



RESEARCH PAPER

**Introduction, Growth and Future of Web Series in Pakistan: An
Exploratory Study**

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Over the past two decades, there is a rise and change in a format of storytelling. People have switched themselves from conventional media to new media. Content for entertainment is now produced and distributes in new ways. Such as Web series which is also named as Webisode or TV bites. Initially, Web series launched on internet were based on the format of traditional television series but these Web series have changed the entertainment industry and enriched the people's lives with full of diversity in term of entertaining content This research paper attempts to look into the production techniques and reasons behind the production of Web Series. In depth interviews were conducted from total of eight Pakistani writers, producers and directors to find out the future of web series and why they are switching themselves from traditional media to digital media. Findings of the study revealed that traditional media is not offering freedom of expression. The channels dictate us what the moral compass of the country which is considered to be a very conservative view in the mainstream media.

Introduction

The development of interactive technologies and the creation of digital content, transformed the scenario of Television globally, entertainment content is now produced, distributed and consumed in different ways (Roscoe 2004). As (Wu & Chen, 2015) sated that now a days' not only methods and means of communication has changed due to the emergence of technologies but also the consumption patterns changed .Over the past two decades, television entertainment content has replaced by a new type of digital content which comprises representation of diversified topics, leads towards the selection of topics according to the choices of consumers and producers. Coinciding with this, "there is a rise and change in a format of storytelling, such as Web series which is also named as Webisode or Television bites" (Monaghan, 2017). At the start, Web series uploaded on internet were created on the same patterns of traditional television series but with the passage of time "Web series have changed

the entertainment industry and enriched the people's live with full of diversity in term of entertaining content" (Wu & Chen, 2015). The above facts prompts the researcher to work on this significant part of digital media that how the bit sized digital content take the revolution in entertainment industry. Keeping in view the current study has tried to dig out the introduction, growth and future of Web Series in Pakistan.

The content of Web series as compare the content of Television are considered less costly and easier to get off the ground (Keltie, 2017; Screen, 2016; Williams, 2012). Creator of Web series' most of the time invests their own money but sometimes companies also fund the production of web series. As there is no pressure from the boards and media channels so creator of web series have freedom to create content (Bizzaca, 2016; Keltie, 2017; Williams, 2012). As a result, web series considered as more flexible content of entertainment industry and content creator like producers directors and writes can highlight the issues of marginalized group of the society because there is no pressure on the producers from the stakeholders, policy makers and advertisers (Bizzaca, 2016; Keltie, 2017; Williams, 2012). Furthermore internationally Web series represent the issues of marginalized groups which are considered as taboos such as transgender, bisexual, intersex because these communities are underrepresented on Television screen. Webseries are produced by both professionals and amateur people and have serious and loyal viewers who not only watch every episode but also give reviews about every episode.

Literature review

New media technology has played a critical role in the process of production, distribution, and reception of the web series. (Yijun, 2016 & Roscoe, 2004) elaborated in their studies that people of both genders are digitalized now in the consumption of Web series and on one hand people who watch Web series are creating some types of needs which also influence their believes and attitudes and on the other hand these make profit too. Present study will try to gauge either both gender are consuming the Web series and how they are creating and gratifying their needs.

Zheng, X. (2015).stated in his research study that production techniques for web series are different as compared to the production of traditional Television dramas and movies moreover the content created for Web series have similarities with content of movies. In this age of digital media web series are considered as new field of entertainment industry as its not only have influenced the young generation but also instigated the digital content creators to create these type of content on their official channels . A research has been conducted by Chen, L. (2014) related to impacts of Web series on students of middle school revealed that Web series can be a good genera to engage and teach the young students .Studyalso suggested that Web series are easily available on internet either on paid platform or non-paid platform and of short duration as compared to movies and dramas so these can be helpful to engage the students for their guidance and knowledge. Present study has focused on introduction, growth and future of web series in Pakistan and how the digital content in a form of web series have replaced the traditional Television dramas and movies in Pakistan.

Digital content in the form of web series are becoming popular among Pakistani public and have impacts on different sections of society. A study on Pakistani youth revealed that the content of new media positively influenced the youth in terms of information and education but at the same time consumption of unethical content on digital media influenced them negatively too (Zaheer, 2018). Another research conducted by (Yin, 2016) suggested that prudently and intelligently created content of Web series can provide the guidance to the target audience in a positive manner.

Digital media not only facilitate the content creator to create content according to their ideology but also provide platforms to share their creation revealed by (Marathe & Shirsat, 2015). They also revealed that web series are available on different streaming sites which not only educating the different sections of society but also providing an open platform where the people can react and share their thoughts regarding different issues considered as taboos in different societies. As a result digital content creation is on a peak now; people are creating content without considering it either it is ethically right or wrong.

Yin, (2016) revealed that Chinese Web series producers of web series has played a vital role to influence the public in terms of the selection of the topics on which they have produced web series. Studies also revealed that Web series which are available on YouTube can be used as promotion of the products used in their different scenes as in movies and it also be used as a tool to disseminate any information regarding any social issues as multiple audience can access these Web series around the globe (Segarra-Saavedra, 2017 and Sinthamrong & Rompho, 2015 cited in zaheer 2017).

Many studies have been conducted on the effects of web series and results showed that violent content in Web series can lead the youth towards aggressive behavior. (Huang, Y., 2015 & Vinod, S., 2019). Present study has tried to find out the introduction, growth and future of web series in Pakistan and what techniques are being used by producers and directors to produce web series in Pakistan.

Material and Methods

Since this is a new genera of entertainment in Pakistan therefore this study demand in-depth interviews from the people who are more inclined towards the creation of web series and switched themselves from traditional Television dramas to web series.

In current study In-depth interviews were used to explore the introduction reason and techniques of production of web series from renowned screen writers, producers and directors Wajahatrouf, kashifnisar, sadijabbar, amin Iqbal, najaf Bilgrami. All these interviewees were previously directing producing and writing for Television Dramas and movies but now they are more inclined towards the creation of web series. Check list was prepared on the basis of the themes and interviews were

conducted from the experts. Every interview was about of ninety minutes to one hundred and twenty minutes conducted through zoom and Google meet etc.

The theme were developed for In-depth Interviews current status; motivation behind production, popularity, less expensive more profit, freedom of expression, bold topics, time flexibility, no censorship policy, diverse audience, interactive feedback; techniques of production i-e script writing, filming, editing ; future of web series in Pakistan.

The first theme was current status; motivation behind production, popularity, less expensive more profit, freedom of expression, bold topics, time flexibility, no censorship policy, diverse audience, interactive feedback.

Second theme was production techniques based on the phases of production

Pre-production (organizing and planning) this phase deal with script, plot, dialogue, story boarding, generate a shot list for filming the footage and screenplay which also contains a chronological order of camera angles and sequencing of shots according to the availability of equipment, location and cast.

Production (filming the content) this phase include the filming of the script, which include the designing and formation of set according to the demand of script along with the availability of equipment used in production that planned in pre-production phase. As further added in production phase capturing of shots, angles and movements according to the demand of scripts with appropriate lighting and makeup.

Post production (Editing the Content) phase deals with the editing of footage on editing software to import the footage and also check the, lighting, audio synchronization, adding audio and visual effects etc.

Results and Discussion

Web series is new genera of entertainment in Pakistan for both the people who are producing and consuming this creation. To find out the definition interviewer was probe to know about the definition of web series. Majority of the respondents defined web series as a blend of drama and film but Digital medium is a different genre. As Television and films are watched with family and friends together while digital medium or digital entertainment is for individual viewing. The person watches the content whatever he wishes for regardless of the place where he is sitting either its bathroom or drawing room or he's lying or sitting. It's more of an independent viewing. As (Zaheer 2018) stated in his research stated that now a days smartphones are used for the content consumption this leads the audience towards the new era of entertainment you can consume the content without any boundaries of time and space. In contrast to that, some respondents believed that the term web-series mean Original content made for the web that would neither come on television nor play in cinema and it would not be on any other medium except the web. As Williams (2012) described web series as a form of content that allows content creators to create original

content that are excluded from traditional media forms. Few respondents considered that it is too early to define web series as it has just recently started in Pakistan.

Introduction of Web Series in Pakistan

On investigating when web series started in Pakistan, majority of the respondents stated that they recently started producing web series and creating digital content. This phenomenon is yet new to people as Pakistani audiences are deeply rooted into Television, the acceptance and acknowledgment has not yet been developed. One of the respondents' Amin iqbal claimed that *audience are reluctant to watch new content so if they switch to any streaming service they prefer to watch already on aired programs on traditional media* but still we are working on the production of web series. Many web series producers and content creator started from Television dramas, advertisements and film and now they are going global with digitalization. In 2018 "middle se oper" web series was produced by Kenwood uploaded on YouTube and the story was about family. Another mini web series "chattkhara" by Hum network was on aired in 2018 which was based on light comedy. One of the respondent wajahtrouf mentioned "Ennaya" streamed in 2019 was first original Pakistani web series streamed on Eros. Story was about urbanized musical girl and about college life. This web series give boost to this field of web series. Another interviewee "sadiajabbar" mentioned about her original web series streamed on YouTube with the title of shameless proposal which has represented the toxic proposal culture in Pakistani Society. (Shafi. 2019) have mentioned that viewers are now switching themselves to You Tube and other videos on demand entertainment portals to watch Pakistani web series.

Reasons behind Producing Web Series

Exploring the reasons behind production of web series, many producers believe that since it's a new phenomenon for the both content creator and content consumer so only those people are creating web series that are passionate and are exploring new trends other than traditional media. Majority of the respondents believed that major reason behind the production of web series are those issues which considered are taboos and are not approved to be broadcasted on traditional media. In this scenario, web series are the platform to voice those issues. As walliam (2012) also underpinned that Web series are made on issues which are about marginalized groups in society and considered as taboos to present on Television screen. One of the respondents said that *"the reason we are doing it because we want to get away from the channels. The channels make the most of money and they act as pimps between us and the audience"*. Few respondents said that in Asia, our neighboring country India is taking a major chunk of commerce in terms of business through digital media so it's a need of time for Pakistani content creator to now turn to web series. *"The stakes of return on investment are not as high as cinema and dramas either so you are open to writing anything under the sun"* said by Wjahatrouf.

Majority of Respondents agreed that channels dictate us what the moral compass of the country which is very conservative in the mainstream way .Najaf Bilgarami, a renowned film maker and one of the respondents of the study mentioned that *“he is compelled that traditional media is not offering freedom of speech. Web series need not adhere to the rules of film and television, allowing creators to be as experimental as they like with what they create, without having to worry about strict television censorship and rules of production as suggested by (Garson 2017).*

Respondents also stated that the web series are popular within urban segments of the society those who have internet service and can afford it. Majority of respondents agreed on the fact that the biggest motivation for an artist or content creator is that its work could be watched by maximum people. The largest online viewed digital video channel is YouTube with more than two billion users and particularly consume by urban consumers over a billion hours of YouTube video consumption.

One of the respondents' kashifNisar stated that *“if a producer wants to reach a larger and diverse audience, he has to use international platforms. It is accessible and easier for people to watch with either no or less payment and it comes on their telephone screen.*

Majority of respondents were in a view that binge watching played a major role in the production of web series as scheduling of dramas on Television made them wait for days and even week to watch their favorite series. As mentioned by (dhanoka 2019) with the evident change of consumption of a content from traditional media to digital media , the traditional watching content on the television sets has been reduced as people are now binge watching content on smaller screens.

Majority of the respondents mentioned that they have a strong background of Drama's production and Pakistani dramas are internationally famous because of the script and stories. It was further found from the respondents that in Pakistan, we always had the potential of producing international stuff but we never availed it. Our serials always had the potential of discussing good while keeping the mainstream narrative. We can produce a very competitive content but we never hired good writers. We always had the potential but we purposely never availed that potential. Now the Producers and directors who are producing web series focuses on the story line , script , dialogues and even they generate the short list before the production. One of the respondent Sadijaabar mentioned *that she worked internationally and nationally but she follows all the production rules while producing Web series. Because she believed that on Digital content like web series you immediately receive feed backs from the audience so you cannot afford any negligence in your production.*

Majority of respondents respond that they work on designing and formation of set according to the demand of script and make sure the high end Equipment for the production web series. One of the respondents KashifNisar(director) mentioned that as they are competing internationally so he work more harder on selection of location and equipment and capturing of shoots according to the demand of script. Whereas one of the producers mentioned that for a low budget web series he try to shoot on

locations which are easily available to him as they don't have financier so they don't focus on formation of sets and even change the scenes according to the location.

Research study probed about the post production phase majority of professional respondents respond mentioned that take keen interest in post-production phase and try to focus on editing techniques which can improve their project. One of the professional director Amin Iqbal said *"I believe post production is a most important phase because you can either make your web series more attractive by best editing tools or you can spoil your whole series if you will not technically or professionally skilled in editing."* Whereas one of the respondents mentioned that there are few people who are producing web series mostly use the free available versions of editing software to edit their episodes of web series.

Future of web series in Pakistan

"Web series popularity is increasing in Pakistan and it is going to increase even more in future" stated Sadia Jabbar. Web series can be a best tool to promote culture, norms, ethics, your identity, languages, and mindset not as an individual but also as a country. Pakistan needs to develop its industry in digital platform, theatre and film as our Television is already a developed medium. It comes with both good and bad quality stuff. But in film and digital medium, there is so much room we have to work on. In Pakistani web series we have potential stories and other things but we lack proper business models. People are making independent investments in web series but they are trying to work international platforms and soon will sign joint ventures with EROS, zee 5, Amazon prime and even with Netflix too. Our State and private sectors need to make it a successful business model so that more people and youngsters come in this field of digital content creation in a form of web series. This medium has lot of potential and there is so much we have to do at this stage.

Majority of respondents were in a view that, by digital platform, we don't only mean to rely on YouTube. On YouTube, very cheap content can be profitable only if that content gets viral. Otherwise, the professional products are very expensive so these cannot be used for YouTube. Sadia Jabbar One of the respondents mentioned that *On YouTube, homemade content is profitable in which all you have to do is to grab your phone and sell the content. Otherwise, any content in a form of web series which is professional would not be profitable if we will upload only on YouTube .*

Web series are gaining popularity with the passage of time and audience like to binge watch. One of the reasons for this popularity is its novelty. People watch it because it is based on great creative ideas and topics which are not available on their Television screens. As it is not on the Television, it has to be somewhat different than the ones on television. But it has not made an impact like the impact made by mainstream drama serials. However, the aspiring producers can be very beneficial if they are given freedom to produce the content which needs to bring change. Majority of the respondents agreed on a point that Web can provide a phase to Pakistani youth in future. Digital medium can voice our youth. We are still unable to see youth's

voice, ideology and what sort of future they want in modern Pakistan. The future is digital. Almost everyone in the world has switched to creating work for digital platforms and although Pakistan is a little behind, it will catch up soon.

Conclusion

Findings of the study revealed that In Pakistan, we only have infrastructure of the dramas, not even films, so web series is something that comes later. Audiences' shift from traditional media to digital media instigated producers to produce the personalized content. Audiences are bored of dramas on the traditional media which follow the same topics and patterns. They are in need for diversified media content which is giving boost to the production of web series in Pakistan. Web series are important genre of entertainment industry to gratify the need of audience who want to watch diversity of topics available to them twenty four hours and seven days a week. Web series content creators claimed that Traditional media was disappointing the audience by not adopting the changing times and ideology. Being a personalized content creator they have more freedom of expression and can write and produce the content according to the new trends emerging in international market because there is no censor ship policy being imposed by Government as imposed in Pakistani Television channels. As far as production techniques are concerned respondents claimed that there are not much different techniques used in web series production other than time duration and time to launch the episode. It depends on the feedback that producers upload episodes on every day.

Findings also revealed that our neighboring country India is taking a major chunk of commerce in terms of business through production of content via digital media. According to respondents future of web series is bright in terms of joint ventures with India. Pakistani producers are producing their original web series which are then being streamed on Indian channels like "eros" and "zee 5". Launching of Urdu flex first Pakistani web streaming service is one step is being taken by the Government to meet the competition in international market.

Recommendations

Finally, some suggestions have been drawn on the basis of production of web series in Pakistan, these are;

- To compete with international market web series producers need for those writers who write stories for the times of today.
- Pakistan needs OTT (over the tape) platform of its own to suit the requirements of individual consumer.
- Pakistan needs to develop its industry in digital platform and have to develop a proper business model to compete the international market.

- Producers don't rely only on YouTube for their web series they must avail the international streaming services and present their content with subtitles to grab the international audience.
- Monitoring of digital media is as important as traditional media. PTA (Pakistan telecommunication authority) has to play its role and actively monitor the content which is being produced by both professionals and amateur.

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