REPORT

The Global Appeal of Turkish Drama Series: A Case Study in Pakistan

Ravale Mohydin

TRT WORLD research centre

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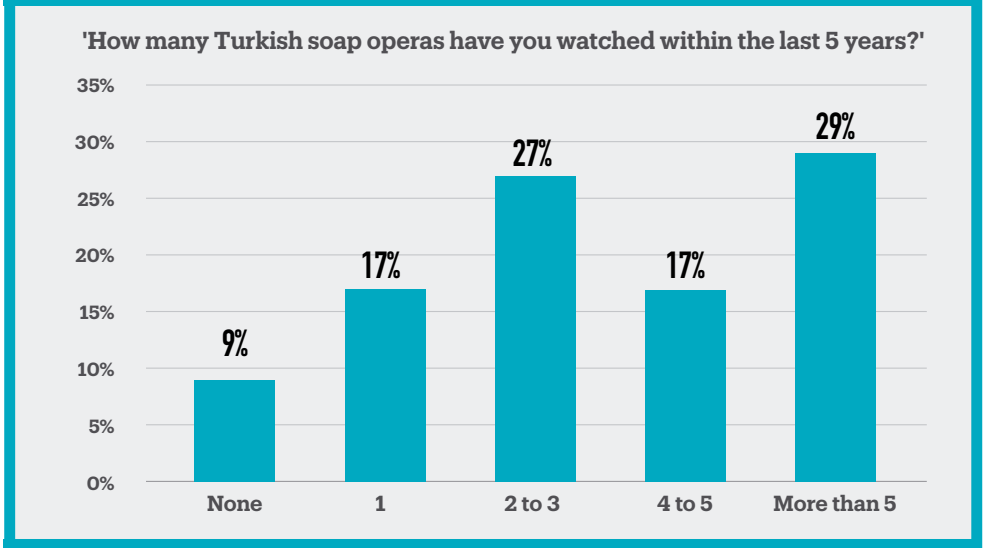
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Executive Summary

Turkey's entertainment sector, particularly its soap operas, have been gaining popularity worldwide in the last two decades. The phenomenon has potentially enabled Turkey to leverage its significant cultural and historical heritage to its benefit in terms of public diplomacy efforts. Similar to the success of Hollywood and Brand Korea, since 2002 nearly 150 Turkish soap operas have been sold to more than 100 countries. Export revenues have grown exponentially reaching $180 million by 2014. The Turkish government hopes export revenues will exceed $1 billion by 2023. Although Turkish soap operas **were not produced keeping a specific audience or purpose in mind or to promote an official cultural policy,** they may have inadvertently served the purpose of public diplomacy as many opinion studies have showed improving attitudes towards Turkey in countries where Turkish drama series were regularly aired. The possible connection between increasing exports of Turkish soap operas and documented improved attitudes towards Turkey proved intriguing and was noted by multiple experts.

To evaluate Turkish soap operas as effective public diplomacy instruments, the proposed mechanism by which a change in attitude towards the country is brought about was defined as the Turkish soap operas' capacity to generate empathy. Empathy is to 'recognise others' feelings, the causes of these feelings, and to be able to participate in the emotional experience of an individual without becoming part of it'. Entertainment media-generated empathy has been linked with both attitude and behavioral change.

Figure 1: **Number of Turkish soap operas watched**



Source: TRT World Research Centre

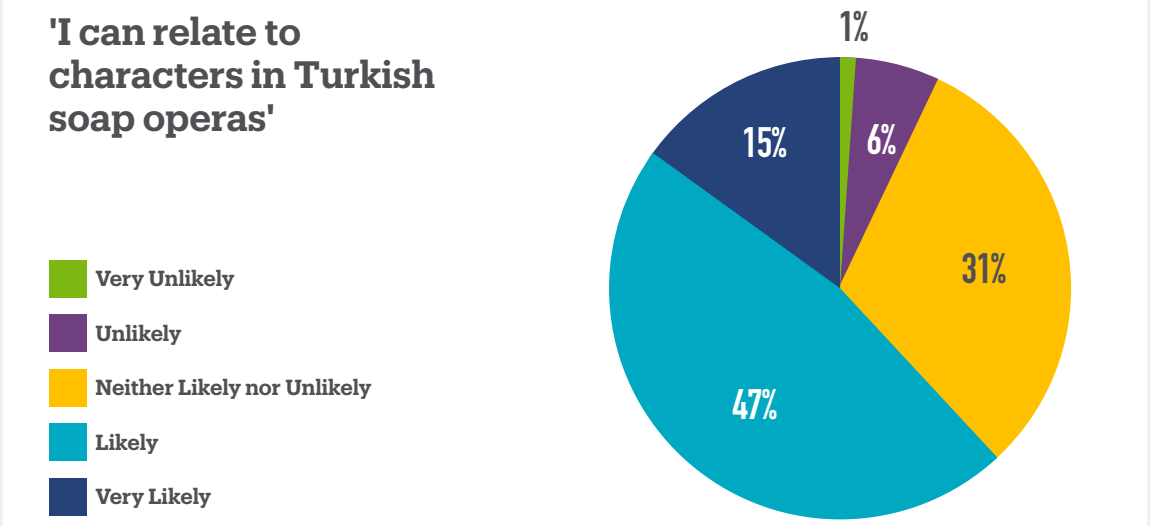
Based on findings from in-depth interviews with leaders across the Pakistani government, military and entertainment media industry, a survey instrument was developed to examine the association between the popularity of Turkish soap operas and empathy building. The study results are based on a survey of 558 people conducted in January 2020 and the analysis confirmed that:

(1) Those who watch Turkish drama series are statistically more likely to support Turkey than those who do not

(2) The more Turkish drama series watched, the more one is likely to support Turkey

(3) Relating with characters in Turkish drama series is significantly associated with support for Turkey, even after adjusting for background characteristics such as religion and gender

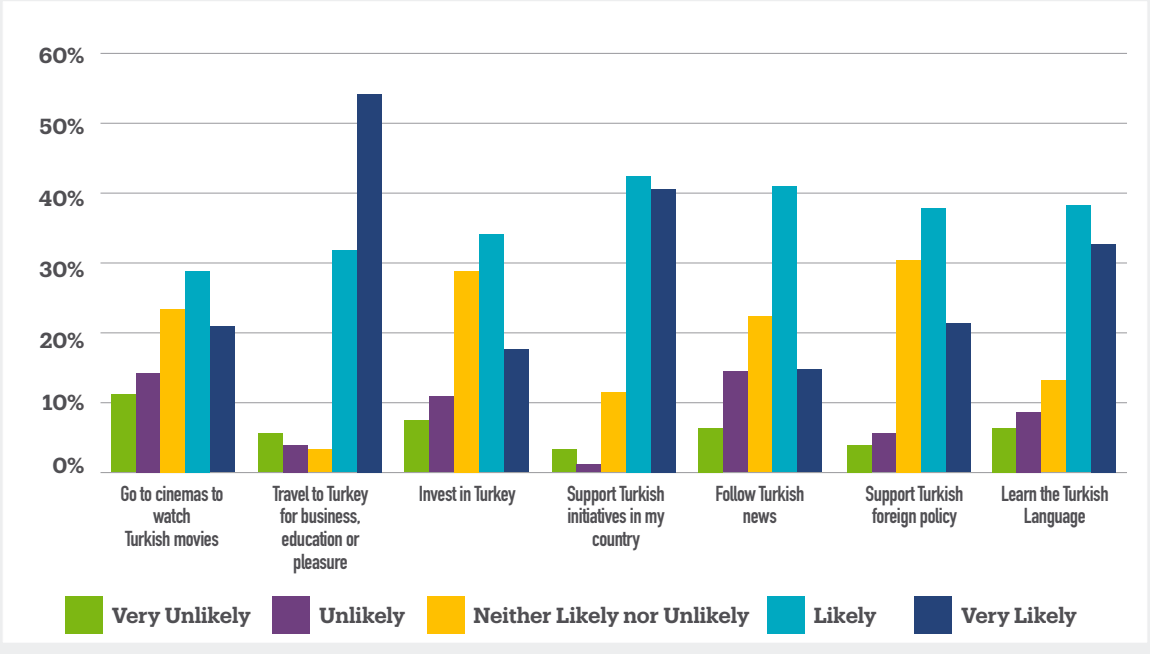
Figure 3: Relating to Characters in Turkish Soap Operas



Source: TRT World Research Centre

In terms of quantification, for every ten percent change in relating to characters in Turkish soap operas, a 1.5 percent positive change in intent to support and align with Turkey is expected.

Figure 4: Intent to support and align with Turkey



Source: TRT World Research Centre

With all three hypotheses confirmed, it can be said that Turkish soap operas are reliable instruments for public diplomacy. It is important to note that the present research demonstrates Turkish soap operas to be viable instruments for public diplomacy for **both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences**, as the effect of relating to characters in Turkish soap operas remains even after removing the effect of being Muslim.

The current study was carried out prior to the airing of *Diriliş Ertuğrul* dubbed in Urdu on state- run Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) in April 2020, which broke popularity records in the country. There is reason to expect the effect size of relating to characters in Turkish soap operas to be even higher. This is also likely to positively impact intent to support and align with Turkey, and potentially more compelling in demonstrating the hypothesis of this research study. Moving forward, the next phase intends to expand the study to include more countries with different levels of exposure to Turkish drama series and support for Turkey. Additionally, phase two intends to employ an experimental design in order to establish causality, if it exists.



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Introduction

Mass media fictionalizes social realities by reimaging and reconstructing it in accordance with dominant norms and presenting this newly created reality to its target group in a way that may substitute the objective truth (Takeshita, 1997). In terms of communication technology, television has been the most widely utilised and is considered to be the most effective means - appealing as it does to both visual and auditory senses - of transferring ideas and concepts to society. Through television transmission, political, social and cultural identities are constructed, represented, identified, modeled and documented (Takeshita, 1997).

Turkey's entertainment sector, particularly its soap operas, have been gaining popularity worldwide in the last two decades. The phenomenon has potentially enabled Turkey to leverage its significant cultural and historical heritage to its benefit in terms of public diplomacy efforts. This study attempts to establish a relationship between Turkish soap operas that have proven to be very popular internationally and foreign audiences' intent to support or align with Turkey. To achieve this, the paper will first explore the use of entertainment products for international public diplomacy efforts. Then, it will review Turkish soap operas through the lens of public diplomacy and place branding, evaluating their candidacy for effective public diplomacy

instruments. The paper will then outline the mechanism via which Turkish soap operas can achieve the aim of public diplomacy efforts, i.e. empathy building. After a literature review of how empathy can generate soft power by 'capturing the hearts and minds' of foreign audiences through Turkish soap operas (Kendall, 2011 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016), the research design entailing interviews and a survey study in Pakistan is detailed along with research findings.

A discussion of the research findings follows, with a closer look at the impacts of relating to characters in Turkish soap operas on intent to support and align with Turkey. It also examines the effects of being Muslim, being Pakistani and the level of exposure and enjoyment derived from Turkish soap operas. Ultimately, this study sheds light on how relevant stakeholders can expect to generate soft power through public diplomacy and place branding efforts that aim to build empathy among foreign audiences.



(Bozdağ Film - Anadolu Agency)

The Rise of Public Diplomacy

In today's evolving world, according to the 'theory of complex interdependence' (Keohane and Joseph, 1977 in Carbone, 2017), which forms the basis of 'theory of international integration' (Mazzei, 2012 in Carbone, 2017), international relations is based on principles on the recognition of the growing importance of transnational relations that are beyond intergovernmental relations, an international agenda that does not necessarily prioritise security only and the lessening relevance of military power considering the growth of economic interdependence among states (Carbone, 2017). The development of 'soft power', a term first popularised by Joseph Nye (1990), a kind of power that is 'significantly based on intangible factors, such as the system of values, lifestyles and cultural models not imposed coercively' (Nye, 2008a in Carbone, 2017, p. 64) is linked with this evolving international system.

Soft power can include cultural influence as per the US Congressional Research Service (2008, p. 3 in Heng, 2010, p.279), while the Chicago Council on Global Affairs interprets it as 'the ability to wield influence by indirect, non-means, whether by persuasion or attraction' (Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2008 in Heng, 2010, p. 279). Public diplomacy 'consists of all the efforts and activities that a nation does to explain itself to the world, and cultural diplomacy supplies much of its content' (Schneider, 2006a, p. 191).

To practice cultural diplomacy is 'to persuade through culture, values and ideas rather than through military means' (Nye 2002, 8-9 in Carbone 2017, 64). It represents 'the exchange of ideas, information, art and other features of culture among nations and their people to foster mutual understanding' (Cummings 2003, 1 in Carbone 2017, 64). Main components of cultural diplomacy were outlined to include an 'agent', 'an agenda', 'a vehicle' and 'a target audience' (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried 2010, 196-198). The 'agent' transmits the cultural expressions or values of a nation represents the 'vehicle' of cultural diplomacy to achieve an 'agenda' (Carbone 2017). The 'target audience' of cultural diplomacy are usually either a 'cross section of civil society or...certain targeted elites such as academics, journalists and politicians' (Carbone 2017, 67). Ultimately, the purpose of cultural diplomacy is 'to keep alive the feeling of sympathy towards the fundamental cultural values of [a] country itself' (Carbone 2017, 68).

Among others, the 'independence of cultural diplomacy' is an essential principle that guarantees its credibility (Schneider, 2006a, p. 194 in Carbone, 2017, p. 65), because, unlike propaganda that pushes a specific political cause, cultural diplomacy is based on values and beliefs such 'as respect and recognition of cultural diversity [and] heritage and global intercultural dialogue' (Carbone, 2017, p. 66), among others.

To illustrate this difference, the United States utilised cultural diplomacy to the point of becoming propaganda as the country entered WWII in 1941. President Roosevelt established the Office of Wartime Information (OWI) in 1942 which, beyond its original purpose, was also responsible for shaping Hollywood into an effective propaganda tool (Nye, 2008b). It was able to do so by denying licenses to filmmakers, suggesting additions and deletions to films and encouraging Hollywood executives to comply with the OWI, which they often did (Nye, 2008b, p. 98). According to Pells (1997), 'American corporate and advertising executives, as well as the heads of Hollywood studios, were selling not only their products but also America's culture and values, the secrets of its success, to the rest of the world' (Pells 1997, p.13 in Nye, 2008b, p.98). Thus, cultural diplomacy is an ingredient of public diplomacy, which is one of soft powers' key instruments.

Entertainment Products as Public Diplomacy Instruments

Hans Tuch defined public diplomacy as 'a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies'(Tuch, 1990 in Melissen, 2005, p.12). According to Melissen (2005), while public diplomacy should be aligned with a country's foreign policy and be in tune with medium-term objectives and long-term aims, it is not entirely suitable to leave it to official channels or even linked with the state. Another crucial factor for effective public diplomacy efforts is to 'ensure information is received in the way that it was intended, which is far from easy as people tend to be suspicious of foreign officials' motives' (Melissen, 2005, p. 16).

The aims of public diplomacy often work best when they are long-term and targeted to influence a milieu constituting the 'psychological and political environment in which attitudes and policies towards other countries are debated', and not linked to short term objectives of democratic governments that often have to push forward on domestic and foreign policies that may not be popular with foreign audiences[1]. In this context, 'nations don't have permanent friends...they only have permanent interests' (Melissen, 2005, p. 23). It works best when the aim is to build bridges between different cultures, specifically when:

> '...bilateral relationships are complicated by a cultural divide between the civil societies involved, it will be harder for diplomats to find the right interlocutors and to strike the right tone. It is, for instance, one thing to confess to the necessity of speaking with the 'Arab street', but quite another to get through to youngsters in their formative years in the highly politicised societies of Middle Eastern countries' (Melissen, 2005, p.15-16).

According to Holden (2013), the strategic aims surrounding public diplomacy efforts to promote soft power can range from 'increasing familiarity and awareness of a country to creating positive perceptions and encouraging further engagement (e.g. tourism, study abroad, and buying its products) to influencing people's behavior and



(Sipa Press - Anadolu Agency)

'getting companies to invest, encouraging public support for your country's positions and convincing politicians to turn to it as an ally' (Holden, 2013, p. 22 in Flew, 2016, p.285). Entertainment has been utilized by international governments by making their country's 'cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad ... to facilitate the export of examples of its culture (Cull, 2008, p. 33).

The United States is the first to come to mind. Industries such as Hollywood are 'powerful carriers and distributors of values and beliefs' (Otmazgin, 2008, p.77). Hollywood movies have shaped ideas and images of economic, political and societal development that became the core of modernisation theories in the 1950s and 1960s (Nye, 2008b). The James Bond films in particular were highly successful and viewed as 'dangerous anti-Soviet propaganda' by Soviet officials (Connick, 2017). US cultural diplomacy programs such as the American Film Showcase (AFS) conduct screenings of American documentaries and films around the world to enhance foreign audiences' understanding of American society and its views (Peters, 2015).

Given the above constraints of public diplomacy in terms of efficacy as well as preferred media, along with examples of successful utilisation, entertainment products can be considered 'vehicles' for shaping ideas and images of economic, political and societal development, and thus as effective instruments for public diplomacy efforts.

[1] Milieu aims of public diplomacy should not be confused with those of international lobbying, which are to influence those who are responsible for specific policymaking (Melissen, 2005).

Turkish Entertainment Products Through the Lens of Public Diplomacy

Similar to the success of Hollywood and Brand Korea, since 2002 nearly 150 Turkish soap operas have been sold to more than 100 countries. Export revenues have grown exponentially reaching $180 million by 2014 (Gök, 2015). The Turkish government hopes export revenues will cross $1 billion by 2023 (Bhutto, 2019).

Television soap operas only became popular domestically in the 1980s, with the industry growing rapidly after private television channels proliferated in 1993 (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). Given intense competition, production companies felt the need to produce higher quality output that would attract bigger audiences (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016).

The higher quality programming did attract larger domestic audiences but also triggered a search for new markets in the mid 2000s. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan were the first foreign markers for Turkish entertainment products ("Türk Dizilerinin Yurtdışı rekoru," 2011 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016) however, the major sale was to three Arab satellite channels; the Middle East



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Broadcasting Centre (MBC), Dubai TV, and Abu Dhabi TV. They acquired the rights to the series in 20 countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). The first screening was of the series Iklil al Ward in 2007 (Çemberimde Gül Oya). Nour (Gümüş) in 2008 reached more than 85 million Arabs (Cerami, 2013). A selection of international hits included 'A Thousand and One Nights' that depicted a reputable architect's son suffering from a disease, 'Forbidden Love' that depicted a wealthy widower's quest for love and 'The Magnificent Century' that portrayed the life of Sultan Suleiman of Turkey (Rousselin (2013). Recently, 'Dirilis: Ertugul', a depiction of the life of Ertugrul, father of the 13th-century founder of the Ottoman Empire, gripped audiences globally (Rousselin, 2013).

Exports predominantly to the MENA region had skyrocketed by 2007 (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). Though the connection is uncomfirmed, when the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV)[2] conducted public opinion surveys in 2009 in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, results unexpectedly showed an uptick in Turkey's image. A survey conducted by BILGESAM in 2010-11 titled 'The Perception of Turkey and Turks in Egypt' had similar findings: the survey confirmed that more than 60 percent of Egyptians considered Turkey to be an effective role model for the Middle East (Ulgen, 2011). Moreover, 81 percent expressed sympathy with Turkish people and half named Turkey as their choice for a second home (Ulgen, 2011). The 2011 Arab Attitudes survey, an annual poll conducted by IBOPE Zogby International, also confirmed the findings of the 2010-2011 BILGESAM survey's findings as outlined above. According to the survey:

> 'Turkey's policies receive wide support in the Arab world, ranging from 45 percent approval in Jordan to 80 percent approval in Morocco and even 98 percent approval in Saudi Arabia...even in Lebanon, a stronghold of Hizbollah, 93 percent have a favorable view of Turkey' (Ulgen, 2011, p.16)

These results were surprising given that Turkey's image in the Arab world had been negative throughout most of the twentieth century (Salem, 2011).

> Although Turkish soap operas were not produced either for Arab, or any other audiences or to promote an official cultural policy (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013), they may have inadvertently served the purpose of public diplomacy. The possible connection between increasing exports of Turkish soap operas and improved attitudes towards Turkey proved intriguing and was noted by experts.

Linking Turkey's positive image to Turkish soap operas, Cerami (2013) stated that the 'popularity of Turkish television series, from the Balkans to the Middle East, has brought Turkey to an international audience and is subtly transforming the image of the country abroad'. Media researchers Marwan Kraidy and Omar Al-Ghazzi (2013a) proposed that 'neo-Ottoman cool' – a term used to describe the Turkish version of modernity, combining Islam, secularism, and capitalism, which proved to be attracting many Arabs – was behind the popularity of Turkish popular culture, specifically Turkish soap operas, that became the 'main symbol' of Turkey's soft power in the Arab world (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013b).

Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu (2016) however, believed that this was 'implausible given historical tensions and postempire disconnects' (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016, pp. 3617). Even though Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu (2016) consider cultural proximity as one of the factors behind Arab interest in Turkish soap operas, they further elaborated that 'class, age, gender, and personal history–related differences of the audience' (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016, pp. 3617) also played a role. Accordingly:

> '...economic and cultural attraction may not always be audience admiration and consumption driven, but they may be contingent on a number of factors such as national and global television market dynamics as well as entrepreneurial initiatives' (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016, pp. 3619).

As per Yanardağoğlu and Karam (2013), the 'influence of shifts in foreign policy' was one of the four major factors

[2] From 2009 till 2012, TESEV conducted public opinion surveys on perceptions of Turkey in the MENA region and Iran. These surveys cannot be expected to offer a complete and accurate view of the public opinion, but they offer a broad view of perceptions on some issues (Alankuş & Yanardağoğlu, 2016).

identified with the success of Turkish soap operas in the Arab world (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). Pakistan was no different, as according to many television and media professionals in the country, the recurrent bans on Bollywood content in Pakistan (personal interview, December 2019; BBC News, 2019) have led to distributors and television networks explore Turkish content. This is illustrated by a comment by prominent Pakistani distributor-producer in Lahore:

> 'They are [Turkish soap operas] close enough to home, yet are not home. There is a novelty factor also, which is not there with Bollywood entertainment [for Pakistanis]. The space freed by Bollywood has been taken up by Turkish entertainment' (personal interview, December 2019)

Additionally, Turkey and Pakistan have historically enjoyed strong political relations, recently undertaking measures to further people-to-people contact (Express Tribune, 2019).

When Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan asked state-run Pakistan Television to screen the dubbed version of 'Dirilis: Ertugul', recommending the show for promoting 'true Islamic values' (Shabbir, 2019), it led to a spike in Google search terms for the soap opera, with Pakistan becoming the number one consumer of the series on YouTube (personal interview, February 2020). However, this can go either way: diplomatic spats between Turkey and countries like Egypt have resulted in a decline of Turkey's soap opera exports to the country (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016).



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (L) and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan (R) attend agreement signing ceremony between two countries prior to their joint press conference in Islamabad, Pakistan on February 14, 2020. (Muhammed Semih Uğurlu - Anadolu Agency)



(Bozdağ Film - Anadolu Agency)

Empathy-Generating Soft Power

Turkish TV series are seen as professionally organised instruments for 'capturing the hearts and minds' of Arab audiences (Kendall, 2011 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi (2013b) explain that Turkey's positive image in the larger MENA region was due to multiple strategies including the use of 'popular culture…in a soft power push' (2013b, pp. 2342–2343 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). While analysing the 2010 TESEV survey results, Paul Salem also identified the popularity of Turkish soap operas with increasing familiarity with Turkish culture and society (Salem, 2011) as a potential reason. In fact, a representative of the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs said:

> 'Turkish soap operas are popular [in Pakistan] as they are relatable. They are not Western, they do not have slapstick comedy. The characters have Muslim, similar-sounding names. They are relatable, they are comfortable to watch' (in-person interview, 2019)

Additionally, according to Griffiths (Centre for Empathy in International Affairs, n.d.), 'diplomatic work…is all about empathy at its core'. Castells (2008, p. 91) believed that the purpose of public diplomacy 'is not to assert power or to negotiate a rearrangement of power relationships. It is to induce a communication space in which a new, common language could emerge as a precondition for diplomacy'.

To evaluate Turkish soap operas as potential public diplomacy instruments, the mechanism by which a new common language can emerge, and by which the instrument i.e. Turkish soap operas, can achieve the objective of increasing Turkey's soft power, can be defined and measured. That mechanism could be Turkish soap operas' capacity to build empathy through the relatability of their characters.

Empathy is to 'recognise others' feelings, the causes of these feelings, and to be able to participate in the emotional experience of an individual without becoming part of it' (Keen, 2007 in Ioannidou and Konstantikaki, 2008, p. 119). Empathy is defined as:

> '...knowing another person's internal state...coming to feel what the other feels...projecting oneself into the other's situation...imagining how another person is thinking and feeling...imagining how one would think in the other's place...and feeling for another person who is suffering' (Batson, 2009, p. 4–6 in Svenaeus, 2015. p. 268)

Mirror neurons - a type of brain cell - are a 'set of neurons in the premotor area of the brain that are activated not only when performing an action oneself, but also while observing someone else perform that action' (Lacoboni et al., 2005 in Manney, 2008, p.3). They are said to be crucial when it comes to an individual's ability to understand another's behavior (Lacoboni et al., 2005 in Manney, 2008, p.3). This is known as 'primitive emotional contagion', defined as '...the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronise facial expressions, vocalisations, postures and movements with those of another person and consequently to converge emotionally' (Hatfield et al., 1992, p. 153-154 in Hatefield, Cacioppo and Rapson, 1994, p. 4). It is before one develops care, sympathy or compassion for another (Svenaeus, 2015). Apparently, the very act of being exposed to a story would lead to empathy for characters involved in that story by increasing perceived similarity of oneself to them (Moreland and Zajonc, 1982).

Montag and Gallinat (2008) contend that this may be because the viewer synthesises the work of art in the act of viewing it. Lazarus (1991) developed the cognitive-mediational theory of emotion that asserts emotions are determined by appraisals of stimuli that precede cognitive labeling. An 'emotional experience is based on evaluative interpretations of situations or appraisals' (Ellsworth and Scherer, 2003). Building on that, according to Hoffman (2000), empathy, particularly empathic distress, can be created via direct association, mediated association and role-taking, among others. For example, one can relate to a character in a soap opera by imagining how they felt (role-taking). Hoffman (2000) distinguished role-taking as the only mechanism for empathy that did not necessarily rely on prior personal experience so foreign audiences can feel empathy for characters in Turkish soap operas even if they themselves have not had the same experience.

Storytelling is then 'both the seductive siren and the safe haven that encourages the connection with the feared "other" (Manney, 2008, p. 3)'. Empathy and technology 'have been linked for

millennia [and] became inextricably linked when information technologies developed' including television and the Internet (2008, p.2). A new genre of interactive video games enable players to assume roles that deal with real world problems. For example, in a game called Peace-Maker, players assume either the role of the Israeli Prime Minister or the Palestinian President, signifying a difficult situation 'where their [players'] choices and outcomes can greatly affect how the player ultimately feels about the real world conflict and its participants' (Manney, 2008, p. 6). Both sides' players 'developed a more nuanced sense of why the other side acted as it did' (Manney, 2008, p.6). It appeared that the 'very act of presenting complex questions and real-life issues within a game has raised video gaming from entertainment to art, with a positive effect on empathy' (Manning, 2008, p. 7). Nomura and Akai (2012) also found that empathy for characters in fictional stories correlated statistically significantly with empathy for real people. Apparently, real empathy can be created through entertainment products such as Turkish soap operas via mediated story telling as 'all emotions we may feel are part of the same appraisal process, be it real-world encounters or mediated encounters' (Nals, 2019, p. 56).

Furthermore, entertainment media generated empathy has been linked with both attitude and behavioral change. A study by Dovidio et al. (2004) looked at the role of different affective and cognitive mediators in explaining how perspective taking can decrease racial prejudice. Results indicated that only perspective taking led to a statistically significant reduction in prejudice in White study participants after adjusting for prior levels of prejudice. They also reported higher levels of self-other merging while observing videos of episodes of discrimination faced by black men in everyday life. As for behavioral change, a case study in point is the expanded industry in whale watching following the commercially very successful Free Willy film series. The 1993 film portrayed a lone captive orca released into the wild and reunited with his family (Wincer, 1993 in Wearing and Buchmann, 2011). From being perceived a 'killer whale' that was 'feared and hunted' (Lawrence and Phillips, 2004, p. 9 in Wearing and Buchmann, 2011, p. 128) to being revered creatures (Lawrence and Phillips, 2004), there was a distinct change in attitude. As millions flocked to see orcas in the wild instead of at aquariums, a change in behavior in the form of a billion-dollar whale watching industry has been credited to the Free Willy films (Lawrence and Phillips, 2004 in Wearing and Buchmann, 2011).



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Research Design

This research study evaluates the efficacy of Turkish entertainment products, specifically Turkish soap operas, as reliable public diplomacy instruments given their ability to create empathy. The purpose of this study is two-fold: firstly, to provide evidence for a quantitatively measured association between Turkish soap operas and intent to align and engage with Turkey, and secondly, to determine empathy-building as the mechanism by which Turkish soap operas can generate intent to support and align with Turkey. Given the study's purpose, current literature and in-depth interviews with Pakistani government and military officials as well as prominent television industry leaders informed the design of a preliminary survey instrument. That survey instrument was tested, finalised and deployed on an online survey platform for a week between January 4th 2020 till January 11th 2020. Online surveys are suitable for descriptive and evaluation studies (Nayak and Narayan, 2019).

Four Pakistani influencers belonging to the Pakistani television and film industry featured the link to the online survey on their own social media platforms including Instagram Stories, Facebook and Twitter. Besides online surveys being cost and time effective (Wright, 2005 in Nayak and Narayan, 2019), utilizing online influencer marketing helped improve known disadvantages of online surveys (Nayak and Narayan, 2019) including participation and completion rates for the survey, along with ensuring that the online survey does not yield a non probabalistic sample[3]. The sample was drawn predominantly from the target population (Pakistani citizens with an interest in film and television)[4]. Even though the longest version of the survey was 15 questions, the participation and completion rates were both high, leading to acceptable levels of missing data: 556 total responses and 366 complete responses within seven days[5]. However, some disadvatages of online surveys remain: bias can still be introduced by questionnaire filling time as researchers cannot determine that or judge participant seriousness while responding (Nayak and Narayan, 2019).

Given the literature review as well as interviews, the following hypotheses were tested:

H1: There is a difference between those who watch Turkish drama series and those who do not when it comes to intending to support and align with Turkey

H2: The higher the number of Turkish drama series watched, the more likely one is to intend to support and align with Turkey

H3: Relating with characters in Turkish drama series is significantly associated with intent to support and align with Turkey, even after adjusting for background characteristics

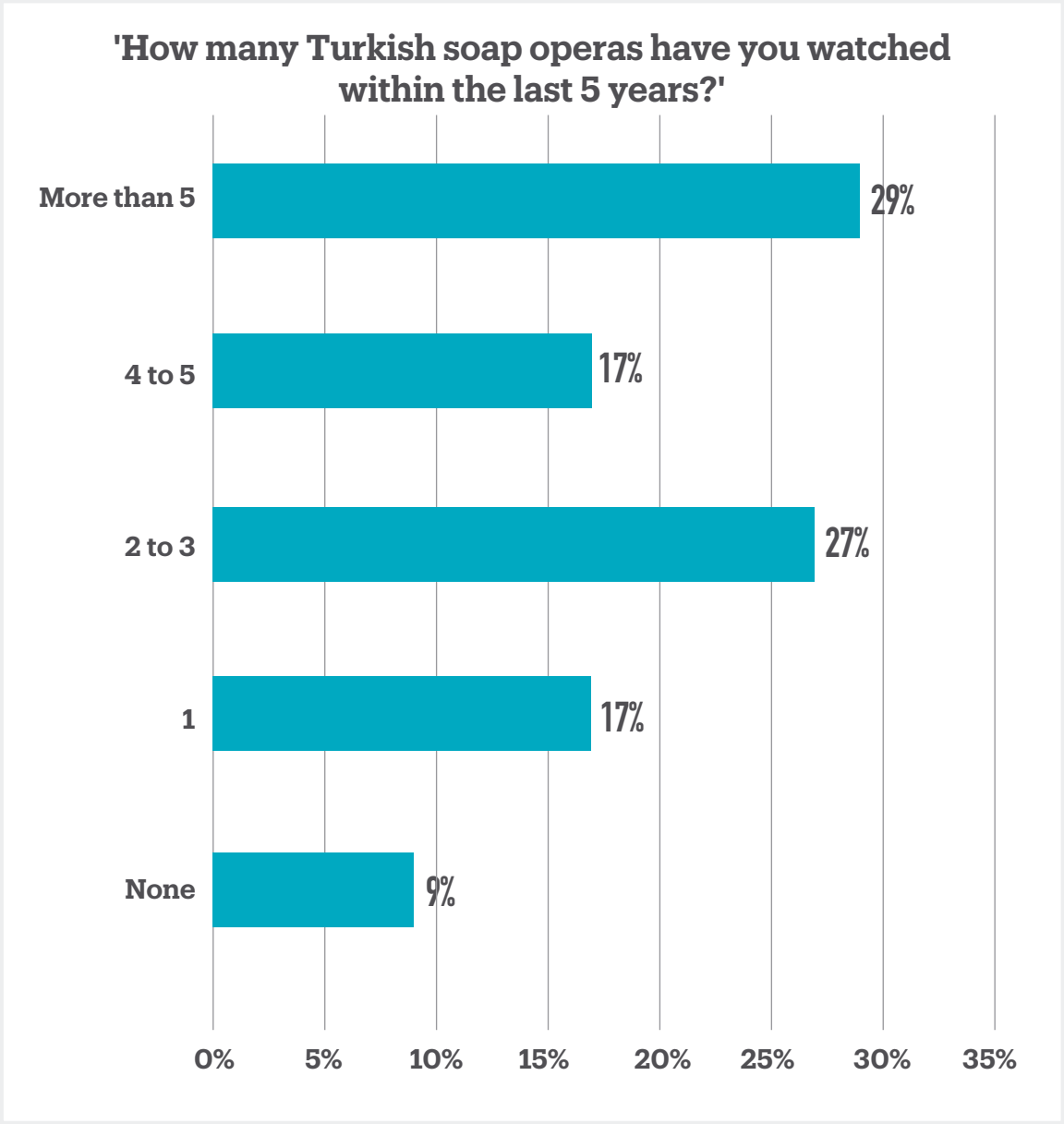
If all three hypotheses are accepted, then it would be reasonable to accept Turkish soap operas as effective public diplomacy instruments. Increased relatability of characters in Turkish soap operas can be identified as the main mechanism via which Turkish soap operas can generate intent for foreign audience members to support and align with Turkey.

3 Online surveys cannot ensure sample population is mainly from targeted population as anyone can open the link and fill the form.
4 Nayak & Narayan (2019) recommend a similar strategy for accessing target population via professional groups on social media platforms.
5 A comparison study of survey data collection strategies showed that the average response rate for all methods is 33 percent, with in-person being the highest (55 percent) (Survey Anyplace, 2018 in Nayak & Narayan, 2019).

Research Findings

A total of 548 respondents' data was included in the study. Respondent analysis showed that 85 percent of the survey respondents were Pakistani, 96 percent were Muslim, 70 percent were female, and in terms of age, 51 percent were in the 18-24 age group, 30 percent in the 25-34 age group, 15 percent in the 35-44 age group and 4 percent were 45 or older. In terms of prior exposure to Turkey, 22 percent had travelled to Turkey within the last five years.

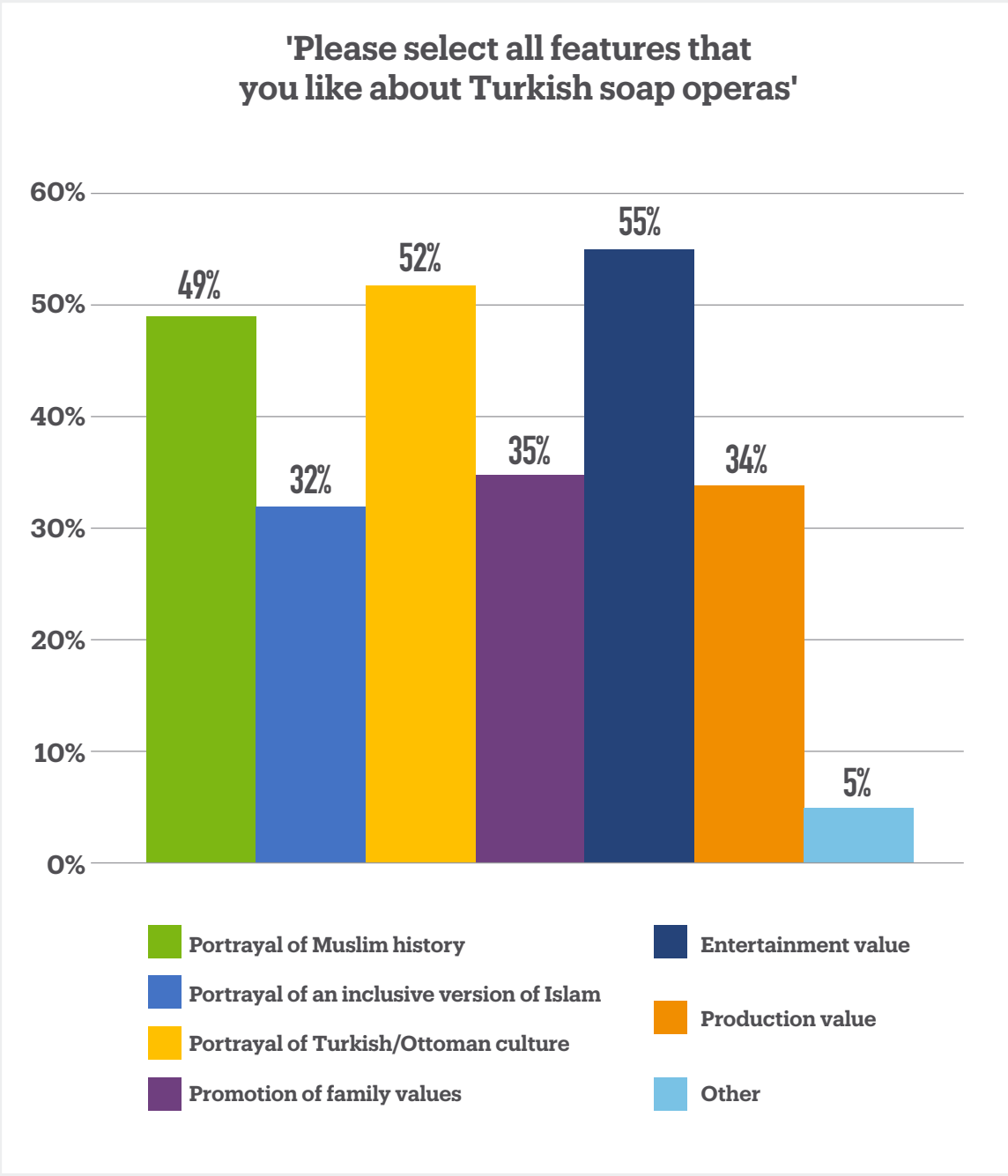
Figure 1: **Number of Turkish soap operas watched**



Source: TRT World Research Centre

Measuring exposure (see Figure 1), almost 5 out of 10 respondents had watched at least 4 Turkish soap operas while almost 3 out of 10 respondents had watched at least 2 Turkish soap operas within the past 5 years. Almost 20 percent respondents had watched at least 1.

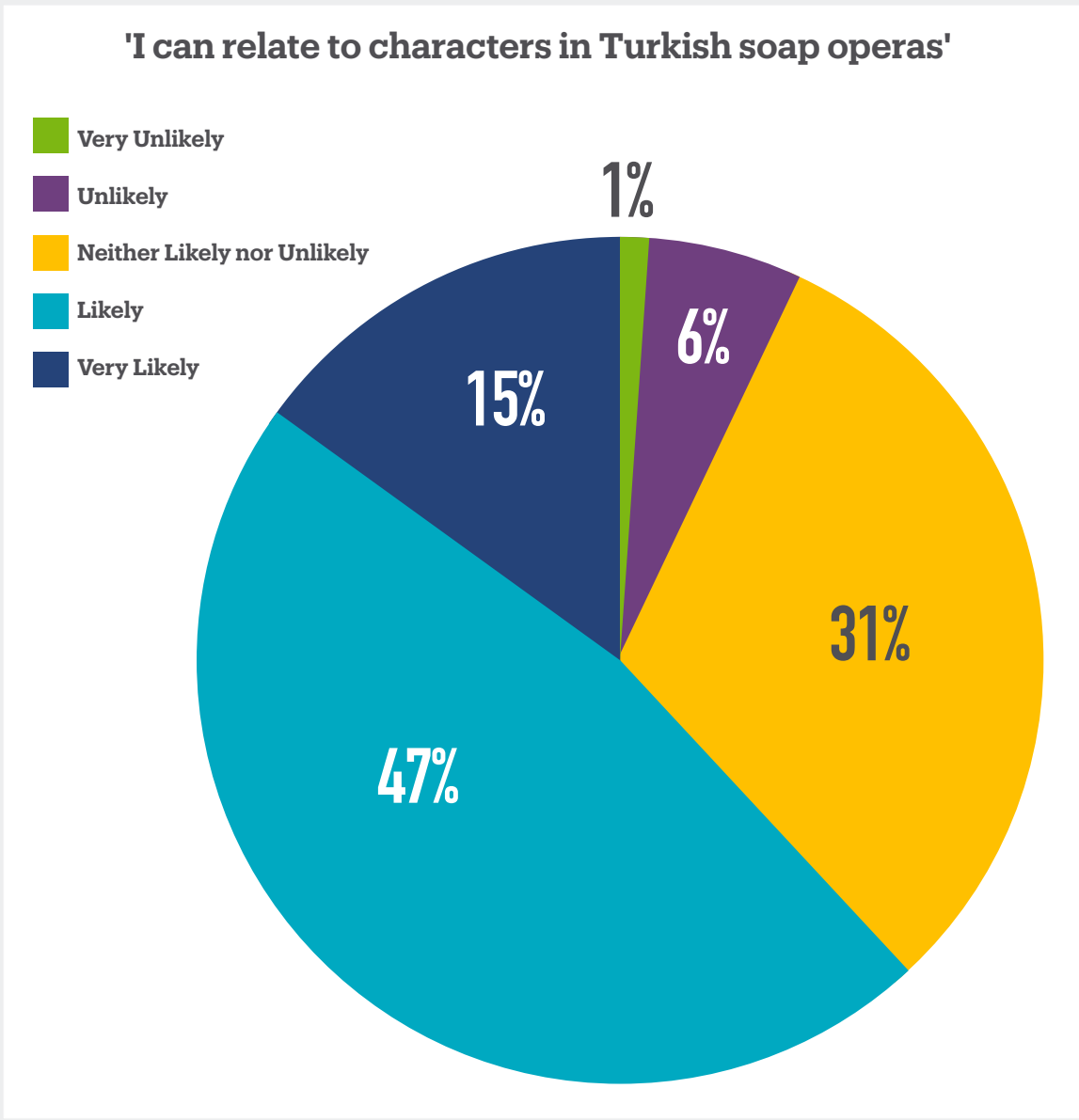
Figure 2: Personal Employment



Source: TRT World Research Centre

Personal enjoyment was a composite variable captured by asking respondents to select features of Turkish soap operas they liked. The more features selected, the greater personal enjoyment was assumed (Figure 2). The answer options were informed by current literature and interviews with Pakistani government and military officials as well as prominent television industry leaders. The most popular features included entertainment value i.e. storylines and themes (55 percent), portrayal of Turkish/Ottoman culture (52 percent) and portrayal of Muslim history (49 percent). Respondents could score between 0 (no personal enjoyment) to 6 points (very high personal enjoyment).

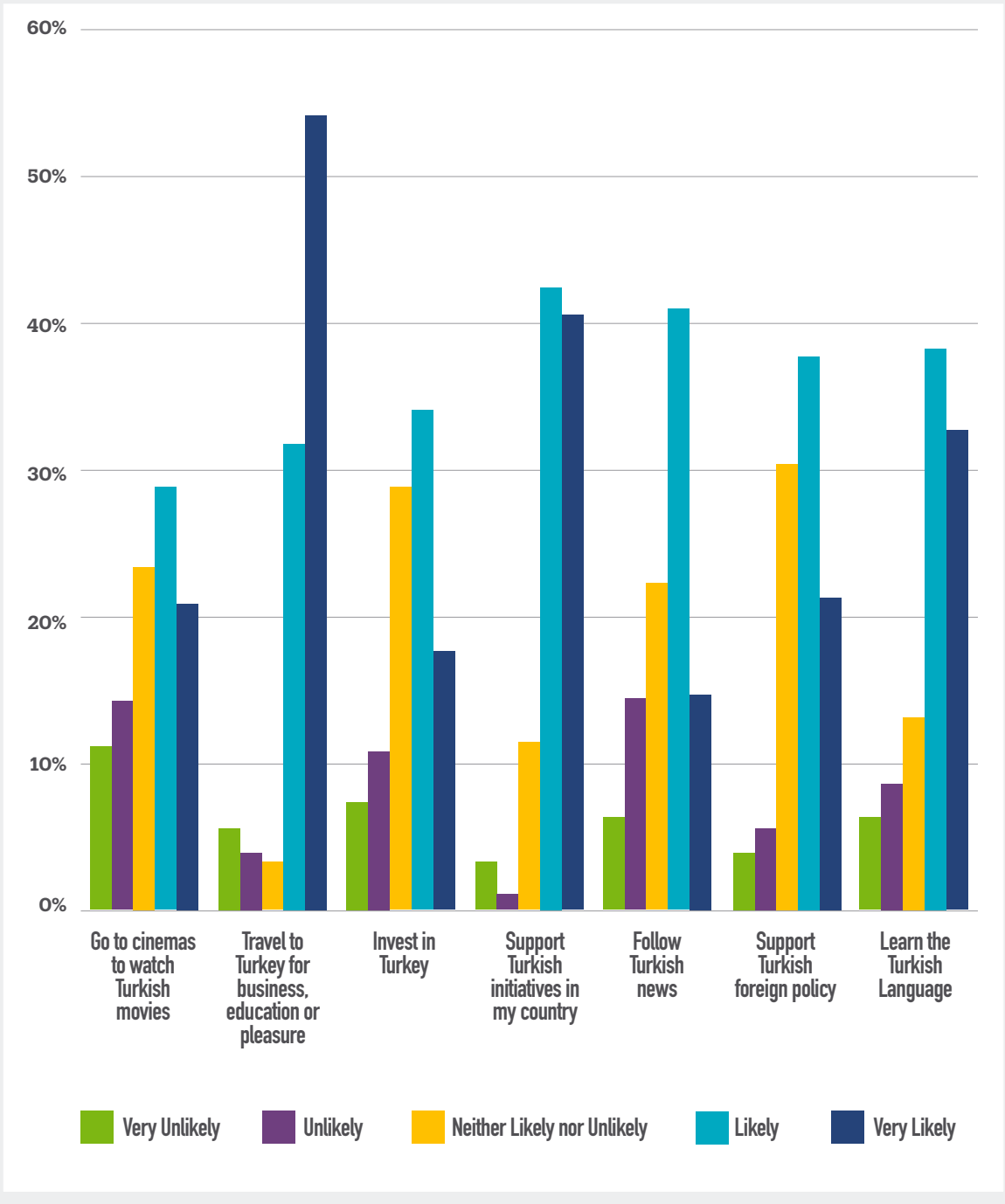
Figure 3: **Relating to Characters in Turkish Soap Operas**



Source: TRT World Research Centre

When respondents who had seen at least one Turkish soap opera within the last 5 years were asked whether they could relate to characters in Turkish soap operas (see Figure 3), more than 6 out of 10 respondents either strongly agreed or agreed. Respondents could score between 1 (very unlikely) to 5 points (very likely).

Figure 4: **Intent to support and align with Turkey**



Source: TRT World Research Centre

Intent to align and engage with Turkey was a composite variable measured by asking respondents to rate how likely they were to go to the cinema to watch Turkish movies, travel to Turkey for business, education or pleasure, invest in Turkey, follow Turkish news, learn the Turkish language, support Turkish initiatives in their country as well as support Turkish foreign policy. Options for this question were informed by available literature and prior interviews. An audience member could score between 5 (very low intent) and 35 points (very high intent).

Confirming the first hypothesis, an indepedent sample t-test assuming unequal variances was conducted to compare intent to support and align with Turkey between those who who had watched at least one Turkish drama series within the past 5 years and those who had not. The test confirmed that there was a significant difference in intending to support and align with Turkey between the two groups of survey participants (t= -4.62, df = 461, p<0.001).

Additinally, a Pearson's correlation was conducted to test the second hypothesis to ascertain whether dosage (number of Turkish drama series watched) is linked with likelihood to support and align with Turkey. The test confirmed the second hypothesis as there was a moderate significant positive correlation between the number of Turkish drama series watched and intending to support and align with Turkey (r=0.195, p<0.01).

In order to test whether relating with characters in Turkish soap operas is significantly positively associated with intent to support and align with Turkey, and as multicollinearity was expected between multiple variables (see Table 1), a principle components analysis was first performed to determine variables explaining the most variation in the data. This technique circumvents potential multicollinearity (please see footnote 6).

Table 1: **Correlations between selected variables** *(n=548)*

Variables	Intent	Relate	Dose	Enjoy	Travel	Age	Muslim	Pakistan	Female
Intent to support and align with Turkey (Intent)	1.00								
Relating to characters (Relate)	-.13**	1.00							
Number of Turkish soap operas watched (Dose)	.12***	.05	1.00						
Personal enjoyment (Enjoy)	-.13***	.20***	-.08	1.00					
Prior travel to Turkey (Travel)	-.13***	.06	-.17***	.19***	1.00				
Age	-.15***	.06	-.22***	-.22***	-.30***	1.00			
Muslim	.02****	-.04	-.07	0.6	-.15***	-.07	1.00		
Pakistani	.02	-.05	-.02	-.1.4**	-.07	-.13**	.26**	1.00	
Female	.02	-.04	-.21***	-.09	-.06	-.11*	.03	-11**	1.00

* : p<05 ** : p<01 *** : p<001

Source: TRT World Research Centre

The principal components analysis (PCA) (please see footnote 7) results based on the correlation matrix analysis with Varimax rotation indicate three principal components, or underlying factors explaining the most variation in the data, with eigenvalues greater than 1.00, which corresponded to an overall cumulative variance of 49.63 percent. A threshold of 0.50 was used for identifying reliable factors in this study. To select prominent variables for sub-

6 Situation when two or more explanatory variables in a multiple regression model are highly linearly related, making the coefficient information unreliable.

7 A statistical procedure that converts a set of observations of possibly correlated variables into a set of values of linearly uncorrelated variables called principal components

sequent regression analysis, the first three variables with the highest factor loadings were selected as representative variables of each of the principle components. The first component correlated most strongly with age. The second component correlated most strongly with being Muslim. The third component correlated strongly with relating to characters in Turkish drama series.

To test the third hypothesis of whether relating with characters in Turkish drama series is significantly associated with intent to support and align with Turkey after adjusting for background characteristics, intent to support and align with Turkey was selected as the response variable in a multiple regression analysis with the components above as the explanatory variables. The multiple regression analysis confirmed the third hypothesis also as relating with characters in Turkish drama series remained significantly associated with intent to support and align with Turkey even after adjusting for background characteristics such as age and religion.

In terms of quantification, for every ten percent change in relating to characters in Turkish soap operas, a 1.5 percent change in intent to support and align with Turkey is expected.

As all three hypotheses were confirmed in this study, it can be said that Turkish soap operas may be effective public diplomacy instruments. However, due to the observational nature of this analysis, causal claims cannot be made.

It must be noted that this study was carried out prior to the airing of Diriliş Ertuğrul dubbed in Urdu on state-run Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) in April 2020, which broke popularity records in the country. There is reason to expect the effect size of relating to characters in Turkish soap operas to be higher as Pakistanis claim characters to be 'like them' (Hasan, 2020). According to Mr. Riyaad Minty, Director for Digital at TRT (TRT has been managing YouTube channels for Diriliş Ertuğrul and other Turkish drama series internationally), the number of online views for the Urdu YouTube channel has crossed 230 million with more than 3.1 million subscribers as of 20th May 2020. This is also likely to positively impact intent to support and align with Turkey, and potentially more compelling in demonstrating the hypothesis of this research study.

Discussion

While Turkish soap operas were not produced either for MENA audiences or to promote an official cultural policy (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013), they may have inadvertently served the purpose of'capturing the hearts and minds' of foreign audiences. Relating with characters in Turkish soap operas was significantly positively associated with intent to support and align with Turkey for foreign audience members, adjusting for background characteristics. Thus, the study confirms empathy (i.e. relatability to characters in Turkish soap operas) as the mechanism by which Turkish soap operas generate intent to align and engage with Turkey. Thus, Turkish soap operas can be considered effective 'vehicles' (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2010) of public diplomacy.

Watching Turkish soap operas is linked with intent to support and align with Turkey via a sense of familiarity, as evidenced by a positive correlation between relating to characters and experiencing personal enjoyment. Research has shown that even unconscious familiarity drives 'liking' or positive attitude formation through mere exposure (Wänke and Hansen, 2009). This is certainly applicable when characters in Turkish soap operas have familiar sounding names, similar religious values et cetera as foreign audience members, as was likely the case for Pakistani survey respondents. The 'mere exposure effect' (Zajonc, 1968), or familiarity principle, can be observed in this study as, according to the PCA above, watching Turkish soap operas is highly correlated with relating to characters in Turkish soap operas. Repeated exposure increases familiarity, which in turn increases liking or 'conversion' in advertising and marketing terms (Smith, 2015).

Smith, Dijksterhuis and Chaiken (2007) observed that 'even interactionless exposures to members of a particular group should improve attitudes toward that group (2007, p. 50). This is also applicable in the case of Pakistani, or any other foreign audience, members as they consume Turkish soap operas on television screens. In a story's narrative, appraisal of a character and their situation creates an 'opportunity for empathy' (Wondra and Ellsworth, 2015, p. 418). The greater the exposure to Turkish soap operas, more opportunities for appraisals of characters and situations, and consequently, more oppor-

tunities to create empathy. Additionally, according to Zajonc (2001), 'repetitions of an experience in and of themselves are capable of producing a diffuse affective state' (2001, p. 226). This may be due to two reasons: one often assumes that people that one encounters share at least some of their own attitudes, values, and beliefs (Mess and Sivacek, 1979; Ross, Greene, and House, 1977 in Moreland and Zajonc, 1982). The second reason is in response to cognitive dissonance, which is individuals' tendency to seek consistency in their cognitions (Festinger, 1957). Repeated exposure can lead to firmer beliefs as cognitive dissonance is resolved (Sun and Guo, 2013).

While cross-border communication such as images or impressions of a country do not necessarily shape foreign audiences' opinions about said country, it can help support perceptions towards it which are 'primarily shaped by the confluence of current/historical events, social/cultural predispositions, and variable personal/individual factors (Sanders 2011; Li and Chitty 2009 in Peters, 2015, p. 92). Accordingly, in terms of social/cultural predispositions, being Muslim was a significant predictor for intending to support and align with Turkey. Recall 'neo-Ottoman cool' or the Turkish concoction of modernity, combining Islam, secularism, and capitalism as coined by Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi (2013a) on display in Turkish soap operas. Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi (2013a) believe that is behind the popularity of Turkish soap operas in the Arab world, and that may be true in the Pakistani context as well given it is also an Islamic country.



(Anadolu Agency)



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro (L) and his wife Cilia Flores (R) visit the set of famous Turkish TV show "Dirilis Ertugrul", which is broadcasted in 65 other countries, in Beykoz district of Istanbul, Turkey on July 10, 2018. (Orhan Akkanat - Anadolu Agency)

Moreover, in terms of current and historical events, it was surprising to find that being Pakistani was not associated with intent to support and align with Turkey, given strong historical, political and economic ties (Ashraf, 2020). However, this may be due to the fact that Pakistan's estimated Muslim population is 96 percent and being Muslim is already directly linked with intent to support and align with Turkey. Additionally, there is a good chance this may change with a larger sample that includes a significant number of other nationalities.

It must be noted, however, that the present research evidences Turkish soap operas to be viable instruments for public diplomacy for both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences, as the effect of relating to characters in Turkish soap operas remains even after removing the effect of being Muslim.

Extending from that, Turkish soap operas, or rather any entertainment product that induces perceived similiarity and thus empathy, can be especially useful in countries with audiences that do not share social/cultural predispositions, which may otherwise make them suspicious of foreign officials' motives or information may not be received in the way that was intended (Melissen, 2005).

Relating with characters in Turkish soap operas was positively correlated with personal enjoyment levels while no correlation was found between relating with characters in Turkish soap operas and number of Turkish soap operas watched. These findings have practical implications when it comes to developing entertainment products for public diplomacy efforts. While it is clear that an entertainment product has to generate empathy for it to be considered part of public diplomacy efforts, it appears that long-running soap operas (in the case of Turkish soap operas, for

example, 'Nour' (Gümüş) ran for 100 episodes, while 'Dirilis: Ertugul' had 150 episodes), can be superfluous (not to mention time consuming and costly). Importantly, as personal enjoyment is correlated with relating to characters in Turkish soap operas and that even unconscious familiarity drives 'liking' or enjoyment as noted above, elements that may increase perceived similarity amongst target audience members should be devised during the product development stage. As evidenced in this study, these elements can be empathy building features such as themes and topics that may resonate with the target audience or values shared with them. Audience engagement is inevitably linked to emotional appeals, and emotions 'are the buildup of action-specific energy' (Coopman and Lull, 2012, p. 271). Utilising more empathy-building measures is likely to lead to greater audience engagement and thus higher content consumption. Moreover, as age is negatively correlated with watching Turkish soap operas, older people are less likely to watch Turkish soap operas. In terms of entertainment product development with the objective of public diplomacy, age is an important consideration when it comes to defining the target audience and, consequently, in terms of narrative or theme development.

This finding can be applied for public diplomacy efforts beyond entertainment products in the form of activities and initiatives that create opportunities for empathy. Traditionally, initiatives such as scholarships for foreigners and cultural exchanges aim to achieve similar objectives, but in terms of futuristic innovation, the same findings can be applied. In terms of emphasising empathy-building when designing tourist experiences, creating content marketing for travel and tourism that enable or envisage two-way conversations[9] and utilising virtual reality for 'empathetic technology' (Pozniak, 2019) to help 'outgroups' (Tajfel, 1978) understand issues experienced by the other. This is especially as smart television market penetration, usage and technology is expected to rise exponentially in the coming years (Mathews, 2020).

Conclusion

The findings point towards Turkish soap operas being considered effective public diplomacy instruments, even for foreign audiences that are culturally and religiously dissimilar to Turkey. However, the more similar the foreign audience, the greater the effect of Turkish soap operas. Moving forward, to confirm present findings as well as parse the impact of international relations, the next phase intends to expand the study to include more countries with different levels of engagement and support for Turkey. Additionally, phase two intends to employ an experimental design in order to establish causality, if it exists.

As borne out in the data, empathy-building features of an entertainment product, even after adjusting for the effects of personal enjoyment derived from it, exposure to it, prior exposure to the country of origin, age, gender, religion and nationality, may be the reason behind it being associated with increased goodwill towards the country of origin.

Conveniently, such measures are often also essential features of a gripping storyline and good for business also. Empathy-building appears to be a useful ingredient in entertainment products that aim to generate interest in and support for a country, but the finding can be applied to public diplomacy and place branding efforts in general.

[9] "Small World Machines" was an initiative by Coca Cola that provided a live communications portal through Coca Cola vending machines for Indians and Pakistanis to interact across country borders

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