

Media Discourse in Society: A Critical Analysis of a Pakistani Game Show

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the semiotic and discursive practices of a Pakistani game show through CDA approach focusing on communicative interactions to identify sources of power and mediation of discourse within society. CDA aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes, Fairclough (1993). In Pakistan, Family Game Show is a recently emerged prime time television genre that attracts a huge and diverse viewership. The selected show follows the popular model; where the host is the central figure with a dominating demeanor. The audience is generally very vibrant and mostly represents a particular class of society. The analytical foci of the research include text i.e. the interaction and the context including discourse and socio-cultural practices, specifically the mediation of social capital in media discourse. This study also examined micro structures including lexical aspects, salience of words and phrases as used by the host and the participants.

Key Words: Game shows, CDA, Power, Pakistan

Introduction

This paper attempts to study a genre that has been deprived its due scholarly attention and yet is an integral part of daily lives of millions as per Television Rating Point (TRP) data. The focus is semiotic practices of Game Show genre through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to unravel the rhetoric of dominance and social power and the mediation of social capital & media discourse including representation of class and gender. The show, Jeeto Pakistan (Win Pakistan) broadcasted in Pakistan over the weekends (Fridays and Sundays: prime time 8pm to 10pm), serves as primary text for this study. The variables researched are: the host, whose significance is pivotal to the show; the set; studio audience, their role and contribution to the show.

The analytical framework draws on major theories: Uses & Gratification (U>) and Expectancy- Value in connection to Fiske's notion of Polysemy of Television Text (Fiske, 1987) established that television audience is not homogeneous mass and that they are active readers of television text in the light of their social experience and hence television text is polysemic. (Blumler & Katz, 1974) in (U>) focuses on the social psychological origins of audience members, their needs and expectations and the sources of media that lead to the exposure of media content thus gratifying the needs. (Fiske, 2011) U> is based on the notion that the audience is not passive, they select what they want to view on television that best satisfy their needs, and sometime same program gratify different needs. It holds true that people interest can be developed and that if a program meets the needs of millions of people then it is not significant if the 'highbrow aesthetes are offended'. However, (Quail D. M., 2010) proposes in Expectancy Value Theory that for every individual audience member use of media accounts for both 'perceptions of benefits' and 'differential value of these benefits'. (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985) distinguishes between Gratification Sought (GS) and gratification obtained (GO) based on the media use behavior. It not necessary

that the intended satisfaction is achieved which, the viewer had in mind before consuming that media content.

Game/Quiz Shows genre has been a part of media from the inception of commercial broadcast of radio in America in 1930s. The game show genre appealed due to a low cost solution and using common people as audience (Hoerschelmann, 2006) and thus ordinary and common people became the studio audience creating a “spectacle” (Holmes, 2008). To keep this genre alive in the transition from radio to television various aesthetic problems aroused that led to the 1958 scandal this marked boundaries and differentiated between quiz and game shows. (Fiske, 1987) defined Quiz Shows as a genre based on Academic and Factual knowledge. (Dyer, 1992) States that entertainment can be described as utopianism, it gives something to a common man to escape to from the routine of daily life and it enduring monotony. (Hoerschelmann 2006) In addition to other reasons for the popularity of this genre is that it, provides the incentive to win smaller monetary prizes, merchandise, while the audience participation remains the central focus. Above all these another factor contributing to the popularity of the genre is the desire of ordinary people for “celebrification” (Turner, 2010)

An important aspect this paper addresses is Discourse in society and power dynamics; the discourse of the mass media that manifests power in subtle ways (Foucault, 1972). Pakistan television history has few but very popular formats of quiz and game shows. Amongst them the longest in terms of duration is Neelam Ghar (Auction House) televised from 1970s to present; an amalgamation of quiz and game show. But the phenomenon for game shows is quite recent. After privatization of media in 2002 private channels experimented and adopted international formats of many genres. Inam Ghar (The Awards house) was aired inspired with the format of Neelam Ghar. It was the popularity of Inam Ghar first post-privatization game show broadcasted in January 2014 and later

same year Jeeto Pakistan was aired by a competitive private channel.

‘Jeeto Pakistan’ as the name reflects patriotism, which none of the other game show does. It celebrates pluralism and diversity for all. The show is televised on ARY Digital Channel with a tagline “Sab layJao” (Take everything). The show celebrates consumerism and is inclined to give many giveaways that concede with the tagline. The channel is proud of its history as a ‘gold giver’ as mentioned in an interview with, Marketing Manager of the channel. (Khan, 2016) Responded that the channels is keeping its tradition alive, the show gives away gold and other valuable prizes each episode. According to Mr. Shehzad the show is based on random game segments designed by the creative team of the channel.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The data sources for the study comprised interviews with members of production team, social media survey of viewers responding to two questions “Do you watch Pakistani Game Show and the other one, ‘What is your opinion about Pakistani game shows?”, demographic details of studio audience accessed through the data available with the channel and three (03) shows of two hours each (shows aired on: March 08, 2015; March 27, 2015 & Jan 01, 2016) up to a total air time of six hours.

As (Holmes, 2008) proposed critical approaches to analyze quiz shows, this study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze discourse patterns of game shows. (Fowler, Kress, & Trew, 1979) observes that discourses are always socially, economically, politically and racially loaded. (O'Halloran, 2001) CDA defines as an interdisciplinary approach that can be used for critique on language, power & ideology in discourse. This paper is organized using three-stage trajectory for analysis including description, interpretation and explanation of the discourse (Fairclough, 1989). One of (Clive, 1995) the three dimensional

framework to infer text, discourse practices and social practices is adopted for the study.

The major framework employed for analysis includes **Members-groups**, **Actions-processes** and **Context-social structure**. Members-groups approach was used for a semiotic analysis in order to determine that each participant (including the host and studio audience) act their roles and the same is reaffirmed through language choices; **Actions-processes** focus was useful to further analyze the ‘acts’ of participants and determine how it serves two purposes: reaffirming social practices and allowing the host to serve as cultural intermediary. **Context-social structure** served as a useful frame work for analyzing the role of power in general and specifically with reference to class & gender. It was also a useful framework to determine how ideologies are practiced in social space, whether real or imaginary.

FINDINGS

Game Segments

The two- hour show opens with a segment that requires participants to compete for a bike in a fun-filled activity. After fifteen minutes of activities a bugle is heard signaling giveaway time, followed by another array of games and activities that makes up most of the remaining air time; with bugle signaling at intervals followed by giveaways.

Activities and tasks make audience demonstrate skills and competencies and engage participants in playing for reward; energizing the studio audience and suggesting that the activities are not scripted. There are question based segments that generally test observation of social practices and behaviors. The ‘star segments’ are gambling based.

The Set & Audience:

The coliseum like set adds to vibrancy, enhancing audience involvement and making the show enjoyable by increasing proximity. In addition to placing the host prominently, the set also allows the audience to have a clear view of the range of expensive gifts such as cars and bikes. Three sides of the set are occupied by audience, mostly families. The online registration permits participation of a family of four per entry. The range of gifts and the game segments caters to all genders and age groups. The data indicates that most of the participating families come from Socio-Economic Class 3 & 4.

Context- Social Structure:

Situations of discursive interaction are part or constitutive of social Game space consecrated spot (Huizinga, 1949). The manner of address as preferred by the host and audience speaks of their perceived positions and status within the virtual reality of the show. The lexical choices and the tone of the host demonstrate dominance whereas verbal choices and even intonation patterns of audience signify that they agree to the assumed status of being powerless.

As it is normative of game shows, in this case as well, female assistants' role appears to be ceremonial as compared to that of their male counterparts. Though all of them wear the same uniform, their tasks correspond to the gender roles hard wired in the society.

The show seems to present ideologies such as consumerism and capitalism as pragmatic and normative and also validates the societal norms of gender and class. The same could also be observed in the gender based humor and witticism, mostly used by the host. The influence of sponsors as the source behind the gifts on the show is evident with each announcement commencing the game throughout the entire show. The range of gifts offered indicates the target class for the sponsors and producers.

The studio audience observe hierarchy agreeing to their designated position; they also try to please the host in various ways such as bringing gifts and cards and telling the host about his fan following. The fact that the show format encourages family participation reflects on the significance of family as a unit.

Members-Group

Influence of group identity, on an individual engaged in a discourse practice: Use of language, non verbal practices. The host dictates his power and exercises free movement whereas the participants could move around as and when directed. The power of the host is demonstrated in his verbal and nonverbal communication; his assertive manner of addressing the audience is as demonstrated clearly in his conversations, as he invites an audience member to the center of the set and then commands to go back, reflects his position as well.

Moreover, he capitalizes on societal norms and stereotypes such as women go to parlor to spend hours beautifying them, uses the social currency of the semantic field of relationships for example Aunty, bhabi (sister in law), Bhai (brother), behan (sister) to show courtesy, frequently uses pun for two purpose; express authority and create humor. The host tends to objectify participants creating entertainment and enjoyable experience for the audience. Since he seems to have the discretion of distributing gifts amongst the audience, he partakes the role of the grand giver. He, due to his amiable nature, pulls audience into tasks that may be otherwise deemed culturally inappropriate.

The show has a dominating presence of the host for the entire air time; which is furthered by the fact that there is a team of helpers, young boys and girls, to do the petty running around the studio, carrying gifts all the way up to the audience, handing gifts to the

host, balloting for participants for the next game segment and hushing the audience. They appear to be in a powerless position.

STUDIO AUDIENCE:

Powerless

The studio audience represents Socio Economic Category (SEC) C & D with a negligible presence of SEC B and no representation of SEC A. Audience appears to be completely dominated by the host and his powerful presence. Audience is willing to be engaged in activities that would put them in awkward position in real life for example messing up their appearance, dancing in public, public display of romantic emotions to name some. They refer to the host as Bhai (brother) or Beta (son) to show respect and express their gratitude. Women are seen to be using their perceived fragility to their advantage in terms of requesting for a second chance/attempt, a hint or a desired reward.

Action Process:

Individual's actions are constituent parts of group actions and social processes. Game shows reflect the traditionally utopian qualities of light entertainment, as well as are reflective of the culture. In a traditional Pakistani family the male member is the head of the family and usually takes and announces the decision, but the decision is hardly taken in isolation. He will consult to his spouse/wife and then declares the decision. This is highlighted in all game segments where a family unit or spouses plays together; signifying the stereotypical roles within a family. If a woman wins a bike the host invites her husband to come take a ride around the stage. Game shows can still beckon an escape from the everyday, while pivoting on this very same context in the process.

SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

A social media survey was conducted to understand audiences' perception regarding game shows and shows of their preference

from within the selected genre. The response could be termed as mixed; suggesting varied perceptual frameworks within same households and representatives of same class. Mostly, it's the older generation that finds these shows interesting whereas most of the young respondents would term these shows as 'sub-standard' and 'scripted'; hence not a viewing preference for them.

DISCUSSION

Media Text and Discourse:

The text comprises the show under discussion. A detailed study of the text implicates that social power is expressed and dominance reproduced through control on discourse as observed by (Foucault, 1972).

(Fairclough, 2003) Speaks of three aspects of discourse; part of action, representation of social practices and that of identity. Using this framework, the following discussion would look into the Format as part of action; class & gender as ideologies; (representation of social practices as individual identity.

Shared representation for a society is essential for communicating (Moscovic, 1984) it provides with a system and a set of values, ideas and practices and also helps to interact with other members of the community.

THE FORMAT:

Part of Action

According to (Moran, 2001) television program format is a key indicator of globalization impact in Asia. (Lacey, 2000) Visions that game show genre has ample repertoire. It has an interesting narrative with glamorous set, as important aspects of iconography and a studio show with audience and host as being vital importance of the structure.

Considering the game show phenomenon in Pakistan and especially the show under discussion, despite the claim by the program producers that 'the show has a format of its own' (Khan, 2016), various segments appear to be inspired by a range of international game shows e.g. One of the segments 'Baat Banti Hai' (Getting A Good Deal) offering 120 grams of gold as the highest prize is very similar to the internationally acclaimed Deal No Deal.

The show seems to celebrate consumerism as most of the studio audience alongside the contestants get a sponsored take away; yet it is normative that they would try to get more gifts by requesting the host for one of their favorite items. This can be established further by analyzing major game segments and their formats. Jeet ki Baazi (The Winning Deal) Mostly an aiming task, where each bucket holds valuable prize card of consumer items ranging from mobile phones to cars.

Khul Gai Qismat closely meaning becoming fortunate is a game whereby two invited families to try their luck and have multiple chances to play for valuable gifts. A lucky family might win an assortment of a wide range of valuables including but not restricted to expensive home appliances, gold, motor bikes and cars.

Baat Banti Hai has two rounds of lucky draw; in the first, seven members are selected from the studio audience, in the second round one of the seven is selected to play for a prize up to 120 grams of gold.

Jeet ka Funda (The Recipe to win) offers a jackpot worth 350,000 PKR. (\$3500). Two families selected through balloting are invited and have to answer three questions based on basic general knowledge and understanding of a popular view of the masses.

The show opens with twinkling lights resonating with the golden stars that appears flying and sets on the logo. It is followed by the

golden letters Jeeto (Win) flying in. The semiotic representation of the commencement calls for an open invitation to the viewers to come and try their luck to win gold or equally valuable gifts from this show. The commencement thus, presents the channel's history as a gold giver. The logo consists of two words Jeeto Pakistan (Win Pakistan) with the font size of Jeeto being three times bigger than Pakistan, clearly emphasizes the consumerist value to attract viewers. The first scene is of the dark studio with spot lights revolving until the running host arrives to the center stage which seems to signify celebration of consumerism.

The Bugle, historically used to indicate routines, indicates commencement of a segment where inexpensive sponsored giveaways are distributed amongst audience. But beyond that, the sound also brings excitement and entices them to try grabbing one of the mysterious giveaways, trying their best to grab one or more being given out by the host. This segment directly resonates with the tagline of the show that says sab ley jao (take everything). (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973-4) in Uses and Gratification argues that people are led towards media by social environmental circumstance and they use media for specific reasons and motives seeking gratification. These reasons are important as they help in understanding the selective approach towards media content, and lead audiences to employ media content in different ways for different reasons. And one can conclude that the various factors such as psychological dispositions , sociological factors and environmental conditions together encourages member audience towards specified use of media content.

Set Design

The set of the show follows the norm of a glitzy well lighted coliseum shaped gaming arena. But the highlight of this set is the circular coliseum shape that serves the benefit of autocratically democratic setup. It holds the host in the most prominent position

in the center within focus of the audience all around. He solely is responsible to take the show forward and is in the autocratic position of a one man show. At the same time the clear view facing to the host gives a democratic feeling to the studio audience where better visibility means better chances to win.

**REPRESENTATION:
Social Practices & Individual Identity**

The show presents a microcosm of the societal realization and performance of gender and class replicating the existing social hierarchy in terms of both class and gender. The show is projected as a family Show. In Pakistani collectivistic society when the tag family is added to a public space, it is translated as a polite rejection to male-only groups ensuring the comfort level of women in particular and families in general. This is a commonly held perception that male-only groups have a nuisance value in public spaces whereby; discourage women and family groups to participate. So, the audience comprising groups of extended family and acquaintances appears to represent all age groups which reflect the prevalent family dynamics of the society.

Not only the host but the studio audience also capitalizes on the significance of wide range of semantic field of relationship and the society's preference to establish social conversations. The host refers to elderly ladies as aunties (aunt), younger women as behan (sister), married young women as bhabhi (sister-in-law), young men as bhai (brother) and dost (friend), elder men as uncle. In most of the cases, he would refer to kids as beta (literal 'son', but also used as a neuter / generic term to refer to children irrespective of gender.)

It is vital for discourse and communication that who controls the theme, it is observed that the host & the team he represents determine the text of the game show. On the continuum of Power and dominance, the host and audience could be considered as two

extreme ends. With his perceived position, the host controls the audience, his demeanor and choice of verbal expressions; audience plays their part in completing the discourse cycle through their verbal and nonverbal communication. Hence the host appears as the face of power and control. (Foucault, 1972) argues that meaning in a given social situation is created through language and behavior and that both are affected by power positioning and hierarchy. The host would prefer using short, imperative sentence & phrases such as jao (go) baetho (sit) instead more polite alternates for example jaen (go: polite), baethen (sit: polite), aap baeth jaen / aap apni jagha pay wapis jaen (would you please sit/ go back).

| <i>Imperative (Authoritative)</i> | <i>Imperative (Polite)</i> | <i>Imperative (Polite/tentative/ powerless)</i> | <i>Meaning</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|----------------|
| <i>Jao</i> | <i>Jaen</i> | <i>Since these two expressions are used by the host, there is no evidence of the use of powerless/ polite/ tentative alternatives for the two terms mentioned. The tentative/ powerless options could be: baethenna! jaenna!</i> | <i>Go</i> |
| <i>Baetho</i> | <i>Baethen</i> | | <i>Sit</i> |
| <i>Karo</i> | <i>Kareden</i> | <i>Kardaenna!</i> | <i>Do</i> |
| <i>Dou</i> | <i>Daen</i> | <i>Daedaenna!</i> | <i>Give</i> |

All the options in these cases would have the same denotative meaning but different social meanings, hence the host mostly prefers the authoritative option whereas the audience would prefer expression choices that exhibits tentativeness. It's especially highlighted in their tone while requesting the host for a desired gift that they intend to take away. The intonation matters; it is usually the prolonged last syllable that signifies the self- realization of an audience member (mostly women, of their place in the power hierarchy).

The host would also show his dominance by playing down the audience and through his frequent use of pun and expressions with culturally sensitive implicit meaning and undertones. This status is furthered by the fact that he would behave 'holier than thou' whenever asked for a favor; constantly reminding the audience of his position by acting very benevolent while granting such requests and sounding very authoritative while declining. The host would reinforce his powerful position by hand picking participants for various game segments and the audience plays their role in completing the cycle, by agreeing to agree with him and participating in activities as advised. The host is always performing multifarious roles such as engaging with studio audience, addressing home audience, a referee (over- seeing a game), an evaluator- expert (a scoring game) and a sage (giving an expert-like opinion). Therefore, on occasions, he creates an allusion of personal relationship with the medium while addressing directly to the viewers (Bonner, 2014).

By virtue of being in a position of centrality, the host also enjoys the role of what (Bourdieu, 1993) refers to as "Cultural Intermediary", he thus becomes a part of the process of reshaping the society but making these inroads very gradually, challenging the sensibility about entertainment i.e. people preferring strict compartmental possibilities for different age groups and members of a family to a situation where all the members of family would enjoy together that also in front of camera. Studio audience tend to

take refuge in alternate reality; they “enter a temporary world of play” (Huizinga, 1938) then helps them assume an alternate identity as well so that they don’t hesitate while requesting the host for a favor either in the form of a desired gift or another chance to play; something they are likely to avoid in a real life situation.

(Bonner, 2013) Argues entertainment media personalities become presenters to get into spotlight at a point in their career. Most of the cases in Pakistan appear to defy the assumption as most of game show hosts, including the host of the show under discussion, follow the reverse route. Rather, the show hosts are already established showbiz celebrities whose presence on the show favors the channel and the program owing to their fan following.

CONCLUSION

Genre:

Game show genre has recently become a subject of academic inquiry. The global trend is to prefer a distinctive format; some very popular game shows include Price is Right, the contestants have to correctly guess the retail prices of items to either win the same items or other prizes, Wheel of Fortune where contestants spin the wheel to get cash prizes depending on how lucky one could get and Power of 10 and its Indian version Dus Ka dum where contestants compete to correctly guess answers to survey poll questions for cash prize.

The show under discussion Jeeto Pakistan presents an amalgamation of formats including but not restricted to the games mentioned above, presenting an array of games including sports related activities, dance competitions and guessing games. Some of the segment inspirations come from Power of 10, Deal or No Deal and Wheel of fortune. Free giveaways without any task is a unique feature of this show; at intervals the host would give a number of consumer items to studio audience without assigning

them any tasks whereas at times he might ask questions that are in common knowledge to the people of the country, for example complete a proverb or answer a riddle. The show intake pattern that is through online registrations and social class representation according to data of the show indicates penetration of new media literacy in Lower Middle Class.

In contrast to (Waisbord, 2004:5) argument that “formats travel across boundaries” and that the formats retain the cultural values of their origin, the format under discussion appears more of a local cultural narrative where segments format have ‘transcended’ the boundaries but the discourse is very localized from Hajj & Umrah (pilgrimages) tickets & land as popular gifts to sensitivity towards social norms and nuances of cultures. The show does manifests the global cultural flow in terms of growing consumerism and ever increasing commercialism; the range of gifts offered are significant for the target audience i.e. middle class and lower middle class, thus inducing love for more; but at the same time retains what is purely local. It seems to have penetrated globally even in the third world countries with a growing middle class and mass scale urbanization; Pakistan is no exception with its all-time high urbanization and increased participation of women in economy giving families more earning members.

However, it can be argued that the theory of Cultural Imperialism (Schiller, 1973) presents an over-generalized and oversimplified view of one way cultural flow- from the first world to the third world. If it’s the question of the flow of culture, a dynamic situation could be observed in an interesting case of India, Pakistan where due to shared heritage and background, elements of modern life style and trends on both sides are acknowledged on the other side ever since penetration became possible after media boom. This otherwise is situation of political hostility where people from both sides have only one common feeling, malice. Also, observable is the expression of dominant and subordinate cultural positions performed through elements such as music; the beats are

local or regional; one of the game segments brings in pictures of celebrities, all local either showbiz or sports stalwarts.

The show appears to have an autocratic feel and appears to be aligned with notion of 'Uses and Gratification' and is always a result of motivation based on their understanding of 'perception of benefits' and 'differential value of benefits (Heam, 1989). But once the audience decides to become a part of the discourse i.e they are in the show, the choices are only practiced by the host.

Despite the fact that there are no specific criteria for class representation, it is interesting that studio audience only represents lower middle to middle class, it could be concluded that SEC A would not consider the offerings worth their while. They might also consider indulging in the array of activities as position / prestige risk. Active participation of the lower middle class in game show reflects on penetration of consumerism in a developing economy i.e Pakistan. It could be established that Consumerism is emerging as the New Culture fueled by Globalization/ westernization, as faces of power.

Whereas, media in Western countries are considering incorporating Intellectual Property (IP) to recognize audience contribution in the content making of the show, this seems to be a far cry in Pakistan's case. Not only the show under discussion but the rest of the shows in this genre seem to be indifferent to the fact that IP narrative is gaining momentum in media discourse. If this consideration gets a foothold, it would be imperative to redesign game shows to curtail the dominance of the host, who represents those who control power, the text and the audience; and to acknowledge the significance of other actors, primarily studio audience.

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