

PHARMACEUTICAL INTOXICATION IN PASHTO POPULAR MUSIC: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF “GABICA KHORE” AND ITS SOCIOCULTURAL RECEPTION IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

Dr. Zeeshan Qasim^{*1}, Dr. Inam Ullah Khan²

^{*1,2}Department of Communication and Media Studies, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan

^{*1}sovereign26@hotmail.co.uk

^{*1}ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1092-5042>

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Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Zeeshan Qasim

Abstract

The growing misuse of pharmaceutical substances among youth in Pakistan has emerged as a significant yet underexplored cultural and media phenomenon. This research paper investigates the representation and normalization of pharmaceutical intoxication in Pashto popular music through a critical discourse analysis of the song “Gabica Khore.” Drawing on Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis framework and informed by cultural studies perspectives, the paper examines how linguistic choices, imperative □□□□ (address), and affective musical structures construct meanings around pregabalin consumption within a localized youth context in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The analysis focuses on four key dimensions such as lexical representation of the drug, tonal framing, □□□□ structures, and cultural embedding within Pashto youth culture. Findings indicate that the song does not explicitly advocate drug use in a conventional sense rather it contributes to a process of discursive normalization, where pharmaceutical consumption is embedded within everyday language, humor, and performative expression. The repeated imperative framing (“khore”) and absence of cautionary cues create a permissive symbolic environment that may influence perception, particularly among digitally connected youth audiences. The study further puts the song within its sociocultural reception, including narratives of moral backlash and contested legitimacy of musical expression in KP. It argues that such cultural texts operate within a broader field of tension between informal media production and regulatory or moral authority. By foregrounding the role of informal digital circulation and localized cultural codes, this research contributes to emerging researches on media, youth culture, and substance use in peripheral contexts. It calls for a shift from causal models of media effects to nuanced understandings of symbolic framing and normalization.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The relationship between media representation and substance use has long occupied a central position in communication and cultural studies.

Early research focused primarily on alcohol and illicit drugs, yet recent developments suggest a shift towards the cultural visibility of pharmaceutical substances, particularly in non-Western contexts.

In Pakistan, and especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the misuse of prescription medication such as pregabalin has begun to surface not only in clinical observations but also within everyday discourse and popular culture. This convergence of medical and cultural domains raises important questions about how meanings around drug use are constructed, circulated, and normalized.

Media researchers have argued that media does not simply reflect social reality; it actively participates in shaping it through processes of framing and representation (Fairclough, 1995; Hall, 1997). Within this framework, popular music occupies a distinctive position. It operates simultaneously as entertainment, cultural expression, and a site of ideological production. Songs, particularly those circulating through informal digital platforms, can embed meanings in subtle yet powerful ways. Repetition, rhythm, and linguistic simplicity allow certain ideas to become familiar, even mundane. Over time, this familiarity may contribute to what Parker et al. (1998) describe as the normalization of previously marginal or deviant behaviours.

The emergence of songs such as “Gabica Khore” must therefore be situated within a broader context of pharmaceuticalisation, a process through which social and personal conditions increasingly come to be understood and managed through pharmaceutical interventions (Williams, Martin, and Gabe, 2011). While this concept has largely been examined in relation to formal healthcare systems, its extension into informal cultural production remains insufficiently explored. In regions such as KP, where regulatory oversight of both pharmaceuticals and media content is uneven, the boundaries between medical use and recreational consumption can become blurred. This ambiguity creates space for new forms of cultural expression that draw upon, reinterpret, and sometimes trivialize pharmaceutical practices.

At the same time, KP presents a complex media environment shaped by historical, political, and ideological forces. The region has witnessed periods of strict control over cultural production, particularly music, which has been viewed by

certain conservative and militant actors as morally problematic (Yousaf, 2012). Despite such constraints, technological changes have enabled the proliferation of informal media ecosystems, where content is produced and disseminated outside traditional institutional frameworks. Mobile internet access, social media platforms, and video sharing sites have facilitated the rapid circulation of locally produced songs, often without editorial mediation or regulatory scrutiny. Within this environment, cultural texts can achieve widespread visibility while remaining largely absent from formal academic or policy discussions.

The song “Gabica Khore” provides a compelling entry point into these dynamics. By explicitly referencing a pharmaceutical product and embedding it within a musical narrative, the song brings together two domains that are rarely analysed in conjunction: drug discourse and popular music in a peripheral linguistic context. The use of the imperative form “khore” introduces a خطاب structure that is both direct and performative. It does not merely describe an action; it invokes it. This linguistic feature, combined with the song’s rhythmic and cultural framing, raises questions about how audiences interpret and internalize such messages.

However, it is important to approach this phenomenon with analytical caution. Media effects are rarely linear or deterministic. As Shildrick (2002) notes, the interpretation of cultural texts is mediated by a range of social factors, including peer networks, socioeconomic conditions, and existing knowledge of substances. To assume a direct causal relationship between a song and drug use would therefore oversimplify a complex social process. A more productive approach is to examine how such texts contribute to a discursive environment in which certain behaviours become thinkable, speak-able, and, in some cases, acceptable.

Adding further complexity to this case are reports of moral backlash against the song and its performer. Although such accounts often circulate through informal or unverified channels, they reflect a broader pattern of tension between cultural expression and regulatory or moral

authority in KP. This tension is not new. It echoes earlier struggles over the legitimacy of music and performance in the region, yet it now unfolds within a transformed media landscape where control is more diffuse and resistance more networked. The alleged reaction to “Gabica Khore” can thus be understood not simply as an isolated incident but as part of an ongoing negotiation over cultural boundary.

This inquiry seeks to explore these issues through a critical discourse analysis of “Gabica Khore.” It asks how the song constructs meanings around pharmaceutical consumption and how these meanings are situated within the sociocultural context of KP. In doing so, it contributes to three areas of research. First, it extends research on media and drug use by focusing on pharmaceutical substances within a non-Western musical context. Second, it brings attention to the role of informal digital media in shaping cultural discourse. Third, it engages with broader debates on normalization, representation, and the politics of cultural production.

The significance of this inquiry lies not in establishing causality but in illuminating the subtle ways in which language, culture, and media intersect. In a context where both drug misuse and media regulation are pressing concerns, understanding these intersections becomes essential. The analysis that follows therefore moves beyond simplistic assumptions and instead examines the layered, contested, and often ambiguous processes through which meaning is produced and negotiated.

2. Literature Review:

The investigation of drug use within media and cultural frameworks has undergone a marked transformation over the past three decades. Earlier researchers often approached substance use through the lens of deviance, pathology, or peer pressure. Contemporary research, however, situates drug use within broader cultural, symbolic, and communicative processes, recognizing that meanings are constructed through everyday media encounters rather than imposed through isolated influences. This shift is particularly evident in the development of the

normalization thesis, which continues to inform critical analyses of youth culture and substance use.

2.1. Normalization & Youth Culture:

The concept of normalization, first articulated by Parker, Aldridge, and Measham, reframed drug use as an increasingly ordinary feature of youth lifestyles rather than an exceptional or marginal activity. Subsequent research has expanded this framework by emphasizing the role of cultural diffusion and symbolic representation. Drug use, in this view, moves from hidden subcultural practice to a visible and often mundane element of everyday life (Duff, 2020).

This transition is not merely behavioral. It is discursive. As Manning’s work demonstrates, media representations play a central role in this shift by embedding drug use within narratives of identity, leisure, and consumption. Over time, such representations contribute to the movement of drugs from the margins to the mainstream, where they are no longer framed exclusively as deviant but as part of ordinary social experience.

Recent studies extend this argument by suggesting that youth engagement with drugs is better understood as part of consumer oriented cultural practices rather than as a simple response to peer influence. Drug use becomes one expression among many within a broader repertoire of lifestyle choices, shaped by media, markets, and symbolic capital (Shildrick, 2002; Duff, 2020).

Within this framework, music assumes a particularly influential role. It does not instruct behaviour in a direct sense. Instead, it contributes to a cultural environment in which certain practices appear familiar, accessible, and socially intelligible.

2.2. Media Representation & Drug Perception:

A growing body of research highlights the importance of mass culture in shaping attitudes towards drugs. Representations of substance use in music, film, and digital media do not merely reflect existing practices; they actively participate in the liberalization of public attitudes. Motyka and Al Imam argue that repeated exposure to drug

related imagery in cultural products can influence how audiences perceive risk, desirability, and social acceptability.

This influence is particularly pronounced among young audiences, for whom musicians and performers often function as symbolic authorities. When artists reference or depict drug use, they do so within a framework of credibility and cultural relevance. The message does not need to be explicit. Even neutral or ambiguous portrayals can contribute to a gradual shift in perception, especially when embedded within appealing aesthetic forms such as music.

More recent research has begun to explore how these dynamics operate within digital environments. A 2024 study on social media and youth cognition found a strong association between exposure to drug related content and the normalization of perception, even when such exposure is incidental rather than intentional.

This finding is significant for two reasons. First, it underscores the role of algorithmically mediated exposure, where users encounter content through recommendation systems rather than deliberate search. Second, it highlights the cumulative effect of repeated encounters with similar representations across platforms. In such contexts, meaning is not derived from a single text but from a network of reinforcing messages.

2.3. Popular Music & Discursive Production:

Popular music occupies a distinctive position within this landscape. Unlike news media, which often frames drug use within narratives of risk or policy, music tends to operate through affect, rhythm, and repetition. These features allow it to encode meanings in ways that are both subtle and enduring.

researches in cultural studies have long argued that music functions as a site of identity formation and ideological negotiation (Hall, 1997). In the context of drug representation, this means that songs can contribute to the construction of what might be termed “acceptable imaginaries” of substance use. These imaginaries are not fixed. They are shaped by genre, language, and cultural context.

Empirical studies further suggest that musical preferences are often associated with patterns of substance use, not necessarily through direct causation but through shared cultural orientations. Music can signal belonging, reinforce group identity, and provide symbolic resources through which behaviours are interpreted and justified (Motyka and Al Imam, 2021).

In recent years, attention has shifted towards the role of digital platforms in amplifying these processes. Social media has transformed music from a bounded cultural product into a circulating fragment, where short clips, repeated hooks, and viral trends extend the reach and impact of individual songs. This transformation intensifies the role of repetition, a key mechanism through which discursive normalization occurs.

2.4. Pharmaceuticalisation & Cultural Reframing:

While much of the literature has focused on illicit substances, there is increasing recognition of the cultural significance of pharmaceutical drugs. The concept of pharmaceuticalisation provides a useful framework for understanding this shift. It refers to the process by which human conditions and experiences are increasingly understood and managed through pharmaceutical interventions (Williams et al., 2011).

In cultural terms, pharmaceuticalisation extends beyond clinical settings. It enters everyday language, humor, and social practice. Drugs that were once confined to medical discourse become part of popular vocabulary, often detached from their original therapeutic context.

This transition raises important questions about semantic recontextualization. When a pharmaceutical term appears in a song, it undergoes a transformation. It is no longer simply a medical reference. It becomes a cultural signifier, capable of carrying meanings related to pleasure, escape, or social belonging.

Research on mass culture indicates that such transformations can contribute to the blurring of boundaries between legitimate and non-legitimate use. As representations multiply, the distinction between treatment and recreation becomes less clear, particularly for younger audiences who

encounter these references outside formal medical contexts (Motyka and Al Imam, 2021).

2.5. Digital Media Ecosystems & Informal Circulation:

The rise of digital media has fundamentally altered the conditions under which cultural texts are produced and consumed. In contrast to traditional broadcast systems, contemporary media environments are characterised by decentralization, speed, and user participation.

Studies of social media platforms such as TikTok demonstrate how content related to substance use can form interconnected communities, where meanings are shaped through interaction rather than top-down transmission. These environments often contain a mix of representations, including humor, satire, recovery narratives, and occasional depictions of use.

Importantly, these platforms enable the circulation of content that may not pass through formal editorial or regulatory processes. This is particularly relevant in peripheral contexts such as KP, where informal networks play a central role in media dissemination. Songs like “Gabica Khore” are not confined to a single platform or audience. They move across digital spaces, acquiring new meanings and interpretations in the process.

Recent research on music consumption further indicates that social media significantly influences music discovery and popularity, often elevating locally produced content to wider visibility.

2.6. Media, Morality & Contested Cultural Spaces:

The representation of drugs in media does not occur in a neutral environment. It is shaped by ongoing tensions between cultural expression and moral regulation. Studies have shown that media can both normalize and stigmatize drug use, depending on the framing and context (Habib et al., 2023).

In regions such as KP, these tensions are particularly pronounced. Cultural production, especially music, has historically been subject to scrutiny and restriction. This creates a paradoxical situation. On one hand, digital platforms enable unprecedented freedom of expression. On the

other, they expose creators to social and ideological contestation.

Contemporary research on media discourse highlights how representations of youth substance use are often shaped by broader societal concerns, including morality, governance, and public health. Media narratives can emphasize risk, responsibility, or deviance, each carrying distinct implications for how audiences interpret behaviour (Canadian study, 2024).

Within this context, reactions to songs that reference drugs cannot be understood solely in terms of content. They must be analysed as part of a discursive struggle over meaning, authority, and cultural legitimacy.

So far as the research gap is concerned the literature reviewed above converges on several key insights; (a) Drug use is increasingly understood as a culturally embedded practice rather than a purely deviant behaviour. (b) Media representations contribute to the normalization and liberalization of attitudes. (c) Popular music functions as a powerful site of symbolic production, particularly in youth contexts. (d) Pharmaceutical substances are undergoing cultural recontextualization beyond medical domains. (e) Digital platforms intensify the circulation and transformation of meaning.

Despite these advances, a significant gap remains. Existing research has largely focused on Western contexts and on illicit drugs. There is limited researches on; (a) pharmaceutical drug references in non-Western music. (b) Pashto popular culture and its digital circulation. (c) the intersection of media discourse, youth culture, and pharmaceutical misuse in KP.

This critical qualitative research paper addresses this gap by examining “Gabica Khore” as a culturally specific yet theoretically relevant case. It brings together insights from CDA, cultural studies, and drug normalization theory to explore how meanings are constructed and contested within a peripheral media environment.

3. Theoretical/Conceptual framework:

The current exploration requires a clearly articulated theoretical grounding to connect textual analysis with broader sociocultural

implications. Given the nature of the research problem, a multi layered theoretical model is most appropriate. This model integrates critical discourse analysis, cultural studies, and media effects researches in order to explain how a musical text can shape meaning without functioning as direct behavioral instruction. The analytical framework for this study rests on the intersection of three complementary theoretical strands, which are;

1) Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis:

At the core of this examination lies Fairclough's (1995) model, which conceptualizes discourse across three interrelated levels; (a) Text (*micro-level*) that focuses on linguistic features such as lexical choice, **خطاب**, tone, and structure. In this investigation, it explains how "Gabica" is named and framed. (b) Discursive Practice (*meso-level*), which examines production, circulation, and consumption. This is particularly relevant in understanding digital dissemination and audience engagement in KP. (c) Sociocultural Practice (*macro-level*) that Places discourse within broader power structures, cultural norms, and social realities. Here, it connects the song to pharmaceutical misuse and youth culture in the region. This model enables a structured movement from language to society, ensuring analytical coherence.

2) Representation & Encoding Decoding:

To complement CDA, the paper draws on Hall's (1997) theory of representation and encoding decoding. This is essential because the song does

not convey a fixed meaning as the producer encodes meanings through language, tone, and cultural symbols and Audiences decode these meanings differently depending on context. This framework therefore explains why (a) some listeners interpret the song as humor (b) others perceive it as problematic and (c) some may derive curiosity or awareness from it. It reinforces the argument that the song represents rather than promotes, while still allowing for varied social effects.

3) Normalization & Cognitive Availability:

The third pillar is the normalization thesis (Parker et al., 1998), extended through contemporary work on cultural exposure and substance use (Duff, 2020). Its Key concepts include; (a) Discursive normalization. (b) Behaviour becomes culturally acceptable through repeated representation. (c) Cognitive availability as the increased familiarity makes a behaviour more imaginable and discussable. In this study, the framework explains how (a) the song does not instruct drug use (b) yet contributes to symbolic visibility and reduced stigma. This is further supported by the concept of pharmaceuticalisation (Williams et al., 2011), where medical substances enter everyday cultural discourse.

When integrated, these above theories form a coherent model in which; (a) CDA explains how meaning is constructed. (b) Representation theory explains how meaning is interpreted and (c) Normalization theory explains how repeated meaning shapes perception. Together, they support a non-deterministic media effects approach, which is central to this research paper.

3.1. Conceptual Model:

The research paper proposes the following conceptual relationship:

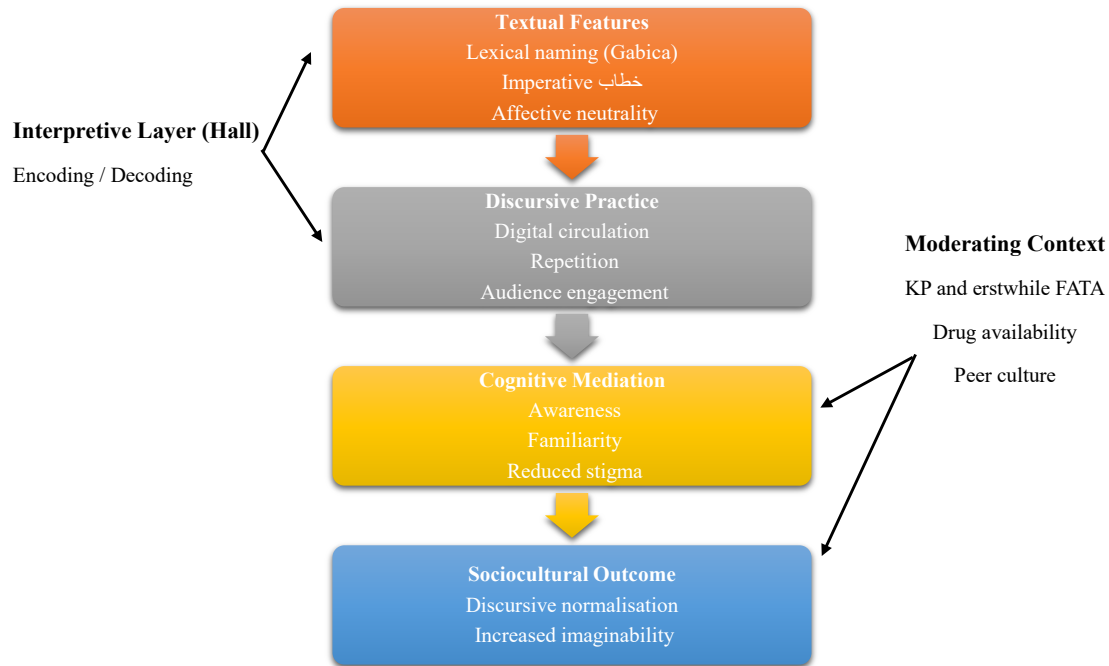


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Illustrating Discursive Pathways of Pharmaceutical Representation and Cognitive Normalization in Pashto Popular Music.

It is pertinent to mention that there is no direct causal pathway assumed, the model operates through mediation and context and Structural factors such as availability of the drug remain external but influential.

3.2. Research Objectives:

RO1: The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the representation of pharmaceutical substances in Pashto popular music through a discourse analytical lens. Focusing on the song “Gabica Khore,” the investigation seeks to explore how linguistic choices, tonal features, and patterns of repetition construct meaning around the named substance without explicitly promoting its consumption.

RO2: A further objective is to analyse the discursive practices through which the song circulates within digital media environments, including patterns of repetition, audience

engagement, and performative reproduction. This enables an understanding of how meaning is extended beyond the original text through participatory media cultures.

RO3: The research also aims to investigate the processes of cognitive mediation, particularly how repeated exposure to neutral or humorous representations may contribute to increased familiarity and reduced stigma associated with pharmaceutical substances among youth audiences.

RO4: In addition, the research seeks to situate these discursive processes within the sociocultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and erstwhile FATA, with attention to local cultural norms, peer dynamics, and the accessibility of such substances.

RO5: Finally, the paper aims to contribute to the broader field of media and communication studies by demonstrating how popular cultural texts may

shape perceptual frameworks and discursive normalization without direct behavioral advocacy, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of media influence in sensitive sociocultural contexts.

3.3. Research Questions:

In light of the theoretical model and Research objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions;

RQ1: How does “Gabica Khore” linguistically and discursively construct pharmaceutical intoxication within its lyrics, tone, and performative style?

RQ2: To what extent do the lyrics represent behavioral signs and experiential states rather than explicitly promoting or encouraging drug consumption among youth?

RQ3: How is the song produced, circulated, and consumed within digital media environments in KP, and what patterns of audience engagement emerge?

RQ4: How does repeated exposure to the song contribute to cognitive availability and discursive normalization of the referenced pharmaceutical substance among youth in KP and erstwhile FATA?

RQ5: How do different social actors interpret the song, particularly in relation to morality, cultural norms, and youth behaviour?

RQ6: How can the influence of such musical texts be understood beyond direct causation, in terms of symbolic environment and conditions of possibility?

4. Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how meanings around pharmaceutical consumption are constructed and circulated in Pashto popular music. The focus on “Gabica Khore” as a single case is deliberate. It allows for a contextually embedded, in-depth analysis of language, symbolism, and reception within a specific cultural and media environment. The methodology is informed by Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of discourse, which integrates textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural context (Fairclough, 1995).

4.1. Research Design.

The current exploration employs Fairclough’s three level CDA framework, which enables a layered understanding of discourse; (a) Textual Analysis i.e. the examination of linguistic features such as vocabulary, **خطاب** structures, repetition, and tone. (b) Discursive Practice i.e. Analysis of production, distribution, and consumption patterns, particularly through digital platforms. (c) Sociocultural Practice i.e. Interpretation of the broader social and cultural conditions in KP, including youth culture, drug use patterns, and moral regulation.

These above multi-level approach ensures that the song is not analysed in isolation. It is situated within a dynamic network of meanings and practices.

4.2. Data Collection:

The presents research investigation draws on three primary data sources;

1. **Primary Text:** which is the song data and consists of these three subsets (a) Audio and video versions of “Gabica Khore” obtained from YouTube (b) Transcription of key lyrics in Pashto (c) Translation into English for analytical clarity.

2. **Digital Reception Data:** which contains (a) User comments from YouTube and short video platforms. (b) Social media posts referencing the song, including narratives of alleged backlash. (c) Engagement indicators such as shares, repetitions, and adaptations.

3. **Contextual Data:** (a) Secondary literature on pregabalin misuse in South Asia. (b) Reports on media culture and music regulation in KP. (c) Observational insights from digital circulation patterns.

This combination allows for triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

4.3. Data Analysis:

The analysis was conducted in three iterative stages, broadly aligned with Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

i. Stage-1 (*Transcription & Familiarization*): The song was transcribed verbatim in Pashto. Particular attention was paid to; (a) repetition patterns (b)

خطاب structures (c) culturally specific expressions. The transcript was then translated into English while retaining semantic nuances.

ii. Stage-2 (*Coding & Thematic Development*): A thematic coding framework was developed, combining theory driven and data driven categories. The initial coding scheme included; (a) Drug Representation. (b) Explicit naming, implicit references, semantic framing. (c) Tone and Affect e.g. Neutral, celebratory, humorous, or cautionary.

(d) خطاب (Mode of Address) e.g. Imperative, descriptive, narrative. (e) Cultural Embedding e.g. Use of slang, humor, performative cues. (f) Normalization Indicators e.g. Repetition, trivialization, absence of risk framing. Coding was conducted systematically to identify patterns and recurrences within the data, while interpretive inferences regarding discursive strategies and their implications were reserved for the subsequent analytical stage.

Table 1. Thematic Coding Framework for CDA of ‘Gabica Khore’

Category	Sub-Codes	Operational Definition	Analytical Purpose
Drug Representation	Explicit naming; Implicit references	Direct or indirect mention of pharmaceutical substances (e.g., Gabica)	To identify presence and visibility of drug-related discourse
Semantic Framing	Neutral; Humorous; Celebratory; Cautionary	Tone used in describing the substance or its effects	To examine whether discourse normalizes or problematizes usage
Mode of Address (خطاب)	Imperative; Narrative; Descriptive	Linguistic form through which the message is conveyed	To analyse how the listener is positioned within the discourse
Repetition Patterns	Lexical repetition; Phrase recurrence	Frequency and recurrence of key terms or phrases	To assess reinforcement and memorability of discourse
Cultural Embedding	Slang; Local idioms; Performative cues	Use of culturally specific expressions and stylistic features	To locate the discourse within local sociocultural context
Normalization Indicators	Trivialization; Absence of risk framing; Familiar tone	Indicators that reduce perceived seriousness of the substance	To evaluate discursive shifts towards cognitive normalization

i. Stage-3 (*Sociocultural Interpretation*): Building on the coded patterns, this stage moves from description to interpretation, examining how the identified discursive features operate within broader communicative and sociocultural contexts. The findings were interpreted within the broader sociocultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and erstwhile FATA. This stage examined how the discursive patterns identified in the text and its circulation relate to youth culture, informal knowledge networks, and the accessibility of pharmaceutical substances. Particular attention was paid to processes of cognitive normalization, whereby repeated exposure to lexical naming and neutral or humorous framing contributes to increased

familiarity without explicitly promoting consumption. The analysis also considered how audiences may differentially interpret the song within their lived realities, drawing on Hall’s encoding and decoding framework to account for negotiated and oppositional readings.

4.4. Use of Analytical Software:

To enhance rigour and transparency, the study utilized NVivo for qualitative data analysis. The software supported; (a) Systematic coding of textual and visual data. (b) Organization of nodes corresponding to thematic categories. (c) Retrieval of coded segments for cross comparison. (d) Development of hierarchical relationships between themes. An audit trail was maintained

within NVivo, documenting the following; (a) coding decisions. (b) node refinements. (c) analytical memos.

This process strengthens credibility and dependability, aligning with qualitative research standards (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The analysis followed a recursive logic, moving between text and context. Rather than treating codes as fixed, themes were refined through continuous engagement with the data. This allowed for the identification of; (a) discursive patterns. (b) contradictions and ambiguities. (c) implicit meanings beyond surface text.

Particular emphasis was placed on how language performs action, especially in the use of imperative **خطاب**, which transforms description into suggestion.

4.5. Validity & Qualitative Trustworthiness:

To ensure methodological rigour, the study applied the criteria of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985);

- i. Credibility: Achieved through triangulation of multiple data sources and prolonged engagement with the text.
- ii. Dependability: Ensured through a transparent coding process and audit trail
- iii. Confirmability: Maintained by grounding interpretations in textual evidence rather than subjective inference.
- iv. Transferability: Supported through thick description of context, enabling comparison with similar settings.

4.6. Ethical Considerations:

This research paper relies on publicly available data, including songs and social media content. No private or identifiable personal data were used. However, ethical sensitivity was maintained in; (a) avoiding the amplification of unverified allegations. (b) interpreting user generated content with caution. (c) recognizing the potential social implications of the analysis.

4.7. Methodological Limitations:

While the study provides in depth insight, presence of certain limitations must be acknowledged; (a) The focus on a single song

limits generalizability. (b) Social media data may not fully represent audience diversity. (c) The absence of direct field interviews restricts behavioral validation.

These limitations are addressed by positioning this research paper as an exploratory, discourse-oriented inquiry rather than a causal analysis.

5. Results:

5.1. Textual Analysis:

The textual analysis of this examination reveals a consistent pattern of explicit lexical naming, particularly through the repeated use of the term “Gabica,” which functions as a central signifier within the song. The repetition enhances salience and recall, embedding the term within the listener’s cognitive frame. Linguistically, the song employs a mixture of imperative and descriptive **خطاب** structures, positioning the subject in a stylized and performative manner. Importantly, the tone remains largely affectively neutral, with occasional humorous undertones, rather than overtly celebratory or cautionary. The absence of explicit moral or risk-oriented language suggests that the text does not directly advocate consumption but instead constructs a descriptive and aestheticized representation.

5.2. Discursive Practice:

At the level of discursive practice in this paper, the song demonstrates significant digital circulation across social media platforms, where repetition through sharing, short video formats, and user engagement amplifies its reach. The recurring lyrical elements, combined with performative enactments in user-generated content, contribute to the reinforcement of key lexical items. This circulation transforms the song from a static text into a dynamic communicative event. Beyond the circulation of the song itself, secondary discursive formations on social media further shape its meaning. Circulating narratives on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) have linked the song to alleged behavioral practices among youth, framing the referenced pharmaceutical substance within a broader discourse of concern and moral scrutiny. Such representations do not merely report events but actively participate in the construction of

meaning around the song, amplifying its visibility and associating it with emerging cultural anxieties. In this sense, social media discourse extends the communicative life of the text, contributing to its reinterpretation within public consciousness (KP Frontline, 2025). While the original lyrics do not promote drug use, their repeated exposure within participatory digital environments increases familiarity and reduces symbolic distance from the referenced substance. Audience engagement thus plays a crucial role in extending the discursive life of the text beyond its original production context.

5.3. Sociocultural Practice:

Situated within the sociocultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and erstwhile FATA, the discourse reflects emerging intersections between youth culture, digital media consumption, and informal knowledge networks. The findings indicate a process of cognitive normalization, wherein repeated exposure to neutral or humorous representations fosters familiarity without explicit endorsement. Importantly, the song does not instruct or encourage consumption; rather, it reflects and reproduces an existing discursive environment in which pharmaceutical substances are increasingly recognizable. Drawing on Hall's encoding and decoding framework, it is evident that audience interpretations are not uniform. While some may engage with the song as entertainment, others may derive curiosity or awareness, particularly in contexts where such substances are already accessible. This layered interpretation underscores the indirect yet meaningful role of media discourse in shaping perceptual landscapes.

6. Discussion:

The analysis of "Gabica Khore" reveals a set of discursive dynamics that require careful interpretation. It would be analytically misleading to characterise the song as a straightforward endorsement of pharmaceutical drug use. The lyrics do not function as a direct promotional message. They do not instruct, persuade, or explicitly encourage young people to consume pregabalin. Instead, the song constructs a descriptive and stylized narrative in which

references to the substance appear as part of a broader depiction of behaviour, mood, and youthful expression. This distinction is central to the argument developed in this research paper.

A close reading of the lyrics suggests that the song operates through representation rather than prescription. The repeated phrase often interpreted as an imperative can also be understood within a performative and expressive register common in Pashto musical traditions. In this register, exaggeration, **خطاب**, and rhythmic repetition are used to depict states of being rather than to advocate action. The references to "Gabica" appear embedded in a narrative that evokes; (a) altered states of mood. (b) behavioral signs associated with intoxication. (c) performative expressions of youthful leisure.

Within this framework, the song can be interpreted as painting a picture of symptoms or experiential markers, rather than issuing a literal call to consume. The figure of the "young lad" in the song is stylized. His actions are framed within a cultural idiom that blends humor, exaggeration, and social commentary. Such representation aligns with broader traditions in popular music, where references to intoxication often function as symbolic devices rather than behavioral instructions.

This interpretation complicates simplistic readings that equate mention with endorsement. As Hall (1997) argues, representation is always mediated. It constructs meaning through selection and framing, not through direct transmission of intent.

While the song may not promote drug use explicitly, it nevertheless contributes to what can be described as cognitive availability. By repeatedly naming a specific pharmaceutical substance within an engaging musical format, the song increases the likelihood that the term enters youth vocabulary and awareness.

This process aligns with the concept of discursive normalization (Parker et al., 1998; Duff, 2020). Normalization does not require explicit advocacy. It emerges through; (a) familiarity (b) repetition (c) absence of stigma.

The results suggest that "Gabica Khore" operates within this domain. It does not instruct listeners

to consume the drug, yet it makes the substance; (a) recognizable (b) discussable (c) culturally visible.

In regions such as erstwhile FATA and KP, where access to formal health education may be uneven, such visibility can have unintended consequences. Youth audiences encountering the term in a musical context may develop curiosity or reduced perceived risk, particularly if the representation is not accompanied by negative consequences.

It is within this indirect pathway that concerns about influence arise. The song does not cause behaviour in a deterministic sense. However, it may contribute to a discursive environment in which experimentation becomes more conceivable.

The transition from awareness to actual consumption cannot be explained by media exposure alone. It requires attention to structural and contextual factors, including; (a) availability of the drug (b) peer networks (c) socioeconomic conditions (d) existing patterns of substance use.

In KP, reports of pregabalin misuse indicate that the substance is already present within certain social circuits. The song, therefore, does not introduce a new practice. It interacts with an existing behavioral landscape.

This interaction is best understood through the lens of articulation, where cultural texts connect with preexisting meanings and practices (Hall, 1997). The song articulates the drug within a familiar cultural form, thereby reinforcing its presence within the symbolic economy of youth culture.

Consequently, any observed increase in youth consumption cannot be attributed solely to the song. It must be situated within a convergence of media representation and material conditions.

A notable feature of “Gabica Khore” is its ambiguity. The lyrics allow for multiple readings. They can be interpreted as; (a) humorous exaggeration (b) social commentary (c) depiction of altered behaviour.

This ambiguity is not accidental. It is a common feature of popular music, enabling texts to circulate across different audiences without being fixed to a single meaning. From a discourse analytical perspective, ambiguity enhances

discursive flexibility, allowing the song to function simultaneously as entertainment and as a carrier of socially relevant themes.

However, ambiguity also complicates regulation and interpretation. Without explicit endorsement or condemnation, the song occupies a grey zone where its effects are difficult to categorize. This grey zone is precisely where processes of normalization often occur, as behaviours are neither fully accepted nor clearly rejected.

The reported backlash against the song, including narratives of violence against the singer, reflects the politics of interpretation in KP. For certain actors, the mere mention of a drug within a musical context may be perceived as morally problematic, regardless of intent or nuance.

This reaction can be understood as part of a broader pattern of moral regulation, where cultural texts are evaluated not only for what they say but for what they are perceived to imply. In such contexts, ambiguity may be interpreted as endorsement, and representation as promotion.

The tension between these interpretations highlights a key insight. Media texts do not carry fixed meanings. They are subject to contestation, shaped by the values and assumptions of different social groups. The controversy surrounding “Gabica Khore” thus reveals as much about the sociocultural environment as it does about the text itself.

The findings of this inquiry also contribute to several theoretical debates. Firstly, they reinforce the relevance of the normalization thesis while extending it to the domain of pharmaceutical substances. The case demonstrates that normalization can occur not only through behavioral prevalence but through discursive visibility. Secondly, the study supports arguments from cultural studies that emphasize the role of media in constructing rather than transmitting meaning. The song does not impose a message. It offers a set of signifiers that audiences interpret within their own contexts. Thirdly, the analysis highlights the importance of pharmaceuticalisation as a cultural process. The movement of a drug name from clinical discourse into popular music signifies a broader

transformation in how substances are understood and represented.

Finally, the paper contributes to emerging research on digital media ecosystems, where informal circulation amplifies the reach and impact of cultural texts. In such environments, even ambiguous or indirect references can achieve wide visibility and influence.

A key contribution of this academic research lies in its reframing of media effects. Rather than asking whether the song causes drug use, the analysis shifts attention to how it shapes conditions of possibility. This approach avoids the limitations of deterministic models and instead focuses on; (a) symbolic framing (b) cognitive availability (c) cultural resonance.

Within this framework, “Gabica Khore” is understood as one element within a broader network of influences. Its significance lies not in direct causation but in its participation in a discursive field where meanings around drug use are negotiated and normalized.

The central argument that emerges from this discussion is nuanced but clear. The song does not promote or encourage young people to consume pregabalin in any explicit or instructional manner. It does, however, contribute to a cultural vocabulary in which the substance becomes visible, familiar, and symbolically integrated into youth discourse.

In contexts such as KP and erstwhile FATA, where structural vulnerabilities intersect with evolving media environments, such symbolic integration may carry unintended consequences. It may not compel behaviour, but it can lower the threshold of imagination, making certain practices easier to conceive and, under specific conditions, to enact.

7. Conclusion & Implications:

7.1. Conclusion:

This academic study set out to examine the discursive construction and sociocultural implications of pharmaceutical intoxication in Pashto popular music, with specific reference to “Gabica Khore.” Through a critical discourse analytical framework, the research has demonstrated that the song cannot be reduced to a simplistic narrative of media-induced deviance.

Its significance lies in a more complex interplay between language, culture, and context.

At the textual level, the song employs direct lexical reference, performative *خطاب*, and affective neutrality to construct a narrative that depicts altered states and behavioral signs associated with intoxication. Crucially, the analysis confirms that the lyrics do not explicitly promote or encourage drug consumption. They do not provide instruction, persuasion, or endorsement. Instead, they represent a stylized portrayal of experience, embedded within a culturally familiar musical idiom.

However, the absence of explicit promotion does not render the text socially inert. At the level of discursive practice, the song’s circulation through digital platforms enables repetition, fragmentation, and wide accessibility. These processes transform the song into a distributed cultural artefact, where its central signifier, “Gabica,” gains visibility beyond its original context.

Within the broader sociocultural environment of KP and erstwhile FATA, this visibility assumes particular significance. The findings suggest that the song contributes to discursive normalization and cognitive availability. It introduces and stabilizes a vocabulary through which pharmaceutical substances become recognizable and discussable among youth audiences. This does not imply causation. Rather, it indicates the formation of a symbolic environment in which certain behaviours may become more conceivable. The research study therefore advances a nuanced conclusion. “Gabica Khore” does not function as a vehicle of direct encouragement. Yet it participates in a cultural process that may indirectly shape perceptions by lowering the threshold of imagination and reducing discursive distance from the act. Its influence is contingent, mediated, and context dependent.

This research contributes to ongoing debates in media and cultural studies in several ways, such as; 1) It extends the normalization thesis beyond illicit drugs to include pharmaceutical substances, demonstrating how everyday language and popular culture facilitate their integration into youth discourse.

2) It reinforces the relevance of critical discourse analysis in unpacking media texts that operate through ambiguity and cultural coding. The study shows that meaning is produced not only through explicit statements but through absence, tone, and repetition.

3) It situates pharmaceuticalisation within a cultural and communicative framework, highlighting the role of popular media in transforming clinical terminology into socially meaningful symbols.

Finally speaking, the exploration contributes to research data on digital media ecosystems, where informal production and algorithmic circulation amplify the reach of culturally embedded texts, often beyond the control of traditional regulatory structures.

7.2. Policy Implications:

The findings carry important implications for media policy, public health, and youth engagement in KP and similar contexts.

7.2.1. Moving Beyond Censorship Driven Approaches:

The reaction to the song, including attempts at suppression and reported punitive actions against the artist, reflects a censorship-oriented response. While such measures may be intended to protect moral order, the analysis suggests that they are unlikely to address the underlying issue.

Discursive normalization operates through circulation and familiarity, not solely through explicit messaging. Suppressing a single text does not eliminate the broader conditions that allow such discourse to emerge. Moreover, censorship may inadvertently increase the song's visibility by framing it as controversial or forbidden.

A more effective approach would involve engagement rather than prohibition, recognizing the complexity of media influence.

7.2.2. Integrating Media Literacy into Youth Policy:

The study highlights the importance of interpretive capacity among audiences. Youth engagement with the song varies, indicating that meaning is negotiated rather than imposed.

Policy interventions should therefore prioritize media literacy, enabling young audiences to; (a) critically interpret cultural texts (b) distinguish representation from endorsement (c) understand the broader implications of symbolic content.

Such initiatives can reduce the risk of uncritical appropriation while preserving space for cultural expression.

7.3. Public Health Communication & Pharmaceutical Awareness:

Given the role of cognitive availability, there is a need for targeted public health communication that addresses pharmaceutical misuse in accessible and culturally relevant ways. Rather than relying solely on formal messaging, health authorities could; (a) engage with local cultural forms, including music and digital media. (b) collaborate with artists to produce counter narratives. (c) contextualize the risks associated with substances like pregabalin.

This approach acknowledges that cultural discourse and health behaviour are interconnected, and that effective communication must operate within the same symbolic space as the content it seeks to address.

7.4. Regulation of Pharmaceutical Access:

The issue cannot be addressed at the level of discourse alone. The availability of the substance remains a critical factor. Strengthening regulatory oversight of pharmaceutical distribution is essential to prevent misuse. This includes; (a) stricter enforcement of prescription requirements. (b) monitoring of informal supply chains. (c) coordination between health authorities and local administrations. Without addressing access, discursive interventions alone will have limited impact.

7.5. Engaging Cultural Producers:

Artists and content creators occupy a significant position within the communicative ecosystem. Rather than treating them solely as subjects of regulation, policy frameworks should consider them as potential partners. Engagement strategies may include; (a) dialogue with musicians regarding social impact. (b) incentives for socially

responsible content. (c) inclusion of artists in awareness campaigns. Such collaboration can help align cultural production with broader social objectives without undermining creative autonomy.

7.6. Limitations & Future Research:

This critical analysis is based on a single case, which limits the generalizability of its findings. While “Gabica Khore” provides a valuable entry point, further research is needed to examine; (a) a broader corpus of Pashto and regional music. (b) audience reception through interviews and focus groups. (c) longitudinal patterns of discourse and behaviour.

Future studies may also employ mixed methods approaches, combining discourse analysis with quantitative data to explore correlations between media exposure and behavioral trends.

To be conclusive, it can be said that the case of “Gabica Khore” illustrates the evolving relationship between media, culture, and social behaviour in contemporary KP. It reveals how a seemingly simple musical text can become embedded in complex processes of meaning making, negotiation, and contestation.

The central insight of this research is that influence does not require intention. Cultural texts need not promote a behaviour to participate in its normalization. At the same time, representation should not be conflated with endorsement. Recognizing this distinction is essential for both academic learning analysis and policy formulation.

In navigating these dynamics, the challenge lies in developing responses that are analytically grounded, culturally informed, and socially effective.

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