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EDITORIAL Number 30 Communication Papers Editora Communication Papers

We are delighted to present Volume 15, Issue 30 of Communication Papers, an international peer-reviewed journal dedicated to advancing critical scholarship in media, communication, gender studies, and media literacy. This issue brings together a diverse and interdisciplinary collection of articles, essays, and a book review that collectively explore the transformations shaping contemporary media cultures, political communication, digital technologies, gender representations, and communicative practices across global contexts.

The contributions included in this issue reflect the increasing complexity of contemporary communication environments, where digital platforms, visual cultures, algorithmic systems, political discourse, and mediated identities intersect in dynamic and often contested ways. The issue foregrounds themes such as gendered visibility, democratic participation, masculinity, technological transformation, corporate communication, philosophical inquiry in cinema, and the evolving relationship between media and power.

The opening article by Pilar Rodriguez Perez examines violence against women in politics as a critical democratic issue. Focusing on Spain, the study analyzes how digital harassment, sexist disinformation, fake imagery, and online attacks function as mechanisms aimed at silencing women's political participation. By discussing contemporary cases involving female politicians, the article demonstrates how social media platforms and emerging technologies such as deepfakes intensify gender-based political violence and contribute to democratic erosion.

Questions of gender representation are further explored in Tonči Gabelić and Victorija Car's study on masculinity and the concept of gaze in international advertising. Through a narrative analysis of television commercials, the authors investigate how the male body is increasingly commodified and objectified in contemporary media culture. At the same time, the study reveals the persistence of structural male dominance, complicating traditional understandings of gendered objectification.

In a similarly visual and representational context, Nurdan Ezmek's contribution examines corporate uniforms in the airline industry as ideological and communicative tools that construct professional identity and gender roles. Drawing on theories of representation, performativity, dramaturgy, and symbolic capital, the article demonstrates how uniforms simultaneously reproduce and transform gendered expectations within contemporary corporate culture.

Political communication and epistemic authority form the basis of Nevzat Alp Büyükyüksel's article, which analyzes Devlet Bahçeli's post-2023 discourse in Türkiye. The study conceptualizes the construction of a "moralized regime of truth" within a competitive authoritarian context and argues that truth is reframed as a mechanism of political alignment grounded in nationalism, loyalty, and state authority. The article contributes significantly to discussions surrounding post-truth politics and epistemic populism.

Technological transformations within cinematic production are addressed in Amna Shahzad Arif's study on graphic design in contemporary Pakistani cinema. Through interviews with industry professionals and academics, the article explores the role of VFX, VR, and AI technologies in shaping filmmaking processes while also highlighting the infrastructural and educational challenges facing the Pakistani film industry. The study offers valuable insight into the intersection of design, emerging technologies, and national cinema.

Cinema and philosophy intersect in Elif Demoğlu and Korhan Topçu's analysis of Roy Andersson's *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* through Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. The article offers a compelling exploration of alienation, guilt, and human relationships, demonstrating how Andersson's distinctive cinematic language invites philosophical reflection on the fragmented nature of modern existence.

In addition to the research articles, this issue features two insightful essays that broaden the thematic scope of the journal. Garcia Milian Ana Julia and León Cabrera Pablo present a study on the construction and validation of an instrument designed to evaluate the communicative quality of hospital discharge reports for patients with heart failure. Their contribution highlights the importance of communication quality within healthcare systems and emphasizes continuity of care and patient-centered communication.

Michael Pitts' essay examines the commodification of masculine anxiety within digital platform cultures, focusing particularly on the ideological transformations within online incel communities. The essay offers a timely reflection on how social media platforms mediate and monetize contemporary crises of masculinity, linking ideological discourse, mental health, and digital economies.

Finally, this issue concludes with a book review by Hasan Gürkan on Judith Butler's recent work *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (2024). The review discusses Butler's analysis of contemporary anti-gender movements and examines how gender has increasingly become the target of political, ideological, and cultural anxieties across different global contexts.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue demonstrate the continuing importance of critical media and communication scholarship in understanding rapidly transforming social realities. The articles and essays included here not only analyze contemporary media phenomena but also address broader questions concerning democracy, identity, representation, technological change, and social power.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all authors, reviewers, editorial board members, and readers who continue to support Communication Papers. Their contributions and commitment make possible the ongoing development of critical and interdisciplinary dialogue within the fields of communication and media studies.

We hope that this issue will inspire further discussions and encourage new perspectives on the challenges and possibilities emerging within contemporary media and communication landscapes.

MARIA DEL CARMEN ECHAZARRETA SOLER
Editor-in-Chief
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Violence Against Women in Politics as an Erosion of Democracy

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Violence Against Women in Politics as an Erosion of Democracy

Abstract

This article examines violence against women in politics (VAWP) as a significant form of democratic erosion, focusing particularly on the role of gendered disinformation and digital harassment in undermining women's political participation. It argues that democracy cannot be fully realized while women continue to face systemic exclusion, intimidation, and attacks designed to silence their participation in public life. Drawing on recent scholarship and contemporary examples from Spain—including cases involving Irene Montero, Rita Maestre, and Isabel Díaz Ayuso—the study analyzes how sexist disinformation, sexualization, fake images, and online harassment are used to undermine women's credibility and discourage their political engagement. The article also considers the role of social media platforms and emerging technologies such as deepfakes in amplifying these attacks. Ultimately, it argues that combating violence and disinformation against women is essential for protecting democratic institutions, ensuring equal political representation, and strengthening inclusive citizenship.

Keywords: violence; social media; women in politics; online harassment; Spain

Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental principle for strengthening democracy, as it guarantees the equitable participation of all citizens in political, economic, and social spheres. Various international organizations and academic literature maintain that a full democracy cannot exist while forms of gender-based discrimination and exclusion persist (Andersen, 2023; Piconne, 2017; Post, 2006). Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary condition for achieving peaceful, sustainable, and democratic societies. Therefore, promoting policies of equality, equitable access to education, and participation in decision-making strengthens democratic legitimacy and fosters a more just and inclusive citizenry. However, various forms of violence against women in politics seriously threaten equal participation and severely erode democracy. Violence against women in politics constitutes a form of democratic erosion because it limits the full exercise of political rights and restricts equal representation in decision-making spaces. Mona Lena Krook (2017) argues that violence against women in politics (VAWP) is a global phenomenon that threatens democracy by restricting women's participation as candidates, voters, activists, and leaders. The author explains that women in politics experience physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and symbolic violence designed to discourage their involvement in public life and reinforce traditional gender roles. Krook emphasizes that these attacks undermine democratic institutions because they silence women's voices, weaken political representation, and violate fundamental human rights and equality principles. The author concludes that addressing violence against women in politics is essential for building inclusive and robust democracies.

Gender disinformation refers to false information directed through social media platforms against specific individuals based on their gender, often perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices; it is a form of online violence primarily directed against women. Jankowicz et al. (2021) provide this definition: "A subset of online gendered

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abuse that uses false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives against women, often with some degree of coordination, aimed at deterring women from participating in the public sphere. It combines three defining characteristics of online disinformation: falsity, malicious intent, and coordination.” (2021, p. 1). This type of disinformation is particularly insidious when directed against women in the public sphere, including politicians, journalists, or activists, with the intention of discrediting and undermining their credibility (Di Meco and Wilfore, 2021; Mocerri, 2021). In addition to posing a danger to democratic participation, some authors consider this phenomenon a serious security risk, as in some cases it incites violence (Di Meco and Wilfore, 2021; Blatnik, 2023).

Social media platforms play a significant role in the spread of gender disinformation, acting as amplifiers of this harmful content because their business model favors the promotion of the most eye-catching content, which generates the most attention and data. Four key factors contribute to this: the prioritization of harmful content on the platforms, the massive and real-time dissemination of this content, the limited or flawed moderation of such content, often protected by anonymity, and the creation of ideological bubbles (Gutiérrez, 2024). Platform algorithms tend to favor content that generates the most attention, regardless of its veracity or social impact. This often results in the amplification of sensationalist or controversial information, including gender disinformation (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Social media platforms enable the instant and large-scale dissemination of information, making it easy for disinformation to spread rapidly before it can be verified or refuted. Many platforms lack effective moderation systems to identify and remove harmful content; moreover, online anonymity can encourage toxic behaviors without consequences for the perpetrators (Gillespie, 2018; Vosoughi et al., 2018). Furthermore, recommendation algorithms tend to expose users to content that reinforces their existing beliefs, creating echo chambers that can amplify misinformation and gender biases (Pariser, 2011).

Disinformation is not a new phenomenon, but the ease of its creation and massive, real-time dissemination on online platforms has transformed it into a global problem, as it is used as a weapon to manipulate beliefs, emotions, and opinions for political, military, or commercial purposes. The use of deepfake technology for disinformation, which can create realistic but fabricated audiovisual content using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, exacerbates this problem (Cerdán Martínez and Padilla Castillo, 2019). Deepfakes are versatile AI applications that can be used positively in content creation; however, the potential for their misuse has been increasing. The rise of deepfake technology represents a real threat to participatory citizenship, primarily through the creation of synthetic audiovisual media for identity theft, gender disinformation, and hate speech.

María Pilar Rodríguez, Miren Gutiérrez and María J. Pando (2026) affirm that Kamala Harris serves as a primary example of gendered disinformation, where false or misleading narratives are used to discredit female leaders and deter them from public life. The disinformation directed at Harris includes sexist attacks and hyper sexualization, which aim to undermine her professional authority by reducing her to

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a sexual object or suggesting she reached her position through inappropriate means. Additionally, she has faced coordinated accusations of being politically extremist or incapable, with campaigns spreading rumors about a lack of preparation or professional experience to question her competence. Attacks also include false associations with controversial figures to damage her integrity and judgment. These orchestrated efforts, spread through various social media platforms, create a hostile environment that can lead to personal discredit and self-censorship, ultimately discouraging other women from participating in the political sphere.

Cases in Spain

While disinformation and VAWP are frequently aimed at feminist and left-leaning women, research confirms that these issues negatively affect all women. For example, in Spain, several recent cases confirm that disinformation and VAWP are frequently used against women in politics. The article titled "She Looks Like She'd Be a Filthy Pig in Bed": Online Misogyny and Denigration of Women Politicians" (Lacalle et al., 2025) summarizes the main results of a study about the disparagement of women politicians in Spain. The thematic analysis of 1,245 comments spontaneously posted on the Burbuja.info forum reveals that the commenters feel entitled to humiliate and disparage the eight female politicians embattled by the hate speech posts. While the main targets of this form of harassment have been women representatives of left-wing parties, the focus of the disparaging attacks has been the female body.

Irene Montero is a representative case. She is a prominent Spanish politician and a key figure in the Podemos party. She currently serves as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and is the Vice-Chair of The Left group in the European Parliament. She was Minister of Equality (2020–2023), and during her tenure, she championed several high-profile and often controversial legislative initiatives, including the "Trans Law" (expanding LGBTQ+ rights) and the "Only Yes Means Yes" Law (centering consent in sexual assault cases). Let these three instances serve as an example of the many others that Montero has suffered.

¹

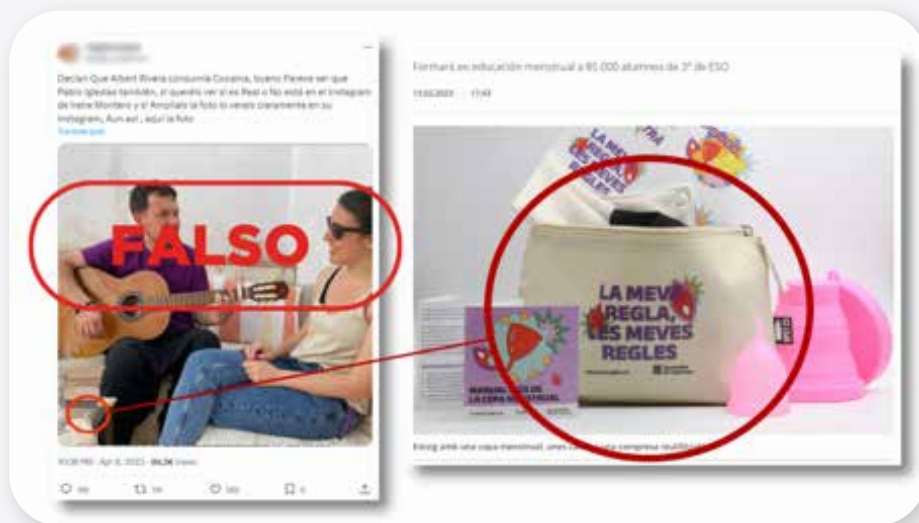
Some of the ideas presented in that recent article are included here

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1. In 2022, A Facebook post in July shows an image of Irene Montero, Ione Belarra, and Isabel Serra with their breasts exposed and messages written on their bodies such as "my breasts are not your business" and "the breast that offends is the one that is not for sale." The image was fake .



2. In 2023, in a Facebook post in April she was accused of consuming cocaine. The "white line" you see on the table is not cocaine, but the zipper pull of a toiletry bag. Nevertheless, disinformation spread and the image appeared in X with the same meaning.



2

All examples of Irene Montero and the images are taken from:

<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20231120/bulos-falsedades-sobre-irene-montero/2461390.shtml#:~:text=VERIFICARTVE-,No%20son%20Montero%2C%20Belarra%20y%20Serra%20ense%C3%B1ando%20los%20pechos%2C%20es%20un%20montaje,-%22Y%20pensar%20que>

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3. In many cases, Montero has been accused of making statements that were simply not true. They include, for instance, the information provided on March 2021, when users on X circulated an image of the Minister of Equality holding a digital clock, accompanied by the headline: "Irene Montero calls Saturday's time change a sexist act." The image also included a quote attributing to Montero: "Heteropatriarchy is robbing women of an hour of rest." It was false.



There are many other examples, but Montero's case is far from an exception. In March of 2026, Rita Maestre, spokesperson for Más Madrid in the Madrid City Council, has reported that she has been suffering harassment for about a year after someone published her address online in anonymous ads offering sexual services. In a message posted on social media, Maestre explains that for months men have been coming to her home, ringing the doorbell or knocking on the door, sometimes at night and in some cases intoxicated, after having obtained her address through online channels. The councilwoman has linked what happened to a form of digital violence and has indicated that it is political harassment directed against her "for being a woman, for being left-wing and for being a feminist."

While it is true that left-wing female politicians and those who define themselves as feminists suffer the most attacks, other female politicians such as Isabel Díaz Ayuso have seen their bodies sexualized with fake images and have been attributed statements that they either did not make, or that have been manipulated and distorted. She is a prominent Spanish politician from the conservative People's Party (PP), serving as the President of the Community of Madrid since 2019

³

<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20260305/rita-maestre-denuncia-sufrir-acoso-difundirse-direccion-anuncios-sexuales-internet/16966751.shtml>

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While male politicians simply ignore these facts, or, even worse, in some cases promote them, Catalan politician Gabriel Rufián has repeatedly denounced the sexualized attacks suffered by female politicians and has compared the attacks he himself suffers for being a Catalan nationalist and leftist with those directed at women, highlighting the fact that in his case there has never been explicit sexualization.

Conclusion

The systematic targeting of women in the public sphere through violence and disinformation represents a severe threat to the stability and legitimacy of modern governance. Gender equality serves as a cornerstone of democratic strength, ensuring that all citizens can participate equitably in the social and political life of their nations. However, as various international organizations and academic scholars have noted, a full democracy is impossible to achieve as long as gender-based exclusion and discrimination persist. Violence against women in politics (VAWP) acts as a primary driver of democratic erosion by restricting the exercise of political rights and limiting equal representation in decision-making spaces. This global phenomenon manifests as physical, psychological, sexual, and symbolic violence specifically designed to discourage women's involvement in public life while reinforcing restrictive, traditional gender roles.

A particularly insidious dimension of this hostility is gendered disinformation, which utilizes false or misleading narratives to deter women from participating in the public sphere. Characterized by coordination, falsity, and malicious intent, these campaigns aim to discredit women by attacking their professional authority through hyper-sexualization and sexist narratives. High-profile leaders such as Kamala Harris serve as primary examples of this tactic, facing coordinated efforts to

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In Spain, the prevalence of online misogyny and the denigration of female politicians confirm that these issues negatively affect women across the political spectrum. The social impact of these coordinated attacks is profound, as social media platforms often act as amplifiers for harmful content due to business models that prioritize high-engagement, sensationalist data over veracity. This environment fosters ideological bubbles and echo chambers that reinforce existing biases and amplify gendered misinformation. Beyond the immediate psychological harm to individual victims, these phenomena represent a serious national security risk by inciting physical violence and manipulating public opinion for political or commercial gain. Ultimately, addressing violence and disinformation against women is not merely a matter of human rights; it is a fundamental requirement for building robust, inclusive, and peaceful democratic societies.

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Media Apollos: Representation of Masculinity through the Concept of Gaze

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- (Im)Balanced Power
- The Concept Of 'Gaze'
- (R)Evolution of Apollos
- Research Framework
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 - i. 'Axe – Chocolate man, Dark Temptations'
 - ii. 'Old Spice – The Man Your Man Could Smell Like'
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Abstract

The contemporary media landscape is increasingly characterized by the pervasive phenomena of corporeal commodification and objectification. Drawing upon Anthony Giddens' assertion that mediated power dynamics between objectified men and women reflect broader societal structures, this study investigates the representational tropes of masculinity within international television advertisements for fragrances, deodorants, and apparel. The primary objective is to elucidate how the mechanism of the 'gaze' facilitates the objectification of the male physique. Through a narrative analysis of eight purposively selected commercials produced between 2010 and 2021, the research demonstrates that the strategic emphasis on muscularity – specifically the torso, biceps, and chest – effectively transmutes the male subject into an object of desire. Critically, however, the findings suggest a semiotic divergence: while visually objectified, male subjects maintain a position of structural agency and dominance relative to their female counterparts, thereby complicating the traditional paradigms of gendered objectification.

Keywords: masculinity, objectification, gaze, commodification, TV commercials, narrative analysis

Introduction

Objectified, Commodified, Commercialized

While the media representation of the human body has historically witnessed numerous instances where female nudity provoked intense public reactions, equivalent representations of the male body remain significantly scarcer and historically more suppressed. For instance, the highly publicized covers of naked Demi Moore on the cover of 'Vanity Fair' in 1991 (Collins, 2018) and Kim Kardashian balancing a champagne glass on her buttocks in 'Paper' magazine in 2014 (Fortini, 2014) effectively fulfilled their commercial and editorial objectives by generating widespread audience engagement. These two covers, as expected, sparked countless controversies, discussions and debates about nudity, body image and the use of sexuality in the media. In contrast, the depiction of naked male celebrities on magazine covers represents an anomaly, exemplified by Indian actor Ranveer Singh's 2022 nude photographic spread in 'Paper' magazine (Subramanyam, 2022). Historically, public exposure of the male nude has encountered severe systemic backlash and institutional censorship. A prominent regional case occurred in SFR Yugoslavia, where the student newspaper 'Polet' (issue no. 127) was judicially sanctioned and its distribution prohibited under the pretext of violating public morality. The state intervention was directly triggered by the publication of full-frontal photographs featuring Milan Šarović, the prominent goalkeeper of the Zagreb football club (Krušelj, 2024).

Still, the contemporary media environment is exposed to the unstoppable trend of body commodification. According to Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant (2002), the body is being seen as an object and consumer item that may be bought and sold. The tenet might be applicable to women and men, as well as the commercialization concept since the body is "crafted in accordance with industry standards for -

commercial applications.” (Adamović & Maskalan, 2011: 54) As an example, the front pages of ‘Men’s Health’ magazine only feature men with well-defined muscles so “not only is the male body instrumentalized but is also objectified and exposed to the reader’s gaze.” (Rubio-Hernández, 2010: 66) The phenomena extend far beyond the confines of lifestyle magazines, pervading diverse facets of societal discourse and cultural representation. The widespread use of social media and accompanying culture of visual portrayal contribute to the dehumanization of individuals by sustaining social standards that prioritize physical attractiveness. Over the past decade, numerous conducted studies have confirmed that social media exerts a substantial influence on individuals’ self-perception, reinforcing gender-based stereotypes (e.g. Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019; Davis, 2018; Daniels, 2018; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Moreover, the research carried out by LaForme-Csordas (2021) provides support for the notion that the media idealizes the flawless physique and constructs a standard for how one’s body is supposed to look.

Traditional media platforms are not exempt from the influence of objectifying the physical appearances of both men and women, especially in attention-seeking advertisements (Vidia & Retnaningdyah, 2021; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Vance et al., 2015). Desirability is not an innate character trait, but a characteristic that person can embody. It has been defined as the quality of being sexually attractive, but also worth having (Gajger & Car, 2020: 106). Back in the 1950s, Sartre defined desire as the tendency to possess the essence of ‘the other’ (Sartre, 1956: 394, cf. Gorton, 2008: 10). It is therefore not unusual that the commodification of desire, or rather desirability, is one of the fundamental sources of profit in the marketing industry. The sale of desirability as a marketable commodity, and then the advertising of certain products as an important factor that will contribute to the individual level of desirability, is not only aimed at women, but also at men, and in the twenty-first century increasingly often. The important difference is that “men are taught to want, and women to be desired.” (Gorton, 2008: 13)

In the 20th century advertising, according to Goffman (1979) men were frequently portrayed as powerful and dominant, while women were represented as submissive and caring. Men have often been portrayed on television as incompetent husbands and fathers (Kaufman, 1999). At the turn of the century commercial enterprises have increasingly prioritized the portrayal of the masculine physique (Beynon, 2002). Rohlinger’s (2002) study illustrated that the erotic man is increasingly becoming the depiction that dominates mainstream conceptions of masculinity. This trend is further exemplified by the growing tendency to depict men as objects of sexual desire, even in contexts that are not overtly sexual (MacKinnon, 2003: 88). In addition, MacKinnon (2003) points out that man’s authority and strength can be determined through his physique, but also through the suggestion of his wealth and business success. It is crucial to highlight, in this case, that MacKinnon (2003) describes men from television commercials as men “to-be-looked-at” (Mulvey, 1975), which means that male’s dominance is suspended for a short period (MacKinnon, 2003).

The primary objective of this study is to demonstrate how the mechanics of the gaze contribute to the objectification of the male body.

(Im)Balanced Power

In his influential publication on the evolution of personal relationships 'The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies', Giddens' (1992) theoretical assumptions are based on the disintegration of uneven social divisions and gender equality. Discussing how the traditional divisions between men and women in intimate relationships are evolving, through the prism of sexuality, Giddens (1992) argues that the sexual control of women by men is much more than an incidental feature of modern social life. Furthermore, historical division on "virtuous" and the "loose" women is now replaced by the modern paradigm on free choice "according to which women reject male sexual dominance." (Giddens, 1992: 8) Lilian Rubin's (1990) research, according to which Giddens' premise is supported, has shown that today's married women possess a considerably greater amount of sexual experience due to the breakdown of old conventions, which traditionally required women to abstain from sexual activity until marriage. In this manner, Giddens (1992) concludes that intimacy unveils the principles of democracy and equality, as well as the right of individuals to be self-determined.

Giddens' (1992) theories, particularly his emphasis on individual agency and the negotiation of relationships in the context of modernity, share common ground with certain aspects of postfeminist thought which "brings a shift in understanding the construction of identity and gender categories." (Genz & Brabon, 2018: 23) Postmodern theory highlights its pluralistic and anti-foundationalist tendencies whereby it rejects the notion of a universal and singular conception of a woman and instead foregrounds the individual differences between women (Genz & Brabon, 2018). As Toro (1999) argues, it articulates the deconstruction of current hegemonic systems and entails a convergence of theories emanating from diverse fields and disciplines. Genz & Brabon (2018) claim that Madonna represents the archetypal postmodern (post)feminist woman since postfeminism emphasizes individual agency and the idea that individuals, particularly women, have the power to shape and redefine their own identities. To add, in her performances, Madonna shows how the gaze can be realigned using the hyper-feminine but also encourages the viewer to reread her body as the intersection of converging differences. Madonna influenced the development of the so-called "porno chic" – culture of open expression of female sexuality and became a kind of originator of the concept of emancipated self-objectification (McNair, 2002; 2013).

Lady Gaga, an American singer-songwriter, producer, and actress whose professions inherently support the notion of redefining identity, serves as an additional illustrative instance. Her public persona and artistic expression have been characterized by a deliberate and bold departure from conventional gender norms and expectations (Deflem, 2019). Lady Gaga challenges traditional notions of femininity and masculinity through her performances, fashion choices, and advocacy for self-expression.

Postfeminism, though, is not only about women. Men attempt to redefine masculinity and comprehend their role within feminism in reaction to the questioning of the term 'woman' by feminism and the interest in gender relations. At the same time, men are bombarded with pressures to live a desirable and "correct lifestyle" (Zeman & Geiger Zeman, 2012). The notions that contributed to this state should not be neglected. According to Beynon (2002) and Gill (2003), there are several norms and characteristics that have influenced such a state, and they are widely connected with the concept of masculinity in Western societies. Those characteristics include feminism, world wars that required bravery, endurance, and emotional restraint as well as the emergence and popularity of men's style magazines and gay movement. The result of all those processes is the challenge of male power while the male body is sexualized and visualized for profit (Beynon, 2002). Zeman and Geiger Zeman (2012) argue that the rise of consumerist society is a key factor in the alteration of masculinity.

Genz and Brabon (2018) provide a description of the "postfeminist man" as a new category of masculinity for the twenty-first century. According to Rosin (2012), middle class, where the disparities between men and women are the greatest, is slowly turning into a matriarchy, with men increasingly absent from the workforce and from home, and women making all the decisions. MacKinnon (2003), accordingly, provides a description of a "new man" who embodies "the sort of anti-sexism which is characterized by his attempts to form non-oppressive relationships with women, children and other men." (MacKinnon, 2003: 13) It is important to point out that in this context the "new man", in his relations with women, tends to disavow the traditional link between sexual desire and female objectification. "Soft masculinities," characterized by a departure from traditional, stereotypically aggressive, or dominant forms of masculinity, can be observed in various films such as 'Call Me by Your Name' (2017, dir. Luca Guadagnino), '500 Days of Summer' (2009, dir. Marc Webb) or 'Lost in Translation' (2003, dir. Sofia Coppola). All of them challenge the conventional notions of masculinity.

Regarding the redefinition of the postfeminist man's identity, Connell and Connell (2005) assert that contemporary man with a history of violence and a criminal record feels no unease about staying home to do the childcare if his wife or partner can get a better-paying job than he can. By the mid-1990s he was easily recognizable as a "new" icon of masculinity in range of cultural forms (Gill, 2013). Moreover, as Nixon (2001) claims, in the early 1990s, magazines shifted their focus from portraying the "equalitarian" new man to a more assertive representation of the post-permissive masculine heterosexual script with growing numbers of sexualized images. Those "softer" portraits of men could thus represent a renegotiation of masculine ideals, the meaning of which must be carefully examined (Goedecke, 2021).

Gender portrayals in advertisements do not only sell products but they also perpetuate and propagate gender stereotypes and behavioral norms (Akesse-Brempong & Cudjoe, 2023). As Dow (2004) argues, the postfeminist men that are respectful, sensitive, and nurturing, start appearing in 1980s film and television. Since then, postfeminist portrayals of men are increasingly visible in

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popular culture. For instance, characters like Don Draper in 'Mad Men' (2007, dir. Matthew Weiner) and Tony Soprano in 'The Sopranos' (1999, dir. David Chase) show complex and multidimensional portrayals of men that go beyond traditional stereotypes. Movies like 'The 40-Year-Old Virgin' (2005, dir. Judd Apatow) and 'Moonlight' (2016, dir. Barry Jenkins) depict male protagonists struggling with identity and societal expectations while advertisements often portray men as involved fathers challenging traditional gender roles. This represents the results of multiple analyses conducted thus far on the depiction of males in most of the media.

Goedecke (2021) found out that the depiction of both men and gambling as soft is concomitant with developments in international consumerist culture, "where the acceptance of traditional, or 'hard' masculine positions is lessening." (Goedecke, 2021: 816) Moreover, research conducted by Matthes et al. (2016) has shown that male television commercials characters in the United States were not stereotypically associated with car, electronic products and that approximately the same number of men and women were shown both at home and at work, and men and women were portrayed in work roles about evenly. Dwivedy et al. (2009) carried out the research on role portrayals of men and women in Indian magazine ads which addressed the "new man" who is sensitive, egalitarian in outlook and highly conscious about his physical appearance. All those portrayals should be seen as arenas where negotiations around masculine ideals and power take place.

While some of the brands try to persuade their customers through linguistic expressions, others do it by the objectification of gender (Khan et al., 2021). Advertisements often depict men in a manner that highlights their physical attractiveness, reinforcing societal norms and expectations surrounding masculinity, contributing to the objectification of men. A content analysis of magazines targeting men found that these media outlets depicted greater muscular male images than those intended for general audiences (Lanzieri & Cook, 2013). Moreover, researchers suggested that advertisements targeting men have become more objectifying over time (Ricciardelli et al., 2010). To add, the men in advertising increasingly display the signals of objectification as it relates to gaze and touch behaviour. The problem with such images is that it attaches themes of liberation to sexuality, which may eventually dilute equality issues in favor of commodification (Rohlinger, 2002). Another danger of such images lies in self-objectification. The persistent portrayal of men and women in commercials according to restricted physical ideals fosters unrealistic body standards, which might result in self-objectification and dissatisfaction. According to objectification theory, the primary psychological consequence of sexual objectification is the development of unnatural perspectives on oneself, which is called self-objectification (Calogero, 2004: 16). Women who self-objectify themselves have internalized the observer's perspective on their bodies and chronically control themselves in anticipation of how others will evaluate their appearance and treat them accordingly (ibid.). The act of self-objectification, driven by the aspiration to adhere to society standards propagated by advertisements, can lead to mental health problems, unhappiness with appearance and a false perception of one's own value (Kumar, 2023).

The Concept Of 'Gaze'

A foundational tenet within feminist theory and cultural studies is the 'gaze' – a construct denoting the subjective realization of being observed and interpreted by an external 'Other,' which subsequently necessitates a recalibration of individual conduct (Moe, 2015). More precisely, the gaze encapsulates the intrapsychic phenomena that occur when an individual internalizes the awareness of being a spectacle. This consciousness triggers a modification of performative identity, wherein the subject strategically alters their physical presentation, linguistic choices, and behavioral demeanor to align with or respond to perceived external expectations.

Laura Mulvey (1975) describes the tendency of men to “project their fantasy onto a female figure who, in her traditional exhibitionist role, is shown with a coded look for strong visual and erotic effect” (Mulvey, 1975: 15) during which the men “own” the woman on the screen. Since then, Mulvey’s essay ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’ (1975) has become “the most widely cited, heavily anthologized and endlessly summarized essay in Film Studies.” (Buckland, 2025: 1) ‘Male gaze’ is a concept of depicting a woman in film or any other visual media, from a masculine, heterosexual point of view, presenting a woman as a passive object of male desire and pleasure. This concept asserts that the audience is aligned to adopt a male perspective, thereby reinforcing patriarchal power structures through the objectification of a female character.

Whereas the ‘male gaze’ traditionally reduces the female physique to a passive object of visual consumption, French (2021) argues that the ‘female gaze’ is inherently nonhomogeneous, resisting any singular or monolithic definition in favor of diverse, multifaceted expressions. This perspective prioritizes the interiority of the character, emphasizing subjective cognitive and emotional states over external aestheticization. Furthermore, Fan (2023) posits that the female gaze facilitates a deeper empathetic engagement, allowing audiences to discern complex emotional nuances through subtle physical cues; consequently, this framework serves as a potent emancipatory tool for advancing gender equality and feminist discourse by subverting the heteronormative eroticization of women.

The ‘queer gaze’ extends this theoretical critique by fundamentally challenging the binary ontological assumptions inherent in both the ‘male’ and ‘female’ gaze. McNealy (2021) posits that ‘queer gaze’ functions as a form of resistance against hegemonic epistemologies, simultaneously disrupting heteronormative paradigms and destabilizing the notion of fixed, essentialist identities. In redefining queer spectatorship, McNealy argues that representation through this lens transcends simple identification; desire is provoked regardless of whether the imagery aligns with the spectator’s own identity (McNealy: 2021: 447). Furthermore, as Erickson (2014) suggests, the ‘queer gaze’ subverts the unidirectional power dynamics of traditional observation by introducing intersubjective reciprocity. Within this framework, the object of the gaze becomes a self-aware agent with the capacity to ‘look back,’ thereby confronting the observer with their own ontological incompleteness (McNealy, 2021).

(R)Evolution of Apollos

Throughout history, societal norms have consistently idealized conventional notions of male attractiveness, accentuating attributes associated with physical strength, muscularity, and athletic builds. This prevailing cultural inclination, deeply ingrained in societal expectations and media representations, perpetuates a narrow and standardized perception of the aesthetically desirable male physique. The ideal image of male beauty can be discerned from the physical features depicted in, for example, ancient Greek sculptures. This artistic tradition is commonly referred to as “Apollo,” named after the Greek deity associated with male beauty.

Ideals of male beauty have evolved significantly over time. Moreover, beauty was never absolute or unchanging; rather, it varies depending on historical periods and cultural contexts, taking on diverse characteristics (Eco, 2004). For instance, while in ancient Greece and Rome athletic and muscular physiques symbolized strength and prowess, during the Renaissance artist celebrated more rounded and proportionate male form (Martinec, 2013).

On the other hand, during the Middle Ages, thinness was valued as it symbolized a devout rejection of physicality, a sentiment particularly prominent during Christianity’s peak ascendancy (Kunitz, 2017). Moreover, Middle Ages favored a lean and slender look, influenced by the focus on intellect over physicality. By the late 19th century, muscularity regained favor with the rise of physical culture movements and the promotion of athleticism.

According to Martinec (2013) the thinness imperative was introduced again at the start of the 20th century, but in the next few decades, as Beynon (2002) claims, the World Wars emphasized the ideal of robust, courageous men prepared for combat. The wars might have spurred a surge in male enlistment, contributing to an increased tendency for men to join gym clubs seeking physical fitness and readiness. Accordingly, Andreasson and Johansson (2014) find a significant increase in the sexualization and visual representation of men, related particularly with the fitness business. While the fitness industry was at its peak of expansion, number of subscriptions in fitness clubs and gyms was constantly increasing, and as Andreasson and Johansson (2014) claim, gym walls often displayed photos of youthful attractive bodies idealizing a youthful and healthy physique that emphasizes dynamism and vitality. This trend is accompanied by a global shift and substantial growth in the advertising industry. In this context, Osgerby (2003) points out that advertising becomes particularly important because marketing and media shape societal perceptions of attractiveness and reinforce gender stereotypes, which can significantly influence individuals’ thoughts and behaviors (Sever Globan et al., 2018).

Advertisements integrate narratives of empowerment, implying that masculinity may be achieved through well-defined facial features and unwavering physical might. However, beneath the outward appearance of impressive physical beauty, there is a danger of self-objectification, as men absorb these idealized pictures and shape not only their bodies but also their sense of self based on society norms. The

commercialization of muscular ideals in television advertisements reflects a continuous narrative that requires men to shape their identities based on a standard of perfect physical form. This visual story resonates across our culture, with the prominence of well-defined biceps serving as a recurring theme.

Research Framework

The primary intention of this study is to examine how masculinity is depicted in television perfume, deodorant, and underwear commercials of international brands. Considering theoretic premises related to male objectification, the goal is to demonstrate how the concept of 'gaze' acts in male body objectification. Eight brands have been selected into the research sample: 'Axe', 'Old spice', 'Paco Rabanne', 'Christiano Ronaldo 7', 'Jean Paul Gaultier', 'K by Dolce & Gabbana', 'David Beckham' and 'Gregg Homme'.

Criteria for brands selection were more than a million viewer on YouTube, and visual representation of a man character in TV ad as an object. The search was conducted in two rounds. First was done through YouTube search using key words 'men's fragrance commercial', 'male luxury fragrance', 'male cologne ad', 'men's deodorant commercial', 'male boxer brief ad', and 'men's underwear commercial'. Second was done by researcher. The selection process incorporated diverse narrative patterns as fundamental eligibility criteria.

On a selected sample of eight video commercials created from 2010 to 2021, narrative analysis has been conducted. Narratives in media texts are essential for understanding current political, financial, and social priorities and power positions (Gillespie & Toynbee, 2006: 83). Narratives in media texts can announce or lay the foundations for certain changes, and can also deepen the status quo (Gillespie & Toynbee, 2006: 83). Ultimately, the importance of narratives is also reflected in how much they occupy and influence the audience intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. The audience connects with narratives while the characters within the narrative invite the audience to engage, and generally they provide pleasure or some kind of relief (Gillespie & Toynbee, 2006: 85).

Analysis

(i) 'Axe – Chocolate man, Dark Temptations'

In the first shot of the commercial 'Axe – Chocolate Man, Dark Temptations'¹, the central character is depicted in the bathroom, wearing only trousers, as he applies deodorant to his chest. In the subsequent frame, the male individual undergoes a transformation into chocolate – a delectable comestible that holds an appealing allure for numerous individuals. Moreover, the identical individual in the shape of a chocolate bar is presently strolling along the road with a smile on his face. As he walks past a woman engrossed in a book, she sighs, and her facial expression reflects profound contentment. The man forcefully removes a portion of his chocolate nose and delicately scatters it across the ice-cream of two women who gaze at him with desire as they savor the ice-cream, exemplifying how the man gratified their desires. While the man reclines on the grass, as seen in the figure 1, the woman proceeds to take a strawberry and vigorously rub it against his groin

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area, insinuating sexual activity, as he smiles with satisfaction. The chocolate guy exerts control over the women in the movie theatre, who express their desire and nibble on the man's chocolate ears. The advertisement reaches its pinnacle of male objectification when the chocolate guy is depicted in a public transportation setting, and the lady symbolically 'bites off' a piece of his chocolate buttocks. The man is depicted as an object of desire when he walks past the gym, causing all the women to gather at the window and express their admiration for him. Specifically, they are captivated by the chocolate sculpture in the form of a man. The protagonist's objectification is further demonstrated in the final scene, where the woman forcefully tears off his arm from the car.



Figure 1: 'Axe Chocolate Man - Dark Temptations', source: MullenLowe Global, YouTube (2010)

(ii) 'Old Spice – The Man Your Man Could Smell Like'

'Hello, ladies! Look at your man. Now back to me'² is one of the most recognizable phrases used in television commercials. Namely, the protagonist of the advertisement, a muscular man naked to the waist (covered only with a towel), as seen in the figure 2, looks directly into the camera, addresses the women in a semi-stern voice, and with carefully chosen words achieves a kind of dominance over them. In this context it is important to note that "male models in advertisements rarely look at the camera, but when they do it represents power." (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004: 32) While the focus is on his sculpted abs, as well as his broad shoulders, he tells women that their husbands, or partners, could be like him. As the commercial continues, the man becomes increasingly dominant. While still addressing the women directly and giving them orders of sorts, the man appears on the boat, dressed in luxurious clothing, but again with a large part of his chest exposed, which continues to emphasize his muscles. Apart from the ship, the man's wealth is connotatively expressed by the diamonds he scatters from his hand while at the same time gaining power over women and keeping it. At the same time as

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the diamonds fall out of his hands, Old Spice deodorant comes out of his hand. The last shot shows the same man sitting on a big white horse, which gives the impression that the main character of the commercial can do anything he sets his mind to, and at the same time, as if by magic, he can control the women who have 'lost their power' in this commercial as well.



Figure 2. 'Old Spice - The Man Your Man Could Smell Like', source: Old Spice, YouTube (2010)

(iii) 'Paco Rabanne – Pure XS'

From the very first frame of the 'Paco Rabanne – Pure XS'³ perfume advertisement, it becomes evident that the product exudes opulence and grandeur, as seen by the setting of the shop adorned with golden decorations. The man removes his deep crimson jacket, revealing his well-defined back muscles reminiscent of the chiseled physique of the Greek deity 'Apollo'. The same individual becomes objectified and desired purely for his physical appearance. The background music amplifies, heightening the tension as the man systematically removes each article of clothes, revealing his impeccably chiseled physique. Simultaneously, unbeknownst to him, women clandestinely observe him via the mirror and walls. They audibly express desire whenever he undresses, symbolizing their submission to him and the perpetuation of his control. The culmination of the events and the absolute authority of the man over women is reached when the protagonist removes his final garment – trousers and simultaneously applies the fragrance on his genital area, as seen in the figure 3. The women are seen falling to the ground, seemingly under the man's influence, but he maintains a mysterious smile. This scene serves as a reminder of his ability to exert control and domination over women, despite being objectified and reduced to a mere object of desire.



Figure 3. 'Paco Rabanne - Pure XS', source: Central Models, YouTube (2017)

(iv) 'Cristiano Ronaldo – CR7'

It is difficult to fathom that Cristiano Ronaldo, a renowned soccer player of exceptional skill, is encountering multiple challenges and setbacks. Nevertheless, this aligns precisely with the storyline depicted in the television advertisement for perfume⁴. Ronaldo awakens in a highly irritable state and is additionally incensed by the fact that the photograph he shared on social media has received no 'likes'. Subsequently, Ronaldo emerges from his bed, drawing attention to his impeccably shaped abdominal muscles, as well as his remarkably slender physique. Furthermore, the use of visuals showcasing the opulent residence in which Ronaldo resides amplifies the perception of him as a formidable and affluent individual. Ronaldo, who is treated like an object, moves about his residence and encounters difficulties in performing mundane tasks: he is unable to prepare toast, exhibits subpar skills in handling a ball, and then sustains an injury from scalding coffee. The climax of the challenges he encounters occurs when Ronaldo loses his footing and plunges into the pool situated in front of his residence. However, as seen in the figure 4, the storyline takes a twist when the protagonist applies fragrance on his well-developed pectoral muscles and neck. Specifically, at the conclusion, Ronaldo skillfully maneuvers the ball, successfully scores a soccer goal near the pool, and furthermore, a woman emerges in the advertisement presenting him with a cup of coffee, which he enjoys. To conclude, the woman places her head across his robust chest, deriving solace and a sense of safety from his presence. Ronaldo, while being objectified and reduced to a desired object like the main characters in the previously examined advertisements, managed to exert authority and control over the woman, who ultimately submits to him.



Figure 4. 'Cristiano Ronaldo - CR7', source: Cristiano Ronaldo Fragrances, YouTube (2021)

(v) 'Jean Paul Gaultier – Le Male'

The commercial is set at a seaport, a location that is commonly linked to notions of harshness, dominance and masculinity⁵. In the advertisement, the main character showcases his physical power and impeccably honed abdominal muscles and biceps by forcefully toppling the arm of another muscular individual, as seen in the figure 5. The issue becomes intricate when a svelte, fair-haired woman beckons to a man through melodic singing, reminiscent of sirens. The protagonist, completely unclothed from the waist up, navigates through the harbor, triumphantly surmounting every hindrance encountered. Furthermore, the man is depicted as an object of attraction, since the emphasis is placed on his well-defined abdominal muscles, as well as his radiant white smile. The portrayal of an idealized yet dehumanized man is further emphasized during the instances when he effortlessly leaps over the ropes and ascends the lighthouse where a young woman eagerly awaits his arrival. Ultimately, the man successfully entices the girl, causing her to adopt a subservient role, so granting him authority not just over her, but also over the other ladies and men in the seaport.



Figure 5. 'Jean Paul Gaultier - Le Male', source: Jean Paul Gaultier, YouTube (2017)

(vi) 'K by Dolce & Gabbana'

The ad's protagonist, Mariano di Vaio, a renowned fashion designer and actor, is immediately objectified as the camera zooms in on his well-defined abdominal muscles while he strolls around an Italian vineyard and greets acquaintances⁶. While his companions are harvesting luscious grapes, Mariano frequently strolls across the vineyard and admiringly gazes at the neighboring town where he resides, riding his formidable and swift motorcycle. The culmination of the action occurs when Mariano comes into a quaint town, strolling through its charming streets with great allure, while the scenes of enjoyment in the town square are alternated with images highlighting his well-defined stomach muscles and captivating stare. Mariano achieves the epitome of masculinity by embodying the ideal father figure, diligently tending to his children, while simultaneously captivating a woman who willingly submits to him and seeks refuge in his embrace, as seen in the figure 6. In the final scene of the video, Mariano is positioned by himself on a hill, with a captivating close-up shot that emphasizes his symmetrical facial features and impeccably white teeth.



Figure 6. 'K by Dolce & Gabbana', source: Perfumerias Unidas, YouTube (2021)

(vii) 'David Beckham's Underwear'

Retired English soccer player and one of the world's most famous athletes, David Beckham, is the main actor in the underwear commercial⁷. The musical background of the advertisement is the song 'Don't Stop' by the group 'Foster the People', and this music enhances the dynamism of the advertisement in which Beckham successfully overcomes all obstacles. Namely, in the introduction of the commercial, a dressing gown is attached to the car door, and Beckham is left in his underwear, undershirt and panties. Realizing that he can't get back into his opulent house that exudes wealth, Beckham starts running parallel to the car and encounters and jumps numerous obstacles: first he runs down the street, then he jumps over walls and bushes in his neighborhood, and on that occasion, he is left without slippers and an undershirt. Then Beckham is reduced to a pure object of lust, considering that the focus is on his abdominal muscles, but also on his properly rounded buttocks, as seen in the figure 7. However, although he is objectified, Beckham catches the eye of a woman when running and jumping into his neighbors' pool, and in this way, Beckham exercises power and dominance over the same woman. Also, the objects of desire are his muscular legs, whose strength he shows when, while running, he plays soccer with the children in the neighborhood. Arriving at a big bend in the road, Beckham stops briefly and attracts the attention of tourists. Beckham's power over all the other characters in the ad reaches its peak when passengers on the bus take out their smartphones and cameras to take pictures of his body. In this way, Beckham became a pure object of lust, but at the same time kept power and dominance in his hands.



Figure 7. 'David Beckham's Underwear', source: Fashion SGM, YouTube (2013)

(viii) 'Gregg Homme – One Night Stand'

Underwear is often an object of desire and passion. An additional erotic charge in this underwear commercial⁸ was achieved by using transparent underwear, through which both the buttocks and the male genital organ can be seen. The main character of the advertisement is in a luxurious apartment, naked to the waist and covered only with a towel over his genitals, while the focus is on his well-sculpted abdominal muscles, as well as his overall athletic physique. He pulls Gregg Homme underwear out of a drawer, while at the same time close-up shots of his backside quickly alternate. However, the protagonist is portrayed as an object of desire as the man turns towards the camera and shows his dominance. Not long after that, he took out a pair of transparent blue panties from the drawer and put them on, during which his backside came to the fore again, as seen in the figure 8. The climax of the video commercial occurs when the police ring his doorbell and warn him that his neighbors have complained about his posing, given that the outside of his apartment consists only of transparent glass walls. The denouement is constructed by a time jump – after the police warning, the shot shows the main actor completely naked in bed. His genital area is covered with a quilt while he wears a police cap on his head, which connotatively shows that he had sex for one night with the policewoman who was knocking on the door. So, although this man is objectified to the extreme and reduced to an object of lust during almost the entire advertisement, he achieves power and dominance over the woman who came to warn him that he is breaking the law, and in this way, he kept the power in his hands. In addition, his direct gaze into the camera further enhances the impression of dominance.



Figure 8. 'Gregg Homme - One Night Stand', source: CityBoyz USA, YouTube (2013)

Discussion & Conclusion

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the representational tropes of masculinity within international television advertisements for deodorants, fragrances, and apparel. Specifically, the study sought to elucidate the operational role of the 'gaze' in the corporeal objectification of the male character in TV commercials. Methodologically, a narrative analysis was performed on a purposive sample of eight commercials produced between 2010 and 2021. The selection was characterized by protagonists exhibiting hyper-muscularity and idealized physical conditioning. The analysis reveals that these advertisements strategically foreground the male physique – with particular emphasis on the abdominal and brachial muscle groups – utilizing cinematic techniques such as extreme close-ups to accentuate these features as primary sites of visual consumption.

As an instance, the protagonist of the Jean Paul Gaultier perfume commercial is portrayed as a highly commodified strong man who knocks another man's hand, jumps over all obstacles with a light step and climbs the ropes. The underwear commercial in which David Beckham, thanks to the underpants he wears, has a similar narrative – he jumps all over the obstacles while being objectified with close-up shots of his legs and backside. Cristiano Ronaldo is the one who manages to turn a bad day into a series of perfect events with the help of perfume while the 'Axe's Chocolate Man', by applying deodorant, manages to gain the attention of all the women who come across him. By applying perfume to his crotch, the main protagonist of the Paco Rabanne commercial manages to throw a dozen women into ecstasy as they sigh lustfully watching him like a voyeur. The main character of the Old Spice deodorant commercial also dominates women: looking directly into

the camera and inviting women to compare him to their men in a slightly cheeky way. A woman is conquered and seduced by the protagonist of the K by Dolce & Gabbana commercial, who is also objectified given that his abdominal muscles are in focus. The main focus is on the erogenous zone of the main character of the Gregg Homme advertisement, which pushes objectification to its limits by focusing on the genitals and buttocks. Of course, that man also 'conquers' the woman who previously came to warn him.

An examination of TV commercials for male deodorants, fragrances, and apparel through the lens of the 'gaze' provides nuanced insights into the simultaneous reinforcement and contestation of traditional gender norms. The findings indicate that the sample is uniformly characterized by protagonists exhibiting hyper-muscularity and idealized physical conditioning. Through strategic cinematic framing, low-angle perspectives, and minimal costuming, the narrative focus is centered on the tonicity of abdominal and brachial muscle groups. Consequently, these subjects undergo a process of corporeal objectification, wherein masculinity is fragmented and reduced to a commodified aesthetic to serve commercial interests. In this framework, physical attributes function as a 'marketing catalyst,' engineered to elicit a visceral response from the audience and optimize brand engagement. These results corroborate extant literature (e.g., Rubio-Hernández, 2010; Lanzieri & Cook, 2013), which suggests that the male physique is not merely instrumentalized but is actively subjected to an objectifying scopophilic regime.

On the other hand, research has shown that even when men are objectified and reduced to objects of desire, they still retain power in their hands over women. The men in the analysed advertisements address both women and men in a dominant tone (Old Spice, Gregg Homme), utilize fragrance to exert influence over women (K by Dolce & Gabbana, Cristiano Ronaldo), easily pass through all obstacles (Jean Paul Gaultier), while women are subject to them, depicted as voluptuous bodies yearning to be satisfied by a man (Paco Rabanne, Axe, David Beckham). Those women are treated as an object 'to-be-looked-at', and pleasure men's needs (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Finally, although objectified, men still retain power in relation to women, which is contrary to the objectified portrayal of women in advertisements (Lubina & Brkić Klimpak, 2014; Gajger & Car, 2020). Men maintain a position of authority in relation to women, no matter they are presented to be primarily seen as objects of desire.

However, it is clear that the observers, those on the other side of the screen, are not only women, regardless of the fact that the content of the commercials places a man in a heteronormative position. Still, the interpretation of 'queer gaze' that challenges heteronormative paradigms, goes beyond the methodological framework of this research and therefore represents a limitation of this study.

Notes

1. 'Axe Chocolate Man – Dark Temptations'. Source: YouTube, MullenLowe Global. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4G3_jovoTc (14th July 2024).

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2. 'Old Spice – The Man Your Man Could Smell Like'. Source YouTube, Old Spice. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owGyKVbfgUE> (14th July 2024).
3. 'Paco Rabanne – Pure XS'. Source: YouTube, Central Models. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9Y7CLmHhJc> (14th July 2024).
4. 'Cristiano Ronaldo – CR7'. Source: YouTube, Cristiano Ronaldo Fragrances. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItR2zbqwnNQk> (14th July 2024).
5. 'Jean Paul Gaultier – Le Male'. Source: YouTube, Sephora Romania. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajfUBzyp9IY> (14th July 2024).
6. 'K by Dolce & Gabbana'. Source: YouTube, Parfumerias Unidas. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tX2dcUxXKo> (14th July 2024).
7. 'David Beckham's Underwear'. Source: YouTube, Fashion SGM. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPcjTefW_Ao (14th July 2024).
8. 'Gregg Homme – One Night Stand'. Source: YouTube, CityBoyz USA. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fc4bZrAJUU> (14th July 2024).

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**Visual Politics of Corporate Uniforms in the Airline Industry:
A Study on the Representation of Gender and Professional Identity**

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Abstract

This study examines corporate uniforms in the civil aviation sector as visual and ideological tools that construct corporate identity, professional hierarchy, and gender roles. Adopting a qualitative multi-case visual analysis, the research analyzes promotional videos, social media content, campaign visuals, and uniform designs from five airline companies between 2008 and 2024. Drawing on representation theory (Hall), gender performativity (Butler), dramaturgy (Goffman), and symbolic capital (Bourdieu), the study explores how uniforms mediate institutional values and social norms. The findings reveal that uniforms function as strategic communicative devices that both reproduce and transform gendered professional identities. While traditional visual codes, such as color schemes, tailoring, and styling, continue to signal femininity and masculinity, there is a growing hybridization of gendered attributes. Emotional labor and communicative skills, historically feminized, and authority and technical competence, traditionally masculinized, are increasingly expected across all roles. This shift is further shaped by the rising visibility of female pilots, male cabin crew, and customer-oriented branding strategies.

Keywords: Airline industry, Corporate uniform, Professional identity, Gender, Representation theory, Visual representation

Introduction

The civil aviation sector is a highly visible field in which corporate representation, aesthetic regulation, and gender norms intersect. Corporate uniforms in this sector function not only as work attire but also as communicative and symbolic devices that convey institutional identity, professional hierarchy, and social expectations (Witz et al., 2003; Mills, 2003). Through their design, styling, and use in promotional materials, uniforms contribute to how employees are positioned within organizational structures and how they are perceived by the public.

Existing research has largely focused on the alignment between flight attendants' appearance, emotional labor, and corporate branding strategies (Tyler & Abbott, 1998; Mills, 2003; Bailey, 2017). These studies show that uniforms often reproduce gendered distinctions: cabin crew are associated with femininity, care, and service, while pilots are linked to authority, technical expertise, and masculinity. However, recent transformations in the aviation sector—including the increasing visibility of female pilots, the growing presence of male cabin crew, and the expansion of customer-oriented service models—suggest that these established representations are shifting. Despite these changes, there remains limited research examining how such transformations are visually and symbolically articulated through uniforms, particularly in the context of Türkiye (Özkan, 2020).

This study addresses this gap by examining corporate uniforms as visual and ideological tools that shape professional identities and gendered representations. Rather than treating uniforms as purely functional garments, the study approaches them as communicative elements embedded in broader institutional and cultural frameworks.

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The central research question guiding this study is: How do corporate uniforms in the civil aviation sector construct, reproduce, and transform gendered professional identities and organizational representations? To answer this question, the study analyzes promotional videos, social media content, campaign visuals, and uniform designs from five airline companies. By focusing on visual and representational practices, the research explores how uniforms mediate changing expectations around gender, authority, emotional labor, and professionalism.

The study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it shifts the focus from static interpretations of uniforms to their role as dynamic representational systems shaped by institutional strategies and socio-cultural change. Second, it highlights how gendered meanings are not only reproduced but also reconfigured through visual and communicative practices in the aviation sector. Third, it provides empirical insight from Türkiye, where such transformations remain underexplored.

Literature Review

Uniforms, Representation, and Gender in Civil Aviation: Representation and Gender Performativity as Analytical Frameworks

This study conceptualizes corporate uniforms as visual and discursive elements through which meaning is constructed and circulated. Drawing on Hall's (1997) theory of representation, uniforms are understood not as neutral or functional objects but as cultural signs embedded in institutional and ideological systems. Through visual codes such as color, tailoring, and styling, uniforms communicate values including authority, trust, service orientation, and professionalism. These meanings are not inherent but produced within specific cultural and organizational contexts.

To understand how these representations are gendered, the study adopts Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity. From this perspective, gender is not a fixed identity but is continuously enacted through repeated practices, appearances, and norms. Uniforms play a crucial role in this process by stabilizing and institutionalizing particular gendered expectations. For example, requirements related to grooming, posture, and aesthetic presentation function as regulatory mechanisms that guide how employees embody gender within professional roles. Thus, uniforms do not simply reflect gender differences; they actively participate in producing and normalizing them.

By combining representation and performativity, this framework allows for an analysis of uniforms as sites where institutional identity and gender norms intersect. Uniforms become visual technologies through which organizations encode particular meanings, while employees reproduce, or occasionally challenge, these meanings through embodied performance.

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Gendered Labor and Visual Codes in Aviation & Corporate Identity, Branding, and Uniform Design

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that the aviation sector has historically been structured around gendered divisions of labor. Early studies show that the emergence of cabin crew as a feminized profession was closely tied to care work and service expectations (Barry, 2007; Mills, 1998). Uniforms played a central role in this process by visually aligning flight attendants with qualities such as warmth, elegance, and approachability, often drawing on aesthetic codes associated with nursing and caregiving (Witz et al., 2003).

As the aviation industry expanded in the post-war period, uniforms increasingly became part of corporate branding strategies. Research indicates that airlines deliberately designed uniforms to reflect brand identity and enhance customer experience, often reinforcing gendered expectations in the process (Tyler & Abbott, 1998; Hochschild, 1983; Woodward, 2007). Feminized attributes such as emotional labor, attractiveness, and attentiveness were institutionalized through uniform policies, while masculinized attributes such as authority and technical competence were associated with pilots and reinforced through militarized design elements (Enloe, 2000).

More recent studies suggest that these traditional distinctions are being reconfigured. The increasing presence of female pilots and male cabin crew challenges established visual and professional hierarchies, yet these changes are not always fully reflected in institutional representations (Bailey, 2017). Contemporary research on gender diversity in aviation highlights ongoing tensions between inclusivity policies and persistent symbolic inequalities (Gender Diversity in Aviation, 2026). These findings suggest that while occupational roles are evolving, visual and representational systems may continue to reproduce older gender norms.

Beyond gender, uniforms function as key instruments of corporate identity and branding within the aviation industry. Recent research emphasizes that visual consistency, including uniforms, plays a crucial role in shaping brand perception and customer trust (Yilmaz, 2025). Uniforms contribute to the construction of a recognizable corporate image by aligning employee appearance with broader branding strategies.

Studies on employer branding and post-pandemic transformations in aviation further demonstrate that uniforms are increasingly integrated into strategic communication practices, particularly through digital platforms (Employer Branding in Aviation, 2025). Social media and promotional campaigns extend the visibility of uniforms beyond the workplace, transforming them into tools for storytelling and audience engagement.

In parallel, research on corporate image and consumer behavior indicates that visual coherence, including staff presentation, directly influences customer loyalty and purchase intentions (Han et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022). These findings highlight

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that uniforms operate not only as internal organizational tools but also as external communicative assets that shape how airlines are perceived in competitive markets.

Research Gap and Contribution

Despite the growing body of research on aviation, gender, and branding, three key gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature treats uniforms as secondary elements within broader discussions of labor or branding, rather than as central analytical objects. Second, there is limited research examining how uniforms simultaneously function as visual, ideological, and communicative tools. Third, empirical studies focusing on Turkey remain scarce, particularly in relation to recent transformations in gender roles and digital communication practices.

This study addresses these gaps by analyzing corporate uniforms as multidimensional representational systems that mediate gender, institutional identity, and professional hierarchy. By focusing on visual materials such as promotional content and social media, the study offers a contemporary perspective on how uniforms operate within evolving organizational and cultural contexts.

Methodology

This study is structured around an interdisciplinary qualitative research strategy based on the premise that uniforms used in the airline industry serve as vehicles for multi-layered representations related to gender, professional identity, and corporate ideology, going beyond their role as mere visual aesthetic elements. The research adopts a multiple case study model within the scope of qualitative visual analysis. Each airline company was treated as a separate case within its own institutional and cultural context and analyzed using comparative visual reading methods.

The data collection process in this study is based on a mixed methodology that combines visual analysis—which examines the structural characteristics of visuals—with discourse analysis—which aims to uncover the meanings behind texts and representations. This approach allows the study to go beyond visual data alone and also analyze the discursive meanings carried by these data.

The study population consists of all personnel in the civil aviation sector who wear corporate uniforms (pilots, flight attendants, technicians, ground staff, etc.). The study examines companies holding prominent positions at the national and international levels, including (i) Turkish Airlines, (ii) AnadoluJet, (iii) Pegasus Airlines, (iv) British Airways, and (v) Singapore Airlines—which hold prominent positions at both national and international levels—were selected. The sample was constructed based on content published by these companies between 2008 and 2024 across digital platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn), corporate websites, and print communication tools such as promotional catalogs, advertising archives, and magazines.

To enable a comparison of different forms of cultural and corporate representation, the study selected a sample comprising airlines based in Turkey, Europe, and Asia.

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Turkish Airlines, AnadoluJet, and Pegasus, as Turkey-based airlines, provide an opportunity to examine local corporate representation practices and uniform design for cabin crews; British Airways, as a long-established European flag carrier, represents Western service culture. Singapore Airlines was included in the sample because it is an Asian airline that attracts global attention for its cabin crew image and uniform design. This selection enables a comparative analysis of the relationship between airline uniforms and corporate identity and gender representation across different cultural contexts.

The year 2008 was selected as the starting point because it marks the period when social media began to be used as a corporate communication tool. In particular, the accelerated digitalization and increased production of visual content following the COVID-19 pandemic have made this timeframe methodologically significant.

Data Analysis Method

Two main analysis methods were used in the study:

Descriptive analysis: Visuals associated with each brand were systematically examined; the visual representations of female and male employees were described in terms of the aesthetic codes used and the corporate values highlighted.

Visual thematic analysis: Recurring symbols, costume elements, color usage, body language, gendered poses, and performative roles were analyzed to identify common themes.

This analytical process is theoretically grounded within the frameworks of Butler's performativity of gender, Goffman's dramaturgical approach, Hall's theory of representation, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. This multi-layered methodological approach allows for the analysis of the uniform not merely as a garment, but also as a stage for institutional visibility, the ideological shaping of the body, and a space where social norms are reproduced on the visual plane.

To ensure that the analysis process was carried out systematically and transparently, the visual materials were examined using a multi-stage coding process inspired by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. In the first stage (open coding), visual elements such as color usage, clothing cuts, accessories, body language, posture, and style were identified and labeled across the dataset. In the second stage (categorization), these initial codes were grouped under broader analytical categories; headings such as gender representation, authority, emotional labor, professionalism, and corporate identity were created. In the final stage (theme development), recurring patterns among different examples were synthesized to reveal overarching themes reflecting the visual policies of corporate uniforms. The analysis process focused on revealing how specific visual elements—such as the use of color (dark tones and pastel colors), cut characteristics (structured or relaxed fits), accessories (scarves, ties, etc.), and bodily performance (posture, facial expression, and gestures)—contribute to the construction of gender-based occupational identities and institutional representations. To enhance analytical consistency, the coding process was conducted iteratively, and

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In this context, the research examines how institutional identity is constructed through the aesthetic codes of the uniform using selected airline examples, how this identity is organized within the contexts of gender, professional identity, and status, and how it is reproduced through digital representations.

Ethical Principles and Limitations

Only publicly available digital and social media content was used in this study. The study's sample consists of visual materials, promotional videos, advertisements, and social media posts. Therefore, there are no concerns regarding personal data breaches, participant privacy, or unethical practices. Among the study's limitations are the fact that the data was largely collected from digital platforms and public communication channels (social media, corporate websites, promotional videos, catalogs, etc.) and that the analysis focuses solely on content from the 2008–2024 period for the companies examined. While this limits the study's claim to encompass all general trends in the sector, it enables in-depth analysis through specific examples.

The timeframe used in the research corresponds to a period when social media began to be widely used in corporate communication; the acceleration of digitalization following the pandemic makes this historical period even more meaningful. Although this approach is limited in terms of generalizability, it lends the study a detailed conceptual depth. The interviews and archival searches conducted as part of the research were carried out in accordance with ethical approval principles, with participants' identities kept confidential.

This research is grounded in the researcher's in-depth field knowledge, derived from twenty-seven years of experience in civil aviation. The researcher's ability to approach institutional practices from an insider (emic) perspective has imparted an autoethnographic depth to the study, shaped not only by an observer's role but also by that of a participant (Ellis et al., 2011). This approach has enabled not only the interpretation of textual and visual documents but also a holistic and contextual analysis process informed by the researcher's sector-specific experience. Here, autoethnography is positioned not merely as the transmission of subjective experience but also as a critical and analytical method of knowledge production in relation to the theoretical framework (Spry, 2001).

However, the conceptual proximity afforded by the insider perspective also carries risks of subjectivity, naturalization, and a lack of critical distance. Therefore, throughout the research process, the potential effects of the researcher's sectoral affiliation were continuously reviewed and managed through systematic reflexivity, critical self-evaluation, and theoretical oversight mechanisms (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2009).

Within this framework, the study draws not only on textual and visual content but also on ethnographic insights regarding the forms of daily interaction in the organizational field, performance practices, and how gender-based differences are experienced at the field level. Thus, the multi-layered nature of the relationship

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between institutional discourse and individual performance has been addressed at both theoretical and experiential levels; the intersectional dimensions of gender, professional identities, and representational practices have been analyzed in greater depth.

Findings

The analyses conducted demonstrate that the uniform is not merely an aesthetic and functional element; it is also a representational practice that visually reproduces institutional power relations (Gürkan and Ege, 2023), ideological meanings, and gender representations. In the airline industry, corporate uniforms contribute to the reproduction of gender norms intertwined with professional roles (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990).

Uniforms for cabin crew are associated with female-dominated service roles through aesthetic concerns and bodily discipline; standards such as high heels, makeup, and skirt length create a more intense form of bodily control and pressure for gendered representation on female employees. In contrast, simple and comfortable uniforms for male employees reveal how gender norms are reproduced under the guise of “neutrality” (Butler, 1990).

The military-inspired, authoritarian, and masculine visual codes seen in pilot uniforms, however, create a reverse representational pressure for female pilots. These formal structures, designed based on the male body, place female pilots at a disadvantage in terms of both visibility and professional representation; they reproduce gender-based binary structures.

These findings demonstrate that professional identities in the aviation industry are shaped according to gender norms through corporate representation strategies, and that these codes are reproduced through visual representations and corporate aesthetic policies.

The Corporate and Social Representation of Airline Uniforms: Company-Based Analyses

In this section, the corporate identity strategies and visual representation policies of the organizations are analyzed through the uniforms of five selected airlines. Each company visually expresses not only its employees but also the brand’s historical context, cultural values, and the relationship it establishes with its target audience. In the company-based analyses, the effects of uniforms on corporate image, the concept of professionalism, and customer perception are evaluated; the relationship between corporate aesthetics and visual communication is highlighted.

(i) Turkish Airlines: A Representation of National Elegance and Global Discipline

Turkish Airlines’ new cabin uniforms, designed by Ettore Bilotta and introduced in 2023, blend traditional motifs with modern design to reflect elegance, cultural heritage, and professionalism. While the women’s uniforms offer aesthetic coherence and visual richness, the men’s uniforms emphasize authority through

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their more technical and functional appearance. These representations can be interpreted in a multi-layered manner within the frameworks of Hall's (1997) theory of representation, Goffman's (1959) performance model, and Bourdieu's (1984) concept of symbolic capital.



Figures 3, 4, and 5: The new cabin crew uniforms designed by Ettore Bilotta and unveiled by Turkish Airlines in 2023. Source: Turkish Airlines. (2023). Turkish Airlines brings elegance to the skies with its new uniforms. turkishairlines.com/tr-int/turk-hava-yollari-yeni-uniformalariyla-sikligi-gokyuzune-tasiyor

The 2023 Turkish Airlines uniforms featured in Figures 3, 4, and 5 visually reflect the brand's understanding of elegance, sophistication, and cultural representation (Turkish Airlines, 2023). The integration of traditional motifs with modern design elements in the uniforms is not merely an aesthetic choice; it is also a strategic approach to emphasize the organization's commitment to its local cultural roots while simultaneously highlighting its identity as a brand competing on a global scale. In this context, as Hall (1997) emphasizes in his theory of representation, how visual representations are interpreted and made meaningful by the audience is of critical importance in terms of deciphering ideological codes. When evaluated through the perspectives of Goffman (1959), Bourdieu (1984), and Hall (1997), Turkish Airlines' current uniform design reveals its connection to the multi-layered production of meaning in visual representation.

When viewed within the framework of representation theory, this example reveals how corporate identity is constructed through gender-based visual codes.

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(ii) AnadoluJet: Accessibility and Pragmatic Representation

AnadoluJet's identity as a low-cost airline is directly linked to the simple and functional design choices in its cabin crew uniforms. This is not merely an aesthetic preference but also a visual reflection of the economic strategy the brand represents. When evaluated within the framework of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, these uniforms construct a professional identity that is more accessible, humble, and service-oriented, rather than projecting an image of high status or privilege. Additionally, the blurring of gender codes in the uniforms has enabled a more neutral and inclusive representation; this has ensured that the professional identity is expressed in a simple yet effective manner.

At this point, by bridging Hall's approach to cultural representation with Goffman's theory of social roles, it becomes clear how the brand's economic position is communicated through the visual representation of cabin crew. Consequently, uniforms serve not only as a sign of corporate affiliation but also as the symbolic carrier of the message the airline conveys to its target audience.



Figures 6 and 7: AnadoluJet cabin crew uniforms. Source: AnadoluJet. (March 31, 2024). Spreading Our Wings Toward the Future with Our New Uniforms! [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/FHnh6wDIokQ> (Accessed June 2, 2025).

In Figures 6 and 7, AnadoluJet cabin crew uniforms reflect the brand's principles of accessibility and inclusivity through their simple and functional design. This visual choice, which challenges gender stereotypes, contributes to the construction of a pragmatic and service-oriented brand identity.

(iii) Pegasus Airlines: Youth, Dynamism, and Innovative Representation

The denim fabric and relaxed cuts used in Pegasus Airlines' cabin crew uniforms emphasize youth, accessibility, and a contemporary lifestyle. Butler's (1990) theory of the reproduction of gender is useful for understanding how the visual codes in these uniforms are subverted. At the same time, these designs are positioned as an indicator of the brand's stylish, innovative stance within the framework of Bourdieu's approach to symbolic capital.

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Figures 8 and 9: Pegasus cabin crew uniforms, featuring relaxed fits and the use of denim fabric, embody the brand's youthful, dynamic, and inclusive identity. Although shoes are not shown in the image, the overall design language reflects a new approach to representation focused on comfort and modernity. (Cabin Crew, 2025) Source: kabinmemuru.com. (2025). Pegasus Cabin Crew Uniforms 2025. (Accessed June 2, 2025), kabinmemuru.com/Pegasus-hostes-kiyafetleri-2025

The new Pegasus Airlines flight attendant uniforms featured in Figures 8 and 9 emphasize comfort, dynamism, and modernity as an alternative to traditional airline representations. This transformation in attire is not merely aesthetic; it can be viewed as part of a narrative strategy that challenges gender representations and seeks to align the corporate identity with youth, accessibility, and contemporary lifestyles (Cabin Crew, 2025).

This example reflects a shift towards more fluid and inclusive gender representations, in line with contemporary brand strategies.

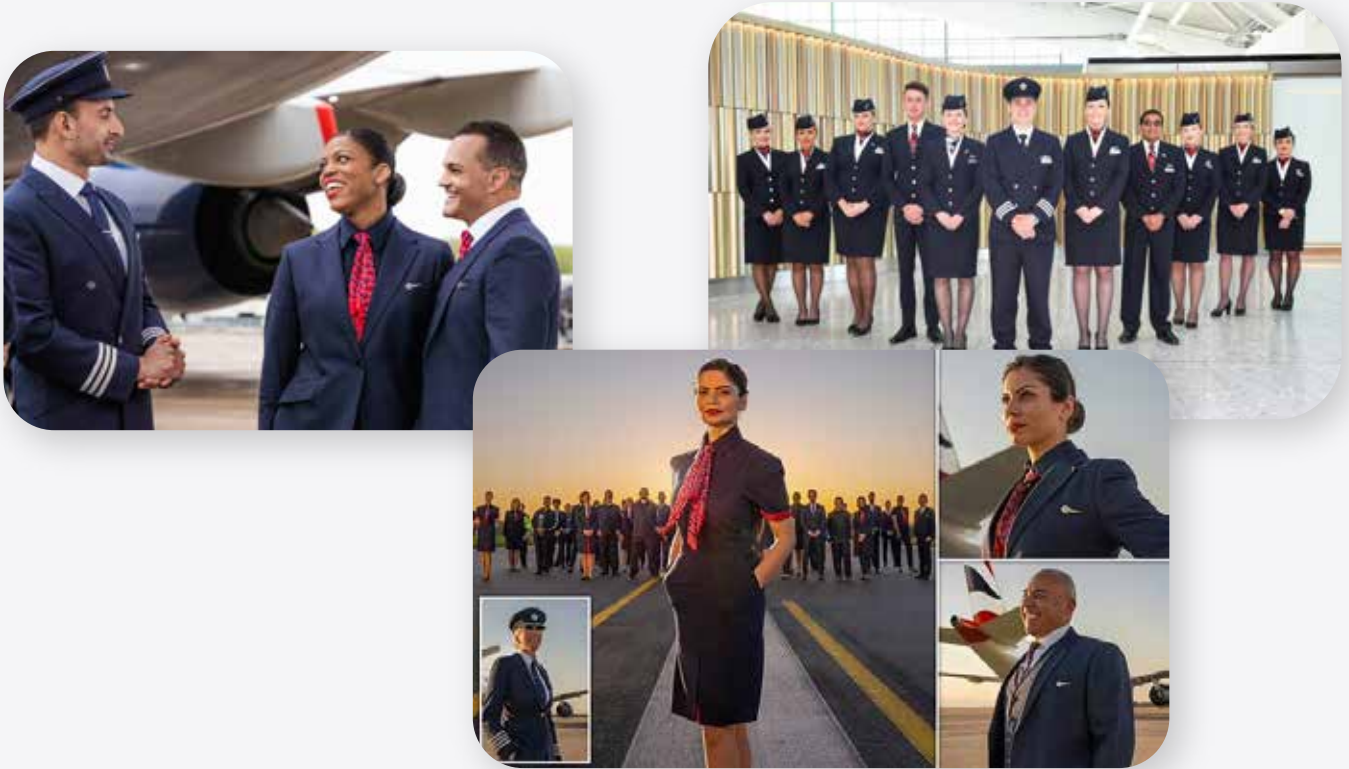
(iv) British Airways: Discipline, Continuity, and Professionalism

British Airways' uniforms convey a message of discipline, continuity, and professionalism by blending classic British elegance with a contemporary design language. While gender balance is maintained in both women's and men's designs, a commitment to the corporate heritage is visually sustained.

Furthermore, the fact that the uniforms have remained unchanged for over 20 years (BBC, 2023) reinforces this sense of continuity. The designs reflect the company's multicultural structure and universal professional standards, thereby supporting its image of distinction.

When evaluated through the approaches of Goffman, Butler, and Bourdieu, these uniforms signify a sustainable visual representation of corporate prestige and traditional professionalism.

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Figures 10, 11, and 12: British Airways' new uniform collection, unveiled in 2025 after a hiatus of nearly twenty years, was designed by Ozwald Boateng and reinterprets the brand's classic elegance and professionalism through a contemporary design language (RavenyPapagena, 2025). Source: RavenyPapagena. (2025). British Airways new uniform 2025. ravenypapagena.pages.dev/trxayyp-british-airways-new-uniform-2025 (Accessed June 2, 2025).

(v) Singapore Airlines: Cultural Identity and the Aesthetic Representation of Femininity

Singapore Airlines' Sarong Kebaya uniform is an iconic design representing Asian cultural elegance. While the "Singapore Girl" figure transforms into a stage where femininity and the concept of service merge with aesthetics, the simple suits offered to male cabin crew members serve as a complementary element of professional representation.

These visual performances point to the staged representations of in-cabin roles in line with Goffman's (1959) theory; meanwhile, Bourdieu's (1986) approach to cultural capital interprets the uniforms as carriers of the company's historical and cultural prestige. Within the framework of Hall's (1997) theory of performance, this iconographic arrangement facilitates the reproduction of specific cultural identities and their transformation into a universal brand narrative.

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Figures 13 and 14: Singapore Airlines cabin crew are represented in uniforms that reflect Asian cultural elegance: women wear the Sarong Kebaya, while men wear a classic suit and color-coded ties. (CabinCrew24, 2025) Source: CabinCrew24. (2025). Singapore Airlines uniforms and cabin crew roles. cabincrew24.com/singaporeairlinesuniforms

These visual representations reveal not only cultural identity but also how femininity is aestheticized at the institutional level and reinforced through normative roles. With the uniforms featured in Figures 13 and 14, Singapore Airlines cabin crew present a corporate identity where Asian aesthetics, gender roles, and professional representation are intertwined, through traditional Sarong Kebaya and color-coded suits.

Empirical Analysis and Case Studies

In this subsection, the visual politics of corporate uniforms in the aviation sector—within the contexts of gender, professional identity, and corporate representation—are thematically examined through five selected airline examples. Through these case studies identified from Turkey and the international arena, the visual, ideological, and cultural dimensions of the uniform are deeply analyzed and discussed.

(i) Color Choices in Uniform Design and Gender Perception

The use of pastel tones such as pink and turquoise in uniforms designed by fashion designer Cemil İpekçi for Turkish Airlines (THY) has sparked various criticisms within the organization and among the public, particularly due to male staff wearing these colors (Son Dakika Haber, 2008). These reactions demonstrate how deeply ingrained perceptions of gender norms are, the resistance the organization faces when presenting a visual representation that does not align with these norms, and the

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extent to which the public adheres to gender norms.

The fact that these colors are perceived as “feminine” reveals that the uniform is not merely functional; it is also a representational tool through which gender is visually constructed. This aligns with Butler’s (1990) approach, which argues that gender is not a natural but a performative construct.



Figures 15, 16, and 17: An image from a news article covering the process of changing the uniforms following the backlash that occurred after THY unveiled the uniforms designed by Cemil İpekçi in 2005. Source: THY is phasing out the Cemil İpekçi-designed dress. (January 16, 2008). Hürriyet.

hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/thy-cemil-ipekci-izimli-elbiseyi-cikariyor; HaberTürk (February 16, 2013). haberturk.com/yasam/haber/820523-bu-defa-uniformalar-uctu

In line with Goffman’s (1959) idea that institutions stage individuals according to specific social roles, THY quickly canceled these designs; in their place, it implemented new uniforms prepared by Vakko, featuring dark tones and traditional aesthetic codes.

In the new designs, the skirt lengths for female staff were lowered to below the knee, and it was decided that male staff would wear navy-patterned ties instead of pink ones (Habertürk, 2013). These changes demonstrate that corporate dress policies are shaped not by aesthetic preferences but by social norms, and that these norms are internalized by the organizations themselves.

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Figures 18 and 19: “In the uniforms designed by Vakko, flight attendants’ skirt lengths have been lowered to below the knee. Male staff members, who wore pink ties as part of the concept designed by Cemil İpekçi and had complained about them, will now wear patterned ties on a navy blue background.” (Sondakikahaber, 2008).

Source: Son Dakika Haber. (2008). *THY Entered Its 75th Year with Knee-Length Skirts*. sondakika.com/haber/haber-thy-75-inci-yilina-diz-alti-etek-le-girdi/
In Figures 18 and 19, the skirt lengths of flight attendants were lowered to below the knee in the uniforms designed by Vakko in 2008; in Cemil İpekçi’s designs, navy blue patterned ties were chosen instead of pink ties, following criticism of male staff wearing pink ties (Habertürk, 2013).

In conclusion, this situation transforms the uniform into a silent ideological text, revealing how aesthetic details that might seem insignificant on the surface can carry profound meanings. The debates surrounding color choices turn the uniform into not merely an article of clothing, but a symbolic element at the center of a representational crisis. It is evident that corporate identity and gender norms clash at this point. In this context, the uniform becomes part of a symbolic response to gender norms, going beyond merely defining the wearer (Goffman, 1959).

(ii) The Tension Between Aesthetic Perception and Visibility in Uniform Design

British Airways has made significant changes to its uniform design after many years. (BBC, 2023) The new uniforms, designed by Ozwald Boateng in 2023, claimed to promote diversity and inclusivity by offering options such as jumpsuits and headscarves for female cabin crew. However, the transparency of the silk blouses worn by female staff caused discomfort among employees as their undergarments were visible; this revealed just how sensitive an area this is regarding the representation of employees’ bodies and gender, beyond the uniform’s aesthetic dimension. In response to this criticism, the company plans to make changes to the blouse design (Milliyet, 2023).

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Figures 20 and 21: British Airways' 2023 uniforms designed by Ozwald Boateng. Although the uniforms include inclusive elements such as headscarves and jumpsuits, the sheer blouses have drawn criticism (Milliyet, 2023). Milliyet.

(December 9,

2023)..milliyet.com.tr/dunya/unlu-havayolu-cuvalladi-seffaf-bluz-skandali-Source: British Airways Media Centre (Accessed June 2, 2025).

Following comments about the staff's underwear, the company apologized and withdrew the white transparent shirt design shown in Figure 21, replacing it with jumpsuit-style uniforms that do not reveal undergarments (Milliyet, 2023).

However, the transparency of the silk blouses worn by female staff caused discomfort among employees as their underwear became visible; thus, it became evident that this issue extends beyond the aesthetic aspect of the uniform, highlighting how sensitive an area it is regarding the representation of employees' bodies and gender. This situation can be evaluated within the context of institutions "staging" individuals according to specific social norms (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990). In response to these criticisms, the company plans to make changes to the blouse design

(iii) The Tension of Representation at the Intersection of Grace and Obedience

Singapore Airlines' "Singapore Girl" representation—dressing female flight attendants in the traditional Malaysian "kebaya" as their uniform—has combined the brand image with grace and hospitality. While Singapore Airlines' "Singapore Girl" image associates female flight attendants with elegance and hospitality, it simultaneously confines them to the submissive and traditional social roles found in Asian culture. This dual identity, through the representation of women as both elegant and passive, demonstrates the reproduction of cultural stereotypes at the institutional level. This situation highlights the conflict between social identity and corporate image.

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*Figures 22 and 23: Singapore Airlines' "Singapore Girl" icon depicts female flight attendants wearing the traditional Malaysian-style kebaya dress. While this uniform reflects cultural identity, it has been criticized for reinforcing gender and cultural stereotypes. Source: CabinCrew24. (2025). *Singapore Airlines uniforms and cabin crew roles*. singaporeairlinesuniforms*

The posture of the flight attendants depicted in Figure 22 and the uniform design have been criticized as gendered and cultural stereotypes that confine Asian women to “submissive” and “traditional” social roles. This situation serves as an important example of how gender is reproduced through institutional representational practices. In response to these criticisms, Singapore Airlines implemented a uniform update in 2008 for male cabin crew members, featuring navy suits and colored ties (Galibert, 2008). These criticisms align with Goffman’s notion that the individual is “placed on stage” as a figure representing institutional roles. Singapore Airlines’ “Singapore Girl” image reinforces the corporate identity by confining female employees to aesthetic and traditional behavioral patterns. Thus, the uniform becomes an effective tool for reproducing gender norms and institutional representations. (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990).

(iv) Comfort in Uniforms, Gender-Neutral Representation, and the Reconstruction of Corporate Image

AnadoluJet’s uniform policy aims to create a service-oriented and inclusive corporate image through a simple, functional, and gender-neutral design. Gender distinctions in the visual representations of female and male employees have gradually diminished, giving way to a more neutral and professional language. By reflecting this flexibility in its uniform design, AnadoluJet facilitates the reshaping of gender roles (Butler, 1990).

According to Goffman’s theory of symbolic interaction, organizations “stage” individuals according to specific social roles and symbolically organize these role representations (Goffman, 1959). AnadoluJet’s encouragement of sneaker use

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without distinguishing between men and women represents an egalitarian approach in this staging. The preference for pants in uniforms and the selection of neutral colors such as dark navy can be interpreted as a conscious choice to avoid the visual reproduction of gender roles.



Figures 24 and 25: AnadoluJet cabin crew uniforms; with their simple, functional, and gender-neutral design, they emphasize professionalism and equality. Source: AnadoluJet. (March 31, 2024). Soaring into the Future with Our New Uniforms! [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/FHnh6wDIokQ> (Accessed June 2, 2025).

AnadoluJet's streamlined and functional uniform policy strengthens the brand's modern and inclusive identity, offering a visual strategy aligned with its economic positioning (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, these visual arrangements have a direct impact on the organization's reputation and social status (Bourdieu, 1986). As seen in Figures 24 and 25, AnadoluJet's uniform design stands out as an egalitarian and inclusive representation strategy rather than one that reproduces gender roles.

(v) Young, Innovative, and Inclusive Uniform Policy

Pegasus Airlines adopted an innovative and inclusive approach to uniforms through a competition it launched in 2010 for young designers. Sporty and comfortable designs made of denim reflect the lifestyle of the younger generation while reshaping professional identity and gender performances in an egalitarian and neutral manner (Milliyet, 2010).

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Figures 26 and 27: Pegasus's sporty, dynamic, and comfortable denim uniforms reflect a youthful and inclusive approach to representation. Source: kabinmemuru.com. (2025). Pegasus flight attendant uniforms 2025. (Accessed June 2, 2025), kabinmemuru.com/pegasus-hostes-kiyafetleri-2025

As can be observed in Figures 26 and 27, Pegasus's approach demonstrates its stance on challenging traditional gender roles in visual representation (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, the organization's sensitivity to current social transformations and the corporate identity strategies shaped in this direction confer prestige upon it in the social sphere (Bourdieu, 1986).

Indeed, Pegasus's commitment to increasing the proportion of female employees by joining IATA's "25by2025" initiative and its efforts to maintain gender balance in management positions are among the concrete indicators of this symbolic capital. By signing this initiative, Pegasus has committed to increasing the representation of female employees (Demirören News Agency, 2019).

In 2022, 34% of the company's workforce consisted of women (Pegasus Airlines Inc., 2023). When evaluated alongside the transformation in its uniform policy, this corporate commitment stands out as a concrete demonstration of a will toward gender equality and inclusivity.

Discussion

This study examines the five airlines comprising its sample—along with their uniform policies and forms of corporate representation—across five sections, analyzing them on a company-by-company basis through historical and visual dimensions. These five airlines were analyzed using visual corporate communication materials within the framework of this study. The findings reveal the relationship between uniform-based representations and professional identity and corporate structure.

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(i) Reinforcement of Gender Codes in Digital Representations

On airline companies' digital platforms, female employees are frequently presented through themes of aesthetics, elegance, and a friendly demeanor, while male employees are highlighted through images of technical competence and leadership. This visual distinction, as Hall (1997) notes, points to the cultural and ideological construction processes of identities. This gender-based distinction is reproduced through visual representations and integrated into the organizational identity.

(ii) Gender Performance Through Uniforms

While aesthetic elements such as skirts, makeup, and high-heeled shoes are emphasized in uniforms for female cabin crew, male employees are represented through simple and functional designs within a masculine framework. This difference indicates that women are expected to present a representation based on outward appearance, while men are expected to demonstrate a performance focused on authority and technical competence (Butler, 1990). In this sense, the uniform is not merely clothing; it is the visual carrier of corporate gender norms.

(iii) The Exceptional Representation of Female Pilots

According to data from the General Directorate of Civil Aviation, women account for only 3.5% of pilots in the sector. (SHGM, 2018) Female pilots adapt to the male-dominated professional structure by wearing similar uniforms; yet, in the public eye, they are constantly highlighted as "female pilots," and their professional identities are defined through their gender. This situation constitutes a typical example of being symbolically overrepresented despite their small numbers: While female pilots attract attention through their visibility, they are simultaneously forced to constantly re-establish their professional legitimacy.

(iv) Dramaturgical Identities in Uniforms

According to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach, institutions are a stage, and employees are actors playing roles on this stage. In this context, female employees are often presented as "gentle and elegant," while male employees are portrayed as embodying "authority and control." Uniforms, in turn, become visual costumes that reinforce these roles. This form of representation reveals how visibility functions as a strategic tool in the staging of organizational identities.

(v) Symbolic Capital and Uniforms

Within Bourdieu's (1986) framework of symbolic capital, uniforms imbue meaning not only for employees but also for organizational values and cultural identities. For example, Singapore Airlines' Sarong Kebaya design integrates Eastern culture with its global brand image; Turkish Airlines' uniform, designed by Ettore Bilotta, strikes a balance between national identity and international professionalism. These examples demonstrate that the uniform also serves as an ideological medium of representation.

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(vi) Visual Culture and Gender Representations

Berger's (1972) theory of ways of seeing emphasizes that visual presentations are biased and selective. In airline advertisements, female employees are typically portrayed as aesthetic and inviting, while men are highlighted for their technical and authoritative qualities. Within this framework, Mirzoeff's (2011) concept of "visual hegemony" explains how institutions shape identities and roles through their visual communication language. Representations are ideological tools that shape not only individuals but also institutional structures.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that corporate uniforms in the civil aviation sector are not merely functional garments; they are multi-layered visual representations intertwined with gender roles, professional identities, and corporate ideologies. As visual culture becomes increasingly decisive in corporate communication strategies, it inevitably imbues elements such as uniforms with political meanings. By drawing on Hall's theory of representation, Butler's performative approach to identity, Goffman's dramaturgical theory, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, the study has provided a conceptual framework for understanding inequalities in corporate representation. Analyses of airline companies' uniform policies reveal that female employees are associated with aesthetic and emotional domains, while male employees are linked to technical competence and authority. In this context, the uniform is not merely an element that shapes individual identities according to corporate norms; it is also a representational tool continuously reproduced through visual strategies. Consequently, by examining how visual presentations in the airline industry intertwine with professional identities and corporate values, this study offers a critical and original contribution to the literature of communication studies and cultural studies. The findings answer the research question by revealing how uniforms function as visual tools that both reproduce and transform gender-based occupational identities. The study highlights the need for more inclusive and reflective uniform design approaches in the aviation sector. Future research could further expand this analysis by incorporating audience reception research or employee perspectives.

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Abstract

This article analyzes how Devlet Bahçeli's post-2023 discourse constructs a moralized regime of truth in Türkiye's competitive authoritarian context. Based on a qualitative analysis of parliamentary speeches and X posts, the study examines how *hakikat* is framed as a moral and civilizational attribute grounded in national unity, loyalty, and state authority. The findings show that truth is not relativized but recentralized, with dissent recoded as moral and epistemic deviance. Conceptualized as epistemic populism, this discourse fuses populist moral dualism with claims of epistemic authority, transforming truth into a mechanism of political alignment rather than deliberation. The article contributes to post-truth scholarship by highlighting a non-relativist configuration of post-truth politics and advances research on Turkish political communication by foregrounding the epistemic role of nationalist-populist discourse.

Keywords: Post-Truth, Devlet Bahçeli, Turkish Political Discourse, Populism, MHP

Introduction

Türkiye's political trajectory since the early 2010s has increasingly been characterized by a transition from defective democracy to competitive authoritarianism, as institutions that once provided horizontal accountability have been systematically eroded. Esen and Gümüştü (2016) document how, especially after 2011, the ruling party expanded executive dominance by weakening the separation of powers, politicizing the judiciary, and blurring state-party boundaries, producing an uneven playing field in which elections remained formally competitive yet substantively unfair. This deterioration accelerated after the collapse of the 2013–2015 peace process and culminated in the consolidation of the People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) in 2023, where the Justice and Development Party (henceforth, AKP) governed with the ideological support of the Nationalist Action Party (henceforth, MHP). Özbudun (2014) argues that Türkiye's shift reflects an increasingly majoritarian conception of democracy that legitimizes executive aggrandizement and minimizes institutional constraints. Somer (2016) further situates this transformation within a broader model of new authoritarianism marked by the erosion of the rule of law, media capture, and crisis-driven legitimation strategies that reconfigure state-society relations toward personalized and partisan forms of power. Together, these developments have elevated political discourse into a central terrain of governance, a site through which authorities determine whose claims to knowledge, truth, and political credibility can be recognized within the national public sphere.

Within this environment, Devlet Bahçeli, the long-standing leader of the MHP, has become a key actor in shaping the discursive architecture of the post-2023 order. Although AKP dominates the executive, MHP provides the coalition with an ideological vocabulary grounded in nationalism, moral discipline, and state-centered conceptions of political legitimacy. As Cengiz (2021) argues, the party's trajectory is marked by ideological immoderation, a durable fusion of Turkish nationalism, religio-moral conservatism, and a historically rooted understanding of the state as a sacred custodian of national unity. Having emerged in the late 1960s

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as an ultra-nationalist and anti-communist movement, the MHP cultivated a worldview centered on loyalty and security-oriented political reasoning, a tradition that Bahçeli has reinforced through doctrinal rigidity since 1997. This ideological repertoire underpins his post-2023 discourse, which relies on a moralized epistemic vocabulary such as *hakikat*, *tecelli*, sincerity, unity, and warnings against deception to frame politics as a struggle over moral and cognitive order in a context of weakened institutional checks. In a political environment shaped by competitive authoritarianism, this rhetoric casts journalists, intellectuals, opposition parties, and various critics as agents of epistemic deviance rather than legitimate interlocutors, echoing Esen and Gümüüşçü's (2016) analysis of discursive dominance, media capture, and the delegitimization of opponents as core mechanisms of governance. As avenues of accountability shrink, political identity becomes the basis of epistemic credibility, and truth shifts from a matter of deliberation to a marker of moral belonging reserved for those aligned with the loyal national community.

These patterns align with the broader structure of right-wing populist discourse identified by Bobba and McDonnell (2016), who outline four elements that organize populist narratives: the people, the elites, the others and democracy. This structure parallels Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2017) characterization of populism as a thin-centered ideology that divides society into morally charged camps of pure people and corrupt elites, while claiming privileged access to the national will. In Bahçeli's discourse, the people appear as a virtuous and cohesive national community defined by sincerity, discipline and loyalty, whereas elites are cast as actors who distort this will. The category of the others encompasses domestic and external groups presented as existential threats, reflecting the exclusionary and securitized logic common to right-wing populism. Through notions such as *tecelli*, democracy is reframed as the moral expression of a unified national will rather than the outcome of pluralistic deliberation. Together, these elements create a discursive environment in which truth becomes inseparable from political loyalty and dissent is recoded as deception.

Türkiye's trajectory illustrates a distinctive variant of post-truth politics that departs from Western contexts often associated with epistemic relativism or the erosion of verification norms. Instead, the Turkish case exhibits a moralized and non-relativist form of epistemic closure in which truth is recentralized and claimed as the exclusive property of the loyal national community. As Rogenhofer and Panievsky (2020) show in their comparison of Türkiye, India and Israel, populist leaders in deeply divided societies frequently moralize truth and frame dissent as a threat to the nation, producing environments in which truth functions as a resource to be defended against internal and external enemies. Similar strategies can be observed in the leaderships of Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu, who deploy moralized truth claims to justify exclusion and consolidate authority. Yet Türkiye differs in its combination of competitive authoritarian institutions, state-centered nationalism and coalition-based ideological production, which together create a more structured regime of epistemic control that aligns truth with loyalty and delegitimizes alternative interpretations.

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Against this background, the article conceptualizes Bahçeli's post-2023 rhetoric as an instance of epistemic populism, a mode of discourse in which truth is defined through moral belonging rather than empirical verification. Epistemic populism merges populist moral dualism with claims of epistemic authority by attributing inherent truthfulness to the people and casting opponents as intrinsically deceptive. In Bahçeli's discourse, terms such as *hakikat* and *tecelli* morally anchor truth to loyalty, unity and state fidelity, transforming truth from a domain of deliberation into a mechanism of political alignment and reframing epistemic tensions as moral and security challenges that legitimize vigilance and exclusion. The study therefore asks: (1) how Bahçeli constructs a moralized regime of truth in post-2023 Türkiye, and (2) how this discourse exemplifies epistemic populism within a competitive authoritarian context? By addressing these questions, the article extends research on post-truth politics by showing how truth can be recentralized rather than relativized, contributes to scholarship on Turkish political communication by analysing how epistemic authority is articulated through nationalist and moral vocabularies, and advances the study of populism by demonstrating how truth becomes a domain of knowledge governance that connects ideology, style and strategy across institutional and digital arenas.

Political and Institutional Context

The consolidation of the People's Alliance after 2018 established a political environment marked by executive dominance, constrained pluralism, and the progressive erosion of boundaries between party and state. The AKP's transformation into a dominant party during the 2000s, driven by electoral expansion and the absorption of the centre-right, laid the structural foundations of competitive authoritarianism. As Çarkoğlu (2011) observes, declining fragmentation and electoral volatility reduced the prospects for genuine alternation in power, enabling the governing bloc to operate within a system that remained formally competitive yet substantively asymmetric. This configuration created the conditions under which the MHP could assume a more decisive role within the governing alliance.

The MHP's influence within this architecture is rooted in its longstanding ideological rigidity. The party has consistently advanced a maximalist orientation grounded in Turkish ethno-nationalism, religious majoritarianism, and a security-centred conception of politics. Cengiz (2021) characterizes this "ideological immoderation" as a durable feature sustained by the fusion of Islam and nationalism, close alignment with state security priorities, and the symbolic authority of *Türkeş*. While such rigidity historically constrained the party's programmatic flexibility, the post-2015 political environment transformed these features into strategic assets, enabling the MHP to exert influence without assuming full executive responsibility.

This capacity is anchored in a deeper institutional posture. As Çınar and Arıkan (2002) argue, the MHP has long defined itself less as a party operating within pluralist competition than as a guardian of the state. Emerging during the Cold War and later hardened around the perceived threat of Kurdish separatism, this self-conception aligned seamlessly with the AKP's shift toward centralized,

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security-oriented governance following the collapse of the peace process. Over time, the ideological repertoires of the two parties converged, producing a mutually reinforcing partnership grounded in state-centric nationalism and securitized political reasoning.

This convergence unfolded alongside a broader transformation in the governing bloc's discursive orientation. As Dudlák (2025) demonstrates, since the mid-2010s the AKP has increasingly articulated political authority through a civilizational discourse that fuses Islamism, neo-Ottomanism, and anti-Western resentment into a moralized account of national identity. This discursive shift reframed political conflict as a civilizational struggle, securitized dissent, and redefined truth claims as expressions of moral and cultural authenticity rather than outcomes of institutional deliberation. Within this environment, loyalty to the nation and the state emerged as a prerequisite for epistemic credibility. The MHP's nationalist and moral-statist vocabulary thus did not merely align with the AKP's authoritarian consolidation but actively reinforced and stabilized this civilizational framing of politics.

Under Devlet Bahçeli's leadership, the MHP's influence within the alliance expanded further. Although his personal political style is often portrayed as restrained, the party's ideological core has remained intact. Organizational networks such as Ülkü Ocakları, nationalist unions, and conservative-nationalist media outlets provide the infrastructure sustaining this continuity. Bahçeli has functioned as a "balancing authoritarian actor," contributing ideological coherence, parliamentary discipline, and symbolic legitimacy. His influence derives less from direct control over executive institutions than from agenda-setting power in areas such as national identity, security policy, and the boundaries of legitimate political representation.

The introduction of the presidential system in 2017 intensified these dynamics. By incentivizing pre-electoral alliances, the system granted the MHP leverage disproportionate to its electoral size. The party's stable vote share, documented by Çarkoğlu (2011), rendered it indispensable for majoritarian legitimacy. As the AKP increasingly relied on identity-based and security-oriented narratives, Bahçeli's discourse both justified and deepened the authoritarian turn. The alliance thus rests on a shared ethno-religious majoritarian vision in which dissent is routinely framed as a threat to national unity.

As a result, the People's Alliance constitutes a hybrid political arrangement that is electorally grounded yet institutionally skewed. A dominant party and an ideologically rigid far-right party jointly produce a form of authoritarian stability in which executive centralization and nationalist immoderation mutually reinforce one another. This evolving configuration, particularly between the 2023 elections and October 2024, provides the political context within which the present study situates its analysis.

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Populism as a Thin-Centered Ideology

Populism is best conceptualized as a thin-centered ideology whose restricted conceptual core revolves around a moralized antagonism between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite.” Mudde (2004) distinguishes this worldview as the defining feature of populism: political conflict is not framed in terms of competing interests or rational disagreements but as an ethical struggle between virtue and corruption. This moral absolutism simplifies political life by asserting that the *volonté générale* of the people should override institutional mediation. However, because this ideological core is exceedingly limited, it cannot independently generate a coherent political program. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) therefore classify populism as a thin-centered ideology that must attach itself to thicker ideological traditions, nationalism, socialism, religious conservatism, authoritarian statism, to acquire substantive meaning. Populism provides the moral grammar, while the host ideology supplies the content that defines who “the people” and “the elite” actually are.

This structural thinness also explains populism’s adaptability. Since “the people” is a symbolic, constructed category rather than an empirically given social group, its identity is continuously shaped by the ideological environment (Mudde, 2004). As a result, populism can manifest in left-wing, right-wing, religious, or nationalist variants without losing its essential character. Yet thinness alone cannot account for the remarkable ideological volatility often associated with populist politics. Taş (2022) addresses this gap by theorizing populism’s “chameleonic quality,” arguing that populist movements survive “despite and through” ideological shifts. Populism’s “empty-shell composition” allows it to resignify symbols, myths, and demands across changing contexts, reconstructing meaning as political conditions evolve (Taş, 2022).

Laclau (2005) argues that populism should not be defined by its specific ideas or policy content, but by how it organizes political demands. In his view, populism becomes possible when many different social demands remain unmet by institutions. When this happens, these demands begin to come together around a shared sense of frustration. Laclau (2005) calls this the “logic of equivalence”: different groups start to see themselves as part of the same struggle because they all face the same obstacle. Through this process, populism does not represent an already existing group; instead, it creates a new collective subject that comes to be called “the people.”

A key mechanism in this process is the use of empty signifiers. As more demands join this emerging coalition, the terms that unify them must become broader and more flexible. Words such as “the nation,” “justice,” or “the people” gain political power not because they describe a precise program, but because their vagueness allows many different groups to identify with them. The more diverse the coalition becomes, the more these signifiers must “empty out” their specific content to function as a shared rallying point.

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Laclau also emphasizes that “the people” is not a fixed, pre-given social group waiting to be represented. Instead, it is something produced by populist discourse itself. Populism transforms scattered demands into a unified political identity by creating boundaries, assigning meanings, and building connections among them. This insight complements Mudde’s (2004) ideational definition by showing that the real power of populism lies not in what it claims to stand for, but in how it structures political meaning. Through discursive practices, populism turns fragmented grievances into a collective political force.

In Türkiye, the thin-centered core of populism interacts with a moral-statist tradition. In this tradition, the state is imagined as the guardian of both national virtue and epistemic authority. This ideological environment thickens the populist core with nationalist, civilizational, and moral content, making loyalty to the state appear synonymous with loyalty to “the people.” Through this fusion, populism’s Manichean antagonism becomes mapped onto moralized narratives of national unity, security, and authenticity. The result is a hybrid formation in which thin-centered ideology, chameleonic adaptability, and Laclauian logics of equivalence combine to produce a powerful mechanism of political articulation and truth construction.

Post-Truth: Relativist and Non-Relativist Approaches **Relativist Approaches to Post-Truth**

Relativist approaches interpret the post-truth condition as the culmination of a broader epistemic fragmentation and pluralization in which the foundations of truth, justification, and authority become socially and culturally contingent. Rather than viewing post-truth as the victory of falsehood, relativist thinkers argue that contemporary societies have lost a shared epistemic ground. This shift is rooted in long-standing philosophical critiques of objectivity and universal reason. Boghossian (2007) captures this view by defining epistemic relativism as the position that “truth and justification depend on a particular conceptual scheme or cultural framework” (pp. 2–3). In this sense, what counts as a valid belief or credible source is determined not by universal standards but by the norms of specific communities. Because there is “no framework-independent way to determine what is true,” disagreements across epistemic frameworks become difficult, if not impossible, to resolve (Boghossian, 2007).

Harsin (2015) extends this philosophical account into the digital media environment, arguing that contemporary societies have shifted from coherent “regimes of truth” to fragmented “regimes of post-truth,” characterized by proliferating and competing “truth markets” (p. 327). In these markets, truth claims circulate across countless platforms, feeds, and micro-publics, each with its own norms of credibility. The breakdown of fiduciary trust in traditional arbiters, journalists, scientists, courts, creates an epistemic landscape in which “institutions can no longer coordinate truth claims” (Harsin, 2015, p. 329). This environment is intensified by algorithmic personalization and attention economies, where visibility, affect, and virality function as indicators of truthfulness. As Harsin notes, truth now unfolds within “an

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affectively charged attention economy” (2015, p. 329), making emotional resonance more politically influential than empirical verification.

From this perspective, post-truth is not primarily a product of intentional deception but the structural outcome of epistemic pluralization. As competing “truth games” multiply, each community becomes embedded in its own epistemic world, governed by internal standards of evidence, identity, and meaning (Harsin, 2015, p. 330). Boghossian (2007) warns that this leads to a “collapse of objective knowledge” (pp. 10–11) because no shared epistemic criteria remain available for adjudicating between conflicting claims. The relativist condition thus does not deny the existence of truth but disperses it across multiple, incompatible frameworks.

Baer (2018) clarifies how this relativist environment can fuel post-truth rhetoric. She argues that when the socially constructed nature of authority is misunderstood as arbitrary or purely subjective, it creates fertile ground for the belief that “expertise or source authority is merely a matter of opinion” (p. 73). This misconception reflects what she calls “absolute relativism,” the notion that all viewpoints are equally valid and all facts are mere constructions. Baer’s intervention is significant because it reveals how post-truth discourse often exploits such oversimplified forms of relativism to erode trust in expertise. She counters this with the concept of “weak relativism,” which acknowledges cultural and contextual differences in epistemic authority while still affirming shared principles of evidence, reasoning, and evaluation (pp. 74–75). In other words, authority is indeed constructed and contextual, but not arbitrary; facts remain meaningful, and empirical standards continue to function even within culturally diverse epistemic communities.

Taken together, these perspectives frame post-truth as the result of a long-term shift from unified epistemic regimes to fragmented, culturally situated systems of justification. Truth becomes plural, contested, and increasingly mediated by identity and affect. The relativist approach thus explains post-truth politics not as a deliberate rejection of truth but as the structural outcome of epistemic pluralization, digital fragmentation, and misconstrued notions of contextual authority. In this view, truth claims become increasingly dependent on social location rather than shared standards of verification.

Non-Relativist Approaches to Post-Truth

Non-relativist approaches argue that post-truth politics does not emerge from epistemic pluralization or the collapse of universal truth frameworks. Instead, it is a strategic political project that intentionally erodes the epistemic conditions required for democratic communication. McIntyre (2018) captures this dynamic with precision, noting that “post-truth is not the claim that there is no truth, but the claim that truth does not matter” (p. 2). In this view, the central mechanisms of post-truth are epistemic manipulation, institutional delegitimization, and the displacement of verification by affect and loyalty. The objective is not to replace truth with alternative facts but to collapse the distinction between truth and falsehood, producing a public increasingly dependent on partisan and emotional cues rather than shared standards of evaluation.

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McIntyre (2018) traces this strategy to practices such as science denial, propaganda, and the cultivation of epistemic cynicism designed to “create a general atmosphere of doubt” (pp. 3–4). This atmosphere destabilizes democratic judgment and undermines institutions, journalism, science, courts, universities, that serve as arbiters of factual authority. Emotional identification can “crowd out evidence”, allowing leaders to re-anchor truth in charisma, moral affect, and shared identity rather than institutional verification (McIntyre, 2018, p. 10).

This strategic manipulation of truth becomes particularly visible in Türkiye. Taş (2022) demonstrates that Turkish post-truth politics operates not only through epistemic destabilization but also through chronopolitics, the strategic reorganization of temporal narratives. Erdoğanist discourse fuses an essentialized Ottoman past, a conspiratorial present marked by existential siege, and a future hinging on national redemption. This fusion constructs a closed temporal universe in which empirical inconsistencies become signs of moral struggle and dissent is rendered historically treasonous. Chronopolitics thus complements McIntyre’s account: truth is not relativized but subordinated to a leader-centric moral narrative that governs the meaning of past, present, and future.

Yılmaz and Ertürk (2021) further show that Türkiye’s authoritarian Islamist populism anchors epistemic authority in affective and necro-political symbolism, mobilizing emotions such as grief, sacrifice, pride, and national innocence as epistemic touchstones. The AKP’s discourse frames politics as a struggle between the “national” (milli) and the “anti-national” (gayrı milli), a moralized opposition that renders empirical disagreement illegitimate. Necro-political motifs, martyrs, funerals, collective sacrifice, serve as mechanisms for authenticating truth claims: what resonates with national suffering is treated as epistemically valid, while competing interpretations are dismissed as conspiracies or elite deception. In such a regime, truth becomes dependent on affective loyalty, not evidence.

Waisbord (2018) reinforces this non-relativist interpretation by demonstrating that populism is fundamentally at odds with the communication commons, a democratic space grounded in diversity, tolerance, fact-based reasoning, and truth-seeking. Populism’s political ontology is binary and agonistic; it reduces politics to a Manichaean conflict between “the people” and “the elite,” rendering truth inherently partisan and moralized. As Waisbord notes, populism “espouses post-truth politics” because it rejects the notion of shared truth as a democratic good, treating truth instead as the property of the virtuous people against corrupt elites (pp. 21–23). Its dismissal of mediating institutions, journalistic oversight, plural public spheres, independent courts, mirrors McIntyre’s account of targeted institutional erosion. Populism’s unified conception of “the people,” as Waisbord argues, produces an epistemic environment in which criticism is reinterpreted as elite conspiracy and factual disagreement as betrayal (Waisbord, 2018, pp. 23–24).

When read together, McIntyre, Taş, Yılmaz & Ertürk, and Waisbord reveal a coherent non-relativist pattern: post-truth politics in Türkiye is not the consequence of epistemic diversity but the strategic recentering of truth around a morally sanctified

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national subject. Truth is reorganized around the leader's moral authority, the nation's sacred temporality, and affective bonds of loyalty and sacrifice. Rather than dispersing truth across communities, as relativist theories suggest, post-truth populism in Türkiye recenters and monopolizes truth through the destruction of institutional credibility, the emotional scripting of national time, and a Manichaean moral order that dictates who can speak truth and who cannot.

The Moralization of Knowledge and the Politics of Truth

The moralization of knowledge and the politics of truth form the central mechanism through which contemporary populism extends its Manichean antagonism into the epistemic sphere. In this dynamic, truth is no longer understood as the result of institutional verification or deliberative contestation but as a moral attribute believed to reside within the authentic people and their legitimate representatives. Knowledge ceases to be a public good mediated by expertise and becomes a proprietary resource of a morally purified national community. This conceptual shift draws on Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2017) account of populism as a thin-centered ideology rooted in moral dualism, Krämer's (2017) discussion of emotionally immediate and unmediated truth claims, and Waisbord's (2018) argument that populism collapses the boundary between identity and knowledge by turning epistemic conflict into a contest between virtue and corruption.

Within such a moralized order, epistemic authority is authenticated through affective alignment and political loyalty rather than empirical justification. Institutions historically responsible for producing and arbitrating knowledge, including journalism, the judiciary, universities, and scientific bodies, are reframed as corrupted extensions of a deceitful elite whose claims cannot be trusted. As Waisbord (2018) notes, dissent is interpreted not as legitimate critique but as moral betrayal, marking the dissenter as outside the virtuous community. The result is an epistemic environment in which credibility becomes inseparable from conformity, and disagreement is pathologized as evidence of disloyalty.

In Türkiye, the moralization of knowledge assumes distinctive institutional and discursive forms. Ünal (2025) demonstrates that the pursuit of epistemic hegemony has become a central state objective, as critical, secular, and gender-focused scholarship is delegitimized as elitist or immoral. At the same time, new infrastructures of knowledge production, including regime-aligned universities, councils, and think-tanks, are constructed to generate compliant and morally sanctioned truth. These developments combine repression with proactive institutional engineering and emotional governance, shifting epistemic legitimacy away from verification and toward affective intensity and moral resonance.

Taş (2022) further shows that the moralization of knowledge is structured through chronopolitics, a temporal logic that fuses an idealized Ottoman-Islamic past, a conspiratorial present under permanent siege, and a redemptive national future into a unified narrative of collective struggle. Truth claims gain legitimacy when they align with this temporal script. Empirical contradictions are not treated as falsification but are absorbed as further evidence of an ongoing moral conflict.

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Chronopolitics thus provides the narrative architecture through which epistemic authority is consolidated and insulated from empirical challenge.

Yılmaz and Ertürk (2021) demonstrate that necro-political symbolism, particularly martyrdom, sacrifice, and national grief, functions as an epistemic filter that validates narratives resonating with collective suffering while denouncing competing accounts as treacherous or foreign-inspired. Yılmaz and Morieson (2023) add a civilizational dimension, showing that truth is increasingly framed as inherent to Islamic-Ottoman civilization, whereas Western epistemic forms, such as human rights reporting, secular scholarship, and liberal theory, are portrayed as ideological weapons designed to erode national morality.

Taken together, these processes constitute a comprehensive politics of truth in which knowledge is systematically moralized, re-centred, and monopolized. Independent institutions are delegitimized, temporality is reorganized into a sacred national narrative, affect and necro-political symbolism become criteria for determining truth, and civilizational identity emerges as the ultimate warrant of epistemic legitimacy. In Türkiye's post-2023 environment, truth does not belong to evidence or deliberation but to those who demonstrate unwavering loyalty to the morally defined nation and its leadership. To know correctly is to belong correctly, and to speak otherwise is to place oneself outside both truth and the moral community.

Methodology

Research Design and Analytical Orientation

This study examines how Devlet Bahçeli's post-2023 parliamentary and digital discourse constructs, stabilizes, and governs "truth" (hakikat) as a moralized, securitized, and civilizational category in Türkiye's contemporary political landscape. The analysis adopts a qualitative interpretive research design that combines reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Discourse is approached not merely as representational language, but as a constitutive mechanism of epistemic governance through which political authority defines the conditions of truth, legitimacy, and political belonging.

Reflexive TA is employed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) formulation, which conceptualizes analysis as an active, researcher-driven, and theoretically informed interpretive process. Coding was conducted inductively and at a latent level, enabling the identification of moral, epistemic, affective, and temporal assumptions embedded in Bahçeli's discourse beyond surface lexical patterns. Importantly, themes were not treated as static categories. Instead, they were conceptualized as epistemic formations whose meanings and political functions are reconfigured across time and across communicative arenas.

CDA complements this thematic orientation in two interrelated ways. First, the study draws on van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (2008; 2015), which conceptualizes discourse as a primary site through which political elites shape shared knowledge, ideologies, and mental models. Second, it engages the

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discourse-historical approach (DHA) developed by De Cillia et al. (1999), which foregrounds discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification or mitigation within a diachronic and context-sensitive framework. These approaches enable the analysis to connect micro-level linguistic choices with macro-level structures of power, ideology, and institutional authority.

Corpus Construction, Delimitation, and Data Sources

The corpus comprises twenty-two texts produced between May 2023 and August 2024: ten parliamentary group addresses delivered at the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) and twelve posts authored by Devlet Bahçeli on X. Texts were selected based on their temporal proximity to key political and geopolitical milestones and their discursive density with respect to truth, morality, national unity, and security. These milestones include the immediate post-election period following the 2023 general elections, the Republic's centenary, the Gaza crisis of October–November 2023, the aftermath of the 2024 local elections, and major domestic security incidents during 2024.

All parliamentary group speeches were retrieved from the official archival section of the MHP website, ensuring textual authenticity and consistency across versions. X posts attributed to Devlet Bahçeli were collected from archived sources and subsequently cross-verified against his official X account. Archived versions were preserved using platform-based archiving tools and manually stored records, and were cross-checked against the official account as of December 2025 to account for potential deletions, edits, or platform-related access restrictions.

The corpus was deliberately delimited prior to Bahçeli's parliamentary speech of 22 October 2024, which marked a discernible discursive reconfiguration characterized by the emergence of resolution-oriented language and the recalibration of previously rigid moral and securitizing boundaries. This intervention is treated as inaugurating a post-consolidation phase oriented toward the performative deployment of epistemic authority and was excluded in order to preserve analytical coherence and focus on the construction and stabilization of the moralized regime of truth.

Analytical Template and Coding Procedure

All texts in the corpus were analyzed using a standardized, multi-layered analytical template developed through iterative engagement with the data. This template operationalized the integration of reflexive TA and CDA by organizing each text according to recurring analytical dimensions, including but not limited to: forms of truth articulation, sources of epistemic authority, affective framing, temporal construction, security logic, enemy construction, moral lexicon, institutional legitimacy, party identity, and processes of political delegitimization.

Within each analytical dimension, coding followed a consistent structure comprising: (1) analytically defined codes, (2) illustrative textual excerpts, and (3) interpretive commentary situating these excerpts within broader epistemic and

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ideological formations. This code–example–interpretation triad ensured analytic transparency and facilitated systematic comparison across texts and communicative genres.

Rather than imposing a fixed coding scheme in advance, the analytical template evolved reflexively as patterns recurred across the corpus. This process allowed for the expansion, refinement, or consolidation of analytical dimensions in response to the data. Diachronic shifts were identified through comparative analysis of code density, affective intensity, and securitizing logic across time, enabling the inductive reconstruction of higher-order themes and discursive phases.

CDA tools informed interpretation at every stage of analysis, particularly in tracing how nomination, predication, and argumentation strategies stabilized moral boundaries and epistemic hierarchies. Drawing on Fairclough’s (1992) insight that “form is part of content,” attention was paid to how genre conventions, modality, rhetorical intensity, and narrative sequencing contributed to the production and circulation of epistemic meaning.

Taken together, this methodological framework provides a transparent, replicable, and theoretically integrated basis for analyzing how truth is moralized, securitized, and governed across institutional and digital political communication in Türkiye’s post-2023 environment

Results

The analysis identified four diachronically ordered higher-order themes that organize the discursive construction of hakikat in Devlet Bahçeli’s parliamentary speeches and X posts in the post-2023 election period. These themes are constituted through recurring code clusters that emerge across distinct temporal segments and are reproduced across parliamentary and digital domains. Rather than functioning as discrete or isolated stages, they reflect patterned reconfigurations of epistemic authority, affective alignment, institutional reference, and security framing.

1. Reconstitution of the Civilizational and Moral Truth Frame, Hakikat is articulated as manifested revelation (tecelli), anchored in national conscience, founding authority, and civilizational continuity.
2. Moralized Truth and the Totalization of Threat, Truth claims are organized through moralized and securitized frames in which opposition, media, and external actors are discursively delegitimized.
3. The Global Moral War and Türkiye’s Protective Mission, International crisis is framed through codes of moral catastrophe, international delegitimization, and Türkiye’s positioning as a moral and diplomatic arbiter.
4. Total Securitization of the Domestic Sphere and the Re-Centering of the Alliance, Terror, political opposition, judicial authority, media, and digital platforms are integrated into an expanded security matrix centered on national unity and alliance discipline.

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Reconstitution of the Civilizational, Moral Truth Frame

Across the parliamentary speeches constituting the first theme, the corpus consistently produces a set of code clusters that define Bahçeli's post-election discourse. The most frequent and structurally central cluster is manifested_truth / revelation, marked by formulations such as "millet vicdanının tecellisidir" (it is the manifestation of the nation's conscience) and "seçimle tecelli eden TBMM" (the Parliament manifested through the election). These expressions code truth as an event of appearance or unfolding rather than argumentative verification, a pattern reinforced by parallel formulations such as "tezahür ve tekemmül eden ilerleyiş" (an advancement that manifests and matures).

A second stable cluster is Source of Truth = national_will / founding_authority, signaled through statements such as "egemenliğin yegâne sahibi büyük Türk milleti" (the great Turkish nation as the sole owner of sovereignty) and "TBMM'de mayalanmıştır" (it was fermented in the Grand National Assembly). This cluster expands through the coding of youth as truth-carriers: "çağa ve zamana yönelik mesajlarımızın taşıyıcı kolonu gençlerdir" (youth are the carrier column of our messages to the era).

Affective registers form another recurring cluster, gratitude/reverence/loyalty, signaled by expressions such as "Türk milletine şükranlarımı sunuyorum" (I extend my gratitude to the Turkish nation) and "sevgi ve saygıyla selamlıyorum" (I greet you with love and respect). These affective markers appear consistently at openings and closings and accompany references to unity and solidarity.

The corpus also generates a clear temporal_continuity cluster linking "geçmişin hatıraları" (the memories of the past) with "geleceğin yüksek hedefleri" (the lofty goals of the future), with the past coded as guarantor_of_the_future: "Şanlı geçmişimiz aydınlık geleceğimizin kefilidir" (our glorious past is the guarantor of our bright future). These formulations consistently place present political action within a past-to-future continuity frame.

A further cluster, national_unity and common identity, appears through recurring statements like "Hepimizin ortak paydası Türkiye'dir" (our common denominator is Türkiye) and "birlik, beraberlik, kardeşlik" (unity, solidarity, brotherhood). The moral_lexicon cluster is equally dense, with terms such as "fazilet," "edep," and "mukaddes" (virtue, decency, sacred) dominating alongside moralized evaluative terms including "güzel ahlak" (good morality) and condemnatory triads such as "günahdır, cinayettir, melanettir" (it is a sin, a crime, a wickedness).

Institutional grounding produces another stable coding field, founding_authority and delegated_responsibility, appearing in formulations like "Gazi Meclis kurucu niteliğiyle" (the Veteran Assembly with its founding character) and references to "tevdî edilen vekalet vazifesi" (the entrusted parliamentary mandate). Finally, although explicit post-truth or misinformation vocabulary does not surface in this phase, the corpus includes a minor but traceable correct_conduct / right_action cluster: expressions describing the need to "doğruyu bilmek, edep ile taşımak"

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(to know what is right and carry it with decency) function as boundary markers for proper vs. improper conduct, though without naming specific antagonistic actors at this stage.

Overall, this phase yields a coherent code set manifested_truth, national_will_as_epistemic_source, affective_reverence, temporal_continuity, unity, moral_vocabulary, and institutional_anchoring, that define the discursive pattern of the early post-election period.

Moralized Truth and the Totalization of Threat

Across the parliamentary speeches and X posts constituting the second theme, the corpus produces a dense pattern of codes marking a shift toward moralized and securitized truth claims. The corpus frequently encodes Truth_as_Moral_Clarity through formulations that establish truth as illumination opposed to darkness: "Medeniyet ve mehabet timsali Gazi Meclisimizi kim yok sayıyorsa... bir karanlık içindedir" (Whoever disregards our venerable Parliament is in darkness) and "Bizim yönümüz doğrudur, yolumuz doğrudur" (Our direction is correct, our path is correct). X posts extend this moral clarity into crisis settings, framing tragic events as undeniable fact through formulations such as "korkunç bir trajedinin bütün komplikasyonları" (all the complications of a terrible tragedy).

A parallel cluster establishes Source_of_Truth through national will, foundational authority, and moral ancestry. Parliamentary discourse anchors truth in the people's sovereign claim "Söz de, karar da Türk milletininindir" (Word and decision belong to the Turkish nation) and invokes Atatürk as an epistemic anchor through commemorative formulations. X posts similarly frame truth through national conscience, positioning "gerçekleri yansıtmayan... tehlikeli isnatlar" (claims failing to reflect the truth, dangerous imputations) against a morally grounded correctness.

The corpus constructs affect through combined registers of reverence and indignation. Parliamentary discourse codes reverence in heartfelt greetings while simultaneously encoding indignation: "CHP... yozlaşmanın uçurum dibine çakılmıştır" (CHP has crashed into the pit of degeneration). X posts intensify affective polarity through formulations such as "Çocuklar yaşasın, katiller kahrolsun" (Let the children live, may the killers perish) and "soykırıma varan kanlı tablo" (a bloody tableau amounting to genocide). Temporal coding frames crisis as part of a historical continuum, linking past heroism to present challenges and marking urgent thresholds through conditional imperatives.

A central cluster in this theme is delegitimization_of_opposition_and_media. Parliamentary discourse encodes opposition_as_moral_failure: "CHP... milli mensubiyetini kaybetmiştir" (CHP has lost its national belonging). X posts extend this through media delegitimization: "Bir avuç sözde uzman... nefret ve nifak aşısı yapmaktadır" (A handful of so-called experts inject hatred and discord). Security emerges as an equally explicit coding field, with parliamentary speeches framing terror as an existential tool "PKK terörü bir vasıta"dır" (PKK terror is a tool) and calling for eradication: "Bu haşaratların kökü kurutulacaktır" (The roots of these vermin will

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be eradicated). X posts integrate security with moral imperatives, demanding swift and unconditional intervention.

Finally, the corpus repeatedly codes international_delegitimization, particularly of the United States and Israel, framing U.S. involvement as partisan complicity and characterizing Israeli actions as "aleni insanlık suçu" (a blatant crime against humanity). These codes converge with domestic securitization to form a coherent pattern in which truth, morality, loyalty, threat, and security are tightly interlinked across parliamentary and digital discourse.

The Global Moral War and Türkiye's Protective Mission

The third theme generates a consolidated set of codes that frame international crisis as a moral and geopolitical field in which Türkiye is positioned as the essential agent of resolution. The corpus consistently encodes catastrophe_as_moral_truth through formulations that render suffering as self-evident moral fact: "Vahşet her gün yeni bir boyut kazanmaktadır" (the brutality gains a new dimension every day), "Soykırım raddesine ulaşan hunhar saldırılar" (savage attacks reaching the level of genocide), and "Filistinli masumlar kan revan içindedir" (innocent Palestinians are in blood and pain). This coding is reinforced through quantified suffering "4385 Filistinli... 1756 çocuk" (4385 Palestinians... 1756 children) which functions as numerical grounding for moral certainty.

A parallel cluster constructs delegitimization_of_International_Actors. International institutions are coded as inert "BM... kilitlemiştir" (the UN is locked), "İİT'den hiçbir şey çıkmamıştır" (nothing has come out of the OIC) while the United States is framed as complicit through partisan involvement and veto power. Israel is characterized through total moral condemnation: "acımsız ve ahlaksız saldırılar" (merciless and immoral attacks) and "savunmasız bir halk canlı hedef haline getirilmektedir" (a defenseless people are being turned into live targets).

The corpus amplifies Türkiye_as_moral_and_diplomatic_arbiter, framing the President as engaged in sincere pursuit of a solution and positioning Türkiye as the carrier of humanitarian, conscientious, and legal theses to the global agenda. This merges with Securitization_Through_Protective_Duty: "Gazze'yi koruma ve kollama misyonunu üstlenmek... ecdadımızın mirasıdır" (assuming the mission to protect Gaza is the legacy of our ancestors), culminating in the unconditional imperative "Türkiye süratle devreye girmeli... her neyse yapmalıdır" (Türkiye must swiftly intervene and do whatever is necessary).

Affective intensification forms a sustained code throughout. Emotional polarity escalates from "Çocuklar yaşasın, katiller kahrolsun" (let the children live, may the killers perish) to declarations that "Türk milletinin sabrı artık taşma noktasına ulaşmıştır" (the patience of the Turkish nation has reached a breaking point). A distinct cluster introduces Paramilitarized_Compassion, coding mobilizable publics within a moral-security register through formulations such as "Gönüllü Kudüs Sevdalıları... her türlü göreve hazırdır" (Volunteer Lovers of Jerusalem are ready for any duty). The theme closes with Temporal_and_Civilizational_Thresholding, linking

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the Gaza crisis to national-historical epistemic continuity through the declaration that the final verdict given in 1923 was confirmed in 2023, a formulation that absorbs international crisis into the *longue durée* of civilizational struggle.

Total Securitization of the Domestic Sphere and the Re-Centering of the Alliance

The fourth theme yields a dense configuration of codes through which internal security, alliance politics, and digital space are jointly securitized. One of the most salient clusters is *terror_as_total_ontological_threat*. The corpus codes martyrdom as moral apex and terror as an existential assault through formulations such as "9 kahraman kardeşimiz şehit düştü... şehit kanları yerde kalmayacaktır" (nine heroic brothers were martyred... their blood will not be left on the ground), while threat ontology is expanded through "saldırı/sızma girişimi" (attack/infiltration attempt), framing terror as a penetrative danger rather than a discrete act.

Closely linked is *expansion_of_the_enemy*, where terror is no longer confined to armed groups. Expressions such as "siyasi veya sivil toplum kuruluşu maskeli odaklar" (actors masked as political or civil society organizations) and "müttefik görünümlü muhasım ülkeler" (hostile countries disguised as allies) code internal actors, NGOs, and external states within a single threat matrix. Parliamentary speeches reinforce this by repeatedly associating PKK, FETÖ, and domestic opposition with coordinated destabilization efforts. Another dominant cluster is *militarization_of_state_response*: Bahçeli declares that "barındığı, sığındığı... her yer meşru hedeftir" (every place where they shelter or hide is a legitimate target), asserting a border-transcending operational logic, while parliamentary discourse consistently codes eradication rather than containment through formulations emphasizing struggle "son terörist ele geçirilinceye kadar" (until the last terrorist is neutralized).

The fourth theme also produces a consolidated *national_unity_and_emotional_synchronization* cluster. The corpus states "Türk milleti tek ses, tek nefestir" (the Turkish nation is one voice, one breath), while parliamentary speeches frame unity as an affective obligation tied to martyrdom and gratitude, coding emotional alignment as a security resource rather than a rhetorical appeal. A further major cluster concerns *re-centering_of_the_peoples_alliance_as_existential_safeguard*: the alliance is defined as "Cumhur İttifakı, Türk tarihinin varoluş refleksi" (the existential reflex of Turkish history) and "milli güvence, milletin özgüveni" (a national guarantee, the nation's self-confidence), coded not as a political arrangement but as an ontological security mechanism. Alliance debates are dismissed as "beşinci kol faaliyeti" (fifth column activity).

Digital space emerges as a distinct threat field through *digital_platforms_as_security_risk*, with global internet platforms and social media channels explicitly targeted as producers of chaos and disinformation, and specific media outlets coded as operational actors rather than communicative institutions. The corpus also sustains *judicial_delegitimization_via_national_will*: "Anayasa

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Mahkemesi'nin kararı Türk milletinin iradesiyle çöpe atılmıştır"(the Constitutional Court's decision has been thrown away by the will of the Turkish nation) establishes a hierarchy in which national will overrides judicial authority, coding legality through popular sovereignty. Finally, teleological stabilization of power appears through repeated denials of electoral rupture "Türkiye'nin gündeminde seçim yoktur" (there is no election on Turkey's agenda) framing political continuity as a moral and existential necessity.

Together, these clusters demonstrate that the fourth theme is characterized by the comprehensive securitization of terror, opposition, digital media, and alliance politics, articulated through a unified moral–security lexicon across parliamentary and X discourse.

Discussion

Against this background, the analysis undertaken in this article invites a reconceptualization of Devlet Bahçeli's post-2023 rhetoric not simply as an intensification of nationalist discourse, but as the construction of a moralized regime of truth. What is at stake in this discourse is not primarily the content of political claims, but the redefinition of how truth itself is constituted, authorized, and defended. Rather than treating truth as an object of empirical verification or public deliberation, Bahçeli's rhetoric positions it as an attribute of moral belonging, anchored in loyalty to the state, unity of the nation, and fidelity to a historically constituted political community. Truth, in this configuration, ceases to function as a shared horizon of contestation and becomes instead a mechanism of political alignment.

Conceptualizing this configuration as epistemic populism clarifies how populist moral dualism is extended into the epistemic domain. Epistemic populism does not merely oppose "the pure people" to "corrupt elites"; it attributes inherent truthfulness to the former while casting the latter as intrinsically deceptive or cognitively deficient. In Bahçeli's discourse, concepts such as hakikat and tecelli operate as epistemic anchors that bind truth to moral substance rather than to evidence or procedure. Epistemic disagreement is thus reframed as moral deviance, and moral deviance, in turn, as a security concern. Through this move, epistemic tensions are transformed into grounds for vigilance and exclusion, allowing political authority to govern truth without openly rejecting it.

This dynamic directly addresses the article's first research question by showing how a moralized regime of truth is constructed in post-2023 Türkiye. Truth is neither pluralized nor rendered unstable; on the contrary, it is stabilized through moral clarity and historical continuity. This finding challenges dominant post-truth frameworks, which often associate contemporary epistemic crises with relativism, fragmentation, and the proliferation of "alternative facts." In the case examined here, post-truth operates in a non-relativist mode. Truth is not weakened but monopolized. Rather than multiplying competing truths, epistemic populism recentralizes truth around a single moral axis, thereby foreclosing deliberation while maintaining a strong truth claim.

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Addressing the second research question, the analysis demonstrates how this configuration exemplifies epistemic populism within a competitive authoritarian context. Epistemic populism functions as a regime of knowledge governance that translates moral superiority into epistemic authority. By grounding truth in belonging rather than verification, it allows political power to bypass deliberative institutions without appearing anti-truth or irrational. Truth is constantly affirmed, yet only as something that already exists within the nation and reveals itself through loyalty. Political communication thus shifts from persuasion to boundary-drawing: the central task is no longer to convince skeptics, but to identify those deemed epistemically unfit to participate in truth production.

This perspective also helps explain why epistemic populism is particularly compatible with competitive authoritarian governance. In such contexts, political authority benefits less from epistemic uncertainty than from epistemic closure. A moralized truth regime reduces ambiguity, stabilizes loyalty, and narrows the space for legitimate dissent without requiring continuous coercion. Epistemic populism therefore operates as a low-cost but high-impact mechanism of control, reinforcing existing power relations by reorganizing the conditions under which truth can be claimed.

Situating this argument in comparative perspective further clarifies its contribution. Studies of antidemocratic populism in cases such as India and Israel emphasize moral polarization, securitization, and the erosion of pluralism. The present analysis complements this literature by specifying the epistemic mechanism that underpins these processes. Moralized constructions of “the people” gain political force not only through identity narratives or emotional appeal, but through the monopolization of epistemic authority. Epistemic populism thus serves as the connective tissue between populist ideology and authoritarian practice, translating moral dualism into epistemic sovereignty.

The findings also advance scholarship on Türkiye’s civilizational discourse. Analyses that conceptualize Türkiye as a civilizational state have shown how political authority mobilizes history, religion, and anti-Western narratives to construct moral hierarchies between civilizations. This article extends that literature by demonstrating that such civilizational narratives are sustained by a distinct epistemic logic. Civilization, in this configuration, does not merely define who belongs; it defines where truth comes from. Epistemic populism supplies the internal epistemology of the civilizational state, converting moral identity into an epistemic resource and rendering alternative truth claims illegitimate by definition.

Crucially, this epistemic configuration cannot be understood through an AKP-centric lens alone. The analysis foregrounds the role of Bahçeli and the MHP in articulating and stabilizing this regime of truth. Within the AKP–MHP alliance, epistemic populism performs a structuring function by hardening the moral and epistemic boundaries of political discourse. While other actors may display rhetorical flexibility or strategic ambiguity, Bahçeli’s discourse provides epistemic rigidity and continuity. This suggests that epistemic authority in competitive

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authoritarian regimes may be distributed across actors, with different political forces contributing distinct but complementary functions to the maintenance of moralized truth.

The decision to delimit the empirical analysis prior to Bahçeli's parliamentary speech of 22 October 2024 should be understood in this conceptual light. That intervention does not challenge the moralized regime of truth identified in this study; rather, it presupposes its consolidation. Once truth has been fully anchored in moral belonging, epistemic authority can be exercised more sovereignly, including through the controlled re-signification of previously excluded figures. Such gestures do not reopen deliberation, but instead reaffirm epistemic supremacy by demonstrating that inclusion itself is conditional upon moral submission. The October 2024 speech thus signals a transition from the construction of epistemic authority to its performative deployment, marking a post-consolidation phase that lies beyond the scope of the present analysis.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations that also point toward productive directions for future research. Empirically, the analysis is confined to Bahçeli's parliamentary speeches and X posts within a delimited post-2023 period, which enables analytical depth but limits the ability to assess how epistemic populism operates across other political actors or how it is received by different audiences. Future research could extend this framework comparatively in two directions: first, by examining whether similar moralized regimes of truth emerge in the discourse of other actors within Türkiye, particularly within the AKP; and second, by comparing ideologically similar nationalist-populist parties across different competitive authoritarian contexts to assess whether epistemic populism constitutes a broader pattern of right-wing authoritarian knowledge governance or remains specific to Türkiye's institutional and civilizational configuration. Reception-oriented studies could further explore how concepts such as *hakikat* and *tecelli* are internalized, contested, or reinterpreted by partisan publics, thereby illuminating the social life of epistemic populism beyond elite discourse. Finally, longitudinal analyses incorporating subsequent political crises may clarify how epistemic populism evolves once moralized truth has been consolidated, particularly whether it stabilizes authoritarian governance or generates new epistemic tensions over time.

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

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

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	OLOMOPOLLO 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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**An Analysis of A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence
(Roy Andersson, 2014)
through Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue**

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An Analysis of A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence (Roy Andersson, 2014) through Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue

Abstract

Some films go beyond mere entertainment; they challenge our perspectives on life, society, and humanity. The cinema of Swedish director Roy Andersson, with its non-plot-driven, recurring thematic and formal choices and unique mise-en-scène style, requires effort from the audience to be fully understood. Andersson's cinema, with its complex narrative and existential inquiry, provides a structure suitable for philosophical analysis. Martin Buber, an existentialist philosopher, is a fitting figure for a philosophical analysis of Andersson's films. This is due to the thematic similarities between Buber's ideas and Andersson's films, as well as the philosopher's influence on the intellectual background of the films. This paper will analyze the prominent questionings in Andersson's post-2000 films through Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, which highlights the I-It and I-Thou relationships, as well as the feeling of guilt. After a general examination of Andersson's cinema and its intersection with Buber's philosophy, the director's film *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014) will be analyzed. This paper reveals that Martin Buber's philosophy aligns with the themes explored in Andersson's films, and his thoughts provide a helpful framework to analyze the director's depiction of guilt. The superficial, meaningless relationships between the characters in Andersson's film reflect Buber's I-It relationship. Andersson has created a unique, absurd narrative and storytelling style that invites the audience to observe and question these unformed relationships. This style encourages the audience to engage in philosophical inquiry, developing distinctive mise-en-scène elements that highlight the director's detached, critical stance. This approach unveils the absurdity of the alienation prevalent in the I-It relationship, with the aim of encouraging the audience to question themselves.

Keywords: film and philosophy, martin buber, philosophy of dialogue, I-It, I-Thou, sense of guilt, mise-en-scène, Roy Andersson, *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*

Introduction

Film and Philosophy

Understanding a work of art as belonging to a specific art form requires placing it in a mental category. For this reason, the existence of works of art is a subject of philosophy (Şan, 2024, p.15). Reflecting on and perceiving films opens a door for philosophical thought. Cinematic works themselves lead one to think and lead to mental questioning. According to Bazin (2011), a film's ability to withstand philosophical criticism is important because it elevates the film beyond mere entertainment and allows it to present the realities of life to the audience (p. 10). In the relationship between cinema and philosophy, there is a distinction between the philosophy of cinema and the philosophical examination of film, even if the boundaries can sometimes be blurred. On the one hand, there are the meanings attributed to images by the formal qualities of cinema, and on the other hand, there are the meanings created by films and the connections established between them and philosophical concepts (Kabadayı, 2013, p.51). The relationship between film and philosophy, as defined by Rossouw (2021) with the two-way street metaphor, is approached not only from the perspective of philosophy contemplating film but

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also from the perspective of the film engaging with philosophy (pp. 19-21).

A film can be analyzed by using various philosophical concepts. When analyzing a film philosophically, it is important to reveal the specific concept embedded within the film. According to Kabadayı (2013), topics covered in film criticism that draw on philosophy are diverse and include subjects such as 'truth, fiction, humanity, knowledge, wisdom, existence, freedom, morality, virtue, truthfulness, justice, ethics, nihilism, time, simulation, chance, destiny, happiness, pleasure, pain, aesthetics, beauty, ugliness, good, and evil'(p.51).

As was stated in Bazin's quote above, films that go beyond being mere entertainment products invite the audience to think actively, rather than clearly conveying meaning through their intellectual depth, complex structures, and explicit narratives that deviate from classical narration. Roy Andersson is a director who stands out for his unique *mise-en-scène*, episodic, non-plot-driven narrative style that lies outside the realm of classical storytelling. His thought-provoking films provide fertile ground for philosophical analysis.

Johann Rossouw (2021) makes three classifications regarding the philosophical nature of cinema: the "weak" thesis, which argues that films are merely illustrative tools that exemplify philosophical concepts; the 'moderate' thesis, which claims that films serve as thought experiments contributing to philosophical debates; and the 'bold' thesis, which asserts that films produce philosophy through their own unique methods. In this paper, the aim is to move beyond the weak thesis that views cinema as a simple visual reflection of philosophical texts and adopt a balanced stance between the moderate and bold approaches. While the ambitious claim that films can do philosophy is partially accepted, a cautious limitation is maintained, emphasizing that each case should be evaluated within its specific context.

This paper aims to utilize the concepts of a particular philosopher to explore the deeper meaning embedded in Roy Andersson's cinema. Based on Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, which focuses on the I-Thou and I-It relationships and the feeling of guilt, a philosophical analysis will be conducted on one of Andersson's films that shares similarities with his post-2000s films.

Within this paper, the relationship between Roy Andersson's cinema and Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue will not be examined through a rigid claim that films directly 'do' or 'produce' Buber's concepts. Instead, a more measured and analytical perspective will be adopted, highlighting how Andersson's *mise-en-scène* reveals these philosophical relationships, opens them up for reconsideration, and invites the audience to a dialogical encounter. In this context, alongside philosophical analysis, *mise-en-scène* analysis will be conducted to examine how elements such as decor, lighting, camera angles, and camera positioning reveal philosophical concerns, such as existential guilt, in Andersson's cinema. According to Kabadayı (2013), *mise-en-scène* analysis goes beyond describing 'what is there' in a scene; it investigates 'how' the audiovisual elements construct the conceptual world (pp. 16-19).

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In this paper, there are two reasons for choosing Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Firstly, the concepts emphasized in Buber's philosophy of dialogue play an important role in understanding the director's questioning of the concept of the individual in his films. In Andersson's films, the alienation and lack of communication between modern individuals correspond to Buber's I-It relationship, which is connected to the I-Thou relationship. The feeling of guilt seen at the core of the I-It relationship is the basis on which the director focuses in his films. The second reason is that the director states in an interview in the documentary *Being a Human Person* (dir. Fred Scott, 2020) that he was influenced by Martin Buber's philosophy and that he perceives the individual within the intellectual framework of his films. In the documentary, the director refers to Martin Buber's work *Guilt and Guilt Feeling* (first published in 1958, 1999) as follows:

Martin Buber expresses it beautifully when he talks about atrocities committed against the order of people or the order of life. When you destroy that, a feeling of guilt arises. Something that makes people dirty and bothered. Buber says that humans feel this but can also repair it. Not necessarily at the place where the crimes were committed, but we can repair it by worshipping life in other situations. I think it's a very optimistic expression. It's possible to repair this guilt. By doing good. Simple is that (Scott, 2020).

In his article *Guilt and Guilt Feeling* (1999), Buber examines people's feelings of guilt and the moral responsibilities that arise from this situation. Buber nurtures hope that feelings of guilt can be overcome by returning to the I-Thou relationship through solidarity, empathy, and mutual respect. Absence of solidarity is often questioned in Andersson's films. This trigger for a sense of guilt that is prevalent in the director's cinema can also be seen in the I-It relationship.

In this paper, Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, his concepts of I-It and I-Thou relationships, and his views on guilt feeling, will be explained to analyze Roy Andersson's cinema through Buber's lens, and it will be argued that Buber's philosophy and Andersson's cinema overlap significantly. Then, Andersson's cinema will be discussed in general terms, his relationship with Buber established, and a philosophical and *mise-en-scène* analysis of *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014) will be presented through Buber's concepts. As mentioned before, the director's films after 2000 share similar characteristics. The reason for choosing *A Pigeon Sat on A Branch Reflecting on Existence* from among these films is that it contains scenes that are more conducive to discussing feelings of guilt than others.

Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue, I-Thou and I-It Relationship, and the Feeling of Guilt

Since Martin Buber is thought to belong within existentialist philosophy, it is necessary to first examine the philosopher's status within this philosophical discourse. In existentialist philosophy, the question of existence is linked to the human condition. Existentialism questions the meaning of human existence and seeks to help people avoid feeling alienated from themselves (Akarsu, 1975, p. 179).

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Existentialism holds that individuals can succeed only by finding themselves through free will, personal responsibility, and choice. Philosophers who have embraced existentialism, despite significant differences among them, argue that philosophical thought should focus on the human experience of existence (Kleinman, 2019, p. 25).

Orhan Hançerlioğlu (1980) draws a distinction between philosophers such as Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers, Nicolas Berdreaeff, Lev Cestov, and Martin Buber, who developed their existentialist ideas at a theistic level, and philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus, and Jean Paul Sartre, who developed their ideas at an atheistic level (p.144). Toprak (2022) expresses Hançerlioğlu's distinction by referring to it as theological and secular. Buber can be categorized among the theistic/theological existentialists who view their philosophy as a surrender of human imperfection to God, and his relationship with God has been influential in his questioning of Western philosophy and his stance against rational thought. Buber's philosophy offers a unique perspective on existential individualism and the Cartesian subject, while taking a holistic approach to human relationships, society, and cultural heritage (Toprak, 2022, pp.15-16).

When examining the concepts that stand out in Buber's philosophy of dialogue, the I-It and I-Thou relationship, the principles of good and evil, and guilt and guilt feelings come to the fore. Since this paper does not aim to explain Martin Buber's philosophy in detail, it is limited to the I-It and I-Thou relationships and the sense of guilt, which can be argued to be directly related to Roy Andersson's cinema.

Buber essentially criticizes modern society and the modern individual. According to Buber (2019), in an era of crises, society cannot progress solely on abstract ideologies. He argues that this society, which he describes as sick, needs to be fundamentally transformed in line with modern social understanding, emphasizing that appropriate treatment is required for the illness. The roles imposed by institutions and the system's tendency to turn people into robots, mechanizing them, and standardizing their lives alienate them from their own existence. Buber encourages people to take action to realize their own existence. The modern individual, as Buber defines it, is incapable of communication and unable to recognize others. He believes it is necessary for the individual to establish meaningful relationships to overcome this problem.

Buber (2019), when approaching humanity based on dialogue, divides this relationship into I-It and I-Thou. These concepts provide an important framework for understanding the connections humans establish with existence and the fundamental role they play in the individual's existence. The I-It relationship is the superficial relationship humans have with existence, while the I-Thou relationship is the deep relationship they establish with one another through dialogue.

The difference between Buber's I-Thou and I-It relationships points to one of the main problems of existentialism: seeing humans as subjects rather than objects. According to Buber, an individual can only become an I by encountering You and

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accepting You. Given the conditions of the modern world, relationships between people are at risk of becoming I-It relationships (Çınar, 2006, p. 14).

Due to the passive nature of the I-It relationship, dialogue does not exist in this form of dynamic between people. This relationship is close to mutual interaction due to its monological structure. According to Ulukütük (2011), in the I-It relationship, the other person is reduced to an object evaluated based on their physical characteristics; the individual experiences objects in the world rather than establishing real relationships with other people (p. 99). This situation is an obstacle to the human capacity for relationships. It causes not only the loss of humanity but also the loss of the self-worth of presence (Toprak, 2022, p. 32).

In his article *Guilt and Guilt Feeling* (1999) Buber presents his ethical philosophy and thoughts on human relationships. He discusses how people's feelings of guilt are related to moral responsibility. According to him, feelings of guilt stem from people perceiving a sense of deficiency or disconnect in their relationships and actions. Buber states that feelings of guilt stem from the I-It relationship. In this type of relationship, other people are perceived as manipulable objects. Buber emphasizes the importance of focusing on the I-Thou relationship rather than on establishing genuine, meaningful relationships.

Buber (1999) argues that personal guilt, understood as existential guilt people assume within specific personal situations and in relation to their own identity, cannot be explained by categories such as repression and awareness in analytical science. The bearer of such guilt constantly reminds themselves of their guilt. However, the person often tries to escape this remembrance; what they are escaping is not the event they remember but the depth of their existential guilt (Buber, 1999, p. 116).

Buber (1999) states that the magnitude of a person lies in their ability to face their misery, accept their guilt, and achieve self-enlightenment. The individual will be able to understand the nature of his guilt once he breaks his resistance to self-enlightenment. Buber defines the door that opens to self-enlightenment as the law of self-identification. A unity is established between the person who accepts guilt and the person who bears guilt, between the person who is in the light and the person who is in the dark. However, what follows the difficult process of self-enlightenment is the effort to maintain the identity one has established with oneself, and this is an endless test. This process does not mean that the individual constantly punishes himself with guilt; on the contrary, it is the human being's effort to remain calm and dignified through enlightenment (Buber, 1999, pp. 135-137).

According to Buber (1999), when a person is guilty towards himself, it is sufficient to move forward patiently after self-enlightenment to respond to the high call of conscience. People are not only guilty towards themselves, but also towards other beings, the rest of the world, and those around them. Therefore, to respond to the call of conscience with justice, they must also follow the path of reconciliation. Reconciliation means approaching the person who is guilty in the light of

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self-enlightenment, accepting one's existential guilt, and striving to make amends for the consequences of one's actions. This action has the quality of reconciliation when it occurs not only in accordance with a preconceived decision, but also as a natural reflection of a transformed existence. Ultimately, this process is achieved only when a renewed person develops a new understanding of service to the world through their renewed powers and transforms their relationship with the world (Buber, 1999, p. 137).

While confronting guilt is related to self-enlightenment, overcoming feelings of guilt is connected to the I-Thou relationship. This relationship is characterized by a person recognizing another as an equal and a fellow subject. Both sides try to establish mutual empathy and form a deep connection. Elements like mutual understanding, love, respect, and empathy shape the I-Thou relationship.

Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue goes far beyond what has been described above and offers a much broader framework. To understand and analyze Roy Andersson's cinema from a philosophical perspective, which is the subject of this paper, the conceptual framework of the I-Thou, I-It relationship and its connections with guilt are discussed here in general terms. Before analyzing *A Pigeon Sat on A Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014), Roy Andersson's unique cinematic style and the fundamental issues he highlights in his films will be examined, and his relationship with Martin Buber's philosophy will be discussed.

An Overview of Roy Andersson's Cinema

Roy Andersson is one of the most important directors of contemporary Swedish cinema, known for his unique cinematic language and international success. The director, who shot his last film, *About Endlessness*, in 2019, began his feature film career in 1970 with *A Swedish Love Story*. Following his first film, which dealt with the corrupt welfare society and its economic and class struggles in a realistic cinematic language, he made his second film, *Giliap*, in 1975. In his second feature film, the director has used less dialogue and more long takes, focusing on the lack of communication and existential questions. After his second film, he took a long break from his feature film career and turned to directing commercials and short films (Dağaç, 2019, pp. 381-382). Twenty-five years after *Giliap*, Andersson made his third feature film, also the first film of his *Living Trilogy*, *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000), followed by the other films in the trilogy, *You, the Living* (2007), and *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014). Andersson also made his last film, *About Endlessness* (2019), in a similar style to the trilogy.

Dağaç (2019) states that Andersson developed a new cinematic language in *World of Glory* (1991), one of his many short films, which he continued to use in his films after 2000. He also notes that this film served as a foundation for the *Living Trilogy* through its *mise-en-scene* and themes (p. 382). In *World of Glory*, Andersson avoided using close-up shots to prevent the audience from identifying with the victims. Instead, he employed stable shots and wide angles to encourage the audience to interpret the images critically and analytically (Brunow, 2010, p.84).

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When trying to understand the cinematic language Andersson began to implement in this short film and continued to use in his films after 2000, a few key concepts need to be addressed. Andersson's use of complex image and trivialism, as well as his unique *mis-en-scène* elements and thematic preferences, are crucial to his filmmaking language in these films.

According to Hanich (2014), Andersson carefully prepared the sets in his studio to create a metaphorical version of reality in his films, reshooting scenes multiple times until he achieved the desired effect, and preferring to use wide shots in almost all scenes. Andersson defines this approach as a complex image characterized by minimalism. According to him, the artistic design of these scenes is quite challenging, and the audience must make an effort to analyze them (p.40). The aim is to force the audience to confront complex images that are difficult to grasp, to give ordinary moments a deeper meaning, to stir the audience's conscience through the characters' direct gaze at the camera, and to create scenes that will remain in the memory even after the film ends (Lindqvist, 2016, p. 547). While classical narration cannot go beyond appealing to the audience's senses, complex images are an effective way to engage the audience. Andersson (1995, 2010) explains this situation as follows:

I want to start a conversation: About morality and seriousness. By seriousness, I do not mean the absence of humor or joy, but rather taking matters seriously, doing one's work diligently, getting to the heart of the matter, drawing conclusions, and providing clarity. These things do not necessarily lead to a sour expression or a lack of humor (Andersson, 1995, p.23; 2010, p.555).

Complex image is visible in the *mise-en-scène* elements of Andersson's films. Through long takes, wide shots, and depth of field, all objects and characters within the frame remain consistently clear. Camera movement is very limited, shots are generally stable, and the characters' movements are almost at a standstill. The film's tempo is slow. The characters are usually archetypal figures. The dialogues are minimal, artificial, and full of banalities. The plot does not rely on causality; instead, the narrative is shaped through thematic, visual, musical, and verbal repetitions, creating an episodic structure (Chinita, 2018, p. 70).

Stable shots and wide-angle, plan-sequences, theatrical and bizarre acting, absurd-poetic-surrealistic narration, and alienation effects, such as actors sometimes looking directly at the camera and addressing the audience, are distinctive features of the director's unique style (Dağaç, 2019, p. 382).

In Andersson's cinema, the concept of trivialism, which can be described as paying attention to trivial details, is also important. The simple, ordinary, trivial details of everyday life become fundamental parts of existence in Andersson's cinema (Dağaç, 2019, p. 384). According to Lindqvist (2012), Andersson aims to bring the audience back to the world by highlighting trivial details. The director prefers amateur actors

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to well-known actors to make this world even more effective (p. 214). Andersson's characters' faces are painted white like limestone, as if they are somewhere between life and death. According to Kaya (2014), Andersson states that the use of white-faced actors was intended to universalize the characters and the story. In this context, the scenes represent the common experience of all humanity, not just that of a particular individual or society (p. 47).

Roy Andersson offers a new perspective on cinema through trivialism and complex image, allowing the audience to reflect, introspect, and actively participate. His films are only complete with the audience's participation. This completion is achieved through history, memory, questioning, and absurd humor (Afonso, 2021, p. 97).

The people in limbo or the sense of alienation and rootlessness that permeates Andersson's films can be seen not only in public spaces but also in private places. The concept of *folkhemmet* (the people's home), a term used in Sweden to describe the welfare society, is one of the main points of Andersson's social criticism. According to Tucan (2016), in Andersson's trilogy, the home is also the center of communication breakdown, monotony, and alienation (p.182).

When considering Roy Andersson's cinema from a thematic perspective, his films after 2000 highlight concepts such as existential dilemmas, criticism of welfare societies, references to the darkest moments in history, the destructive consequences of individualism, alienation, the lack of communication, the collective subconscious, and the loss of meaning. According to Lindqvist (2012), Andersson questions individual and social alienation by showing the consequences of the idealization of individualism through provocative, exaggerated examples (p. 211). According to Dağaç (2019), Andersson's decision to name his trilogy *The Living Trilogy* reflects his ironic approach to modern humanity. The white faces, minimal movement, and the characters' lack of communication in the films point to the increasingly mechanized and meaningless existence of 21st-century humans (p. 384). At the same time, he often emphasizes the guilt of European society and the duplicity of the welfare state in his films.

Having discussed the common themes and characteristics in Andersson's films after the year 2000, the director's last film of his *Living Trilogy*, *A Pigeon Sat on A Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014) will be analyzed in relation to Martin Buber's concepts of I-Thou and I-It relationships and guilt feeling. Before the analysis, the influence of Buber's philosophy on Andersson's cinema will be discussed.

Martin Buber's Effect on Andersson's Cinema

To reveal the impact of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue on Andersson's cinema, it is important to examine the intellectual background of the director's short film *World of Glory* (1991). This film, shot for the short-film series *90 minuter 90-tal* (90 Minutes 90s) at the Gothenburg Film Festival, is a clear example of the narrative and storytelling style seen in the director's feature films after 2000. The opening scene of *World of Glory* shows a group of people packing another group of people into the back of a truck and killing them with poison gas. According to

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Dağaç (2019), this scene, which directly references Europe's Nazi past, is repeated in similar ways throughout Andersson's trilogy. Similarly, the themes of loss of meaning, unhappiness, the ordinariness of everyday life, the collective unconscious, and alienation between people, which are clearly observed in *World of Glory*, also form the basis of the films Andersson made after 2000 (p.382).

It can be argued that the main theme underlying Andersson's cinema is a confrontation with guilt, and its origin is related to historical memory. Guilt lies in apathy, and Andersson's questioning of humanity and society is based on the idea that people have been passive witnesses to human cruelty throughout history.

Andersson, in *World of Glory* and his other films, refers to the extermination of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and political dissidents in gas chambers at concentration camps during World War II, stating that such events are the most concrete representations of evil. Questions such as how to deal with the knowledge that people can commit such acts, whether this knowledge can be forgotten, or whether such events can be prevented from happening again are important to the director. Additionally, the director questions why history repeats itself and how such events are possible (Andersson, 2010, p. 276).

Andersson was born in 1943, during the most intense phase of mass extermination. While growing up, he was aware that millions of people were being killed in the most brutal ways in a neighboring country. He notes that the country responsible for this was a society with a high education rate and cultural traditions like those of his own country. These events had a deep impact on Andersson. He expresses shame on behalf of humanity for these crimes, stating that, although he was not a direct witness to them, he feels guilty (Andersson, 2010, p. 276).

Andersson states that Martin Buber's work *Guilt and Guilt Feeling* had a significant impact on his decision to explore this theme for the first time in his film *World of Glory*. He notes that Buber uses extremely impressive and clear language when describing feelings of guilt (Andersson, 2010, p. 276).

The idea of existential guilt suggests an unavoidable situation. However, Andersson stresses that Buber not only explains the feeling of guilt but also offers a way to achieve redemption and reconciliation. While noting that Buber focused on personal guilt, Andersson argues that his ideas are only valid for the masses (Andersson, 2010, p. 277).

Andersson reflects on how these events, now part of historical memory, should be portrayed in cinema. He states that he chooses not to use moments of suffering as an effective tool. He criticizes this approach and cites Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) as an example. As discussed earlier, regarding the term "complex image," a key element of his post-2000s films, Andersson suggests that audiences should analyze the image themselves and experience this process without commentary or guidance (Andersson, 2010, p. 277).

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An example of this approach can be seen in the opening scene of the film *World of Glory*. Andersson highlights the importance of the positioning between the person connecting the hose to the bus and the main character looking at the camera. In this context, the camera is not just a tool for observing time and history; it also symbolizes memory and knowledge. Therefore, the main character's gaze at the camera is described as a gaze toward history, memory, time, and the audience. One of the witnesses in the gas poisoning scene turns back to the camera, which is positioned at eye level, and looks at the audience as if questioning his own moral responsibility and that of others in the face of the massacre. The audience is prompted to ask themselves, 'What would I have done?' Andersson encourages the audience to reflect on and question their own attitudes through the detached *mise-en-scène* in *World of Glory*, which lacks the emotionalism typically used in such scenes (Andersson, 2010, p. 278).

Andersson uses this cinematic style to express his criticism of apathy, anti-intellectualism, and a lack of historical awareness in contemporary Swedish society. Andersson was one of the organizers of the exhibition *Sweden & The Holocaust* (2005–2006), which criticized Sweden's passive attitude toward the Holocaust. According to Andersson, the attitudes that led to the Holocaust—the ideology of superiority, the lack of responsibility for one's decisions, fear of seriousness, and contempt for humanity—continue to exist today. The erosion of the welfare society and the ideals of solidarity and support are contemporary reflections of these attitudes. Andersson notes that his aesthetic echoes writer Elie Wiesel's statement that 'the opposite of love is not hate, but apathy,' and as mentioned above, his approach is also influenced by Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Buber's works *Guilt and Guilt Feeling* (1958, 1999) and *I-Thou* (1923, 2019) have contributed to Andersson's aesthetic view and his particular language of film (Andersson, 2010, pp. 292-293).

It's important to mention that the historical references to apathy and guilt in the director's films aren't just about the Nazi era. His films also address other shameful periods in human history, like the slave trade and the massacre of Native Americans. Andersson, following Buber, points to existential guilt and says that all human suffering is connected. The director states that the guilt he feels over the Native American genocide is equal to the guilt he feels over Sweden's friendly relations with Nazi Germany during World War II (Lindqvist, 2012, p. 312-313).

A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence:

The final film of the *Living Trilogy*, *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014), explores themes of lack of empathy, communication, and meaning. With this film, Roy Andersson became the first Swedish director and second Nordic filmmaker to win the Golden Lion award at the Venice International Film Festival. This award was previously won by Danish director Carl Dreyer for his film *The Word* (*Ordet*, 1955). According to Lindqvist (2016), Andersson's award in Venice represents a victory for a director who has been pushed outside the traditional film financing system, struggled to find support for years, and yet fought resolutely for his unique cinematic language (p. 548).

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It is difficult, if not impossible, to describe the plot of this film, as it is with the other films in the trilogy. Similar to the other films in the trilogy, *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* is not plot-driven. Instead, it has an episodic narrative structure consisting mostly of independent parts. Unlike other films, the characters Jonathan and Sam appear repeatedly in some episodes of this film. These two characters sell funny items to entertain people. However, no one is interested in these items that are not actually funny, so the characters fail to achieve their goal. According to Lindqvist (2016), Sam and Jonathan's relationship and dialogue are inspired by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (p. 552). Andersson was inspired by Pieter Bruegel's painting *Hunters in the Snow* (1565) when creating the film's visual world. While developing the idea for the film, Andersson noticed a pigeon perched in a tree outside his window and drew inspiration from the pigeon's thoughts on existence (Petho, 2015, p. 50).

I-It Relationship: Non-Dialogic Relations

In the film, Andersson powerfully illustrates Martin Buber's view that modern individuals and societies need to be radically transformed (Toprak, 2022, pp. 16-19) through his exaggerated, artificial audiovisual world. The film depicts the individual, who has been reduced to a robotic, homogenized form by the roles imposed by the system's institutions, in an absurd manner. All the characters' faces are painted white, as if they are wearing masks. Their faces are emotionless, their movements are very limited and heavy, and their dialogues are artificial and theatrical. Similarly, Buber defines the individual in modern society as unable to communicate and does not know those around them. The film demonstrates this characteristic as it is difficult to speak of a real relationship in superficial dialogues and expressionless faces. People view each other as part of the system and its rules. People have become mechanical beings deprived of their emotions. In this passive I-It relationship, there can be no real dialogue. White-colored and emotionless faces and absurd dialogs can be seen as a metaphor for these non-dialogic relationships.

The film contains many scenes that exemplify this situation. After paying for his meal in the cafeteria line, a man dies in front of everyone, and the reaction of those around him is directed not at the man himself, but at the question of who will take the meal that has been paid for. Or in another scene, which will be analyzed below, children waiting by the bedside of a dying woman in the hospital room are not concerned with her death, but with the money-filled bag she is clutching tightly in her hands.

According to Buber, a person's experience with objects in the world hinders meaningful dialogue. In such a case, the individual's self-worth is also lost (Toprak, 2022, p.32).

In the film, the broken conversations between individuals are seen in both public and private spaces. People who are unable to establish dialogue at home as well as in monotonous spaces are supported by a pale color palette. The director commonly employs framing techniques such as wide shots, static angles, and depth of field, often creating a frame-within-frame effect in the composition. In a wide shot, the people seen in the other room or behind the window are positioned as separated,

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divided, and distanced from each other. This visual separation also reinforces the sense of disconnection among the individuals.

Özgüven states that the director discusses values that have become so corrupted in society that they cannot be fixed (Barış, 2022, p.107). In an interview, the director criticizes alienation in human relationships and says he longs for a society where people understand one another, feel responsible for one another, and support one another (Barış, 2022, p. 106). In his films, the society he hopes for does not seem to exist because the relationships he depicts lack meaningful dialogue, clearly indicating that people do not see each other as subjects. As an example, the scene chosen from the film will be analyzed in terms of I-It relationships with the elements of mise-en-scene.

Death Encounter Scene No.2:



Image-1

The scene, which is the second of the scenes titled 'Three Encounters with Death' in the opening of the film, approaches the moment of death as a situation that reveals the tension of material relationships rather than interpersonal spiritual ones. As seen in Image-1, the camera is positioned diagonally from the side of the room, fixed in place, framing the room in a wide shot that also includes the open door. This general shot remains unchanged throughout the scene. The dominant tones are pale shades, such as gray and yellow. The scene uses high-key lighting, with no shadows. In the center of the frame, there is a wheeled hospital bed. The diagonal placement of the bed and the planned positioning of the children of the woman who is about to die around this axis construct a rational, distant, and cold tableau of this power struggle centered on ownership. Within Roy Andersson's stable framing, with characters on the same plane, along with the pale shades and overall shot choice, the scene's tense, cold nature is enhanced. Close-up shots that would establish emotional intimacy with the characters are not used in the scene. No character's facial expression is clearly shown. With these mise-en-scène choices, the scene emphasizes the situation rather than emotions.

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The elderly woman's tight grip on her bag while lying in bed symbolizes not only her vulnerability in the face of death and her distrust of those around her, but also her possessiveness. The elderly woman's tight grip on her bag while lying in bed symbolizes not only her vulnerability in the face of death and her distrust of those around her, but also her possessiveness. The scene offers no explanation for this behavior. Her refusal to let go of her bag even at the moment of death suggests that love and trust have been replaced by transactional relationships, even within families. When those around her attempt to take the bag from her, the woman screams sharply while clutching the bag tightly. The struggle during the attempt to take the bag causes the wheelchair to shift.

At the end of the scene, a nurse who hears the sounds appears on the threshold of the open door. The nurse, dressed in a white uniform and positioned on the left at the doorway, merely observes the event from a distance. An open door, which Andersson uses in almost all scenes, is not open to external intervention. It creates a depth of field, breaking the one-dimensional structure of the theater stage. The nurse at the threshold remains a passive and distant observer, not intervening in the event.

All the *mise-en-scène* elements on the scene support the cold, distant, and apathic nature of the I-It relationship established between the characters.

Guilt and Guilt Feeling: Watching or Remaining a Spectator

As mentioned earlier, a sense of guilt pervades Andersson's cinema. The director's films show guilt through references to historical events and the normalization of inhumane acts. This feeling of guilt, related to the I-It relationship, fosters a passive connection characterized by a lack of empathy and solidarity.

The film does not move from an I-It relationship to an I-Thou relationship, nor does it depict a process of self-enlightenment. The characters do not experience any transformation. Therefore, we need to question how the director tried to establish a relationship in the film with a sense of guilt. The film reminds the audience of their role as spectators. This does not only appear in the form of self-reflexive elements, such as characters looking directly at the camera and speaking towards the audience, which reminds the audience of their position as spectators. The film's complex structure highlights the audience's passivity and indifference towards society, others, those in difficult situations, cruelty, and injustice. In this way, the film encourages the audience to question their existential guilt by making them consider watching and being a spectator.

In almost every scene of the film, the characters in the frame seem to be spectators/passive observers of everything happening around them. Sometimes the camera shows the passive observers directly in the frame, without showing what they are looking at. In the opening scene of the film, we see people watching stuffed animals in an exhibition hall. Among these animals, there is a pigeon, which also serves as a reminder of the film's title. Even though people watch animals in the exhibition hall, it is thought that stuffed animals also watch the people. Compared

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to the other scenes, such as those standing over the woman dying in her hospital bed, looking at the man who died in the dining hall, watching people eat in the restaurant from outside, and observing those kissing in the bar, all are equally indifferent and emotionless to what they are looking at.

In several scenes, we move to a layered dimension of watching. In a poetry reading event for children with Down syndrome, the camera is positioned behind the stage. It shows both those on stage from a back-plan and the spectators watching the event. In another scene, we directly observe the indifference of those watching dead people. In the film, the question 'what would you do if you were in the situation of those who are watching?' is posed not through a specific event, but through various circumstances. According to Buber, the event that triggers existential guilt cannot be undone, but the individual can become a better person by accepting their guilt, taking responsibility, empathizing with others, and establishing an I-Thou relationship in their future life. At this point, following Buber, we can say that this narrative structure seeks to foster self-enlightenment in the audience by questioning. This structure, which invites the audience to an active spectator experience, is similar to Buber's invitation to take action and assume responsibility to recognize human existence.

The phrase 'I'm glad to hear you're well', which is frequently heard in the film, appears especially in phone conversations. What makes this expression even more striking is that each time the sentence is repeated, the other person does not understand what is being said at first, and the person repeats the sentence, saying, 'I said, I'm glad to hear that you're well'. This phrase highlights the characters' communication gaps and their tendency to ignore one another in the film (Brodén, 2017, p. 5). Brodén (2017) notes that, in one scene where this expression is used, a woman talking on the phone in an old, neglected laboratory, while electroshocks are administered to a monkey, conveys loving messages in a monotonous, indifferent voice (p. 6). According to King (2021), this monkey scene is one of the most striking examples of the themes of indifference and apathy that Andersson frequently explores in his films. Indeed, it emphasizes that contemporary indifference is just as frightening as humanity's existential guilt over past crimes (p. 193).

This phrase also appears to carry an important possibility for empathy and an I-Thou relationship. On the other hand, this sentence is an ordinary, everyday phrase. While it could be seen as an expression of the individual caring about the other, its monotony and lack of emotion do not constitute a dialogical relationship. The effort to establish dialogue is most evident in Jonathan and Sam. The two who complain about each other also know how to apologize when they hurt one another. Still, it is not possible to say that their dialogue is filled with meaningful love and empathy. While fragments of the I-Thou relationship are visible, they do not materialize. However, this absurd structure suggests potential.

One of the scenes in which inhumane indifference is displayed, and the audience is invited to become accomplices, is the two-shot scene at Boliden.

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Boliden Scene:



Image-2



Image-3

The Boliden scene in the *Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* consists of two shots. In the first shot, a massive cylinder occupies most of the frame, positioned at a slight diagonal angle to the camera. The cylinder is placed in an open, calm area, with a few peaceful houses and trees visible in the background. Soldiers around the cylinder are forcibly pushing chained black people into the cylinder (*Image-2*). As the scene opens, the barking of dogs in the background heightens the tense atmosphere. After all the slaves are loaded into the cylinder, it is set on fire by the soldiers. The dogs fall silent, and the soldiers watch as the cylinder spins and releases toxic gas, killing those inside. As the cylinder spins, the 'Boliden' sign becomes visible on it (*Image-3*). Boliden is a Swedish mining company that, in the 1980s, sent toxic waste to Chile (Daglidén, 2014, cited in Barış, 2022, p. 105). While Sweden has protected its own nature from pollution, it is reminded that it has poisoned the soil of a distant country with its waste. The scene is shot from a stable, wide-angle. When the cylinder begins to spin, tense music plays in the background. The expressions on the faces of neither the soldiers nor the slaves are clearly visible.



Image-4

In the second shot of the scene, the reflection of the cylinder from the first shot appears on a building's glass door, establishing a unity of space and time within the frame. Andersson's use of frame-within-frame causes two scenes to intertwine. The curtain behind the glass door opens. Then, the door slowly opens. A crowd approach

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hing the camera in a stable and wide shot exits through the door with heavy steps. It's as if the curtain has been lifted and the actors have stepped onto the stage. This crowd is filled with characters reminiscent of zombie movies. Their faces are as white as chalk, and their eye sockets are as dark as possible. The crowd, dressed in clothing indicating high social status, appears quite old. The men are wearing tuxedos, and the women are dressed in long beige dresses matching their pale skin tones. In many scenes of the film, Jonathan, who sells odd items, appears as a waiter, refilling the champagne glasses held by the crowd. Among the crowd, a woman with a gray suit, distinguished from the others, walks arm-in-arm with an elderly man with a cane at the forefront, holding a champagne glass (*Image-4*).

It is understood from the reflection at the beginning of the shot that the crowd's gaze is directed towards the burning cylinder. At the same time, this gaze is directly to the camera, that is, the audience. All the characters are expressionless, emotionless, and almost motionless. They remain in this position for a while, like a tableau.

The visual composition emphasizes those responsible for this brutality and passive witnesses rather than the perpetrators of violence. The fact that some figures within the community directly face the camera, that is, the viewer, and that their faces show no emotional expression, shifts the testimony from passive observation to making the viewer the direct recipient of this moral burden. Despite the harshness of the situation on both levels of the scene, a calm and orderly atmosphere prevails. This second shot of the scene directly reveals a lack of empathy, social indifference, and complicity, while also exposing the I-It relationship.

Conclusion

There is a broad literature in the fields of cinema and philosophy studies. In this paper, the deeper meaning and philosophical inquiries of Roy Andersson's films from after 2000 are examined in relation to the concepts of I-It, I-Thou, and guilt, as discussed in Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. To reveal the relationship between Andersson's unique cinematic language, created through complex image, and the philosophical inquiries, a combination of *mise-en-scène* analysis and philosophical analysis has been employed.

Each of the four feature films the director made after 2000 has a fragmented narrative that seems independent from one another and consists of episodes. In these films, which are not plot-driven and do not follow a straightforward event, ordinary everyday situations are emphasized. The language of classical narration that identifies with characters has not been deliberately preferred; instead, the focus is on questioning what is happening on the scene rather than forming an emotional bond with the characters.

In these films, the relationships between characters, their reactions to everyday situations, or their responses to human conditions reveal mechanical, unresponsive, lack of empathy, and emotionless, which are identified as non-dialogical relationships, as defined by Buber's I-It relationship. By exaggerating the I-It relationship, it draws attention to the absence of genuine, dialogical relationships,

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known as the I-Thou relationship.

With *mise-en-scène* elements, lack of communication and alienation are absurdly visualized. In all four films, the characters' white makeup, limited movements, and artificial dialogue are featured. The camera angle is almost always a wide shot and stable. The lighting is high-key; dramatic, shadowy lighting is not preferred, and every part of the scene is illuminated equally. Depth of field is sometimes achieved by using an open door in indoor scenes or by a frame-within-frame technique. These choices aim not to establish an emotional connection with what happens on the scene but to direct audiences toward intellectual engagement and questioning. Andersson's characters are mostly those who either avoid confrontation or are unprepared for it; however, their states of loneliness and helplessness leave the audience face-to-face with their own responsibility towards society. The scenes with stable angle, wide shot, and pale shades not only remove the audience from being just an observer but also compel them to adopt a moral stance in response to what they watch.

The gaze in scenes targeting especially immigrants and those pushed to the margins of society shows that this alienation produces systematic indifference. By framing all kinds of human contact that cannot be established despite physical closeness, it exposes the audience to the state of disconnection. In addition to unestablished relationships, the act of watching/staying as a spectator itself is a central theme in Andersson's films.

The essence of philosophy lies in asking questions and inquiry. Even if you find an answer, the questioning process continues (Şan, 2024, p. 13). In the film *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*, which was analyzed in this paper, the act of watching can be linked to being a spectator, a passive observer. This serves as a reminder for audiences to take action. Therefore, the first step Buber suggests for developing the I-Thou relationship, awareness and acceptance will be realized. Just as philosophical inquiry proceeds with new questions, Andersson's films do not provide solutions but instead encourage the audience to keep questioning themselves and the world they live in. We hope that this paper's examination of *mise-en-scène* elements will contribute to future research on their role in shaping philosophical inquiry.

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Resumen

El informe de alta hospitalaria es referencia para proporcionar al paciente con insuficiencia cardíaca y/o sus cuidadores, información para garantizar los cuidados necesarios. Diseñar la construcción y validación de un instrumento que evalúe la calidad comunicativa de los informes de alta médica hospitalaria en pacientes con insuficiencia cardíaca y aplicarlo en la práctica clínica hospitalaria en pacientes con insuficiencia cardíaca. Investigación descriptiva, cuali-cuantitativa realizada en tres etapas. Se trabajó con expertos y se realizó grupo focal. Se realiza un análisis de la concordancia W de Kendall de 0.85, para la validez interna, el IVC fue de 1.00. Todos los criterios obtuvieron una media ≥ 4 , lo que los considera relevantes. Mediante el grupo focal, se categorizaron los comentarios en aspectos generales (AG); positivos (AP) y de mejora (AM). El 61.5 % de los expertos, consideraron los informes como insuficiente y el 15.3 % inválido. Las orientaciones pacientes/cuidador y la comunicación y coordinación fueron las dimensiones peor evaluadas. El instrumento propuesto abarca aspectos clave como la información del paciente, la información clínica, el plan de tratamiento y seguimiento, y la comunicación y coordinación que permiten asegurar la continuidad asistencial y el seguimiento adecuado de los pacientes con insuficiencia cardíaca en tanto que garantiza una transición efectiva entre el hospital y la atención primaria. La aplicación del instrumento en la práctica clínica evidenció la factibilidad de su uso para la mejora de la calidad de la atención brindada a los pacientes con insuficiencia cardíaca.

Palabras clave. Informe de alta hospitalaria, insuficiencia cardíaca, validación de instrumento

Construction and validation of an instrument to evaluate the communicative quality of hospital discharge reports in patients with heart failure

Abstract

The hospital discharge report is a reference to provide the patient with heart failure and/or their caregivers with information to guarantee the necessary care. Goals. Design the construction and validation of an instrument that evaluates the communications quality of hospital discharge reports in patients with heart failure and apply it in hospital clinical practice in patients with heart failure. Descriptive, qualitative-quantitative research carried out in three stages. Work was done with experts and a focus group was held. An analysis of Kendall's W agreement is carried out of 0.85, for internal validity, the CVI was 1.00. All criteria obtained a mean ≥ 4 , which considers them relevant. Through the focus group, the comments were categorized into general aspects (AG); positive (AP) and improvement (AM). More than half of the experts, 61.5%, considered the reports insufficient and 15.3% invalid. Patient/caregiver orientations and communication and coordination were the worst evaluated dimensions. The proposed instrument covers key aspects such as patient information, clinical information, the treatment and follow-up plan, and communication and coordination that ensure continuity of care and adequate follow-up of patients with heart failure while guaranteeing an effective transition. between the hospital and primary care. The application of the instrument in clinical practice showed the feasibility of its use to improve the quality of care provided to

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patients with heart failure.

Keywords: Hospital discharge report, heart failure, instrument validation

Introducción

La insuficiencia cardíaca (IC) es un problema de salud pública, constituye una patología crónica con una incidencia y prevalencia crecientes debido a una expectativa de vida mayor de la población y del aumento en la supervivencia de los pacientes afectados por esta patología.

Es un síndrome clínico complejo, que se caracteriza por la progresión de los síntomas que conducen a hospitalizaciones frecuentes, siendo la primera causa de hospitalización en personas mayores de 65 años, con una alta tasa de reingreso, uno de cada 5 pacientes volverá a reingresar en los siguientes 30 días con la consecuente mala calidad de vida y alta tasa de mortalidad.

En Cataluña la IC es la tercera causa de muerte cardiovascular, con una prevalencia global del 6,8%, en mayores de 45 años que aumenta exponencialmente a partir de los 75 años (González y Mena, 2022).

La colaboración entre pacientes, cuidadores y profesionales de la salud es esencial para lograr mejores resultados en el manejo de la insuficiencia cardíaca. La planificación del tratamiento es un proceso colaborativo, reduciendo el riesgo de complicaciones y hospitalizaciones, mayor satisfacción para los pacientes, uso más eficiente de los recursos y reducción de errores de medicación.

El envejecimiento poblacional con la presencia de multimorbilidad y cronicidad avanzada (complejidad clínica) condiciona la polifarmacia (pauta de 5 o más fármacos administrados de forma crónica y polifarmacia excesiva o severa cuando se utilizan 10 o más) (Escobedo-Romero e Izquierdo-Fernández, 2023).

Por otra parte, la escasa adecuación terapéutica en este grupo de edades, en particular con las personas con fragilidad avanzada y en fase final de vida (MACA – entendida como los últimos 12-24 meses de vida aproximadamente) condiciona la necesidad de brindarle a los pacientes y/o cuidadores información comprensible, legible y ejecutable.

Los procesos médicos requieren de la realización de documentos de carácter legal que den fe de los procedimientos a los que es sometido el paciente, dentro de estos se encuentra el informe clínico de alta. El mismo, se considera de obligatoriedad según la Ley de 41/2002 de información sanitaria y autonomía del paciente (BOE, 2002).

Al igual que todos los documentos de la historia clínica son datos de especial protección, tanto cuando se conservan en papel como en formato digital. Por eso, su uso y acceso debe estar regulado y limitado. Otros requisitos relacionados con su elaboración son la confidencialidad del paciente y entregado en mano, por

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indicación del médico responsable, al paciente, al familiar o tutor legal del enfermo.

El estudio de la calidad de la información que forma parte de un informe de alta hospitalaria (IAH) es escaso por lo que consideramos de gran interés la elaboración de instrumento que permita la evaluación de la calidad del mismo.

El Real Decreto 1093/2010 aprueba el conjunto mínimo de datos de los informes clínicos en el Sistema Nacional de Salud (BOE, 2010)

Los requisitos mínimos que debe cumplir el informe de alta están contenidos en este documento, orientados hacia el registro y normalización de la información. Sin embargo, los documentos que se emiten adolecen de una falta de información referida a los cuidados posteriores al alta, el seguimiento, contactos de dudas y complicaciones.

El informe de alta hospitalaria puede entenderse como un acto de comunicación institucional de especial relevancia social. Más allá de su función clínica, este documento desempeña un papel fundamental en la comprensión que los pacientes tienen de su estado de salud y de las indicaciones terapéuticas posteriores, lo que incide directamente en la equidad y la calidad de la atención sanitaria. Analizar el informe de alta desde la perspectiva de la comunicación permite identificar cómo el uso del lenguaje, la estructura del mensaje y la adecuación al receptor influyen en la eficacia comunicativa.

El documento de alta debiera ser una referencia para proporcionar al paciente y/o sus cuidadores, información para garantizar los cuidados necesarios. Teniendo en cuenta la importancia que un documento de alta hospitalaria reviste para el paciente, diseña la construcción y validación de un instrumento que evalúe la calidad comunicativa de los informes de alta médica hospitalaria en pacientes con insuficiencia cardiaca y con posterioridad se aplica el instrumento diseñado en la práctica clínica hospitalaria en pacientes con esta patología en una muestra de informes de alta en los hospitales comarcales de Blanes y Calella. Este instrumento sitúa la comunicación al paciente, como un elemento central en la mejora de los servicios públicos, la alfabetización de la ciudadanía y la responsabilidad social de las instituciones.

Diseño

Investigación clasificada como descriptiva, cuali-cuantitativa con el propósito de diseñar un instrumento que permita evaluar la calidad de los informes de alta médica hospitalaria en pacientes con insuficiencia cardiaca y su aplicación en la práctica clínica.

Se realizó en una primera etapa una amplia revisión bibliográfica de la literatura existente relacionada con el tema, con el objetivo de identificar las diferentes formas, instrumentos y enfoques para el abordaje de la investigación, metodología para la construcción y validación de cuestionarios y documentos de alta. Ante la ausencia de instrumentos que permitieran su uso con el propósito definido para el estudio se decide la construcción y validación de uno.

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Con posterioridad se tuvo en cuenta la estructura y su contenido, las dimensiones y logística de la recogida de datos. El cuestionario representa varias dimensiones, dado lo complejo del fenómeno. A continuación, se hizo una validación de contenido (5 expertos) que se pronunciaron con relación a los atributos de Moriyama teniendo en cuenta los siguientes criterios:

Comprensible: comprensión de los diferentes ítems que se evalúan en relación con el tema.

Sensible a variaciones en el fenómeno que se mide: si del instrumento puede derivarse un índice que muestre diferencias en la variable que se medirá.

Relevancia justificable: si el instrumento (inciso) tiene suposiciones básicas justificables e intuitivamente razonables: es decir, si existe una justificación para la presencia de dicho inciso en el instrumento.

Aplicabilidad: Derivable de datos factibles de obtener: si es posible obtener la información deseada a partir de las respuestas dadas ante el instrumento.

Mediante una escala ordinal: mucho, poco, nada. Esto permite la evaluación del cumplimiento de cada uno de estos principios por los expertos. Las valoraciones emitidas fueron tomadas en cuenta y a partir de ellas se hicieron las modificaciones correspondientes. Los ítems que fueron considerados por más del 75% dentro de las categorías poco o nada fueron eliminados.

La validación de contenido concierne al grado de rigor con que el instrumento contempla el entorno teórico en el que se inscribe la categoría sintetizada. Se refiere al grado en que la prueba que se está usando, representa y es capaz de expresar la característica que se investiga. Permite determinar si el instrumento incluye todos los aspectos del concepto estudiado.

Los elementos se denominaron «ítem». La estructura y formulación del instrumento se somete a un proceso de validación de contenido por criterio de expertos que se conforman a partir de los criterios como experiencia profesional entre 5 a 10 años en el tema y la disposición a participar en el ejercicio. El criterio de los expertos se utiliza para evaluar la correspondencia de los ítems en relación con la definición operacional y las categorías propuestas y su comprensión.

Para la evaluación de la comprensión se tuvo en cuenta las cinco propiedades básicas formuladas por Moriyama y cuyas sugerencias permiten su corrección. Cada pregunta fue evaluada por los expertos en una planilla a partir de los siguientes criterios:

- **Razonable y comprensible:** se refiere a la comprensión de los diferentes ítems a evaluar y a su correspondencia con la categoría que se pretende medir.
- **Sensible a variaciones en el fenómeno que se mide:** si el ítem es capaz de discriminar entre diferentes grados de respuesta.

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- Con suposiciones básicas justificables e intuitivamente razonables: Si justifica la inclusión de ítems en las pruebas.
- Con componentes claramente definidos: si el ítem se expresa claramente.

Con posterioridad se utilizó la técnica de grupo focal para la evaluación cualitativa del instrumento final.

Una vez confeccionado el primer pre-test se realizó un grupo focal de 7 miembros, en tanto se trata de un proceso dinámico, de interacción entre los participantes, de forma que sus opiniones pueden ser confirmadas o contestadas por otros participantes. Su escogencia se fundamentó en que son una herramienta valiosa en la investigación cualitativa que permiten obtener opiniones, percepciones y experiencias detalladas sobre un producto, servicio o tema específico. (Morgan, D. L. (1996). Estos datos cualitativos son de alta calidad y no siempre son accesibles mediante otras técnicas de investigación.

Además, aporta información en un período de tiempo relativamente corto. A diferencia de las entrevistas individuales, los grupos focales ofrecen la posibilidad de obtener múltiples perspectivas y opiniones en una sola sesión. Esto ahorra tiempo y permite recopilar una gran cantidad de información.

Con la interacción grupal, los participantes en los grupos focales interactúan entre sí, generando discusiones enriquecedoras. Esta dinámica grupal puede estimular el pensamiento creativo y la generación de nuevas ideas (Mella, O. (2000) y Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2011).

Durante las sesiones de grupo, los participantes pueden proporcionar comentarios inmediatos, lo que facilita la identificación de áreas de mejora o nuevas oportunidades generando retroalimentación inmediata. Por último, en comparación con otras técnicas de investigación, los grupos focales son económicos y ofrecen una gran cantidad de información.

Con posterioridad, este instrumento se validó por un estudio piloto en un grupo de Informe Alta Hospitalaria (IAH) de pacientes que recibieron asistencia durante el primer trimestre del 2024 en el Hospital Comarcal de Blanes como parte de la validación práctica.

Los cinco expertos, dieron respuesta de la evaluación cualitativa a través de una escala ordinal.

-Informe válido: cuando está bien estructurado, en apartados independientes, y su lectura es comprensible.

-Informe insuficiente: cuando, a pesar de una redacción poco estructurada y con defectos de forma, permite su comprensión.

-Informe inválido cuando no cumple los criterios mínimos de calidad para el conjunto mínimo básico de datos (CMBD).

El cuestionario aplicado se analizó, y se obtuvo los porcentajes de concordancia entre los expertos. Se consideró el ítem válido cuando existió una concordancia máxima del 80% por parte de los expertos para realizar modificaciones, quedando

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así confeccionado el instrumento de validación definitivo (véase Anexo 1).

El instrumento definitivo se aplicó en la práctica clínica a mayor escala, en IAH por IC en pacientes atendidos por los hospitales comarcales de Blanes y Calella en el periodo de enero 2022-diciembre 2024.

Variables y dimensiones

Identificación (hospital y unidad asistencial o servicio clínico que dé el alta, edad y sexo del paciente, lugar habitual de residencia del paciente).

Proceso asistencial. (día de admisión y día de alta, motivo del alta, diagnóstico del ingreso, resumen de la historia clínica, exploración física del paciente, diagnóstico principal, procedimientos médicos/quirúrgicos, estado de salud)

Recomendaciones terapéuticas. (plan terapéutico (medicamentos, dosis, vía de administración y frecuencia), indicaciones para seguimiento ambulatorio (exámenes), programación de citas de control y prolongación de los cuidados (dieta, actividad física)

Orientaciones pacientes/cuidador. (explicación del diagnóstico y pronóstico, instrucciones sobre el tratamiento y cuidados en el hogar, recomendaciones y recursos para el autocuidado)

Comunicación y Coordinación. (lenguaje claro, uso de términos sencillos y comprensibles para el paciente, claridad en la redacción y organización de la información y continuidad en la transmisión de la información relevante).

Se utilizaron los informes de alta médica de los pacientes con IC atendidos en el Hospital Comarcal de la Selva durante el periodo de enero 2022 a diciembre 2023. Dado que se trabajó con todos los informes de alta hospitalaria disponibles en las historias clínicas, y el muestreo fue aleatorio simple, no se necesitó definir criterios de inclusión ni de exclusión.

Se seleccionó una muestra representativa de informes de alta hospitalaria de pacientes con ICC mediante el cálculo del tamaño muestral a través de la siguiente fórmula estadística:

$$n = \frac{no}{1 + \frac{no}{N}}$$

$$no = \frac{1.96 * p * q}{Eo^2}$$

n= Tamaño muestral.

1,96= Percentil de la distribución normal.

p= Proporción de altas (50%).

q= 1-p.

Eo2= error máximo permisible (3%).

El valor 50 % se fija a partir de la ausencia de investigaciones similares previas. La selección final de la muestra se realizará mediante un muestreo aleatorio simple. Finalmente fueron elegibles un total de 13 IAH para el estudio piloto y 227 para la aplicación práctica.

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Se utilizó el paquete estadístico SPSS 29 para Windows. La estadística descriptiva se presentó por medio de proporciones o razones para las variables categóricas y medidas de tendencia central y de dispersión para las variables cuantitativas.

Para determinar el grado de acuerdo entre los 5 expertos en la evaluación de cada criterio de Moriyama se utilizó coeficiente de concordancia de Kendall (W de Kendall).

La W de Kendall varía entre 0 (no hay concordancia) y 1 (concordancia perfecta). Interpretar los resultados: $W \geq 0.7$: Concordancia fuerte entre los expertos, $0.5 \leq W < 0.7$: Concordancia moderada entre los expertos; $W < 0.5$: Concordancia débil entre los expertos

En el análisis de la validez de contenido, para cada criterio de Moriyama, se calculó el Índice de Validez de Contenido (IVC). El IVC se calcula como la proporción de expertos que califican un criterio como "Bueno" o "Excelente" (calificación 4 o 5). Un $IVC \geq 0.78$ se considera aceptable.

Calcular la media y desviación estándar de las calificaciones otorgadas por los expertos para cada criterio de Moriyama permitió realizar el análisis de la relevancia de los criterios. Estos se interpretaron:

Media ≥ 4 : El criterio se considera relevante

Media < 4 : El criterio se considera poco relevante

Además, se calculó la media y desviación estándar de las calificaciones otorgadas por los expertos para los criterios claridad, comprensión y análisis de la aplicabilidad

Media ≥ 4 : El instrumento se considera claro y comprensible

Media < 4 : El instrumento se considera poco claro y comprensible

Este análisis estadístico permitió evaluar la validez y confiabilidad del Instrumento de Evaluación de Informes de Alta Hospitalaria en Pacientes de Cardiología, identificando fortalezas y áreas de mejora para su optimización.

Se trata de un estudio observacional retrospectivo, con baja carga ética. Se tuvo particular atención a la protección de datos de acuerdo con la ley 3/2018 de protección de datos digitales (España, 2018).

Para garantizar el circuito de protección de datos durante el proceso de investigación se limitó la extracción y codificación de datos al investigador principal. El almacenamiento de la información se realizará en el ordenador institucional que tiene configuración personal con clave de acceso y se llevara en una base de datos confeccionada para este fin de manera anónima, y así evitar datos susceptibles de identificación del paciente.

Dado que no se trabajará con pacientes y solo será con informes de manera anónima se solicita la exención del consentimiento informado. Se solicitó autorización al Comité de Investigación del Maresme para el análisis de los informes de alta hospitalaria.

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Este producto denominado "Instrumento de evaluación de informes de alta hospitalaria en insuficiencia cardiaca" puede ser aplicado por profesionales de salud, revisores de calidad o investigadores para evaluar la calidad de los informes de alta médica de pacientes hospitalizados por insuficiencia cardíaca.

Los resultados obtenidos pueden utilizarse para identificar áreas de mejora y diseñar intervenciones orientadas a fortalecer la calidad de la documentación médica en este contexto.

Sin embargo, la principal limitación es la carencia de instrumentos validados y estandarizados para evaluar la calidad de los informes de alta hospitalaria, lo que a su vez presta relevancia a nuestro estudio, cuyos resultados podrían redundar en la propuesta de una herramienta que contribuya a mejorar los informes de alta y con ello la información que los pacientes reciben.

A esto se suma la escasa publicación actualizada del tema que limitan contrastar los resultados obtenidos con investigaciones realizadas en otros contextos. Una segunda limitación es la validación del instrumento propuesto en una sola patología.

Los centros se han escogido por conveniencia y factibilidad, la patología, insuficiencia cardiaca, se ha elegido en primer lugar porque se trata de una patología que requiere la colaboración del paciente y/o sus cuidadores para su tratamiento y control y en la que las descompensaciones son tratadas habitualmente en el entorno hospitalario, en segundo lugar, por la necesidad de homogeneizar las características de los pacientes para un primer análisis de la validez del cuestionario.

Resultados

Con el propósito de obtener la validez de contenido del instrumento diseñado, se realiza en primer lugar un análisis derivado del trabajo con cinco expertos.

El análisis de la concordancia entre expertos para la validación del Instrumento de Evaluación de Informes de Alta Hospitalaria en Pacientes de Cardiología según los criterios de Moriyama, se realizó según el coeficiente de concordancia de Kendall (W de Kendall). Tabla 1

La W de Kendall fue 0.85, obtenido para la validez interna, indica una concordancia fuerte entre los 5 expertos. Por su parte, el IVC fue de 1.00 para todos los criterios, lo que significa que el 100% de los expertos los calificaron como "Bueno" o "Excelente"

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Tabla 1. Evaluación del Instrumento de Evaluación de Informes de Alta Hospitalaria en Pacientes de Cardiología, según los criterios de expertos

Criterios	Persona Experta 1	Persona Experta 2	Persona Experta 3	Persona Experta 4	Persona Experta 5	Media	Desv. Est.	IVC
Claridad y comprensión								
Claridad en la redacción y organización	4	5	4	4	5	4.4	0.55	1.00
Uso de términos sencillos y comprensibles	4	5	5	4	5	4.6	0.55	1.00
Relevancia								
Diagnóstico principal	5	5	5	4	5	4.8	0.45	1.00
Diagnósticos secundarios	5	5	4	4	5	4.6	0.55	1.00
Resumen de evolución clínica	5	5	5	4	4	4.6	0.55	1.00
Procedimientos y estudios	4	5	5	4	5	4.6	0.55	1.00
Medicamentos al alta	5	5	5	4	5	4.8	0.45	1.00
Indicaciones de seguimiento	5	5	5	4	5	4.8	0.45	1.00
Educación al paciente y familia	5	5	5	4	4	4.6	0.55	1.00
Coordinación con el equipo	5	4	5	4	4	4.4	0.55	1.00
Sensibilidad								
Capacidad de detectar diferencias en calidad	5	5	4	4	4	4.4	0.55	1.00
Aplicabilidad								
Uso por profesionales de la salud	5	5	5	4	5	4.8	0.45	1.00
Facilidad de implementación	5	5	4	4	5	4.6	0.55	1.00
Puntaje total promedio	4.87	4.93	4.73	4.13	4.73	4.68	0.34	1.00

Fuente: elaboración propia

Todos los criterios obtuvieron una media ≥ 4 , lo que los considera relevantes. La media de los criterios de claridad y comprensión fue 4.5, con una desviación estándar de 0.55, lo que indica que el instrumento se considera claro y comprensible.

En cuanto a la aplicabilidad, la media del criterio fue 4.7, con una desviación estándar de 0.45, lo que indica que el instrumento se considera aplicable. El puntaje total promedio obtenido por el instrumento fue de 93.6 puntos, lo que lo ubica en el

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rango de "Calidad excelente" según los criterios establecidos.

En resumen, el análisis estadístico muestra que el Instrumento de Evaluación de Informes de Alta Hospitalaria en Pacientes de Cardiología cumple satisfactoriamente con los criterios de Moriyama, demostrando una alta validez y confiabilidad para su uso en la evaluación de la calidad de los informes de alta en este contexto. Los expertos estructuraron los ítems según claridad y comprensión, relevancia, objetividad, sensibilidad y aplicabilidad.

El instrumento propuesto presenta una estructura clara y organizada, con secciones y criterios de evaluación bien definidos. La utilización de un lenguaje sencillo y comprensible facilita su uso por parte de profesionales de la salud. Además, La escala de calificación (1-5) es clara y fácil de interpretar. Cumple con los criterios de claridad y comprensión.

Tabla 2. Criterios de Moriyama según opinión de expertos

Personas Expertas	Criterios de Moriyama									
	Razonable		Discrimina		Justificable		Definido		Factible	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	5	100	4	80	5	100	5	100	5	100
2	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100
3	5	100	4	100	5	100	5	100	5	100
4	5	100	4	80	5	100	5	100	5	80
5	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100

Fuente: elaboración propia

A continuación, se presentan los resultados obtenidos para cada categoría. En la tabla 2, todos los ítems alcanzaron altas puntuaciones para razonable. En cuanto a que el instrumento discrimina variaciones, todos los ítems alcanzaron puntuaciones mayores a 70 %. De igual forma para justificable, claramente definido y datos factibles de obtener.

Las respuestas brindadas por todas las personas expuestas al cuestionario de validación, aportó que las dimensiones propuestas para ser incluidas en la construcción del instrumento eran apropiadas, es decir, no realizaron propuestas de modificaciones, ni consideraron pertinente excluir alguna. Muy útil resultó la valoración de la correspondencia entre las categorías y los ítems redactados para su

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medición, pues permitió realizar un ajuste en la propuesta definitiva de aquellas que conformarían la definición operacional del instrumento. Como resultado del grupo focal, se categorizaron los comentarios de los expertos en aspectos generales (AG); positivos (AP); de mejora (AM) a partir del análisis de los comentarios del grupo focal.

En cuanto a los AG, el instrumento abarca las principales dimensiones y elementos clave para evaluar la calidad de los informes de alta hospitalaria en pacientes de cardiología, la estructura y organización facilitan su aplicación y comprensión. El nivel de detalle incluido en cada criterio de evaluación es adecuado y permite una valoración integral de la calidad de la documentación. Consideraron como AP, la inclusión de información del paciente, que facilita la contextualización del informe y la evaluación de la información clínica, incluyendo diagnósticos, evolución y procedimientos, fundamental para la continuidad de la atención. El énfasis en el plan de tratamiento y seguimiento, así como en la educación al paciente, refleja la importancia de estas áreas para mejorar los resultados de salud.

La valoración de la comunicación y coordinación entre profesionales de salud resalta la relevancia de una transmisión efectiva de la información.

Incluir una sección específica que considere la posibilidad de incorporar criterios relacionados con la legibilidad y formato del documento se consideró como AM.

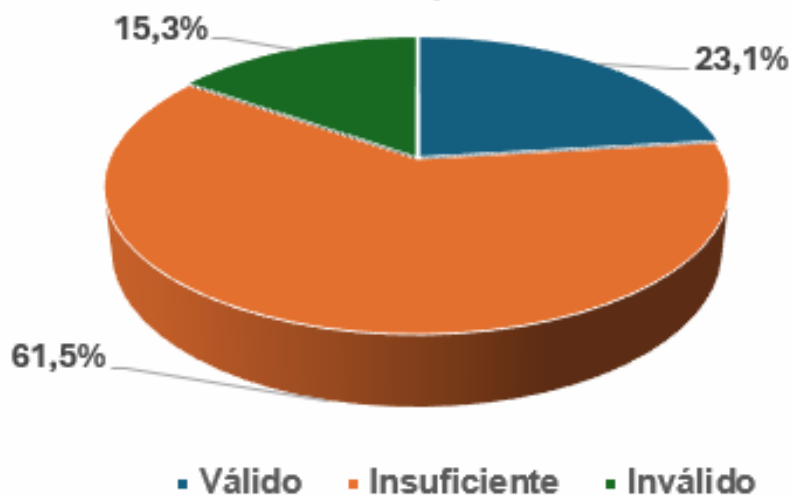
En general, el panel de expertos considero que el instrumento propuesto es una herramienta comprehensiva y útil para la evaluación de la calidad de los informes de alta hospitalaria en pacientes de cardiología.

En la construcción del instrumento final no se incorporó la sugerencia de mejora, en tanto que el documento se entrega impreso por lo que es legible. La prueba piloto del instrumento en el entorno clínico, con el fin de evaluar su aplicabilidad, validez y confiabilidad permitió ajustar y perfeccionar el instrumento, antes de su implementación a mayor escala.

La respuesta de los expertos recogida a través de la escala ordinal aparece en la tabla 3, gráfico 1. Según los expertos, el 61,5% (n= 8) de los informes se consideran insuficientes y el 15,3% (n= 2) inválido.

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Gráfico 1 . Evaluación cualitativa de los IAH según criterio de expertos.



Fuente: elaboración propia

Tabla 3. Evaluación cualitativa de los Informes de Alta Hospitalaria según criterio de expertos

Evaluación	No.	%
Válido	3	23.1
Insuficiente	8	61.5
Inválido	2	15.3
Total	13	100

La aplicación práctica del instrumento aparece en la tabla 4.

Fueron elegibles 227 informes, como se puede observar en la dimensión de identificación se obtuvo mayor puntuación en la notificación del Hospital y unidad asistencial que da el alta y la edad y sexo del paciente 100 %, sin embargo, el lugar de residencia recibió un puntaje de 65.2%.

En cuanto a la dimensión proceso asistencial, la presencia del procedimiento en

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Tabla 4. Distribución de IAH según dimensiones y ítems

Dimensiones/Ítems	No.	%
Identificación		
Hospital y unidad asistencial que dé el alta	227	100%
Edad y sexo del paciente	227	100%
Lugar habitual de residencia	148	65.2%
Proceso asistencial		
Día de admisión y día de alta	227	100%
Motivo del alta	227	100%
Diagnóstico del ingreso	222	97.8%
Resumen de la historia clínica	220	96.9%
Exploración física del paciente	198	87.2%
Diagnóstico principal	227	100%
Procedimientos	189	83.3%
Estado de salud	145	63.9%
Recomendaciones terapéuticas		
Plan terapéutico	227	100%
Indicaciones para seguimiento	102	44.9%
Programación de citas de control	56	24.7%
Prolongación de los cuidados	48	21.1%
Orientaciones pacientes/cuidador		
Explicación del diagnóstico y pronóstico	72	31.7%
Instrucciones sobre el tratamiento y cuidados en el hogar	43	18.9%
Recomendaciones y recursos para el autocuidado	43	18.9%
Comunicación y Coordinación		
Lenguaje claro	132	58.1%
Uso de términos sencillos y comprensibles	87	38.3%
Claridad en la redacción y organización de la información	130	57.3%
Continuidad en la transmisión de la información relevante	37	16.3%

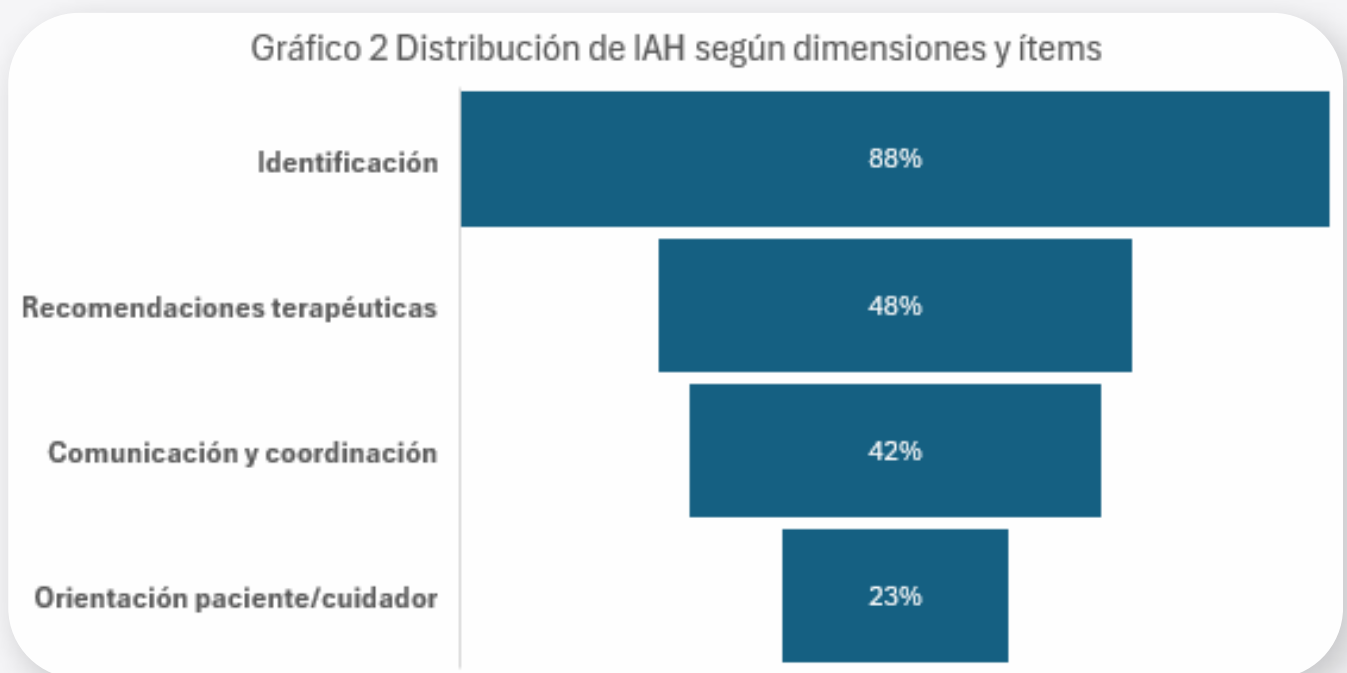
n= 227

Fuente: elaboración propia

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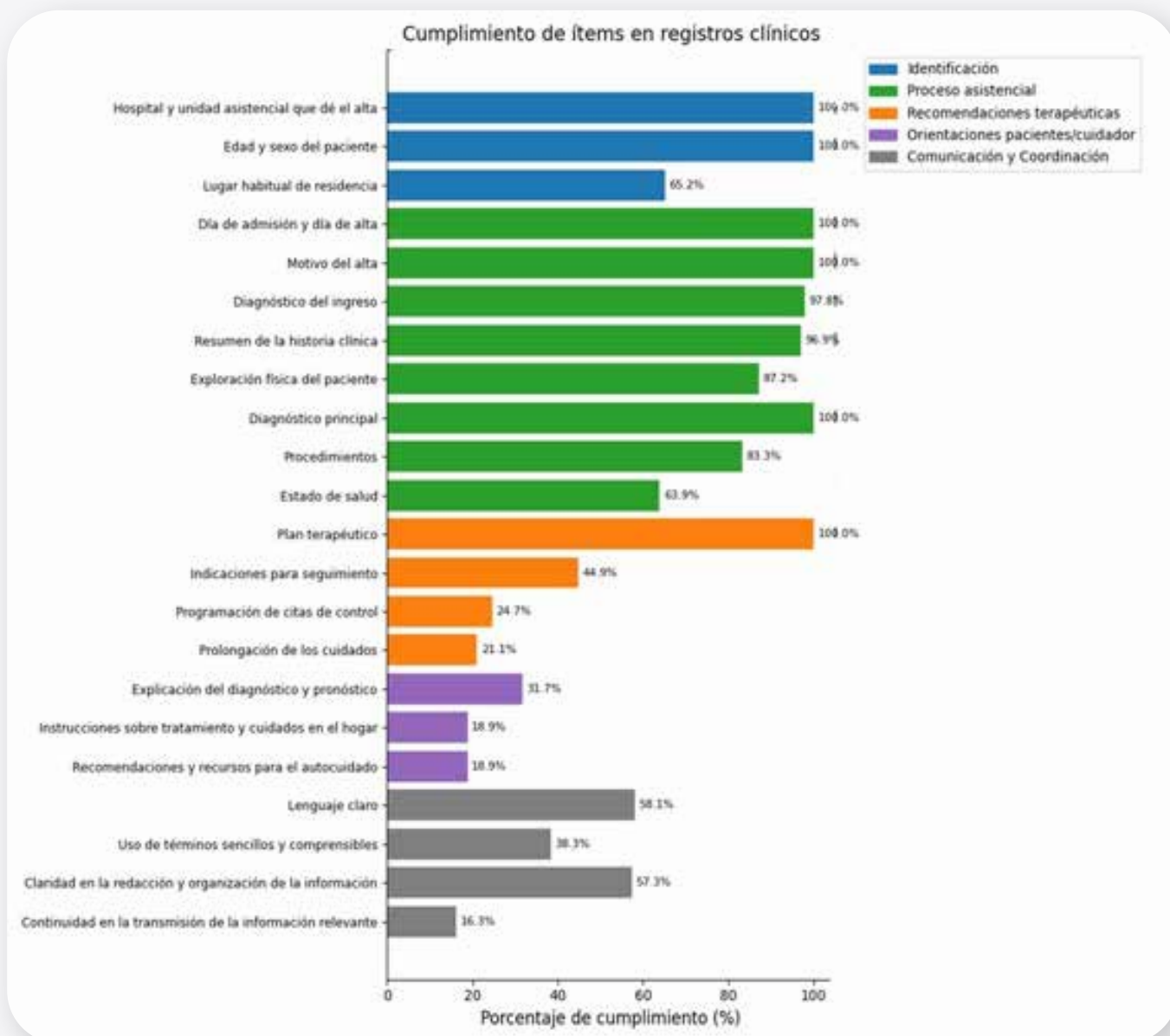
el 83.3% y el estado de salud en el 63.9 % fueron los más bajos. Las indicaciones para seguimiento en el 44.9%, la programación de citas de control en el 24.7% y la prolongación de los cuidados en el 21.1% de los informes fueron evaluados con peores valores para la dimensión recomendaciones terapéuticas. Las orientaciones pacientes/cuidador y la comunicación y coordinación fueron las dimensiones peor evaluadas.

Una mirada hacia el interior de estas permitió identificar que la continuidad en la transmisión de la información relevante 16.3%, instrucciones sobre el tratamiento y cuidados en el hogar 18.9% y recomendaciones y recursos para el autocuidado 18.9% fueron las peores evaluadas; seguidas de la explicación del diagnóstico y pronóstico en 31.7%, el uso de términos sencillos y comprensibles en 38.3 % y el lenguaje claro 58.1%. Gráfico 2 y 3



Fuente: elaboración propia

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Discusión

El aumento de la prevalencia de la insuficiencia cardíaca se asocia a múltiples comorbilidades y deterioro de la calidad de vida de las personas que la padecen. Además, los costes sanitarios, y los no sanitarios, relacionados con los cuidados, suponen ya un importante esfuerzo para el sistema sanitario público, con el agravante de que las estimaciones son que tanto su incidencia como su prevalencia continuarán en aumento (Fernández-Bergés y González-Fernández 2022). A esto se le suma los frecuentes reingresos y la mortalidad hospitalaria de estos pacientes, por lo que un informe de alta con calidad contribuye a disminuir el reingreso.

El informe de alta es el cierre del proceso asistencial del paciente. Por ello el conocimiento de cómo se debe realizar, que aspectos debe contener y qué normativa regula este proceso, es importante para realizarlo correctamente. Esto es debido a que una elaboración incorrecta puede suponer consecuencias legales debido a una denuncia del propio paciente (García-Alegría y Jiménez-Puent 2005).

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En primer lugar, en la revisión documental se observó que no hay instrumentos que permitan ser utilizados en la práctica clínica para evaluar la calidad de los informes de alta hospitalaria de pacientes con insuficiencia cardiaca, de tal manera que esta propuesta suple en alguna medida la carencia existente en el ámbito investigativo de con ese fin.

Por otro lado, constituye una herramienta metodológica para investigar en un tema altamente prevalente como la insuficiencia cardiaca que se plantea como una patología de alta prevalencia para los sistemas de salud pública.

Este trabajo presenta el proceso de construcción y validación mediante expertos de un instrumento para evaluar la calidad de los IAH de pacientes con insuficiencia cardiaca. El procedimiento de carácter mixto llevado a cabo ha posibilitado un análisis contextualizado de los ítems en su conjunto, así como de forma individual.

Se obtuvo una puntuación alta en cuanto a la claridad, coherencia y relevancia por parte de los descriptores cuantitativos asociados al cuestionario. Por su parte, los descriptores cualitativos, brindan información realmente útil que no sólo contextualiza los resultados cuantitativos, sino que potencia el valor de los expertos en cuanto a su aporte en su área de experticia.

El cuestionario propuesto, adquiere valor de uso en la práctica asistencial, pues es adaptado a los requerimientos propuestos por la Ley 41/2002 (BOE 2002)(3), convirtiéndolo en un instrumento confiable que permite evaluar de manera rápida, sencilla y completa los IAH y de esta forma favorecer mejorar la calidad de la atención medica que se brinda y el continuo asistencial.

El grado en que la prueba que se está usando, representa y es capaz de expresar la característica que se investiga se refiere a la validación de contenido, con esta se determina si el instrumento incluye todos los aspectos del concepto estudiado (Martín Alfonso y Bayarre Vea 2008).

El instrumento cumple el criterio anterior; esto constituye un importante indicador de su valor y una justificación loable tenida en cuenta en el proceso de validación, pues esta alternativa de validez permite realizar una valoración crítica del constructo teórico del que se parte y las categorías que se proponen. Se obtienen valores del Coeficiente de Concordancia de Kendall (W), en todos los casos, por encima de 0.85 lo que indica un equilibrio de acuerdo entre los expertos al calificarlo como "Bueno" o "Excelente". La media obtenida permitió considerar como relevante los criterios de claridad, comprensión, aplicabilidad y sensibilidad.

La escogencia del grupo focal como opción metodológica, se fundamentó en la posibilidad de interacción entre los participantes, esto proporciona el incentivo a respuestas significativas o ideas nuevas, al mismo tiempo que instiga opiniones contrarias. A este tenor, la proximidad de estos con el tema facilita las respuestas, siendo discutido por todos. Estos criterios coinciden con lo planteado por Silveira (2015).

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No existe consenso acerca del número de expertos a emplear; hay autores que señalan que el número óptimo debe ser entre 15 y 30 (Masó y Rangel 2022), otros sugieren tomar de 2 a 20 expertos (Collet 2019) y algunos señalan que con 10 expertos es suficiente para brindar una estimación confiable de la validez de contenido de un instrumento. (García Muñoz 2019), al plantear que los grupos focales constituyen espacios de investigación, en tanto permiten mayor flexibilidad al investigador para diseñar distintas actividades, lógicas y dinámicas al interior de los grupos.

Según García Millán (2009), el desarrollo del proceso asistencial se ve favorecido cuando se proporciona al paciente o usuario información clínica, de igual forma mejora la relación entre sanitario-paciente y, por tanto, influye en la calidad del servicio. En este sentido, el grupo focal permitió considerar la información al paciente como aspecto positivo del instrumento.

Una información adecuada provoca en los pacientes una reacción que conduce a la comprensión y cumplimiento del plan terapéutico prescrito. Bolaños (2014) consideran que el lenguaje, la etnia del paciente y la experiencia del médico pueden ser una limitación para que este plan sea adecuado; tanto por parte del médico, como por parte del entorno social del paciente.

De tal manera que, si el paciente y las familias están bien informados, su participación en la mejora de la seguridad de su atención puede ser muy beneficiosa, en términos de una mejor salud para el paciente y desempeño profesional.

Brindarle información al paciente en el informe de alta permite involucrarlo activamente en la toma de decisiones sobre su cuidado, promueve un sentido de empoderamiento y responsabilidad, lo que puede contribuir a una mayor adherencia al tratamiento y resultados más positivos.

Adoptar un enfoque que considera los aspectos médicos junto con los factores emocionales y sociales, permite un abordaje mejor de la complejidad de las condiciones de salud, de esta forma se mejora la calidad de la atención y su capacidad para abordar las necesidades únicas de cada individuo (García Millán 2009). Ambos planteamientos son aspectos importantes de la atención centrada en el paciente, estrategia esta necesaria para la atención con calidad.

Con independencia de la consistencia estadística, la validez de los instrumentos depende de varios factores. En términos generales, el análisis de la fidelidad, aceptabilidad y efectos preliminares es posible mediante el diseño e implementación de los estudios piloto.

Permite evaluar la idoneidad del cuestionario utilizado para la obtención de los datos. Por otra parte, sirve para identificar a través del encuestado o sujeto de investigación si los instrumentos de medición fueron largos, cortos, complejos, ambiguos o confusos y de esta forma determinar la factibilidad de aplicación o

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validez interna. En otras palabras, permite verificar la comprensión por parte de los sujetos de investigación y si los ítems o preguntas son verdaderamente suficientes y claros.

Además, se tiene oportunidad de evaluar la congruencia del lenguaje, redacción o adaptación cultural (si fuera necesario). La aplicación del mismo, proporciona al investigador, elementos para realizar algunas modificaciones antes de realizar el muestreo a escala completa (Abeille Mora y Soto Carrasco 2015). Sin embargo, no puede ser aplicada a la misma población, donde se realiza la recolección final de los datos, es por esto que este trabajo la validación practica se realizó en una población diferente a la que se le aplico el cuestionario a gran escala.

Las intervenciones deben mantener las características del estudio principal. Constituyen una versión miniatura de la intervención que se realiza en un estudio a mayor escala. Algunos autores recomiendan de 10 a 12 participantes (Fernández-Sánchez, Guzmán-Facundo 2023 y Moore, Carter 2011).

La prueba piloto realizada en este trabajo permitió evaluar como insuficiente a la mayoría de los IAH, esto sugiere la necesidad de desarrollar estrategias que permitan mejorar la calidad de estos. Es por ello que el instrumento que se aporta permitirá al médico tratante estructurar un informe con toda la información necesaria para que le paciente participe de manera activa en su autocuidado.

En cuanto a la aplicación del instrumento, a gran escala en la práctica clínica, es importante recordar que las personas de edad avanzada con enfermedad aguda presentan mayor riesgo de estadía hospitalaria prolongada y de reingresar tras el alta que población más joven, lo que implica costos para usuarios y sistemas de salud (Budnich, Sastre 2020). En tal sentido se debe proporcionar información precisa sobre la conducta a seguir una vez dado de alta.

Otro elemento a señalar es la perspectiva del lugar de residencia. El envejecimiento de la población y el despoblamiento de las zonas rurales en las últimas décadas ha supuesto un cambio de paradigma, incrementando las necesidades de cuidados paliativos y colocando a los residentes rurales en una situación de especial vulnerabilidad respecto a la accesibilidad.

El tiempo de desplazamiento y de acceso a la atención medica modulan la calidad de la atención. Los residentes rurales y sus cuidadores enfrentan barreras significativas en la calidad de la atención. Esta desigualdad se incrementa por los determinantes sociales de género y nivel socioeconómico, además de por el coste incrementado de la atención.

El lugar de la residencia puede considerarse como una barrera determinante para acceder a la protección de la salud (Tolosana y Serrano 2021). A esto se le suma las indicaciones para seguimiento, su ausencia o mala elaboración puede conllevar a errores medicación, mala adherencia y automedicación. Diferentes factores influyen en que los medicamentos no se siempre se empleen de la manera más apropiada, tal es el caso del incremento del número de fármacos disponibles, unido al creciente hábito de buscar en la prescripción de medicamentos la solución a todos los

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problemas de salud (Muñoz y García Milián 2021).

En el contexto digital en el que nos encontramos, la gestión de pacientes ha evolucionado de manera significativa. Por ello, la adopción de programas de control del paciente se ha vuelto necesaria para proporcionar una atención médica de calidad. Brindar al paciente una programación de citas de control optimiza la gestión de atención, reduce los costos operativos y de tratamiento, agilizando la programación de pacientes y mejorando la eficiencia del personal para determinar el tiempo requerido para cada intervención o consulta.

Martín Fortea (2013) en su trabajo “Análisis de calidad de los informes de alta hospitalaria como garantía de continuidad de cuidados y herramienta de mejora en la atención médica a pacientes con insuficiencia cardíaca” se centra en la importancia de los informes de alta hospitalaria para garantizar una buena comunicación entre los distintos niveles asistenciales y proporcionar una continuidad de cuidados óptima a los pacientes con insuficiencia cardíaca (IC). Refiere la necesidad de una buena comunicación, la IC es una patología común que requiere cuidados médicos y sociales tanto intra como extrahospitalarios. Los IAH son fundamentales para transmitir información relevante y garantizar una atención adecuada. Su evaluación permite identificar deficiencias en los IAH, como la falta de información sobre el tratamiento al alta, pruebas pendientes y seguimiento. Esto afecta la transmisión de información y puede tener consecuencias negativas para los pacientes.

A pesar de que la redacción debe hacerse en términos médicos, no se debe olvidar que el paciente va a ser uno de los principales usuarios del IAH y debe comprender el mensaje que se le transmite, sobre todo, en lo que hace referencia al tratamiento. También se recomienda evitar el uso de abreviaturas y acrónimos, no sólo porque son tecnicismos que el paciente no comprende, sino que en muchas ocasiones se escapan del manejo habitual de los especialistas que pueden recurrir a buscar información en el IAH. Asimismo, es conveniente no usar términos ambiguos que den lugar a interpretaciones subjetivas (Conthe Gutiérrez 2010). En este sentido, un exceso de información supondría la pérdida de algún dato relevante para el seguimiento posterior del paciente. La redacción de un resumen más exhaustivo, que no implica que sea más extenso, no sólo mejora la calidad de los informes, sino que, además, supone mejoras de tiempo (Zapatero Gaviria 2010).

Al recibir el alta hospitalaria, es fundamental seguir recomendaciones para garantizar la recuperación y cuidado personal.

Se debe brindar información sobre las medidas de prevención, las pautas nutricionales, comprensión del tratamiento, vigilancia de signos vitales, entre otros. Sin embargo, en la evaluación práctica realizada, la prolongación de los cuidados, las instrucciones sobre el tratamiento y cuidados en el hogar, así como las recomendaciones y recursos para el autocuidado recibieron puntuaciones muy bajas.

Tampoco aparece explícito el pronóstico, a pesar de que se conoce que la

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identificación de los factores pronósticos (entre ellos, marcadores biológicos, dimensiones de personalidad o riesgos psicosociales) respalda asimismo la prevención secundaria y terciaria. A su vez, los factores de riesgo (y los de protección), así como la vulnerabilidad o la resiliencia del sujeto, son siempre referentes útiles a considerar en la elaboración del IAH (Ibáñez y Echeburúa 2025).

Los informes no deben considerarse como un registro formal de los acontecimientos ocurridos durante un episodio de hospitalización, sino como un importante medio de comunicación y herramienta de aprendizaje para mejorar la continuidad de cuidados en el paciente con ICC. Estos resultados sugieren la necesidad de desarrollar estrategias de intervención para mejorar la calidad de los informes y como consecuencia la calidad de la atención y de los IAH en pacientes con ICC con la consecuente evaluación de su impacto mediante investigaciones.

Se concluye que los criterios de evaluación incluidos en el instrumento son relevantes y pertinentes para valorar la calidad de los informes de alta hospitalaria en pacientes con insuficiencia cardiaca.

El instrumento propuesto abarca aspectos clave como la información del paciente, la información clínica, el plan de tratamiento y seguimiento, y la comunicación y coordinación que permiten asegurar la continuidad asistencial y el seguimiento adecuado de los pacientes con insuficiencia cardiaca en tanto garantiza una transición efectiva entre el hospital y la atención primaria.

La aplicación del instrumento en la práctica clínica evidenció la factibilidad de su uso para la mejora de la calidad de la atención brindada a los pacientes con insuficiencia cardiaca.

Anexos

Anexo 1

Instrumento de Evaluación de la Calidad del Informe del Alta Hospitalaria en Pacientes con insuficiencia cardiaca

Este instrumento proporciona una guía estructurada para evaluar la calidad del informe del alta hospitalaria, abarcando aspectos clave como la claridad de la información, la precisión en los tratamientos prescritos y las instrucciones para el seguimiento y cuidados posteriores.

Información de identificación

¿El informe incluye la información sobre hospital y unidad asistencial o servicio clínico que da el alta de manera clara y completa?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿El informe incluye edad y sexo del paciente?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿El informe incluye lugar habitual de residencia del paciente?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

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Proceso asistencial

¿Se especifican las fechas de ingreso y alta hospitalaria?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se mencionan los diagnósticos principales y secundarios del paciente?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se presenta un resumen la historia clínica del paciente?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se describe la exploración física del paciente?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se mencionan los procedimientos médicos/quirúrgicos?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se presenta un resumen del estado de salud del paciente?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

Información sobre el Tratamiento

¿Se describe el tratamiento farmacológico prescrito al alta?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se proporcionan instrucciones claras sobre la dosificación, la frecuencia y duración de los tratamientos?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se indican las recomendaciones específicas sobre la actividad física y la dieta?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

Orientaciones pacientes/cuidador

¿Se incluyen las citas de seguimiento programadas con especialistas?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se proporciona información sobre los signos de alarma y cuándo buscar atención médica de emergencia?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

¿Se detallan los cuidados a tener en cuenta en el hogar para el cuidado del paciente?

Sí ----- No----- Parcialmente-----

Comentarios Adicionales:

[Espacio para comentarios adicionales o sugerencias sobre el informe de alta hospitalaria]

Observaciones del Evaluador:

[Sección para las observaciones y la evaluación general del informe de alta hospitalaria]

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Communication Papers

Media Literacy & Gender Studies

**From "Alpha" to "Asset":
Social Media Platforms and the Commodification of Masculine Anxiety**

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Commentary

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Research at the intersection of masculinity studies and social media increasingly centers upon the so-called Incel community. Deriving their name from a portmanteau of “involuntary celibate,” the group is defined loosely as “an online subculture of men who identify with their perceived inability to establish sexual relationships,” and have recently risen in prominence/notoriety for their grievance-based activism and denigration of women (Costello et al., 2025, p. 1815). Studies focused upon the group have emphasized the frequency of mental illness diagnoses among its members (Moskalenko et al., 2022). More relevant for my approach, however, is a study conducted by William Costello, Joe Whittaker, and Andrew G. Thomas, who approached the community via the application of the 3N (needs, narrative, and network) theoretical model. These scholars suggest that, based upon their findings, ideological adherence and poor mental health are considerably more predictive of harmful beliefs and attitudes than the networking that takes place within such online communities (which has received considerable attention) (Costello et al., 2025). In this brief analysis, then, I hope to consider noteworthy shifts in the ideological foundations of the Incel community—namely, changes in how they conceptualize manhood.

One largely overlooked site of such research involves connections between the evolving gender identities of Incels and the neoliberal era within which such transformations are occurring. Scholars trace the early impact of capitalism upon manhood, citing as a product of the 19th century the concept of the self-made man, an anxious achiever who was compelled to earn his masculinity: “Manhood had to be proved, earned, demonstrated. And the place to do so was in the workplace” (Kimmel, 2003, p. 703). Wendy Brown has subsequently extended this work into our current, neoliberal era. Utilizing the conceptualization of homo economicus—who, as Foucault theorized, is “an entrepreneur of himself”—she contends that neoliberalism and its attending view of the human subject essentially as a rational actor within the free market is no longer isolated to economic theory; it instead now stands as the dominant, organizing principle of late capitalistic society (Foucault, 1988, p. 17). As she argues in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, “market values are crowding out all others and... vulnerable, precious, or sacred things, including democracy itself, are being increasingly and inappropriately subjected to markets” (Brown, 2017, p. 79). This marketization of all human experience renders individuals mere units of human capital driven by competition and the need to enhance their stock value via self-improvement. As is demonstrated in current male-focused platform media, the marketization of the subject has predictably and dramatically shifted masculinities from the predication of manliness upon financial success (the self-made man) to the commodification of the body (the neoliberal man). A succinct review of the current round of influencers gaining traction in this social media niche will illuminate this trend.

The Looksmaxxers—male Incel content creators who emphasize physical transformation and the marketization of the body—signal a shift away from earlier predominant discourse trends in the Manosphere. Unlike the pick-up artists who dominated the field previously, the Looksmaxxers do not package and sell behavioral advice; instead, they commodify the body itself. As a result, platform

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media in this vein has moved dramatically away from products meant to improve male behavior and towards those that, they assert, physically enhance the male body. They subsequently market what Foucault conceived of as technologies of the self, which “...permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988, p. 17).). Exploiting an algorithm that directs insecure men to their channels, this subset of the Incel community market technologies of the self to men who, occupying the lower rungs of Raewyn Connell’s (1995) patterns of masculinity—complicity, subjugation, and marginalization—seek to join the coveted final pattern, hegemony. The accumulation of digital performative capital is central to this quest for hegemony. As Lin (2025) explains, “Within platform capitalism, creators do more than brand themselves—they actively construct and refine their personas as datafied assets, calibrated for algorithmic visibility and valuation” (4). The Looksmaxxers exemplify the impact of this strain of capitalism upon masculinity. A core tenet of their philosophy is after all the idea that men must, to gain access to the coveted hegemonic pattern of masculinity, accumulate digital performative capital via the constant monitoring and modification of what they view as the most consequential batch of assets they and their followers possess: their bodies.

Prescribed alterations to this asset portfolio range from the realm of health and grooming to cosmetic procedures. Influencers in the community recommend, for example, skincare routines, haircuts, wardrobe updates, sleep, diet, and exercise, but often also venture into the more serious realms of orthodontics, injectables, and plastic surgery. Perhaps the most famous figure within the community, Braden Peters (known as “Clavicular”), has advocated taking anabolic steroids, using methamphetamine for its appetite-suppressing properties, and “bonesmashing,” (a dangerous, self-administered attempt to reform the body through small, repeated hits with a hammer or one’s fist). Exploiting and cultivating anxieties among its male audience, this segment of the Manosphere promotes a new, profoundly neoliberal ideal of masculinity that treats the body as an asset subject to the trends of the market.

This neoliberalization of masculinity is reflected in the market-oriented rhetoric deployed by these platform personalities. Influencers such as Dylan Leam, Kareem Shami, and Clavicular prescribe bodily alterations as methods for improving one’s capital. They, exemplifying the ideologies of the neoliberal man, describe the male subject as an asset portfolio of sorts: he must strengthen his marketable assets—which are subject to competition and capable of both appreciation and depreciation—for his life to improve. Such assets, alternatively labeled “data points,” the Looksmaxxers contend, increase in value via self-optimization and depreciate if no action is taken. Using the language of what they view as cold market rationality, they assign scores for height, status, and looks to arrive at an individual’s supposed sexual market value (SMV). Their goal is to enhance their “metrics” (interpupillary distance, jawline definition, etc.) and to thereby ascend what they describe in

¹

Though, it must be pointed out, the technologies they promote deal strictly with physical appearance.

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business terms as the corporate ladders of dating and social interactions. Those nearing the masculine ideal are praised for their strong “real estate.” These figures, then, utilize market terminology to lend credence to the ideological shift in gender identity they signal.

This approach of course has significant repercussions beyond the borders of the male body. These influencers borrow the concept of ROI (return on investment) from economic theory and apply it to all relationships and actions. Besides their ranking of technologies of the self-according to the perceived increase in value of their bodies, they similarly apply a marketized rubric to their valuations of others with whom they share relationships and sexual experiences. Clavicular, for example, recently argued that it is not important to bring female sexual partners pleasure since “the amount of extra effort that’s required to do that is just not going to really have much ROI” (Impulsive, 2026). They also use business terms to frame and shape their relationships to women as a class more broadly. Members of this community assert that women are attracted to a minority of men (the hegemonic pattern of masculinity), and that this group therefore monopolizes—weaponizing another business term—the sexual marketplace. Anger, then, is stoked and rationalized through the use of capitalistic terms, in this case that of a monopolized market. These young men view the world in the reductive language of capitalism and simplify human interactions to the basic terminology of investment, value, and cost, limiting the opportunity to pursue a fulfilling life. Their rhetorical choices illustrate the subservience of contemporary masculinities to neoliberal logic.

The results of this discursive colonization in which neoliberalism increasingly escapes the bounds of economics and permeates every aspect of society are profoundly negative. As this brief analysis illustrates, the intrusion of neoliberalism into all facets of 21st-century societies has contributed overwhelmingly to what many consider a crisis of masculinity. Exploiting an algorithm that traffics their content to insecure men, the Looksmaxxers sell technologies of the self that are frequently harmful—the uses of methamphetamine and bonesmashing techniques being a case in point. The roots of these physical dangers are of course ideological ones: as these digital media creators illustrate, neoliberal logic, now duplicated throughout culture, hollows out the human subject. Rendering the individual a mere asset whose worth is to be estimated according to superficial criteria and whose relationships and experiences are reduced to the profit gained from the exploitation of another person, the discourse surrounding the Looksmaxxers and the Incel community more broadly illuminate the dire impact of neoliberalism upon contemporary masculinities.

These trends illustrate how masculinity is being reconstructed and marketed in digital culture to prey upon male anxieties in much the same way media have and continue to engender and exploit beauty-related anxieties among women. Looksmaxxers frequently foreground and critique appearance-based hierarchies, mimicking earlier radical feminist analyses of the beauty industry. But unlike their feminist predecessors, these influencers weaponize such critiques, treating problematic, appearance-based power systems in the same manner they view the

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free market: as natural and inevitable. A feminist critique of these standards would consider these phenomena in light of objectification theory, which, as Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts (1997) outline, proposes that this reduction of the male body to a mere object/portfolio of assets prompts the male audience members to internalize an observer's perspective of their bodies. But, as a subset of a misogynistic community that benefits financially from ascribing to all women an outsized valuation of physical appearances, this newest wave of Manosphere figures quietly recommends that its audience accept this harmful ideology. Far from critiquing the beauty industry, these figures reduce the male body to quantifiable metrics (midface ratio, hunter eyes, canthal tilt, etc.) and then, having convinced their followers that potential mates value only these physical attributes, sell them a cure steeped in pseudoscience and sexism. As this brief analysis demonstrates, the contradictions endemic to this ideology are disguised via the application of market-oriented rhetoric.

In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf (1990) outlines her idea of an "iron maiden," which she defines as an impossible standard of beauty exploited to psychologically punish women for their inability to achieve it. The Looksmaxxers market to the Incel community a masculine equivalent of the iron maiden, an "iron man" of sorts, which they describe as the "Chad." This idealized conception of manhood is, like the iron maiden, unattainable and thereby enables this wave of influencers to capitalize on their followers' resulting anxieties. As is clearly illustrated, the key deception of this social media niche—that the Looksmaxxers are rational altruists seeking to equip their followers to compete in the social and sexual marketplace—is delivered in the language and logic of neoliberalism. In this way, these platform creators are transforming masculinity, objectifying their followers by tying manhood to the body as a portfolio of assets. The impacts of this ideological shift as it proliferates across digital media are only beginning to be felt.

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BOOK REVIEW



**Butler, J. (2024). *Who's Afraid of Gender?*
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.**

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Judith Butler's book *Who's Afraid of Gender?* is a significant theoretical work that analyzes the "anti-gender" discourses currently on the rise globally. Butler discusses how political and ideological attacks on the concept of gender have emerged, the discursive strategies through which they have circulated, and the role played by the media and the cultural sphere in this process. The book examines the anti-gender movements that have gained momentum in recent years in Europe, Latin America, and the United States within their historical, political, and cultural contexts

Butler's central argument is that the "gender ideology" discourse was produced not as a genuine theoretical debate but rather as a political phantasm. The author argues that the concept of gender is often distorted by conservative political actors and that this discourse is linked to authoritarian forms of politics. In this context, Butler contends that anti-gender movements are not merely a critique of an academic concept but are also part of a broader political attack on feminist and queer rights.

The book also highlights the role of media and public discourse in the circulation of anti-gender rhetoric. According to Butler, media outlets often simplify or sensationalize gender discussions, thereby laying the groundwork for misunderstandings in the public sphere. In particular, social media and political propaganda channels can exacerbate social polarization by disseminating discourses that portray gender studies as a threat. In this regard, the book also makes a significant contribution to the literature on media studies and cultural studies.

Theoretically, Butler's approach is situated between queer theory, feminist theory, and critical political theory. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theories of power and discourse, as well as the queer theory literature, the author explains how anti-gender policies are produced. This analysis treats gender debates not merely as an academic issue but also as part of cultural wars and ideological struggles.

One of the book's significant contributions is demonstrating that anti-gender movements are interconnected on a global scale. Butler notes that anti-gender discourses emerging in different countries employ similar rhetorical strategies and are often supported by religious, nationalist, or conservative political actors. This perspective reveals that anti-gender policies circulate within a transnational network.

However, the book also has some limitations. Because Butler's theoretical approach is quite dense and conceptual, certain sections of the work may be challenging for readers unfamiliar with academic literature. Additionally, while the book focuses primarily on ideological and discursive analyses, it addresses empirical examples of how anti-gender movements spread through digital media practices or algorithmic platforms only to a limited extent.

Who's Afraid of Gender? offers an important theoretical contribution to understanding contemporary gender debates. Butler's analysis demonstrates that

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anti-gender discourses are not merely a cultural debate but also a critical political issue regarding democratic values and human rights. For this reason, the work serves as an important reference source for researchers in the fields of gender studies, media studies, and political science.,

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