

International Audience's Perception about the Turkish TV Serial "The Magnificent Century" In the Context of Portrayal of History and Women

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Abstract

Media (specifically television) is a vital tool of cross-cultural communication, cultural exportation, gaining soft power, and public diplomacy. Lately, Turkey has adopted a strategy of multidimensional public diplomacy where the Turkish media (Television serials) exports have emerged as a public and commercial cultural diplomacy tool for the last two decades. Turkish television channels are not only popular through local TV networks, but it also has access to a significant number of international audiences.

This research article focuses on the reception and perception of international audience regarding Turkish television historical serial "The Magnificent Century". While questioning its perception through the international audience, this research highlights the representation of history (Ottoman era) and the portrayal of women in the selected drama serial. As methodology, following the quantitative research techniques, an online survey was conducted covering the general audience of two countries, Pakistan and Egypt. The main objective was to be able to question the sample audience representing two different regions: South Asia and the Middle East. The data proves that the audience from these two regions, developed a diverse opinion regarding the representation of the history and portrayal of women of the time. Throughout the survey, a certain segment of the respondents strongly argue that this serial has distorted the history, and contrary to the truth, the women in the serials were depicted as strong and powerful characters. On the other hand, a growing body of literature argues that women have been presented in the serials as an icon of lust, sex, and a satisfaction tool for the Sultans.

Key Words: Turkish TV Serial, The Magnificent Century, International Audience, Perception, Representation of Women, Ottoman History.

Özet

Medya (özellikle televizyon) kültürlerarası iletişim, kültürel ihracat, yumuşak güç kazanmak ve kamu diplomasisi için hayati bir araçtır. Türkiye, son 20 yılda Türk medyasının (Televizyon dizileri) ihracatının kamusal ve ticari bir kültürel diplomasi aracı olarak ortaya çıktığı çok

boyutlu bir kamu diplomasisi stratejisini benimsemiştir. Türk televizyonu yalnızca yerel TV ekranlarında ünlü değil, aynı zamanda çok sayıda uluslararası izleyiciye de erişebilmektedir. Bu araştırma makalesi, Türk televizyon tarihi dizisi “Muhteşem Yüzyıl” ile uluslararası izleyicilerin algılarına odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma, seçilen dizide tarihin ve kadınların temsil edilmesine vurgu yapmaktadır. Nicel yöntemin ardından, iki ülkenin, Pakistan ve Mısır'ın izleyicilerini içeren bir çevrimiçi anket araştırması yapılmıştır. İzleyici örneklemini iki bölgeyi, Güney Asya ve Orta Doğu'yu temsil etmektedir. Veriler, her iki ülkeden gelen izleyici sunucularının, Türk tarihini ve kadınların tasvirini temsil etme konusunda çeşitli görüşlere sahip olduklarını göstermektedir. Ankete katılanların bir kısmı, seçilen türün tarihi çarpıtığına ve kadınların güçlü bir karakter olarak gösterildiklerine inanmaktadır. Öte yandan, araştırmacılar, kadınların bu dizilerde çoğunlukla şehvet, cinsiyet ve Sultanlar için bir memnuniyet aracı olarak sunulduğunu savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Dizileri, Muhteşem Yüzyıl, Uluslararası İzleyici, Kadın Temsili, Osmanlı Tarihi.

Introduction

Like other prominent countries of the world, Turkey has also adopted a policy of gaining "Soft Power" and "Public Diplomacy" to become one of the important actors in a regional order and the global system (Kalin, 2011). As for Cevik (2014), the primary producer of soft power is the popular culture which contains music, cinema, television, and other forms of art. According to Arsan and Yıldırım, during the ruling era of AK (Justice and Development) party, the concept of neo-Ottomanism is under discussion which has also appeared through popular cultural products such as books, feature films, TV commercials and TV series (Arsan & Yıldırım, 2014). Turkish Television channels started to develop productions as non-governmental public diplomacy tool representing Turkey internationally (Cevik, 2014).

Handling a historical fiction story, “*The magnificent century*” (*Muhtesem Yuzyıl*) is one of the cultural media products ratifying the concept of neo-Ottomanism and Turkish-Islam Synthesis (Yanarocak, 2012). According to Elif Batuman, the “Magnificent Century” is part of a Turkish trend called Ottomania, a propagation of Ottoman cuisine, recipe books, Hammams (Ottoman-style bathroom consoles), palaces, living styles, wedding invitations with Ottoman calligraphy, and graduation gowns and flight-attendant uniform designs inspired by caftans and fezzes (Batuman, 2014).

The series the magnificent century was released for the first time in Turkey on January 5, 2011, and its final episode was broadcasted on June 11, 2014. Aired originally via Show TV and Star TV networks which are the local screens of Turkey, the TV show had four seasons with a total of 139 episodes. The story is based on the forty-six years (1520-1566) reign of the Sultan Suleyman (Suleiman) and Hurrem, the slave girl who is known in European literature

as Roxelana (Gottschlich, 2013), who later became Sultan Suleyman's wife and queen. Sultan Suleyman (Ottoman Sultan) ruled the longest reign of the Ottoman and marked the height of the Ottoman military, political and economic power, when it expanded its borders from Budapest to Mecca, from Algiers to Baghdad.

The series glorifies the Turks by depicting the Ottoman Empire as the superpower of the world where European emissaries are degraded in the sultan's court, and European states are helpless against the Ottomans' absolute power (Yanarocak, 2012). The series was initially broadcasted in Turkey and Northern Cyprus, subsequently, exported to transnational screens and aired in more than seventy countries including USA, Japan, Russia, Egypt, Pakistan, Spain, Poland, Mexico, Greece, Georgia, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Italy, Arab League, Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, check republic, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Kosovo, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Morocco, Montenegro, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Vietnam, Tanzania. So far, the most recent purchaser is the South Korea who has purchased the serial in July 2019, following by Uzbekistan, Colombia, and Tanzania who have purchased the serials respectively in December, September, and April in 2018. The consumer countries have renamed the serial with their colloquial languages and broadcasted it with subtitles or voice dubbing. The program - "*Magnificent Century*" - is a titillating weekly TV series that exaggerates the intrigue, romance and sex life of Suleyman the Magnificent, a revered 16th-century Ottoman leader. Broadly popular in Turkey and the Middle East, the show was broadcasted totally in 43 countries within a year after released and was watched by around 200 million people until 2012 (Rohde, 2012).

This research paper addresses the public reception and perception of the Turkish TV serial "*The Magnificent Century*" by the international audience. It provides a glimpse of the portrayal of history (Ottoman era) and women and the perception of all by transnational spectators. It aims to question the perception and reaction of the audience through the data covering the results of an analysis of online-survey of the audience members limiting it into two sample case countries, Egypt (Middle East) and Pakistan (South Asia).

Literature Review

Employing the soft power resources to shape a feasible environment for policy (Pilon, 2005), is common in the international encounter, although it may take a long time to produce the desired consequence. According to Olson (1999), countries such as the USA, Britain,

China, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, India, and Russia spend an enormous sum on media to use it as a tool of public diplomacy to acquire soft power.

Some scholars suggest, a successful film or TV show can be helpful in developing a positive image of a location and its socio-cultural and economic situations, (Can, Necmettin, & Ozcan, 2016) such as *Braveheart* (1995), *The Sea Inside* (2004), and *Troy* (2004) have strongly impacted the flow of tourists to Scotland, Spain, and Turkey, respectively (Graziano, 2015; Machin, 2007). Kalin (2011), Gürzel (2014) and Eksi (2018), point out that in order to get softer power Turkey has adopted a strategy of multidimensional public diplomacy through humanitarian assistance, developmental aid, mediation efforts and also extended its strategic, political, and economic relations to both Eastern and Western parts of the world. (Eksi, 2018; Gürzel, 2014; Kalin, 2011). As for Cevik (2014), for the last two decades, Turkish media exports have evolved from a non-governmental cultural diplomacy tool into a government-supported tool of soft power and economic development (Cevik, 2014).

The TV drama, in general, tends to be forming our social and cultural imagination, indicates that storytelling through TV shows a vital role in our society and our modern collective memory (Bondebjerg et al., 2017a). It is believed that television is a significant medium for transnational co-productions. Researchers of the book “*Transnational European Television Drama*” which was published in 2017, put forward that video has played an essential role in European audiences' cultural screen encounters. According to them, since 2000, the rise in stories of different nations and regions of Europe are reaching to a wider European audience, and along with these stories a more transnational nature has occurred among several European co-production partners (Bondebjerg et al., 2017b). Before the age of globalization, television production was limited more to a national or domestic medium, but technological advances, economic pressure and liberalization policies have transformed this medium from domestic to international (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1991). Esser and Jensen (2015), state that the rise of the ‘internationalization of television’ and the developing networks, produced a kind of global climate in the form of competitive transnational environment, growing demand for digital content, changing consumer demographics and audience fragmentation (Esser & Jensen, 2015).

The media imperialism (Fejes, 1981), Hollywood media hegemony (Artz, 2015; Ikhsano & Stellarosa, 2015), the one-way flow of technology (Ibbi, 2013), and the one-way international flow of information (Bornman, 2017; Tunstall, 1977, 2007), from the USA to the rest of the world are not more effective as we have witnessed many examples of the exportation

of television productions from different other countries, such as the popularity of Danish TV drama series among the viewers in the United Kingdom (Esser, 2017), the widespread international acceptance of Korean TV serials (¹The Korean Wave) and ²K-pop precisely in East Asia, Middle East, and Latin America (Min, Jin, & Han, 2018; Won, 2017). Furthermore, few researchers have addressed the massive acceptance of Turkish television productions around the world, which are currently (01.10.2019 - At the time of the writing of this paper) being broadcast in 156 countries and watched by 500 million people (Daily Sabah, 2019). A growing body of literature has examined that Turkey ranks second largest in global TV series exports after the U.S., which are playing an effective role in the cultural exportation, gaining soft power, cultural-encounters, and capitalization—i.e., content sale, indirect advertisement of Turkish products³, and media-induced tourism. (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017; Balaban, 2015; Hodzic, 2013; Rehan & Hassan Raza, 2017; Yesil, 2015). Turkish Television products played a role in removing the negative impression remaining from the Ottomans to Turkey in the Balkans can be considered to be the primary and long term achievement that could be obtained via soft power (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017).

There are few key reasons for the continuing overseas success of Turkish TV Serials, including its moderateness, modernity, and flexibility (having both conventional and liberal tastes), which allow them to be accepted in different cultures around the world. It provides an entertainment function and a platform in the Middle East and Arab countries in which old customs and religious values are challenged (Can et al., 2016). Artan Muhaxhiri, a sociologist from Kosovo, believes that the stories of Turkish shows are melodramatic, lengthy and emotionally loaded with simple dialogues and events which promotes the establishment of relations of viewers to crowds of characters. In terms of cultural references the social norms and values, the general mentality, family relationships, lifestyle, clothing, food, furniture, character names have similarities with Balkan audiences (Cabric, Nedelkovska, Demoli, & Hamzic, 2013).

¹ The Korean Wave (Hallyu) refers to the global popularity of South Korea's cultural economy exporting pop culture, entertainment, music, TV dramas and movies.

² K-pop is a genre of popular music originating in South Korea. While the modern form of K-pop can be traced back to the early 90s, the term itself has been popularized since the 2000s, replacing the term Gayo, which also refers to domestic pop music in South Korea

³ Advertisement of products such as furniture, medical and surgery service, fabrics, jewelries and makeup accessories.

According to the Cabric, who reported in *BalkanInsight*⁴ (2013), Turkish TV serials have replaced Latin America shows which boomed 15 years ago (Cabric et al., 2013). According to Darko Brocic, director of the AGB Nielsen⁵, which conducts media research across the Balkan region says that Turkish shows are most watched in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Macedonia followed by Kosovo and Serbia, where the phenomenon is still developing. Even if Macedonia passed a bill in 2012 to restrict broadcasts of Turkish TV series during the day and at prime time to reduce the Turkish impact on Macedonian society (*Hurriyet Daily News*, 2012), five Turkish shows were ranked top among 15 in 2013 in term of viewers in Macedonia (*BalkanInsight*, 2013). Sociologists believe that the vast acceptance of Turkish shows in Balkans is an emotional reaction on the part of viewers: Even if the old patriarchal family model that appears to be dead in the Balkans it seems to be still alive in Turkey – at least in TV serials. Viewers do love the shows for their realistic characters, intriguing plot lines that include whole families, and the lack of violence and obscenities (Cabric et al., 2013). Research regarding Balkan audience of Turkish soap opera was conducted by Mareco Index Bosnia⁶, represents that the most-watched show in Bosnia and Herzegovina was "*The Magnificent Century*“, the story of the golden age of the Ottoman Empire at the court of Suleyman the Magnificent. According to Serbian sociologist Ratko Bozovic, people in Balkan identify and recognize the serials with the patriarchal values, cultural and linguistic similarities of the Turkish shows are the reasons they easily appealed to watch them. He believes that the Turkish shows help the Balkan countries to recall the value systems seem to be lost (Hodzic, 2013). According to *Nine O'clock* (Romanian English-language newspaper), The Romanian local TV channel replaced some of its local productions that used to run at prime-time hours during the week – with Turkish soaps. It broadcasts Turkish soap operas almost four hours of a day, including a one-hour re-broadcast in the morning, and over an hour and a half during prime time (*Nine O' Clock*, 2016). Daniel Abdul Fattah, MBC and Al-Arabiya's representative in Turkey, reported (January 25, 2013), that one of the Turkish soaps was being aired during

⁴ *Balkan Insight* is a publication of the (BIRN) Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, that focuses on news, analysis, commentary and investigative reporting from southeast Europe.

⁵ Nielsen Media Research (NMR) is an American firm that measures media audiences, including television, radio, theatre films (via the AMC Theatres MAP program) and newspapers. NMR, headquartered in New York City, is best known for the Nielsen ratings, an audience measurement system of television viewership that for years has been the deciding factor in canceling or renewing television shows by television networks.

⁶ Mareco Index Bosnia (MIB) is public opinion, media and market research company, located in Bosnia and Herzegovina

the most violent period of conflict between Al-Fattah and Hamas, where both sides had agreed on a cease-fire to be able to watch the show (Idiz, 2013).

The hypothesis of ‘cultural proximity’ (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008), could be accepted in this context regarding the broad acceptance of Turkish shows by middle eastern countries. ‘Cultural Proximity’ hypothesis was also supported by Berg (2017), in her research proving that as well as ethnic, racial, cultural and religious similarities, the dubbing of Turkish programs into colloquial dialects (language) are the reasons for the extensive acceptance of Turkish serials throughout Middle Eastern audiences (Berg, 2017). ‘Cultural Proximity’ is defined as one of the main factors affecting the preference or acceptance of media products from the most similar possible culture (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005; Straubhaar, 2003). It developed in response to cultural imperialism and economic theories that predicted one-way flow of culture, from richer to poorer countries, based on superior production quality (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008).

Including the other Turkish TV productions, the serial “*The Magnificent Century*” got a heartfelt response from around the world. Pakistan is one among those countries which have given an uncommon response to the serial “The Magnificent Century.” After watching this serial, the Pakistani audience has started following the protagonists of the serial as their favorite actors and actresses; consequently, the majority of viewers had voted for *Halit Ergenc* (main male character of the serial who played the leading role as *Sultan Suleyman* in the show) as the best actor. He was awarded the “*Best Actor Award*” in 2017 International ⁷Lux Style Award ceremony in Pakistan (Hurriyet Kelebek, 2017). This was the first Turkish show, which was dubbed with Urdu (Pakistan National language) for the local audience. The show had got attention from different walks of life, including the academic sector in Pakistan. Following the massive admiration of the show, the academics and students discussed and questioned the Ottoman history due to the growing interest and appeal. Lectures and events were organized on different occasions about the Ottoman history and contemporary role of Turkey in international politics. With increased interest in the Ottoman history in Pakistan due to popular dubbed TV series on Suleyman the Magnificent, in November 2014 a Polish historian Dr Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, professor at the University of Warsaw, had delivered lectures on “*Khan, Caliph, Tsar and Imperator: Multiple Identities of the Ottoman Sultan*” in embassy of

⁷ The Lux Style Awards is the largest award ceremony held annually in Pakistan since 2002. The awards celebrate "style" in the Pakistani entertainment industry, and it is the oldest event dedicated to cinema, television, fashion, music and film industry in Pakistan.

Turkey and different universities in Islamabad (Mussadaq, 2014). After observing the farthest popularity of the show the local broadcasters in Pakistan had started blaming each other for disseminating blasphemous content (Luqman, 2014), which was nothing but using the religion as tool for defamation, jealousy and competition.

The romantic storylines emphasizing the strength of love and positive emotions, Turkish serials are more appealing to Egyptian viewers as they were fed up with Egyptian dramas frequently based on topics of corruption, rape, crimes and tragedies involving street children. These themes reflect the economic and social transformation of Egyptian society, but the frequent broadcasting of the same issues drawback the audience towards different taste which they found in Turkish serials (Zayed, 2013). As for Georgiou, one of the reasons for the Arab audience' watching Turkish soap operas was the women who were getting fed-up from the daily depressing news stories (Georgiou, 2012). Egypt was one of the main consumers of Turkish TV serials up to the date of the outbreak of political crises between Cairo and Ankara due to a military coup against the democratic government in Egypt in 2013. Consequently, several Egyptian TV channels stopped showing the Turkish drama series as a protest against, the then, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's stance over the military coup (Alreedy, 2013; Hurriyet Daily News, 2013). Therefore, Egyptian satellite channels turned to Indian productions to fill in the gap left by the absence of Turkish soap operas (Deccan Herald, 2015). TRT World (2016), claims that despite these political crises, the television series has motivated the fans to visit Turkey and to explore more of the country instead of just watching the series on their screens.

Magnificent Century (Muhtesem Yuzyl), the [controversial] drama series on Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, now airs in more than 70 countries and was sold to Emirates in 2013 to be aired on their flight entertainment system. The same drama series has been exported to Italy, the first Western European country and it became a hit show in Greece, stirring political debates while growing interest in Turkish language classes. At the same time some consumer countries, such as Macedonia, a former Ottoman territory in the Balkans, had some concerns over the extensive popularity of the show such as to prevent the Turkish influence in the country (Hurriyet Daily News, 2012a; Sofuoglu, 2017). Moreover, Makris (2012), mentions Greek Orthodox Bishop Anthimos criticizing local fans of Turkish soap operas with the argument that “*Nobody must-watch Muhtesem Yuzyl (The Magnificent Century), watching Turkish soaps is equal to telling them we have surrendered*” (Makris, 2012).

The show also received criticism from national and international audience and authorities. According to Rohde, the show was criticized by the then Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip blaming the director and owner of the television stations for distorting the history and disrespecting the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman (Rohde, 2012). The conservative segments of Turkish society believe that the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman has been disrespected and depicted as hard drinker and womanizer while the *New York Times* called the serial a sort of "Sex in the City" (Bilefsky, 2012). Back in 2013, the then, ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) Istanbul deputy had submitted a parliamentary petition for a law to ban the broadcasting of serial "*The Magnificent Century*" (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012). According to *The New York Times* after airing the serial "*The Magnificent Century*," 70,000 complaints were received by the citizens who had concerns over the content of the show (Fowler, 2011).

Researchers believe that in Turkey politicization of television drama is remarkable, such as, after gaining power, the AK party pursued a decisive political agenda in regulating media content (Çetin, 2014). Connecting the drama fictions with reality and history, academicians gaze it from a different angle, such as, Erhan Afyonca, professor in the board of the Atatürk High Institute of Culture, Language and History, and the former consultant for "*The Magnificent Century*" said that "*Turkish people confuse the idea of TV series and documentary. A TV serial is a different thing than a documentary*" (Hurriyet Daily News, 2012b). According to professor Ali Acikel (historian at Gaziosmanpasa University), fictionalization is occasionally necessary when there is a dearth of historical documents, but, he further adds that these dramatizations should not contradict with the historical facts, general customs, traditions, and law (Anadolu Agency, 2014; Hurriyet Daily News, 2012b).

On the other hand, producer, screenwriter of the show and secularist group argue that criticism is baseless, and the serial should not be taken more than a show and art. A similar reaction was outlining the same opinion was made up by Kemalists (Followers of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkey) after releasing the film '*Mustafa*' in 2008 depicting Atatürk as a hard-drinking, lonely man beset by doubts (Toksabay & Villelabeitia, 2011).

Apart from the depiction of the Sultan and his era during the Ottoman, the serial was also taken into consideration due to the women's representations it brings forth. The women representation in the media always remains to be a controversial issue due to the depiction of women in the stereotypical and dependent way in Television programs. For example, the physical qualities of women in media content has always been associated with its appearance (look – tall, slim) and criteria for the 'conventionally beautiful'. In general, the actress should

have a friendly and happy personality, without much intelligence. In other words, some kind of woman figure is necessary to reflect the value of woman or for measuring a woman's worth in the show. According to the previous research, the depiction of overweight women tends to receive negative comments about their bodies and appearance specifically from male characters and general audience (Fouts & Vaughan, 2002). Gilbert argues that women are represented in a stereotypical way connecting with the character qualities they typically exhibit. Their characters were subjugated by personal relationships and family issues as compared to their male counterparts (Motsaathebe, 2010). However, this trend began to change in the recent era when women were portrayed in more dynamic roles. McNeil (1975) critically analyzes the women representation in TV serials. According to him, as compared to the male counterparts, the women characters are passive, fewer, and less central to the story. Women have always been presented dependent, and marriage/ parenthood is considered to be more important to them as compared to male actors. Working women are shown in conventionally female occupations, as subordinates to men and with little status or power (McNeil, 1975). Conducting research in Indian societies Kaul and Sahni (2010) assessed that the depicted modern and liberated images of women in the media are not the image of the contemporary Indian women. It seems that gender-stereotyping is more deeply woven into the fabric of television soap operas that it does not depict the reality of women's role in society. It is noted that, parallel to the stereotyped images, the importance has been given to fashion and beauty instead of intelligence, confidence, and emancipation in the depiction of women in TV serials (Kaul & Sahni, 2010).

Researchers has a diverse opinion regarding the portrayal of women by Turkish soap operas. The Turkish viewers believe that the women have been stereotypically presented dependent and timid in comparison to their male counterparts while the consumers from conservative countries think the opposite. As for Nawa, in the late 1990s, Turkish soaps portrayed women in a more dynamic way until they began exporting the serials as materials of entertainment to conservative Islamic countries. According to her, later, women's roles changed to reflect more conservative societies (Nawa, 2017). However, some researchers believe that women have been portrayed in Turkish soaps, particularly in *The Magnificent Century* as an icon of sex and lust (Samya, 2012).

Aims and Methodology

In this research, the perception of the audience in terms of the depiction of women in the TV serial '*The Magnificent Century*' is analyzed. Following the criticism on the show in the context of the distortion of history and portrayal of women, a research question has been developed to analyze the perception of the international audience regarding the issue. As the sample, the audience from two countries, Egypt (Middle East) and Pakistan (South Asia) were selected. The research question is formulated as follows: What is the perception of the international audience about the portrayal of Women and History (Ottoman Era) by the Turkish historical serial "*The Magnificent Century*"?

A quantitative approach is followed to collect the data. To analyze the widespread reception and perception of the Turkish TV serial "*The Magnificent Century*" by the international audience, an online survey is conducted by December 2018, through which the data is collected throughout Pakistanis and Egyptians who have access to the Internet and have watched Turkish television serial "*The Magnificent Century*." The survey questionnaire contained questions regarding demographic information, as well as questions with answer options on a 5-point Likert scale (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Priority is given to the questions regarding the portrayal of Ottoman history, Sultan Suleyman, and depiction of women in the serial.

Regarding the choice of the scale of the research the methods of sampling from a population are considered and simple random sampling is used. In this case each individual is chosen entirely by chance and each member of the population has an equal chance, or probability, of being selected. According to the 2017 statistics, the population of Pakistan is 200 million, whereas the population of Egypt is 97.5 million (2017). According to Internet World Stats (IWS) in December 2017, then the ratio of Internet users in Pakistan was 22% of the total population, while Egypt stands at 33% (www.internetlivestats.com). The main target audience of the survey was those 22% of Pakistan and 33% of Egypt population in general, respectively, who have access to the Internet. Since the cadre of the target sample group was so high, it would be more effective to follow the snowball sampling technique (Sedgwick, 2013). Thus, the questionnaire is sent to the direct emails of the targeted samples to promote individual participation. Also, the link to the survey on different social media networks is provided to make it possible to share and reach wider audiences.

Data Analysis

Demographically the populations of Pakistan and Egypt have some fundamental differences, such as the population of Pakistan is 200 million having diverse ethnic groups share different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, etc., while on the other hand, the population of Egypt is 97.5 million, and about 99 percent of the Egyptian population comes from Eastern Hamitic⁸ backgrounds while the remaining 1% is comprised of Greek, Nubian, Armenian, Italian and French ethnicity (Allonsy, 2018). Almost, all of the Egyptian population speak their official ‘Arabic’ language, unlike Pakistanis. Majority of the people of both selected countries, Pakistan and Egypt, are practicing the same religion Islam, so there is a significant similarity in the family norms and social values of both nations inherited from religion Islam. Similarly, both societies are patriarchal and polygamy is legal in both countries, though, it is under discussion to be banned in Egypt (Jansen, 2019). Another resemblance in both countries is the lack of democracy as both nations have witnessed a long regime of dictatorship and still passing through the stage of (direct or indirect) military involvement in the democratic process. The socio-economic positions of Egypt and Pakistan are not ideal as both countries have \$2,573 (nominal 2018), and \$1,357 (nominal 2018) GDP per capita, respectively. When it comes to comparison, Egypt’s socio-economic status is better than Pakistan in terms of economy, life standard, education, women liberation and access of the citizens to the basic needs. Both of the countries are the remarkable consumers of Turkish TV serials; thus, they were chosen as samples for the survey of the research (Allonsy, 2018; Hali, 2018).

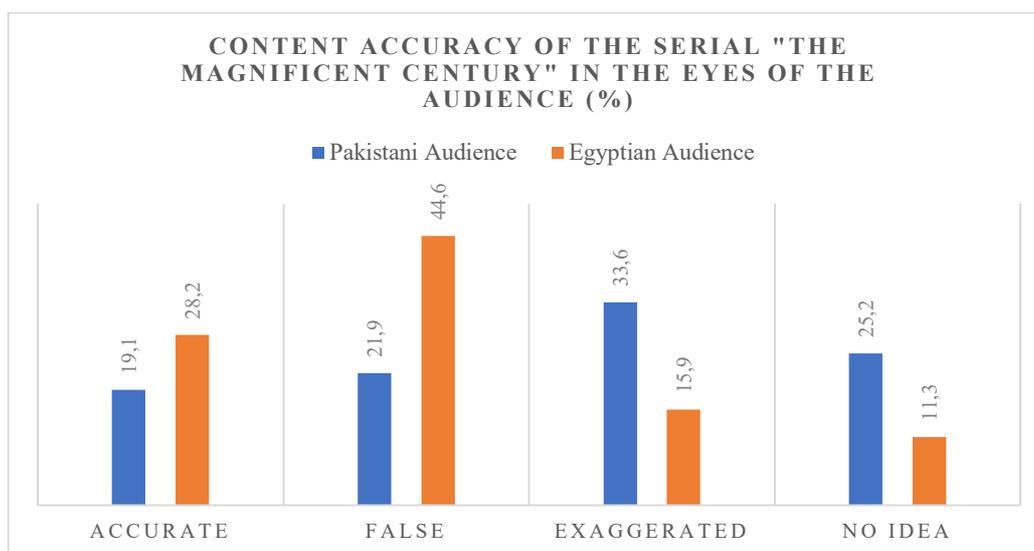
A questionnaire was set containing questions regarding overall content presented in the drama serial “*The Magnificent Century*”. Some questions were asked regarding the depiction of Ottoman history, the historical figures especially Sultan Suleyman and portrayal of women in general and queen Hurrem in particular as well as the role of women in state affairs.

Five hundred twenty-nine audience members from Pakistan and 423 audience members from Egypt filled out the survey. Due to patriarchal society structure, the access of women to many things, including education and the internet, is limited. This could be one of the reasons regarding the imbalance in respondents' gender ratio. Survey participants from Pakistan were 58% male and 42% female, whereas the Egyptian respondents include 52% male and 48% female.

⁸ Hamites is a historical term in 19th and early 20th century ethnology and linguistics for a division of the Caucasian race and the group of related languages these populations spoke, such as Berber, Cushitic, and Egyptian.

The questions were mainly about the content and information about the selected historical serial “*The Magnificent Century*.” Even if they watch the serial in different times and through a different language structure, the same questions were used for both audience types. The main aim was to find out how these both countries, Egypt and Pakistan valued the information they got through the “*The Magnificent Century*.” What was their main evaluation regarding the accuracy of presented information after watching the historical fiction (see figure 1).

Figure 1. The opinion of respondents from Egypt and Pakistan regarding content accuracy in the historic fictional TV serial "The magnificent century."

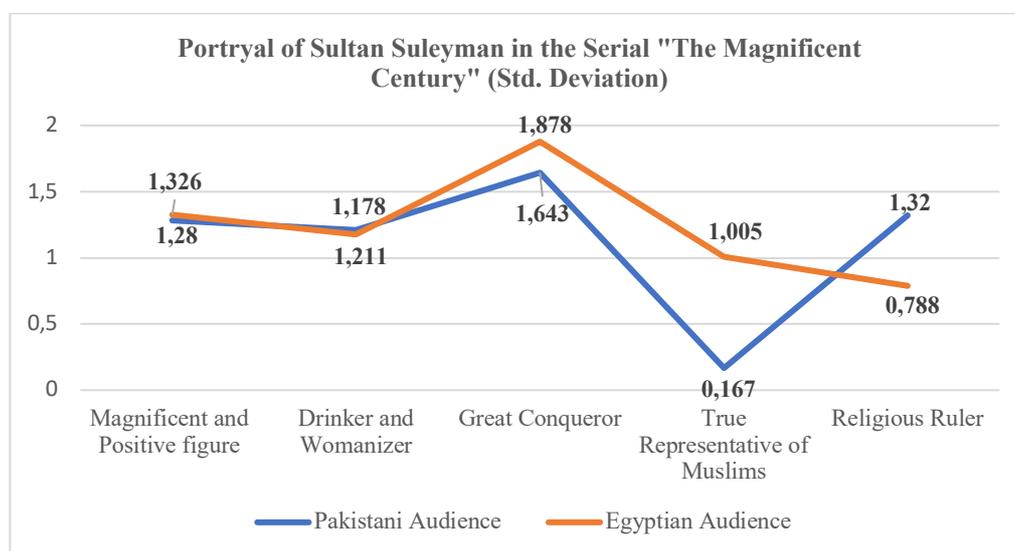


From Egypt, 45% of the audience believe that the presented information is false, 28% thinks that the fiction presented accurate information, 16 % of the respondents think that information has been exaggerated and 11% stated that they have no idea about information presented in the fiction. The reaction of the Pakistani audience towards the same question was different. 34% of the audience believed that the presented information has been exaggerated, 25% stated that they had no idea, 22% think that the presented information was false and 19% believe that the drama serial showed accurate information.

The data displays that from Pakistan, 33.6% respondents believe that the information presented in the story is exaggerated while the second-highest number of respondents 25% who have no idea about the presented information in the story. In such circumstances, when the audiences are passive, the media could fulfill their mind with the information of their interests (hypodermic needle theory). The impartiality or responding with the option of no idea proves that the lesser the interest of the audience in the type of content they watch the lesser their reactions. Yet, for example they prefer to entertain themselves thoroughly, instead of dealing

with the content or minute details that could leave a socio-cultural impact on their life. As for the cultivation theory, media (television) could shape the viewer's perception, attitudes, and beliefs (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980). According to cultivation theory, the more people watch television, the more they come to adopt its key messages (Mosharafa, 2015). If the media (Television) productions provide an actual picture of the world to the audience, it may leave little effects on the personal behavior of the viewers. However, content does matter (Mihai, 2016; Shrum, 2017). To Shrum, the content analysis of television productions noticeably suggests that the depicted world in television is quite different from the real world (Shrum, 2017). The highest number, almost 45% of the respondents from Egypt have responded that the information presented in the show is fabricated and false. The difference of the answers proves that compared to Pakistan, the Egyptian audience seem to be more active and able to make a decision over the content they watch. The data made it also clear that it is difficult for the audience to decide the accuracy of the content, that means the audience is either not much concerned about the content or they have previously laid information in their mind.

Figure 2. The opinion of respondents regarding the depiction of Ottoman Sultan Suleyman and historical figures



In the questionnaire, five statements were made about the depiction of the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman with a Likert scale rating. The audience was asked to rate their perceptions regarding these five choices of the depiction of Sultan Suleyman in the context of his personality, behavior, and his private life (See figure 2). The data (Standard deviation) shows

that respondents from both countries have a different opinion regarding some of the statements. The data shows that the respondents from both countries admit the magnificence and charismatic depiction of Ottoman Sultan Suleyman but, on the other hand, a remarkable number of respondents believe that there were controversial depictions in the show. A handsome number of audiences believe that the historical figures had been misrepresented and the Ottoman Sultan was presented as a womanizer, drinker, and portrayed his personality negatively. Comparing and contrasting the opinion of survey respondents with that of the general criticism, mainly the conservative segment of the Turkish society and political leadership complaining about the serial (Bilefsky, 2012; Rohde, 2012), to some, the drama serial could mean a sense of the distortion of history. Yet, there seems to be a dilemma here, if the serial has distorted the Ottoman history than why some of the international countries such as Macedonia (a former Ottoman territory in the Balkans), (Hurriyet Daily News, 2012a; Sofuoglu, 2017), and Greece (Makris, 2012), have criticized and blamed the show as a threat for their local culture and identity.

Figure 3. The opinion of the audience about the depiction of Ottoman Empire and Sultan Suleiman

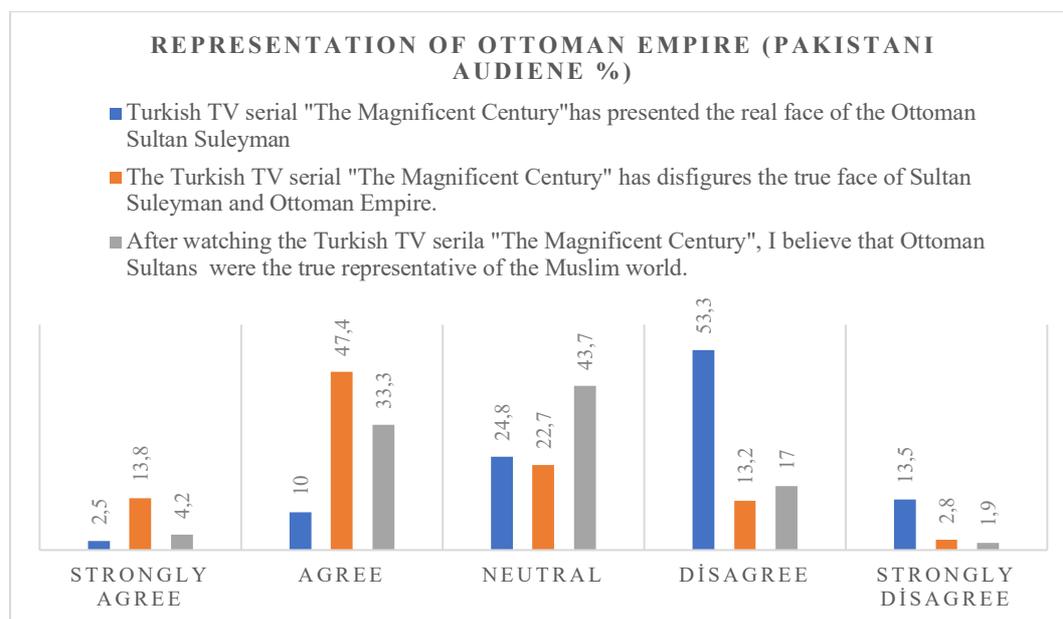


Figure 4. The opinion of the audience about the depiction of Ottoman Empire and Sultan Suleiman

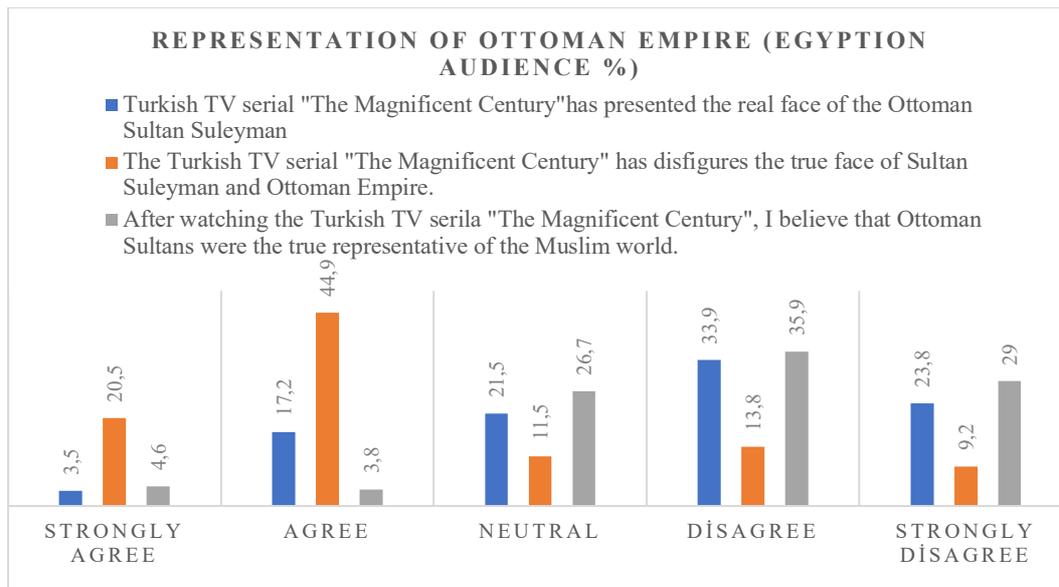
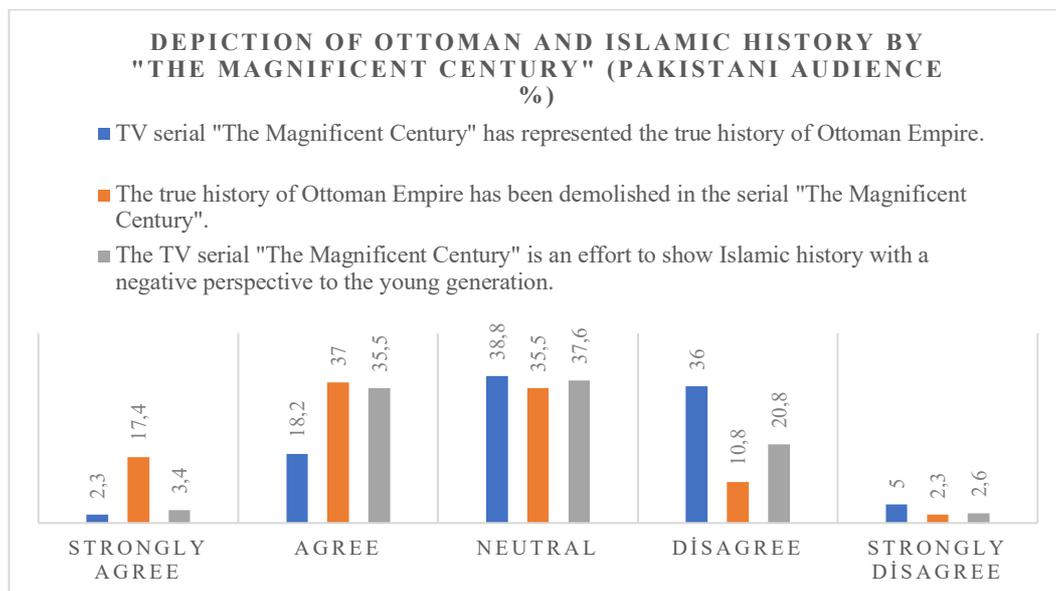


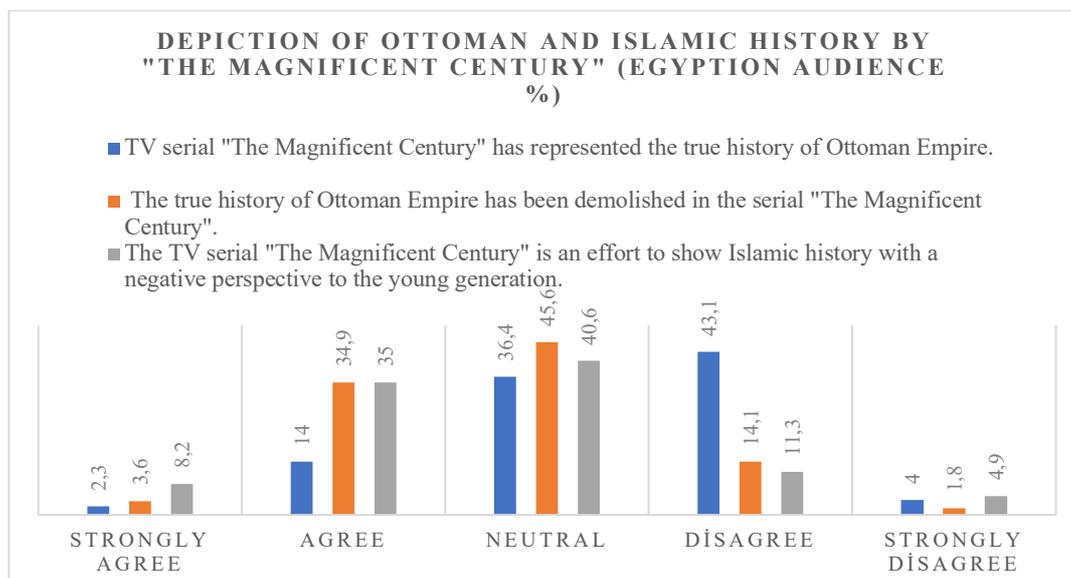
Figure 3 indicates the response of the audience from Pakistan & figure 4 represents the audience group form Egypt.

The data shows that respondents from both countries have some dissimilarity in the opinion regarding the statements they have asked. Majority of the audience agreed with the statements that the historical figure Sultan Suleyman was negatively portrayed in the serial while the second largest number of the audience seemed to be noncommittal to make a decision over the statements. In a way, audience from both countries stated that the Ottoman history has been distorted in the show, and the main character, Sultan Suleyman, has been negatively portrayed.

Figures 5. The opinion of the audience regarding the representation of the overall history of the Ottoman Empire



Figures 6. The opinion of the audience regarding the representation of the overall history of the Ottoman Empire



A set of questions was fixed for the audience of both selected countries that what kind of image had been built in their mind about the Ottoman Empire after watching the serial the magnificent century (see figures 5 & 6). Unlike Pakistani audiences who remain neutral, the majority of the audience from Egypt reacted actively to express that the Ottoman and Islamic history was misrepresented in the serial. According to the uses and gratification theory (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016), the media's most important role is to fulfill the social, psychological needs and motivations of the audience. The endorsement of Egyptian audience that the serial hasn't left a positive image in their mind regarding Ottoman Empire. This represents that they have watched the serial not only for entertainment, but they have actively made a clear perception about the content they have watched. On the other hand, the majority of the audience from Pakistan preferring to be neutral indicates that they have only watched the content without questioning or making up any perception about the accuracy or inaccuracy of the events in the serial regarding the content portrayed about the Ottoman history.

One thing is debatable that why television production came under controversial discussion if it is a tool of entertainment and presenting fictional stories rather than presenting the real world. The reason is, in Turkey, the television production has been taken as a political element which is supposed to be used as a kind of diplomacy tool for shaping public opinion, cultural exportation, media-induced tourism, gaining soft power and economic purposes (Çetin, 2014).

Another historical fiction *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (Resurrection: Ertugrul) having 5 seasons with total of 150 episodes, was initially released in December 2014 and, stayed on local and transnational screens until May 2019 (TR Haberler, 2019), is the reflection of the Turkish government policy and diplomacy which is besides providing historical information, transfers Turkey's new political identity pointing to its new vision-based real policies and focusing on national unification (Alankuş & Yanardağoğlu, 2016; Carney, 2019; Elitaş & KIR, 2019). The criticism of political leaders including Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan on “The Magnificent Century” and praising the serial “Resurrection: Ertugrul” (Turkish Minute, 2017), is one of the gestures that the AK⁹ Party government in Turkey is aiming to give focus in reestablishing the history, even in their history textbooks (Turkish Minute, 2017; Yanarocak, 2012). After the collapse of Ottoman Empire during the First World War, Turkey was struggling in for restoration of its national and political identity under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to create a strong, modern, western-like state. But, the process of modernization through westernization was supposed to transform the political subjects of the Ottoman Empire (Karabelias, 2009). Later on, since 1980, following the concept of “Turkish- Islam Synthesis,” the Turkish nationalism and identity was connected to its historical reality Ottomanism and religious (Islamic) sentiments for which consequently history textbooks, education system, and cultural objects, events and activities were redesigned to emphasize the new agenda (Yanarocak, 2012). Carney calls it the recreating of history and recreating of the public (Carney, 2014). During the era of the government of the AK Party the commemorations of the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul (then Constantinople), in 1453, have been increased. Renovation of old Ottoman buildings along with the constructions of new Ottoman-style buildings (Mosques, Universities, Hotels, shopping malls) also has been increased during the last decade. Following this trend in 2013 a protest, Gezi Park Protest (Ete & Taştan, 2014), was triggered by the AKP government decision to replace the Gezi Park (Located in Taksim square central Istanbul) with an Ottoman-style shopping mall (Batuman, 2014). So, all these political forces drive the popular cultural products to use it for ideological and political gaining.

Figures 7 & 8. Audience opinion regarding their rising interest in Ottoman history after watching the Turkish historical fiction “*The Magnificent Century*”

⁹ The Justice and Development Party abbreviated AK Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), is a conservative political party in Turkey, consecutively ruling on Turkey since 2002.

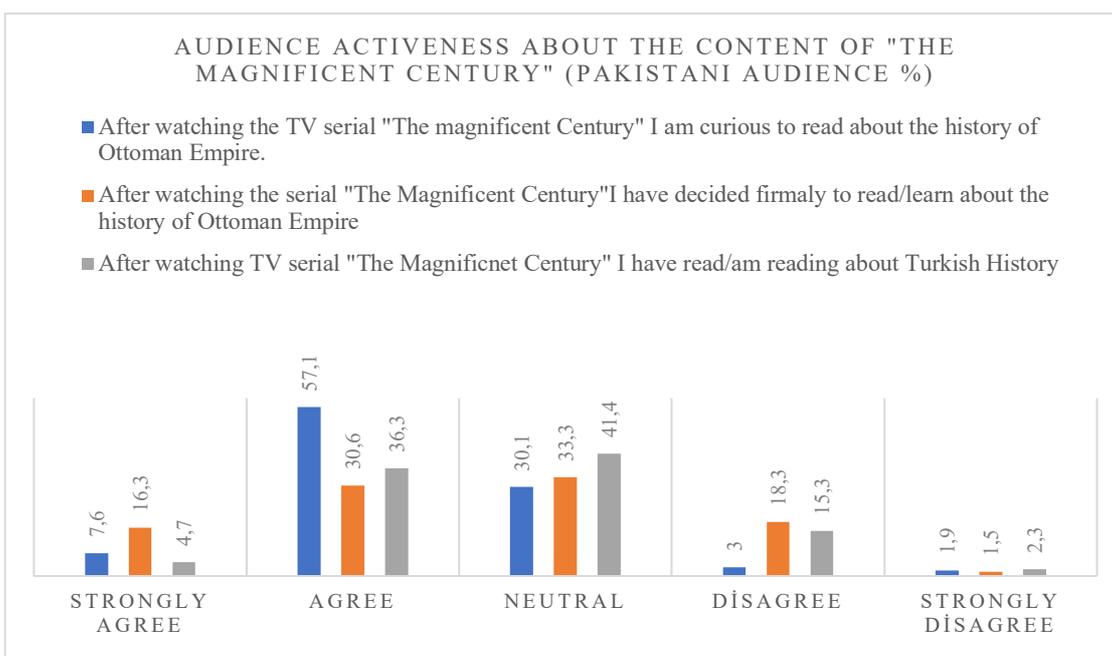
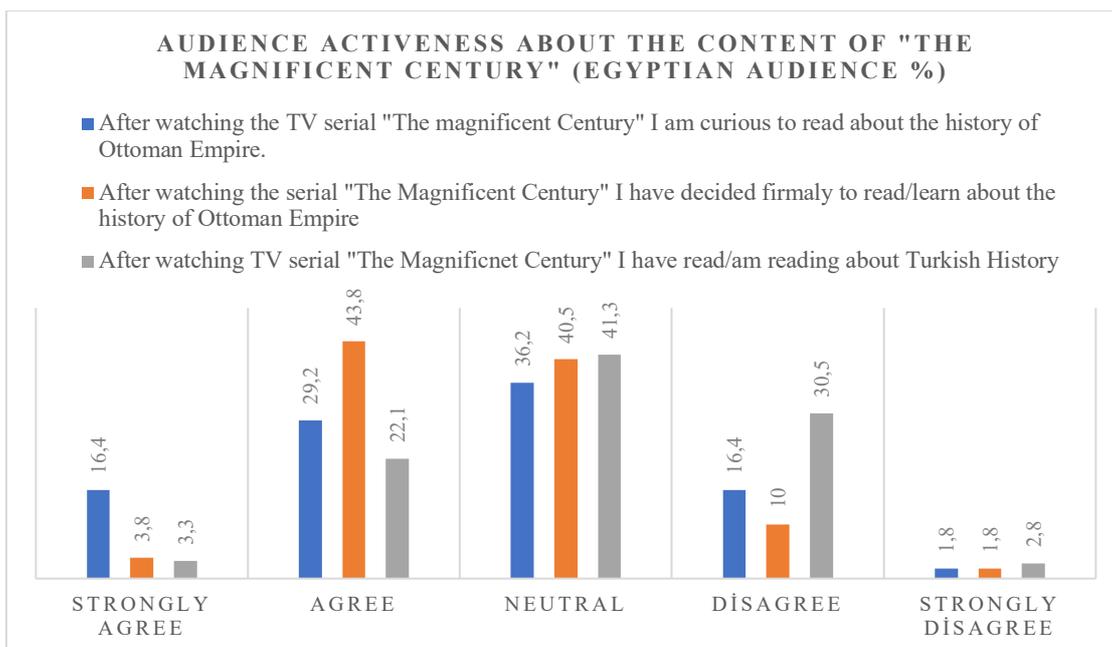


Figure 7, represents (Egyptian) while figure 8, represents Pakistani audience opinion regarding their curiosity towards Ottoman and Turkish history after watching the drama serial "The Magnificent Century".

Three different statements were given to the audience, such as, about their curiosity, their firm decision, and their immersion in the ottoman history after watching the serial. In the first statement, the majority of the audience from both countries stated their agreement that they feel curiosity about the Ottoman and Turkish history after watching the serial. Regarding

the firm decision of the audience to get more knowledge about Ottoman history and modern Turkey via visiting or reading their history, they remained neutral and agreed. It shows that television can be a powerful medium for gaining soft power and, the effective and engaging communication of history to the wider public (History Today, 2019). The compelling TV shows compelling their audience as intelligent individuals with the ability to follow and understand the subject matter to make their opinion according to their agenda. Research states that to the successful TV shows, the viewers pay attention and attach themselves intellectually (Chalaby, 2012).

In the conducted survey, 20 to 25 respondents from both countries have written a detailed note in the survey questionnaire revealing that they have read about the Ottoman history and did research about contemporary Turkey. Some of the respondents have written down in the detailed notes that before watching the serial “*The Magnificent Century*,” they had no idea about Turkey or its historical reality. So, we can understand the importance of information, culture exportation, or soft power gaining through the exportation of popular cultural products.

Figure 9. The audience perception regarding women representation in the Turkish TV serial "The Magnificent Century"

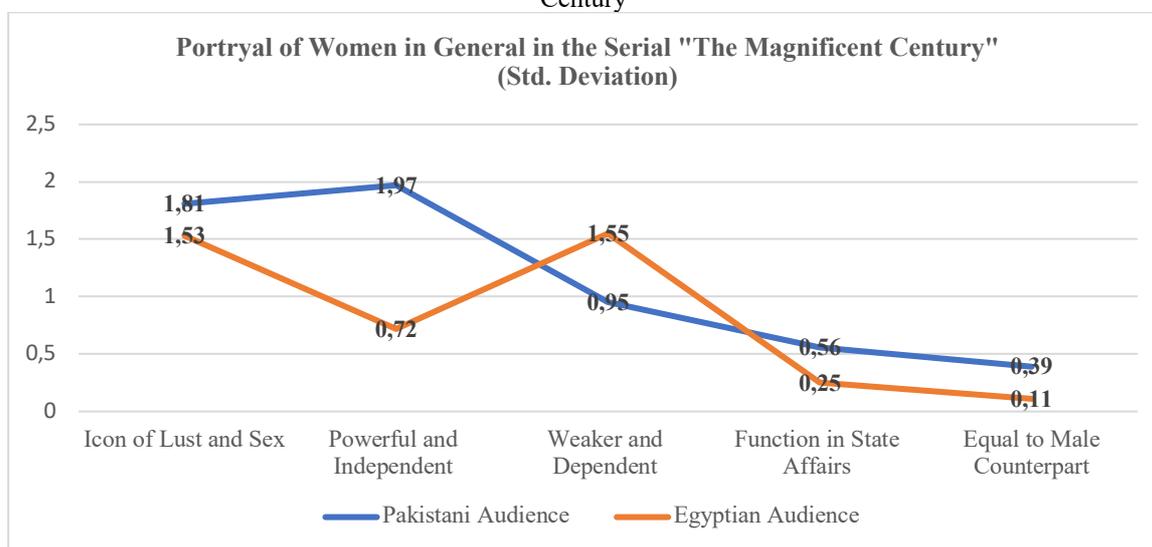
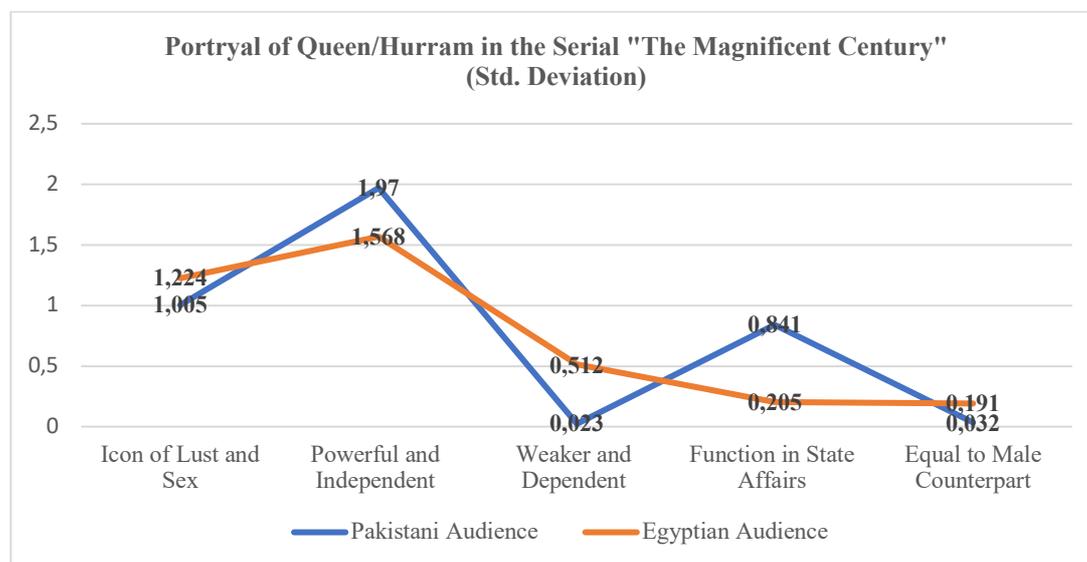


Figure 9 denotes the representation of women in the TV serial "The Magnificent Century". Following the Likert scale analysis, the perception and reaction of audiences have been shown in the graph through standard deviation. Viewers from both selected countries have a diverse opinion regarding the depiction of women as a powerful and independent character. Audience group from Pakistan believe that the women, in general, have been portrayed as a

powerful and independent character, unlike the Egyptian audience who think the opposite. When it comes to the portrayal of women as an icon of lust and sex, the audiences group from both countries are on the same page. We can call it the illusionary power of seduction (Jabbour, 2016), shown in the serial that how the women in Harem¹⁰ used to seduce or entice the rulers to get their attention and secure a vital position in the empire. Ottoman Harem was Sultan's family place headed by Valide Sultan (mother of the sultan) to educate girls as competent future wives for sultans, princes, viziers, generals, etc. After the Valide Sultan, the Kadins who had borne the Sultan sons were the most important women. All the women in Harem were classified in a hierarchy system. Such as, Kadins, Iqbals, Odalisques or concubines, etc., and all these titles had their own importance and responsibilities (Nahar, 2016). Despite depicting gender discrimination in the show, due to patriarchal and polygamous nature of the society, a great number of the audience from Pakistan believe in the independency of the women depicted in the serial. From both countries, the respondents believe that women had a dinky role in state affairs.

Figure 10. The audience perception regarding the portrayal of the protagonist (queen/Hurrem) in the Turkish TV serial "The Magnificent Century"



In figure 10, the data represents the audience opinion regarding the portrayal of the female protagonist in the serial. It was asked that either the queen (Hurrem) was depicted as a strong character, equal to the male counterpart, having a role in the state affairs or not. In the data, the *independency* tops all other elements following by *Icon of lust and sex*. The majority

¹⁰ The word "Harem" means a house or part of a house in which the women of a Muslim household live and where men from outside were not permitted to go without permission.

of respondents of the survey from both countries stated that the queen was shown as a powerful and independent woman. This concept could be varying and depend on the countries and culture that how the women are being treated in a particular area or culture. In the patriarchal and non-monogamous societies where the women have limited liberation, even regarding their personal life decisions, such as marriage, education, job, etc. This could be one of the reasons that the Middle Eastern and South-Eastern, which are the patriarchal societies believe in the liberation and empowerment of women portrayed in the drama serial "The Magnificent Century."

On the other hand, the conducted researches in the developed or less developed societies where the women have more rights, have the opposite opinion that the women and protagonist (Hürrem) have got a stereotyped depiction, and the women have been portrayed as an *icon of lust and sex* (Christie-Miller, 2013; Gottschlich, 2013; Kumari & Joshi, 2015).

Conclusion and Discussion

Following a growing body of the literature, this paper has highlighted the importance of the Turkish television production in the context of its transnational role, such as cultural exportation, gaining soft power, cultural-encounters, and capitalization—i.e., content sale, indirect advertisement of Turkish products, and media-induced tourism (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017; Balaban, 2015; Hodzic, 2013; Rehan & Hassan Raza, 2017; Zafer, Göksu, & Yavaşgel, 2018).

It is examined that the huge exportation of TV production is becoming a major means of economy, gaining soft power and culture exportation. Turkey produces approximately 100 TV series per year, export to 156 countries, and the circulation and watches might reach up to 500 million people around the world (Daily Sabah, 2019). According to the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, the current volume of TV series exports is almost \$350 million, and the sector plans to hit \$1 billion in exports by 2023 (Anadolu Agency, 2016). This revenue has been made through content sale while the other Turkish products and tourism which are promoted via these serials also has boosted to the economy, as Bendeçi Palandöken Chairman of Confederation of Turkish Tradesman and Craftsman (TESK) stated that TV series had boosted our furniture exports and local manufacturers are currently exporting furniture to 179 countries, hitting \$3.14 billion in 2018. In addition, according to the United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Turkey received 39.9 million tourists and ranked sixth among the most-visited countries in the world in 2017 (Daily Sabah and Anadolu Agency, 2018).

To summarize the results of our survey, a threefold explanation could be provided. The perception of the audience regarding the representation of history and historical figures, the audience concerns and appeal in the real history (Ottoman era) after watching the serial and the perception of women portrayal in the serial. Due to the similar value systems experienced, the opinion of the audience from both regions has some resemblance regarding the representation of Ottoman history and historical figures. As the audience from both countries believe that the historical figures, particularly Sultan Suleiman, has been disfigured in the show whereas the facts and actual history has been distorted through the filmic discourse (See for example figures 3, 4, 5 & 6). The data provides clues that the audience from Pakistan has a negative opinion regarding the main character Sultan Suleiman and they do not consider him as the true representative of the then Muslim world. On the other hand, the Egyptian audience does not share the same opinion (see, for example, figure 2). This state of Pakistani audience could have been developed after watching the serials as in the following questions they have shown their concern more actively to read and learn more about the Ottoman history. As compared to the Egyptian audience, the more Pakistani viewers admitted that they have read about the Ottoman history after watching the serial (see figures 7 & 8). Audience perception regarding women depiction in the show is almost similar in both societies. However, the Egyptian audience believes that women have no dominant role; instead, they were depicted as an icon of lust and sex. On the other hand, Pakistani audience members believe that the women have been presented as an icon of lust but having an active and influential role at the same time, such as the role of the queen (wife) and mother of Sultan Suleiman (see figure 9 & 10).

In general, the research reached its aims as to find out more about the impact of the serial, focusing and relying more upon the international audience and investigate their reception and perception to the Turkish historical fiction "*The Magnificent Century*." The study proved to conclude that the audience interests, controversies over the content and appealing the audience towards history all reveal that TV productions could be a good source for not only entertainment but for educating and informing the audience about the history, culture, social values and norms.

A segment of the audience strongly believe that the selected genre has depicted the Ottoman history in a diversified way and the women have been depicted as strong and powerful characters. However, some of the previous work has examined that women have been portrayed as an icon of beauty, sex, and a seductive character, such as, *The Muslimah Media Watch* says that in the serial "*The Magnificent Century*" women have only one concern to get

the attention of Sultan Suleiman to secure their survival in that rather intriguing royal setting (Samya, 2012). Few researchers argue that the series focused more on one of the most remarkable women in Ottoman history than on the Sultan himself. Hurrem was the woman who used intelligence, ruthlessness and a convincing performance in the sultan's bed to rise from being a harem slave to being the Sultan's legal wife (Christie-Miller, 2013; Gottschlich, 2013).

The findings might not be generalized to the whole international audience, but one could get the idea that the audience belongs to patriarchal and polygamous societies and those who selected to watch the content relying upon the “cultural proximity” hypothesis (Yesil, 2015), have taken an unfathomable interest deeply in the content of the selected TV serial.

The study clearly has some limitations throughout the research as an online survey is conducted, and the low rates of Internet penetration in both regions could be referred to be the reason for the small sample size of the audience. However, the individuals who just choose the serial as an entertainment wouldn't bother to answer questions about it.

For future research projects, the idea of including a sample of transnational audience from a variety of countries/regions to cover the area in a wide range might be suggested. Furthermore, the depiction of women and history seem to be having only two aspects, and such serials could also be amplified with some other important angles.

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