Turkish Dramas' Impact on Tourism, Skilled Immigration and Foreign Direct Investment

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Abstract

Turkish drama series have made their mark in foreign markets, reaching international audiences in more than 160 countries by 2021. While Turkish drama series were neither produced for a foreign audience nor promoted an official cultural policy, research has shown that Turkish television series' popularity has brought Türkiye to an international audience and subtly transformed the country's image overseas. They are now being viewed as professionally organized instruments for capturing the hearts and minds of international audiences through intended engagement with the country.

Given the popularity of Turkish drama series, increasingly positive attitudes towards Türkiye and the surge in immigration to Türkiye for work and education, a three-phase mixed methods study was conducted. This approach consisted of surveying foreign-based audience members and those Turkish drama consumers who had already moved to Türkiye to explore the appeal of Turkish drama series and their impact on foreign audiences. The aspects explored in terms of engagement with Türkiye consisted of evaluating travel (as well as intent to travel) to Türkiye for work, education, pleasure, and investment opportunities. Interviewing survey respondents who had already moved to Türkiye and referred to Turkish drama series as a key reason behind their move to the country, a thematic analysis is presented that will examine the utility of Turkish dramas in their everyday lives. Ultimately, the study aims to provide a novel examination of entertainment products' potential to further public diplomacy and place branding efforts and how they could potentially translate into increased tourism, skilled immigration, and foreign direct investment.

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Connecting Public Diplomacy and Entertainment

In the current hyperconnected global system, international relations are based on an international agenda that does not necessarily prioritize security only and incorporates the lessening relevance of military power considering the growth of economic interdependence among states (Carbone, 2017). 'Soft power' (Nye, 1990) is a kind of power that is "significantly based on intangible factors, such as the system of values, lifestyles and cultural models not imposed coercively" (Nye, 2008a in Carbone, 2017, p. 64) and is linked with this evolving international system. The term was used to refer to a country's "ability to influence other countries" behaviour or "the ability to shape what others want" without using hard or coercive power (Nye, 2004, p.5).

Nye identified three sources of (American) soft power, including American culture, multinational corporations, and international laws and institutions (Nye, 1990 in Fan, 2008). On the other hand, Fan (2008) believed that only cultural power is a potential source of soft power. That too is dependent on other variables when it comes to converting cultural assets into soft power. Fan (2008) contends that soft power is difficult to measure because it can be sourced from multiple state and non-state actors. Furthermore, soft power is also targeted towards a plethora of audiences including elites and the broader public (Kurlantzick, 2006), which adds to the complexity surrounding measurement. Hans Tuch defined public diplomacy as 'a government's process of communicating with foreign publics to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies' (Tuch, 1990 in Melissen, 2005, p.12).

According to Melissen (2005), while public diplomacy should be aligned with a country's foreign policy and be in tune with medium-term and long-term aims, it is not entirely suitable to leave it to official channels or even linked with the state. The reason for this is that 'people tend to be suspicious of foreign officials' motives' (Melissen, 2005, p. 16). Secondly, public diplomacy often works best when its objectives are long-term. As such, they aim to influence a milieu constituting the 'psychological and political environment in which attitudes and policies towards other countries are debated.' Public diplomacy is less effective when linked to short term objectives as some domestic and foreign policies may not be popular with foreign audiences. In this context, 'nations do not have permanent friends… they only have permanent interests' (Melissen, 2005, p. 23). It works best when the aim is to build bridges between different cultures, specifically when:

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

Given the above considerations, governments have utilised entertainment as public diplomacy by making their country's "cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad … to facilitate the export of examples of its culture" (Cull, 2008, p. 33). The strategic aims surrounding public diplomacy efforts to promote soft power can range from "increasing familiarity and awareness of a country to creating positive perceptions and encouraging further engagement (e.g., tourism, study abroad, and buying its products) to influencing people's behaviour and 'getting companies to invest, encouraging public support for your country's positions and convincing politicians to turn to it as an ally" (Holden, 2013, p. 22 in Flew, 2016, p.285).

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

Turkish Drama Series History and Growth

While Turkish soap operas were neither produced for a foreign audience nor promoted an official cultural policy, research has shown that the popularity of Turkish television series has brought Türkiye to an international audience and subtly transformed the country's image overseas, with Turkish drama series reaching international audiences in more than 160 countries by 2021. Television soap operas only became popular domestically in the 1980s, with the industry growing rapidly after private television channels proliferated in 1993 (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). Given the intense competition, production companies felt the need to produce higher quality output that would attract larger audiences (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). The higher quality programming attracted larger domestic audiences and triggered a search for new markets in the mid-2000s, with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan being the first foreign markets for Turkish entertainment products ("Türk Dizilerinin Yurtdışı rekoru," 2011 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016).

However, the most lucrative transaction was concluded with three Arab satellite channels: the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC), Dubai TV, and Abu Dhabi TV. They acquired the rights to a trove of Turkish drama series in 20 countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). The first screening was of the series *Iklil al Ward* in 2007, while *Nour* was viewed by more than 85 million citizens of Arab countries in 2008 (Cerami, 2013). A selection of international hits included *'A Thousand and One Nights'* that depicted a reputable architect's son suffering from a disease. Similarly, *'Forbidden Love'* depicted a wealthy widower's quest for love. At the same time, *'The Magnificent Century'* portrayed the life of Ottoman Sultan Suleiman (Rousselin, 2013). The latter became a global hit with an audience of more than 200 million people in 50 countries. Between 2005 and 2011, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism predicted that Türkiye could export more than 36,000 hours of programming[1] (Yeşil, 2015). More recently, Turkish Radio and Televi-

sion (TRT) developed and produced *Diriliş: Ertuğul* depicting the life of Ertuğrul, father of the 13th-century founder of the Ottoman Empire, that gripped audiences globally. Export revenues grew exponentially, reaching $180 million by 2014 (Gök, 2015). The Turkish government hopes export revenues will cross $1 billion by 2023 (Bhutto, 2019).

By 2013, more than 100 Turkish dramas were exported to more than 80 countries and brought in $100 million in foreign revenue. Each episode was priced between $15,000 and $150,000. Remake rights were also sold internationally (Yeşil, 2015). For example, the broadcast channel ATV sold the remake rights of the Turkish drama *Ezel* to several international markets, including Belgium. Though causation has not been established, when the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) conducted public opinion surveys in 2009 in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, results showed an uptick in Türkiye's image. The 2011 Arab Attitudes survey, an annual poll conducted by IBOPE Zogby International, also confirmed the 2010-2011 BILGESAM survey's findings as outlined above (Ülgen, 2011). According to the survey: "Türkiye's policies receive wide support in the Arab world, ranging from 45 percent approval in Jordan to 80 percent approval in Morocco and even 98 percent approval in Saudi Arabia...even in Lebanon, a stronghold of Hezbollah, 93 percent have a favourable view of Türkiye" (Ülgen, 2011, p.16). A survey conducted by BILGESAM in 2010-11 titled 'The Perception of Türkiye and Turks in Egypt' had similar findings. The survey confirmed that more than 60 percent of Egyptians considered Türkiye to be an effective role model for the Middle East (Ülgen, 2011). Moreover, 81 percent expressed sympathy with Turkish people and half named Türkiye as their choice for a second home (Ülgen, 2011).

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

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[1] Government support played a role in terms of supply-side factors associated with increasing international appeal of Turkish drama series (Yeşil, 2015). The Turkish government provided financial support to content producers and distributors to attend international trade shows, organize trade tours to potential buyer countries and provide logistical support to host trade shows in Türkiye bringing international television professionals on platforms such as Discop West Asia and Discop Istanbul (Yeşil, 2015). However, this was only after the 'distributors and producers had already been able to establish their presence in the global marketplace' (Yeşil, 2015, p. 49).

image to Turkish soap operas, Cerami (2013) proposed that Türkiye's image abroad was being subtly transformed due to the popularity of Turkish television series, from the Balkans to the Middle East, as they bring Türkiye to an international audience. Media researchers Marwan Kraidy and Omar Al-Ghazzi (2013a) proposed a term known as 'neo-Ottoman cool' – a term used to describe the Turkish version of modernity, combining Islam, secularism, and capitalism. This 'neo-Ottoman cool' formula proved to be attractive to many Arabs. It made Turkish popular culture, specifically Turkish soap operas, the primary symbol of Türkiye's soft power in the Arab world (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013b). According to Fatima Bhutto, whose analysis of Turkish drama series is mostly based on the wildly successful *Diliriş Ertuğrul*, the Turkish drama series' ability to balance middle-class conservatism with secular modernity is key for its international appeal. Unlike Hollywood, Bollywood, or K-Pop, which increasingly emulate American culture, the Turkish approach differed. "Turkish television shows blazed through…because their heroes were modern, but not westernized [and] propelled purely by the righteous power of values" (Bhutto, 2019). Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu (2016) considered cultural proximity as one of the factors behind Arab interest in Turkish soap operas. However, they further elaborated that "class, age, gender, and personal history–related differences of the audience" (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016, pp. 3617) also mattered.

At the same time, immigration to Türkiye surged. In 2000, approximately 1.2 million foreign-born people lived in Türkiye, most of them assumed to be ethnic Turks (Düvell, 2014). By 2010, this number had risen to 1.9 million people, including those who gained Turkish citizenship, with most of these people being non-Turkic and non-Muslims (Düvell, 2014). Additionally, between 2001 and 2004, around 160,000 residence permits were issued annually, increasing to around 180,000 annually from 2006 to 2010. Of these residence permits, an average of 20,000 permits were issued for employment and another 30,000 for studying. By 2013, the number of student permits had risen to 50,683. Meanwhile, the number of work permits issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security increased from around 7,000 in 2004 to 14,200 in 2010 and 32,271 in 2013 (Düvell, 2014). In 2020, the number of work permits had increased to 123,574 (TR Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2020), while the number of international students rose to 224,053 in 2021 (Council of Higher Education, 2021). The number of residence permits issued to foreigners grew more than seven times to 1,275,741 in 2021 alone (Presidency of Migration Management, 2021), compared to approximately 180,000 issued in 2010.

Research Design and Findings

Given the popularity of Turkish drama series, increasingly positive attitudes towards Türkiye and the surge in immigration to Türkiye for work and education, a three-phase mixed methods study was conducted. This approach consisted of surveying foreign-based audience members and those Turkish drama consumers who had already moved to Türkiye in order to explore the appeal of Turkish drama series and their impact on foreign audiences. This approach explored the appeal of Turkish drama series and their impact on foreign audiences in terms of engagement with Türkiye, specifically travel (as well as intent to travel) to Türkiye for work, education, pleasure, and investment opportunities. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Does watching Turkish drama series translate to foreign audiences' increased intent to support and align with Türkiye, specifically travelling to Türkiye for work, education, pleasure, and investment opportunities?

2. Does watching Turkish drama series lead to travelling to Türkiye for work, education, or investment opportunities?

3. Does watching Turkish drama series help those who have moved to Türkiye for work, education, or investment opportunities in their current adjustment levels to life in Türkiye and knowledge about Türkiye?

The above questions guided the design and implementation of the three phases of the study.

Turkish Dramas' Pakistani Audience

A survey study was conducted with a foreign audience to answer the first question. In this case, we selected Pakistan due to the hugely reported popularity of *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*, a Turkish drama series, in January 2020 (Hasan, 2020). Five thousand five hundred and seventeen respondents were reached via phone and asked questions related to their exposure to Turkish drama series and their intent to travel to Türkiye for business, education, pleasure, and investment opportunities. Three hypotheses were tested and confirmed, including the following:

● There will be a difference between those who watched Turkish drama series and those who did not watch them when it came to intending to travel to Türkiye for work, education, pleasure, and investment opportunities.

● Higher exposure to Turkish drama series led to a greater intention to travel to Türkiye for work, education, pleasure, and investment opportunities.

● Familiarity with the background (such as relating to characters in Turkish drama series and knowledge of Turkish culture) was significantly associated with intent to do the same.

The first hypothesis was proven as two-sample t-tests showed significant differences in intentions to travel to Türkiye for work, education, or pleasure ($t=-59.45$, $df = 5517$, $p<.001$) as well as investing in Türkiye ($t=-24.75$, $df = 5517$, $p<.001$) among those who watched Turkish drama series and those who did not. Respondents who had watched Turkish drama series were 1.47 times more likely to intend to travel to Türkiye for work, education, or pleasure than those who had not. Respondents who had watched Turkish drama series were 1.3 times more likely to intend to invest in Türkiye than those who had not.

Confirming the second hypothesis, a significant positive relationship shown by linear regression analysis was evidenced between the number of Turkish dramas watched and intent to travel to Türkiye for work, education, or pleasure ($t=.25$, $df = 5517$, $p<.001$). A significant positive correlation was also found between the number of Turkish dramas watched and the intent to invest in Türkiye ($t=.17$, $df = 5517$, $p<.001$). As per Cohen (1988), these can be considered medium and small effect sizes, respectively. The study made interesting findings regarding background characteristics and aspects of Turkish dramas potentially affecting intent to travel to Türkiye for work, education, pleasure, or investment opportunity.[2] It notably found that gender, relating to characters in Turkish drama series, and knowledge of Turkish culture were significantly positively associated with intent to travel to Türkiye for work, education and pleasure and investing in Türkiye (Mohydin, 2020).

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[2] Aspects of Turkish dramas such as the relatability of characters in Turkish drama series culture that potentially impact intent to support and align with Türkiye were included based on interviews conducted with Pakistani stakeholders prior to the study including government officials and media industry leaders (Mohydin, 2020).

Foreigners in Türkiye

In response to the second question, the study's second phase explored the impact of Turkish drama series on respondents who had already moved to Türkiye for work, education, or business. The study extension was conducted online in March 2021 and included 127 respondents. Three hypotheses were tested and confirmed, including the following:

• There will be a difference between those who had watched Turkish drama series and those who did not when it came to moving to Türkiye

• There will be a difference between those who had watched Turkish drama series and those who did not when it came to highlighting Turkish culture and lifestyle as depicted in Turkish dramas as one of the reasons they moved to Türkiye

• There will be differences between those who had watched Turkish drama series and those who did not when it came to personally relating to characters in Turk-

ish dramas in their daily lives in Türkiye, adjusting to life in Türkiye and feeling knowledgeable about Türkiye

The first hypothesis was not proven as there was no significant difference between those who had watched Turkish drama series and those who did not watch them in actually making the move to Türkiye. However, confirming the second hypothesis, logistic regression analysis found that those who had watched Turkish drama series were 2.66 times more likely to highlight Turkish culture and lifestyle depicted in Turkish dramas as one of the reasons they moved to Türkiye. Furthermore, the third hypothesis was partially confirmed: while there was no significant difference between those who had watched Turkish drama series and those who did not when it came to personally relating to characters in Turkish dramas in their daily lives in Türkiye or adjusting to life in Türkiye, those who had watched Turkish drama series were 1.58 times more likely to report feeling more knowledgeable about Türkiye than those who did not.

Interviewing Foreigners

To answer the third question, interviews were conducted with 14 respondents. They were selected to be part of the interviews if they fulfilled the following criteria: currently available and living in Türkiye and having selected Turkish culture and lifestyle depicted in Turkish dramas as one of the reasons they had moved to Türkiye. All interviewees were asked about the impact of Turkish drama series on their decision to move to Türkiye and their current levels of adjustment to life in Türkiye, knowledge about Türkiye and relatability to characters in Turkish drama series now that they live in Türkiye. A thematic analysis was done to uncover patterns of themes in the interview data as well as nuances. Three major themes emerged:

• *Turkish drama series sparked an interest in Türkiye*

Respondents mainly reported watching Turkish drama series before moving to Türkiye. One of the interviewees stated that she "continued to watch Turkish dramas to stay

connected to Türkiye after visiting the country" (personal interview, 2021). Most reported discontinuing watching Turkish dramas unless it taught the Turkish language (two interviewees reported this). Some reasons for discontinuation were: lack of time, Turkish dramas not reflecting "reality on the ground" (personal interview, 2021) and "why would I watch dramas about a country I now live in?" (Personal interview' 2021). After moving to Türkiye, reasons for watching Turkish dramas included entertainment value and "I find them to be personally very relatable" (personal interview, 2021). It was very interesting to note a comment by one of the interviewees:

> "Turkish dramas were the only ones my Muslim parents allowed me to watch before I moved to Türkiye - in fact, they only let me move to Türkiye because they saw the Turkish dramas and believed this was a safe country for a Muslim girl to move to" (personal interview, 2021)

● *The utility of Turkish drama series can be high in both personal and professional life*

Interviewees reported that the utility of watching Turkish dramas before they moved to Türkiye was high as they were able to "catch a preview of Turkish culture and lifestyle intimately" (personal interview, 2021). Most respondents agreed that Turkish culture and lifestyle, particularly family dynamics, were depicted accurately in Turkish dramas. After moving to Türkiye, they could apply what they had learned in their daily lives and interactions with Turkish people. One of the interviewees reflected:

> "I married a Turkish man and moved to Türkiye with him. His family is exactly like one of the families in a Turkish drama I used to watch, and that is how I know how to treat my in-laws and what traditions are important to them." (Personal interview, 2021)

One of the areas Turkish dramas do not provide much utility to the interviewees was work and professional life. One of the interviewees stated that "Turkish dramas do not usually show much about office lives and especially not for women", which is why there is little to learn about Turkish office culture. However, most respondents believed that watching Turkish dramas helped them develop rudimentary Turkish language skills and cultural awareness that were useful in their interactions both in their professional and personal lives. This aspect was evident in the research findings as noted above, as those who had watched at least one Türkiye drama series in the past five years were 1.58 times more likely to report feeling more knowledgeable about Türkiye than those who did not.

● *The relatability of characters differs*

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was that respondents felt that Turkish dramas did not represent the lower and middle socioeconomic strata of Turkish society:

> "I could not see myself in them after moving to Türkiye and found out that only the rich can live the way those girls in Turkish dramas live - not everyone lives like that here. The dramas are not about people like me in Türkiye." (Personal interview, 2021)

Additionally, for many respondents, cultural differences were more pronounced in real life. When they watched Turkish dramas in their home countries, Turkish culture seemed more like their own culture. After moving to Türkiye, cultural differences were more pronounced:

> "When I used to watch them in Tunisia, I thought they are just like us! But then when you move to Türkiye, you discover small nuances that differentiate Turkish culture from Tunisian culture - I guess that is natural - I also think watching them dubbed in Arabic brought them closer to home and created familiarity" (personal interview, 2021)

These findings can potentially explain that there was no significant difference between those who had watched Turkish drama series in the past five years and those who did not. This aspect is accurate when relating to characters in Turkish dramas in their daily lives in Türkiye or adjusting to life in Türkiye.

While Turkish soap operas were not produced either for foreign audiences or to promote an official cultural policy (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013), they seem to have inadvertently served the purpose of 'capturing the hearts and minds' of foreign audiences. Research findings show that not only do they spark interest in Türkiye as a country and encourage tourism but also lead to increased engagement with it in terms of skilled immigration and investment. Moreover, once foreign workers and international students move to Türkiye, they are able to navigate Turkish culture and people better if they had watched Turkish dramas beforehand due to being more knowledgeable about them.

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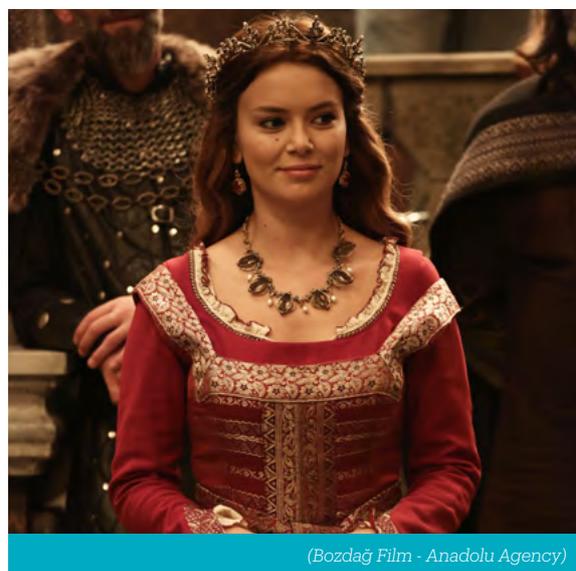
Discussion

The study found that those who had watched Turkish drama series were almost three times more likely to highlight Turkish culture and lifestyle as depicted in Turkish dramas as one of the reasons they moved to Türkiye compared to those that had not. This aspect is a notable finding as it potentially confirms the use of entertainment products as public diplomacy instruments.

Indeed, entertainment has been used as education before, and entertainment-education (EE) has been defined as "the intentional placement of educational content in entertainment messages" (Singhal & Rogers, 2002, p. 117 in Murphy et al., 2012, p.9). Mexican writer-director Miguel Sabido directed a 1978 Mexican telenovela by the name of *Acompáñame*. Even though other factors may have played a role, the telenovela was associated with a 32 percent increase in the number of Mexican women going to family planning clinics (Slater, 2002, p. 159). A 23 percent increase in contraception sales such as condoms also occurred (Poindexter, 2004, p.28 in Murphy et al., 2012, p.9). The following year, Mexico's birth rate dropped from 3.1 percent to 2.7 percent (Poindexter, 2004, p.28 in Murphy et al., 2012, p.9). The magnitude of this behavioural and population shift made many researchers note that EE can act as a viable tool via influence. Later research suggested that EE in the form of popular television programming can lead to a shift in audience attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour (Brodie et al., 2001; Collins et al., 2003; Valente et al., 2007; Heather et al., 2008 in Murphy et al., 2012).

Aligned with Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory that emphasises the importance of observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1986), EE utilizes narratives and storytelling to convey information. Narratives can be impactful as audiences tend to care about and relate to the television series characters (Singhal et al., 2004 in Murphy et al., 2012). As per Moyer-Gusé (2008), the "narrative structure of entertainment-education messages can overcome reactance by diminishing the viewer's perception that the message is intended to persuade" (p. 415). This perspective resembles other concerns related to public diplomacy as noted above: it is important to ensure the intended audience receives that information in the way that it was intended because "people tend to be suspicious of foreign officials' motives" (Melissen,

2005, p. 16). Moreover, narrative-based information is processed differently than the same information based on a non-narrative format. As depicted in Lang's (2000) limited capacity model of mediated message processing, emotional and non-emotional stimuli are processed differently. Lang stated that "emotion-eliciting material is more easily encoded, stored, and retrieved" (Lang, 2000 in Murphy et al., 2012, p. 8). Green and Brock (2000) also noted the important role of emotions with audiences becoming absorbed in the drama of a narrative largely due to the elements of romance, comedy, suspense, triumph over tragedy and conflict. Notably, Appel and Richter (2007) suggest that "fictional narratives can have a persistent implicit influence on the way we view the world, and that these effects may last longer than the effects of typical explicit attempts to change beliefs by presenting claims and arguments" (p. 129). Thus, the impact of entertainment-education may be long lasting. Amongst foreigners who had moved to Türkiye, those who reported watching even one Turkish drama series in the past five years were 1.58 times more likely to feel more knowledgeable about Türkiye than those who did not. This fact is a testament to the power of narrative and storytelling when storing and retrieving information.

With that said, government officials in many countries have recognized the potential of entertainment products to support and further their international public diplomacy objectives (Murphy et al., 2012). For example, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) was tasked in 2006 by the British government to bring 'the world to the UK and the UK to the world' to be able to justify the privilege of a licence fee paid by British citizens. The opportunity to realise public diplomacy gains resulting from providing an internationally renowned, highly valued service is not lost on the British government (Murphy et al., 2012). Another example is a 2009 US diplomatic cable sent from the US embassy in Saudi Arabia to the US Department of State (Booth, 2010). The cable stated that popular US television shows, such as *Desperate Housewives* and *The David Letterman Show*, have not only spurred the audience's interest in the West but also more efficaciously persuaded "Saudi youth to reject violent jihad." The shows were more effective than the US-funded al-Hurra TV news channel (Booth, 2010, paragraph 1). Elasmar (2008) also found a significant positive correlation between supportive Mus-

lim attitudes towards the US and the US-led war on terror and consumption of US entertainment products.

The impact of narrative and storytelling on information processing and consequent shift in attitudes and behaviours is noteworthy. Audiences tend to care about and relate to television series characters. This fact may help explain why in the study conducted with the Pakistani audience of Turkish dramas, relating to characters in Turkish drama series was significantly positively associated with both intent to travel to Türkiye for work and education as well as investing in Türkiye. However, it was interesting to note that, in contrast to the study conducted with Pakistani audiences, the study conducted with foreigners that had moved to Türkiye for work, education, or investment in Türkiye revealed that they were not affected by characters in Turkish dramas. This difference may be due to multiple reasons. Research has shown that even unconscious familiarity drives positive attitude formation through mere exposure (Wänke and Hansen, 2009). This aspect applies when Turkish drama series characters have familiar-sounding names, similar religious values, et cetera. This factor was likely at play for Pakistani survey respondents. There may also be a country-level effect that needs to be accounted for. These findings align with the cultural proximity theory, which suggests that media from culturally affiliated countries can garner more attention and engagement from an audience than those from countries considered less culturally close.

Secondly, for many Pakistani survey respondents, characters in Turkish drama series may be aspirational. As noted above, 'neo-Ottoman cool' (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013a) is a term used by media researchers to describe the Turkish version of modernity that combines Islam, secularism, and capitalism. This trilogy is present in most Turkish drama series and has become the main symbol of Türkiye's soft power in the Muslim world. This is particularly true for Pakistan. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan even asked state-run Pakistan Television to screen the dubbed version of *'Dirilis: Ertugrul'* and recommended the show for promoting 'true Islamic values' and values to aspire towards (Shabbir, 2019). Yanardağoğlu and Karam (2013) believe that shifts in Turkish as well as the foreign policies of other regional states play a major role in the success of Turkish soap operas in the Arab and the larger Muslim world (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013 in Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu, 2016). However, this can go either way: in early 2018, the Dubai-based, Saudi-owned media group MBC spokesperson Mazen Hayek announced via Emirati media that they would ban Turkish drama series without explanation. At the time, all shows with Turkish origins were immediately taken off air in Saudi Arabia as well as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), despite the Turkish drama series' massive popularity in the Arab world. The move was denounced by Turkish officials as a 'political move', considering Türkiye supported Qatar during the Gulf states' blockade of the country, which was led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Egypt, an ally of Saudi Arabia and the UAE followed suit by banning all Turkish content in the country. At the same time, Egypt's *Dar Al-Iftaa*, responsible for issuing religious edicts, reportedly published a statement or *'fatwa'* accusing Türkiye of trying to create an 'area of influence' for itself in the Middle East using its soft power. The involvement of religious bodies in this debate underscores the strength and efficacy of the medium when it comes to public diplomacy. However, by mid-2021 relations between Türkiye and the UAE and Egypt appeared to have begun thawing. Even though political differences remain, the countries were "expected to focus on building economic ties and de-escalating their rift" (Daily Sabah, 2021), with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stating there was "positive momentum" in Türkiye's discussions with UAE and Egypt in September 2021 (Daily Sabah, 2021). Thus, it can be presumed that there may be a positive impact on sales and consumption of Turkish content in those countries.

Finally, those who have moved to Türkiye compared to those who had not moved may not find it as relatable, as evidenced by the interviewees who noted pronounced socioeconomic and sociocultural differences between Turkish drama characters' lives and their own lives in Türkiye. This may be because Turkish drama producers tend to focus on productions with universal themes and melodramatic storylines (Yeşil, 2015). This is aligned with the concept of delocalization i.e., "minimization of certain kinds of cultural specificities in a cultural product to lower the possibility of a cultural discount by the foreign audience" (Straubhaar, 2007, p. 170 in Yeşil, 2015, p. 52). This potentially explains the already immigrated foreigners' perceptions of a mismatch between their localized experiences and the ones they see in Turkish dramas. Such findings also point towards 'multiple proximities' (Straubhaar, 2007, p. 199-202 in Yeşil, 2015, p. 52)) such as shared cross-cultural genre structures and narrative themes accounting for the popularity of Turkish drama series globally.

Conclusion

As evidenced, Turkish drama series have become a potent public diplomacy instrument for Türkiye. Even though the study design does not allow for a causal relationship between Turkish drama series and an increased fascination with Türkiye, there is reason to believe that a positive association exists: Turkish dramas' narrative-building and storytelling power have led to an increased fascination with Türkiye (backed by a theoretical explanation found in EE literature). Their relatability have potentially led to an increase in both intent to and actual travel to Türkiye for work, education, pleasure, or investment opportunities. Further, they can be helpful for those who have already moved to Türkiye when it comes to navigating and adjusting to their new home.

Government officials and policymakers may utilise entertainment education via drama series as public diplomacy instruments to spark greater interest in their country, boosting tourism, skilled immigration, and investment. Future research can build on this study to know how generalizable these findings are to environments where dramas are, in fact, either government produced or are products of high level of cooperation between governments and production companies.

Drama series play a key role in educating international audiences about many aspects of society and culture, some of them being perhaps too nuanced to communicate through traditional diplomatic channels, with many foreign viewers delighting in the knowledge of a country, culture, family, life, or personality similar in nature to their own, offering an opportunity to connect and dream.

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