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Abstract

This essay explores the evolution, challenges, and prospects of television journalism in Pakistan, tracing its origins from the first television witnessed in 1955 to the dynamic and competitive landscape of today. The historical context highlights the establishment of the Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) in 1964 and the significant shift brought about by the liberalization of the media sector in 2002. This liberalization ended the state monopoly and led to the emergence of numerous private channels, which introduced innovative and diverse programming. The study examines the distribution and accessibility of television content, noting the dominance of terrestrial broadcasting by national channels such as PTV Home, PTV News, and ATV. Further, the paper analyzes the role of private channels in shaping public discourse vis-à-vis public opinion formation. It discusses the challenges posed by sensationalism and the prioritization of commercial interests over journalistic integrity and suggests prospects in the current media-saturated society.

Keywords: Television Journalism, History, Challenges, Prospects, Media Industry, PTV

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Title

Television Journalism in Pakistan. Historical Evolution, Challenges, and Prospects

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Abstract

This essay explores the evolution, challenges, and prospects of television journalism in Pakistan, tracing its origins from the first television witnessed in 1955 to the dynamic and competitive landscape of today. The historical context highlights the establishment of the Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) in 1964 and the significant shift brought about by the liberalization of the media sector in 2002. This liberalization ended the state monopoly and led to the emergence of numerous private channels, which introduced innovative and diverse programming. The study examines the distribution and accessibility of television content, noting the dominance of terrestrial broadcasting by national channels such as PTV Home, PTV News, and ATV. Further, the paper analyzes the role of private channels in shaping public discourse vis-à-vis public opinion formation. It discusses the challenges posed by sensationalism and the prioritization of commercial interests over journalistic integrity and suggests prospects in the current media-saturated society.

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Early History of TV Journalism in Pakistan

American consulate organized the first television demonstration in Karachi in 1955. This was the

beginning of the television era in Pakistan (Hussain, 2012). National Education Commission under the leadership of the then president Ayub Khan formally took the initiative to establish the



television industry in Pakistan (Hussain, 2012; Baig, 2012). For instance, to establish a television station, an agreement was signed with Nippon Electric Company (NEC), a Japanese multinational technology and electronic corporation. The project was started under a joint private and government agreement. By 1963, the government assumed control of the project in the "greater national interest" (Naveed, 2019; Baig, 2012). In 1964, the first official television station started inaugural transmissions in Lahore. A year later, Dhaka also witnessed the beginning of television (Yousaf, 2022; Anand, 2014; Baig, 2012).

In the following two years, television stations at Rawalpindi-Islamabad and Karachi were established. It followed the inception of the Peshawar and Quetta centers in 1974 (Naveed, 2019; Anand, 2014; Baig, 2012). In the beginning, the Television Promoters Company (TPC) took all these significant initiatives. However, 1967 witnessed the upgrading of TPC into Pakistan Television Corporation (PTC) (Naveed, 2019). Interestingly, PTC was nationalized in 1972. Nevertheless, the journey of growth and innovation continued in all regimes, despite hurdles and changes in leadership. Importantly, PTV began experimental color transmissions in 1976 (Anand, 2014). The Pakistan Television Academy was founded in 1987 to train professionals working in the evolving medium (Naveed, 2019). However, morning transmissions began in the late 1980s (Naveed, 2019).

In 1990, the government launched the semi-government TV network "Peoples Television Network" (PTN). This network was later renamed Shalimar Recording and Broadcasting Company (SRBC) (Ali, 2022; Baig, 2012). A year later, PTN merged with Shalimar Recording Company and renamed it Shalimar Television Network (STN) (Khan, 2018; Baig, 2012). In the beginning, STN was launched in Islamabad. However, it was expanded to Karachi and Lahore. To put it crudely, by the mid-1990s, the STN broadcast covered almost the entire population of the country (Hussain, 2012; Khan, 2018).

To put it succinctly, STN pioneered the terrestrial transmissions of CNN International and BBC World in Pakistan, providing diversity, different perspectives, and international stories to

the viewers (Khan, 2018). To put it another way, STN's broadcasts included CNN transmission, NTM's slot, and limited broadcasts of BBC World and German DW TV. The upshot of all this is that STN continued successfully until 1999. Nevertheless, the newly created NTM introduced innovative and invigorating programs catering to the tastes and interests of diversified Pakistani viewers (Baig, 2012).

Technological Developments in Television Industry

The evolution of television in Pakistan over 57 years can be categorized into two parts. 1967-2002, wherein Pakistan Television Corporation enjoyed the monopoly in broadcasting, informing, educating, and entertaining the viewers. Part two ranges from 2002-2024 in which privately-owned channels are the dominant source of agenda-setting and public opinion formation. In the first part of the history of Pakistan Television Corporation, the first ten years from 1964 to 1974 are termed a golden decade of broadcasting which even the state broadcaster could not compete in the following years. The second phase of television evolution is dominated by privately-owned television channels which are considered the prime agenda-setter and source of public opinion formation on a range of issues for the diversified public (Jabbar, 2017).

PTV Network launched PTV-2 as Pakistan's first satellite channel in 1992 (Baig, 2012). This journey of innovation and technological advancement continued through 1998 when PTV World appeared on the scene. In 1998, PTV collaborated with a private company to initiate PTV Prime solely for Western viewers (Hussain, 2012; Naveed, 2011; Baig, 2012). Digital TV satellite broadcasting commenced in 1999, with PTV/PTV-1 gaining an independent satellite beam in 2001. Financial losses led to the shutdown of NTM in 1999. PTV Network took over STN in 1999, renaming it Channel-3, which began regular transmissions in 2000, accompanied by a satellite beam (Khan, 2018; Baig, 2012).

Privatization of the Television Industry

Over the several years, the television industry has undergone radical changes since the inception of the first television station in Pakistan. The current

Pakistan society is a society of mediated realities created by a saturated media landscape (Yousaf, 2023). It has evolved from a state-owned television station to several privately owned television stations dedicated to catering to the news and current affairs, religious, sports, and infotainment needs of the diverse populace of the country. The liberation of the media industry especially television has significantly influenced every segment of society ranging from politics, culture, religion, education, economy, and entertainment (Schmidt, 2014). To reinstate, exposure to diverse content corresponds to more liberal norms, less cultural and religious conservatism, and pluralistic public discourse about various political, religious, and cultural issues (Blumenstock, Dube & Hussein, 2022). In this regard, 2000 saw the dawn of several privately owned news and current affairs televisions which resulted in content diversity, competition, and a window of freedom from tight government control on the content. For instance, Indus Vision was Pakistan's first private satellite channel which started transmission. The channel was launched in 2000 (Anand, 2014). It was followed by the launching of ARY Digital in 2000. This channel familiarized viewers with new and innovative trends in news reporting, and current affairs shaping the public discourse of the society regarding issues and attributing the responsibility of the issues to those who are assumed to be responsible for the issues. In addition, Geo News was another revolutionary addition to the media industry in 2002. The channel gained popularity owing to its news and current affairs programs and providing timely news and in-depth analysis of the issues. Likewise, Aaj News was another good addition to news and current affairs programs. The channel was launched in 2004. Moreover, Hum TV started transmission in 2005 (Hussain, 2012; Anand, 2014). The trend of launching new televisions is continued and Pakistani society is now a media-saturated society wherein these channels mediate public realities and shape public discourse. In 2005, PTV Channel-3 ceased operations. This allowed Shalimar Recording and Broadcasting Company to rebrand its TV channel as ATV through a joint venture with SSI. As a result, ATV became Pakistan's sole semi-private TV channel, broadcasting on both terrestrial and satellite platforms to the Pakistan public. However,

it evolved into a semi-government channel as SRBC did not renew its agreement with SSI (Naveed, 2011).

In another development in 2007, PTV-1 was renamed PTV Home to cater to the needs and interests of local viewers. Later on, PTV World became Pakistan's sole state-owned English language channel to disseminate Pakistan's narrative and story to the English-speaking audiences of Europe and America. Yet in another development, PTV News replaced PTV World in 2007. To elaborate on the difference, it is important to note that PTV Home, and PTV News both were state-owned, and ATV was semi-private. These television channels broadcast on both terrestrial and satellite beams. In another recent development, PTV Sports airs on terrestrial beams to cover national and international sports events organized both in Pakistan and abroad (Baig, 2012). In 2005, PTV Prime became an independent entity, and in 2006, PTV launched PTV Global exclusively for audiences in the Americas and Europe (Baig, 2012). At present, according to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) report issued on June 2024, 141 television channels have been issued licenses to function in Pakistan (PEMRA, 2024).

It is important to mention that privatization and modernization broadened the content accessible to viewers and assumed a pivotal role in forming public opinion and promoting democratic rule in Pakistan. Throughout different political eras ranging from military rule to democratic governments, Pakistani television journalism has evolved in its ability to influence the public agenda (Anand, 2014; Haqqānī, 2018; Riaz, 2008). For instance, under Zia-ul-Haq's regime, strict censorship limited media coverage to state-approved topics, impacting public discourse (Ali, 2013). This government control hampered the media's agenda-setting capability and identification of social issues of ordinary and marginalized groups in society (Hussain, 2012).

Television channels serve as platforms for public debate on national issues, contributing to a more informed and engaged populace (Riaz, 2008). The inclusivity and diversity of these discussions are crucial factors in their effectiveness vis-à-vis their role in promoting democratic and liberal

culture in the country (Hussain, 2012). To ensure inclusivity and diversity, the representation of various groups and political viewpoints on television is required to be enhanced (Baig, 2012). The consideration of these factors is crucial because marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and opposition parties, often struggle to gain visibility in mainstream media, especially in state-owned television. However, the digital revolution and the expansion of the media industry have significantly transformed the way media communicate with the public (Sheikh, Yousaf, Yousaf, & Kiran, 2024). To cut a long story short, television journalism promoted a pluralistic correspondence to engaged polity and democratic culture.

Functions of Television Journalism in Pakistan

Pakistan is a media-saturated society (Yousaf, 2023). Media represents the image of nations (Ji et al., 2016), frames conflicts (Lee & Maslog, 2005; Yousaf et al., 2020), build consensus on social issues (Yousaf, 2018), define the attributes of issues (Yousaf et al., 2022) and influence political participation (Ijaz & Yousaf, 2023). Mass media especially television has performed the function of mass communication since its inception in Pakistani society. In the current television journalism landscape, Geo News and Ary Digital set the agenda regarding politics, culture, and economics, making national issues salient, and how to perceive those issues in Pakistan. In other words, they are the prime agenda-setters in a saturated television environment. Lasswell (1960) noted three essential functions of mass communication in a society that includes surveillance, correlation among different segments of society, and cultural transmission. Charles R. Wright added the fourth function of mass communication, namely the entertainment function (Wright, 1974).

Throughout different political eras, from military rule to democratic governments, Pakistani television journalism has evolved in its ability to influence the public agenda (Riaz, 2008). For instance, under Zia-ul-Haq's regime, strict censorship limited media coverage to state-approved topics, impacting public discourse. Analyzing the coverage patterns of major channels reveals how issues like terrorism, corruption, and

elections are prioritized, exposing potential biases and political affiliations. During political turmoil, authorities may suppress coverage of protests or dissenting voices, influencing public Perception (Yousaf, 2019). Likewise, different channels may present similar events in contrasting ways; for example, state-owned PTV might portray government initiatives positively, while private channels may adopt a more critical stance. Importantly, the framing of issues like terrorism or economic policies can significantly shape viewers' perceptions and responses (Entman, 1993). Sensational framing can heighten fear or anxiety, while balanced framing can promote informed public discourse (Tuchman, 1978). However, censorship can lead to self-censorship among journalists, resulting in more cautious and less critical framing of sensitive, thereby reducing the range of perspectives presented to the public.

Television channels can serve as platforms for public debate on national issues, contributing to a more informed and engaged populace (Riaz, 2008). However, the inclusivity and diversity of these discussions are crucial factors in their effectiveness. Nevertheless, inclusivity and diversity are essential factors for representation. To ensure inclusivity and diversity, the representation of various groups and political viewpoints on television could be studied. The consideration of these factors is crucial because marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and opposition parties, often struggle to gain visibility in mainstream media. At a broader theoretical level, mass communication via-a-vis television journalism performs the main four functions in any given society. Many other functions originate from these main functions. However, here, our focus is on the four functions of television as a medium of mass communication.

Surveillance of Society

The first function of mass communication is termed surveillance. The surveillance function involves the collection and dissemination of useful information to the public. More specifically, through surveillance, television spotlights issues and makes them salient for the public vis-à-vis agenda-setting function. For instance, television journalism in Pakistan, notably by state-owned PTV and private channels like Geo TV and ARY Digital, plays a

pivotal role in shaping public discourse. Scholars term this function of mass communication agenda-setting role (McCombs and Shaw, [2013](#); McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, [1997](#)). This function can be divided into two main categories: warning or beware surveillance and instrumental surveillance (Wright, [1960](#); Yousaf, [2023](#)).

- **Warning/Beware Surveillance:** This type of surveillance includes providing details regarding prompt dangers, risks, or emergencies that require public consideration and activity. For example, information about earthquakes, storms, floods, and other regular disasters. Like tropical storm Katrina, news sources gave basic data on departure courses and security measures (Tierney, [2007](#)). Further examples include reports on health crises like pandemics, scourges, or food reviews. The Coronavirus pandemic is a great example of a situation in which the media played a critical role in dispersing data about contamination rates, security conventions, and immunization drives and dealing with misinformation and disinformation (Garfin, Silver, & Holman, [2020](#); Jin et al., [2022](#)). Likewise, cautions about psychological militant assaults, crimes, or any dangers to public wellbeing. For instance, after the 9/11 assaults, the media gave constant inclusion and updates, assisting individuals with grasping the developing circumstance and answering suitably (Chermak and Gruenewald, [2006](#)).
- **Instrumental Surveillance:** Instrumental surveillance includes continuously checking society to provide data that assists people in making informed choices. For instance, reports on securities exchanges, financial strategies, and monetary news help organizations, financial backers, and the overall population pursue financial choices. For example, everyday monetary news gives experiences into market patterns and venture potential open doors (Davis, [2016](#)). Moreover, reports about government exercises, strategy changes, and political occasions. Media inclusion in decisions, administrative meetings, and political discussions keeps the public informed about administration and

community obligations (Iyengar and Kinder, [1987](#)). In addition, television covers changing societal patterns, comprehensive developments, and way of life changes. The inclusion of occasions like the Oscars, critical games, or cultural movements gives a more extensive comprehension of social elements (Rojek, [2001](#)).

Correlation/Consensus among Masses

The correlation function of mass communication refers to the way media helps audiences interpret and understand information by placing it within a broader context, thereby facilitating social cohesion and stability among diverse demographic segments of society (Yousaf et al., [2023](#); Yousaf, [2018](#)). In contrast, some scholars, name this function of consensus building as social homogenization. The predominance of specific societies in worldwide media can prompt social homogenization, where nearby societies might be eclipsed by prevailing social stories, taking a chance with the deficiency of social variety (Tomlinson, [2009](#)). This view elaborates that culture portrayed in global media could lead to global citizenship and global cultural homogenization. The correlation function involves interpreting events and issues, prescribing behaviors, and providing value systems, which collectively contribute to a shared social reality (Lasswell, [1960](#); Wright, [1960](#)). This function is performed in several ways;

- **Political Analysis:** Media outlets offer in-depth analysis of political events, such as elections, policy changes, and international relations. For instance, news coverage during elections includes not just reporting on the events but also expert commentary, historical context, and predictions about the impact of the election outcomes (Dunaway & Graber, [2017](#)).
- **Economic Reports:** Media interpretation of economic data, such as employment rates, inflation, and market trends, helps the public understand complex economic issues and develops understanding among the masses. This can include expert opinions and analysis that contextualize raw data, making it accessible and relevant to the average person.

- **Public Health Campaigns:** Media plays a crucial role in health communication by prescribing behaviors to prevent diseases, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, where media outlets disseminated information on hygiene practices, social distancing, and vaccination (Wakefield, Loken, & Hornik, [2010](#)).
 - **Social Norms:** Media often portrays idealized behaviors and lifestyles, influencing public perceptions and behaviors. For example, television shows and advertisements frequently promote certain standards of beauty, success, and morality (Gerbner et al., [2002](#)). As a result, the masses develop a consensus on the standards of beauty, success, morality, and immorality in society. Similarly, the media engages in discussions about moral and ethical issues, such as human rights, environmental sustainability, and social justice. This helps shape public attitudes and values toward these issues. The political economy of media shapes these discourses (Chomsky & Herman, [2002](#)).
- programs, and online content that promotes and shows these dialects (Grenoble and Whaley, [2006](#)). Moreover, the following functions also include.
- **Educational Programs on TV and radio** intended for kids frequently consolidate social stories, fantasies, and verifiable occasions, showing them their social legacy (Buckingham, [2003](#)). Additionally, media content, like shows and sitcoms, frequently reflects cultural qualities and standards, unobtrusively teaching viewers about satisfactory ways of behaving and cultural jobs (Silverstone, [2003](#)). Moreover, narratives on verifiable occasions, like conflicts, transformations, and huge cultural changes, give top-to-bottom examination and protect these occasions for any family down the line (Rosenstone, [1996](#)).
 - **Ethical Representation:** Guaranteeing a moral and precise portrayal of societies in the media is vital to forestall generalizations and deceptions that can harm social gatherings. In simpler language, media represents ethical standards that become norms for the public.

Transmission of Cultural Heritage

The transmission of social legacy is a basic capability of mass correspondence, wherein media acts as a channel for passing social qualities, customs, standards, and customs from one generation to another generation. This capability helps keep up with the progression of social character and social union among the general public. Moreover, the cultural transmission from one generation to another generation informs the current generation about the past cultural heritage, values, customs, and values of their ancestors, thus, bridging the generation gap and creating cohesion among generations. For instance, dramas, movies, and TV programs frequently portray conventional functions, celebrations, and specialties, safeguarding these components of social legacy and making them open and providing youth an opportunity to appreciate the rich cultural heritage of past national events such as Pakistan Day, Independence Day, Defense day, and religious festivals keep young generation connected with the past of their nation and ancestors. Similarly, media outlets play a significant part in saving endangered dialects through radio stations, television

Entertainment

The entertainment function of mass communication is essential in current culture. It furnishes crowds with entertainment, unwinding, and a break from the everyday practice of day-to-day existence. Through different types of media, diversion satisfies mental and social requirements, impacting social patterns, ways of behaving, and esteems. For instance, famous television series, movies, and streaming content offer stories and encounters that enthrall crowds and provide a transitory break from the real world (Morley, [2006](#)). Likewise, listening to music and radio projects can be a mitigating and pleasant movement, assisting individuals with unwinding and de-stressing (Lonsdale and North, [2011](#)). Similarly, broadcasting of live sports and occasions such as the Olympic Games and other leading sports competitions cultivates a feeling of having a place and shared energy and entertainment (Boyle, [2009](#)). Likewise, cinema and theatre are cheap and easily accessible sources of entertainment in Pakistan (Ali, [2022](#)). Moreover, online platforms

such as YouTube, TikTok, and gaming discussions permit clients to share content, interface, and structure networks in light of shared amusement interests (Baym, 2016). In addition, music cultural shows, and elite culture portrayal influence style and way of life decisions, reflecting and forming contemporary cultural taste (Frith, 1996). There is also the facility of online streaming of movies, series, dramas, and a variety of content available online on membership (Vogel, 2007).

- **Media as Watchdog:** The media acts as a watchdog, holding people with significant influence responsible by researching and uncovering bad behaviors, debasement, and shortcomings. This job is fundamental for maintaining straightforwardness and responsibility in administration (Stapenhurst, 2000).
- **Gatekeeping:** Media associations go about as guardians by choosing which reports to distribute and how to introduce them. This command over the data stream shapes the public's comprehension and sentiments about different issues (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). To elaborate, editors working in media close the gate for certain items, and allow certain items to be broadcast, thus, making them important to the public.

Challenges to Television Journalism

Television journalism encounters several challenges. We have presented a summary in the following section.

Firstly, authorities exercise a huge command over media content, frequently smothering basic details. Electronic media regulators such as PEMRA are utilized to implement these limitations, prompting certain agendas. This practice affects content diversity and pluralistic culture in society.

Secondly, stations frequently depend intensely on advertisements for income, which prompts one-sided storytelling that favors supporters and promoters (Shah, 2014). More modest news sources need help with monetary maintainability, which influences their capacity to deliver top-notch reporting. This dependence on advertisements prompts elite culture and the issues of the ordinary

public do not get enough space in media reportage, thus, they are ignored.

Thirdly, reporters face dangers, badgering, and savagery from different entertainers, including political gatherings, fanatic associations, and groups of thugs, which obstruct their capacity to report uninhibitedly and securely. Media freedom is essential for fair and honest reporting of issues and events. Unless and until, media practitioners are independent, unbiased, and free from all types of pressures, fair and objective reporting becomes a dream.

Fourthly, there needs to be more satisfactory preparation and expert improvement, which potentially opens doors for columnists and influences the nature of detailing (Iqbal, 2018).

Fifthly and more importantly, the shift to online websites represents a test for customary television reporting, expecting variation in new organizations and innovations.

Sixthly: Journalistic integrity is a serious challenge to the quality of journalism especially television journalism. Journalists must uphold high standards of integrity and morality while reporting for the public and the greater public interest and societal cohesion. There is a developing accentuation on editorial uprightness and moral principles for certain media associations doing whatever it may take to resolve issues of predisposition and emotionalism (Iqbal, 2018).

Seventhly, biased reporting is another challenge that corresponds to polarization in a society. The viewers' consumption of biased framing of issues shapes their opinion about national issues (Amin, Amin & Ali, 2021) and corresponds to polarization in society.

To meet the aforementioned challenges, digital literacy is an essential tool. Therefore, developing digital literacy among different segments of the populace and professional journalists is a key factor in making television more effective for bringing constructive changes in society. In a recent study, Kiran, Yousaf & Yousaf (2024) concluded that digital literacy competence is a key factor in empowering the public to better utilize media content in their daily lives. As a result of digital literacy campaigns, the mind-boggling transaction between media technological advancement, administrative difficulties, and creating meanings

of television news, current affairs, and other infotainment programs coverage aimed to cater to diverse audiences in Pakistan would become effective.

This theoretical exploration features the significant effect of media advancement on TV reporting in Pakistan, uncovering both the advantages and difficulties that have arisen since the 2002 changes. This discussion integrates these issues, looking at the ramifications for the business models of media and public interests to better serve diverse Pakistani society.

Prospects for Television Journalism

This essay explores how the media revolution in Pakistan has influenced all aspects of life and has corresponded to a more liberal, diverse, and informed society. Media regulating bodies such as PEMRA and the Press Council of Pakistan assume a basic role in keeping up with moral guidelines to promote ethical journalism and decent content for the consumption of the public.

Additionally, there are more opportunities for digital TV reporting, especially as online website presence is essential for television reporting. Furthermore, there is a requirement to investigate the degree of biased television news reporting and its effect on public opinion, trust, and socialite cohesion. Television news reporting in Pakistan has taken critical steps since the advancement of the media business. However, it keeps on confronting difficulties connected with guidelines, oversight, and keeping up with editorial respectability. Tending to these difficulties requires a more straightforward and unprejudiced administrative system, as well as proceeding endeavors to advance more credible, unbiased, and fair news reporting.

The development of television news coverage in Pakistan is a demonstration of the unique transaction between media development, administrative structures, and socio-political impacts. The evolution of the media business in 2002 denoted a turning point, changing the TV scene from state-controlled syndication to an energetic, cutthroat field, diverse, and competitive field. This shift provided plenty of private channels such as ARY Digital, Geo television, and several other television channels. These channels offer innovative programming that catered to masses with different inclinations, improving the general quality of TV content.

The evolution strategy permitted private broadcasters to work candidly, prompting diversity and refinement in the quality of news content. It empowered the media to cover more issues and points of view and, in this way, assumed a vital part in forming public opinion and discourse. The competition for viewership frequently prompts sensationalism. This has, at times, brought about the spread of deception, influencing public confidence in the media.

With a huge and fast-growing population, television remains a main source of news, information, current affairs, and entertainment in Pakistan. To cater to this huge and diverse, there are more prospects for investigating television journalism, more solution-orientated talk shows, and the production of dramas that address social issues widespread in the developing society of Pakistan. To improve media journalistic standards, ethical training, and fact-check mechanisms need to be ensured to restore public trust in television journalism as well as improve the quality of television news reporting and programs.

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