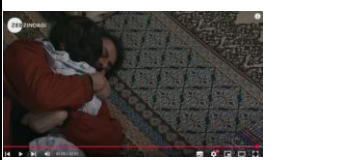

5. ANALYSIS



| Image Ref. / Timecode | Camera Framing | Lighting & Tones | Costume & Styling | Spatial Hierarchy | Body Language & Movement | Symbolic Motifs | Sound-Visual Interaction |
|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Mrs & Mr. Shameem / Episode 3 | | | | | | | |
|  <p>Shamim struggling Umaina, from committing suicide.</p> | Handheld tight close-up at slight Dutch angle: represents Umaina's inner chaos. | Low-key, cool-tone intensifies a sense of disorientation and emotional darkness. | Her messy printed kurta, hair falling messily over her face also portrays her distress emotional state | The extreme proximity and struggle with Shamim in a dull room, visually encodes her suicidal urge. | Uncontrolled gestures of overwhelming distress and loss of control. | | Diegetic sounds of her snatching the pills from Shamim immerse us in her panic at the threshold. |
|  <p>Shamim brings Umaina to a shrine for peace</p> | Wide Close-up, eye-level with shallow focus, her gaze forward aligns us with her pensive presence and submissiveness. | Soft, ambient shrine lighting, low-contrast glows, underscores spiritual atmosphere. | Pure-white dupatta and kurta signal ritual purity and respectful modesty. | Umaina in foreground with shallow focus shows her disconnect with her surroundings | Shoulders relaxed yet upright, her still, attentive posture models devotional engagement rather than passive observance. | The strung fairy lights and shrine arches serve as motifs of divine illumination; the white cloth evokes ritual purity and female piety. | Diegetic qawwali vocals, her silent absorption of song signals the female gaze as an act of obedience. |
| Mrs & Mr. Shameem / Episode 7 | | | | | | | |

| Image Ref. / Timecode | Camera Framing | Lighting & Tones | Costume & Styling | Spatial Hierarchy | Body Language & Movement | Symbolic Motifs | Sound-Visual Interaction |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|
|  <p>Shamim refused to accept umaina's submission, honoring her bodily integrity.</p> | <p>The scene move from a tight, emotional close-up of Umaina's face to a bird's-eye view of her lying on the floor bed while Shamim covering her representing him as a gentleman.</p> | <p>the overhead harsh and directional light casts shadows around her, emphasizing the weight of confinement.</p> | <p>Umaina's bare shoulder and her tangled hairs scattered on the pillow shows her emotional distress.</p> | <p>Framed at the corner of an empty room with patterned floor, visually represents the social structures that confine her as a woman.</p> | <p>Her stillness and Shamim's gentle gesture to cover her symbolizes him as a protector and her as protectee.</p> | <p>Pillow as cocoon. The soft pillow beside her head feels protective; while Shamim's gesture of covering her symbolizes his masculine integrity.</p> | <p>Shamim's whimpering sound followed by the non-diegetic emotional background music</p> |
|  <p>Shamim wiping his tears after failure in searching Umaina's son.</p> | <p>The camera smoothly pans from a blurred foreground toward Shamim in mid-frame portraying male's emotional moment, traditionally reserved for female characters.</p> | <p>Soft, warm key-light on his face with gentle, low-contrast shadows, highlighting male's emotional feelings for Umaina's lost son</p> | <p>Shamim's deep-navy kurta and the pan draws attention to his role as caring counterpart rather than distant patriarch.</p> | <p>The pan reveals him alone in the frame's center, the out of focus surroundings represents his emotional state, reversal of the stoic male archetype.</p> | <p>As the camera settles on him, his bowed head and the deliberate tear wipe become the focal movement, representing male's tearful moment.</p> | <p>The cloth appears as a motif of cleansing and emotional labor, signifying that men, too, perform this traditionally feminized act.</p> | <p>The smooth camera movement is matched by non-diegetic score, recasting male fragility as equally worthy of cinematic attention.</p> |
| <p>Mrs & Mr. Shameem / Episode 9</p> | | | | | | | |
|  <p>Shamim cradling his son.</p> | <p>Medium shot framed through the draped canopy: Shamim is mid-ground leaning over the</p> | <p>Soft, diffused daylight floods through unseen windows, creating a balanced, low-</p> | <p>Shamim's deep-maroon kurta and white scarf signal his role as nurturing</p> | <p>The cradle sits between both figures, closer to the father, marking gender-neutral</p> | <p>Shamim's steady hands adjust the baby's blanket with careful attention signifying</p> | <p>The canopy symbolizes a protective shelter.</p> | <p>Diegetic sounds of father playing with the child emphasizing that this is a moment</p> |



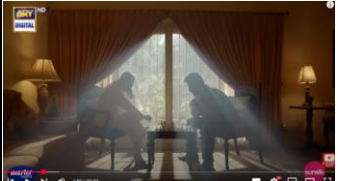
| Image Ref. / Timecode | Camera Framing | Lighting & Tones | Costume & Styling | Spatial Hierarchy | Body Language & Movement | Symbolic Motifs | Sound-Visual Interaction |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| | cradle, portraying his active responsive role in childcare. | contrast look highlighting the warmth of domestic space. | caretaker, not distant patriarch. | division of caregiving space. | father's caregiving movements. | | of, gender-neutral childrearing. |
|  <p>Baby crying on bed while the mother hiding in post-partum depression.</p> | Split diegesis, forcing the viewer to see mother and child in their separate emotional worlds. | The baby's space is brighter and softly lit, while shadows under the bed, this tonal contrast visually segregates the child's helplessness from the mother's despair. | The baby rests swaddled in pastel blankets while Umaina's loose clothes and disheveled hair reinforce her raw distress and distance from the maternal decorum. | The vacant room with crying baby and child alone placing traditional maternal care above her, and her own suffering below. | The baby's crying stand in stark relief to Umaina's curled, ear-covering posture, her gesture of self-protection in response to the child's demands. | The bed frame becomes a horizontal barrier between mother and child. | The diegetic baby's cry is loud signaling constant caregiving demands. |
|  <p>Humera witnessing her husband's extra marital affair.</p> | Humera's slight high angle shot, framed behind bars signifying her character's confinement. | Natural light highlighting her as routine matters. | Humera dressed in traditional clothes with loose braid portraying her traditional gender role. | Hidden behind the traditional bed signifying her spying on his husband's affairs. | Dropped shoulders directed gaze signaling her on something | The inverted bed and its bars symbolizes her upside down marital life. | Non digetic score to amplify her inner turmoil |
| Mrs. & Mr. Shameem / Episode 11 | | | | | | | |

| Image Ref. / Timecode | Camera Framing | Lighting & Tones | Costume & Styling | Spatial Hierarchy | Body Language & Movement | Symbolic Motifs | Sound-Visual Interaction |
|---|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|
|  <p>Humera confronting her husband's infertility who used to accuse her as barren woman.</p> | <p>Tight close-up, slight low-angle as she points a finger towards her husband shifting power from typically male figures to a woman demanding respect.</p> | <p>Naturalistic daylight with soft, even fill; minimal shadows on her face highlights her uncompromising self-assertion.</p> | <p>Traditional shalwar-kameez and bold red lipstick highlights traditional feminine elements with a striking, modern assertiveness.</p> | <p>She fills the right two-thirds of frame; the blurred male figure remains out-of-focus emphasizing her as the central agent.</p> | <p>Her upraised index finger and tensed facial muscles and direct address signifies refusal to be passive directing empowerment.</p> | <p>The raised finger acts as a symbolic "stop" sign of boundary-setting that traditionally identifies male authority now gestured by a woman.</p> | <p>Diegetic dialogue ("I won't endure any more abuses") is spoken in a firm, reinforcing her moment of empowerment.</p> |
|  <p>Tony being beaten up and looted by some boys he tried to flirt with.</p> | <p>Low-angle, medium shot in near-silhouette showcasing vulnerable and emotionally distressed character.</p> | <p>Extreme low-key lighting creating a silhouette, against debris-strewn ground highlighting both the violence done to him and his gender status looked on by society.</p> | <p>The silhouette overshadows the costume and styling.</p> | <p>The open, debris strewn ground around him portrays how societal hate pushed him into a fallen, powerless state.</p> | <p>The silhouette highlights his crawling posture, shoulders dragging challenges norms that men must always stand and fight.</p> | <p>The mud and scattered debris become a motif of social casting-out: what the community has flung onto him as punishment, now he must bear in silence and continue moving.</p> | <p>Diegetic sound of his ragged breathing, groans mixes with the non diegetic foleys of crickets followed by a sad music highlights male emotional state.</p> |
| Mrs. & Mr. Shameem / Episode 15 | | | | | | | |
|  | <p>Split-focus medium shot Shamim sits in sharp focus mid-ground, head bowed, while</p> | <p>Soft, neutral fill signifies that both parents share emotional burden, even if</p> | <p>Both parents in traditional Pakistani dresses highlights traditional</p> | <p>Shamim occupies the mid-frame visually "caught" between two</p> | <p>Shamim's shoulders slump and his hands twist in his lap, gestures male helplessness.</p> | | <p>Diegetic dialogue of Umaina pacifying his son and sobbing of Shamim indicates his weakness while</p> |




| Image Ref. / Timecode | Camera Framing | Lighting & Tones | Costume & Styling | Spatial Hierarchy | Body Language & Movement | Symbolic Motifs | Sound-Visual Interaction |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| The parents suffers the pain for their son, who is facing societal backlash because his parents are HIV+ | Umaina and their son are softly blurred in the foreground, shifts sympathy onto the father's misery. | expressed differently. | restraint in the face of stigma. | blurred figures, signaling whose grief is prominent. | Umaina's still seated profile convey more inward, contained female grief. | | Umaina's strength. |
|  Umaina accompanied Shamim to the lawyer for giving their child's adoption to Humera. | Medium shot, Umaina's arm wrapped around Shamim's back as they step into lawyer's office signaling her support in this hard time. | Even, soft daylight, the neutral fill keeps the focus on their posture rather than dramatic contrasts. | Both in everyday attire, signaling partnership in this new fight. | The tall vertical panels on either side, highlights legal vicinity. | Umaina's protective arm and Shamim's slight lean into her support signifies mutual care disrupts the solo male hero image. | The black signage panels, emblazoned with male lawyer names, become a symbol of patriarchal power. | Non-digetic sad score. |
|  Shamim hugs his son tight as they will be leaving him the next morning in custody of Humera. | High-angle medium shot of Shamim lying on the bed as he cradles the child in a tight embrace, elevates his tenderness and emotional supress. | Soft, warm fill from above highlights on his face and the child's head signifies this male act as nurturing rather than incidental. | Casual clothes signal his comfort in blending masculine protectiveness with parental warmth. | Framed through rule of thirds spatially marks their bond as the emotional peak of the story. | Shamim's arms wrapped around the son, gestures paternal love, countering the "stoic father" image. | Domestic textile motifs symbolize home as the safety net for the father and son. | Non-digetic emotional score highlights the father's emotional state. |
| Ep 19 | | | | | | | |
|  | Medium shot through carved doorframe, this "frame within | Soft, gentle daylight fills the room, celebrating their | Her white wrap codes peaceful strength and new life while his | They occupy equal center-frame spatially positioning | Shamim's protective arm and gentle lean and Umaina's | | Non-digetic emotional score highlights it as a private, gender- |




| Image Ref. / Timecode | Camera Framing | Lighting Tones & | Costume & Styling | Spatial Hierarchy | Body Language & Movement | Symbolic Motifs | Sound-Visual Interaction |
|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| They decide to give birth to the child despite being HIV+ | frame” both armors their intimacy and elevates it to a moment of shared action. | mutual hope rather than enforcing gendered contrast. | practical-casual dress signal his supportive role. | them as co-equals in this moment of shared decision. | hand cradling her bump are gestures of emotional support and upcoming parental responsibility. | | equal moment of hope and renewal. |
|  In the absence of Shamim her younger sister acts like Shamim by wearing a beard to comfort her ill mother. | Close-up, slight high-angle of Wajiha’s focused expression as she cradles the mother’s head portraying her caregiving role. | Soft, directional overhead fill highlights her gesture as both intimate and substantial. | Wearing beard to look like Shamim for her mother emphasizes her role as loving daughter who erase her identity to comfort her mother. | The bedroom spatially places the females in a protective position. | Her steady hand on the mother’s temple is a gesture of her emotional attachment and caring nature. | The beard drawn on her face symbolizes the extent of her love to comfort her mother. | Diegetic soft breaths, along with the non-diegetic emotional score symbolizes it as an emotional moment. |
|  Nobody agrees to deliver an HIV+ mother resulting in Shamim himself assisting her wife to deliver a still baby. | Extreme close-up of a projected silhouette to signify the body shape of a still born baby highlighting the emotional pain. | High-contrast silhouette signifying the still moments of the baby and desperate action of a father to make her come to live. | The absence of visible costume details negates traditional gender markers and universalizes the figure’s distress. | Outdoor space for giving birth in light of a car just represents societal rejection of a stigmatized couple. | A man performing her wife’s delivery in an open space portrays his affection and struggle to save his family. | The use of shadow itself becomes a motif of repression and invisibility highlighting pain. | Non-diegetic background score emotionally enhances the pain. |

5.2. Analysis of Kuch Ankahi

| Image Ref. / Timecode | Framing & Gaze | Lighting & Tones | Costume & Styling | Spatial Hierarchy | Body Language & Movement | Symbolic Motifs | Sound-Visual Interaction |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| Kuch Ankahi / Episode 3 | | | | | | | |
|  <p>Samia sitting near his father giving her assurance of happiness to marry with her mother's choice.</p> | Wide, Eye-level, two shot framing the father daughter in a domestic setting. | Warm high-key light normalizes the duo's conversation as routine. | Both characters dressed in traditional clothes signifying their comfort around domestic traditional setting. | Samia framed against multi-layered door frames signifies her confinement as compared to her father. | The father's relaxed posture and Samia sitting near him shows their bond as father and daughter. | The perspective view of multilayered door frames symbolizes Samia's enclosed nature. | Diegetic sound of their conversation. |
|  <p>Mother and daughters working in the kitchen</p> | Wide, eye-level shot frames all three women in the kitchen workspace emphasizing their collective presence in a traditionally feminine domain. | Warm, high-key overhead fill creates a cozy atmosphere that normalizes women's work in domestic spaces. | Mixed attire highlights generational, stylistic variation among women. | The central placement of the mother emphasizes her role as household authority, supported by female kin engaged in chores. | Active, varied movements of the three women show their management of the domestic routine. | Kitchen tools and open cabinets serve as motifs of continuous responsibility of women in maintaining home life. | Diegetic sounds of women's voices and sounds of their work, situating them as the scene's main focus. |
|  | Symmetrical medium two-shot, profile view of both men occupy equal weight as strategic thinkers. | Strong shafts of sunlight through the window create dramatic contrast, highlighting their depth of thoughts. | The elder's kurta signals patriarchal authority and tradition while the younger's casual wear symbols a more | The perfect symmetry around the Chess table visually enacts a power balance between the two men. | Their contemplative postures and minimal movement convey intellectual engagement and | Chess board symbolizes male strategic combat and control. | Diegetic environmental sounds heighten the focus on masculine reasoning and competition. |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| | | | contemporary masculinity. | | active male agency. | | |
| Kuch Ankahi / Episode 7 | | | | | | | |
|  <p>Samia's fiancée dating with another woman "Shagufta".</p> | Medium wide shot, side angle of both characters on the motorbike; the urban cityscape in the background supports everyday realism. | Warm daylight contributes to a sense of openness, contrasting with the personal nature of the talk. | Shagufta's vibrant clothing suggests femininity and a hopeful emotional state dominating the light blue shirt of the male. | He physically leads, but she is closely aligned with him without holding him for support, suggesting her independent and bold nature. | Her expressive gesture and dialogue show urgency, while his stillness hints at emotional disconnection. | | Dialogue over ambient city noise. |
|  <p>The domestic space of the Hindu maid</p> | Wide eye-level shot frames all five figures in the cramped room. | Warm, low-contrast indoor light underscoring the relentless nature of everyday oppression. | mother/maid in plain sari. Reflects cultural difference through dress codes. | males standing while females sitting on couch and floor symbolize patriarchal power and female subordination. | Standing men and sitting females marks a clear division between aggressor and caretakers. | religious painting above couch becomes a symbol of Hindu religion of the maid. Also symbolizing religious tolerance. | Traditionally shouting male over his family members. |
| Kuch Ankahi / Episode 11 | | | | | | | |
|  <p>Alia comes to Samia to handover her hennah dress</p> | Medium shot focusing Samia's hands with Aliya's mirror reflection, represents tension in her mind regarding the sister's wedding | Soft warm fill on her figure, cooler shadows in reflection represents the split between the two. | The traditionally "feminine" color and jewelry accentuate societal expectations. | The hierarchy literally places Samia's emotional interior, showing how women are valued for | Nervous finger-tapping signals anxiety at conforming to her mother's shaped standards. | The mirror itself is a classic device for self-scrutiny. | Non-diegetic emotional music highlights the inner sadness |

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| | | | | behavior over agency. | | | |
|  <p>Sofia taking stand for not cutting any of the clauses of Nikah as it is female rights.</p> | <p>Medium close-up, eye-level, Aunt is dead-center, claims moral and visual authority.</p> | <p>Warm key on her face, soft bokeh from fairy-light garlands Highlights her as a symbol of resistance.</p> | <p>Rich teal-pink sari with heavy jewelry signifying her role as matriarchal enforcer of rights.</p> | <p>Aunt in sharp focus at center visually elevates her stance.</p> | <p>Upright posture Conveys measured firmness</p> | <p>Diegetic dialogue (“...these clauses...for a woman’s security”) highlights the significance of Nikah’s clauses</p> | |
|  <p>Office scene</p> | <p>Medium-wide, eye-level across table signifies a professional setting</p> | <p>Cool, even fluorescent daylight highlighting the rational, merit-based setting where gender biases are meant to dissolve.</p> | <p>westernized clothes of the female boss represent her authority simultaneously stereotyped the working female.</p> | <p>The female boss in the office environment retains top visual authority.</p> | <p>The female boss’s relaxed posture marks her authority while Aliya’s straightened posture as an active agent, not a passive subordinate.</p> | <p>Glass wall & city skyline behind the boss represents the corporate sector.</p> <p>Non-Diegetic background score.</p> | |
| Kuch Ankahi / Episode 15 | | | | | | | |
|  <p>Parents concerned about their daughters. Mother blaming the father for giving them extra trust and freedom.</p> | <p>Medium two-shot, eye-level, the patriarch occupies more screen width than the female.</p> | <p>Warm, even room light, reinforcing this as a “routine” where male authority is normalized.</p> | <p>Both dressed in traditional dresses.</p> | <p>Father in a large, ornate armchair symbolizes his authority</p> | <p>His expansive gesture dominates the space; her stillness and folded hands signal constrained agency.</p> | <p>Diegetic dialogue over muted room ambience</p> | |

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|  <p>Sofia asked to remarry after 10 years of her husband's death but she is reluctant.</p> | <p>Medium-wide, slight low angle signaling her internal world a total chaos.</p> | <p>Warm practical lamps with soft fill providing peace to concentrate.</p> | <p>Her pale, monochrome look suggests purity and vulnerability.</p> | <p>She lies centrally in foreground; background recedes into stairs and fountain giving her the attention.</p> | <p>A rare stillness for Sofia's character and her horizontal posture signals a momentary surrender of her usual resilient role.</p> | | <p>Muted night-garden ambience amplifies the intimacy of her inner turmoil almost audible in the silence.</p> |
| <p>Kuch Ankahi / Episode 19</p> | | | | | | | |
|  <p>Welcoming Thanvi for Sofia's proposal</p> | <p>Medium three-shot, eye-level: All three characters occupy the same horizontal plane; exempting gendered positioning.</p> | <p>Gentle sunlight illuminates the courtyard, highlights the ordinary setting of a family space.</p> | <p>Daughter in bright yellow floral kurta marks youthful optimism while father and uncle in muted blues contrasted with their more restrained tones.</p> | <p>All given equal space eliminating gender hierarchy.</p> | <p>Her guarded stance and lifted chin convey confidence; their forward leans signal urgency to accept the proposal.</p> | <p>Bouquet of flowers held protectively highlights the importance of relationships.</p> | <p>Diegetic dialogue</p> |
|  <p>Salman confronts aliya</p> | <p>Two-shot, over-the-shoulder & reverse positioning him as the emotional focal point and her as his silent speaker.</p> | <p>Warm courtyard lamp light with soft shadows hint at their inner conflict.</p> | <p>His smart casual attire contrasts her draped shawl, suggesting his emotional clarity vs. her emotional sternness.</p> | <p>He occupies the visual higher place yet is emotionally exposed, whereas she remains mysterious.</p> | <p>His fixed stance speak of his hurt pride; her stillness signals constrained agency.</p> | <p>The steps evoke the emotional distance between them</p> | <p>Diegetic exchange of dialogues</p> |
| <p>Kuch Ankahi / Episode 23</p> | | | | | | | |

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|  <p>Shagufta's father trying to convince her not to marry a married man</p> | <p>The father is framed behind the grid, highlighting his helplessness over his daughter's sternness.</p> | <p>Warm indoor key with cooler background fill represents his confinement and emotional plea.</p> | <p>His sober, adult attire marks him as the rational patriarch.</p> | <p>Father centered but behind the door mesh amplifies the generational divide between them.</p> | <p>His forward tilt and grip signal desperation and the authority he tries to reclaim.</p> | <p>The bars symbolize his protective role; the domestic lamp behind him hints at the home as his domain now contested.</p> | <p>Diegetic speech over muted household ambience</p> |
|  <p>Gets notified by the institute on raising voice against harrasment by the institute's trustee.</p> | <p>Medium close-up, eye-level: Protagonist occupies the exact center of frame.</p> | <p>Uniform overhead lighting emphasizing the neutrality of institutional space.</p> | <p>Bright hue draws us to her amid muted background; glasses suggest both clarity of vision and youthful assertiveness.</p> | <p>She is walking in a corridor with fellow students, visually elevating her moral courage.</p> | <p>Rigid posture, shoulders squared, hands gripping straps conveys inner resolve and protective readiness.</p> | <p>The linear architecture behind her echoes her singular path/mission against the institutional backdrop.</p> | <p>Non-diegetic</p> |
| <p>Kuch Ankahi / Episode 27</p> | | | | | | | |
|  <p>Samia's husband came to ask for her forgiveness.</p> | <p>Medium close-up, over-shoulder implied two-shot centering the wife's face and her direct, forgiving gaze.</p> | <p>Soft key light with warm fill highlights her facial features and conveys a mood of reconciliation.</p> | <p>Deep maroon dress suggest emotional depth and maturity, signaling her readiness to listen and perhaps forgive.</p> | <p>Wife fully in focus, husband out of frame left</p> | <p>Subtle head tilt, relaxed shoulders, steady eye contact communicate receptivity and the possibility of reconciliation.</p> | | <p>Quiet room ambience, hushed dialogue.</p> |
|  | <p>Wide two-shot, bench foreground, emphasizes her emotional withdrawal and his active pursuit.</p> | <p>Overhead station fluorescents & distant city glow highlighting the tension between</p> | <p>His light, pristine attire marks authority and determination; her darker, layered shawl</p> | <p>He towers over the bench while she remains physically and emotionally behind it,</p> | <p>His decisive forward motion contrasts her static posture, signifying his agency versus her</p> | <p>Empty bench & stationary train carriage, emphasizing her impulse to flee and</p> | <p>Ambient station echo & muted dialogue heighten the intimacy of his plea making the visual pursuit the</p> |

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| | | public spectacle and private crisis. | denotes vulnerability and retreat. | stressing the divide he must close. | emotional stalemate. | his mission to retrieve her. | scene's driving force. |
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6. Findings and Conclusions

6.1. Similarities and differences in production elements used in dramas broadcasted on both OTT platforms and mainstream television.

A thorough analysis of the seven production variables in the coding scheme highlights both similarities and striking differences between *Mrs & Mr Shameem* (OTT) and *Kuch Ankahi* (mainstream TV). Both platforms address female oriented issues, express female empowerment and supporting male characters but both in their own expressive style. However, OTT platforms not just discussed female oriented themes but also address male emotions that has not been addressed on mainstream platform as reviewed by Reddit viewers on the authentic portrayal of effeminate men (PakCelebGossipFan., 2024). Considering camera framing the OTT series incorporates layered, subjective compositions, rack-focus pulls, OTS shots and split-diopter frames, focusing more on highlighting character's emotions. The TV drama, on the other hand, mostly uses static, symmetrical two-shots or medium-wide setups observing the character interactions from a comfortable distance, but in a few scenes females while taking stand for themselves are framed centrally. In short on OTT platforms directors uses the camera more subjectively, connecting the viewer with the character more deeply. Secondly, *Mrs & Mr Shamim* is well sculpted with a mix of lighting techniques, from low-key, cooler fill light to natural light and often *bokeh* effect highlighting character's isolation, whereas *Kuch Ankahi* is uniformly lit with high-key and warm light reassuring the family-drama palette. Thirdly, on OTT, both domestic and public spaces are used to frame both male and female characters. Female leads occupy central zones with men pushed to margins. While on TV, patriarchs hold architectural high ground like armchairs, desks while women sit or stand at lower eyelines or mostly framed in domestic settings. Fourthly, OTT show besides using the background score mostly incorporates diegetic soundscapes as Qawwali at a shrine, ambient footsteps and near-silence to let

imagery and dialogue carry emotional weight, with musical underscore used carefully. The TV series mostly incorporates non-diegetic score to prompt audience attention and sustain a melodramatic tone. In addition to technical choices, OTT wardrobe choices lean towards soft, character-specific palettes having both eastern and western attires with occasional symbolic intonations (e.g. a bold dupatta during ethical confrontations). On the contrary in mainstream TV, women mostly wear bright, printed patterns and fitted silhouettes that strengthen traditional femininity and domestic roles, however while showing empowerment the females are shown in western dresses. The OTT series provides more expressive participation and a broad range of emotions for both genders using bold gestures like lean-ins, raised arms and even physical encounters. On the contrary mainstream dramas specifically showcased a narrow window of emotions for men with emphasis on using controlled postures like folded arms, bowed heads and normalizing self-punishment for women, promoting modesty and emotional limitations. Finally, Mrs. and Mr Shamim continuously used mirrors, doorways and religious icons to represent spiritual and social depths while *Kuch Ankahi* mostly relies on domestic props like kitchen accessories and house hold settings reinforcing familiar settings rather than exploring new ways of representation aligning the role of *mise-en-scène* in representing women Radinger Field, L. (2024).

6.2. Representation of Gender-Roles through production techniques

While discussing the variables of stylistic analysis, unique representational themes appear. The OTT sample (*Mrs. & Mr. Shamim*) used dynamic framing techniques and low-key lighting centering women, which enhances female subjectivity and emotional turmoil. Variations in costume choices according to the development of the characters and asymmetrical blocking not just position women as active participants making moral decisions and claiming their

own space but also disrupt the concept of masculinity, where male characters often weep or crawl. The use of diegetic soundscapes more frequently, intensifies the presence of both male and female characters equally in frame.

While mainstream sample “Kuch Ankahi” mostly used traditional production strategies like high-key lighting, symmetrical setups and bright prints keeping women in domestic, supportive and decorative roles. 6.4. When female characters take a stand and speak up, confined framings and melodramatic musical cues raise viewers sympathies. Females are mostly framed within domestic settings, giving gestures of obedience rather than expressive movements or emotional expressions. While males are mostly framed in center either sitting on prominent places or with a slight low angle shot keeping the higher status of patriarchy.

6.3. Conclusion

The comparison of samples from mainstream dramas and OTT platforms demonstrates that although both platforms narrate social issues in Pakistan, OTT series not just discuss females as emotional figures but also represent males as humans with a soft heart. The analysis suggest that OTT web series are developing more cinematic, emotionally sensitive production language, that not just empowers female protagonists through framing, lighting techniques,

costume and audio choices but also considers men equally emotional as women. On the contrary, mainstream television dramas depicts melodramatic conventions reinforce patriarchal gender hierarchies, representing women as caretakers while men at heroic centers. These portrayals somehow explain the massive shift of Pakistani audiences towards streaming platforms.

Study Contributions

The study makes a few significant contributions to media and communication researches, specifically in context of Pakistan. Firstly it implements stylistic analysis, which is traditionally applied to cinema, to a comparative examination of Pakistani mainstream television dramas and the OTT web-series, an area that is under explored in Pakistani academic literature. The study offers a framework for visual stylistic analysis to understand the construction of narrative meanings through production techniques.

Secondly, the study implements a dual theoretical lens to demonstrate how visual techniques construct meaning in representation of gender rather than just creating a visual aesthetic.

Finally, it provides guidance to story-tellers, directors, producers and cinematographers in Pakistan by identifying evolving stylistic trends in story telling procedures that can be useful in upgrading the traditional dramatic strategies in mainstream television.

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