
Critical Analysis of Political Music Videos of Pakistan (2007-2021): A Socio-Cognitive Approach

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Abstract

This research paper examines the socio-cognitive procedures employed in the creation of political song videos in Pakistan. The data spans fifteen years, from 2007 to 2021. According to this study, music videos are a new and potent weapon for creating political narratives in Pakistan using themes of integration and disintegration. These narratives are then used to pique the interest of the audience. This research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on detailed interviews conducted with vocalists, songwriters, and directors of music videos. Purposive sampling is used to select five respondents for the interviews. The themes are then gleaned from the respondents' responses. Rick Altman's approach to film genre (1987) is used as a theoretical framework for the interpretation of the findings. The results point to an increase in Altman's philosophical outlook. Results also demonstrate that state-sponsored socially conscious themes predominate in Pakistani sociopolitical music videos.

Keywords: In-depth interviews, Nationalism, Pakistan, Socio-cognitive framework, Political discourses, Music clips

I. Introduction

All forms of expression stem from mental processes sparked by social exchanges and imaginative ideas. In his chapter “The Psychology of Music,” Rink (2009) argues that listeners, not just composers, undergo an imaginative mental activity when encountering music. Given that the mental frameworks for composing music rival the intricacy of perceiving it, musical expression remains far from simple. Composers, performers, and producers bring these imaginings to life through songwriting, video production, vocal performance, instrumental play, and the strategic use of visual elements. Consequently, the resulting song embeds socio-cognitive mechanisms shaped by real-world experiences and interpersonal dynamics in the act of music-making.

The medium of the music video enables artists to express visually and interpret the intended meaning of the songs, while also establishing their public persona. According to Paracha (2014), the Pakistani pop music industry experienced significant growth following the end of Zia’s authoritarian regime and the restoration of the democratic PPP government under Benazir Bhutto. In 1988, when PPP and MQM supporters used to drive through Karachi in jeep convoys blasting music, campaign songs were in style. At that time, Pakistan experienced a boom in the political musical circus.

This study seeks to examine the socio-cognitive mechanisms underlying the creation of political music videos in Pakistan, along with the contextual factors shaping their content. It aims to pinpoint the specific socio-cognitive processes that influence the production of such videos within the Pakistani context.

II. Literature Review

Every culture relies heavily on music. It could serve a symbolic purpose or be connected to a particular religion or country. As a result, everyone uses and practices it in a culturally appropriate manner. Music is utilized as a symbol for battle, hunting, celebration, and sadness. In some civilizations, it is also used in religious ceremonies. Then there are the genres; for example, Rap music originates from African traditions, whereas folk music

contributes to shaping the cultural identities of certain nations. It has to do with the setting in which music is played. Nonetheless, music is a religious practice in some religions, and some communities forbid it (Garfias, 2004). Music videos provide a purpose in some way. Similar to West Sumatra, they are utilized to raise public awareness of the suffering and difficulties experienced by earthquake victims. As a result, the music videos shed light on their suffering, encouraged community involvement, and united people behind a common goal. According to Fraser (2013), music video producers and artists not only expressed sympathy for earthquake victims through their creative work but also endeavored to represent the victims' emotional and physical conditions to promote their resilience and fortitude.

This also leads to the conclusion that, given music's prevalence in the new country, Iranian refugees found strength in music videos. Iranians have utilized music videos as a form of self-motivation in dangerous environments and to expose the world to their true selves. They therefore used music videos to make two distinct points by engaging in self-reflection and provocative behavior, as well as by shifting people's perceptions of them (Naficy, 1998).

By fostering patriotism and national loyalty among the populace, music videos also shape a person's sense of personal identity as well as their sense of national identity and pride. After the fall of the USSR in 1991, Kazakhstan became a sovereign nation. They tried to promote national unity in Kazakhstan by creating music videos infused with Kazakh culture, aiming to bridge religious and political divides (Johnson, 2006).

III. Theoretical Framework

Discourse studies often employ the socio-cognitive approach. According to this school of thought, society's constituents construct the "sociopolitical domain," and these creations serve as cognitive representations. According to constructionists, in order to fully comprehend the socio-cognitive processes, these representations and their context should be examined appropriately (Dijk, 1998).

In 1987, Altman broadened his framework for analysing film genres by incorporating a pragmatic dimension alongside semantic and syntactic elements. This pragmatic lens

emphasises the situational context of a message and how viewers derive its significance, giving rise to two subcategories: the ideological and ritual approaches. The ideological perspective scrutinises the institutional frameworks of cinema; for example, it explores how Hollywood crafts war films to promote pro-American sentiments. Conversely, the ritual approach centres on audience reception and how spectator preferences shape production decisions. The present analysis applies Altman's ideological stance on film genres to investigate the socio-cognitive mechanisms underlying the production of music videos.

IV. Methodology

Qualitative research often employs in-depth interviews, which allow for extended dialogue with participants to capture their unique perspectives and experiences. Developing an interview guide aligned with research objectives, identifying suitable participants, and collecting relevant data is a detailed and time-intensive process. As a result, these interviews are typically conducted informally, though they may adopt a semi-structured format based on the study's requirements (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2017). Scholars have grouped the sociopolitical music videos into three categories: patriotic, satirical, and non-satirical.

In-depth interviews were conducted with five participants, comprising the music video creator, vocalists, and lyricists. Additionally, three singers and producers were recruited and interviewed through snowball sampling, following the purposive sampling of two individuals who had produced music videos with social themes.

Sahir Ali Bagga, a musician, has composed music for numerous patriotic music videos. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan, a renowned vocalist and qawwal in Pakistan and India, has performed in many patriotic music video songs. Ali Gul Pir, a comedian and rapper, gained social media prominence in Pakistan after releasing his satirical music video Waderay ka Beta (Son of a Feudal Lord). He focuses on creating humorous sociopolitical music videos in Pakistan.

Ali Aftab Saeed, a producer, artist, and video blogger working for the BBC, has created both satirical and non-satirical sociopolitical music videos. He established a group called "Beyghairat Brigade" (Shameless Brigade), known for its controversial name. Dr Taimur

Rahman, a musician and lecturer at a prominent university in Lahore, leads the band “Laal” (Red), which produces non-satirical social music videos. Based on the literature review, an interview guide was developed.

V. Findings and Discussions

The findings are organized into six themes derived from participants’ responses to questions about political narratives in Pakistani music videos. These themes encompass ideology, sponsorship, political intent, the preferred state institution, connections with political parties, and audience reactions.

A. Ideology

For specific social groups founded on conflict or cohesion, ideology is a philosophical foundation built on widely held beliefs that also depend on their history (Dijk, 1998). The education and occupation of the vocalists and music video makers can be used to judge the background history, which ultimately aids in the development of a particular ideology. Hence, ideology and background both aid in comprehending the relevance and context of the content created by the music industry. Graduate Rahat Fateh Ali Khan comes from a musically-inclined family, and Sahir Ali Bagga’s father was a well-known musician; therefore, both people share a musical heritage. Both singers concur that their ideology is rooted in music, which they both create.

They sing patriotic songs because they care about the nation. According to Ali Gul Pir, who studied both media studies and theatre, the conceptual foundation of his songs and visuals lies in the prejudice and unfairness prevalent in our society. I compose satire, drolly sing it, and create music videos that illustrate the issues I see around me. After earning his Doctorate in political economy from the UK, Taimur Rahman is now a professor at one of the top universities in Lahore. His second passion is music. He claims, “I wanted my band to have a short, catchy name, so I gave it the name Laal, which means red and also represents our political philosophy. It also demonstrates that we are socialists.

After 11 years of employment, Ali Aftab Saeed, a graduate, is now in charge of his own production company. Nobody supports an artist who is politically conscious and purposeful, he claims. We used to mock news analysts by jokingly referring to them as the end of our group, “Beyghairat Brigade” “, Ghairat Brigade”, since we reject their hypotheses (Modest Brigade). Since we held an entirely different philosophy, we call ourselves the Shameless Brigade. The media industry humorously produces political music videos, whereas music video producers and vocalists with a strong musical background typically concentrate on patriotic music videos. Political music videos with serious content are being produced by highly educated and politically aware music producers. The political music’s reformist and patriotic ideology calls for highlighting social injustices and political watchfulness.

B. Sponsorship

Who finances the political content in your music videos? Participants in the study provided revealing insights in response to this question. “All my patriotic songs are funded by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) and the current government,” states Sahir Ali Bagga. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan confirms that ISPR supports most of his music videos, which emphasise nationalism and the military. Taimur Rahman of Laal Band notes that only one music video, “Umeed-e-Sehar,” was sponsored by Geo, while their other videos are consistently self-funded.

“I get money by composing songs for brands,” claims Ali Gul Pir, “and then I invest that money in my music videos with political satire like ‘Waderai ka Beta’ (Son of a feudal), ‘Modi Teri’ (You! Modi), and VIP are my self-sponsored songs.” “All these videos are undoubtedly self-financed,” says Ali Aftab Saeed. The corporate sector does not support political satire. I have to invest my own money to make political music videos because they do not generate any profit. In 2015, I received sponsorship for one of my projects, “Gao Suno Badlo” (Sing, Listen, and Change). Five Non-Governmental Organizations were united in this alliance (NGOs). It explains that the majority of patriotic music videos are produced by ISPR, the Pakistani military’s publicity division. In contrast, serious political music films are

typically self-financed, and music videos containing political humour are occasionally sponsored by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

C. Political Motivation

This study characterises political impulse as the driving force or inspiration behind an artist or singer's creation of politically charged music videos. "'Aalu Anday' (Potatoes and eggs), released in 2012, was my debut music video. We were inspired to create this satirical political music video by numerous political occurrences," explains Ali Aftab Saeed, who aimed to express his emotions through music videos. He notes that the brutal killing of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer was among the events that led to funding for the Dr Abdus Salam chair at Government College Lahore, though the funds were misallocated due to bias and inflexible beliefs. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan shares that ISPR produced his first music video, "'Sun Sakhiye' (Listen, my buddy!)," for the Pakistan Army, adding, "I have developed music videos according to the conditions in the country in every term." Sahir Ali Bagga reveals, "ISPR offered me to do music videos for the military in the year 2012," and confirms, "That offer was accepted, and I am still employed at ISPR." Taimur Rahman states, "We began producing films in 2007 in response to Général Pervez Musharraf's proclamation of the state of emergency following Benazir Bhutto's murder the very next month of that year. We started creating videos about the revolutionary poetry of Habib Jalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, which was a turning point for us." Ali Gul Pir reflects, "I produced the 'Waderai ka Beta' music video after noticing so many Waderas," feudal landlords, and adds, "I am currently viewing the 'Taaro Maaro' music video from my youth, in which 'Taaros' (stalkers) are everywhere. Now, however, I compose music videos in response to political news and events. For example, because Narendra Modi was so hostile against Pakistan, his comments inspired me to create the music video 'Modi Teri.' Pakistan's YouTube censorship inspired 'Kholoban.'" Significant political events, social injustices, national causes, integrity, and motivation during crises, such as the fight against terrorism, serve as the foundation for politically satirical and patriotic music videos.

D. Favored Pillar of the State

Executives, the courts, and the legislature are the three institutions that make up estate orthodoxy. Press is regarded as the estate's fourth pillar. Due to the military's contribution to Pakistan's democracy, it was previously classified as part of the executive institution but is now considered a separate pillar. The original three estates—nobility, clergy, and commoners—in the calling of the State's General prior to the French Revolution are where the idea for these three pillars originated. Later, the press became involved because of its influence and power (Niazi, 2014).

"I believe that the media is the most significant state pillar today," says Sahir Ali Bagga. Without media attention, we would be nothing. I also have a great deal of faith in the military. I admire all of these institutions, but only if they operate independently of one another, according to Ali Aftab Saeed. In my opinion, our traditional media is heavily focused on making money. However, given that everything these days is published online and social media has emerged, news outlets and the press cannot avoid bringing up actual issues. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan declares, "I trust media as a cornerstone of the state, as it has given us a platform to showcase our message through art..." I do not trust anyone," Ali Gul Pir chuckles, "because I believe that powerful organizations, including the media, are defending their own interests. Government officials and political groups all defend their own group. Everyone is self-centred and shows little concern for the country. According to Taimur Rahman, who is a political scientist, "Every institution is working for its own personal gains; thus, I examine their responsibilities and the benefits they are getting, and then I apply our progressive ideology accordingly." Taimur Rahman concurs with Pir's position.

E. Political Parties Relationships: Whether they are patriotic, satirical, or not, the sociopolitical music videos' vocals and imagery are politically fueled and driven. To better understand the context of these music videos, researchers have also investigated the political affiliations of those working in the music business. According to Sahir Ali Bagga, the ruling political parties receive scathing criticism. "I do not get involved in politics. My family formerly supported Zulifqar Ali Bhutto because they believed he was a risk-taking politician in that situation. However, after Benazir Bhutto passed away, we no longer support the

Pakistan Peoples' Party. We do not even cast a single vote. I am not particularly political, as I have already stated, but I do support my country. Taimur Rahman declares, "I accept socialist philosophy. I serve as the general secretary of the Mazdoor Kisaan Party and remain steadfast in my allegiance to it. To me, this is the sole political organization that truly upholds socialist principles. The following figures embody progressive political leadership and mirror my own convictions: Habib Jalib, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Hassan Nasir, Sajjad Zaheer, Nazir Abbasi, Major Ishaq Muhammad, Sibat-e-Hassan, and Eric Cyprian. According to Ali Aftab Saeed, "I support all parties because a party's weakness can be a strength for another. Moreover, I believe they are unintentionally contributing to Pakistan's progress. Of course, Benazir Bhutto was a leader who offered hope, but even if she were still alive today, she would have been powerless to change the situation."

"As an artist, I feel I can have no attachment to any political party, not even with the borders," says Rahat Fateh Ali Khan. For me, a political party that seeks to improve the nation deserves support. Nevertheless, I have no preference for any present politician or political figure. I only admire Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and he ought to serve as an example for current leaders as well. According to Ali Gul Pir, "I am not linked with any political party since I write satires, thus I avoid any form of political prejudice. When you admire someone, you will be less critical of him or her. No one is flawless, and no political party in Pakistan is ideal. As a little child, I used to appreciate Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's charisma and think of him as a charming leader. However, in today's world, no political figure is even close to ideal."

F. Viewer comments

The research findings also cover the audience's reaction as reported by Pakistan's well-known vocalists and producers. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan expresses gratitude for the great response to his songs by saying, "I have received recognition and immense love from people up until now, and I am happy for that." "People appreciate my music, and it makes me happy," says Sahir Ali Bagga. I have received criticism in the past, too, but that has not stopped me. My tunes for ISPR are well cherished. Taimur Rahman giggles, "Reaction to my

music videos has been quite positive. Before I started making music, nobody knew who I was, but now everyone knows me by the name of my band. Even those who disagreed with our philosophy admired the poetry we chose.

Ali Aftab Saeed claims that the public is open to different viewpoints. “I never imagined that people would be open to a different viewpoint, therefore I’m delighted with the public’s enthusiastic response. I believe supply and demand are the primary drivers of the market. Alternative viewpoints are valued when people show an interest in them. People may seek out alternative narratives, but they may not find any. “Response is fantastic,” adds Ali Gul Pir. I spent money on a music video that did not succeed. Excellent response. I invest money in a music video that generates no revenue. I only learn political things.

The audience loves satire and has a fan base, which I adore. It indicates that all the musicians, singers, and producers in Pakistan who are creating political music videos are getting praise and favorable comments from the audience.

G. Concluding Remarks and Suggestions

By applying Altman’s (1987) ideological framework—which posits that audiences are manipulated by the political and economic agendas of content creators—the study examines the socio-cognitive mechanisms behind the production of sociopolitical music videos. In-depth interviews with producers, lyricists, and singers yielded six key themes. These findings suggest that musicians with extensive training generally create patriotic videos, whereas satirical works typically come from professionals lacking such formal expertise. In contrast, videos addressing grave social and political issues are usually crafted by highly educated artists actively engaged in community affairs. The ideological foundations of these political music videos encompass nationalism, societal ills, systemic corruption, civic consciousness, and forward-thinking principles. Most patriotic videos—celebrating military valour, martyr sacrifices, and a positive armed forces image to foster an advancing national identity—are funded by ISPR. Non-satirical sociopolitical videos, supported mainly by NGOs, social initiatives, or occasionally self-funding, differ from satirical ones, which receive no institutional or corporate backing and are typically financed discreetly by the creators

themselves. Political music videos are developed in reaction to major political developments, significant events, structural societal challenges, and periods of conflict.

Most creators of music videos view traditional media as the state's most reliable institution, as it backs them and amplifies their content. However, not every producer depends on conventional outlets; some distribute their material via social platforms. Content makers funded by the government or ISPR trust these state entities, while activists tied to political parties generate their own material for election drives and to discredit rivals. Political loyalties do influence the making of sociopolitical music videos; nevertheless, satirists and performers aim to avoid favoritism toward any single party by mocking all sides, such as Ali Gul Pir in his song "VIP," Ali Aftab Saeed in his song "Aalu Anday" (Potatoes and eggs), and Faris Shafi in his music video. Ultimately, any ideology embedded in media is crafted for viewers or profit; in Pakistani political music videos, creators and artists report strong audience approval despite earning no revenue from satire. Still, their works gain admiration and build a substantial following.

The organizations sponsoring these videos aim to cultivate national pride, enhance their image, and boost their status, all within the broader context of politically charged music videos. Such videos can also serve as vehicles for dissent, challenging defects in societal and governance structures. The findings align with Altman's (1987) ideological framework insofar as state entities, armed forces, advocacy groups, and political factions entice viewers toward their agendas. However, the analysis further reveals a refinement: an informed political segment employs music videos to voice opposition to institutional failures, thereby heightening public awareness. The investigation uncovers counter-narratives that decry systemic breakdowns and spotlight deficiencies across governmental and social bodies. While various entities draw spectators into their orbits, a politically aware cohort simultaneously crafts sociopolitical music videos to fulfil their urge to contest systemic imperfections and to enlighten and mobilize the viewership.

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