
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Saudi Women's Consumption of Turkish Dramas

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ABSTRACT

Turkish television dramas have surged in popularity across the Arab world, particularly among female viewers, yet quantitative research on Saudi women's consumption patterns and sociocultural interpretations remains scarce. This study, anchored in Uses and Gratifications Theory and Cultural Proximity Theory, with interpretive support from Cultivation Theory and Social Identity Theory, examines motivations, viewing preferences, and selective adoption of portrayed values among Saudi female audiences. Data were gathered via an online questionnaire from 1,274 Saudi women aged 20–60 who regularly watch Turkish dramas. The sample was predominantly young (68.4% aged 20–29), single (61.7%), highly educated (63.3% bachelor's or above), urban (95.5%), and moderately religious. Results reveal a clear preference for Arabic subtitles (82.3%) over dubbing, solitary viewing (75.8%), consumption via the Qissaht Asik application (71.7%) on laptops (71.2%), and genres such as realistic fiction and family dramas. Primary gratifications included pleasure ($M = 4.14$) and passing time ($M = 3.93$), while cultural similarity was rejected ($M = 2.52$). Most participants rarely or never compared drama narratives to their reality (75.9%) and reported guilt regarding intimate scenes (67.8%). Younger, single, and more educated respondents displayed significantly higher acceptance of non-traditional gender roles (women's independence, freedom in dress, reduced dependence on men; $p < .05-.001$). Findings underscore active, critical, and culturally selective engagement, where Turkish dramas mainly serve entertainment while facilitating modest, demographically moderated negotiation of gender norms and identity in a conservative context.

KEYWORDS

Turkish Drama, Cultivation Theory, Saudi female viewers, Social Identity, Theory, Soap Opera, Saudi Arabia

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1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, Turkish dramas have evolved from traditional television formats into globally popular cultural products, achieving notable success in the Arab world. The rapid expansion of Arab media captured diverse audiences (Alardawi et al., 2021), with Turkish content entering the region as early as 2006. The Saudi-owned Pan-Arab satellite channel, Middle East Broadcasting Company (MBC), broadcast Noor (Gümüş) in 2008, leading to a viewership surge across the Arab world and turning the drama into a regional phenomenon (Durmuş, 2016). According to MBC's marketing department and The New York Times, Noor attracted over 80 million viewers, of which 50 million were women (Yanardağöğlu & Karam, 2013). This unprecedented success garnered international attention and inspired other countries to explore Turkish dramas in their own markets (Berg, 2023). Consequently, many Arab channels began broadcasting Turkish serials regularly, with Turkish programs accounting for approximately 60% of foreign content in the Arab world (Berg, 2017).

The widespread appeal of Turkish dramas is further enhanced by dubbing and subtitling in multiple languages, allowing them to reach diverse demographics, including both male and female viewers (Jabbour, 2015). Beyond entertainment, these dramas have influenced tourism, fashion, music, and cultural consumption in the region. Turkish dramas have been widely exported to countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia (Buccianti, 2010), contributing significantly to Turkey's soft power. By portraying a society where modernity and tradition coexist and displaying a range of social values, these dramas have shaped Turkey's cultural and political image in ways that resonate with Arab audiences (Berg, 2023).

Dramas, in particular, have become a dominant form of entertainment among women. Scholars note that Turkish dramas provide a window into a different world, fostering emotional realism and personal connection, which explains the high female viewership (Abo-Saleem, 2019). The depiction of urban contemporary Turkish life offers a sense of modernity that feels both familiar and distinct within the Arab context (Issa, 2011). These factors make Turkish dramas more appealing than local, regional, and Western productions (Irani, 2007).

Despite this widespread consumption, there remains a notable gap in research specifically addressing Saudi women's engagement with Turkish dramas. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the motivations, preferences, and sociocultural interpretations that shape Saudi female viewership.

The study is theoretically grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), which conceptualizes audiences as active agents who select media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs, including entertainment, escapism, and cultural exploration. Cultural Proximity Theory (Straubhaar, 1991, 2007) is applied to investigate how perceived similarities and differences between Turkish and Saudi cultures influence viewing choices and interpretation. Additionally, elements of Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) are incorporated to interpret how repeated media exposure and social comparison processes may shape perceptions of gender roles and cultural identity, although the cross-sectional design limits causal inference.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) (Katz et al., 1973; Rubin, 2009), which conceptualizes media audiences as active agents who selectively engage with media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs, such as entertainment, passing time, escapism, and identity-related exploration. In the present study, U&G directly informs the operationalization of key variables related to motivations and viewing preferences. Accordingly, Research Question 1 (RQ1) examines reported motivations (pleasure, passing time) as well as format and platform preferences (subtitles versus dubbing, solitary viewing, genre selection, and digital platforms). The theory provides the primary explanatory foundation for understanding why Saudi women engage with Turkish drama content.

Complementing U&G, Cultural Proximity Theory (Straubhaar, 1991, 2007) is employed to interpret how perceived cultural similarities and differences between Turkish and Saudi societies may shape viewing choices and content interpretation. Cultural Proximity Theory posits that audiences tend to prefer media content that reflects culturally familiar values, norms, or social structures. In this study, the theory informs RQ2 by examining preferences for subtitled versus dubbed content and viewers' perceptions of cultural fit or distance. Given the emphasis on Arabic subtitles and reported evaluations of cultural similarity, this framework provides an appropriate lens for analyzing format choices and comparative cultural perceptions.

To extend interpretive depth, selected elements of Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) are incorporated in an exploratory manner. Cultivation Theory suggests that repeated exposure to media representations may gradually shape perceptions of social reality, including attitudes toward gender roles. In this context, RQ3 explores whether viewing frequency is associated with differing levels of acceptance of non-traditional gender values across demographic groups (age, education). However, due to the cross-sectional design and the absence of longitudinal exposure measures, the study does not test cultivation effects in a causal sense; rather, it examines correlational patterns consistent with cultivation-related propositions.

Similarly, Social Identity Theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals may selectively adopt or resist portrayed values based on social comparison and group identification processes. RQ4 therefore investigates the relationship between demographic variables (age, education, marital status, and religiosity) and endorsement or rejection of specific value representations (women's independence, freedom in dress). Given the non-experimental and cross-sectional nature of the design, these analyses are exploratory and do not constitute direct tests of identity formation mechanisms.

Collectively, these frameworks structure the study's variables and analytical approach. Uses, Gratifications Theory, and Cultural Proximity Theory serve as the primary explanatory foundations guiding measurement and research questions, while Cultivation Theory and Social Identity Theory are employed as interpretive lenses to contextualize demographic differences in value perceptions. The study's design permits the examination of associations rather than causal inferences, and theoretical interpretations are therefore presented cautiously and within correlational limits.

2.2 Related Work

Turkey is the world's second-largest exporter of television content after the United States, attracting a substantial international audience, particularly among Arab women. Previous studies on Turkish dramas highlight their widespread popularity and the strong appeal they hold for female viewers (Aljammazi & Asil, 2017). In 2006, 75 Turkish dramas were broadcast to Arab audiences, with Saudi Arabia emerging as the highest consumer (Bhutto, 2019). An estimated 85 million viewers watched the 2008 romantic drama *Noor* across the Middle East, underscoring the immense reach of Turkish television content (Buccianti, 2010).

Since the 2000s, the proliferation of digital platforms, gadgets, and online streaming services has significantly expanded the accessibility and popularity of soap operas and dramas (Johnson, 2019; Ju, 2020). Turkish dramas are now available globally, reaching audiences in Europe, North Africa, South America, and Asia. For example, *Magnificent Century* (2011) was broadcast in 43 countries and viewed by approximately 500 million people worldwide (Khedimi, 2021). Beyond entertainment, studies have shown that these dramas can influence socio-cultural perceptions. For instance, Al-Hashani (2019) found that Turkish dramas positively affected young Algerian women's views on marriage and romantic relationships.

The popularity of Turkish dramas has also contributed to Turkey's cultural soft power. By portraying a society where modernity and tradition coexist, these dramas create a positive image of Turkey as a modern, pro-Western yet Islamic nation (Kujawa, 2011). Broadcasters often adapt the content linguistically and culturally—for example, by dubbing or altering character names—to enhance appeal for Arab audiences (Jabbour, 2015). These adaptations not only increase engagement but also generate tourism interest and contribute to destination promotion, as viewers often express a desire to visit Turkey after watching these shows (Beshay, 2013).

Research has further examined the demographics and sociocultural engagement of viewers. Georgiou (2014) highlighted that soap operas help women negotiate their cultural identity, enabling them to imagine alternatives to traditional gender roles while maintaining alignment with broader moral and social norms in the Arab context. Biga (2023) emphasized that some dramas challenge patriarchal norms by highlighting issues such as male violence and femicide. However, the impact of Turkish dramas is complex: while some promote cultural dialogue and self-awareness, others may misrepresent social and moral frameworks, resulting in negative or conflicting influences (Syed et al., 2023).

Despite extensive research on Turkish dramas' popularity and soft power effects (Alardawi et al., 2021; Berg, 2023; Berg et al., 2025), quantitative studies specifically examining Saudi women's consumption patterns remain scarce. Most prior research focuses on dubbed broadcasts via satellite channels (Buccianti, 2010; Jabbour, 2015) or broad sociocultural impacts in other Arab countries (Al-Hashani, 2019; Khedimi, 2021). Recent studies have begun to explore streaming-era viewing among Gulf youth (Berg et al., 2025) and identity negotiation (Alardawi, 2023). However, no study has quantitatively investigated subtitled viewing via dedicated apps (post-2018 MBC restrictions), the influence of religiosity and hijab type, daily consumption frequency, guilt over sexual content, or generational and educational differences in value acceptance among Saudi women. The current study addresses these gaps by providing a large-scale quantitative analysis of motivations, preferences, and selective cultural interpretations.

2.3 Research Questions

Guided by the theoretical framework, this study addresses the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the primary motivations and gratifications Saudi female viewers seek from Turkish dramas (pleasure, passing time, escapism, cultural learning)?
- **RQ2:** To what extent do perceptions of cultural similarity or difference between Turkish and Saudi societies influence viewing formats (subtitles vs. dubbing) and genre preferences?
- **RQ3:** Is frequency of exposure to Turkish dramas associated with viewers' acceptance of non-traditional gender roles and perceptions of social reality?
- **RQ4:** How do demographic factors (age, education, marital status, and religiosity) relate to viewers' selective adoption or rejection of portrayed cultural values?

2.4 Hypothesis

- **H1:** Younger viewers and those with higher education will show greater acceptance of non-traditional gender values.
- **H2:** Single viewers will report stronger motivations for escapism and cultural exploration, consistent with Uses and Gratifications Theory.

3. Methodology

The current study used a quantitative method to collect the data using an online questionnaire. The data was gathered from 1,274 Saudi female respondents between the ages of 20-60 years who daily watched Turkish Dramas. With the help of a survey questionnaire, the data was analyzed statistically to get more detailed and precise results from which the study can be concluded.

3.1 Study Sample and Size

In this study, 1,274 respondents completed an online questionnaire. As shown in Table 1, the majority of female participants were aged 20–29 years, representing 68.4% of the total. For context, a report by International Youth Day (2020) indicates that approximately 52.4% of the female population in Saudi Arabia falls within this age group. The study utilized a non-probability purposive and snowball-sampling approach, which means the findings, cannot be generalized to all Saudi women.

3.2 Design of the Study Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a self-designed questionnaire to examine the attitudes and motivations of Saudi viewers in watching Turkish television series. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first one was the demographics, which included 33 items. The second section involved viewing habits and consumption patterns comprising 17 items. The third section evaluated the mode and preference for watching the series consisting of 17 items, whereas the last section assessed the reasons for exploring the values and attitudes depicted in the Turkish dramas with 12 items included. Responses were recorded using the five-point Likert scale. Items in Section 4 (reasons for watching and value perceptions) were designed to operationalize the theoretical constructs: motivations aligned with Uses and Gratifications, cultural comparison items with Cultural Proximity and Social Identity Theory, and exposure-related perceptions with Cultivation Theory.

3.3 Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was a self-designed questionnaire developed specifically for this exploratory study. Section 4 (12 items on motivations, reasons for watching, and value perceptions) was designed to operationalize the key theoretical constructs: gratifications sought (U&G), perceived cultural similarity/difference (Cultural Proximity), selective value acceptance (Social Identity Theory), and perceptions of social reality (Cultivation Theory). A pilot study with 25 Saudi female viewers confirmed the instrument's internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.731$ for the full scale). For the main study, reliability was assessed per major construct: motivations/gratifications scale ($\alpha = 0.82$), cultural comparison items ($\alpha = 0.79$), and gender/value perception items ($\alpha = 0.76$). All values exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70 for exploratory research (Nunnally, 1978). Content validity was established through review by six experts in media studies, communication, and cultural studies, who recommended revisions to item wording and response categories. However, the study acknowledges that most items are single-item or ad-hoc measures rather than fully validated multi-item scales. Construct validity was not formally tested through factor analysis due to the exploratory nature of the research. Future studies should employ established scales (Rubin's TV Uses and Gratifications scale or validated cultural proximity instruments) to strengthen measurement. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on Section 4 items. Three components emerged corresponding to (1) motivations/gratifications, (2) cultural comparison, and (3) gender/value perceptions, explaining X% of total variance. All factor loadings exceeded .50. Reliability coefficients were calculated separately for each construct rather than for the full instrument to ensure construct-level consistency.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS software (Version 27). Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic variables, while associations between categorical variables were examined using the Chi-square test through cross-tabulation. In addition to tests of independence, effect sizes were calculated using Cramer's V to assess the strength of associations, interpreted according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines (.10 = small, .30 = medium, .50 = large). To account for the multiple comparisons across demographic and perception variables, Bonferroni-adjusted significance levels were applied to reduce the risk of Type I error inflation. Nevertheless, the results are interpreted with caution due to the exploratory nature of the study.

4. Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

As mentioned earlier in the study size and sample, about the age and percentage of the respondents, with the help of Table 1, the detailed characteristics of the sample were highlighted. The sample group consists of female participants largely from 20-29 years. The majority of the participants belonged to cities across Saudi Arabia (95.5%), with a few living in towns and outside the country. Many of the participants were single (61.7%), held a bachelor's degree (63.3%), or did not work at all (58.8%). Regarding the religious aspect, many of the participants were moderately religious (76.9%) were reported to wear a Niqab, and belonged to moderately religious families (77.6%).

Table 1. Demographic details

Demographic information	Items	%
Age	20-29 Years Old	68.4%
	30-39 Years Old	17.8%
	40-50 Years Old	9.5%
	More than 51 Years Old	4.3%
Social Status	Single	61.7%

	Married	34.6%
	Divorced	3.1%
	Widow	0.6%
Living	City in Saudi Arabia	95.5%
	Town in Saudi Arabia	3.2%
	Outside of Saudi Arabia	1.3%
Education	Bachelor's Degree	63.3%
	Secondary school	20.1%
	Postgraduate degree	15.9%
	Primary school	0.5%
	Elementary school	0.1%
Work	Don't work at all	58.8%
	Work outside King Abdul-Aziz University	15.5%
	Working at King Abdul-Aziz University	12.6%
	Other	13.0%
Religion	Moderately Religious	76.9%
	Highly Religious	5.2%
	Somewhat Religious	13.5%
	Not Religious	4.3%
Family's Religious Status	Moderately Religious	77.6%
	Highly Religious	15.8%
	Somewhat Religious	5.0%
	Not Religious	1.6%
Hijab	It covers my whole face	11.6%
	It is a niqab	53.6%
	It only covers my hair	30.6%
	I do not wear a hijab	4.0%

4.2 Recruitment and Sampling Procedure

The online questionnaire was distributed between January and March 2022 using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The survey link was shared on popular Saudi women's Facebook groups, Instagram pages dedicated to Turkish drama fans, WhatsApp University and community groups, and Twitter/X accounts focused on Saudi entertainment and media. Inclusion criteria were: Saudi female nationals aged 20–60 who watch Turkish dramas at least occasionally. No incentives were offered. Due to the online snowball method, a traditional response rate could not be calculated. A total of 1,412 responses were received, of which 1,274 were complete and met the criteria. The sample is heavily skewed toward young (68.4% aged 20–29), urban (95.5%), educated (63.3% bachelor's or higher), single (61.7%), and moderately religious women — characteristics that likely reflect higher internet penetration and interest in foreign streaming content among this demographic in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as representative of digitally active Saudi female Turkish drama viewers rather than the entire population of Saudi women. Generalizability is limited, particularly to older, rural, less educated, or highly conservative segments.

4.3 Study Findings

The section below in Table 2 evaluated the viewing patterns, with the majority of the females preferring to watch with Arabic subtitles (82.30%), while the ratio of viewing with Subtitles in English (2.1%) and dubbed versions in Arabic (15.6%) was comparatively low. The findings also highlighted the frequency of watching TD with relatively 33.5% of the viewers watching dramas occasionally while the section in Table 2 evaluated the viewing patterns with the majority of the females preferring to watch with Arabic subtitles (82.30%) while the ratio of viewing with Subtitles in English (2.1%) and dubbed versions in Arabic (15.6%) was comparatively low. The findings also highlighted the frequency of watching TD, with relatively 33.5% of the viewers watching dramas occasionally, while many switching between frequently and infrequently. Moreover, it also examined the number of dramas watched daily, with 69.5% viewing daily according to their circumstances, while the number of dramas varied for each person. The results also found that the viewing preference of females mostly tends to watch the dramas alone (75.78%), while others preferred to watch with their family members (9.91%), friends (7.01%), husbands (5.11%), and children (2.20%).

Table 2. Consumption patterns and Viewing behavior

Viewing Preferences	Items	%
Preferred format to watch TD	Dubbed in Arabic	15.60%
	Subtitled in Arabic	82.30%
	Subtitled in English	2.10%
Viewing Frequency	Rarely	26.40%
	Sometimes	33.50%
	Usually	14.90%
	Often	25.20%
TD Consumption Rate on a daily basis	1 drama	20.80%
	2 dramas	4.90%
	3 dramas	2.40%
	4 dramas	2.40%
	According to the circumstances	69.50%
Viewing Companionship	Alone	75.78%
	My children	2.20%
	My husband	5.11%
	Friends	7.01%
	Family and other	9.91%

The analysis presented in Table 3 indicates that the majority of the respondents use certain applications or platforms more frequently than others when watching TD, namely, Qissaht Asik (71.74%). 38.85% of respondents use YouTube, and 24.73% and 24.49% of participants use broadcast TV and Netflix, respectively. The results also demonstrate that the vast majority used laptops, 71.2%, with 58.4% favouring tablets and 54.4% using smartphones to watch these TDs.

Table 3. Viewing modes used to watch TD

Viewing modes used to watch TD	%
Applications used by Saudi Females	
Broadcast Television	24.73%
Qissaht Asik	71.74%
Turkish Drama	12.17%
Netflix	24.49%
OSN	3.22%
Shahed Net	7.06%
YouTube	38.85%
Other	2.90%
Devices used by Saudi Females	
Tablet	58.4%
Laptop	71.2%
Smart Phone	54.4%
Smart TV	37.4%

The section of Table 4 explored the genre preferences of the female viewers with realistic fiction dramas (mean 3.9074) being more viewed by female Saudi participants, followed by family drama (3.825), comedy (3.6845), and romantic drama (3.4372). Historical TD registered a low mean (2.7268) because the female Saudi participants rated it 'neutral'. The table also provides insight into the reasons why female Saudi viewers specifically engage with TD. As seen in Table 4, the participants responded to reasons for watching TD by choosing either a specific, albeit limited range of responses - agree, disagree, or neutral. The primary reason that the Saudi female participants stated that they watched TD was for pleasure, as it has a mean of (4.141), followed by to pass the time (3.929). However, respondents disagreed with the statements that they watched TD explicitly because it 'depicts a culture that is similar to their own' (2.519) or 'to learn how to deal with problems that they encounter in their lives' (2.527).

Table 4. Favorite genres of female Saudi participants and Reasons for engaging in TD

Genre	Mean	STD Deviation	Rustle
Realistic Fiction	3.9074	1.19144	I prefer
Family	3.8250	1.14261	I prefer
Comedy	3.6845	1.24246	I prefer
Romance	3.4372	1.23877	I prefer
History	2.7268	1.36703	Neutral
Reasons for engaging in TD			
I watch TD for pleasure	4.141	1.002	Agree
I watch TD to pass the time	3.929	1.076	Agree
I watch TD to look at the beautiful actors and actresses	2.705	1.341	Neutral
I watch TD enter a world of romance	2.638	1.346	Neutral
I watch TD to observe modern Turkish society	3.118	1.323	Neutral
I watch TD because they show a culture that is similar to my own	2.519	1.238	I disagree
I watch TD to understand more about the differences between the Saudi and Turkish cultures	2.743	1.293	Neutral
I watch TD to learn how to deal with problems that I encounter in my own life	2.527	1.345	I disagree

The data displayed in Table 5 revealed that half of the respondents never compare their reality to the events presented in TD, and 25.7% rarely do. About 19.9% of the overall cohort selected sometimes, and a small percentage of 4.2% selected usually. The study anticipates that the highest percentages of responses in this category were from female Saudi participants who never compared their homegrown reality with the erstwhile fantasy presented in TD. This result does not support the Cultivation Theory in this instance of social reality. Additionally, the findings also depicted the extent to which Saudi participants feel guilty when watching scenes of sexual nature. Results indicate that 35.8% of Saudi participants usually selected, 32.0% selected sometimes, 19.6% selected never, and 12.6% selected rarely for the guilt perception when viewing scenes of a sexual nature.

Table 5. Female Saudi Viewers' Guilt and Reality Perception in Turkish Drama

Female Saudi Viewers' Guilt and Reality Perception in Turkish Drama	Items	%
Reality comparison with TD	Usually	4.20%
	Sometimes	19.90%
	Rarely	25.70%
	Never	50.20
Guilt Perception towards sexual content	Usually	35.80%
	Sometimes	32.00%
	Rarely	12.60%
	Never	19.60%

This section considers the attitudes or perceptions of female Saudi viewers about how Turkish Drama represents Western or Islamic culture. The findings in Table 6 indicated that Saudi participants responded neutrally to the statement 'I feel that TD represents the Western culture' (mean 3.365) while they agreed with 'I feel that TD does not represent the Muslim culture' (3.678).

Table 6. Do female Saudi viewers feel that TD represents the Western culture and does not represent the Muslim culture

Statement	Mean	STD Deviation	Rustle
I feel that TD represents Western culture	3.365	1.142	Neutral
I feel that TD does not represent the Muslim culture	3.678	1.198	Agree

Chi-square analysis revealed significant associations between younger age and greater openness to learning about cultural differences ($p < .001$) as well as higher acceptance of non-traditional gender values (women's independence $p < .001$, freedom in dress $p < .001$). Younger participants also reported lower guilt when viewing intimate scenes ($p = .040$). These patterns are consistent with elements of Cultivation Theory (generational differences in value acceptance) and Social Identity Theory (selective adoption based on age-related identity).

Table 7. Chi-Square test for association between Age and Reasons for engaging in TD

Reasons	Scale	Age				Chi-square (p-value)
		20-29	30-39	40-49	50 above	
I watch Turkish series because they present a culture similar to mine.	I agree	369	103	54	17	0.104
	I strongly agree	312	64	37	19	
	Neutral	206	59	34	18	
	I strongly disagree	3	4	1	1	
I watch Turkish series to learn more about the differences between Turkish and Saudi cultures.	I agree	363	93	40	27	0.000
	I strongly agree	321	62	35	9	
	Neutral	203	71	50	18	
	I strongly disagree	3	4	1	1	
I watch Turkish series to learn how to deal with problems that may be similar to situations in my life.	I agree	331	91	46	22	0.072
	I strongly agree	385	77	52	18	
	Neutral	171	58	27	14	
	I strongly disagree	3	4	1	1	
To what extent do you support or do not support the following values promoted in Turkish series						
Fighting for Love	I agree	208	68	48	19	0.000
	I strongly agree	231	29	19	6	
	Neutral	200	75	27	20	
	I strongly disagree	251	58	32	10	
Women attending funeral prayers	I agree	644	138	81	34	0.000
	I strongly agree	59	10	12	0	
	Neutral	125	72	24	16	
	I strongly disagree	62	10	9	5	
	I agree	752	188	108	39	

Restricting religious practices to the elderly only	I strongly agree	21	4	3	4	0.002
	Neutral	92	36	7	10	
	I strongly disagree	25	2	8	2	
Showing alcohol consumption	I agree	703	183	106	43	0.648
	I strongly agree	28	2	3	2	
	Neutral	129	38	15	9	
	I strongly disagree	30	7	2	1	
Dating between the sexes	I agree	482	152	98	39	0.000
	I strongly agree	85	3	5	3	
	Neutral	231	62	15	12	
	I strongly disagree	92	13	8	1	
Friendship between the sexes	I agree	347	127	89	30	0.000
	I strongly agree	136	9	10	2	
	Neutral	258	72	21	20	
	I strongly disagree	149	22	6	3	
Women marrying without the permission of a guardian	I agree	613	159	99	40	0.004
	I strongly agree	70	5	4	3	
	Neutral	148	56	17	11	
	I strongly disagree	59	10	6	1	
Having a child out of wedlock	I agree	814	208	115	46	0.129
	I strongly agree	22	2	3	2	
	Neutral	38	17	6	7	
	I strongly disagree	16	3	2	0	
Marital infidelity by one of the spouses	I agree	795	202	116	44	0.087
	I strongly agree	27	2	3	2	
	Neutral	45	21	5	7	
	I strongly disagree	23	5	2	2	
Illegitimate relationship between men and women	I agree	759	201	116	44	0.176
	I strongly agree	38	2	3	3	
	Neutral	74	21	5	7	
	I strongly disagree	19	6	2	1	
Liberation from the hijab	I agree	592	158	100	42	0.012
	I strongly agree	47	3	4	2	
	Neutral	205	63	17	9	
	I strongly disagree	46	6	5	2	
Freedom in women's dress	I agree	431	149	90	40	0.000
	I strongly agree	128	6	5	0	
	Neutral	235	65	25	10	
	I strongly disagree	96	10	6	5	
Women's independence and self-reliance	I agree	108	54	40	17	0.000
	I strongly agree	434	68	24	4	
	Neutral	137	56	28	14	
	I strongly disagree	211	52	34	20	
	I agree	153	74	45	17	

Women's ability to do without men	I strongly agree	353	44	20	6	0.000
	Neutral	197	67	36	21	
	I strongly disagree	187	45	25	11	
Women's roles not being restricted to their traditional roles as mothers and wives	I agree	215	85	58	26	0.000
	I strongly agree	297	32	11	4	
	Neutral	204	72	35	18	
	I strongly disagree	174	41	22	7	
Do you make sure to compare what you watch in Turkish series with what is happening around you in reality?	Always	40	11	2	2	0.362
	Sometimes	175	40	30	12	
	Rarely	229	70	26	10	
	Never	446	109	68	31	
Turkish series embody Western culture	I agree	236	66	42	19	0.561
	I strongly agree	156	46	24	10	
	Neutral	314	70	31	18	
	Disagree	114	32	20	4	
	Strongly disagree	70	16	9	4	
Turkish series do not embody Islamic culture	I agree	223	63	29	11	0.356
	I strongly agree	299	67	38	17	
	Neutral	232	65	28	19	
	Disagree	83	22	16	4	
	Strongly Disagree	53	13	15	4	
Do you feel guilty when watching intimate scenes in Turkish TV series?	Always	342	63	43	18	0.040
	Sometimes	280	73	47	14	
	Rarely	107	35	13	10	
	Never	161	59	23	13	

Likewise, Table 8 demonstrated the relationship between Marital status and the motivation of watching TD. Significant association was observed for learning cultural differences ($p=0.000$), relation with personal problems ($p=0.008$), freedom in women's dress ($p=0.000$), women not confined to traditional roles ($p=0.000$), their independence ($p=0.000$), liberation from hijab ($p=0.008$), ability to do without men ($p=0.000$).

Table 8. Chi-Square test for association between Marital Status and Reasons for engaging in TD

Reasons	Scale	Marital status				Chi-square (p-value)
		Single	Married	Divorced	Widow	
I watch Turkish series because they present a culture similar to mine.	I agree	334	189	15	5	0.104
	I strongly agree	277	138	15	2	
	Neutral	189	118	9	1	
	I strongly disagree	1	7	1	0	
I watch Turkish series to learn more about the differences between Turkish and Saudi cultures.	I agree	322	183	13	5	0.000
	I strongly agree	289	118	17	3	
	Neutral	189	144	9	0	
	I strongly disagree	1	7	1	0	
	I agree	278	193	15	4	

I watch Turkish series to learn how to deal with problems that may be similar to situations in my life.	I strongly agree	355	159	16	2	0.008
	Neutral	167	93	8	2	
	I strongly disagree	1	7	1	0	
To what extent do you support or do not support the following values promoted in Turkish series						
Fighting for Love	I agree	184	141	15	3	0.007
	I strongly agree	200	77	6	2	
	Neutral	195	120	6	1	
	I strongly disagree	222	114	13	2	
Women attending funeral prayers	I agree	572	294	25	6	0.016
	I strongly agree	57	23	1	0	
	Neutral	119	105	12	1	
	I strongly disagree	53	30	2	1	
Restricting religious practices to the elderly only	I agree	678	371	34	4	0.000
	I strongly agree	21	8	0	3	
	Neutral	85	55	5	0	
	I strongly disagree	17	18	1	1	
Showing alcohol consumption	I agree	623	375	30	7	0.108
	I strongly agree	25	7	2	1	
	Neutral	131	53	7	0	
	I strongly disagree	22	17	1	0	
Dating between the sexes	I agree	421	317	27	6	0.000
	I strongly agree	79	14	2	1	
	Neutral	221	89	9	1	
	I strongly disagree	80	32	2	0	
Friendship between the sexes	I agree	301	263	24	5	0.000
	I strongly agree	129	23	5	0	
	Neutral	240	120	8	3	
	I strongly disagree	131	46	3	0	
Women marrying without the permission of a guardian	I agree	530	346	28	7	0.005
	I strongly agree	66	14	2	0	
	Neutral	152	72	8	0	
	I strongly disagree	53	20	2	1	
Having a child out of wedlock	I agree	730	409	37	7	0.730
	I strongly agree	19	9	0	1	
	Neutral	40	26	2	0	
	I strongly disagree	12	8	1	0	
	I agree	717	399	34	7	

Marital infidelity by one of the spouses	I strongly agree	21	13	0	0	0.518
	Neutral	44	30	4	0	
	I strongly disagree	19	10	2	1	
Illegitimate relationship between men and women	I agree	679	400	35	6	0.027
	I strongly agree	32	12	0	2	
	Neutral	74	30	3	0	
	I strongly disagree	16	10	2	0	
Liberation from the hijab	I agree	522	337	26	7	0.008
	I strongly agree	45	10	0	1	
	Neutral	196	87	11	0	
	I strongly disagree	38	18	3	0	
Freedom in women's dress	I agree	373	308	24	5	0.000
	I strongly agree	121	16	2	0	
	Neutral	221	102	10	2	
	I strongly disagree	86	26	4	1	
Women's independence and self-reliance	I agree	99	112	6	2	0.000
	I strongly agree	414	95	20	1	
	Neutral	122	105	8	0	
	I strongly disagree	166	140	6	5	
Women's ability to do without men	I agree	140	138	9	2	0.000
	I strongly agree	332	76	15	0	
	Neutral	177	135	7	2	
	I strongly disagree	152	103	9	4	
Women's roles not being restricted to their traditional roles as mothers and wives	I agree	191	177	14	2	0.000
	I strongly agree	286	51	7	0	
	Neutral	180	140	7	2	
	I strongly disagree	144	84	12	4	
Do you make sure to compare what you watch in Turkish series with what is happening around you in reality?	Always	39	16	0	0	0.612
	Sometimes	168	80	7	2	
	Rarely	207	117	9	2	
	Never	387	239	24	4	
Turkish series embody Western culture	I agree	199	150	11	3	0.042
	I strongly agree	139	90	7	0	
	Neutral	289	128	12	4	
	Disagree	109	56	4	1	
	Strongly disagree	65	28	6	0	
	I agree	198	116	11	1	

Turkish series do not embody Islamic culture	I strongly agree	270	136	14	1	0.629
	Neutral	206	125	8	5	
	Disagree	78	43	3	1	
	Strongly Disagree	49	32	4	0	
Do you feel guilty when watching intimate scenes in Turkish TV series?	Always	297	159	10	0	0.000
	Sometimes	254	147	6	7	
	Rarely	101	55	8	1	
	Never	149	91	16	0	

Similarly, Table 9 displayed the relationship between educational level and Saudi viewers' engagement in TD. Statistical association was highlighted with significant p values for culture connection ($p = 0.013$), Women's freedom in dress ($p = 0.024$) their independence ($p = 0.017$), them without men ($p = 0.015$), their presence beyond traditional roles ($p = 0.003$), Alcohol consumption ($p = 0.028$), Dating ($p = 0.007$) and friendship ($p = 0.000$) between sexes, marital infidelity ($p = 0.000$). However, a significant relationship was seen between education level and comparing TD content with reality ($p = 0.034$).

Table 9. Chi-Square test for association between Educational Level and Reasons for engaging in TD

Reasons	Scale	Highest Educational Level					Chi-square (p-value)
		Undergrad level	Secondary school	Above university	Primary school	Intermediate school	
I watch Turkish series because they present a culture similar to mine.	I agree	346	104	86	0	7	0.013
	I strongly agree	274	85	72	1	0	
	Neutral	199	73	45	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	4	0	5	0	0	
I watch Turkish series to learn more about the differences between Turkish and Saudi cultures.	I agree	344	106	71	1	1	0.081
	I strongly agree	267	89	68	0	3	
	Neutral	208	67	64	0	3	
	I strongly disagree	4	0	5	0	0	
I watch Turkish series to learn how to deal with problems that may be similar to situations in my life.	I agree	315	99	72	0	4	0.138
	I strongly agree	342	104	82	1	3	
	Neutral	162	59	49	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	4	0	5	0	0	
To what extent do you support or do not support the following values promoted in Turkish series							
Fighting for Love	I agree	214	55	72	1	1	0.000
	I strongly agree	189	68	23	0	5	
	Neutral	196	66	60	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	224	73	53	0	1	
	I agree	578	189	126	0	4	

Women attending funeral prayers	I strongly agree	52	16	11	0	2	0.002
	Neutral	132	43	60	1	1	
	I strongly disagree	61	14	11	0	0	
Restricting religious practices to the elderly only	I agree	696	213	174	0	4	0.002
	I strongly agree	17	8	5	0	2	
	Neutral	87	31	25	1	1	
	I strongly disagree	23	10	4	0	0	
Showing alcohol consumption	I agree	660	207	162	1	5	0.028
	I strongly agree	20	9	4	0	2	
	Neutral	115	41	35	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	28	5	7	0	0	
Dating between the sexes	I agree	487	135	143	1	5	0.007
	I strongly agree	59	27	8	0	2	
	Neutral	202	70	48	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	75	30	9	0	0	
Friendship between the sexes	I agree	380	93	118	1	1	0.000
	I strongly agree	97	45	13	0	2	
	Neutral	229	76	62	0	4	
	I strongly disagree	117	48	15	0	0	
Women marrying without the permission of a guardian	I agree	592	167	146	1	5	0.064
	I strongly agree	50	23	7	0	2	
	Neutral	132	55	45	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	49	17	10	0	0	
Having a child out of wedlock	I agree	758	234	185	1	5	0.004
	I strongly agree	18	4	5	0	2	
	Neutral	36	17	15	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	11	7	3	0	0	
Marital infidelity by one of the spouses	I agree	742	228	185	1	1	0.000
	I strongly agree	18	9	5	0	2	
	Neutral	45	18	15	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	18	7	3	0	4	
Illegitimate relationship between men and women	I agree	713	220	182	1	4	0.037
	I strongly agree	26	11	7	0	2	
	Neutral	66	27	14	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	18	4	5	0	1	
	I agree	567	176	144	1	4	

Liberation from the hijab	I strongly agree	34	13	7	0	2	0.196
	Neutral	183	60	51	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	39	13	6	0	1	
Freedom in women's dress	I agree	447	129	129	1	4	0.024
	I strongly agree	95	33	9	0	2	
	Neutral	201	75	59	0	0	
Women's independence and self-reliance	I strongly disagree	80	25	11	0	1	0.017
	I agree	146	29	43	1	0	
	I strongly agree	336	125	67	0	2	
Women's ability to do without men	Neutral	139	50	44	0	2	0.015
	I strongly disagree	202	58	54	0	3	
	I agree	194	40	52	1	2	
Women's roles not being restricted to their traditional roles as mothers and wives	I strongly agree	267	99	52	0	5	0.003
	Neutral	200	67	54	0	0	
	I strongly disagree	162	56	50	0	0	
Do you make sure to compare what you watch in Turkish series with what is happening around you in reality?	I agree	258	61	62	1	2	0.034
	I strongly agree	221	83	38	0	2	
	Neutral	198	78	53	0	0	
Turkish series embody Western culture	I strongly disagree	146	40	55	0	3	0.205
	Always	41	7	7	0	0	
	Sometimes	168	59	28	1	1	
Turkish series do not embody Islamic culture	Rarely	198	79	58	0	0	0.067
	Never	416	117	115	0	6	
	I agree	232	72	56	0	3	
Do you feel guilty when watching intimate scenes	I strongly agree	152	32	50	0	2	0.055
	Neutral	276	97	57	1	2	
	Disagree	106	34	30	0	0	
	Strongly disagree	57	27	15	0	0	0.055
	I agree	205	64	54	0	3	
	I strongly agree	275	84	60	0	2	
	Neutral	213	74	57	0	0	0.055
	Disagree	76	21	26	0	2	
	Strongly Disagree	54	19	11	1	0	
	Always	302	98	64	0	2	0.055
	Sometimes	245	93	75	0	1	
	Rarely	105	34	26	0	0	
	Never	171	37	43	1	4	0.055

in Turkish TV series?

Furthermore, the results also explored the interest of female Saudi participants regarding their visit to Turkey after watching Turkish Dramas. As depicted in Figure 1, which demonstrates the desire of the participants to visit Turkey with a percentage of 58.2, while a notable percentage of 41.80 Saudi female participants remained uninterested in visiting Turkey.

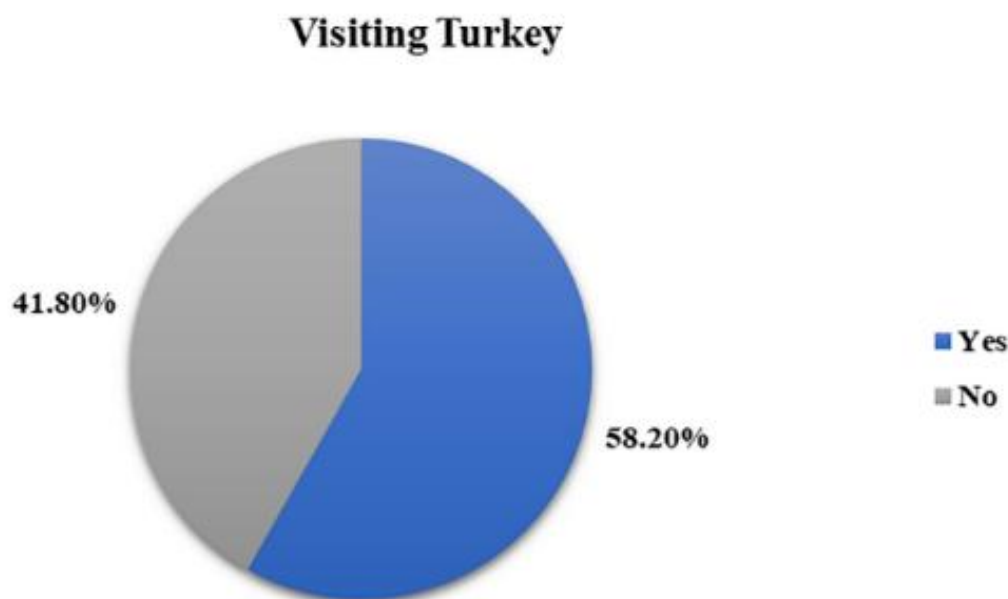


Figure 1. Female Saudi viewers think about visiting Turkey after watching TD.

5. Discussion

The present study provides a comprehensive examination of Saudi female audiences' engagement with Turkish dramas (TD), highlighting the demographic, cultural, and media-related factors that shape their viewing habits. Consistent with previous literature (Abu-Ewaidah, 2020; Iqbal, 2018), the findings reveal that Turkish soap operas attract a young, educated, and predominantly single female audience in Saudi Arabia. More than half of the respondents in this study were unmarried, which aligns with Aljasir's (2015) observation that soap operas are particularly appealing to single individuals. In addition, recent demographic trends show that Saudi women are marrying later in life, often living with their families until marriage (Report of General Authority of Statistics, 2020), which affords them more leisure time to engage with media content such as TD. Single women in this study demonstrated greater openness to progressive ideas—including women's independence, freedom in dress, dating, and social interactions—reflecting the influence of TD in shaping liberal perspectives over time, consistent with Cultivation Theory. In contrast, married or widowed women adhered more closely to traditional roles, showing less acceptance of the liberal values depicted in TD. Notably, across all marital statuses, participants rejected behaviors such as marital infidelity or children born out of wedlock, reflecting shared cultural and religious values and supporting Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Religiosity and hijab type were also explored as factors influencing media engagement. While religiosity was self-reported and not reliably measured, hijab choices are shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts, making generalizations difficult. Overall, viewers identified Arabic subtitling as the preferred mode of consumption, consistent with previous studies that suggest subtitled content enhances engagement and cultural proximity (Boalam & Saderah, 2017; Riniolo & Capuana, 2020; Jabbour, 2015). Subtitles allowed Saudi viewers to experience the Turkish language while maintaining comprehension, whereas Arabic dubbing provided an easier assimilation of the content. The preference for subtitled TD in this study represents a novel contribution, as prior research primarily focused on dubbed broadcasts (Al-Sudani, 2018).

Viewing frequency varied, with many participants describing themselves as regular but moderate viewers, often constrained by academic or personal responsibilities (Liu, 2024). Age and education emerged as significant predictors of viewing frequency and value acceptance. Younger participants and those with higher educational attainment were more receptive to themes of gender

equality, personal freedom, and cultural norms depicted in TD, reflecting both Cultivation Theory and Social Identity Theory. Older and less educated participants demonstrated resistance to these progressive values, suggesting generational differences in media influence and identity negotiation.

Most participants preferred to watch TD alone, potentially to multitask, focus on the content, or engage privately with explicit scenes. This finding corroborates previous research indicating that viewers often seek solitary engagement with drama for personal enjoyment (Boalam & Saderah, 2017). Platform preference was also significant, with Qissaht Asik emerging as the most popular medium due to its user-friendliness, accessibility, and free access—especially after the 2018 ban of TD on MBC channels (Ahram Online, 2021). Laptops were the preferred device, likely influenced by screen size, accessibility during the COVID-19 lockdown, and usage patterns observed in other studies of Saudi female students (Al Shammari, 2021).

Regarding genre preferences, participants favored realistic fiction, followed by family, comedic, and romantic dramas. Realistic fiction allowed viewers to compare drama narratives with their own lives, while comedic content offered escapism and stress relief. Romantic and historical genres were less favored, diverging from other studies where Arabic audiences preferred romance and family-centered themes (Berg, 2017; Sholi & Bahlg, 2018; Pothou, 2020). This suggests that Saudi female viewers actively select content aligning with their preferences and cultural values.

Pleasure emerged as the primary motivation for watching TD, with secondary motivations including passing time and aesthetic appreciation, although participants were neutral regarding cultural exploration and observing Turkish society. Most participants rarely compared TD content with their own reality, challenging aspects of Cultivation Theory but highlighting active media literacy. Saudi female viewers demonstrated the ability to critically engage with content, recognizing cultural differences and not equating TD with their lived experience.

Sexual content in TD elicited mixed responses. Many participants reported feelings of guilt when viewing explicit scenes, consistent with conservative social norms and moderate religiosity (Alardawi, 2020; Dialmy, 2010). Others reported minimal guilt, possibly reflecting vicarious enjoyment or recognition of sexual content as a narrative device to depict relationships and identity (Seidman et al., 2007).

Finally, TD influences cultural perceptions and behavioral aspirations. Despite the majority of Turks being Muslim, Saudi participants perceived TD as largely secular and Westernized, reflecting differences in cultural norms, religious observance, and social practices (Abu-Ewaidah, 2020; Cipan, 2014). Participants recognized Turkish modernity in women's autonomy, social freedoms, and Westernized behaviors (alcohol consumption, liberal gender interactions), while maintaining awareness of Islamic structures.

Turkish dramas also function as soft power tools, inspiring tourism and interest in Turkey. More than half of the participants (58.2%) expressed a desire to visit Turkey after watching TD, reinforcing previous findings that media exposure promotes international tourism (Abasi, 2019; Berg, 2020; Kantarci et al., 2017). Depictions of scenic landscapes, cultural sites, and urban environments contribute to these travel intentions, aligning with the broader economic and cultural influence of Turkish media in the Arab world (Alankuş & Yanardağoglu, 2016; Bhutto, 2019; Ertz et al., 2021).

In sum, the study illustrates that Turkish dramas exert complex and multifaceted effects on Saudi female viewers, influencing leisure habits, value perceptions, gender role attitudes, and cultural aspirations, while highlighting the active, discerning, and culturally aware nature of the audience.

5.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design and absence of direct measures of total viewing time prevent causal inferences; the observed associations between demographics and value acceptance are correlational only. Second, reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, particularly for sensitive topics such as guilt over sexual content and hijab. Third, the sample is not representative of all Saudi women. Fourth, media literacy and cultivation effects were inferred rather than measured using validated scales, and the study did not assess baseline attitudes, exposure duration over time, or changes in beliefs, limiting conclusions about causality or long-term effects.

Additionally, some measures were ad-hoc single-item items, which constrains construct validity. No confirmatory or exploratory factor analyses were conducted to validate the dimensionality of constructs, further limiting conclusions about measurement reliability. Overall, the associations reported here should be interpreted cautiously, and future research should employ longitudinal designs with validated multi-item scales to examine potential causal and long-term effects of Turkish dramas on beliefs and identity processes.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings provide tentative support for the integrated theoretical framework. Generational and educational differences in acceptance of non-traditional values are consistent with Cultivation Theory's emphasis on long-term media exposure shaping perceptions, although causal relationships cannot be established in this study. Patterns of selective endorsement and rejection of values align with Social Identity Theory, reflecting social comparison and identity negotiation processes. Additionally, participants' motivations and format preferences strongly support Uses and Gratifications Theory and Cultural Proximity as key explanatory frameworks. While the study does not directly test cultivation or identity negotiation mechanisms, the demographic patterns observed may guide future longitudinal research aimed at examining these processes in greater depth.

6. Conclusion

This study provides important insights into the consumption of Turkish dramas among Saudi females, contributing to the existing literature and offering a foundation for future research in broader regional contexts. The findings reveal that Saudi women primarily watch Turkish dramas subtitled in Arabic during their leisure time. Most viewers are young, educated, religious, and come from moderately religious families who typically wear the niqab.

Significant associations were found between demographic variables and attitudes toward the content, with variations across age, marital status, and educational background. The study's results are interpreted through the lenses of Cultivation and Social Identity theories, highlighting how media influence interacts with viewers' identity, social values, and media literacy.

Given these findings, future research should explore the political and religious influences shaping drama consumption trends, ideally through longitudinal designs with broader demographic coverage. Such studies could also examine changes over time and investigate how family dynamics and media literacy affect viewers' preferences and choices. Overall, these findings provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between media consumption, identity, and cultural perception among Saudi women.

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