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**THE EFFECT OF THE TURKISH SERIES ON  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN  
THE MIDDLE EAST : MASS MEDIA  
PERSPECTIVE**

**Aya SAHLOUL**

Master's Thesis

Supervisor

Asst. Prof. Dr. Berna EKAL ŞİMŞEK

İstanbul, 2024

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The thesis titled THE EFFECT OF THE TURKISH SERIES ON THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: MASS MEDIA PERSPECTIVE prepared by AYA SAHLOUL and submitted on 06/06/2024 has been **accepted unanimously** for the degree of Master of Politics and International Relations.

---

Asst. Prof. Dr. Berna  
EKAL ŞİMŞEK  
Supervisor

Thesis Defense Committee Members:

Asst. Prof. Dr. Eylem  
AKDENİZ GÖKER

Department of Political  
Science and Public  
Administration,  
Altınbaş University

Asst. Prof. Dr. Berna  
EKAL ŞİMŞEK

Department of Sociology,  
Altınbaş University

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merve  
ÖZDEMİRKIRAN EMBEL

Department of Political and  
Social Sciences,  
Marmara University

I hereby declare that this thesis meets all format and submission requirements for a Master's Thesis.

I hereby declare that all information/data presented in this graduation project has been obtained in full accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare all unoriginal materials and conclusions have been cited in the text and all references mentioned in the Reference List have been cited in the text, and vice versa as required by the abovementioned rules and conduct.

Aya SAHLOUL

Signature

XXXXXX

## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to God for allowing me to be here and for giving me the chance to grow both personally and professionally. I would also like to thank my adviser, who worked really hard and handled me properly and kindly at the same time. Special thanks also to my grandparents, who always encouraged me to succeed and were constantly role models for me. My sister and parents deserve appreciation as well. Ever since my birth, they have supported me, knowing that I can thrive in the most challenging situations. That's what I did.



## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE EFFECT OF THE TURKISH SERIES ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

SAHLOUL, Aya

M.A., Political Science and International Relations, Altınbaş University

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Berna EKAL ŞİMŞEK

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The media is one of the elements that have the ability to manipulate shape foreign policy or international relations. Many people also feel that the evidence supporting media influence is purely subjective, and thus hard and fast evidence is hard to prove. It seems that there is a possibility that the media, the series, and the programs they broadcast will influence the population or the government. Three strategies can be employed to attain this impact or influence: First, impacting the public will pressure governments to make decisions. Second, by directly influencing the decision-makers themselves by getting them to act proactively to shape public perceptions about what they have just seen in the media, and third by causing a political reaction due to the expected or perceived public response to televised series operas.

Recently, Turkish series have played a major role in influencing the Arab audience, especially series of a cultural and social nature, such as The Lost Years series, which I mentioned as an example. This series is considered among the social series that have had a huge impact on the Arab viewer. In Arab countries in particular, Turkish series have had a significant influence on people and political decision-makers. For example, Turkish series have encouraged tourism in Türkiye, and some countries have sought to establish projects in Türkiye under the influence of Turkish series.

Hence, it can be argued that Turkish series are considered a means of communication, discourse, and forming public opinion. They have now turned into a tool for guiding political processes within the framework of the use of soft power. This study will mainly focus on

how Turkish series alter Arab viewers' perspective towards Türkiye, its role, and its level of development. It will shed light on the Turkish series as a means of soft power for Türkiye towards the Arab countries and its impact on the Arab viewer. Examples from Turkish series like The Lost Years and Nour series will be mentioned in the context of emphasizing the importance and role of the media, especially in MBC channel in the Middle East.

**Keywords:** Media, Foreign Policy, Influence, Turkish Series, Arab Audience.



## ÖZET

# TÜRK DİZİLERİNİN ORTADOĞU'DAKİ ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLERE ETKİSİ

SAHLOUL, Aya

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler, Altınbaş University

Danışman: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Berna EKAL ŞİMŞEK

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Medya, dış politikayı veya uluslararası ilişkileri şekillendirme gücüne sahip unsurlardan biridir. Pek çok insan, medyanın etkisini destekleyen kanıtların tamamen öznel olduğunu ve bu nedenle somut ve kesin kanıtların zor olduğunu düşünmektedir. Medya, diziler ve yayınladıkları programların halkı veya hükümeti etkileme olasılığı bulunmaktadır. Bu etkiyi veya etkilemeyi sağlamak için üç strateji kullanılabilir: Birincisi, halkı etkileyerek hükümetlerin kararlar almasına baskı yapmak. İkincisi, karar vericileri doğrudan etkileyerek onların medyada gördükleri hakkında halkın algısını şekillendirmek için proaktif davranmalarını sağlamak. Üçüncüsü ise, televizyon dizilerine verilen halk tepkisinin beklenen veya algılanan politik bir tepkiyi tetiklemesi.

Son dönemde, Türk dizileri özellikle kültürel ve sosyal nitelikteki dizilerle Arap izleyicisini etkilemede önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Bu dizilerden bir örnek olarak bahsedilen "İhlamlar Altında" dizisi, Arap izleyici üzerinde büyük etki yaratan sosyal diziler arasında yer almaktadır. Arap ülkelerinde, özellikle Türk dizileri hem halk hem de siyasi karar vericiler üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. Örneğin, Türk dizileri Türkiye'de turizmi teşvik etmiş ve bazı ülkeler Türk dizilerinin etkisiyle Türkiye'de projeler kurmayı amaçlamıştır.

Dolayısıyla, Türk dizilerinin iletişim, söylem ve kamuoyu oluşturma aracı olarak değerlendirilebileceği söylenebilir. Artık, yumuşak güç kullanımı çerçevesinde siyasi süreçleri yönlendiren bir araca dönüşmüşlerdir. Bu çalışma, Türk dizilerinin Arap izleyicilerin Türkiye'ye, Türkiye'nin rolüne ve gelişmişlik düzeyine bakış açısını nasıl

değiřtirdiđine odaklanacaktır. Türk dizilerinin, Arap ÷lkelerine yönelik olarak Türkiye'nin yumuřak gücü olarak rolü ve Arap izleyici üzerindeki etkisi incelenecektir. " İhlamurlar Altında" ve "Gümüş" gibi Türk dizilerinden örnekler, özellikle Orta Dođu'da MBC kanalı bağlamında medyanın önemi ve rolünü vurgulamak amacıyla kullanılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Medya, Dış Politika, Etki, Türk Dizileri, Arap İzleyici.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

|          |   |                                                            |
|----------|---|------------------------------------------------------------|
| IR       | : | International Relations                                    |
| MENA     | : | Middle East and Northern Africa                            |
| TV       | : | Television                                                 |
| MBC      | : | Middle East Broadcasting Center                            |
| U.S.     | : | United States of America                                   |
| CD       | : | Compact Disc                                               |
| UAE      | : | United Arab Emirates                                       |
| GSMA     | : | Global System for Mobile Communications                    |
| OTT      | : | Over The Top                                               |
| GCC      | : | The Gulf Cooperation Council                               |
| COVID-19 | : | Corona Virus Disease of 2019                               |
| VOD      | : | Video on Demand                                            |
| CBC      | : | Canadian Broadcasting Corporation                          |
| CNN      | : | Cable News Network                                         |
| AKP      | : | Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) |
| TRT      | : | Turkish Radio and Television Corporation                   |

# 1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the structure and format of modern media, accompanied by the high level of advanced technological means, concepts have emerged on the surface related to cultural globalization and the cross-continental influence of the policies and objectives of different countries. Western media, particularly, have come to dominate global culture and aimed to spread their intellectual and moral systems in order to alter peoples' lifestyles in line with their political goals. Ultimately, technological development in the structure of the media leads to a long-term impact on the policies and principles of decision-making among the peoples and governments of the world. This influence is achieved through the deliberate and systematic use of contemporary media, using a mechanism through which various social, cultural, and economic formations seek to influence the general policies of nations and to shape public opinion and international decisions. Typically, this process involves the manipulation of public opinion at the international level through the involvement of particular media companies that specialize in organizing public relations and audience manipulation. The employees of these companies are experts with experience in the field of influence, persuasion, behavior modification, and patterns, many of whom have previously fulfilled similar roles on an international scale.

The role of the media has become so important that all countries and their governments allocate departments and ministries to achieve the state's goals internally and externally.

The role of the media in the Middle East, one of the most dynamic and volatile regions in the world, often goes unnoticed but deserves continued attention because it provides insight into the people, institutions, and society of the region. The information accessible about the region, both internally and externally, is shaped by traditional news outlets, opinion and entertainment platforms, as well as the ever-evolving world of social media. Despite the prevailing perception of instability and conflict in the Arab region, studying media use in the Middle East provides a deeper understanding of public policy, interstate relations, and the influence of the media within the sway of the Arabic language and Islamic faith. The media is one of the elements that has the ability to steer or shape foreign policy or international relations. Many people also infer that the evidence supporting media influence is purely subjective, thus hard and fast evidence is difficult to prove (Yıldırım & Hira, 2016). It seems that there is a possibility that the media, the series, and the programs they broadcast would influence the population or the government. This influence or pressure can be

achieved in three ways: First, by coaxing the public who will pressure governments to make decisions. Second, by directly impacting the decision-makers themselves, getting them to act proactively to determine public perceptions about what they have just seen in the media. Third, by evoking a political reaction due to the expected or perceived public response to televised series and operas (Evaluation of the Economic and Cultural Effects of the Turkish Soap Operas and TV Series Exported to the World TVs in the Example of ‘Muhteşem Yüzyıl’ and Greece., 2014).

Recently, Turkish series have played a major role in effecting the MENA audience, especially series of a cultural and social nature, such as the Lost Years series and Nour series. Hence, the Turkish series forms the focus of this study and is considered to have had a great influence on the Arab viewer. It changed their perception of Türkiye, its role, and its level of development. Turkish series is considered a means of communication and discourse, moulding public viewpoint, and have now become a tool for guiding political processes within the framework of using soft power approaches (Kuyucu, 2019). In Arab countries in particular, Turkish series have had a significant impact on people and political decision-makers. For example, the Turkish series has encouraged tourism in Türkiye, and some countries have sought to establish projects in Türkiye under the impact of the Turkish series (Yıldırım & Hira, 2016).

This study mainly aims to shed light on Turkish series as a means of soft power for Türkiye towards the Arab countries and its impact on the MENA viewer in the context of its effects, importance, and political, cultural, and social role, especially in the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) channel in the Middle East. The MBC is considered the largest and leading media group in the Middle East and North Africa, and its goal is to enrich the lives of the public through information, interaction, and entertainment. The history of the "MBC Group" is full of success, growth, and expansion, as the group was founded in London in 1991 as an independent satellite channel, MBC1. The theoretical framework of the research will shed more light on the role and importance of the MBC channel.

## **1.1 PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study aims primarily to shed light on the impact of the Turkish series that was broadcast on MBC on relations between Türkiye and the countries of the Middle East. Several objectives branch out from the main objective, the most important of which is

First, to evaluate the cultural, social, and political impact of the Turkish series on viewers in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa that were shown on MBC.

Secondly, identifying the trends and ideas that viewers of Turkish series in the Middle East and North Africa have about Türkiye.

Third, providing a theoretical framework, results, and recommendations of benefit to viewers, those working in the production and dubbing of Turkish series, and researchers in this field.

The importance of this study stems from the fact that it is one of the few studies that focused on the media impact of dubbed Turkish series and their participation in strengthening relations between Türkiye and Middle Eastern countries. These series are a vital media tool for Türkiye at the present time, as the media is considered one of the elements that have the ability to manipulate or shape foreign policy or international relations.

This study follows a descriptive and analytical framework, and it is one of the few studies that seek to study the impact of Turkish series from the perspective of viewers as well as employees of MBC, which is the most popular Arab channel that broadcasts Turkish series.

## **1.2 STUDY METHOD**

In this study, the researcher adopted qualitative research methods. These methods rely on theories, ideas, and results of previous research. First, the researcher analyzed past studies to reveal relevant literature, conceptual framework, and explanations in the process of discussion and interpretation (Easdown, Castro, Shinkle, Small, & Algren, 2005). Then the researcher applied the study in the first part to a number of experts working in the MBC channel to obtain their opinion about the media and its cultural and political role, and the impression of the dubbed Turkish series that were shown on the MBC channel on Arab viewers. In the second part of the study, interviews were conducted with Arabs in Türkiye to demonstrate their opinions about the Turkish series, their consequences on the Middle East region, their duty in shaping Türkiye's foreign policy, and how they affected them and moved their political, social, and cultural outlook towards Türkiye and its relationship with other Middle Eastern countries to a new level.

In data analysis, both content analysis and descriptive analysis, which are two types of qualitative research methods, were used in the research. The purpose of descriptive analysis

is to present the results to the reader in an organized and explained manner, describe the data in a clear and systematic way, examine the causal relationships between them by explicating and interpreting these descriptions, and reach a certain conclusion based on these examinations. Content analysis, on the other hand, is a survey conducted with the aim of identifying specific features of a particular text, book, or document by digitizing it. In this context, the data collected for this research has been digitized according to definite characteristics with the help of content analysis and interpreted with the facilitation of descriptive analysis (Kessler, 2006).

### **1.3 STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

Population is the set of elements that aim to generalize research findings. This can include any living or nonliving item that has common characteristics.

The generalizability of research findings is an important issue. In this regard, the large size of the universe will allow generalizing the explanations reached as a result of the research. However, as the universe grows larger, it becomes more abstract and the universe becomes more difficult to access, so it will be easier to include a concrete set of samples from the universe in research. A sample is a small group that is selected from an individual universe according to explicit rules and is considered capable of representing the universe from which it was selected. Research is often conducted on sample groups and the results are generalized to the universe in question (Easdown, Castro, Shinkle, Small, & Algren, 2005).

The study population consists of two parts. The first part represents the workers at MBC channel, which has a total of about 250 workers. This includes 78 workers who are employed in the technical and dubbing departments. The researcher contacted several individuals who work at the channel, and two of them agreed to participate in the study. One of them works in production at MBC, while the second person serves as an intermediary between MBC and Sama art production. This individual has extensive experience in dubbing Turkish series. The second part of the study population comprises the viewers of the Turkish series. Interviews were conducted with 13 individuals from Middle Eastern and North African countries who are currently residing in Türkiye.

**Table 1.1:** Population Country and Sample.

| Country   | Number | Coding                  |
|-----------|--------|-------------------------|
| Jordan    | 1      | Int 1                   |
| Syria     | 3      | Int 2 , Int 3 , Int 4 , |
| Palestine | 1      | Int 5                   |
| Lebanon   | 2      | Int 6, Int 7            |
| Morocco   | 1      | Int 8                   |
| Iraq      | 2      | Int 9, Int 10           |
| Bahrain   | 1      | Int 11                  |
| Egypt     | 1      | Int 12                  |
| Tunisia   | 1      | Int 13                  |

In the purposeful sampling method, the researcher attempts to understand social events or phenomena in the context of selected situations and discover and define the affiliation between them. Typical situation sampling requires identifying it among many situations in the universe with respect to the research problem and information gathering. Therefore, the study examined the dubbed Turkish series and their impact on relations between countries and the foreign policies of countries.

#### **1.4 DATA COLLECTION**

The semi-structured in-depth interview technique was used within the scope of the study. In general, an in-depth interview is a type of qualitative interview that can be developed in different directions with new and in-depth questions under the influence of the answers given by the interviewees, without fully adhering to the pre-prepared list of questions. These interviews are concerned with what the participants want to say and learn about their experiences (Kessler, 2006). In semi-structured in-depth interviews, specific and open-ended questions are used.

Interviewees for the study were accessed through snowball sampling. The interviews were generally conducted at the workplaces of the individuals who agreed to be interviewed, and slightly different settings were utilized. The duration of the interviews ranged from 15

minutes to 20 minutes. Some interviewees were occupied during the interview, while others preferred to provide shorter responses to the questions. Answers to the questions were collected using a note-taking system. By employing a note-taking system, it becomes easier to comprehend points by considering the interviewee's tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions in their answers to the interview questions, and these significant points can be recorded simultaneously. Not using any recording device also eliminates the risks associated with potential malfunctions and breakages that may occur with such devices later. Furthermore, the note-taking system ensures that individuals' personal rights are treated with sensitivity.

MBC staff stipulated that only written copies of the records should be used and that the names of the people interviewed should not be included. The interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, and sample questions were used to assist. While the first five questions of the template consist of demographic questions, the other questions and sub-questions relate to people's perceptions of the impact of the Turkish series in the context of relations between countries.

Open-ended questions were generally used. Questions that restrict or limit the possible answers are called closed questions, and questions that do not restrict or limit the possible answers are called open questions. Open-ended questions are generally used at the beginning of interviews and for each new topic. These types of questions depend on the interviewee's level of knowledge, worldview, etc. (The behavioral event interview: Avoiding interviewing pitfalls when hiring, 2006). The reason for the absence of closed questions in this study was to ensure that the interview participants were not influenced by their own experiences and perspectives, allowing for the inclusion of diverse opinions and comments.

## **1.5 STUDY QUESTIONS**

In order to study the effect of the Turkish series on people in the Middle East, as well as to measure their effect on societies in these countries and their outcomes on the relations between these countries and Türkiye, the researcher interviewed both the MBC Channel employees and Arab audience of Turkish series who reside in Türkiye. To the interviewees, the following set of questions were asked:

What is the role of the media in the foreign policy of countries?

What is Türkiye's international relations policy towards the Arab world?

Does the Turkish series represent an example of soft power in the Middle East?

Does the Turkish series reflect the political goals?

Are TV series considered to have political goals?

Can the Turkish series have an impact on the relationship between Türkiye and Middle Eastern countries?

Did the Turkish series play a role in shaping public opinion in Middle Eastern countries?

Did the Turkish series influence decision-makers in Middle Eastern governments regarding foreign policy and their relations with each other?

## **1.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

During the analysis of the collected qualitative data, descriptive analysis, content analysis, and reporting are performed, and the data obtained are evaluated generally and objectively. The data obtained in the descriptive analysis are summarized and interpreted according to pre-defined themes. The goal of this analysis is to present the structured and interpreted form of the results to the reader. The goal of content analysis is to attain concepts and relationships that can comprehend the collected data. The data summarized and interpreted in descriptive analysis undergo a deeper process with content analysis, and themes that were not observed in descriptive analysis are revealed through this analysis. Therefore, when using these two types of analysis, the data must first be visualized and then logically arranged according to concepts. Finally, the results reached by the researcher were presented from the point of view of the employees of the MBC channel and from the standpoint of the audience who watched the dubbed Turkish series.

## **1.7 OBSTACLES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

While conducting the research, the researcher faced many obstacles, the most important of which were:

There are limited literary sources that focus on the MBC channel, as most of these sources are public sources.

Choosing the relevant data collection tool, such as the questionnaire helps the researcher

reach a larger number of respondents. However, the interview method contributes to acquiring accurate information and explaining the ideas that the researcher wants. Therefore, in consultation with the supervising professor, the researcher chose the interview method for collecting data.

The difficulty of reaching people and getting their consent to conduct the interview is a challenge, as expatriates in Türkiye have concerns about providing information related to Turkish drama and its impact. Therefore, the researcher has made a commitment not to share any personal information and to use the data solely for the purposes of the research.

While conducting the interviews, the researcher had to explain the meaning of the questions and respond to the participants' inquiries.

The researcher was only able to reach 15 participants, including 2 specialists at MBC. Most of the individuals contacted refused to conduct the interview due to the sensitive nature of the research topic.

## **1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

Within the framework of achieving the study objectives, this thesis is organized as follows: In the first chapter, the structure of the media in the Middle East and North Africa is explained. At the beginning of the chapter, the concept of the media and its development is clarified, in addition to providing information about the Middle East and North Africa. Then the structure of the media in many countries of the Middle East and North Africa, such as Egypt, UAE, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and others was described. After that, the spotlight is shed on the MBC channel, its spread, distribution, work, and place in the media structure in the Middle East. The second chapter focuses on the purpose of the media in international relations in terms of the modern media and communication revolution and the study of signs and symbols in contemporary media influences, in addition to explaining the concept of mass communication and audience engineering. Then the emotional and intellectual impact of the media and the power of the media in international politics and its role in relations are illustrated.

In the third chapter, the Turkish series and international relations in the Middle East were highlighted. Where television series are mentioned as a tool of culture and public diplomacy, the role of Turkish series in light of the modern state and the position of Turkish series in

the Arab television market also were mentioned. Besides, the importance of dubbed Turkish television series is also pointed out. In this chapter, Türkiye is examined as a source of inspiration for the Arab world, in addition to the impact of the Turkish series on Arab culture and Turkish-Arab relations.

In the fourth chapter, the demographic data of the respondents are analyzed, and the answers of the sample members to the interview questions are analyzed, showing the significance statute of the Turkish series, their impact on individuals and society in the Middle East and North Africa, and their role in enhancing the image of Türkiye and its relationship with some Arab countries. Then in the last section, references are made to the results and recommendations reached by the researcher in this study.



## **2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE MEDIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MBC**

The Middle East remains one of the most complex regions in the world, both culturally and politically. It is the cradle of three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Despite its rich and diverse cultural history, the Middle East today faces the challenge of balancing Western influences, modernization, and traditional and religious values (Dennis, Martin, & Hassan, 2018).

Because of this ongoing conflict and diversity in the region, the media holds a unique place in Middle Eastern society and politics. The media has a widespread presence in all aspects of life and exerts a profound, but often immeasurable, influence. Coverage of important issues such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict takes center stage in the media, and public discontent fueled by media reports is likely to spill over into the streets. Realizing the importance of the media, many Middle Eastern governments have imposed heavy censorship on it. However, censorship is only one aspect of the problem, as individual responses to the media are affected by various factors such as circumstances, education, social background, and political beliefs (Breuer, Landman, & Farquhar, 2012).

Unlike many situations in the Middle East, the media in Western countries enjoys the absence of any official censorship. In fact, as early as the twentieth century, the media had gained enough influence to be referred to as the "Fourth Estate." This implies that the media occupies a position of almost equal importance with the traditional pillars of power, including the nobility, the clergy, and the common people (Boughelaf, 2011).

Given the importance and role of the media in the Middle East, this section of the study will provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the structure and role of the media in the Middle East, in addition to highlighting the MBC channel and its role. Developments in the world and the Middle East indicate that media around the world share common characteristics, such as the need to address concerns about ownership, adapt to rapidly evolving technology, move across different platforms, operate in diverse environments, and face challenges associated with unbiased news reporting and commentary. The critical challenge in addressing the issue of bias is not whether it exists, but to what extent and its tangible effects (Al-Mohammad, 2012).

## **2.1 MEANING AND SCOPE OF THE MIDDLE EAST**

The term "Middle East" is a highly debated term among international relations experts, especially among those residing in the region. The main point of contention revolves around the geographical borders of the Middle East. Before World War I, the Western world used three different terms to refer to the vast region of South and East Europe and Russia. First, "Near East" refers to the region occupied by the Ottoman Empire. Secondly, the term "Far East" refers to the geographical region of China. Finally, the "Middle East" includes the region between the Near and Far East. In 1902, Alfred Thayer Mahan, a U.S. Navy officer, was the first to officially use the term Middle East. He used it while discussing U.S. naval strategy in response to Russian activities in Iran. Mahan applied this term specifically to the region centered around the Persian Gulf, which was not clearly classified as the Near or Far East at the time. However, Mahan did not provide a definitive list of countries included within this newly defined region (Ahmed Sidqi al Dgama, 1996)

Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, coined the term Middle East in 1911 to refer to Türkiye, the Persian Gulf, Iran, and Asia as they were "en route" to India. The term gradually expanded to include areas of the Far East by 1921. Winston Churchill established the Middle East Department in 1921 to oversee Palestinian affairs, Transjordan, and Iraq. During World War II, the term Middle East became more widespread, but it lacked any real borders and was based on action during the war. Various definitions of the Middle East have subsequently been applied by standard texts and institutional references. A British publisher defined the Middle East in 1974 as the region that includes Türkiye, Iran, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf states, Yemen, Cyprus, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

The British Royal Institute of International Relations defined the Middle East as the region that includes Türkiye, Iran, the Arab Gulf states, Yemen, Cyprus, Egypt, and Sudan. Some writers in the region have used the term Middle East to define countries south of the former Soviet Union, as well as west of Pakistan and Egypt in Africa. Still, other writers use the term Middle East to refer to the region that includes Egypt, the Persian Gulf states in Asia, Iran, Cyprus, and sometimes Libya and Sudan (Gamil Matar & Aley El Din Helal, 1974), From the different definitions and concepts of the Middle East, three conclusions can be drawn. First, it is generally agreed that the Middle East is a broad region located at the intersection of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Secondly, the term Middle East is a strategic and

political expression rather than a geographical region. Finally, the term Middle East is relative and can be interpreted differently by different people. Westerners tend to focus on this term more than other world populations, which may have strong political connotations. In this study, reference will be made to the countries of the Middle East and North Africa in terms of growth and cultural and political similarity (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

The countries of the Middle East can be classified into twenty-two countries, including nineteen Arab countries and three non-Arab countries. Arab countries in this category include Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan, Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip), Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen. The non-Arab countries in this category are Israel, Türkiye and Iran. Due to its large size, this category can be divided into three sub-regions: North Africa, the Levant, and the Arabian Gulf. The North Africa sub-region includes seven Arab countries: Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania. The Levant region consists of seven Arab countries and two non-Arab countries. The Arab countries in this sub-region are Palestine (Gaza Strip and West Bank), Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, while the non-Arab countries are Türkiye and Israel (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

In this study, the focus will be on the 19 Arab countries surrounding the Middle East, which include Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan, Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip), Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen

## **2.2 MEDIA MEANING**

To discuss the concept of media, one must first understand what it includes. Media can be defined in different ways, including objects that store data such as hard disks, floppy disks, CDs, and tapes. In computer networking, media refers to the cables that connect workstations. Transmission media come in different types, such as twisted pair wires, coaxial cables, and fiber optic cables. Media can also refer to the forms and technologies used to communicate information, such as multimedia presentations that combine sound, images, and videos (Salvin Paul and Maheema Rai, 2021),

This study is based on the Oxford University definition of mass media, which includes all forms of information that reach a large audience through various channels such as radio, television, films, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet. This definition was first

formulated in the 1920s when mass media became mainstream due to the emergence of nationwide radio networks, newspapers, and magazines.

Some researchers argue that the media creates a mass society with unique characteristics, including fragmentation and a lack of social ties, that make it particularly vulnerable to the influence of new media technologies such as advertising and propaganda. The development of mass media during the 20th century was driven by technology that allowed material to be copied at low cost, creating enormous fortunes in the industry. Media literacy, as defined by the University of Oxford, is concerned with helping individuals develop an informed understanding of the nature of media, the technologies used by them, and their impact. Despite the comprehensive nature of the above definition, this study focuses specifically on television (Zexing Xie, 2023).

### **2.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

When we closely examine the news from the Middle East in the global media, we observe that the topics covered are mainly related to the region's geostrategic location, terrorist activities, and the consequences of wars, as well as the role of oil production in the area. Additionally, there is significant coverage of the global economy and politics, the significance of Islam people's lives, and its influence on traditions.

The television broadcasting environment in the Middle East has changed rapidly and continues to change. Programs and content formats produced outside the Arab world are being brought to the region, and streaming of new programs and audience gatherings is becoming possible (Christensen, 2013).

After the First Gulf War, the Middle East transitioned from having very limited access to television, where watching the TV was completely controlled by each state, to a market where individuals could choose from a variety of channels. Diversification, a competitive environment, and increasing competitive conditions also necessitate the updating of broadcast content on media channels. Additionally, the fact that audiovisual media can reach a larger audience than journalism has helped create a specific audience at the national and regional level, enabling the emergence of a new region where the cultural and political commonalities of the Arab world are shared (Castells, 2010).

Furthermore, in circumstances where patriarchal culture continues to dominate, religious values and social traditions intensely support the dominant culture, and where generally masculine content dominates the public sphere, the penetration of television into the

family/home environment gives rise to profound social relations. Another area of transformation is the cross-challenge between a popular radio network built on traditional content and satellite-focused broadcast television (Christensen, 2013).

The question of which channel, to whom, and how the message will be conveyed remains important in the Middle East. Finally, in this new environment, where people are often categorized as consumers or viewers rather than as citizens or political participants, television can play a more influential role than typical tools of formal policy in defining and understanding what matters in political debates. In the production and implementation of regional and national policies, television involves a larger number of people than print media, embraces more sophisticated desires, and moves towards new horizons (Lamay, 2019).

The last quarter century has been a period of rapid change in media in the Middle East. Although the comment that national decision-making processes have an important place in shaping the media environment in Middle Eastern countries (Rugh, 2004: 2007) remains true, it is a controversial fact that the Arab world, fueled by international information and communication resources, is trying to create a force for change in local political figures and institutions. In the Middle East, whether the media is under public or private ownership does not make any significant difference in the political structure. Legal, economic, and cultural pressures on the national mechanism for mass communication are concerning. The censorship of information obtained from national news agencies, the obligation to publish news and commentary, and the self-censorship practiced by writers and editors who hold key positions in media organizations, often due to government advice or even appointment, pose a threat. The factors that hinder ownership from becoming a dominant force extend beyond mere profit and gain (Lamay, 2019).

As a result of the law prohibiting criticism of the president, the army, religious beliefs, cultural values, or even the administrations of friendly countries, the media always remains loyal to the ruling regime and is therefore classified as “pro-regime” (Lamay, 2019). In the Middle Eastern world, where state influence over markets is weaker and semi-democratic government is maintained, different and competing political parties or groups can reflect their views in a “relatively free” manner. However, the publication line was closed to questions related to the administrative structure and national values. While the national media systems of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman have a hard pro-

regime line in reflecting domestic political debates; the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan, Yemen, and Lebanon have relatively free content. On the other hand, Türkiye, Egypt, and Israel have a political structure – and thus global media dynamics – outside these two groups aim to integrate into the international structure (Chokoshvili, 2011).

The inevitable assessment of Middle East policy in international relations leads to a consideration of the media structure along with the international communications system, radio and television broadcasting. Discussions of radio broadcasting in the region, which began before World War I, led to the emergence of Radio Bari from Italy, BBC Empire British from London, Voice of America from the USA, Radio Moscow from the Soviet Union, and Monte Carlo from France. Monte Carlo deepened due to Moyen Orient publications and turned into a political propaganda arena for international powers (Chokoshvili, 2011).

Until the mid-1980s, when the influence of the Soviet Union in the region was waning and tensions, and conflicts between the Arab countries, as well as the problems resulting from Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, were reaching their peak, the national radio and television channels did not broadcast anything else. From officially approved news and data in the Middle East, where access to information is almost impossible, the First Gulf War and the new system of political relations that emerged after the war prepared the ground for media change. In the process that began with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the success of the transcontinental information management policy was based on the speed and immediacy that was followed by the Atlanta-based CNN (USA) network, as well as the international satellite broadcasts that covered this invasion (Ding, Cheng, Duan, & Jin, 2017).

It is a political and supportive process for this mode of broadcasting, and it has brought dynamic, multi-faceted, and missing online journalism to the forefront. The rapid spread of satellite technologies and satellite dishes throughout the post-war period in the Middle East, and the bias expressed by the Western perspective that dominates international channels such as CNN towards the Arab world, led to efforts to directly control their information. “The comprehensive reporting provided by CNN during the Gulf War, which made the Arab world and other people realize how powerful the media was, led to the development of Arab satellite broadcasting (Oh, Roumani, Nwankpa, & Hu, 2017).

Over the next few years, Arab channels gradually filled the gap that Western media had traditionally filled, as they broadcasted to a wide range of Arab audiences who turned to them for more accurate news, reliable and uncensored information, and better programming than what was being offered largely under state media regulation. During this period, although the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), which began broadcasting with the support of the Saudi administration (in 1989), intended to be the voice of the Arab world with its news selections and commentary; it was unable to transcend traditional content and was unable to meet expectations due to its relations with the administration (Ding, Cheng, Duan, & Jin, 2017).

Satellite television channels in the Middle East offer a variety of content, including news, programs addressing public concerns, and statements from dissenting voices. They also feature Hollywood films and entertainment programs that are purchased from American television. However, there are two notable characteristics of these news channels, that have had a revolutionary impact on Arab broadcasting. Firstly, they employ correspondents who can provide live information about the location and circumstances of events. These correspondents can even access previously restricted areas in order to gather news and cover important regional events to a much greater extent. Additionally, they possess the ability to communicate professionally and effectively. Secondly, these channels are open to discussions on sensitive issues, presenting different viewpoints that challenge traditional interpretations and taboos (Harb, 2019).

Today, Arab TV viewers who have access to satellite broadcasting have the opportunity to choose from a wide range of channels. However, like television viewers in many parts of the world, Arab viewers focus on a maximum of six or seven channels in a weekly period. An avid TV watcher might watch Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, or the Arab News Network, which broadcasts news and public affairs 24 hours a day, Asharq Al-Awsat, Orbit TV, Arab Radio and Television, or the Arab News Channel, which provides Western and Arab entertainment programs. You can watch the Lebanese International Broadcasting Company, Hezbollah's Al-Manar channel, which broadcasts Pro-Palestinian commentary and news from Lebanon. Additionally, you can tune into local Abu Dhabi channels for a more interesting presentation of regional news, as well as national TV channels for political news. The discourse that dominates the news and public affairs programs on these channels is nationalist, anti-American, and anti-Arab discourse (Harb, 2019).

## **2.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE MEDIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

To understand the structure and role of the media in the Middle East, it is necessary to discuss the Middle East by sub-region. Each sub-region has its own characteristics, greatly influencing the role of the media, especially television.

### **2.4.1 EGYPT**

Egypt is an important player in the media landscape in the region. Its journalism has enormous influence and is widely read throughout the Arabic-speaking world. The country's television and film industries also play a crucial role in supplying various products to the region. Media Production City, the heart of Egypt's film industry, was established with the ambitious goal of becoming "the Hollywood of the East." However, although media criticism of the government is common, self-censorship is encouraged due to press laws that impose prison sentences for defamation and insults on sensitive topics. Egypt has purchased two national television channels and six regional channels. It also holds a prominent position in satellite channels, as Egyptian satellite channels are widely viewed across the Arab world. These channels receive support from Egypt's extensive media production industry and have access to a vast archive of Egyptian films and television programs ( <http://www.minfo.gov.eg> ).

Egypt is distinguished by being the first Arab country to own its own satellite, Nile-Sat 101.15. In 2001, the country witnessed the launch of its first private television stations, Dream 1, Dream 2, and Al Mehwar TV, which broadcast via satellite. The government monopoly on radio broadcasting was broken in 2003 with the emergence of private commercial music stations. Egypt also established a "media-free zone" in 2000, providing media infrastructure and economic support to attract foreign media companies. According to estimates by the International Telecommunication Union in 2003, the number of Internet users in Egypt reached about 2.7 million users (<http://www.nilesat.com.eg> ).

### **2.4.2 SUDAN**

Turning to Sudan, since gaining independence in 1956, the media has played a role in disseminating information supporting various political parties during parliamentary periods or official government views during military rule. Radio, as an important means of mass communication in Sudan's vast territory, remained mostly under government control. Television broadcasting was also a complete monopoly. Sudan's official news agency

(SUNA), founded in 1971, distributes news around the country in Arabic, English, and French, and provides foreign and local services (<http://alanbaa.info> ).

Since assuming power, the current government has only allowed the publication of a limited number of newspapers and periodicals, all of which are controlled by the military or government agencies and subject to strict censorship. In 1991, the prominent daily newspaper was “National Salvation.” The government also exercises influence over radio and television broadcasting. In 1990, it was estimated that there were about 250,000 television sets and six million radio receivers in Sudan. Sudan TV operates three stations located in Omdurman, Al Jazeera, and Atbara. The main radio station of the Sudanese National Broadcasting Corporation was located in Omdurman, in addition to a regional station in Juba serving the southern region. Following the 1989 coup, the new government dismissed several broadcasters from Sudan Television due to suspicions regarding their loyalty to the new regime and its policies (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

In opposition to the official broadcast network, the SPLM operates its own secret radio station, Sudan People's Liberation Army Radio, using secret transmitters within the country and facilities in Ethiopia. Sudan People's Liberation Army Radio broadcasts in Arabic, English, and various languages spoken in the southern region. ([https://photius.com/countries/sudan/government/sudan\\_government\\_radio\\_and\\_television.html](https://photius.com/countries/sudan/government/sudan_government_radio_and_television.html) ).

### **2.4.3 LIBYA**

The Libyan people, workers, and foreign diplomats residing in Libya express a significant level of dissatisfaction with the quality and content of Libyan television and radio programs. This dissatisfaction stems from the fact that individuals are appointed to technical and managerial positions based on political affiliations rather than their experience or knowledge in the field. As a result, the overall quality of programming has suffered, and there is a lack of diverse and engaging content that would appeal to the general population. Additionally, there is a lack of effective broadcast signals reaching the southern part of the country, which is a sparsely populated area consisting of remote villages. Efforts are being made within the government to address these issues, but the outcome remains uncertain. In December 1995, the government announced the allocation of funds and priorities for the media, but no reliable statistical forecasts or economic data were provided. The government claims that due to the economic crisis, the media, along with other institutions, received low levels of support.

These important institutions can be revitalized, and new telecommunications technologies developed only by improving the economic situation and increasing funding (<http://www.free-libya.com> ).

#### **2.4.4 ALGERIA**

In Algeria, there is limited freedom for the media, as most television channels are state-owned. Although Algeria has not paid much attention to the media, the infrastructure and media facilities have achieved an acceptable level of development in recent times. However, mismanagement and political unrest have created obstacles. Lack of human expertise, persistent technical problems, and misuse of facilities have prevented the media from fully realizing its potential to contribute to the political, educational, economic, and social development of the country (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

#### **2.4.5 MOROCCO**

Moroccan private media enjoys the freedom to investigate and discuss sensitive topics, including social issues. However, it is important to note that there are limits to press freedom in the country. In 2003, the media rights organization Reporters Without Borders criticized the intelligence services for regularly interfering in the press. In addition, there is a press law that imposes prison sentences for crimes such as attacking Islam, the monarchy, and territorial integrity. These restrictions, coupled with low literacy levels and fierce competition for advertising, affect newspaper readers in Morocco .It is worth noting that the government owns or has a stake in the two Moroccan television networks. However, there are plans to allow private investment in state-run media and the official news agency. Broadcasters tend to be more cautious in their coverage of sensitive issues than their counterparts in journalism. Many Moroccans use satellite dishes to access a variety of foreign television stations (Yahya R. Kamalipour-Hamid Mowlana, 1994).

#### **2.4.6 SYRIA**

The media in Syria is generally state-owned, with some private television stations being allowed to broadcast programs, news, and series within the framework of state policy, as the Syrian government recognizes the important role that the media can play in the education, training, and comprehensive development of its citizens, as well as in the progress of the nation and the region. Specifically, the government believes that the media can effectively

advance the Baath Party's political, social, and cultural agenda. The goal is to create an enabling environment for national development through media influence. Furthermore, the media also contributes to non-formal education and training of Syrian citizens in vital areas such as health, hygiene, agriculture, and child development. In addition, the media serves as a means to promote Arab pride and promote the concept of "Arabism." Despite criticism that the media is merely a tool for political propaganda, it is clear that the Syrian media has successfully achieved some of its stated goals (Yahya R. Kamalipour-Hamid Mowlana, 1994).

#### **2.4.7 IRAQ**

Iraq effectively used the media to communicate its social and economic development goals to the Iraqi people and provide guidance on the employment and skills required to achieve these goals. Television has emerged as the most valuable communication tool for social and economic development in Iraq. The government utilized television to broadcast educational programs, cater to a diverse range of students, and motivate illiterate individuals to overcome language and mathematics challenges. Through a large-scale literacy campaign that started in the 1970s, television played a crucial role in increasing adult literacy rates from 42% to 93%. In Iraq, the Baath Party's control over 1968, the media was extensive, and it served as a tool for propaganda. Promoting the party's agenda. The limited entertainment programming, and restricted diversity of content reflected the government's tight grip on the media landscape. Now in Iraq, there are personal party, and religious channels, as well as public channels, as media freedom has increased. However, the structure of the media stations lacks a national orientation (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

#### **2.4.8 LEBANON**

Lebanon, despite having a thriving media industry, has not been able to effectively utilize it to enhance national development. The press in Lebanon has primarily functioned as a means to express certain opinions rather than serving as a platform for constructive discussions and opposing viewpoints. The broadcasting industry, whether legal or illegal, has also failed to provide citizens with relevant information that meets their societal needs. Television, in particular, heavily relies on imported programs that do not align with Lebanese culture, while locally produced programs lack educational value. The Lebanese scene witnessed major changes as a result of the outbreak of the civil war, which also had a profound impact on the

media. By studying the history of the media in Lebanon, it becomes clear that the civil war played a decisive role in shaping its structure. Surprisingly, the consequences of this shift have not received much attention, which highlights the need to further understand the effects of the gradual re-institutionalization of media on the country's population. There are dozens of private channels in Lebanon, as media freedom is great in Lebanon, and many citizens in other Arab countries follow these channels, including MTV, OTV, Al-Jadeed, and others (<http://www.lebanon.com> ).

#### **2.4.9 JORDAN**

Throughout its 70-year existence, Jordan has adopted a mixed system of government in which private institutions and the public sector have worked side by side, fostering an environment of cooperation and reciprocity. Thus, Jordan's media landscape consistently reflects this mixed system, where newspapers and other print media fall under private ownership while broadcasting remains under government control. Although the Jordanian press enjoyed a certain level of freedom in the 1950s, it was only in 1989 that the media enjoyed unrestricted opportunities to cover public affairs in a democratic environment. Three years later, democracy in Jordan faced many challenges, most notably the Gulf crisis and the war. However, both the media and the public demonstrated a remarkable level of responsibility, demonstrating their maturity and commitment to supporting democratic values in Jordan (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

#### **2.4.10 PALESTINE**

Given the varying degrees of Israeli occupation, the media played a crucial role in promoting Palestinian nationalism. The media plays its role by introducing the people, their land, and their leaders. It presents lessons from Palestinian history and presents a vision for the Palestinian future. Consequently, the press became an instrument of Palestinian nationalism. Given its opposition to the occupation, the press has repeatedly hesitated to criticize national institutions or publish investigative articles on the benefit of development aid. The video is used by women's groups and health organizations for educational purposes as well as to discuss political and social issues ( Al-Mohammad, 2012).

#### **2.4.11 KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA**

The media plays a crucial role in Saudi Arabia. Saudi broadcasting, especially television, is widely used for national development. It broadcasts daily campaigns on various topics, such as environmental cleanliness, proper garbage disposal, combating noise pollution, adhering to traffic laws, using seat belts, donating blood, and reducing electricity consumption. These campaigns appear in short public service announcements and longer discussion programs, which air during the afternoons and primetime periods. The government ministries responsible for these campaigns ensure that they are carried out professionally and that the required message is delivered effectively. The MBC Channels Network (in English: MBC Group) or MBC (in English: MBC) is a Saudi television channel that was founded and whose board of directors is headed by the Saudi businessman Walid bin Ibrahim Al Ibrahim. It broadcasts a variety of entertainment and non-entertainment television channels. Its headquarters is currently located in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It will be mentioned in detail later as it forms the focus of the study (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

#### **2.4.12 KUWAIT**

In Kuwait, the constitution guarantees freedom of opinion within the limits of the law. However, the Press and Publication Law of 1961 imposes fines and prison sentences for publishing prohibited material, including reports critical of the government. Despite this ruling, Kuwait is known for its freedom of the press. In 1986, the government implemented measures to suppress political opposition, including new censorship regulations. The Ministry of Information requires all publications to submit advance copies for approval and prohibits criticism of the ruler, his family, other Arab leaders, or Islam, as well as accepting foreign funding. The Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) is independent in theory, but in reality, it is an arm of the Ministry of Information. Newspapers are generally privately owned, with seven daily newspapers, five in Arabic and two in English. The largest daily newspaper, Al-Qabas, is independent, while two smaller daily newspapers, Al-Anbaa and Al-Rai Al-Am, are more conservative and supportive of the government. The Ministry of Information runs the three Kuwait Radio stations and the Kuwait TV station (<http://www.moe.edu.kw> )

#### **2.4.13 QATAR**

The primary purpose of the media in Qatar was initially to help develop a modern country. This goal is evident in the deliberate focus on electronic media. The Ministry of Information

has formulated policies and plans aimed at bridging the gap between the oil boom of the 1970s and early 1980s and the slow pace of internal development, using the media as a means to achieve this goal. Despite being a small country, Qatar has experienced rapid growth in its journalism industry, largely due to strong government support and the recruitment of well-trained journalists from other Arab countries with less economic prosperity. The competitive nature of the media industry has improved the quality of local electronic media production. This environment eventually led to the emergence of Al Jazeera, widely considered one of the most popular media outlets in the Middle East. It is worth noting that Al Jazeera operates independently of any government or regime, which leads people to consider it a neutral source of information (<https://www.e.gov.qa> ).

#### **2.4.14 BAHRAIN**

The media in Bahrain mainly focuses on advertising and covering ceremonial and heritage events. The private press in Bahrain is not inclined towards social advocacy that conflicts with national interests. The government is responsible for developing national awareness through media publications and updates on state activities. Media consumers in Bahrain generally trust the accuracy and substance of private and government media, as there are no restrictions on media selection or external measurement ( <https://www.bna.bh/en> ).

#### **2.4.15 THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

The mass media industries in the UAE have firmly established themselves in the political, economic, and cultural landscape after experiencing a period of continuous growth. Currently, the media in the UAE is witnessing a process of consolidation and effectively meeting the communication needs of both the local population and the expatriate community. For Arab journalism, professionals often come from countries with established journalistic traditions such as Egypt and Lebanon. On the other hand, news workers in the English-language press mostly come from Europe, India, and Pakistan. However, this over-reliance on foreign workers is gradually changing with increased access to local talent. Given the political stability that the UAE has enjoyed since its founding, it is reasonable to expect continued prosperity for the media industry. This growth is fostered and sustained through practical and charitable leadership. The emergence of the Al Arabiya channel was a witness to these trends (<https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/uae-media> ).

#### **2.4.16 SULTANTE OF OMAN**

Over the past 25 years, Oman has made significant progress in the use of media for informational, educational, and entertainment purposes. This progress is evident in the variety of broadcast media programs available. About 74% of radio programming focuses on entertainment, religion, and news, while these categories make up about 54% of all television programming. Omani print media also shares similar trends with broadcast media, aiming to inform, educate, and entertain.

In 1989, a new comprehensive complex consisting of a radio station and studios was built in Oman. The following year, Oman entered into an agreement with a French group to expand television and radio facilities, resulting in the construction of sixteen major stations. The project was completed in 1993 and cost Oman about 26 million Omani Riyals. The continuing progress in the media field in Oman demonstrates the ability of Omanis to deal with change skillfully while preserving their cultural heritage (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

#### **2.4.17 YEMEN**

Radio broadcasting in Yemen began in 1940 with the establishment of a small radio station by the British at Ras Bradley, located in the Tawahi district of Aden. Initially, transmissions were brief and focused primarily on military updates related to World War II, along with information regarding precautions against air raids. The first known speaker from this station was Sheikh Abdullah Muhammad Hatem. However, the station ceased operations in 1945. Apart from radio, Yemen has two national television channels. Channel One, originally the Northern Television Service, began broadcasting in 1975. The former Southern Television Service, now known as Channel Two, was established in 1964. Color broadcasting was introduced in the North on September 26, 1979, and in the South on March 8, 1981. The role of the media in Yemen should be like that of most Gulf countries, with a focus on education and national development, especially in the areas of healthcare, childcare, and the environment (Ahmed Mady, 2005).

**Table 2.1:** Media and Channels in MENA.

|    | Country         | Population | TV<br>Stations                 | Internet<br>Users |
|----|-----------------|------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1  | Algeria         | 41,176,000 | 67+223repeaters                | 64%               |
| 2  | Bahrain         | 1,314,089  | 12                             | 78%               |
| 3  | Egypt           | 91,680,500 | 124                            | 88%               |
| 4  | Gaza Strip      | 1,756,871  | 9                              | 76%               |
| 5  | Iraq            | 32,585,692 | 23                             | 68%               |
| 6  | Jordan          | 7,930,491  | 34 (+ 111 repeaters)           | 69%               |
| 7  | Kuwait          | 4,156,306  | 19+ several satellite channels | 86%               |
| 8  | Lebanon         | 5,882,562  | 20 (+ 9 repeaters)             | 82%               |
| 9  | Libya           | 6,244,174  | 19+1 low power repeater        | 73%               |
| 10 | Mauritania      | 3,516,806  | 7                              | 62%               |
| 11 | Morocco         | 32,987,206 | 43 (+ 57 repeaters)            | 77%               |
| 12 | Oman            | 3,219,775  | 19 (+ 29 low-power repeaters)  | 89%               |
| 13 | Qatar           | 2,123,160  | 6 (+6 repeaters)               | 93%               |
| 14 | Saudi<br>Arabia | 33,413,660 | 187                            | 92%               |
| 15 | Yemen           | 26,052,966 | 16                             | 75%               |
| 16 | Sudan           | 35,482,233 | 8                              | 68%               |
| 17 | Syria           | 17,951,639 | 56 (+ 26 repeaters)            | 66%               |
| 18 | Tunisia         | 10,937,521 | 42 (+ 89 repeaters)            | 73%               |
| 19 | Emirates        | 8,264,070  | 87                             | 95%               |

**Table 2.1:** Media and Channels in MENA “Table Continued”.

|    |                         |             |      |     |
|----|-------------------------|-------------|------|-----|
| 20 | Total<br>Arab countries | 430,753,333 | 874  | 81% |
| 21 | Total<br>Middle East    | 547,845,774 | 3489 | 74% |

Source: (Allagui & Akdenizli, 2019)

## 2.5 MEDIA IN TÜRKİYE

Türkiye's media industry is vast, being the largest in the region. In 2018, there were a total of 6,896 newspapers and magazines published, with 49 of them (6.4%) being national and having a combined circulation of over four million, as reported by the Turkish Statistical Institute. The country also boasts 698 television stations and 1,115 radio stations, most of which are privately owned by corporate conglomerates. These conglomerates have the legal ability to own multiple publishing and broadcasting entities under a single umbrella structure, as well as other media-related entities like advertising and distribution (Farmanfarmaian, 2020).

It is worth noting that the media in Türkiye, as a collective entity, holds a unique position as a mediator between society and power. It serves as a platform for independence and authority, and has established its own set of professional standards, often referred to as the "fourth estate." In Türkiye, the media reflects the social values defined by its audience, which widely relies on and respects the media as a reliable source of information. The media plays a significant role in promoting communal culture, sectarianism, historical identities, and national ideological discourses, in contrast to the more conventional Western press. This includes values such as monitoring activities and engaging in investigative reporting (Kocamaner, 2016).

In 2012, Show TV faced sanctions from the Supreme Council of Radio and Television for allegedly airing a program that was deemed to be in conflict with the national and moral values of society. The regulatory body cited a violation of Article 4's broadcasting standards as outlined in Law No. 3984 on the Establishment of Radio and Television Institutions and their Radio Programs. The decision to impose sanctions came after approximately 75,000 public complaints were lodged with the Turkish Broadcasting Corporation over a three-week period, expressing discontent with the program's treatment of moral and national values.

Drawing on the theory of negotiation of values and status, it is evident that values are dynamic and reflect societal norms and ideological imperatives, thus allowing for a framework that incorporates the concept of choice (Kocamaner, 2016).

When defining status, we can refer to Willem Doues's perspective, which posits that it signifies the unique affiliation of individuals or institutions to groups and their shared social relationships and experiences. Moreover, status also denotes their position within the group or society based on reputation, access to resources, and the ability to authentically embody society's values. Values and status are considered political in nature and closely linked to the concept of power. Negotiation plays a crucial role in balancing these elements within the realm of ideas and discourse in the media, encompassing risk management, bargaining, patronage, and ethical considerations. Since the inception of the Republic, there has been a longstanding tradition of state influence and exploitation of mass media (Farmanfarmaian, 2020).

The transition in values from secular Kemalism to Islamic neoliberalism in Türkiye has brought about significant changes in the role and nature of the media, impacting their negotiation strategies. Atatürk's promotion of Western and secular values through the media enforced behaviors and norms that diverged from those of the Ottoman era, and were often at odds with the Islamic customs embraced by a large portion of Türkiye's religious population. Presently, while the media still aims to promote state values, they also convey messages related to Islamism, a value system that resonates with the majority of Turks. This shift has led to the emergence of Islamic-oriented media and entertainment, catering to both private and public audiences, marking a notable transformation in the sector (Kuyucu, 2019). Nevertheless, a significant outcome of the media's symbolic social standing has been the consolidation of ownership by conglomerates, resulting in their isolation from other entities. The intricate relationship between politics and media in Türkiye remains a central aspect of the country's landscape. The media serves as a reflection of the ideological shifts and historical developments that have shaped Türkiye's trajectory, while also functioning as a tool of the state. The laws that have evolved over time, commencing with the Constitution, safeguard the freedom of expression for Turks, albeit within ethical boundaries that safeguard the security of the nation and society (Kuyucu, 2019).

Consequently, the media's utilization of its social capital of ideas and information hinges on its ability to effectively incorporate power values into the messages it conveys. For many

media organizations in Türkiye that serve as instruments of religious, regional, and commercial networks, the exercise of symbolic power in the public sphere closely aligns with the values of central authority (Kuyucu, 2019).

In the social and cultural context, Turkish series often reflect the cultural and social content, as well as the relationships between individuals and institutions in Türkiye. They may also reflect the desires, culture, and interests of those in power, whether it be the government or the group that holds power through capital. The claim that the ideology of those in power or media owners is being spread through the media is a very old debate. However, media tools not only shape ideology but also culture. Sometimes, the culture and lifestyles portrayed in series are real, while at other times they are fictional, and attempts are made to impose a lifestyle or cultural truths on the public within the framework of dominant ideology. At this stage, television series work to spread ideology and culture. The script of the television series is also created within the scope of this function (Karaboğa, 2016).

In the context of cultural production, television series scripts are sometimes prepared in a way that makes the government or media owner the voice of the dominant ideology. For example, today, in line with the ideological interest of the current government, historical and cultural content series such as "Payitaht Abdulhamid," "Diriliş: Ertuğrul," and "Mehmed: Bir Cihan Fatihi" are being broadcast. In addition, series like "Çarpışma," "İçerde," "Kurtlar Vadisi," "Saklı Yüzler," and "Adanalı" which contain negative elements such as mafia, drugs, and weapons, are products that feed on a culture of violence in society and perpetuate this culture (Nouredine, 2016).

When examining Turkish television series in the context of cultural production, we see that some series present a uniform life. The abundance of TV series that depict the love story between a rich girl and a poor boy in their scenarios, and portray glimpses of lavish lifestyles, may aim to make the audience believe that the life depicted in those TV series is an ideal life, rather than just an idealized life. Therefore, the goal is to make the audience emulate the same life, imposing a uniform life (Nouredine, 2016).

Customization and standardization become more important as the prevailing ideology is reflected in the scenario (Kula, 2012). Thus, society can be pressured through television series, and these series can serve the desire for the life depicted in them to be a social life. For example, TV series that include many conservative elements to create a conservative society can lead to an increase in conservatism in society. Such efforts can enforce the

traditional gender roles in society. Men and women playing leading roles in TV series are generally placed on the axis of power and obedience. The duo of "the strong and ideal man" and the duo of "obedience, made for obedience" presented in the series unifies women in gender roles and positions men as "obedient" (Karaboğa, 2016).

This may lead to exacerbating gender inequality in society. In television series, the "strong" woman is generally portrayed as someone who has "lost her fertility" and is no longer a "woman" in terms of gender, or "women like men." Influential and respected women in television series only appear as relatively older women holding the title of family elders. This results in social assumptions that glorify traditional roles for women and conform to stereotypical molds, such as the influence of women that can only be transcended as they age. When evaluated from the perspective of the cultural industry, one of the most important functions of television series is to stimulate the consumer industry (Aydın, 2014).

In this context, the clothing worn by actors and the products used by the actors portraying characters in television series can cause an explosion in demand for these clothes and products. For example, striped vanilla pajamas, which were popular in the seventies, were forgotten in the nineties and the first decade of the twenty-first century, but became famous again with the character Gaffur in the television series "Avrupa Yakası," which began airing in 2004 and were put up for sale once again under the name "Gaffur Pajamas." The villa located in Sarıyer, where the television series "Aşk-ı Memnu" was filmed and broadcast on Kanal D, became crowded with people during and after the series aired. The province where the television series "Aşk-ı Memnu" was filmed and broadcast on ATV, became a tourist area and opened up to tourists, leading to the creation of an economy in that region. Television series not only allow places but also the geographical areas where they are shot, to become popular and transform those places into commercial data (Noureddine, 2016).

TV series contribute to both the culture industry and the consumption industry in that they enable the wheels of the consumer economy to turn quickly. While capitalism produces "new needs" with the help of various tools, TV series also feed into this desire. Spotlighting beautiful women and muscular men in TV series creates a uniform perception of beauty. Consumption is fueled by items such as makeup used by beautiful women, hair dyes, the clothes they wear, the gyms where muscular men exercise, the cars they own, their relationships, and their positions in business life (Aydın, 2014).

Another issue that fuels the consumption of TV series is the passion for luxury. The series portrays a life of extreme wealth, cars, planes, boats, palaces, and luxurious living that the general public cannot experience. This creates a perception through TV series that luxury is the only goal one wants to achieve in life. Naturally, the passion for luxury appears as a result of the TV series' efforts to create a unified society that serves capitalism. When all of these elements are evaluated together, TV series serve the efforts to create a unified society through their scenarios, and they quickly turn the wheels of consumption and manipulate the roles of both genders in society (Coşgun, 2012).

## **2.6 MEDIA MARKET IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

The Middle East media and entertainment market size is expected to grow from US\$39.05 billion in 2023 to US\$61.23 billion by 2028, at a CAGR of 9.41% during the forecast period .(2028-2023)

The media and entertainment industry in the region is undergoing a major transformation. Cultural shifts among the region's youth have generated significant momentum, and the untapped demand for local Arabic content will spur regional media to grow significantly (Allagui & Akdenizli, 2019).

The media and entertainment (ME) industry was one of the first business sectors to experience digital disruption, and its transformation is far from over. As major networks and studios continue to introduce direct-to-consumer services facilities in 2021, players will likely compete to offer content libraries that are broad enough to attract and retain customers. This presents opportunities for media and entertainment companies to repackage their content libraries with a comprehensive range of offerings, including music, video, gaming services, and ad-supported content.

The increasing adoption of mobile internet services is driving the growth of the market. For instance, according to the GSMA? the number of mobile internet users in the MENA region exceeded 300 million in 2021, and the penetration rate is expected to reach 50% of the population by the end of 2022.

The use of social media has also been increasing in MENA, which is of interest to agencies, brands, and media companies for advertising. For example, according to the Global News Publishers Association, people in the MENA region spend an average of about 3.5 hours per day on social media across platforms.

Furthermore, developments in paid and digital media have created new reasons for investments. These changes give regional media players an opportunity to reset their business models, explore investments in high-quality local content, and provide a reason for global players, in particular, to re-evaluate their presence in the region (Allagui & Akdenizli, 2019).

Moreover, new pay TV and OTT players are increasingly filling a market that has been dominated until now by free direct-to-home (DTH). The GCC countries are investing heavily in technology development due to broadband initiatives of various countries to support OTT platforms. A growing number of streaming networks such as Influx, Starz Play, Istikana, and Netflix, operating globally and locally, are offering subscription-based video-on-demand services to viewers in the region (Benmamoun, Singh, & Sobh, 2019).

However, the area is relatively more restricted compared to other parts of the world. They are still traditionally set up as carriage-only deals, meaning broadcasters and operators do not have complete freedom to optimize revenue from areas such as creativity in terms of content creation and ad insertion. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the media and entertainment industry in the region has suffered greatly. Although the consumption of information and entertainment content in digital media has witnessed an upward trend as people have been spending more time at home. Restrictions on outdoor activities have greatly affected the business of a section of the media and entertainment industry, such as cinemas (Allagui & Ayish, Big Data in the MENA Region: The Next Path towards Socio-economic and Cultural Development, 2017).

In the Middle East today, telecom companies offer a solution that provides information regarding the amount of data used while streaming video over the mobile network. For example, Vodacom introduced Video Playtime Packs, a unique solution in the world that takes the guesswork out of data usage when streaming video over a mobile network and helps customers use their data efficiently.

Apple TV subscribers can watch on-demand content online or download their favorite shows for offline viewing on the Apple TV app. Up to six friends or family members can share Apple TV channel subscriptions through Family Sharing using just their Apple ID and password. It is expected that by including these perks in the subscription, more consumers will choose the service, increasing the market share of VOD providers like STARZPLAY

(Allagui & Ayish, Big Data in the MENA Region: The Next Path towards Socio-economic and Cultural Development, 2017).

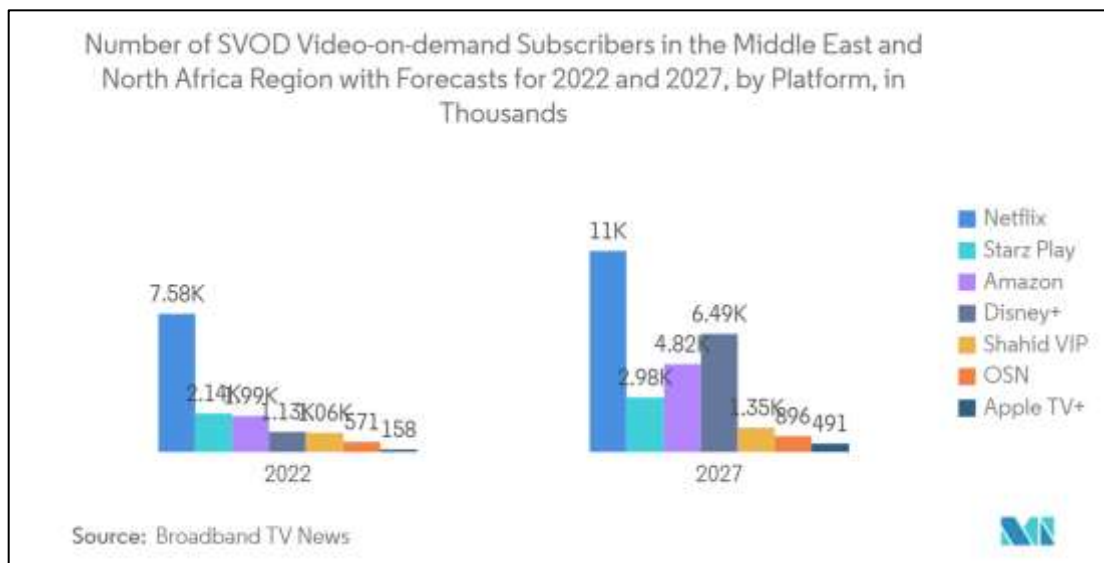


**Figure 2.1: SVOD 2022-2027.**

The Middle East media and entertainment market is highly competitive, with significant regional and international players. During the forecast time frame, the industry is likely to experience growth, which will likely lead to increased competition. The market has a remarkable degree of consolidation because only a small number of companies control a large portion. Arab Media Group, Abu Dhabi Media, Orbit Showtime Network, and Integral are a few of the major companies active in this field.

## **2.7 MBC CHANNEL GROUP**

The MBC Group of television and radio channels is considered one of the most important media outlets in the Middle East and Arab countries, particularly due to its ability to reach a wide segment of the Arab audience. This is attributed to the high quality of broadcasting and content, as well as the significant financial capabilities of the MBC Group. The group offers a variety of channels specializing in series, news, songs, advertising, and more. Additionally, the MBC Drama channel is particularly significant as it broadcasts foreign and Turkish dramas dubbed into Arabic. The exclusive broadcast of numerous series and programs on this channel has greatly expanded its audience in the Arab world.

MBC has been broadcasting since August 8, 1969, and now boasts a reach of 13.5 million households and coverage of 98% of the Korean Peninsula. Its diverse programming range

includes everything from news to sports, cultural programs, news magazines, drama, and entertainment which are broadcast live for 15 hours a day during weekdays and 20 hours a day during weekends.

The MBC channel began broadcasting in 1961. It broadcasts a variety of programs including news, culture, and entertainment programs 24 hours a day, while two FM channels play all types of music for all listeners around the clock.

As of March 2003, MBC employed 1,725 people at its headquarters in Seoul. 2,303 workers work at 19 nationally owned and operated regional stations; 1,008 employees work in seven subsidiaries 19 regionally owned and operated stations located in major cities across the country combined with headquarters in Seoul to complete MBC's national broadcast network.

All local stations operate as sole proprietorships, but MBC retains ownership of 51% to 100% of their shares. Approximately 15% of their programming portfolio consists of programs produced for local audiences .

As can be seen from the discussion above, studying how television series are broadcast on MBC is important because it gives a clear picture of how television series are broadcast and the framework of television media broadcasting in the Middle East, especially for dubbed series, in addition to the influence of authority and bias in choosing the series that are shown on the channel.

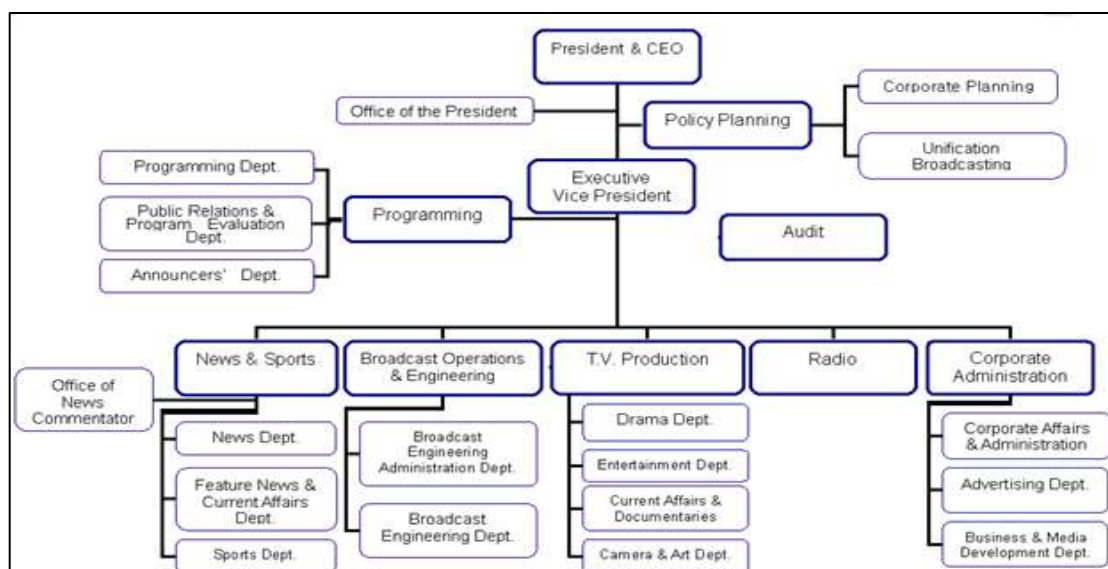


**Figure 2.2:** Organizational Structure of MBC Chanel.

### **3. ROLE OF MEDIA IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Western media, for example, has come to dominate global culture and seeks to spread its intellectual and moral systems with the aim of changing the lifestyles of different people. This ultimately has a long-term impact on the policies and principles of decision-making for both the people and governments of these countries. This is achieved through the planned and systematic use of contemporary media influences, where various social, cultural, and economic formations strive to influence public policies of countries and exert pressure on public opinion and international decision-making (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). The goal of influencing public opinion at the international level is usually accompanied by the mediation of companies specialized in organizing public relations, audience engineering, and news fabrication. The workers in these companies are specialists and have experience in studies of influence, persuasion, behavior change, and patterns. They have previously practiced this role at the international level (Castells, 2010).

The role of the media in influencing relations between countries has become of great importance, leading all countries and their governments to allocate departments and even ministries to them in order to achieve the state's goals both internally and externally. The internal role of the media aims to disseminate media influences that are organized by decision-making and governance centers, with the objective of influencing internal public opinion and directing its attention towards achieving specific electoral or other objectives. This is in addition to the cultural, economic, and social aspects that are carried out within the framework of the state. As for the external role, it extends and encompasses international influence, with the aim of promoting culture for tourism purposes or introducing the world to the state's civilization and its people, as well as achieving political and military objectives, such as spreading military media influences or changing government systems or other systems in some countries (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008).

#### **3.1 MODERN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION**

Taking into account the rapid development in the field of media spaces, the entry of the era of digital technology, and the spread of personal and collective means of communication, including Internet applications, the position of the media that play has expanded, and it is active functions that were not within the framework of its media system in the previous few years. This has led to increased confusion between the concept of political media power and

the role of social media. The media and its practices regarding spreading its impact on public opinion, and the concepts of charging and attracting the public (Rubenzer, 2017).

The problem of combining the concepts of media manipulation, its fields, and political concepts is not new. Hitler employed media influences within the framework of intellectual popular subjugation to the rules and principles of Nazi politics. The great powers used the psychological factor among themselves in the era of the Cold War to develop the methods and scope of political media effects (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008).

In the midst of the digital revolution, the extensive information sharing, and the spread of social media and smartphone applications, political platforms and local channels have emerged to broadcast political media influences. Their aim is to engineer the masses, control their feelings and emotions, and manage them considering the goals of agenda-setting in order to make consequential political decisions. An example of this is the use of the concept of logical regression, which implies control. The psychological inventory of individuals and their management through it (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008).

In the book of researcher Guy Durandin (2017), called *The Book of Political Media Influences*, we find that political broadcasting aims to stimulate the subconscious of individuals, control their emotions, and exclude them from logic and inductive thought. Media domination itself is not the art of persuasion because being convicted with an idea requires full awareness and the ability to differentiate between facts and false rumors. It is the manipulation of perception through artistic methods.

### **3.1.1 Signs and Symbols in Contemporary Media Influences**

The media effects producer has a wide range of options when it comes to using communication channels, symbols, and techniques to reach their purpose of media effects. In the science of media psychology, signs are defined as stimulating points or influences that target the human element and move it from one intellectual or emotional state to another targeted state. Symbols, on the other hand, are a type of sign that carries a special and specific meaning. Examples of signs include positions (seating), structures (buildings), or visible, audible, or readable signs. Examples of symbols include a curved cross, which symbolizes strength and victory, or the symbol of the eagle, among others (Bahador, 2007).

It can be said that the media, whether visual, such as television, or audio, such as radio, or other internet and other means, increases in importance with the increase in the size of the propaganda institution. It should be noted that in the modern era, groups called pressure groups have begun to grow, which undertake propaganda campaigns, use symbols and signals, and are led by specialized scholars and experts for the purpose of pressure. In a specific region, a country, or even a specific geographical scope, these groups are considered of great attention, especially in areas with little homogeneity, with the aim of attracting different opinions towards a specific position to change the decision-making process or cause an imbalance, conflict, or division in a country (Basta Fleiner ).

### **3.1.2 Political Influences of Media and Mind Control**

In our contemporary world, language has its limitations. Personal opinions and young perspectives are no longer mere expressions but have transformed into weapons during space and information warfare. The digital realm has given rise to activities that mold public sentiment. This opinion is not necessarily designed to achieve negative objectives, but it can reflect the intentions of certain groups to engage in warfare. Psychological tactics are employed to alter the behavior of targeted individuals or groups. This is what is referred to as modern lethal combat. We can witness this phenomenon on the social media platform Twitter, which is now utilized by influential political figures and other media personalities. Twitter, along with other social networks, serves as the foundation of the new political landscape (Naveh, 2002).

It must be noted that political influence on public perception is applied through social networks according to certain characteristics that link them to other types of communication networks. This has created a state of chaos between the recipients for several reasons, including: (Naveh, 2002)

First: Political media influences are exerted through the method and manner of mobilizing and rallying the masses by sharing and disseminating ideas among the target audience. Then, efforts are made to promote and reinforce these ideas once they relate to the masses. These ideas often align with the broadcaster's agenda and aim to complete their targets of influence. By providing justifications and reassurances to the audience, their fears are alleviated.

Second: The sender and publisher of media influences, to deliver their messages and accomplish their purposes, rely on a strategy of addressing and motivating emotions and feelings without relying on the logical essence and addressing the minds of the recipients. Thus, media manipulation is reflected in illogical responses, including impulsiveness, anger, and others, in the recipients.

Third: Using lies and relying on the method of fabrication and spreading incorrect information by counting on the principle that it is easy to deceive the public due to their insufficient knowledge and thus their inability to analyze and extract facts and their tendency towards believing propaganda (Bahador, 2007).

Fourth: One of the tools that media influencers can use is to support their media influence with a reference acceptable to the public, such as seeking help from clerics and famous figures.

### **3.1.4 Mass Communication and the Audience Engineering**

Mass communication is defined as the process of transmitting information through the media to large numbers of individuals within a specific society or multiple societies simultaneously. It is often associated with various means such as television, the Internet, magazines, and newspapers, which serve as the media for delivering communication messages to the public.

#### **3.1.4.1 Mass communication means**

Mass media is defined as the means that target the majority of the public, as is the case in current social media networks and platforms like Twitter and Facebook, and as is the case in traditional means such as television, in order to convey ideas and attract attention towards specific issues and topics in a way that serves functions of communication. The importance of mass media has emerged as it is the right arm of the media producer due to its ability to reach the largest segment of people. Local and international media influences have relied on it to achieve their various goals over time (Yordanova, 2012).

It is useful to mention that some individuals, groups, and even countries in the modern era gain and increase their social status through methods of communication and media influences, to the point that legitimacy has become given and taken away through media power at the international level. Some officials of Western countries delegitimized Gaddafi in Libya even before they did so in their countries by systematically using means of

communication through organized propaganda. This method was also followed in various parts of the world with the aim of creating a strategic impact on the structure and scope of countries and their peoples (Trice, 1978).

Opinions differ among scholars, politicians, and others about the purpose of media and the means of communication that they use in bringing about political, economic, and social changes at the international level. For instance, Hitler was certain that media manipulation would one day make him conquer the world, and indeed it had the greatest role in his victory and invasion of Europe in 1939. Lenin and others were also able to empower and build the Communist Party and spread its ideas through media influence as well. Hitler said that media influence allowed us to move mountains and change reality in more ways than we had imagined. Lenin said that the basis for media influences is to arouse and move people from one side to another. Others oppose this through irritation and persuasion (Yordanova, 2012).

In the modern era, we find that media influences have contributed to and succeeded in spreading the cultural ideas of some countries through communication with other countries. This was previously considered immoral, such as the spread of hard rock songs in Arab countries and others. Additionally, media influences have played a role at the political level, attempting to manipulate principles and values. People in order to create a rift between them and their rulers. This manipulation aims to pave the way for military wars or coups, with the support of the people of the country itself (Adhikary, 2008).

The influence of media results from a stimulus, which is an influence that affects the emotions of the target as an individual or group. As a result, the respondent works to adapt to it and sometimes creates an incentive to act in a specific way. This is the essence and foundation of the formation of public opinion, and media influences do not necessarily have to be negative in this context (Smith, 2012).

Public opinion results from a group of individuals coming together or adjusting and spreading around a specific idea. This spreading can occur through face-to-face gatherings, like conferences and demonstrations, or it can happen without a physical gathering, such as the formation of public opinion through social media or through written or printed media like newspapers, television, and other forms of media (Anderson, 2009).

Looking at the mass media, it can be said that these means are considered among the best means of communication that can be followed in the current era, and among the most dangerous. Since the emergence of these means, they have been able to achieve the following (Anderson, 2009):

- a. Influencing the public's emotions and transferring them from a rational state to a subconscious state by manipulating sensory perception. This allows for the replacement of real objective reality with propaganda myths that are not based on truth. These tactics were used to manipulate the public's sense of the masses, making them numb and easily led, as seen in the cases of Nazism and Communism.
- b. A steady increase in the volume of participation in political, economic, and social aspects has been observed. According to the scientist Malcahon, the world has become a small village, leading to an increased ability to spread media influences and create a greater impact.
- c. Media influences through mass communication have become a tool for defending and consolidating the ideas of the ruling class, and thus an authoritarian tool that may be used against the people or to manipulate them.

In-depth and comprehensive studies have been conducted on mass media, and most research has proven that the greater the degree of personal approach to the media, the greater its persuasion and influence. Television is more persuasive than radio and means of communication that include one person versus one person are more persuasive than television, and so on (Rubenzer, 2017). In addition, the success of media influences is achieved through adopting more than one means of communication to support it. Propaganda campaigns that used more than one means of communication were distinguished by their success and greater ability to influence the recipient. The West, for example, tried to subjugate most of the international media of all types, even Arabic ones, in their various forms, read, audible, and others, to promote the values of democracy (Van Belle, 2009).

Despite the enormous and sometimes destructive influence of the media, there are limits that cannot be crossed regarding the party that publishes and relies on media influences. Changing being carries ideas and adopt multiple information and concepts. The preacher cannot control him absolutely. Human values, customs, and traditions. The state of media influences and their ideas conflict, thus limiting their ability to influence. Also, informing a

person about the components of media influences, and their dimensions, and approaching them logically may lead to their failure to achieve their goal (Yordanova, 2012).

The psychological tendencies that develop in individuals within primary social groups (such as family and school) are so deeply ingrained that it is challenging for a preacher to alter them. On the other hand, tendencies that arise within superficial groups like unions are easier to change since they do not have a strong hold on the individual's personality. The influence of media is more effective in supporting and reinforcing existing trends and beliefs, rather than promoting change and advocating for the fundamental beliefs and ideas of the targeted individuals (Yordanova, 2012).

In addition, the relationship between the person performing the media influences and the recipient, their direct contact, and their closeness to each other play a role in the success of the media influences and increase the chances of their influence. For example, influences the individual more than co-workers, and friendly countries have more influence than countries far away from each other (Smith, Hadfield, & Dunne, 2017).

We can say that the effectiveness of media influences in general and political influences in particular is through: (Acharya, 2006).

- a. Supporting media influences, especially political ones, with economic, social, cultural, and psychological mechanisms that are linked to public opinion so that they are able to influence and succeed in achieving their goals within several dimensions.
- b. The effectiveness of media influence is directly related to the media and its use. For instance, when there is a monopoly of the media, opinions and actions are broadcast in a specific direction without any competition. This enables the media to have the ability to influence and bring about learning. Therefore, there is an inverse relationship between the effectiveness of media influence and the freedom of the media and its means.
- c. 3- Emotional factors and involuntary feelings play a major role in the success of media influences. When a person is exposed to something exciting, it is difficult for them to control their instincts, and thus media influences succeed in achieving their goals.

### **3.1.4.2 Audience engineering meaning**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the concepts of public opinion leadership began to gain greater momentum because they constituted the basis for formulating the policies of different countries. Among these concepts is the public engineering approach, which was founded by the Austrian scientist Edward Bernays and used in political media influences in particular, through an article published in the year 1974, where the audience engineering curriculum is classified within the scope of public relations science (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008).

The scientist Edward defined the audience engineering approach as an engineering constructivist approach based on studying, managing, and leading the psychological, political, and social communication process among individuals and the public. In addition, it is a method of addressing the human subconscious, feelings, and instincts to achieve specific interests ( Philip & Pradip, 2012).

The scientist Joseph Clapper defined it as seeking to bring about a change in the mind of another, and others defined it as manipulating the public, changing their behavior, and intimidating them by strategic means to achieve certain goals. The scientist Edward achieved success in his approach through the Torchlights of Freedom campaign, which linked women's ability to be independent, self-leadership, and smoking cigarettes, which led to a significant increase in cigarette sales to women ( Philip & Pradip, 2012).

In the modern era, governments have begun to apply this concept to bring about a change in the orientations, values, and decisions of the public through media influences in the context of achieving their interests, even if this leads to adverse results in the structure and composition of the targeted societies. The concepts and terminology of creating public opinion, controlling it, and leading it are considered tools of the public engineering approach (Robinson P. , 1999).

It must be pointed out that the concept of audience engineering is not concerned with truth much, but rather it seeks to achieve the interests of its users through the means of media influences and the media. It should be noted that it depends on stimulating the unconscious side of the person and not addressing them or eliciting their opinion. Therefore, it moves the person in an emotional manner, preventing them from expressing mental resistance and a

logical approach to getting rid of the effects of this approach (Robinson P. , Media as a Driving Force in International Politics: The CNN Effect and Related Debates, 2013).

In the crowd engineering approach, techniques are used that are more detrimental to public opinion. They are based on the principles of involuntary manipulation and are linked to psychological and persuasive factors. They may be associated with media technology and impact studies, and when used positively, it is believed that their outcomes will surpass those of the media in spreading human values and world peace, promoting safety and freedom, and disseminating collaborative principles.

As an example of using the audience engineering approach, let's consider what happened in the evening of 1938. The broadcast of the American CBC channel was suddenly interrupted, and announcer Orson Welles began announcing that the United States had been subjected to an alien attack by unknown beings. After a short while, the theatrical show that was being shown on the screen returned, and then the broadcast resumed. The incident of the alien invasion continued, creating panic, anticipation, and fear among the audience throughout the night. Eventually, the radio revealed that it was not real and was taken from the writing of a play called The War of the Worlds (Tomz, . Weeks , & Yarhi-Milo, 2017).

### **3.2 THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THE MEDIA**

Where media influences are used and their impact is considered through the concept of manipulating emotions and feelings with the aim of managing people, and this may be for the purpose of revenge and spreading hatred or pushing towards wars and hostilities on one side against another. Emotions are used when rational discourse is useless because the results of propaganda work seek to sabotage or incite hatred or have negative effects on a particular social system (Tomz, . Weeks , & Yarhi-Milo, 2017).

Examples of this include acts of violence that occurred against Muslims in China, where the Chinese media incited Buddhists to harbor hatred towards Muslims, their customs, and traditions. The media insulted them and defended the notion that they were superior. Another example is the Nazi massacre against the Jews, where the media described them as rats in order to justify their extermination.

Emotional dimensions of the media product (addressing feelings):

It also includes four dimensions:

- a. The dimension of desires and dispelling fears: This dimension depends on using the idea of influence to emotionally support a certain idea, dispel fears about it, and convey feelings of fear and caution from others, such as an electoral candidate when voters feel that he is capable of achieving their ambitions and goals, while his competitor does not. On the international level, this dimension is seen when a country like the United States is established, promoting an emotional state that it came to achieve the goals of certain people and rid them of dictatorship.
- b. The Myth of the Friend: This dimension is based on integrating myths into the emotional state by conveying the idea that the preacher is a legend and a savior, such as an election candidate, for example. Through his propaganda, he aims to touch people's emotions by saying that he is an exceptional person with legendary features that are not present in his competitors. The symbolic necessity of actions must be emphasized here. In the field of political media influences, such as opening or inaugurating a building or exhibition, or dining with the public, these actions suggest to the group that he shares its basic concern (Tomz, . Weeks , & Yarhi-Milo, 2017).
- c. The myth of the enemy (the ram): This dimension includes two stages. The first is concerned with spreading the idea of the common enemy to the population in various groups, convincing them of that, urging them to hate him and beware of him, and thus urging them to accept a specific idea or program against him. As for the second stage, it expresses the idea of projection and support to make the people believe that this enemy is not only their enemy but represents the greatest evil. It can be said that the organized media influences against the ruling regime in Syria are an expression of the use of the scope of media influences and the myth of the enemy (Robinson, 2000).
- d. The dimension of individualism: Often, the target of media influences is an individual or a small group. To separate this individual or group from the larger group it belongs to, specific propaganda is broadcast. The aim of this propaganda is to convey the idea of an authentic, distinct being who should not be part of a group that is considered inferior. This is done to encourage the individual or group to separate themselves from the public, viewing it as unexpressive. The concept of belonging and the need for belonging are used within an emotional framework in two ways. Firstly, the person making the call addresses us and tries to convince us that the group we belong to has taken a certain position that

does not represent us. They seek to persuade us to distance ourselves from the group (Robinson ,2013)

### **3.3 THE COGNITIVE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA**

Whereas successful media influences seek to address emotions and feelings without neglecting the mental aspect, media influences seek to influence the faculty of reason and emotion. However, the role of the mind comes second in being influenced by media influences. The goal of media influences is to bring about a rapid and immediate change in the position and behavior of the targeted groups and countries. This requires resorting to emotional and emotional variables more than resorting to issues that require discussion and thought work before making a specific decision (Castells , 2010).

New developments in political neuroscience and computational cognitive science highlight that the biological sciences may provide important insights into cognitive contexts within the context of media influences and their exploitation of the faculty of the mind through influencing and shaping ideological behavior based on specific ideas and concepts. Ideological behavior can be defined as ideological, cognitive, and intolerant behavior toward non-affiliated or non-members (Smith C. , 2012). In other words, a person who thinks or acts “ideologically” adheres strongly to a doctrine, resists reliable evidence when forming opinions, and is selectively hostile to individuals who do not follow their ideological group or cause. Therefore, ideological behavior can occur in the field of politics, religion, gender, race, class, social media, or any other field of life where social conditions are described, and actions are narrowly defined. This leads to the formation of in-groups and out-groups, which is the focus of media influences when they target the human mind (Afsharpur, 2013, 447 - 451).

Until recently, the use of social psychology within media influences has been somewhat limited in the methods available to study such processes rigorously. Measurement approaches have largely been based on self-report questionnaires, which are susceptible to subjective knowledge and social desirability biases and struggle to tap into unconscious processes and dispositions. Methods were limited to laboratory-based studies, which included participants from a limited number of college students who were often neither representative nor diverse. However, over the past decade, and particularly over the past five years, the methodology has advanced significantly. Behavioral and cognitive measures can

now be applied online, as these effective online models have the added value of increasing the accessibility and diversity of the participating population and enabling more reliable cross-cultural comparisons (Van Belle, 2009).

Moreover, the emergence of neuroscience has opened the door to the study of the neural systems that support the political perception of media products, leading to new insights and potential pitfalls. Computational modeling approaches are now also being incorporated into political psychology and its concepts, enabling a more precise understanding of cognitive norms and allowing for more imaginative and complex simulations of how mental processes interact with social dynamics. As a result, political psychology and neuroscience are now better equipped to address the intricacies of the political mind. In a time of great upheaval and ideological division, the field has perhaps never been more relevant (Louw, 2005).

However, as any good philosopher of science will note, improved methodologies have limited impact without innovative and thoughtful theoretical approaches that can move the field forward and build knowledge across disciplines. Cognitive dimensions of the media product (addressing the mind):

It includes four basic dimensions: (Louw, 2005).

- a. The political and media dimension (reflection of events in the light of truth and lies):
- b. This dimension includes manipulating information and facts, changing them, or publishing them briefly in order to achieve a targeted impact on public opinion on a specific issue and within a specific time period and facts.
- c. The linguistic dimension: By adapting the language into specific slogans and labels, those who broadcast media seek to create a world of words and expression within specific facts. This is done in such a way that these facts are reflected in a specific manner, leading us to believe in them without conducting further research. Consequently, this creates a highly influential artificial world that is based on customs, traditions, and practices.
- d. The influence dimension: This dimension represents a systematic disruption of the recipient's logical and intellectual state, and it signifies the most crucial stage in political media influence. Disseminating harmful ideas among a particular audience is seen as an introduction to a specific assessment or subsequent conclusions for the recipient. The publisher holds significant influence in determining its choices as humans have a tendency. My inclination is towards things that are created with precision and emotion,

thus the level of success at this stage is largely dependent on the effectiveness of conveying emotion in the idea.

- e. After revision: by examining the internal consistency of a specific issue, for example, determining whether the topic is relevant to its purpose or not, or by evaluating the topic using external variables, such as the opinions of experts in the field, such as scientific topics and others.

### **3.4 MEDIA AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

International relations are interactions characterized by the fact that their parties or behavioral units are international entities. When we mention the word international, this does not mean that international actors are limited to states, which is the stereotypical or classic image in which international actors were viewed in the past decades.

In addition to states, there are two other types of international parties that are intertwined and interact in the context of international relations to a degree that cannot be ignored according to the traditional view of international actors.

International actors are parties or actors below the level of states in some cases, such as groups with political or ethnic characteristics that may operate outside the framework of the state to establish relations with external international entities, regardless of the approval or disapproval of the states under whose banner they join, such as separatist groups and armed opposition groups. This also includes the international relations of liberation movements that have not yet achieved statehood or representation.

As for the second type of actors, it is represented by organizations that have gone beyond the framework of the state to include several countries in their membership. These organizations can be international or regional, and they can be political, military, economic, cultural, or social organizations. Some organizations also aim to strengthen the bonds of religious brotherhood (Bahador, 2007).

International relations are two-faceted interactions with two patterns: a cooperative pattern and a conflictual pattern. However, despite countries' attempts to hide or deny it, the conflictual pattern dominates international interactions. We can say that the cooperative pattern that may appear in some countries is actually directed towards serving a conflict or another conflict pattern that may be managed by the state or group of states. For example,

political alliances and ties between a group of states may superficially appear cooperative, but they are actually established to serve the struggle of that group of countries against another group (Anderson, 2009).

International relations include all the links and interacting factors between the driving forces of international society, whose effects extend beyond the borders of a single country. These relationships emerged as a social phenomenon within the development of human societies and were established as an independent science when some European countries recognized its importance as a distinct subject among other social sciences. In their studies of international relations, researchers have followed multiple approaches and methods (Acharya, 2006).

International relations were formed with the emergence of organized and governed human societies and became established as a phenomenon within the framework of international society and its development. It took on multiple forms that highlight the unity of this society and its contradictions at the same time. The field of international relations expanded to include all influential forces at the international level, especially after the elimination of colonialism and the spread of awareness. States feel that the unity of human destiny requires international solidarity in various fields. This change has resulted in an imbalance in the standards, concepts, and values that have prevailed for a long period of time, despite the residues and failures that sometimes plague them resulting from a narrow interpretation of the concept of international relations.

International relations originated in ancient times when primitive societies had knowledge of peace and war, the establishment of reconciliation and truces, as well as commercial and religious communications. These relationships evolved into customs and traditions, eventually becoming binding legal rules.

#### **3.4.1 The Media's Power in International Politics**

In the era of mediation, both domestic and global public opinion have emerged as crucial factors in shaping foreign policy. In the past, international politics were predominantly conducted in secrecy, behind closed doors (Collier, 2004). However, throughout the twentieth century, governments have utilized the media as a tool to influence public opinion on foreign policies, particularly in their favor. Cohen (1986) conducted a study on the British

Foreign Office and discovered that government departments, officials, and ministers employ mass media as direct channels to foreign societies. Their aim is to elucidate policy positions to the overseas public, either to advance or conceal certain policy opinions. Furthermore, politicians exploit mass media during international negotiations to manipulate the international public sphere and other governments (Collier , 2004). This indirect media impact primarily relies on the pressure exerted by the government's supporters and interest groups, which can ultimately lead to policy changes during the planning stage of foreign policy decisions.

Notably, during the Cold War, the United States effectively utilized the media to disseminate its ideological message worldwide. Alongside its military and economic power, the media played a significant role in bolstering US hegemony. The media channels from the US to other countries were instrumental in spreading anti-communist propaganda and reassuring its allies about the validity of the transatlantic perspective against the Soviet threat. Through tactical disinformation about opposing forces, the US undermined Soviet attempts and manipulated international public opinion (Collier , 2004).

In relation to this topic, McNair (1999) conducted research on the examples of East-West relations during the Cold War period and argued that the perception of 'the enemy' changed due to the manipulation of symbols and images in the media. His study demonstrated the significant role played by the media in international relations as a means of disseminating political actors' images.

### **3.4.2 The Role of the Media in Relations between Countries**

The media is considered the young hand in implementing the foreign policies of countries in the current era, as countries have begun to rely on it in terms of intensity and diversity of use. These means have been supported in the modern era by technological means such as the Internet and others, which have made broadcasting propaganda messages very easy compared to the effort and trouble that were required previously (Adhikary, 2008). Within a very short period of time, especially after studies and research have proven the ability of media to influence the individual and social behavior of the recipient, it can be said that different countries use propaganda.

This use may be within the territory of a particular country or between countries, and it depends on the technical and media means that they possess. The state, the target audience, and the goal of media influences. There is no doubt that media influences in our current era have begun to address people as well as rulers and decision-makers, which gives media capacity a greater role in influencing various levels in the targeted country (Kenski & Jamieson, 2017).

It should also be said that the use of media in broadcasting influences and implementing the foreign policies of countries has become more important. This is not only due to technical and information development, but also because of the increasing importance of public opinion in political decision-making in countries in the modern era. This has made media influencers more inclined and eager to influence people in other countries with the aim of bringing about political change, destabilizing them, or inciting wars (Fox & Sandler, 2006).

As a vivid example of the use of media influences to implement foreign policy and the role of the media, we find that the United States, after the Cold War and its control over the world, began directly supporting propaganda work by means of soft power to spread American values and way of life among various countries of the world, especially the targeted and developing countries. All media and technological means were used. In order to achieve this goal, most of people of the world were influenced by the American Hollywood situation which made them embrace Western ideas and lifestyle (Fox,& Jonathan, 2019).

From what has been mentioned, we can conclude the important and effective role of the media in implementing the foreign policy of countries influencing public opinion towards demanding higher aspirations for their governments, and supporting or hindering the implementation of any program approved by the governments. The media also has the power to influence decision-making circles, intervene, and direct the foreign policy of countries according to the desired direction. Today, the media creates and influences the relations of countries through several roles: (Acharya, 2006).

- a. Environmental monitoring.
- b. Its connection with different parts of society is a response to the environment.
- c. Transferring social heritage from one generation to another.
- d. Later, two jobs were added to the list.

- e. Entertainment.
- f. Packing.

The decision-making process takes place within an environmental framework in which the media factor enters and influences it significantly through two parts: the first is the decisions and the source of information for making them, and the second is the surrounding environment and its dimensions.

Persuasion in light of the use of contemporary media influence methods

Persuasion is defined as a process that aims to influence and change the attitudes, beliefs, or behavior of individuals and groups regarding a specific idea, situation, or event, which may be towards a person, group, or country. Persuasion is done through the use of means such as words, feelings, media tools, media influences, and others.

-Using persuasion in media influences:

There is no doubt that media products have a purpose through the use of certain media, and this purpose is not achieved except by influencing the target audience to practice behavior or think in a certain way, this is what we call persuasion. Theater, personal means of communication, and dialogue have been used since ancient times as methods of influence and persuasion, but in the twentieth century, the concept of persuasion began to be based on scientific frameworks in addition to artistic use. In the modern era, persuasion has become a basis in the science of contemporary media influences. Without persuasion, media influences cannot achieve their goal. The process of persuasion is linked to ideas and starts from them, then moves on to how to convey the idea and express it, and this is what media experts do (Fox & Sandler, 2006).

Hence, we find that persuasion is compatible with the use of media and media influence methods to present messages to target audiences, with the aim of changing behavior or creating new ideas and behaviors among these audiences. It is not easy, of course, to measure the impact of media outlets in changing or creating behavior, especially within the framework of a group of individuals, but it can be said. The human stock of knowledge is in addition to information broadcast by the media that intersects with other information, forming a certain perception about a specific thing in the human being. From this standpoint,

the influence resulting from media, which aims to cause persuasion, is an important factor in forming the mental perception that prompts the human being to act in a certain way.

In the international context, it must be noted that countries in the modern era have begun to realize the importance of propaganda means and their strategic role in creating persuasion. They have also begun to use them to spread their culture, traditions, and values in the environment of other societies. To support this, they create a common language between several countries using specific meanings and symbols. This leads to imposing the decision and sovereignty of one party over another party, even if it is cultural at a minimum. An example of this is the American culture and its control over the concepts and perceptions of Arab youth. To the point that most of the youth are completely convinced of the positivity of that culture and its expression of development and the future (Fox & Sandler, 2006).

The French scientist and researcher Edgar Morin, in his book *The Spirit of the Age*, expressed that the cultural systems in any country are the product of myths, values, personalities, events, and images that may constitute a collective truth or imagination among the individuals of that country. These cultural systems intersect with other systems through the media or are targeted through media influences. From other systems, it either triumphs and consolidates or is eroded and dissolved. Mass culture has begun to change more than before through propaganda means and through its development. It has also become subject to market standards in terms of cultural supply and demand, and this is what is formed in the environment of the culture industry, in a country that is not culturally productive such as other countries. Arabic people of these countries tend to seek cultural models, whether artistic or other media and thus they are influenced by them and convinced by them, such as Hollywood films, for example (Humagain, 2007).

The ability to influence and persuade each media outlet differs from the other depending on several factors:

- a. In terms of the structure and content of the media topic: Some topics require visual media, some audio, and some require more than one medium together.
- b. In terms of the nature of the targeted effort and the capabilities available through means of communication, these are considered important factors that must be taken into consideration. The audience, which is the recipient and target, should also be taken into consideration.

- c. In terms of human capabilities and personal skills in adapting the media to deliver messages to the recipient.
- d. In terms of the ability of media influencers to package the conveyed message with attractive, striking, and realistic content that allows for achieving the desired goals.

It must be noted that when the message is directed in an international context, it must take into account a number of dimensions and variables that are more comprehensive than those in the local context, and among these dimensions are:

The international cultural dimension: which expresses the nature of the target audience, its customs, traditions, cultural values, level of education, patterns of thinking, etc. The American scientist Hovland explained that there is a correlation between the individual's mental ability built within the framework of a particular culture and the degree of his comprehension of the media message. As for the media taking into account the age of the target audience, it is known that a person goes through different age stages during which his media interests differ. In childhood, the child tends to cartoons and entertainment programs, while in adolescence, the teenager is attracted to television programs, cinemas, theatre, etc, and at the age of forty, a person is attracted to reading media such as newspapers and others, and following news programs. Here, the international media plays a prominent role in directing what it wants to each group individually, and each gender, male or female, has different interests that the media effects designer should take into account ( Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

After persuasive communication: It is used in the international framework that is concerned with using the appropriate media means to persuade the target audience. A number of scholars have developed models targeting the process of persuasion and influence through means of public communication, including the Yale model for designing the media message, which focuses on the skills of the message designer and their ability to attract the recipient. The more experienced the source is, the more influence they have on the recipient, dispelling their fears and making them gravitate toward the specific goal of the message, thus persuading and influencing them (Dahal, 2009).

After the audience: The media message must be designed according to the framework of the audience, its customs, culture, and needs. Before designing the media message, the audience must be studied thoroughly and its style of thinking, intelligence, and values respected.

Influence and persuasion are based on the audience's interest in the propaganda message directed, and this interest emerges from this message's consideration of what the audience wants. By appealing to reason and emotion, Yale's model explains how the audience's attitude changes according to its changing beliefs and ideas ( Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Dahal (2009), agreed with Hovland, who explained that the media influences people in order to achieve persuasion and control over individuals and audiences, especially at the international level. To accomplish this, they must utilize all available propaganda and means of communication, including the Internet, newspapers, television, and others. These are the powerful tools of media influence, and they are employed by individuals to achieve their desired effects, regardless of moral considerations. The methods employed are determined by the desired outcomes, regardless of whether they are considered good or evil. The use of violence itself is not considered propaganda, but the threat of violence is. Media influences target psychological manipulation, and evasion is one of the methods employed to change trends, beliefs, and values (Dahal, 2009). As we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, TV series can be situated as role models, if the content gives us a glimpse into a profession or world we care about. Favorite series can also help give ideas for solving personal problems, by remembering how a character in the series acted or dealt with a particular crisis. In addition, television series may develop behavior by spreading positive values among people, such as courage, morals, etc. They may strengthen relations between countries by encouraging tourism to certain countries and learning about different cultures.

#### **4. TURKISH SERIES AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

During the late 1990s, Turkish-Arab relations were predominantly characterized by a mutual lack of trust, which stemmed from various factors including perceptions, circumstances, and historical events that had plagued the Middle East region. These unfavorable perceptions were evident in the policies adopted by both parties. Notably, there was limited regional cooperation between Türkiye and major Arab countries such as Egypt and Syria. The primary objective of diplomatic relations was to maintain a stable relationship and avoid direct confrontation by refraining from interfering in each other's affairs. Türkiye, for the most part, had little influence and did not actively seek to exert its influence in Middle Eastern affairs and conflicts, unless they directly impacted Turkish interests. The cultural interaction between Türkiye and the Arab world often mirrored the political dynamics. For a significant period, Turks tended to perceive Arab culture as regressive and as a potential threat to the authenticity of their own culture.

However, in recent years, cultural exchanges and interactions have predominantly occurred in one direction, with Turkish culture exerting a growing influence. Turkish cultural impact has emerged as a key factor in Türkiye's increasing prominence in the Middle East, and the Turkish government has prioritized cultural identity and the promotion of the Turkish language through soft power initiatives. Among the various elements of contemporary Turkish popular culture, none have garnered as much attention as Turkish series. These series offer a fertile ground for exploring the extent of Turkish cultural influence in the Middle East, particularly among Arabic-speaking audiences. The appeal of the Turkish series lies in the portrayal of a "modern" lifestyle. From the Arab perspective, modernity is closely associated with specific gender relations and gender equality. In order to understand the factors that facilitated the arrival of Turkish drama series in the Arab television market, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the market itself, from the emergence of private satellite television stations in the early 1990s to current media outlets.

Additionally, this chapter delves into the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the sector by examining media structure, ownership, and affiliations across the MENA region. Furthermore, it highlights the challenges facing the television industry, including an

unstable economy, political instability, and dependence on income from Saudi Arabia, the largest economy in the Arab world.

#### **4.1 TV SERIES**

Audiovisual products, such as popular television shows and films, play a role in modifying and reinforcing concepts and values associated with particular cultures. These products display embedded culture through narrative and character identification (Abu-Nasr, 2019). Culture theory explains how mediated reality can shape perception and enhance identification. The desire for gratification is a major motivator for viewers to engage with multicultural content. Consumption itself provides satisfaction and satisfies the need for entertainment and excitement. Additionally, viewers find satisfaction in participating and socializing with others who share common interests, such as fandom communities. Therefore, consumption of cross-cultural products enhances cultural awareness when these products effectively convey essence and heritage through storytelling (Pacheco, 2020).

Viewers may encounter characters and settings that differ significantly from their own backgrounds, which may motivate them to learn more about foreign folklore or even visit filming locations. Enjoyment is an outcome of individual TV program consumption, as observed among college students who engage in TV series viewing (Benrazek, 2022).

##### **4.1.1 TV Series Consumption and Cultural Relations**

Consumption of cultural products begins with cultural awareness, which involves recognizing and understanding the values, customs, and characteristics of different cultures. According to Nicolau (2021), audiovisual media, especially through live streaming, can facilitate learning by portraying international genealogical traits, inherent cultural characteristics, and sociocultural identity, thus influencing knowledge acquisition. Cultural awareness enables individuals to recognize and appreciate cultural values and customs that differ from their own (Benrazek, 2022). It also includes learning about how culture influences human behavior and values. When creating cultural products, the appeal of the content and the cultural background of the product naturally play a role. The role of the producer seems to be more influential in cultural transmission. Product experiences, emotional involvement, and cultural perspective are included in the content creation process. By engaging with cultural products such as television series that expose them to diverse cultures, learners develop awareness and critically evaluate their beliefs, practices, and

perspectives by comparing them with those of other cultures. Since stories convey different aspects of culture, individuals gain insight into different cultural elements. Television series consumption and cultural acceptance (Ahdika A. , 2017).

Cultural acceptance refers to embracing the different cultures or cultural identities of others. According to Kuhn (2015), cultural acceptance involves openness to accepting or trying unfamiliar things, such as ethnic cuisines from cultures outside our own. The acceptance of new cultures by consumers is greatly influenced by similarity. In order to achieve effective communication, communicators strive to ensure that their messages are consistent with the expectations and values of their audience. In the context of digital marketing for global brands, Almeida (2015) discovered that successful marketers possess a deep understanding of different cultures. The perception of similarity in communication has been found to increase consumer acceptance and purchase intention (Ahdika A. , 2017). As stated by Lee (2019), the film has a rich history of not only providing entertainment but also as a means of education, challenging stereotypes, and crossing boundaries to promote mutual understanding through the exchange of ideas, information, art, and different aspects of culture between nations and their people (Ahdika A. , 2017).

#### **4.1.2 Television Series as Tools for Culture and Public Diplomacy**

Soap operas were initially presented as radio programs in the United States during the 1930s. These shows were sponsored by companies specializing in household products, especially cleaning supplies, in exchange for product placement. This practice has earned the entertainment genre the nickname "soap opera." The growing popularity of TV series, primarily targeting women, has prompted more companies to invest in this type of programming. As a result, by the early 1940s, approximately 75 percent of radio programming in the United States, which had been limited to the hours between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., consisted of variations of soap operas (Ahdika, 2019).

During this period, the series also made its way to Latin America and later to Great Britain. With the advent of television, the genre moved to the screen, attracting larger audiences. The global popularity of soap operas has presented challenges for researchers trying to define them as a distinct genre (Ağırseven & Öрки, 2017). Thus, the researchers chose to identify common characteristics exhibited by this entertainment form rather than provide a definitive definition. In this regard, soap operas can be described as a "serial format with programs

continuing from one day to the next", featuring "continuous characters" and a "continuous story", and presenting "similar plot lines". Soap operas often center around family life, constructing melodramatic narratives with overlapping stories and characters aimed at attracting women (Rehan & Raza, 2017).

Paul Soukup, an expert on soap operas, offers five distinctive features that distinguish and define this genre. According to Soukup, the first characteristic of soap operas is their "recurring themes." Most series within this genre deal with conflicts, depict contrasting characters of good and evil or depict a comfortable upper-middle-class life. These themes serve as the basis for storytelling in television series. Cakir further explains that the most distinctive feature of TV series is their serialization. This indicates simultaneous continuity and commentary of the story, which is crucial to building viewer loyalty. (Çakır, 2014).

Another distinctive feature of soap operas is their "real-time orientation." By depicting the daily lives of characters in near real-time, television series create an atmosphere of realism that parallels the viewer's own world. This sense of realism makes the genre so poignant, as viewers can relate to the experiences and situations shown on screen (Bouhamda, 2016).

Additionally, soap operas excel at creating a sense of "visible intimacy" between the viewer and the characters. By following the development of characters over a long period, viewers develop a sense of involvement in the events of the story and the lives of the characters. This intimacy is further enhanced through the use of 'story exposition' which gives the audience a sense of absolute power and knowledge. By providing them with complete knowledge of (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017).

All of these elements work together to immerse the casual viewer in the world of the series, creating a medium through which impact can be effectively achieved. The combination of recurring themes, serialization, real-time direction, apparent intimacy, and story presentation characterizes the series and contributes to its enduring popularity (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017).

Soap operas are not the only aspect of popular culture that influences foreign policy. Many scholars have explored the relationship between cultural artifacts and international relations. Bruno Levric, in his study on the influence of cinema and soft power, demonstrates how cultural products in general, and films in particular, can be used as political tools to spread a nation's influence (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017). Soft power, as envisioned by Joseph Nye,

operates by captivating public opinion through attraction rather than coercion. By utilizing "compelling characters" and "dynamic narratives" to captivate audiences, films have the potential to exercise soft power not only by engaging with global audiences but also by exerting influence over politicians and governments worldwide (Bouhamda, 2016).

Films are particularly effective in this regard because, despite the risk of alienating large audiences and jeopardizing profits, producers often choose to side with their governments' official positions rather than oppose them. Lovric's research emphasizes that while some states may choose to support the creation of cultural products that align with their foreign policy goals, filmmakers often choose to conform to traditional political and societal norms even in the absence of state intervention. In this particular context, films and other cultural products have the potential to exert significant influence on the state (Tunstall, 2008).

Furthermore, investigations into the viewership of television series have shown that the high level of audience engagement associated with this entertainment form makes it a particularly influential medium. For example, a study focusing on Latin American soap operas revealed that storylines effectively influenced viewers' perceptions of gender roles and specific ethnic groups (Çevik, 2019). Likewise, television series have been shown to play an important role in shaping individual and collective identities, including aspects of national, cultural, gender, and sexual identities. The roles portrayed by the characters and their interactions with each other are all elements that are initially filtered through cultural and personal perspectives, subconsciously absorbed by viewers, and ultimately manifest in their behavior and interactions with their surroundings (Parris, 2009).

This highlights the enormous potential that TV series have in projecting soft power and serving as effective tools for public diplomacy. Sinem Çevik, a professor specializing in public diplomacy, supports this idea by emphasizing that popular culture serves as a channel for transmitting a nation's cultural traits, and thus serves as an important source of soft power (Tunstall, 2008).

Based on extensive research, it has been shown that TV series, when used as a private soft power initiative, have demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in shaping positive perceptions of states. Expanding on the existing body of knowledge, this study uses theories of soft power to examine the impact of soap operas on global audiences, with a particular focus on the importance of cultural proximity and, specifically, credibility in determining

the effectiveness of this process. To provide concrete explanations and evaluate the achievement of soft power objectives, this research specifically focuses on the case of Turkish soap operas (Bhutto, 2019).

#### **4.2 TURKISH SERIES UNDER THE MODERN STATE**

The role of the Turkish series in persuasion through culture, values, and ideas is significant. Cultural propaganda diplomacy is closely associated with soft power and public diplomacy, often intersecting with them. As a result, these three concepts have become integral to the field of propaganda in international relations and have become standard terms in the foreign policy discourse of nations. By leveraging the power of cultural diplomacy, Turkish popular culture has successfully mitigated the damage caused by internal political turmoil, thereby safeguarding its soft power (Ataman, 2022).

Moreover, in the 1960s, Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan predicted that the media would be able to turn the world into a hamlet. Nowadays, in a wired postmodern society, a statement or simply a 280-character tweet can reach and influence audiences all over the world. Throughout the world, in the current interconnected world dominated by globalized media, there are no longer national borders, and concepts of time and space have been shortened. Secondly, these developments have brought about important changes, not only in the social and political arenas but have also affected the areas of global politics and diplomacy. It is worth noting that the latter witnessed a period of major changes that emerged through the emergence of new types of initiatives (Ataman, 2022). Among these, soft power is nourished by the possibilities and opportunities provided by globalization. According to the British political scientist and historian Nicholas Cole, “propaganda diplomacy is an attempt by an international actor to manage the international environment through “communication with foreign audiences,” or, in other words, “a government’s diplomatic efforts that directly target foreign citizens, the press, and state departments rather than their own governments” (Akıllı & Donelli, 2016).

Although propaganda diplomacy was just an idea, it was relied upon and applied during the Cold War period, along with the growing interest in soft power tools. In fact, the basics of soft power can be traced back to Joseph Nye's idea of soft power as the ability to influence the behavior of others to obtain desired results. Nye argues that soft power is important, even more so than hard power in international politics. In a post-modern and globalized society,

soft power, built on the “value-based” concept of power, has the advantage of taking into account the economic, political, and cultural dynamics of globalization, along with the consequences of the information revolution (Akıllı & Donelli, 2016).

According to Joseph Nye, (2001), “Soft power stems from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, concepts, and policies.” That is, it is the power of persuasion, rather than force. In short, soft power relies on the ability to influence others and to gain and possess without resorting to force, coercion, or violence. For this reason, diplomacy and public propaganda play a central role for emerging powers like Türkiye in the modern era. Türkiye is striving to gain international visibility and political importance by relying on limited material resources (Algan & Kaptan, 2021).

As a result, a growing number of emerging powers, including modern Türkiye, understand the importance of culture and consciously use it as a means of projecting themselves into global public opinion through what is commonly known as cultural propaganda diplomacy (Mikos, 2016).

The most common definition is that proposed by Milton Cummings: “Cultural diplomacy is the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other cultural aspects between nations and their peoples to promote mutual understanding”. The term cultural diplomacy has expanded greatly over the years and now applies to any practice related to meaningful cultural cooperation. Between countries or groups of countries, cultural diplomacy is always linked to soft power and soft power and often overlaps with them (Algan & Kaptan, 2021).

In fact, the use of effective cultural propaganda diplomacy is intrinsically linked to the soft power attributes and capabilities of the country, especially after the social media revolution that affected mass communication on a global scale. The most common opinion at the global level is to consider cultural propaganda diplomacy as a tool or method for soft power or one of its types. Thus, the three concepts - soft power, public diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy have entered the dictionary of international relations and international propaganda and have become standard terms in the foreign policy thinking of countries (Mikos, 2016). Türkiye is among the emerging powers that utilize public diplomacy, popular propaganda, and international culture. Its primary narrative, which has been presented abroad mainly through media products and Turkish series, is based on its domestic perception of democracy and rapid economic growth, along with its openness to the global economy. However, after the

“golden period” from 2007 to 2013, the effectiveness of Turkish media products has declined due to the crises that the countries of the Middle East have gone through on the one hand, in addition to the stereo typicality of dubbed series on the other hand. Nowadays, Türkiye is attempting to project a different image to promote itself abroad. This new image aims to overcome the declining reputation of recent years through organized international cultural propaganda that is rooted in Turkish media production (Özalpman & Sarikakis, 2018).

In fact, due to the effects of these internal contingencies, Turkish soft power has had to shift from a model of democracy in a Muslim state to an approach more focused on the Turkish worldview, lifestyle, and cultural appeal. In recent years, Türkiye has focused its efforts on popular propaganda culture, especially through broadcasting on television, with the aim of presenting fascinating and engaging stories about the country to foreign audiences (Yesil, 2015).

Türkiye has used culture as a purposeful propaganda framework to strengthen relations with other countries and enhance the image of the nation and Turkish interests abroad. Therefore, an analysis of Türkiye’s cultural diplomacy not only highlights the features and characteristics of Türkiye’s soft power but also helps enrich the literature in the field (Jazeera, 2020).

#### **4.2.1 Turkish Series in the Arab Television Market**

It is important to realize that the entry of the first Turkish drama “Nour”, on MBC in 2008 marked an important turning point. Turkish drama series has gone from being successful locally and within their geo-linguistic market to gaining international popularity. This development not only highlights the success of foreign policy efforts but also demonstrates the expansion of trade relations by the Turkish government (Jazeera, 2020).

Since assuming power in 2002, the AKP government has pursued a multi-directional foreign policy, moving away from mostly Western-oriented relations. The goal has been to strengthen Türkiye's political and economic interests in various regions. This shift in Türkiye's political direction, characterized by improved diplomatic relations with the Arab world, has paved the way for important trade deals, the establishment of free trade zones, and the easing or elimination of visa restrictions with Arab countries (Berg, 2023).

Consequently, Turkish products and companies, including drama series, were able to penetrate the Arab world, while Arab tourists had greater opportunities to visit Türkiye. According to international relations professor Mustafa Kutlay and other experts, foreign policy initiatives under the AKP government followed a functional framework. This framework involves taking advantage of economic opportunities and interdependence to strengthen institutional relations with neighboring countries (Arabnews, 2021).

The sudden thought of MBC acquiring a Turkish drama series, when its CEO Fadi Ismail discovered the Nour series at a trade fair in Türkiye, was perhaps unexpected. But this can be attributed to Türkiye's new political orientation and its efforts to strengthen relations with the Arab world. For example, the Nour series is one of the Turkish drama series, that was acquired in 2007 and eventually aired in 2008 on MBC Television, which is owned by Saudi Arabia and based in Dubai (Arabiya, 2008). This timing was strategic because it coincided with the month of Ramadan, a period when television viewership was at its peak in the region. During this period, diplomatic and trade relations between Türkiye and the Gulf states flourished and reached an unprecedented level. For example, trade volume between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia increased significantly from \$8.3 billion in 1996-1997 to \$20.3 billion in 2002-2008. This growth was not limited to government partnerships, but also extended to commercial deals with the private sector, especially in sectors such as energy, finance, banking, tourism, construction, communications, and the food industry (Uştuk, 2019).

To highlight the strengthening of relations between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, Saudi King Abdullah was honored with the Medal of Honor during his visit to the Turkish capital, Ankara, in November 2007. This honor was a testament to his role in strengthening partnerships between the two countries. It is worth noting that this visit was the first time that a Saudi king visited Türkiye since King Faisal's visit in 1966. These historical political, economic, security and cultural agreements laid the foundation for the entry of Turkish cultural products, including drama series, into the Turkish market. The introduction of Turkish drama series into the Arab television market was not only a result of economic factors but also a reflection of the increasing political and cultural integration between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia. This interaction between economic and political dynamics has played an important role in facilitating the penetration of Turkish cultural products into the Arab television market (Clarke, 2019).

#### **4.2.2 Turkish Drama Series in the Arab World**

The Middle East Channel (MBC) played a crucial role in introducing Turkish series to the Arab world. This began primarily through the broadcast of the *Nour* series, which was later dubbed into Syrian colloquial Arabic in 2008. *Nour*'s broadcast garnered an unprecedented number of viewers across the Middle East and the North Africa region, where it attracted about 80 million Arab viewers. Among these viewers, it is estimated that 50 million are women over the age of 15 (Arabnews, 2021). The enormous popularity of the *Nour* series, along with other Turkish series such as *Mirna* and *Khalil* in 2007-08, and the *Asi* series in 2008, also on MBC, prompted other Arab channels to follow suit by incorporating a large number of Turkish dramas into their daily programming. As a result, Turkish drama now makes up 60% of foreign content in Arab broadcast schedules. This marked a major shift in Turkish drama series, which had previously been popular only within Turkish-speaking countries, and the Turkish diaspora, which mainly consisted of Turks residing in Western Europe (BBC News Mundo, 2017). The increasing popularity of Turkish series in the Middle East has had a significant impact on the revenues and growth of this sector. This not only attracted international media attention but also sparked growing interest in Turkish drama series in other parts of the world. MBC holds an important position not only as a highly influential media organization in the MENA region, because of its role in sparking the popularity of Turkish series on Arab television (Ekşi & Erol, 2018). Interestingly, after a decade, MBC made the decision to ban these series from being shown on its free-to-air satellite channels. In this discussion, we will delve into the events that led to the ban of Turkish drama series in March 2018 by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as free-to-air satellite TV stations, as well as their subsequent return. Furthermore, this chapter examines the impact of over-the-top (OTT) set-top boxes, pay TV, and streaming services in the region, in line with global trends (Bulut & Karlıdağ, 2014).

These services enabled Arab audiences to choose content outside the boundaries of network television schedules, giving them greater independence and allowing them to circumvent MBC's ban on Turkish programming. In addition, this chapter explores MBC's efforts to adapt to the Turkish form of drama production by creating local series (Fuchs, 2020).

The analysis presented here is based on empirical data, industry reports, academic papers, and newspaper articles in Arabic, English, and Turkish. Notably, the main findings suggest

that Turkish drama series have become an essential part of the region's content landscape, with financial interests trumping political differences through regional pay TV and streaming services. These platforms have continued to reap the benefits of the popularity of Turkish dramas, despite diplomatic tensions (Aslan , 2019).

#### **4.2.3 RAMADAN TV: Turkish Series and Arab Audience**

Despite the differences in the MENA region and the growing popularity of digital media, the holy month of Ramadan remains the preferred time to watch network television. Arabic television dramas, known as soap operas, have been a popular genre in the Middle East since the 1960s, and during Ramadan, they attract large audiences. Ramadan, known for its family iftar meals, has become synonymous with widespread television viewing and drama consumption in the family environment. As a result, Ramadan greatly influences production, programming, and acquisition trends in Arab television throughout the year (Aslan , 2019). The massive content produced for Ramadan is broadcast throughout the rest of the year, and the programs are often rebroadcast on different channels. Therefore, when MBC presented its first dubbed Turkish drama during Ramadan 2008, it was a bold and strategic move to test Turkish content with the largest potential TV audience in the MENA region (TRT Arabic, 2018).

After the huge success of "Nour" in 2008, most Arab channels devoted some prime time to Turkish drama. Media reports indicate that the Nour series has garnered nearly 30 million daily viewers across the region, and the final episode is said to have been watched by 92 million people. As a result, acquiring the Turkish series was seen as a beneficial arrangement for Arab networks. First, Turkish dramas are seen as being able to attract valuable advertising revenues. Secondly, these programs are particularly popular with Arab television networks, as they have already proven popular among Turkish audiences (Kuyucu, 2019).

Turkish drama differs from traditional Ramadan series in that it is presented as a complete product, rather than purchased as a concept, idea, or scenario. This makes it easier for TV stations to predict their success. In addition, the fact that Turkish dramas often consist of many episodes, sometimes exceeding 100, is beneficial for generating lucrative advertising revenue. Arab media organizations typically buy Turkish drama series exclusively, ensuring that advertisers get exclusive access to their platform (Güzel & Aktaş, 2016).

It has been observed that viewers appreciate the longer duration of Turkish dramas<sup>1</sup> as it allows them to develop a closer relationship with the characters and storylines. Media executives and advertisers also appreciate the extended duration of these shows as they enhance viewer loyalty and connection to the channel. Furthermore, depending on the terms of the contract, Turkish dramas can continue to generate income for Arab TV channels even after their initial broadcast, as they can be re-released on other platforms. Additionally, if a network owns the copyright to the series, it can also sell the show to other channels, making Turkish content a very lucrative commodity (Yıldırım & Hira, 2016).

The increasing demand for new content and the decline of traditional Arab film and television production centers have created an opportunity for Turkish series to enter the Arab television market. This phenomenon cannot be attributed solely to the political and economic downturn that the Middle East is witnessing in the wake of the Arab uprisings and ongoing conflicts. According to Kreidi and Al-Ghazi (reference), the restructuring of the Turkish and Arab media industries played an important role in facilitating the entry of Turkish dramas into the Arab media space. However, their argument fails to fully explain this phenomenon. In contrast, my research in Chapter Three, reveals that Turkish dramas do not merely fill a gap in regional content production. Instead, they meet audience demand for high-quality entertainment, cultural familiarity, and emotional realism. In addition, Turkish drama explores themes and stories that are often ignored in Arabic series due to cultural taboos (Yıldırım & Hira, 2016).

#### **4.3 TURKISH-ARAB RELATIONS AND THE SOFT POWER OF DRAMA SERIES**

In the last ten years, a convergence has occurred between Turkish political influence, economic strength, and the popularity of Turkish dramas in the MENA region. This convergence has taken place amidst a dynamic political environment between Türkiye and the Arab nations. The merging of the Turkish television industry with the largest media network in the Arab world, MBC, was primarily fueled by the demand for content, the enhancement of diplomatic ties, and the flourishing trade relations between Türkiye and influential Saudi Arabia. Turkish drama series has played a crucial role in raising Arab

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<sup>1</sup> Each episode of Turkish TV series is quite long, unlike European and North American TV series of 45–60 minutes, Turkish TV series are 120–160 minutes long.

consciousness and fostering a positive perception of Türkiye. These dramas have been recognized as a significant instrument of soft power, molding a favorable image of the nation. Notably, historical dramas have been pivotal in portraying Türkiye's imperial history as a period of Islamic grandeur rather than one marked by Arab subjugation and suffering (Keddache, 2018).

The impact of Turkish soap operas on Türkiye's rise as a prominent nation has been widely acknowledged by scholars. These television dramas have played a pivotal role in enhancing Türkiye's influence in the Middle East and North Africa region. This can be observed through Türkiye's remarkable economic growth during the 2000s when the country swiftly recovered from the financial crisis of the 1990s and emerged as a member of the G20 developing nations with one of the world's fastest-growing economies. Consequently, Türkiye has become increasingly appealing to its Arab counterparts, not only as a significant economic partner but also as a gateway to global opportunities (News, 2018). In addition to this, the chapter also offers a concise historical overview of Turkish-Arab relations, shedding light on the context in which these soap operas have gained such prominence (Salem, 2017).

In 2005, Türkiye's progress towards EU membership was viewed by many Arab countries as a means to access economic opportunities that could significantly benefit the Arab region. Another significant development that year further solidified Türkiye's relationship with the Middle and Islamic East, elevating its status. The election of Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, a Turkish candidate, as the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation marked a historic moment. Despite previous unsuccessful attempts, Türkiye garnered strong support from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries for Ihsanoglu's candidacy. This event underscored Türkiye's increasing influence and soft power in the Islamic and Arab worlds. (Keddache, 2018).

Additionally, in 2008, Türkiye demonstrated its economic resilience on the global stage by weathering the impact of the global financial crisis better than the European Union and the United States. This relative economic prosperity enabled Türkiye to enhance its foreign policy and adopt a more diplomatic approach to power projection. Furthermore, the debut of the Turkish drama series *Noor* on MBC, the most popular satellite television station in the Arab world, in the same year garnered over 80 million viewers across the region, sparking immediate interest and discussion. The widespread popularity of Turkish dramas among

Arab viewers and their potential implications on Arab society drew attention from both the media and scholars, shedding light on the political influence of Turkish series (Deloitte, 2014).

It is crucial to understand the concept of soft power in the world of cultural products in order to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of Turkish drama series as a crucial source of soft power. Furthermore, it is necessary to analyze the transition of Turkish drama from being an accidental success to a more deliberate and strategic tool (Akıllı & Donelli, 2016).

It is important to reiterate that the triumph of Turkish dramas in the Middle East was not a deliberate soft power pursuit by the Turkish government. Instead, it emerged as an unintended consequence of Türkiye's economic prosperity, which the government later took advantage of to promote Türkiye in the former Ottoman territories. Recognizing the enormous effectiveness of drama series as a platform to showcase the country's cultural identity and way of life, the Turkish government has also acknowledged their positive impact on other sectors such as tourism (Berg, 2023).

Since the introduction of the Turkish drama series on MBC in 2008, and then broadcast on other channels in the Middle East and North Africa region, there has been a significant increase in the number of Arab visitors to Türkiye. This notable increase in tourism can be attributed to the popularity and influence of Turkish dramas in the region. At the same time, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Arab citizens investing in real estate within the country.

In addition, Turkish television producers, who recognized the importance of Turkish drama series as valuable exports, were granted representation in the Exporters' Council in 2010, along with representatives of Türkiye's other export-oriented industries. A perfect example of the Turkish government's strategic use of Turkish drama series is the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's announcement in 2012 of various distribution agreements to show Turkish series internationally, at no cost (Deloitte, 2014).

Former Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism, Abdul Rahman Arici admitted during a speech that Turkish TV series have effectively allowed Türkiye to spread its cultural influence by reaching households across the Arab world. Consequently, this has attracted tourists who are keen to visit the sites they have seen on television. Moreover, as Turkish TV

stars have grown in popularity, they have increasingly been employed as cultural ambassadors to leverage their fan base as a source of soft power. However, it is important to realize that the strategic use of TV series by the Turkish government is not rare or exclusive to Türkiye. Other countries, including the United States, Japan, and Korea, have effectively used their popular culture in a similar way (Akıllı & Donelli, 2016).

Many scholars of the political influence of soap operas find that the growth of the popular culture industry is driven primarily by economic incentives rather than as a result of government cultural diplomacy. In contrast, Otmazkin and Ben Yari argue that culture can be used strategically as a political tool through technology and political channels to achieve economic and political goals. They point out that popular culture can serve as a vehicle for transmitting a country's core values and ideology and serve as a window to showcase its attractive culture to the international community (Carney, 2018).

However, it is important to acknowledge that trade and investment between Türkiye and the Middle East and the spread of the Turkish television industry not only improved Türkiye's economic reputation in the region but also had a significant impact on the perception and awareness of Türkiye by ethnic citizens. Turkish drama series, in particular, have emerged as influential exports to the MENA region, playing a pivotal role in shaping positive perceptions and raising awareness of Türkiye (Carney, 2018).

#### **4.4 TÜRKİYE AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR THE ARAB WORLD**

Some experts emphasized that the Turkish experience is unique and difficult to apply elsewhere. In fact, Türkiye is considered different compared to other Arab countries. This is mainly due to its secularism and guarantees of equal rights for women – a legacy of Atatürk's long-standing, pro-Western orientation. In Arab countries, only Tunisia has introduced similar secular reforms, albeit on a smaller scale. As a result, there are deep divisions among the Turks (Zayed, 2014).

s for Arab societies, for example, Saudi and Egyptian societies are more conservative or even fundamentalist than Turkish society, which generally opposes the establishment of an Islamic state based on Islamic law. In a 2010 Pew Research Center study, nearly 85% of Egyptian Muslims supported the idea of legalizing the death penalty for apostasy and stoning for adultery. In another study conducted by Gallup, about 65% of Egyptian Muslims declared

that Sharia should be the sole source of legislation. In comparison, less than 10% of Turks supported this idea. It was telling that Erdogan's recent speech in Cairo to promote a secular state was met with some negative reactions among Egyptian Islamists (Okumuş, 2020).

A unique feature of Türkiye is the presence of a large pro-secular minority within its society, amounting to approximately 35% of the population. The strength of this pro-secular minority was clearly visible during the massive demonstrations in 2007 when millions of Turks protested in favor of the separation of state and religion. The character of the Turkish Islamic movement also shows the specificity of the state: electoral democracy, the strong position of the army, and a system of values shared by society led to the development of mainstream Turkish Islamists who never used violence in politics (Okumuş, 2020). The culmination of this process is the Justice and Development Party, which rejected the idea of a sectarian state and is only now trying to relax the strict rules of the division between the public sphere and religion. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the rise of the AKP's Islamist predecessors in Türkiye was a parallel process, with similar trends emerging in the Middle East and influenced by recent trends (Pothou, 2018).

However, the differences between Turks and Arabs regarding worldviews and value systems should not be overestimated. The latter is not a homogeneous group. Many researchers have proven that there are very great similarities between Lebanese, Tunisian, and Turkish Muslims in terms of value systems. Also, the differences between Turks, Moroccans, and Syrians are not very large. Moreover, Türkiye's internal problems, which are generally of a less severe character than those of other Middle Eastern countries, are shared by other Arab countries. Türkiye is a partly free country, where the military has a significant influence on politics (although currently significantly reduced), women are still discriminated against by a patriarchal society, national minorities (Kurds) still await full respect for their rights, and members of sectarian and religious minorities (Alawites and Christians) feel as if they are second-class citizens compared to the Sunni majority, religious fundamentalism remains a challenge, income inequality is much greater than in Europe, and last but not least, the youth unemployment rate is high (TRT Arabic, 2018).

The similarities between the challenges in Türkiye and the Middle East mean that finding a solution for Türkiye will have a significant impact on the potential of Türkiye's foreign policy in the Arab world. The Achilles' heel of Turkish democracy is the Kurdish issue, that

is, the armed conflict with Kurdish guerrilla warfare, the problems of integrating Kurdish nationalists into political life, and expanding Kurdish rights. Because of the huge Kurdish communities living in Iraq, Iran, and Syria, there is a very close connection between Türkiye's full democratic transformation and its ability to influence the Middle East. Türkiye, by respecting its social and ethnic diversity, will become an exceptional case in the region, thus making significant gains in the eyes of discriminated minorities in the Arab world. Moreover, Türkiye will also impose its image as a reliable mediator and honest broker between warring ethnic and religious groups - a role that Ankara is trying to play (News, 2018).

This focus on minority rights and gender should not lead to resignation from secular ideas because the Turkish example shows that there is a relationship between democracy and secularism. However, in Arab countries, the process of separating religion from the state must take place in a more precise way - by promoting social pluralism. The stronger the diverse society, the greater the need for a neutral public sphere open to different groups. Hence, the most important measures that must be taken are to improve the legal status of women and respect the rights of national and religious minorities (Khalil, 2019).

In this context, the AKP could become a particularly valuable model to follow. For example, for a post-Islamist party, the AKP surprisingly made many – albeit still insufficient – reforms regarding gender equality. The secular and authoritarian Kemalist Republic of Türkiye cannot serve as a model for other countries in the region. It is the Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, a devout Muslim, not Atatürk, who has captured the hearts of many Arabs. This does not mean that Türkiye cannot be a source of inspiration, quite the opposite. The single example of deep democratic reforms resulting from the EU integration process could serve as a guide for the transition for other countries in the region. At the same time, the majority of these reforms may be accepted in Arab countries, especially those related to minorities, women's rights, or freedom of the press.

The Turkish experience of economic transformation as a backdrop to democracy and the soft secularization of political life is particularly valuable for Arabs. As Dietrich Jung rightly points out, “Türkiye’s political transformation was preceded by a fundamental transformation of Türkiye (Habibi, 2015).

In terms of the economic sector, in the recent past, Türkiye has developed a productive, innovative, and socially diverse entrepreneurial class with large sectors that do not represent large corporations but rather local and regional businesses. In short, Türkiye has been able to develop a political economy that represents the basis of its new regional foreign policy and the process of domestic democratic reforms.” The main beneficiaries of the economic transformation are the new emerging socially conservative middle class, which forms the backbone of the AKP's voter base (Gallarotti, 2011).

Indeed, as American political scientist Vassil Nasri asserts, nowhere in the Middle East will the middle class become as powerful as in Türkiye. It would reaffirm the moral values of Islam and downplay its real or imagined prescriptions for politics and law (Buccianti, 2010).

However, the argument often used to oppose Türkiye's role as a source of inspiration for the Arab world is the exceptional EU context of Turkish politics that severely limits the applicability of the “Turkish model” even though the EU accession path cannot be followed. By the Arab countries, it seems that this difference should not be overestimated. First, transformation in Türkiye has “indigenous” roots. Second, the probability of accession has always been much lower in the case of Türkiye than in Central Europe. Third, Arab countries are not interested in joining and expect less from Türkiye than the European Union (Buccianti, 2010).

At the same time, the EU's neighborhood policy has become increasingly similar to the enlargement policy (political conditionality, integration with the EU in different dimensions in exchange for reforms). Most importantly, Arab countries, like Türkiye earlier, generally need support from the European Union because it will greatly facilitate their transformation. Some experts believe that Türkiye's main flaw is that it is not an Arab country (Abu-Nasr, 2019).

Thanks to the democratic revolutions and the Arab Spring sweeping the region, this leadership vacuum will no longer exist in the near future. As Egypt finds its footing as a more democratic regime, it will be Egypt, not Türkiye, that will emerge.” “And yet, first of all, the democratic transition in Egypt, due to many internal problems and constraints, will most likely not be as smooth and rapid process as it seems ( Celik , 2020).

Moreover, even in the event of a successful democratic transition in Egypt, Türkiye will remain - albeit to a lesser extent - attractive to the Arabs due to its potential which is much greater than that of Egypt, especially if Turkish democracy maintains its “superiority” over Egypt. Regarding the asymmetry of the potential and characteristics of democracies between Türkiye and the Arab countries, it could become a serious challenge to Türkiye's role as a source of inspiration for the Arab world if Ankara is corrupted by the “big brother syndrome” that “always” knows everything better. Thus, Türkiye's success will depend on its ability to refrain from an arrogant approach and build a genuine partnership with the new Arab democracies (Gallarotti, 2011).

Given the tremendous rapprochement between Türkiye and Egypt after the revolution and their close cooperation, it can be expected that Ankara will not “get” the sin of arrogance. However, the challenge to Türkiye's engagement in the Middle East and its appeal in the region could, in the medium term, constitute a change of government in Ankara. In fact, a government ruled by Türkiye's AKP opponents would be less attractive to Arabs and would have little interest in engaging on the same scale in the Middle East as the AKP currently does (Buccianti, 2010).

The difference between Turkish and Arab democratic qualifications should not be exaggerated from a historical perspective. For example, in the 20th century, before the democratic transition that occurred in 1950, Türkiye was less free than Egypt, which was a partially constitutional monarchy. Furthermore, until the civil war in Lebanon in the 1970s, Lebanon was also considered more democratic than Türkiye. Indeed, because of EU reforms, Türkiye has recently significantly improved its rankings in terms of freedoms, compared to other Arab countries (Yesil, 2015).

In order to fully apply its potential to the Arab world, Türkiye had to realize the famous quote from Atatürk: “Peace in the homeland, peace in the world.” Nowadays peace means liberal democracy. However, without Türkiye's accession to the European Union, success in establishing liberal democracy seems less likely. The past decade has shown a strong link between the credibility of the European perspective and the democratization process in Türkiye. Türkiye's acquisition of official candidate status for accession to the European Union in 1999 led to the “Quiet Revolution” - a series of democratic reforms introduced at the beginning of the 21st century (Deloitte, 2014).

#### **4.4.1 The Attractiveness of Turkish Series to Arab Viewers:**

The dramatic growth of Turkish drama series, especially in the Arab world, has been referred to by scholars as the "Normania and Muhannad effect," a phenomenon that captured the attention of Arab satellite channels and was described as a "wonderful neo-Ottomanism." These descriptions effectively highlight the enormous popularity and influence of these series in the MENA region. Not only did it enhance Turkish soft power, as discussed in Chapter Three, but it also pushed the Turkish drama series into a transnational format, with the Middle East becoming its most important export market (Aslan , 2019). As a result, the MENA region has become the largest consumer of Turkish drama series internationally. However, the unprecedented entry and acceptance of Turkish cultural products into the former Ottoman territories was not always met with open arms in terms of media presentations on Arab television. Instead, Türkiye's strong cultural presence has, at times, been met with negative perceptions from the media and certain segments of Arab society. Instead of embracing it, some viewed it as a Turkish cultural invasion and a form of cultural imperialism (Eurodatatv, 2018).

The impact of Turkish dramas in the MENA region has been limited in recent years due to actions taken by the Saudi-owned MBC network and the UAE's Abu Dhabi and Dubai TV. These measures included removing Turkish dramas from free-to-air MBC satellite channels and from Abu Dhabi and Dubai TV. Despite this, Turkish dramas have continued to expand their reach, with greater intensity and wider geographical dispersion. In 2021, Turkish dramas returned to Emirati satellite channels, and in 2022 they returned to MBC. However, the ban on free-to-air channels has not prevented the continued expansion of Turkish drama series, which now reach an audience of 700 million in more than 150 countries (Aslan , 2019).

This expansion can be attributed to factors such as the introduction of cheaper and faster internet, a more technologically literate audience, and the rise of streaming services. These factors have facilitated the wider spread of Turkish drama series. In this chapter, the concept of cultural proximity is used as an analytical tool to explain the popularity of Turkish drama in the Arab world. This chapter focuses on the social and cultural factors that attract and engage Arab audiences, drawing on qualitative and quantitative fieldwork conducted in Qatar between 2013 and 2018 by (Algan & Kaptan, 2021).

The research by Algan & Kaplan includes participants from different Arab countries with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. In addition, informal conversations with Arab citizens over the past decade have provided insight into the reasons behind the popularity of Turkish drama series among Arab audiences. This enduring relationship has spanned over fifty years and, despite political rivalries and differences, has been founded on a shared culture, heritage and religion. These commonalities have proven to be pivotal factors in attracting and motivating the Arab audience to interact with Turkish dramas ( Celik , 2020).

In addition, the research also highlights the importance of dubbing Turkish programs into the Syrian colloquial dialect, allowing access to a wider audience, including those who may have faced challenges with translation. The enormous popularity of dubbed Turkish dramas has led to dubbing being more widely adopted as a translation method to localize foreign content in a region traditionally dependent on subtitles. Most importantly, the dubbing of Turkish dramas played a crucial role in bringing an entire nation and its people closer together, revealing a closeness that many in the Middle East were not aware of before (News, 2018).

As part of their efforts to attract Arab viewers who have become fond of Turkish drama, Arab production companies, and broadcasters have made great strides in adopting the Turkish style of producing series. One notable example is the success of O3 Productions, an Istanbul-based subsidiary of MBC, which has been able to produce a series of Turkish series for local television and even create Turkish originals for Netflix since entering the Turkish market in 2014. In 2019, O3 Productions took a unique approach by producing an Arabic version of its world-famous series “The Bride of Istanbul” (Istanbul Célen, 2017-19, Türkiye: Star TV), renaming it “The Bride of Beirut” (2019-20, MBC) (News, 2018).

What distinguishes this production is that instead of simply dubbing Turkish content or filming the film adaptation in the Arab world, O3 Productions took advantage of its experience in producing Turkish dramas by filming the series in Türkiye, hiring Arab actors, and taking advantage of Arab locations. In addition, in October 2022, MBC Group concluded a five-year agreement with Turkish production companies Med-Yapim and Ay-Yapim (Khalil, 2019).

This partnership will result in the exclusive sharing of a wide range of Turkish content with MBC Group through “first look” agreements and volume deals, as well as the production of

original Arabic content tailored to the MENA market. It can be said that adapting Turkish series and incorporating Turkish expertise into drama production could represent an important milestone in the Middle East's approach to content production, as Turkish influence in the cultural field reshapes the narrative landscape (Keddache. ,2018).

#### **4.4.2 The Role of the Turkish Series and the Turkish Influence on Arab Culture**

Determining the cultural, social, and political influences of Türkiye's soft power on the Arab citizen, their culture, and their thinking is a challenging task. While an interest in Turkish drama series may be perceived as an indication of Türkiye's political strength, it is important to note that a positive image does not necessarily equate to actual strength or the ability to garner support from the people.

From the Turkish perspective, the popularity of these TV series has resulted in Arab audiences viewing contemporary Türkiye as a modern nation. Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in interest in Turkish culture and language, as well as a rise in the number of Arab tourists visiting Türkiye. These tangible outcomes highlight the impact of the Turkish drama series on shaping perceptions and generating curiosity among Arab individuals.

From the Arab perspective, these TV series have raised awareness about the influence of the secular system on daily life. According to Daniel Abdel Fattah, representative of the Al Arabiya channel in Türkiye, the series has also prompted Arabs to engage in public debates surrounding controversial issues, such as honor killings. This suggests that Turkish drama series have not only entertained Arab audiences but also sparked discussions on important social matters.

In conclusion, while the impact of Turkish drama series on the Arab citizen, their culture, and their thinking is evident, it is important to differentiate between a positive image and actual political strength. The popularity of these series has allowed Türkiye to be perceived as a modern nation from the Turkish perspective, while also raising awareness and stimulating debates on social issues from the Arab perspective. The long-term effects of the Arab Spring on Turkish cultural influence are yet to be fully understood, but it has certainly provided an opportunity for Turkish products to consolidate their position in the Arab market.

Propaganda of the Neo-Ottoman Era: Turkish popular culture has greatly influenced the Arab region and the Arab public in the past decade, and in the modern era, this influence has increased. Turkish television drama has enjoyed great popular success in the Middle East, which has fueled widespread controversy in the field. This popularity is puzzling at first glance (Okumuş, 2020). After living under Ottoman rule for 400 years, the Arabs experienced a period where most of Türkiye's population in the twentieth century consisted of foreigners. During this time, Turkish policy overlooked Arab interests. Turkish drama has gained popularity among Arab audiences due to its ability to evoke a relatable modernity in some instances, while also presenting a dominant counter-narrative that positions Middle Easterners as protagonists. The emergence of Turkish TV drama provides the Arab public sphere with valuable insights into the geopolitical foundations, geo-cultural effects, and transnational media influences (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017).

In a changing geopolitical context in which Türkiye assumes an increasingly central role in the culture, politics, and economics of the Middle East, the popularity of Turkish TV dramas captures the idea of neo-Ottomanism, which is extremely ironic considering Kemalism and the Arab countries that emerged after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Against the backdrop of imperial Ottoman history and complex Turkish-Arab relations in the modern era, the emergence of Turkish media among Arab audiences offers insights into the geopolitical underpinnings of Turkish traditional and electronic media flows across the national borders of Arab states, best captured by the idea of neo-Ottomanism (Alardawi, Bajnaid, & Brereton, 2021).

The changing image of Türkiye in the Arab world: from the Ottoman Empire to transnational media History has given the Arabs a charged image of Türkiye. After 400 years of Ottoman domination over the Arabs, after the end of World War I, Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk pushed for a campaign of forced secularization. This campaign led to decades the abandonment of the Arabic alphabet and the purging of the Turkish language of Arabic during the first decades of the republic. On the other hand, during the second half of the twentieth century, Türkiye's secularism, nationalism, and NATO membership politically distanced it from its Arab neighbors (Ahdika A. , 2019).

Several factors facilitated a change in Turkish-Arab relations, including the 2001 launch of the Justice and Development Organization party led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah

Gül. Self-identifying as a "conservative democrat" rather than an Islamist, the new party introduced a democratic system of electoral politics on a pro-business platform reflecting the AKP's strengths and entrepreneurship. A constituency in mid-sized provincial cities that became known as the "Anatolian Tigers" (Bouhamda, 2016).

The AKP has consolidated its strength in electoral victories since 2002, and a series of incidents in which Türkiye has acted to suggest a geopolitical maneuver: such as the 2003 parliamentary vote refusing to allow the United States to open a northern front in its impending invasion of Iraq, and the AKP's criticism of Israeli actions, and others. At the same time, Türkiye's strong diplomacy signaled an ambitious foreign policy that intensified discussions about "neo-Ottomanism." In the two decades that preceded the rise of the AKP, Turkish media were subjugated (Pothou, 2018).

For a structural transformation with two components, the first, which has occurred since the mid-1980s, was characterized by the concentration of ownership, the break-up of unions, and the commercialization of the airwaves. Additionally, media companies were acquired by large conglomerates with the aim of institutionalizing and politicizing the Turkish media field, as new media owners sought to expand their market share and political influence. "This period was marked by tremendous upheaval and unprecedented transformation in the media in Türkiye" (Carney, 2018).

The second shift, which has taken place since the mid-1990s, entails the relocation of Turkish state and commercial media. Seeking to reach Turkish immigrants worldwide and Turkish populations in the former Soviet republics as well as influence across borders, cross-border broadcasting with the state apparatus TRT began in 1990. After the 1994 law regulating private commercial television channels began targeting Turks abroad, initially mostly in Europe, where they outgrew TRT programs. The forces that changed the Turkish media landscape were also at work in the Arab world. Since the 1990s, the Arab media sector has become increasingly commercial and cross-border, creating an inclusive Arab public sphere involving more than twenty Arabic-speaking countries, and at the same time sharply socialized ( Celik , 2020).

Increased demand for content, has opened up Turkish productions to a market that currently includes nearly 700 satellite channels as well as national broadcasters. In tandem, a parallel structuring of the Turkish and Arab media industries was made, by creating "push" (channels

from the Turkish side) and “pull” channels (from the Arab side), paving the way for Turkish drama to enter the Arab media space. In this context, the Arabic channel MBC, which is owned and Dubai-based, broadcast many Turkish series like *Nour* series for the first time in the summer of 2008. MBC is the flagship channel of Saudi Media Group, a conglomerate owned by Saudi businessmen with family connections to the Saudi royal family (Salem, 2017).

MBC Group is one of the few pioneers of multi-platform media companies that have evolved over the past two decades in what is often described as the “Arab Satellite Revolution.” In addition to Arab and Turkish websites that broadcast the drama live, cross-border broadcasting in the Middle East was supported by geopolitical concerns. The following sections show how these concerns play out in a slightly different but generally identical way in Arab discussions of Turkish social and political television drama. *Nour* and the *Valley of the Wolves* generated the most heated debates in Arab public discourse (Alardawi, Bajnaid, & Brereton, 2021).

Political and cultural propaganda within the framework of social drama: A large proportion of Turkish dramas dubbed in Arabic tell stories about the Istanbul elite and its population, and the problems of love, sex, marriage, family, money, violence, social class, and organized crime. For instance, these social dramas are the famous series *The Lost Years*, *The Lost Dream*, and *Forbidden Love* (Yıldırım & Hira, 2016). According to MBC, more than 84 million Arabic-speaking viewers watched the final episode of MBC's *Nour* series, making it one of the most popular Arab TV and social shows. There are widespread stories about the popularity of goods bearing images of the Stars of Light: “From the markets of Tunisia to the markets of occupied East Jerusalem, T-shirts with pictures of Turkish celebrities. The French news agency quoted a street vendor near the University of Damascus saying that he sells more than 500 pictures of the stars daily near the university campus.” Other reports discussed the impact of the series' popularity on business and tourism and recorded a record increase in the number of Arab tourists visiting Türkiye (Güzel & Aktaş, 2016).

In 2009, there was a 21% rise in the number of tourists from the United Arab Emirates to Türkiye and a 50% increase from Morocco. Some journalists began to promote the “Turkish invasion” on television and websites as a threat to Egypt and Syria, where one Syrian critic said that the Syrian series received “a fatal blow from a Turkish series.” This criticism is

ironic because being dubbed in the colloquial Syrian language helped spread Turkish drama throughout the Arabic-speaking world (Ahdika A. , 2019).

However, conservative Arab clerics took measures to combat what they considered a harmful Turkish drama. The mufti of the Syrian city of Aleppo issued a fatwa prohibiting anyone from praying while wearing T-shirts depicting stars from the Nour series. Islamic activists in the city of Nasiriyah, southern Iraq, placed pictures of Turkish actor Kivanc Tatlitug in the streets to make people step on their feet, expressing their condemnation of the non-religious content of the Turkish series. Stronger condemnations came from hardline Saudi clerics, with Mufti Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Al Sheikh issuing a fatwa prohibiting Turkish series like the Nour series (Rehan & Raza, 2017).

**Political Drama: Regional stories and Middle Eastern politics** Turkish dramas with overt political themes have resonated with Arab viewers, especially those sympathetic to the Palestinian cause .The most notable of these was the film and series “Valley of the Wolves”, a film and television series that induced a diplomatic dispute between Türkiye and Israel. Valley of the Wolves was dubbed in the Syrian language and broadcast on Abu Dhabi TV between 2007 and 2012. Many regular and electronic websites and channels narrate the story through the perspective of a Turkish intelligence officer, Polat Alemdar (Murat Alamdar in Arabic), who uncovers conspiracies against Türkiye and the Middle East, leading Türkiye to seek revenge on foreign conspirators (Salem, 2017).

Some of the hero Polat Alemdar's exploits had a significant impact beyond the Turkish borders, especially in northern Iraq, Syria, and the occupied Palestinian territories, where graphic acts of violence showed up against American forces in Iraq and Israeli forces in the occupied territories. Tensions arose with negative images of Israelis and Jews in the Valley of the Wolves, and Arab media extensively covered the Turkish-Israeli dispute, describing Türkiye as proactive and Israel as reactive (Ahdika A. , 2017).

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Within the framework of the study's goal of understanding the impact of Turkish series on audiences in the Middle East region, as well as understanding the extent of their impact on societies in these countries and their impact on the relations between these countries and Türkiye, the study was divided into two theoretical and practical parts, as in the theoretical section the focus was on the media in general and its concept, in addition to the role, the importance and structure of the media in the Middle East and North Africa region. In addition to highlighting the MBC channel and its place in the media structure in the Middle East. Reference was also made to the role of the media in international relations in terms of the modern media and communication revolution and the study of signs and symbols in contemporary media influences.

In addition, Turkish series and international relations in the Middle East region were highlighted. Where television series were mentioned as tools for culture and public diplomacy, discussing the role of Turkish series in light of the modern state and the status of Turkish series in the Middle East.

Analysis of the sample members' answers to the interview questions explains the importance and role of the Turkish series and their impact on individuals and society in the Middle East and North Africa region. Additionally, it discusses their role in enhancing Türkiye's image and its relationship with some Arab countries. Finally, the last chapter references the results and recommendations reached by the researcher in this study.

In the practical section of the study, the researcher conducted interviews with viewers from Middle Eastern and North African countries who are in Türkiye, as well as two employees of the MBC channel, in order to answer the study's questions.

## 5.1 RESULTS

### 5.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Audience

**Table 5.1:** Demographic Analysis.

| Variable        | Classification           | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender          | Male                     | 4         | %31     |
|                 | Female                   | 9         | %69     |
|                 | Total                    | 13        | %100    |
| Education level | High school graduate     | -         | 0       |
|                 | Bachelor's degree        | 5         | %38     |
|                 | Master's degree          | 6         | %46     |
|                 | Doctorate degree         | 2         | %16     |
|                 | Total                    | 13        | %100    |
| Age             | 18-25                    | 1         | %8      |
|                 | 25-35                    | 6         | %46     |
|                 | 35-45                    | 5         | %38     |
|                 | More than 45 years       | 1         | %8      |
|                 | Total                    | 13        | %100    |
| Working field   | Media and communication  | 4         | %31     |
|                 | Educational sector       | 3         | %23     |
|                 | Management and marketing | 5         | %38     |
|                 | Other                    | 1         | %8      |
|                 | Total                    | 13        | %100    |

**Table 5.1::** Demographic Analysis “ Table continued”.

|                   |                   |    |      |
|-------------------|-------------------|----|------|
| Living in Türkiye | 0- 2 years        | -  | 0    |
|                   | 2 years           | 4  | %31  |
|                   | 3-4 years         | 6  | %46  |
|                   | More than 4 years | 3  | %23  |
|                   | Total             | 13 | %100 |

Based on the results in Table No. 1 above, we find that 69% of the sample members are female, while males constitute 31% of the sample members. Regarding the question about educational level, we note that all participants in the interview hold university and postgraduate degrees. This is because the nature of the questions requires a deep understanding in order to answer them, in addition to the fact that the researcher’s acquaintances and friends are expatriates in Türkiye to study: university graduates constitute 38 % of the sample, holders of a master’s degree constitute 46% of the sample, while holders of a doctorate degree constitute 16% of the sample. Regarding the age of the respondents, we find that the majority of the sample members are young people, with 8% of those between 18 and 25 years of age, 46% of those between 25 and 35 years of age, and 38% of those between 35 and 45 years of age, making up 8% of those over 45 years of age. Looking at the question regarding work specialty, we find that 31% of respondents work in media and communications, 23% work in the education sector, 38% work in management and marketing, and 8% work in various other jobs. As for the question about job experience, we find that 31% of the sample members have less than 5 years of experience, 46% of the sample members have between 5 and 10 years of experience, 15% of the sample members have between 10 and 15 years of experience, and 8% of the sample members have experience of more than 15 years. By asking the respondents about the period of time they have lived in Türkiye, 4 of them answered that they have been in Türkiye for two years, 6 answered that they have been in Türkiye for three to four years, while 3 of them answered that they have been in Türkiye for more than 4 years.

### 5.1.2 Content Analysis of Audience Answers

**Table 5.2:** Content Analysis of Question 1.

| Questione                                 | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| Have you watched a Turkish series before? | Yes     | 15        | 100%       |
|                                           | No      | 0         | 0          |
|                                           | Total   | 15        | 100%       |

Regarding the question about watching Turkish series, all respondents answered that they watched Turkish series, reporting that they watched at least two series, while 2 respondents answered that they watched one or two series only.

Where the Int 3 answered:

*Yes, I watched many Turkish series, including famous series such as “Ertugul”, “Icerde” (Inside), and “Kara Sevda” (Black Love).*

While Int 11 answered:

*I have watched many Turkish series. The last Turkish series I watched was "Yabani", which was really fun and entertaining.*

The Int 6 answered:

*"Yes, I have watched some of them, but not regularly or completely. I have watched some episodes of Kurtlar Vadesi, Ertuğrul, and Karagül"*

The Int 2 answered:

*Yes, I have watched a Turkish series before. I really enjoyed (Nour) as it is the first Turkish series to be shown on television.*

I think that the results obtained in the table above are quite logical, as the interviews were conducted only with people who had already watched the Turkish series.

Content Analysis Of Question 2

**Table 5.3:** Content Analysis of Question 2.

| Questione                         | Opinion          | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-----------|------------|
| What type of series did you watch | Drama & Social   | 13        | 100%       |
|                                   | Historical       | 9         | 69%        |
|                                   | Political Series | 9         | 69%        |

Regarding the question about the type of series that the respondents watched, all participants answered that they watched drama series, while 69% of them answered that they watched a historical series, and 69% of them answered that they watched a political series.

The Int 9 answered:

*I watched a variety of Turkish series, including drama, comedy, and thriller. One notable example is “The Lost Years,” a popular series known for its engaging story and well-developed characters. This romantic drama captivated audiences with its exploration of love, family dynamics, and societal challenges. It has been widely praised for its emotional depth and has become one of the most beloved classic series in the history of Turkish television.*

While The Int 4 answered that he saw:

*Drama series are primarily historical series, as they provide insight into Turkish culture and history.*

The Int 11 answered:

*I saw a variety of species. Most of them were drama and romantic series. They have deep stories that grab your attention and characters you can feel close to.*

The Int 5 answered:

*I watched dramas mainly because they delved into human emotions and cultural differences.*

Content Analysis of Question 3

**Table 5.4:** Content Analysis of Question 3.

| Questione                                   | Opinion  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| What is your opinion of the Turkish series? | Positive | 11        | 85%        |
|                                             | Negative | 2         | 15%        |
|                                             | Total    | 15        | 100%       |

Regarding the question about the opinion of the viewers who were interviewed about the Turkish series, 85% of them said that they liked the Turkish series, as they provide suspense and love stories and reflect the rich Turkish culture in addition to the strong acting performances.

Where The Int 9 answered:

*Turkish series have received widespread praise for their rich stories, complex plots, and strong performances by talented actors. They span across different genres, attracting diverse audiences with their compelling narratives and high production values. The global popularity of Turkish series reflects their ability to attract viewers from different cultural backgrounds and entertain them with engaging stories that often delve into universal themes such as love, family, and redemption.*

The Int 1 answered:

*In terms of the types of Turkish series I watched, I explored a wide range of Turkish series including drama, romance, and historical series. Each genre offers a unique perspective on Turkish culture and society, creating a diverse viewing experience.*

The Int 8 answered:

*I have watched many types of Turkish series, some of which included historical events of Türkiye, such as the Ertugrul series and the Osman series, as well as series related to family and love stories, such as the Nour series, and series related to Turkish politics, such as the Organization.*

The Int 7 answered:

*Turkish series or Turkish cinema, in general, are very successful in influencing their viewers and conveying messages to viewers, such as conveying Turkish culture and customs and introducing viewers to beautiful Turkish places and heritage in a wonderful way. This makes viewers want to know more about the Turkish state and its citizens.*

While 15% of the respondents said they didn't like the Turkish series, they are fictional series that do not reflect reality in general. In addition, historical series are greatly exaggerated to attract the public's attention and glorify Turkish culture and history.

Where The Int 6 answered:

*It is fairly good, but there is a problem with it, which is the lengthening of the episodes to find a solution to the problems that occur during the series, such as finding the criminal or the missing son, etc., This is actually intended to excite the viewer and make them relate to Turkish culture.*

The Int 13 answered:

*I can only speak about the type of drama in TV series based on the few titles I watched, which were generally good but long and boring. They had a cultural and political aim that sought to attract a wide viewing audience based on popular themes, suspense, as well as beautiful actors and scenery.*

We can notice that the answer of the sample members supports the theoretical framework discussed previously in that there is a generally positive impact of the Turkish series that was shown on television channels on the Arab viewer, as this impact is considered to have a cultural, social and political dimension as well.

Content Analysis of Question 4

**Table 5.5:** Content Analysis of Question 4.

| Questione                                                       | Opinion           | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| What do you think of the Turkish series that were shone on MBC? | Positive          | 10        | 67%        |
|                                                                 | Somewhat Positive | 3         | 33%        |
|                                                                 | Negative          | 0         | 0          |
|                                                                 | Total             | 15        | 100%       |

Regarding the viewers' opinion of the Turkish series shown on MBC, 67% of the respondents answered that they loved the Turkish series because they reflect love, drama, and suspense. All respondents considered MBC be the most important channel in the Middle East for dubbing and translating Turkish series. It has had a great impact on viewers, as the series and shown on this channel reflect the beauty of Türkiye and the culture of its people. These series also have a social character and a strong influence.

Where The Int 4 answered:

*Turkish series were shown on MBC, including famous series such as “The Lost Years” and “Nour”, which had a great impact on the Arab television audience. These series are known for their compelling stories, strong character development, and high production quality. “The Lost Years” captivated viewers with its romantic drama and emotional depth, while “Nour” gained immense popularity for its depiction of family dynamics and love stories. Both series have played a major role in increasing the popularity of Turkish drama in the Arab world, attracting a loyal fan base, and contributing to cultural exchange between Türkiye and Arabic-speaking countries.*

The Int 9 answered:

*The Turkish series on MBC impressed me with their attractive stories. These series were very popular and provided an interesting look at different aspects of life, love, and challenges. They have been well-received for their quality storytelling.*

The Int 8 answered:

*I think that the Turkish series on MBC, such as “The Lost Years” and “Nour,” were really good. I watched Nour years ago, and when they were broadcast, we fell in love with those series. Indeed, in Egypt, all ages loved this series. Both series tell stories about love and life that many of us can feel are similar to our own. They were more than just romantic. They also showed how people deal with big problems and help each other, something we all know. I think that MBC chose these series well for us in the Middle East, especially in Egypt. They chose series that were not only fun to watch but also made us think about important things in life. In my view, Lost Years and Nour became famous because they talked about these big ideas in a way that felt real and meaningful, and that people could relate to. Watching these series made me see that even though they are from Türkiye, the stories and feelings are very similar to our own stories and feelings, or that we want to live like these stories.*

On the other hand, 33% of the participants answered that the series that were shown were somewhat good, but they were largely stereotypical. They considered that MBC had a negative impact on societies in the Middle East as it contributed to transmitting Turkish culture. This led viewers to consider it as a good culture that should be adopted.

The Int 11 answered:

*I am from Lebanon, so there are some similarities between Turkish and Lebanese people in both cultures but we also have a few differences. I liked the way they celebrate weddings, how they knock on wood so as not to give off any negative vibes, how they get together on holidays, and even how much they drink tea! It influenced me in a good way which made me more interested in going to Türkiye and exploring it! I believe that the series shown on MBC are carefully studied and make the viewer adopt Turkish culture and customs.*

While the Int 11 answered:

*Regarding the Turkish series shown on MBC, such as “The Lost Years” and “Nour”, although they are attractive and have high production quality and special appeal. They present many ideas that do not reflect Arab society, Eastern society, or religions, such as marital infidelity and illicit relationships outside of marriage, even after living in Türkiye.*

*The results reached from this question support the theoretical framework regarding the*

*influence and position of MBC within the media structure in the Middle East, as most of the answers indicated the importance and role of the channel in showing dubbed Turkish series in the Middle East.*

#### Content Analysis of Question 5

**Table 5.6:** Content Analysis of Question 5.

| Questione                                                                             | Opinion   | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Do you think that these series influenced you as a viewer from a cultural standpoint? | Extremely | 10        | 67%        |
|                                                                                       | Somewhat  | 3         | 33%        |
|                                                                                       | Total     | 15        | 100%       |

Regarding the question about the cultural impact of Turkish series and how these series influenced them culturally, 67% of the respondents answered that Turkish series have a strong cultural impact on viewers, while some of them considered that Turkish culture is strong and deeply rooted in time, which makes the viewer adopt it. Most of the respondents considered that the impact of these series is not negative, as they tell social stories and tales, and convey Turkish customs and traditions within a framework of suspense and love. The participants considered these series powerful, as they contributed to bringing people together and helping us understand each other better. At first, for the viewer, it was just watching TV, but then it turned into a true love for Turkish culture. It made us want to learn more about Türkiye, such as speaking the language, visiting the country, or learning more about its culture. This makes it feel like a closer, more connected place.

Where The Int 4 answered:

*As a watcher of Turkish series, they had a huge cultural impact during my three years living in Türkiye. These series were not only a source of entertainment, but also a window to exploring new cultural elements and understanding the traditions of the Turkish community. Through the stories and characters, I gained a better understanding of the values and beliefs that are an integral part of Turkish identity. Additionally, these series have expanded my cultural horizons and appreciation for diversity and opened doors to a deeper understanding of Turkish history and traditions.*

The Int 8 answered:

*Yes, of course, it had a strong influence on me, as it showed me Turkish culture in general and showed me the beautiful places in Türkiye that I visited when I arrived in Türkiye. For example, in the series “çukur, I went to an area in Istanbul called Balat to see the place and take a tour of it.*

The Int 5 answered:

*Turkish series have changed the way we think and talk every day. They have shown us a world that seems different and similar to our own at the same time. This is really great for us, especially for young people. This series makes us feel more connected to Türkiye. Interest in Turkish culture in Egypt has increased significantly. Now, you can see more Turkish restaurants and cafes everywhere, and more people listen to Turkish music. They are adding Turkish songs to their favorite playlists. Also, more Turkish books are being translated into Arabic than ever before. It is as if these TV shows have opened up a whole new world of Turkish culture, which many of us in Egypt are eager to explore and enjoy. This interest in Turkish culture is like building a bridge between Egypt and Türkiye, making us feel closer to each other.*

While 33% of the participants considered that there is little impact of the Turkish series on their culture, as it is closer to European culture than Arab culture, and does not reflect the values of the Islamic and Arab world.

The Int 8 answered:

*I believe Turkish series have an impact on Arab culture because they belong to a society that embraces European culture.*

The Int 7 and 5 answered:

*No, I don't think these series had a major cultural impact on my culture as a viewer.*

The literary study indicated the role and importance of Turkish series in terms of cultural impact on viewers in the Middle East, as Turkish series reflect the beauty of nature in Türkiye and social-civilizational relations, and this is consistent with the results we obtained from this question.

## Content Analysis of Question 6

**Table 5.7:** Content Analysis of Question 6.

| Questione                                               | Opinion   | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Do you think these series changed your political views? | Greatly   | 9         | 69%        |
|                                                         | A littile | 4         | 31%        |
|                                                         | Total     | 13        | 100%       |

Regarding the question about the role of the Turkish series in changing the political opinions of the people I interviewed, 69% of the participants answered that these series actually affected them politically and changed their outlook towards the relations between Türkiye and the Arab countries, and even the countries of the world. It also helped them better understand the government in Türkiye and its foreign policy, as the series Valley of the Wolves was one of the series that left a strong political impression and influence in the countries of the Middle East.

Where The Int 9 answered:

*Although these series deal with political topics, I would say that they have greatly changed my political views. An individual's political views are shaped by a wide range of factors, including the media. I think that the Valley of the Wolves series and series that talk about the Turkish army and Turkish history have a great political impact on the viewer.*

The Int 11 answered:

*Previously, I did not have strong political opinions, but in recent years there have been some political disputes between Egypt and Türkiye. This situation has certainly changed the way some people see things politically. For example, due to these tensions, some channels in the Middle East have stopped showing Turkish TV series. However, that didn't make people stop watching them. Instead, many turned to the Internet to watch their favorite shows.*

The Int 3 answered:

*Although Turkish series are mostly watched for entertainment, they also give us a peek into Türkiye's political perspective and how its decision-making works, like Valley of the Wolves,*

*and show us its culture, how modern it is, and what is important to them. This does not mean that every series is trying to make a political statement, but seeing Türkiye from these series can shape our ideas about the country. This does not mean that everyone starts thinking politically about Türkiye, but it opens a window to understand its culture and political and social values, despite the political issues between our two countries.*

On the other hand, 31% of the interviewees also answered that Turkish series did not affect them politically and that they were only a means of entertainment and enjoyment. They also answered that these series have more of a cultural impact than a political one, such as the series *Nour* and the *Lost Years*.

Where The Int 10 answered:

*Of course, for me, the Turkish series did not affect my political views. I believe that these series are watched for entertainment and enjoyment, and not necessarily to form political opinions. Although some series may address social and political issues, I distinguish between reality and television drama, and I reserve my political opinions based on my personal experiences and analysis, rather than relying on what television programs depict.*

The Int 7 answered:

*Turkish series did not make me change my political view of Türkiye, but rather they made me know Turkish politics better and through them, I learned about Turkish political power.*

The Int 13 answered:

*While Turkish series may touch on political topics from time to time, I don't think they have changed my political viewpoint. I tend to view them primarily as a form of entertainment rather than a political viewpoint.*

The results obtained in this question are consistent with the theoretical framework that was presented in terms of the role, importance, and impact of Turkish series on the political point of view adopted by the viewer in the Middle East, as Türkiye is an Islamic country and has a great influence, in addition to the fact that there are series such as *Valley of the Wolves*, which were shown on MBC and had a significant impact in changing the viewer's perspective in the Middle East of the political events taking place around him.

## Content Analysis of Question 7

**Table 5.8:** Content Analysis of Question 7.

| Questione                                                   | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| Do you recommend watching Turkish series dubbed into Arabic | Yes     | 10        | 67%        |
|                                                             | No      | 3         | 33%        |
|                                                             | Total   | 13        | 100%       |

Regarding the question that the researcher asked the people she interviewed if they would advise watching dubbed Turkish series, 67% of the participants answered that they would, of course, advise that. However, in general, they should choose the appropriate series for themselves and their families. Considering the cultural differences between Arab people and Turkish society. All participants also confirmed that Turkish series provide a wonderful entertainment and social experience for viewers. I believe that viewers of dubbed Turkish series were truly impressed by the social and cultural lifestyle that these series offer, which led them to recommend watching them.

Where The Int 4, 6, 9,11 answered:

*In my opinion, watching Turkish series dubbed into Arabic provides a captivating viewing experience with easy access to the language. It provides access to diverse cultural narratives and perspectives while removing language barriers. I highly recommend it to those looking for quality TV entertainment with easy-to-understand Arabic dialogue.*

The Int 10 answered:

*When I watched “Nour” and “The Lost Years,” I saw them dubbed in Arabic, and it was good. This is especially useful for older people who may prefer to listen to programs in their own language. But recently, many of us have begun to enjoy watching with subtitles more. From my point of view, I do not watch Turkish series dubbed into Arabic, and I do not encourage that, because in order to get to know the Turkish language better, you must listen to them while watching these series, and also when the series is dubbed into Arabic, their effect changes in terms of reactions and actions.*

Also, 33% of the interview participants answered that they prefer to watch Turkish series with subtitles, that is, without dubbing into Arabic, because dubbing changes the ideas that the actor wants to convey, and it may also convey vocabulary and cultural elements incorrectly.

Where The Int 8 answered:

*I never recommend watching dubbed series because dubbing often loses the original meaning of the scene.*

The Int 1 answered:

*People in Middle Eastern countries are becoming more interested in learning the Turkish language, and watching subtitled programs is not only fun but also beneficial for learning. Now, watching subtitled programs has become a way for me to learn more about the language, and sometimes I watch them without any subtitles. It's a great way to delve deeper into the language and culture here. So, whether you prefer dubbed shows or watch with subtitles, they both have their benefits.*

#### Content Analysis of Question 8

**Table 5.9:** Content Analysis of Question 8.

| Questione                                                             | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| Do you think that the media reflects the political goals of countries | Yes     | 132       | 100%       |
|                                                                       | No      | 0         | 0          |
|                                                                       | Total   | 13        | 100%       |

Regarding the question about the media, and whether it reflects the political goals of countries, all participants answered that media and politics are definitely linked to each other. The media is one of the means that countries use to justify their policies at home and abroad. Additionally, the media is a means of influencing the foreign policies of countries.

Where The Int 4 answered:

*From my point of view, the media can amplify the political ambitions of countries.*

*For example, state-run media may present narratives that closely align with the goals of the ruling government, while privately owned media may exhibit biases that align with the political leanings of their owners. This interaction between media and politics underscores the significant impact of information dissemination on public perception and policy-making.*

The Int 9 answered:

*It is certain that the media is one of the external tools of states. For example, Hollywood has always promoted the idea of the “American dream,” the “American superhero,” and American heroism. It was one of Washington's most important weapons during the Cold War. “The media is considered one of the most prominent tools of propaganda and promotion, whether locally or internationally, and one of the most important tools of symbolic violence used by states”.*

The Int 12 answered:

*Yes, of course. The media has tremendous power to influence political goals. It can shape how people see the world and what they think about different issues and even encourage them to take action. Sometimes, the media can play a role in starting big changes, such as revolutions. The media can publish information that supports certain political views. It can also highlight issues that need attention, making more people aware of them. In many cases, the media is used to share government achievements or to show the positive side of what is happening in a country.*

The Int 5 answered:

*Definitely. The media can be a powerful tool in shaping perceptions and can reflect or reinforce countries' political goals.*

*Yes, the media indirectly works to reflect the political goals of states through the selection and delivery of content, although their focus appears to be primarily on entertaining and engaging viewers. But I think their main goal is to change the political orientations of the public through the subconscious.*

*The results obtained are consistent with the theoretical framework that was presented in that the media, whether traditional or modern, are greatly influenced by the political orientation of countries, especially in non-democratic countries, which makes the media a tool in the*

*hands of the ruling authority and reflects its political orientation.*

#### Content Analysis of Question 9

**Table 5.10:** Content Analysis of Question 9.

| Questione                                                           | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| Do you think that MBC as a media channel also has a political role? | Yes     | 8         | 62%        |
|                                                                     | No      | 5         | 38%        |
|                                                                     | Total   | 13        | 100%       |

As for the question about MBC as a media channel also having a political role, 62% of the participants answered that they believe, MBC has a political role and influence through the programs and series it broadcasts, whether intentionally or not. For example, it focused on Turkish series for a long time. It was later banned for purely political reasons.

Where The Int 10 answered:

*MBC's broad reach and influence in entertainment also extends to news and current affairs programs, indirectly shaping public opinion on political matters. Although it focuses primarily on entertainment, its news coverage, selection of stories, and commentary can influence viewers' political perceptions. Ownership interests and commercial factors may also influence editorial decisions, potentially aligning coverage with certain political agendas. Although MBC's media role is not overtly political, it inevitably intersects with political discourse.*

The Int 7 answered:

*Yes, I think that MBC, like any major media channel, can play a political role. For example, I remember that during the period of disputes between some Arab countries and Türkiye, they stopped broadcasting Turkish series on their channels. This move may show the channel's opinion on political issues or how it reacts to broader political pressures. By choosing which programs to broadcast or not to broadcast, a media channel like MBC can influence public opinion and even diplomatic relations indirectly. This action shows how media channels are not just about entertainment, but can also be part of larger political*

*conversations and decisions.*

38% of the participants answered that they do not believe that the role of the MBC channel is only entertainment media, according to their belief, and that it does not promote political agendas.

Where The Int 8 answered:

*Media channels like MBC may indirectly reflect states' political goals through the selection and presentation of content, and I do not believe their primary purpose is to promote specific political agendas. Their focus is primarily on entertaining and engaging viewers. But I do not agree with the idea that says that MBC, as a media channel, has a political role.*

The Int 12 answered:

*No, I don't think so. It is possible that MBC plays a role in influencing public opinion, which is mainly a socio-cultural role. The extent of this role can vary.*

Content Analysis of Question 10

**Table 5.11:** Content Analysis of Question 10.

| Questione                                                                                | Opinion           | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| In your opinion, can the Turkish series produce an impact, and is this impact important? | Yes, I think      | 13        | 100%       |
|                                                                                          | No, I don't think | 0         | 0          |
|                                                                                          | Total             | 13        | 100%       |

Regarding the question of whether television series have political goals, 92% of the participants answered that it is possible for television series to include political topics and provide social commentary, but their primary goal is usually entertainment. Although they may unintentionally convey political messages, overt political goals are not inherent in most television series.

Where The Int 3 answered:

*Yes, television series can have political goals, whether consciously or unconsciously. For example, a series highlighting the challenges faced by refugees might aim to promote*

*empathy and support for humanitarian policies. Likewise, a display depicting government corruption could seek to raise awareness about the need for political reform. Even in cases where the primary goal is entertainment, the themes and messages conveyed in television series can have political implications and influence viewers' opinions on societal issues.*

The Int 10 answered:

*Series in general have different goals, some of which are to spread cultures and heritage, some to spread history, and some to spread political power through a series that includes political events and the power of the state in solving the political problems it faces.*

The Int 11,5 answered:

*Yes, sometimes. Although I usually watch series that focus on romance and drama, there are some series that try to influence viewers' opinions on politics. I have especially seen this in some Arabic TV series aimed at audiences in the Arab world. These series are designed to send certain messages to their viewers. They are put together in a way that is not only about entertainment but also, in a subtle or quite direct way, attempt to shape the way people think about various political issues or historical events. This method is used by the people who make or show these series to share their views and perhaps change public opinion a little.*

While 8% of the participants believe that television series are not linked to the political goals of countries in general and that they are limited to conveying social, cultural, or even political ideas without their goals being political.

The Int 9 answered:

*While some Turkish TV series may include political themes, I do not think they necessarily have clear political goals. Many of them are created with the primary goal of entertaining audiences rather than conveying overt political messages.*

The results obtained from this question are consistent with the studies and theoretical ideas presented in this study in that the media may sometimes have political goals, as many media outlets choose series and programs to be shown that are based on specific political goals. However, this result that was reached cannot be generalized, as the results obtained did not provide evidence that Turkish series have a direct political impact, and therefore the researcher believes that it is necessary to conduct much research in this context until results

that can be generalized are reached. Table 11: Content Analysis of Question 10

As for the specific question about the impact of Turkish series and whether this impact is large and important, all participants answered that Turkish series have left a very strong impression on viewers in Middle Eastern countries and that their impact is important and positive in general within the framework of the view of Türkiye in terms of culture, social aspects, and support for tourism.

Where The Int 2,6,7 answered:

*Yes, Turkish series can have a tangible impact, and this is what is important. For example, they often highlight cultural differences and societal issues, promote cross-cultural understanding, and stimulate conversations. In addition, their popularity contributes to Türkiye's cultural influence globally. In short, the influence of Turkish series should not be overlooked, as they play an important role in shaping perceptions and promoting cultural exchange.*

The Int 9 answered:

*Turkish series has had a great cultural impact, especially in promoting Türkiye as a tourist destination and as a cultural bridge between East and West. This cultural diplomacy is necessary.*

The Int 12 answered:

*From my point of view, the Turkish series definitely has a great influence, and this influence is really important. These shows are watched by people from all over the world, not just in Türkiye, and are especially popular in the Middle East. They explain to the viewers what Turkish culture and values are and talk about social issues in Türkiye. This starts a kind of cultural exchange, which helps people from other countries understand and appreciate Türkiye and the Turkish people more. In fact, this has increased the desire of tourists to visit Turkish cities that appear in Turkish series. I believe that the Turkish series has had a major role in increasing tourism in Türkiye.*

*These results are consistent with the literature review in this study, as it was shown that Turkish drama and Turkish series, in general, have an important impact on viewers and have led to an increase in Arab investments in Türkiye and an increase in the rate of tourism*

*in Türkiye, in addition to the demand for Turkish universities for study by Arab students.*

#### Content Analysis of Question 11

**Table 5.12:** Content Analysis of Question 11.

| Questione                                                                                                      | Opinion           | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| In your opinion, did the Turkish series have a role in shaping public opinion in the Middle Eastern countries? | Yes, I think      | 13        | 100%       |
|                                                                                                                | No, I don't think | 0         | 0          |
|                                                                                                                | Total             | 13        | 100%       |

Regarding the specific question about whether Turkish series have a role in shaping public opinion in Middle Eastern countries 10 of the interviewees answered that Turkish series contributed greatly to shaping public opinion in Middle Eastern countries, towards local and international issues. They also influenced the views and attitudes of viewers about the system of government, political issues, and relations between countries. Additionally, Turkish series have been found to change the viewers' perspective on important social issues such as gender equality and work relations, etc.

Where The Int 5,8 answered:

*Yes, Turkish series have already influenced public opinion in Middle Eastern countries. For example, their compelling narratives and relatable personalities have sparked debates and shaped positions on social and cultural issues within the region. In addition, the popularity of these series facilitated cultural exchange and dialogue, which contributed to shaping public opinion throughout the Middle East.*

The Int 11 answered:

*Yes, I think Turkish TV shows influenced people's opinions in Middle Eastern countries. In my experience and based on what friends and acquaintances have told me, Turkish series are very popular and loved by many. They tell stories that people from different places can relate to, especially because they blend traditional Turkish culture with themes like love and family that everyone understands.*

The Int 8 answered:

*Yes, from what I see, Turkish series have really influenced the way people think in Egypt and throughout the Middle East. One of the main reasons is that many Arabs live in Türkiye. These series showcase life in Türkiye, its culture, and stories that sometimes seem familiar to Middle Easterners. Watching these series, people start to see Türkiye in a new light. They may learn about Turkish traditions, family values, or what Türkiye looks like today, mixing the old and the new. This can change their feelings about Türkiye, making them more interested or feel closer to the Turkish people. Also, since these series are so popular, they have become a popular topic that people talk about. This means that what is presented in these series can start conversations in the Middle East about different ways of life, what is important in life, and how societies can change.*

The Int 10 answered:

*Turkish series play a prominent role in shaping public opinion in the Middle East, especially as they address some of the political issues of Middle Eastern countries. Introducing historical figures in historical series is one of the common denominators among Middle Eastern countries, which contributes to shaping public opinion based on what is presented in the series, making it the historical reference for the public instead of other sources.*

*The results obtained from this question are consistent with the theoretical framework of the study in that television series, especially those that have specific political or religious orientations, have an impact on public opinion and contribute to forming this opinion. Turkish series have greatly contributed to changing the view of individuals in the Middle East regarding... Historical and political issues.*

**Table 5.13:** Content Analysis of Question 12.

| Questione                                                                                                       | Opinion      | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Do you think that the ideas broadcast through the Turkish series contributed to spreading political propaganda? | Yes, I think | 7         | 54%        |
|                                                                                                                 | No, I don't  | 6         | 46%        |
|                                                                                                                 | Total        | 13        | 100%       |

Through the results obtained, we find that about half of the participants (about 54%) whom the researcher interviewed answered that they believe that Turkish series have been used, especially those that contain political or military ideas, to spread Turkish political propaganda and achieve Türkiye's political interests. On the other hand, we find that There is a percentage of about 46% who do not believe this, and this means that the results reached do not provide conclusive evidence in this research about the political role of Turkish series.

The Int 4,7 answered:

*In my opinion, it is possible that Turkish series, especially series like "Valley of the Wolves," have been used to spread political propaganda. This series was known for its strong political themes and controversial depiction of real-life events. While television dramas are primarily intended to entertain, they can sometimes be influenced by political agendas, consciously or unconsciously. In the case of Valley of the Wolves, its story and characters may have been used to promote particular political ideologies or opinions, which may shape public opinion on political issues.*

The Int 11 answered:

*While some series may address political themes, it is important to distinguish between storytelling and propaganda. Not all ideas presented in Turkish series should be considered part of a deliberate political agenda, such as the Ertugül series, and also the organization series that have been broadcast so far, which have made viewers very aware of Turkish political power, Türkiye's power in eliminating corruption and terrorists, and also Türkiye's external power.*

The Int 13 answered:

*I largely believe that the ideas presented in the Turkish series are part of spreading political messages, but people in Middle Eastern countries are usually more interested in the cultural stories and values that appear in these series than in the political details.*

While 46% of the interviewees believe that Turkish series have not been used to spread political propaganda, especially since most of these series are dramatic series and focus on culture, tourism, and the beauty of nature in Türkiye, in addition to stories of love and suspense.

Where The Int 9 answered:

*It is mainly about feeling connected to the culture, traditions, and stories being shared, not promoting political views. The big attractions are the drama, love stories, and outlook on Turkish life and what is important there. This goes beyond politics and touches on big ideas that many people can relate to.*

The Int 4 answered:

*Not in a direct way. While some series may fit broader national narratives, most aim to entertain and educate about cultural aspects rather than political propaganda.*

The Int 2 answered:

*Although Turkish series may inadvertently convey certain political ideas, I do not classify them as carrying political propaganda. In general, it is important to analyze each series individually and consider its broader context before drawing conclusions about its political implications.*

*Many political and economic figures in Middle Eastern countries discussed the role of the Turkish series in spreading certain political agendas in the Middle East and the world, as mentioned in the theoretical framework of the study. It was shown through the results obtained that a large percentage of respondents find that Turkish series carry cultural and political agendas. And social within the framework of achieving the Turkish interest.*

Content Analysis of Question 13:

**Table 5.14:** Content Analysis of Question 13.

| Questione                                                                                                                                                               | Opinion           | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| In your opinion, have the Turkish series influenced the decision-makers by governments in the Middle East regarding foreign policy and their relations with each other? | Yes, I think      | 11        | 85%        |
|                                                                                                                                                                         | No, I don't think | 2         | 15%        |
|                                                                                                                                                                         | Total             | 13        | 100%       |

Regarding the special question about the influence of Turkish series on decision-makers by Middle Eastern governments regarding foreign policy and their relations with each other,

85% of the interviewees answered that the media is considered the link between the decision-maker and the public, and it is affected and influenced by the political, economic and social system. The media in the Middle East mainly suffers from the problem of dependency on the ruling authority, through the severe censorship practiced by the regimes. The media shapes public opinion through a series of influences exerted on members of society, ending with mobilizing their satisfaction and agreement on specific points on certain issues. This, of course, is reflected in the political decisions of governments and the formation of political alliances, as well as political disputes between parties within one country and between countries.

Where The Int 1,8 answered:

*The media affects the decision-making process through four stages: defining the problem, identifying alternatives, selecting information, and implementing the decision. The media strategy works to provide consistent information in the direction that influences decision-making. As for the relationship between public opinion and political decision-making, it is a mutual relationship, as they both influence each other.*

The Int 13 answered:

*From my point of view, the Turkish series may have an impact on decision-makers in Middle Eastern governments regarding foreign policy and regional relations. The depiction of cultural and political dynamics in these series can subtly shape policymakers' perceptions and attitudes toward neighboring countries. Although not the only factor, the widespread popularity of Turkish series suggests that they can play a role in shaping public opinion and influencing diplomatic strategies in the region.*

The Int 8 answered:

*I believe that the Turkish series has influenced Middle Eastern governments and their foreign relations with Türkiye because citizens in the Middle East frequently visit Türkiye. This indicates that Middle Eastern governments have established strong relations with Türkiye in order to exchange cultures and engage in trade, which satisfies their citizens.*

While 15% of the interviewees stated that the Turkish series did not have a significant political impact on relations between countries, as its influence was limited to the economic interests of the countries.

The Int 5 answered:

*In my opinion, Turkish series are likely to have an impact on public discourse and cultural perceptions in the Middle East. However, government decision-makers are not waiting for a Turkish series to make important decisions regarding foreign policy and relations between countries. While Turkish soap operas may play a role in shaping societal attitudes, decision-makers base their actions on a wide range of factors, including geopolitical considerations, strategic interests, and diplomatic relations, and not just on the content of the TV series.*

The Int 9 answered:

*Turkish series are unlikely to have a direct impact on government decision-makers. However, they may contribute to a broader cultural understanding that could indirectly influence diplomatic relations over time.*

Through the results obtained from the viewers with whom the researcher conducted the interview, it was found that all of them watched Turkish series. Most of them answered that they had watched two or more series and that they liked drama and social series. Turkish series are entertaining and have good content because they address social issues. MBC succeeded in showing dubbed Turkish series, which received great interest in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The participants also answered that the series affected them culturally. The results reached did not provide evidence about the political role of the Turkish series, as approximately half of the participants considered that the Turkish series had no political impact or carried political goals for Türkiye. Through the results, we find that the Turkish series enhances the positive outlook on Türkiye and enhances the tourism and education sector in Türkiye.

The results obtained are consistent with the literature review in this study, as the Turkish series had an impact not only on society and viewers but enhancing on viewers' positive outlook towards Türkiye. Also, relations between Türkiye and the Middle East may be affected by the content of the Turkish series, and on the other hand, cultural and political relations may affect the showing of the series. For example, in Saudi Arabia and some Gulf countries, the showing of some Turkish series was banned by the authorities, and in other countries at a certain stage where Political relations were not positive between Türkiye and the Arab Gulf states. Then relations improved and the decision was made to strengthen

commercial and industrial relations with Türkiye, as the Turkish series played an important role in forming a positive public opinion towards Türkiye.

### 5.1.3 Demographic Characteristics of the Experts

**Table 5.15:** Demographic Analysis of Experts.

| Variable           | Classification       | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender             | Male                 | 2         | %100    |
|                    | Female               | 0         | %0      |
|                    | Total                | 2         | %100    |
| Education level    | High school graduate | 0         | 0       |
|                    | Bachelor's degree    | 1         | %50     |
|                    | Master's degree      | 1         | %50     |
|                    | Doctorate degree     | 0         | %0      |
|                    | Total                | 2         | %100    |
| Age                | 18-25                | 0         | %0      |
|                    | 25-35                | 0         | %0      |
|                    | 35-45                | 1         | %50     |
|                    | More than 45 years   | 1         | %50     |
|                    | Total                | 2         | %100    |
| Working experience | Between 10-15 years  | 1         | %50     |
|                    | More than 15 years   | 1         | %50     |
|                    | Total                | 2         | %100    |

From the results we obtained regarding the experts, it is clear that the experts whom the researcher conducted interviews with are male, and one of them holds a university degree while the other holds a master's degree. The functional experience of the two experts exceeds 10 years.

#### **5.1.4 Content Analysis of Experts Answers**

When the face-to-face interviews were examined through content analysis by experts, it was found that the answers to the first question, which examined the structure of the media in the Middle East, mostly focused on the fact that the media in the Middle East is not free and is mainly based on television. Recently, social media and its broadcasting have gained significant importance. Some also observed that the technologies used in Middle Eastern media are constantly evolving and that the media is mostly driven by profit and aligned with the state's goals and policies.

The first expert reported the following:

In my opinion, I see that the media in the Middle East is improving significantly, better than before. I have high hopes that it will be more prominent in Western media in the future. In the Middle East, most media operations are organized within the framework of production and sales; marketing, promotion, and advertising, as well as finance and human resources.

While The second expert stated that:

In the Middle East, visual media is usually relied upon, especially television, and nowadays youth trends are turning towards social media. Since 2000, dubbing operations have spread throughout the Arab world and the Middle East, especially Turkish series. They have achieved great popularity, and this popularity has been supported by the heavy reliance on television in the Arab world.

Regarding the question that expresses the opinion of the expert on the MBC channel website regarding the media structure in the Middle East:

It turned out that the answers focused on the fact that MBC is an important channel and has a great impact in the Middle East. It is considered one of the most widespread channels, as it broadcasts new series with exclusive rights, which increases the number of its followers.

The first expert reported the following:

I see that MBC channels top the list of media outlets in the Middle East for several reasons, the first of which is the quality in transmitting the image and attention to the smallest details that can make the viewer enjoy it. The diversity of MBC channels in several Arabic dialects made it top of the list, the throne of Arab media.

While The second expert stated that:

MBC is one of the leading television broadcasting companies and live-streaming platforms (Shahid). The group is the main driver of television, acquiring, commissioning, and producing Arabic content (dramas, shows, documentaries, etc.) in the Gulf region and the MENA region. It also plays an important role in acquiring and commissioning Egyptian content alongside Egyptian broadcasters.

Regarding the question about the interviewees' opinion on the vision and mission of MBC:

The results indicated that MBC aims to dominate the media sector in the Middle East, as it is regarded as the most popular channel in the region.

The first expert reported the following:

I believe that MBC's vision is to achieve widespread distribution and high market value in the world of media and to have the greatest influence on viewers in the Middle East and other countries. Its mission is to attract the public and achieve high efficiency and effectiveness in the world of media compared to other channels.

While The second expert stated that:

MBC, in its mission and vision, seeks to provide distinguished entertainment to Arab viewers, especially in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. Additionally, it aims to target local viewers and markets in specific countries (such as Iraq, Egypt, and North Africa). MBC also strives to influence viewers and maximize its market value.

Regarding the question about the role of the media in the foreign policy of countries:

The experts answered that the media is a reflection of the foreign policy of countries. Countries formulate their policies through the media, and the media also has a great influence in transmitting the policies, ideas, and culture of countries abroad. This allows for the strengthening of their tourism, economic, social, and even political position in the minds of

those who receive them.

The first expert reported the following:

If media outlets are created and/or funded by government agencies, their goals are usually to promote their countries and their political and social views in the target countries (depending on the language they use). Examples of this include Al Jazeera English, TRT Arabic, and others.

While The second expert stated that:

I do not think so. There is an exaggeration in this matter. I believe that the media does not have a significant role in shaping the policies of countries and achieving their foreign interests. For example, if we look at Turkish, Indian, or other series dubbed into Arabic, we find that they are a means of entertainment and nothing more, in my opinion.

In the question regarding the opinion of the specialists on the MBC channel regarding the framework or policy followed by Türkiye towards the Middle East:

We find that the answers focused on the fact that Türkiye's foreign policy, like other countries, stems from achieving its personal interests while respecting the social and cultural characteristics of the Middle Eastern countries. Each country in the Middle East also has its own relationship with Türkiye.

The first expert reported the following:

I believe that politics is reflected in the framework of international relations from the point of view of interests, and Türkiye is always keen to strengthen relations with Arab countries, to achieve its interests on the one hand and to strengthen the bonds of the relationship in the region on the other hand. This, of course, serves the interest of the Turkish state with the Arab countries, and the Arab countries also have interests.

While The second expert stated that:

I do not believe that there is one policy towards the Middle East. For example, there are different policies towards different countries in the Arab world. Like any other country, Türkiye seeks to achieve what it considers to be in its national interests, whether militarily, diplomatically, or otherwise. In recent years, Türkiye's relations have gone through a very

turbulent phase with many major Arab countries (such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt), and these relations have recently improved with these two countries. On the other hand, Türkiye has strong relations with Qatar. Another type of “relationship” includes military presence and operations (for example: Qatar, Libya, and Syria).

The results obtained are limited to the opinions of two experts and therefore cannot be generalized, but it can be said that the media is a reflection of the foreign policy of countries, as countries formulate their policies through the media, and their goals are usually to promote their countries and their political and social opinions in them. Target countries (depending on the language they use the media in).

Experts also reported that Türkiye's foreign policy, like that of other countries, is based on achieving its interests while respecting the social and cultural characteristics of Middle Eastern countries.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to explore the importance of the media and its impact on public opinion. It also aimed to study the changes in the political point of view of viewers of Turkish series and its impact on foreign relations between peoples and countries. The focus of this study was mainly on how the Turkish series changed the way viewers in Arab countries perceived Türkiye, its role, and its level of development. It aimed to shed light on the Turkish series as a means of Turkish soft power towards Arab countries and their impact on Arab viewers. Additionally, it aimed to highlight the importance and role of the media, particularly the MBC channel.

The impact of the Turkish series was studied on a sample of 15 viewers from Middle Eastern countries residing in Türkiye. In addition to studying the impact of Turkish series on viewers through polling the opinions of specialized workers and experts at MBC, which is considered the most important channel in the Middle East for broadcasting dubbed Turkish series, 9 people were interviewed.

The researcher used the qualitative approach by applying content analysis techniques to expatriates to Türkiye and specialists in the MBC channel. This method is one of the qualitative research methods, chosen to ensure research diversity and facilitate result comparison.

Through his findings in interviews conducted with viewers of Turkish series who came to Türkiye from Middle Eastern countries, it became clear that most of the viewers watched more than one series, and that these series were of a dramatic, entertaining, or social nature. Also, 9 of the participants answered that they watch series of political, historical, or military nature.

Research on the impact of films in East Asia has revealed that the exchange of cultural goods across borders can enhance people's understanding of other societies and even alleviate long-standing historical injustices. This finding is of particular importance in our case study, as Turkish series have unexpectedly gained enormous popularity in the Arab world. Given the history of conflict between Türkiye and Arab countries, it is expected that there will be a hostile attitude towards Türkiye in this region. However, the broad appeal of the Turkish series challenges this assumption (Çevik S. B., 2019).

As for the viewers' opinion of the Turkish series, they pointed out that the Turkish series played a major role in influencing the Arab audience, especially series of a cultural and social nature, such as the *Lost Years* series and the *Nour* series. These series are considered among the social series that had a great impact on the Arab viewer. In Arab countries in particular, Turkish series have had a significant impact on people and political decision-makers. For example, Turkish series have encouraged tourism in Türkiye, and some countries have sought to establish projects in Türkiye under the influence of Turkish series.

Most viewers also answered that the Turkish series influenced them culturally, changing their view of Türkiye and making them adopt some Turkish values and customs and consider Turkish cultural life an ideal life. In addition, their desire to visit Türkiye and learn about its cultural and historical landmarks has increased.

Most of the participants in the interviews also stated that Turkish series have changed their political views and the role of Türkiye in the Arab world and its relationship with Arab countries. They believe that the media, in general, reflects the political goals of countries and serves as a means of conveying political ideas to the world. Most of the participants considered television series to have political goals and to represent public opinion in general. The channels that show these series, including MBC, are seen as intermediaries in conveying political ideas to countries. Most viewers also agreed that the Turkish series serves as a means of communication, discourse, and mobilizing the masses. They have now become a tool for directing political processes within the framework of the use of soft power.

Observers widely talk about the “wow elements” that Türkiye has, such as luxury homes, modern cars, stunning nature, and beautiful girls, which enable drama producers to reach the largest possible segment of viewers around the world. Those behind the Turkish series focus on highlighting these elements in particular and exporting them to the public.

Viewers say that “the carefully selected charming landscapes in the filming locations, in addition to the elegant, modern clothes and warm colors” are considered elements of the cultural influence in Turkish artistic works.

Viewers also see that dramas are effectively used as a tool for what is known as “cultural diplomacy”, and Türkiye has a cultural, historical, and civilizational reserve, as well as human, geographical, and natural elements on which Turkish series are based. These

elements help to introduce Turkish culture, language, history, and the present.

The results reached did not provide significant evidence about the political impact of Turkish series on viewers, as 54% answered that they believe that Turkish series are a reflection of Türkiye's political vision and goals, while 46% see the opposite, and therefore the researcher believes that it is necessary to focus on this question. In future studies.

Viewers also responded that these dramas arouse the desire of viewers to explore more about Türkiye by going on a tourist trip or starting to learn the Turkish language and participating in cultural and educational activities and programs at the Yunus Emre Institute, whose cultural centers are widespread. Around the world, she represents a special ambassador for culture. Turkish is spoken in many homes in the eastern and western parts of the world.

In the context of discussing the impact of the Turkish series on women in the Middle East, Turkish actress Beren Saat, who plays the lead role in the Fatima series, states: "The female viewers are aware that we come from a Muslim country. They see the Bosphorus and modern women wear clothes in which they feel comfortable, they see the mosques, and the entire combination looks wonderful." They also find a lot of familiarity with Fatima, who is similar to them, and awakens the possibility of being decision-makers with hope in their hearts." Elem Kanbulat, one of the authors of the "Nour" series, says: "Nour represents the modern Turkish woman. She is successful and maintains her moral values at the same time".

This is supported by what was reported in the news about a ceasefire between the Palestinian movements Fatah and Hamas at the time of one of the Turkish series so that both groups can follow it. Daniel Abdel Fattah, the representative of MBC channels in Türkiye, says this: "If there is a love or romantic story in a series or movie, in that case, it can bring a truce to the fighting and bloodshed.

In this regard, Miriam Berg, a German researcher in the Department of Media at Northwestern University, says: "The Turkish government has realized that Turkish cultural products are very effective platforms for promoting the country, its culture, and its people to the Arab public."

In the context of these results, Berg asserts that the spread of Turkish dramas in the Arab world in particular, has contributed to "changing prejudices in the Arab world about Türkiye", and has also created a good external reputation for the country in various parts of

the world, attracting the attention of tourists and investors from all over the world. He headed to Türkiye.

In a 2020 study by Jinan University in Lebanon on young people's imitation of Turkish series, it was found that 76 percent of respondents imitate Turkish series in terms of the emotional aspect and that 29 percent of respondents imitate them in terms of words and expressions, and that 33 percent of respondents imitate them in terms of movements and gestures, and that 72 percent of respondents imitate them in terms of expressions and words. Some of the respondents do not mind imitating Turkish soap operas in terms of clothing and drink.

When surveying the views of MBC specialists regarding the dubbed Turkish series that are shown on the channel, they stated that MBC is considered the most important channel in the Middle East for broadcasting dubbed Turkish channels. It holds a prominent position among television channels in the Arab world and embraces modern broadcasting technologies. Through the broadcast of dubbed Turkish series and other shows, this channel aims to attain extensive distribution and high market value.

The channel's specialists pointed out that when the media became an indispensable necessity in people's lives to benefit from the continuous flow of information that is increasing day after day in various fields as a result of the development of technologies and means of communication, interest in the communication process increased more than before, until it became, in our current era, at the heart of political action. It is one of the components of its success, as those who occupy decision-making positions in countries, and actors in the political scene in general, from parties and official institutions, find themselves forced to formulate their perceptions and visions in accordance with modern means of communication for good policy-making and proper implementation.

Specialists also believe that the media influences the decision-making process, so the media strategy works to provide consistent information in a direction that influences decision-making. As for the relationship between public opinion and political decision-making, it is a mutual relationship, as both influence each other. Participants also believe that it is a factor influencing the political decision-making process, and the social and political structure of society, which was greatly influenced by the Turkish series that were shown, whether on MBC or other channels.

We also find, through the results obtained, that the views of viewers largely agree with the opinions of MBC specialists in the context of the importance of the media, its cultural and social role, and its impact on relations between countries. We also find that there is great agreement among viewers and specialists regarding the role of MBC in disseminating Turkish series and encouraging people to learn about Turkish culture. These series, in general, have led to economic benefits for the Turkish state through tourism. Education and the purchase of Turkish series and products also led to greater political rapprochement between the countries of the Middle East and Türkiye, as the peoples of these countries began to view Türkiye as the most important and most developed Islamic country.

This is supported by the opinion of researcher Panayiota Kavatas, who said that exporting Turkish series is part of Türkiye's foreign policy and that Türkiye's policy of exporting its series to the Arab region ensures in recent years the integration of Islamic principles with modern life.

American writer Nick Vivarelli also confirms that Türkiye ranks second in the world after the United States of America in terms of the most widespread and influential drama, especially in the Middle East region. Turkish dramas were exported to 142 countries around the world in 2019 and have achieved enormous financial revenues.

The French Audience Research Authority also confirmed that 75 Turkish series were shown on Arab screens in 2016, with total revenues amounting to \$600 million, and Saudi Arabia ranked first in terms of viewership.

Turkish writer and researcher Hakan Demir confirms, “The countries of North Africa and the Middle East have a great passion for Türkiye, and a large part of it is because of Turkish series and the new and different images that the drama reflects, close to the heart of the Arab viewer.” It had a deeper impact on him to learn about the Turkish world and was more eloquent than the impact of any number of articles.”

After conducting a comprehensive analysis of the interviews conducted with MBC viewers and experts regarding the impact of the most “popular” dubbed Turkish series on the foreign policy of Middle Eastern countries in this thesis, it is clear that only one conclusion can be drawn: the main question of the thesis has been addressed by addressing secondary questions as shown below:

In fact, the media has the ability to influence its audience, and dubbed Turkish series is a prime example of this. Undeniably, the integration of visual representations and real-time television production holds the potential to elicit emotional responses among residents of Middle Eastern countries if implemented in an appropriate semiotic manner.

This influence certainly carries great weight. The media now has the ability to reach a larger audience than ever before, due to advances in technology and contemporary methodologies.

Although unplanned, the international triumph of Turkish drama fits seamlessly into the Turkish government's soft power strategy. As a result, the government began to use these series strategically to enhance the country's image and generate soft power, especially in the Arab world.

In conclusion, there are cases where the media has influenced foreign policy. However, uncertainties remain in this area of investigation. It is worth noting that the challenge lies in determining the extent of the influence that series broadcast on television or online platforms may have on public opinion and political decision-making. Examples of government reactions to media content are clear, such as the reactions of various Middle Eastern countries to the Valley of the Wolves series.

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## APPENDIX A



