

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF NETFLIX ON CULTURAL ACCULTURATION: A STUDY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Sana Tariq

Student at Department of Sociology, BS Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan

Email: tsana7585@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

Ali Ahmed

MS Economics, Faculty of Economics, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

Email: aliahmed004500@gmail.com

Noman Nadeem

Student at Department of Criminology, BS Criminology, NFC IET Multan

Email: nomannadeem2026@gmail.com

Dr Ahmad Saad

Assistant Professor at NFC IET Multan

Email: ahmadsaad08@hotmail.com

Coressponding Author Email: tsana7585@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Netflix—a global subscription-based streaming service that offers on-demand access to a diverse array of films, television series, and original content—on cultural acculturation among university students in Lahore, Pakistan. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with students from COMSATS University Lahore and Bahria University Lahore, the research examines how exposure to international content via Netflix affects students' language, behaviors, and cultural values. The findings indicate a significant correlation between frequent Netflix consumption and noticeable changes in linguistic expressions, dress preferences, and social practices. While many students report cultural enrichment and broadened worldviews through Hollywood, Bollywood, Korean, and Turkish series, there is also a prevalent concern regarding the erosion of traditional Pakistani values. These results underscore the importance of integrating media literacy into university education to equip students with the critical skills necessary for engaging thoughtfully with global digital content and navigating the complexities of cultural identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: *Acculturation, Netflix, Globalization, Media Influence, Lahore*

Introduction

The global landscape of media consumption has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years, driven largely by the rise and proliferation of digital streaming platforms. Among these, Netflix stands out as one of the most influential and widely accessed services, boasting a worldwide subscriber base that continues to grow at a remarkable pace. With its vast, algorithm-driven content library encompassing a multitude of genres, languages, and cultural perspectives, Netflix has redefined the ways in which people access, interact with, and are influenced by media (Appadurai, 1996; Jenkins, 2006). Unlike traditional broadcast media, streaming platforms empower viewers to curate personalized entertainment experiences, often resulting in deeper engagement and more sustained exposure to international content.

This transformation has far-reaching implications—not only for the entertainment industry, but also for patterns of cultural exchange, identity formation, and value negotiation across societies. As digital technologies erode traditional barriers of geography and language, individuals are increasingly exposed to diverse cultural expressions, social norms, and worldviews from around the globe (Castells, 2010; Tomlinson, 1999). Media scholars argue that the easy accessibility and ubiquity of platforms like Netflix have fundamentally shifted the dynamics of acculturation, hybridity, and even resistance in both Western and non-Western contexts (Kraidy, 2005; Robertson, 1992).

In Pakistan, and specifically in urban centers like Lahore, these developments are particularly salient. With high-speed internet access becoming commonplace and smartphones and smart televisions proliferating, young people in Lahore are among the most active digital consumers in South Asia. For university students, streaming platforms have become much more than sources of entertainment—they serve as critical windows into global cultures, lifestyles, languages, and ideologies (Kraidy, 2005; Livingstone, 2004). The exposure to diverse media—from Hollywood blockbusters and Bollywood dramas to popular Korean (Hallyuwood) and Turkish series—offers students unprecedented opportunities for learning and cultural enrichment. It can foster cosmopolitan attitudes, broadened worldviews, and a heightened awareness of both similarities and differences across cultures (Jenkins, 2006; Arnett, 2002).

Yet, this transnational media consumption is not without its challenges. As students encounter a spectrum of values, behaviors, and identities on platforms like Netflix, they may also experience tensions between these global influences and the traditions, customs, and moral codes of their own society. In a city like Lahore—widely recognized as Pakistan’s historic and cultural heartland—such tensions may be especially pronounced. Here, the deep-rooted traditions of family, religion, language, and collective identity co-exist with increasing exposure to modern, globalized, and sometimes conflicting cultural norms.

Students at institutions such as COMSATS University Lahore and Bahria University Lahore thus find themselves at a unique crossroads. They are simultaneously inheritors of Lahore’s rich heritage and active participants in a rapidly modernizing, digitally connected world. Their daily media consumption choices—and, in particular, their engagement with platforms like Netflix—play a significant role in how they negotiate identity, belonging, and cultural authenticity amid accelerating social and technological change. Netflix, in this context, acts as both a mirror and a mold: reflecting global realities while also subtly shaping local aspirations and behaviors.

Despite the significance of these phenomena, scholarly research on the cultural impact of Netflix in Pakistan—especially within the context of Lahore’s universities—remains limited. Prior studies in other settings have highlighted how streaming platforms can both enrich and challenge traditional cultural norms (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Kraidy, 2005; Said, 1978). However, the unique historical, social, and educational context of Lahore calls for a nuanced, locally grounded investigation into the ways digital media shape youth identities today.

Given this context, the present study aims to examine how Netflix influences the cultural attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of university students in Lahore. Specifically, it seeks to understand how exposure to international content on Netflix is reflected in students’ language use, fashion choices, social practices, and their evolving perspectives on Pakistani traditions and values. By focusing on students from two major Lahore universities, this research contributes valuable empirical evidence to ongoing debates about globalization, media influence, and cultural adaptation in South Asia. The findings are intended to inform not only academic understanding,

but also practical strategies for educators, policymakers, and parents seeking to support young people as they navigate the opportunities and challenges of a hyper-connected, digital world.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its timely exploration of how global digital media—especially streaming platforms like Netflix—are reshaping the cultural landscape for Pakistani youth, particularly university students in Lahore. As globalization accelerates, young people are increasingly exposed to diverse cultural narratives, lifestyles, and social values, leading to profound changes in their worldviews and day-to-day behaviors (Castells, 2010). This research highlights the urgent need to understand these influences, as they are not only redefining individual and collective identities but also presenting new opportunities and challenges for social cohesion and cultural continuity. By closely examining the media consumption habits of university students, the study offers valuable insights for educators and academic policymakers, underscoring the importance of integrating robust media literacy and critical thinking skills into university curricula. Such educational initiatives can better prepare students to navigate the complexities of global media, discern underlying messages, and maintain a thoughtful balance between embracing new influences and preserving their own cultural heritage (Livingstone, 2004). Additionally, the findings provide much-needed empirical evidence for cultural policymakers, helping to inform strategies that support a healthy interplay between global exposure and the protection of local values and traditions. This is especially crucial in a society like Pakistan's, where cultural identity is closely tied to social stability and collective well-being (Mowlana, 1997). Ultimately, the study not only contributes to academic discourse but also serves as a practical resource for those aiming to foster resilient, culturally aware, and globally competent youth in the 21st century.

Objectives

1. To identify which genres on Netflix are most popular among university students in Lahore.
2. To assess specific changes in language, dress, and social behaviors linked to Netflix content exposure.
3. To explore students' perceptions regarding the impact of Netflix on traditional Pakistani values.

Literature Review

Globalization, driven by advances in technology and communication, has dramatically intensified cultural exchanges across borders, enabling the rapid diffusion of values, beliefs, and social practices worldwide (Appadurai, 1996; Tomlinson, 1999). The advent of digital platforms—especially global streaming services like Netflix—has further accelerated these processes, making it possible for individuals to access and interact with a wide variety of cultural content from virtually anywhere in the world. As a result, cultural boundaries have become increasingly porous, and individuals are now routinely exposed to lifestyles, languages, and ideologies far removed from their own local realities.

Media theorists have long emphasized the role of sustained media exposure in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and identities. Gerbner and Gross (1976) introduced the concept of cultivation theory, which posits that continuous engagement with media content can have a gradual yet profound impact on viewers' perceptions of reality. This idea has become even more relevant in the digital age, as platforms like Netflix enable binge-watching and sustained exposure to foreign media, often blurring the line between entertainment and cultural education. Jenkins (2006) expanded on

these ideas with the notion of "convergence culture," where traditional and new media interact to create novel forms of cultural experience and expression, further complicating the process of cultural identity formation.

In the Pakistani context, the influence of international media is especially pronounced among youth and urban populations. The popularity of Bollywood and Hollywood films has a long history in the region, but the recent surge in access to Korean (Hallyuwood) and Turkish series via digital platforms marks a new era of cross-cultural engagement. These media imports introduce not just entertainment, but also fashion trends, social values, and linguistic expressions that are increasingly visible in everyday life. Kraidy (2005) discusses this phenomenon as cultural hybridity—a blending of global and local elements that can enrich cultural experiences but may also lead to tension or resistance. Such hybridity is often double-edged, fostering cosmopolitanism on the one hand while raising anxieties about the erosion of indigenous values and social norms on the other (Said, 1978).

Recent studies in media and communication also highlight the implications for national identity and social cohesion. As young Pakistanis consume content that reflects diverse, and sometimes contradictory, worldviews, questions arise about the long-term effects on cultural authenticity and collective identity. Some scholars argue that digital media can empower youth by expanding their horizons and encouraging critical engagement with multiple perspectives (Livingstone, 2004). Others caution that unchecked exposure to global media may undermine traditional norms, weaken local languages, and even reshape aspirations in ways that distance young people from their cultural roots (Robertson, 1992; Mowlana, 1997).

In summary, the literature points to the complex and multifaceted impact of globalization and digital media on cultural acculturation. For Pakistani university students, who are at the forefront of this media revolution, platforms like Netflix serve as both windows to the world and mirrors reflecting back evolving cultural identities. Understanding this interplay is essential for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to support healthy cultural adaptation in an era marked by rapid social and technological change.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two key theoretical perspectives—Cultural Globalization Theory and Cultivation Theory—which together provide a comprehensive lens for analyzing the influence of digital media on cultural acculturation among university students in Lahore.

Cultural Globalization Theory, as articulated by Appadurai (1996), posits that the increasing movement of people, information, and media across national boundaries has led to the emergence of hybrid cultural identities. According to this framework, globalization is not simply a process of homogenization, but rather a complex interplay of global and local influences. Individuals continually negotiate and blend cultural elements from diverse sources, resulting in new forms of identity, practice, and meaning. In the context of Lahore, where students are exposed to a wide variety of international content through platforms like Netflix, Cultural Globalization Theory helps explain the processes by which traditional and global cultural norms are integrated, adapted, or contested within everyday life.

Cultivation Theory, introduced by Gerbner and Gross (1976), further complements this analysis by emphasizing the cumulative effects of prolonged media exposure on perceptions and behaviors. This theory suggests that consistent and repeated viewing of specific types of media content can gradually shape individuals' beliefs about social realities, norms, and expectations. In the era of streaming platforms, where binge-watching and sustained engagement with foreign series and films are common, Cultivation Theory is especially relevant. It provides a framework for

understanding how ongoing exposure to diverse media narratives—whether from Hollywood, Bollywood, Korean, or Turkish productions—can influence students’ language use, dress preferences, attitudes, and even their perceptions of their own culture.

By combining Cultural Globalization Theory and Cultivation Theory, this study is able to analyze both the dynamic processes of identity negotiation in a globalized media landscape and the long-term, subtle effects of repeated exposure to international content. Together, these frameworks support a nuanced investigation into how Netflix is shaping, challenging, and redefining cultural identities among Lahore’s university students.

Methodology

Sample

The study sample comprised 48 university students, including 24 males and 24 females, selected from COMSATS University Lahore and Bahria University Lahore. This sample was chosen to represent both genders and to reflect the experiences of students from two prominent universities in Lahore.

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of Netflix’s influence on cultural acculturation. Data collection involved the administration of structured surveys for quantitative data, alongside semi-structured interviews to gain deeper qualitative insights.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and correlational statistical methods to identify patterns and relationships between Netflix usage and cultural changes. Qualitative data from interviews were examined using thematic analysis, as recommended by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), allowing for the identification of recurring themes and nuanced perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

All necessary ethical protocols were strictly observed. Institutional approval was obtained prior to data collection, informed consent was secured from all participants, and strict measures were implemented to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants throughout the study.

Results

Table 1. Diffusion of Korean (Hallyuwood) Culture Through Netflix

Survey Item	Male (n=24)	Female (n=24)	Total (%)
Watch Hallyuwood shows significantly	6	18	50%
Admire or follow Hallyuwood actors/actresses	2	10	25%
Incorporate Hallyuwood fashion into style	0	6	12.5%
Noticed language/slang changes from Hallyuwood media	0	10	20.8%
Listen to Hallyuwood music	0	16	33.3%
Notice Hallyuwood norms in Pakistani media	0	12	25%
Observe changes in fashion due to Hallyuwood	0	10	20.8%

Interpretation:

Female students report higher exposure and influence from Korean media, especially in viewing habits, language, and fashion adoption.

Table 2. Diffusion of Hollywood Culture Through Netflix

Survey Item	Male (n=24)	Female (n=24)	Total (%)
Watch Hollywood content significantly	15	8	47.9%
Admire or follow Hollywood actors/actresses	14	4	37.5%
Incorporate Hollywood fashion/trends	17	8	52.1%
Noticed language/slang changes from Hollywood media	20	10	62.5%
Notice Hollywood norms in Pakistani media	8	7	31.3%

Interpretation:

Hollywood content strongly shapes students' language, fashion, and attitudes, with males generally reporting greater influence than females.

Table 3. Diffusion of Bollywood Culture Through Netflix

Survey Item	Male (n=24)	Female (n=24)	Total (%)
Watch Bollywood content significantly	22	17	81.3%
Admire or follow Bollywood actors/actresses	12	13	52.1%
Incorporate Bollywood fashion/trends	14	14	58.3%
Noticed language/slang changes from Bollywood media	23	21	91.7%
Notice Bollywood norms in Pakistani media	14	15	60.4%

Interpretation:

Bollywood is a dominant influence on students' language, social customs, and fashion, affecting both males and females.

Table 4. Diffusion of Turkish Cinema Through Netflix

Survey Item	Male (n=24)	Female (n=24)	Total (%)
Watch Turkish cinema significantly	7	16	47.9%
Admire or follow Turkish actors/actresses	12	6	37.5%
Incorporate Turkish fashion/trends	9	4	27.1%
Noticed language/slang changes from Turkish cinema	9	5	29.2%

Interpretation:

Interest in Turkish media is rising, with more influence reported among females, especially in viewing habits and admiration for actors.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide clear evidence that exposure to international content via Netflix is actively reshaping the cultural landscape among university students in Lahore. The data show that Bollywood content is currently the most watched and culturally influential among respondents, a reflection of both geographical proximity and shared historical ties between Pakistan and India. However, Hollywood's persistent global appeal ensures its position as the second most influential genre, with Korean and Turkish media quickly gaining popularity and becoming significant agents of cultural exchange.

This growing diversity in media consumption is resulting in tangible cultural shifts. Students consistently reported the adoption of new linguistic expressions, fashion styles, and social

behaviors derived from international media, indicating a process of hybridization described by Appadurai (1996) and Kraidy (2005). The language used in casual conversations, the clothing styles seen on campuses, and even attitudes toward relationships and social roles are increasingly influenced by global trends. These findings align with Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), which suggests that sustained media exposure gradually shapes perceptions of reality and normative behaviors.

However, alongside these signs of cultural enrichment and cosmopolitanism, there is also a pronounced concern about the erosion of traditional Pakistani values and identities. Many students voiced anxieties about cultural dilution, generational divides, and the weakening of local customs, echoing the warnings of Said (1978) regarding the potential for cultural imperialism and loss of indigenous authenticity. This tension underscores the complex nature of cultural globalization—where the benefits of greater understanding and openness to difference must be weighed against the risks of losing unique cultural heritage.

Finally, the study revealed a widespread recognition of the need for stronger media literacy among students. Respondents expressed the desire for critical skills to help them better evaluate, contextualize, and selectively engage with digital content. This aligns with Livingstone (2004), who advocates for the integration of media literacy into educational curricula as a means to empower youth in the digital age. Such skills are essential not only for personal development but also for maintaining a balanced relationship with the rapidly evolving global media environment.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that Netflix serves as a powerful catalyst for cultural change among university students in Lahore. By providing access to a diverse array of international content—including Bollywood, Hollywood, Korean, and Turkish media—the platform facilitates exposure to new ideas, lifestyles, and social norms, thereby influencing language, fashion, and everyday behaviors. This process of cultural acculturation highlights the dynamic interplay between global influences and local traditions, as students negotiate their identities within an increasingly interconnected world.

While many students benefit from the broadening of perspectives and the enrichment of cultural experiences, there remains a palpable concern regarding the preservation of traditional Pakistani values and the potential erosion of cultural authenticity. These findings emphasize the need for a balanced approach that embraces the positive aspects of global media while maintaining a strong sense of local identity.

To address these challenges, universities in Lahore should prioritize the integration of comprehensive media literacy programs into their curricula. By equipping students with the critical skills necessary to analyze, interpret, and engage thoughtfully with digital content, educators can empower the next generation to navigate the complexities of cultural globalization responsibly and confidently. In doing so, students will be better prepared to benefit from the opportunities of the digital era while remaining grounded in their own cultural heritage.

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