



**Graphic Design in Contemporary Pakistani Cinema:  
A Qualitative Study of VFX, VR, and AI Practices**

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### Abstract

This study investigates the role of graphic design within contemporary Pakistani cinema, focusing on its application in visual effects (VFX), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled filmmaking processes. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study is based on semi-structured interviews with ten academic and industry professionals, including filmmakers, educators, VFX practitioners, and design-related experts. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to design practices, technological integration, and production workflows. The findings indicate that graphic design contributes to Pakistani cinema primarily through motion graphics, visual composition, digital interfaces, and narrative visualization within technologically driven production environments. At the same time, the study highlights persistent challenges such as limited budgets, inadequate technical infrastructure, and gaps in specialized training. By grounding the analysis strictly in the Pakistani context and in the perspectives of the interviewed participants, the study provides an empirically focused understanding of how graphic design operates within emerging cinematic technologies in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Graphic Design; Pakistani Cinema; Visual Effects (VFX); Virtual Reality (VR); Artificial Intelligence (AI); Qualitative Research

### Introduction

New technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), Visual Effects (VFX), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are increasingly transforming filmmaking practices worldwide and within emerging cinematic contexts such as Pakistan (Manovich, 2001; Haqqi et al., 2025). These tools enable filmmakers to tell stories in more engaging and interactive ways. However, in Pakistan, the adoption of these technologies remains limited due to financial constraints and inadequate infrastructure (Matay & Bayar, 2023). Despite this, emerging formats like Cinematic Virtual Reality (CVR) provide exciting opportunities to enhance viewer experiences.

Film theory aids in understanding these changes. Bordwell and Thompson (2004) describe how film language constructs meaning, while Manovich (2001) explains how digital media alters our perception of images. Huhtamo's concept of media archaeology bridges old and new technologies (Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011), suggesting that Pakistani cinema can merge its heritage with modern advancements. A major driver of the Pakistani cinema revival has been the transition from outdated, low-budget equipment to high-definition cameras and sophisticated CGI, allowing filmmakers to create visually impressive films.

Despite advancements, significant challenges persist in film education. Dr. Kanwal pointed out in a January 5, 2025, interview that many film educators lack both academic rigor and industry exposure, creating a training gap. Tariq et al. (2021) emphasize that modern audiences demand strong storytelling and high-quality visuals, pushing Pakistani filmmakers to embrace contemporary technologies. Their study, grounded in the uses and gratifications theory, reveals that the industry currently fails to meet audience expectations, necessitating urgent reforms to align with cultural and social demands (Khan, 2018).

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In contrast, countries like India have effectively integrated advanced technology into their filmmaking processes. From the early adoption of synchronized sound and elaborate set designs to the current use of digital cameras and editing software, Indian cinema consistently embraces innovation. Recent Indian films such as *Baahubali 2: The Conclusion* (2017), *RRR* (2022), and *Brahmāstra: Part One – Shiva* (2022) demonstrate the advanced capabilities of visual effects (VFX) and large-scale digital production pipelines in creating immersive cinematic experiences (Dwyer, 2022; Ganti, 2023).

Cinema plays a crucial role in shaping culture and public opinion (Ali et al., 2016) and connects with global audiences (Gürkan, 2017). With VFX, VR, and AI, Pakistan can enhance film quality and expand its audience reach. However, outdated teaching methods, limited budgets, and weak ties between academia and the industry hinder progress. Addressing these gaps is essential, and film education must align with industry needs (Ali Khan & Nobil Ahmad, 2016).

This study aims to investigate the current state and potential of integrating graphic design practices and emerging digital technologies particularly visual effects (VFX), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI) within contemporary Pakistani cinema, while situating these developments within broader frameworks of media literacy, digital creativity, and visual communication. By identifying gaps in education, infrastructure, and industry practices, the study examines how technological adoption and cross-cultural influences shape cinematic storytelling and professional workflows. Through engagement with educators and industry professionals, the study proposes practical strategies to better align film education and creative practice with evolving industry needs.

### Literature Review

#### Modern Technology in Pakistani Films with a Comparative Outlook

Steckman (2021) examines the global adoption of internet-related technologies, such as AI and VR, focusing on their sociocultural and economic impacts. The study aims to highlight how these technologies can address local challenges while showcasing both their potential and barriers to implementation. A key gap is the limited focus on resource-constrained industries, such as filmmaking in emerging markets like Pakistan.

While Steckman provides a broad overview of technology's role in creative industries, he does not delve deeply into film-related applications. This study builds on his work by applying VFX and VR specifically to Pakistani cinema, linking international advancements with local challenges to propose context-driven solutions.

Williams (2021) explores cine-VR, a fusion of cinema and virtual reality, emphasizing immersive storytelling, audience engagement, and visual aesthetics. Drawing on case studies from the GRID Lab, Williams introduces tools like the Story Engagement Matrix and creative camera techniques. Although he presents a strong global framework, he overlooks the resource limitations faced by filmmakers in

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developing regions like Pakistan. This study aims to adapt those techniques to fit local industry constraints and cultural narratives, making it a valuable cornerstone for contextualizing global VR practices within Pakistan's evolving film landscape.

Das (2023) traces the evolution of visual effects from early practical methods to the digital revolution of CGI, highlighting key advancements like motion capture, VR, AR, and AI. Through qualitative analysis and landmark case studies—from Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* to *Jurassic Park* and *Avatar*—the study illustrates how VFX has transformed cinematic storytelling. While celebrating global progress, it also emphasizes the inaccessibility of these tools for smaller film industries, making the work relevant for understanding the need for investment in technology and training to help Pakistan's film sector align with international standards.

Masihuddin (2022) critiques *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022) for its departure from the cultural authenticity of the original 1979 film. She highlights elements such as Turkish-inspired architecture, modernized costumes, and stylized violence that, while visually impressive, compromise the depiction of rural Punjab's traditional essence. Masihuddin observes that the film's emphasis on grandeur and gore caters to global cinematic trends, potentially at the expense of Pakistan's unique cultural identity. She concludes that such stylistic choices, while appealing to contemporary audiences, risk overshadowing the film's indigenous roots.

### **The Evolving Role of Graphic Designers in Film**

Krasner (2013) conceptualizes motion graphic design as a hybrid communication system that integrates typography, animation, sound, and visual sequencing to support narrative construction across film, television, and interactive media. Through qualitative analysis of historical developments and professional case studies, Krasner establishes a theoretical foundation for understanding motion graphics as both an aesthetic and functional storytelling tool. Extending this framework to the Pakistani context, Bilal (personal communication, August 15, 2025) emphasizes that motion graphics designers increasingly contribute to cinematic meaning through title sequences, visual transitions, and digitally constructed atmospheres, particularly in contemporary film and streaming productions. Bilal notes that while Pakistani cinema has begun adopting motion graphics techniques, the role of specialized designers remains underdeveloped due to limited industry recognition and formal training pathways. Together, Krasner's theoretical model and Bilal's practitioner insights highlight the need for greater integration of motion graphic design expertise within Pakistan's evolving film production ecosystem.

Zehra et al. (2018) investigate how graphics-based VR can address gaps in experiential learning within Pakistan's curriculum design. Utilizing surveys, interviews, and observations, the study finds that immersive 3D environments enhance student engagement and conceptual understanding. Although underutilized in higher education, VR shows strong potential for teacher development, vocational training, and educational storytelling.

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Jaan et al. (2021) analyze Manto (2015), an adaptation of Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories, using a mixed-methods approach to examine shifts in plot, narrative, and characterization. This study combines quantitative analysis of adaptation types with qualitative insights framed through a postmodern and socio-cultural lens. It criticizes the lack of structured models for adaptation and introduces a framework from translation studies to assist filmmakers in balancing creative freedom with cultural authenticity. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that the contribution of graphic designers in Pakistani cinema extends beyond technical execution and must be understood as a distinct narrative function. While infrastructural and budgetary constraints shape the broader filmmaking environment, practitioner interviews reveal that graphic designers actively construct cinematic meaning through motion graphics, title sequences, interface design, and digitally mediated world-building. Omer Daraz (personal communication, July 31, 2025), speaking from an industry perspective, emphasizes that graphic design operates as a narrative system rather than decorative enhancement, particularly in projects where visual transitions, digital atmospheres, and screen-based interfaces guide audience interpretation. In contrast, Professor Usman (personal communication, August 6, 2025) situates graphic design within a pedagogical and institutional framework, arguing that the absence of specialized training in motion graphics, CGI, and interface design leads to the marginalization of designers' creative agency in Pakistani film production.

Together, these perspectives clarify that the graphic designer's role frequently becomes subsumed under the broader category of "VFX" due to structural limitations rather than conceptual insignificance. This convergence of practitioner and academic insights reinforces the argument that graphic design functions as cinematic language shaping narrative clarity, cultural translation, and audience engagement and therefore warrants explicit analytical attention in both the findings and discussion sections.

By foregrounding designers' contributions to motion graphics, interface-driven storytelling, and digitally constructed visual spaces, this study directly substantiates the title's framing of graphic design as a core cinematic language rather than a subsidiary technical function.

Iqbal and Nadeem (2023) analyze Bol through a feminist lens, applying Simone de Beauvoir's theory to highlight patriarchal dominance and gender inequality in education, employment, and personal agency. The study illustrates how dialogue and narrative structure reflect systemic injustices. From a graphic design perspective, the film's visual composition reinforces these themes, demonstrating how design elements can support socio-political commentary. With advancements in technology, the role of graphic designers in cinema is evolving, making their contributions increasingly vital in crafting impactful, socially driven narratives.

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### Problem Statement and the Aim of the Study

Pakistani cinema is in a transitional phase but faces significant challenges in adopting advanced technologies such as VFX, VR, and AI. This study aims to critically examine these challenges by engaging with educators and industry professionals to develop practical strategies for improving both film education and professional practice. As these technologies become integral to global cinematic production, understanding their role within the Pakistani context reveals both promising opportunities and pressing limitations. The research highlights how innovative design and digital tools can help overcome resource constraints, enhance storytelling, and elevate the creative standards of local cinema.

The study focuses on three core issues: first, the lack of multidisciplinary training among graphic designers, limiting their ability to effectively engage with emerging technologies; second, systemic barriers such as limited budgets, high production costs, outdated equipment, and weak infrastructure; and third, a disconnect between academic institutions and industry needs, reflected in outdated curricula and insufficient training in digital filmmaking tools. The overall goal of this research is to examine how media literacy, digital creativity, and graphic design as forms of visual communication operate within cross-cultural cinematic contexts in Pakistan and Turkey, and how these practices shape contemporary storytelling, audience engagement, and cinematic meaning.

The findings suggest that closer collaboration between academic institutions and the film industry may help address gaps in training and better support designers working at the intersection of graphic design and cinema.

The research questions aim to identify key issues and gaps in Pakistani cinema, highlight challenges related to emerging technologies, and propose solutions that can empower the industry's future development. The research questions are as follows:

- **RQ1:** How do global films and Pakistani films differ in their use of advanced technologies like VFX, VR, and AI?
- **RQ2:** How do filmmakers, graphic designers, and VFX professionals understand the role of advanced technologies in shaping storytelling practices in Pakistani cinema?
- **RQ3:** What challenges and opportunities related to adopting advanced technologies are identified by filmmakers, designers, and academics working within the Pakistani film industry?

### Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with filmmakers, producers, academic experts, and VFX artists. In-depth interviews are widely used in qualitative research to explore complex topics, as they allow participants to share detailed professional experiences and perspectives (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020; Gürkan, 2019). Such interviews are commonly applied in the social sciences to capture real-world insights and enhance the depth and understanding of research findings (Creswell, 2014).

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The study engages directly with prominent creatives, including Kanwal Khoosat, Faisal Qureshi, Asad Iqbal, and Shah Zaman Baloch, to explore professional perspectives on how emerging technologies are influencing contemporary Pakistani cinema. By focusing on participants lived experiences, the interviews provide insight into practical challenges and industry conditions within local film production.

In addition, interviews with academic experts, including Sadia Bashir, Dr. Kanwal Khalid, and Dr. Shaukat Mahmood, were conducted to obtain perspectives on film and design education in Pakistan. These interviews contributed contextual insights into existing academic practices and the perceived relationship between educational training and industry requirements.

In-depth interviews served two primary purposes in this study. First, interviews with filmmakers, VFX artists, and producers were conducted to explore professional experiences related to the practical use and challenges of integrating technologies such as VFX, VR, and AI within Pakistani cinema. These interviews were designed to capture insights into industry conditions, professional practices, and perceived constraints within local film production.

Second, interviews with academic experts and design professionals including filmmakers, graphic designers, and educators were conducted to gather perspectives on film and design education in Pakistan. This combined perspective made it possible to understand how both the film market and educational institutions operate within film and television departments, particularly in relation to skill development, curriculum relevance, and the incorporation of emerging technologies in academic training.

Semi-structured interviews were employed to allow flexibility while maintaining consistency across participants, enabling the collection of diverse professional perspectives from educators, filmmakers, and VFX specialists on the integration of advanced technologies in Pakistani cinema. This approach is supported by Giri and Sharma (2023), who emphasize the effectiveness of interviews in capturing nuanced and varied professional viewpoints.

### **Table 1:** The interview questions for the Participants

How do you perceive the adoption of advanced technologies like VFX, VR and AI in Pakistani cinema filmmaking trends?
What are the main financial challenges faced by Pakistani filmmakers in integrating VFX and VR technologies into their films?
How can cultural motifs and traditional storytelling be effectively blended with advanced cinematic technologies to enhance audience engagement?

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What is the role of graphic designers in incorporating VFX and VR technologies in Pakistani films, and how can their skills contribute to the industry's advancement?
What skill sets or resources do you think are lacking in Pakistan to meet international standards for VFX and VR integration in films?
How do you assess the response of Pakistani audiences to immersive experiences created by VFX and VR technologies?
What collaborative efforts or partnerships with international studios or technology providers could accelerate the adoption of advanced filmmaking techniques in Pakistan.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they were identified as experienced professionals and academic experts relevant to the study's focus.

### Exploration and Analysis

Data were collected from ten participants (six men and four women) through semi-structured interviews. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on their professional experience as filmmakers, VFX professionals, graphic designers, and academic experts, ensuring relevance to the study's focus on advanced technologies in Pakistani cinema. This approach enabled the inclusion of informed and contextually grounded perspectives.

Interviews were conducted via email and zoom, providing flexibility in participation while maintaining consistency in the themes and topics explored across respondents.

**Table 2:** Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Name	Specialization	Designation	Organization	Experience	Interview Date	Mode
Kanwal Khoosat	Director/Producer/Graphic Designer	Film Maker/Creative Entrepreneur	OLOMOPOLO Media/Khoosat Films	More than 20 years	January 6 2025	Zoom
Asad Iqbal	Graphic Designer/Animator/Game Designer	VFX/AI artist	Freelancer Consultancy	More than 10 years	January 1 2025	Zoom
Faisal Qureshi	Graphic Designer/Director/writer/Producer	Film Maker	CEO, Game Over Production	More than 28 years	January 8 2025	Zoom
Shah Zaman Baloch	Director/ Photographer /Cinematographer	Film Maker	Independent Filmmaker/ Photographer	More than 20 years	January 5 2025	Zoom
Mr. Muhammad Nazim	Filmmaking	Assistant Professor	Script writing /Film making/ Cultural Studies	More than 10 years	January 2 2025	Zoom

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Dr. Kanwal Khalid	Graphic Designer/Art Historian/Researcher/Publications/Scholar	Director of Punjab archive Pakistan/Professor/Author	Agah Foundation Pakistan/Visiting Faculty PUCAD and NCA Lahore, Pakistan	More than 30 years	January 5 2025	Zoom
Dr Shaukat Mahmood	Architecture/ Cartoonist/Art Historian/Researcher /Scholar/Author/ Academic Roll of Honors GC, Lahore Gold Medal for Research in Islamic Calligraphy	Professor/Medal for Pride Of performance (2001). Sitara-i-Imtiaz (2010)	Ex-HEC Professor, Professor in Fine Arts (Voluntarily Basis) & Coordinator, Research Centre for PhD Studies Formerly Professor and Holder of Al-Bukhari Chair at the International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	More Than 40 years	January 8 2025	Zoom
Saadia Bashir	Visual Communication Designer/ Illustrator/Researcher	Associate Professor	National College of Arts, Lahore Pakistan	More than 30 years	January 7 2025	Email
Farwah Batool	Graphic Designer/Illustrator/Visual Artist	Assistant Professor	Institute Of Art and Design, Faisalabad	More than 10 years	January 6 2025	Zoom
Dr. Farjood	Communication Designer/Art Historian/Researcher	Assistant Professor	PUCAD, College of art and design, Lahore, Pakistan	More than 26 years	December 28 2024	Zoom

The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, selected for its flexibility and suitability for identifying recurring patterns across participants' accounts without the objective of generating a formal theory. Interview transcripts were systematically coded, and themes were developed through an iterative process of comparison across interviews to identify convergences and divergences in professional perspectives.

Although comparative techniques were used during the coding process to refine and organize themes, these techniques functioned strictly as analytical tools within thematic analysis, rather than as a Grounded Theory methodology. References to the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) are therefore understood as supportive analytical strategies, not as an indication of theory generation. The analytical framework of the study remains firmly grounded in reflexive thematic analysis.

Reflexivity informed the analytic process, acknowledging the researcher's interpretive role in shaping theme development, as emphasized by Charmaz (2003). As new insights emerged, earlier interviews were revisited to ensure analytical coherence and depth. While the study employed purposive expert sampling, future

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research could benefit from broader participant diversity and more detailed documentation of the coding process to further enhance methodological transparency.

Given that graphic design is central to this study, the analysis moves beyond a purely technical understanding of design and adopts visual communication theory as an interpretive lens. Drawing on Mirzoeff's (2009) concept of visual culture and Dondis's framework of visual literacy, the study examines typography, motion graphics, and visual semiotics as forms of cinematic meaning-making. These theoretical perspectives allow visual design to be interpreted within broader cultural contexts and narrative structures, explicitly foregrounding the graphic designer's role as an active contributor to cinematic storytelling, rather than as a purely technical support function within Pakistani cinema.

### Findings & Discussion

This study explored the challenges of using advanced technology within the Pakistani film industry and academic institutions. It highlights the significance of modern technologies, their application in current films, and their impact on the role of graphic designers. By comparing and adopting these techniques, professionals can thrive in the digital landscape and make a substantial impact.

#### **(i) Enhancing Production Capacity: Overcoming Studio and Equipment Deficits**

Pakistan's film industry is undergoing a gradual yet essential transformation, driven by technological advancements and creative innovation. However, systemic limitations in infrastructure and professional training continue to constrain sustainable growth. According to Dr. Kanwal Khalid (personal communication, January 5, 2025), the absence of modern studios, updated production equipment, and specialized post-production facilities significantly restricts the industry's capacity to fully integrate advanced technologies such as VFX and AI.

However, systemic limitations in infrastructure and training continue to hinder progress. A key concern is the lack of high-quality production and post-production facilities. As emphasized by Kanwal Khoosat, (personal communication, January 6, 2025) the absence of modern studios, updated equipment, and ergonomic workspaces restricts local capacity for high-end filmmaking. Basic deficiencies such as low-quality monitors, inadequate internet bandwidth, and reliance on laptops instead of proper workstations contribute to a work environment that is not conducive to globally competitive visual effects (VFX) production.

These challenges are echoed in the work of Ahsan et al. (2024), who identify weak infrastructure, piracy, and the lack of local Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms as structural barriers to growth. They argue that without governmental and institutional investment in production ecosystems, the digital shift in cinema cannot be sustained. A similar concern is raised by Asad Iqbal (2025), who underscores the limitations of stagnant learning environments and outdated equipment, stressing that such conditions not only hinder innovation but also drive skilled professionals out of the industry in search of better opportunities.

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Despite these constraints, selected Pakistani filmmakers have demonstrated the potential for global success through strategic and design-driven uses of advanced technologies. Kanwal Khoosat (personal communication, January 6, 2025) highlights how international collaborations and access to high-end post-production tools such as professional color grading and audio-visual synchronization can significantly elevate cinematic quality, as seen in films like *Kamli*, while still remaining limited by local resource gaps.

A complementary perspective is offered by filmmaker Azfar Jafri, whose work on *Umro Ayar* illustrates the growing necessity of integrating VFX and simulation-based effects as narrative tools rather than visual embellishments. Jafri emphasizes that contemporary genres such as fantasy and action require a strong foundation in production and graphic design to effectively communicate story worlds and visual logic to audiences (personal communication, August 4, 2025). His experience underscores that advanced technologies such as VFX and particle simulation are not optional but essential to cinematic storytelling, particularly when grounded in coherent production design.

Together, these perspectives reinforce the study's argument that graphic design, VFX, and visual planning function as core components of cinematic language in Pakistani cinema, shaping narrative meaning while simultaneously exposing persistent infrastructural and financial limitations.

Furthermore, graphic designers and animators are vital to the success of VFX and virtual reality (VR) initiatives in contemporary filmmaking. This practitioner perspective is reinforced by Lal Haseeb Ahmed, a Pakistani VFX and design professional, who notes that while core technological tools are largely accessible in Pakistan, the principal constraints lie in insufficient design training, limited exposure to international VFX production pipelines, and persistent budgetary pressures (personal communication, August 2025). According to Haseeb, many designers operate at a mid-level technical capacity, producing work that meets only partial international standards due to gaps in institutional education and a lack of sustained industry mentorship. He further observes that although AI-driven tools are rapidly reshaping concept art and visual design practices globally, their effective integration into Pakistani cinema remains restricted by weak pedagogical frameworks and inadequate production-level investment.

These practitioner insights align closely with academic perspectives emphasizing the foundational role of design education in technological transitions. Iqbal (2025) underscores the importance of strong design fundamentals for successfully adopting advanced tools such as VR, while both Iqbal and Kanwal argue that contemporary creative roles increasingly demand not only artistic sensibility but also technical literacy and adaptability to evolving software environments. To address these gaps, Kanwal advocates for the development of specialized training programs that integrate design thinking with technical proficiency, reflecting global best practices that prioritize interdisciplinary education across design, animation, and VFX (Ahsan et al., 2024). She further emphasizes the need for

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infrastructural improvements including ergonomic workspaces and reliable high-speed internet to support professional training and production workflows.

Beyond capacity building, Kanwal highlights the potential of culturally grounded innovation, proposing projection mapping on heritage sites as a means of bridging tradition and technological experimentation. Such applications demonstrate how digital tools can enhance narrative expression while preserving cultural authenticity for global audiences. Taken together, Kanwal's contributions position this research as a strategic roadmap for addressing structural challenges within Pakistan's film industry, emphasizing that sustained investment in training, infrastructure, and international collaboration is essential for achieving a resilient and globally competitive cinematic future.

### **(ii) Addressing the Innovation Gap Through Financial and Infrastructure Reforms**

The growth of Pakistan's film industry into a technologically competitive sector has been significantly impeded by foundational gaps, primarily inadequate funding, outdated infrastructure, and insufficient training. These barriers have created an innovation gap, particularly in the fields of VFX (Visual Effects), VR (Virtual Reality), and AI (Artificial Intelligence), which are increasingly vital for contemporary cinematic storytelling.

A consistent theme among experts is the lack of sustained investment in Pakistan's media production ecosystem. Asad Iqbal (personal communication, January 3, 2025) highlights that limited access to funding hinders filmmakers from adopting advanced VFX and VR techniques, often resulting in compromised production quality.

Faisal Qureshi (2025) also emphasizes that advanced visual technologies should not overshadow storytelling, particularly in a market with tight budgets. He points out the disparity between commercials and feature films, where the former often receives better funding for VFX, leaving cinematic narratives under-resourced. His critique aligns with global findings that consistent investment is essential for both technical and narrative innovation in developing film industries.

To bridge the innovation gap, experts stress the importance of foundational education. Asad Iqbal advocates for a two-tiered training model: first, cultivating strong skills in visual composition, aesthetics, and storytelling, followed by advanced training in technical proficiencies in VFX and VR. This pedagogical approach reflects best practices in design education and aligns with global scholarship emphasizing interdisciplinary creative literacy in emerging film economies.

Qureshi (2025) supports this view, noting that graphic designers in Pakistan often have to multitask handling design, animation, and VFX due to limited budgets and a lack of specialized teams. While this multitasking demonstrates resilience, it

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restricts innovation and quality due to overextension and a lack of deep specialization. He argues that without consistent projects and stable institutional support, professionals cannot develop the expertise necessary to meet international standards.

Both Asad and Qureshi agree on the value of international collaborations—not as a panacea but as a necessary step following foundational industry development. Asad's involvement in global gaming projects like *Hell Let Loose* illustrates how partnerships can introduce technical sophistication and cross-cultural storytelling expertise into local contexts. However, both experts caution that Pakistan's current infrastructure cannot support widespread, effective collaborations without first strengthening local institutions.

As Qureshi (2025) notes, building more cinemas, developing a robust movie-going culture, and raising storytelling standards must precede efforts to implement advanced VFX techniques or pursue global partnerships. He draws parallels with successful models like Turkish drama exports, which blend cultural specificity with universal appeal, suggesting that a similar approach could enhance Pakistan's global positioning.

Finally, both experts view this research itself as a valuable intervention. While acknowledging that formal research cannot resolve these systemic challenges on its own, Qureshi (2025) emphasizes its role in documenting, validating, and disseminating industry concerns, which can guide future investment, training, and policymaking. He hopes this work will catalyze broader discussions across academia, creative industries, and policy circles, generating momentum for reform.

### **(iii) Empowering Pakistani Cinema: Skill development training and industry collaboration**

The Pakistani film industry continues to be constrained by limited infrastructure, weak skill pipelines, and insufficient institutional support, despite growing global interest in immersive storytelling and digital technologies. Strengthening industry requires not only financial investment but also strategic collaboration across academia, industry, and government, along with education reform tailored to emerging technologies such as VFX, VR, and AI.

As Shah Zaman Baloch (personal communication, January 5, 2025) notes, Pakistan's cinematic output remains critically low, producing only 5–7 films annually with just 100–130 functioning screens across the country. Most productions operate on modest budgets of around 8 crore PKR, a stark contrast to high budget exceptions like *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (50 crore PKR). Compounding these issues is an unfavorable revenue-sharing structure, where only 35% of box office earnings return to filmmakers, discouraging investment in creative risks or technological innovation. Furthermore, the 2007 ban on Indian films, once a reliable source of cinematic content, has diminished cinema profitability and audience traffic.

These systemic limitations have stunted the growth of advanced film technologies,

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including VFX and VR, which require both capital and technical infrastructure. As Muhammad Nazim (personal communication, January 2, 2025) points out, Pakistan remains primarily a consumer of global media innovation, unable to develop original content at scale due to budget constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and inconsistent institutional support.

A critical shortfall within the film sector is the lack of formal training in emerging media technologies. Shah Zaman Baloch (personal communication, January 5, 2025) emphasizes that graphic designers and VFX artists are often self-taught, learning in isolation without mentorship, industry feedback, or structured progression. This hinders both creative confidence and technical depth, limiting the country's potential in global digital storytelling.

Muhammad Nazim (personal communication, January 2, 2025) echoes this concern, noting that Pakistan's education system does not equip students with the necessary skills for success in modern filmmaking. He advocates for curriculum development in universities and film departments, focusing on storytelling, aesthetics, and new media technologies, an essential step for bridging the knowledge gap.

(Khalid, personal communication, January 5, 2025) also stresses the urgency of technological foresight in education, asserting that fear or resistance to technology in classrooms will leave future generations unprepared. As she states:

*"When teachers fear technology, generations fall behind... A curriculum without technological foresight builds a future stuck in the past."*

Experts concur that while international collaboration is crucial for enhancing professional skills and sharing technical resources, its effectiveness is diminished if foundational issues within the local system remain unaddressed. Muhammad Nazim (personal communication, January 2, 2025) suggests that international partnerships should be developed alongside domestic capacity-building, particularly in research and content development.

At present, the lack of a robust research culture in Pakistan's creative industries stifles innovation. Without rigorous academic involvement, the sector risks stagnation, failing to produce tools, methodologies, or narratives suited to local contexts (Nazim, 2025). As he articulates:

*"Emerging technologies hold enormous potential, but the lack of a research culture hampers our ability to innovate."*

(Khalid, personal communication, January 5, 2025) offers a complementary viewpoint, stressing that passion and creativity are essential. While digital tools are important, she argues that strong storytelling rooted in local heritage forms the foundation of meaningful cinema. She critiques current student tendencies to undervalue indigenous narratives, reminding us that:

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*“The greatest stories are often found in the heart of our own land, yet we fail to see their worth.”*

To revitalize the Pakistani film industry, a multi-faceted approach is necessary:

- (i) Expand cinema infrastructure and cultivate a movie-going culture to boost audience demand.
- (ii) Integrate VFX, VR, and AI training into media and design curricula at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- (iii) Develop national mentorship programs and encourage cross-sector collaborations.
- (iv) Strengthen the research ecosystem to foster original content and local innovation.
- (v) Celebrate and fund storytelling is rooted in regional culture, ensuring cultural authenticity while leveraging global platforms.

Experts like Qureshi (2025) and (Khalid, personal communication, January 5, 2025) agree that genuine transformation relies not only on tools and funding but also on human capacity, creativity, and a long-term vision.

### **(iv) Transforming editing and color grading through digital tools**

In the digital age, editing and color grading function not merely as technical post-production processes but as critical narrative tools that shape emotional tone, thematic depth, and audience engagement. In Pakistan’s film industry, however, the transformative potential of these digital tools remains underutilized due to persistent cultural disconnection, institutional inertia, and uneven professional training.

(Khalid, personal communication, January 5, 2025) argues that advanced editing and visual technologies should serve to strengthen culturally rooted storytelling rather than replicate dominant Western aesthetic frameworks. She observes that Pakistani cinema often prioritizes technical imitation over narrative authenticity, resulting in visually polished films that lack a strong indigenous voice. This tension between form and content limits the industry’s ability to create globally resonant yet culturally distinctive cinema.

Comparative examples from Iranian cinema demonstrate how restrained editing practices, combined with strong cultural grounding, can achieve international recognition without heavy reliance on spectacle. Similarly, while Pakistani films such as *The Legend of Maula Jatt* and *Kamli* display notable technical ambition, their mixed narrative reception reflects an ongoing disconnect between digital proficiency and culturally coherent storytelling (Khalid, 2025). Addressing this imbalance requires a deliberate shift toward integrating digital expertise with locally embedded narrative sensibilities.

Color grading, compositing, and digital editing function today as integral narrative devices rather than purely technical stages of film production. Graphic designers therefore play a critical role in shaping cinematic meaning by aligning visual

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aesthetics with storytelling intent. Their contribution requires not only technical competence but also a strong foundation in design principles, visual literacy, and narrative coherence.

This perspective is supported by insights from Ahmed Bilal, who notes that while Pakistan has increasing access to digital tools and a growing pool of creative talent, particularly within animation and digital media, these resources are not fully translated into cinematic quality due to systemic educational and institutional gaps (Bilal, personal communication, August 15, 2025). According to Bilal, design and film education in Pakistan often lack advanced production facilities, structured curricula, and sustained exposure to international workflows, resulting in fragmented skill development and heavy reliance on self-learning.

Bilal further emphasizes that although some educators and professionals gain international training, the absence of knowledge-sharing mechanisms and collaborative academic cultures limits the long-term impact of such exposure (Bilal, personal communication, August 15, 2025). Without standardized assessment systems, faculty development programs, and industry-linked curricula, institutions struggle to prepare designers who can operate confidently at global production standards.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the primary constraint on Pakistan's cinematic advancement lies not in technological availability, but in the weak integration of education, institutional infrastructure, and industry collaboration. Strengthening design pedagogy, investing in production-oriented training environments, and fostering sustained academic-industry partnerships are therefore essential to enabling graphic designers to contribute meaningfully to culturally grounded and internationally competitive filmmaking.

In his interview, Dr. Shaukat Mahmood's analysis situates Pakistan's digital filmmaking challenges within a broader regional context, using Malaysia's early struggles with cinematic digitization as a comparative reference. Mahmood emphasizes that limitations in Pakistan's visual and digital practices stem not from artistic inadequacy but from structural factors, including insufficient economic investment, weak institutional support, and a shortage of industry-grade training. By invoking Malaysia's initial stagnation where delayed adoption of advanced tools constrained creative and technical growth he cautions that Pakistan risks a similar trajectory unless sustained investment in technology, structured learning, and professional development is prioritized. This comparison allows the discussion to objectively frame technological adoption in cinema as a function of policy, infrastructure, and workforce development, rather than creative potential alone.

Beyond institutional reforms, (Khalid, personal communication, January 5, 2025) highlights the importance of knowledge democratization as a critical driver of creative and technological advancement in Pakistani cinema. She argues that limited access to academic research particularly MPhil and PhD theses restricts meaningful engagement between academia and industry. In Pakistan, where much

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scholarly work remains confined to university libraries or departmental archives, valuable insights into editing, color grading, VFX, and digital storytelling often fail to reach practitioners who could apply them in real-world productions.

Khalid further notes that open-access platforms, including digital repositories and short-form educational video content, can help translate complex research into practical knowledge. This approach is especially relevant in Pakistan, where informal learning channels such as YouTube tutorials, Instagram reels, and workshop-based training already play a significant role in skill development among editors and post-production artists. For instance, many independent filmmakers and post-production teams in Lahore and Karachi rely on self-taught workflows using tools like DaVinci Resolve and Adobe Premiere, compensating for the absence of structured institutional training.

From this perspective, improving editing and color grading practices in Pakistan requires more than access to advanced technologies such as AI-assisted editing, VR environments, or high-end color grading software. These tools become effective only when supported by well-trained professionals who possess both technical competence and cultural understanding (Khalid, 2025). Without contextual knowledge of local narratives, aesthetics, and audience sensibilities, technological adoption risks producing visually sophisticated yet culturally disconnected content.

Ultimately, Khalid frames the future of Pakistani cinema not in terms of technological availability alone, but in how digital tools are integrated into storytelling, education, and collaborative knowledge-sharing ecosystems. When technology functions as a support mechanism rather than a substitute for creative judgment it has the potential to enhance narrative depth, preserve cultural authenticity, and elevate Pakistan's cinematic output within regional and global contexts (Khalid, personal communication, January 5, 2025).

### **(v) Navigating the gap: tradition versus technological adoption**

Pakistan's film industry stands at a crucial juncture, where centuries-old storytelling traditions must harmonize with cutting-edge technologies like VFX, VR, and AI. Scholars and industry experts agree on the urgency of embracing innovation, not as a replacement for cultural identity, but as a means to enhance and modernize tradition.

(Mahmood, personal communication, January 8, 2025) asserts that traditional narratives are deeply embedded in generational memory, shaping cultural identity and film content even as new tools emerge. "The stories of the past still live in the memories of older generations," he notes, emphasizing the ongoing influence of heritage on film narratives. He urges filmmakers not to see tradition and innovation as opposing forces but as complementary:

*"Cultural integration and technological adoption are like clouds that cannot be divided."*

Advanced tools like 3D, 4D, VFX, and VR possess the potential to reshape the

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cinematic experience, much like sound once transformed into silent films. Mahmood draws parallels with the transition to "talkies" in Turkish and global cinema, emphasizing that Pakistan must adopt such technologies to maintain relevance.

However, technological integration must be anchored in cultural storytelling. Dr. Farjood (2024) emphasizes that audience engagement strengthens when digital visuals serve authentic narratives. By referencing *The Legend of Maula Jatt*, he illustrates how dynamic VFX sequences gain meaning only when placed within a cultural context, a necessary balance for emotional and artistic resonance.

Modern graphic designers are no longer confined to aesthetic execution; they are increasingly expected to be technologically agile contributors to immersive environments across cinema, animation, and digital art (Bashir, personal communication, January 7, 2025) identifies graphic designers as central to the development of 3D visualization, VR experiences, and motion graphics, while noting that Pakistan's persistent skill gaps and outdated academic curricula significantly hinder this professional evolution. This concern is further reinforced by (Mahmood, personal communication, January 8, 2025) who argues that designers unable to integrate emerging technologies risk professional obsolescence.

Evidence from primary qualitative interviews strengthens this position. Professor Usman, a professional graphic designer and film-and-television academic at Beaconhouse National University, emphasizes that contemporary graphic designers function as a structural backbone of visual production rather than mere stylists, shaping narrative clarity, audience engagement, and market positioning within films and digital campaigns (Usman, personal communication, August 6, 2025) He explains that the absence of specialized degree programs in VFX and CGI in Pakistan has produced a critical expertise deficit, compelling designers and filmmakers to rely on self-learning or fragmented freelance labor. As a consequence, directors frequently avoid VFX-driven narratives due to production delays, inflated costs, and limited access to industry-grade professionals. Professor Usman further highlights the role of graphic designers in what he terms the "upfront packaging" of cinematic and digital content, where visual identity, motion graphics, and CGI directly influence a project's commercial viability. His observations align with broader industry concerns that outdated curricula and restricted access to professional tools continue to limit the full integration of graphic designers into advanced cinematic workflows in Pakistan (Usman, personal communication, August 6, 2025)

Complementing Professor Usman's academic-industry perspective, insights from Omer, a professionally trained graphic designer who later transitioned into filmmaking within Pakistan's commercial film market, further illuminate the structural role of graphic design in contemporary cinema. Drawing from his professional experience, Omer explains that graphic design education develops a problem-solving mindset rather than limiting practitioners to two-dimensional aesthetics. He argues that design training equips filmmakers with a deep understanding of visual fundamentals such as composition, perspective, depth,

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color harmony, and spatial balance which become critical when working with moving images, VFX, and CGI integration (Omer Daraz, personal communication, July 31, 2025)

Omer explains that his transition from graphic design to filmmaking emerged from an understanding of cinema as an extension of visual communication, where each frame operates as a deliberately designed space that conveys meaning, emotion, and narrative intent. He observes that Pakistan's film industry continues to underutilize this design-driven approach, largely due to the absence of formal academic pathways that integrate graphic design, VFX, and film production. Consequently, many practitioners are compelled to rely on self-directed learning, online tutorials, and informal professional networks to acquire essential cinematic and technological skills. This pattern is evident in the careers of several Pakistani creatives, such as Kanwal Khoosat, whose background in visual performance and design sensibilities informs her work in production and storytelling, as well as Sarmad Khoosat, who, despite formal training in theater, developed his cinematic language through experiential learning and cross-disciplinary collaboration rather than structured film or VFX education. These examples illustrate how, in the absence of institutional support and access to industry-grade tools, Pakistani filmmakers and designers often construct their professional competencies through practice-based learning rather than formalized training structures (Omer Daraz, personal communication, July 31, 2025).

From an industry perspective, Omer emphasizes that while Pakistani VFX and post-production professionals possess strong creative potential and frequently contribute to international projects, domestic film productions struggle to allocate sufficient budgets and time for advanced visual work. He notes that producers typically prioritize cast, sets, and logistics, leaving minimal resources for post-production, which discourages designers and VFX artists from engaging deeply in local cinema. Consequently, graphic designers with filmmaking sensibilities often gravitate toward commercials, international collaborations, or digital media, where design expertise is better valued and compensated. These observations reinforce broader concerns that Pakistan's film industry lacks an integrated ecosystem capable of fully leveraging graphic design as a core driver of cinematic innovation (Omer Daraz, personal communication, July 31, 2025).

Collectively, the perspectives of (Batool, personal communication, January 6, 2025), (Farjood, personal communication, December 28, 2024) and (Bashir, personal communication, January 7, 2025) all trained graphic designers now actively engaged in academic instruction underscore a shared concern regarding the disconnect between design education and Pakistan's evolving film and digital production needs. While Batool foregrounds structural deficiencies in funding and access to equipment, Farjood emphasizes the persistence of outdated pedagogical models within public institutions, and Bashir advocates for strategic public-private collaboration to bridge this gap. Extending this discussion, Dr. Ahmed Bilal, a graphic designer and filmmaker trained in the UK and currently leading postgraduate creative research in Pakistan, situates the issue within a broader

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comparative framework. He argues that while Pakistani designers possess strong creative capacity and often succeed in international markets, the absence of sustainable exhibition platforms, institutional backing, and technological infrastructure within the local film industry discourages long-term innovation. Bilal contrasts Pakistan's fragmented ecosystem with models from India and Iran, where continuous production cycles and policy-level support enable design, technology, and storytelling to function cohesively. Together, these accounts reveal that the primary challenge facing Pakistan's cinematic future is not a lack of talent, but the absence of an integrated system that aligns design education, technological resources, and industry sustainability (Bilal, personal communication, August 15, 2025).

(Khalid, personal communication, January 5, 2025) asserts that bridging the divide between technology and tradition requires not only technical training but also the democratization of knowledge through open access to academic research, including MPhil and PhD theses, and the strategic use of short-form digital platforms to disseminate educational insights, emphasizing that education thrives not on tools alone but on the ability to embrace and adapt to innovation. Aligning with this view, Mahmood (2025) stresses that research and knowledge-sharing must transcend age, discipline, and institutional hierarchy, supported by effective mentorship and structured evaluation systems that translate learning into professional practice. Moving beyond the outdated binaries of "traditional versus digital," Bilal's (2017) analysis of filmmakers such as Shoaib Mansoor demonstrates that hybrid cinema where digital technologies are employed to articulate contemporary socio-political realities while preserving cultural identity offers a sustainable creative model. (Bashir, personal communication, January 7, 2025) further argues that international collaboration, updated curricula, and accessible training can enable Pakistan to produce cinema that is both globally resonant and locally grounded, provided technological adoption occurs gradually and remains driven by creativity, cultural context, and audience connection. Synthesizing these perspectives alongside industry interviews reveals that the central challenge facing Pakistani cinema is not a conflict between culture and technology, but the absence of structured systems that allow both to evolve together. Addressing this gap requires institutional mechanisms that convert research, design thinking, and technological skills into practice, positioning film and television programs at institutions such as NCA, BNU, and LUMS as potential incubators for culturally grounded innovation through integrated curricula and mentorship from active industry professionals.

At the industry level, filmmakers consistently emphasize that sustainable innovation emerges when designers, technologists, and storytellers collaborate from the earliest stages of production rather than treating technology as a post-production add-on. In this sense, the convergence of tradition and technology does not weaken Pakistani cinema but strengthens it, supporting (Farjood, personal communication, December 28, 2024) assertion that the future lies not in choosing between culture and code, but in weaving them together into a new cinematic language that reflects both local pride and global potential.

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### Conclusion

This study highlights a critical moment for Pakistan's film industry: a dynamic intersection of tradition and technological transformation. Insights from leading academics, designers, and filmmakers reveal a shared understanding that technological tools like VFX, VR, AI, and 3D/4D editing should not replace cultural narratives but rather enhance them. The strength of Pakistani cinema lies in its rich heritage storytelling, which, when authentically expressed through contemporary tools, can create a compelling global cinematic language.

However, several systemic challenges impede this potential, including outdated equipment, shortages of specialized professionals, weak public institutional support, insufficient curricula, and a limited culture of knowledge-sharing. These constraints are consistent with national policy discussions on cinema revival, which acknowledge the need for a comprehensive roadmap and stronger implementation of film policy to address funding, infrastructure, and industry support (Press Information Department, 2025). Moreover, Pakistan's Film Policy framework explicitly proposes public-private partnerships for studio and post-production facilities and fiscal incentives (e.g., duty/tax relief and a formal finance fund) to mobilize investment which signals a recognized policy need to strengthen investment and production infrastructure in support of technology-led filmmaking (Zulfiqar, 2021).

To bridge the gap between tradition and technology, the industry should adopt a hybrid development pathway built on: (i) curriculum reform in film and design programs to strengthen digital storytelling competencies; (ii) public-private partnerships and international collaboration to expand access to affordable tools and expertise; (iii) open-access research and knowledge-sharing mechanisms that translate academic work into professional practice; (iv) stronger recognition of graphic designers, animators, and editors as core contributors to cinematic meaning-making; and (v) policy and infrastructure investment aligned with cultural preservation, ensuring innovation strengthens rather than erodes identity.

Ultimately, Pakistani cinema does not need to choose between the old and the new. It needs a coherent ecosystem in which cultural heritage and digital innovation co-evolve through education, infrastructure, and professional collaboration. With sustained institutional commitment, Pakistan can develop a confident cinematic voice that remains locally rooted while meeting global production expectations.

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